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# Safeguarding Democracy: Understanding Ghana's Resilience to Electoral Violence

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## Abstract

Ghana has held eight consecutive elections since its return to multi-party democracy in 1992. The country has consistently demonstrated resilience against large-scale armed violence during elections, notwithstanding the pockets of violence that have characterised elections over the years. This has distinguished the country from many others in the West African sub-region, which have experienced instability before, during and post-electoral periods. Nonetheless, the increasing levels of electoral violence has fed the perception that Ghana's democracy might be under threat. This paper attempts to contribute to a better understanding of the sources of Ghana's democratic resilience, particularly during elections. Through interviews, and a review of extant literature, it seeks to provide insights and recommendations from the Ghana case study towards strengthening democracy in West Africa and beyond. Overall the paper argues that though Ghana has all the underlying conditions for electoral violence, a combination of diverse actor's institutions and the people themselves manage to keep her from tilting overboard.

Key Words: Ghana, Election, Democracy, Resilience, Electoral Violence.

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## Introduction

On December 7, 2024, Ghana will hold its 9th round of general elections since its return to multiparty democracy in 1992. Increasingly, there is an intense sense of insecurity and fear that engulfs Ghana in the run-up to any major national elections, mainly due to the kinds of violence and electoral fraud that characterise such events.<sup>1</sup> Thus, political violence has become symptomatic of the larger anxieties of political uncertainty, economic deprivation, and social exclusion.<sup>2</sup> The previous eight elections recorded various cases of injuries, deaths, and violent clashes amongst political party supporters.<sup>3</sup> In the 2020 elections, eight people lost their lives,<sup>4</sup> properties were attacked, and there were over 61 incidents of violence including 21 incidents of election-related violence.<sup>5</sup> These incidents are worrying, especially when juxtaposed against the democratic credentials the country has garnered over the years. It exposes institutional weaknesses and gaps in the security architecture that must be addressed<sup>6</sup>. All this happens against the backdrop of a democracy plagued by the zero-sum politics<sup>7</sup> usually described as ‘winner-takes-all’<sup>8</sup> which entrenches the politics of patronage.<sup>9</sup> In response to this heightened competition for power, violent political vigilante groups have emerged in many parts of the country serving as violent gangs, goon-squads, protection rackets, militias or storm-troopers; operating tacitly with extensive support from the political class.<sup>10</sup>

As intimated above, political vigilantes<sup>11</sup> have been a

threat to peace in the country, including contributing to electoral violence. However, a Vigilantism and Related Offences Act, 2019 (Act 999) has been passed with bipartisan support banning vigilantism and punishable with a 10-year minimum jail term.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, not all provisions of this Act have been enforced; stoking fears of party vigilantism in the December 2024 elections.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, trust in election management bodies such as the Electoral Commission (EC) of Ghana, is key in guaranteeing a peaceful process devoid of violence. However, a 2024 Afrobarometer survey shows that popular trust in the EC is at a 23-year low, making the closely contested 2024 election both a test and an opportunity for commissioners seeking to regain public confidence.<sup>14</sup> Despite all these contentious issues and violence in past elections, Ghana has remained resilient and relatively peaceful. Epistemic communities, institutions, and diverse actors often play a role in ensuring tensions do not lead to hostilities and outright violence. Still, there are lingering concerns of whether Ghana is living with a false sense of peace or will be able to safeguard its democracy. This paper therefore seeks to understand the key sources of resilience in Ghana’s electoral democracy. Hence, it analyses perceptions and experiences from a cross-section of citizens in the country through interviews, and a review of literature. The paper is structured as follows: the first section gives an introduction and a background to some key issues regarding elections in Ghana; the second section discusses the main sources of resilience in Ghana; and the third and final section provides a conclusion with policy recommendations. Overall, the paper

<sup>1</sup>Edu-Afful, F., & Allotey-Pappoe, S. (2016). Political Vigilantism and Electoral Violence in Ghana. In K. Aning, K. Danso & N. Salihu (Eds.), *Managing Election-Related Conflict and Violence for Democratic Stability in Ghana II*. (pp. 63-84). Accra: KAIPTC.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>In the 2000 elections for instance, there were reported clashes between the supporters of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) in Bawku in the Upper East Region, during which 13 people died. Further, 27 violent incidents were reported in 2004 with two deaths recorded. This trend continued into 2008 with widespread violence during voter registration, an upsurge in other cases of pre-election violence, three deaths recorded, an exchange of gun shots, vandalization of some registration centres and curfews imposed in hot spots.

