

ENSURING PEACEFUL ELECTIONS IN GHANA

The Role of Civil Society Organisations in the 2020 Elections

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the role civil society organisations (CSOs) play in promoting peaceful elections in Ghana. Preventing electoral violence is a key factor in the support of functioning democratic societies, and the role of CSOs in promoting peaceful elections continues to grow with each electoral contest. This paper reviews secondary sources to interrogate the questions about the nature, interventions, impact, and challenges of CSOs in Ghana before, during and after general elections. Specifically, the paper examines the 2020 presidential and parliamentary elections using the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) and the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) as case studies. Overall, the recommendations in this study suggest CSOs must build synergies to increase collaboration in order to promote peaceful elections and political transitions. In addition, to strengthen their election observation, civic/voter education, peace promotion and violence monitoring roles through sustainable funding, CSOs in Ghana must review their funding strategies to include donations from non-partisan organisations and individuals. Furthermore, to maintain the integrity of CSOs in Ghana, they must develop internally-built transparency and accountability mechanisms such as legal structures to govern their operations.

Keywords: civil society organisations, peacebuilding, peace and governance, electoral violence

INTRODUCTION

The 2021 Global Peace Index (GPI) ranks Ghana as the 38th most peaceful country in the world, and the second most peaceful nation in sub-Saharan Africa. The 2021 ranking is an improvement from Ghana's 2019 GPI ranking where Ghana was ranked as the 44th most peaceful country in the world, and the fourth most peaceful nation in sub-Saharan Africa. Since the inception of the Fourth Republic in 1992, Ghana has held eight successful elections in 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2016 and 2020. The relatively peaceful conduct of these successive elections has made Ghana a beacon of hope for democracy, good governance, peace, and stability in Africa (Issifu 2017).

Historically, Ghana's track record supports claims of relatively peaceful elections, and overall a less hostile security environment. According to Issifu (2017), the country has not experienced any form of large-scale violence or civil war since its independence in March 1957. Since 1992, the country has witnessed relatively peaceful democratic transitions, with political power alternating between an incumbent government and an opposition party. The presidential and parliamentary elections in 2000, 2008 and 2016, for instance, represented the first, second and third time respectively that a democratically-elected incumbent president uninterruptedly handed over power to the opposition political party (Arthur 2010). In other words, the Ghanaian electorates have freely ensured a turnover of government between the two main political parties, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC), without large scale violence (*ibid.*).

It is widely acknowledged that civil society organisations (CSOs) have significantly contributed to the country's enviable record of relatively peaceful elections and political transitions (Aubyn 2012). All past eight elections have witnessed the active support and participation of CSOs whose diverse interventions have complemented the work of key election stakeholders such as the Electoral Commission (EC), the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE), the security agencies, the National Peace Council (NPC) and the National Media Commission (NMC). The role of CSOs in the past eight elections has focused mainly on election observation, civic/voter education and peace promotion, violence monitoring, peace support interventions, media monitoring of hate speech and language use, as well as efforts around manifestos and media monitoring of mis/disinformation and fact-checking (Asante & Osei-Afful 2021).

However, apart from media reports and information on CSO websites, not many systematic studies have been conducted to comprehensively appraise the roles of CSOs during and after elections. This article, therefore, examines the role of CSOs in ensuring peaceful and credible elections in Ghana. It focuses specifically on the 2020 presidential and parliamentary elections using the West

Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) and the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) as case studies.

While WANEP is a regional peacebuilding organisation with a strong network of CSOs across West Africa, CODEO is an independent and non-partisan network of civil society groups, faith-based organisations and professional bodies which observe Ghanaian elections (WANEP 2023; CODEO 2023). On one hand, WANEP election activities are designed to mitigate election violence through the National Early Warning Systems (NEWS) by monitoring, reporting, analysing, and facilitating responses to incidents which may threaten the peaceful conduct of elections. On the other hand, CODEO's activities focus on promoting free, fair, and transparent elections, preventing electoral fraud, encouraging citizen participation in elections, promoting issue-based campaigns, and enhancing the credibility of electoral outcomes (CODEO 2023). Put together, the election activities of both organisations demonstrate the diverse but unique roles CSOs play in ensuring peaceful elections and democratic transitions in Ghana. Accordingly, this article interrogates their respective roles and challenges during the 2020 elections to inform CSO participation in future elections. The article is guided by the proposition that CSOs have a significant role to play in strengthening the quality of democratic elections in general, and complementing the efforts of state institutions in mitigating election violence and ensuring transparent, free, fair, and peaceful elections.

The article is divided into five different but interrelated sections. The first section provides an overview of elections in Ghana with a specific focus on the 2020 elections. This is followed by a general discussion on CSOs and elections in Ghana in the second section. The third section analyses the roles of WANEP and CODEO during the 2020 elections. The fourth section interrogates the challenges confronting CSOs in their efforts to promote peaceful elections. The last section concludes the discussions with some pragmatic policy recommendations.

