

WANEP ALERT AND RESPONSE MECHANISM

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GHANA'S

2024 ELECTIONS:

A TEST CASE FOR
DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE



**WEST AFRICA NETWORK
FOR PEACEBUILDING**

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS FOR PEACE

GHANA'S 2024 ELECTIONS: A TEST CASE FOR DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE

1. Introduction

Ghana's general election, scheduled for December 7, 2024, will mark the ninth multiparty democratic election since the country returned to constitutional rule in 1992. Following this period, Ghana has made steady and incremental progress towards democratic consolidation. Remarkably, since the country was ushered into its Fourth Republic, it has successfully organised eight multiparty democratic elections, which have led to three peaceful power alternations between the two main political parties - the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) in 2001, 2009, and 2017. Integral to this success is the burgeoning culture of open spaces for inclusive political participation of citizens, periodic elections, media freedom, and adherence to the rule of law and human rights.¹ Ghana is therefore widely acknowledged as one of Africa's strongest democracies, consistently achieving high rankings in various global assessments, including the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) and Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) Democracy Indexes.² Democratic governance has gained citizens' acceptance. Consequently, the Afrobarometer Report 2022 indicates that 76 per cent of Ghanaians have expressed support for a democratic form of governance as opposed to other forms of government, while 67 per cent rejected military rule.³ The 2024 elections will usher a new President into office as incumbent President Nana Akufo-Addo completes his constitutionally mandated second tenure. The elections provide opportunities to further consolidate democratic



Credit: Google Images

governance gains achieved over the last three decades in Ghana.

Despite Ghana's record as a beacon of democracy in West Africa, electoral violence, disagreements, and trust deficits in key state institutions that play critical roles during elections, such as the Electoral Commission (EC), remain seemingly intractable in the election cycles. The WANEP Report on the 2020 elections, for instance, recorded 26 incidents of violence, which led to eight deaths in the Odododiodoo, Savelegu, and Tachiman South constituencies and 61 injuries.⁴ Additional to this was a series of post-election protests organised by the opposition NDC against the EC over alleged irregularities, which resulted in confrontations between the protestors and security agencies. While political parties have frequently challenged election outcomes in recent years at the Supreme Court of Ghana, the 2024 election is mainly

¹ Oduro, F. and Selvik, L., and Dupuy, K. (2022). Ghana: A Stagnated Democratic Trajectory. In Arriola, L.R., Rackner, L., and de Walle (eds), *Democratic Backsliding in Africa?*

Autocratization, Resilience, and Contention? Oxford University Press.

² Ibid.

³ Afrobarometer Reports (2022). Democracy in Ghana: The People's Perspective. <https://dataforgovernance.africa/democracy-scorecards/> (Accessed 16 August 2024).

⁴ Ghana 2020 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections Security Report: Building Trust While Ensuring Transparency and Accountability among Stakeholders. A Joint Publication by the European Union, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP).

WANEP Alert and Response Mechanism (WARM)

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

WARM 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 WARM 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 the 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.

unfolding in a climate of heightened mistrust and lack of confidence of the main opposition party, the NDC, towards the EC and the Judiciary. For the EC, the issue primarily stems from the dismissal of the former Chairperson of the EC and her two deputies by the President in 2018, citing misconduct as per Article 146 of the 1992 Constitution and recurring statistical errors it keeps on making in their results tabulations.⁵

The pre-election environment is replete with declining citizens' trust in state institutions, increased socio-economic challenges, heightened tension between the two main political parties, and escalating risks of insurgency violence spilling over from Burkina Faso, particularly along the northern border. Already, the electioneering campaigns of political parties have also been marked by tensions induced by vile propaganda, mudslinging, misinformation, a resurgence of political vigilantism, and inciteful language with ethno-religious undertones through the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on various social media platforms.

While these factors collectively threaten the peaceful conduct of the 2024 elections and serve as a test case for Ghana's democratic resilience, the country has demonstrated the capacity to conduct well-coordinated and relatively peaceful elections over the last eight election cycles. This achievement has played a pivotal role in consolidating Ghana's democracy within the comity of nations in Africa. Although various actors have extensively discussed different dimensions of Ghana's 2024 presidential and parliamentary elections⁶, little attention has been given to strategies for involving key stakeholders in promoting sustainable peace and consolidating and strengthening democratic resilience, particularly amid growing concerns about democratic backsliding in West Africa.

This policy brief analyses the prevailing political climate ahead of the elections, highlighting vulnerabilities that pose risks to the peaceful conduct of the electoral process. It also explores critical human security challenges and pathways that could be leveraged to foster sustainable peace and enhance democratic resilience in Ghana.

2. Pre-Election Context

Amid recent democratic regression and disputes around elections in the West African region, the electoral context of Ghana's December 2024 general elections is fraught with increased political tensions, ethno-religious issues, a resurgence of political vigilantism, labour strikes and demonstrations, and waning state-citizen relations, all of which have implications for the peaceful conduct of the elections. It is, therefore, essential to interrogate these factors and how they impact the dynamics of the electoral process.

2.1 Trust Deficits in Key State Institutions and Heightened Political Tensions

The political climate is marked by a lack of confidence in public institutions and attendant political tensions. Findings from the most recent Afrobarometer survey show that while most citizens support elections as the best way to choose their leaders, public trust in the Electoral Commission (EC) is at the lowest level recorded in two decades of surveys.⁷ The survey result reveals that the EC, which had a trust level of 75 per cent in 2005, declined to 33 per cent in 2022.⁸ This represents a significant decline from its earlier trust rating, indicating a potential loss of confidence among stakeholders or the general public.⁹ Of particular concern is the mistrust of the main opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC) towards the EC. This mistrust is particularly evident in their concerns about the lack of consensus on critical issues, such as the EC's decision to use the National Identity Card as the sole method for limited voter registration, compiling a new voter register, and data collation. Although the EC has a reputation for professionalism, independence, and integrity in organising transparent and credible elections, a lack of trust and confidence in the management of the electoral process raises concerns about the peaceful conduct and outcomes of the elections. The National Chairman of the NDC, Asiedu Nketia, has already announced that the party will not be signing any peace pacts ahead of the December

⁵ Afrobarometer (2024), Op.cit.