<sup>4</sup>Ghana Business News. (2020). Eight People Killed During Ghana 2020 Elections - Police. Retrieved November 11, 2024 from <https://www.ghanabusinessnews.com/2020/12/19/eight-people-killed-during-ghana-2020-elections-police/>

<sup>5</sup>Salifu, A. G. A. (2024). State-Sponsored Killings? Here’s How the Victims of Election 2020 Died. Retrieved on November 15, 2014 from <https://www.fact-checkghana.com/state-sponsored-killings-heres-how-the-victims-of-election-2020-died/>

<sup>6</sup>For instance, in the post-elections phase, the unprecedented invasion of Parliament by armed military and police, ostensibly to restore order in the House, also sent worrying signals of a fractured democracy in the country.

<sup>7</sup>Kpessa-Whyte, M., & Atuguba, R. A. (2020). Getting to the Roots: Constitutional Rules and the Zero-Sum Politics of Winner-Takes-All in Ghana. *Journal of Law, Policy and Globalization*, 99: pp. 75-85

<sup>8</sup>Ijon, F. B. (2019). Winner-takes-all politics and democratic consolidation in Ghana’s Fourth Republic. *Asian Research Journal of Arts & Social Sciences*, 7(4): pp. 1-11.

<sup>9</sup>This fosters the rise of illegal networks during elections; working towards securing political power and, in turn, controlling access to the vast political and economic resources often vested in the Presidency. For more insights see Lamptey, A., & Salihu, N. (2012). Interrogating the relationship between the politics of patronage and electoral violence in Ghana. *Managing election-related violence for democratic stability in Ghana*, 176-209.

<sup>10</sup>Edu-Afful & Allotey-Pappoe. (2016). Op. cit. (pp 63-84).

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>The law, so far, appears to be a deterrence judging from events leading to the elections. The two main political parties had been guilty of hiring muscular young men with quasi-security training ostensibly to “secure the ballot.” They instead built a reputation of using intimidation and violence against opponents. See Nunoo, F. (2020). Ghana’s Election: Six Things You Should Know. Retrieved on November 20 2024 from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-55186931>

<sup>13</sup>Interview with Governance Expert on November 25, 2024 in Accra.

<sup>14</sup>Asante-Darko, D.K. (2024). Ghana wants Fair and Competitive Elections but Mistrust the Electoral Commission. Retrieved on November 20 from <https://www.afrobarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/AD781-Ghanaians-want-fair-elections-but-mistrust-electoral-commission-Afrobarometer-6march24.pdf>

argues that though Ghana relies on multiple actors and mechanisms to shore up its resilience, perceived political interference and the politics of patronage are significant threats to this resilience.

### Navigating Peaceful Elections in Ghana: Lessons So Far

Ghana is situated within a troubled West African sub-region which has been characterised by instability and violent conflict.<sup>15</sup> Several academic articles have examined Ghana's reputation as a peaceful and democratic nation.<sup>16</sup> Yet, a review of Ghana's evolution as a nation-state would show that the country has experienced the same challenges that have led to conflicts in other countries in the sub-region.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, its image as a peaceful country disguises the fractious politics within its borders.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, the country has successfully avoided sustained violent conflicts at the national level.

