

## Political Vigilantism in Ghana's Democratic Consolidation: Critical Mass, Political Behavior, and Actor Choices

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**Abstract:** Ghana's twenty-nine-year-old democracy has passed three 'turnover' tests. Though indicative of a consolidating democracy, there is a consistent increase of low intensity electoral violence. The perpetrators of such political violence are politicians acting through vigilante groups affiliated to their political parties. This paper seeks to unravel the puzzle why vigilante-perpetrated electoral violence rises even as Ghana's democracy consolidates. To answer this, the article utilizes the results of Afrobarometer survey rounds five and seven, data from Countries at Risk of Electoral Violence, and Bob-Milliar's disaggregate data of electoral violence in Ghana. By a times series analysis, elections were categorized into two cases according to trends in attacks on institutions around elections. Based on this, the hypothesis, "the higher the opposition's expected benefit of the use of vigilantism, the more electoral violence irrespective the stage of democracy" was tested. Then, the most similar systems design was used to study the relationship between independent economic, institutional, and political culture and actor variables and the dependent variable of democratic consolidation across both cases. The results indicate that vigilante attacks on institutions are more frequent around 'turnover' elections. This can be explained if considered that it is a rational behaviour of opposition political actors to attain power at all cost. These political choices have gained root in the absence of a critical mass against it. The danger is that vigilante activities after these elections inform a negative perception about crucial institutions such as the executive (the Presidency and the Ghana Police Service), the judiciary and the legislature. Thus, democracy suffers declining support amongst some Ghanaians. To eliminate political vigilantism in Ghana's democracy, more Ghanaians need to engage in political discourses to attain the critical mass that forces political actors to make democracy consolidating decisions, including disbanding all vigilante groups in Ghana.

**Keywords:** democratic consolidation, political vigilantism, political culture, political actor behaviour, electoral violence, Ghana

### The Baggage of Electoral Violence in Ghana's Democracy

Ghana transitioned to a democracy in 1992 after ten years of the Provisional National Defence Council military regime, electing its first civilian government of the fourth republic. At the time of this research in 2019, power had already alternated three times between two political parties; the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the National Patriotic Party (NPP).<sup>1</sup> So far, the 'winner takes all' approach to the allocation of national resources has been the tradition of all governments across political divides. That is to say, parties have shaped the behaviour of political actors in the struggle for power amidst an intensely competitive atmosphere. In such an atmosphere, though one would expect that youth involvement in politics informs policies against high unemployment, the availability of unemployed youth is instead exploited by some politicians to pursue their political agenda.<sup>2</sup>

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<http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v20/v20i1a4.pdf>

In Ghana, this exploitation manifests itself in the deployment of youth as foot soldiers or vigilantes to perpetrate political violence in exchange for favours such as employment or monetary gain. Vigilantism is a phenomenon across Africa but presents itself differently. In South Africa and Mozambique, community protection groups emerge where the security sector is absent.<sup>3</sup> However, vigilantism in Nigeria and Ghana is highly political in nature.<sup>4</sup> In this article, the author relies upon Tankebe's definition of political vigilantism as "instances in which people take the law into their own hands in order to advance a partisan political agenda."<sup>5</sup> Political vigilantism is a sub-category of vigilantism as generally studied by Rosenbaum and Sederberg.<sup>6</sup> This paper focuses on political vigilantism in Ghana vis-à-vis the role of political actors in the two main parties. This phenomenon has gained such currency amongst the NDC and NPP that both political parties have vigilante groups present in all sixteen regions of Ghana as private security and 'election observers' during elections.<sup>7</sup>

Some scholars argued that this phenomenon has persisted in the Ghanaian political environment due to a lack of formal recognition within parties for the youth.<sup>8</sup> These vigilante groups come to life during election periods as they are promised benefits once their parties come out victorious. This gives these vigilante groups the perception that holding public office positions is a quick means of access to scarce socio-economic resources. Against this backdrop, the immediate aftermath of elections is characterised by the display of entitlements to state resources by vigilante groups of victorious parties.<sup>9</sup> The situation is worse in elections that lead to turnover of political power. In these instances, this sense of entitlement exhibits itself in vigilante groups' seizure and occupancy of state institutions. Unsurprisingly, the forceful removal of these groups from occupied state institutions or failure of patrons to meet expectations by fulfilling their promises can drive groups to attack their patrons and or state institutions.<sup>10</sup> Irrespective of the tendencies and proven record of these groups to engage in lawlessness, parties and individual political actors continue to establish these vigilante groups.

