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## **Domesticating Vigilantism in Ghana's Fourth Republic: The Challenge Ahead**

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### **Author's contribution**

*The sole author designed, analyzed and interpreted and prepared the manuscript.*

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### **ABSTRACT**

Political party vigilantism in Ghana has consistently been on the ascendancy since the return to Constitutional rule in 1993. Their activities have usually been during and after elections across the country. By-elections in Atiwa, Akwatia, Chereponi, Talensi, Amenfi West and more recently Ayawaso West Wuogon, have all been marred by acts of violence. Ghana in 2017 recorded for the first time political party vigilante groups storming a courtroom in Kumasi and freeing some of their members standing trial after assaulting a regional security coordinator in the second largest region in the country – Ashanti region. The paper seeks to highlight the dangers inherent in this rather negative development which could reverse the gains Ghana has made in consolidating its democracy. The author relied on secondary data including relevant media publications and statements from civil society organizations, political parties and religious bodies on vigilantism in Ghana. Findings show that the seed of vigilantism has been sowed and allowed to be nurtured to the extent that the parties have taken uncompromising positions in ending the cancer because it borders on political power. A law has been passed but indications are that nothing much is changing. The National Peace Council has intervened yet there is no sign of lasting solution to the problem. The paper concludes that all stakeholders especially the civil society organizations and

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the religious bodies ought to be objective and bold to openly name and shame political parties whose members engage in negative acts of vigilantism and urge the masses to vote against such parties or else the phenomenon will persist and its ramifications will be disastrous.

*Keywords: Political parties; vigilantism; domestication; by-election.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Vigilantism, of all forms, is a negative phenomenon that has over the past decades weakened democracies and undermined the sovereignty of some states across the world. Right from Venezuela and Guatemala to Bolivia and Peru, angry crowds have taken “the law into their own hands, meting out physical punishment for crimes real or imagined” leading to insecurity [1]. Violent activities of vigilante groups have triumphed in Latin America, especially in areas where the people have lost faith in their political and civic institutions [2,1]. In Africa, the net effect of vigilante related activities has been chaos and have contributed to the insecurity in parts of Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya, Mali and Burkina Faso [3].

The Hobbesian question about the sovereignty of the law and the state of nature can be imagined in the above scenario as the people no longer trust the state security apparatus and even the judicial officials to protect them from harm and injustice [4,5]. This was the feeling among some Ghanaians after the Ghana Police Service revealed that the first quarter of 2019 recorded the highest level of insecurity in the country's history, largely caused by vigilante groups. Although, the picture painted about the Hobbesian state of nature as one reflects the worse forms of vigilante groups' activities in northern Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa cannot under any circumstance parallel the situation in Ghana's Fourth Republic, indications are that the seed has been sowed and the worse could happen despite the passage of the Vigilantism and Related Offense Bill into Law in 2019. In other words, the evidence of a seed of vigilantism related crimes has been planted and its features are increasingly visible in the country with the rise in street kidnappings, shoot to kill and worse of it all, the intimidating political party affiliated vigilante groups who unleash violence on their opponents. This is further exacerbated by growing helplessness of the Police and the tacit endorsement of violence through heated radio broadcast by the offending party (ies).

Political party sponsored vigilante violence in Ghana has so far been disproportionately

concentrated in the major cities of Tamale, Kumasi, Accra and Tema, where the strong presence of the state and its legal apparatus are more visible [5]. For the very first time in Ghana's Fourth Republic, violence perpetuated by political parties' vigilante groups led to the setting of a Commission of Inquiry to look into the phenomenon in 2019. The “greatest significance of support for vigilantism is the ability to create an environment that condones and justifies the practice” [5]. The aftermath of the Ghana' Commission of Inquiry's work and the reluctance by the state to prosecute the perpetrators, as recommended in the Commission's Report, has led to sustained media discussions which suggest that the country has an environment which condones acts of impunity particularly by ruling party(ies) affiliated vigilante groups.

### 1.1 Political Party Vigilantism in Ghana: A Theoretical Seeting

The effect of the violent activities of vigilante groups in Ghana cannot be delinked from elections. The return to constitutional rule in 1993 and the sustained multi-party elections thereafter, which have led to the alternation of political power from one party to the other is a testimony that elections are the only legitimate means of attaining political power in Ghana. It is, however, disheartening to note that even though, political parties have played a central role in Ghana's democratic gains, they have dented the prospects by domesticating vigilante groups with alacrity. The overt and the covert endorsement of vigilante groups' activities in the two leading political parties in Ghana-the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP) has fertilized the grounds for potential violence which could unmake the democratic gains and pose existential threat to Ghana. Since 1993, Ghana has held 7 presidential and 7 parliamentary elections as well as 31 by-elections following deaths and resignations of MP [6]. In all these elections, political party vigilante groups have caused mayhem in the forms of beating opponents, burning of ballot boxes, inflicting gun shots and cutlass wounds and in some few instance deaths. According to Oquaye [6], Ghana was on the brink of conflict in December 2008 when the

then opposition NDC complained that it had unveiled a conspiracy between the Electoral Commission and the ruling New Patriotic Party, NPP, to rig the elections. Based on this allegation the NDC's vigilante group, *Azoka Boys* invaded the EC Head Office and burnt vehicle tires, smashed vehicle windscreens and chanted war songs [6]. A foreboding doom clouded the hemisphere as prayer warriors congregated for God's intervention [6]. Again, after the 2012 elections the opposition (this time the, NPP) vigilante groups led by the *Invisible Forces* took to the streets of Accra, burnt vehicle tires, smashed windscreens, and beat up people going about their normal businesses including journalists. Also, at the disputed 2012 presidential election petition in the Supreme Court, the presence of the Ghana Armed Forces and the Police did not deter vigilante groups from loitering around the court premises with T-shirts with inscription such as *Untouchable Forces*, linked to the NDC and *'Invisible Forces*, linked to the NPP. The phenomenon has since worsened to the extent that as of June, 2019, there were 24 violent political party vigilante groups in Ghana [7,6].

