

Political Vigilantism and Democratic Governance in Ghana's Fourth Republic

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Abstract

Ghana's fourth attempt at constitutional democratic governance which started in 1992 has been plagued with negative acts of political vigilantism. Political vigilante groups play a key role in securing electoral victory for their parties. But they are also key agents in pushing their parties to opposition. Vigilante groups, particularly those belonging to the party that won elections have over the years, taken the laws of the country into their own hands, forcibly ejected officials of previous administration from their apartments and physically assaulted them, as well as engaged in seizures of public property and assets in the custody of public officials in an uncoordinated manner. These acts have fuelled polarization in Ghana's body politic and undermined the nation's drive towards democratic maturity. What accounts for the rise in the activities of vigilante groups? How useful are these groups to political parties? In what specific ways do vigilante groups pose a threat to Ghana's democratic governance? These and other allied questions are addressed in this article.

Keywords: *Ghana, Political Vigilantism, Political Clientelism, Political Party, Democratic Governance*

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Introduction

Ghana attained another step forward as a model of democracy in Africa on 7 January 2017 when there was a third peaceful transfer of political power from one government to another.¹ Several election observer groups such as Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) and the European Union Elections Observer Missions (EU-EOM) described the 2016 general elections as well administered, free, fair and transparent (CODEO, 2017a; EU EOM-Ghana, 2016; Ghana Web, 2016a). However, The EU-EOM outlined several challenges such as misuse of incumbency, unequal access to media, unaccountable financing during the campaign period, abuse of state resources and infrastructure of the presidency (GhanaWeb, 2016a).

Additionally, CODEO's *Post-Election Observation Statement* pointed out amongst other issues that there were isolated cases of acts of violence allegedly perpetrated by some supporters of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) against some advocates of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), as well as the unlawful and forceful seizures of public and private property in some constituencies across the country. Also, CODEO's Communiqué released on 6 April 2017, the domestic observers expressed grave concern about the proliferation of the activities of vigilante groups and faulted the two major political parties, the NPP and NDC as being culpable for creating such dangerous party militia in Ghana. The activities of these groups pose a considerable danger to Ghana's electoral politics, democratic governance and development (CODEO, 2017b : 2). It must however be noted that vigilante groups do not spring up in a vacuum. What accounts for their formation? What are they expected to do? What do they actually do? How do their activities promote the interest of political parties? How do their activities undermine Ghana's drive towards democratic maturity? These are the questions to be addressed by this article. The central thesis of this paper is that even though political vigilantism plays a key role in securing electoral victories, it also contributes to electoral defeats of political parties and also undermines Ghana's drive towards democratic maturity and consolidation.

There are several works on Ghana's democratic development, democratic consolidation and electoral politics such as Ayee (1997, 1998, 2002), Frempong (2008, 2012), Gyimah-Boadi (1991, 2001, 2009) and Smith (2002a, 2002b). Other works looked at the role of civil society, and several state institutions in Ghana's democratic consolidation (Whitfield, 2003; Arthur, 2010; Gyampo and Asare, 2015). Some have looked at the prospects and challenges of democratic consolidation in Ghana (Abdulai and Crawford, 2010; Fobih, 2008). There are

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several works on ethnicity and electoral politics in Ghana and the threat to Ghana's maturing democracy (Adjei, 2013; Arthur, 2009; Frempong, 2001, 2004, 2006). Some works have also looked at voter behaviour (Debrah, 2016 and; Lindberg and Morrison, 2005, 2008).

Undoubtedly, Ghana's flourishing democracy has also received significant intellectual attention (Debrah, 2016; Gyampo and Asare, 2015; Yobo and Gyampo, 2015; Alidu, 2014; Brierley and Ofosu, 2014; Bob-Milliar, 2012; Abdulai and Crawford, 2010; Ayee, 2011, 2002, 1998, 1997; Arthur, 2010; Daddieh, 2009; Gyimah-Boadi, 2009; Boafo-Arthur, 2006; Agyeman-Duah, 2005; Frempong, 2001, 2004, 2006, 2012; Oquaye, 1995; Smith, 2002a, 2002b). Nevertheless, there appear to be no scholarly study of the activities of political vigilantism and how they affect Ghana's drive towards democratic maturity. The divisive activities of vigilantism have plagued all the three turnovers of political power in 2001, 2009 and 2017 and must not escape intellectual research and analysis.