⁶ Siegle J. and Cook, C. (2024). Africa's 2024 Elections: Challenges and Opportunities to Regain Democratic Momentum. Africa Center for Strategic Studies. Available at: <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/2024-elections/> (Accessed 17 September 2024).

⁷ Afrobarometer (2024). Ghanaians want fair elections but mistrust the Electoral Commission. Dispatch No. 781.

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

elections and expressed scepticism about its effectiveness.¹⁰ While the signing of peace pacts forms part of the peace initiatives of the National Peace Council (NPC) to engage political parties to commit to peace in the electoral process, these agreements are not legally binding. Nevertheless, the main opposition party's decision not to sign peace declarations indicates mistrust in the electoral process and tensions ahead of the elections.

Similarly, public trust and confidence in the Police Service and the Courts have also waned over the last two decades. While the courts have equally seen an erosion of public trust, from 62 in 2005 to 36 per cent in 2022, the police declined from 64 to 28 per cent within the same period.¹¹ Despite their crucial roles in enforcing laws and adjudicating election-related disputes, the police are frequently criticised for heavy-handedness and political interference. At the same time, the courts face accusations of judicial bias and delays in justice delivery. Considering their key roles in law enforcement and maintaining peace and security, citizens' mistrust of the police and courts is a cause for concern in the peaceful conduct of the elections. Additionally, inflammatory language, misinformation, and disinformation by political leaders, party communicators, and the media further exacerbate these tensions before the elections.

2.2 Ethno-religious Cleavages

Another concern is the ethno-religious factor, which poses risks to peace ahead of the elections. Ethnic identity has always been used as a tool for political mobilisation in elections in Ghana. The ethno-political leanings suggest ethnic affiliations along partisan lines in the country's political evolution. For the first time in Ghana's electoral history, two northern candidates are contesting presidential elections. While the NDC elected John Mahama, Ghana's President (2012-2017), the NPP's Presential

flagbearer is Mahamudu Bawumia, the incumbent Vice President, with both hailing from the northern region of Ghana. Notably, both candidates are adherents of the two main religions in the country: John Mahama is a Christian, while Mahamudu Bawumia is a Muslim. Historically, Christians, Muslims, and the various ethnic groups in Ghana have coexisted peacefully and exhibited religious tolerance, leading to enhanced social cohesion and political stability without large-scale fragmentation and polarisation.¹² This has contributed to social cohesion, peace, and political stability in Ghana. Politically, the northern region and Muslim communities have been mainly the base of the NDC, while the Akan regions have been the base of the NPP.¹³ Despite the religious tolerance and ethnic diversity in Ghanaian society, there has not been a Muslim Presidential candidate representing the major political parties in elections since 1992.

Also, this is the first time the NPP has elected a presidential candidate from the northern region of Ghana in its electoral history. The preceding analysis suggests that while political parties will be leveraging ethno-religious cleavages for votes, the elections serve as a litmus test to the country's religious tolerance and ethnic diversity, essential to political stability and consolidation of democracy. However, the ethno-religious dynamics reveal high stakes and heightened competition for votes through political mobilisation along ethnic and religious cleavages. This could heighten tension in the lead-up to the elections. Already, the current electioneering campaigns of political parties are fraught with vile propaganda and misinformation with ethno-religious undertones. As a result, the National Peace Council (NPC) and the Christian Council Ghana (CCG) have cautioned politicians and religious leaders against the weaponisation of religion and ethnicity for political mobilisation in their electioneering campaigns.¹⁴

¹⁰ See Jow News (2024). NDC won't sign peace declaration ahead of election, says Asiedu Nketia. Available at: <https://www.myjoyonline.com/ndc-wont-sign-peace-declaration-ahead-of-election-says-asiedu-nketia/> (Accessed 16 August 2024).

¹¹ Afrobarometer (2024), Op.cit.

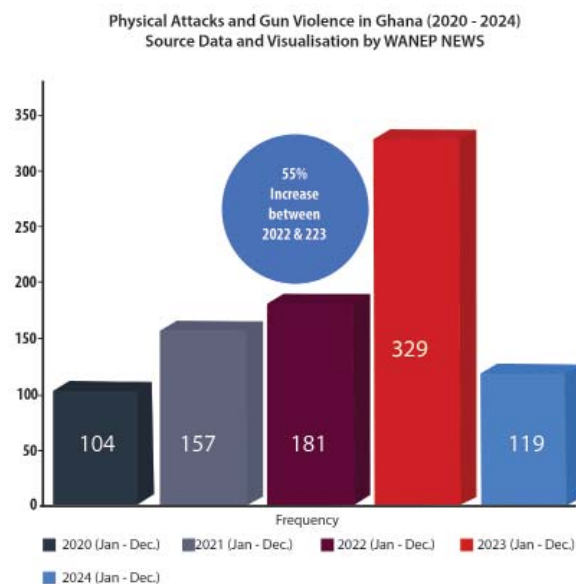
¹² Wiafe, E.O. (2023). Christians and Muslims in Ghana: A Case Study of Togetherness. E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies. Vol. 9, Issue 9. Pp. 417-427.

¹³ Atta Mills, C. (2018). Politics, Policy and Implementation: The Ghanaian Paradox. Commentary, Brookings Institution. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/politics-policy-and-implementation-the-ghanaian-paradox/> (13/08/2024).

¹⁴ Myjoyonline News (2024). Election 2024: Don't weaponize religious, ethnic affiliations – Christian Council to aspirants. Available at: <https://www.myjoyonline.com/election-2024-dont-weaponize-religious-ethnic-affiliations-christian-council-to-aspirants/> (Accessed 28 August 2024).

