

Frameworks and Mechanisms for Peaceful Elections and Resolving Election-Related Conflicts: A Critical Appraisal of Ghana's Situation

Master's Thesis in
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Developmental Psychology
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Abstract

Aim: This study aimed at investigating the frameworks and mechanisms for peaceful elections and resolving election-related violence in Ghana.

Method: A semi-structured interview comprising 40 questions was administered to 12 experts in the field. The respondents consist of journalists, legal professionals, electoral commission staff, election security personnel, CSOs in election observation, the Academia, and political parties' representatives.

Results: The study revealed that Ghana has a comprehensive set of frameworks and mechanisms (formal and informal), designed to promote peaceful elections and the resolution of conflict whenever they occur. These frameworks include the 1992 Constitution, the National Peace Council Act, the Electoral Commission Act (act 451), and the existence of the National Election Security Task Force. The roles of traditional and religious leaders, CSOs, the media and the judiciary have been identified to be crucial in resolving election-related conflicts.

Conclusions: Despite the existence of these frameworks and mechanisms that govern the electoral process of Ghana, evidence suggests that their enforcement leaves much to be desired. Examples of selective enforcement of rules and perceived biases by authorities create a gap where vigilante groups exploit the situation to cause violence during elections.

Key Words: Electoral violence, democracy, elections, frameworks and mechanisms, security.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate the frameworks and mechanisms for peaceful elections and resolving election-related violence in Ghana. Electoral violence has been the bane of most young democracies across the world, and Ghana is no exception. By studying electoral violence, this thesis seeks to understand the role of democratic institutions, both formal and informal, in managing election-related violence and the frameworks available to forestall such violence from occurring. The study also seeks to examine the concept of peaceful elections and the consequences of electoral violence on society.

1.2 Political Background of the Study

Ghana is celebrated by the international community as a beacon of democracy in Africa. The country has earned an enviable credential for its political stability since the reintroduction of multi-party democracy in 1992 after several intermittent military coups (Gyimah-Boadi & Prempeh, 2012). The transition to competitive elections in Ghana's Fourth Republic marked an important milestone towards democratic entrenchment and consolidation (Aning & Danso, 2012; Gyimah-Boadi, 2008; Ninsin, 1998; Whitfield, 2009). The country has witnessed relative peace and stability with democratic continuity despite a highly competitive political environment, steadily moving towards democratic transformations (Huntington, 1991). This democratic feat could not be achieved without setbacks and monumental challenges.

As part of its electoral gains, Ghana has conducted eight successful elections since 1992. The country has witnessed peaceful alternations of power between the two dominant political parties, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC). According to many political analysts, the country has passed the litmus test, qualifying what Huntington (1991) describes as the turn-over test for democratic consolidation and stability. The historic outcome of all these elections held since 1992 and the subsequent concession of defeats by the losing political parties is a testament to the democratic maturity of the Ghanaian political landscape. Beside the electoral successes, Ghana has made significant strides in strengthening its democratic institutions, such as the independency of its judiciary; the robustness of its legislative body; a liberalized media landscape; vibrant civil society, and professional conduct of its security agencies (Aning & Danso, 2012; Gyimah-Boadi, 2009; Whitfield, 2009).

However, the outcomes of the 2012 and 2020 presidential and parliamentary elections were a subject of intense dispute and fierce contestation by the two main political parties that led to a long-drawn legal battle at the Supreme Court for adjudication. The validity of these elections was questioned, and the declaration of the results made by the Electoral Commission (EC) was challenged by the main opposition parties, leading to a petition filed at the Supreme Court for determination. The judicial verdict and subsequent concession of defeat has been hailed by both national and international communities as a great success and a significant leap towards democratic consolidation. While this development could be viewed by many as a feather in the cap, others perceive it as a troubling phenomenon and a potential breaking point for Ghana's democracy.

Despite these mixed reactions, the resort to judicial review to resolve electoral disputes and to seek redress for political grievances instead of resorting to violence, amply demonstrates Ghana's determination to maintain its leading role as a model for Africa's democracy. Thus, despite the controversies that surrounded the 2012 and 2020 elections and the subsequent legal battle, the political parties and their candidates opted to pursue their cases in court and to seek legal remedies without jeopardizing the political atmosphere. Several political pundits and cynics had predicted violence and chaos, regardless of whichever way the judicial pendulum might swing to. In contrast, the country defied all odds and emerged peaceful after the acceptance of the court's verdict by the opposition party, despite expressing some deep reservations towards the conduct of the election (Omotola, 2013).

As may be acknowledged, the conduct of free, fair and transparent election remains one of the key cardinal metrics for measuring democratic governance around the world, especially in young democracies in Africa (Gyekye-Jandoh, 2014). The centrality of elections in a democratic dispensation is critical towards providing the citizens an opportunity to participate in governance and in the selection of their leaders. It provides the citizens with an opportunity to influence public policy discourse. Elections also provide a platform for engagement between the government and the electorate (Aryee, 2008; Gyekye-Jandoh, 2014). Additionally, elections serve as a means to ensure inclusive and participatory governance in a liberal democracy. According to Ninsin (1998), elections give voice to the voiceless and the marginalized in Ghana to decide the direction they want the country to face.

The mass proliferation of political parties in Ghana has also been cited as one of the symptoms of the consolidation of democratic values in Ghana and a transition towards multi-party democracy. However, Bratton (1998:52), has expressed that "while elections and democracy are not synonymous, elections remain fundamental, not only for installing

democratic governments, but as a necessary requisite for broader democratic consolidation. The regularity, openness, and acceptability of elections signal whether basic constitutional, behavioural, and attitudinal foundations are being laid for sustainable democratic rules". Although elections alone do not provide the single yardstick for measuring the democratic prosperity of a country, they nonetheless provide a significant insight into the expression of free will to choose leaders (Frempong, 2008). Elections also demonstrate how the citizens exercise their fundamental human rights and the respect for civil and political rights (Ninsin, 1998).

In spite of these democratic laurels and achievements, the conduct of Ghana's elections has increasingly witnessed an upsurge of election-related violence and antagonism as elections have become more competitive and a scramble for control of the country's resources. It must be acknowledged, however, that this violence that occur in Ghana during elections are mostly "localized and confined" (Ninsin, 1998). They are not as severe and widespread as those happening in other African countries. However, if this development is left unchecked, it threatens to derail the successes the country has chalked and undermine the stride towards the apex of democratic consolidation.

Ample evidence suggests that the two major political parties in Ghana (the NPP and NDC) have resorted to unfair tactics and illicit ways to manipulate the electoral processes to their advantage (Quarshigah, 2016). Such unhealthy practices, e.g., voter intimidation, physical assault, victimization, threats, vandalization of electoral materials, snatching of ballot boxes by party affiliates, and manipulations of the electoral roll have threatened the atmosphere of peace and stability in the country (Aning, 2001; Aning and Danso, 2012; Gyampo, 2008; Ninsin, 1998). Yet, every electoral year, the patience of Ghanaians is being tested with heightened tensions and the increasing use of hate speeches and incendiary languages meant to stoke ethnic, religious, and political rivalries. In some other African countries, these same negative practices have thrown the countries into an all-out civil war. For example, instances of mass violence that characterized the elections in Kenya, Zimbabwe, Cote d'Ivoire, Uganda, Congo, and Burundi represent the same risk factors that could potentially plunge Ghana into protracted mass civil violence. According to the report by the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD, 2008), supporters of the two main political parties in Ghana employ violence and opponent intimidation as a means to further the interest and agenda of their respective political parties in return for material rewards or appointment to political positions. The youth especially have been used by the various political parties to do their bidding by unleashing violence and terror on opponents to intimidate them to achieve competitive edge. Commenting on the 2008

election, the Centre for Democratic Development had noted that, elections normally reignite old tensions and rivalry that may relate to tribal feuds, chieftaincy succession, land ownership, and other grievances which had been dormant for years (CDD, 2008).

The future of Ghana's democracy remains fragile and unpredictable, given the rising propensity of political parties' perception of elections as a "win-or-die affair" and the deepening entrenchment of the "winner-takes-all" syndrome in the political space. The rampant use of vigilante groups to unleash violence unto political opponents has assumed a dangerous proportion. The preponderance of physical violence committed by supporters of the various political parties against their opponents has created a make-or-break political atmosphere with high stakes for electoral violence. As stated above, although election-related violence in Ghana is comparatively less in terms of prevalence, severity, and magnitude to what pertains in other neighbouring countries, but completely denying its existence and accompanying symptoms is a ticking time bomb (Amankwah, 2013). It must be acknowledged that the causes of election-related violence in certain parts of Africa are not fundamentally different from what pertains in Ghana (Aning & Danso, 2012). Failing to inoculate and address this canker before it becomes cancerous would prove catastrophic to the political stability of Ghana in the future.

The consequences, therefore, of election-related violence are enormous and inimical to development and nation building. Violence before, during, and after election has various socio-economic and political consequences as it threatens the peace, security, and stability of the country. Beside the loss of human lives, the consequences of political violence are severe which may include disruption of economic activities; deterring investments; bringing untold hardships to civilians; rising inflation; damaging cost to infrastructure; financial cost to businesses and individuals as well as torture, human rights violations, and rape.

In order to prevent election-related violence, the neutrality of democratic institutions such as the Electoral Commission is relevant for the successful conduct of elections that are deemed legitimate and acceptable for all. When institutions lack the capacity and neutrality to undertake their constitutional mandate, it casts a doubt on the institution's ability and integrity to conduct free, fair, and transparent elections that meets international standard. This becomes a recipe for dispute. According to Whitfield (2009:623), Ghana only survived the 2008 elections for a number of reasons, remarkably, it has "developed stabilizing characteristics such as the independency of its Electoral Commission, the transparent electoral processes, the integration of the political elite alongside the creation of norms and institutions structuring their behaviour, and the institutionalization of parties".

That notwithstanding, many analysts, researchers, and political actors have cited some fundamental dysfunction of the electoral processes in Ghana and the inadequacy of the Electoral Commission to maintain its balance of fairness and credibility that result to suspicion of collusion, questioning and compromising the legitimacy of election results. Some have also questioned the viability of Ghana's election as a mere ritual, seeking to endorse the highest bidder amongst the political elites (Omotola, 2013). This perception of flawed elections undermines the sanctity and integrity of elections and provides the reasoning for electoral violence. In order to address the underlying causes of election-related violence, the role of institutions such as the Electoral Commission, political parties, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), election observers, traditional and religious leaders, the media, and the role of women are crucial in this regard.

Although Ghana is touted as having one of the most comprehensive legal systems and institutional frameworks that regulate its elections against electoral fraud and violations, it is yet to be subjected to rigorous academic scrutiny. While the existence of laws and institutions are relevant for ensuring peaceful elections devoid of violence, their application and adjudication is critical towards ensuring electoral justice and transparency (Omotola, 2010). The primary objective of this thesis, therefore, is to investigate the frameworks and mechanisms available in Ghana for peaceful elections and resolving election-related violence. This paper will also assess the underlying causes of tensions during elections and seek to examine Ghana's susceptibility and vulnerability to electoral violence and explore ways to prevent it. Finally, the study will examine how to improve the participation of minority groups, especially marginalized women and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) towards promoting inclusive politics/governance.

1.3 Research Questions

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the frameworks and mechanisms for achieving peaceful elections and resolving election-related violence in Ghana.

To help achieve this objective, the following questions and themes were examined:

- (a) What are the frameworks and mechanisms in Ghana for promoting peaceful elections?
- (b) What strategies and mechanisms exist in resolving election-related conflicts?

Other relevant sub-themes of this study include the following:

- (i) What is the relevance of election security?
- (ii) What role do women play in the political spaces in ensuring peaceful elections and preventing election-related conflicts in Ghana?
- (iii) What is the relevance of election funding?
- (iv) What is the role of the media in promoting peaceful elections and resolving election conflicts?
- (v) How important are the activities of Civil Society Organisations in election monitoring and observation in promoting peaceful election and resolving electoral conflicts?
- (vi) What role does the Electoral Commission play in election management and administration towards peaceful election?
- (vii) How significant is the role of political parties in promoting peaceful election and resolving election-related conflict?

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Historical Context of Ghanaian Political Environment

Ghana became the first Sub-Saharan African country to gain political independence from the British colonial rule in 1957. The country became a unique trailblazer, inspiring many African countries to fight for independence and self-determination from colonial grips. Following its declaration of independence, Ghana's political landscape underwent a series of political experimentation (Aning & Danso, 2012), alternating between military dictatorship, civilian democratic regimes and quasi civilian-military regimes. The first elected government of Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah, representing the first republic (1960–1966), was overthrown in a military coup d'état in 1966 headed by Lieutenant-General Joseph Arthur Ankrah of the National Liberation Council (NLC) (Commonwealth Observer Group, 2013). The second republic, between 1969 and 1971, witnessed the restoration of civilian rule with some traits of liberal democracy spearheaded by Kofi Abrefa Busia as Prime Minister and Edward Akufo Addo as President (Gyimah-Boadi, 2000). The civilian rule was short-lived, reversing the country back to military rule in 1979, when the military under the leadership of General Kutu Acheampong of the National Redemption Council (NRC) seized power (ibid).

In 1979, under the command of flight lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings and the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), led an insurrection that seized power and later installed a civilian administration of Hilla Limann of the People's National Party (PNP) (Frempong,

2008). After a short rule of Limann civilian administration, the military junta, under the leadership of Jerry Rawlings, retook power from the Limann's administration with the aim of ensuring what it called accountability, discipline and sanity within the political arena. The Armed Forces Revolutionary Council metamorphosed into the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) under the leadership of Jerry Rawlings that ruled Ghana until the adoption of constitutional rule in 1992, heralding Ghana into the Fourth Republic (ibid). Thus, between 1957 and 1992, Ghana had witnessed three periods of civilian elected governments and three military rules, with erratic back and forth relapse between authoritarian regime and civilian rule.

2.2 Transition to Multi-Party Democracy in the Fourth Republic (1992–2020)

In 1992, following an intense and incessant internal and external pressure, the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) under the leadership of Jerry John Rawlings, who had led two military coups, succumbed to the demand for a return to multi-party democracy (Frempong, 2008). Although the Provisional National Defence Council was unwilling to revert to democratic rule, it nonetheless established a committee to oversee drafting of a new constitution that would later be subjected to a national referendum for approval (Ninsin, 1998). It began to initiate processes towards transformation after more than a decade of military rule, putting in place mechanism that will protect its interest. The transition process was entirely supervised by the Provisional National Defence Council in a bid to retain power through all means necessary (Frempong, 2008).

The Provisional National Defence Council established the National Commission for Democracy (NCD) with the responsibility of charting the path towards democratic transformation. During this transition, the consultative process was limited by the Provisional National Defence Council seeking to restrict inputs made into the new mode of democracy. The membership of the Interim National Electoral Commission (INEC), the body tasked to supervise the election and oversee the drafting of the new constitution, were handpicked and selected by the PNDC (Aiyede, Eramah & Orimolade, 2013). The draft new constitution received an overwhelming approval and endorsement following a national referendum (Ninsin, 1998). The ban on political activities was lifted to facilitate multi-party democracy. The Provisional National Defence Council under the leadership of Jerry John Rawlings had a worse record of human right violations, suppression of dissenting opinions, arrest of political opponents, torture and political repression. The Provisional National Defence Council was

transformed into a political party-National Democratic Congress (NDC), giving it a civilian facelift to contest for the 1992 general election.

Following the adoption of the new constitution in 1992 under the fourth republican constitution, the first democratic presidential election was held and the presidential candidate of the NDC, Jerry John Rawlings was declared the winner (Nkanasah & Gawu, 2020). The opposition New Patriotic Party under the leadership of Adu Boahen, boycotted the subsequent parliamentary election, accusing the National Democratic Congress of electoral fraud, vote rigging, voter intimidation, manipulation, lack of transparency, and mismanagement by the INEC (Ninsin, 1998), resulting in National Democratic Congress dominated first parliament within the fourth republic. The opposition parties, particularly the New Patriotic Party, described the election as a “stolen verdict” and some election observer groups confirmed the allegation of widespread irregularities, abuse of incumbency and the unequal playing field in the election (Jeffries & Thomas, 1993). This marked the beginning of polarization in the Ghanaian body politic where the political landscape is dominated by the National Democratic Congress and New Patriotic Party.