Scholarly discussions of this rather negative phenomenon have not been dominant in Ghana except in a few instances [8,9,10,5]. Instead, a chunk of discussions of vigilantism in Ghana has taken the form of media commentaries. As a contribution to the growing phenomena of vigilantism in Ghana, this article contributes to knowledge by examining the impact of vigilante groups' activities on Ghana's democratic prospects.

In terms of scope, the paper reviews the activities of vigilante groups in the Fourth Republic, with special focus on 2001 when the first alternation of power took place and 2017, when the very latest alternation took place. The reason being that the 2001 power alternation witnessed the minimal activities of vigilante groups such as seizure of public property including toilets and toll booths. The 2017 alternation of power experienced the worse of vigilante group activities, culminating in the setting up of a Commission of Inquiry and subsequently the passage of a Vigilantism and Related Offenses Law.

The introductory section is followed by discussion on relative deprivation which serves as the theoretical lens that explains the motivation behind vigilantes. We regard the activities of vigilante groups in Ghana as drivers

of survival instincts. The next section is devoted to a review of the literature, including the types of vigilante groups. This is followed by discussion of the literature, analysis of the potential danger of vigilante groups, the law on vigilantism and followed by the reality on the ground and conclusions.

## 2. METHODS

The paper is an overview of vigilante activities in Ghana from 2000-2019. This paper is based on a desk study review of political party linked vigilante groups activities and the general response from stakeholders in Ghana's body politic. The content analysis method was used in the examination of the various activities of vigilante groups. The paper relied heavily on secondary sources of data in the forms of published articles, books, book chapters, media publications in Ghana and releases from think tanks and other bodies. The motive of these vigilante groups are explained using the relative deprivation theory.

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework: Relative Deprivation Theory

Political science analysis show that the potential for violence, is fundamentally linked to the intensity and scope of feelings of relative deprivation by perpetrators [11]. In the special case of vigilante violence, however, a singular type of deprivation appears to be operative: detrimental deprivation. This happens when anticipated values of groups remain fairly constant, but perceived value capabilities decline [12,4]. As such, the more precipitous this decline, the higher the potential for violence by the perceived deprived group (s) [12,4]. In the special case of Ghana, relative deprivation best explains the causes and sustained trend of violence by political party vigilante groups.

A house may be large or small; as long as the neighboring houses are likewise small, it satisfies all social requirements for a residence. But, let their arise next to the little house a palace, and the little house shrinks to a hut. The little house now makes it clear that its inmate has no social position at all to maintain [13].

Marx et al. in the quote above captures the intuitive appeal of relative deprivation (RD) as an explanation for social behavior. If compared to other people, groups or even themselves at different points in time may lead people to believe that they do not have what they deserve,

hence they will be angry and resentful [Cited in 13].

Stouffer [14] coined the term Relative Deprivation to describe unforeseen relationships that emerged from surveys of American soldiers in the Second World War. Stouffer and his colleagues noted that U.S. Army Air Corpsman expressed frustration over promotions in comparison to the military police even though under normal circumstance the soldiers enjoyed a much faster rate of promotion than the police [14]. In other words, Stouffer and his colleagues observed that the wartime military police were dissatisfied with their slow promotions than their air corpsmen counterparts were, with their rapid promotions. Also, African American soldiers in southern camps were found to be more satisfied than those in northern camps despite the fact that the “racist South of the 1940s remained tightly segregated by race” [13]. These comparisons were wrong because the military police compared their promotions with other military police and not air corpsmen while the black soldiers in the South compared their lot with black civilians in the South and not with black soldiers in the North who were out of their view [13]. Based on this, Stouffer and his colleagues held the view that satisfaction is relative to the available comparisons people have. Relative deprivation has since become a major concept in the social sciences because social judgments are shaped not only by absolute standards, but also by standards set by social comparisons [13].

Relative Deprivation is, therefore, a social psychological concept which postulates a subjective state that shapes emotions, cognitions, and behavior linking the individual with the interpersonal and intergroup levels of comparisons. It is a judgment that one or one's in-group is disadvantaged compared to a relevant referent and that this judgment invokes feelings of anger, resentment, and entitlement [13]. An individual or group who undergoes Relative Deprivation may experience three psychological processes. First, they make cognitive comparisons with others. Second, they do cognitive appraisals and conclude that they or their in-group are disadvantaged. Third, they get the conviction that they are unfairly disadvantaged hence an arousal of angry resentment occurs within them [13].

Based on the arguments of Relative Deprivation, one can infer that political parties' vigilante groups (in-group) will react violently in order to

have their share of the national/party booty when they are conditioned that the absolute level of deprivation of their members (much less collective levels of deprivation) is the cause of their feelings of dissatisfaction and injustice [13]. This they do by imagining alternatives, comparing their state with past experiences and responses [13]. The objectively disadvantaged people are usually satisfied with their share of societal resources even if it is low, while the objectively advantaged are often dissatisfied with high levels of societal resources, when they retrospectively examine their contribution to the parties' victory [13]. In other words, the objectively disadvantaged are frequently comparing themselves to others in the same situation or worse, while the objectively advantaged are frequently comparing themselves to those who enjoy even more advantages than they possess [13]. People in politics can believe that they are personally deprived when their party win elections and control resources or that a social group to which they belong and identify with is deprived. Feelings of group deprivation can be associated with a confrontational group serving attitudes and behavior, including collective action [13].

