

# One Election, Two Victories: Ghana's 2016 General Elections Revisited

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**Abstract:** This article examines election-related violence that characterizes some electoral processes across Africa. The study thematically focussed on two dominant political parties in Ghana, thus the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) in respect of the December 2016 Presidential election. These two political parties have alternated executive power in Ghana since the birth of the Fourth Republic in January 1993, with Ghana having failed to maintain the status quo immediately after independence from British colonial rule. The claims and counterclaims of victory immediately after polls closed in the December, 2016 Presidential and Parliamentary elections, brought Ghana to the brink of election violence. Both parties' counter-claimed victory, purportedly based on 'results' obtained from their polling agents posted across the various polling stations in all the 275 constituencies. The Electoral Commission (EC), which supervised the general election was surprisingly mute in declaring the winner of the 2016 Presidential election in the midst of these controversies. This paper argues that the vacuum created by the EC per its delay in the declaration of certified Presidential election results after polls had closed, was a blot on Ghana's status as the beacon of democracy and peace in Africa.

**Keywords:** Ballot Rigging, Electoral Processes, Electoral Fraud, Political Violence, Vote Buying

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## 1. Introduction

Democracy has unprecedentedly spread across much of the world. The concept 'democracy', is arguably the most promiscuous terminology in the political science discourse. This is because autocratic and other regimes whose ideology clashes with the ideals or tenets of democracy (i.e., multiparty society, periodic free, fair and transparent electoral competition, accountable governance, free market society, freedom of speech and of assembly, protection of fundamental human rights, respect for the rule of law, etc.) and other notable 'constitutional dictators' or pseudo-democratic states who, by their actions and inactions, are not burdened with the uncertainty and inconvenience of elections; also, purport to be practising democracy in the midst of a non-existent acceptable competitive electoral process. Political parties, whether in government or in opposition, are usually gripped with the fear of political power eluding them before and during elections. In other words, political parties are more risk averse before, during

and the aftermath of electoral competition. Electoral competition is part of the routine body politic and the scion or bedrock of democratic quality. It is a means by which contesting political parties trade in a variety of ideas including other mainstream strategies (i.e., propaganda) to win the 'minds and souls' of the electorate, to vote in their favour to either acquire or maintain executive power. The voting booth, and not the barrel of the gun has become the internationally accepted instrument of political change [1]. Unfortunately, this important democratic gymnastics is to greater extent, mired by election violence in many developing countries across the globe. Some scholars in the domain of political science, view contested elections as the 'primary litmus test for democracy'. This is because, electoral competition is a major determinant of democratic sustenance [2].

In spite of the expectations of peaceful choices of Chief Executives of states, including members of the legislature and other officials at the local and national levels through electoral competition, elections are allegedly tainted with

voter fraud, intimidation and manipulations by competing political parties and incumbent governments to influence the electoral outcome in one way or another, to favour a particular political class and their surrogates. Accordingly, electoral violence characterize and historicize electoral competitions in much of Africa. This is as a result of the widely-held suspicion by opposition political parties of election rigging machinations of incumbent governments, ostensibly aided by some elections management bodies. The level of suspicion has risen so dramatically that there was a serious threat to undermine Ghana's political system as well as the electoral process [3]. Election is narrowly construed in this paper to mean, a method by which citizens are periodically or intermittently given the opportunity to discharge their civic responsibilities by participating in the selection or choice of officials for the executive and legislative branches of government among an array of competing political parties and candidates. Election fraud in this perspective, involves a significant irregularity from the compilation of voter's register to the actual act of voting.

Fabrice Lehoucq (2003), identifies two types of electoral fraud; thus, procedural and ballot frauds. Procedural fraud occurs during elections and include one of the following:

The causes of procedural fraud include but not limited to; polling booths opening late and closing early; failure to advertise the location of a polling station before election day; delaying polling materials; disqualification of competent and competing candidates under mischievous circumstances; violating voting requirements; incomplete voters' register; coercing voters to choose a particular candidate; no census before the compilation of electoral register; expelling or threatening party observers; change of location of polling stations on election day without prior adequate notification to all concerned and their like.

Ballot fraud on the other hand, include but not restricted to the following:

Holding elections outside the official time period; stuffing and theft of ballot boxes with votes; over voting; allowing unqualified persons to vote; preventing eligible voters from casting their votes; substituting votes of one candidate for another candidate; not holding elections at the stipulated time; altering the ballots; intimidating voters; illegally annulling votes; failure to carry out a proper verification of voters identity; illegal removal of ballots; vote tallying conducted by unauthorized persons; election materials opened before election day and date [4].

Some other forms of tainting the electoral process, ranges from questionable compilation of the electoral register; non-disclosure of source of campaign funds; intimidation of voters or citizens before and during the conduct of elections; harassment or muzzling of political opponents; registration of ineligible foreigners and minors among others. This has always been the concern of competing political parties in Ghana. The general elections of December 7, 2016, was markedly different from all the previous elections since 1992. This was on the basis that it was characterized by the disqualification of some Presidential aspirants before the

general elections. The political temperature was high as a result of the 'unfriendly attitude' of the Electoral Commission (EC) of Ghana towards some particular Presidential candidates. The EC was unwavering to pressures from the disqualified Presidential candidates, including appeals from former Presidents of the Republic of Ghana and civil society organizations to the EC to allow time and space for the disqualified Presidential hopefuls, amend their filing papers in lieu of peace. The political temperature was reduced by the ruling of the Supreme Court of Ghana, which directed the EC to give a window of opportunity to the disqualified Presidential candidates, the right to rectify the inherent errors on their nomination forms in order to qualify them to file and contest.

