

Political vigilante groups and rationalism in Ghana's electoral democracy

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Abstract

In Ghana, electoral democracy appears to threaten the peace, security and stability of the country. Localised violence has accompanied every election, at least under the Fourth Republic. Political violence usually occurs in the electoral cycle and is characterized by threats, intimidation, physical assault, vandalization of electoral materials, as well as the use of hate speeches and incendiary language. This paper analyses political vigilantism in Ghana's electoral politics. The paper examines the historical and social conditioning of political vigilantism in Ghana with the view of appreciating the relationship between the social and the political dimensions. The social variable of political vigilantism is still reinforced by rational calculation of the actors: in terms of the political benefit emanating from the action, the social reaction of citizens in the country and the response of the state to their actions. As citizens seem to accept the actions of party vigilante groups as the norm rather than an exception to societal values and behaviour, they are emboldened to perpetuate their activities.

Keywords: Multiparty; democracy; Vigilante Groups; political violence; Ghana.

1. Introduction

Multiparty democracy has unwittingly contributed to the occurrence of political violence in Ghana (Awedoba, 2010). It continues to threaten the peace, security and stability of the country. Manifested in electoral competitions, multiparty democracy is affected by localized violence that has accompanied every election, at least under the Fourth Republic. Political violence usually occurs in the electoral cycle (i.e. before, during and after elections) and is characterized by threats, intimidation, physical assault, vandalization of electoral materials, as well as the use of hate speeches and incendiary language (Tietah, 2011). Election-related violence is routinely employed by the political class as an operational strategy or counter strategy to obtain electoral advantage (Aning and Danso, 2011). The Armed Conflict Location and Event Database (ACLED, 2016) observed that political militias perpetrate 24.59% of all violent events in Ghana. Political militias are seen as a diverse set of violent actors, who are often created for a specific purpose or during a specific period for the furtherance of a political objective, such as violence. Generally, political vigilantism perpetrated by political party militias is classified under the wider literature of election-related violence (Aning and Danso, 2011; Pokoo, 2011; Abdallah and Osei-Afful, 2011; Armah-Attoh, 2017). Political vigilantism is seen as the use of vigilantes in the name of partisan politics (Tankebe, 2019). Another view is that political vigilantism is an instance where organized armed or unarmed groups are deployed as private forces to safeguard the electoral prosperity of political parties (Amankwah, 2017). Bob-Milliar (2014) conceptualizes these occurrences in Ghana differently. In what he termed “low-intensity electoral violence” (p.126) he characterizes political vigilante activities as involving “manipulation of formal procedures, violent assault/harassment, breach of the peace, disorderly behaviour, protests, disorderly conduct, violent intimidation, vandalization or destruction of the properties of parties and supporters, stealing or stuffing of ballot and other kinds of electoral fraud” (p.126). Other actors, including state security agencies such as the police or military, may also be employed for the purposes of provoking violence during elections.

Political party vigilantism has often been treated as a mere political phenomenon much to the neglect of the historical context and social structures that perpetuate it (Johnston, 1996; Burr, 2008). Though it will not be the main focus of this paper, it will nonetheless trace the historical and social conditioning of political vigilantism in Ghana with the view of appreciating the relationship between the social and the political dimensions. The social variable of political vigilantism

is still reinforced by rational calculation of the actors: in terms of the political benefit emanating from the action, the social reaction of citizens in the country and the response of the state to their actions. As citizens seem to accept the actions of party vigilante groups as the norm rather than an exception to societal values and behaviour, they are emboldened to perpetuate their activities. The scenario is worse when state's response to party vigilante groups is politically driven and hypocritical. Given such state posture, the vigilante groups are not only emboldened to perpetuate their activities, but hysterically work also to undermine the constitution, disturb democratic norms and principles and compete with the state for the monopoly of violence.

This paper is organized into four major sections. Section one juggles with the concept of vigilantism with the view of operationalizing it and its relationship to the arguments in the chapter. Section two analyzes the role of rationalism in the actions and activities of party vigilante groups and how these calculations are distributed throughout the electoral democratic process. Section three weighs the responses from various electoral stakeholders to the activities of these groups and their implication on the governance process in Ghana. Finally, section four looks at the way forward in terms of policy and provides a conclusion.

