

WEST AFRICA EARLY WARNING & EARLY RESPONSE NETWORK

WARN

Policy Brief

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GHANA

Presidential and Parliamentary
Elections 2020:

Building Confidence and Generating
Trust Amid **COVID-19 Pandemic**



**WEST AFRICA NETWORK
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Source: Google Images

1. Introduction

Since the early 1990s, Ghana has made a steady progress in the quest to consolidate democratic governance in its political landscape. Between 1992 and 2016, the country has successfully organized seven multi-party democratic elections which have culminated in three peaceful political transitions between the two major political parties – the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC). Inherent to this success is the growing culture of open spaces for inclusive political participation of citizens, freedom of the media and adherence to the rule of law. Despite this progress, tensions and violence remain protracted in Ghana's electoral cycle. Notably, disagreements over the electoral processes, ethnic cleavages, political vigilantism, abuse of incumbency and issues of exclusion, among others, are recurrent fault lines that continue to re-surface and generate conflicts in every election. Already, there are growing tensions and disagreements ahead of the December 2020 presidential and parliamentary elections among stakeholders. There has been divided public opinion over the dismissal of the former Chairperson of the Electoral

West Africa Early Warning & EARLY RESPONSE Network (WARN)

The West Africa Early Warning Network (WARN) is an integral part of the West Africa Preventive Peacebuilding Program co-ordinated by the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP). Through its WARN Program, WANEP is setting the stage for a civil society-based early warning and response network in Africa with emphasis on human security.

WARN covers the entire Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) region.

Since 2002, WANEP entered into an agreement with ECOWAS through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in the framework of capacity building in Conflict Prevention. One of the goals of

this agreement is to interface WARN with the ECOWAS Early Warning Systems to optimize early warning conflict prevention in West Africa. In view of this development, WANEP has been operating a liaison office located at the ECOWAS Secretariat in Abuja, Nigeria since April 2003.

In recognition of the role and achievements of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) in Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding in Africa, particularly in West Africa, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations at its substantive session of 2006 granted WANEP Special Consultative Status to the UN. WANEP is therefore mandated to designate official representatives to the United Nations in New York, Geneva and Vienna to further its advocacy and outreach strategies for peace and human security.

Commission (EC) and her two deputies by the President on grounds of abuse in line with Article 146 of the Constitution¹. This has contributed to the distrust and lack of confidence of the NDC as well as some sections of civil society in the neutrality of the current leadership of the Electoral Commission. This is evident by the organized protests led by the NDC against the decision of the EC to compile a new voter register.



*Protest march in Tamale against EC's plan for new voters register
Source: Graphic online*

As the country contends with rising tensions and threats of violence, the transmission and spread of the COVID-19 pandemic across the country since the first confirmed case in March 14, 2020, further complicates the preparedness by the EC to ensure the successful implementation of the current election calendar. With the imposition of the Government restriction on public gatherings and other containment measures to mitigate further spread of the disease, the National Identification Authority (NIA) citizens Identification Card (ID) registration process has been halted. The scheduled new voter registration processes has also not commenced. Given the limited time before the elections in December and the increasing cases of the COVID-19, there are growing stakeholder concerns in the ability of the EC to conclude its preparations ahead of the December 7 elections. Despite these obstacles, there is wide optimism that Ghana has the resilience and potential to overcome these challenges to conduct a peaceful election.

This policy brief highlights pathways to build confidence, generate trust among key stakeholders and recommendations to address the challenges posed by COVID-19 to the peaceful conduct of presidential and parliamentary elections.

2. The Prevailing Context:

Persistence of Winner-Takes-All Politics

The Winner-Takes-All (WTA) political model as enshrined in the 1992 Constitution of Ghana continues to define the strategies and actions of political parties who exercise all means to attain power which sometimes results in tensions and violence in elections. There is a high concentration of power in the hands of a central government led by an executive President. Critics of this model indicate it is a threat to checks and balances expected in governance as the opportunity cost of the executive powers lies in the weakened constitutional provisions of the relevant oversight functions of the legislature.