The thrust of this paper therefore, is to explore the actions and inactions of the EC, as well as the claims and counterclaims of victory by the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) in Ghana's election 2016. This article also suggests practical steps geared towards preventing similar threat of electoral violence or stalemate in the 2020 general elections and beyond.

## 2. Method

This section denotes the procedures employed in the collection and interpretation of data for the study. Much of the discussion in this study was based on the results of both pre-election and post-election surveys in the Ghanaian capital of Accra. Data and information was obtained mainly from two main sources. The primary source of information was obtained from voters and party officials of the various political parties. The target population of this study were eligible voters who were found on the streets of the capital city either protesting in support of the New Patriotic Party or the National Democratic Congress. In effect, purposive sampling was adopted to select a total of 130 voters for the pre-election and post-election individual interviews. Besides, twenty (20) party elites were also, randomly selected (comprising ten (10) each from the two main political parties in the capital city) for the study. The participants in this research were mainly young men and women between the ages of 18 and 40. The breakdown of those surveyed in terms of gender composition was 74 male and 36 female.

The main instrument employed to solicit information for this study was through the administration of questionnaires and face-to-face interviews shortly before and after the December 2016 general elections. The purpose was to capture a near-live-pulse of the electorate on the actions and inactions of the EC, party officials as well as supporters of the two political parties' vis-à-vis the claims of victory by the two main parties that nearly resulted in electoral violence. The study area was chosen because, the highly contentious election calls between the two dominant political parties (that almost sent Ghana to the brink of political violence and bloodshed in the just ended election on December 7, 2016), was concentrated in Accra – the capital city of Ghana.

The second source of data for this study was mainly

gleaned from books/monographs, journal articles, reports from newspapers, seminar/working papers, periodicals on electoral competition and electoral violence across Africa. These sources or pieces of information were subjected to scrutiny, analysed, synthesized, described, presented and organized into themes for the purposes of understanding the substance of the information gathered.

Research participants were pre-informed about what the research set out to do – it was purely to inform policy makers and election management bodies to forestall future election-related violence. Consequently, participants were given the option or freewill to either withdraw from the study or continue their participation. Although respondents were on the whole cooperative, some female participants declined in participating mainly due to the fear of attacks from political opponents and name calling. In this perspective, the identity of individual respondents were anonymised to prevent exposure, vilification and violent attack or victimisation from political adversaries and their surrogates.

### 3. Theoretical Perspective on Voting Behaviour

There exist a plethora of models or theories in the domain of social science discourse to undergird this study - voting behaviour and electoral competition. These theories explain why politicians and other party apparatchiks behave the way they do in electoral competition during the process of capturing or maintaining political power. In economics, companies compete in an attempt to establish a household brand in the market sphere in order to gain profits at the expense of other firms (zero-sum game). In politics, political parties compete with the sole aim to capture executive power and govern at the expense of other competing political parties. This competition is however contingent on the choices or preferences of voters'. Two models of voting behaviour, i.e., party-identification and rational choice theories, are particularly important explanatory models in this study.

There is a compelling array of evidence to suggest that individuals, groups, kinships, families and whole societies, vote for a political party based on some affinity rather than being influenced by policy on societal development. The Party-identification model is a psychological and/or emotional attachment people have towards a particular political party and not the candidates vying for executive or legislative power [5-9]. The model argues that electors identify themselves with political parties as inseparable. Accordingly, individuals, whole families and ethnic groups are willing to support and vote for the party in any election regardless of any circumstances. In this regard, "voting ... is a manifestation of partisanship, not a product of calculation influenced by factors such as policies, personalities, campaigning and media coverage" [10]. The family is usually the socialising agent through which loyalty or party identification is formed.

The *party-identification model* is suitable in explaining the patterns of voting behaviour in Ghana. For instance, four administrative regions – Upper East; Upper West; Northern and Volta Regions – have identified themselves with the NDC party and have always voted the party irrespective of individual benefit (s) and/or community benefit and/or development. These administrative Regions have unrepentantly voted for the NDC in all elections since 1992. Another two Regions – Ashanti and Eastern – have always voted the NPP in all elections since 1992.

In recent times however, the two major parties (i.e. the NPP and the NDC) are making serious inroads into each other's strongholds by increasing the popular vote in each general election. This explains to some extent, the general fall or partisan de-alignment in party identification and a decline in habitual voting patterns [10]. Despite the drawback, *party-identification theory* is still relevant in explaining the voting behaviour of electors in Ghana.