UNDERSTANDING ELECTIONS IN GHANA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC

Throughout democratic societies worldwide, presidential elections are popular, and the risk of violence in presidential elections is high, especially in a hotly competitive contest. Ghana is unique, as mixed assessments of the overall climate of its elections, both municipal and presidential, are often described as relatively peaceful and non-violent. Ghana is among the few African countries that have not 'experienced any form of large-scale violence or civil war since its independence in March 1957. Therefore, the country has often been described at both the local and international levels as an oasis of peace and stability on a continent besieged by conflicts' (Issifu 2017, p. 2).

Table 1: History of Ghana's Elections

Election Year	President	Political Party
1993-2001	Jerry John Rawlings	NDC
2021- 2009	John Agyekum Kufuor	NPP
2009-2012	John Evans Atta Mills	NDC
2012-2017	John Dramani Mahama	NDC
2017-2020	Nana Akuffo Addo	NPP
2020-Present	Nana Akuffo Addo	NPP

Source: Authors

Historically, the political trends of presidential and parliamentary elections in Ghana since 1992 have yielded eight consecutive general elections resulting in generally peaceful handovers, as indicated in Table 1. The 2020 Ghanaian presidential elections can also be added to the list of relatively peaceful elections, although a minimal number of incidents of violence were reported by both CSOs monitoring the elections and media outlets. According to Asante and Osei-Afful (2021):

Most previously held elections since 1992 were generally assessed to be free, fair and peaceful. Electoral competition, particularly among the two leading political parties, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP) is keen, with both parties having roughly equal chances of winning elections. This keen electoral competition has produced three electoral turnovers, with the two main parties alternating power since 1992. A prevailing vibrant media space and an active civil society environment continues to support the electoral process. Peaceful transfer of power since the year 2001 has been the feather in the country's cup.

However, in Ghana's election cycle, electoral violence remains protracted, adversely affecting lives and properties. The climate of political elections in Ghana is changing as outbreaks of violent events before, during and after elections increase with each election contest. In the opening executive summary of the recent *Ghana: Freedom in the World 2021 Country World Report* by Freedom House (2021, p. 1), the growing concern regarding electoral violence is clearly expressed:

Since 1992, Ghana has held competitive multiparty elections and undergone peaceful transfers of power between the two main

political parties. Although the country has a relatively strong record of upholding civil liberties...there are some weaknesses in judicial independence and the rule of law, corruption presents challenges to government performance, and political violence is a growing concern.

The same concern is echoed in Badasu's research (2018, p.1) where he points out that:

Ghana has had several successive presidential and parliamentary elections resulting in peaceful turnovers from one political party to another, and other intervening elections such as by-elections, re-runs, district level and internal political party contests. However, none of these elections have been conducted without some forms of violence, and the violent incidents keep intensifying with increasing competitive election.

Similarly, according to the Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) none of the eight consecutive elections have been conducted without some form of violence, and the violent incidents keep intensifying with increasing competition. Aside the national level elections, Ghana has also experienced violence connected to other subnational electoral process. For example, during a constituency election held on 31 January 2019, there was an outbreak of violence in the Ayawaso-West Wogon district in the Greater Accra region of Ghana. According to the 2019 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index report (p. 20), 'Chaos erupted when masked vigilante groups wearing uniforms of national security forces and allegedly allied with the ruling party invaded some polling stations and attacked suspected opponents, injuring twenty-six people'.

However, the violent incidents experienced overall during Ghana's elections cannot be compared to those that happen in many other countries in Africa, especially West Africa, such as Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea. For instance, in Côte d'Ivoire more than 50 people were reportedly killed in street clashes and violent episodes after the recent controversial presidential election in October 2020 (Human Rights Watch 2020a). Similarly, in Guinea, more than two dozen people were reportedly killed after the country's hotly contested elections on 18 October 2020 (Human Rights Watch 2020b). In both countries, the violence in the streets fueled vitriolic speech among the electorate and problematised the democratic process of free and fair elections. In Ghana, however, violence surrounding both presidential and municipal elections has occurred, but many peace and governance experts have described the overall electoral climate as 'docile' when compared to other violent presidential elections on the African continent.

The 2020 elections which are the focus of this article, were held in a very tense political atmosphere due to several contentious issues. These include the EC's decision to compile a new voter register, the phenomenon of political vigilantism, and the sudden outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic which influenced the conduct of the elections (Asante & Osei-Afful 2021, p. 9). Regarding the voter register for instance, while the NPP supported the EC's compilation of a new register, the NDC disagreed because the party described it as a wasteful expenditure since the EC had an existing register that they found credible (*ibid.*). After a Supreme Court ruling on the matter, the EC went ahead with the voter registration process, but the exercise was marred by violent incidents, tension, and chaos. Beyond the voter registration challenges, the 2020 elections were also characterised by growing concerns over the possible spread of COVID-19 in the electorate, security challenges including secessionists threats in the Volta region, and concerns about security deployment to border regions. The collation of election results also encountered some chaos and violence at collation centres, resulting in the loss of human lives.