For example, the Speaker of the House is elected by a majority vote in parliament and at least forty Members of Parliament (MPs) are also members of the executive arm of government². This constitutes a conflict of interest as the legislature could be compromised to exercise its oversight function to put the powers of the President in check. In addition, the Presidency has the power to appoint Ministers, Boards of state-owned enterprises and District Chief Executives. These officials in turn award state contracts and create jobs to their political cronies³. For this reason, accountability is weak, as public prosecutors report to political appointees in the executive branch⁴. Given the strong political structures of the NPP and NDC in the country, the zero-sum political tussle continues to intensify competition between the ruling and opposition party. Both the NPP and NDC view power as the only viable way to accumulate individual and party control of the State⁵. As a result, electoral competition escalates into trends of violence as has been witnessed in the past elections.

¹See Article 146 of the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana. Available at: https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Ghana_1996.pdf?lang=en (Accessed on 20/03/2020).

²Ibid.

³Leslie Fox, Barak Hoffman, Amos Anyimadu, and Michael Keshishian, "Ghana Democracy and Governance Assessment: Final Report," U.S. Agency for International Development, August 2011, 7.

⁴Saskia Brechnmacher, "Ghana's Vaunted Electoral Process Under Stress". Carnegie International Endowment for International Peace. December 1, 2016. Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2016/12/01/ghana-s-vaunted-electoral-process-under-stress-pub-66307> (Accessed on 4/5/2020).

⁵Ibid.

Political Patronage and High-Stakes

Closely related to the zero-sum game is the political patronage and high stakes in power contestation in Ghana elections. Although political competition is fundamental to multiparty free elections, patronage and high stakes often flare tensions, conflicts and violence during elections. The use of incentives by political parties to garner support is common in Ghanaian electioneering process since its independence. Winning public office is considered a means to change the livelihood status of not just the political actors, but their associates, ethnic groups and political party⁶. Patronage is often at its peak during an election year when political parties devise elaborate strategies to win power in order to control the vast political and economic resources vested in the presidency. As such, the parties resort to political patronage to incentivize and mobilize voters, especially in their strongholds. This has led to factionalized politics, played along regional and ethnic lines. Based on past experience, 2020 elections are likely to reinforce these threats especially in constituencies considered as hotspots from the past two elections.

Additional dynamics are created by the unique contestation of the presidential elections of 2020 in which for the first time in the political history of Ghana, an incumbent President, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo of the NPP will contest against a former President, John Dramani Mahama of the NDC, who lost the 2016 elections. The tensions ahead of the December elections are already evident in the inter-party rancor, vilification campaigns, mutual accusations, use of hostile language and physical violence, as manifested in the Ayawaso West-Wuogon Constituency Parliamentary By-election of January 2019⁷. These are visible signs that suggest potential violence between the two dominant parties in the lead up to elections of December 7. Additionally, there are concerns that the fear and panic associated with COVID-19 disease coupled with social distance measures to curtail the spread of the pandemic are likely to affect participation in the elections.

Ethnic Cleavages

Ethnic cleavages plays a significant role in Ghana elections⁸. This is evident in the varied nature of the ethnic composition of Ghana's past seven elections and political transitions. Control of state power has moved from southern Akan during the Nkrumah years; through to a Ga-Ewe coalition under the National Liberation Council (NLC); the central Akan (Asante-Brong) alliance of Busia; the ethnically balanced National Redemption Council (NRC)-Supreme Military Council (SMC) constellation; a minority cluster with unequal northern representation in the Government of the Third Republic; and then to an Ewe-based ruling circle in the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC)⁹. These ethno-political leaning could suggest ethnic divides along partisan lines in the political evolution of the country. However, this perceived dichotomy has not degenerated into large-scale polarization and violence but remains a threat to peaceful elections if ethnic mobilization along party lines by the major political parties escalates. Given the tensions and disagreements unfolding in the lead up to the elections in December, such ethnic cleavages are likely to be exploited by politicians in their bid to canvas for votes.

