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# SPOT LIGHT

**CERAP EGAP SMALL GRANTS AWARD**

*RESEARCH PROJECT*

“From verbal violence to physical violence in the Ivorian  
political field”

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*Interview by Amnis VIGAN*



# RESEARCHER BIO

Dr. ADOU Amadou Ouattara is a specialist in discourse analysis, pragmatics and argumentation.

As a young Ivorian interested in the political life of his country (and his continent), he decided to study it through the speeches produced by the politicians of his country.

He has devoted several research projects to this subject.

He is the principal investigator of a research team on the general theme of 'Democracy, conflict and polarisation' as part of the West Africa Regional Hub Small Grants Fund of the CERAP - EGAP programme.

The project led under this grant is entitled:

*From verbal violence to physical violence in the Ivorian political field*

The project "From Verbal Violence to Physical Violence in the Ivorian Political Field" seeks to understand the public's perception of political violence and the strategies they suggest for its prevention. Specifically, the study examines whether the population recognizes that verbal violence, which incites or escalates physical violence, stems from partisan animosity and political dehumanization, posing a threat to the Ivorian nation. To achieve this, they surveyed 561 individuals from various socio-professional backgrounds in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire and planned to analyze the data using Modalisa software and the theory of linguistic politeness.

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# REPORT INTERVIEW



## *Can you define political violence in the Ivorian context?*

Political violence can be understood as the use of an act or set of acts, a word or a set of words that infringe on the physical, moral or psychological integrity of the person who suffers or receives it, in a political context and for political ends. In other words, political violence occurs whenever a speaking subject, a political actor or a supporter of an ideology, a party or a politician performs physical or linguistic acts that hurt, kill, discredit, denigrate, threaten, etc. one or more persons, or destroy public and/or private property, with the aim of achieving one or more objectives related to the quest, management or preservation of state power.

## *How has violence in the Ivorian political field evolved over the decades?*

The first hours of the political life of the Ivorian nation were marked by forms of violence, particularly through French colonization and the struggle for independence. Once political independence was achieved, Côte d'Ivoire experienced a short period of multiparty politics that was hampered by arrests and assassinations of political leaders, to settle into a one-party regime with its corollaries of imprisonment and threats. The opponents organized clandestinely and organized public activities (meetings, marches, sit-ins, etc.) which were violently reprimanded by the public forces but which led to the return of a multiparty system in April 1990.

Since then, Côte d'Ivoire has been living a democracy in which some of the pillars (freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and demonstration, etc.) are regularly flouted by the leaders. This state of affairs sometimes gives rise to discursive productions and acts, of the protagonists present (leaders vs. opponents) who are marked by violence (physical violence, arrests and imprisonments, breaking, destruction of public and private property, denial, demonization of actors, hate speech, etc.), especially in (pre)electoral periods.

The Ivorian political history after independence is characterized by seven major political crises:

- The Guébié crisis in 1970: massacre and imprisonment of leaders to prevent the secession of this region from Côte d'Ivoire;
- The political crisis of 1992 (imprisonment of opponents and dissolution of trade unions);
- The 1999 coup d'état overthrew the PDCI-RDA regime in power since 1960;
- The post-electoral crisis of 2000;
- The September 2002 rebellion;
- The post-electoral crisis of 2010 having officially left 3000 dead (imprisonment of several leaders of the FPI regime deposed by France's military intervention, extradition of former President Laurent Gbagbo to the International Criminal Court); and
- The post-electoral crisis of 2020 officially left 85 dead and saw the establishment of the National Transitional Council by opposition leaders who refused the victory of President Alassane Ouattara.





### *What speeches or practices in the Ivorian political field tend to exacerbate verbal or physical violence?*

According to the results of the study, there are several reasons for the various manifestations of political violence in Côte d'Ivoire. Among these reasons, discourses and practices exacerbate violence in its verbal or physical forms in the Ivorian political field. They are:

- Bad governance;
- Disagreement between politicians and between populations;
- Lack of respect for the law and democracy;
- Denigrating the opponent;
- Insulting and insulting speeches for the opponent and his supporters;
- The promotion of tribalism and ethnocentrism;
- Threatening the opponent and his supporters; and
- Discourses that marginalize and frustrate categories of citizens.

