

Review Article

‘Multiparty’ Democracy in Ghana a Blessing or a Curse: The Case of the Fourth Republic

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Abstract

Since the inception of the Fourth Republic in 1993, Ghana has emerged as one of Africa's most stable democracies, renowned for its peaceful political transitions and equitable elections. Central to this stability is its multiparty system, which facilitates the participation of diverse political actors and ideologies in the political process. This study critically evaluates whether Ghana's multiparty democracy has been advantageous or detrimental over the past three decades, with a focus on its impact on political stability, governance, citizen engagement, and national development. The literature on the issues, suggest that the multiparty system has positively influenced Ghana's democratic trajectory. Firstly, it has reinforced constitutional rule and terminated the military interventions that characterized the pre-1992 era, with regular elections and peaceful transfers of power enhancing political legitimacy and international reputation. Secondly, the environment fosters public participation, media plurality, and a robust civil society, resulting in high voter turnout and vibrant political discourse. Thirdly, competition among parties drives the implementation of developmental policies, improving social services, infrastructure, and education to attract voters. However, challenges threaten the long-term sustainability of Ghanaian democracy. The dominance of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) has marginalized smaller parties, reduced ideological diversity, and led to polarized discourse, even affecting the judiciary. This polarization fosters corruption and vote buying and undermines democratic integrity. Frequent policy reversals undermine institutional efficiency and hinder economic transformation and equitable development, raising doubts about whether democracy meets citizens' needs or serves partisan interests. This study typically uses *a review approach* as a methodological *system* to arrive at a conclusion. The study concludes that Ghana's multiparty democracy presents both advantages and challenges. Although it has bolstered political stability and democratic practices, systemic flaws persist, impacting effective governance. It posits that the future of Ghana's democracy hinges on reforms to depoliticize state institutions, strengthen internal party democracy, improve civic education, regulate campaign financing, and promote inclusive governance, thereby transforming multiparty democracy into a genuine driver of national progress.

Keywords

Fourth Republic, Multiparty System, Stable Democracy, Election, Governance

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1. Introduction

The primary aim of this study is to rigorously evaluate whether Ghana's multiparty democratic system in the Fourth Republic authentically represents the interests of broader society or predominantly serves the political elite. This evaluation involves analyzing whether political stability and competitive elections have fostered an inclusive and participatory democracy or whether elite dominance, socioeconomic disparities, and limited intra-party democracy hinder genuine representation. During the Fourth Republic, Ghana established a multiparty democratic system that resulted in political stability and competitive elections. Nevertheless, the nation continues to face challenges, such as elite dominance, socioeconomic inequalities, and a lack of inclusivity within political parties. These issues raise questions regarding whether the system truly represents the broader interests of Ghanaian society or primarily benefits the political elite in Ghana.

Huntington [1] noted that since 1974, a wave of democratization has spread globally, leading to the establishment of various multiparty political systems. Over the past decade, there has been a notable increase in the number and proportion of multiparty democracies, particularly in Africa and the world. By 2001, the number of nations conducting competitive elections and meeting basic standards of freedom and fairness reached a record high, with 122 out of 192 countries (or 63 percent) classified as 'electoral democracies' Freedom House, [2]. Currently, more governments are being elected through free and fair elections. In democratic countries, political parties play a pivotal role as voluntary and informal social groups where individuals share and develop ideas, values, and attitudes to achieve political power through democratic means. Political parties, as instruments of collective action, are formed by the political elite to manage government resources, and agents to implement an ideology or political agenda for the common good.

A 'free and fair' election is defined as an open and competitive race for political office, free from significant electoral violence, while 'fair' generally denotes a level playing field, equal participation rights, and acceptance of results by all parties. However, the interpretation of these terms varies significantly, and a universally accepted definition of a 'free and fair' election remains elusive despite some efforts. [3] Ghana is often regarded as stable and peaceful despite numerous conflicts, many of which are violent and threaten democracy. As Akwetey highlighted, the 2008 presidential and parliamentary elections in Ghana exposed a detrimental political culture that was linked to the winner-take-all electoral system. Akwetey further noted that instead of promoting national unity, elections exacerbate latent ethnic and chieftaincy conflicts and create divisions that undermine the democratic principle of consensus in diversity. [4].

Elections should typically be celebrations for citizens, as they provide opportunities for reflection and decision-making that shape a country's socio-political and economic future.

However, in Ghana, elections are increasingly becoming periods of significant uncertainty, with the governing elite anxious about the outcomes because of the stark contrast between winning and losing elections. [5] National responses to conflicts have been largely reactive, with governments maintaining peacekeeping forces in conflict-affected communities without resolving underlying issues. At the national level, inter and intra-group conflicts have persisted without an effective mechanism for prompt resolution. Nonetheless, it is widely acknowledged that the electorate's ability to participate freely in elections is heavily influenced by security conditions before, during, and after elections. Similarly, political parties' ability to conduct campaigns independently, freely, and effectively depends on secure and peaceful conditions throughout the electoral process.