Exclusion of Youths and Women – Social, Economic and Governance

The historical exclusion of women and youth participation in decision making processes is also a contentious issue in the socio-economic and political dynamics of Ghana. Currently, Ghana has an estimated population of 28,102,471¹⁰, of which women constitute about 51.2 percent of the population¹¹. Despite this figure, only 36 women are elected in the current parliament of 275 Legislature, which represents 12.75 percent from both the majority and minority sides. This is short of the 30 percent representation as set by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)¹². However, the figure represents an increase of 7 against the 2012 election figure of 29, where 133 women contested for 102

⁶Mohammed Ibn Chambas, "Ghana: Reducing the Incidence of Violence in Elections 2016 and Beyond". UNOWAS, 7 September 2016. Available at: <https://unowas.unmissions.org/ghana-reducing-incidence-violence-elections-2016-and-beyond> (Accessed on 4/5/2020).

⁷The West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), Ghana: Current Peace and Security Dynamics in Perspective. WANEP Publication, June 2019.

⁸See Chazan, N. (1982). Ethnicity and Politics in Ghana. *Political Science Quarterly*, 97(3), 461-485. Available at: doi:10.2307/2149995

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), "Women's Political Participation – A Catalyst for Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in Ghana". January 23, 2017. Available at: https://www.gh.undp.org/content/ghana/en/home/our_perspective/ourperspectivearticles/2017/01/23/women-s-political-participation-a-catalyst-for-gender-equality-and-women-empowerment-in-ghana.html (Accessed on 5/5/2020).

¹²See <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Meet-the-36-female-MPs-in-Ghana-s-Parliament-729099> (Accessed on 5/05/2020).

parliamentary seats¹³. Despite the slight increase, there are concerns that women representation in the legislature has not translated to an increase in gender sensitive legislations and a wider inclusion of women in political decision making processes at district, regional or national level. Only 30 percent of Ministers of State and District Chief Executives are women¹⁴. The low representation of women in decision-making processes is attributable to entrenched gender inequality and election-related violence fostered by socio-cultural and economic conditions¹⁵. This could suggest the inadequate gender consideration by the State to ensure protection of women. A case in point is the lack of gendered responses in addressing the COVID 19 pandemic, despite the fact that women constitute the largest gender representation of the informal sector. Given that a significant number of women are engaged in micro economic activities in the markets, road sides, groceries and other agricultural value chain, the poor representation at the political decision making table on issues affecting them increases their vulnerability to the disease as a consequence of their exposure. Strong voices and representation is imperative to address their negative exposure to health hazards which has a domino effect on community transmission in their homes and invariably further expression of frustration of communities emergencies including sexual and gender-based violence.

Similarly, youth constitutes about 57 percent of the country's population¹⁶. Yet they are under-represented in political decisions. Although youth largely participate in decision-making as voters, they are under-represented in leadership roles. Their socio-economic limitations such as unemployment, poverty, quality of education and leadership deficits, contribute to poor representation at political decision levels. Consequently, there are growing inter-generational conflicts and youths are utilizing violence as a tool to push their interests and needs at the intra-party and inter-party levels during elections. The risk of these escalating during the electioneering processes is high in view of the experiences of the 2016 elections as well as the growing trend of youth related political violence

since 2016. Added to this is the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 pandemic on youths which has led to resistance to lockdown measures introduced by the Government. There has been reported cases of violence between the youths and security personnel, especially in Accra, Ksoa, Kumasi and other affected areas. It further suggests that such economic and other social vulnerabilities are catalysts for youth led violence in the lead up to the election.

Seeming Deterioration of State-Citizens Relations

Another critical concern ahead of the December 2020 elections is the deterioration of state-citizens relations. Despite efforts by successive governments to improve provision of socio-economic service to the citizens, there are challenges of inadequacies in social service delivery including water, electricity, housing, roads, healthcare, education, transparent and accountable governance among others. Inadequate social services and unemployment are fueling rural-urban migration, urban crimes and dense urban population leading to over-burdening of already weak infrastructure. In addition is the public perception of entrenched corruption by elected public officials. Ghana is currently ranked 80 out of 180 countries with a 41 percent score by Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index report of 2019¹⁷. Perception of corruption among state officials is giving rise to mistrust between the State and the citizenry. This growing mistrust has been clearly manifested in citizens raising concerns of transparency and accountability of the Government to its COVID-19 stimulus packages, with ongoing debates as to its politicization as a strategy to canvas for votes ahead of election rather than objective response to the socio-economic needs of Ghanaians at this time. The distrust in governance has also been reflected in the divisions over the proposed new voter register by the Electoral Commission. A waning social contract has possible implications for political stability of the country, especially in the lead up to the elections.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Op.cit. UNDP.