### *Which places or regions in Côte d'Ivoire are most affected by this violence?*

Survey data indicates that 32 cities were named as the most affected by political violence. They are, in order of importance:

*Abidjan, Bouaké, Duékoué, Gagnoa, Man, Daloa, Korhogo, Kouibli, Tiassalé, Guiglo, Soubré, Toumodi, Daoukro, Lakota, Bongouanou, Dabou, Vavoua, Adiaké, Adzopé, Agboville, Bangolo, Bloléquin, Bonon, Danané, Divo, Ferké, N'douci, Séguéla, Taï, Tiébissou, Yamoussoukro, Zuénoula.*

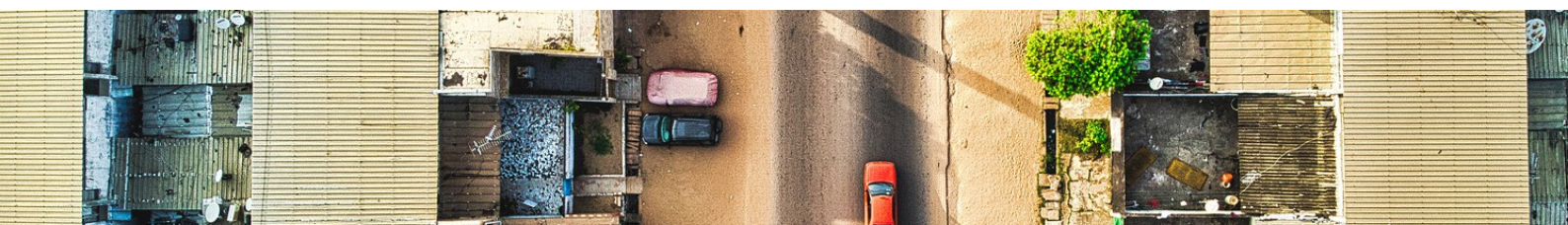
The number of occurrences by region (the number of times a city in a region is cited) is as follows:

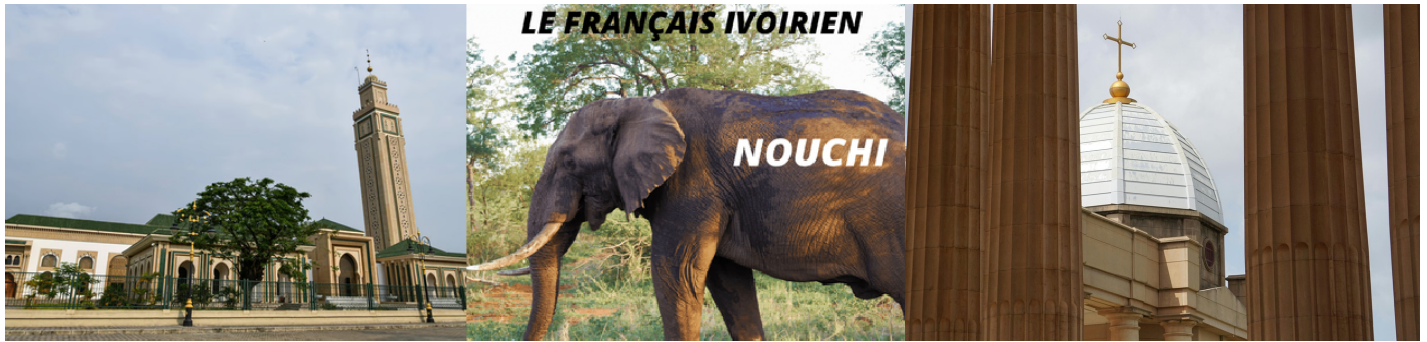
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|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| • Southern region: 175 occurrences;   | • South-West region: 8 occurrences; |
| • Western region: 39 occurrences;     | • Eastern region: 5 occurrences;    |
| • Centre region: 33 occurrences;      | • South-East region: 2 occurrences; |
| • Centre-West region: 24 occurrences; | • Northwest Region: 1 occurrence.   |
| • Northern region: 8 occurrences;     |                                     |

Finally, a classification was made to know the most affected municipality among the various municipalities of Abidjan, the economic capital of Côte d'Ivoire and the most populous city in the country.