Nevertheless, political vigilantism has not been given the needed attention in the academic literature on democratic consolidation in Ghana. Also, the existing body of knowledge on political vigilantism and democratic consolidation does not adequately explain the causal relationship between these two concepts.<sup>11</sup> This is partly because literature on political vigilantism and electoral violence is only now emerging amongst social scientists interested in Ghanaian politics.<sup>12</sup> The existing literature has however adopted an institutionalist approach to understanding the topic of political vigilantism, namely a focus on the ineffectiveness of state organs such as the police to deal with vigilante activities. Indeed, some go further to almost exonerate vigilantes of wrongdoing and highlighting their positive works such as providing security during elections in areas where the state is unable to do so.<sup>13</sup>

Based on existing literature, this article neither sets out to give a descriptive account of how vigilante groups evolved in Ghana nor outline the causes for their emergence. A detailed historical narrative, possible causative factors, and an exhaustive list of all vigilante groups in Ghana are offered by Asamoah and Gyampo and colleagues.<sup>14</sup> This article instead focuses on how political actor choices, decisions to involve such groups in elections, and the initial subtle public acceptance has not only emboldened groups but also impacts democracy entrenching institutions. There is no detailed academic work solely dedicated to this perspective. At best, previous researchers have only alluded to the role of actors without empirical evidence.

This article is, rather, centered on political actors' behaviour and how such behaviours toward vigilante groups affect state institutions. Thus, this paper considers the systemic effects of political vigilantism on, or for, the democratic consolidation process in some core state institutions: the Executive (here narrowed down to the Presidency and the Ghana Police Service), the Legislature, and the Judiciary. Also, while most existing literature on Ghana presents democratic consolidation in its 'negative' conceptualization, this paper moves away from this trend by viewing the concept within a 'positive' definition that seeks to explain institutionalization of democracy at the systemic level.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, since political vigilante groups do not act on their own accord, this article examines the behavior of political actors towards vigilante groups vis-à-vis observed trends in electoral violence and effects on state institutions in turnover elections.

To achieve this aim, we set out to answer the question: why does political vigilantism rise in turnover elections although Ghana's democracy appears to consolidate? This research is situated within the political culture and actor school of thought. Methodologically, variation within cases is used to observe electoral violence across elections between 1996 and 2012. Based on the trends observed, the elections were categorized into cases (turnover/non-turnover). The continual use of the 1992 Constitution which establishes all political institutions over the study period allows for the assumption that the institutional variables are less likely to cause the variance in outcome. Also, the existence and the functioning of both NPP and NDC political parties gave control over institutional variables. On the other hand, data from the World Bank Group indicating consistent economic growth accounted for economic variables. The most similar systems design was then used to observe the influence of political culture and actors on the cases. To ensure reliability, data is used from generally recognized sources, namely the World Bank, Countries at Risk of Electoral Violence (CREV), Bob-Milliar's categorization of electoral violence in Ghana, and Afrobarometer surveys rounds five and seven. This paper relies on the measurement of the use of violence to achieve political goals as a 'reverse' proxy for the level of democratic consolidation put forward by Andreas Schedler.

Results show electoral violence on the increase, as well as a growing concentration of attacks on state institutions around turnover elections since Ghana's transition to democracy. This is against the expectation that extended years of democratic practice should lead to less electoral violence. Vigilante groups perpetrating violence in the interest of political actors and police inability to prosecute members of these groups has deepened the public's mistrust in the police. Opposition parties in turn play on this mistrust to form more vigilante groups assisting them to power. This vicious cycle has negative implications for democratic consolidation by placing criminal groups beyond the control of the state, disregard for laws, and bringing the sanctity of the courts into disrepute. Ghanaians disapprove of vigilante activities but do not form the critical mass required to force choices from political actors against the creation of vigilante groups to further their agenda. Clearly, the persistence of vigilante groups and electoral violence is facilitated by the choices of political actors and the low level of civic culture amongst the citizenry. Therefore, political scientists and policy makers should not misconstrue the 'survival' of a new democracy over time as a positive progression to democratic consolidation.