¹⁵Linda Darkwa, "Gender, Elections and Violence: Pricing Women out of Democracy in Ghana". In Kwesi Aning and Kweku Danso (eds), *Managing Election-Related Violence for Democratic Stability in Ghana*. Published by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2012. Pp-276-304. Available at: http://www.fesghana.org/uploads/PDF/Managing_ElectionRelated_Violence.pdf (Accessed on 6/5/2020).

¹⁶See https://theodora.com/wfbcurren/ghana/ghana_people.html (Accessed on 6/5/2020).

¹⁷Transparency International Corruption Perception Index, 2019. Available at: www.transparency.org. Accessed on 06/05/2020.

Creation of New Regions and Impact on Elections

The promise to restructure and improve Ghana's geo political administration at regional level formed an integral part of the manifestos of NPP and NDC in their campaigns for the 2016 General Elections. As the ruling party NPP honoured their campaign promise by creating additional six regions, the total number now stands at 16 regions in Ghana. Though several consultations were made with key stakeholders in line with the 1992 Constitution, there was opposition to the process expressed in the form of demonstrations by some chiefs and youth groups¹⁸ in the Volta Region who challenged the creation of the Oti Region. Based on existing knowledge that the Volta Region is the stronghold of the NDC, there are concerns by the main opposition that the partition of the region is an attempt by the ruling party to neutralize the electoral strengths of the NDC in the region. In addition, secessionist groups clamouring for Western Togoland exploited this dynamic to fuel nationalist sentiments to gain popular support for their separatist agenda. Protests and contestations as regards the location of the capitals of newly created regions also suggest disagreements and political grievances among key stakeholders. Given the high stakes and the influence of regional dynamics in the elections, such contending issues are likely to be exploited by politicians in their electioneering campaigns.

3. Proximate Causes/Challenges

COVID-19 and Election Preparedness

Preparation towards the December 2020 elections by the Electoral Commission, National Identification Authority (NIA), political parties and other stakeholders has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Within the second week of June 2020, confirmed cases rose to 10,201, 48 fatalities and 3,755 recoveries¹⁹. Current statistics indicate the disease has spread across all the country's 16 regions. In response, the Governments has elevated health

protocols to the level of national security and instituted extraordinary measures, including restrictions of movement. As a result, the EC has called off the proposed new voter registration process. Also, the Ghana NIA halted its ongoing registration exercise. Political party primaries and campaigns have been affected as well. The fear of infection has the potential to limit the extent and level of voter participation in the electoral processes – including the new voter registration and validation, as well as attendances of campaigns and rallies²⁰. These are key components of civic participation and governance that contribute to the credibility and legitimacy of elections. The uncertainty associated with stemming the tide of the pandemic could complicate the EC's election plan. Changing the electoral calendar or postponement could also trigger constitutional crisis and increase the risk of violence in light of existing tensions and dwindling trust between stakeholders and the Election Management Body over the transparency of the electoral process²¹.

Tensions from the Social Media

The Social media space is a vital tool for advancing democratic governance through creation of platforms for mass political participation. However, the exploitation of this space as a mobilization and propaganda tool for violent communication has negative impact on the peaceful conduct of the 2020 Presidential and Parliamentary elections. It has become a conduit for the spread of fake news, hate speeches, intemperate and inflammatory political statements as well as an avenue for inciting physical violence and mobilizing groups to public disorder. While social media platform serves as a veritable space for public enlightenment and active discourse of key political issues, it has also been used widely for propaganda and fake news, especially in light of the dynamics around the COVID-19 pandemic within the last few months. This continues to create fear and panic. As more people rely on the digital space for communication

¹⁸See <https://www.myjoyonline.com/politics/2018/November-13th/dagbon-protests-new-region-will-not-affect-traditional-boundaries-dan-botw-e.php> (Accessed on 7/5/2020).

¹⁹Ghana Health Service, Situation Update, COVID-19 Outbreak in Ghana. Available at: <https://ghanahelthservice.org/covid19/archive.php> (Accessed on 10/6/2020).