This classification gives the following results:

- |                  |                   |
|------------------|-------------------|
| • Abobo (158)    | • Koumassi (4)    |
| • Yopougon (127) | • Anyama (3)      |
| • Adjamé (55)    | • Treichville (3) |
| • Attécoubé (18) | • Marcory (3)     |
| • Port-Bouët (9) | • Plateau (1)     |
| • Cocody (6)     |                   |





## What elements or behaviors promote the transition from verbal to physical violence in the Ivorian political sphere?

In the Ivorian political sphere, the use of certain words or expressions promotes the transition from verbal violence to physical violence. According to the investigators, these are:

Ivorian words	Translation	Meaning
Il ny'a rien en face, c'est Maïs	There is nothing on the other side, it's corn	a slogan launched by Charles Blé Goudé (leader of the patriotic galaxy) during the 2010 presidential election and the ensuing crisis;
On gagne ou on gagne	We win or we win	Another slogan launched by the same political actor under the same conditions;
Étranger	Foreigner	to designate nationals of countries in the sub-region or nationals of Ivorian villages far from the economic capital (Abidjan);
On n'est pas au marché d'Abobo	We are not at the Abobo market	to express that disorder will not be tolerated;
On va tout gnagami		literally, we're going to mix everything;
L'heure est grave		a term generally used by student leaders to launch slogans or attract attention;
Je frapperai ce pouvoir moribond, et il tombera	I will strike this moribund power, and it will fall	statement produced by Alassane Ouattara (then opponent) on RFI, against the regime of Laurent Gbagbo (former President of the Republic);
	terms insulting the parents of an interlocutor; the President of the Republic; Your candidate is a foreigner;	
Maudit-là	cursed	an expression addressed to someone to indicate that one does not appreciate his or her behavior;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ADO Solution</li> <li>• Prenons les armes, battons-nous</li> <li>• Idiot, bête ;</li> <li>• Vous suivez bêtement les politiciens ;</li> <li>• Ton candidat est laid ;</li> <li>• Tu es mouton / Bâtard-là / Mère con</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alassane Ouattara's slogan during the 2010 presidential election;</li> <li>• Let us take up arms, let us fight;</li> <li>• Your party is doing nothing, your leader is wasting our time, your politicians are crooks;</li> <li>• Idiot, stupid;</li> <li>• You foolishly follow politicians;</li> <li>• Your candidate is ugly;</li> <li>• You are sheep / Bastard there / Mother idiot (insult related to the sex of the mother);</li> <li>• Who won the 2010 elections?</li> </ul>	<p>The use of And or Or : Expression referring to Article 35 of the Constitution of the 2nd Republic, stipulating that the candidate for the presidential election must be Ivorian, born of a father and mother who are themselves Ivorians;</p> <p>It's the Muslims / It's the Christians: an expression accusing the practitioners of the two religions mentioned (Islam and Christianity) as the executioners;</p>
	It's not a bridge we're going to eat / We're hungry, but you're building bridges	An expression produced by those who believe that the construction of many bridges by President Alassane Ouattara does not solve the crucial problems of Ivorians;
ADO, c'est un maudit	ADO is a cursed man	ADO is the nickname given to President Alassane Ouattara;
Vous les Dioula-là	You the Dioula	an expression received as stigmatizing for most of the Northerners.





### *How do citizens perceive the impact of violence?*

The consequences indicated by the respondents were organized into three categories: physical and socio-economic consequences, psychological consequences and socio-political consequences. The table below shows the manifestations by type and the number of occurrences of each noted manifestation. (See Table on following page)

### *Were there any specific challenges to overcome in the implementation of this project?*

The study in its various articulations was not without difficulties. The major difficulties are essentially of two kinds.

The first order of difficulties is technical. It was essentially the inability to acquire the Modalisa software that we had planned for data analysis. This difficulty has been overcome by the use of Microsoft software for the processing of the data collected. The online version of Modalisa, which the funds could cover, did not provide any security in terms of data protection.

In addition, we had to reduce the number of investigators and managers planned, from 10 to 08 and from 02 to 01 respectively.

The second order relates to the fact that some respondents refused to participate in the survey because of the political nature of the subject treated, on the one hand. On the other hand, some other interviewers did not complete the questionnaire, which they found too long depending on their availability. We therefore had to retake the unfinished questionnaires with other volunteers.