### **Finding a Nexus between Political Vigilantism and Democratic Consolidation in Africa**

Democratic consolidation is conceptualized either as a means to an end or an end in itself. For Gasiorowski and Power, define democratic consolidation as a means: "...the process by which a newly established democratic regime becomes sufficiently durable that a return to nondemocratic rule is no longer likely."<sup>16</sup> Such a "...slow but purposeful..." process usually is ushered in by free and fair elections.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, as an end, Stepan and Linz understand democratic consolidation as a "...political regime in which democracy as a complex system of institutions, rules, and patterned incentives and disincentives has become 'the only game in town.'"<sup>18</sup> Though such a state of democracy can regress.<sup>19</sup> Amongst both schools are minimalists and maximalists.

Minimalists define democratic consolidation as a specific point in time, e.g., for Huntington, it is after the completion of the 'two turnover' test and for other comparative scholars it is after twelve years or between seventeen and twenty years after a democratic transition.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, the maximalists focus on outcomes in a political regime. For Stepan and Linz, those outcomes are 'behavioral' (no violent attacks on democracy), 'attitudinal' (citizen perceptions and preferences) and 'constitutional' (strong democratic institutions serving as incentives or disincentives).<sup>21</sup> For empirical studies, Andreas Schedler is credited for the operationalization of democratic consolidation based on his claim that the sustenance of a democracy is dependent on the behavior of political actors, the attitude of citizens and politicians, as well as institutional structures.<sup>22</sup> Scholars such as O'Donnell and Diamond caution that democratic consolidation is not a teleology, but imperfect democracies can endure and democratic consolidation does not solve all economic, political, and social problems.<sup>23</sup>

One such political problem, political vigilantism, is studied here. Most empirical studies on democratic consolidation are grounded in the maximalist school in which scholarly works have converged around different perspectives—economic, institutional, and political culture and actor. As these perspectives in the literature seek to explain the possible challenges posed to democratic consolidation, the sections below consider the factors leading to the rise of political vigilantism.

#### *Economic Perspective*

This perspective focuses on economic growth as either correlating, causing or sustaining the democratic consolidation process. Lipset, Huntington and later Barro, claim that transitioning of countries from non-democratic to democratic is preceded by economic growth and modernization.<sup>24</sup> Rueschemeyer, Huber, and Stephens argue that economic growth ensured democratic consolidation by creating a large middle class to enforce a balance of power between the political and economic elites.<sup>25</sup> More recently, Dunning studied democratic consolidation in countries endowed with sufficient natural resources to provide public goods.<sup>26</sup> In this context, democracy persists if the elites feel secure about their political and economic power. Though this may give these countries a democratic consolidation outlook, it does not explain the quality of democracy in these states.<sup>27</sup> Przeworski and colleagues also demonstrated that economic growth has no causal relation with democratic transition since democracy can be introduced from without.<sup>28</sup>

More directly relevant to this article, Boix and Stokes claim that economic growth is rather a relevant explanation to the survival of democracy in the long term.<sup>29</sup> The literature on political vigilantism in Africa suggests that economic development and equality in the

distribution of the proceeds of such developments matter for the emergence of vigilantism.<sup>30</sup> In Nigeria, economic reforms did not tackle deprivation and inequality so vigilantism thrived.<sup>31</sup> With criminals targeting those perceived to be better off, vigilantism manifests in the highly privatized security sector in Africa to protect means of livelihood, e.g. the fight of farmers against Fulani in Ghana, the initial aim of the Bakassi boys to protect their market goods against theft, and the protection of homes in South Africa.<sup>32</sup> Aside those who form vigilante groups as a substitute for missing state security forces to protect their livelihoods, there are also those who seek vigilante work as a source of income and political resource for the poor.<sup>33</sup> For Ethiopia, Di Nunzio concludes that unemployment is one of the catalysts for quick mobilization of youth to engage in political vigilantism in the interest of the government.<sup>34</sup> Vigilante work is for sale to those that can afford it.<sup>35</sup>

### *Institutional Perspective*

This school views effective formal political institutions as the causal factor for democratic consolidation. Those can be general (e.g. rules, organization, procedures and constitutional systems of government) and specific formal institutions (e.g. political parties, arms of government, and bureaucratic institutions).<sup>36</sup> These institutions are built over time and relevant to democratic consolidation by regulating executive power.<sup>37</sup> In this regard, parliamentary and multiparty systems were for a long time seen as more conducive to democratic consolidation than presidential systems that create a 'winner takes all' situation and thereby risk undermining other arms of government. Also, a first past the post system rather than proportional electoral system can discredit democracy by neglecting minority voices. Therefore, to ensure democratic consolidation in heterogeneous countries, power sharing systems are preferable since they guarantee the participation of all minorities. Thus, the type of institutions adopted influences political culture.<sup>38</sup>