It was such on a murky foundation Ghana’s democracy was built on which many political analysts had wrongly predicted to crumble. Even though Jerry Rawlings has been criticized for his worse record of human right violations, he is also credited for putting Ghana back on track to democratic rule albeit rather reluctantly. The 1992 constitution granted the Ghanaian public some crucial civil and political liberties such as the universal adult suffrage, freedom of speech and expression, freedom of the media and the right for the formation and participation in political activities (Ninsin, 2006).

Built on a feeble foundation, Ghana’s democracy has seen the light of the day despite speculation of future collapse. The next general election held in 1996 saw the re-election of Jerry John Rawlings to office (Ninsin, 1998). The election was an improvement from the 1992 election as many changes were made including the simultaneous presidential and parliamentary election held on the same day as well as the seeming independency of the Electoral Commission. The stability of the political atmosphere became promising and the overall conduct of the election was deemed free and fair; a marked improvement from that of 1992 (Boafo-Arthur, 2006).

In 2000, after the mandatory constitutional term limit of eight years, Jerry Rawlings stepped down, paving a way for new election (Frempong, 2008). The 2000 election was quite competitive, with neither the NDC under the candidature of John Atta Mills and the NPP under the leadership of John Agyekum Kufuor secured the 50+1 percent margin needed to be

declared a winner. In the absence of a clear winner in the first round, a presidential run-off was required, which saw the NPP winning in the re-run of the election, and Agyekum Kufuor declared president (Ninsin, 2006). This election was largely described as free, fair and transparent by both domestic and international election observers, marking the first peaceful transfer of power from one democratically elected government to another. The successful transfer of power was hailed as an important echelon of democratic consolidation in Ghana's democratic history.

In 2004, President Kufuor of the NPP secured a second term victory to lead the country for another 4 years. Once again John Atta Mills suffered a second defeat to John Agyekum Kufuor (Frempong, 2008). The election was described largely free and fair, building on the previous electoral success.

In 2008, President Kufuor in compliance with the constitutional 8-year term limit, stepped down from power, paving the way for an election. John Atta Mills of the NDC was elected as the next president, securing his first term in office. Though after the first round of voting, neither the presidential candidate of the NPP nor the NDC received the number of votes needed to be declared a winner. Nana Akufo Addo of the NPP secured 49.1% while John Atta Mills of the NDC polled 47.9 %, necessitating a run-off (The Carter Centre, 2009). After a fiercely contested re-run, the Electoral Commission declared John Atta Mills of the NDC winner, having polled 50.13% while Nana Akufo Addo polling 49.87% of the votes (Whitfield, 2009). This was the second alternation of power between the two major political parties. Though the election was largely peaceful, both the NPP and NDC accused each other of voter fraud, malpractices and widespread irregularities. Other complaints made included bloated electoral roll, delays in register compilation, limited days of compilation exercise and the integrity of the Chair of the Electoral Commission was called into question (EU Election Observation Mission, 2009). It was a near breaking point for Ghana's democracy, but the country defied the odds. Pockets of clashes and electoral violence were recorded. The electoral stakes were very high after the discovery of oil in Ghana and the desire of the NDC to return to power after eight years in opposition (Commonwealth Observer Group, 2013). President John Atta Mills died in the fourth year of his presidency, and in accordance with Ghana's constitution, the Vice president John Dramani Mahama was sworn in as president to complete the presidential period.

The 2012 presidential election also witnessed a fiercely contested election between the two main political parties. Run up to the 2012 election, 45 new constituencies were created by the Electoral Commission which became a subject of contention and dispute (Hiadzie, 2012). Both the timing and boundary delineation became a subject of controversy and the Electoral

Commission was dragged to the Supreme Court (Quartey, 2012). The Electoral Commission was accused of gerrymandering to favour the NDC (Commonwealth Observer Group, 2013). The Court upheld the decision of the Electoral Commission bringing the total number of constituencies to 275. The 2012 election witnessed eight presidential aspirants contesting for the seat of the presidency. The National Democratic Congress, under John Dramani Mahama's candidature won the 2012 election, polling 50.7% of the votes ahead of Nana Akuffo Addo of the New Patriotic Party who polled 47.7 % (Kelly & Bening, 2013). The victory of John Dramani Mahama was fiercely challenged, leading to a petition filed to the Supreme Court for adjudication. Some of the issues challenged were the validity of the results indicating widespread irregularities and voter fraud (Gyampo, Agbevade & Graham, 2013). The court upheld the decision of the Electoral Commission and declared John Dramani Mahama the winner of the 2012 election. The international community and many political pundits applauded Ghana's resolve to use the Courts to settle electoral disputes (Asante, 2016). However, the court acknowledged some obvious anomalies and expressed deep concerns in the electoral system and made several recommendations for electoral reforms.

In 2016, the NPP under its flag bearer Nana Akuffo Addo made a comeback and won the election in a landmark victory that sent the NDC back to opposition. Another smooth transfer of power from one political party to another. The NPP secured 53.6% of the votes while the NDC polled a total of 44.6% of the votes (PeaceFM online.com, 2020). Some of the issues raised during the 2012 general election largely remained unresolved. Issues regarding abuse of incumbency, monetisation, clientelism, malfunctioning of biometric machines, ethnocentrism, the involvement of local chiefs and religious bodies in election campaigns and political rallies, the use of incendiary languages on radio by party supporters and communicators, police intimidation and rising activities of party vigilante groups in election were cited by most political parties (Gyampo, Graham & Yobo, 2017).

In 2020 general elections held on 7th December, the Electoral Commission declared Akuffo Addo the winner of the presidential election, prompting a massive challenge from the NDC. Nana Addo, seeking a second term re-election, emerged a winner by polling 51.30% of total votes while his closest political rival of the NDC received 47.35% of the votes (Electoral Commission, 2020). Aggrieved by the election results, the presidential candidate of the NDC, John Dramani Mahama filed a petition to the Supreme Court of Ghana challenging the outcome of the result. The petition sought the court to declare the result null and void, citing issues of irregularities, fraud and misconduct by the Electoral Commission. In a unanimous decision, the Supreme Court upheld the Electoral Commission's results and quashed out the petition

filed by John Mahama, indicating that the petition had no merit to warrant a re-run of the election (myjoyonline.com, 2021). The NDC and its candidate accepted the verdict passed by the Court but expressed some misgivings and disappointment about the judgement. The international community commended this peaceful election and the resort to judicial review for resolution of electoral dispute. Another feather in Ghana's cap towards democratic consolidation.

2.3 Electoral System, Process and Administration

Since the adoption of the 1992 Republican constitution, Ghanaians have declared a penchant desire for the acceptance and practice of liberal democratic system of governance. This system provides distinct checks and balances for the clear separation of powers among the three arms of the state-the executive, the parliament and the judiciary. The system is designed in such a way that no single institution has an absolute unhinged power to exert uncontrollable influence in the country. The constitution establishes the executive arm of the state with a vested authority to the presidency, while the Council of State exercising advisory role and other host of independent institutions (EU Election Observation Mission, 2009; Folson, 1993). In addition, the President is vested with varying degree of powers including being the Head of State, Head of government and the Commander in Chief of the Ghana Armed forces as enshrined in Article 57-70 of the Constitution (EU Election Observation Mission, 2009; Constitution of Ghana, 1992; Ninsin 2008). The president forms his cabinet by appointing 50% of Ministers of State from the parliament subject to parliamentary approval while the Vice President assumes the duty of the President in his absence (EU Election Observation Mission, 2009). The President of the Republic of Ghana is given a four-year mandate in an election polling more than 50 percent plus 1 of the total valid vote cast in a single national constituency (Aiyede, Eramah & Orimolade, 2013). The constitution grants a maximum of two term limits for the presidency.

Ghana runs a unicameral system of parliament with a total number of 275 parliamentarians elected for a four-year term from a single member constituency subject to re-election (Commonwealth Observer Group, 2013; EU Election Observation Mission, 2009). The power of the parliament is mediated by a network of institutions limiting its powers against indiscretion (ibid). The parliament is charged with the responsibility to legislate laws governing the country. It exercises its oversight responsibilities through the establishment of Standing Committees responsible in investigating issues under the government ministries and agencies (Ninsin, 2016). The judiciary arm of the state is vested with the power to interpret the laws and

adjudicate in times of conflict and litigation. The court is made up of the Superior Courts and the lower courts, and at the highest point of the pyramid is the Supreme Court, followed by the Courts of appeal, the High Court and the regional tribunal while the lower Courts are made up of circuit Courts and tribunals (1992 Constitution).

The constitution of Ghana affirms several rights to individuals and groups including the protection and preservation of fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms such as freedom of speech and expression; freedom of assembly; the Universal Adult Suffrage; the Rule of law and the freedom to participate in political activities (1992 Constitution).

Holding competitive elections in a multi-party system is one of the key components of civil and liberal democracies as it provides the citizens with the opportunity to participate in governance. Elections are intricately connected with the principle of political equality and the bedrock of democratic consolidation (Heywood, 2002). For that matter, Ghana has a set of laws that governs the conduct of elections and its administration. The constitution has made room for an open democracy with the creation of the Electoral Commission, pursuant to Article 47 of the 1992 Constitution, tasked with the responsibilities, among other things, to compile the register of voters and revise it at such periods as may be determined by law; Demarcate the electoral boundaries for national and local government elections; Conduct and supervise all public elections and referenda; Educate the people on the electoral process and its purpose; Undertake programmes for the expansion of the registration of voters (Aiyede, Eramah & Orimolade, 2013; Electoral Commission Act 451, 1993). The Electoral Commission, according to Article 43 of the constitution, shall consist of seven members, comprising the Chairman appointed by the president, two deputy chairmen and four members (Constitution of Ghana, 1992).

The Electoral Commission, based on the Electoral Commission Act 451, exercises the oversight responsibility of election administration in Ghana (Nkansah & Gawu, 2020). The Electoral Commission is designed to be an independent organization free from the control of the government. It maintains several departments such as the accounts office, Information and data, Voter registration, public affairs, education, research, evaluation and training (Omotola, 2013). The Electoral Commission is mandated to establish regional offices in all the 16 districts in the country and must also have a returning officer in each of the country's constituencies in the district electoral office.

The conduct of free, fair, and transparent election meeting international standard is the most pressing objective of the Electoral Commission of Ghana and must strive to maintain its independency and credibility at all times. Citizens measure the quality of an election based on

their perceived independency and autonomy of the Electoral Commission (Debrah, Asante & Gyimah, 2010). Any interference from the government and other political actors has the tendency of eroding the confidence citizens have on the electoral process. Independent election observers, party agents and the security agencies are required to be present during elections to ensure transparency, accountability and to maintain the sanctity of the electoral process. Accredited party agents have the right to challenge any malpractices witnessed at the polling station and this provides the opportunity to ensure fairness. Civil Society Organizations are also involved in election monitoring and observations.

Although the Electoral Commission has made several strides to improve the administration of elections over the years, it is still saddled with the problem of maintaining clean electoral roll, over bloating of ballot box, perceived biases and collusion with incumbent government etc. That notwithstanding, the Electoral Commission has managed to earn some level of confidence of Ghanaians and political parties through the Inter Party Advisory Committee (IPAC) to conduct independent elections; reach consensus with the political parties; and improved on election management.

The Electoral Commission has embarked on several electoral reforms meant to improve its electoral outcomes and transparency of its electoral processes. Gyampo (2017) and Gyekye-Gyandoh (2014), have argued that Ghana's democratic consolidation and political stability have been a result of reforms in its electoral management and the increasing independency and autonomy of the Electoral Commission. Ghana has undertaken several initiatives in streamlining and improving its electoral process and management such as the introduction of biometric identifications; demarcation of new constituencies; the creation of the IPAC; and the amendment of its electoral laws.

2.4 Institutional Frameworks and Legal Mechanisms for Elections in Ghana

The 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana is the primary legal document governing all election-related activities in Ghana, including parliamentary and presidential elections (Aiyede, Erameh & Orimolade, 2013). It provides the comprehensive legal framework for the conduct of democratic elections that meets both domestic and international standards that guarantees equality of all persons, and the protection of their fundamental human rights (EU Election Observation Mission, 2009). The constitution also guarantees other political rights, including the freedom of speech and expression; the freedom of political association; the right to movement and assembly and the right to civil liberties based on the principle of equality and

non-discrimination (EU Election Observation Mission, 2009; Ninsin, 2006). The constitution makes detailed arrangement on individuals to take part in the political process and provides for political representation.

Apart from the constitution, which is the supreme law of the land, the conduct of elections, both presidential and parliamentary, are governed by a wide range of other laws and statutory documents which include Presidential Election Act (1992), Electoral Commission Act (1993), Political Parties Act (2000), Public Elections Law (1992), Political Elections Act-CI 75 (2012), Political Parties Code of Conduct (2012), Representations of the People (Constituencies) Instrument (2004), and Representations of the People Act (1992) (Debrah, 2004). Aside these networks of legal frameworks, Ghana is a signatory to international conventions such as the AU Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (2007), ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1996), Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and African Charter on Human and People's Rights (1981) (Aning & Danso, 2012).

The provisions of the constitution establish the eligibility criteria for contesting for the office of the presidency and the seat of parliament. According to Chapter 8, Article 62 of the 1992 constitution, a person wishing to contest for the presidency shall meet the following criteria: be a citizen of Ghana by birth; has attained forty years of age; be a registered voter; qualified to be elected as a member of parliament and is not disqualified by any applicable clause (1992 Constitution, amended, Presidential Elections Law, 1992-PNDCL 285). The president of Ghana is elected for a four-year term and is subject to re-election. However, the constitution allows for a maximum of two terms in Office.

In accordance with constitutional dictates, the prospective presidential candidate has to go through nomination process, submit appropriate documents signed by him and two other registered voters in each district assembly and return a completed form to the EC within a deadline determined by the EC. Similarly, a parliamentary candidate is required by law to be over 21 years of age, a registered voter, a citizen of Ghana not holding a dual citizenship of any other country (EU Election Observation Mission, 2009). The prospective parliamentary candidate is required to submit a nomination form duly endorsed by 20 registered voters resident in his constituency endorsing his candidature (*ibid*).

Article 43, 44 and 45 of the 1992 Constitution provides for the establishment of the Electoral Commission with the aim:

(a) To compile the register of voters and revise it at such periods, as may be determined by law.

- (b) To demarcate the electoral boundaries for national and local government elections.
- (c) To conduct and supervise all public elections and referenda.
- (d) To educate the people on the electoral process and its purpose.
- (e) To undertake programmes for the expansion of the registration of voters: and
- (f) To perform such other functions as may be prescribed by law

With these functions in mind, the Electoral Commission Act (451, 1993) confers the responsibility of boundary delineation with the Electoral Commission. In accordance with the constitution, the Electoral Commission is mandated to create new constituencies or merge existing ones subject to parliamentary approval. In 2012, the Electoral Commission embarked on an exercise to create 45 new electoral areas and constituencies (Quartey, 2012). The decision was contested at the Supreme Court. Both the timing and the geographic boundaries were a subject of intense controversy. The Court upheld the decision of the Electoral Commission to create new constituencies-based on article 47, and new constituencies were duly created bringing the number of constituencies from 230 to the current number of 275.

The Electoral Commission is mandated by law to supervise all public elections, including presidential and presidential elections. The independency of the Electoral Commission is of paramount interest to all stakeholders to guarantee the needed transparency and credibility of the elections it supervises. As part of its mandate, the Electoral Commission exercises its powers to collate new electoral rolls or to revise existing ones. National registration of voter is conducted, and ID cards issued to those registered (Aiyede, Erameh & Orimolade, 2013). Article 42 of the 1992 constitution guarantees that every Ghanaian citizen of sound mind who is 18 years or more is qualified to be registered in order to participate in a public election. The continuous reform undertaken by the Electoral Commission has led to the adoption of photographic and biometric voter ID to improve credibility, verification and eligibility of voters. The introduction of biometric voter identification is significant in timely identification of instances of multiple registration and purging the register against impersonation (Gyekye-Gyandoh, 2014; Gyampo, 2017).