The second theory or model employed to put this study in the right perspective is the *Rational Choice Theory*. Rational choice theory has been the theoretical cornerstone of economics for more than a century [11]. Yet, rational choice theory has played a key role in understanding the political behaviour of both politicians and voters. Rational choice model (also known as strategic choice theory), attempts to explain political institutions and public policy by modelling the behaviour of rational actors – be they individuals, political parties or other organizations [12]. The essence of rational choice model is to explain social phenomena by assuming rational choice at the actor's level [13]. Rational choice theory is described as methodological individualistic. In other words, an individual actor will choose an alternative or preference that will yield the ultimate social outcome or maximum utility all things being equal. It employs rational assumptions to explain the behaviour of actors and explain political outcomes by the strategic response of actors in given structural and institutional settings [12]. Rational choice theory has been very crucial in explaining voters' decision to vote the way they do in an election. Politician's leech for political power is the main motivation for which they seek to be elected and re-elected in all elections, while each elector is seeking to have a government whose policies will favour his or her preference (s). Downs (1957), conceptualizes voter choice as a choice for the party that will provide him with the highest utility. Downs refers to this difference as the *party expected differential*. Downs argues that:

If he is rational, he knows that no party will be able to do everything that it says it will do. Hence he cannot simply compare platforms; instead, he must estimate in his own mind what the parties would actually do were they in power ... Therefore the voter must weigh the performance that the opposition party would have produced in period *t* if it had been in power ... As a result, the most important part of the voter's decision is the size of her *current party differential*, i.e., the difference between the utility income he actually received in period *t* and the one he would have received if the opposition had been in power [14].

In this regard, voting is seen as a rational act, in the sense that voters are believed to decide their party preference on the basis of personal interest [10]. In other words, most electors are rational in the choice of a President, members of the Legislature and other state officials at the national and local levels. They are not emotionally or psychologically attached to political parties *per se*. However, their decision to vote a particular candidate or political party is informed by the policy orientation to which they stand to benefit as individuals rather than what benefits the society. In the Ghanaian society or parlance, politicians refer to these strategic electors as “floating voters” - they are the undecided and highly unpredictable voters who can swing to any political party whose policies appear rational and achievable. In Ghana, four administrative Regions (Brong Ahafo; Greater Accra, Central and Western), are said to be *strategic or rational* in their voting behaviours or patterns. These administrative Regions swing at almost every general election from one political party to another. Whenever these four Regions vote for a political party in an election year, that party wins political power, regardless of how the other six administrative Regions (Upper East; Upper West; Northern; Volta; Ashanti and the Eastern) cast their ballot.

The main drawback of rational choice model is that, scholars of the theory narrowly construe rationality in terms of transitivity and consistency of choice. For instance, Mclean and McMillan (2009), are of the view that, an individual is transitive if, given that he or she prefers *A* to *B* and *B* to *C*, then he or she also prefers *A* to *C*. It is consistent if the individual always make the same choice when presented with identical options in identical circumstances [15].

In spite of the above criticisms or drawbacks of these theories or models, the party-identification and rational choice models continue to be significant in an attempt to comprehend voters' behaviour in Ghana. The two major political parties – the NDC and the NPP – usually start their electioneering campaigns in each election year with the unalloyed support from their stratified strongholds. These strongholds of the two main political parties further explain why many other political parties in Ghana, flounder, while the NDC and the NPP flourish in terms of membership, revenue mobilization, electoral victories and alternation of executive power for the past two and a half decades.

#### 4. Democracy, Elections and Society Polarization

This section gives a panoramic overview of democracy and how party formation and elections have divided and polarized the Ghanaian society along ethnic and other social cleavages. These divisions are further exploited by politicians for their individual and collective parochial interest. Democratic electoral processes and systems ... help ensure that government is responsive and accountable to the people [16]. This meta-governance undoubtedly, has triumphed

across much of the world as a result of its emphasis on liberty and/or freedom of expression, of assembly and of the press, accountable governance, rule of law, existence of multiparty electoral competition among others. These democratic ideals were hitherto not only impossible, but unthinkable to say the least in Africa especially in the early 1950s to late 1980s. State violence against political opponents and the citizen-body across the globe, has generally receded in recent times. Most countries in Africa, including Ghana, have seen dramatic improvements in the area of respecting the fundamental human rights of their citizens, at least in the past two decades. In spite of the general acceptability of democratic governance across the world, democracy to some extent, has ruined some aspects of African cultural values. African way of governance is embedded in its traditional institutions and culture. For instance, traditional governance' is visible in its chieftaincy institution. The chief, once enstooled or enskinned, remains in power until death (may only be removed from the throne by the Kingmakers for misconduct or by an order of a Court of competent jurisdiction, and not by politicians, that is, in the case of Ghana). The chief administers the traditional state with his Council of Elders reminiscent of contemporary Executive, Legislature and the Judiciary, with some modicum of checks and balances. Even though the chief appears to wield enormous power aside the Executive functions for example, by presiding over cases brought before him and therefore, defeating the doctrine of separation of powers (another alien concept in African tradition), nonetheless, the chief may be removed from office by the Council of elders if found to have abused or breached the oath of office. Modern democracy however, has gained roots nevertheless in Africa. For, it has empowered ordinary citizens to participate in taking collective decision (s) to elect who to rule them through periodic elections.