In sharp contrast, Power and Gasiorowski find the choice of constitutional type (political party system and system of government) not significantly related to democratic consolidation.<sup>39</sup> Alexander also remains unconvinced about the above institutional choice argument given how 'substantially' these formal political institutions remain open to revision and manipulation. Acemoglu and Robinson could only demonstrate an 'interwoven' relationship between economic and political institutions aiding democratic consolidation, calling for further research.<sup>40</sup> In discourse on the role of institutions in democratic consolidation however, political parties have been sidelined.<sup>41</sup> Though relevant, Lipset argues that the mere presence of political parties in a democracy does not guarantee democratic consolidation but rather guarantees the emergence of political elites, which in new democracies especially in developing countries can instead impede democratic consolidation by a domination of personalist or elite interests.<sup>42</sup>

It is interesting to note that political vigilantism defies the above submissions. Political vigilantism in Africa plays dangerously outside the democracy rulebook while democratic consolidation is about democracy being the only game in town.<sup>43</sup> Democratic consolidation might need certain institutions in specific contexts but vigilantism defies this requirement. Vigilantism in Africa is present in different institutional settings such as the unitary, presidential, and first past the poll systems of Ghana; the federal system of Nigeria; the ethnic federal system of Ethiopia; and the proportional system of South Africa.<sup>44</sup> From this

literature, the weaknesses of law and order institutions coupled with competitive multiparty politics account for vigilantism.

#### *Political Culture and Actor Perspective*

This school argues that democratic consolidation is caused by the political culture (habits and attitudes) of people in a state. Scholars have advocated for 'civic culture' in which citizens demand good governance and accountability from their leaders through active discourse. In new democracies where this culture is absent, the citizens must be taught.<sup>45</sup> Further, democratic consolidation requires interpersonal trust to ensure political participation amongst the public. Trust also provides the sense of security for political actors to adhere to the 'democratic rules of the game' in alternation of power. Besides trusting others, citizens must also trust that democracy is "...an inherently good thing."<sup>46</sup>

Focusing on political actor decisions, 'choices and choosers' are the direct regime changing factors for good or bad.<sup>47</sup> Rational choice theorists argue that political actors, if left uncontrolled, can jeopardize stability for the benefit of their parochial interest.<sup>48</sup> To avert this, Weingast submits that democracies need citizens with 'values' to put elites in check.<sup>49</sup> Hence, citizens must be committed to 'defend democratic institutions' even if the act of violation would inure to their benefit. Political elites' fear of losing power would force them to make democracy consolidating choices. He also argues that though countries with ethnic divisions impede the accumulation of 'mass behavior' to keep elites in check, interethnic solidarity can emerge because "...citizens aid those who are threatened because the potential victims will later fail to come to their aid if they fail to come to the victims' aid."<sup>50</sup>

Vigilantism in African countries thrives on citizen and political elite support, indicating the possible lack democratic values in such societies. If such values are absent, political elites are left unchecked in their use of vigilante groups for parochial interests. For example, the Bakassi boys enjoyed increased public support as more people became disillusioned by democracy's failure to improve their economic situation, indicating low intrinsic support for democratic values.<sup>51</sup> In Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria, political actors use vigilantes to intimidate their opponents which questions their commitment to democracy as the only game in town.<sup>52</sup> Political actor choices can destroy the trust needed between opposing political actors to consolidate democratic gains.

The political culture and actor perspective form the theoretical foundation for this article. This translates into the hypothesis: the higher the opposition's expected benefit of the use of vigilantism, the more electoral violence irrespective the stage of democracy. This notwithstanding, some components of the research question dovetail into different schools of thought. Inasmuch as the topic of this paper relates much to the behaviour of political elites, the article is also concerned with how these behaviors affect state institutions. Taking a clue from Schedler, the primary source of observation and measurement of democratic consolidation in a state is based on the behavior of political actors and citizens. The focus here is on the behavior of the political elites towards the phenomenon of involving vigilante groups in elections.