However, the eligibility of a person not to register can be challenged by any registered voter or party agent based on reasons of foreign nationality, underage or double registration. This checks and balances mechanism is to rid the electoral roll of unqualified voters. The Courts also exist to hear contested cases. The update of the electoral roll is a continuous exercise to get those who have turned 18 years on the electoral roll and to remove deceased persons on the roll. Apart from these functions, the Electoral Commission is charged with the responsibility of educating voters as well as provide the public with sufficient information and communicate

election information to the public. The Electoral Commission closely work with the Inter Party Advisory Committee (IPAC) to resolve grey issues and to reach consensus.

Since 1992, the Electoral Commission has markedly improved in the discharge of its duties and its public image and its credibility has improved significantly. However, much has to be done to increase its independency, autonomy and confidence.

Besides the constitution and the Electoral Commission Act that provide the legal basis for the conduct of election and its administration, the Political Parties Act (Act 574) of 2000 provides the blueprint regulating the formation of political parties and their activities. The significance of political parties in a liberal democracy is essential and it contributes significantly to enriching the democratic process. Political parties are key prerequisites for multi-party democracy and the development of democratic values. Article 55 and 21 of the 1992 constitution outlines principles and conditions of the organization of political parties. As such, every citizen in Ghana is free to join any political party of his/her choice and reserves the right to form a political party as well.

However, political parties, as enshrined in the constitution “shall conform to democratic principles and its actions and purposes shall not contravene or be inconsistent with the constitution or any other law” (1992 Constitution:42). Political parties shall not be based on ethnic, regional, professional, or religious affiliations in order to allow citizens to participate whichever political party they want to join. Article 55 (C) also emphasizes that “the party’s name, emblem, colours, motto, or any other symbol, has no ethnic, regional, religious or other sectional connotation, or gives the appearance that its activities are confined only to a part of Ghana” (1992 Constitution of Ghana:42). The political party law placed a responsibility on the Electoral Commission to supervise their activities in order to ensure fairness and openness and to guard against contravention of the electoral laws (Folson, 1993).

As stipulated in Act 574 of the political parties’ law, “every citizen of voting age has the right to form or join a political party”. As such Ghana has witnessed a liberalized political atmosphere with increasing influx of political parties. Since 1992, the political space has been inundated with growing number of political parties contesting for elections. A total of 13 political parties registered to contest the 1992 political elections, after the ban on political parties was lifted (Ninsin, 2016). Some of the political parties have emerged from a long-standing tradition and have a well-defined political ideology while others are entirely new without any definite political ideology. For instance, the New Patriotic Party emerged from the Busia-Dombo tradition leaning towards conservative liberalism while the National Democratic Congress is aligned to social democratic principles. The New Patriotic Party,

according to Ninsin (2016) and Jonah (1998), professes to be aligned to pro-market liberal conservatism while the National Democratic Congress subscribes to social and welfare structural democratic principles. While this ideological differences in theory means a lot, in practice, both political parties are not different from the policies they implement on the ground except their strong ethnic affiliation and tribal leanings (Gyimah-Boadi & Asante 2006).

Other long standing political party traditions in Ghana include the Conventions Peoples Party (CPP), Peoples National Convention (PNC) while new political parties emerge in almost every election year, for example the Democratic People's Party (DPP), National Salvation Party (NSP), National Justice Party (NJP), National Independence Party (NIP), Great Consolidated Peoples Party (GCPP) and the United Front Party (UFP).

Even though Ghana practices a multi-party democracy, its political space is dominated by the two major political parties (NDC and NPP) who are thought to have the financial wherewithal to finance the activities of political parties and capable of fielding candidates in all elections in the country.

The Public Elections Regulation Law (2012) also provides the rules and regulations governing the process of public elections after it was passed to replace the Public Elections Law of 1992 (Aiyede, Eramah & Orimolade, 2013). Aside the above-mentioned laws, elections in Ghana are regulated by the Elections Act which contained detailed procedures for the conduct of public elections in Ghana (ibid). The document provides general and specific procedures regarding all voter registration and boundary delineation of electoral constituencies.

Other relevant instruments governing the conduct of election and related matters include Political Parties Code of Conduct (2012), Representations of the People (constituencies) Instrument (2004), Representations of the People Act (1992), which among other things regulate the conduct of political parties, the right to citizens to contest for political positions and the right to vote and be voted for.

The constitution has spelt out detailed mechanisms for the resolution of electoral disputes and it is one of the critical mechanisms that has played an important role in Ghana's electoral history. According to Omotola (2010), there are three mechanisms that have evolved in addressing post-election conflicts in Africa and these include constitutional frameworks for electoral justice, power sharing devices, and electoral reform initiatives. Ghana has adequately utilized two of these mechanisms in the resolution of electoral disputes. The constitution of Ghana has anticipated instances of electoral disputes at all levels and have adequately made provisions towards its resolution. Electoral justice, therefore, becomes a basic democratic tenet for the conduct of elections. Under the fourth republican constitution, the Supreme Court

provides the avenue for aggrieved persons to seek legal redress to issues of electoral injustices and resolving electoral disputes (Nkansah, 2016). Only the Supreme Court is mandated by law to handle petitions related to Presidential elections in Ghana. For instance, in the 2012 general elections, the presidential candidate of the New Patriotic Party, Nana Akufo Addo, was dissatisfied with the conduct of the election and sought to challenge the validity of the election results at the Supreme Court. After eight months of litigation in court by the parties, the Court brought finality to the dispute by ruling in favour of John Dramani Mahama (Aiyede, Eramah & Orimolade, 2013). Similarly, in the 2020 general elections, John Mahama filed a petition to the Supreme Court seeking that the results of the election be annulled. However, the Court, in a unanimous decision pronounced a verdict upholding the results declared by the Electoral Commission.

The judicial structures and mechanisms put in place in the constitution allowing the Courts to hear cases of electoral disputes and to make judgements on them becomes a very important and effective avenue for resolving electoral disputes. The mechanism safeguards the electoral process against abuse, malpractices, and ensuring electoral justice. Anticipating issues of electoral disputes and providing avenues to seek redress is an effective way of managing electoral conflicts, and thereby granting electoral justice. The electoral laws of Ghana also make adequate provisions for dispute arising from the electoral process such as voter registration, compilation, voting process, eligibility issues, election officials, declaration of results, and incidences that emanate before, during and after elections. Some of these issues are adequately addressed by the constitution while others are resolved through administrative processes established by the Electoral Commission (Nkansah, 2016). The judiciary is mandated by law to adjudicate electoral disputes brought before it by ensuring that the electoral rules are adequately and equally applied in conformity to the constitutional requirements while ensuring strict compliance to the legality of the electoral laws (ibid).

There have also been several electoral reforms undertaken by the Electoral Commission with the close involvement of key political stakeholders in a bid to improving the electoral processes. This is another way of resolving future electoral disputes and providing electoral justice. Since 1993, the Electoral Commission has continuously updated and compiled a new voter registry; established the Inter Party Advisory Committee (IPAC); introduced the simultaneous holding of parliamentary and presidential elections on the same day; introduced the biometric verification and photographic voter ID cards; demarcated new boundaries and creating of new constituencies; replaced opaque ballot boxes with transparent boxes; and the timely declaration of election results (Gyampo, 2017). These continuous reforms are aimed at

improving the electoral process, making it capable of responding to the expectations of the electorate as well as intended to improve the efficiency, transparency and accuracy of the electoral process (Jacobs & Leyenaar 2011).

The basic characteristics of Ghana's electoral system and processes could be catalogued according to Modern Ghana, into the following: Universal Adult suffrage, periodic renewal and registration of voter, presidential and parliamentary elections held every four years, voluntary participation in registration and voting, equal representation, secret ballot, rule of law, political parties as corporate bodies, partisan politics at national level only, one man one vote, absolute majority at parliamentary and presidential election, presidential and parliamentary election simultaneously held on the same day, run-off if neither candidate attains 50+1 percent, election run by the Electoral Commission, Electoral Commission responsible for voter registration, Issuance of ID card and Voting administration (Modern Ghana, 2020).

2.5 Youth Involvement in Politics, Vigilantism and Political Violence in Ghana

The youth constitutes an important segment of every country's population. In Ghana, not only do they constitute the human resource base and active labour force necessary for the country's development, they also represent the future generation of leadership waiting to take up the mantle of political positions from the older generation who may be retiring from active service. Due to the relevance of the youthful population in Ghana, in 2010, the National Youth Policy was formulated to provide the blueprint and guidelines for all stakeholders involved in the implementation of policies, programmes, and projects for the development of the youth (National Youth Policy, 2010). The youth then becomes not only the target for the government and its agencies, but also the private sector, NGOs and other Civil Society Organization working together to harness their potential for national development.

However, globally, the youth are identified as a group that are more vulnerable to be at risk of perpetrating political violence due to a number of socio-economic challenges they are predisposed to. These socio-economic challenges, according to the 'youth bulge' theory include high rate of unemployment, poverty, illiteracy, exposure to drugs and abusive substances, breakdown of family and traditional values, delinquency, and exposure to negative peer pressure (Abdallah & Osei-Afful, 2012). This theory explains that countries with large proportion of youth population, coupled with weak socio-economic and political systems, are vulnerable to political and youth-related violence. The theory has been used to explain the political unrest that characterized the Arab Spring and several ethnic, religious, and political

violence that occurred in Sub-Saharan African countries such as Rwanda, Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, Kenya, Congo, and Sierra Leone (ibid).

Youth involvement in politics and youth political activism in Ghana predates colonial era with the fight for independence orchestrated by youth groups across the country. Since then, the youth have been a formidable force to reckon with as their presence has been felt in every sphere of the country's socio-economic and political life. The struggle for political independence led by Kwame Nkrumah and the Convention People's Party (CPP) witnessed mass political movements, boycotts and grassroots mobilization by youth groups (Kyei & Berckmoes, 2020). The Builder's Brigade and the Ghana Young Pioneer Movement (YPM) are two youth movements that played significant roles in the political process of Ghana. These groups have been at the forefront of many protests, demonstrations, and boycotts calling for an end to corruption; improvement of quality of life; calling for a change in government and an end to unemployment; calling for improvement in economic conditions and demanding the provision of social amenities to improve the general welfare of Ghanaians (ibid). The youth have been a catalyst for political and economic transformation since Ghana gained independence.

In contemporary Ghanaian politics, the youth are still recognized as an indispensable asset and increasingly involved in the political process, especially during electioneering campaigns (Bob-Milliar, 2014). The National Union of Ghanaian Students (NUGS) has become one of the most important youth organisations in Ghana with greater influence in the political process. The NUGS is central to Ghanaian politics and enjoys greater influence in determining the direction of policies and programmes that affect the youth. The activities of youth groups of the political parties are also visible and well-represented in almost all the public universities in Ghana (Dumenu & Adzraku, 2020). The New Patriotic Party's Tertiary Education Students Confederation (TESCON) and the National Democratic Congress's Tertiary Education Institutions Network (TEIN) are represented in almost every tertiary institution in Ghana, and their activities are important in determining the electoral fortunes of their respective political parties. They are also a fertile ground for recruiting and training active, educated young people, and potential future party leadership.

Apart from the youth wings at the tertiary institutions, the political parties have also created a well-functioning youth portfolio to woo young people into their respective parties. The youth groups of the political parties have become the important factions that determine to a large extent, the political fortunes of the parties in election and have received funding to strengthen their activities across the country (Bob-Milliar, 2014). During elections, the youth are an

indispensable asset, serving as party agents at polling stations, mobilizing support for electioneering campaigns, and organizing grassroots supports that conduct door to door campaigns, while travelling across the remote places in the country to disseminate party messages to rural folks (ibid).

Recently, there have been an increasing wave of political violence and vigilantism in Ghana involving the youth in various spheres of the political process. The violence, perpetrated mostly by the youth, takes place before, during, and after elections. The violence takes the form of political opponent intimidation; snatching of ballot boxes during elections; vandalism of election materials; violent clashes between political opponents and disruption of political campaigns and rallies (Kyei & Berckmoes, 2021). These conflicts have been exacerbated by a range of factors such as unemployment, ethnic and religious differences, chieftaincy issues, clientelism and manipulations of the youth by politicians. The bulk of these perpetrators are the youth who have formed vigilante groups, aided by the political parties, to support and defend their interest. Elections have become a “do or die” affair in Ghana with a high propensity for violence. Consequently, the youth are being deployed by politicians to perpetuate all kinds of violence with the aim of achieving political victory in elections (Bob-Milliar, 2014).

According to the 2000 Ghana Population and Housing Census, an estimated 33 per cent of the country’s population represent the youth. If this human resource is not well trained and protected, the potential of politicians using them to commit atrocities during elections is high. The use of political thugs and macho men to intimidate opponents during election is gaining traction in Ghanaian elections (Asamoah, 2019). They are hired by politicians to snatch ballot boxes, brutalize opponents, and intimidate voters. These are men from economically deprived areas of Ghana, especially from the Zongo communities with predominant Muslim or northern descent population (Amankwah, 2013). Due to the high stakes involved in elections and the increasing prevalence of violence, the Electoral Commission has identified certain hotspots and flashpoints in the country where additional security measures are required in every election due to the high propensity of violence and disruption of electoral process. During elections, differences and old rivalries are often revitalized to gain political support.

Political vigilantism has been justified by some politicians due to the perceived biases of the country’s security forces during election, citing issues of collusion with incumbent governments (CODEO, 2017). They are seen as a private security recruited and deployed to protect the interests of political parties (Welch, 2020). According to the Centre for Democratic Governance (CDD) and Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO), and other Civil

Society Organizations, several political vigilante groups affiliated to the two major political parties (NDC and NPP) operate across the country with impunity and ruthlessness during elections. They identified groups such as the Azorka Boys, Kandahar Boys, Aluta Boys, Invincible Force, Bolga Bull Dogs, Bamba Forces, Bawumia Fun Club, and Nima Boys. Other groups include Delta Force, Al Jazeera, Veranda Boys, Mahama Boys, Aluta Boys etc. (CODEO, 2019).

The issue of vigilantism has gained media attention in recent times following the violence that erupted during the Ayawaso West Wuogon Constituency By-election in 2019 where vigilante groups affiliated to political parties and the security forces clashed leading to many sustaining gunshot injuries. This incident culminated in the commissioning of the Emile Short Commission of Enquiry to investigate the causes of the violence and to prescribe solution to it. The investigation led to the adoption of the Vigilantism and Related Offences Bill to criminalize vigilante activities and punish perpetrators (Welch, 2020).

2.6 Media Role and Democratic Elections in Ghana

The media plays an important role in any democratic dispensation and often regarded as the gatekeepers and arbiters to democratic governance (Dumenu & Adraku, 2020). Ghana has a vibrant media environment following the liberalization of the media space and the reduction of state censorship after the adoption of the 1992 Constitution. The Constitution provides for the freedom of speech and expression including the independency of the media to operate without government interference (Temim & Smith, 2002). This has resulted in the proliferation of many independent private media houses providing balanced narratives to the Ghanaian public. The National Media Commission is established by the constitution as a regulatory body to oversee the activities of the media (Arthur, 2010). It monitors and regulates the activities in the media domain to improve and maintain quality standards in the pursuance of fair, balanced, independent, and satisfactory media programming. Despite its existence, some media houses flagrantly disregard media ethics and code of conduct and engage in purely partisan and politically charged programmes.

The state-run media is often criticised for giving favourable coverage to the incumbent government at the disadvantage of opposition parties (Temim & Smith, 2002). Even though the state-owned media is required by law to provide equal and impartial access to all political parties during election campaigns to present their policies and manifestos to the electorates, the reality remains that the incumbent government have more finances to pay for more airtime and

coverage for their activities (Gyimah-Boadi, 2012). Equal and equitable access to the state-owned media has been a problem and many smaller political parties are less represented in the media due to low budget and flagrant abuse of incumbency (*ibid*).