Although the results of the presidential election became the subject of an election petition in the Supreme Court for the second time after 2012, a ruling by the court affirmed the EC results in March 2021 (*Citinewsroom* 2021). However, there were a few parliamentary candidates who challenged the outcomes of their constituency elections results with some cases still pending in the courts. The Star Ghana Foundation notes that 'although the 2020 elections were generally peaceful, the incidence of violence at various phases of the electoral process means that a lot more still has to be done to sensitize citizens against electoral violence' (Asante & Osei-Afful 2021). Over the years, electoral violence has clearly become a growing concern which validates the need for CSO interventions to promote peaceful elections, especially in a nation that is viewed as a leading beacon of peace in West Africa.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND ELECTIONS IN GHANA

CSOs, or non-governmental organisations (NGOs), are defined by the United Nations (2021) as:

any non-profit, voluntary citizens group which is organized on a local, national, or international level. Task-oriented and driven by people with a common interest, civil society organizations (CSOs) perform a variety of services and humanitarian functions, bring citizens' concerns to Governments, monitor policies, and encourage political participation at the community level.

In Ghana, CSOs have a clear and noticeable stance. Krawczyk (2020) notes that Ghanaian civil society is vibrant, with thousands of registered CSOs. While a complete database of registered CSOs is not available, data indicates that over 33 000 organisations were registered between 2000 and 2012, with steady increases in the number of CSOs registering in each of those years (Krawczyk 2020, p. 7). The work of Barnes (2006, p. 8) also emphasises that the role of CSOs in supporting an atmosphere of peace throughout the election process is vitally important:

In an attempt to help ensure sustainable peace in violence prone communities in Ghana, the role of CSOs cannot be overemphasized. In recent years, there has been increased recognition of the role CSOs can play as partners with government and intergovernmental organizations in the conflict resolution and peacebuilding agenda.

Studies regarding the types of CSOs that are prevalent in Ghana, and what introduced the emergence of CSOs specifically in the electoral process, indicate emerging trends. These range from reports of incidences of occasional election-related violence that have increased with each election cycle, to reports of questionable voting practices throughout various polling sites in Ghana. Recounting Ghana's eight consecutive presidential and parliamentary elections since constitutional rule in 1992, the Star Ghana Foundation (2021) reports that in the elections held on 7 December 2020, '...the results management processes including the collation of results and declaration encountered some incidents of crowding, chaos and violence including the loss of some lives'. Hence, CSOs are needed to support the electoral process to ensure violence-free and credible elections.

Generally, the Ghanaian CSOs work in four main categories during elections: service delivery, advocacy, in watchdog roles, and as collaborative partners with the government, engaged in research and planning related to national development (GIZ 2013). Focusing on the roles of CSOs in the advocacy, watch-dog and service-delivery sectors, there are many CSOs in Ghana purely focused on peacebuilding, preventing conflict, election governance, and preventing electoral violence. For example, the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) is a CSO which works throughout West Africa focused on peacebuilding, and advocacy in peace, democracy, and good governance. In Ghana's previous presidential contests, WANEP has been instrumental in voter education by promoting peace before, during and after elections. Equally, the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) is also recognised as an effective front-runner in supporting the promotion of credible and peaceful elections in Ghana. Established in 2000 and composed of 41 organisations drawn

from civic, secular, religious, professional, and non-governmental institutions, CODEO, under the auspices of the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), is focused on supporting and contributing to peaceful elections in Ghana (CODEO 2023).

The emergence of CSOs in the realm of electoral peace promotion is increasing, although the specific number and the rate of the emergence of CSOs is still being quantified. This is an area that continues to evolve and needs more tracking attention. However, the lack of data does not diminish the need for CSOs in promoting peaceful elections in Ghana. Civil society organisations became prominent in the country due to the democratisation process and the quest for enhancing state capacity through a broad-based participatory approach in development. The urgent need for peace, security and development created the environment for civil society to assume critical roles in the democratic process (CODEO 2021). Thus, a democratic process supported by CSOs in promoting peaceful elections is having an impact in Ghana.