Admittedly, an earlier work of Gyampo (2010) focused on some narrow issues of party apparatchiks (agents of an apparatus), however, it did not cover the particular subject of how political vigilantism contribute to electoral victories, defeats and poses serious threats not only to governance but also on Ghana's entire democratic development. The distinctiveness of this paper is that it is, arguably, the first or among the ground-breaking studies that seek to examine activities of political vigilantism in the democratic practice of Ghana's fourth republic.²

Structurally, the paper provides a conceptual or theoretical definition and explanation of political vigilantisms and discusses the nexus between clientelism and vigilantism. It examines the activities of vigilantism in Ghana from a historical perspective and highlights the contributions of vigilantism towards electoral victories and defeats. It examines the negative effects of vigilantism on Ghana's democratic practice and proffer some recommendations on the way forward.

Political Vigilantism

To be vigilant is simply to be watchful and awake. Being watchful and fully awake to ensure nothing untoward happens has nothing to do with violence. However, in many developing democracies, vigilantism is commonly summarised as "taking the law into one's own hands" And violent display of

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brute force to protect the interest of a group that one belongs to (Rosenbaum and Sederberg, 1974: 542). It consists of acts or threats of coercion in violation of the formal boundaries of an established socio-political order, which, however, are intended by the violators to defend that order from some form of subversion (ibid).

Vigilantism covers a broad range of violent acts ranging from dissident violence, to the legal exercise of physical coercion by a regime or its representatives. Several basic types of this variegated phenomenon can be analytically distinguished. Fundamentally, these are related to the intended purposes of vigilante action. Three such purposes appear to predominate: crime control, social group control, and regime control. Social groups control vigilance has diverse manifestations based on communal (i.e., having a primordial characteristic such as race, religion, caste, tribe, and the like), economic, or political. Violence intended to regulate pariah communal groups constitutes the first subtype. Unlike crime control vigilantism, this form of establishment violence often appears rooted less in government ineffectiveness per se than in the irrelevance of formal avenues of redress (Rosenbaum and Sederberg, 1974: 548–556).

Vigilantisms could therefore be summed up as a form of social group controlled violence or activism, which serves the political interest of both an incumbent government and the opposition since both incumbent government and the opposition have their vigilante groups. These groups' actions could be fair or foul. Political vigilante groups are part of the broader concept of party apparatchiks who are agents of a government or party "aparatus" (apparatus) they comprise amongst others party foot-soldiers who work intensely to ensure the election of their respective parties into power and can be relied upon to defend the party without compromising (Gyampo, 2010: 562). It must however be noted that there may also be vigilante groups organized around ethnicity as some examples in Kenya and Philippines show.

The activities of political vigilante groups are based on the notion of reciprocity and the provision of personalised goods. They believe that public office holders (patrons) are wealthy and control massive resources (Daddieh and Bob-Milliar, 2012). Consequently, they expect the political elite to share the state resources with them once they are in government, therefore, they work hard to win and retain power for their political elite (Bob-Milliar, 2014). There is therefore a linkage between political vigilantism and clientelism which ought to be explored

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further.

The Nexus between Clientelism and Vigilantism

In the 1960's and 1970's studies on African politics, in general, were conceptualised with words like "clientelism," "neo-patrimonialism," "personalism," "prebendalism," and "rentier state" (Bratton and van de Walle, 1994; Lindberg, 2004, p. 4). Political clientelism became a prominent feature of developing countries during these periods. Many comparative electoral studies on Africa described electoral politics in Africa as systematically and intrinsically clientelistic. African leaders, whether autocratic or democratic, rely on the distribution of personal favours in selecting people in return for unceasing political support (Scott, 1972; Bratton and van de Walle, 1994).

Although there are many definitions of clientelism, it can be described substantially as transactions between politicians and citizens whereby material favours are offered in return for political support at the polls (Wantchekon, 2003: 3). Clientelism is a political exchange where a politician (i.e., a "patron") gives patronage in return for the vote or support of a "client". Clientelism also refers to a multifaceted chain of personal bonds between political patrons or bosses and their individual clients or followers. These bonds are founded on mutual material advantages where the patron furnishes excludable resources to their client or dependents and accomplices in return for their rigid support and cooperation (Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith, 2004: 165). These patrons are incredibly powerful and distribute these assets to their supporters. The patrons are not independent actors but are connected to a larger grid of contacts that serve as middlemen who arrange exchanges between the local level and the national level.