In a secure environment, election management bodies can effectively prepare, oversee, conduct, and monitor elections without any limitations. Such a calm electoral setting allows women, people with disabilities, and other marginalised groups to fully participate in the electoral process. It also supports the unrestricted movement of electoral observers, media representatives, and civil society organisations, which are crucial for activities such as observation, reporting, and voter education. (UNDP Development Programme Tanzania, http://www.tz.undp.org/ESP/Peaceful_Elections.asp) The authors of Ghana's Political Parties Code of Conduct 2012 highlighted in the Preamble: "The foundation of a flourishing democracy lies in peace, stability, law and order, and adherence by all stakeholders to clearly defined electoral laws and codes." [6]

To foster a peaceful environment that supports national development, the National Peace Council was established in Act [7] to create and strengthen mechanisms to prevent, manage, and resolve conflicts, with the goal of achieving lasting peace in the country. This involves creating various platforms for dialogue, negotiations, and consensus-building at known conflict sites across the nation. According to the United Nations Human Rights Standards on elections, three fundamental rights are involved in every election: the right to participate the government, the right to vote and be elected, and the right to equal access to information. The extent to which these rights are respected within a political system depends on the electorate's awareness and the transparent organization of electoral processes leading up to Election Day in a peaceful environment.

In Ghana, the infringement of citizens' rights related to elections is primarily attributed to a lack of public awareness and communication restricted access to electoral rules and regulations the unacceptable behavior of political parties and politicians who use unconventional methods to win at any cost and the lack of accessible institutions for individuals to file complaints before, during, and after elections. This overlooked is-

sue consistently results in increased tension during the election years. Research shows that electoral violence in Africa affects between 19 and 25 percent of elections within any given timeframe. [8] In many countries where electoral violence or tension is a concern, it often recurs, potentially leading to a negative view of democratization. The frequent occurrence of electoral violence suggests that underlying grievances or structural issues may be linked to elections and contribute to violence, often started with rejection of election results. This study explores the conditions necessary for creating a peaceful environment that is essential for peaceful elections. Our goal in this presentation is to support the pursuit of peace in Ghana, particularly before, during, and after the upcoming elections. We address this issue by examining the role of various participants in the electoral process. We assert that a peaceful election is shaped by factors such as impartial oversight of the electoral process, vigilant security provided by professional and neutral agencies, a mature political culture, prompt resolution of electoral disputes, objective and effective media, and an engaged civil society and democratic government.

The roles of the Electoral Commission (E. C), political parties, judiciary, security agencies, citizenry, media (often referred to as the fourth state), and other statutory bodies established to promote civic education and a peaceful environment are crucial in ensuring peaceful election. These entities are considered stakeholders because they are entrusted with responsibilities that collectively impact the smooth and peaceful election conduct. Stakeholders are individuals or institutions whose actions or inactions, whether through omission or commission, can significantly affect elections success. Before discussing the role of these stakeholders in fostering a peaceful environment, which is essential for peaceful elections, it is important to examine the issues that lead to electoral tension and violence in the country.

2. Conceptual Issues

2.1. Issues That Precipitate Electoral Tensions in Ghana

The increasingly hyper-aggressive, winner-take-all nature of the Ghanaian electoral system, specifically the first-past-the-post mechanism, exerts significant pressure on the electoral framework, particularly on the Electoral Commission (EC), which has become emblematic of the nation's successful democratic transition. To address the challenges posed by this winner-take-all approach, some have advocated the adoption of proportional or semi-proportional representation systems in their various forms. This discussion focuses on political parties representation in proportion to their share of popular votes. Currently, Ghana is divided into 275 single-member constituencies, each electing one Member of Parliament (M. P.). Voters cast their ballots for a single candidate, and the candidate

with the highest number of votes, whether a majority or largest minority, is declared the winner. This first-past-the-post system does not require candidates to secure at least 50 percent of votes, resulting in numerous Members of Parliament (M. P. s) being elected with minority support. Consequently, Ghana's government can be elected with minority votes cast. Under this system, it is possible for a party to receive the highest aggregate vote nationwide, yet it fails to secure any parliamentary seats. The Liberal Party's situation in the United Kingdom serves as an illustrative example, as noted by the political scientist T. Brennan.

