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## **Beyond the Ballot: Participatory Peacebuilding and Electoral Violence Prevention in Côte d'Ivoire**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis investigates whether the Cadres de Collaboration (CDCs) contributed to reducing electoral violence during Côte d'Ivoire's 2023 municipal and regional elections. Grounded in John Paul Lederach's theory of conflict transformation, the study explores whether participatory, locally rooted strategies can address the structural and relational drivers of violence more effectively than short-term interventions. An exploratory qualitative analysis showed strong alignment between the CDCs and principles of sustainable peacebuilding. However, a quantitative difference-in-differences analysis using ACLED data found no statistically significant reduction in electoral violence in regions with CDCs. While limited in scope and timeframe, the findings highlight the challenges of measuring long-term, transformative change using short-term violence indicators. The study contributes to scholarship on electoral violence prevention by underscoring the importance of local ownership, middle-range actors, and context-sensitive evaluation strategies in promoting peaceful democratic transitions.

## **1. Introduction**

Electoral violence has become a persistent threat to democratic consolidation worldwide.

Although not confined to authoritarian or fragile states, it is particularly acute in transitional and post-conflict societies where institutional trust is low, state capacity is limited, and historical grievances remain unresolved (Birch et al., 2020). In such settings, elections can represent both a vehicle for political inclusion and a flashpoint for renewed conflict.

To date, most efforts to prevent electoral violence have centered on three main types of interventions: electoral monitoring, institutional capacity-building, and attitudinal change among citizens (Birch & Muchlinski, 2018). While these initiatives have yielded some positive results, they are often short-term in scope and tied to the electoral calendar. As such, they tend to address the symptoms of violence—such as fraud or voter intimidation—without tackling the deeper structural and relational drivers that sustain it. There is thus a growing consensus around the need for more comprehensive, sustained, and locally grounded approaches to violence prevention (Matlosa, 2024).

This thesis responds to that need by drawing on the theory of conflict transformation to develop a more holistic and sustainable framework for electoral violence prevention. John Paul Lederach's (1997) conflict transformation paradigm goes beyond crisis management to focus on altering the underlying structures, relationships, and cultural narratives that enable to create a sustainable and self-regenerating peace. Despite its promise, there remains a lack of empirical research on how

such participatory, community-driven initiatives function in the specific context of electoral violence. This thesis seeks to address that gap.

The societal relevance of this inquiry is also considerable. Electoral violence not only threatens the credibility of elections but also erodes public trust in democratic institutions and undermines peacebuilding in transitional societies. In many post-conflict countries, the holding of elections is seen as a milestone on the path to democratization. However, when these elections are accompanied by violence, they can deepen societal divisions and stall democratic progress. Understanding whether long-term, participatory peacebuilding strategies can mitigate electoral violence has direct implications for domestic civil society actors, international organizations, and policymakers committed to supporting peaceful democratic transitions.

Côte d'Ivoire offers a compelling case study for such an investigation. Since the reintroduction of multiparty elections in 1990, the country has experienced recurring episodes of electoral violence. While elite-level rivalries have dominated much of the literature on electoral conflict in Côte d'Ivoire, more recent research has drawn attention to the role of subnational dynamics in fueling localized violence (van Baalen & Gbala, 2023). These underlying factors are often poorly addressed by centralized, state-led interventions or externally imposed reforms.

In light of these challenges, bottom-up, participatory strategies have gained traction in recent years. One such initiative is the Cadres de Collaboration (CDCs), launched in 2020 by the NGOs

Indigo Côte d'Ivoire and Interpeace. CDCs are locally embedded, citizen-led platforms aimed at preventing and managing conflict through inclusive civic engagement, sustained dialogue, and the rebuilding of trust across social and political divides (Indigo & Interpeace, 2023). This thesis seeks to fill the theoretical gap by evaluating whether the CDCs contributed to a reduction in electoral violence during the 2023 municipal and regional elections in Côte d'Ivoire, relative to the 2018 elections. The central research question is therefore as follows:

To what extent, if any, did the Cadres de Collaboration contribute to a reduction in electoral violence during the 2023 municipal and regional elections in Côte d'Ivoire compared to those held in 2018?

To answer this question, the study builds a theoretical framework rooted in conflict transformation theory and focuses on the role of middle-range actors in fostering sustainable peace. It then adopts an exploratory qualitative analysis to determine to what extent the CDCs align with Lederach's (1997) conflict transformation theory. Then, it employs a quantitative approach, using a Difference-in-Differences (DiD) research design, to compare the evolution of electoral violence across regions that implemented CDCs and those that did not. Electoral violence is measured using the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), and the analysis controls for several potential confounders.

The structure of this thesis is as follows. Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical framework, engaging with key academic debates on electoral violence, prevention strategies, and conflict transformation. Chapter 3 applies this framework to the case of Côte d'Ivoire, providing essential contextual background. Chapter 4 explains the methodological approach, detailing the qualitative and quantitative data sources and approaches. Chapter 5 presents and interprets the empirical findings. Finally, Chapter 6 offers concluding reflections, discussing the study's limitations and identifying directions for future research.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

### *2a. Electoral violence*

Elections are widely regarded as a cornerstone of democracy, enabling the peaceful transfer of power, promoting accountability, and facilitating dialogue between citizens and political leaders (Höglund, 2010). In post-conflict settings, elections carry additional weight, acting not only as mechanisms for democratic representation but also as tests of political actors' commitment to peace (Höglund, 2010). Although democracy is frequently seen as a long-term remedy for political violence, the process of democratization can itself provoke conflict, especially in fragile post-conflict settings where institutions are weak and socio-economic conditions remain precarious (Höglund, 2010). The Electoral Contention and Violence (ECAV) dataset reveals that over 50% of elections include at least three violent incidents, with around 30% involving lethal violence (Daxecker et al., 2019). This is especially true in the African context, where despite the formal adoption of electoral systems, many of these countries continue to experience recurrent violence (Fjelde & Höglund, 2016; Omotola, 2010). . Since 1990, between 50% and 60% of

elections in African states have involved some form of violence, with incidents most commonly occurring in the pre-election period (Bekoe & Burchard, 2021).

Given the growing body of scholarship on electoral violence, multiple, and at times conflicting, definitions have emerged (Bado et al., 2022). Nevertheless, most scholars agree that electoral violence involves the use of coercion during the electoral period, ranging from threats and intimidation to acts of physical harm (Birch & Muchlinski, 2020; Birch et al., 2020; Fjelde & Höglund, 2016; Fischer, 2002; Omotola, 2010; Höglund, 2010). Coercive acts can take various forms, including verbal intimidation, harassment, and blackmail, as well as physical violence such as assault, destruction of property, rioting or assassination (Fischer, 2002; Hoglund, 2010). While acts of physical violence can have direct effects by deterring candidates or suppressing voter turnout, non-physical forms of coercion, including threats and intimidation, also play a crucial, yet often underestimated role in shaping electoral environments (Höglund, 2010). Omotola (2010) goes further by highlighting the structural dimension of electoral violence, rooted in long-standing imbalances within the political system. This includes practices such as coercion by the state to compel voter registration or participation, unequal access to political opportunities for parties and candidates, and the politicization of security and electoral officials (Omotola, 2010). While analytically valuable, this structural form of violence is difficult to measure systematically and will, therefore, not be included in the working definition used in this thesis.