Political patrons disregard the long-term national interest and focus on supporting their clients hence anyone who is not a client receives nothing from the government. These acts of clientelism tend to thrive in uncertain political and economic environments at the rural and urban level making it an avenue for the politics of survival for both patrons and clients. As a result, the poor and marginalised members of society are drawn into these networks as the only solution to their daily survival due to limited access to formal assistance. Clearly, a dominant feature in the literature is that, in clientelism, it is jobs that are exchanged for votes (Robinson and Verdier, 2013: 262). The structure of the political clientelistic connection concerns both the input side of democratic politics regarding elections and to its output side about state-funded benefits

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based on political and administrative decisions, i.e. characteristics associated with functions of the welfare state (Kusche, 2014: 208). Such welfare state involves universal provisions for subsistence, health, housing, education, etc., provisions that would render patron–client ties, otherwise often essential for receiving support, obsolete (Therborn, 1987: 240). Although, social policy as such does not impede clientelism (Kurtz, 2002). In some welfare regimes, it is used to target particular groups in the electorate and link welfare state benefits with individual voting decisions. Apart from such benefits, employment in the public sector, administrative decisions concerning concessions, fines, public contracts and many other aspects of state regulation and activity are turned into personal favours within a clientelistic relationship when the public bureaucracy does not decide according to universalistic criteria. In the context of a democratic political system, the main service clients can offer in return for such favours, apart from deferential behaviour and diffuse loyalty, are their votes in political elections (Kusche, 2014).

Clientelism fuels the activities of political vigilante groups in the sense that once the patron wins power, clients who in this situation are the vigilante groups feels entitled to jobs and all the resources conferred by power. They therefore resort to all means to forcibly capture state resources, property and opportunities, especially when there is a feeling of delay on the part of the patrons in meeting the needs of clients within the frame work on patron-client relations (Bratton and van de Walle, 1994; Robinson and Verdier, 2013; Kusche, 2014). It is instructive to note that vigilantism in Ghana is also fueled by clientelism. There appear to be no research on how this happens but this paper shows the way in subsequent sections. It links political clientelism to political vigilantism in Ghana's fourth republic, focusing on how the latter has led to both the electoral defeat and victory of NDC and NPP and the major threat it poses to Ghana's fledgling democracy. The next important question to address is, how did political vigilantism start in Ghana? The next section responds to this question by discussing political vigilantism in Ghana from a brief historical perspective.

Political Vigilantism in Ghana: An Overview

Political Vigilantism has its historical antecedence from youth activism in politics during the British colonial era when the Convention People's Party youth wing, known as Nkrumah's 'Veranda Boys' set the pace for party youth activism in Ghana. Kwame Nkrumah steered his 'Veranda Boy' (who were mostly youth) to a successful political sovereignty from the British (Paalo, 2017). Several political

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parties since independence's have engaged the services of youth groups. In the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) era, some vigilante groups such as the "Mobisquad", Committee for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR), Workers Defense Committees (WDCs), Peoples Defense Committees (PDCs) and others were trained and armed to defend the revolution. Many wings such as the Women's and Youth Wings of Political Parties, particularly the two largest ones (NPP and NDC), were formed which were made up of die-hard or core foot soldiers (Gyampo, 2010).

Currently, there are over twenty-four (24) registered political parties in Ghana some of which include Convention People's Party (CPP), People's National Convention (PNC), NDC and NPP (Paalo, 2017). Both NDC and NPP have gained national and international notoriety for their continuous association with youth arms such as 'Azoka' (for NDC) and 'Invincible Forces' (for NPP) (Bob-Milliar, 2014). It is imperative to note that the activities of political vigilante groups have manifested in all the seven elections and three transitions that Ghana's fourth republican democratic dispensation has undergone. Both NPP and NDC have their vigilante groups in all the 10 regions of Ghana, sometimes, with different names. Table 1 is a pictorial representation of the various vigilante groups across the ten administrative regions of Ghana and their names:

