

# **Election Security and Violence in Ghana: The case of Ayawaso West Wougon and Talensi By-Elections**

## **Abstract**

Conducts of by-elections in recent times have been fraught with a lot of security challenges. This is as a result of the violence that characterized the conduct of by-elections recent times in Ghana. Violence during by-elections in Ghana plays a vital role in securing election victories for political parties. In all the by-elections characterized by violence in Ghana, they were won by parties that were accused of inciting the violence. The main tenets of election violence as identified by the paper include, actors, motives, timing, consequences, and patterns.

The paper reveals that there is a correlation between violence during by-elections and victories of incumbent parties. This is because, in the two by-elections understudy, those accused of starting the violence and using national security operatives won the elections. The paper also found out that by-election violence impacts negatively on Ghana's democratic maturity in several ways, such as; low voter turnout, weakening of democratic foundation and breeding an atmosphere of insecurity. Finally, the paper also revealed that political parties especially those in government resort to violence during by-elections in Ghana because they fear losing it will mean the government is underperforming as argued out by Feigert and Norris and also because they want to add to their tally in parliament.

**Keywords:** Election security, election violence, by-elections, Ghana

## **Introduction**

Elections undisputedly have become the most significant and popular tool through which political office holders are selected across the globe. In most jurisdictions, this selection is done through voting. Incontrovertibly, an election is viewed by the majority of the citizens as the most important political right through which democracy flourishes. Veritably, every well-functioning democracy thrives on the conduct of credible elections. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP, 2004) points out that election is the only means that offer the citizens of a country the opportunity to take part in decision making which directly affects them. It further contends that elections also give the citizens the power to hold their officeholders accountable. Similarly, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR, 2015) also suggests that it is through elections that the citizens participate in public affairs through voting. In many states, political participation can take the form of referendum and plebiscites where the people express their political choice.

The conduct of elections is viewed as the most suitable means through which the required link between the governors and the governed is established (Gyimah-Boadi, 2007; Moehler, 2009). It is important to note that the legitimacy of a government is obtained from the accord of the electorates. Across Africa, elections have become frequent and an accepted means of selecting leaders (Cheeseman, 2016, 2017; Gyimah-Boadi, 2007).

Conducting an election that meets the accepted international standard remains a daunting task for many African countries such as DR Congo, Burundi, Nigeria, Togo and many more. Ogbeidi (2010) observes that even the developed countries also struggle to conduct free and fair elections. In as much as other countries across the globe are improving on the credibility of their elections, violence during by-elections is marring the credibility of Ghanaian elections.

The transparency and credibility of elections are chiefly reliant on the level of respect for people to fully exercise their fundamental rights to participate freely in the life and management of political affairs of the country. Notwithstanding the achievements chalked in the democratization process, in some African countries, elections remain a persistent cause of human rights abuse, leading to social instability and violence during and after elections (UNCHR, 2015). Unlike the advanced democracies such as the US, UK, Germany, Sweden and the like, elections are conducted without any grave violence. However, in Ghana, there are often some pockets of violence which have increased the calls for the state to tighten election security during by-elections.

In relation to the foregoing, barely can one point to any previous election in Ghana that had not witnessed some form of violence in spite of the presence of security personnel. For instance, the 2008 and 2012 elections in Ghana were characterized by some pockets of violence. Across the

continent too, scarcely can you single out an election on the continent that has not been marred with rancor, intimidations, threats, and brutalities. For instance, 2011, 2015 and more recently, the 2019 elections in Nigeria, Kenya in 2007, Zimbabwe in 2007, Cote d'Ivoire in 2010 were all characterized by violence. In most cases, election violence ensues during the campaign period, voting or when results are declared and thereafter. That is why security is key to the success of every country's electoral process. This has raised some questions such as, is the Ghanaian security well equipped to handle election violence? Or is Ghana going to overcome election insecurity challenge in the near future?

The rebirth of democracy in Ghana in 1993 coupled with periodic elections has earned Ghana the accolade the beacon of democracy in Africa. However, there are some troubling developments that often characterize elections in the country. Article 66 (1) of the 1992 constitution of Ghana made provisions for elections to be held every four years. It also made special provisions for the conduct of by-elections when a Member of Parliament dies, resigns or is debilitated and is inept to perform his or her duties (Republic of Ghana, 1992). In either of these situations, parliamentary elections will only be conducted in the affected constituency to get a replacement (Republic of Ghana, 1992).

Since the 1992 Constitution came to being, thirty-one by-elections have been held, sometimes producing some enthralling results. By-elections have been held in, but not limited to Chereponi, Odododiodio, Atiwa, Asawase, Tamale Central, Kumawu, Offinso South, Fomena, Talensi and more recently Ayawaso West Wougou. In the last two recent by-elections in Talensi in 2015 and Ayawaso West Wougou in 2019, there have been a lot of security lapses. This has led to a situation where many observers questioning the preparedness of Ghanaian security agencies during by-elections.