Scholars also debate whether electoral violence should be conceptualized as a subtype of political violence or as an extreme form of electoral fraud. From the first perspective, electoral violence is understood within the broader context of conflict and political instability, where tensions escalate around elections (Daxecker et al., 2019). This perspective emphasizes how the institutional framework of elections shapes both the opportunities and constraints for violent action, determining who resorts to violence, when it occurs, and who is targeted (Birch et al., 2020). From the second perspective, electoral violence is viewed as a coercive strategy used to manipulate electoral outcomes, alongside tactics such as ballot rigging, vote buying, and voter registration fraud (Fjelde & Höglund, 2016; Omotola, 2010). What distinguishes it from these other forms is its reliance on physical coercion and its immediate threat to human security (Birch et al., 2020). Many actors taking this second perspective see electoral violence as a strategy aimed at influencing the electoral process (Fjelde & Hoglund, 2016; Omotola, 2010). However, others argue that not all incidents are premeditated (Fischer, 2002). Some episodes arise spontaneously from the grassroots, triggered by contentious or disputed electoral events (Fischer, 2002).

Rather than treating these two perspectives as mutually exclusive, this thesis follows scholars who adopt a more integrative approach, recognizing that electoral violence can function both as a form of political violence and as an instrument of electoral manipulation (Birch & Muchilinski, 2020; Birch et al. 2020, Hoglund, 2010). To encompass these diverse forms and sources of electoral violence, this study adopts the definition provided by the European Commission and the United Nations Development Programme (2009), which defines electoral violence as actions or

threats involving force or physical violence that are intended to influence the electoral process or that occur in the context of electoral competition.

Most scholars agree that electoral violence typically targets three main areas: individuals involved in the electoral process (e.g. voters, candidates, election officials, and media personnel); electoral information (e.g. registration data, vote counts, ballots, and campaign materials); and electoral infrastructure (e.g. polling and counting stations) (Birch & Muchlinski, 2020).

However, some scholars also include a fourth category: electoral activities, such as campaign events and the movement of individuals to polling stations (Höglund, 2010; Omotola, 2010).

This broader category will also be incorporated into the scope of this study.

Scholarship agrees that electoral violence can occur at any stage of the electoral cycle, during the pre-election campaign, on the election day(s) or through post-election disputes (Bekoe & Burchard, 2021; Birch & Muchilinski, 2020; Birch at al., 2020; Fischer, 2002; Fjelde & Hoglund, 2016; Höglund, 2010; Omotola, 2010). In the vast majority of cases, most violence takes place before elections (Bekoe & Burchard, 2021). During this pre-election period, political parties often intimidate rival supporters to discourage their political participation, force them to relocate, or sway their voting preferences (Bekoe & Burchard, 2021). Violence on election day can involve the theft of ballot papers or boxes, physical attacks on opposition representatives or party members, as well as harassment or intimidation carried out by security forces (Omotola, 2010). After an election, electoral violence may erupt in the form of protests against alleged or perceived electoral fraud (Omotola, 2010). In response, the state may deploy security forces,

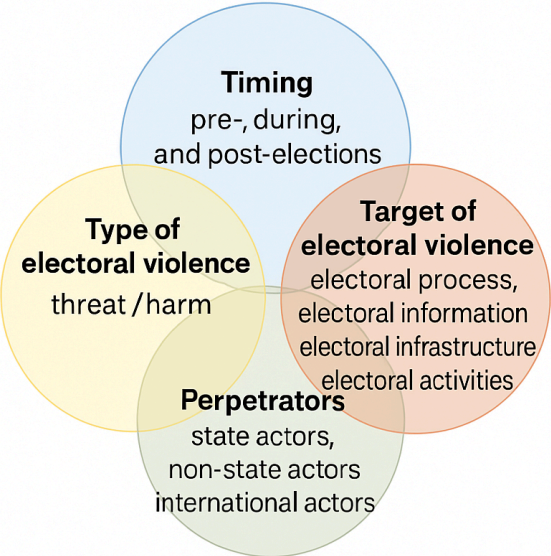
which can escalate tensions and intensify the violence (Omotola, 2010). Although less common, violence after elections tends to be more lethal (Bekoe & Burchard, 2021).

Most scholars also agree that electoral violence can originate from state and nonstate actors (Birch et al., 2020; Daxecker et al., 2019; Höglund, 2010). State actors include for example the government, the army and the police (Höglund, 2010). Nonstate actors encompass opposition political parties, rebel or guerrilla groups, militias and paramilitary organizations and criminal gangs (Birch & Muchlinski, 2020; Birch et al., 2020; Höglund, 2010). It can also involve international actors such as intergovernmental and transnational organizations (Birch & Muchlinski, 2020). Because electoral violence poses serious reputational risks for perpetrators, especially under international scrutiny, political parties tend to conceal their involvement, often outsourcing violence to militia groups, criminal gangs, or their youth wings (Birch et al., 2020). These third-party actors may pursue their own interests, creating a complex interplay of motives where electoral objectives intersect with personal vendettas and local grievances (Birch et al., 2020). Consequently, electoral violence is highly localized and shaped by both national strategies and subnational dynamics (Birch et al., 2020).

To capture the multifaceted nature of electoral violence, this study adopts a layered framework that brings together four key dimensions. First, the type of violence refers to whether the act involves a threat or physical harm. Second, the target of violence can vary and includes the electoral process itself, electoral information, electoral infrastructure, and electoral activities. Third, timing plays a crucial role, as violence may occur in the pre-election, election-day, or

post-election periods. Finally, the perpetrators may include state actors, non-state actors, or international actors. These four dimensions are represented in figure 1, where each circle corresponds to one dimension and their intersections highlight how different forms of electoral violence can overlap, depending on the type, timing, target, and actor involved.

Figure 1. The Dimensions of Electoral Violence



*2b. Electoral Violence Prevention*

Electoral violence prevention (EVP) has only recently emerged as a distinct focus within international electoral assistance (Birch & Muchlinski, 2018), and studies assessing its effectiveness remain limited. EVP refers to a range of interventions aimed specifically at preventing or reducing violence linked to electoral processes (Birch & Muchlinski, 2018). These

interventions are implemented by a diverse set of actors—domestic, international, and transnational—and target a broad spectrum of stakeholders (Birch & Muchlinski, 2018).

Historically treated as a security issue, EVP has evolved from a narrow focus on policing toward more comprehensive approaches addressing the political and social dynamics behind the use of violence during elections (Birch & Muchlinski, 2018).

Contemporary strategies generally fall into three categories: election monitoring and observation, technical capacity-building, and attitude-transformation (Bekoe & Burchard, 2021). Monitoring aims to deter misconduct and violence through external scrutiny (Bekoe & Burchard, 2021).

However, the results are mixed. While international observers often reduce government-sponsored violence, they sometimes provoke opposition-led unrest, particularly in highly fraudulent elections (Smidt, 2016). Moreover, observation alone is unlikely to deter actors who intentionally use violence to intimidate opponents or manipulate outcomes (Bekoe & Burchard, 2021).