Table 1: The political vigilante groups in all the Ten Regions of Ghana

Region	NPP	NDC
Ashanti	Delta Force	No special name/ NDC Foot soldiers
Eastern	Invincible Forces	No special name/ NDC Foot soldiers
Western	Western Crocodiles	No special name/ NDC Foot soldiers
Brong-Ahafo	No special name/ NPP Foot soldiers	No special name/ NDC Foot soldiers
Central	No special name/ NPP Foot soldiers	No special name/ NDC Foot soldiers
Northern	No special name/ NPP Foot soldiers	No special name/ NDC Foot soldiers
Upper East	Bolga-Bulldogs	Azorka Boys
Upper West	No special name/ NPP Foot soldiers	No special name/ NDC Foot soldiers
Greater Accra	No special name/ NPP Foot soldiers	No special name/ NDC Foot soldiers
Volta	No special name/ NPP Foot soldiers	No special name/ NDC Foot soldiers

Source: Authors' compilation

These groups have resorted to illegal acts including confiscation of state property, forcible ejection of officials of state from their apartments, physical

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assault of former government appointees and other human right abuses in a manner have filled Ghana's body politic with tension, rancor and acrimony within the first few months of new regimes. The activities of the activities of political vigilante groups, as indicated earlier, have several repercussions. These are specifically discussed in the next section.

Political Vigilantism and Electoral Victories in Ghana

A major role that political vigilante groups have played in Ghana's fourth republic has been serving as agents for the distribution and spread of party manifestos and ideologies to the electorates especially in remote parts of the country in what is known as "door-to-door campaign". In all the seven general elections conducted in the fourth republic, these vigilante groups were present at many homes in remote parts of the country supporting their various political parties (Paalo, 2017).

On the NPP side, their foot soldiers were instrumental in all the electoral victories chalked by the party in 2000, 2004 and 2016 general elections, For instance, at a meeting of over a 1000 foot soldiers prior to the 2008 general election the National Coordinating Director of the Foot Soldiers Association (FOSWA) of the NPP stated that it was the "immense political strategy" of these foot soldiers which won the NPP in power in 2000 and 2004 (Gyampo, 2010). It was their vigorous campaign from house to house to get reluctant voters who came out in their numbers to vote for the party (GhanaWeb, 2007). Again, in 2016 general elections an NPP member of parliament Mr Kennedy Agyapong stated that part of their electoral victory was as a result of the efforts of "these boys" who fought hard for the party to return to power in 2017 (Daily Graphic, 2017).

Similarly, the NDC foot soldiers helped their party win the 2008 general election by engaging in door-to-door campaign and by distributing and spreading their party's manifesto and ideology across the length and breadth of the country (Gyampo, 2010) For instance, on May 1, 2010, the NDC presented about 1,000 certificates to dedicated polling station agents, foot soldiers and officials in Ablekuma Central Constituency as an appreciation of their role in securing victory for the party in the 2008 general elections (GNA, 2010). Again, in 2011 before the 2012 general elections, the NDC foot soldiers launched a campaign to support their presidential candidate in which several activists were spotted in T-Shirts with their presidential candidates picture on them campaigning across the country (Daily Guide, 2011).

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Additionally, these vigilante groups in collaboration with party activists and youth wings have been active in all election-related matters such as serving as polling agents, helping with voter registration and other election-related support. As a result of this, they have encouraged fairness and transparency during all the seven general elections in the fourth republic especially during the voter registration exercises. For instance, in 2008, these vigilante groups were instrumental in monitoring polling centres, specifically in the remote rural districts, which contributed massively towards the checking of impersonation (Gyampo, 2010). Both NPP and NDC vigilante groups, youth groups and party activists have served as polling agents and monitoring agents throughout the electioneering cycle such as voter registration, voting and coalition of votes from 1992 up to 2016 (Paalo, 2017).

More importantly, they have taken the role of party security apparatus. They are often trained as security agents for their party before, during and after elections. Some of them are trained to protect the leadership of their party especially when that party is in opposition for the lack of trust in the state security agencies. In April 2016, three South African ex-police officers contracted to train the security detail of the NPP flag bearer, and running mate were arrested deported by the government for their actions (Paalo, 2017). Nonetheless, the NPP youth organiser Sammy Awuku in an interview with *Citi News* admitted:

We are taking steps to give maximum protection to our presidential candidate and his running mate. That is non-negotiable. So whether the South Africans have been sent home or not, we will take that step to protect our presidential candidate and his running mate and of course by extension, to also offer some protection to all those who will be on the campaign trail until the police come with their help (Allotey, 2016a).