Although general literature on political party development in Ghana abounds (see for example, Frempong, 2012, 2009, 2008, 2001, 2006; Agyemang-Duah, 2000, 2005), it is, however startling how little research has focused on by-elections in Ghana. Much of the literature on elections in Ghana has focused on election outcomes in Ghana and its implications in the various years on specific years (Anebo, 2001, 1998; Ayee, 2001, 1998; Debrah, 2001; Drah, 2001, 1998; Gyimah-Boadi, 2001; Jonah, 2001; Gyekye-Jandoh, 2014). Others such as Gyampo et al (2017), Bob-Milliar (2014) and Armah-Attoh (2017) also focused on political vigilante groups and elections violence in Ghana's fourth republic. However, there is dearth in the literature on by-elections and security in Ghana because there has not been any scholarly work on it. The paper, therefore, makes a modest attempt to highlight by-elections and security challenges in Ghana using the Talensi and Ayawaso West Wougou by-elections as a case study. The paper, therefore, contributes to knowledge and expand the literature on by-election and security. The main aim of the study is to find out why by-elections in Ghana are characterized by violence. It will also examine the impact of by-election violence on democratic maturity. In the succeeding sections, the paper examines some concepts, overview of elections in Ghana, election security, political

violence and by-elections in Ghana, Ayawaso West Wougon and Talensi by-elections in Ghana and political violence and democratic maturity in Ghana.

## **Conceptual clarifications**

### ***Elections***

Elections across the globe have been accepted as the heart of every democracy. This means that there cannot be any meaningful democracy without the conduct of credible elections. Similarly, Omotola (2010) posits that elections are very significant to competitive politics. He further postulates that elections promote political participation and competition, which are very key to democratic maturity.

According to Ijon (2019:4), an election is a “mechanism through which leaders are selected through a competitive process in accordance with the laws of the country to occupy vacant positions.” Bamgbose (2012:206) also defined an election as “a process of selecting the officers or representative of an organization or group by the vote of its qualified members.” Basically, elections serve as a vehicle through which representatives emerge to manage the affairs of the state on behalf of the citizens. Forero et al (2013) observe that elections play a vital role in every democracy, which allows all the citizens to articulate their views. As noted by Frempong (2012), elections have become an established challenge to symbolize the principle of democracy. That is why every definition of democracy in modern times include participation and competitive elections.

Though elections were meant to promote healthy participation and competition among candidates for votes, in most African states, elections become a victim of periodic incidents of violence. Dunning (2011) argues that elections can promote conflicts and can also be used as a tool for conflict resolution. Unfortunately, in recent times, most of the violence in Africa emerged as a result of the conduct of elections which some of the parties failed to accept the outcome. Some classical examples include Nigeria in 2015 (Campbell, 2010), Zimbabwe in 2008 (Hickman, 2011), Kenya in 2007 (Cheeseman, 2008; Klopp & Kamungi, 2007) and Cote d’Ivoire in 2011 (Zounmenou & Lamin, 2011). Nevertheless, Ghana has had relatively violence-free general elections, by-elections in recent times have always been fraught with violence on Election Day. Dunning’s theorization that election can both cause violence and also prevent violence is very true in the case of Ghana during by-elections.

## ***By-elections***

Electing people to represent their constituents in parliament is a vital tenet of representative democracy. Since the end of popular democracy where every male adult citizen takes part in the decision-making process, the election of parliamentarians has come to stay. In most democracies, parliamentarians are selected through the first past the post or simple majority in single-member constituencies. Parliamentary elections are conducted in constituencies where one person (in case of single-member constituency) is elected to represent the people and more than one in case of multimember constituencies.

According to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA, 2005), there are four types of plurality or majority systems used in selecting parliamentarians. These are the first past the post (FPTP), party block vote, the two-round system, and alternative vote. Among all the systems enumerated above, Oloo (2011) indicates that the FPTP is the simplest form among all. According to him, the use of single member districts allows an electorate to choose only one candidate from the list of candidates on the ballot paper. The winner is the candidate who receives the most votes and this may not have to be an absolute majority. Ghana and many other African countries use FPTP system in their parliamentary elections in single-member district.

Since representatives are elected through a single member district, when there is a vacancy it must be filled. The vacancy is usually filled through a bye-election. Feigert and Norris (1990:183) defined by-election as an “election held to fill a political office that has become vacant between general elections”. By-election can also be defined as special elections held in between general elections due to the resignation, death, incapacitation and or conviction of an incumbent member of parliament which has rendered the seat he or she occupies vacant. In most cases, by-elections ensue when the incumbent Member of Parliament (MP) dies, resign, or is incapacitated. They can also occur when the incumbent MP is recalled, faced criminal conviction or failed to maintain the minimum attendance expected of every member. By-elections are usually used to fill vacant seats in between regular elections in parliament (Feigert & Norris, 1990). They further revealed that by-elections are used in sixty-four countries across the globe for parliamentary replacement.