²⁰Linda Darkwa, "Keeping an eye on elections amid COVID-19". Training for Peace. May 4, 2020. Available at: www.trainingforpeace.org (Accessed on 8/5/2020).

²¹Ibid.

and information amidst the constraints of restricted movement by the COVID 19 pandemic, it is likely to be exploited by political actors to reinforce hostile communication and violence in the lead up to the elections of December.

Political Vigilantism and Electoral Security

The influence of vigilante groups on electoral violence is the most potent threat to the country's peace and political stability ahead of the 2020 General Elections. Currently, there are over 24 vigilante groups affiliated with political parties operating in the country²². Key among them are the *Azorka Boys and Hawks* associated with the NDC and *Delta and Invisible Forces* associated with the NPP. The recent violence at the Ayawaso West-Wuogon Constituency Parliamentary By-election in January 2019 linked to the alleged vigilante group associated with the ruling NPP suggests the gravity of the threats it poses to Ghana's democracy.



Ayawaso West Wuogon by-election Shooting Electoral Violence
Source: Modern Ghana

These groups are largely made up of unemployed youth, mobilized as party foot soldiers to provide security for political parties or as polling or monitoring agents during voter registration, voting, and results tabulation. Following the violence at the Ayawaso West Wuogon constituency by-elections, there have been national efforts to end vigilantism through the passage of the Vigilantism and

Related Offences Act, Act 999 (2019). The National Peace Council is also leading in the effort to implement the code of conduct to disband vigilantism while the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD) has conducted a research to understand the drivers of political vigilantism and electoral violence with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). These efforts have yielded limited results in addressing the problem and the risk they pose as platforms of political violence during the general elections.

4. Key Resilient Factors for Trust Building and Confidence Generation

Despite the prevailing threats highlighted ahead of the December elections, Ghana has existing agencies – both external and internal - that could be engaged to build trust and generate confidence among key stakeholders to mitigate the threats to peaceful conduct of the elections.

External Actors – AU, ECOWAS and UNOWAS

Ghana is a key player on regional and continental peace and security platforms through its active membership of the African Union (AU), Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS) and the United Nations (UN). The AU, ECOWAS and UNOWAS, through preventive diplomacy, has been able to intervene in West African political crises and therefore capable of engaging political stakeholders to resolve disputes and disagreements that could mar Ghana's democracy. Already, ECOWAS and UN through West Africa Health Organization [WAHO] and WHO have been collaborating with the Ghana's Ministry of Health and the Ghana Health Service on health safety standards to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Such support shores up the trust of political stakeholders on the capacity of these institutions to play an interlocutory role that ensures peaceful elections and political transition in Ghana.

²²See Ghanaweb. Available at: <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Security-analyst-names-24-violent-groups-in-Ghana-727985>. Accessed on 08/06/2029.

Internal Actors

EC Preparedness – voter registration and election materials

The Electoral Commission has announced it has concluded its timetable for the 2020 General Elections which will be made available to the various political parties. As part of its preparation it has also put out advertisement for the recruitment of temporal staff for the conduct of the elections. Successful applicants will be engaged in all the three major activities of the Commission comprising voter registration, exhibition of the voter register and the general elections. Though the Commission appears to be forging forward in preparation, there has been controversies related to the compilation of a new voter's register.

The EC has explained that the country stands to save GHS173.07 million if a new register is compiled ahead of the 2020 General Elections²³. However, some CSOs through a press release have noted that it would rather be prudent to open up the electoral register for voters to verify their names, enhance the efficiency of the existing software and remove names of unverified voters. Suggestions have been made on the necessity of the EC to replace faulty hardware and acquire new ones as a maintenance strategy rather than a full end-to-end replacement²⁴. A series of demonstrations have also been held against the compilation of the proposed new register by opposition parties led by the NDC²⁵.

However, the ruling NPP and some sections of political stakeholders support the compilation of a new voter register as a means to ensure credible elections. Amid this contestation, measures introduced by the Government to curb the spread of COVID-19 disease including social distancing pose significant challenges to the intended exercise and the larger electoral processes. Additionally, lack of technology bedeviling the Ghanaian voting system, limit voting largely to physical balloting.