Elections are a critical component in any system of democratic governance [16-11]. Elections empower 'ordinary' citizens to directly participate in electing leaders they desire to govern society. This presupposes that, citizens are confronted with the opportunity to choose from a pool of candidates as state officials from two or more political parties. This process of electing state officials has divided and polarized the Ghanaian society along extreme partisanship, amid occasional violence, factionalism, ethnic, religious and the usual rekindling of sharp and intolerable provincial differences. Whenever Ghana is approaching an election period, primordial and contemporary intra and inter-ethnic conflicts (the two oldest conflict that predates Ghana's political independence from the British government in 1957, e.g. Bawku inter-ethnic and the Abudu and Andani intra-ethnic conflicts) and other petit religious and chieftaincy related conflicts resonate. These divisions or social cleavages have further polarized the Ghanaian society into a watertight political football of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) to the extent that, employment opportunities, starting from a conservatory labourer to the highest paid jobs, are reserved for party

members regardless of their competences. For instance, some notable state entities such as the National Disaster Management Organization (NADMO), National Health Insurance Authority (NHIA), the Youth Employment Agency (YEA), Toll booths, Ghana Ports and Harbours Authority (GPHA), among several others, are seized and most of the workers employed under the outgoing government, chased out by rampaging youth of the political party that wins an election. In 2009 for instance, supporters of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), having won the 2008 general elections, seized some state departments, agencies and other semi-state institutions. The same political violence has been unleashed on the supporters or perceived sympathisers of the defeated National Democratic Congress (NDC) Party in the aftermath of the 2016 general elections by supporters or militia of the victorious New Patriotic Party (NPP). Political or electoral violence after change of one administration to another has been some extent institutionalised in Ghana. The security agencies whose key responsibility is to maintain law and order, usually fail to curb the political-inspired violence for fear of being dismissed, transferred to 'Siberia', or sanctioned beyond human comprehension. Accordingly, the various security apparatuses, usually look on helplessly in the face of these lawlessness owing to the extreme partisan politics that has the potential of destabilising the country.

## 5. Franchising Political Violence: One Election, Two Victories

There is poignant evidence to suggest that elections across many developed and developing countries, have been highly contentious as a result of a myriad of allegations of voter fraud or ballot rigging, intimidation of political opponents by state security apparatuses, and manipulation of both voter equipment and electoral officials. This voter fraud suspicion is a threat to Ghana's evolving democratic consolidation. Almost every general election since 1992, has been characterized by political tension, destruction and vandalization of the property of political opponents (posters, vehicles, billboards, etc.), unprintable invectives on political opponents, intimidation and lawlessness that is characterized by injuries and death among others. The political demagogues or some party stalwarts, allegedly engage in overt or covert compunction in supporting their over-zealous followers to unleash mayhem on political opponents (usually before, during and after elections) or attempt to subvert the will of the people through electoral fraud (that include ballot box snatching; ballot stuffing; over voting and intimidation of electoral officials; electoral irregularities such as delaying polling materials; opening polling stations late and closing early; transfer of names of voters to unknown polling stations; intimidating voters to vote for a particular political party or candidate; among others). As a consequence, many Ghanaian voters are to some extent, convinced that politicians cannot be trusted or lack moral fissure to play by the rules and will either commit fraud or intimidate voters at

the slightest opportunity [3-2]. It is axiomatic that killing, destruction, repression and fear (the key ingredients of war), are the antithesis of political and economic development [17]. Yet politicians, albeit unrepentantly, continuously stoke the ingredients of war, and are only concerned with retaining, clinching on to, or capturing executive power at all cost possible – including the killing and maiming of political opponents. It appears no political party or individual is prepared to fairly lose an election in Ghana.

### 5.1. Ghana's Election 2016: Nexus Between Politicians and Political Violence

Ghana's election 2016 will forever be remembered by many Ghanaians as the most well organized and orderly democratic elections (i.e. no incidences of biometric election machines failure; ballot stuffing or fraud; intimidation of party agents; ballot snatching; etc.) since 1992. Yet, the December 7, 2016 general elections in Ghana, will equally be remembered by peace loving Ghanaians as the most frightening and ugly spectacle of threatened political turbulence and contention in the aftermath of voting. While the election 2012 electoral contention or dispute was finally 'battled' at the Supreme Court of Ghana, the 2016 election was marred by the self-declaration of results by the two major competing political parties (the NDC and the NPP) – a function solely reserved for the Electoral Commission (EC) of Ghana. The two dominant political parties by their actions or inactions through for example, assembling their over-zealous supporters on the streets of Accra to claim victory, was a clear indicator that neither the NDC nor the NPP was in the mood to resort to the law courts if eventually declared losers by the EC; a process the then main opposition political party (the NPP) had publicly declared never to resort to prior to the December 7, 2016 elections. The self-declaration of results of the 2016 Presidential election, was premised on the believe that the 2012 general elections, was won by the NPP; but the Supreme Court of Ghana declared the NDC as validly elected after eight months of court deliberations. Explicitly and implicitly, the NPP was ever willing to resort to 'violence' and not the courts again if they feel cheated at the polls. It was therefore not surprising when the party declared: *"We know we have won the December 7, 2016 elections per the results gathered from our polling agents"*. The NPP therefore, called on the incumbent government to concede defeat to ameliorate the anxiety and fear of citizens of a possible electoral violence. Many political pundits and research institutions, both domestic and international, had predicted a landslide electoral victory for the NDC in the 2016 polls (the then incumbent government). Hence, the vast majority of the NDC supporters, national, regional and constituency executives, were in a certain coterie of not only beating Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo (the then main opposition Presidential candidate) at the polls, but will retire him from politics, having contested and lost two previous elections to the NDC.