Capacity-building includes technical assistance to electoral commissions, security forces, civil society, and voters (Bekoe & Burchard, 2021; Birch & Muchlinski, 2018). These efforts assume that electoral disputes often arise from logistical failures or perceived institutional bias (Birch & Muchlinski, 2018). Enhancing the capabilities and impartiality of electoral institutions, especially EMBs and security agencies, is therefore considered key (Birch & Muchlinski, 2018). Evidence suggests that well-designed technical interventions can reduce electoral violence, particularly when non-state actors are involved (Birch & Muchlinski, 2018). For example, Opitz

et al. (2013) found that EMBs which adopted inclusive, consultative approaches with other electoral stakeholders significantly reduced the incidence of post-electoral violence in Zanzibar, Ethiopia and Malawi.

Nonetheless, critics argue that technical solutions alone cannot address the deeper political and structural causes of violence (Birch et al., 2020). This has led to increasing interest in "attitude-transformation" approaches, also referred to as political or transformational strategies, that aim to shift norms, foster trust, and delegitimize violence as a political tool (Birch & Muchlinski, 2018). These include peace messaging, codes of conduct, political dialogue, mediation, and youth programming. For example, peace messaging aims to shift perceptions about the usefulness and legitimacy of violence as a strategy during elections. Youth programs, instead, offer alternative opportunities for young people, who are often recruited as agents of violence. Birch and Muchlinski (2018) noted that attitude-transformation efforts were effective primarily against state-led violence. However, evidence remains mixed and highly context-dependent (Claes & Borzyskowski, 2018; Birch & Muchlinski, 2018). For example, during the 2017 general elections, youth programming and civic education reduced violence in Liberia but had no observable impact in Kenya (Claes & Borzyskowski, 2018).

Despite growing interest in EVP, several limitations persist. First, most programs adopt a top-down, macro-level perspective that emphasizes national institutions and formal processes, often neglecting the local-level dynamics that are crucial in shaping conflict trajectories (Baú, 2016). Many studies rely on aggregated national data, overlooking how violence unfolds and is

managed within specific communities. Second, most interventions are short-term, narrowly focused on electoral events, and fail to address long-term drivers of violence, such as marginalization, historical grievances, and institutional mistrust (Orij, 2013; Birch et al., 2020). However, electoral violence should not be viewed solely as a security issue, but as a symptom of deeper structural problems such as inequality, political exclusion, and institutional weakness (Birch et al., 2020). Addressing these root causes requires a shift from reactive crisis management to proactive conflict transformation grounded in inclusive peacebuilding and democratic resilience (Orij, 2013). This calls for a holistic understanding of elections, not just as isolated events, but as part of broader efforts to build just, equitable, and sustainable political, social, and economic systems (Mbugua, 2006). Reducing electoral violence demands moving beyond short-term interventions and investing in long-term reforms that tackle systemic inequalities and exclusion (Orij, 2013). Effective prevention strategies must therefore combine immediate responses with sustained, structural change (Birch et al., 2020).

### *2c. Conflict Transformation and Sustainable Peacebuilding in Preventing Electoral Violence*

A promising framework for such efforts is John Paul Lederach's (1997) conflict transformation theory. John Paul Lederach's (1997) theory of conflict transformation presents a comprehensive and deeply relational approach to building sustainable peace. At its core, conflict transformation is about shifting relationships from adversarial to peaceful, not merely by resolving surface-level disputes, but by addressing the underlying patterns, institutions, and cultural norms that sustain conflict (Lederach, 1997). Lederach (1997) defines conflict transformation across four interconnected dimensions: personal, relational, structural, and cultural. The personal dimension

focuses on emotional and spiritual healing of individuals involved in or affected by conflict (Lederach, 1997). The relational dimension emphasizes rebuilding trust and improving communication and interdependence between groups (Lederach, 1997). The structural dimension addresses the root causes of conflict by reforming institutions and ensuring access to basic human needs (Lederach, 1997). Finally, the cultural dimension reshapes group norms, values, and narratives to foster peaceful responses to conflict (Lederach, 1997).

This multidimensional approach diverges significantly from traditional notions of conflict prevention or mitigation (Lederach, 1997). While conflict prevention aims to avert the outbreak of violence and mitigation seeks to reduce its intensity, conflict transformation envisions a holistic and long-term shift in how conflict is understood and addressed (Lederach, 1997). Lederach's (1997) emphasis is not simply on stopping violence, but on nurturing processes that transform the very fabric of society, enabling sustainable peacebuilding, which refers to the creation of a self-regenerating process of peace and development (Lederach, 1997). Unlike "negative peace," which denotes only the absence of violence, or even "positive peace," which implies the presence of justice and equity, sustainable peacebuilding focuses on the creation of a self-regenerating process through which those outcomes are generated and maintained over time (Fischer & Galtung, 2013; Lederach, 1997).

Lederach's (1997) framework for sustainable peacebuilding is grounded in five core components: relationship, structure, process, resources, and coordination. Relationships are at the heart of the reconciliation principles, necessary for any conflict transformation (Lederach, 1997).

Reconciliation is not merely about forgiving or forgetting; it is a space for encounters where parties engage (Lederach, 1997). This relational encounter fosters mutual recognition, empathy, and a shared vision for the future(Lederach, 1997). Lederach sees relationships as both the source and solution to conflict, and thus, rebuilding them is essential for transforming conflict into constructive social change (Lederach, 1997).

Structure refers to the multiple levels at which peacebuilding must take place (Lederach, 1997). Lederach (1997) maps the structural complexity of conflict onto four concentric levels: issue, relational/subsystem, system, and global. The issue level involves specific, visible disputes; the relational level focuses on the social contexts where these disputes occur; the system level addresses broader socio-economic and political structures; and the global level captures the influence of international systems (Lederach, 1997). Structural transformation requires a simultaneous focus on all these levels to ensure both immediate grievances and systemic injustices are addressed (Lederach, 1997).

The process component identifies conflict as a dynamic evolution, moving from latent injustice to confrontation, negotiation, and ultimately transformed relationships (Lederach, 1997). Each stage demands different peacebuilding interventions, such as awareness-raising, mediation, or long-term reconciliation Lederach, 1997). Lederach (1997) critiques short-term, crisis-driven responses that often ignore this trajectory and argues for a nested time approach that includes short-term relief, mid-term capacity building, and long-term visioning. These processes must be

interconnected to support a comprehensive and lasting transformation of conflict (Lederach, 1997).

Lederach (1997) expands the notion of resources beyond financial means to include human, social, and cultural assets. Socioeconomic inputs such as funding must be allocated strategically to avoid reinforcing inequalities (Lederach, 1997). Sociocultural resources, including local leadership and indigenous traditions, are invaluable in building peace from within (Lederach, 1997). Finally, coordination involves creating mechanisms that connect various peacebuilding efforts without resorting to centralized control (Lederach, 1997). Lederach advocates for developing peace inventories, improving communication between different levels of actors, and organizing strategic donor conferences and expert groups to support long-term efforts (Lederach, 1997).

According to Lederach (1997), three types of actors can engage in conflict transformation: top-level elites (political, military, diplomatic), middle-range leaders (NGOs, religious leaders, academics), and grassroots actors (local communities, youth, and women). While all levels are vital, Lederach (1997) places particular emphasis on middle-range actors. These individuals often possess enough influence to connect with elites while remaining grounded in community realities (Lederach, 1997). They play a crucial role in designing peacebuilding initiatives, mediating conflict, and fostering dialogue (Lederach, 1997). Their strategic position allows them to bridge formal institutions with informal community networks, making them indispensable to the implementation of transformational peace processes (Lederach, 1997).