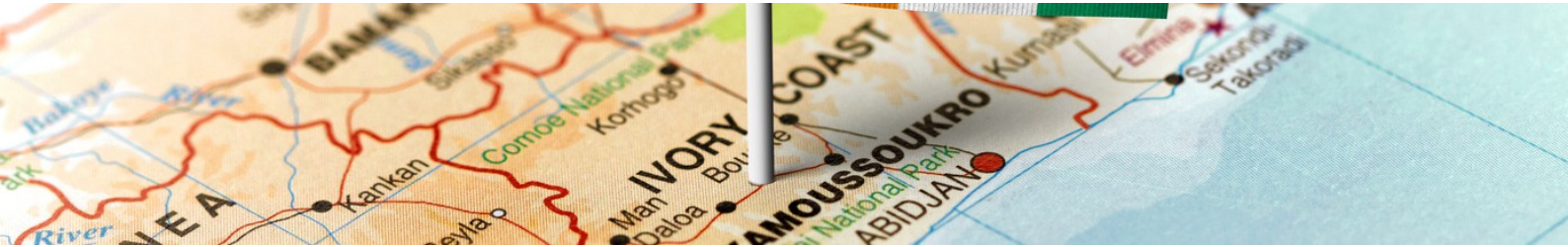


No.	Types of	Events	Number of
1	<b>Physical and socio-economic consequences</b>	Injury to body (Injury)	15
2		Murders/Massacres	53
3		Destruction of homes	19
4		Ethnic divisions	20
5		Corruption	3
6		Tribalism/Rejection	6
7		Insecurity/Robbery/Robbery/Robbery/Rape	8
8		Conflicts/Brawls	4
9		Poverty/High cost of living/Famine	10
10		Unemployment	2
11		Chaos	2
12	<b>Psychological consequences</b>	Hatred	4
13		Regret	1
14		Frustration	1
15		Terror	2
16		Trauma	1
17		Distrust	2
18		Fear	1
19	<b>Socio-political consequences</b>	Post-election crises	9
20		Discrimination	2
21		Civil war	20
22		Coups d'état	1
23		Imprisonment	1
24		Revolt	1
25		Slander	1
26		Loss of the people's trust	1
27		Unanswered	6



### *What are your recommendations for peace in Côte d'Ivoire?*

This study has shown that the population is aware of the existence of violence in its verbal and physical forms in the Ivorian political field. Some citizens believe that violence is normal and cannot be eradicated; while others (the vast majority) find it abnormal and believe that measures must be taken to eradicate, contain or prevent it. To do this, they made proposals for solutions, from which we made a set of recommendations.



## **I- SOCIO-ECONOMIC RECOMMENDATIONS**

The socio-economic situation of the populations living in Côte d'Ivoire is not always good. For example, the poverty rate is more than 35% according to International Monetary Fund reports in 2022, while the non-employment rate hovers around 26%. To this could be added all the disparities and inequalities observed in the development of the country's cities. This situation of socio-economic precariousness of the populations makes them fragile, especially the youngest, who represent more than 75% of the population, according to the RGPH of 2021. Their fragility can be a risk that can be exploited by politicians, especially in electoral contexts.

- The implementation by the government of programs and projects that significantly reduce unemployment and poverty rates: this action in favor of working-age populations will reduce the risk of manipulation and negative influence to which they could be subjected by political leaders.
- The implementation of civic education programs by governments: These programs can be broken down into awareness-raising, training in dedicated civic centers, integration into the curricula of the Education-Training sector of lessons relating to civics. They will make it possible to inculcate in the population the virtues of citizenship, the principles of the Republic, respect for the symbols and institutions of the Republic, as well as the personalities who embody them.
- The implementation of training and awareness-raising programs on verbal violence and hate speech by governments: These programs will allow the population to know how to recognize their manifestations, to understand their subtlety and to be able to avoid or contain them when they arise.
- The updating, publication and implementation of the resolutions of the Commission for Truth and National Reconciliation set up after the post-electoral crisis of 2010: The aftermath of this crisis, which has not been addressed to date, is a breeding ground for violent acts and comments at each election in Côte d'Ivoire. This crisis had crystallized ethnic and political cleavages; which constitute a fertile ground for political violence. Also, many of the victims identified have not yet received reparation for the harm suffered. Violence (verbal or physical) may appear to them as an outlet or an opportunity to take justice into their own hands during popular activities, as is the case with political rallies.
- The promotion of the values essential to a nation (cohesion, peace, harmony, tolerance, inclusion, etc.) by the rulers on the one hand and by the populations on the other hand (religious leaders, traditional and customary leaders, heads of households, etc.).



## II- LEGAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The life of the state is framed by regulatory mechanisms, generally organized into rights and duties for citizens and leaders. The State of Côte d'Ivoire has put in place several mechanisms (laws, decrees, orders, codes, etc.) to regulate life in society and the sound practice of politics and communication. Unfortunately, it is clear that the provisions provided for are not always respected, thus giving rise to manifestations of violence in the political environment, among other things.