The existence of independent private media outlets has improved the competitiveness of elections, making the general public more interested in election-related debates. During electioneering campaigns, both the state-run media and the private media provide the platform for all candidates to articulate and disseminate their campaign messages to the electorates.

Radio stations have particularly become a widely listened to media in Ghana and the most important source of news information to the general public where information is being broadcasted in either English or local dialects. Some media stations are widely known to engage in extremely partisan politics expressing opinions in support of particular candidates during elections. The two major political parties, the National Democratic Congress and the New Patriotic Party, have media houses that are openly affiliated to them and they engage in propaganda programmes aimed at shaping public opinion to their advantage (Meissner, 2010). There are other media houses who have earned their places in the Ghanaian media spaces with neutral, fair, balanced, and verified reportage. The media is powerful in shaping and manipulating public opinion and some radio stations air their programmes in the local languages, targeting the electorates to vote in a certain direction. The use of press conferences and media releases are a common phenomenon in Ghanaian party politics with the ruling government and opposition parties using press conferences to stake claims and to offer counter claims.

The media in Ghana is generally seen to act in a responsible manner (Meissner, 2010). However, there are instances where certain media houses who have conducted themselves irresponsibly by using intemperate, abusive, and incendiary languages that threatens the political atmosphere in the country. Some media houses blatantly disregard media ethics in the type of opinion they express, and they sometimes influence their listeners by spreading unverified reports of the activities of political opponents.

Another important issue is the cost of media campaigns to political parties. The cost involved in running election campaigns and media advertising is very high and most political parties spend huge chunk of their election budget in this area (Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 2020). The incumbent government, with huge financial wherewithal to pay for airtime for media coverage attempt to win support by frequently showing some of the developmental projects that it has undertaken while the opposition, mostly with limited media budget, attempt to counteract the government claims and also put their party promises and

policies on display. Due to the high cost in media advertising, the smaller parties are less represented.

During elections, effective use of the media to convey messages to electorates has become one of the ways to court support and win elections (Commonwealth Observer Group, 2013). In Ghana, the use of the media to send out messages on party manifestos and to control the narratives to deliver campaign messages has proven to be effective in determining who wins the elections. Expert panel discussions on topical issues surrounding elections are often discussed and phone-in segments allow listeners to contribute to the shows. Highly opinionated issues are raised, and uncontrolled emotions are expressed during phone in segments.

The media is also instrumental in providing live coverage of election events as it unfolds (Election Observation Mission, 2009). On election days, the television and radio stations provide live broadcasts of election by sending reporters on the ground to provide information on security situations at polling stations. They also prompt electoral officials of where additional voting materials are needed as well as providing timely provisional results to the public and projecting winners. They provide election analysis as well as provide unfolding real time events happening at the polling stations while engaging expert opinions on events.

The vibrancy of the media in uncovering incidences of electoral fraud has helped to strengthen the Ghanaian electoral process and improved on the transparency and accountability of the elections. Some media houses such as JOY FM and Peace FM offer comprehensive media coverages of elections; monitor voting process; broadcast collated results; tally election results; and predict winners with their provisional results of both parliamentary and presidential election results (Frempong, 2008). This has helped strengthen the electoral process.

2.7 Civil Society Engagement in Election Monitoring and Observation

Since Ghana's return to democratic governance in 1992 with uninterrupted elections held every four years, the country has witnessed a vibrant and thriving Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in every sphere of its economic, social, and political life. Ghana has become a textbook example of good democratic governance and electoral success across the African continent. Prior to 1992, the military governments that ruled the country had cracked down on dissent and stifled the activities of Civil Society Organisations (Gyekye-Gyandoh, 2016). Groups that were critical of government's policies were either oppressed, their leadership imprisoned or co-opted by the government (ibid). The transition to democratic governance marked by the adoption of the 1992 constitution, enjoined greater participation of citizens in governance including the

activities of Civil Society Organisations in public policy discourse. An important aspect of this democratization process is the active activities of Civil Society Organisations engaged in various areas of campaign, advocacy, service delivery, policy, government oversight and lobbying (Awal & Debrah, 2013; Carothers, 1994; Carothers, 1997). Other areas that Civil Society Organisations have proven effective in affecting changes in various policies of national interest include child's rights, women's rights, domestic violence, road safety, civic engagement, election monitoring and observation, peacebuilding, and peace brokering during election disputes (Hearn, 2010).

The activities of Civil Society Organisations are in fact, critical in promoting liberal democracy; citizen participation in governance; deepening political pluralism; and further consolidating democratic governance (ibid). They have succeeded in persuading governments and political parties to adopt policies that seek to protect the rights of citizens and improve the lives of marginalized groups (Frimpong, 2017). Civil Society Organisations wield a powerful influence on political parties during elections by influencing their campaign messages by making specific demands to be implemented when voted into power. Through petitioning governments, holding press conferences, conducting seminars, protests, media campaigns, and sensitisation programmes, some Civil Society Organisations have been successful in affecting government policies or have had their demands incorporated in manifestos or provided alternative opinions to political parties (Botchway & Bendall, 2018). Election years offer unique opportunities for Civil Society Organisations to press on their demands for consideration.

Elections that are deemed free, fair, and transparent constitutes one of the key tenets of democratic governance. Effective Civil Society observation during elections help to confer some degree of credibility, legitimacy, and transparency to the outcome of elections and help to decide whether an election results would be accepted or disputed (Alidu & Gyekye-Gyandoh, 2016). In recent times, Civil Society Organisations enjoy relatively free space to operate without government interference in Ghana. That is not to suggest that attempts are not being made by governments and its agencies to gag and intimidate the work of Civil Society Organisations when it feels threatened. There are still limitations to the extent Civil Society Organisations could operate especially with the deliberate delay to pass the Right to Information Bill meant to provide access to information to private citizens and organizations. It is also relevant to state that, the work of Civil Society Organisations is being hindered by limited financial power, inadequate capacity and manpower to influence government's policies (Hearn, 2010). Strong, independent, autonomous and neutral Civil Society Organisations play

an important role in democratic consolidation. The political neutrality of Civil Society Organisations is an important requirement in influencing government policies and providing credibility and legitimacy to an election result. If a Civil Society Organisation is perceived to be colluding with a particular political party, its credibility in terms of lending credence and legitimacy to an election results are questioned. Building trust and confidence and maintaining unbiased stance on the political pendulum is required in maintaining credibility (Botchway & Bendall, 2017). Non-state actors exist to hold government to account and a close collaboration between Civil Society Organisations and the state helps to expedite development projects.

For democracy to thrive, there is the need for active Civil Society participation in governance and in particular, election monitoring and observation. Election observation is typically done by independent parties, such as Civil Society Organisations, Non-Governmental Organisations or other International agencies whose main goal is to ensure that the electoral process conforms to national and international standards; devoid of rigging and manipulations; that no candidate is given unfair advantage over the other on the basis of free, fair and transparent elections (Gyekye-Gyandoh, 2016). Observer's responsibilities include monitoring the electoral process and report any anomalies, malpractices, and fraudulent activities that casts some doubts on the integrity of the electoral process. The major function of election monitoring, therefore, is to detect election fraud and to see under what conditions elections were conducted (ibid). Even though observers do not themselves seek to correct the anomalies and malpractices, their activities nonetheless, help to prevent vote rigging since parties are aware of the watchful eyes of observers who have domestic and international audiences. However, some elections are rigged and manipulated despite the presence and reports of both domestic and foreign observers.

Ghana has a well-organized domestic election observer groups who record election processes and report to both domestic and international audiences whether the process was conducted in a free, fair, and transparent manner. From 1992 to 2020 elections, the number and quality of Civil Society Organisations engaged in election observation has increased significantly. For instance, the number of domestic election observers deployed in the 1996 election were over 3,100 as compared to about 200 domestic election observers deployed in the 1992 election (Gyimah-Boadi, Ocquaye & Drah 2000). Although attempts were made by the government in 1996 to limit the work of the Network of Domestic Election Observers (NEDEO), observers were represented in most constituencies across the country, especially trouble spot polling stations. The NEDEO monitors elections nationwide and have agents on the ground who monitor voting processes, tabulate results, report on voting malpractices and

conduct general assessment of the voting process (Gyimah-Boadi 1999; Gyimah-Boadi, Oquaye & Draah 2000). The Electoral Commission also cooperated with NEDEO and provided them unrestricted access to monitor the electoral process.

By 2000 election, the number of domestic observers recruited, trained and deployed to various polling stations across the country had tripled to over 15,000 (CODEO, 2013). The NEDEO had also transformed to CODEO representing the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers, consisting of about 24 local civil society groups whose membership was drawn from professional and religious groups such as teachers, lawyers, nurses, journalists and religious groups. The work of domestic observer groups in 2000 election became indispensable due to the dwindling role of the international observer groups, providing the front seat role for domestic election observer groups (Boafo-Arthur 2001).

The work of CODEO had even become more important in 2004 election with the growing reputation for its credibility. The electorates have grown confidence in the work of CODEO due to rising objectivity, neutrality and non-partisanship (Gyekye-Gyandoh, 2016). The final reports of CODEO, contained in final observer's report was largely accepted by Ghanaians, pointing to the peaceful manner the election was conducted. The civic education provided by CODEO also helps to educate the general public on election processes and creates awareness on potential violent tendencies and how to prevent them. The contributions made by think tanks such as the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD), Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), Institute for Democratic Governance (IDEG) and the Christian Council (CC) were significant. They have aided the observation process by training and deployment of personnel that enhanced the peaceful outcome of elections in Ghana.

In 2012, even though the results of the presidential election were contested by the opposition New Patriotic Party, the report of CODEO of the general outcome of the election were largely free, fair and transparent and was embraced by Ghanaians. Despite the incidence of some pockets of violence and irregularities recorded at some polling stations, the results, according to CODEO was not compromised and it was generally free and fair.

The outcome of the 2016 elections was largely peaceful and the activities of Civil Society Organisations in election observation was remarkably important in the final acceptance of the results. Even though some reservations were made by the incumbent government who had lost the election to the opposition. The outcome of the 2020 elections were contested by the National Democratic Congress despite the declaration of both domestic and international observers as largely free and fair (Gyampo, Graham & Yobo, 2017). Due to the reputation of neutrality, independence, and impartiality built by CODEO over the years, their final

observer's report was largely embraced, except by the National Democratic Congress, whose suspicion of foul play and collusion could not be substantiated in court.

The credibility of Civil Society Organisations in election monitoring and observation have increased significantly since 1992. Their activities have contributed immensely to the peaceful outcome of elections and the consolidation of democratic governance in Ghana. However, Civil Society Organisations are faced with a number of challenges in their discharge of duties. Among these challenges include financial constraints and lack of capacity to train and recruit well qualified personnel to undertake various responsibilities. Financial independence from government is key in maintaining neutrality from external and internal influences. Unhealthy competition amongst Civil Society Organisations working in the same field has also been identified as a major challenge. Civil Society Organisations that successfully form coalitions and networks to press for their collective demands have a powerful bargaining chip to be heard than those standing alone. Civil Society Organisations must not be seen as projecting anti-government agenda. They must be viewed as partners in development.

Meaningful engagement between political parties, government and Civil Society Organisations provides the thriving environment to affect public policy discourse. Often, non-state actors offer different perspectives and opinions that improve the political process. The State-Civil society relationship provides the conducive environment for dialogue and development where private citizens are engaged in the political process (Hearn, 2010). Empowering citizens and partnering with government to embark on development project initiatives. They also serve as a watchdog on government, demanding probity and accountability and giving voice to the voiceless and marginalized (Botchway & Bendall, 2017). They offer grassroots support to the marginalized and building capacity. Civil Society Organisations that manage to maintain political neutrality and be independent of government, political parties and state agencies have succeeded in building a reputation of credibility and legitimacy. Certain governments have tried to forcibly incorporate Civil Society Organisations into state structures or set up parallel rival organization or use repressive tactics to limit their activities (Robinson & Friedman, 2005).

Flawed and disputed elections are the number one cause of political violence in Africa. The work of Civil Society Organisations in election observation and monitoring have helped in preventing some of this violence that erupt before, during and after elections. Civil Society Organisations must be supported in their efforts to contribute to the sanctity and transparency of electoral outcomes in Ghana.

2.8 Women Participation in Democratic Elections in Ghana

After years of democratic progress and the restoration of multi-party democracy in Ghana, women representation in political leadership still leaves much to be desired (Tagoe & Abakah, 2015). While women constitute over 51.2 percent of the country's population, their representation in public and political spaces is negligible (Munemo, 2017). The country lags behind many countries in the area of women political participation despite the country's international and regional commitment to ensure equal representation of women in political leadership and public space. Women continue to face myriad of challenges and resistance in their attempts to occupy political positions. Such resistance is either influenced by archaic traditional and socio-cultural practices or economic constraints (Tagoe & Abakah, 2015). Other barriers faced by women include inadequate financial resources exacerbated by low level of education, negative gender stereotypes, discrimination, and patriarchal ideology that led to their exclusion from taking part in political leadership and decision making (Chowdhury, 2009; Munemo, 2017). Women have been held down for far too long and it is important that these barriers that prevent women from climbing up the political ladder be removed in order to tap into the full potential of equal representation of women in politics.

While there are not explicit legal and constitutional barriers barring women from contesting for political offices, structural and covert status quo have relegated women to the background (Munemo, 2017; Sossou, 2011). The few that have braved the odds to contest for political positions have suffered structural violence such as intimidation, aggression, humiliation, mockery, and verbal assault that has resulted in their abysmal performance in local and national elections (Tagoe & Abakah, 2015). There is also some laxity in government's policies towards affirmative actions to boost the number of female parliamentary aspirants vis-a-vis their male counterparts. A more inclusive and participatory democracy still eludes Ghana despite its democratic gains. When even political parties decide to field a female candidate, she is either held in a subordinate position to a male such as a running mate or rationally placed to attract female voters. Such practice has found expression in the political environment in Ghana. The patriarchal nature of the Ghanaian society determines who is elected to lead a political party (Munemo, 2017).

Although over the years the number of women representations in Ghanaian political landscape continue to increase steadily, the rate of increase is at a snail's pace despite the support and acknowledgement of the important role women play in the Ghanaian body politic (Dake, 2008). Ghana stands a chance to benefit substantially if gender parity is achieved in

political representation and decision making (Sossou, 2011). It is acknowledged that when women are actively involved in political leadership, it leads to quality decisions; promotes gender equality; improves general living conditions; accelerate peaceful resolution of disputes and leads to a more equitable and just society with sustainable future (Duverger, 1955; Lovenduski, 1981; Paxton et al., 2007; Schlozman et al., 1993).

Fair and equitable representation of marginalized, disadvantaged, and minority groups such as women in political leadership is a basic principle of democratic governance and Ghana as a signatory to several international and regional conventions and protocols must take steps to ensure that women are adequately and equitably represented (Dake, 2008). Ghana's affirmation to the Beijing Conference and its commitment to implement the SDGs (SDG 5.5) requires the country to end the disproportionate representation of women in public and political spheres (Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2021). The constitution of the republic of Ghana clearly stated that steps should be taken to promote gender equality and no person shall be discriminated based on race, gender, ethnicity, religion, creed etc. (Constitution, Art. 17:2, 35:5). It makes it criminal for people to be discriminated on those grounds. Despite these commitments, women still struggle to close the gender disparity gap and are highly underrepresented. The Ghana National Gender Policy was introduced in 2015 in an effort to include gender equality and women's empowerment into the national developmental process (Munemo, 2017). Even though some successes have been chalked in recent times in the appointment of females to top executive and political positions such as Chief justices, speaker of parliament, Chair of the Electoral Commission, and Chief executives of state Institutions, there have been some regression in some areas of the number of parliamentary seats held by women (Sossou, 2011). Women have also been nominated as running mates to flag bearerership contesting for presidential seat (Bondzie, 2020).