Scarcely, by-elections have also occurred because a constituency election has been nullified because of voting irregularities. In the Philippines and the United State, it called special elections, by-polls in India. Knotts and Ragusa (2016) state that they are called special elections in the US because they are not held on statutory Election Days.

By-elections can be vital for both the party with the majority in parliament and the minority party. For the majority in parliament. By-elections are very important for them to maintain their majority should they be victorious in the by-elections. On the other, by-elections are very

significant for the minority party in order to gain more seats and gain their official status or balance power in parliament (Silver, 2011) especially in situations like Ghana where the difference between the majority NPP and Minority NDC is very large.

### ***Election security***

Election insecurity has become a serious threat facing society because an attack on elections threatens the survival of democracy (Danso & Larney, 2012). The task of ensuring that elections are conducted on the African continent is an onerous one for most countries including Ghana. Authorities often take steps to ensure that voters, candidates, electoral officers, observer and all the stakeholders engaged in elections are protected from harm. They also ensure that everyone involved in elections experiences the process free from fear and also ensures that all electoral materials are secured.

Fischer (2002:9) defines election security as the “process of protecting electoral stakeholders such as voters, candidates, poll workers, media, and observers; electoral information such as vote results, registration data, and campaign material; electoral facilities such as polling stations and counting centers; and electoral events such as campaigning rallies against death, damage, or destruction.” The stakeholders of election security according to Fischer (2002) include the security forces, media, political parties, civil society organizations, judicial officials and the election management bodies. However, in Ghana, the statutory bodies in charge of election security are primarily the security services such as the police, military, prison officers, fire service and immigration officers (Larney & Aning, 2013). It is important to state that no election can take place in a situation of insecurity, lawlessness, terrorization, and violence. This, therefore, calls for a stronger and well-structured security for a country’s electoral process. For an election to be credible and its outcome acceptable by the contesting parties, there is the need for a complete security arrangement during elections (USAID, 2013).

Lately, there is no single election in Africa that has not been characterized with some acts of malice, acrimony, intimidation, threats, brutalities, and arsons among others (Collier & Rohner, 2008). In some cases, they even degrade into full-blown conflicts as happened in Kenya, Zimbabwe, Cote d’Ivoire, and the likes. Election violence can occur before, during and after elections when the results are declared. This is the reason why security must always be key to the electoral process.

Election insecurity has become a persistent challenge in the conduct of by-elections in Ghana in recent times. It traversed a lot of issues including the security of election officials, party officials, and protection of electoral materials and ensuring order at polling stations. The last two by-elections conducted in Talensi in 2015 and most recently Ayawaso West Wugon in 2019 were characterized with a lot of violence leading to injuries to party officials and election officers. Suleiman, (2014:66) defined electoral violence as “any form of behavior arising from an organized use of physical, psychological and structural force to cause damage to property, kill or

injure individual or group, aimed at intimidating and blackmailing such group or individual before, during and after elections in order to influence the outcome of the election.”

### ***Election violence***

Election violence has become a common phenomenon during by-elections in Ghana. The presence of election violence and its destructive nature has the potential to truncate the democratization agenda in Ghana. It is important to state that election violence is a subset of political violence and can also be compared to communal violence or rebellion (Taylor, 2018). Stremlau and Price (2009) espouse that election violence has a worldwide footmark and impact and as a result of that there is the need for a comprehensive study of how and when it occurs. Just as elections in Africa have become more competitive and more participatory, they have also become more violent. Elections are supposed to expedite violent free and legitimate outcomes whether democratically determined or not (Stremlau & Price, 2009), but due to the weaknesses of African state institutions, it has become difficult to conduct violent free elections.

The concept of election violence is very complex and there is no universally accepted definition. Election violence is often regarded as a sub-field of political violence that is fundamentally differentiated by timing and motivation. Adolfo et al (2012:2) defined election violence as a “coercive and deliberate strategy used by political actors – incumbents as well as opposition parties – to advance their interests or achieve specific political goals in relation to an electoral contest.” Ladan-Baki (2016:24) also defined electoral violence to include the “snatching of ballot boxes to rig and manipulate election results; causing pandemonium in polling stations to hinder voters from voting; beating up electoral officers and sometimes killing same in the process when weapons such as guns and cutlass are used during the elections”. The UNDP gave a more elaborate definition of election violence as

Any acts or threats of coercion, intimidation, or physical harm perpetrated to affect an electoral process, or that arise in the context of electoral competition. When perpetrated to affect an electoral process, violence may be employed to influence the process of elections —such as efforts to delay, disrupt or derail a poll or to influence the outcomes: the determination of winners in competitive races for political office, or securing the approval or disapproval of referendum questions (UNDP 2011).

Fischer (2002:8) also defined election violence as “any random or organized act that seeks to determine, delay, or otherwise influence an electoral process through threat, verbal intimidation, hate speech, disinformation, physical assault, forced “protection,” blackmail, destruction of property, or assassination.” He further revealed that sufferers of election violence do not only limit to people but data, things, and places also suffer.