Middle-range actors are often embedded within civil society, a key force in Lederach's (1997) peacebuilding vision (Lederach, 1997). Civil society encompasses organizations that operate independently of the state and market, such as NGOs, faith-based groups, and grassroots movements (Hermoso & Luca, 2006). Civil society plays seven critical roles in conflict transformation: protection, monitoring, advocacy, socialization, cohesion, facilitation, and service delivery (Barnes, 2009).

### **3. Contextualization**

#### *3a. Electoral violence in Cote D'Ivoire*

Côte d'Ivoire is often classified as a competitive authoritarian regime in which democratic institutions exist in form but are undermined in practice by authoritarian tactics (van Baalen, 2024; Howard & Roessler, 2006). Since the introduction of multiparty politics in 1990, every presidential election has been marked by conflict (van Baalen, 2024). Electoral violence is a recurrent feature, and the opposition is systematically disadvantaged due to the incumbent's control over electoral institutions and processes (van Baalen, 2024). While elite power struggles are central, electoral violence in Côte d'Ivoire is also rooted in local dynamics, including land disputes, ethnic divisions, and uneven development (van Baalen & Gbala, 2023). Long-standing political exclusion—especially of northern and Muslim communities—has deepened social fractures. Over time, electoral violence has evolved from elite-driven repression to more

decentralized, intercommunal clashes involving civilians, youth groups, party militias, and security forces (Smidt, 2020).

The flawed elections of 1995 and 2000, marked notably by the exclusion of many political candidates, played a significant role in fueling the 2002 rebellion, as groups such as the Forces Nouvelles demanded more inclusive electoral processes and an end to marginalization (Piccolino, 2016). Amidst these persistent uncertainties, the 2010 elections ultimately triggered a civil war. When incumbent Gbagbo refused to accept the election results in favor of Ouattara, despite international recognition of Ouattara's victory, the nation descended into violent conflict. The post-election crisis left around 3,000 people dead and displaced over 700,000—making it the deadliest election-related violence in sub-Saharan Africa since 1990 (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2011; Bekoe, 2018). The violence ranged from urban repression by pro-Gbagbo forces to rural clashes involving ethnically charged narratives and long-standing land disputes (Smidt, 2020; Straus, 2011). Though the 2015 election was less violent, mistrust remained high, particularly toward the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), which was viewed as partial (Piccolino, 2016). The 2020 elections reignited tensions when President Ouattara ran for a controversial third term, sparking opposition boycotts and violent protests. At least 600 people were injured, and 8,000 were displaced (Banégas & Popineau, 2021; UNHRC, 2020).

### *3b. Electoral Violence Prevention in Cote D'Ivoire*

Over the years, national and international actors have sought to prevent electoral violence in Côte d'Ivoire. Internationally, ECOWAS, the African Union (AU), and the United Nations have played central roles. ECOWAS intervened during the 2002 rebellion with peace negotiations and the ECOFORCE mission, while the AU provided diplomatic support (Daniel & Enweremadu, 2020). The UN launched MINUCI in 2003, followed by the more robust UNOCI in 2004, tasked with civilian protection, disarmament, and election monitoring (Bekoe, 2018).

Despite these efforts, international interventions fell short of achieving lasting electoral peace. The 2010–2011 crisis erupted even after UNOCI certified the election results, highlighting the failure to address crucial preconditions such as disarmament, institutional impartiality, and inclusive voter registration (Bekoe, 2018). ECOWAS, though a vital mediator, lacked the financial and logistical capacity to fully implement peace agreements, often deferring to the more resource-rich UN and French military presence (Daniel & Enweremadu, 2020). In the absence of cohesive coordination among these actors, prevention efforts were reactive rather than strategic, allowing deeper grievances to fester (Ogunnubi, 2024).

UNOCI also experimented with more localized prevention strategies. From 2010 to 2016, it organized community-based “election-education” events combining peace messaging with civic education, theatre, and sports (Smidt, 2020). Where UNOCI was perceived as impartial, these initiatives significantly reduced violent protests (Smidt, 2020). Participants reported lower fear of political violence and a greater willingness to engage peacefully in politics (Smidt, 2020).

However, in areas where peacekeepers were viewed as biased—especially opposition strongholds—these efforts had little impact (Smidt, 2020).

### *3c. Conflict Transformation and Sustainable Peacebuilding in Preventing Electoral Violence in Cote D'Ivoire*

Aware of the limitations of short-term, election-cycle peace initiatives, Interpeace and Indigo Côte d'Ivoire have since 2020 pursued a more sustainable approach to preventing electoral violence (Indigo Côte d'Ivoire & Interpeace, 2023). Interpeace, active in Côte d'Ivoire since 2012, is an international peacebuilding organization that collaborates with Indigo Côte d'Ivoire, a local NGO focused on dialogue and policy reform to strengthen social cohesion (Interpeace, n.d.; Indigo Côte d'Ivoire, n.d.).

Their joint initiative, the Cadres de Collaboration (CDC), consists of citizen-led structures that promote participatory governance and long-term conflict prevention (Indigo Côte d'Ivoire & Interpeace, 2023). They aim to provide an inclusive, locally rooted alternative to traditional peace committees or externally imposed mechanisms (Indigo Côte d'Ivoire & Interpeace, 2023). Rather than reacting to crises, CDCs serve as permanent platforms for dialogue, grounded in shared understanding of local conflict drivers (Indigo Côte d'Ivoire & Interpeace, 2023).

Activities include preventive mediation, dialogue, and community-based peacebuilding. CDC members map grievances, engage conflicting groups, and build trust between communities and authorities (Indigo Côte d'Ivoire & Interpeace, 2023). The approach emphasizes peer learning, mentoring, and skill development (Indigo Côte d'Ivoire & Interpeace, 2023). They address tensions before, during, and after elections, and work to create trust between communities and authorities (Indigo Côte d'Ivoire & Interpeace, 2023). CDCs are formed inclusively, involving different sectors of society such as the youth, women, traditional leaders, local officials, and at times, former perpetrators (Indigo Côte d'Ivoire & Interpeace, 2023). Their sustainability stems from voluntary civic participation, not financial incentives, and is supported through long-term accompaniment from the two NGOs (Indigo Côte d'Ivoire & Interpeace, 2023). This leads to the following hypothesis:

H1: The localities where at least one CDC was implemented have experienced electoral violence in the 2023 municipal and regional elections when compared to those held in 2018.

## **4. Methodology**

### *4.1 Case Selection*

Côte d'Ivoire was selected as the case study for this research due to its recurring experiences with electoral violence and its recent adoption of innovative prevention strategies. Notably, the Cadres de Collaboration (CDCs) stand out as a long-term, locally anchored initiative led by mid-level actors. Launched in 2020, the CDCs remain active and have been established in eight communes:

Abobo, Bangolo, Béoumi, Bongouanou, Bouna, Divo, Yamoussoukro, and Yopougon. These communes fall within five regions, namely Abidjan, Guémon, Gbêkê, Moronou, Bounkani, Yamoussoukro, and Lôh-Djiboua. Although CDCs are officially implemented at the commune level, their activities often extend beyond local boundaries, promoting peacebuilding initiatives throughout neighboring localities in the same region. As a result, this study adopts the region as the unit of analysis to more accurately reflect the geographic and political reach of CDC implementation and its intended influence.