CSO interventions in the 2020 elections mirrored traditional areas of support such as election observation, civic/voter education and peace promotion, violence monitoring, peace support interventions, and media monitoring of hate speech and language use (Asante & Osei-Afful 2021). Collectively, the interventions by CSOs such as the Institute for Democratic Governance (IDEG), Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), CDD, WANEP and CODEO, to name a few, fostered an environment of trust, synergy and motivation among voters, helping to promote peaceful elections. The presence of CSOs throughout communities helped to create harmony and positive sentiments among the electorate. This was effected by building trusted relationships with voters and genuinely engaging with citizens through voter education activities and voter registrations. Building and maintaining trusted relationships with all stakeholders in the electoral cycle has proven to have an impact on the behavior.

CSOs engaged in election observation and monitoring also contributed significantly to the credibility of the process and the prompt resolution of electoral irregularities. CSOs such as CODEO, the Civic Forum Initiative (CFI) and WANEP have over the years become more systematic with the deployment of election observers to the field to help deter fraud and electoral malpractices. For instance, election observers/monitors used Short Messaging Service (SMS) technology and WhatsApp to send instant messages about irregularities to a situation room or data processing centre, which helped to relay timely information directly to the EC officials concerned for prompt redress. The same method was used to track and report incidents involving violence or intimidation to the security agencies for immediate action. The use of eminent persons with influence and convening power to follow up on the reported cases of irregularities to the EC and security agencies helped for a prompt resolution of most of the reported cases at various

places across the country on election day (NPC and WANEP 2020b). Depending on the cases reported, the EC and the security agencies often deployed security personnel, issued press releases, organised press conferences and appealed to the public through the media to manage and resolve the situation.

Several CSOs also developed educational materials and resources including posters, short videos, banners, leaflets, stickers, and t-shirts to promote civic and voter education. Some of these educational materials targeted the youth, women, conflict hotspot communities and people with disability (PWDs) using channels like social media, newspapers, radio, TV, churches, and mosques. CSOs like Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) and others used radio, TV and social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and YouTube to educate, inform, track and report on incidents using crowdsourced videos and pictures. The MFWA's monitoring of indecent language on radio, naming, and shaming political actors who had breached electoral rules contributed immensely to reducing the abusive language and personality attacks during the election campaigns (MFWA 2021). The project helped to promote decent language and issue-based discussions by political actors in the media.

In addition, community forums, dialogue sessions, durbars, and radio/TV programmes were organised by CSOs to educate people about why they should vote, how to vote, the use of non-violent approaches to address concerns, avoiding the use of vituperative language, and the consequences of engaging in election violence. All these interventions by CSOs contributed to minimising the high incidence of rejected ballots, violence, vote buying and the politics of insults which had characterised previous elections.

The abuse of incumbency has always been a major issue during elections. These transgressions included free access to media time from the state broadcaster, Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC), abuse of public functions and platforms, access to public facilities, and use of state-funded projects to solicit votes. During the 2020 elections, the advocacy campaigns, tracking, and reporting of various abuses of incumbency by CSOs not only served as a restraint to political actors who planned to use state resources for their private political campaigns. These also helped to promote a more level political playing field for all political parties, and the legitimate use of public resources (Awelana Adda 2020). Organisations such as the Ghana Integrity Initiative (GII), the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) and Ghana Anti-Corruption Coalition (GACC) are some of the key CSOs whose intervention contributed to reducing the abuses of incumbency and electoral corruption to ensure a free, fair, transparent, and peaceful election.

Furthermore, in an effort to thwart election-related conflicts and vigilantism in the 2020 elections, CSOs worked with government agencies to establish plans

and implement interventions at the national and local level. For example, WANEP played a direct role in collaborating with other CSOs in the development of a roadmap and code of conduct to eradicate politically violent vigilante activities. According to Asante & Osei-Afful (2021, p. 17):

... the passage of the Vigilantism and Related Offenses Act (2019), the National Peace Council, worked with some CSOs such as the Institute of Democratic Governance (IDEG), WANEP and CDD on a framework for ending violent vigilantism in the country. These efforts resulted in a Roadmap and Code of Conduct to Eradicate Politically Violent Vigilante Activities which was signed by the NPP in February 2020 and subsequently by the NDC in June 2020 after the party (NDC) raised some initial misgivings about the roadmap including the specific role of key electoral stakeholders in the implementation of the roadmap. The signing of the roadmap and code of conduct committed the two main political parties to the elimination of violent vigilante activities.

The roadmap was not the only key intervention spearheaded by CSOs as an action item toward promoting a peaceful pre-elections climate. CSOs also led the way in supporting a presidential election peace pact (PEPP) on the theme 'Eradicating vigilantism: The role of political parties' that was signed by both frontrunners in the 2020 Ghanaian presidential election (Emmanuel 2020). The objective of the PEPP was to get a firm commitment from the candidates to follow electoral rules and ensure that Ghana should remain peaceful after the election. The Peace Pact which was at the instance of the National Peace Council, the National House of Chiefs, and the National Chief Imam was supported by IDEG and other CSOs such as NORSAAC.