Election violence is usually systemic and can occur at all three segments of the electoral process. These three segments encompass the pre-election stage, the election day(s) and the post-election period. However, in most cases election violence occurs around pre- and post-election periods

(Stremlau & Price, 2009). Conversely, during all the two by-elections under study in Ghana, the violence occurred on Election Day. This is a sharp contrast to the view held by Stremlau and Price.

It must be noted that election violence may not necessarily be physical violence, but may include coercive means such as intimidation, harassment, and threat of violence. The reasons for election violence is multidimensional but can be categorized into two expansive types (Adolfo et al, 2012). According to them, election violence can be categorized into; structural factors and the 'socio-economic uncertainties of losing power' and the factors of the electoral process and the electoral contest. When people fear that they will lose the basic means of their survival during elections, they will be motivated to engage in violence during elections to keep their core means of survival (Ijon, 2018). Adolfo et al (2012) also stated that when the socio-economic uncertainties of losing political power in states where power is concentrated imminent, people are more prone to violence during elections.

The structural factors as a cause of election violence are connected to the core power constructions predominant in emerging democracies across Africa, which includes poor governance, divisive politics, informal patronage systems, and winner takes all politics (Adolfo et al, 2012; Ijon, 2018). Though, African states have introduced democratic institutions including periodic and, in some cases, competitive elections, the power structures in the country are still weak. As a result of the weakness of the structures in many African states, politics tend to be inclusive and there is high intolerance for the opposition. In some cases, too mistrust in the election management bodies as a result of the weak institutional structures can also serve as a motivational factor that can lead to election violence.

According to Bekoe (2012) and Hoglund (2009), the specific characteristics of election violence include actors, motive, timing, consequence, and patterns. In every election violence, actors whose interest leads to the violence exist. These actors maybe those behind the violence or their supporters may not cause mayhem with their own might to get their patrons elected. The instantaneous motive for election violence is to influence the electoral process and the result for the actors involved (Laakso, 2007). Its causes are connected to either social, economic or political grievances (Laakso, 2007) or political greed (IPI, 2012).

## **Methods**

The paper covers two out of the thirty-one by-elections held in Ghana since the inception of the Fourth Republic in 1993. These two by-elections were selected to provide a comprehensive understanding of why by-elections in Ghana are prone to violence. The paper relied heavily on secondary sources of data.

## **Overview of bye-elections in Ghana**



The rebirth of constitutional rule in 1993 and the coming into force of the first parliament of the fourth republic to the seventh parliament, there has been thirty-seven parliamentary vacancies in Ghana. This means that elections must be conducted to fill these parliamentary vacancies. The 1992 constitution of Ghana made special provision for replacing vacant seats in Ghana. Article 112 (5) of the 1992 Constitution says

[W]henver a vacancy occurs in Parliament, the Clerk of Parliament shall notify the Electoral Commission in writing within seven days after becoming aware that the vacancy has occurred; and a by-election shall be held within 30 days after the vacancy occurred except that where the vacancy occurred through the death of a member, the by-election shall be held within 60 days after the occurrence of the vacancy (Republic of Ghana, 1992).

The constitution further stipulates clearly that in any other event that renders a seat vacant apart from the death of a member, a by-election shall be held within 30 days. However, if a vacancy occurs as a result of death, by-elections shall be within 60 days. Out of the thirty-one vacancies that occurred between 1993 and 2019, by-elections were conducted in twenty-six constituencies producing some intriguing outcomes. Elections were not conducted in the other five constituencies because there is another constitutional provision which indicates that by-elections shall not be held when a vacancy occurs three months to the general elections. In the case of Ho West in 1996, Ashanti Akim North in 2008, Wulensi in 2012, Kwabre West in 2012 and Bawku Central in 2012, the vacancies occurred some few months to the general elections that made it impossible to conduct a by-election.

The first parliament of the fourth republic witnessed five vacancies all ensuing as a result of the death of the incumbent members of parliament. All but one of the vacancies were not filled. These vacancies occurred between 1993 and 1996. In the second parliament (1997-2000), there were only two vacancies that also occurred due to the death of the incumbents in 1999 (Frempong, 2016). It is worthy to note that all the two vacancies were filled in by-elections that were conducted peacefully.

In the third (2001-2004) and fourth (2005-2008) parliaments, seven vacancies each ensued calling for by-elections for replacement (Frempong, 2016). Some of the vacancies occurred as a result of very fascinating reasons. In 2002, Ibn Chambas resigned his seat to take over as Executive Secretary of ECOWAS. Another interesting case of a vacancy was the disqualification of Samuel Nyimakan of Wulensi constituency by the court due to residency issue in 2003. In the same year, Abraham Kofi Asante of Amenfi West also resigned his seat under interesting circumstances. In 2005, Wayo Seini crossed carpet back to the NPP rendering the Tamale Central seat vacant. Another parliamentary vacancy was created in the Nkoranza constituency due to the incarceration of Eric Amoateng in the US.