Because the CDCs were introduced in 2020 and the next presidential elections are scheduled for October 2025, comparing two presidential elections was not feasible. Given the long-term nature of the CDC approach, it is more appropriate to focus on elections that occurred at least a few years after implementation. Therefore, this study analyzes the municipal and regional elections held on 13 October 2018 and 2 September 2023. In both instances, citizens voted for regional councils, municipal councils, and district-level assemblies. While these sub-national elections may feature fewer incidents of electoral violence than presidential contests, they offer a valuable lens through which to examine local and regional dynamics. This is particularly relevant when evaluating community-based peacebuilding initiatives like the CDCs, which are designed to operate within and respond to localized patterns of conflict.

#### *4.2 Research Design*

This study employs a primarily quantitative research design, complemented by qualitative insights. The first phase consists of a preliminary qualitative assessment based on three semi-structured interviews and a review of relevant reports to analyse to what extent the CDCs implemented a conflict transformation approach aimed at sustainable peacebuilding as delineated by Lederach (1997). The second phase adopts a difference-in-differences (DiD) model to evaluate whether regions with a CDC experienced a statistically significant reduction in electoral violence during the 2023 municipal and regional elections, compared to a 2018 baseline. This method estimates causal effects by comparing changes in violence over time between treated and untreated regions, while accounting for broader temporal and national trends.

#### *4.3 Qualitative data*

The qualitative phase draws on three primary sources of data. First, a report produced by Indigo Côte d'Ivoire and Interpeace (2023) provides insights into the CDC initiative, including its objectives, strategic rationale, and practical examples of implementation. Secondly, each CDC developed an internal action plan detailing the specific activities conducted in its locality, along with intended outcomes, success indicators, and implementation timelines. These documents are confidential and were shared under the condition that they not be publicly disclosed. As a result, they cannot be directly referenced in this study. Third, three semi-structured interviews were conducted.

Semi-structured interviews are a qualitative research method that combines predefined questions with the flexibility to explore emerging topics in greater depth. Because the research aims to capture participants' experiences, perceptions, and insights across complex and context-specific dimensions, such as relational dynamics, institutional change, and cultural shifts, semi-structured interviews offer the depth and adaptability needed to explore these nuances. They allow for both consistency across interviews and responsiveness to the unique expertise and role of each respondent.

The sampling method employed is snowball sampling, a non-probability technique commonly used in qualitative studies to identify participants with specific expertise or involvement in a targeted field. The process began with one expert recommended by a colleague, who then referred two additional individuals meeting the study's criteria. In total, three professionals working for Interpeace were interviewed: a Programme Officer, a Research Assistant, and a National Representative, all actively engaged in the implementation of the Cadres de Collaboration (CDCs) in Côte d'Ivoire. Their ages ranged between 30 and 50 years old. While broader participation would have strengthened the data, only three interviews were conducted due to time constraints and the limited availability of Interpeace staff during the research period. The three interviews were conducted on June 4, 2025 between 10 and 15. They lasted approximately 1 hour each.

#### *4.4 Initial Qualitative Explorative Analysis*

The data gathered from the confidential reports and interviews was used to conduct a qualitative assessment of the extent to which the Cadres de Collaboration (CDCs) align with the principles of conflict transformation and sustainable peacebuilding. This analysis was structured by crafting a table based on John Paul Lederach's conceptual framework, which outlines four key dimensions of conflict transformation—personal, relational, structural, and cultural—and five core components of peacebuilding: relationship and reconciliation, structure, process, resources, and coordination.

Each item in table 1 corresponds to one of these dimensions or components and was assessed through revision of reports and questions conducted during the interviews. For each item, the table includes (1) the name of the dimension or principle, (2) brief explanation of its meaning in the context of peacebuilding, (3) an evaluation question used to investigate it, (4) the extent to which it was applied in each CDC, and (5) a quote from one of the three interviews to support interpretation.

Table 1. Evaluation of the CDC through Lederach's Conflict Transformation Theory

Dimension/Principle	Meaning	Evaluation Question	Implementation in CDCs	Quote from Interview
Conflict Transformation Dimension - Personal	Emotional and spiritual healing of individuals affected by conflict	Did the CDCs promote emotional healing or personal empowerment among participants?	Partially, in all CDCs, through dialogue forums aimed exchange between communities	"The young people told us they felt heard and that they had a role to play, which was new for them"
Conflict Transformation Dimension - Relational	Improving trust, communication, and interdependence among conflicting parties	Did the CDCs help build trust and improve communication between different community actors?	Yes, in all CDCs, through dialogue initiatives and mediation efforts aimed at fostering exchange between communities	"We saw leaders who previously wouldn't speak to each other now organizing meetings together for the youth"
Conflict Transformation Dimension - Cultural	Changing societal norms and narratives that perpetuate conflict	Did the CDCs challenge harmful narratives or promote peaceful values and community norms?	Partially, in all CDCs, by involving traditional leaders and drawing on local customs to promote peace among different communities	"We draw on local customs, which lends legitimacy to the discussions. In Bangolo, this approach helped prevent clashes for a significant period, though tensions eventually resurfaced due to new issues"
Conflict Transformation Dimension - Structural	Reforming institutions to meet basic human needs and reduce injustice	Did the CDCs lead to changes in local governance or institutional practices to address community needs?	Yes, in all CDCs, through the inclusion of actors from various sectors of society (e.g. traditional leaders, youth, and local government officials)	"We try to include actors from different communities and various roles in local governance, which also helps bring about change in more traditional meeting settings."
Peacebuilding Principle - Relationship	Transforming relationships and	To what extent did the CDCs promote	Partially, in all CDCs, through the organization of meetings	"After a conflict occurs, a meeting is held with those

	building mutual understanding through truth, justice, and shared future visions	reconciliation and address past grievances among conflicting parties?	held after conflicts had occurred, involving the affected communities	involved. This often plays a key role in restoring relationships. [...] However, the people involved sometimes refuse to participate"
Peacebuilding Principle - Structure	Creating systems and institutions that support inclusion, justice, and participation	Have the CDCs contributed to building inclusive structures or mechanisms for conflict resolution?	Yes, in all CDCs, different resolution mechanisms (eg. dialogue forums, mediation efforts and town meetings) are held and integrate different sectors of society	"Before, groups belonging to different religious groups in Abobo were not communicating. Now, they participate in monthly meetings together."
Peacebuilding Principle - Process	Developing peacebuilding as a dynamic, inclusive, and long-term engagement	Were the CDCs designed as an ongoing, inclusive, and participatory initiative rather than a one-off intervention?	Partially, across all CDCs. While new initiatives are launched continuously, they are not always continued	"Some activities are carried out consistently, while others are implemented on an ad hoc basis and, therefore, not sustained over time."
Peacebuilding Principle - Resources	Using local knowledge, people, and financial/material support to sustain peace efforts	Did the CDCs mobilize local capacities, knowledge, and support from within the community?	Yes, in all CDCs, diverse sectors of society are included. Financial input is kept to a minimum, and transfer skills to local actors.	"We provide some materials, but the real resource are the people who contribute to these initiatives voluntarily"
Peacebuilding Principle - Coordination	Connecting efforts across levels and actors to increase impact and coherence	Were the CDCs linked with other initiatives or actors to enhance coordination and overall peacebuilding impact?	Partially, across all CDCs. There is coordination between with societal actors, but not with other international stakeholders.	"We often work with Indigo, but also with local authorities, especially during the election period."