2.3 Rising armed attacks, ethnic and inter-communal violence

Illicit weapons proliferation has contributed to a significant rise in armed attacks and urban crimes in Ghana, with data from WANEP NEWS showing a 55% increase in physical attacks and gun violence - 329 incidents recorded in 2023 compared to 181 in 2022.¹⁵ Data collected between January and June 2024 also reveal a concerning trend of gun violence



in the country. Similarly, protracted chieftaincy disputes and ethnic clashes remain prevalent, particularly in the Upper East, North East, and Savannah regions. The Northern and Upper West Regions also have intra-chieftaincy and inter-ethnic land ownership disputes. Between January 2023 and March 2024, data from WANEP NEWS indicated that the country recorded ten incidents and 23 deaths related to ethnic and chieftaincy conflicts.¹⁶ The Mamprusis and Kusasi conflict in Bawku in the Upper East Region has spread to neighbouring districts like Bawku West, Pusiga, Garu Tempane, Binduri, Bolga, Walewale and parts of the Bono region.¹⁷ In the Savannah region, ethnic conflict between Gonja and Mamprusis led to the burning of villages in June 2023¹⁸, while inter-ethnic tensions

remain between the Gonjas and other tribes in the Sawla-Tuna-Kalba and Bole districts. Given this, curfews have been sustained in parts of the Upper-East, North-East, North and Oti Regions. The climate of fear emanating from recurrent insecurity has the potential to inhibit the inclusive participation of vulnerable populations in the upcoming elections.

Furthermore, the unresolved chieftaincy and communal disputes have become a cause for concern. Rival factions or Royal Gates involved in these disputes often align with political parties.¹⁹ This alignment is strategic, as the parties in conflict seek to gain local influence and bolster their chances of prevailing in disputes, particularly if their affiliated party attains power.²⁰ This phenomenon has significant consequences as local conflicts become intertwined with national political dynamics, leading to party-related disputes that can escalate into violence. Notably, various groups and individuals have accused the NPP and the NDC of historically exacerbating the Dagbon, Bawku, and Bimbilla Chieftaincy disputes for political gains.²¹ Given the local conflict dynamics and tensions unfolding in the lead-up to the elections in December, such intra, and inter-ethnic conflict dimensions are likely to be exploited by politicians to canvas for votes, emphasising client-patron relationships in Ghana's body polity. Importantly, given the proximity of these conflicts to the rising insurgencies and violent extremist groups in the Sahel, Ghana faces the risk of violence spilling over from its northern border with Burkina Faso and Togo. This could intersect with local conflicts and exacerbate insecurity.

2.4 A Resurgence of vigilantism and political violence

Additional public concern has been raised over the resurgence and active involvement of vigilantes in political violence. Many violent incidents were perpetrated by vigilantes during past general elections and by-elections in the country. A typical example was the violent incident that occurred

¹⁵ WANEP Ghana Monthly Bulletin (2020 - 2023). www.wanep.org (Accessed 26/07/2024).

¹⁶ WANEP Ghana Monthly Bulletin (January 2023 - March 2024). www.wanep.org (Accessed 26/07/2024).

¹⁷ WANEP Ghana Monthly Bulletin (January - June 2024). www.wanep.org (Accessed 26/07/2024).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Tonah, S. (2012). The Politicization of a Chieftaincy Conflict: The Case of Dagbon, Northern Ghana. (1), 1-20. Nordic Journal of African Studies, 21 Tradingeconomics. com. (n.d.). Ghana Unemployment rate. Retrieved November 28, 2019, from <https://tradingeconomics.com/ghana/unemployment-rate> (Accessed 26/07/2024).

²⁰ See Tsikata, D., & Seini, W. (2004). Identities, Inequalities and Conflict in Ghana. CRISE Working Paper No. 5. Oxford: University of Oxford.

²¹ Op. Cit. The Politicization of a Chieftaincy Conflict (2019).

Political Vigilante Violence in Ghana. <https://www.eisa.org/storage/2023/11/2023-journal-of-african-elections-v22n2-political-vigilante-ghana-eisa.pdf?x78477> (Accessed 30/07/2024).

The Vigilantism and Related Offences Act 2019 was promulgated to proscribe activities of vigilantism and prevent election-related violence, peace, and security in the conduct of elections in Ghana.

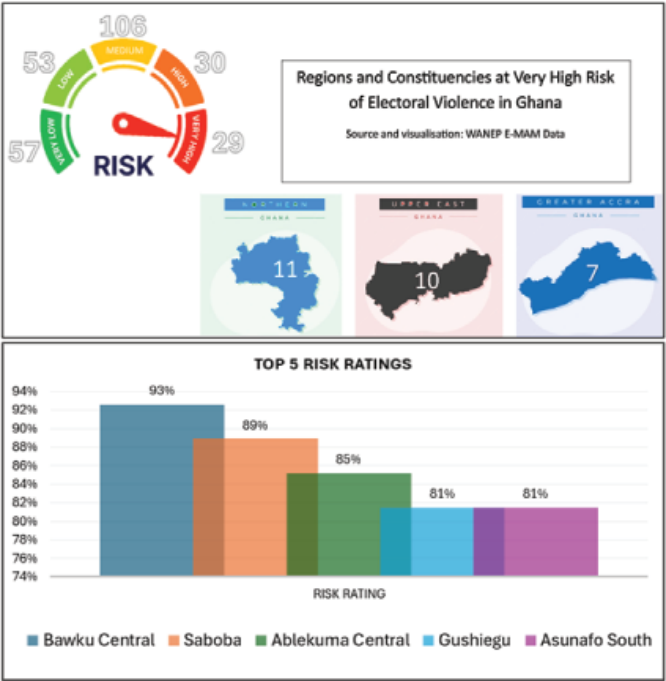
during the Ayawaso West Wuogon Constituency by-election in 2019, which was allegedly committed by a group of political thugs suspected to be emboldened by national security operatives. The violent incident led to clashes between supporters of the opposition NDC and supposed national security operatives, resulting in 18 people sustaining injuries.²² The consequences of the incident led to the promulgation of the Vigilantism and Related-Offences Acts 2019²³ law, which proscribes acts of vigilantism in the country. While the law contributed significantly to curtailing acts of vigilantism in the 2020 elections, the phenomenon has emerged in the 2024 electoral process. This underscores the political parties' lack of confidence in the country's security agencies and their inability to meet security needs due to the police force's insufficient numbers, resulting in reliance on vigilantes for additional security ahead of the elections. The resurgence of this practice signals a potential for increased violence in the upcoming elections. For instance, the Coalition of Domestic Election Observation (CODEO) second report on the 2024 limited voter biometric registration exercise highlighted several

school teacher and student applicants by suspected vigilantes and intimidation of registration officials by a constituency chairman in Lebanon Ashaiman, Greater Accra Region.²⁴

In addition, WANEP, through its Electoral violence Monitoring, Analysis and Mitigation (E-MAM) project, engaged various stakeholders in hotspot mapping in 275 Constituencies in the country to identify potential risks and vulnerabilities for early interventions. This hotspot mapping was based on five key factors: environmental conditions, political dynamics, socioeconomic conditions, humanitarian challenges, and security threats. The assessment identified Bawku Central, Saboba, Ablekuma Central, Gushing, and Asunafo South as high-risk Constituencies. The Northern, Upper East, and Greater Accra Regions were highlighted as the most vulnerable, with 11, 10, and 7 hotspot areas, respectively. These insights underline the importance of early intervention, community engagement, and strategic planning to mitigate potential election-related violence.