In this vein, protracted and violent intra and inter-ethnic conflicts have been prevented from escalating beyond their immediate vicinity. Electoral disputes that brought the country to the brink of conflict in 2008 and 2012, were managed to avert nation-wide violence.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the independence of election-related institutions appears to be generally respected, the involvement of non-state actors - for example, civil society organisations (CSO), religious and traditional bodies, and the media - in electoral processes has been encouraged, and the will of the people at the end of elections seems to have been largely upheld over the years. Nevertheless, the credibility and independence of

institutions such as the EC, security agencies, and the judiciary seems to have been eroding in recent years. This erosion has been fuelled by perceptions of partisanship among the electorate regarding appointments of EC personnel, heads of security institutions, and Supreme Court judges over the years.<sup>20</sup> In this sense, many scholars argue that the President's powers of appointment are too broad<sup>21</sup> and are non-inclusive.<sup>22</sup> Other scholars put forward that the unbridled exercise of these powers could breed dictatorship, undermine constitutionalism, and weaken important oversight institutions.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, state security institutions for example are generally perceived to have opaque recruitments<sup>24</sup> which dilutes trust and confidence in their overall output. The influence on institutions is further buttressed by a report of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, which, reveals that there was a significant decline of about 30 per cent in the perceived impartiality of Ghana's judiciary between 2017 and 2023. The report's indicator measures judicial impartiality based on factors such as the independence of the courts, the autonomy of judges, and judicial appointments. The report found that in 2014, confidence in the judiciary's impartiality was rated at 95.3 points; however, this has dropped to 68.3 points in 2023 - a 27-point decline.<sup>25</sup> So, generally, whereas Ghana has built relatively strong institutions and ad-hoc coalitions to shape its democratic processes, these, bodies in recent times, have been regarded, by some citizens in the country, as being compromised.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>15</sup>Aning, K., Albrecht, P., & Blaabjerg Nielsen, A. (2021). West Africa Security Perspectives *Danish Institute for International Studies Report*, No. 03. Retrieved on November 16 2024 from <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/250091/1/1759207713.pdf>

<sup>16</sup>Agbelengor, S. C. (2024). Infrastructure for Peace and Peaceful Elections in Ghana: 2012–2020. *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, 19(1), pp 18-31. See also Boadi, E. (2001). A Peaceful Turnover in Ghana. *Journal of Democracy* 12(2), pp 103-117. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jod.2001.0026>; Agbevade, A., Graham, E., & Van, R. E. (2021). The national peace council and democratic Consolidation: An assessment. *International Journal of Political Science and Governance*, 3(2): pp. 90-100; Yakohene, A. B., & Appiah, J. A. (2022). The shining black star of Africa: The tale of Ghana in conflict resolution. *Handbook of Regional Conflict Resolution Initiatives in the Global South* (pp. 193-210). Routledge.

<sup>17</sup>Osei-Hwedie, K. (1985). Economy and Governmental Disorder in Ghana. *The African Review: A Journal of African Politics, Development and International Affairs*, pp 43-53.; Amoah, M., Aning, K., Annan, N., & Nugent, P. (2015). *A Decade of Ghana: Politics, Economy and Society 2004-2013*. Brill Academic Publishers, Leiden, Netherlands; Debrah, E., Alidu, S., & Owusu-Mensah, I. (2016). The cost of inter-ethnic conflicts in Ghana's Northern Region: The case of the Nawuri-Gonja conflicts. *Journal of African Conflicts and Peace Studies*, 3(1): pp. 1-27.

<sup>18</sup>Papa Bentil, E., Nunoo, I., & Oduro Appiah, M. (2024). Threat of political vigilantism to political security in Africa: a case of Ghana. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 10(1):1-18; Ogbuli, K. (2024). Ghana, current issues and U.S. relations. Congressional Research Service, Retrieved on November 28, 2024 from <https://crsreports.congress.gov>

<sup>19</sup>Ovadia, J. S. (2011). Stepping Back from the Brink: A Review of the 2008 Ghanaian Election from the Capital of the Northern Region. *Canadian Journal of African Studies/Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines*, 45(2) : pp. 310-340.

<sup>20</sup>Interview with CSO on October 11, 2024.