The situation is not all that gloomy. A Ministry of Gender, Women and Children's affairs have been created in 2001 and Women's desk at the Presidency have been established to address women's concerns and to boost their participation in the political sphere. There is also an increasing recognition of women's wing within the political parties, responsible for organizing grassroots support for the various political parties. Gender advocacy campaigns need to garner additional momentum to increase pressure on government to implement the Women's manifesto. Additionally, the work of Civil Society Organisations towards pushing the agenda of women and affirmative policies have to be expanded in order to achieve gender equality. Women's equal representation in political leadership is not only important to achieve

a fair and equal society, but a necessary prerequisite for the consolidation of democratic governance in Ghana (Dake, 2008).

The 2020 elections marked a milestone in women's political history of Ghana where the country witnessed an appreciable number of women contesting for the high office of the land (Madsen, Aning & Adu, 2020). Akua Donkor of the Ghana Freedom Party (GFP), Brigitte Akosua Dzogbenuku of Progressive People's Party (PPP), Nana Konadu Agyemang Rawlings of the National Democratic Party-(NDP) and the Vice-Presidential Candidate of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) Prof. Nana Opoku Agyemang (ibid). They received support from different Women's Right groups such as the Network for Women's Rights in Ghana (NETRIGHT), the Domestic Violence Coalition (DV Coalition) and the Women's Manifesto Coalition (WMC)(ibid).

However, the abysmal performance of female candidates contesting for the seat of the presidency is an indication that the country is not ready to accept a female president and has revealed the deeply entrenched patriarchal ideology embedded in the Ghanaian society. One important reason for women's poor performance in elections are that women campaigns are heavily underfunded as compared to their male counterparts even within the intra party level primaries which is the gateway to grant tickets to candidates to contest for national elections are available to the highest bidders (Aning & Adu, 2020; Dake, 2008; Madsen). They lacked equal playing field at that level because the financial demands are huge to secure the ticket. Sponsors and donors would rather finance a male candidate than a female candidate.

Before Ghana can join the likes of Finland, Ireland, Tanzania and New Zealand who have female Heads of State, Ghana needs to adopt a more drastic affirmative action to promote equitable representation of women.

2.9 Election Security

Election Security is an important component to peaceful election. As elections in Ghana has assumed a make-or-break tendency with high stakes for renewal of ethnic conflicts and political rivalry, any lapses in the security preparation can lead to undesirable violent outcomes. As stated in the previous discussions, there has been an increasing penchant for violence in both magnitude and frequency over the years perpetrated by party vigilante groups and foot soldiers. The enviable peaceful atmosphere that characterizes Ghanaian elections is fast being replaced by uncertainty, threats, tensions, intimidations, and charged political atmosphere (Dumenu & Adzraku, 2020). This situation has been compounded by the growing suspicion of the

proliferation of small arms and light weapons that has been smuggled in from neighbouring countries and the already volatile ethnic feud and chieftaincy disputes pose a big security threat to the fragile political atmosphere during election (Aubyn & Abdallah, 2013).

Owing to these growing security concerns and the need to maintain security during elections, the capacity, professionalism, and the ability of the security agencies in charge of maintaining security before, during, and after elections has become critical. Against this backdrop, an *ad hoc* security task force called the Ghana Election Security Task Force (NESTF) is commissioned in every election year to ensure security during and after elections (Aubyn & Abdallah, 2013).

The composition of the National Election Security Task Force involving all the security agencies including the Ghana Police Service (GPS), Ghana Armed Forces (GAF), Ghana Fire Service (GFS), Ghana Immigration Service (GIS), Customs, Excise and Preventive Services (CEPS), Prison Service, Bureau of National Investigations (BNI) and the External Intelligence Service are tasked with the responsibility of maintaining security during elections (Aubyn & Abdallah, 2013). The Ghana Police Service is the leading agency that coordinates the activities of all the other security agencies in maintaining peace and order during elections. At the regional and district level, the Joint Regional Security Taskforce (JRSTF) and the Joint District Security Task Force (JDSTF) are responsible for maintaining security at the regional and district level respectively. The taskforce is deployed at various polling stations, electoral offices, collation centres, vehicle escorts to collect or deliver election materials, protecting ballot boxes and providing security to election officials. Polling stations known to be trouble spot areas are beefed with additional security to avoid clashes and malpractices. Reinforcements and contingency forces are mobilized and deployed to restore peace in emergency situations while rapid deployment forces and mobile forces are always on standby to respond to unforeseen contingencies (ibid).

Appraising their performance, the National Election Security Task Force has been credited for ensuring peaceful elections and successfully foiling incidences of electoral violence. Their swift response and rapid deployment have been hailed (Aubyn, 2013). Their visibility in all polling stations has led to fewer incidences of violence at the polling stations. They have succeeded in quelling riots caused by thugs and prevented macho men from snatching ballot boxes at certain polling centres and deescalated tensions at various hotspots.

However, complaints of shielding some big men and miscreants who have misconducted themselves during elections and reports of collusion with some political parties have also been reported. The rising politicisation of the security in charge of managing election poses a great

threat to elections atmosphere in Ghana (Aning & Albrecht, 2020). The neutrality of the National Election Security Task Force has been questioned by some politicians and activists. There is the need for capacity building, retraining, and additional logistical support to further improve the function and performance of the National Election Security Task Force.

2.10 The Role of the National Peace Council in Sustaining Peace and Resolving Conflict During Election

The need to sustain peace, prevent disputes, resolve conflicts, promote national harmony and reconciliation has culminated in the establishment of the National Peace Council (NPC). Firmly established by legal and constitutional frameworks, the National Peace Council Act (Act 818) was passed by the parliament of Ghana in March 2011, as a national level institution tasked with the responsibility of ensuring peace and resolving conflicts (Awinador-Kanyirige, 2014). Even though the National Security Council (NSC), the Northern Region Peace Advisory Committee (NRPAC), and the Centre for Conflict Transformation and Peace Studies (CECOTAPS) had existed and been instrumental in resolving instances of conflict in some parts of Ghana, they lacked the required capacity, skills, financial resources, and the legal backing to deal with complex chieftaincy and land-related issues (Agbevade, Graham & Gyampo, 2021). Therefore, the formation of the National Peace Council was intended to fill the gap in dealing with sensitive and complex issues that threaten the peace and stability of the country and find amicable solutions to problems that could potentially throw the country into chaos.

As an independent state institution established by law, the National Peace Council is constitutionally mandated, among other things, to facilitate and develop mechanisms for conflict prevention, management, resolution, and to build sustainable peace in Ghana (National Peace Act, 2011). The National Peace Council is empowered to mediate instances of conflict and bring lasting solutions to all inter-ethnic, chieftaincy, land, and political disputes. In all its operation, the National Peace Council is required to remain independent and autonomous of external and domestic interference and machinations.

As enshrined in Act 818, the main objectives of the National Peace Council are:

(a) To harmonize and co-ordinate conflict prevention, management, resolution, as well as to build sustainable peace through networking and coordination,

- (b) To strengthen capacities for conflict prevention, management, resolution, and to build sustainable peace in the country, including but not limited to chiefs, women, youth groups, and community organisations,
- (c) To increase awareness on the use of non-violent strategies to prevent, manage, and resolve conflict and to build sustainable peace in the country,
- (d) To facilitate the amicable resolution of conflict through mediation and other processes including indigenous mechanisms for conflict resolution and peace building,
- (e) To promote understanding of the values of diversity, trust, tolerance, confidence building, negotiation, mediation, dialogue, and reconciliation,
- (f) To co-ordinate and supervise the work of the Regional and District Peace Councils,
- (g) To facilitate the implementation of agreements and resolutions reached between parties in conflict,
- (h) To make recommendations to the Government and other stakeholders on actions to promote trust and confidence between and among groups and to perform any other functions which are ancillary to its objectives,

The composition of the National Peace Council governing board comprises thirteen well-respected and influential members selected from religious bodies, traditional Council, and identifiable groups (Agbevade et al., 2021). While the body is autonomous, the President is empowered to appoint two members of the governing council in consultation with the Council of State. Such members are revered with a high degree of moral respect within their communities, and their judgments on issues are unquestionable (Kotia & Aubyn, 2013). Furthermore, the members are selected from various Christian bodies, Muslim denominations, and other ethnic, gender, and religious groups in Ghana. Such diversity and non-partisanship of the body enable it to provide the parties in conflict with a common ground to resolve conflicts.

The members of the governing board have a tenure of four years and they are eligible for re-appointment. The Council has representatives in the regions and districts across the country and have engaged in various forms of public education, sensitization, awareness, dialogues to foster peace and harmony (Agbevade et al., 2021). The Council adopts consensus and simple majority as their operational strategy to arrive at a decision (ibid). Over the years, the National Peace Council has partnered and collaborated with other organizations in bringing peace, stability, and resolving conflicts, including election-related violence (Kotia & Aubyn, 2013).

3. Methodology

This chapter presents a general overview on how the research was undertaken and explains how the data collection was conducted. It presents how the respondents were selected, the instrument used, the procedure and the sample size. The chapter also highlights the challenges encountered during data collection and other methodological issues. In order to ensure objectivity, reliability, and credibility of the outcome of the study, several factors were considered to enrich the outcome of the study.

3.1 Sample Size

Table 1. Background Information of the Respondents in the Study ($N = 12$)

Respondents' Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Organization	Area of Expertise
Nana	Male	43	Law Firm	Legal Expert
Fiifi	Male	40	University of Ghana	Lecturer
Abdul	Male	32	Public Agenda	Journalist
Daniel	Male	38	CDD-Ghana (CSO)	Elections Observer
Alfa	Male	55	Peace Council	Peace Organisation
Justice	Male	48	Electoral Commission	Election Officer
Eunice	Fem	36	Law Firm	Legal Expert
Ama	Fem	47	University of Cape Coast	Lecturer
Akosua	Fem	30	Multimedia	Journalist
Linda	Fem	45	NDC (Political Party)	Politician
Dija	Fem	33	NPP (Political Party)	Politician
Ana	Fem	29	Ghana Police Service	Election Security

A total of 12 expert respondents selected from a cluster of seven groups consisting of Political Party Officials, Electoral Commission Officials, Constitutional and Legal Experts, Media Personnel, Civil Society Organisations, Election Security Personnel, and the Academia took part in the study. An attempt was made to select two respondents from each category and a deliberate effort was made to include at least a female in each category to reflect diversity in the study. A total of six females and six males participated in this study. The choice of women and experts in these fields was carefully made to solicit quality information from diverse socio-economic, gender, and demographic groups. The sampling technique was therefore purposive, grounded in the notion that experts in the various fields will provide high-quality responses on questions presented regarding electoral violence in Ghana. Respondents from Electoral Commission, the Media, Political Parties, Security Services, and Election Observers are directly involved in election-related matters and have experienced first-hand issues of electoral violence. Therefore, they are in a position to recount their experiences and provide accurate

answers regarding the spate of electoral violence in Ghana. The respondents were also selected so that the information provided can be verified and evaluated to eliminate bias.

3.1.1 Respondent 1: Nana (Legal Practitioner)

Nana is a university lecturer and a legal practitioner with expertise in criminal and constitutional law. He has more than ten years' experience as a lecturer and in practice as a lawyer. He has consulted for several international NGOs on issues related to election security, peace, mediation, arbitration and constitutional amendment. He has also authored several articles on elections and electoral violence as well as spoke on different platforms and granted several interviews on television and radio on issues related to constitutional law, peaceful elections, and electoral violence.

3.1.2 Respondent 2. Fiifi (University Lecturer)

Fiifi is a lecturer at the University of Ghana Business School. He has profound knowledge in the electoral process of Ghana and has participated in workshops promoting peaceful election in Ghana. He was a student leader and has several years of experience in the political terrain of Ghana.

3.1.3 Respondent 3. Abdul (Journalist)

Abdul has more than 10 years' experience as a political journalist. He has extensively covered election activities since 2008. He has also reported directly from polling stations across the country during elections and has witnessed election-related violence first-hand. His main area of expertise includes politics, elections, social development, environmental issues, and sports. He reported on 2008, 2012, 2016 and 2020 elections in Ghana.

3.1.4 Respondents 4. Daniel (Election Observer)

Daniel has been involved in election monitoring for over a decade for one of the most credible CSOs in the field of election monitoring and observation in Ghana. He is the team leader in election monitoring and observation in his organisation and has observed six different presidential and parliamentary elections in Ghana. As a team leader, he is tasked with the responsibility of providing a report about the conduct of elections. He has also consulted for many private organisations in the field of peace promotion, elections monitoring and women participation in politics in Ghana.

3.1.5 Respondent 5. Alfa (*Election Observer & Peace Campaigner*)

Alfa has worked as an election observer and peace campaigner for the past 8 years. He is a member of the Ghana Peace Council. He has organized several peace campaigns in the deprived Zongo communities noted as flashpoints/trouble spots where most machomen and vigilante group members are recruited from to cause mayhem during elections. He has engaged many youths from these communities and organized programmes to educate and enlighten them against election violence. Being someone coming from the community of Nima, he has witnessed electoral violence first-hand and has conducted several programmes to educate the youth. His expertise cuts across election observation, peace promotion, dispute resolution, and election education.

3.1.6 Respondent 6. Justice (*Election Officer*)

Justice is an election officer who has supervised parliamentary and presidential elections in the Eastern Region of Ghana. He served as a returning officer in a constituency in the eastern region and supervised several elections. He has witnessed first-hand some electoral violence that took place at polling stations in the Eastern Region.

3.1.7 Respondent 7. Eunice (*Legal Practitioner*)

Eunice is a lawyer working as a private legal practitioner with a law firm based in Accra. Her area of expertise includes criminal law, constitutional law, administrative law, and taxation. She has represented private client and companies across Ghana with several years of experience. She has also participated in discussions relating to electoral violence in Ghana and consulted for Civil Society Organizations on peaceful election and election-related violence.

3.1.8 Respondent 8. Ama (*University Lecturer*)

Ama is a Political Science Lecturer at the University of Cape Coast. With profound knowledge and experience in Ghana's electoral history, she has authored many articles about election and election-related violence in Ghana.

3.1.9 Respondent 9. Akosua (*Journalist*)

She is a news editor at multimedia group of companies. She has been involved in political talk shows and hosted many political programmes. As an anchor in one of the main private radio and television stations in Ghana, she has interviewed many political figures on peaceful election, election-related violence, and have commented on political happenings in Ghana.

3.1.10 Respondent 10. Linda (Politician)

Linda is a politician affiliated to the New Patriotic Party. She has served in various capacities for the party as constituency executive, regional executive, and currently serving as a national executive member. She has immense experience in the area of elections and engaged in several discussions regarding peaceful elections with other stakeholders such as the Electoral Commission, other political parties, and Civil Society Organisations.

3.1.11 Respondent 11. Dija (Politician)

Dija has served in various capacities within the National Democratic Congress. She contested for a parliamentary seat on the ticket of the National Democratic Congress but lost in the 2020 general election. She is currently a member of the NDC Communications team, and she has huge experience in the area of elections in Ghana. She has served as a polling station agent in multiple occasions for her political party.

3.1.12 Respondent 12. Ana (Election Security)

Ana is a police officer who has been deployed to keep peace at various polling stations across Accra during the last two general elections. She has experience on riot control and how to diffuse a volatile situation from escalating. As part of her duties as election security task force, she has helped quelled some riots and de-escalated several situations that could have resulted in violence.

3.2 Instruments and Design

The study was conducted using a qualitative research method to obtain data for analysis. This technique was chosen essentially to obtain the minutest details of respondents' opinions, feelings, and interpret their meanings and actions (Denzin, 1989). The problem of electoral violence is dynamic, complex, and multi-dimensional, stemming from a wide range of socio-political and economic issues. Issues such as vote rigging, ballot padding, opponent intimidation, fraud, electoral malpractices, and manipulations of the electoral process are some of the leading causes of electoral violence. It is also fuelled by already existing ethnic, tribal and chieftaincy feuds and exacerbated by polarized political environment. By using a qualitative research method, the technique provides the opportunity to capture and observe respondents' personal feelings, expectations, and experiences that can best be obtained by

qualitative method. The technique also provides in-depth contextual understanding about how electoral violence unfolds.