#### **Research Design**

This article relies on Schedler who conceptualizes a consolidated democracy as "one that is unlikely to break down."<sup>53</sup> The operationalization and measurement of democratic consolidation is based on the attitudinal, structural, or behavioral foundations. The object of

study is observable behavior based on the assumption that "...past behaviour (under stress) is predictive of future behaviour." Under the behavioral foundation are three basic categories: "the use of violence, rejection of elections, transgression of authority."<sup>54</sup> For the category 'use of violence' this paper concentrates on electoral violence defined as a "...subset of political violence distinguished by its timing, perpetrators and victims, objectives, and methods."<sup>55</sup> To understand the implications for institutions, electoral violence against four state institutions are analyzed.

Table 1: Operationalisation of Independent and Dependent Variable and Measurement

Variables	Operationalisation	Observation/ Measurement
Political culture and actor	Political party support for use of violence through formation of Vigilante groups. Citizen behaviour towards political vigilantism.	Results of Afrobarometer round 5 and 7 results, news and journal articles.
Democratic consolidation	Lesser electoral violence incidences as compared to previous election.	Recorded number of electoral violence.
	Lesser number of vigilante seizure of government owned public offices.	Recorded number of seized government owned public offices.

### Case Selection

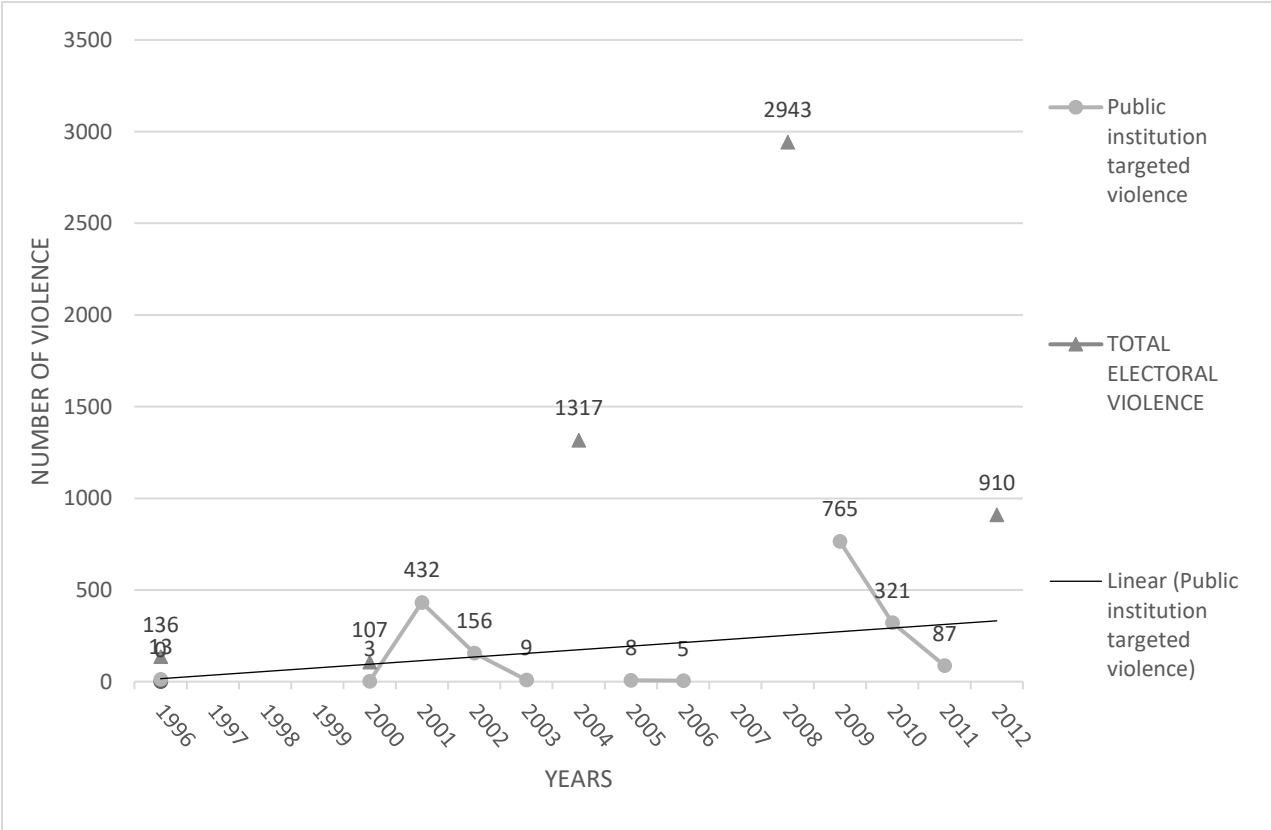
In selecting the cases, the starting point for the analysis is 1996 as the first election after the transitional elections of 1992. The cut-off point is 2012 because of restricted data availability on general electoral violence and institutions targeted by electoral violence afterwards. There is variation because on the one hand, the 2000 and 2008 elections resulted in alternation of power between the two major political parties contesting elections between 1996 and 2012. On the other hand, the 1996, 2004 and 2012 elections retained incumbent governments. The analysis accounts for the economic and institutional independent variables across time to avoid their influence on the dependent variable. Institutionally, the 1992 Constitution of Ghana which established all other institutions has not been repealed since its approval. Also, both the NDC and NPP have remained the dominant political parties active across the study period. Therefore, all major political institutional arrangements established during the transitional period remain across the period of study. To account for economic variables, data from the World Bank indicates GDP growth started at 3.88 percent in 1992 and was 9.29 percent in 2012, with an average growth of 5.66 percent from 1992 to 2012. GDP per capita also increased starting at \$414.77 in 1992 and growing to \$1,629.80 in 2012.<sup>56</sup> Following from the economic perspective, Ghana's consistent economic growth would have positively affected its democratic consolidation, if at all, hence its impact in explaining rising electoral violence can be excluded.