"Between struggling for independence, the Liberal Party experienced a more than twofold increase in its share of the vote; however, the number of seats obtained remained constant. In contrast, the second part of the four republic election saw a 25 percent reduction in the Liberal vote, yet the number of seats increased by over 33 percent. In second republic, the party garnered 7.4 percent of the votes cast, leading to a decrease in the number of seats held from 12 to 6. [9]"

The 'First Past the Post' electoral system is closely associated with the phenomenon of the so-called wasted vote. In this system, a candidate is elected by securing only one more vote than the closest competitor. Consequently, all other votes are considered surplus votes. A candidate may win by a substantial margin, such as 20,000 votes, over their nearest rival, rendering an approximately 19,999 votes surplus in terms the votes necessary votes for election. Despite the wide margin of victory, the party represented by such a candidate receives no additional credit in parliamentary seats. While the system adheres to the principle of 'one eligible individual - one vote,' it fails to uphold 'one vote - one value.' This perceived inequity in the 'First Past the Post' system necessitates the exploration of alternative voting systems that offer parliamentary representation more directly proportional to the votes a party receives. I contend that serious consideration of a voting system that facilitates proportional representation could significantly contribute to fostering a peaceful electoral environment in a nation that is diverse as ours. In this context, I align with Bernard Crick's observation: "Politics ... can be simply defined as the activity by which differing interests within a given unit of rule are conciliated by giving them a share in power in proportion to their importance to the welfare and survival of the whole community." [10] Crick's definition of politics has faced criticism for its limitation to liberal democratic societies. Without assuming Crick's definition as definitive, it is useful to define a political system as one in which "the members of society give expression to their interests and receive satisfaction in a way that ensures that, in the long term, no one interest gains satisfaction to the exclusion of any other; all must get something sometimes if the system is to survive and prosper." [11] The preference for proportional representation over the first-past-the-post system is linked to the need for equitable representation of various groups, particularly ethnic groups and interests, in contexts where proportional representation

may achieve a balanced legislative membership among different parties.

Closely related to the electoral system, 'First past the post' is the existence of what has been described as 'wasted' vote. Under the 'the first past the Post' system a candidate needs only one more vote than his nearest opponent to be elected. All the rest of the votes are in that sense 'surpluses'. A candidate may win by a vast margin of 20,000 or more votes compared to his nearest opponent. About 19,999 or more votes in this sense are surplus with respect to required votes to be elected in that the party represented by such a candidate with a wide margin of winning votes is given no credit in terms of parliamentary seats. The system allows for 'one eligible individual - one vote' but does not allow for 'one vote - one value'. It is for this seeming injustice of the 'First past the Post' system that there is a need to consider other systems of voting, which will give parliamentary representation more directly proportionate to the votes obtained by a particular party.

In my view a serious consideration of a voting system that allows for proportionate representation might go a long way to create a peaceful electoral environment for a peaceful electoral process in a country like ours which is hardly homogeneous. In this sense I share the view of Bernard Crick who has observed that as follows: Politics ... can be simply defined as the activity by which differing interests within a given unit of rule are conciliated by given them a share in power in proportion to their importance to the welfare and the survival of the whole community. To complete the formal definition, a political system is a type of government in which politics proves successful in ensuring reasonable stability and order. [12]

Crick's definition of politics has been criticised that it limits the word 'politics to liberal democracy societies. Without presuming that Crick offers a definitive definition of the word politics, one finds it useful for the purpose of this presentation to define a political system in terms of a system in which "the members of society give expression to their interests and receive satisfaction in a way that ensures that, in the long term, no one interest gains satisfaction to the exclusion of any other; all must get something sometimes if the system is to survive and prosper." [13]

Another factor contributing to political disaffection, which may escalate into violence, is the apparent concentration of wealth among a select group of politicians and their partisan supporters (clients), resulting in the alienation of a majority of citizens. [14] It is evident that in this country, whenever there is a change in government, a significant number of individuals lose employment. This issue extends beyond 'political appointees' to include professionals whose roles in the public sector are determined by their expertise. The practice of appointing supporters of victorious parties to positions regardless of their professional qualifications, fosters tension within the political sphere. In my opinion, a peaceful political environment necessitates an independent public sector that remains free from politicization. It is essential to recognize that an independent public sector contributes to the political and administrative

stability of the nation.

2.2. Issues on Safe Seat

One significant source of tension within the political landscape is the presence of 'safe seat' constituencies. These constituencies are characterized by a high concentration of party supporters, ensuring that the candidate who secures the nomination from the dominant party is almost guaranteed to win the election and become the parliamentary representative. It is evident that party support often stems from enduring loyalty rather than a critical evaluation of the party's policies or qualification of the candidates. Indeed, an individual's vote for a party does not necessarily indicate an endorsement or understanding of its policies. Elections are primarily tests between parties rather than individual candidates. In British politics, it is commonly stated that "no candidate is worth more than 500 votes," underscoring the notion that parliamentary elections are contests between parties, not personalities. A similar sentiment exists in Ghana, where it is humorously noted that voters prioritize parties over individual candidates, ensuring victory for the party's candidate in a safe seat regardless of their identity.

This dynamic fosters both inter-party and intra-party rivalries. The acrimony that emerges during primaries, particularly in constituencies deemed 'safe seats,' highlights this issue. At the core of these intense intra-party rivalries is the 'winner-take-all' nature of the electoral system. Another source of tension during election years is the involvement of politicians in chieftaincy disputes, which often exacerbates these conflicts. Many contenders of chieftaincy positions, who may not otherwise qualify, align themselves with political parties to gain strength and support. This behavior by politicians and the candidates themselves generates significant tensions within communities, where even minor incidents can threaten national peace.