The fifth (2009-2012) parliament also recorded seven vacancies. However, only four of the vacancies were filled (ibid). In the Akwatia constituency, by-elections were conducted in 2009

because the EC did not declare the parliamentary results in 2008 due to some alleged irregularities. In 2012 alone, three vacancies occurred and by-elections were not conducted because it occurred close to the general elections. One intriguing vacancy in 2012 is the Bawku Central constituency whose vacancy occurred due to the fact that Adamu Dramani was disqualified because he holds dual citizenship. The three other vacancies occurred as a result of the death of the incumbents. However, in all the four by-elections conducted, they were all conducted in a violent free atmosphere except in Chereponi where there was a violent clash between the supporters of the NPP and the NDC.

Similarly, the sixth (2013-2016) parliament also recorded seven vacancies resulting in by-elections between 2013 and 2016 (ibid). There were three resignations and fourth death causing the vacancies. It is worthy to document that in all the seven by-elections, only the 2015 by-election in Talensi was violent. Many observers and civil society organizations and opposition parties especially the NPP at the time called for immediate actions to be taken to ensure that Ghanaian elections are devoid of violent. During the elections in Talensi, there was a violent clash between the Azorka boys and the Bolga Bull Dogs who are sympathetic to the NDC and NPP respectively. The conduct of these “criminals” scared many Ghanaians who questioned the ability of the security services to provide election security in 2016.

There were a lot of fears ahead of the 2016 elections because of the activities of the vigilante groups recruited by both the NDC and NPP. However, the election was conducted peacefully and the seventh parliament was sworn in. Just as the previous parliaments, the seventh parliament was also hit by another vacancy propelling a by-election in 2019. The EC in consultation of IPAC set 31<sup>st</sup> January, 2019 for the conduct of the by-election. Regrettably, what was supposed to be a peaceful exercise turn out to be a war zone where national security operatives fired gunshot injuring six people. Consequentially, the NDC announced that they had pulled out of the elections because the safety of their candidate and the supporters was not guaranteed.

The violent conduct of the by-election in Ayawaso West Wougon in 2019 has increased the number of violent by-elections in Ghana. This has therefore led to a situation where many observers are now questioning the relevance of by-elections in Ghana. Admittedly, those questioning the relevance of by-elections in Ghana know it is a constitutional exercise. There are now two schools of thought concerning by-elections in Ghana. The opponents of the continuous conduct of by-elections in Ghana claim that the exercise is expensive. They further argue that a developing country like Ghana should not continue to spend huge sums of money on an exercise that is inconsequential. Additionally, they also suggest that since electorates vote for parties and not individual candidates when an incumbent MP dies, his/her party should be allowed to replace a candidate without any contest. It is, however, important to state in a single member constituency like Ghana, people don't vote for parties but candidates in the parliamentary elections. The candidates only represent the parties in elections. The Hon. Member of Parliament for Kumbungu constituency agreed with this argument and even proposed that the NDC should not fill a candidate in Ayawaso West Wougon (Myjoyonline.com, 2018). The General Secretary

of the NPP also termed it as needlessly expensive and also concurs with calls to allow a party of the incumbent to fill the vacancy for the unexpired term.

The proponents of by-elections, however, want the exercise to continue because it is a constitutional provision and a constituency must have a representative in parliament.

<b>Election</b>	<b>Constituency</b>	<b>Name of MP</b>	<b>Cause of bye-election</b>	<b>Year of bye-election</b>	<b>Region</b>
<b>1992-1996</b>	New Edubiase Wenchi East Tano South Navrongo Central	Mary Ghann E. Obeng-Mensah S.A.K. Asamoah Geofrey Abulu	Died Died Died Died	1993 1995 1995 1995	Ashanti Brong Ahafo Brong Ahafo Upper East
<b>1997-2000</b>	Ablekuma Central Lambussie	C. Samuel Crabb Luke Koo	Died Died	1999 1999	Greater Accra Upper West
<b>2001-2004</b>	Bimbilla Kumawu Wulensi Navrongo Central Gomoa East Amenfi West Upper Denkyira	Ibn Chambas Reo Addai Basoah Samuel Nyimakan John Achiliwor Emma. Acheampong Abraham K. Asante Charles Nyanor	Resigned Died Disqualified Died Died Resigned Died	2002 2002 2003 2003 2003 2003 2004	Northern Ashanti Northern Upper East Central Western Central
<b>2005-2008</b>	Asawase Odododiodio Tamale Central Offinso South Fomena Nkoranza North	Adamu M. Gibril Samuel Mankattah Wayo Seini Kwabena Sarfo Akwas Afrifa Eric Amoateng	Died Died Cross carpeted Died Died Incarcerated	2005 2005 2005 2006 2007 2007	Ashanti Greater Accra Northern Ashanti Ashanti Brong Ahafo
<b>2009-2012</b>	Akwantia Jirapa Chereponi Atiwa	Edward K. Salia Doris Asibi Seidu Kwasi A. Ankamah	not declared in 2008 Died Died Died	2009 2009 2009 2010	Eastern Upper West Northern Eastern
<b>2013-2016</b>	Akatsi South Buem Kumbugu	Doe Adjaho Henry Kamal Ford Muhammed M.	Resigned Died Resigned	2013 2013 2013	Volta Volta Northern