<sup>21</sup>Gyampo, R. E.V., & Graham, E. (2017). Reviewing the Extensive Appointment Powers of the President as Solution to Winner-Takes All Politics in Ghana. *Ghana Social Science Journal*, 14(2), pp. 166-197

<sup>22</sup>Boafo-Arthur, K. (2003). Political Parties and Democratic Sustainability in Ghana, 1992-2000. In M.A.M. Sali, *African Political Parties: Evolution, Institutionalisation and Governance*. (pp. 207–238). London & Sterling, Virginia: Pluto Press.

<sup>23</sup>Gyampo & Graham (2017). Op. cit.

<sup>24</sup>Interview with CSO on October, 2024.

<sup>25</sup>Mo Ibrahim Foundation (2024). *2024 Ibrahim Index of African Governance: Index Report*. Retrieved on November 29, 2024 from <https://assets.iiag.online/2024/2024-Index-Report.pdf>

<sup>26</sup>Ibid, interviewees generally bemoaned political interference at the level of the EC, Security services and appointment of high court judges, this they stated dilutes confidence in the independence of these institutions.

## Unpacking Sources of Resilience in Ghana's Electioneering Process

The elusive search for peace has been a major agenda for states and multilateral organisations like the United Nations (UN). This is evidenced in the many multilateral efforts at peacebuilding and peacekeeping all over the world. Yet, what is 'peace'? Johan Galtung<sup>27</sup> defines peace as the absence or reduction of violence of all kinds, and a non-violent and creative conflict transformation.<sup>28</sup> Violence is further expressed as direct violence, structural violence and cultural violence.<sup>29</sup> Essentially the latter two are not visible but it is their deterioration that causes direct violence. Similarly, peace is sub-divided into positive and negative peace, with the former referring to the absence of violence and war while the latter is the integration of human society.<sup>30</sup> Conflicts are therefore noted to be inevitable with humans, but it is the approach and how they are addressed or transformed so that they do not become violent that is critical. And this is where many societies have faltered and dissolved into wars. Resilience on the other hand, relies on ideas of self-organisation, adaptation, transformation and survival in the face of adversity or crisis.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, Ghana as per this definition is largely in the spectrum of negative peace as it experiences sporadic episodes of violence. Arguably, these episodes are contained; nonetheless, their recurrence at every election season, is symptomatic of hostile undercurrents in the seemingly peaceful democratic State. Still, Ghana's democratic resilience is perceived to be mainly due to its citizens.<sup>32</sup> This sentiment was shared by a number of people interviewed. For example, one interviewee indicated that "in Ghana, citizens, contribute to peaceful elections by [avoiding]... conflicts before, during, and after elections. You will sometimes see party members dancing to the song of the opposition and in some instances, they do this on the same platform together. This harmonious relationship among the people has contributed to peaceful elections. I believe education, coupled with the [sensitization on

the] impact of conflict in some African states that are broadcasted on television has informed the citizens [resulting]... in peaceful elections".<sup>33</sup>

Accordingly, one can deduce that citizens make deliberate rational choices not to engage in violent activities. This is buttressed by a 2022 survey that indicates, that despite facing democratic challenges (with a sizable majority of the population expressing dissatisfaction with democracy's functionality in Ghana), most still favour a democratic system over an autocracy.<sup>34</sup> In this sense, Ghana continues to rely on a dynamic network of civil society actors such as the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), state institutions such as the National Peace Council (NPC), and processes that collectively play a pivotal role in upholding and strengthening its democratic credential. Furthermore, this decision is strengthened by grim reminders of previous and current conflicts in the West African sub-region, including the presence of refugees from Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, and Burkina Faso. Hence, while trust in the electoral institutions may be waning, most citizens prefer to accommodate the perceived flawed institutions than to resort to violence due to the inadequacies of these institutions. Further, Ghanaians tend to use humour to cope with painful experiences.<sup>35</sup> Previous research confirms that Ghanaians have a high sense of humour that enables them to laugh at and laugh off virtually everything, including annoying situations.<sup>36</sup> As a result, issues that should ordinarily make Ghanaians angry easily become "national jokes," which dull the collective consciousness to the evil inherent in the trigger event. Thus humour can be employed to trivialize serious issues, thereby undermining the observed severity, while also being used as a strategy to delegitimize and diminish the perceived importance of serious matters.<sup>37</sup> For example, during the election 2012 petition, a lot of jokes were made about 'pink sheets,' contempt of the Supreme Court, and elections won at polling stations, which helped to diffuse tensions