Northern Ghana, often perceived as a region of conflict, provides political parties with an incentive to mobilize support along ethnic lines, leading to clashes between party supporters. The resolution of these conflicts tends to be particularistic, benefiting certain claimants while failing to address broader issues such as endemic poverty, illiteracy, and ignorance. Overt support from public servants, including national security personnel, for the incumbent government during electoral processes is a major concern. This perceived bias provides losing parties with grounds to claim an 'uneven electoral field,' challenging the notion of 'free, fair, and transparent' elections.

The emergence of 'machos' represents a novel phenomenon introduced into the electoral landscape through political figures. Despite the enactment of the 2019 Act of Parliament (Act 919) aimed at addressing this concern, the reluctance of security personnel to prosecute such behavior due to fears of job loss has exacerbated criminal activities, resulting in increased fatalities during elections. This situation enables 'macho men' to disrupt the electoral process through various illicit means,

favoring specific politicians or political parties. The prevalence of this phenomenon is increasing and poses a significant risk of future violence. Regrettably, that in recent elections, their influence extended to coercing electoral officers to alter vote counts under duress for their advantage. Although evidence indicates that individuals responsible for non-violent actions have been prosecuted as deterrents for future elections, these incidents predominantly occur in rural areas, districts, and swing constituencies, where the presence of security at polling stations fails to deter such uncivilized behavior. The actions of these 'macho men' contravene legal standards and the values of orderly societies such as Ghana, necessitating prompt resolution of the issue.

3. Peaceful Environment

The fundamental requirement for the possibility of conducting peaceful elections is the establishment of a political system characterized by equity, freedom, fairness, stability, law and order, a level playing field, professional and impartial security agencies, and adherence to and compliance with well-defined electoral laws and codes by all stakeholders. In the subsequent analysis, the roles of stakeholders, defined as the government—comprising its three branches, the Executive, the Legislature, and the Judiciary—the Electoral Commission, Political Parties, Security Agencies, media, electorate, and others, will be examined.

3.1. The Executive Arm of Government and Peaceful Elections

For the purposes of this analysis, the executive arm of the government consists of the President, a group of ministers, and other office holders who collectively form the political component of the executive. In Ghana, "the President. [takes] precedence over all other persons." (Article 57 (2) of The Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, [15]. Article 58 (1) of the Constitution explicitly states that "The executive authority of Ghana shall vest in the President and shall be exercised in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution." The executive authority vested in the President encompasses "the execution and maintenance of the Constitution and all laws made under or continued in force by [the] Constitution." This executive power of the President "may be exercised by him either directly or through officers subordinate to him" (58, 3). Article 58 (4) of the Constitution stipulates: "Except as otherwise provided in this Constitution or by law not inconsistent with this Constitution, all executive acts of Government shall be expressed to be taken in the name of the President."

Thus, the government bears the responsibility of ensuring, among other things, a peaceful environment for elections in the country. The provision of a level playing field, security, and logistics necessary for the promotion of free and fair elections in the country is the responsibility of the president, here understood as the Chief Executive Officer of corporate Ghana.

In my view, this necessitates even-handedness on the part of the president regarding the constitutional governance of the nation. The President must embody the role of 'the father of the nation.' This assertion is made because, as both the President of the nation and the leader and flag bearer of his political Party, the President has the formidable responsibility, an almost insurmountable task, to maintain political impartiality concerning the corporate affairs of Ghana, bearing in mind that "the Sovereignty of Ghana resides in the people of Ghana in whose name and for whose welfare the powers of government are to be exercised in the manner and within the limits laid down in [Ghana's] Constitution," which is also "the supreme law of Ghana." (Art. 1, 1 & 2).

3.2. The Role of the Legislature

The legislature is constitutionally mandated to enact laws within the parameters established by the constitution to facilitate national governance. Members of Parliament, who constitute the legislature, are representatives of various constituencies elected either through Political Parties or as Independent members. It is crucial to recognize that parliamentarians serve as representatives of the nation in its entirety. Despite the partisan nature of the legislature, their collective responsibility is to the nation as a whole rather than to their respective Political Parties. It is incumbent upon parliamentarians to prioritize the welfare of the nation over partisan interests. This perspective raises significant issues concerning Article 78(1) of the 1992 Constitution, which stipulates: "Ministers of State shall be appointed by the President with the prior approval of Parliament from among members of Parliament or persons qualified to be elected as members of Parliament, except that the majority of Ministers of State shall be appointed from among members of Parliament."

In my opinion, this constitutional article, regardless of its well-intentioned nature, presents a challenge for parliamentary independence and objectivity. This article, undoubtedly, undermines the checks and balances that the three branches of government are intended to provide one another in the context of balanced national governance. While Ministers of State in Parliament may be inclined to align with the executive, given their membership in the Executive, Parliamentarians from the ruling party seeking ministerial positions may be compelled to compromise parliamentary objectivity and independence, which are essential for effective governance.