	<b>Talensi</b> Amenfi West Abuakwa North Abetifi	Robert Mosore John Gyentuah J. B. Danquah Kwasi W. Peprah	Resigned Died Died Died	2015 2015 2016 2016	Upper East Western Eastern Eastern
<b>2017-</b>	<b>Ayawaso West</b> <b>Wougbon</b>	Emmanuel Agyarko	Died	2019	Greater Accra

### Causes of election violence during by-elections

Election violence during by-elections is mostly triggered by at least a factor. Though there may be other factors leading to violence, there is usually a trigger factor. This section of the paper seeks to discuss the causes of election violence during by-elections in Ghana. First, by-elections in Ghana has been characterized by violence in recent times because since the election is been conducted in just one constituency, all the political parties move their men to the constituency. This is to ensure that they capture the seat and as a result, all the parties are in just one constituency, the likelihood of violence is very high. For instance, in the Talensi by-election in 2015, the violence erupted after the allegations and counter allegations that Sammy Awuku, the national youth organizer of the NPP and Koku Anyidoho, then deputy secretary of the NDC were blocking roads with their boys.

Second, the fear that the outcome of by-elections will serve as a referendum especially on the ruling government is another cause of by-election violence in Ghana. Feigert and Norris (1990) support this assertion and postulates that by-elections can be equated to public opinions which serve as a referendum on the performance of the government. This view was also confirmed by Sigelman (1981) in his study that sort to examine special elections between 1954 to 1978 in USA concluded that they are referenda on the sitting president. As a result of that the ruling parties goes an extra mile to win the elections at all cost. This, therefore, explains why in all the violent by-elections in Ghana, the ruling government was complicit in the violence. Straus and Taylor (2012) advance that in Africa, the majority of the pre-election violence that occurred was committed by the ruling governments because of the fear of losing. When the incumbents fear that the outcome of a by-election will be used as a test case for its governance, they will be more prone to perpetrating violence in order to win the elections. For instance, ahead of the Ayawaso by-elections in 2019, the communication director of the NDC stated that the “Ayawaso by-election is going to be a midterm election to test NPP’s two years in office” (Peacefmonline.com, 2018).

Also, the act of conveying non-indigenes to the constituency to vote is another cause of election violence. In an event that the identity of a voter is challenged at a polling station, the likelihood that it will result in violence is very high. The National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE, 2011) in their studies on *Election violence in Ghana* revealed that when political parties bus

voters from other constituencies to the constituency where the by-election is been conducted to beef up the chances of winning, there will be opposition from the other political parties and that can result into violence.

### **Election violence and Talensi by-elections**

The Talensi by-election received much media attention because of the violence that characterized the electoral process on the voting day. The election was marred by various acts of violence. The Talensi by-election was conducted on the 7<sup>th</sup> July 2015 after the incumbent Member of Parliament resigned. The NPP and NDC together with their leaders were all in Talensi to help their parties win the seat. The seat at stake was been hyped as a dress rehearsal for the 2016 general elections. The election started peacefully, however, how it ended still remains a mystery to many Ghanaians.

There were reports of incidents of violence with the sporadic firing of guns and attacks with machetes, tear gas and use of sticks during the conduct of the polls (Myjoyonline.com, 2015a). The incidence led to the hospitalization of many victims and the destruction of vehicles and other properties. This situation has a raised a lot of concerns about the comfort and latitude with which violence is unleashed during by-elections in Ghana.

The ruling NDC at the time and the opposition NPP were accusing each other of instigating the violence that characterized the by-election. The then Deputy General Secretary of the NDC Koku Anhyidoho at the time accused the NPP of instigating the violence. According to him, supporters of the NPP mounted roadblocks in front of its constituency office (Myjoyonline.com, 2015a). He further revealed that he saw the then National Youth Organizer of the NPP Awuku and Mustafa Hamid the then Spokesperson for the NPP presidential candidate as part of the agitating youth blocking the roads (Citifmonline.com, 2015). The NPP, on the other hand, expressed shock and surprised as they watched gun-wielding Azoka Boys, a fanatic group linked to the NDC. Moving around the constituency in 4-wheel drives, the thugs were said to have left dusty trails of their intent to intimidate and cause harm. The then NPP General Secretary Kwadwo Owusu Afriyie also accused the NDC of starting the violence and said: “It surprises me how they got the guns.” These views by Kwadwo Owusu Afriyie and other members of the NPP were refuted by the Upper East Regional Police Command who accused them of over exaggerating the attacks they suffered during the by-elections (myjoyonline.com, 2015b).