However, as the results started pouring in from polling stations across the country (courtesy radio and television

stations), gloom began to replace the NDC's euphoria. In the end, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo (now President of the Republic of Ghana), the NPP and the Ghanaian electorate, rankled the then incumbent President (John Dramani Mahama) of the NDC for his failure to concede defeat. The electoral vote dichotomy between the NPP's candidate and the NDC's candidate, saw the latter put up a sub-par performance as a sitting President. In the midst of this overwhelming evidence of the NPP electoral victory, it was therefore 'understandable', why the NPP could not wait to be declared the winner of the said Presidential election, when the EC had consciously or unconsciously remained silent in releasing or certifying the Presidential results received. This silence created a vacuum and sent many people, including the International Observer Missions wondering why the EC was not putting out the Presidential results received. At this point, there was high suspicion that the EC intended to manipulate the Presidential results from the polling stations in favour of the incumbent NDC candidate. This allegation heightened the political temperature to an undesirable level in Ghana.

### 5.2. "We Know We Have Won" V. "Mahama Is in a Comfortable Lead"

Ghana's election 2016 was without political wrangling forty-eight hours after voting ended. Anecdotal evidence before, and after Ghana's election 2016, strongly painted a picture that the peace in Ghana was in great jeopardy or danger, and election violence seemed inevitable. The action and inaction of the main actors (the NPP and the NDC) in declaring or proclaiming themselves to be victorious, nearly put the electoral process in disarray. The then main opposition political party (i.e., the NPP) had organized a press briefing and declared: *we know we have won* the December 7, 2016 Presidential election. According to the NPP, per results obtained from the polling stations across the country, they had won the elections. The party therefore warned the EC against any manipulation of the Presidential results and subsequent subversion of the will of the people. The NPP called on the EC to declare it winner of the Presidential election as a matter of urgency to avoid the Youth wing of the party taking the law into their hands. According to the National Youth Organizer of the NPP, any further delay by the Electoral Commission in announcing or declaring the then Presidential candidate, (now President of the Republic of Ghana) winner of the Presidential election, will lead to a possible exponential bloodshed and rapine. The youth wing of the NPP had indeed massed up at the residence of the party's Presidential candidate, apparently waiting for updates on the Presidential election results from the leadership of the party. Many of them were clad in red garments and in a posture of 'ready-to-fight' spirit, amid the singing of war songs. It was an ugly scene to see the vibrant youth wing and supporters of the NPP in such a posture.

The NDC party, (then incumbent government) also organized a press conference that was addressed by its deputy General-Secretary. The press briefing, apparently, was a reaction to the earlier press conference organized by the then

opposition political party (i.e., the NPP). While many Ghanaians expected the press conference of the governing party to assure the electorate of its commitment to a free and fair electoral process – albeit, to calm down the political tension that had engulfed the entire nation – the party in government also joined the fray, by making the already tensed political atmosphere from worse to worst. It called on its supporters and Ghanaians in general, to disregard the figures and claims of the NPP since the incumbent government, and by *ifso facto*, the NDC party, per their collated Presidential results gathered across the country, pointed in the direction that its Presidential candidate, John Mahama, was in a *comfortable lead*. It also accused some media houses of aiding their main political opponent (the NPP) in spreading falsehood. The deputy General-Secretary of the NDC also lambasted some party officials of the then main opposition political party (the NPP) of concocting figures and in the process, declaring themselves as winners; a function or responsibility reserved for the EC. By this press briefing, the youth and indeed the over-zealous supporters of the NDC, who were despaired by the Presidential results that were churned out so far by a host of radio and television stations reporting live from polling stations across the country, were suddenly energized and also took to the streets to counteract the claims by the main opposition political party of electoral victory. The supporters of the NDC, led by its Greater Accra Regional Chairman, thronged the residence of its then Presidential candidate and President of the Republic, ostensibly, to make a public statement to assure their supporters of electoral victory. In all these claims and counterclaims jigsaw of victory between the two major parties, the smaller opposition political parties had conceded defeat to the then main opposition candidate and now President of the Republic. Many Ghanaians were therefore expecting the incumbent government to concede, not assuring supporters of 'cruising to victory'. In what looked like a highly rehearsed and orchestrated soap-opera of the two main political parties regarding victory in the Presidential election, no one could deny the fact that the actions and inactions of the two main political parties was a fertile nursing ground for election violence. It suffices to say that, the conduct of the top-notch officials of the two main political parties to some extent, franchised political violence in Ghana's election 2016.