A survey of emerging issues from community and regional consultations regarding the 1992 Constitution Review corroborates this position. Approximately 63% of respondents concurred with the notion that the constitution confers excessive power to the president. Furthermore, 88% favored the separation of executive and legislative responsibilities, based on the conviction that the current system does not provide an adequate mechanism for holding the government accountable through parliament. Additionally, 66% agreed that the present

system enables the president to utilize the power of appointment to manipulate and control the parliament. Nearly 70% of those who supported the separation of executive and legislative powers held the view that the president could exploit the power of appointment to manipulate and control the parliament. Approximately 76% of those interviewed preferred an amendment to Article 78(1), which mandates the president to appoint the majority of ministers from the Parliament (Public Opinion: 8).

We submit that an independent and objective legislature plays a crucial role in fostering a peaceful electoral environment conducive to peaceful elections. The partisan manner in which CI 78, which seeks to create 45 additional constituencies, has been addressed, should be a matter of serious concern for all, with respect to parliamentary independence and objectivity in addressing issues of national interest.

3.3. The Role of the Law Enforcement and Security Agencies

It has been observed that the electorate's ability to freely participate in elections is significantly contingent upon the security and peaceful conditions prevailing before, during, and after the electoral process. Similarly, political parties' capacity to conduct their campaigns without obstruction or disruption, as well as the overall fairness of the electoral process, is heavily reliant on secure and peaceful conditions throughout the electoral period. Concerns arise regarding whether the nation's security agencies can effectively address any security challenges that may emerge before and after elections. The heightened political climate during campaign seasons introduces numerous potential security risks, underscoring the critical importance of law enforcement. It is incumbent on the incumbent government to enhance the capacity of law enforcement agencies to ensure a peaceful environment conducive to free and fair elections.

A law enforcement agency capable of maintaining law and order must not only be politically neutral, professional, and efficient but must also be perceived as such. In essence, political neutrality, professionalism, and efficiency are aspects of both perception and practice. It is imperative to acknowledge that the effectiveness of law enforcement and security agencies in maintaining law and order is predicated on the confidence that citizens have in them. Any actions, whether by commission or omission, that undermines public confidence in law enforcement agencies should be regarded as a threat to national security.

This analysis clearly indicates that the effectiveness of law enforcement and security agencies in maintaining law and order is contingent upon the following factors: A) The capacity and resourcefulness of enforcement agents to uphold law and order, facilitated by the government through the provision of essential resources, including human resources, capacity-building programs, and state-of-the-art equipment, to engage

in proactive security measures. B) Professionalism, characterized by fairness and objectivity in the service delivery of law enforcement and security agents. A delicate balance exists between loyalty to the state and political parties in power. The Chairman of the Police Council is the Vice-President of the Republic of Ghana (Article. 201, a). Article 202 (1) of the Constitution stipulates that, "The Inspector-General of Police shall be appointed by the President acting in consultation with the Council of State." Article 202 (3) further states, "Subject to the provisions of this Constitution, the power to appoint persons to hold or to act in an office in the Police Service shall vest in the President, acting in accordance with the advice of the Police Council." It is noteworthy that the president appoints the majority of the members of the Police Council, indeed, the authority to appoint key officers of the Police Service and its Council resides with the president. This situation presents the potential risk encapsulated in the adage, "He who pays the piper calls the tune." The inclination and pressure of law enforcement and security agencies to align with the current government's agenda cannot be underestimated. In my opinion, law enforcement and security agencies would reach maturity if they could eschew political partisanship to fulfil their duties to the state. They should be able to distinguish clearly between the state and the governing political party. Law enforcement agencies must uphold constitutional independence and loyalty to the state when executing their responsibilities. Public acceptance of and confidence in law enforcement agencies will depend on their unequivocal demonstration of political neutrality, objectivity, and professionalism in the performance of their duties. Nevertheless, it is incumbent upon the government in power, political parties, citizenry, and the law enforcement agents themselves to refrain from any actions, whether by commission or omission, that might undermine public confidence in these institutions. It is equally crucial for citizens to have confidence in the existing institutions that support multiparty democracy the nation has chosen. In my view, essential institutions include the Electoral Commission, the Judiciary, and, as previously mentioned, security agencies, particularly the police service.

3.4. The Electoral Management Body and Its Constitutional Mandate

Article 45 of the Constitution of the Republic of Ghana explicitly outlines the responsibilities of the Electoral Commission as follows: "(a) to compile the register of voters and revise it during such periods as may be determined by law; (b) demarcate electoral boundaries for both national and local government elections; (c) to conduct and supervise all public elections and referenda; (d) to undertake programs for the expansion of the registration of voters; and (f) to perform such other functions as may be prescribed by law." Additionally, Article 46 stipulates: "Except as provided in this Constitution or in any other law not inconsistent with this Constitution, in the performance of its functions, the Electoral Commission

shall not be subject to the direction or control of any person or authority.”