This initial qualitative evaluation reveals that the Cadres de Collaboration (CDCs) align closely with the core principles of John Paul Lederach's conflict transformation theory and sustainable peacebuilding model. CDCs adhere to all relevant dimensions of Lederach Conflict Transformation theory at least partially. Also, there does not seem to be variations across different CDCs. The implementation of the CDCs, led by middle-range actors demonstrates a multidimensional approach to addressing electoral violence. These actors bridge top-level figures such as traditional and political leaders with grassroots stakeholders including youth and women, fostering broad societal participation and horizontal coordination. Across all CDCs, this inclusive structure ensures diverse voices are heard and considered in decision-making processes.

At the heart of Lederach's theory lies the restoration and transformation of relationships. The CDCs clearly embody this principle through regular dialogue forums and mediation efforts that aim to rebuild trust between historically opposed communities. Testimonies indicate that intercommunal tensions have been reduced, and traditional barriers between groups have softened. Elders, youth, and women all participate in these initiatives, suggesting an expanded space for mutual recognition and reconciliation. While not all conflicts are resolved permanently, and clashes may reoccur, the sustained engagement has fostered increased understanding and emotional healing within and across communities. Lederach's structural lens emphasizes addressing the root causes of conflict across multiple levels. The CDCs adopt an inclusive structure that integrates top-local actors like governance officials, religious and traditional leaders, with grassroot actors such as the youth and women.

The CDCs reflect a dynamic and long-term engagement strategy, consistent with Lederach's call for interconnected interventions across short-, mid-, and long-term timeframes. While some initiatives are implemented regularly, others occur on an ad hoc basis in response to emerging conflicts. This flexibility enables responsiveness to community needs but also presents challenges for consistent progress. The goal, however, remains clear: to establish a self-sustaining peace infrastructure that communities continue to maintain after external actors withdraw.

The CDC model expands the concept of resources beyond financial aid to include local knowledge, skills, and social capital. Community members involved in implementing CDC activities do so voluntarily, highlighting the program's emphasis on local ownership. Hence, financial resources are kept minimal, with the strategic goal of transferring necessary skills to local actors. This participatory and resource-efficient model aligns with Lederach's emphasis on leveraging endogenous assets for long-term sustainability. Initiatives are frequently adapted based on the needs and feedback of participants, reflecting a participatory, bottom-up approach.

Coordination is a foundational aspect of effective peacebuilding. In the CDCs, coordination occurs between Indigo Côte d'Ivoire and Interpeace, as well as with diverse societal actors at the local level. However, collaboration with other international stakeholders (e.g., UN agencies) is currently lacking. This internal coherence nonetheless supports inclusive implementation and

may offer a foundation for future external partnerships. The emphasis remains on community-driven coordination that reflects Lederach's vision of decentralized and interconnected peacebuilding.

This qualitative assessment suggests that the CDCs meaningfully reflect Lederach's conflict transformation and sustainable peacebuilding frameworks. They demonstrate a commitment to inclusive structures, transformative processes, and participatory approaches rooted in local realities. The CDCs have shown promising results in fostering reconciliation and shifting social dynamics, particularly at the structural and relational levels. While not all initiatives are continuously sustained, and conflicts may resurface, the long-term vision and local ownership embedded in the CDCs suggest potential for durable impact. This preliminary analysis sets the stage for the forthcoming quantitative evaluation, which will assess whether these qualitative gains translate into measurable reductions in electoral violence.

#### *4.5 Quantitative Data and Variables*

##### Independent Variable

The independent variable is a binary indicator for treatment status: regions where a CDC was implemented before the 2023 elections are coded as treated. The other regions are treated as the control group. In total, five regions were coded as treated, namely Guémon, Gbèkè, Moronou, Bounkani, and Lôh-Djiboua. The other 26 regions were treated as the control group.

## Dependent Variable

The dependent variable is electoral violence, operationalized as the number of coercive events related to elections. This data is obtained through the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) in each region during the municipal and regional elections in 2018 and 2023.

This study uses data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (n.d.), which provides detailed, disaggregated information on political violence and protest events. The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (n.d.) draws from diverse sources, including local and international media, NGOs, and new media, and mitigates bias through source triangulation and a focus on local reporting. While other datasets like ECAV, CREV, and SCAV (Birch & Muchlinski, 2020) also track electoral violence, ACLED is the only one that records data through 2023.

ACLED data was re-coded manually to ensure consistency and accuracy. In line with previous studies on electoral violence, pre-electoral violence was analysed capturing six months before the elections and immediate post-electoral violence by looking at the three months after the voting day. Accordingly, for the 2018 municipal and regional elections (held on October 13), the study period spans from April 11, 2018 to January 14, 2019. For the 2023 elections (held on September 2), the period extends from March 1 to December 3, 2023. Manual coding involved identifying (a) incidents classified as violent and (b) those directly related to the electoral process. This enabled the compilation of a regional list of coercive events for each election cycle. For the former, this is important because ACLED also includes peaceful protests. For the latter,

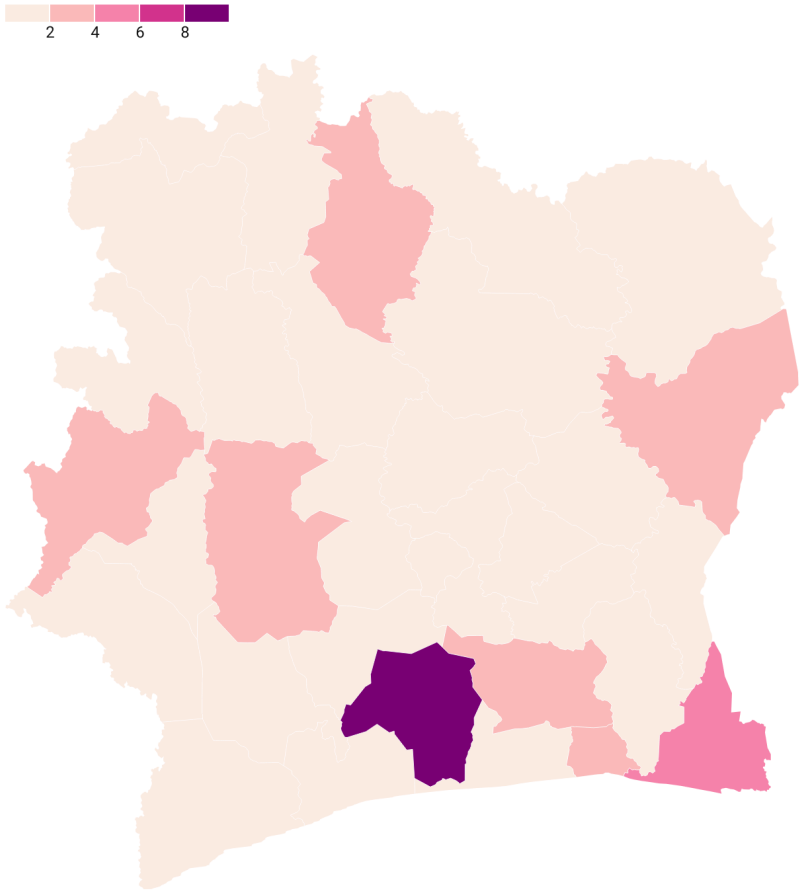
this was relatively easy because ACLED provides annotation for each event and noted down when the incidents were related to the electoral process. After this process, these two maps show the amount of electoral violence in the 2018 and 2023 elections.