The NDC Presidential candidate for the 2016 elections, then President John Mahama on the contrary, appealed to all political parties to remain calm until the declaration of the Presidential election results by the EC. However, the statement from the former President did not in any way reduce the political tension that had engulfed the entire nation. It rather put a lot of citizens in suspense. Some of the International Observer Missions, had to mount some modicum of 'pressure' on the EC through Press Conferences, calling on the EC to certify and release the Presidential election results it had received in order to reduce the anxiety of the Ghanaian voter. At this juncture, many Ghanaians had resorted to panic buying and stock-piling of foodstuffs, in

anticipation of what looked like an inevitable politically-inspired violence. Ghana, (a country designated as an oasis of peace in turbulent West Africa) was on the verge of political disorder – instability, self-destruction, extreme fear and panic, etc. – as a result of these claims and counterclaims of electoral victory in the December 7, 2016 Presidential election. The two main political parties had ignored all pre-election signed Peace Accords in Accra and Kumasi to conduct themselves in a manner that would keep the peace in the Ghanaian society. The two main political parties, even in previous elections, usually volte-face their posture and behaviour when results certified by the EC does not go in their favour.

## 6. Election Violence, Human and Economic Development

Politically inspired violence or the threat of it, is a major single issue that stagnate human progress as well as sustainable economic development of nations. Ironically, violence, insecurity, fear and panic, have always been part of the electoral processes across much of Africa. Politically motivated or inspired violence, does not only traverses human and sustainable economic development, but it deplete the ability of the political leadership of nation-states to function effectively in key areas such as the maintenance of law, order, and accountable governance.

Lethal conflicts are now associated with elections in Africa (e.g., Kenya, Burundi, Zimbabwe, Togo, Cote d'Ivoire, Central African Republic, South Sudan, etc.). This astoundingly destructive and costly electoral violence, is gradually creeping into Ghanaian politics. The usual politically motivated violence associated with elections do not only affect human life and property, but it retrogresses human and economic development. As aptly captured by Hobbes (1961), a state without political order, is a state where:

There is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain; and consequently no nurture of the earth; no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious buildings ...; no knowledge ... no arts; no letters ... and what is worse of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death [18].

Hobbes' assertion is relevant today as it was in 1961. Political disorder inevitably affect citizens in a negative sense as well as the overall development of states in several ways. Human development is not only curtailed, but lives and property are destroyed. Human development in this paper is narrowly construed to refer to all those forces that propels the progress, income growth, and the development of individual potentials to the highest level possible in society. The reverse or the absence of political order also curtails political freedom, respect for human rights and dignity, rule of law, and their like. The future of women, children and the youth, arguably, the treasure of every state, are worse affected when political violence erupts [19]. The youth and to some extent

children, are usually recruited to join belligerents or criminal quasi-political gangs (who support particular candidates or political parties for political office) to serve as combatants; even though they are usually 'innocent' or 'ignorant' of the causes, manifestations and consequences of a political conflict. In the view of this paper, it is mind-boggling when politicians who are supposed to know the economic and social ramifications of political violence, continue to stoke the seeds of political violence through electoral politics or competition, reinventing ethnocentric and religious divisions, just for the sake of temporal political power.

Electoral violence that come after electoral competition diverts the attention of the political leadership in providing welfare and basic security needs of citizens. Governments usually devotes greater percentage of the state's resources towards the purchase of military hardware in times of political violence at the expense of basic infrastructure, health care, education, etc. A state that is unable to protect lives and property of citizens, is said to be a step away from being classified as a failed state. The effect of a failed or collapsed state, as for example Somalia, South Sudan, and Libya, invoke discontentment among citizens leading to more chaos, abject poverty, misery, hunger and violent death. Human progress and national economic development under these hostile conditions, are adversely curtailed. The widespread political, ethnic and religious inspired violence and self-destruction that occurred in some countries such as Rwanda, Burundi, Cote d'Ivoire, Kenya, Togo, Mali, Sierra Leone and the like, should be enough to guide politicians in Ghana and other African countries not to degenerate or circumvent the modest political stability prevailing in their respective countries.

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is an important linchpin to national development. National economic development of a state, has a positive trickling down effect on citizens in terms of employment and quality of life, directly or indirectly. FDI complements the efforts of political leadership of states to better the standard and improve quality of life of citizens. Foreign and even local investors, will customarily channel their investments into countries that are politically stable. This presupposes that there is a symbiotic relationship between political stability and attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Politicians are not unaware of the importance of political stability for national economic development. Yet, some politicians are willing to kill, destroy property or stoke ethnic, chieftaincy and religious conflicts, insofar as the violence will inure to their political advantage – maintain or capture the levers of government. The importance of human and national economic development in Africa seem unimportant to a certain political class in spite of the abundance of natural resources. This partly explains why there is an ever-growing migration of African human resource to Europe to seek greener pastures. Until avarice and greed for political power by a section of politicians is de-emphasized by the moderate African and Ghanaian political leadership, there will continue to exist politically-inspired violence before, during and after competitive national

elections in many African states. The net effect has always been the low agricultural productivity, and subsequently, an increase in the already unbridled dependence on the developed countries for economic 'hand-outs'.