Consequently, the constitutional mandate of the Electoral Commission is to oversee all electoral matters in the nation. As an independent constitutional entity, the Electoral Commission is tasked with conducting elections—Presidential, Parliamentary, and local governments—and this mandate is indisputable for any individual or party committed to the rule of law. Nevertheless, the Electoral Commission, akin to all statutory bodies, must operate and be perceived as operating with fairness and reasonableness to fulfil its constitutional duties. Undoubtedly, Article 23 of the Constitution applies to the Electoral Commission. As the Commission executes its Constitutional responsibilities impartially, reasonably, and without bias, it must garner the trust of the citizenry’s trust.

As previously noted, “the roots of a thriving democracy are to be found in peace, stability, law and order, as well as compliance by all stakeholders with well-defined electoral laws and codes. Equally vital are the role of credible independent umpire and equality of political opportunities for all political parties facilitated by the existence of a level playing field to promote free, fair and credible elections and the acceptance of results.” [16]

The Electoral Commission, as the constitutionally designated body to administer free and fair elections in the country, must be granted autonomy to execute constitutional obligations. In performing its essential electoral functions, the Electoral Commission must uphold the integrity of the state, which is crucial for the nation’s democratic development and governance. Therefore, in determining the electoral boundaries for both national and local government elections, which are among the Commission’s constitutional roles, the Commission must avoid any suspicion of gerrymandering, an act of manipulating voting districts to confer an unfair advantage to a particular party or parties. The Electoral Commission must execute its constitutional functions with fairness, transparency, and objectivity to ensure a credible and peaceful electoral environment. Credible elections are vital for a nation’s democratic governance of a nation and provide the foundation for a peaceful post-election period.

3.5. The Judiciary and Its Constitutional Mandate

In the Introduction to the Manual on Election Adjudication in Ghana (Second Edition), the Judicial Service of Ghana asserts: “For any election to be credible, it must be free, fair and transparent. For an election to be fair, the electoral system must provide credible, transparent, impartial and expeditious mechanism for the adjudication of disputes.” [17] In Ghana, the judiciary holds the constitutional mandate to adjudicate all electoral disputes, as stipulated in Articles 64(1), (2), and (3) concerning presidential elections and Article 99 of the [18] Constitution regarding Parliamentary Elections.

Prompt and credible resolution of electoral disputes is essential for fostering a peaceful electoral environment. Consequently, it is imperative for the judicial services to implement measures that expeditiously address election disputes. As the Service aptly notes, “By their very nature, the conduct of elections under the principle of Universal Adult Suffrage, in a pluralist political party system such as we have adopted in Ghana, imposes enormous responsibilities on the institutions of State constitutionally mandated to adjudicate electoral disputes that arise from the conduct of general elections.” [19] It is encouraging to observe that the Judicial Service, through its Manual on Election Adjudication in Ghana, publicly disclosed the measures it instituted to address election disputes. However, it is crucial for political parties and the general public to be informed of these measures. Therefore, it would be prudent for the Judicial Service to undertake efforts to educate stakeholders on these measures intended to ensure justice in the electoral system if it is not already doing so.

Justice and peace are intrinsically linked to each other. Indeed, a fair and credible dispensation of justice is a prerequisite for sustainable peace. For this reason, the independence and political neutrality of the judiciary in the administration of justice must be upheld consistently. A majority of Ghanaians (64%), surveyed by the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) to inform the review process of the National Constitution, expressed the view that imposing an upper limit on the number of judges appointed to the Supreme Court “would contribute positively to a fair and credible dispensation of justice.” (Public Opinion: 9). This suggests that justice must be fair, accessible and expeditious. It has been observed that “the general mistrust of the legal system by Ghanaians stems from its history of bribes, cronyism, unfair prosecution, crooked judgments, bought juries, prejudiced trials, and dehumanizing change.” [20]

3.6. The Media as the Fourth Estate

The term ‘the media’ serves as an abbreviation for ‘the media of mass communication,’ encompassing television, radio, and newspapers. The concept is relatively modern. While mass-circulation newspapers emerged in the latter half of the nineteenth century, radio broadcasting to the general public commenced [21] and television gained prominence as a mass medium in the Ghanaian space [22]. The profound impact of these new media platforms on public attitudes and behavior, as well as their influence on political and social affairs, has rendered them extraordinarily powerful instruments of persuasion within a relatively brief period. Historically, coups d’état primarily targeted royal or presidential palaces; however, in contemporary times, they often focussed on the capital’s radio or television stations. Control over the media is often equated with control over the state itself, underscoring its media’s pivotal role in the socio-political process.

The media raises several ethical issues, which can be categorized under the following three main headings: the issue of

power media-saturated society the issue of truth.