#### *4.6 Descriptive Analysis*

After coding the violent incidents that occurred during the 2018 and 2023 municipal and regional elections, we turn to a descriptive analysis of the data. Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of electoral violence in 2018. That year, eight regions experienced election-related violence. Abidjan, Poro, Gonougo, Tonkpi, Haut-Sassandra, and Agnéby-Tiassa each recorded two violent incidents. Sud-Comoé experienced four, while Lôh-Djiboua registered the highest number with ten violent events.

Figure 2. Electoral Violence in 2018

### Violent Incidents in the 2018 Municipal and Regional Elections



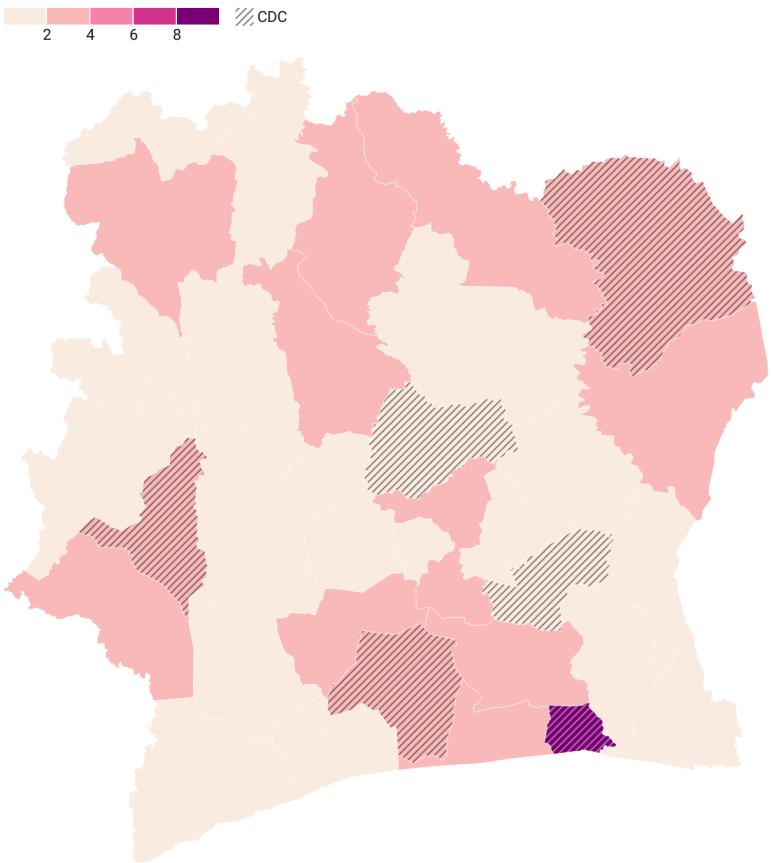
Created with Datawrapper

Figure 3 displays the distribution for the 2023 elections, revealing a notable increase in the spread of electoral violence, now affecting 15 regions. Of particular interest are the striped regions—those where a Cadre de Collaboration (CDC) was implemented. Among these, Moronou and Gbêkê remained peaceful in both electoral cycles. Bounkani, Guémon, and Lôh-Djiboua each recorded two violent incidents in 2023. Notably, violence in Lôh-Djiboua declined significantly from 10 to 2 incidents. Conversely, Abidjan saw an increase from 2 to 8 incidents, and both Bounkani and Guémon experienced new outbreaks of violence, rising from 0

to 2 events. Overall, this preliminary descriptive analysis does not reveal a consistent pattern of violence reduction in regions where a CDC was implemented.

Figure 3. Electoral Violence in 2023

**Violent Incidents in the 2023 Municipal and Eegional Elections**



Created with Datawrapper

*4.7 Quantitative Model*

This study employs a Difference-in-Differences (DiD) research design to estimate the causal impact of the Cadres de Collaboration (CDCs) on electoral violence. The DiD approach compares the change in electoral violence between two time points—2018, before the implementation of CDCs, and 2023, after their implementation—across two groups: regions that received the CDC intervention (treatment group) and regions that did not (control group). The core logic of the DiD method is that if both groups would have followed similar trends in the absence of treatment, then any divergence in outcomes after treatment can be attributed to the intervention itself.

The statistical models are estimated using a Generalized Linear Model (GLM) with a Negative Binomial distribution and a log link function, a specification particularly well-suited for overdispersed count data. A Negative Binomial regression is employed because the dependent variable in this analysis, the number of electoral violence incidents per region, is a non-negative integer variable and it exhibits overdispersion, where the variance exceeds the mean. Indeed, the dependent variable had a mean of 0.42 and a variance of 0.66, producing a dispersion ratio of approximately 1.57.

Descriptive statistics and independent samples t-tests were conducted to examine the balance between treatment and control groups on these covariates. The initial diagnostics revealed significant differences between the groups, particularly in population size and historical levels of violence. These imbalances raised concerns about the comparability of groups and, by extension, the credibility of the parallel trends assumption. To investigate further, standardized z-scores

were calculated for each variable to detect potential outliers. Any region with a z-score below -3 or above +3 was flagged for further scrutiny. This analysis identified the region of Abidjan as a high-leverage outlier, displaying extremely high values for both population and historical electoral violence. Given its disproportionate influence on the distribution of key covariates and the risk of introducing bias, Abidjan was excluded from the main analysis. After removing Abidjan, the same set of descriptive and inferential tests was repeated. The revised analysis showed no statistically significant differences between treated and control regions across any of the included covariates.

#### *4.8 Parallel Trends Assumption*

One of the main assumptions of the DiD model is the parallel trends assumption, which holds that, in the absence of the CDCs, electoral violence in treated and control regions would have evolved similarly over time. Because this assumption cannot be tested directly, it is crucial to examine whether the treated and control regions are comparable before treatment. If they are similar on important covariates that could affect electoral violence, then it becomes more plausible that any difference in post-treatment trends is due to the CDCs rather than confounding factors.

To assess the plausibility of this assumption, the study incorporates several covariates that are theoretically relevant to the occurrence of electoral violence. First, the population size of each region was included, as recorded in publicly available data on Wikipedia. The rationale for this

variable lies in the assumption that larger populations provide more opportunities for mobilization and may result in a higher number of reported violent incidents. Second, voter turnout during the 2013 municipal and regional elections was included, using figures reported by the local news outlet Abidjan.net. Turnout rates serve as a proxy for political engagement and are often correlated with the intensity of political competition, which in turn affects the likelihood of violence. Third, the level of historical electoral violence was operationalized as the sum of all violent incidents related to elections in the 2013 municipal and regional elections and the 2016 presidential election. This variable was constructed by manually re-coding and aggregating violent events related to these elections from the ACLED dataset and serves as an indicator of each region's long-term susceptibility to electoral violence.