### **Election violence and the Ayawaso West Wougou (AWW) by-elections**

The unfortunate incident that occasioned the Ayawaso West Wougou by-election is not a good omen for Ghana’s democratic credentials. The Ayawaso West Wougou by-election was slated for 31<sup>st</sup> January 2019 after the demise of the Member of Parliament. The violence began when masked men dressed in black polo shirts stormed the polling station when the election was ongoing. Gunshots and a bloodbath marked the Ayawaso West Wougou by-election which

forced the NDC to pull out of the elections. WANEP (2019) in its situation report of the Ayawaso by-election revealed that eighteen people were injured through gun-shots. The National Chairman of the NDC Samuel Ofose cited security reasons for that reason. According to him, despite the attacks on their members, the security services did not protect them.

Just as in the Talensi by-election, both the NPP and the NDC gave different versions of what happened at the polling station. These double versions of accounts have made it very difficult for Ghanaians to grasp what actually triggered the violence. The opposition NDC alleged that masked and gun-wielding men attacked the La Bawaleshie Primary School Polling station during the elections. They also claimed that these masked men were members of the NPP Invincible Forces (a vigilante group linked with the NPP) who dressed as National Security officers and caused pandemonium at the polling station. However, the ruling NPP repudiated this claim and stated that the NPP brought some youth from the Northern region who were camped in the NDC candidate's house apparently to cause disorder during the elections. In the view of the National Chairman of the NPP, Freddie Blay, the National Security operatives got this information and decided to send their men there to maintain law and order.

### **Election violence and by-election victories**

The impact of violence on the outcome of by-elections in Ghana cannot be underestimated. The primary motive of those who employ violence during by-elections usually seeks to thwart election result in favor of their political parties or candidates. Election violence can help those who employ it to win elections (Drumond, 2015). This is common in situations where violence has resulted in low voter turnout.

In the entire two by-elections understudy, the ruling parties were victorious at the end of the elections. The NDC won the violent 2015 Talensi by-election and the NPP also won the violent 2019 Ayawaso West Wougbon by-election. Coincidentally, these elections occurred when all these parties were in government and they were accused of fomenting the violence in each of the by-elections. Studlar and Sigelman (1987) state that in by-elections that are closely contested, the ruling party wins. They arrived at this conclusion after a comparative analysis of British by-elections and USA special elections.

Though the 2009 Chereponi by-election is not part of this study, it is important to note that the then ruling NDC party won that violent by-election. Similarly, the NDC was accused of causing the violence because they want to win the seat at all cost, which they won. In contrast, the 2009 Atiwa violent by-election was won by the opposition NPP in which the then ruling party (NDC) was accused for causing the violence. Apart from Atiwa, the ruling party won all the other three violent by-elections in the Fourth Republic. They were accused of using national security operatives (state-sponsored terror) and party militias to cause violence at polling stations.

From this background, this paper states clearly that there is a positive relationship between political violence and by-election victories in Ghana looking at the outcomes of the two by-

elections understudy and the Chereponi by-elections. This also means that when ruling parties use national security and party militias to cause violence during elections, they are more likely to win the election than the opposition parties.

### **Election violence and democratic maturity**

In the wake of recent occurrences of violence during elections in Ghana, the subject of election violence has increasingly become very important among observers, practitioners, and scholars. Rising interest has led to an increase in the number of scholarly work that seeks to explain the causes and effects of election violence (Claes 2017; Kovacs & Bjarnesen, 2018). This section of the paper, therefore, seeks to examine the impact of recent by-elections violence on Ghana's democratization process.

Recourse to election violence and other illegal electoral behavior like multiple registration, vote rigging, and registrations of underage children and snatching of ballot boxes always cause problems to the maturity of democracy. Danso and Lartey (2012) observe that this is very common in countries with frail institutions that fail to respond appropriately to election violence. Just as election violence poses threats to the life of the citizens, it also crumbles the foundation of democracy, which must function by the accord of the citizens. It also crumbles the foundations of democracy because fraud and force shall be replaced with freedom of choice (Danso & Lartey, 2012). In these circumstances, the citizens will always vote without making a choice because those who perpetrate violence can use other illicit ways to win elections.

Also, election violence can lead to low voter turnout during elections if it persists. In event that election in a country is usually characterized by violence, voters will not be motivated to take part in elections and that will defeat the purpose of participation in a democracy. Habasonda (2018) asserts that an effective way to discourage voters who may not vote in favour of a particular candidate or a party is the use of violence during elections. Sesan (2012) confirmed this and espoused that in the 2011 and 2015 elections in Nigeria, Lagos State recorded a voter turnout of 35% due to the violence that characterized the elections in the state. Similarly, in the Ayawaso West Wougou by-election, the voter turn-out was just 19.83% and this was linked to the violence that marred the violence.

However, Studlar and Sigelman (1987) contradict the view election violence can lead to low voter turn-out and postulates that voter turnout in by-elections are generally low as compared to general elections and that is not caused by violence.