4. The Issue of Power

Due to the nearly universal accessibility of electronic media, if not print media, those who control them wield a substantial influence in shaping public opinion. In totalitarian states, this has resulted in political indoctrinations. In liberal democracies, the media has tended to promote the idea of the cultural establishment or the commercial interests of proprietors. It is posited that television, in particular, has contributed to fostering a permissive attitude toward sexual behavior in society. Conversely, some argue that broadcasting merely reflects the evolving views and values of the society. The media acts as mirror, reflecting the shifting attitudes of that society. However, it can be contended that even a reflecting mirror exerts 'influence,' as it repeats and sometimes amplifies what it reflects a phenomenon that appears true of electronic media. The argument is that the influence of electronic media in shaping public opinion cannot be underestimated, raising numerous ethical issues for those who control it particularly concerning Ghana's political process. A study conducted in Ghana revealed that a significant portion of the sampled population believed that they could monitor much of the political arena through media. A typical response from a participant regarding the media and the Ghanaian political process, corroborated by others, was as follows: "Before I leave my house in the morning, I listen to the morning news on the radio even before considering breakfast. On my way to work, I purchase several newspapers to read during breaks at work, and while working, I tune my radio to various stations for engaging discussions on politics. It is important to note that, in matters of significant belief and behavior, individuals appear to exhibit a notable resistance to media influence. While media influence is indeed pervasive and significant, particularly in relatively minor matters, it is not insurmountable. Research indicates that the selection of a specific radio station, television channel, or newspaper may be influenced by the alignment of the communication style and content with the preferences of a particular audience. [23] In essence, individuals' choices regarding mass communication mediums may be shaped by their social and political inclinations.

4.1. The Issue of Truth

In his work "Christ and the Media," Malcolm Muggeridge posited that television cameras are "the repository and emanation of all fraudulence," suggesting that they act as deceptive witnesses, distorting truth by their mere presence. D. B. Winter, in his critique of Muggeridge's rather extreme stance on television, noted: "While this seems an extreme view, there is little doubt that the mass media's tendency to trivialization, sensationalism, and confrontation does tend to oversimplify and distort issues" [24] Winter's perspective aligns with that

of Walter Lippmann, who, in "The Public Philosophy," observed that when complex, distant, and unfamiliar matters are communicated to large audiences, the truth often undergoes significant and sometimes radical distortion. The complex is simplified, the hypothetical becomes dogmatic, and the relative is rendered absolute [25].

4.2. Perception of Media Contribution to the Ghanaian Political Process

The mass media has made substantial positive contributions to the Ghanaian political process, including enhancing the public's understanding of political dynamics and providing more informed insights into democratic governance. Studies by George Asare reveal that a significant portion of the sampled population obtains information on democracy and politics from the media, which they consider to be sufficient to understand current events. Many respondents agreed that it would be challenging to comprehend numerous issues related to democracy and politics with the media. They view the media as an essential tool in the era of Ghana's constitutional governance, aiding the consolidation of democratic principles [26] While the media's positive contributions are undeniable, it is imperative to not overlook the inherent dangers of mass communication, particularly when control is concentrated in the hands of a select few, often affluent and politically biased individuals driven by financial, ethnic, and political interests. This raises a pertinent question posed by Winter: "The media like to see themselves as the guardians of the public conscience. But who guards the guardians?" The centrality of truth and the risks associated with manipulating, oversimplifying, or distorting truth to align with the medium, time constraints, producer's intentions, or station owner's preferences are critical concerns in media ethics. Media personnel, including those who work in and for the media, may encounter ethical dilemmas due to conflicts of interest, potentially compromising their objectivity and ability to report accurately and fairly. Engagement with a news source or pressure from superiors to omit or include certain items undermine objectivity. Despite the media's positive contributions to Ghana's democratic development, some individuals perceive that the media has distorted the concept of democracy in Ghana. According to this perspective, individuals invited to discuss political issues often exhibit partisanship, leading to contentious debates. Newspapers frequently publish articles that malign individuals or groups for their political views with impunity. Furthermore, individuals who comment on newspaper articles online or call into radio stations to discuss political issues often resort to derogatory, unprintable, and insulting language against their opponents, sometimes on live radio and television as well as in newspapers. Such behavior has the potential to incite chaos and must be regulated and sanctioned. [23] A roundtable discussion on the presidential and parliamentary elections criticized some journalists as unprofessional and