Criticism of Relative Deprivation has focused on its use as a major predictor of collective protest. Political scientist, Gurr [11] in, *Why Men Rebel*, criticized Relative Deprivation as a phenomenon of individuals and not societies by employing gross macro-level measures of Relative Deprivation as economic and political indices of whole societies [11]. Similarly, Thompson [15] developed a time-series of political violence in Ireland between 1922 and 1985 but could not find any relationship between unemployment rates and collective violence. It should be noted, however, that Gurr [11] and Thompson [15] did not claim in their studies to be testing Relative Deprivation theory. Instead, they speak of “deprivation” and “frustration” [11,15]. Besides, Gurr [11] study was a macro-level one that did not involve the micro level of Stouffer's conception of Relative Deprivation [Cited in 15]. In the view of Pettigrew [16] a classic ecological fallacy occurs when macro-level findings are placed within a Relative Deprivation micro-level framework. That is, micro-level phenomena, such as the Relative Deprivation of individuals within a group (political party), are being erroneously assumed from macro phenomena. This, is the fallacy that some people consider and hence draw weak conclusions about individual voters from aggregate voting results [13].

Williams [17] captures Relative Deprivation's role in sustained protest as follows (1) a collective sense or feeling of Relative Deprivation, especially in prestige and political power, that (2) occurs suddenly; and (3) the deprived collectivity is large, commands substantial economic and political power recently achieved, and is internally cohesive; and (4) the established "control elements of the society have given signals of weakness, indecision, disunity, or actual encouragement of militant dissent" [17].

## 2.2 The Literature on Vigilantism in Africa

Vigilantism has a long history, but the topic has been dealt with only relatively recently in research, especially in Africa [18]. Scholarship on the issue has covered many aspects including the origin of various vigilante groups in various countries, their activities, evolving nature of vigilantism, the effect on peace and democratic development [3,19,20,3,18,12,5].

On the face of it, vigilante activities have a blunt, brutal message. The activities of the Bakassi Boys, a notorious vigilante group in Nigeria has included subjecting people suspected of crimes to beatings and dragging some on the floor along the streets in successions [21]. The perpetrators "have no time to turn to the bystanders, bewail their fate, or appeal to onlookers' feelings of compassion" [21]. Usually on arrival at the place of execution, the vigilantes simply throw the bound victims onto the ground and "chop away at them for minutes on end with their blunt machetes – a silent bloodbath, because the victims do not scream, even though some are still writhing on the ground when the Bakassi Boys finish their task by tossing car tires on top of them and dousing them in petrol" [21]. Buur [22] discussed the activities of vigilantes in a township in South Africa and noted that their presence has turned the townships into a "spaces of exception; spaces in which the law is, if not completely suspended, then, at least, enforced primarily by local justice structures that are governed by values and practices other than human rights and due process". Based on this, their activities can be said to be a departure from norm-based principles and regulations in civilized societies [22]. The picture painted by Harnischfeger [21] on vigilantes' activities is similar to the picture painted by Buur [22] in South Africa. In Ghana, political party vigilantes have in some instances beaten their targets mercilessly. Some deaths have been reported in election related violence spearheaded by party

militias. Sometimes too, people have been killed by vigilantes for trying to stop or prevent vigilantes from having their way out especially in illegal mining when they think their party is in power. Vigilantes in Denkyira Obuase in the Central Region of Ghana on May 29, 2017 murdered the commander of the military taskforce (5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion of the Ghana Army) stationed in the town, Captain Maxwell Adam Mahama, when he soldier went jogging alone. Similar ones have been recorded in the past including the murder of the Ashanti Regional Chairman of the Ghana Journalists Association, Mr. Samule Anim in 2006 [23].

Harnischfeger in a comparative analysis between the Odua People's Congress (OPC) in southwest Nigeria and Islamist Hisba vigilantes in northern Nigeria argued that the two vigilantes do not recognize the political and legal authority of the Nigerian government [21]. These vigilantes frame their own activities as struggles for self-determination without obeying the laws of the state [21]. Kirsch and Gratz [18] argued that vigilantism presents a picture of bewildering volatility and complexity in how they are structured and organized in Africa. The authors noted that vigilantes have sometimes surreptitiously aligned themselves with other recognized bodies such as traditional and modern institutions and even secret societies in a bit to provide community-oriented services like policing [18]. They note that much as such activities cannot be said to be negative, the in-groups within these vigilantes who have diabolical agenda are also aligned to occultists and other forms of esoteric powers for various reasons [18]. One such paradox of vigilante groups is that, in many instances, their acts of "violence and extrajudicial executions are paralleled by a desire for peace and order which led to their emergence and which genuinely seems to inform most of their activities" [24,25].

Biney [26] traces the origin of vigilante groups in Ghana to the country's inability to sustain democratic rule after independence. This, according to him, has led to the use of various violent means in a bit to restore democratic rule, which actually culminated in the military interventions [26]. In the course of such interventions, acts of violence of all forms, including the seed of vigilantism were sowed in Ghana [7,4]. Historical development has made Ghanaians fully conscious that the only language their governments understands is violence [27]. There are numerous instances where peaceful

means have failed to get problems solved while violent protests have yielded immediate positive responses [27]. In the Fourth Republic, the same mindset propelled individuals within political parties, particularly those in opposition to form vigilante groups to either press home their demands or ensure their security on the grounds that they do not trust the state security for protection. This has been corroborated by public utterances of opposition candidates who all later became presidents such as the late Prof. John Evans Atta Mills, Nana-Addo-Dankwa Akufo Addo and Mr. John Dramani Mahama to the effect that they did not trust the state security agencies for protection. In fact, the actions of the police have sometimes given legitimacy to such claims. For instance, after vigilantes had perpetrated violence on January 31, 2019 during a by-election and beaten an opposition member of parliament for Ningbo Prampram, Samuel Nartey George, the police decided to invite the MP to the police station for his statement and rather went to the home of the leader of the pro-government vigilante group to take his statement. The case has since died off. In line with such conducts, political parties form vigilantes to defend the "territories of their rival political parties" particularly during elections [28,7]. In Ghana, the popular assumption is that it appears the police provide regime protection and not state protection, a situation which emboldens people to see the need to resort to vigilantes for their own protection.