2. Conceptualizing political vigilantism in Ghana

Vigilantism is difficult to characterize because of its diverse and broad nature. Historically, Brown (1975) conceptualizes vigilantism as “low level classes” of prohibited character (in what he termed “classic vigilantism”) and a contrasting conceptualization of identity-motivated attacks directed at “labour leaders” (in what he called “neo-vigilantism”) before and after the nineteenth centuries, respectively. Presumably, Brown's categorization may have influenced Johnston's (1996) distinction between a “crime control” and “social control” vigilantism. The former focused on the “pursuit of criminal deviants” while the latter deals with “maintaining communal, ethnic and sectarian order and values” (p.228). This categorization dovetails into Brown's (1975) further distinction between vigilante groups that are “organized extra-legal movements the members of which take the law into their own hands” and “associations in which citizens have joined together for self-protection under conditions of disorder” (cited in Johnston, p.232).

The Ghanaian experience with vigilantism is quite different from all these categories. There are vigilante groups that are either organized for “social”

or “crime” control but the category of groups being examined in this paper are largely organized for political control and the benefits associated with that control. Therefore, as an extension to Johnston’s categories¹, some categories of Ghanaian vigilantism will fall broadly under “political control,” which is defined as an attempt to perpetuate individual and group interest by maintaining party control of resource allocation and political opportunities. Vigilante groups in Ghana are either established by political parties or claim allegiance to them and mostly employ extra-legal mechanisms for the purposes of self-protection and also the protection of party leadership, events and properties. Party foot soldiers are more likely to be male than female and within the age cohort of fifteen to thirty-five. As a non-elite group, many tend to live in poor neighbourhoods or in urban slums. The political activities that engage the attention of vigilante groups include taking part in pro- and anti-government protests, attending meetings, canvassing for votes, and exercising public authority in diverse ways – i.e. providing security for their communities – (Bob-Millar, 2014). Table 1 represents the various typologies of vigilante groups in the literature and makes the case for “political control” character of similar groups in Ghana.

These groups are able to maintain political control in several ways. Johnston (1996: 220) identifies six major elements of vigilantism including their ability to premeditatedly plan their activities; the composition of their membership; the character of the membership, their approaches to achieving the group’s objectives, their pattern of growth and finally, the objective of the group. The activities of party vigilante groups begin with “planning and premeditation” and since independence, the gravity as well as the complexity of their actions suggest that they are not spontaneous. Like the political parties that they purport to represent or work for, membership of these groups is voluntary and made up of private citizens. The composition of vigilante groups in Ghana is mostly “autonomous citizens” but they do not constitute “social movements.” Largely, most of these groups gained notoriety for the use of force and other illegitimate means to achieve their objectives. Their actions come to prominence during election period where there is the potential for a governmental change and also where ‘rewards’ in the form of appointments are ongoing. Therefore, the actions of vigilante groups are carried out in defence of an “established order” (i.e. form of government or an acquired authority such as political appointments) or in an attempt to change same. Some actions of Ghanaian vigilante groups

¹ Johnston (1996) provides two broader vigilante categories namely, “social” and “crime” controls.

TABLE 1: LIST OF VIGILANTE GROUPS IN GHANA

Name of Vigilante Group	Party allegedly associated with	Year formed/ prominence *
The Action Groupers	The National Liberation Movement	1953
The Action Troupers	The Convention Peoples' Party	1954
Azorka boys	National Democratic Congress	2004
Bamba boys	New Patriotic Party	2004
Action Troopers	New Patriotic Party	2008
Bolga Bulldogs	New Patriotic Party	2015
The Maxwell Boys**	New Patriotic Party	2008
Invincible Forces	New Patriotic Party	2015
The Kandahar Boys	New Patriotic Party	2008
Delta Forces	New Patriotic Party	2014
The Burma Camp Youth	New Patriotic Party	2017
The Eagles	National Democratic Congress	2018
The Lions	National Democratic Congress	2018
The Hawks	National Democratic Congress	2018
The Eye Group	New Patriotic Party	2008
The Rasta Boys	Unknown	Unknown
Salifu Eleven	Unknown	Unknown
Basuka Boys	Unknown	Unknown
Zongo Caucus	Unknown	Unknown
Verandah Boys	Unknown	Unknown
Ashanti Vigilante Group	Unknown	Unknown
The Pentagon	Unknown	Unknown
Aluta Boys	Unknown	Unknown
Aljazeera	Unknown	Unknown
Nima Boys	Unknown	Unknown
Bindiriba	Unknown	Unknown

Notes: * This refers to the years they have become known perhaps during an election period and may not necessarily be a date it was established.