some media outlets as politically biased, partisan, and influenced by politicians. Certain media houses were accused of disseminating news based on rumors to incite the public. [24] The use of media, particularly radio, during the Rwandan genocide [25] to incite ethnic violence is now widely recognized, and Ghanaian media practitioners must heed this lesson. While the positive contributions of the media are indisputable, it is crucial to acknowledge the inherent risks associated with mass communication, particularly when control is concentrated in the hands of a select few individuals who are often affluent and politically biased. These individuals may be motivated by financial, ethnic, and political interests. This raises a pertinent question, as articulated by Winter: "The media like to see themselves as the guardians of the public conscience. But who guards the guardians?" The centrality of truth and the potential for its manipulation, oversimplification, or distortion to align with the medium, time constraints, producer's intentions, or station owner's preferences are critical concerns in media ethics. Media professionals may encounter ethical dilemmas related to conflicts of interest, which could compromise their objectivity and their capacity to report accurately and fairly. Engagement with a news source or pressure from superiors to omit or include certain items undermines objectivity. Despite the media's positive role in advancing Ghana's democratic development, some individuals sampled believe that the media have distorted the concept of democracy in Ghana. According to this group, individuals invited to discuss political issues often exhibit partisanship, leading to contentious debate. Newspapers frequently publish articles that malign individuals or groups for their political views with impunity. Furthermore, individuals who post comments on online newspaper articles or call into radio stations to discuss political issues often resort to derogatory, unprintable, and insulting language against their opponents, sometimes on live radio and television as well as in newspapers. Such behavior has the potential to incite chaos, and therefore requires regulation and sanctioning. [26] A roundtable discussion of the presidential and parliamentary elections identified some journalists as unprofessional and some media outlets as politically biased, partisan, and influenced by politicians. Certain media houses were criticized for disseminating news based on rumors to incite the public. [27] The use of media, particularly radio, during the Rwandan genocide to incite ethnic violence is now widely recognized, and Ghanaian media practitioners must learn from this precedent.

4.3. The Role of the Political Parties

Following a prolonged period of political instability characterized by fluctuations between constitutional democratic governance and military regimes, Ghana ultimately embraced a multiparty democratic system. This system permits the participation of multiple political parties in competition for governance, thereby serving the nation through democratic means.

A fundamental aspect of a multiparty democracy is the provision of political choice and alternatives. These concepts necessitate the cultivation of political virtues, such as tolerance, which are informed by political civility and decorum in the presentation of political ideas to attract voters to a particular party.

In the absence of oppressive state intervention, members of a democratic society inevitably endorse a variety of political perspectives. Even within a single party, individuals may hold divergent political views that may conflict with the party's collective stance. This situation underscores the necessity of political tolerance, which manifests as a willingness to coexist with others. This system of tolerance fosters unity within the state, which is defined not by political uniformity but by the diversity of political beliefs and alignments.

In the absence of political civility and decorum, political campaigning can devolve into the use of invectives as well as provocative, derogatory, and insulting attacks on political opponents and parties. The politics of invective or insult can foreshadow political violence, thereby disrupting the peace and stability of the nation. Frequently, upcoming elections and the associated campaigning are met with considerable doubt and apprehension, and the results are often marred by controversy and violence. While the principles of respect for individual rights and freedoms are theoretically endorsed, this endorsement remains largely hypothetical and lacks a tangible implementation.

Although the most apparent intolerance is observed among political parties, it is becoming increasingly challenging to attribute this vice to a specific political faction. Unacceptable levels of intolerance continue to manifest through violent confrontations, insults, vituperations, assaults, and intimidation by hired enforcers among members both within and outside their parties. Recent events in political history, such as the defection of party members to other parties or the formation of new parties or factions within the same party, highlight the lack of peaceful coexistence and the failure to reconcile divergent opinions on specific political issues.

In the context of democratic Ghana, it is essential to uphold the principles of political tolerance, which encompasses the ability to engage in peaceful discourse and exchange opinions without resorting to invectives, political insults, or uncharitable attacks on political adversaries. Intolerance, which stands in opposition to the virtue of tolerance, constrains individuals' perceptions of politics and subsequently influences their political behavior. Tolerance, the cornerstone of a multi-party democracy, is not an inherent human trait; rather, it is a virtue that must be cultivated and developed. The primary agents of socialization—namely, the family, educational institutions, media, and religious communities—play a crucial role in promoting tolerance within our multi-party democracy. The Political Parties Code of [28] is instrumental in its efforts to promote tolerance, civility, and the rule of law within the country's multi-party democratic framework.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, I wish to underscore several potential challenges that threaten the peaceful conduct of the 2024 elections in Ghana: the current strained relationship between the Electoral Commission (EC) and the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC), characterized by mistrust, suspicion, intimidation, and perceived bias; the determination of the NDC to gain power from the New Patriotic Party (NPP) by any means necessary, and the NPP's corresponding resolve to retain power to break the myth of historical eight years team at all costs; the use of indecent or intemperate language during campaigns; the issue of a winner-take-all political system; the apparent institutionalization of "moneycracy"; and the notion of democracy being pursued in a manner that is exclusive or uncompromising. The lack of trust among stakeholders in electoral processes, leading to an 'if not me, then no one else' mindset, poses significant threats to the democratic progress of our fourth republic.

Abbreviations

EC	Electoral Commission
NPP	New Patriotic Party
NDC	National Democratic Party
UNDP	United Nation Development Programmes
IEA	Institute of Economic Affairs
MP	Member of Parliament
MPs	Members of Parliament
CI	Constitutional Instrument

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as potential conflicts of interest.

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