2.5 Seeming public discontent and attendant demonstrations

Another critical concern ahead of the December 2024 elections is the seeming deterioration of the state-citizen relationship. Despite the efforts by successive Governments to improve the socio-economic situation in the country, there are challenges of inadequacies in social service delivery, including public safety, food security, water, electricity, housing, roads, healthcare, education, and transparent and accountable governance. Inadequate social service provision and unemployment, especially among the youth, are fuelling rural-urban migration, urban crimes and a dense urban population that impacts the existing limited public service infrastructure. In addition, global occurrences, including the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical conflicts, especially the Russia-Ukraine war and attendant impacts, have intersected with internal challenges to exacerbate the socioeconomic challenges facing populations in the country.



issues, including physical confrontations between political party members at registration centres in the Ledzokuku Municipal Assembly, Greater Accra Region. Also, there were violent assaults on a

²². Political Vigilante Violence in Ghana. <https://www.eisa.org/storage/2023/11/2023-journal-of-african-elections-v22n2-political-vigilante-ghana-eisa.pdf?x78477> (Accessed 30/07/2024).

²³. The Vigilantism and Related Offences Act 2019 was promulgated to proscribe activities of vigilantism and prevent election-related violence, peace, and security in the conduct of elections in Ghana.

²⁴. Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO Ghana) (2024). Second Report on the Limited Biometric Voter Registration Exercise. Available at: [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://codeoghana.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/CODEO-Report-II-on-2024-Biometric-Voter-Registration-Exercise_June-3-2024.pdf](https://codeoghana.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/CODEO-Report-II-on-2024-Biometric-Voter-Registration-Exercise_June-3-2024.pdf) (Accessed 19 August 2024).

The ripples manifest in rising inflations on essential goods and services, leading to a high cost of living. This continues to generate protests and demonstrations like the “FixTheCountry” and “AriseGhana” and organised labour strikes that resulted in clashes with law enforcement agencies.²⁵



Another concern is the public perception of corruption by state officials.²⁶ Ghana is currently ranked 70 out of 180 countries with a 43 per cent score according to Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index report for 2023.²⁷ Such perception of corruption further negates citizens' trust in the level of transparency and accountability of the Government, resulting in growing discontent among citizens, which is symptomatic of a waning social contract, with negative implications for social cohesion in the pre and post-December 2024 elections.

2.6 Gender and youth concerns around elections and representations

In Ghana, female representation in politics remains low despite women making up about 50.1 per cent of the estimated 2024 population of 34.1 million.²⁸ In the current Parliament, only 40 out of 275 members are women, representing just 14.5 per cent.²⁹ Trends in female representation in lower-level elections also show a decline in the country. In the 2023 District Assembly elections, only 4.1 per cent of elected members were women, and

at the Unit Committee level, women represented 12.8 per cent of those elected.³⁰ Furthermore, the representation of women as candidates in the December 2024 presidential election has declined compared to the previous elections. Out of 13 nominated candidates, only 2 are women, representing 15.38 per cent of the total candidates. This is a drop from the 25 per cent representation in the 2020 election, where 3 out of 12 candidates were women.³¹

These figures fall well short of the 30 per cent quota set by the Affirmative Action (Gender Equality) Bill 2024 and the National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325, which aim to enhance women's participation in decision-making. Although women constitute 52.79 per cent of eligible voters,³² their voting strength does not translate into political representation, as seen by Ghana's low ranking of 119 out of 146 countries on the Global Gender Gap Index in political empowerment.³³ The low participation and representation of women in decision-making processes is attributable to entrenched gender inequality, intimidation and election-related violence fostered by socio-cultural and economic conditions. However, the passage of the Affirmative Action (Gender Equality) Bill 2024, which aims to achieve 30 per cent female representation by 2030, could help promote gender parity and involve women more in governance and other sectors.

Despite making up 36.5 per cent of the population, youth also face significant under-representation in political decision-making.³⁴ Also, there are growing inter-generational tensions, and youths are utilising violence to push their interests and needs at the intra-party and inter-party levels during elections.³⁵ This trend is driven by their exclusion from formal political processes, which they respond to by aligning with or forming vigilante groups. These groups have played a notable role in election-related violence,

²⁵ JoyNews (2021). Police clash with #FixTheCountry protestors at Accra High Court. Available at: <https://www.myjoyonline.com/police-clash-with-fixthecountry-protestors-at-accra-high-court/> (Accessed 28 August 2024).

²⁶ Afrobarometer (2014). Trust and Corruption in Public Institutions: Findings from the Afrobarometer Round 6 Survey in Ghana.

²⁷ Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, 2023. <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2023> (Accessed 26 July 2024).

²⁸ Ghana Statistical Service (2024). Ghana 2021 Population and Housing Census: Population Projections 2021 – 2050. June 2024 Report.

²⁹ Under-representation of Women in Leadership in Ghana. <https://www.undp.org/ghana/publications/under-representation-women-leadership-ghana-action-needed-achieve-sustainable-development-goals> (Accessed 11/07/2024).

³⁰ 2024 Inauguration of District Assemblies and Unit Committees: Women still underrepresented? <https://www.modernghana.com/news/1293240/2024-inauguration-of-district-assemblies-and-unit.html> (Accessed 11/07/2024).

³¹ Electoral Commission Candidate list (2020). <https://ec.gov.gh/2020-presidential-election-results/> (Accessed 01/08/2024).