** Some analysts believe the Maxwell Boys are just the personal bodyguards of Maxwell Kofi Jumah, a high-ranking member of the party.

Source: Author's compilation.

are not aimed at “crime control or other social infractions”; rather they resort to crime to guarantee security to both their membership and their paymasters. A permutation of these strategies against vigilante groups that operate in Ghana produces different outcomes as presented in Table 2. from historical, economic, political, geographical, cultural and social factors. It is, therefore, the interplay

of these factors that constantly generates the dynamics which characterise the practice of fiscal federalism in the country.

TABLE 2: CHARACTERIZATION OF VIGILANTE GROUPS IN GHANA

Categorization Types	Premeditated Attacks	Voluntarily Participation	Social Movement	Threatens or Uses Force	Offers Security Guarantees
The Action Troupers	+	+	-	+	-
The Action Groupers	+	+	-	+	-
Azorka boys	+	+	-	+	+
Bamba Boys	+	+	-	+	+
Action Troopers	+	+	-	+	+
Maxwell Boys	+	+	-	+	+
Delta Force	+	+	-	+	+
Kandahar Boys	+	+	-	+	+
Invincible Forces	+	+	-	+	+
The Burma Camp Youth	-	+	-	+	+
The Hawks	-	+	-	+	+
The Lions	-	+	-	+	+
The Eagles	-	+	-	+	+
The Eye Group	-	+	-	-	+

Source: Author’s compilation influenced by Johnston (1996).

3. Political vigilantism and rationalism in Ghana’s electoral democracy

Voter behaviour, using the rational choice theory, focuses on two key actors: *political parties* and *electorate*, omitting a key stakeholder in the electoral process – “*electoral investors*.” The term, “*electoral investors*” is more appropriate than “*electoral financiers*” since the former suggests supporting political parties with only money or financial resources, which many vigilante groups are not able to do. Using the term, ‘investors’ provides an opportunity for an extension of the term to include all forms of ‘investment’ that could help or enhance a party’s chances of winning elections. These may include, but not limited to, support with knowledge, strength, power, authority position, security and vigilance. Vigilante groups largely support with their physical strength, security and vigilance in protecting the ballot, as well as the personal protection of party leaders and polling agents. Some of them even ‘invest’ their lives by

engaging in snatching and swapping ballot boxes at their peril. Arguably, it is the highest form of 'investment' since its consequences, including arrest, physical assault by the general public or even lynching by vigilante group members of rival political parties, are life-threatening and enormous.

This discourse on vigilante rationalism is not complete without making a further elaboration of the terms, *electoral financiers* and *electoral investors* to provide a context within which political vigilantism serves as an agent for the mobilization of resources for political parties in Ghana. Like "electoral financiers" who expect government contracts, political appointments and favours as rewards for their financial investment, vigilante groups also expect some form of benefits for providing the ultimate investment with their lives. The major difference between these two terminologies is that "electoral financiers" know what they want and have people with the capacity and capability to get it in the event that the party they support wins. For example, a company could support Party A and recommend a well-qualified and experienced person for a ministerial, ambassadorial or board membership position. On the other hand, "electoral investors" may know what they want in exchange for their investment but may not necessarily have the capacity and the experience to get or execute the reward should the party they supported win. For instance, party vigilante members may intend to work in state security apparatus (i.e. the police service, the military or the immigration service) but may not have the requisite academic qualification to be recruited into their desired job.

Another dichotomy between the two terminologies is found in the differences in the nature of the contract between political parties that benefit from the support and the people that provide the support. "Electoral financiers" are highly likely going to make a formal agreement regarding their role and intended benefits than "electoral investors" whose contract are likely going to be implied than formally documented. In the case of a formalized agreement, a contractor may provide a \$5 million funding for a campaign with the agreement that it will be awarded a specific government contract that actually exists if the party wins; a typical behaviour of an "electoral financier," which is atypical of "electoral investors" who invest with the conviction that "they will also benefit" if their political party won national elections. There is neither a specific 'benefit' nor a binding contract to this assumption.