Gyampo et al., [10] explored the phenomenon of political party vigilantism and recounted the many instances where their activities including the unlawful and forceful seizures of public and private property in some constituencies throughout the country whenever there is a change of government, have attracted public condemnation. In their view, activities of vigilante groups promise to be solidified due to the tacit endorsement of these groups by the major political parties in Ghana [10]. This creates the impression that a bad seed has been sown and could grow to pose insecurity and undermine the country's democratic gains.

Other scholars in Ghana have observed a link between pockets of electoral violence in the country and vigilante groups belonging to both the NDC and the NPP [29,9,27]. Even though the NDC had earlier denied its association with these groups, the party in 2018 officially endorsed the '*Haws, Lions and Dragons*', when its general secretary Mr. Johnson Asiedu-Nketiah justified their existence on claims that it was "an

appropriate natural response" to the failure of the Akufo-Addo government to rein in its party vigilante groups [30]. The NPP on the other had recognized the *Invisible Forces* in 2015 describing the group as the official party security, citing the inability of the Ghana Police Service to protect its members as the basis for using the *Invisible Forces* [31]. The parties' open support for these groups serve as fertilization for their continued growth and acts of violence with impunity during elections and post transitions.

According to Amankwah [9], people engaged in political party vigilantism in Ghana are mostly able bodied men called 'macho men'. These men are usually hired by political party leaders during elections to snatch ballot boxes and intimidate voters at polling stations in various places around the country and "are more willing to go further and take more risks " [9,21]. He observed that local MPs are frequently cited as being responsible for "organized violence on Election Day and during voter registration" [9,32]. The vigilantes respond largely because they are idle men who are hungry. Alidu [27] argued that vigilantes are rational actors who are motivated by personal or societal benefits and see their actions as a form of investment.

The increasing destructive activities of political parties' vigilantes have attracted the attention of civil society, the media and even international bodies in Ghana. In fact, vigilantism was the most talked about issue in the Ghanaian media in the first quarter of 2019 [27]. The Coalition of Domestic Elections Observers in Ghana has described the activities of political party vigilante groups as being on the ascendency. The coalition blamed the two dominant political parties-NDC and NPP, for creating and nurturing such dangerous party militia in Ghana's body politic who pose a considerable danger to electoral politics and democratic governance in Ghana' (CODEO, 2017). The Institute for Democratic Development (IDEG), the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Ghana Catholic Bishops Conference, the Christian Council of Ghana, the office of the national Chief Imam, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission, all registered political parties are among the numerous bodies that have issued statements expressing worry about the danger posed by vigilante groups in the future of Ghana's democracy. The central line that cuts through all these statements is that these groups pose a danger to the country and even an

existential threat [32]. This article contributes to scholarship on the dangers that political party vigilantes pose to democratic governance in Ghana.

### 2.3 Types of Vigilante Groups

Vigilantism covers a wide range of violent acts merging, on the one hand, into forms of dissident violence, and, on the other, into the legal exercise of physical coercion by a regime or its representative [12]. Commentators and scholars are divided in Ghana as to the exact name to give to violent political party groups. However, the law on Vigilantism and Related Offenses uses the term *vigilantism*. Based on their activities, this section discusses three types of vigilantes namely crime control, social group control, and regime control groups. The typology discussed here does not completely encompass the complexity of establishment violence, but they nonetheless provide a preliminary framework for the categorization of types of vigilante behavior [12] which Ghana's political vigilante groups may fit in.

#### 2.3.1 Crime control vigilantism

This category of vigilantism directs its militant activities against people believed to be committing unlawful acts proscribed by the legal system [32]. According to Rosenbaum and Sederberg [4] crime control vigilantes target people whose acts harm others or their property. They include people who manage to escape the justice system due to corruption, leniency or their position in society. The activities of social crime vigilante groups are sometimes led by representatives of people in very high socioeconomic class although the followers are usually made up of people who belong to the low class in society [4]. Crime Control vigilantism can be initiated by private persons and can take place in any society where the state institutions are believed to be ineffectual in protecting persons and property [4]. A prominent example is Esquadrao da Morte (Death Squad group) in Brazil. These are self-appointed interpreters of the law who act as unofficial policemen. While Brazilian crime control vigilantes specialize in the elimination of petty thieves and hardened criminals, including the assassins of policemen, similar vigilante groups in Argentina are engaged in debt collection [4].

#### 2.3.2 Social group control vigilantism

Social Group Control vigilantes engage in violent activities with the aim of ensuring a fair

distribution of resources or values within a society. Such are unhappy with relative deprivation and its effects so they use illegal coercion anytime they feel threatened by segments of society or by people who appear to advocate for a significant change in the distribution of values in society against the wishes of their members [4]. Group control vigilantism can easily be lapsed into a form of reactionary violence particularly when the formal political system becomes supportive of a new distribution of values [4,11].

According to Rosenbaum and Sederberg [4], the manifestations of social group vigilantes are diverse depending on whether they are distinguished along the communal, economic, or political identity. It is therefore clear that unlike crime control vigilantism, social group control vigilantes become more pronounced whenever there is a semblance or real government ineffectiveness in the equitable distribution of national resources. Certain Islamic groups in predominantly Moslem countries who sometimes advocate for the creation of an Islamic constitution or sharia law fall under this group [4]. Also, much of the anti-black violence in the United States exhibits the characteristics of social group vigilantes [4].