EC Eminent Advisory Committee Meeting with Political Parties over new voter register. Source: Graphic online

Inter-Party Advisory Committee (IPAC) – meetings and manifestations

The IPAC has been a platform created by the EC to engage political parties, civil society, the media and other stakeholders in electoral processes. Following the zero consensus between the Electoral Commission and the NDC as well as other Civil Society Organizations on the collation of a new Voter's Register, the Commission's Eminent Advisory Committee recommended a dialogue process between the EC and the various stakeholders including CSOs²⁶. This is intended to ensure that an agreement is reached for peaceful conduct of the General Elections. As a strategic platform, IPAC has played an important role in resolving disagreements between the political parties and the EC and is therefore a crucial medium to resolve the current crisis related to the proposed compilation of electoral register.

Security Agencies

The country's security agencies have played a crucial role in maintaining law and order. This has contributed to Ghana's relative stability. Notwithstanding this, security agencies are bedeviled with capacity challenges that limit their effectiveness in maintaining law and order in the country. These capacity gaps were recently evident in their effort to enforce and manage the restrictive measures announced by the Government to curb the spread of COVID-19. This notwithstanding, the security agencies have played a positive role in the

²³ <https://citinewsroom.com/2020/01/ghana-to-save-ghs173m-with-new-voters-register-ec/>

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ <https://www.newsghana.com.gh/ndc-allied-parties-demonstrate-against-new-voters-register/>

²⁶ <https://www.myjoyonline.com/politics/2020/january-30th/ecs-presentation-at-ipac-meeting.php>

peaceful conduct of past elections in Ghana. It is likely that this role will be reinforced ahead of the 2020 General Elections.

The Judiciary

The Judiciary has been an important instrument for managing electoral disputes since Ghana's Fourth Republic of 1992. Over the last two decades, the country's apex court has played a crucial role in resolving crucial disputes that would have marred the democracy of the country. These rulings have been crucial to the political stability of the country and have ensured that Ghana remained the beacon of democracy in West Africa. A good example is the historic ruling of the 2012 presidential election petition filed by NPP challenging the EC's declaration of President John Mahama as the winner of the election. In light of this, the judiciary remains a critical institution that could play a role in resolving electoral disputes that may arise before, during and after the December elections.

Traditional Authorities (National House of Chiefs) & Christian Council,

Traditional authorities in Ghana is a key institution relevant for dispute management among political actors and parties affiliated to their constituencies. The National House of Chiefs is making efforts to dialogue with the EC over the new voters' register dispute. Other traditional authorities have responded positively to peace projects in the lead up to the General Elections of December 7, 2020. A typical example is the "Vigilant 4 Election 2020 project"²⁷ funded by the STAR Ghana Foundation to ensure peace before, during and after the 2020 elections implemented in the Tamale Metropolis, Gushegu and Savelugu Municipalities and the Nanton District²⁸. The Christian Council has also called for calm and consensus building between the EC and all political parties involved in the election processes. As the country prepares for another crucial election, the role of the traditional and faith-based groups will be key as rallying points for dispute resolution among aggrieved citizens and political actors. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, traditional authorities and faith-based organizations have played the role of supporting the

Government's efforts in provision of protective equipment (PPEs) and relief items to healthcare professionals and vulnerable groups. Religious groups have abided by government's health regulations on social distancing and ban on religious activities.

These groups have exploited the social media as an outreach platform to rally and engage their members. This effort demonstrates that they are vital institutions necessary in building social cohesion through peace education and other forms of engagement with people, especially the youths.

National Peace Council (NPC)

The National Peace Council (NPC) is a nodal example of peace infrastructure not only in Ghana but in West Africa. The NPC is supported by Parliamentary Act 818, as an independent state architecture to facilitate and develop mechanisms for conflict prevention, management, resolution and to build sustainable peace in the country²⁹. In pursuant of its peacebuilding mandate, the NPC utilizes mediation, good offices, reconciliation, early warning, peace education, capacity-building, networking and resource mobilization as key conflict prevention tools. Since its establishment, it has been decentralized to support regional and district peacebuilding efforts.