Finally, vigilante groups are not individuals; they are groups, as the name implies. Governments may find it difficult providing benefits for all group members instantaneously. When all these factors come to play, vigilante groups

resort to the “struggles approach” where they employ violence, coercion, and blackmail to reap the benefits of their investment. The strategies adopted by political vigilante groups to compel their benefactors for reciprocal benefits fit within the rational choice theory. Nonetheless, this theory has a major inherent weakness. Rationality has two-dimensional interests. The first dimension is the electorate, exercising rationality for their benefit. The second dimension is where the electorate exercises rationality in order to punish (i.e., vote against their detriment). While the first is forward-looking, the second is backward-looking (Alidu and Aggrey-Darkoh, 2018). In the literature, much attention is given to the former than the latter. The analysis in this chapter is underpinned by the forward-looking beneficial rationality rather than the backward-looking punitive rationality.

How does rational political vigilantism manifest in Ghana? This basically has to do with how political power and its associated benefits are distributed in Ghana’s electoral democracy. Political power in Ghana has been acquired in two major ways since the country’s attainment of self-rule in 1957: democratic elections and military coups. Ghana is constitutionally a multi-party state but runs a de facto two-party system. The results of all Presidential elections in the country since the beginning of the Fourth Republic in 1993 seem to reinforce the country’s duopolistic political system. Ethridge and Handelman (2008) argue that a political system becomes duopolistic when two major parties regularly divide more than 75% of the national vote but with no single party receiving as much as 65% of the total votes. This electoral dynamic has played out strongly in the country’s election and is presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3: PRESIDENTIAL VOTES OF THE NDC AND NPP SINCE 1992

Elections Parties	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016
NDC	58.3	57.4	44.6% (43.1%) RO	44.6	49.1 (50.2%) RO	50.7%	44.40%
NPP	30.4	39.6	48.2 (56.9%) RO	52.2	47.9 (49.8%) RO	47.7%	53.85 %
Combined Votes	88.7%	97%	92.8% (100%) RO	96.8%	97% (100%) RO	98.4%	98.25%

Notes: Key: RO = Run-off.

Source: Revised from Alidu (2014).

It is clear from the Table 3 that the NDC and the NPP, since the elections in 1992, have managed a combined vote of more than 75% of the total national votes and none of these parties is able to secure as much as 65% of the total votes in all such elections (Alidu, 2014). Practically, since the beginning of the Fourth Republic, political power in Ghana has alternated between the NDC and the NPP. This arrangement has a huge impact on the distribution of party vigilantism and vigilante activities. As indicated in Table 3 earlier, the NDC and the NPP have the largest number of vigilante groups in the country; also groups associated with these two political parties have been brutal and unlawful.

There are lots of benefits associated with this distribution of power and all these could be explained in rational choice terms. The focus of this study will be on only two: benefits associated with personal or group gain, and benefits associated with protection from the law. The first exercise of rationality by vigilante groups is the benefit in relation to personal or group gain. As argued earlier, party vigilantes are ordinary citizens who are rational about securing benefits (financial or otherwise) when the party they support wins elections. The financial or material gains propel them to give their optimum in guaranteeing victory for their parties. Hence, electoral victory for political parties serves as a launch pad for their personal benefit. If the reverse was correct, members of vigilante groups would not have sacrificed their lives for any party.

This assumption has two implications for vigilante violence even if their party still won national elections. The first scenario is when a change in the distribution of power does not reflect the distribution of benefits. In this instance, people perceived to have sacrificed so much for a change in government or the retention of an incumbent receive less or no benefits at all for the effort they have made. Vigilante groups under this circumstance may use illegitimate means to either draw attention to their plight or illegitimately appropriate the benefits by the use of force. This is clearly demonstrated in Ghana by the seizure of public toilets, tollbooths, lorry parks and public properties by vigilante groups in 2009 and 2017. There is also the possibility that individual political figures may also instigate these groups in order to draw attention to themselves for political benefit. The second scenario is where a change in the distribution of benefits does not reflect the perceived distribution of power. In this case, vigilante group members are not happy with the quantum or quality of benefits that have been given to them relative to their political portfolio after a change in government.

Each of these two scenarios could be valid but could also be resolved without the resort to violence. Vigilante groups are more inclined to use violence because of the second category of benefits: being shielded from the law. The selection of a modus operandi is also informed by rationality, that is, how swift or lame the long arm of the law will stretch to them. The existence of laws and other judicial institutions may not stop people from committing crimes. However, the strength and impartiality of the law could make citizens second-guess their actions and choice of strategies. The activities of vigilante groups are emboldened by their conviction that the law is on their side (i.e. where there are weak judicial institutions or poor political will to prosecute or both). When these groups are convinced about this, then they resort to strategies that are at best detrimental to democratic growth and an affront to the law. Some of these strategies may include the resort to violence, seizure of public properties, intimidation, harassment and forceful dismissal of workers. Besides being shielded from the law, vigilante groups could also be emboldened by the sheer size of their membership, their ability to mobilize and the perceived urgency or legitimacy of their cause. However, all these mechanisms are contingent on the bigger assumption that no one will come after them regardless of how they seek to address their grievances.