#### 2.3.3 Regime control vigilantism

Regime control vigilantes basically refer to the use of violence by established groups on claims that they want to preserve the status quo [4]. This happens when the formal justice system is believed to be ineffective or irrelevant and other institutions are non-functional [4]. They therefore direct their violent activities at threatening elements in society, but when they consider the government itself as ineffective, then government becomes the target of attacks [4]. Regime control vigilantism can thus be said to be an establishment violence aimed at altering regimes in order to reverse the ills in society or restore competence [4]. Even though private individuals or groups sometimes do engage in this type of actions, regime control vigilantes generally either occupy official positions such as the army and the bureaucracy or they are people who are highly connected to powerful officials in the security agencies [4].

The political assassinations such as those recorded during Philippine election campaigns may be examples of private individuals engaged in regime control vigilantism. Also, Coup d'états

in Thailand, Brazil, and Argentina constitute some examples of this type of vigilantism. Other types include coups that brought about some significant alterations in the social base such as the Nasser's seizure of power in Egypt and the reactionary ones such as previously disestablished groups regaining control as occurred in Ghana after the coup of 1966 [4].

In summary Johnston categorized activities of vigilante groups into two – “private voluntary activities that are recognized by the state and those without the state’s authority and support” [33]. He only refers to the latter as ‘vigilantism’. The malleability of the dichotomies, however, imputes an ambiguous status of vigilante groups. One “consequence of this is that it is difficult to determine, despite the attempts of several political commentators, whether vigilantism should be regarded as either a cause or an effect of ongoing sociopolitical crises” in the world [18]. The dominant narrative in the case of the Ghanaian emerging vigilantes pontificates the direction of an effect of the perceived ongoing sociopolitical crisis where ordinary people generally do not trust the state security for protection. They simply believe the police in Ghana do more of regime protection than societal protection. This notion has been solidified by the virtually daily media reports of how selective the police are in the prosecution of the ordinary people and opposition elements as against people in government and their dependents.

### 3. DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Vigilante Groups and Elections in Ghana’s Fourth Republic

Studies on election related violence in Africa have focused on conflicts resulting from disputed elections. The literature on electoral violence dwell on the large-scale violence resulting in the deaths of hundreds and injuries of others. The most recent ones that were accompanied by reported widespread mass killings and destruction of property include Kenya, Togo, Cote d'Ivoire, Sudan, and Zimbabwe [29,34]. However, some of the under reported violence, such as activities of vigilante groups in Ghana, are nonetheless disturbing as they could lead to insecurity and truncate the country’s enviable position as one of the most resilient democracies in Africa [35]. This section discusses some of the election related violence perpetrated by political parties’ sponsored vigilante groups in Ghana

especially after the first, second and third alternation of power from the NDC to the NPP in 2001, NPP to NDC in 2009 and NDC to NPP in 2017.

Even though the competitive behavior of the NDC and NPP, who have dominated politics in Ghana’s Fourth Republic, is relatively free of the kinds of high-intensity violence recorded in Kenya, Sudan, Libya and Cote’ D’ Ivoire, vigilante groups associated with these parties have caused a series of violence. According to Bob-Milliar [29] activities of these militant party foot soldiers manifested itself in the general elections of 2000 and 2008 and the resultant power alternation between the two dominant parties. After the change in government following the victory of the NPP in the 2000 elections, the NPP’s affiliated groups used the “Akan saying “yatu aban” (“we have overthrown the government”) to describe the NDC’s defeat” and practically “seized party patronage objects, including public toilets and lorry parks in Accra and other urban centers” [29]. These actions were characterized by violence because those managing these facilities refused to relinquish authority over these state assets. These unfortunate incidents repeated itself when the NDC recaptured political power from the NPP in 2009. This time round, NDC vigilante groups “went on rampage reclaiming control over public places of convenience, offices of the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), the then National Youth Employment Programme (NYEP) and the Metro Mass Transit Ltd. They, in some cases, succeeded in getting some District Chief Executives (DCEs), managers and staff of NHIS and NYEP relieved of their positions” [35]. This resulted in pockets of violence across most cities in Ghana. Between 1992 and 2012, Ghana recorded 2,807 cases of political parties’ militant youth’s molestations and violent intimidation [29]. The country also recorded 1,812 incidents of seizure of public property by victorious parties’ vigilante groups and 88 cases of party property *vandalisation* [29]. These unhealthy developments in Ghana’s electoral processes have the potential to mar the beauty of the country’s democracy and taint the positive image of the country in a negative way [36].

The post 2016 elections witnessed increased cases of ruling party vigilante groups forcefully removing from office of public officers, including the Ashanti regional security coordinator and the removal from office of the Tamale Teaching Hospital Chief Executive Officer on claims that



he did not contribute in bringing the power to power. Besides, the post 2017 power alternation, saw the ruling party affiliated vigilante group - *the Delta Forces* - storming a High Court in Kumasi, Ghana's second largest city and political stronghold of the NPP, and 'freeing its members standing trial for acts of vandalism [9,10]. The period also witnessed the General Secretaries of the NDC and NPP, Mr. Johnson Asiedu Nketia and Mr. John Boadu respectively, publicly defending their respective vigilante groups. Mr Asiedu remarked that his party's vigilantes actions are a natural response to the ruling party's to rein in its party vigilante groups while Mr. John Boadu of the NPP said vigilante groups in his party once saved his life [37].

The increasing number of vigilante groups and their militant activities prompted the director general in charge of operations of the Ghana Police Service, Commissioner of Police (COP), Nathan Kofi Boakye, to warn that the security agencies may not be able to control the situation if it explores in the future. He warned of an explosion in the future if realistic measures are not taken to end the menace [38]. This position has been shared by the African Centre for Security and Counter-Terrorism and the Ghana Institute of Governance and Security on various public platforms including radio and television discussions.