## **5. Quantitative Results**

The hypothesis proposed that regions where the Cadres de Collaboration (CDCs) were implemented would experience a reduction in electoral violence in the 2023 municipal and regional elections, compared to those held in 2018. Hypothesis 1 is not supported by the data, as can be seen in table 2.

The difference-in-differences (DiD) analysis does not indicate a statistically significant effect of the Cadres de Collaboration (CDCs) on reducing electoral violence at the regional level during the 2023 municipal and regional elections. The interaction term (Time = 1 \* Treated = 1) yielded a coefficient of -0.646 (SE = 1.001, p = 0.519), suggesting that the presence of a CDC did not

lead to a measurable change in violence relative to the 2018 baseline. Neither the main effect of time (2023:  $\beta = 0.533$ ,  $p = 0.244$ ) nor the treatment variable (CDC region:  $\beta = 0.839$ ,  $p = 0.338$ ) reached statistical significance. Among the control variables, none reached conventional levels of significance either.

Table 2

Difference-in-Differences (DiD) model

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	CDC Effect on Electoral Violence
Constant	-10.160
Post-Treatment Period (Time = 1)	0.452
Treatment $\times$ Time (DiD Effect)	-0.675
Population	1.272
Voter Turnout	-2.143
Historical Violence	-0.027
R-squared	

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Note.  $N = 30$ .

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

The deviance and Pearson Chi-square statistics per degree of freedom (0.777 and 0.939, respectively) support the appropriateness of the Negative Binomial model over the Poisson alternative. However, the Omnibus Test (Chi-Square = 5.955,  $df = 7$ ,  $p = 0.545$ ) indicates that the full model does not significantly outperform an intercept-only specification.

While these findings might appear discouraging from a purely instrumental standpoint, they are not incompatible with the expectations set forth by Lederach's conflict transformation framework. Conflict transformation is inherently a slow, non-linear process that emphasizes relational and structural change over immediate outcomes. CDCs aim to build trust, cultivate civic responsibility, and address the cultural and structural roots of violence, objectives that may not be fully captured through event-based indicators such as the number of violent incidents. The absence of a statistically significant decline in violence does not imply the absence of transformative processes occurring beneath the surface.

Several factors may explain the lack of measurable impact. First, the limited geographic scope of the CDC initiative—spanning only eight localities—may constrain its capacity to influence regional-level violence patterns. Second, the persistence of structural drivers of conflict, such as interethnic grievances and unresolved land disputes, underscores the difficulty of achieving rapid results through localized interventions alone. As Lederach (1997) emphasizes, structural transformation requires coordinated efforts across multiple layers of society and governance.

Third, the timing of the intervention may not align with the nested timeframes Lederach advocates: while CDCs were initiated in 2020, elections held in 2023 may have come too early for meaningful cultural and relational shifts to consolidate. Short-term changes in violence metrics may not reflect the deeper processes of healing, trust-building, and social norm change that these initiatives aim to foster.

## **6. Conclusion**

This thesis set out to examine whether the Cadres de Collaboration (CDCs)—a participatory, community-based peacebuilding initiative—contributed to reducing electoral violence during the 2023 municipal and regional elections in Côte d’Ivoire. Grounded in conflict transformation theory, particularly the work of John Paul Lederach, the research sought to assess whether localized, citizen-led mechanisms could prevent violence by addressing underlying relational and structural drivers, as opposed to relying solely on short-term or securitized interventions.

The findings offer a mixed picture. On the one hand, qualitative exploratory analysis points to the promise of these initiatives. CDCs appear to foster dialogue, rebuild trust, and encourage nonviolent forms of political participation in communities historically vulnerable to electoral tensions. These findings are consistent with the expectations of conflict transformation theory, which highlights the central role of grassroots engagement and “middle-range actors” in building sustainable peace. On the other hand, the empirical results from the Difference-in-Differences

(DiD) analysis do not support the hypothesis that CDCs significantly reduced electoral violence at the regional level. The treatment effect, while negative, was not statistically significant, and there was no evidence that the CDCs were more or less effective in regions with higher levels of historical violence. These null findings underscore the difficulties of empirically capturing the effects of complex, participatory interventions—especially within the constraints of quantitative research methods in social science.

More broadly, the thesis demonstrates that while Lederach’s theory offers a valuable normative and conceptual framework for understanding electoral violence prevention, its practical implementation is challenging to evaluate. Measuring transformation in attitudes, relationships, and norms is inherently difficult, particularly over short time horizons and with limited data availability. Furthermore, the absence of statistically significant results should not be taken to imply ineffectiveness, but rather, as a call for more nuanced, context-sensitive research designs.

Several limitations of this study warrant mention. First, the thesis was initially designed to implement a qualitative approach. However, due to time limitations during the thesis writing process, it was not feasible to conduct in-depth qualitative fieldwork, which would have allowed for a more comprehensive evaluation of the CDCs’ evolution across different localities.

Moreover, contacting individuals involved in the implementation of the CDCs proved difficult, and logistical issues—such as unreliable internet connectivity—further complicated data collection efforts. A more qualitative, locally grounded approach, perhaps tracking the trajectory of CDCs across various communities over time, would likely have yielded richer insights.

Second, research design relied primarily on regional-level data, even though the CDCs operate at a much more localized level. Electoral violence often varies significantly within regions, and aggregation may have masked the more subtle, community-level effects of the CDCs.

Unfortunately, detecting violence at the department level proved difficult due to the low number of recorded events and the limited granularity of available data. Second, the timing of the study posed additional constraints

Third, the CDCs were implemented in 2020, giving only a short window before the 2023 elections to assess their potential impact. Behavioral or institutional changes stemming from such interventions may take longer to manifest. Fourth, the municipal and regional elections studied here generated relatively few incidents of electoral violence overall, making it statistically difficult to detect any treatment effect. Future research should focus on general or presidential elections, where stakes—and thus the likelihood of violence—are typically higher.

Methodologically, the implementation of DiD in a real-world social science context presents its own set of challenges. The limited number of treated regions (six out of thirty) reduced statistical power, particularly for testing interaction effects. Moreover, electoral violence is shaped by highly localized social, political, and historical dynamics that are not easily captured through quantitative models alone. While the DiD framework is appropriate for estimating causal effects

under certain conditions, its applicability in fragile and data-scarce environments should be approached with caution.

In conclusion, while the CDCs in Côte d'Ivoire did not demonstrate a statistically significant effect on electoral violence in this study, their potential as a peacebuilding tool remains both theoretically compelling and practically relevant. This thesis contributes to ongoing discussions about the value of participatory, grassroots approaches to violence prevention, particularly in contexts where top-down interventions have failed to produce durable results. Future research should prioritize long-term, mixed-methods evaluations that can capture the complex and often gradual impact of community-led peacebuilding initiatives. Understanding when, how, and under what conditions these interventions work is essential for advancing both scholarly knowledge and effective practice in the field of electoral violence prevention.

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