Again, at an NPP rally in the Northern Region in October 2016, the Regional Chairman of the party, Mr. Bugri Naabu stated that the ballot boxes would be protected by 'macho' men to prevent the ruling NDC from rigging the elections on December 7 (Kombat, 2016). Also, during the 2012 general elections NDC took about 60 members of a group known as the 'Unbreakable Group', a youth grouping made up of well-built men (macho men) to protect ballot boxes in several polling stations at Ho in the Volta Region which contributed to their victory in the elections (Daily Guide, 2014). Again, on 7 December, 2016, whilst voting was going on some vigilante youth group in Nhyaeso with the help of the

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police arrested two men who attempted to snatch a ballot box at the polling station (Myjoyonline.com, 2016b).

Subsequently, these political vigilante groups help support their party by raising funds across the country and abroad. Fund raising is important for political parties to survive especially when that party is in opposition and lacks incumbency advantage. They often organise fund raising activities to solicit funds across the country and abroad from staunch members, companies, business, agencies and all party sympathisers. Furthermore, they engage in selling of party paraphernalia and products to generate funds. For example, both NPP and NDC party activists and vigilante groups created funds for their respective parties before general elections (Gyampo, 2012).

A key contribution of political vigilantism to the electoral victory of both NPP and NDC is that political vigilante groups have the youthful zeal to make the presence of their parties felt across the country. These vigilante groups or foot soldiers attend weddings, funerals, naming ceremonies of the member of their communities to make their presence felt (Bob-Milliar, 2014). In so doing such groups win the sympathy of members of society who in return vote for their political parties describing them as “a party for the people”. There are several cases of such groups getting involved in personal events of their members. For instance, while in opposition, in 2007 a year before the 2008 general elections the NDC launched what could be described as ‘social gather campaign’. With this, the executives of the party encouraged members of the party and foot soldiers to attend almost every social gathering particularly funerals, out-dooring and others to canvass support for the party before the 2008 elections (Daily Guide, 2007). At NDC’s primary elections in Western Region in November 2007, Alhaji Fuseini Mahama, the Western Regional 2nd Vice Chairman of NDC stated that “whoever wins as a parliamentary candidate of the NDC should attend social gathering such as funerals and out-doorings in their areas and sell the party to the people” (ibid.).

Another role the group play is they serve as pressure groups on the government, which has often brought pressure on national executives over pertinent issues, including matters bordering on internal democracy. For example, in 1995 NPP vigilante groups in collaboration with other NPP activists such as the Alliance for Change, demonstrated against the introduction of the Value Added Tax in Ghana by the Rawlings regime led by the NDC. This contributed to the loss of popularity of the NDC and electoral victory of the NPP

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in the 200 elections (Gyampo, 2010). Also, in 2005, the NDC group, Committee for Joint Action piled pressure on the NPP government through series of demonstrations and press releases against what they called 'bad governance' and 'economic hardship' imposed on the ordinary Ghanaian by the NPP administration. This also contributed to the bad image of the NPP government and helped in the NDC's electoral victory in the 2008 elections (Bob-Milliar, 2014).

Electoral Defeats in Ghana

A major factor that has contributed to the electoral defeat of an incumbent government has been the crossing of the carpet (changing their party) of party foot soldiers to the opposition party as a result of neglect by their patrons (government) (Bob-Milliar, 2014). In 2008 some NPP foot soldiers complained of their neglect by the party and government functionaries due to this neglect many decided to vote for the NDC who won the general elections (Arthur, 2009). In April 2007 a year before the 2008 general elections the polling station chairmen, foot soldiers and other activists of the NPP in the Ablekuma Central Constituency called on their party to honour all the promises given to them during the previous political campaigns which the party did not honour (Gyampo, 2010). In a statement signed Mr Lawrence Hesse on behalf of the polling agents and party foot soldiers, the group wanted the NPP government to come out and address these issues or warning that "they" will not involve themselves in any critical party activities within the constituency (GNA, 2007).