At the national level, it contributed to the mitigation of election violence, inter and intra-party disputes before, during and after the 2012 and 2016 elections. Following



National Peace Council meets political parties on roadmap for ending political vigilantism. Source: Ghanaweb

²⁷"Vigilante 4 Elections 2020 Project" is aimed at engaging critical stakeholders, especially traditional authorities to ensure peace before, during and after December 2020 elections. The centrality of traditional authorities in the project is as a result of their role as key actors in social cohesion, especially at the local level of the country.

²⁸ See <https://www.newsghana.com.gh/calid-begins-vigilant-4-election-2020-project/>

²⁹William Awinador-Kanyirige, 'Ghana's National Peace Council', Policy Brief. Global Center for Responsibility to Protect. August 2014. Available at: <http://s156658.gridserver.com/media/files/awinador-ghana-national-peace-council.pdf> (Accessed on 02/06/2020).

the Ayawaso West Wuogon by-election violence on January 31, 2019, the NPC facilitated a political dialogue process between NPP and NDC in resolving the phenomenon of political vigilantism in elections in the country. This resulted in mitigation of associated tensions and threats of violence between NPP and NDC over alleged party vigilante groups linked to the violence in the aftermath of the by-election. It also underscores the relevance of NPC as a vital institution with capacity to mediate disagreements among key political stakeholders and strengthen national cohesion through conflict prevention to ensure peaceful conduct of the December 2020 elections.

Civil Society Organisations

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) have been active in engaging stakeholders in peace and security to enhance state stability. CSO interventions in elections security and other development areas are largely funded by international donors and other development partners. Funding challenges continues to hamper CSOs interventions. In addition, Ghana's attainment of middle income status has also dwindled the flow of bilateral grants for development activities. This also has potential implications limiting external support to the electoral processes. However, CSOs in Ghana have evolved over the years as strong advocacy groups with the ability to facilitate election related disputes which compliments the efforts of the EC in mitigating risks that could mar credible elections and political transitions in the country.

5. Scenarios

Best-Case Scenario (Less likely)

The rapidly changing trends of the COVID-19 pandemic affects preparations for the 2020 elections and requires the EC to its timetable for voter registration in consultation with citizens of influence, political parties and other election stakeholders ahead of the December 7 Presidential elections. The EC announces its inclusion of the existing voter identification card as a form of identification for the new voter registration. NDC withdraws its case against the EC in the Supreme Court. However, mixed reactions continue to trail the plan for a new voter register by the EC. ECOWAS, AU and UNOWAS express their solidarity for the resilience of Ghanaians as the beacon of hope for democracy in the region. CSOs, the

media and other interest groups implement various civic education campaigns and peace messaging to encourage social distancing while eliciting popular participation for peaceful conduct of the elections. Political parties especially NPP and NDC recommit to peaceful elections while the EC completes voter registration, nominations, manifestos and declares campaigns period ahead of the elections. Local and international observers work in partnership to deploy and observe the elections across the country while integrating health safety standards in their operations. Elections are conducted within the rescheduled period leading to peaceful conduct and outcome of the elections. The outcome of the elections is accepted by all.

Middle-Case Scenario (likely)

The Parliament amends and passes the Public Elections Regulations 2020 which empowers the EC to reject the existing voter card as an identification criteria for the new voter registration exercise. The Supreme Court however pronounces judgement on the suit filed by NDC to allow the existing voter card to be used as identification with caveats to ensure transparency and reduction of voter fraud. The EC announces its plans to adjust the election calendar to fit the new reality. The strategy of implementation by the EC is contested by opposition political parties and CSOs who accuse the EC of inadequate consultation of stakeholders and lack of inclusive input to the new strategy. Demonstrations are organized across major cities against the proposed plan.

The Inter-Party Advisory Committee (IPAC) in collaboration with the National Peace Council (NPC) embark on national consultations and dialogue with political parties, CSOs and other interest groups to find a common ground to ensure peaceful electioneering process in the lead up to the election. The National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) and the EC embark on nationwide public education on the entire electoral process, especially on the civic responsibility and voter registration processes for better understanding of the public. Opposition and CSOs are also continuously engaged to solicit buy-in on the entire electoral process to build social cohesion. All electoral activities are implemented with limited challenges as a result of movements caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Low to medium intensity conflicts between the political

party supporter and EC officials is recorded in traditional hotspot areas such as Greater Accra, Northern and Ashanti regions. The elections are conducted amidst disagreements to the process highlighted by the NDC and other political parties.