³² Electoral Commission (EC) Extends Limited Voter Registration Exercise. <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/politics/ec-extends-limited-voter-registration-exercise.html> (Accessed 01/08/2024).

³³ The Global Gender Gap Index 2024, results by subindex. https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2024.pdf (Accessed 01/08/2024)

³⁴ Afrobarometer (2024), Op.cit. Ghana Statistical Service (Accessed 06/05/2024).

³⁵ Debrah, E., Owusu-Mensah, I., Danso, S., Aidoo, G.A. (2024). Electoral Violence in Ghana's Fourth Republic: The Case of Party Vigilantism. In: Mlambo, O.B., Chitando, E. (eds) The Palgrave Handbook of Violence in Africa. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-40754-3_16 (Accessed 01/08/2024).

fueled by their need for recognition, resources, and political influence. The risk of these escalating during the electioneering processes is high, a trend observed since 2011 and notably during the 2020 elections.

2.7 Artificial Intelligence (AI), technology and the new media as tools for political mobilisation

Digital technology and social media have become crucial drivers of rapid globalisation and democratisation in the 21st Century. They have facilitated greater interconnectedness among individuals and nations. In several countries, social media has become an alternative medium to critique the conduct of the government due to excessive control and the reluctance of the mainstream press to report sensitive issues.³⁶ Like many other countries, Ghana has experienced a rise in internet usage, mobile services, laptops, and other digital technologies, which have amplified citizens' voices in governance through platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and X. Individuals and groups widely use hashtags (#) to mobilise and protest issues such as human rights abuses, alleged government corruption, policies, and institutional ineffectiveness, as witnessed in recent demonstrations in the country.³⁷ Political parties have leveraged social media and other digital platforms to reach a wider audience and disseminate campaign messages due to their utility as a channel for information and political mobilisations. Although social media platforms have proven valuable for political education, active discussion of public policies, and mobilising people for voter registration, they are also being exploited for harmful purposes. These include spreading propaganda, fake news, misinformation, accusations, counteraccusations, and violent communication by political parties and their officials, intensifying tensions as the 2024 elections approach.

3. Election Security and Preparedness of Key Actors

Despite the threats identified before the December elections, Ghana has external and internal agencies that can enhance engagement with key stakeholders and promote peace in the lead-up to the polls and strengthen democratic resilience.

3.1 Internal Actors:

a) EC Preparedness (voter registration / voter transfer, ID)

The Electoral Commission of Ghana (EC) is progressively gearing up for the 2024 general elections by opening applications for various positions. So far, they have sought registration officers, exhibition officers, presiding officers, and staff for registration, exhibition, and polling assistance to support the processes. The EC has also published an electoral calendar containing a detailed sequence of events to inform about its processes.³⁷ As part of those processes, the EC instructed its Regional Directors to compile and submit all challenges related to the 2023 voters' register used for the District Assembly Elections. Moreover, the EC set May 7-27, 2024, to update the voters' register ahead of the December general elections. This process went smoothly, but there were a few challenges on days one and two. Although there has been opposition to some actions of the EC, the processes progressed smoothly, except for concerns raised over inconsistencies in tabulating figures of the recently registered electorates and the number of complaints received against some registrants. Nevertheless, the EC and political parties must address these challenges before facilitating pockets of violence in the 2024 elections.

b) Security Agencies Preparedness (National Election Security Taskforce)

The security services in Ghana are preparing for the 2024 elections, with the Ghana Police Service and

³⁶ Frimpong, O.B. (2020). Social Media in West Africa: A Security Quagmire? Africa Up Close. A blog of the Africa Programme. Wilson Center. Available at: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/social-media-in-west-africa-a-security-quagmire> (Accessed 20/08/2024).

³⁷ Nartey, M. and Yu, Y. (2023). A Discourse of Analytic Study of #FixTheCountry on Ghanaian Twitter. Social Media + Society. Vol. 9. Issue 1. January – March 2024.

³⁸ Programme of Activities for 2024 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections. <https://ec.gov.gh/programme-of-activities-for-2024-presidential-and-parliamentary-elections/> (Accessed on 06/05/2024).

other agencies taking extensive measures to ensure a safe and peaceful process. On 24 June 2024, for instance, over 300 multi-agency security officers completed a comprehensive four-week training program on preventing and countering electoral violence at Nangodi, Upper East region, with the support of the UK government.³⁹ The Council of State has expressed satisfaction with these preparations and the efforts to engage all stakeholders to maintain a violence-free environment.⁴⁰ Moreover, a collaborative training initiative involving participants from various security agencies was jointly organised by the Federal Government of Germany and the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre in Kumasi from 10 - 14 June 2024 to enhance the capacity of security personnel to manage potential election-related violence.⁴¹ Despite these initiatives and efforts, there are concerns about the readiness of the National Election Security Taskforce to provide a secure and fair electoral security environment.

c) The Judiciary

The Judiciary is mandated to adjudicate disputes in the country in line with Article 125 of the 1992 Constitution.⁴² Previous presidential and parliamentary elections have been replete with disputes, which ended in the judiciary for resolutions. Therefore, the preparedness of the judiciary ahead of the 2024 elections is crucial to addressing potential disputes, handling any injunctions against the decisions of the EC, and prosecuting perpetrators of electoral violence and other violations of existing electoral laws. The judiciary proposed statutory amendments to speed up the handling of election petitions. For instance, they recommended reducing the time limit for filing parliamentary election petitions from 21 days after

the publication of results in the gazette to seven days after the election results are declared. Additionally, the judiciary recommended amending or repealing specific procedural laws, such as Constitutional Instrument (C.I.) 47, to allow for faster case hearings.⁴³ The Election Management Committee (EMC) of the Judiciary has also recommended that judges hold daily sessions to expedite the adjudication of parliamentary election petitions.⁴⁴

In the last elections, former Chief Justice Anin Yeboah emphasised the judiciary's readiness to handle electoral disputes by organising specialised training for judges overseeing election-related cases.⁴⁵ This year, the current Chief Justice Torkornoo has called for an increase in the judiciary's budget to support the digitalisation of court processes and further expand court infrastructure. She has also launched initiatives such as piloting a court shift system and paralegal training for judicial staff to improve efficiency and output as they prepare for the upcoming elections.⁴⁶

d) The National Peace Council (NPC)

The National Peace Council (NPC) is central to Ghana's peace infrastructure, established constitutionally under Parliamentary Act 818. It functions as an independent body tasked with creating and implementing conflict prevention, management, and resolution mechanisms to foster sustainable peace in the country.⁴⁷ According to its peacebuilding mandate, the NPC employs mediation, good offices, reconciliation, early warning systems, peace education, capacity-building, networking, and resource mobilisation as essential tools for conflict prevention. Its interventions have been pivotal in reducing tensions, such as during the

³⁹ Ghana News Agency. <https://gna.org.gh/2024/06/security-officers-equipped-to-prevent-counter-electoral-violence-in-northern-ghana/> (Accessed on 06/05/2024).