The PEPP partly contributed to the use of the court system by the main opposition party, the NDC, to challenge the outcome of the 2020 presidential elections at the Supreme Court instead of engaging in widespread violence. Indeed, the acceptance of the Supreme Court verdict by the NDC despite losing the case demonstrated the commitment of the political actors to the objectives of the PEPP. In addition, the significant reduction in political vigilantism before and after the 2020 general elections highlighted the impact of CSOs interventions, although some analysts attributed this reduction to COVID-19 restrictions.

In the post-election period, there were efforts to reduce tension and urge public calm. A number of civil society organisations involved in election programming included IDEG, Civic Forum Initiative (CFI), CDD, Ghana Integrity Initiative (GII), Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) and Northern Sector On Action Awareness Centre (NORSAAC), among others. They utilised the

power of their collective voice to wade into certain post-election developments which they believed had the potential to undermine national peace and security (Asante & Osei-Afful 2021).

THE ROLE OF WANEP AND CODEO IN THE 2020 ELECTIONS

The West Africa Network for Peace building (WANEP)

The West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) is one of the organisations that has for two decades participated directly in promoting a peaceful electoral process. Established in 1998, WANEP is a regional CSO focused on peacebuilding, conflict prevention and providing non-violence education throughout West Africa. Headquartered in Accra, Ghana, the nonprofit organisation was founded by Emmanuel Bombande, a noted Ghanaian peacebuilding practitioner, and Samuel Doe, a Liberian peacebuilding advocate. These two respected founders established WANEP on the heels of the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone; their concern propelled a desire to establish an organisation aimed to ‘prevent, resolve, and transform violent conflicts through collective and coordinated efforts of non-governmental institutions, organizations and individuals actively engaged in peacebuilding’ (WANEP 2022). WANEP has extensive regional reach throughout the West African region, specifically in all 15 member states of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (WANEP 2020a):

WANEP has been involved in mediation and peacebuilding initiatives throughout Ghana... and is known for its instrumental role in the formation of the National Peace Council. .

WANEP established a Ghana-focused network, referred to as GHANEP in 2002 (ibid.):

GHANEP seeks to facilitate the creation of a sustainable culture of non-violence, justice, peace, and social reconciliation in Ghanaian communities by ensuring coordination and effectiveness among peacebuilding practitioners in order to avoid duplication of efforts and maximize resources for more effective responses to conflict situations.

In Ghana’s 2020 presidential and parliamentary elections, WANEP together with its partners launched its well-known election situation room (ESR). ESR is a situational analysis platform to observe, report, analyse and facilitate responses to violent threats, voter corruption, compliance to electoral code and human

rights abuses that could threaten the peaceful conduct of the presidential and parliamentary elections. The ESR is a component of the 'Electoral Violence Monitoring, Analysis and Mitigation' project funded by the European Union, with implementing support from the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), and ECOWAS (GNA2020). WANEP worked with the National Peace Council (NPC), NCCE, Star-Ghana and other CSOs, including the Institute for Democratic Governance (IDEG), to operationalise the ESR before, during and after the elections (GNA 2020). The ESR was staffed with both men and women who were trained to monitor, report, and analyse claims of voter intimidation, voting malpractice, violence, and non-compliance with procedural election compliance laws.

The operational setup of the ESR comprised a headquarters in Accra at the Movenpick hotel and three additional satellite monitoring sites in Ho, Kumasi, and Tamale. The central ESR was divided into three sections: the data gathering room, the analysis room, and the decision room to ensure the effectiveness of data collation, analysis, and response to election violence (WANEP 2016; 2020a). The data gathering room constituted the technical room, where data collectors could communicate directly with observers in the field to send data through an online system. For three days, from 6 to 8 December, 350 accredited election observers were deployed across 16 regions of Ghana to areas classified as potential hotspots for electoral-related violence. They provided the early warning information to the data gathering room.

The analysis room was mainly responsible for interpreting the data received from the data gathering room for informed and swift responses and actions by eminent persons in the decision room. The decision room comprised eminent persons of influence who used their good offices to influence positive responses to identified electoral threats.

Aside from these three sections, there was a communication team that focused on crowd sourcing and aggregating data from citizens on social media, namely Twitter and Facebook, for appropriate response. Outside the ESR headquarters, the satellite situation rooms in Ho, Kumasi, and Tamale led by the chair of the NPC in those regions liaised directly with the headquarters in Accra (central situation room) to deliberate and agree on appropriate responses to regional issues that threatened the peaceful conduct of the elections in those regions.