Similarly in July 2015 before the 2016 general elections, some NDC youth and macho men in Ashaiman crossed carpet to the opposition NPP citing that the ruling NDC government failed to attend to their needs (Paalo, 2017). Their leader Ismael Harunastated that after working hard for the NDC for sixteen years and helping the party win power in 2008 and 2012 "nothing better has been given to the youth so now, we want to declare our support to work hard for Nana Akufo-Addo for 2016"(Osam, 2015:10). Additionally, this feeling of neglect by these vigilante groups leads to voter apathy. For instance, during the 2016 general elections, there was a high level of apathy and discontent in the domain of the NDC's core constituencies which led the 'skirt and blouse' voting pattern in many pro-NDC constituencies.³ These included the Lawra and the Nandom Constituencies in the Upper West region; the Krachi East Constituency in the Volta region; and the Zabzugu and the Salaga South Constituencies the Northern region (EC-Ghana, 2016).

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Subsequently, abuse of campaign resources by party executives and leadership of these vigilante groups have also contributed to the electoral defeat of incumbent governments (Bob-Milliar, 2014; Gyampo, 2010). For example, a week after the 2016 general elections, the NDC foot soldiers in Ashanti Region were pursuing members of the regional campaign team to refund huge sums of money sent to them for the elections (Paalo, 2017). The former Municipal Chief Executive Officer of Ejisu Mr. Afrifah Yamoah Ponkok accused the regional Chairman of the Party, Mr. Andy Osei Okrah, of being incompetent with regards to mobilization of resources for campaigning. He stated, *"You (Mr Andy Osei Okrah) have stolen sacks of government and campaign money. Go and enjoy with your wives and kinds. God is watching you"* (TheChronicle.com, 2016).

Similarly, after the 2016 general elections, some polling station agents of the NDC in Kintampo North Constituency of the Brong Ahafo Region accused their executives of diverting Ghc 37,100.00 meant for them as allowance for their contribution towards the party's campaign prior to the general elections. The polling agents numbering about 143 also threatened to resign if the leadership failed to scrutinize and ensure that the executives give accounts of their stewardship (Kombat, 2017). Embezzling resources meant for campaign would definitely have some negative impact on the party's electoral fortunes. This is common knowledge and there is no need for a soothsayer to foretell this.

Drive towards Democratic Maturity

The democratic gains of Ghana cannot be built upon to mature, when there are acts that undermine the expression of the sovereign will of the people, particularly during elections and voting. Unfortunately, the negative activities of political vigilante groups sometimes involves destroying voting materials and snatching of ballot boxes especially when there are indications of electoral defeat. All the seven general elections held in the fourth republic have witnessed this the unfortunate practice of ballot box theft or snatching by vigilante groups (Alidu, 2014; Bob-Milliar, 2014; Myjoyonline.com, 2016). For instance in 2012 general elections there were 137 incidences that undermined voting in the Ashanti, Greater Accra and Northern Regions. These incidences include snatching of ballot boxes, suspension of voting, intimidation/harassment and violation of the voting procedures orchestrated by political vigilante groups (CODEO, 2013b).

Another threat posed by political vigilantism to Ghana's democracy is the vandalization of state or public properties by vigilante groups. For instance, in

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May 2010, some NPP foot soldiers in Wa in the Upper West Region vandalized properties belonging to the party to register their displeasure over the award of a contract to members of the NDC (ModernGhana.com, 2010). Also in 2011, some vigilante groups claiming to be affiliated to NDC burnt down a party office to show their displeasure with a court ruling that saw the release of some persons accused of the murder of a prominent chief in the region (Bob-Milliar, 2012; Alidu, 2014). Again in May 2011, some NDC vigilante group attacked the office of the mayor of Tamale and destroyed office equipment including furniture, stationery, exhibition stands and computers as protest against a decongestion exercise in the city (Bob-Milliar, 2014).

Similarly, after the 2016 general elections there were several reports across the country of NPP vigilante groups destroying some state properties after their party won the elections (Adogla-Bessa, 2017b; Ansah, 2017). Indeed, some vigilante groups attacked some NDC supporters, vandalized some government properties including the portions of the Fountain at the Kwame Nkrumah interchange in Accra (Allotey, 2016b). Also, in April 2017 some members of the Delta Force (an NPP Vigilante group) stormed the Kumasi Circuit Court and freed 13 members of their group who were facing charges for causing disturbances at the Ashanti Regional Coordinating Council. They vandalized some court properties and almost assaulted the Judge, Mary Senkyere (Adogla-Bessa, 2017c).