The study primarily relied on both primary and secondary data. The thematic areas covered by the semi-structured Interview include mechanisms for peaceful elections; election security; Civil Society Organisations in election monitoring; role of the media in elections; role of political parties in elections; election funding; women's role in elections; and election management and administration. This was supported by newspaper publications, press releases, archives from the Electoral Commission of Ghana as well as documents from Civil Society Organizations. In order to gain insight into existing knowledge about political violence and institutional and constitutional mechanisms available in Ghana, a review of existing literature was conducted. This provided a plethora of understanding regarding Ghana's political history; the causes of electoral violence; relationship between political parties, government, and the Civil Society Organisations, as well as election campaigns and manifestos. Sources were crosschecked and analysed to meet scientific standards of research. To ensure that due process was followed during the data collection, the researcher made sure that utmost confidentiality was assured.

3.3 Procedure

Primary data which forms the backbone of this research was collected through interviews with carefully selected respondents. This was particularly important to receive highly accurate responses from informants well-versed in the field under investigation. Representatives of Civil Society Organisations working in election monitoring and observations; Media Personnel who have covered election activities; Political Party Representatives; Constitutional and Legal Experts and members of the Security Taskforce who had been deployed during elections were interviewed. Using a semi-structured interview, the study was able to elicit in-depth responses and insights on the political terrain on election-related violence in Ghana. Engaging with different expert respondents with varied background and with first-hand experience, the interview unearthed information on electoral processes and the activities of various stakeholders during elections as well as the challenges and problems towards achieving free, fair, and violence-free election. In all, 12 respondents were interviewed. A total of 40 questions in a semi-structured format were answered by all respondents. The interview was conducted via Zoom, WhatsApp, and phone calls due to the COVID 19 pandemic. The responses were

recorded for transcription. Details of the semi-structured interview questions are attached as Appendix B.

As with most researches, this study encountered some challenges and steps were taken to minimize the impact of those challenges. The results were unaffected by the challenges since such challenges were anticipated during the research design stage and strategies were designed in advance to reduce errors. The first challenge encountered was the travel restrictions and the need to observe strict social distancing due to the coronavirus outbreak. Therefore, the interviews were conducted via Zoom and phone calls. Secondly, even though the intent of the study was unambiguously communicated in the letter of invitation and the assurance of strict confidentiality guaranteed, some late withdrawals were made due to suspicions that the findings would be used as a political tool by opposition parties. This was also anticipated, and steps were taken to substitute respondents by contacting more respondents than required. In spite of these challenges, steps were taken not to compromise the quality and reliability of the study. The general outcome of this study meets the rigorous scientific standard.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

The study is consistent with the principles concerning human research ethics of the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2013), as well as follows the guidelines for the responsible conduct of research of The Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (2012).

4. Results

This chapter presents the results, following interviews conducted with expert respondents. Excerpts and transcripts of respondent's answers are presented below. A total of 12 expert respondents took part in the study.

4.1 Thematic Areas

4.1.1 *Understanding Mechanisms for Peaceful Elections and Resolving Electoral Conflicts*

Mechanisms for peaceful elections and resolving election-related violence was the central theme of this study. Based on the findings from the interviews, a significant number of respondents acknowledged the existence of electoral violence in Ghana's political landscape, although described it as a low-intensity violence. However, they admitted that the violence is currently assuming an increasingly dangerous precedence in both frequency and magnitude.

There was unanimity in opinion that if drastic measures are not taken, the situation may explode in the future. Similarly, respondents described the fourth republic as the most stable and successful era for democratic governance in Ghana in terms of peaceful elections. They cited that Ghana has had eight successful elections, among which are three peaceful transfers of power from one political party to another, to a large extent without major incidence of violence. Despite the positive views expressed by respondents, some of the views contained careful optimism. The following are the excerpts of the views expressed by respondents on the theme mechanism for peaceful elections and resolution of electoral disputes:

“Looking back 30 years of re-embracing multi-party democracy, I would say that Ghana has made substantial progress and attained some level of democratic maturity when it comes to democratic governance and peaceful elections due to some stabilizing mechanisms it has put in place. The first one is that we have always embraced reforms as the way forward in correcting anomaly in our electoral processes. Reforms provide us with the opportunity to reflect and rectify the wrongs for future elections. Secondly, our election security has been professional in discharging their duties and our Electoral Commission has continually displayed appreciable level of independence and confidence. However, we cannot play the ostrich that Ghana has reached the level that we can confidently say it is totally immune from electoral violence. But so far so good. Our electoral laws provide the avenue for dissatisfied parties to channel their grievances to the Supreme Court for determination and that for me has helped the country to escape high level political violence that other countries experience” (Nana).

The second respondent highlighted some mechanisms and strategies for preventing election-related violence and resolving conflicts whenever they occur:

“I must say that Ghana is not completely insulated from election related-violence. However, what is working great for the country is that it has developed a mechanism where traditional authorities, religious leaders and the National Peace Council play a very crucial role in calming tempers down when it gets to the breaking point. These institutions are well-respected within the Ghanaian setting. In both 2012 and 2020 elections, the National Chief Imam, the Christian Council, the Asantehene, and other traditional leaders and the National Peace Council played an exceptional role in brokering peace between the leadership of the NPP and NDC to accept the verdict of the elections. The electoral laws have also provided an avenue for aggrieved persons to seek redress in courts for contested issues of electoral malpractices. These together with proactive policing and most importantly increasing independency and transparency of the Electoral Commission by the active engagement of political parties through the Interparty Advisory Committee (IPAC) and the adoption of continuous reforms aimed at streamlining the electoral process is what is working for Ghana in preventing violence escalation in the country. What would completely prevent violence during election is addressing the fundamental bread-and-butter issues, where people do not feel that their livelihood would be threatened when their parties move into opposition. At the end of the day, it boils down to the bread-and-butter issues and people will go every length to protect their source

of survival. The national peace council and CSOs must also sustain their peace campaign efforts not only during election years so that their visibility would be felt across the country. To me this is critical. We have reviewed our laws through amendments and reforms to meet the changing complexities of elections” (Eunice).

Another respondent from the Electoral Commission hailed the continuous reforms and innovation adopted by the Electoral Commission as the main catalyst for the low record of conflicts during elections in Ghana. This view was corroborated by the previous respondents as well:

“As an election staff, I can document several reforms we have adopted as a nation to streamline our electoral processes since 1992 and we are still updating our electoral systems and processes. It is an ongoing exercise. We started with voter ID cards with no pictures. Moved on to black and white picture IDs, to coloured photographs and now biometric IDs with high resolution photographs. We have also moved from opaque ballot boxes to transparent ones. Moved from holding presidential and parliamentary elections on different days to the simultaneous elections of both parliamentary and presidential elections. We have also deployed the use of high-quality indelible inks. We have introduced the IPAC that increased the level of engagement between the political parties and the Electoral Commission. Timely declaration of election results due to the deployment of technology that allows fast and accurate transmission of electoral results from polling stations to collation centres. The EC has also trained and deployed highly educated temporal staffs in recent elections. There is a plan in place to allow Ghanaians in the diaspora to be able to vote in elections. All these are innovations and reforms introduced to increase transparency, accountability, and fair elections that meet international standard that will reduce the likelihood of election disputes in Ghana” (Justice).

These sentiments expressed by respondents have been re-echoed by other respondents and corroborated the views expressed in the literature review:

“I think the major challenge we have in Ghana is the winner takes all mentality in Ghanaian politics and that is the cause of election-related violence. Once you win election, you have all the ‘booties and spoils’ at your disposal and other political parties languish without any say or authority on how the affair of the state is run. Once you have the majority in parliament, all your plans, policies, and agenda are activated on automatic pilot to be passed. The politics of it assumes an economic sense so if you are elected to power, it is not a mere opportunity to serve, but an economic dimension to profit. When party foot-soldiers see all sorts of economic benefits they stand to achieve when the politicians they support win elections, they will fight to put them there. So, at the grassroot level, people are motivated by economic incentives to fight to win an election by every means, especially when their source of livelihood are threatened. So, the most effective strategy to curb election-related violence in Ghana is addressing the bread-and-butter issues before any other mechanism. People’s livelihoods are tied to who wins election, that is purely an economic incentive” (Fiifi).

One respondent made these observations on strategies and mechanisms for peaceful elections:

“I would say that 30 years of uninterrupted elections and democratic governance is something worth celebrating because same cannot be said about our neighbours. There are rising concerns in Mali, Guinea, Niger, and Burkina Faso with the recent forceful overthrow of governments and attempted coups happening across West Africa. Ghana is an oasis of peace and a model for democratic governance. I must say that successive Electoral Commissioners have taken the issue of transparency, accountability, engagement and dialogue seriously in an attempt to curbing election violence. People become violent when they do not trust the system as being free and fair. So, the Electoral Commission has continuously taken it upon itself to engage political actors throughout the various stages of the electoral process with the advent of the Inter Party Advisory Committee (IPAC). Run up to every election, lots of *ad hoc* efforts to foster peace are promoted and distinguished actors get political leaders to commit to peace. But addressing the bread-and-butter issues should be at the forefront of any strategy for peaceful elections. For me, these issues are at the heart of these violence and unrest that break out during elections. If people get the assurances that their survival is not affected or threatened regardless of whoever is elected, they will accommodate each other in election, regardless of who is declared the winner or vanquished” (Daniel).

Another respondent noted:

“Institutions such as the National Peace Council, Traditional Council, National House of Chiefs, and Religious Bodies play critical roles in resolving election-related violence. But these institutions could do better than what they are doing currently. I think they are reactionary instead of adopting proactive tactics. You know election-related violence mostly do not erupt like volcanoes....it normally begins with a series of precursor events. These must be nipped in the bud before it explodes. However, these institutions become silent and dormant until the violent erupts before they step in. This does not augur well for the country. Their activities must not be limited to election years or cycles but must be seen all the time. Using intemperate language on traditional and social media get followers of political parties agitated to take entrenched positions. There is always a build up before violence escalates and there must be a way to detect and prevent it from escalation. Going to sleep and resurfacing during election year to take an aligned posture puts the integrity of these organization at risk. To achieve a certain level of relevance, their impact should be felt all year round, not only when an issue reaches a breaking point” (Abdul).

This respondent had this to say regarding the operational independency and integrity of the Electoral Commission and the Supreme Court:

“The Supreme Court and Electoral Commission duties are purely determined by law so there is little room for misconduct and manipulations. What people express about these institutions are mere perceptions and suspicions. Suspicion of bias and partiality has been around for a long time especially with the Electoral Commission because the president appoints the Chair. But I must say suspicions not corroborated by facts

are not enough to discredit the work of an institution that are regulated by law. These institutions are increasingly being neutral and dutiful and that is why we are not ending up fighting” (Ama).

4.1.2 Election Security

Security before, during, and after elections was identified by respondents as one of the major strategies in ensuring peaceful elections and resolving conflicts. Lapses in security preparedness during elections not only mar the elections, but also threatens the peace and stability the country enjoys. Therefore, security became one of the major themes addressed by respondents. Though the general perception of the security situation in the country is positive, some respondents decried the weak enforcement and biases of some security apparatus towards certain political parties.

This respondent expressed positive sentiments on the activities of the security forces:

“Election security has been commendable looking back at our past elections, despite some pockets of violence recorded in some hotspots in the strongholds of the two dominant political parties in the past. But there is always room for improvement as a young democracy, there will always be a security challenge. But as a country, we need to work together to address the issue of perceived support the incumbent government receives from the security agencies. That is the greatest challenge. Until we change the perceived biases of the security services towards the incumbent government to make sure that all political parties, be it the ruling government or the opposition, receives equal and adequate security by ensuring utmost neutrality and independence of the security agencies, we would continue to grapple with the activities of vigilante groups, who mobilize themselves to protect the interest of their political parties. It is refreshing to say that the current Inspector General of Police, Dampare, is doing well in this regard and has demonstrated that the police service can discharge its duties diligently without bias and partisanship. He is restoring confidence in the police service and if he can sustain this momentum into an election year, I have no slightest doubt that less incidence or no violence would be recorded in future elections” (Janet).

The conduct of the National Election Security Task Force was hailed by this respondent. However, expressed some reservations on lack of political will to prosecute some offenders who breached election laws:

“Since most election-related violence in Ghana is localized and concentrated in certain known flashpoints, identifying these hotspots and beefing up security becomes the first and important strategy to curbing the recurring violence. Already the security agencies have these arrangements run up to every election to put the necessary logistics and men in these areas prone to violence and this strategy has worked very well to prevent escalation. The National Election Security Task Force (NESTF) has been professional in the discharge of their duties. What is lacking is the political will to prosecute those who have been caught for various election malpractices and infractions. Shielding such people by “big men” in places of authority

emboldens them to misconduct themselves during elections. The sheer lethargy in investigating incidences of violence, infringements, and fraud is what encourage perpetrators to involve themselves in electoral violence” (Ana).

This respondent raised a very critical issue regarding how recruitment into the security agencies are done and the ramifications it has on security during elections:

“One prominent issue often neglected is how recruitment into the security services are done. People who are loyal to political parties are given preferential slots to be recruited into the security agencies. So, most recruits will go every length to do the bidding of the political parties who facilitated their recruitment. To ensure professionalism and ethics in the security agencies, we must relook on how recruitment is done, streamline these processes to make sure that recruitment is done based on qualification and merits, not based on party loyalty and affiliation” (Daniel).

One responded noted the lack of general enforcement of electoral laws while indicating selective prosecution of persons based on political affiliation:

“The electoral laws need to be enforced in order to prevent electoral violence. You don’t need any hardcore evidence to prove that the conduct of the police service at certain times has been unprofessional. The swiftness of the police in arresting the oppositions and radio presenters who have criticised the government and the lackadaisical attitude of the service in reacting or arresting presenters loyal to government shows how politically tilted the security agencies are” (Dija).

With regards to the disbandment of party vigilante groups in the country, a responded noted:

“The total disbandment of vigilante groups is the way forward. The various groups must be dissolved, and their activities criminalised. But there is the need to restore the trust in our security agencies. The vigilante groups came into existence due to the gaps and the lack of trust and transparency in the security service. When political parties have trust in the security agencies, the need to have vigilante groups filling that vacuum will be non-existent. Political parties or individuals found to be financing, mobilizing, and recruiting vigilante groups must be made to face the full rigour of the law” (Alfa).

4.1.3 *Women in Politics and Peaceful elections*

Women representation in the Ghanaian political landscape is one of the thematic areas of this study seeking to promote inclusive governance of marginalized groups. Women bring fresh perspectives and divergent opinions, and their active involvement would not only promote equal representation in public space, but also ensure that no person is left out in the country’s developmental stride. Respondents bemoaned the unequal representation of women in Ghana’s public and political spaces and advocated ways to close the gap.

One respondent decried the lack of gender parity in the public and political spaces in Ghana:

“When you look at the ratio of men to women in this country, that is not being reflected in parliament and other public offices. Though some political parties took some decisions in the past to support female candidates to run unopposed in primary elections, those decisions were unpopular among party delegates and some officials. It received lots of back lash and negative feedbacks. With all the noise we have made about affirmative actions and gender advocacy, we still have a long way to go in terms of action. In as much as we want the numbers of women representation to equal men, we must also not just call for numbers, but quality representation and substance who will contest in competitive elections and be voted for based on merits and I believe we have qualified women capable of the task. It must not always be the numbers, but quality contributions and delivery must be considered. If I can rightly recollect, out of the total number of 275 parliamentarians that represent the people, only 40 are female and this shows the disproportionate representation of women in political space. With the level of Ghana’s democratic maturity and with about 50.7 percent women population, the 40-female representative in parliament is both tragic and woefully inadequate. They continue to be marginalized structurally, traditionally, and by economic and financial constraints. Outside parliament, there are lots of women heading important public offices and parastatals and I think we should encourage that. The judiciary has seen a woman head; We have had in the past a woman speaker of parliament; the current chief of staff is a woman; the past and current Electoral Commission chairs are women; public universities have also seen women vice chancellors and other state institutions are being headed by women. They are making significant contributions there. Achieving parity is slow, but the momentum is rising” (Nana).