⁴⁰ <https://citinewsroom.com/2024/05/election-2024-council-of-state-hails-security-measures-by-police-service/>

⁴¹ Ghana Peace Journal. <https://www.ghanapeacejournal.com/germany-kaipct-train-security-personnel-for-ghanas-elections-in-ksi/> (Accessed 15/07/2024)

⁴² Judicial Independence. <https://independence-judges-lawyers.org/country/ghana/#:~:text=Article%20125.&text=Justice%20emanates%20from%20the%20people,subject%20only%20to%20this%20Constitution> (Accessed 15/07/2024).

⁴³ Ghana News Agency. https://gna.org.gh/2024/04/judiciary-proposes-statutory-amendment-for-speedy-adjudication-of-parliamentary-election-petitions/#google_vignette (Accessed 15/07/2024); National Commission for Civic Education. <https://nccegh.org/news/voter-education-is-critical-in-national-elections-chief-justice-anin-yeboah> (Accessed 15/07/2024)

⁴⁴ Ghana News Agency (2024). Judges must sit daily on parliamentary election petitions for a speedy trial. Available at: <https://gna.org.gh/2024/04/judges-must-sit-daily-on-parliamentary-election-petitions-for-speedy-trial/> (Accessed on 28 August 2024).

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Ghana Broadcasting Cooperation. <https://www.gbcghanaonline.com/general/torkornoo/2024/> (Accessed 15/07/2024)

⁴⁷ Kanyirige-Awinador, W. (2014). Ghana' National Peace Council. Policy Brief. August 2014. Global Center for Responsibility to Protect. Available at: <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnlpcajcgjclcfindmkaj/https://www.global2p.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/awinador-ghana-national-peace-council.pdf> (Accessed 20 August 2024).

2019 Ayawaso West Wuogon by-election violence, where it facilitated dialogue between the NPP and NDC, leading to the enactment of the Vigilantism and Related Offences Act 2019. This law aims to curb political vigilantism, a significant issue during elections. Ahead of the 2024 elections, the NPC has established a committee on the code of conduct on vigilantism and other related offences. The Council is also working with civil society organisations, including the Institute of Democratic Governance (IDEG), in preparation for the peace declaration to be signed by political parties. It leads the WANEP's National Election Response Group (NERG) to mitigate potential electoral violence. NPC has organised a training session on early warning and response mechanisms for election-related violence in Ho in July 2024, with support from the Kingdom of Netherlands, targeting participants from the Volta, Oti, Eastern, and Greater Accra regions.⁵⁰ These efforts underscore the NPC's role in engaging political stakeholders and enhancing Ghana's peace infrastructure to prevent violence and promote dialogue, making it a central actor in maintaining stability before, during, and after the upcoming elections.

e) Civil Society Organisations and The Media

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) have been prominent drivers of Ghana's democratic governance since 1992. They have played an active role in amplifying citizens' voices in governance, influencing policy formulation and implementation, and advocating adherence to human rights and the rule of law as tenets of democracy. Crucially, CSO activities have evolved to encompass the mitigation of election-related violence and the promotion of peace, significantly facilitating peaceful political transitions in Ghana's Fourth Republic. For instance, WANEP has established a National Election Response Group (NERG) with the primary objective to discuss, develop and recommend response strategies to violent threats to the 2021 election. The NERG comprised eminent persons from key state and non-state institutions to complement the government's efforts to prevent and mitigate violence before, during, and after the election. The group will also operate an Election Situation Room (ESR) to observe threats to the peaceful conduct of the election and provide strategic responses to prevent and mitigate

election-related violence. In addition, the Ghana Women, Youth, Peace and Security Working Group intends to operate a Women's Situation Room in the upcoming elections. This initiative brings together organisations focused on gender equality and youth empowerment to monitor and report on threats to peaceful and transparent elections in Ghana. The Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) has also been a key player in enhancing credibility in electoral outcomes and promoting transparency through monitoring and observing electoral processes. CODEO observed the 2024 limited biometric voter registration exercise organised by the Electoral Commission from 7 – 29 May 2024 and published its report, highlighting key recommendations for improvement.

Moreover, the media has been essential for engaging citizens through civic education, voter sensitisation, and peace messaging in collaboration with the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCCE). In partnership with the US Embassy, the Ghana Journalist Association (GJA) organised a workshop on peaceful journalistic discourse for media practitioners and stakeholders in Accra on 28 August 2024 to promote violence-free and credible elections.⁵¹ The Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) has also rolled out a series of capacity-building workshops to enhance journalists' knowledge and skill set on fact-checking to combat disinformation and misinformation before the 2024 elections. In February 2024, the Multimedia Group launched its 'Election Headquarters' as part of initiatives to provide comprehensive election coverage, offering in-depth analysis, real-time updates, and insightful commentary on critical issues and developments.⁵²

f) Traditional Authorities (National House of Chiefs) and Faith-Based Organisations

Traditional authorities and faith-based organisations play a crucial role in conflict prevention, management, and peacebuilding through dialogue and mediation at the local, regional, and national levels. This pivotal role has significantly contributed to social cohesion and stability in Ghana. The National House of Chiefs, Christian Council, and Muslim Council of Ghana continue using their platforms to advocate for peace, particularly

⁵⁰ Graphic Online (2024). National Peace Council trains 30 in electoral violence prevention. Available at: <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/national-peace-council-trains-30-in-electoral-violence-prevention.html> (Accessed 28 August 2024).