4. Responses to political vigilantism and implication on governance

Politicians and governments in Ghana over the years have provided weak response to the activities of vigilante groups.² When the activities of the Invincible Forces, the Delta Forces and the Kandahar Boys became alarming, the President and his Ministers for the Interior and Security all issued directives to the Inspector General of the Ghana Police Service to deal with them.³ The Ghana Police Service was reluctant to act because of the ramifications that may follow privately after these bold public pronouncements.⁴ Thus, political interference into the work of the Ghana Police Service makes it practically impossible for them to deal with vigilante groups associated with the party in power.⁵ There was a departure from this weak position that governments mostly take after the Ayawaso West Wuogon constituency bye-election violence in January 2019. The President set up a Commission of Inquiry after several

² See “Court process was a cover up to set us free – Delta Force member” (2017-04-08)

³ See “Arrest political militants – Kan Dapaah tells Police” (2017-04-08)

⁴ See “Delta force attack: We were overwhelmed – IGP” (2017-04-07)

⁵ See “Disbanding vigilante groups ‘impossible’ – Freddie Blay” (2017-04-08) and also “Delta Force made you a Minister; shut up - Wontumi to Kan Dapaah” (2017-04-08)

condemnations of the act by the opposition party, civil society organizations, faith-based organizations and the international community. The Commission made a number of findings and recommendations. The NPP Government under Nana Akufo-Addo challenged some of its findings and it seemed disinterested in prosecuting the perpetrators as recommended by the Commission. Since the Commission did not have prosecutorial powers and since the testimonies provided before the Commission cannot be used against those who testified in a court of law, the government's refusal to punish the perpetrators can be described as a licence or the government's tacit acceptance of their impunity.

Interestingly, it would appear that the posture of the government and the Police Service to acts of vigilantism and vigilante groups associated with opposition parties is punitive and repressive. For instance, few weeks after the Ayawaso incident, some vigilante group (the Hawks) associated with the opposition NDC shot and killed a party member in an internal struggle for control of the party in Kumasi. The Police, in this instance, was quick in issuing arrest warrants and declaring over ten members of the group wanted. They also invited two leading members of the opposition party (Joseph Yamin and Yamoah Ponkoh) for interrogation.⁶ The open support for these groups is also borne out of the lack of trust in the security institutions of the country due to the partisan recruitment and infiltrations (Tankebe, 2009, 2011; Haas, *et al.*, 2014).⁷ Over the years, political parties in opposition prefer to have their own trained private security detail rather than those provided by the state. The private security (mostly drawn from partisan vigilante groups), is incorporated into the regular security agencies and continue to provide the services they provided to these politicians when they were in opposition. Weak and often inaction from state institutions and governments have empowered party vigilante groups and continue to contribute to the structural violence the country suffers from as a result of the activities of these groups.

Why is government apparently reluctant to punish vigilante groups of the ruling party for their violence? The media and some state-owned institutions

⁶ See <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Kumasi-NDC-shooting-culprits-named-by-Police-724408>; also <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/police-declare-9-more-wanted-in-connection-with-shooting-in-ndc-office-in-kumasi.html>, and <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Yamin-Yamoah-Ponkoh-arrested-over-NDC-shooting-in-Kumasi-724653>

⁷ See "Vigilante group members free to join national security" – Ambrose Dery (2017-03-30); "Absorb Invisible Forces into National Security... devil finds work for idle hands" – Ayisi Boateng (2017-03-29); "Delta, Invisible forces to join National Security" – Agyapong (2017-03-28); "We'll enlist members of vigilante groups into National Security" – Kennedy Agyapong (2017-03-28); "Delta, Invisible Forces can join National Security" – Ambrose Dery (2017-03-28).