One male respondent observed:

“I think passing the affirmative action bill into law is the starting point in promoting and improving women representation in our local and national elections. The playing field is not level, especially in the instance that our elections are highly monetized. The men have the upper hand to dish out monies. Again, our cultural values have held women in subordinate positions to male counterparts. Women contributions are often being underestimated and overlooked, but they bring distinct perspective to our political landscape” (Akosua).

With the number of women in Ghana far exceeding men, one respondent noted the lack of gender parity in political representation:

“Women are under-represented and the momentum to push forward affirmative action bill has stalled. It would resurface in election year and after elections, it goes cold. So, I will say that women advocacy groups should sustain the interest and put pressure on government and political parties to commit to passing the affirmative action bill so that women representation would be improved. Additionally, the culture of intimidation and machoism in the Ghanaian politics should be dealt with if we are serious in attaining gender parity in the political places. Some women shy away from politics due to some of these intimidation and attacks on their personalities. Women are good leaders and woman leadership bring different perspectives to politics. We must encourage women participation and be willing to support them financially to do so. Inasmuch I support that women must be encouraged and be given some form of priority in

contesting for political position, I do not support the position of a quota system and forcing female candidates on their constituents. There should be a free will of the constituents to decide who should lead them” (Linda).

4.1.4 *Funding of Election*

Funding is crucial to the conduct of free, fair, and transparent elections, not only in Ghana but world-wide. Running elections are expensive to undertake and when institutions lack the financial resources to deliver on their core mandates, it affects the outcome of the election where parties contest the authenticity and transparency of the results declared. Respondents generally expressed satisfaction on the level of financial support and funding received by the Electoral Commission. They however bemoaned the neglect and inadequate financial support received by other state agencies and departments providing vital services regarding elections.

One respondent acknowledged the importance of funding during election and applauded how the Electoral Commission is adequately funded, while lamenting the lack of funding to other equally vital state institutions:

“The Electoral Commission in Ghana is adequately funded, at least we have not heard of any reports or complaints of the Electoral Commission being stifled or under resourced to deliver on its mandate. However, the case of National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) is deplorable. They are heavily underfunded and handicapped to deliver on public education. Their role is very crucial, but they are very limited now due to funding issues. There must be a conscious effort to resource the NCCE and other important state organizations that provide relevant services for election, not only the Electoral Commission. The more citizens become aware of elections as a contest of ideas and policies and not a physical combat, the more they are willing to accommodate each other’s views and eschew violence. Awareness comes with the understanding that elections can be won through the ballots and not through confrontation and antagonism” (Dija).

This respondent expressed his views regarding foreign donor support and suggested the adoption of technology to reduce cost of running an election:

“Receiving funding from foreign governments to fund election, for me, undermines our political independence and sovereignty. Relying on donor support must be reduced to issues of technical assistance, training and the likes, but receiving financial assistance provides an avenue for interference and it is high time such interdependence be reduced. Deploying technologies to cut down on cost is the way to go. Cutting down on cost and adopting technology can reduce cost and converging at a place will even reduce issues of violence. We should develop an election system that is less dependent on donor support. We should move on to the digital space where less people are required to converge at the polling station. This reduces confrontation and violence associated with elections. We should begin to have an open and candid

discussions about our election that allows for more transparency. Systems that cannot be compromised. If we continue receiving funds from foreign agencies, we cannot pride ourselves as an independent democracy” (Ama).

Another respondent corroborated the fact that the Electoral Commission receives sufficient funding to run elections in Ghana:

“The Electoral Commission are adequately funded as far as I am aware. Because of their sensitive mandate they are funded to achieve their objectives and receive support from international organizations or governments. The interest of the foreign donors is not to meddle in our domestic election. Our system does not permit that. Funding we receive externally is to make sure that our election meets international standard devoid of rigging and violence” (Ana).

4.1.5 *Constitutional and Legal Mechanisms for Election*

Ghana’s elections are regulated by laws to ensure that laid down rules are followed and applied. Constitutional and legal mechanisms is one of the key thematic areas of this study. Respondents expressed their views on the electoral laws of Ghana, and many have confirmed that Ghana has a comprehensive set of laws that governs elections and related matters. However, the enforcement of those laws has remained largely problematic based on the views expressed by various respondents.

One respondent with legal background acknowledged the robustness of the Ghanaian electoral laws:

“The fact that we have an independent Electoral Commission that takes its power from the constitution is an indication of how robust and neutral our electoral system is. Though section of society has expressed concerns on how the Commissioners of the Electoral Commission are appointed by the president and also reserves the right to fire a Commissioner. These appointments are subject to parliamentary approval, and they are thoroughly scrutinized to ensure that they are neutral before approval. Once approved and confirmed, they are held accountable, and their duties and responsibilities are strictly guided by law. And we have on several occasions took to reforms to rectify anomalies or to meet emerging trends and to make our electoral systems robust and transparent. We must continue to increase the penalties and punitive measures for electoral related offences and misconduct so that people would be deterred in committing such offences. The overall intent of laws is to promote good behaviour and to deter bad ones. So, if some people still find it attractive committing electoral offences, then it is logical to say that the law is not deterrent enough or maybe we must revisit the laws and adopt reforms” (Nana).

Another respondent with legal background noted the comprehensive nature of the Ghanaian electoral laws:

“I must acknowledge that we have beautiful set of laws in this country and our elections are being regulated by these laws. The framers of the constitution and other laws in this country have anticipated lots of challenges and have made laws to respond to these evolving challenges. Where we find ourselves lacking, we have enacted new laws or modified existing ones to respond to evolving complexities in our elections. The problem has always been implementation” (Eunice).

This responded corroborated the views expressed by the earlier respondents regarding the electoral laws of Ghana:

“I am not a lawyer, but you do need to be a legal brain to accept that Ghana has good laws governing our elections. The constitution has provided that aggrieved persons, can always petition the Supreme Court in case of electoral irregularities or suspicion of misconduct. The Electoral Commission had been dragged to the Supreme Court on two occasions challenging the validity of its declaration of results. Such an opportunity to seek redress through legal means testify to how transparent our electoral system is” (Justice).

4.1.6 Media and Election

The media is often labelled as the fourth arm of government that play vital role in promoting freedom of speech and expression as well as information dissemination. Respondents have expressed satisfaction on the liberalization of the media space and the reduction of state censorship of media content. The media provides the platform and channel for information dissemination and becomes the avenue for campaign messages to reach its targeted audience. However, some respondents decried the use of intemperate and incendiary languages to stoke discontent since most private owned media outlets are owned by politicians who normally dictate the agenda for its staff. Bias reportage and politically tilted programmes served to further deepen the already polarized political atmosphere in Ghana.

“For me the media needs training and capacity building on election reporting. I talk about the media because their work is sensitive. We the media people are generalist. When I say generalist, we report on diverse issues. We try to cover everything we think is news. But reporting on political or electoral news are quite sensitive. For instance, certain media houses rush to announce unverified results that incited party fanatics in past elections. There is nothing wrong with churning out provisional results or projected outcomes. But when the political atmosphere is heated, and party supporters are already agitated, reporting certain issues about election must be done with caution and professionalism to not incite fanatics or increase the political temperature. The media has been able to uncover instances of election malpractices and reported on them to the public. The media also provides information to the security services where there is the need for urgent redeployment of security personnel to quell riots and sent out information to the Electoral Commission where additional election materials are needed due to shortages” (Abdul).

A respondent noted the critical role of the media during elections but decried the lack of equal access to the state media to opposition parties:

“The media informs, educates, and provides an essential platform for campaigns and dissemination of party manifesto. The state media is supposed to operate independently but I am afraid to say that the state media is not being independent. I believe there are government interference in the running of the state media houses. I can also say that most of the private media houses are owned by politicians or businesspeople who are affiliated to a political party or hold some sort of allegiance to a particular political party. So, their contents are very much dictated by their owners and the agendas are set to the benefit of their owners. Private radio stations, television stations, and newspapers are culprits of this political manipulations. But I must clarify this, with regards to the private media, some have tried to remain neutral, providing balanced programming, but not all have been able to remain independent. Proliferation of the media is a good thing, but we must sanitize the media space for a balanced and verified reportage” (Akosua).

One female responded cautioned about the use of hate speeches and inflammatory languages on the media platform during elections:

“We must begin to apply the rules to control the media space to avoid the use of hate speeches and incendiary languages meant to stoke discontent. The problem is, there is a thin line between stifling freedom of speech and controlling the media from unauthorized and unprofessional programming and the National Media Commission has a big role to regulate some of these” (Linda).

Another responded noted:

“Generally, the media in Ghana has conducted itself very well. Others have blatantly disregarded the rules. It is up to the regulator, the National Media Commission (NMC) to enforce its rules to streamline the activities” (Dija).

Another responded expressed views regarding unequal access to the state media during elections:

“The state media Ghana Broadcasting Corporation, the Graphic, Times, and Radio Ghana are required by law to provide equal platform to all political parties during election. But as to whether this is being practiced, is a different story. The media can do better. We can improve. They have not let the state down” (Alfa).

4.1.7 *Election Management and Administration*

Election management and administration is one of the major themes of this study. The Electoral Commission is the body mandated by law to supervise all election and regulate the conduct of all political parties in Ghana. The Electoral Commission has been commended for its increasing

independency and reforms it has adopted in previous elections. The Electoral Commission must continuously strive to change public perception regarding its lack of neutrality and unfair advantages given to some political parties which often breed situation of mistrust from other political opponents. Though some respondents have expressed concerns on how the electoral process is being handled, the general perception is that the Electoral Commission continues to improve on its management and administration of elections in Ghana.

This respondent from the Electoral Commission noted:

“The Electoral Commission has been transparent in discharging its duties. We haven’t achieved 100% free and fair elections yet, but I must say that the Electoral Commission is improving in every election year to reduce the rate of irregularities in our elections. The increasing transparency and accountability are worth commending” (Justice).

Another respondent cautioned about receiving funding from foreign agencies and governments:

“Election management and administration is the sole prerogative of the Electoral Commission. The Electoral Commission must strive to wane itself from the control of the government and should reduce its dependence on foreign governments who fund some of their activities. Depending on these foreign agencies and governments might pave the way for interference and manipulations” (Alfa).

Another respondent noted:

“Management of Election boils down to transparency. The onus on the Electoral Commission now is to correct the public perception of bias. The Electoral Commission is improving in all its aspect of election management, but we must not relent in adopting technology that will improve the robustness of the system against cyber intrusions. The system where Commissioners of the Electoral Commission are hired and fired by the president must be relooked in order to bestow confidence in the office” (Ama).

A responded expressed concern regarding the conduct of the Electoral Commission Staffs:

“The conduct of some Electoral Commission staff leaves much to be desired. The rules are sometimes not applied fairly, and this has been the problem. Such unscrupulous Electoral Commission staff who infiltrate the system to give certain political parties advantage over others must be fished out and punished. This is not a secret that there is collusion to manipulate the election with the full knowledge of election staff at the polling stations” (Akosua).

4.1.8 CSOs in election monitoring, *Peaceful Elections and Resolving Conflicts*

The activities of Civil Society Organisations have been instrumental in promoting peaceful elections and lobbying political parties to resolve disputes amicably instead of violence. From the responses elicited, most of the peace advocacy and education in the country are undertaken by CSOs in partnership with other organisations or state agencies. The role of CSOs has been primarily election observation, peace promotion, and voter education during elections. The activities of international observer groups have waned in the last decade due to the strengthening of domestic observer groups providing effective election monitoring and observation in Ghana. As one of the themes of this study, the activities of CSOs have helped promote peaceful elections and lobbying political parties to resolve electoral disputes.

One respondent noted:

“Our organisation and other organisations have been instrumental in keeping the peace in the country. We have targeted hotspots constituencies and engineered interventions that seek to prevent violence. We have recruited youth leaders across the political divide from the same communities, provided with training, education, and capacity building to resolve political differences. We bring them together under the same roof to share thoughts and ideas on how to bury political differences and this has been helpful in reducing tensions. Some do not know that they can relate with each other and still pursue different political aspirations. In essence, the peace education and advocacy we conduct has borne some fruits in calming tensions and achieving reconciliation. We also work with the Peace Council to establish *ad hoc* committees run up to election across the 16 regions to educate voters. Since the Peace Council are limited, we partner with them to penetrate deep into the communities where their presence is not felt, trying to diffuse tensions. The main challenge of the CSOs in preventing election violence and fraud is funding. Having observers at all polling stations have been identified to prevent election fraud. Just a mere presence of an observer is seen to be effective, and we need the funding to deploy observers across the length and breadth of the country. We deployed about 4000 observers in the 2020 elections, but we need about two times that number to cover all polling stations. We need more people to detect and deter election fraud. In our work, we try as much as we can to ensure some balance between political parties” (Daniel).

This responded argued about the relevance of the CSOs in promoting peace and gender equality:

“Civil Society Organisations play an exceptionally important role in keeping the peace in the country. Seen as a neutral party, they are better placed to negotiate, mediate, and broker peace. Their impacts have been felt in this country and they continue to lobby governments for the rights of marginalized groups and the provision of social amenities in deprived communities” (Eunice).

Another respondent noted the positive contribution of CSOs in Ghana:

“Civil Society Organisations have been solid I must say when it comes to peace education and advocacy. It is quite unfortunate to say that some politicians benefit from violence during elections, and they exploit conflicting situations. So, Civil Society Organisations have to put some checks to make sure that vulnerable groups, mostly the uneducated in the rural areas are not used by some politicians to foment violence during election. They must try as much as possible to remain neutral in their work so that their credibility is not questioned when it comes to facilitating mediation and dialogue between political parties” (Janet).

A respondent observed the important role of CSOs:

“Organizations such as Centre for Democratic Development (CDD), Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), Institute for Democratic Governance (IDEG) have been active in demanding transparency, accountability and peace during elections. The records are there to show that they have been incredible in getting politicians commit to peace. When you have the leadership of the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress shaking hands before elections, it symbolizes peace and sends a message to party supporters to embrace peace and eschew violence. So, the work of Civil Society is not only limited to peace education and advocacy, but also getting politicians to commit to peace and also encourage the participation of women in politics. However, Civil Society Organisations are very much challenged in terms of funding. Most Organisations have limited funds to enable them to penetrate all the corners of the country. Most of their activities are concentrated in the big cities. They can do more given the necessary funding and logistics. Even though they do not have the power to resolve conflicts as CSOs, they have been at the forefront in advocating for peace and calling on parties to commit to peace. Therefore, they have in a way push political parties to apply the rules put in place” (Alfa).

4.1.9 *Political Parties and Resolving Election-Related Violence*

Political parties represent an important stakeholder in a multi-party democracy. The representative of political parties spoke about the internal mechanisms their party structures have put in place to achieve violent free elections and resolving conflicts whenever it happens.

A respondent from the NPP political party noted:

“I will say that political parties are being regulated by the Political Party Act and we are obliged to conduct ourselves in accordance with the laws. So, the NPP as a political party have put in place structures to comply with the laws to ensure that elections are peaceful, devoid of violence. At the grassroots level, all party executives and polling station agents are constantly being trained on how to maintain peace, monitor elections, and at the same time they are trained on how to file challenge forms during elections or voter registration exercise. These trainings on how to file complaints in the event of any irregularities or misconduct is being intensified on election years to be able to detect fraud and report them instead of using violence and force. Remember that elections are won or lost at the polling stations and our ability as a political party to monitor the process and ensure that it is transparent is critical. So, our strategy has always been to use the existing legal means to challenge any breach or malpractice at the grassroots level, at the

polling stations or the collation centres. So basically, we constantly teach our polling station agents who represent the party at the grassroots on how to apply the electoral rules, on how to detect electoral fraud and malpractices, how to file complaints, and how to challenge anything deemed illegal. How to avoid violence is to play by the electoral rules and we expect our political opponents to do so” (Dija).