Vigilante groups also pose a threat to Ghana's democracy through their constant protests and public disturbances. In all the general elections many of these groups affiliated to the winning party have in one way or the other, protested or caused public disturbances as a way of showing their displeasure for the policies or decisions of their government. For instance, in April 2017, over 200 members of the Delta Force attacked the Ashanti Regional Security Coordinator (Mr. George Agyei) and chased him out of his office stating that he was 'not part of the struggle' to win power from the NDC during the general elections in December (Myjoyonline.com, 2017). Also, in 2000 a vigilante group of Okai North Constituency Branch of the NPP vowed to 'fiercely resist' attempt by the leadership of the party to impose the incumbent Member of Parliament Mr Darko as the party's parliamentary candidate (GhanaWeb, 2000). Again in April 2013, some NDC foot soldier numbering about 50 on motorbikes stormed the NDC's Ashanti Regional Office during a meeting to vehemently resist the appointment of Mr Eric Opoku as the Kumasi Metropolitan Chief Executives (MCE). They accused the regional executives of influencing the nomination of

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Mr. Bonsu who was not known to the party foot soldiers (Asare, 2013). These activities have created disturbances of the peace of the nation.

Furthermore, vigilante groups in Ghana have been involved in seizure or occupancy of public properties following the electoral victory of their preferred parties. For example, after the 2016 there were violent actions and the forcible seizure of public and private property by some NPP supporters. There were such acts as unlawful seizure of public installations and services such as tollbooths, lorry parks, public latrines and illegal entry and seizure of state properties in the custody of former government functionaries and political party opponents (CODEO, 2017, Paalo, 2017). Indeed, CODEO Observers reported incidents such as seizure of public places of convenience such as in Asokore market in the New Juaben North constituency of the Eastern region and another in Changni in the Tamale Central constituency of the Northern region. Additionally, on 9 January, 2017, an NPP vigilante group stormed the offices of the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) and the Non-Formal Education Division (NFED) in Juabeso in the Western region, drove away all workers and took over the two places. A similar group repeated same in the Tamale Metro NHIS office in the Northern region and demanded that the managers vacate their post. Furthermore, some NPP supporters marched to the Bodi District Assembly in the Bodi Constituency of the Western Region and demanded the resignation of the District Chief Executive (DCE) explaining that the DCE's party was no longer in power. The group also demanded the car keys of the DCE's official vehicle (CODEO, 2017a).⁴

Similarly, following the electoral victory of the NDC in the 2008 elections, their vigilante groups "captured" and forcibly occupied several government buildings. They evicted the occupants and took over their positions and jobs (Bob-Milliar, 2014). Several revenue collection jobs such as public toilets, tollbooths and others taken over by the foot soldier of the NPP in 2001 were revenged by the NDC in 2009 and clearly the did same when their party won the 2016 elections. This cycle is extremely dangerous to national cohesion and could have major consequences of violent conflict and confrontations which could be a recipe for democratic relapse.

Another major affront to Ghana's drive towards democratic maturity is human rights abuse and physical assaults sometimes perpetrated by vigilante groups against officials of parties that lose elections. Both NPP and NDC vigilante groups and foot soldiers are culpable. For example on 24 March, 2017, the Delta

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Force of the NPP stormed the premises of the Ashanti Regional Coordinating Council and demanded the removal of the Regional Security Coordinator, George Adjei. In the process, they inflicted multiple injuries on the victim and but for the timely intervention of the police, serious casualties would have been recorded (Nyabor, 2017c). As a result of this some 13 thirteen members of the Delta Force were arrested for trial in court. But they were forcibly freed by other members of the vigilante group during their trial at the Kumasi Circuit Court on 20th April 2017 (Adogla-Bessa, 2017c).⁵ Also, After the 2016 general elections the NDC National Organizer Kofi Adams alleged that two of their loyalists were murdered in Sefwi Wiawso and Dunkwa as a result of the rampage and forcible takeover of state property by the NPP foot soldiers and party loyalists (Nyabor, 2017b). Similarly after the 2012 elections, there were reports of harassment, intimidations and violation of voting procedures in the Ashanti, Greater Accra and Northern Regions (CODEO, 2013a). Also, in August 2008 it was reported some NDC foot soldiers and vigilante group members fired gunshots and scattered supporters/ activists (Bob-Milliar, 2014).