<sup>27</sup>Grewal, B. S. (2003). *Johan Galtung: Positive and Negative Peace*. School of Social Science, Auckland University of Technology. Pp 1-7. Published online, retrieved on November 19, 2024 from Alliance for Peacebuilding website: [https://www.buildingpeaceforum.com/no/fred/Positive\\_Negative\\_peace.pdf](https://www.buildingpeaceforum.com/no/fred/Positive_Negative_peace.pdf)

<sup>28</sup>ibid

<sup>29</sup>ibid

<sup>30</sup>ibid

<sup>31</sup>Humbert, C. & Joseph, J. (2019). Introduction: The Politics of Resilience: Problematizing Current Approaches. *Resilience*, 7(3): pp. 215-223.

<sup>32</sup>Interview with Lecturer on October 30, 2024.

<sup>33</sup>Interview with Traditional Ruler on October 30 2024.

<sup>34</sup>Bertlmann Transformation Index (2024). Country Report: Ghana. Retrieved on November 26, 2024 from <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/GHA>

<sup>35</sup>Daswani, G. (2020). On cynicism: Activist and artistic responses to corruption in Ghana. *Cultural Anthropology*, 35(1), pp 104-133. See also Diabah, G., & Ofori, V. (2024). Making light of the burden of economic hardship: A socio-pragmatic analysis of humour in Ghana's post-COVID economic crises. *Legon Journal of the Humanities*, 35(1): pp. 1-36.

<sup>36</sup>Diabah, G., & Ofori, V. (2024). Making light of the burden of economic hardship: A socio-pragmatic analysis of humour in Ghana's post-COVID economic crises. *Legon Journal of the Humanities*, 35(1): pp. 1-36.

<sup>37</sup>Hodson, G., & MacInnis, C. C. (2016). Derogating humour as a de-legitimization strategy in intergroup contexts. *Translational Issues in Psychological Science*, 2(1): pp. 63-74.

and provide therapy for many.<sup>38</sup> Several studies have reiterated the therapeutic nature of humour; stressing how it has often been used as a coping strategy or mechanism for various conditions and stresses.<sup>39</sup> However, there is another argument that jokes epitomise the collective disillusionment of Ghanaians at the persistent failure of political elites to address the issues at stake and have become an expression of Ghanaians' resignation to their fate.<sup>40</sup> Notwithstanding this, jokes have become essential to conflict prevention in the country, helping many Ghanaians navigate tense political situations which otherwise would end badly for the country.

Similarly, the intricate interplay between culture and religion has played a pivotal role in safeguarding the country from descending into armed conflict. Ghana's socio-political fabric is shaped by the dynamic interaction of values, beliefs, institutional involvement, and the engagement of private actors within the domains of religion and culture. These interconnected forces consistently knit together the fragmented and sometimes conflicting aspects of the nation's social structure.<sup>41</sup> Ghana's past elections have seen religious and traditional leaders intervening at various stages of the electoral cycle, particularly to help diffuse political tensions at critical moments.<sup>42</sup> Further, religious<sup>43</sup> and traditional leaders have access to and great influence over huge congregations or subjects and therefore, can persuade a large portion of the populace to choose peace and avoid violence. However, over the years, the religious and traditional institutions have been infiltrated by some political elements, which have weakened their actual and potential impact on society.