*Empirical Data Sources for Analysis*

A time series analysis from 1996 to 2012 was used to observe trends in electoral violence and vigilante attacks on public state institutions. Data from CREV and Bob-Milliar’s categorization of electoral violence in Ghana were used to analyze general electoral violence and vigilante seizure of government offices respectively. Data from Afrobarometer surveys, journal and news articles were added. Observed trends informed the categorization of elections into government alternating and nongovernment alternating cases. The most similar system’s design method (MSSD) was used in conducting a comparative study of the cases.<sup>57</sup> The institutional and economic variables were held constant across cases due to their presence over the whole period of study.

**Explaining Increasing Electoral Violence and Institutional Attacks**

The aftermath of Ghana’s 2016 presidential and parliamentary elections—the most recent of the three alternations in government from the NDC to the NPP—was Ghana’s reality check on how abysmally electoral violence had been handled over the years. Electoral violence has existed from the beginning of the democratic regime in Ghana. The difference, however, is as Ghana accumulated more years towards democratic consolidation, incidences of electoral violence also increased and thus became more obvious. The natural expectation would be for electoral violence to decrease as the country gained more electoral experience in democratic consolidation. However, that the opposite of this is occurring in Ghana supports Diamond’s argument that imperfect democracies can equally endure through formal institutionalization.<sup>58</sup>



Graph 1: Trends of Electoral violence in Ghana from 1996 to 2012



The time series analysis conducted from 1996 to 2012 found a rise in electoral violence perpetrated mostly by party-recruited vigilante groups (except for 2012 elections that recorded a marginal decrease). This analysis covered five general elections, of which two resulted in an alternation in government (2000, 2008). Introducing data about incidences of targeted violence shows both a concentration of attacks on state institutions around government alternating elections and an upward trend from 2000 to 2008. This suggests political vigilantes of the two main political parties are the likely perpetrators of such electoral violence in Ghana.<sup>59</sup> Vigilante group presence in every election is depicted by the relatively consistent increase of incidences of electoral violence. The troubling attacks on state institutions after government alternating elections can best be explained by reflecting on the thoughts of Bermeo that political actors' "...choices are the factors with direct consequences. These decisions if left unchecked can make or unmake democratic consolidation."<sup>60</sup>

*Political Actor Choices: Alternation in Power and Attacks on State Institutions*

According to the answers provided to question 80a1 of Afrobarometer survey round five in 2012, Ghanaians associate both positive and negative roles with political vigilantes. Whilst appreciating that vigilante groups mobilize for political agendas, their illicit activities such as acting as body guards (22 percent), disrupting electoral processes (13 percent), assault on members of opposing parties (12 percent), creating confusion at polling stations, snatching ballot boxes and intimidating voters (8 percent) are highlighted.<sup>61</sup> These criminal activities benefit one political party or the other, hence they are organized and supported by political actors.<sup>62</sup> We can identify a change in Ghanaians' assessment of vigilante groups from 2012 to 2016 (Afrobarometer round seven survey) when 88 percent of the interviewees considered attacks by vigilante groups on government appointees wrong and punishable (Q81a); 87 percent considered lock down of institutions wrong and punishable (Q81b); 91 percent considered attacks on state institutions unacceptable (Q81c); and 88 percent strongly approved of groups engaging in lawless activities being prosecuted (Q81d).<sup>63</sup> This increased condemnation of vigilante groups indicates an inconsistency in public opinion and inspires the analysis in the subsequent section on political culture of Ghanaians vis-a-vis the choices of political actors.