Another responded from the NDC party noted:

“The NDC as a political party has always believed in election as a battle of the minds, ideas, and policies for development of the country. We try as much as possible to refrain from inciting our support base from indulging in attitudes and behaviours that can throw the country into chaos. We have one Ghana as a country, so we try to protect the peace we have enjoyed over the years. So, the party has a zero tolerance for violence. We organize workshops and seminars for party members to be tolerant with other political opponents. We also educate party foot soldiers on the need to apply rules at all the times. Our polling station agents have also been trained to be always vigilant to report any suspicious conduct during elections” (Linda).

4.1.10 Academia and Peaceful Elections

The academic community historically has been instrumental in Ghana’s democratic development. Their views shape government policies and contribute immensely towards the training and consolidation of democratic values in Ghana. Presently, some members of the academic community have bemoaned the governments neglect of their contributions.

“I would say that the academia is under-utilized in the context of Ghanaian politics in general and in election particularly. We have much to offer but successive governments have ignored the contributions the academia has to offer. Even though some elements within the academic community have let themselves to be used by politicians because they eat from the same bowl, for me that is problematic. That sense of neutrality and independency is gradually waning. The academia must be consulted to conduct feasibility study or piloting of new innovations and reforms the Electoral Commission wants to introduce in the country to determine how viable it would be before introducing it. This will save the country any unforeseen challenges. Another worrying trend is that our tertiary students’ politics on our campuses are being interfered with and are being sponsored by political parties in the country. We should treat university politics, the SRC positions as neutral as possible, devoid of partisanships. Such political meddling into tertiary students’ politics is assuming a very dangerous path that must be relooked again. Student politics must be independent of national politics” (Fiiifi).

In general, it is important to state that some of the views expressed by the various respondents were also corroborated in the literature review. The convergence of opinions between the existing literature and the views of respondents in the study amply demonstrate the reality on the ground. Respondents generally have a positive perception regarding Ghana’s democratic

governance. The electoral laws have been described as comprehensive enough to meet the growing challenges of today. While the Electoral Commission has been largely described as independent, it needs to work hard to change its declining public image. Respondents also emphasized the critical roles of Civil Society Organisations, the media, and women towards achieving violent-free elections. Two major sticking points indicated by respondents were about fixing the bread-and-butter issues which was identified as the triggering factor in causing electoral violence. The second issue is the disbandment of the vigilante groups that operate in the country with impunity during elections. Finally, respondents cited the weak enforcement of the electoral laws as a catalyst for election-related violence.

5. Discussions

5.1 Summary of findings

Electoral violence and its ramifications of social and political ills continue to plague most African countries resulting in political instability, chaos, and retardation of development. Evidence from this study not only affirms the existence of low intensity election-related violence in Ghana, but also revealed that such violent tendencies have found expression in the political culture of the country and continue to increase in both intensity and frequency in each successive election. The findings also highlighted the activities of well-organized vigilante groups scattered across the country, mostly consist of the youth from the deprived communities in the country using violence and opponent intimidation in return for financial and material rewards. The culture of impunity and flagrant disregard of the law is gradually creeping into the Ghanaian political space by these vigilante groups who receive unflinching supports from political figures. Poverty, lack of education, unemployment, ignorance, already existing ethnic, chieftaincy, and land disputes were among the major causes of electoral violence. Additionally, electoral fraud, uncontrolled media programming, incitement, misconduct by politicians, the use of inflammatory languages in the media space, suspicion and unprofessional conduct of security agencies, and the perception of mistrust against the Electoral Commission were identified by respondents as well as in the reviewed literature as the main drivers of election-related violence.

Furthermore, evidence presented by respondents largely corroborated by the literature, also highlighted the existence of strategies, mechanisms, and frameworks in Ghana geared towards the promotion of peaceful election and the resolution of election-related disputes. Respondents underscored the relevance of state institutions and para-statal such as the Judiciary, the

Electoral Commission, the National Peace Council, and the Council of State in preventing violence during elections. Other relevant non-state actors such as the traditional rulers, chiefs, religious leaders, Civil Society Organisations and the Media were identified by respondents as playing vital roles in promoting peaceful elections and resolving election-related conflicts. The most significant issue highlighted by respondents as the core issue capable of preventing all election-related violence is the “bread-and-butter” issue. The problem of where the next meal will come from became the basis for people fighting to put the politicians who can guarantee them their source of livelihood. When that problem of jobs and employment opportunities for all are solved, the incentive to engage in political violence would be eliminated. Again, some respondents expressed deep concerns regarding the perceived lack of independence and neutrality of the Electoral Commission and the security agencies in the discharge of their duties as the catalyst for election-related violence.

Significantly, respondents identified the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, the National Peace Council Act (Act 818), the Electoral Commission Act (Act 451), and the National Election Security Task Force (NESTF), as the most important frameworks in promoting peaceful election and preventing election-related violence. With regards to institutions, the Judiciary, Civil Society, Traditional leaders, Religious leaders, and the media have been cited as critical institutions that play crucial roles in promoting peaceful elections and preventing violence. The issue of electoral reforms and judicial review was also cited by respondents as basis for electoral justice and rectifying electoral anomalies.

The views expressed by respondents are generally consistent with views expressed by Anning & Danso (2012); Gyekye-Gyandoh (2013); Gyampo (2017), Jacobs & Leyenaar (2011), Ninsin (1998); Omotola (2010); and Whitfield (2009), that Ghana has a well comprehensive strategies and mechanisms targeted at promoting peaceful elections, and over the years have implemented a range of measures in promoting peaceful elections and curbing election-related violence.

On the contrary, what the findings also indicate is the growing mistrust in the security agencies and the need to streamline how recruitments into the security agencies are conducted to be based on merit and qualification instead of party affiliation. Respondents also expressed the need for the implementation of the electoral laws to its fullest extent and the need to deal with the bread-and-butter issues that was identified as the major cause of election-related violence. When such issues of economic benefits and people’s survival are guaranteed regardless of whichever political party wins political power, the motivation to engage in election-related violence would be curtailed.

The various thematic areas unearthed by this study underscores the crucial roles of political institutions, youth involvement in politics, the role of the media, civil society engagement, women participation, election security and the National Peace Council in sustaining peace and resolving election-related conflicts in Ghana. The study not only underscores the critical roles of these institutions, but also emphasize the need for closer collaboration and relationship among government and non-state institutions in curbing election-related violence. Additionally, the study emphasizes that the interrelationship among these institutions must be maintained not only in election years but all the time. The various themes provided evidence that youth groups and women who are often marginalized, form the core elements in ensuring peaceful election and resolving election-related violence.

Based on the aforementioned findings, there is the need for the promotion of inter party dialogues; resourcing the Electoral Commission to remain independent and neutral; the dissolution of all vigilante groups; the enforcement of electoral rules by the security agencies and the Electoral Commission; building the capacity of National Peace Council; creating sustainable jobs and reducing unemployment; creating the conducive political atmosphere for Civil Society Organisations to operate; media freedom and private sector to thrive; and punishing politicians and party foot soldiers who foment violence.

5.2 Limitations of the Study

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, the major limitation of this study was the sheer suspicion among respondents, especially representatives of political parties, who had the impression that the findings of this study might be used as a political tool by political opponents. Owing to this perception, there were many late withdrawals from the study and reluctance to provide candid opinions. Secondly, the data collection exercise and expert interviews were conducted at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, therefore encountered several hurdles due to travel restrictions and the avoidance of face-to-face interviews. The interviews were therefore conducted via phone calls, WhatsApp, and Skype, limiting access to those who do not have access to internet connectivity. Additionally, the small sample size of twelve respondents taken from a carefully selected group does not adequately represent the entire views of Ghanaians who may have other relevant contributions to enrich the study, therefore not representative enough for generalization. A larger sample size collected from vast majority of expert respondents would have provided a more representative and expansive responses for the study.

5.3 Implications of the Study

The strongly held view that Ghana is immune to election-related violence is contested since the study identified the rising spate of election-related violence across the country. Women and the youthful population, who are often marginalized, have been identified as important segment in promoting peaceful election and preventing election conflicts. Their participation in decision making in the political process should go beyond the rhetoric of political campaigns to pragmatic implementation of affirmative actions and youth policies. Additionally, the bread-and-butter issues (economic situations and employment) which was identified as the core issue causing electoral disputes needs to be taken seriously. Based on the findings, when people's economic interest is not affected by change of government, they would be willing to accept verdicts of elections and refrain from engaging in political violence. The need to actively engage Civil Society Organisations, the Media, National Peace Council and other state parastatals by the Electoral Commission in election-related matters is key to ensuring peaceful elections. Finally, the neutrality and independency of the Electoral Commission and Security agencies in election has been identified as the most important factor in conferring legitimacy in the election results that would be acceptable by all parties.

5.4 Suggestions for Future Research

This study investigated the frameworks and mechanisms for peaceful election and resolving election-related conflicts in Ghana. While the study unearthed facts about the existence of many beautiful laws, structures, strategies, and institutions designed to prevent election-related violence, their implementation and flagrant disregard leaves much to be desired. Further research is needed to understand why the implementation of these frameworks, laws, policies and structures has remained a challenge. Laws if not enforced to the letter is as good as it does not exist. To give meanings to these frameworks and mechanisms to achieve its intended objectives require full implementation and enforcement. Therefore, further studies are needed in this area on how these laws and policies are adequately enforced and implemented and to discover the weaknesses of the existing frameworks that need to be rectified. Secondly, despite Ghana's commitment both on the national and international frontiers to increase the participation of marginalized group such as women and the youth in the political spaces, their neglect is still significant. Further studies are needed to boost their involvement and participation in public and political spaces.

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Invitation for an Expert Interview on Preventing Election-Related Violence in Ghana

Dear Sir/Madam

I am kindly requesting your participation as an expert in an interview for my Master's Thesis on the topic, "*Frameworks and Mechanisms for Peaceful Election and Resolving Election-Related Violence in Ghana*".

The primary objective of the study is to investigate the institutional frameworks and legal mechanisms available in Ghana for ensuring peaceful elections and resolving election-related conflicts. It would also seek to investigate the underlying causes of electoral violence and how to prevent it. The study consists of questions related to peaceful election, democratic governance, electoral violence, election security, funding, women in politics as well as questions that borders around the conduct of elections and resolving disputes.

The study is entirely an academic work and your anonymity and utmost confidentiality is assured. You have been selected as an expert and your participation would be highly appreciated. However, your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may wish to withdraw from the study at any time. The interview would be conducted via phone/zoom/skype due to the need to observe Corona Virus protocols. With your permission your answers would be recorded for transcription.

Thank you very much in advance for considering to be part of this study, your contribution would be a valuable asset in the democratic consolidation and prevention of electoral violence in Ghana.

Vasa, Finland, 24 January 2022

Sincerely,

Jalal Rahman

Enrolled in the International Master's Degree Programme Peace, Mediation, and Conflict Research at Åbo Akademi University, Vasa, Finland

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Information about the Interviewee

- (a) *Name (optional):
- (b) Age:
- (c) Sex:
- (d) Organization:
- (e) Position:

Thematic Areas

Democratic Governance and Mechanisms for Peaceful Elections

1. Ghana has been hailed as one of the countries in Africa with stable democracy; how has this image been maintained or eroded? Has Ghana passed the litmus test for a stable democracy in Africa?
2. Since the return to democratic rule in 1992, what are some of the significant achievements Ghana has attained towards democratic elections and consolidation? Would you say that Ghana is progressing or retrogressing when it comes to democratic election and consolidation of democratic governance?
3. How would you define election-related violence? Is there any evidence of election related violence in Ghana?
4. In your view, what are the underlying causes and major issues that lead to election related violence?
5. What strategies and mechanisms are in place in Ghana in ensuring and promoting peaceful elections?
6. Are there any mechanisms in Ghana to resolve electoral disputes?
7. In your opinion, would you say that the democratic institutions in Ghana are matured and well-resourced enough to ensure violent free elections and the consolidation of democratic governance?
8. Would you say that the current electoral laws are robust enough to guarantee violent free elections and the resolution of electoral disputes?
9. The activities of party vigilante groups, foot soldiers, and some politicians have become violent in recent times. How can such violent tendencies be prevented, and would you recommend the total disbandment of all vigilante groups?

10. The current peace architecture in the country provides for the Peace Council, Traditional Council, Ghana House of Chiefs, Religious bodies and Civil Society Organizations to intervene and mediate instances of electoral stalemates and violence. How relevant and effective are these institutions with respect to resolving electoral disputes?
11. The independency and the autonomy of the Electoral Commission, the Supreme Court, and the Security Agencies are key to peaceful elections and resolving electoral litigation. What are your perceptions on the neutrality of these institutions with regards to elections?
12. Would you recommend training and capacity building for all Election staffs, Media, CSOs, Security agencies and all other personnel of institutions that deal with elections in Ghana?
13. What role do Civil Society Organizations play in promoting peaceful elections and resolving election related conflicts?

Election Security

14. Security before, during, and after elections is key component to peaceful election. What is your assessment of the overall performance of the National Election Security Task force (NESTF) in past Elections?
15. Would you say that the National Election Security Task Force is well prepared in terms of manpower, intelligence gathering and logistics to deal with election related violence?
16. What reforms or recommendation would give in terms of security before, during and after elections?

Women in politics towards Inclusive Governance and Peaceful Elections

17. Is there gender imbalance in the political landscape of Ghana? Are women under-represented?
18. In your opinion, how would Ghana improve the participation of women in politics and strengthen their position?
19. What are some of the positive roles and contributions women bring onto the Ghanaian political landscape in terms of peaceful election?
20. Are the electoral laws liberal enough to ensure equal representation and women participation in politics? Do you suggest a quota representation of women in politics?

Funding

21. Is the Electoral Commission and other democratic institutions adequately funded to deliver on their mandate?
22. The Electoral Commission receives funding from the government, international organization and foreign governments such as the EU, UK the US and other international NGOs. Is that an avenue for domestic and foreign meddling and interference? (He who gives the money, dictates the rules).

Media and Election

23. What role does the media play before, during, and after elections to promote peaceful election and preventing election-related violence?
24. Does the media space in Ghana enjoy freedom to operate without government interference? Are there any evidence of state censorship of the media content to silence dissenting opinions?
25. Fair, balanced, and verified reportage are basic tenets of good journalism. How has the media in Ghana conducted itself during election with reference to these tenets? And to what extent do the media keep an eye on the conduct of free, fair and transparent elections?

Constitutional and Legal Mechanisms for Elections

26. In your opinion, do you think the constitution and the electoral laws of Ghana are comprehensive and robust enough to guarantee free, fair, and transparent elections?
27. What are some of the electoral reforms do you want to see in the future?
28. Cyber interference is on the rise in many elections across the world. Does Ghana have the appropriate laws and technology against both local and foreign cyber interference in Ghana's domestic election?
29. Do you think the laws of the country is deterrent enough for criminal acts committed during elections and the activities of political vigilante groups?
30. Do the electoral laws of Ghana provide equal playing field for all parties and does it adequately protect voters' rights?

Civil Society Organization and Resolving Electoral Disputes

31. To what extent has the activities of Civil Society Organisations succeeded in resolving election-related conflicts and restoring peace before, during and after elections in Ghana?
32. How can CSOs effectively improve on the quality of election monitoring and observation?
33. In your opinion, what are some of the main challenges faced by civil society in their work towards ensuring peaceful elections or resolving election related conflicts?

Election Management and Administration

34. What is the core mandate of the Electoral Commission and to what extent has the Electoral Commission been able to achieve its objectives?
35. To what extent has the Electoral Commission been able to remain independent, autonomous, and neutral of government interference? Do you think the EC has the power, capacity and authority to be autonomous and independent of government control?
36. What are some of the reforms and innovation adopted by the EC towards ensuring violent free elections? How has the EC implemented such reforms?
37. What would you say are some of the biggest challenges faced by the EC in conducting free, fair, and transparent election and how would that be solved?

Political Parties and Election

38. What are some of the internal structures or mechanisms do political parties have in ensuring peaceful elections and preventing electoral violence?
39. Do political parties have systems in place to curb the violent activities of vigilante groups and foot soldiers?
40. What policies and structures do political parties have in improving women's political participation?