Ghana has also witnessed a vibrant and thriving CSO<sup>44</sup> in every sphere of its economic, social, and political life.<sup>45</sup> Prior to 1992, the military governments that ruled the country cracked down on dissent and stifled

the activities of CSOs.<sup>46</sup> The transition to democratic governance marked by the adoption of the country's 1992 Constitution, enjoined greater participation of citizens in governance including the activities of CSO's in public policy discourse.<sup>47</sup> Their activities have contributed immensely to the peaceful outcome of elections and the consolidation of democratic governance in Ghana. For instance, the Network of Domestic Election Observers (NEDEO) transformed into the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO). CODEO consists of about 24 local civil society groups, which have become indispensable to election observation due to the dwindling role of the international observer groups.<sup>48</sup> CODEO also provides Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT), which involves building on the traditional election observation and enabling observers provide accurate and detailed information about the conduct of the elections. In the year 2008, 2012, and 2016 general elections, the PVT was deployed to enhance transparency and credibility in those elections. As a tool for election observation, monitoring the conduct of polling on election day and for verification of official results declared by the EC, CODEO will once again deploy the PVT in the 2024 general elections to provide the public with more accurate and detailed information about the conduct of the elections.<sup>49</sup> For some CSO's particularly youth groups, past incidents and reports of electoral violence as well as the presence of refugees in Ghana's experience who fled their countries due to electoral violence and other factors, propels them to carry-out advocacy and sensitisation programmes to discourage violent activities.<sup>50</sup>

Ghana equally has some institutions that are perceived to play a strong role in contributing to peace and stability in the country, including the National Peace Council (NPC)<sup>51</sup> and the National

<sup>38</sup>Most Ghanaians watched, nervously, the election petitions brought before the Supreme Court in the aftermath of the 2012 elections, which included people being hauled to the Supreme Court for contempt of court. However, at the same time a number of jokes were circulating around the country on the court proceedings, especially on the veracity of the pink sheets used by the Electoral Commission (EC) to tabulate votes.

<sup>39</sup>Fessell, D. (2020). Laughter Leaves Me Lighter: Coping with COVID-19. *JAMA*, 323(24), pp 2476-2477.

<sup>40</sup>Radioxyzonline. (2014). Ghana Is a Nation of Jokers; Time to Get Serious – Otobil. Retrieved on November 28, 2024 from <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Ghana-is-a-nation-of-jokers-time-to-get-serious-Otobil-302136>

<sup>41</sup>Interview with Governance expert on November 25, 2024.

<sup>42</sup>In 2002, Cardinal Peter Turkson—then head of the National Peace Council (NPC)—met with former Presidents John Rawlings and John Kufuor and helped ease the bad blood between them. Again, in the 2008 elections. Cardinal Turkson and Maulvi Dr. Wahab Adam—the late Ameer and Missionary in charge of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission in Ghana and former Vice-Chair of the NPC—shuffled between the offices and homes in efforts to quell tensions. Kufuor's tenure had come to an end and there was discord between his party—the National Patriotic Party (NPP)—and the main opposition party—the National Democratic Congress (NDC) during the elections for his successor. Neither party received more than 50% of the votes cast on December 7, 2008, which, led to a run-off on December 28, 2008.

<sup>43</sup>Interviews with youth and women groups in Cape Coast on October 30, 2024.

<sup>44</sup>Next to religious bodies, CSOs were highly praised by interviewees for their work to reduce tensions during the electoral process.

<sup>45</sup>Rahman, J. H. (2023). *Frameworks and Mechanisms for Peaceful Elections and Resolving Election-Related Conflicts: A Critical Appraisal of Ghana's Situation* (master's thesis). Åbo Akademi University, Turku, Finland.

<sup>46</sup>Gyekye-Jandoh. (2016). Op. cit.

<sup>47</sup>Rahman, (2023). Op. cit.

<sup>48</sup>Boafo-Arthur, K. (2008). Democracy and Stability in West Africa: The Ghanaian Experience. *Claude Ake Memorial Papers*, No. 4. Uppsala: Uppsala University & Nordic Africa Institute.

<sup>49</sup>Coalition of Domestic Election Observers. (2024). PVT Overview. Retrieved on November 30, 2024 from <https://codeoghana.org/pvt-overview/>

<sup>50</sup>Interview with Youth Group on October 31, 2024.

<sup>51</sup>It is an independent statutory national peace institution established by The National Peace Council Act (818), 2011.