Before and after voting on 7 December 2020, the NPC led several press briefings by the central ESR and the satellite ESRs to present preliminary findings regarding the conduct of polls. Some of the findings included the late arrival of voting materials in some polling stations; the absence, or late arrival of security personnel in some polling stations; cases of verification machine failure in some polling stations; persons arrested for attempting to vote twice; incidents of physical

and verbal abuse among voters in queues and around polling stations; and the disruption of the voting process by voters (NPC & WANEP 2020b). In response to these findings, a delegation of the ESR decision room embarked on preventive diplomacy with key political leaders, the EC and security agencies to discuss solutions to the challenges identified. In most cases, the intervention of the ESR decision room helped to resolve most of the issues identified by the observers in the field and on social media platforms.

The security agencies and the EC were all engaged at some point to intervene in different situations to ensure the peaceful conduct of the elections in the polling station and collation centres across the country. Depending on the nature of the situation, the EC and the security agencies often responded to the reported cases with swift personnel deployments to contain the situation, arrest and detain electoral offenders, issue press releases, organise press conferences and media briefings to address any misinformation or disinformation, and appeal to the public to be law abiding. In other instances, they engaged the leadership and supporters of the concerned political parties and key stakeholders through phone calls and emergency meetings to swiftly resolve the situation in order to mitigate any potential violence.

The public were also encouraged through the press briefings to have faith in the EC to deliver a credible electoral outcome, which helped to reduce political tensions in the country. The press briefings also provided recommendations to the relevant authorities to respond to the issues identified in the voting process. For instance, following the delay in the announcement of the presidential results after 24 hours of voting (from 5 p.m. on 8 December), the ESR decision room, led by the NPC, engaged the EC in a meeting to discuss the reasons for the delays and measures to address them to reduce the political tensions. The outcome of the meeting led to a press conference/release by the EU on the night of December 8 apologising for its inability to declare the election results by 5 p.m. as it had previously promised (*Myjoyonline* 2020). The Commission noted that it was waiting to receive collation results from two remaining regions to enable it to declare the presidential election results. It consequently called on the public to remain calm as the political party agents were reviewing all results prior to certification by the chairperson of the Commission, who is the returning officer for the presidential election (*ibid.*).

In addition, the ESR led by the NPC, worked behind the scenes to resolve issues raised by the National Democratic Congress (NDC) about the Electoral Commission's declaration of the presidential poll results in favour of President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo (*Citinewsroom* 2020). The NDC had rejected the results and claimed that it won the presidential and parliamentary elections. The intervention of the eminent persons led by the NPC encouraged the NDC to go

to court to seek redress of its grievances instead of employing violence, to ensure that the country remained peaceful. Overall, the outcome of the ESR operations contributed to the relatively peaceful conduct of the elections despite the isolated cases of violence.

The successful operationalisation of the ESR was partly due to the stakeholder engagements and preparations made prior to the elections in December 2020. Thus, in preparation for the elections, WANEP focused on early warning interventions through various community engagement across the country. In collaboration with the NPC, in September 2020 WANEP established the National Election Response Group (NERG) which comprised eminent persons including representatives from several state and nonstate institutions. These included the NPC, the EC, the NCCE, and STAR-Ghana. The NERG had responsibility for discussing, developing, and recommending response strategies to violent threats to the 2020 elections (Asante & Osei-Afful 2021, p. 17).

WANEP also focused on engaging and educating the youth on the need for peaceful elections. Specifically, in collaboration with the Youth Empowerment Synergy (YES-Ghana) group (recently renamed as the Youth Opportunity and Transformation in Africa organisation (YOTA)), 60 young peace ambassadors were trained and deployed to three regions in northern Ghana ahead of the elections. The peace ambassadors had the responsibility for facilitating communal peace by responding to early warning signs of conflict and mobilising other young persons to promote peace. WANEP also facilitated and trained inter-party youth dialogue committees and women caucuses in eleven constituencies in four northern regions. The intervention sought to promote incident-free elections by providing relevant skills and knowledge to the committee members as agents of dialogue and peace (Star Ghana Foundation 2021). Pre-election peace promotion was also promoted through civic and voter education of various forms.

The Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO)

In the year 2000, the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) established CODEO, a non-partisan organisation comprising a network of CSOs ranging from professional to faith-based organisations working together to observe elections in Ghana (CODEO 2016). With a focus on preventing electoral violence, CODEO aims to work with Ghana's Electoral Commission to help ensure that elections are peaceful, transparent, and credible. As noted by Badasu (2018), CODEO was primarily formed to provide a complementary role in ensuring credible, peaceful, free, and fair elections in Ghana. Apart from the 1992 and 1996 general elections, CODEO has observed all elections in Ghana since 2000. CODEO, with its principle of impartiality, operates through 42 faith-based CSOs

and professional associations to prevent electoral fraud and violence and to enhance the credibility and acceptability of electoral results in Ghana (Badasu 2018). In addition, CODEO's website states that: 'CODEO is the largest and most organized domestic election observation network in Ghana. CODEO's strategic focus is preventing violence, monitoring, and documenting any reports of electoral violence with all stakeholders in the Ghanaian electoral process'.