⁵¹ Atinka Online (2024). 2024 Election: GJA, US Embassy organise workshop to build capacity of journalists. Available at: <https://atinkaonline.com/2024-election-gja-us-embassy-organise-workshop-to-build-capacity-of-journalists/> (Accessed on 28 August 2024).

⁵² Myjoyonline (2024). The Multimedia Group launches 'Election Headquarters' for comprehensive 2024 election coverage. Available at: https://www.myjoyonline.com/the-multimedia-group-launches-election-headquarters-for-comprehensive-2024-election-coverage/#google_vignette (Accessed on 28 August 2024).

during elections. They actively engage with political stakeholders to promote peace throughout the electoral process. The Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference (GCBC) recently convened the Sahel Peace Initiative Forum from 30 to 31 July 2024, bringing together influential religious leaders and stakeholders to address the ongoing crisis in the Sahel region. The conference focused on combating the complex violence affecting West Africa through broad appeals for peace and collaboration.⁵³ Additionally, in July 2024, the Christian Council Ghana (CCG) launched the Eminent Persons Group to lead efforts in promoting peace in advance of the December 2024 elections. The CCG called on presidential and parliamentary candidates to refrain from weaponisation of religious and ethnic backgrounds against their rivals during their electioneering campaigns.⁵⁴ Furthermore, in April 2024, the Ameer and Missionary in-Charge of the Ahmadiyya Mission used the Eid-Ui-Fitr celebration to call on political stakeholders to ensure peace ahead of the December election.⁵⁵

3.2 External Actors – ECOWAS, AU, UNOWAS, and EU

Ghana plays a prominent role in regional, continental, and global peace and security efforts through its active participation in the African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the United Nations (UN). Through this, these international organisations have earned recognition among political stakeholders in Ghana as critical players in peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and democratic governance. In July 2024, for instance, ECOWAS deployed a Pre-election Fact-finding Mission to assess Ghana's state of preparedness for the polls.⁵⁶ The EU also sponsors CSOs like IDEG to deploy election observers. UNOWAS jointly organised a stakeholders forum in Kumasi and Tamale in August 2024 to promote peaceful, inclusive, transparent, free, and fair elections in Ghana.⁵⁷ In August 2024, UNOWAS co-organized stakeholder forums in Kumasi and Tamale to ensure peaceful, inclusive, transparent, free, and fair elections in Ghana.⁵⁸ As part of this peace initiative, Leonardo Santos Simão, the Special

Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) and head of UNOWAS, held preventive diplomatic meetings with several key stakeholders, including Her Ladyship Gertrude Torkornoo, Chief Justice Akuffo Dampare, Inspector General of Police; former President John Mahama, flagbearer of the National Democratic Congress; Honorable Simon Osei-Mensah, Ashanti Regional Minister; Rev. Ernest Adu Gyamfi, Chairman of the National Peace Council (NPC); and various media representatives.⁵⁸

4. Opportunities for Democratic Consolidation

While Ghana has passed the test of holding competitive multiparty elections and attendant turnovers, institutional effectiveness in responding to the needs of citizens, citizens' participation and pervasive structural inequalities, among others, continue to undermine efforts to consolidate democracy. In this regard, the December 2024 elections present a further opportunity for Ghana to strengthen democratic institutions and local governance architecture to respond to the needs of citizens, particularly in rural communities, increase citizen participation in governance, and enhance transparency and accountability in governance, and ensure policy continuity for accelerated development in the country.

Other opportunities to enhance democratic consolidation include promoting civic engagement and participation to improve democratic legitimacy. In addition, political party development can be achieved by strengthening the internal democracy of political parties to be more inclusive, transparent, and responsive to citizens. Further, a robust media environment should be promoted to support democratic discourse and debate, and civil society organisations should be strengthened to promote and protect citizens' civil liberties and hold the government accountable to the electorate. These will mitigate citizens' declining trust and confidence in public institutions and democratic governance by strengthening the leadership-citizens social contract and forging the social cohesion necessary for democratic stability.

⁵³ Vatican News (2024). Episcopal Conference of Ghana hosts Sahel Peace Initiative to address regional crisis. Available at: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/africa/news/2024-08/episcopal-conference-of-ghana-hosts-sahel-peace-initiative-to-ad.html> (Accessed 28 August 2024).

⁵⁴ Graphic Online (2024). Election 2024: Don't weaponise religious, ethnic backgrounds - Christian Council to aspirants. Available at: <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/ghana-news-election-2024-dont-weaponise-religious-ethnic-backgrounds-christian-council-to-aspirants.html> (Accessed 28 August 2024).

⁵⁵ GhanaWeb (2024). Ahmadiyya leader calls for peace ahead of 2024 elections. Available at: <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Ahmadiyya-leader-calls-for-peace-ahead-of-2024-elections-1925649> (Accessed 29 August 2024).

⁵⁶ ECOWAS Press Release (2024). ECOWAS Deploys Pre-Election Fact-Finding Mission to Ghana. Available at: <https://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-deploys-pre-election-fact-finding-mission-to-ghana/> (Accessed 30 August 2024).

⁵⁷ UNOWAS Press Release (2024). In Ghana, Special Representative Simão calls on all stakeholders to strengthen their resolve and commitment to peaceful elections. Available at: <https://unowas.unmissions.org/all-press-releases> (Accessed on 31 August 2024).

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

5. Scenarios

Given the foregoing analysis, this policy brief envisages the following scenarios before, during and after the December 2024 elections.

Best Case Scenario (Unlikely)

Despite the heated political landscape, elections are held, and polls are adjudged free and credible by national stakeholders and international observers. The Electoral Commission ensures a level playing field based on internationally accepted standards, thus creating a conducive environment for the organisation of credible elections. The majority's will is respected, the winners respect the losers, and the losers congratulate the winners. This scenario would, however, be characterised by:

- The NDC leadership reconsidered signing the peace declaration before the December elections and expressed confidence in its effectiveness.
- Physical attacks, destruction of campaign materials, and 'Vigilantism' activities were brought under the control of security agencies, as well as consistent engagement with political parties.
- Massive election turn-out, isolated contentious cases of election malpractices reported, and speedy publication of election results.