In the worst scenario, it can also result into a full-blown armed violence if electoral results failed to reflect the will of the people and that can cause a democratic reversal if care is not taken. Appropriate measures must be taken to end election violence because in African countries where election violence was conducted along ethnic, religious or regional lines has led the countries into civil wars (Danso & Lartey, 2012). For instance, the election violence in Kenya in 2007 and Cote d'Ivoire in 2010 are good examples of how election violence can lead to civil wars. In addition, election violence can breed an atmosphere of insecurity that can result in an inter-group conflict which can truncate the democratization process of a country. Atuobi (2008) postulates

that election violence can lead to widespread and protracted violence. This view has been supported by Aver, Nnorom and Targba (2013) who in their study, *investigating the effects of political violence on social development in Nigeria* concluded that political violence has resulted in a lot of conflicts among ethnic groups, nations, religion and tribes in Nigeria.

For instance, in Rwanda, Burundi and Cote d'Ivoire experience widespread violence, which preceded election, disputes among other factors. Since election violence is targeted at party agents, candidates, voters, and election workers, the slightest mistake that will cause an injury or death to these people during an election will receive reprisal attacks from his or her family or the party he or she associates with. In a situation like that the violence may transcend election violence because people will now fight because of the involvement of their family members.

Moreover, election violence can jeopardize democracy itself as well as peace and stability in a country. Drumond (2015) indicates that violence during elections can impact on the direct participation of the constituents and the candidates during campaigns and this can also shape their behavior, attitude and perception towards democracy. In an event like that the electorates will feel apprehensive to support a candidate and candidates, on the other hand, will also feel endangered to run for offices. Atuobi (2008) concurred with this argument and postulates that in countries where election related violence is common, it threatens democratic values and institutions and prevents them from maturing. Bekoe (2012) subjectively indicated that "citizens who experience repeated or intense electoral violence may view democratization in a less favorable light..." According to her, this can create an environment of annoyance with democracy. In this regard, putting in place effective mechanisms to foil and allay election violence is an important step towards democratic consolidation.

Finally, election violence can also dent the entire election itself. In situations where the threat of violence is present, electorates may decide not to register and others can also opt to avoid the entire election process. Candidates can also pull out of elections or the political actors can also capitalize on the violence to cancel or postpone elections in order to hold on to power (Drumond, 2015). When observers conclude that an election is tainted by violence, the legitimacy of the outcome, as well as the elected official, will be questioned. Situations like this can have an impact on the democratic consolidation because the conduct of free, fair, periodic and violence-free election is a prerequisite for democratic consolidation. This means that countries that conduct elections in a violent environment are most likely to fail in consolidating their democracy.

### **Conclusion and recommendation**

This paper discussed election security and violence and by-elections in Ghana focusing on the Ayawaso West Wougon by-election in 2019 and the Talensi by-election in 2015. These by-elections were selected because they both ended violently. One cannot lose sight on the fact that the conduct of periodic, free, fair, transparent and violent free elections is a defining moment of a country's journey to democratic consolidation. Ghana has fared well in the conduct of elections



and that has earned her the accolade the beacon of democracy. However, the conduct of by-elections in recent times has raised a lot of concerns due to the violence associated with them.

The paper revealed that there is a positive correlation between election violence and by-election victories in Ghana because in each of the by-elections under study and the Chereponi by-election which is not considered in this paper, the parties accused as causing the violence won the election. Election violence during by-elections has become a worrisome situation in the country that the government has constituted a commission to find out what inspired the recent violence in the AWW by-election. The three-member commission chaired by Emile Short which has earned the commission the name “Short Commission” is to investigate and report to the government what to do in order to end political party vigilante groups, who are often used to cause violence during the by-elections.

The paper also examined the impact of election violence on Ghana’s drive to democratic maturity and concluded that violence during by-elections can affect Ghana’s drive to democratic maturity negatively. The impact of election violence on democratic maturity is immense and if care is not taken, they cause democratic reversal or reduce Ghana’s democratic achievement to a pseudo democracy.

### **Recommendations**

Election security has afflicted the republic, especially during by-elections. It is important to state that whichever party is in power, its appointees are usually accused of intimidation and fomenting violence during elections. This paper, therefore, recommends that there should be stringent legislation that will deal with the perpetrators of election violence especially the political vigilante groups. Also, there should be disbandment of all vigilante and militia groups that are linked to political parties in the country. The disbandment can be done through consensus between the various political parties especially the NPP and the NDC who are usually linked with these groups.

In addition, the paper recommends that members of the vigilante groups that often used to cause mayhem during elections should be recruited into the Ghana Armed Forces as part of the measures to disband them since most of them allow themselves to be used for those activities because they are unemployed. Furthermore, the paper recommends that the security service especially the Ghana Police Service should be depoliticized and should be granted all the powers to handle and prosecute all election-related offenses. This means that all election related offenses should be left for the police to handle. Finally, the exclusive powers of the Attorney General who is a political appointee in Ghana and also in charge of all public prosecutions should be given a second look. The powers to prosecute election-related offenses should be taken away from the Attorney General and handed over to the legal and prosecutors of the Police. This will prevent the situation where *nolle prosequi* is always filled by the Attorney General when members of his/her party are engaged in election related crimes.

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