In past elections, including Ghana's 2020 presidential election, CODEO prioritised its role in electoral violence prevention by participating in all three phases of the electoral process. According to the report by Asante & Osei-Afful (2021, p. 20) on the 2020 Ghanaian elections, CODEO observed nearly all aspects of the electoral process from voter registration through long-term observation of the pre-election environment to observation of the post-election environment. Beginning with an emphasis on the pre-election environment, observers were trained extensively in identifying 'red-flag' indicators regarding electoral violence, voting discrepancies and other election-related irregularities in communities, constituencies and regions designated as possible flashpoints for violent outbreaks. Working alongside constituency and regional coordinators in the field, CODEO observers followed strict rules in documenting reports of actions regarding multiple actors, political parties and others working closely in the stages before, during and after elections. These eye-witness observations help CODEO board members and partnering stakeholders to effectively plan peace-promoting engagements aimed at preventing violence throughout the electoral process, especially on and after election day.

Furthermore, civic/voter education also received widespread support from various formal and informal civil society groups as part of efforts to enhance election peace. For instance, CDD Ghana and CODEO partnered with the NCCE to roll out a five-to-six-week community-level civic and voter education programme in all 260 districts across the country (Star Ghana Foundation 2021). Additionally, CODEO worked with other entities such as the CDD-Ghana in conducting nationwide activities targeting peace promotion through conflict mediation committees. These engaged directly with voters and conducted activities such as distributing peace board games throughout communities.

Apart from pre-election observation, CODEO mobilised and deployed 4 000 observers across the country to all constituencies in Ghana on election day (Star Ghana Foundation 2021). To enhance the quality of election day observation, election results tabulation transparency, and the credibility of election outcomes, CODEO implemented a Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT) for the presidential polls (CODEO 2020). The PVT is a powerful citizens' tool for monitoring polling conduct on election day and for verifying official results as announced by the EC. In operationalising the PVT system, CODEO established

a tally headquarters at the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping and Training Centre (KAIPTC) with a mandate to transmit results from polling stations. The tally headquarters were made available to international observers, selected members of the security agencies, leaders of faith-based organisations, and the Electoral Commission. Using SMS-technology, the tally headquarters at KAIPTC received information from election observers to make precise estimates of the outcome of the presidential polls. Thus, the PVT allowed observers to transmit their findings from polling stations via SMS text messaging to a central database, monitored by data clerks specially trained to process the data at the KAIPTC (CODEO 2020). Apart from enabling observers to provide the public with more accurate and detailed information about the conduct of an election, the PVT helped to independently verify the accuracy of the official presidential results declared by the Electoral Commission.

From voter education to in-field voting observations, CODEO's role in promoting peaceful elections continues to evolve with each election. The organisation's use of best practice and its diligence in maintaining and strengthening key partnerships with voters and election stakeholders, has garnered a credible reputation for it as an impactful CSO in the prevention of electoral violence. 'The attempts by CODEO over the years have contributed positively to Ghana's peaceful atmosphere and international admiration as the doyen of democracy in Africa, with accompanying benefits and international support' (Issifu 2017, p. 2).

CSO CHALLENGES IN PROMOTING PEACEFUL ELECTIONS

Although it is noted that CSOs contribute to promoting peaceful elections in Ghana, they also face numerous challenges which encompass a wide range of issues. These challenges are both internal and external, as well as those that focus on structural and operational issues.

To start with, there is the major challenge of funding. Though some CSOs have development partners that support them in their projects, they still have the problem of unsustainable funding which impacts their ability to attract and sustain qualified staff. Moreover, there is unnecessary rivalry among CSOs which prevents collaboration, access to information, and how to ensure the recruitment of non-partisan officers for election-related activities (IJON 2017). Additionally, some CSOs face questions surrounding the way they conduct their internal affairs. Thus, they often lack accountability measures and oversight mechanisms, which would ensure that their actions would be regulated by both the state and by the populace (Annan 2013). The lack of legal structures governing the operations of CSOs is problematic for those CSOs trying to ensure a trustworthy public reputation in

order to maintain trusted relationships with stakeholders and, more importantly, the electorate, working together in efforts to promote peaceful elections in Ghana.

CSOs also face security challenges in promoting peace during all phases of the electoral cycle. The pre-election environment in 2020, for example, was characterised by some security challenges including political vigilantism, the COVID-19 pandemic, political intimidation, hate speeches, and secessionists threats to national peace and security. Some CSOs were attacked in the media by political party supporters for speaking out on various issues concerning voter registration and the conduct of the polls. Some members of the ESR led by the NPC were also attacked by NDC supporters after they tried to mediate between the party and the EC over the former's refusal to accept the results of the presidential election.