In all the 31 by-elections held between 1993 and 2019, vigilante groups have in most cases succeeded in causing some level of mayhem [39, 40]. The worse hit ones have included the by-elections in Chireponi (2009) Atiwa (2010), Talensi (2015) and Ayawaso West Wuogon (2019), where party vigilante groups caused mayhem in the full glare of the cameras and state security agencies [35,40]. Two of these elections were even scarier; the Talensi and the Ayawaso West Wuogon by-elections. In the former, the *Azoka Boys* of the then ruling NDC and the *Bolga Bull Dogs* of the then opposition NPP engaged in violent acts in the full glare of members of the security services [41]. The ruling party forces had the urge when the interior minister (Hon. Mark Woyongo) publicly remarked that 'violence begets violence' [42]. The NDC won that election. In 2019 when the NPP was in power, another by-election took place at Ayawaso West Wuogon and was fraught with violence. As if a tit for tat scenario, the minister of state in charge of National Security Hon. Bryan Acheampong, admitted before the Justice Emile Short Commission of Inquiry, that he deplored

the 'thugs' and armed them to cause mayhem during the Ayawaso West Wuogon by-election, which the NPP won. In fact, the Ayawaso West Wuogon parliamentary by-election in January 2019 witnessed one of the worse use of vigilante force to intimidate innocent voters. A sitting member of parliament for Ningo Prampram who was a presidential staffer under the NDC regime, Hon. Samuel Nartey George, was physically beaten in the full glare of the police and the cameras, videos of which went viral. The action ignited condemnation from various civil society and religious groups. The Catholic Bishops Conference, for instance, expressed concern over the reported use of vigilante groups to disturb the peace of the nation. The Catholic Bishops noted that the incident posed a greater threat to Ghana's democracy and could draw back the progress of the country's democratic gains (Ghana Catholic Bishops Conference, 2019). This sentiment was shared with the Coalition of Domestic Elections Observers (CODEO) whose statement described the 19percent voter turnout in the Ayawaso West Wuogon Parliamentary by-election as symptomatic of the vigilante threats facing Ghana. CODEO noted that its agents on the ground recorded about 40 cases of the presence of intimidating masked men in polling stations across the constituency [43].

The Civic Forum Initiative (CFI) and the Institute for Democratic Development (IDEG) expressed dismay at the acts of violence and intimidation in the Ayawaso West Wuogon by-election in 2019. The two CSOs observed a trend of election related violence in the Fourth Republic which have taken place in the presence of security agencies without prosecution [44].

Although the future negative impact of Political party vigilante groups' activities is glaring, the principal beneficiaries; the political parties, appear to prioritize their immediate benefit which is electoral victory than potential danger ahead. Admittedly, political vigilante groups have played a central role in distributing and communicating manifestos to the electorate in all the seven elections in Ghana's Fourth Republic. This role has been beneficial to the parties. The NPP has publicly acknowledged the role of its foot soldiers in the electoral victories chalked in 2000, 2004 and 2016 general elections [45]. At one of its meetings with more than 1000 foot soldiers prior to the 2008 general election, the National Coordinating Director of the Foot Soldiers Association (FOSWA) of the NPP pointed out

that it was the political strategy of the foot soldiers, which contributed to the victories of the party in the 2000 and 2004 general elections [45]. An NPP member of parliament for the Assin Central Constituency Hon. Kennedy Agyapong has also publicly acknowledged the role of vigilante groups in the electoral victory of the NPP in 2016 severally on national radio and television.

According to Gyampo [45], the foot soldiers of the NDC, contributed to the victory of the party in the 2008 general elections through door-to-door campaign, policing ballot boxes and spreading the party's messages throughout the length and breadth of the country. State media, the Ghana News Agency (GNA), for instance, reported that on May 1, 2010, the NDC presented over 1,000 certificates to its, foot soldiers at the Ablekuma Central Constituency in the Greater Accra region for their role in securing victory for the party in 2008 [46]. What could be more motivating to political vigilante groups than this?

In Ghana it is common knowledge that political party vigilante groups have played various roles including serving as polling agents and other election-related support and by that contributed to fairness and transparency in elections. In 2008, vigilante groups were pivotal in monitoring polling centers, particularly in the rural districts which warded off impersonators [45]. As such, it comes as less or no surprise that political parties have always supported these vigilante groups with financial resources because they basically provide security for party executives especially when in opposition. In 2016, for instance, three South African ex-police officers were contracted to train the security detail of the opposition NPP flag bearer Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo Addo, and running mate, Dr. Mahamadou Bawumia [10]. However, news of their presence broke and they were arrested and deported by the government of Ghana to South Africa [10]. This nothing, the importation of these 'mercenaries' was justified by the NPP youth organizer Mr. Sammy Awuku in an interview with journalists: "We are taking steps to give maximum protection to our presidential candidate and his running mate. That is non-negotiable. So whether the South Africans have been sent home or not, we will take that step to protect our presidential candidate and his running mate and of course by extension, to also offer some protection to all those who will be on the campaign trail until the police come to their help" [10].

Additionally, at an NPP rally in the Northern Region in October 2016, the then Regional Chairman, Mr. Bugri Naabu, stated that the ballot boxes would be protected by "macho men" to prevent the ruling NDC from rigging the elections on December 7 [10]. Similarly, during the 2012 general elections, the NDC took over 60 members of its '*Unbreakable Vigilante Group*', made up of well-built men to protect the ballot boxes at some polling stations in its electoral stronghold in the Volta Region [10].