According to rational choice theory, political parties' increasing use of vigilante groups is a benefit-maximizing behavior of those actors since the voters have not yet punished any party for forming and using vigilante groups. It is clear that political actors abide by the rules of the game only if it is in their interest. But if noncompliance does not threaten their hold on power, the inclination is to go against democratic principles. Ghana's 'winner takes all politics' and the expectation that turnover will happen after every eight years serve as incentives for the opposition to make use of all, even illegal, means to achieve political power.<sup>64</sup> This mentality of winning elections by all means is reflected in Akuffo Addo's (then presidential candidate of the opposition NPP) "All die be die" electoral campaign in 2012. Despite the wide condemnation of this statement as having the potential to foment violence, in 2019 former President John Mahama called on NDC supporters to take on the NPP 'Boot for boot' in the 2020 election.

Irrespective of the above data, the presence of a 'civic culture' that holds political actors accountable for their actions is highly variable.<sup>65</sup> Results of the Afrobarometer survey round five indicate 59 percent of respondents confirm that vigilante groups are rent seekers and 81 percent indicate that their activities jeopardize the democracy and safety of the country.<sup>66</sup> However, 56 percent agreed they should be compensated for their party support in the instances their efforts contributed to their political parties winning office.<sup>67</sup> This expressed sympathy towards vigilante group activities after elections demonstrates lack of a critical mass to force political elites to disband these groups.

*State Institutions in Crisis: Repercussions of Political Actor Choices and Low Civic Culture*

One might assume that the presidency is insulated from the vigilante group violence affiliated to election winning parties. But in reality, vigilantes have challenged the appointing authority of presidents by abusing and rejecting appointees of various presidents to local institutions.<sup>68</sup> This lack of presidential independence might be the cause for 34 percent of the respondents of Afrobarometer round seven survey to question the ability of the government to handle political vigilantism.<sup>69</sup> Reduced faith in government performance can erode citizen trust in democracy as inherently good and worth defending, hence leading to more vigilante groups.

One of the institutions under the executive that is bearing the brunt of vigilante activities is the Ghana Police Service. The 1992 Constitution established Ghana's government as a hybrid system combining features of the presidential and parliamentary system. This has given the President enormous powers which stretch to the security sector.<sup>70</sup> The police especially exhibit their loyalty to the appointing powers such that the public does not believe in their ability to objectively deal with crimes committed by appendages of the government.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, Assistant Commissioner of Police Dr. Benjamin Agordzor bemoaned the accountability of the police to the President as the cause of inability to fight political vigilantism.<sup>72</sup> In the Afrobarometer round five, 90 percent of respondents point to political interference as the reason for police inability to fight vigilantism.<sup>73</sup> This widespread opinion of the police, an essential institution which relies on the trust of the citizenry to perform its duties, is inimical to democratic consolidation.<sup>74</sup> This mistrust can facilitate other criminal activities which is a threat to any democracy. It is also clear that political parties in opposition play on this public mistrust as the rationale to form vigilante groups for protection. They argue that these vigilante groups are needed as security personnel since the police are loyal to the government—their political opponent.

At times, vigilante groups also prevent members of the legislature from visiting their constituencies, indirectly denying citizens the right to participate in decision making. The primary patrons and beneficiaries of vigilante group activities are members of the legislature. These activities not only put the reputation of the law-making arm of government into disrepute but also legislators' personal safety and ability to serve constituents. Members of Parliament who have benefited from the activities of these groups but have not provided compensation after winning elections risk being attacked on constituency visits.<sup>75</sup> While some might argue that those politicians deserve such punishments, it deprives Ghana's democracy of inclusive participation in decision making.

Furthermore, though members of the judiciary are neither patrons nor beneficiaries of vigilante groups and their activities, they equally suffer from its effects. Vigilante groups have defied the sanctity of courts during trials of group members, chased judges away, and

even freed their members.<sup>76</sup> Political scientists argue that the 1992 Constitution has not established an independent judiciary since appointments and promotions in the superior courts are sanctioned by the President.<sup>77</sup> With their patron(s) in power, these groups can attack the judiciary with impunity. While the judiciary ought to uphold justice when all other institutions fail in a democratic polity, political vigilantism mutes their ability to serve justice independently.