such as the National Commission for Civic Education as well as private citizens have openly condemned and spoken against the violent and lawless behaviour of these groups.⁸ Responses from the general society have been mixed, reflecting the partisan support of the people. Generally, NPP supporters are likely to defend the activities of vigilante groups associated with their party and will quickly condemn the activities of vigilante groups associated with the NDC or other political parties. NDC supporters behave in the same manner when it comes to issues of party vigilante groups. The continuous violence and lawlessness of vigilante groups are underpinned by the open justification and support that they receive from their political sponsors (Abrahamsen, 2013). In the wake of the violent campaign against former government appointees by the Invincible and Delta Forces in 2017, leading members of the current government rallied to their defence. Kennedy Agyapong, the NPP Member of Parliament for Assin North, threatened the government of the consequences should it disassociate itself from those vigilante groups.⁹ Similarly, Sammy Awuku, the National Organizer of the NPP and Kwame A-Plus¹⁰ both argued that they could not betray vigilante groups that have struggled for the party's electoral victory. The NDC General Secretary, Johnson Asiedu-Nketia, also vehemently defended the formation of additional vigilante groups for the party (i.e. the Hawks, Lions and Eagles).¹¹ According to him, the NDC will not disband them until the NPP does the same for their groups. Another leading member of the party and one-time Ashanti regional chairman, Joseph Yamin, said they needed those groups to help provide security for party activities.¹² When civil society organizations and the NCCE called for disbanding party vigilante groups, both the NDC and the NPP said no, and pointed accusing fingers at each other. Generally, the justification and unmerited support that these groups enjoy from people in authority emboldens them. This constitutes an endorsement of cultural violence.¹³

⁸ See "GBA, four other bodies condemn activities of NPP group, Delta Force" (2017-04-09) and also "CVM condemns 'nuisance behaviour' of Delta Force" (2017-04-07).

⁹ See Kennedy Agyapong encouraging lawlessness - Asiedu Nketia (2017-04-10); Why I supported Delta Force – Ken Agyapong (2017-04-08); I will bring down NPP if Kan Dapaah does not cease his threats – Ken Agyapong threatens (2017-04-08)

¹⁰ I support Delta Force 100% - A Plus (2017-04-09).

¹¹ See "Asiedu-Nketia fully endorses the Hawks, Lions and Dragons" <https://www.myjoyonline.com/politics/2018/September-5th/i-endorse-them-fully-asiedu-nketia-backs-ndc-vigilante-groups-to-face-npp.php>

¹² See "We will use the Hawks to protect NDC" <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/We-will-use-the-Hawks-to-protect-NDC-Yamin-682725>

¹³ See We don't owe President Akufo-Addo any apology - Delta Force (2017-03-28)

The implication of the activities of these groups on governance amounts to vigilante capture. Vigilante capture refers to a situation where political party vigilante groups hijack, through violence and the threat of same, the governance process of a state by either setting policy agenda or resisting policy decisions coming from the centre of power. “Vigilante capture” is both a *process* and *outcome*. The outcome is the end-result or the expected benefits (i.e. the dividends) of the “investments”¹⁴ that these groups made when their party of choice was in opposition. It is rational for all political actors (political parties, supporters and financiers) in the electoral process to expect some form of benefits in return for their support and effort. The expectation motivates them to commit more resources (i.e. physical strength, monetary contributions, and ideas) with the ultimate aim of benefitting after electoral victory. The end-result is the actual benefit obtained for the commitment after an electoral victory. These benefits embolden groups to continue to do more in order to consolidate their gains but also fend off competition from similar groups that may emerge with same objective.¹⁵ The process deals with strategy and could be a critical distinctive factor between political vigilante groups and any other political actors that provide other forms of investment excluding violence. The processes or strategies employed by party vigilantes in Ghana are at best detrimental to the interest of the state agency (i.e. political parties) that they seek to promote or benefit from. The authoritative allocation of resources and political opportunities (based on an acceptable, equitable and inclusive procedure) is one of the core features of a democratic state and a function of every responsible government. Political vigilantism (and their desire to resort to violence) is one of the consequences of successive governments’ failure to equitably distribute political opportunities and authoritatively allocate resources.

5. Conclusion

This chapter concludes that vigilantism is an enterprising act and vigilante groups rationally supply their services to meet the demands of political parties. Vigilante groups are rational actors and see their actions as a form of investment that has returns. If the returns are not met after an electoral victory, these groups will resort to all means possible in order to get what was

¹⁴ Bob-Miller (2014) in discussing the factors that influence the decision of the youth to support political parties in the country actually refer to all the support the youth provide for political parties in an election year as a form of investment which they expect to reap the benefits.