Commission for Civic Education (NCCE). The core function of the NPC is to prevent, manage, and resolve conflict and to build sustainable peace.<sup>52</sup> The inclusion of religious heads, traditional leaders, and representatives of CSOs offers a valuable combination of skills, experiences, and legitimacy that enhances effectiveness and inclusivity.<sup>53</sup> The independence, integrity, and convening powers of the NPC helped reduce tensions in the very closely contested presidential and parliamentary elections of 2008 and 2012.<sup>54</sup> The NPC has contributed to peaceful elections by spearheading communication, dialogue, and reconciliation sessions in Ghana's electioneering processes.<sup>55</sup> In addition, trust and information sharing platforms with political parties, engagements with the EC, the National Election Security Task Force (NESTF), the National Elections Response Group (NERG), and judiciary all aid the NPC to support peaceful processes in Ghana. In this vein, past efforts to promote religious tolerance appear to be yielding fruit and ethnic sentiments, indecent expressions, and hate speeches seem to be less prevalent in 2024 as compared to 2020.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, the NCCE as part of its broader mission to engage the public and urge Ghanaians to protect the peace before, during, and after the elections, has engaged in advocacy, public education, and sensitisation in parts of Ghana targeted especially at the youth.<sup>57</sup> Thus, the NCCE and NPC together with other state and non-state actors have been instrumental in contributing to strengthening elections in Ghana.

## Conclusion

Ghana has held eight presidential and parliamentary elections with varying degrees of election-related violence, which peaked in 2020. This has raised alarm bells among stakeholders and apprehension among citizens on the impending elections in 2024. However, alongside that apprehension is also a belief and trust in the ability of citizens to be resilient and accommodating, in religious and cultural values, and in the capacity of CSOs and institutions such as the NPC and NCCE to leverage their collective agency directly and indirectly in the electioneering processes to

safeguard the peace of the nation. On the surface, it appears that things are well but as various reports and polls indicate, confidence in state institutions has waned considerably in the last 10 years. This situation must be reversed. As intoned by one expert interviewed, "peace is like a garden that we must cultivate, when left unattended weeds sprout".<sup>58</sup>

Going forward, there is the need to strengthen and restore confidence in particularly state institutions such as the EC, judiciary and state security agencies whose appointment or recruitment should as much as possible be depoliticised. There should also be an enhanced role or strategic plan for the engagement and involvement of religious and traditional leaders not only in institutions such as the NPC but also in local and district level processes that focuses on conflict prevention and instilling a culture of peace using a bottoms up approach. CSOs should also be more involved in nation building through structured processes that enables them to complement the state. Finally, as current events in Africa depicts, citizens can no longer be taken for granted and the state must do more to ensure it engages and fulfils its social contract to avoid future confrontations when that trust becomes strained.

<sup>52</sup>National Peace Council. (2023). Retrieved on November 17, 2024 from <https://www.mint.gov.gh/national-peace-council/>

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Issifu, A.K. (2014). *The Evolution of Ghana's National Peace Council: Successes and Failures* (published master's thesis). University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana.

<sup>55</sup>In the 2020 elections, the National Peace Council (NPC) was instrumental in getting the two major flag bearers - John Dramani Mahama and Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo - to sit down and sign a peace pact. Further in 2020, in the wake of the lives lost during the elections, the NPC together with the Commonwealth Secretariat organised a healing after elections programme in an effort to rebuild national unity post outbreaks of violence in some regions in the country. As a result, the main opposition party - the NDC - returned to the Inter Party Advisory Dialogue (IPAC) platform - in December 2023. Accordingly, the NDC has been attending since IPAC meetings since January 2024, demonstrating the clout, level of respect, and legitimacy of the NPC.

<sup>56</sup>Interview with official of NPC on November 20, 2024 in Accra.

<sup>57</sup>National Commission for Civic Education (2024). National Commission for Civic Education Public Education on Elections. Retrieved on November 05, 2024 from <https://nccegh.org/news/ncces-public-education-on-elections-2>

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

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