### **3.2 Analysis of the Danger of Vigilante Groups' Activities on Ghana's Democracy**

A distinguished war historian, Donald Kagan, argued that war has been a persistent part of human experience before the birth of civilization [47]. In his view, history has shown that the basic cause of war is "failure to keep the peace" [47].

All human events are a progression on two levels of reality – conscious and unconscious. As such, to regard war and threats of war as rational behaviour meticulously planned by chess-playing strategists misses the mark [47]. This is why warnings of the dangers vigilante groups pose to Ghana's security must not be taken lightly.

Many have hailed Ghana as a beacon of hope for Africa due to its electoral success in the Fourth Republic [48]. However, the number of elections and alternation of power doesn't necessarily symbolize the stability of institutions, the consolidation of the democracy and guarantee of peace [28]. The contentious elections periodically marred by violent political party militants also defeats the claim that sustained elections have the potential of reducing conflicts in multi-party democracies [28]. The emergence and violent activities of political party vigilante groups, over 26 years into sustained democracy in Ghana, has the potential to derail Ghana's democratic gains [49].

Regardless of the forms of vigilante groups and the modus operandi, they pose danger to Ghana's democracy. In the Ghanaian scenario, these groups only appear to be proactive when there is a task to execute. A cue should be taken from the multifaceted evolution of hunters' movements in Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire, who over time, took the form of traditional cult of hunters (donsoya) and became involved in vigilante activities and later as mercenaries in the civil war in northern Côte d'Ivoire [18].

The National Commission for Civic Education has noted that Ghana's democracy is under threat due to the increasing nurturing of political party vigilante groups and their acts of lawlessness with impunity [50]. The commission warned that the continued nurturing of these groups by political parties poses existential danger to the country [50]. Several others have publicly cautioned against the danger ahead with the continued domestication of vigilante groups within Ghana's body politic. A senior police officer, Commissioner of Police (COP) Kofi Boakye, has warned that come 2020 elections every aspiring Member of Parliament may have a vigilante group; Ghana could have 500 of such groups. He accused political parties of being behind the groups while accusing the police wrongfully [38]. In a similar tone, Asamoah has warned that there is danger ahead if Ghana does not control the activities of vigilante groups [50]. Overwhelmed by this potential danger, Ghana's parliament quickly passed a law on vigilante and related offenses. We argue that, the law which took the majority side alone to have it passed is not a panacea to the seed of vigilantism and its threat which is glaring.

### **3.3 The Law on Vigilantism and Related Offences, 2019**

Ghana's Vigilantism and Related Offenses Law applies to 'a person who participates in the activities of a vigilante group that is associated, related, connected or affiliated to a political party, political party officer, or political party member. It however does not apply to persons, who live within the same neighborhood or community, and who act in concert with the aim of preventing an offence from being committed within that neighborhood or community; and a person, who having witnessed the commission of an offence, acts with the sole aim of preventing the further commission of that offence or any other offence'.

The law prescribes that 'all political party vigilante groups in existence before the coming into force of this Act are disbanded. It further requires that 'the leaders of the disbanded political party vigilante groups shall, within one month after the coming into force of the law write to inform the Minister of the formal disbandment of their political party vigilante groups, including the date of the formal disbandment and the names of the past and present members of the disbanded political party vigilante group.

Under the law anyone who 'takes part in an activity of a political party vigilante group commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a term of imprisonment of not less than ten years and not more than twenty-five years'. Persons who 'directly or indirectly, instigate, command, counsel, procure, solicit, or in any other manner purposely aid, facilitate, encourage, or promote, whether by a personal act or presence or otherwise, or do an act for the purposes of aiding, facilitating, encouraging, or promoting the activities of political party vigilante group.

The Minister for the Interior is required to publish in the Gazette, a list of the disbanded political party vigilante groups that have complied with the law within three months of coming into force of the law.

A leader of a disbanded political party vigilante group who fails to report to the minister of the disbandment of the group commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a term of imprisonment of not less than five years and not more than fifteen years.

Also, under the law a 'person shall not directly or indirectly, form, organize, operate or promote the formation, organization, operation or activities of a political party vigilante group'. Anyone 'who contravenes this commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a term of imprisonment of not less than five years and not more than fifteen years. Similarly, any person who subscribes as a member of a political party vigilante group; take part in the activity of a political party vigilante group; or act as a member of a political party vigilante group 'commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a term of imprisonment of not less than five years and not more than fifteen years'.

A person who knowingly or having reason to believe that another person is a member of a political party vigilante group or participates in the activity of a political party vigilante group, shall not aid, conceal or harbor that other person, with the purpose of enabling the person to avoid lawful arrest. Anyone who contravenes this commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a term of imprisonment of not less than five years and not more than fifteen years.

Further, anyone found guilty of directly or indirectly to fund or have funded or facilitate the organization, operation or activity of a political party vigilante group commits an offence and is

liable on summary conviction to a term of imprisonment of not less than five years and not more than fifteen years [51].

### 3.4 The Law, the Reality and the Future

The position of this writer is that the Vigilantism and Related Offense Law adds nothing new to Ghana's criminal laws. In other words, if the criminal laws are allowed to work without political interference, there would be no need for another law. The new law does not under the current tensed political atmosphere take away the fact that the need of vigilantism has been planted and may explode in the future. After more than six months since the passage of the Vigilantism law in Ghana, there is no record of any vigilante group leader who has reported to the minister the disbandment of his/her groups. The politicians do not want to bite the finger that feeds them because they are fully aware that they will be hungry one day.