Worst Case Scenario (Likely)

The Parliament amends and passes the Public Elections Regulations 2020 and the Supreme Court awards judgement in favour of the EC which empowers them to enforce the new conditions for voter registration rejecting the existing voter card. Violence is recorded in registrations centres by voters who were turned away by EC officials for presenting existing voter identification card. There are violent clashes between supporters of NDC and NPP which trigger the destruction of equipment and materials of EC and physical abuse of its staff. Opposition parties organize public demonstrations across the regions to protest the lack of transparency in the electoral process. Political parties and opinion leaders take to the social media and the traditional media to express their displeasure over the voter registration and compilation of the new voter register. Despite oppositions, the EC proceeds with the compilation of the new voter register. Opposition parties and sections of civil society file petitions and litigations in court. There is widespread boycott of the registration process by opposition parties and their supporters. Elections are conducted with reported cases of violence especially in identified hotspot regions across the country. There is heavy deployment of security operatives at all EC offices. The entire conduct of the elections is rejected by opposition which sparks medium to high intensity violence across the regions.

6. Options for Response

International Partners – AU, ECOWAS & UNOWAS

- The AU, ECOWAS and UNOWAS, through preventive diplomacy, strengthen collaboration and initiate a multistakeholder dialogue with the Government, EC, political parties, National Peace Council, Traditional and religious leaders, CSOs and other relevant actors to address the disagreements and tensions around the electoral processes in order to generate trust and confidence among stakeholders ahead of the elections;

- The AU, ECOWAS and UNOWAS provides capacity building support including baseline assessment of challenges of the COVID-19 to the impending elections, voter registration and verification as well as other technical assistance that helps improve the electoral processes before, during and after the elections.

The Government & Security Agencies

- The Government strengthens collaboration and cooperation with WHO, West Africa Health Organization (WAHO), private sector and local community agents to expand COVID-19 response mechanisms to ensure mass testing and decentralization at the local community levels to mitigate the growing spread of the pandemic. This should lead to fostering partnership with the EC and political parties to establish health protocol and guidelines to mitigate the spread of the disease in the electoral processes;
- The Government strengthens the capacity of security agencies in preparation towards elections and mitigating threats to security of the country ahead of the December elections.

The EC, Political Parties, National Peace Council (NPC) & Traditional and Religious Bodies

- The EC through IPAC increases dialogue with political parties and other key stakeholders as a preventive diplomacy strategy to reach consensus in addressing the disagreements around the proposed compilation of new voter register. It leads to acceptable terms and transparent guidelines on how the electoral process will be conducted amidst the COVID-19 pandemic;
- The EC increases its visibility through civic education and inclusive dialogue in partnership with National Peace Council, religious bodies, traditional authorities on the electoral processes especially on voter registration and verification and others relevant measures to enhance citizens participation in the electioneering processes.

The National Peace Council

- The NPC organizes quiet diplomacy between the leadership of the NDC and NPP to find workable solutions to the voter registration impasse. Key CSOs are included as technical advisers and observers of the proceedings to ensure inclusive decisions to mitigate threats of violence to the electioneering process.

NCCE, CSOs and the Media

- The National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE), CSOs and the media intensify collaboration through peace and civic education to improve public trust and confidence on the electoral process;
- CSOs collaborate to merge resources and impact of peace related action plans for the mitigation of violent threats to the election across the 16 regions of the country.

7. Conclusion

Despite Ghana's vaunted track record in organizing relatively peaceful elections over the last two decades, actions by political parties and their supporters indicate increasing distrust and confidence deficiencies in the structure and operations of the existing electioneering process. The consequence is the rising tensions and conflicts especially in high risk regions in the country. This dynamic is further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic which has stalled election preparedness. The effect of the pandemic has significant implication on the successful and timely implementation of the election framework and will require external support from various intergovernmental and non governmental stakeholders to mitigate the growing tensions and avert the likelihood of violence that could affect Ghana's election fidelity.

GHANA

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Building Confidence and Generating
Trust Amid **COVID-19 Pandemic**

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