Whether to compensate vigilante groups to prevent their attacks on institutions or to police groups to sustain public support for democracy presents a double-edged problem. This article has established that the failure of political actors to compensate vigilante groups may put state institutions at their mercy. Yet the legitimacy of democracy becomes questionable when state resources flow to groups to avoid attacks on institutions. Democracy needs legitimacy for its feasibility and stability, becoming endangered when its core values (equality and liberty) are questioned.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, supporting vigilante groups with state resources raises the issue of social inequality.

Socio-economic equality tests the ability of democracy to utilize to state resources for attaining the better living conditions to which its advocates allude. In the new democracies of developing countries, democracy may be supported because it is associated with better conditions of living for everyone—not necessarily out of a conviction that it is innately good. Utilizing state institutions to skew socio-economic opportunities in favor of vigilante groups also has the potential to delay democratic consolidation by eroding public acceptance and support. So long as political actors continue to support the involvement of vigilante groups to win political power—disregarding how political institutions are being weakened and the legitimacy of democracy is being questioned in the process—Ghana’s democracy may simply extend its duration but not progress to democratic consolidation as an end in itself. Though political vigilantism might not be seen by all as having enough potential to cause immediate disruption or regression, with the continued strength of these groups democratic consolidation in Ghana stands to suffer in the long run.

### **‘Endurance’ or Democratic Consolidation: The Need for Critical Observation of Ghana’s Democracy**

In 2016, Ghana successfully passed its third turn over test by changing power from the incumbent NDC to the opposition NPP. However, the consistent rise of low-intensity political violence—electoral violence, attacks, and takeovers of state institutions by the youth wings of winning parties—was too obvious to be ignored. In Ghana, these youth groups have assumed the role of vigilantes which is not a new phenomenon in Africa.<sup>79</sup> Though elections are designed as an alternative to violence as a means of achieving governance, political actors in Ghana have used low-intensity violence as a permanent part of the struggle for political power.<sup>80</sup> In this process, they weaken very crucial political institutions such as the three branches of government and the Ghana Police Service.<sup>81</sup> This is not conducive for democratic consolidation.<sup>82</sup> It is evident that self-interested perpetrators of such violence—political parties and actors—are an integral part of any future for democratic consolidation in Ghana.<sup>83</sup> However, their constant involvement of vigilante groups in election processes not only weakens political institutions but also calls to question the legitimacy of democracy as a norm in Ghana. Of course, one may also bemoan the nature of

Ghanaian civic culture and its seeming inability to push actors towards making more democratic-sustaining choices in pursuing political power.

The political culture and actor school of thought provided better answers to the question: why does political vigilantism rise in turnover elections though Ghana's democracy appears to consolidate? In the study of democratic consolidation, behavior of political actors is the first point of observation.<sup>84</sup> More to the point, political parties are not established to institutionalize democratic behavior but rather for the struggle to gain political power.<sup>85</sup> Thus, political actors present the perfect point to start seeking to understand the cause(s) of the rising incidents of electoral violence and attacks on government institutions.

A time series analysis and most similar systems design reveal a causal role of political culture/actor variables in rising electoral violence and consistent attacks on government institutions after political power changes hands. However, the potential role of other variables not in the focus of this paper suggests caution against making a deterministic claim of the independent variable being the sole cause of the dependent variable. Reliable data covering 2016 electoral violence and attacks on institutions also would have painted a more complete picture of the phenomenon of increasing electoral violence in Ghana. These limitations notwithstanding, the findings sustain the hypothesis that higher expected benefits of using vigilantism correlate with increased instances of electoral violence, irrespective the stage of democracy. This trend weakens institutions that sustain the current democratic system and diminishes public trust in democracy.

Therefore, political actors' involvement of vigilantes in election processes is potentially more than just a nuisance to democracy in Ghana. It is urgent to put in place constitutional arrangements to eliminate this phenomenon, e.g., limiting the powers of the executive (Presidency) vis-a-vis other branches of government and crucial institutions such as the Ghana Police Service. A restructuring to guarantee these institutions independence from the executive would allow for vigilantism and other crucial issues to be tackled. Ghana's democracy endures, however some basic rules of the game—e.g., against the use of violence—are not yet institutionalized amongst parties and political actors. Despite the nearly thirty years since the 1992 transition, significant challenges to democratic consolidation remain.

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## Notes

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