Vigilante groups' activities in Ghana take the form of criminality. Both the perpetrators and their hidden sponsors (political parties) have an economic goal. Whereas rationality may explain the parties desire to keep these groups, relative deprivation has always been the dominant motivating factor behind the actions of ruling party vigilantism. Like any other criminality, no law has been able to prevent it. As such, it will be preposterous to assume that vigilantism will die naturally with the passage of a law. Besides, Ghana's problem has never been laws. This is partly because 'vigilantism' and 'criminality' are often networked into each other via links of

various kinds, leading to constellations in which 'the politics of protection and the violence of criminality are closely intertwined' [3,18]. The main challenge is that ruling parties have demonstrated beyond doubt their inability to enforce the law when it has to do their own. For instance, when the Asokwa District Court in the Kumasi metropolis convicted 13 members of the pro-NPP (ruling party) vigilante group (*the Delta forces*), in 2017, for conspiracy and rioting and fined them GHS1,800 each, known party executives and appointees paid the fines after defending them in both the law court and court of public opinion. The 13 vigilante group members were arrested after they stormed the newly appointed Ashanti Regional Security Coordinator George Adjei, assaulted him in the process and vandalized his office [52,53].

The law on Vigilantism and Related Offense has been passed and assented to by the present. That notwithstanding, the Ghana Centre for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), months later, uncovered an active network of vigilante groups affiliated to the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) and opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC) aggressively establishing bases in communities in parts of the country despite a ban on their activities. This was contained in CDD-Ghana's latest Afrobarometer report, which was commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). It noted that the intimidation of opposition political parties and the violations of electoral laws have facilitated the swift establishment of these community-based vigilante groups [53,54].

List of Political Party Vigilante groups operating in sampled communities in Ghana after passage of the Vigilante and Related Offenses Law.

<b>Name of Group</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>
Burma Camp	Yendi	NPP
Bolga BullDogs	Bolgatanga	NPP
Dazota (Don't fear)	Bolgatanga	NPP
Invincible Forces	Bolgatanga, Asawase	NPP
The Hawks	Bolgatanga, Asawase	NDC
Aluta Boys	Bolgatanga	NDC
No weapon (Members have fled town since NPP came to power in 2017)	Sankore	NDC
Anointing's Boys	Sankore	NPP

Source: CDD-Ghana, 2019

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Conflicts arise out of tensions between the principles of sovereignty, empirical statehood and citizens' self-determination. More particularly, they concern the conditions, modes and means of the legitimate exercise of power.

It is untrue that the Ghanaian is peaceful by nature and hence will cooperate, at all times, in the name of peace in the midst of unprovoked. This fits into the general assertion that, it is not true that man by nature is peaceful, but society corrupts and makes him warlike. The stark reality from evolutionary history "shows that men have genetically transmitted propensities for aggression" of all forms as argued by Shaw and Wong [47]. However, these propensities can be ameliorated when case specific conditions of peace are met, but when these conditions are unmet man's innate biological propensities for war will break out [47]. Just like the Cuban missile case there is always the possibility that a crisis will arise, when one side calls the other side's bluff at a moment when the other side believes it cannot allow that to happen. This is because human reason is a critical function of the brain and that unconscious subcortical function are not normally under "rational" control. Konrad Lorenz has demonstrated with socio-biological, ethological and anthropological evidence in support of their claim that species ancestral to Homo sapiens have since creation been prone to violence and that "peaceful primitive" societies have been exceedingly rare [47]. This narrative, in the opinion of this author is applicable in Ghana.

According to Paul Shaw and Yuwa Wong, peace comprises only eight per cent of the entire recorded history of mankind. They note that over the last 5600 years, there have been 14 500 wars worldwide [47]. As such, only 10 of 185 generations have known uninterrupted peace. This means mankind has successfully achieved only 268 years without war in the past 34 centuries. These approximations leave little doubt that we are a warlike species. It is the same conclusion Plato drew from the Peloponnesian War, when he asserted that man is warlike and that states must be organized for war to survive [47].

In Ghana, evidence of intolerance and hostility toward members of out-groups – political or ethnic – buttresses the genetic base of the Ghanaian. The seeds of warfare are in our genes

– but not hopelessly so. This is not a case of biological determinism. In Ghana there is still the possibility to ameliorate the peoples' propensities for warfare. This is possible through the fair application of the law because there is always a limit to which opposition parties can tolerate the oppression from the ruling party. Denial of the potential danger, if this canker is not nipped in the bud, is not the solution.

Political scientists argue that democracy, constitutionalism and civic education could weaken man's propensity for violence and eventually eradicate it. Unfortunately, election related violence in Ghana's neighboring countries such as Cote D'Ivoire and Burkina Faso show that, people who engage in violence are like any others until they get the stage where they feel they can no longer entertain or contain the situation. The fact is that if conditions of war are present in any society the likelihood is that war will break out and no country in Africa can confidently claim to be out of this possibility.

The seed has been sowed, a law has been passed but implementation has been difficult to the extent that the National Peace Council had to intervene with a Code of Conduct on how to practically eradicate political vigilantism in Ghana. The Code too, suffered a major setback when the biggest opposition party refused to sign the document on grounds that out of the 22 recommendations, only four relate to political parties. The other 18 belong to government, National Commission on Civic Education (NCCE), Civil Service Organizations, Electoral Commission (EC) and the Judicial Service. The NDC representative Mr. Alex Segbefia remarked: "none of these are signatories to the document we are going to sign. We cannot be seen to be signing a document for which other parties who are playing a part do not sign because then, we cannot effectively monitor it or be in the position with ensuring that we are signing will be effective" [54].

Ghana can avoid a situation where political parties' vigilante groups will mar the beauty of the sustained electoral democracy through demonstrable commitment by the two leading political parties, fairness in the arrest, prosecution, conviction and high profile commentaries on actions by vigilante groups. Anything short of this leaves the country in a volatile state where the seed of vigilantism showed and being domesticated will mature and cause unexpected trouble.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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