Furthermore, there is also the challenge of mistrust between political parties and some CSOs. There is a belief that some CSOs exist to pursue the parochial interests of either the ruling government or the opposition party. This belief is held by both government officials and opposition parties; but it becomes more entrenched whenever CSOs make pronouncements or publish research findings that seemingly contradict the positions of any of the political parties. Another key challenge is how to effectively measure the impact of the interventions and actions of CSOs in the electoral process in Ghana. There are inadequate scientific studies and reviews of the various electoral interventions by CSOs and how these interventions influence the electoral process (Claes 2016, p. 198). However, with each electoral cycle and contest, more CSOs are entering the arena, participating in direct electoral peacebuilding actions, and employing various and even renewed interventions toward supporting a culture of peace during all phases of the election cycle.

CONCLUSION

This article sought to explore the role, contributions, and challenges of CSOs, specifically the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) and the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) in promoting peaceful elections in Ghana. Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that Ghana's track record of conducting peaceful consecutive elections leading to a stable democracy could not have been achieved without the contribution of CSOs. Especially for the 2020 elections, the analysis has shown that the interventions of CSOs like WANEP and CODEO contributed to the relative success of the elections despite isolated cases of violence. There is no doubt that CSOs involved in promoting peaceful elections in Ghana have had an impact in the electoral process and will hopefully continue to make positive contributions toward promoting peaceful elections in the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the challenges faced by civil society organisations in promoting peaceful elections in Ghana, the following recommendations could help address these issues:

- *Diversify funding sources and enhance sustainability*
CSOs should explore and establish relationships with a variety of funding sources, including international donors, local businesses, foundations, and individual supporters, without compromising their neutrality and objectivity, to reduce dependence on a single source of funding. They must have sustainable fundraising strategies that focus on long-term financial stability, allowing CSOs to plan and execute election-related activities effectively.
- *Promote collaboration and information sharing*
CSOs should actively seek opportunities for collaboration and partnerships with other CSOs working towards similar goals. This can lead to more effective use of resources and a stronger collective impact. They should establish platforms for regular information sharing and knowledge exchange among CSOs to foster a sense of unity and cooperation. This will help to avoid duplication of efforts, enhance the cost effectiveness of interventions, and maximise the impact of these interventions.
- *Enhance accountability and transparency*
CSOs should implement robust internal governance structures, including accountability mechanisms and oversight procedures, to ensure that their actions are transparent, ethical, and aligned with their mission. They must engage in regular audits and reporting to demonstrate accountability to both their donors and the public.
- *Government must intensify efforts around conflict prevention*
There should be effective monitoring of the anti-vigilantism law to identify progress and challenges and how to enhance enforcement where necessary. There should be more sensitisation training with political parties and the public to minimise the violence meted out to CSOs before, during and after elections in Ghana.
- *Advocate for legal framework and regulation*
CSOs should collaborate with relevant stakeholders, including the government and regulatory bodies, to establish clear legal frameworks and regulations that govern the operations of CSOs. This can help build public trust and credibility. They must proactively participate in the formulation of policies that support the role of CSOs in promoting peaceful elections and democratic processes.

- *Mitigate security challenges*
CSOs need to prioritise the safety and security of their staff by investing in security training, risk assessments, and contingency plans. They must collaborate with security agencies to ensure a safe environment for both CSO members and the public during election periods.
- *Build trust with political parties*
CSOs should work on building strong relationships with political parties by engaging in open and transparent dialogue. They must develop clear communication strategies to address concerns of bias or partisanship and showcase the neutral and impartial nature of their work.
- *Conduct impact assessments and research*
CSOs should invest in rigorous research and impact assessment studies to evaluate the effectiveness of their interventions and their influence on the electoral process. They must publish research findings to demonstrate the value of their work and contribute to the knowledge base of electoral peacebuilding.
- *Capacity building and training*
CSOs should invest in training and capacity-building programmes for their members to enhance their skills in conflict resolution, election monitoring, communication, and other relevant areas. By having well-trained and qualified staff, CSOs can effectively navigate the challenges they face.
- *Engage in early conflict prevention*
CSOs should focus not only on responding to conflicts during elections but also on proactive conflict prevention strategies. They must engage with communities, political parties, and relevant stakeholders to address underlying tensions and promote dialogue and understanding.
- *Public awareness and education*
CSOs should continue to raise public awareness about the importance of peaceful elections through campaigns, workshops, and community engagement initiatives. They should foster a culture of inclusivity, tolerance, and peaceful political participation among citizens.

Overall, these recommendations and the experiences of Ghanaian CSOs can usher in new information that can offer guidance to CSOs in other countries in working toward the best outcome of elections for peaceful democracies. Thus, from a practical perspective, CSOs in other African countries should be looking at what structural factors must be addressed in both the short and long term to replicate the operational interventions that have been highlighted in the Ghanaian context.

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