In respect of economic productivity, the livelihood of groups and individuals for example in the tourism sector, are threatened whenever political violence occur in any country. Tourists customarily visits countries where there is peace and security. The absence of peace and stability in a state is enough to derail or end abruptly, the livelihood of citizens who directly or indirectly depend on tourism for survival as employees or operators, guides and supervisors. In this case, human and economic development and its cognates, are cut short, including the obverse rise of unemployment and its effects on the immediate and extended families, including the loss of tax revenue to the state. Substantial revenue that could have been channelled into specific development projects to ameliorate the suffering of the masses, and improve upon the quality of life of the citizens in a developing country like Ghana, is lost. For instance, the contribution to real growth of the tourism sector from the period ending 2016 was 3.6% [20]. Political leadership and politicians as a whole, are obviously aware of the consequences of lost revenue to the state, yet the actions and inactions of political leadership and politicians before, during and after elections, suggest that they are obstinate to political violence insofar as it will confer on them 'borrowed' political power.

Finally, politically-induced violence and for that matter, all types of violence in a state, ultimately triggers human rights issues or concerns. Mass graves have been discovered in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Cote d'Ivoire, Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi, etc., after competitive national elections that degenerated into violence. In such situations, perceived political, religious or ethnic opponents are collectively punished by death squads or gangs of various belligerents. Membership of a political party or an association, ethnic or the religious group one belong to, may serve as enough grounds for one to be rounded up and executed or maimed, as it was the case in Sierra Leone, Rwanda and Burundi. The freedom of association, of assembly, of movement and of speech, are curtailed whenever there is political violence. Persons who are Internally Displaced (IDPs), usually face hardship of varied nature. The key features of election induced violence in a state include, but not limited to the following: starvation, fear, prostitution and rape, the menace of child soldiers and violent attacks on perceived political opponents.

The future development of the state and/or citizens is ruined to a greater extent when violence of any sort erupts in a state. Many child soldiers are usually unable to return to school due to rejection by society. Others are unable to trace their families and as a result, are foisted on society to grapple with. Any attempt by any political leadership to subvert the will of the people, is purely an invitation for violence. Political power which is purely 'temporal', should be handed over peacefully to the next 'borrower' when the incumbent 'borrower' is rejected by the electorate at the polls. State

institutions such as the Police Service, the Electoral Commission or Elections Management Body, ought to be professional in the execution of their mandate to ensure peaceful and incident-free future elections in Ghana in particular and Africa as a whole.

## 7. Discussion

The key findings of this study are based on responses of the survey conducted. In respect of the causes of the Presidential election stalemate between the two main political parties in the 2016 general elections, responses from party officials of both the NDC and the NPP were as expected, mixed and a classic blame game. While all 10 party elites of the NDC were of the view that the fracas and the near-live eruption of election violence was as a result of the NPP self-declaration as victors of the Presidential election; the NPP party officials also, blamed it on the NDC and the EC. According to the NPP officials, the EC was 'in bed' with the NDC before, during and after the 2016 general elections. The silence of the EC in declaring the certified Presidential results according to the NPP, was a calculated attempt to manipulate the election results in favour of the incumbent NDC. The NPP officials agreed in principle that it was wrong to declare themselves as winners, but they did so based on the Presidential results declared at the polling stations across the country. The tallied Presidential results of the NPP according to the officials, indicated a total rejection of the incumbent NDC by the electorate. According to the party officials of the NPP, *our action was a pre-emptive one to garner support of citizens and to avoid any electoral fraud by the EC in favour of the NDC.*

Responses of the youth and many other voters in the 2016 general elections in Ghana indicated that they were frightened to the core. According to the survey results or responses, many voters indicated that they have never been frightened of an eminent outbreak of election-related violence in Ghana since 1992. A total of 45 participants, representing 49.5% blamed the political fracas on the EC's failure to release the certified Presidential results timely, even though the media had more or less, called the election based on provisional Presidential results churned out from polling stations across the country. According to them, the silence of the EC further raised pre-election suspicion to the effect that the EC was doing everything possible to have the incumbent NDC declared winners of the 2016 general elections. A total number of 56 participants, representing 61.6% of the sampled population were of the view that the two main political parties, thus the NDC and the NPP (as a result of their parochial interests), chose party over national interest and stability. In other words, the candidates of the two political parties and their surrogates were willing to preside over Election violence and its consequences if the 2016 Presidential election did not go in their favour. According to a participant:

In the wake of the two main political parties arguments as to who has won the 2016 Presidential election, and who has



not won, the silence of the EC and the ready-to-fight posture of the youth of the parties, made it clear that the youth were just waiting for a whisper from party bigwigs to engage in acts of lawlessness. As a woman, I started thinking of how to protect my kids whose father died a year before the elections. I went to the bank, withdrew all my money and purchased foodstuffs to increase stock at home. The prices of food items suddenly increased astronomically as many individuals were engaged in panic buying of food items. This must not happen again in our future politicking in Ghana.

Another participant had this to say:

I blame the EC and not the political parties. I don't agree with the EC's explanation that its systems were hacked. If even that was the case, couldn't they have found another way of filling the vacuum or the communication gap? It was obvious the NPP had won the Presidential election based on the results from polling stations across the country where the EC officials supervised the conduct of the elections. The other competing political parties conceded defeat to the NPP having collated their own results at the various polling stations. Why was it only the NDC refusing to concede defeat and the silence of the EC?