¹⁵ “Delta Force a gang of thieves – Invincible Force leader” (2017-03-28).

promised them. Dealing with the vigilante menace in Ghana therefore requires a multi-stakeholder approach and a strong political commitment. Attempts to deal with the menace of vigilantism in Ghana have evolved over the years and across governments. Two-pronged strategies have been observed: what ought to happen and what should actually happen. Stakeholders against vigilantism, including civil society organizations, the international community in Ghana, faith-based organizations, ordinary citizens and reservedly, political parties have all made categorical statements of what ought to be. These include ordering governments to disband vigilante groups, empowering state security services to deal with them, arresting and punishing members of vigilante groups and admonishing political parties to withdraw financial support for them. These solutions are not easy, especially when the agency being instructed to take these actions has once been a beneficiary of the activities of these groups.

Currently, the NPP government under President Akufo-Addo has experimented with three policy options: setting up a Commission of Inquiry, following the Ayawaso West Wuogon (AWW) bye-election violence; instituted a dialogue meeting between the NPP and the NDC under the auspices of the National Peace Council and passing the Vigilantism and Other Related Offences Act through parliament – all in an attempt to deal with the menace. Laudable as these measures seem, there are anticipated challenges when it comes to implementation. For example, the same government that set up the AWW Commission of Inquiry issued a white paper rejecting almost seventy percent of the recommendations of the Commission and no one has been punished till date, following the work of the Commission. Also, the dialogue between the NDC and NPP did not end as expected and the blueprint for action was announced at a press without one of the parties, the NDC. The only option now is the law that has been passed to curb the work of these groups. It is important to add that the issue of fighting vigilantism, just like any other unlawful happenings in the country, is more about enforcing legislations rather than the absence of it. As direct beneficiaries of vigilante activities, political parties, especially when they are in government, lack the political will to punish their ‘own.’

What then should the government do in the wake of the seeming failure of the strategies experimented so far? By dealing with the root cause rather than tackling the symptoms will be the solution to the vigilantism menace in the country. This should be comprehensive in order to discourage vigilante activities. The first recommendation for dealing with vigilantism is de-politicizing the

work of a number of state institutions, including the Ghana Police Service and other state security institutions, as well as the work of the judiciary. Allowing both the security services and the judiciary to work independently, and without political interference, is a good way to demonstrate commitment to the fight against them. Secondly, politics in the country should be de-monetized as a matter of urgency. The expenditure involved in running for a political position is prohibitively expensive. This raises the stakes for accepting defeat easily. Electoral competition has become a 'do-or-die' affair when competitors reflect on the monetary investment made. This encourages them to use the services of vigilante groups to win at all costs. The de-monetization of politics is linked to re-thinking about why people run for political office, in the first place: is it for service or for business? Often, people think of politics as a money-making venture rather an opportunity to serve. This affects the attitude competitors assume while running for political positions in the country. The National Commission for Civic Education, political parties and civic bodies will have to re-orient the masses about the essence of democracy and democratic elections in order to move them away from this assumption about politics. On the flip side, state institutions tasked with guaranteeing accountability and transparency in the Ghanaian body politic need to wake up and enforce assets declaration laws and fight political corruption. Citizens' perception about politics is reinforced by the lifestyle of politicians and this perception encourages them to also seek political office with the intention to live the same lifestyle.

Thirdly, the state must initiate and improve on social welfare policies aimed at reducing poverty, inequality and promote inclusion. These developmental 'evils' render the poor and vulnerable to recruitment by vigilante groups for the purposes of helping them get employed if their political party wins. Initiating programmes of this kind and improving on existing ones have the tendency to reduce vulnerability and risk, and making citizens more responsible. Fourthly, the electorate has the power to punish politicians who seek their personal welfare to the collective development of the masses. They can also punish politicians who seek to use violence to win elections. Voting is a civic duty and can be used to endorse or reject the performance and actions of governments and political parties. Reverse or punitive voting from citizens could reduce the use of vigilante groups in Ghana's elections. Finally, further research is needed to properly operationalize the phenomenon of 'vigilantism' or whatever it is that is happening in Ghana; we have to explore the social dynamics that make vigilantism so endearing to many; examine the political settlements that

entrench this practice and finally evaluate, in numerical terms, its implication to the democracy of Ghana and to the state's purse.

Biographical Notes

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