For this reason, we recommend:

- The reinforcement, by governments, of the system reprimanding verbal violence, calls for violence in the context of political activities: this measure will prevent the use of words or expressions that are frustrating, threatening, insulting, insulting, defamatory and calling for violence by political leaders and their activists;
- The organization of awareness-raising campaigns on laws organizing the production and dissemination of hate speech, false information, denigrating messages: Despite the existence of these laws, we are witnessing the proliferation, particularly on digital social networks (DSNs), of messages carrying verbal violence. It seems that the public is not sufficiently informed about the existence of these laws or the whistleblowing mechanism;
- The integration into the curricula of the Education-Training sector of teaching modules related to the Constitution, legal principles, and laws applicable in Côte d'Ivoire: the lack of knowledge of the law is a glaring reality in Côte d'Ivoire. This measure will introduce learners (pupils, students, etc.) to the law and inculcate in them respect for the Constitution and the laws of the country;
- The establishment of public awareness programs on the respect of the Constitution and the laws in force in Côte d'Ivoire, specifically those governing political activities; and
- A vote on a law sanctioning the non-compliance with the results of an election, outside the framework provided for by the law and the electoral code. This provision will make it possible to sanction all leaders who, refusing to acknowledge their political defeat, call on their activists to oppose by all means, or produce speeches that carry verbal violence.

## III- POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Ivorian political environment appears today, due to the numerous political crises with consequences that are still current, as a space for the natural and/or normal manifestation of violence. It can legitimately be argued that political education is lacking or insufficient in Côte d'Ivoire. However, to the extent that politics is the management of public affairs, political leaders will always have recourse to the population. If this population has no political education, the practice of violence will become a permanent part of its habits.

For this reason, we recommend:

- The establishment, by all political structures, of schools for the political training of their activists: these schools will be able to address all issues related to political activity (the rights and duties of the activist, democracy, political ideologies, the organization of political activities, etc.) and equip activists, future leaders, with good political practice;
- The organization, by the government, of a political dialogue open to all Ivorian political actors to clear all the political disputes accumulated since the crises of 1999, 2002, 2010 and 2020: this dialogue will be an opportunity for the various leaders to talk to each other and agree on a code of good conduct that could have the force of law, in political practice;

- The application of the principles of good governance by the leaders will allow the entire population to benefit equitably from the fruits of the country's economic growth and thus avoid frustration and marginalization;
- Politicians and the public applying the principles of democracy: Democracy is not only based on the principles of freedom of expression and association, but it is also based on respect for the rights of others. This is why this mode of government adopted by the State of Côte d'Ivoire must be effectively lived and applied in the production of political messages; and
- The establishment of a mechanism to ensure political change in a peaceful manner: a law and a code governing elections and a body responsible for organizing them exist in Côte d'Ivoire. However, the various elections since 1995 have regularly generated unrest, conflicts, and crises involving various actors. The mechanism put in place must therefore be revisited by political actors, civil society actors, religious and traditional leaders, in order to arrive at a consensual formula that allows for a peaceful alternation in Côte d'Ivoire.

***What are your recommendations for related studies in Côte d'Ivoire? What are the research prospects for further study?***

The issue of violence in the political field remains a topical issue, especially in a context of constant political changes such as that of Côte d'Ivoire. This is why similar studies must continue to be carried out and even deepened with a view to proposing mechanisms for detecting the signs of violence, preventing and curbing violence and its consequences in terms of crises. The history of Côte d'Ivoire is punctuated by crises that have prevented its development and the flourishing of the populations who live there.

This is why, for in-depth research perspectives, we recommend:

- Conduct a more extensive survey in the areas identified as most affected by violence to determine the root causes and propose solutions;
  - to conduct a study on the digital social networks (DSNs) currently used by young people, who constitute the vast majority of the Ivorian population (about 70%), to identify the terms, expressions and establish a nomenclature of words or expressions that trigger violence and to offer users of NSNs alternatives; and make them public during awareness-raising campaigns;
  - to conduct a study on the manifestations of verbal violence in the speeches of Ivorian political actors in order to detect the triggers and to propose a code of linguistic politeness to the various actors, on the eve of the 2025 presidential election and others to come; and
  - to publish the results of the various studies and make them accessible to the general public through awareness-raising campaigns, or in collaboration with institutions or NGOs working on the same issues.
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