Middle-Case Scenario (likely)

Recurrent security challenges, including rising urban crimes, ethnic clashes and actions of other criminal groups, could undermine election security in the country. In addition, the possibility of violent extremist groups bypassing Burkina Faso-Ghana border routes heightens the stake of security, especially along border communities. These threats, combined with public concerns about the current socio-economic situation in the country, contribute to raising tensions among the public and supporters of political parties, resulting in violence and voter apathy in the lead-up to the elections. Efforts made by ECOWAS and AU observation missions, as well as the NPC, NCCE, and CSOs through preventive diplomacy to major presidential contestants and political leaders, did not yield optional results to restore the citizens' confidence

in the electoral process. Despite the signed peace declaration by political parties and other election stakeholders, there were reports of physical attacks and intimidation of political opponents and election officials, as well as the destruction of electoral materials. These incidents were contained and did not significantly affect the outcome of the elections. In the post-election period, an uneasy calm swept over the country as the citizens were divided on the credibility of the polls. A winner emerges amid rancour by political parties with pockets of violence and announcements to challenge the results in court.

Worst Case Scenario (Likely)

Despite rising threats of terrorist attacks, physical violence, and tensions among political parties and supporters, especially the NPP and NDC, the election was held as planned in December 2024. The lead-up to the polls is marred by the reoccurrence of inter-political party wrangling and vigilante violence, mainly as campaigns commence. The election process is trailed by accusations and counter-accusations by political parties claiming non-conformity with the electoral laws, intimidation and irregularities, and the allegation of the EC's complicity of bias favouring the ruling political party. However, the collation and counting of votes continue amid growing anxiety and flaring post-election tensions and violence, especially in identified hotspot regions across the country. The results are announced, and the losers challenge the validity of the outcome. Some political parties file an injunction against the election results in the Supreme Court. Party supporters break into a violent protest, leading to physical attacks and the destruction of property. Security operatives are heavily deployed at all EC and political party offices.

6. Recommendations

Based on the analysis and scenarios, the following recommendations are provided for stakeholders' consideration and intervention.

The Electoral Commission (EC), NPC and NCCE:

- ⬢ The EC, NPC, and NCCE may consider organising regular engagement with the political parties through the IPAC and other election stakeholders forums to build trust or confidence, understanding, sharing information, dialogue on matters of mutual concerns and respond to issues;
- ⬢ EC, through its Public Relations unit, should maintain constant enlightenment and communication with the electorate to foster public confidence and trust in the electoral process;
- ⬢ EC should work with NPC, NCCE and relevant CSOs to sustain voter and peace education at all levels to discourage violence and actions that can threaten the peaceful conduct of the elections;
- ⬢ The NPC and partners should intensify engagement with the NDC leadership to understand and address their concerns about boycotting the signing of the usual Peace Declaration.

The Security and Judiciary:

- ⬢ The leadership of various security agencies should be more proactive and non-partisan in discharging their duties. Militarisation of elections, as reported in the 2020 elections, should be discouraged;
- ⬢ The security operatives should work in collaboration with related state agencies and CSOs that have expertise in conflict Early Warning and response to improve data gathering, analysis reporting to prevent and mitigate electoral violence across the country;
- ⬢ There is a need for dedicated court structures to expedite timely judgements of election-related offences and disputes to forestall possible violence that could emanate from delays by political interest groups of aggrieved party supporters.

Political Parties

- ⬢ Political parties are encouraged to respect and adhere to the rules of the elections, including

respect for the independence of the EC and the commitment to sign and comply with the provisions of the Peace Pact to ensure peaceful elections;

- ⬢ Political parties should contribute to joint public awareness campaigns for peaceful elections across the country to their memberships and supporters to eschew violence throughout the election period and beyond;
- ⬢ Political parties' leadership should consciously enhance youth and women's participation in internal leadership platforms and protect their aspirations to contest general elections.

The Civil Society Organisations and the Media:

- ⬢ WANEP and other CSOs with expertise in Early Warning should ensure effective monitoring and reporting of election violence and response, as well as intensify public education on non-violence in the 2024 elections;
- ⬢ The National Media Commission and Ghana Journalists Association should intensify efforts to regulate media institutions to prevent the broadcast of hate speeches, misinformation and disinformation capable of destabilising the polity;
- ⬢ The CSOs and media should intensify efforts on voter and peace education as well as raising public awareness to encourage citizens to refrain from violence and remain committed to peaceful actions throughout the election period and beyond;

ECOWAS/AU/UN and the rest of The International Community:

- ⬢ ECOWAS / AU / UN and other international peace guarantors may consider intensifying preventive diplomacy actions with the leadership of the political parties, especially the NDC, to resolve their concerns around the signing of the usual Peace Declaration and to ensure signatories to the declaration remain committed to promoting peaceful and credible elections;
- ⬢ ECOWAS / AU / UN and other international agencies may consider providing continuous technical assistance on election security and election dispute management support to IPAC and security agencies to enhance functional election security coordination mechanisms in the country;
- ⬢ Coordination among the various domestic and international interlocutors and observers should be strengthened to ensure synergy of purpose.

7. Conclusion

Ghana's December 2024 election offers an opportunity to strengthen institutions and consolidate democratic governance gains achieved over the last three decades. However, the electoral process has been roiled by challenges, including a lack of trust and confidence in the Election Management Body by the main opposition party, a resurgence of political vigilantism, increased political tensions fuelled by inflammatory rhetoric with ethno-religious undertones, and misinformation spread through various social media platforms. Despite these obstacles, critical interlocutors, including the National Peace Council, traditional and faith-based organisations, civil society organisations, the media, and the international community, play a vital role in democratic governance and election-related peacebuilding processes. Therefore, what is critically required is the need to harness the involvement of these actors to increase collaboration and foster inclusive dialogue with critical stakeholders to address issues related to the electoral process and facilitate information sharing on matters of mutual concern to improve understanding. This approach is vital to navigating the challenges, building trust and confidence, ensuring peaceful conduct of elections, and strengthening democratic resilience in the country.

GHANA

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