Frequent violent clash between groups can also destabilize a nation and undermine its democratic gains. Unfortunately, the activities of vigilante groups in Ghana have also resulted in several violent clashes. For example in November 2016 before the general elections some supporters of both NPP and NDC were involved in a violent attack at Asokore in the New Juaben Municipality of the Eastern Region when their paths crossed during a health walk led by the parliamentary candidates of the two parties (Myjoyonline.com, 2016a). Similarly in November 2016, at least five people were injured as a result of a clash between the NPP and NDC supporters at the Wulensi Constituency in the Nanumba South District of the Northern Region. The clash arose as a result over confusion regarding who had the right to hold a political rally in the community on that particular day (GhanaWeb, 2016c). Again, midnight of 6th December 2016, there were clashes between NPP and NDC supporters at Chereponi in the Northern Region which led to the death of one person and fourteen injured (GNA, 2016). A similar clash happened in 2004 at Tamale when NDC supporters were hosting a flag-raising ceremony and at Zogbeli where the NPP was commissioning a campaign team (Daily Graphic, 2004).

Conclusion

Political vigilantism fuelled by clientelistic politics in Ghana poses severe threats to Ghana's efforts at consolidating her democracy. These groups may exist to promote the parochial interest of politicians. At the same time, their activities

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are counter-productive to securing electoral victories for their parties. On a bigger picture, the activities of political vigilante groups in Ghana are among the key challenges that undermine the nation's drive towards democratic maturity. In this regard, Ghana's efforts to climb higher the ladder of democratic progression would come to nought if proactive measures are not taken to deal with the phenomenon of vigilantism. It is therefore recommended that state institutions such as the police, military and all security apparatus of the state should not only be well equipped, but must be encouraged by regime heads and political leaders to deal rigorously with all forms of threat posed by vigilante groups without fear or favour. Secondly, political parties, working in tandem with the National Commission for Civic Education must educate and sensitize party supporters about the dangers of the negative activities of vigilantism and encourage them to eschew all negative acts of vigilantism that undermines national cohesion and create tension, rancour as well as acrimony in the body politic. Also, the judiciary must deal with culprits expeditiously, without fear or favour in an attempt to send signals to those who may emulate the negative acts of vigilantism. Furthermore, the negative acts of political vigilante groups must be condemned by all, particularly civil society and identifiable groups such as the Ghana Bar Association (GBA), the Centre for Democratic Governance (CDD), and Institute for Democratic Governance (IDEG) in an attempt to also pile pressure on governments and state institutions to deal with those who commit offences and run afoul of the laws of the land under the cloak of political vigilantism.

Notes

1. The first and second turnovers occurred in 2001 and 2009 respectively. In 2001, the incumbent President Jerry J. Rawlings of NDC handed over power peacefully to John A. Kufuor of NPP who also handed over power to John E. A. Mills of NDC in 2009. Also, the third peaceful transition was on 9 January 2017 after the 2016 general election, where the opposition leader, Nana Akufo-Addo, won 53.85 percent of total valid votes while President John Dramani Mahama secured 44.40 percent of the total valid votes.
2. Fourth republic is simply Ghana's fourth attempt at constitutional democratic governance. The first republic lasted between 1960 and 1966. The second lasted from 1969 to 1972. The third republic was from 1979 to 1981 while the fourth republic commenced from 1992 to date. In between the republics were military dictatorships.

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3. Skirt and blouse voting simply means the practice of voting for a Presidential Candidate of one party and voting for a Parliamentary Candidate from a different political party.
4. Also, in the Amasaman Division of the Police Command arrested Kwame Ofose Agyei an NPP constituency Chairman of Trobo for attempting to take over activities of the Doblo tollbooth (Nyabor, 2017a). Another 5 were arrested by the Accra Regional Police command at CMB and Makola Market for seizing the AMA tolls and preventing revenue collectors from issuing toll tickets to traders (Adogla-Bessa, 2017a).
5. The 13 who were freed later on reported themselves to the police and there were 8 members who were also arrested in connection with the court break out. The court later on discharged these 8 members based on lack of evidence from the State Attorney. After this release the Attorney General (AG) Issue an investigation in the their release by the State Attorney stating that the AG was not aware and that the State Attorney did not follow the administrative procedures (Nyabor, 2017a).

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