The rest of the participants, representing 9.9% blamed the political fracas between the two main political parties on the media. According to them, contrary to the agreed principle that the EC must be, as mandated by law responsible for the declaration of results, some media houses had practically called the elections in favour of the NPP. The only difference between the media outlets that called the election and the EC is that they did not organize official press briefing to declare the outcome of the 2016 Presidential election. A participant indicated that:

The posture of the media cabal against the NDC bolstered the NPP confidence and effrontery to declare themselves the winners of the 2016 Presidential election. The NDC perhaps out of panic, also joined the fray in obviously assuring its supporters of electoral victory. There must be some mechanisms in place to punish political parties and media outlets that call future elections to safeguard the peace of Ghana.

The findings from the study are varied as to the circumstances that led to the heightened political tension in the aftermath of the December 7, 2016 Presidential election in Ghana. The 2016 election is one election with an ambivalent outlook. The electoral process was fraught with political tension before and after the election; this was owing to the disqualification of the Presidential candidates of some political parties from participating in the 2016 elections – the disqualification was as a result of errors on the nomination forms submitted to the EC. In the ensuing political tension, and the intransigent posture of the EC not to give opportunity to the affected political parties to effect those corrections identified by the Commission, compelled the aggrieved political parties to drag the EC to the Supreme Court of the Republic of Ghana.. The Court ruling that directed the EC to allow the plaintiffs to effect the necessary corrections on their nomination forms, toned down the political tension to some

extent. The conduct of the poll on December 7, 2016, was largely peaceful. The political tension was heightened 48 hours after the elections due to the failure of the EC to declare the results of the Presidential election, without undue delay. This was at variance with the normal practice of the timely declaration of certified Presidential election results from the collation centres across the country since the first general elections under the Fourth Republican Constitution in 1992.

## 8. Conclusion

The conduct of periodic elections to elect state officials is a cornerstone for democratic governance, sustenance and consolidation. In the words of Cheema (2005):

Free, fair and regular elections constitute one pillar of democratic governance. Such elections confer and sustain political legitimacy because they reflect popular participation and choice in the political process. As such, they are an important first step in crafting government of, by, and for the people. Free, fair and regular elections also hold out the promise of leadership that alternates. That is, they provide losing parties and candidates with incentives to remain participants in the process, ... for example, the promise of winning future elections, ... Elections provide the direct participation, choice, and, ultimately accountability that translate into higher degree of inclusion and, consequently, less alienation and cause for violent dissent [16-25].

Election Management Boards, political parties and other state institutions must work professionally to quench the ever-increasing thirst of politicians for political power. The posturing of the EC in all future elections must be that of an impartial arbiter capable of winning the trust of all participating political parties as well as civil society organizations. As aptly captured by Boafo-Arthur (2004):

Much as the success of electoral politics depends on each stakeholder playing its assigned role, there is very little doubt that the role played by a nation's EC could make or break a political system or throw the electoral process into disarray. Apart from neutrality, the EC must be fair but firm, and be able to win the confidence of the contesting parties... the Electoral Commission epitomizes the growing strength of the electoral process in the polity [21].

Democratic elections are not *perfect* anywhere in the World. The outcome of any election is still a major challenge to democratic sustenance even in the so-called advanced democracies, such as the United States of America, France, United Kingdom, Germany, etc. It is not uncommon for a political party and its supporters to be frustrated through the ballot. However, these frustrations must not lead to the usurpation of state laws and/or election violence. For, there is always another time to compete and possibly win the next election with the appropriate or right strategies. Election is supposed to be a peaceful means by which citizens elect state officials for the purposes of governance. However, this democratic imperative has become a destabilizing force in many countries across much of Africa. Irrespective of the ills

of democratic elections, democracy is a necessary evil for modern states in comparison to other methods of governance. Democracy with its concomitant bill of rights, such as respect for the rights and dignity of citizens; freedom of speech; freedom of assembly; freedom of movement; toleration of alternative views of political opponents; minority rights; and accountable governance, cannot be surrendered for any other method of governance from any quarter.

Elections cannot be isolated from the practice of democracy. State institutions must act professionally according to the rules governing the electoral process. This will invariably guard the peace Ghana is currently enjoying in a turbulent West Africa. The police and other security agencies must not succumb to the whims and caprices of politicians who in times of elections, are more likely to employ all crude tactics available to them to subvert the will of the people. What Ghana need in order to remain stable is to reform the current culture of *winner-takes-all* or zero-sum game politics, in terms of appointments or representation as well as participation in the running of state entities – when a political party loses an election, it loses out completely on any window of opportunity to participate in the governance process and control of national resources.

Having invested huge financial resources (mostly loans from financial institutions) in the campaign process, some political parties find it difficult if not impossible, to accept an electoral outcome that is not in their favour; and having to wallow in debt repayment and poverty until the next election (i.e. four years) in the case of Ghana, makes some politicians wish that the ground opens up and swallow them following an electoral defeat. In most instances, a resort to violence become the only tool for defeated political parties to employ; with the hope of securing a power-sharing deal to participate in the governance process. Classical examples include the cases of Kenya, Cote d'Ivoire, Zimbabwe, Sudan and South Sudan etc. The attitude of *we must win at all cost* by party elites and supporters of some political parties, is one of the main banes of Africa's underdevelopment. What Ghana, and indeed Africa need, is visionary leadership and the need to democratize democracy to ensure political stability.

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## Notes on Contributors

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