

**ARTICLE**

# The Autonomy of Ghana's Electoral Commission and Citizens' Perceptions of Election Quality: A Field Experiment

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**Abstract**

Building trust in management of the electoral process is a major challenge in third-wave democracies such as Ghana. Unsurprisingly, Ghanaian elections have generated impassioned debates since the return to multiparty democracy in 1992 with the Electoral Commission always under intense citizen and stakeholder scrutiny in relation to its independence and mandate. Such criticisms escalated in the 2020 elections following the prodigious dismissal of the chairperson of the Commission by the President. The decision to compile a new voters' list against intense public opposition and during the Covid-19 outbreak cemented allegations of a sinister agenda by the Commission to manipulate the elections in favor of the incumbent. These created a significant credibility "gap" for the Commission going into the election. To interrogate this credibility gap, this study assesses the independence and autonomy of the Commission during the 2020 elections. With a sample size of 100 voters each from 116 constituencies, the analyses shows that the election was credible. However, to cure possible future allegations of bias, the study recommends that just as the Office of the Special Prosecutor, article 70(2) of the 1992 constitution should be amended to allow individuals appointed to head the Commission go through Parliamentary vetting and approval. The current arrangement that allows the President to seek advice from the Council of State in appointing a Chairperson of the Commission is lame as half the members of the Council are also appointed by the President.

**KEYWORDS:**

Election, Ghana, Electoral Commission, Political Parties, Voters' Register, Electoral Violence

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Ghana held its eighth general elections in 2020 since its return to multiparty democracy in 1992. However, events prior, during and in the aftermath of the elections were a major source of worry and concern to practitioners and scholars on the stability of Africa's "darling democracy". Multiparty elections have become a global norm and a sub-political culture in contemporary democracies. However, elections in Ghana and other third-wave democracies can either consolidate democratic gains made or lead to destabilization. One of the most important actors in the electoral process is the Election Management Body (EMB) since its actions can build trust and confidence or contribute to a breakdown due to the contentious nature of elections in emergent democracies. In this regard, James and Alihodzic (2020) averred that, threats to democratic governance such as delays,

suspension or cancellation of electoral processes and decisions imposed on election management bodies, and other unforeseen events have caused systems to malfunction.

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic represents one such unforeseen event that nearly marred the conduct of Ghana's eighth democratic elections. Furthermore, unprecedented events such as the sacking of the chairperson of the Electoral Commission by the executive, barely two years to a major national election and the decision to compile a new voters' roll six months into the elections nearly impaired the integrity of the election. These issues, exacerbated by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, raised significant doubts about the credibility of the pre-election preparations by the Commission. Even across the sub-region, the Economic Commission for West African States, Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC, 2020) issued a report on the potential challenges ahead of member states conducting elections that year due to the global Covid-19 pandemic. There were also lawsuits and protestations by some political parties led by the main opposition on the planned compilation of a new voters' register prior to the elections<sup>1</sup>. These heightened the political temperature and tensions ahead of the general elections.

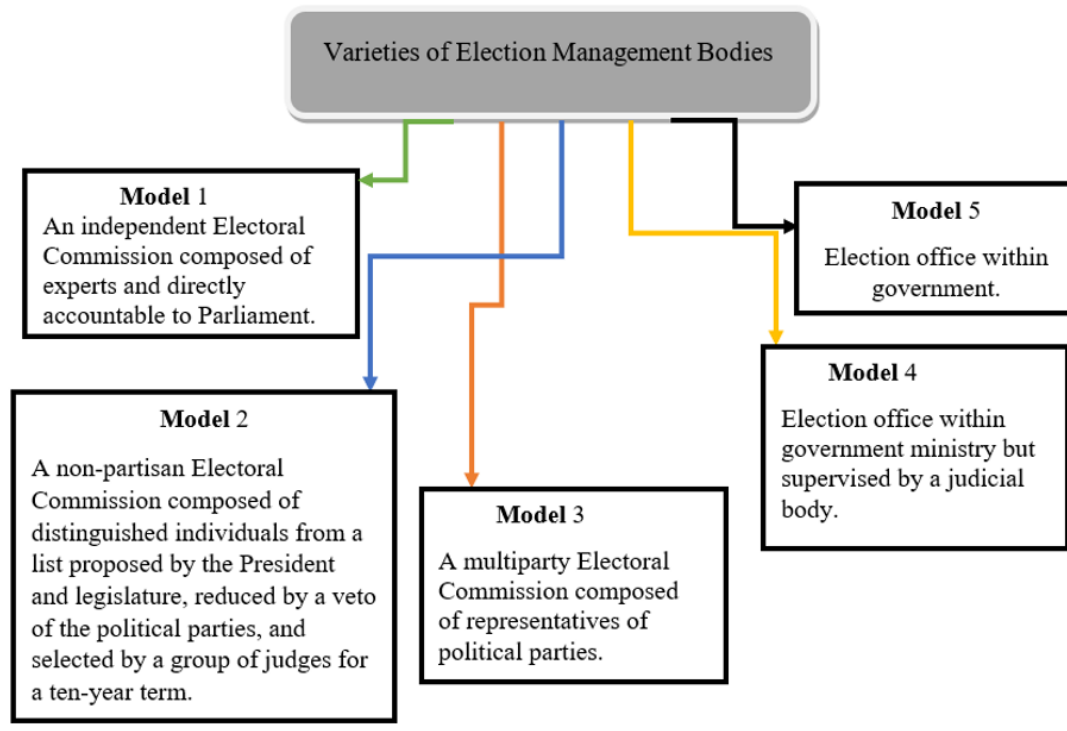
The cloud of despair and uncertainty among the citizenry particularly, the political actors and the moral society was accelerated by the militarization and the violence that characterized the conduct of the Ayawaso West Wuogon by-election, which took place a little over a year prior to the general elections. Cumulatively, these events put the role and actions of the Commission into sharp focus as Ghanaians expressed concerns over whether the upcoming elections could be credible and peaceful. Thus, beyond the Covid-19 outbreak, the election management body was not in proper shape as it struggled with credibility issues ahead of the general elections. In sum, the violence and military brutalities that accompanied the conduct of the by-election along with the first election to be conducted by the new leadership of the Commission heralded the beginning of mistrust and credibility "crises" that were yet to swamp the public image of the Commission. Indeed, the main opposition leader (President Mahama) in the aftermath of the by-election stated, "we are not going to joke in 2020 and I am sounding a warning to the NPP—we are going to match them boot for boot" (Citinewsroom, 2019). These lingering issues motivated this study's survey. Thus, the study sought to ascertain from the electorates if they had confidence in the Commission to conduct credible and peaceful elections based on these developments

## 1.1 | The Commission and Election

The Electoral Commission, established by article 43 of the 1992 constitution is mandated to among other things conduct free, fair and honest elections, as well as supervise electoral proceedings and guard against electoral fraud as stipulated in the Electoral Commission Act (Act 451) of 1993. Before 1968, the Minister of Local Government was responsible for the conduct of elections. Trusting this duty with the minister led to complaints regarding transparency and fairness in the electoral process. After the overthrow of the Kwame Nkrumah led CPP government in 1966, a committee of inquiry was set up to look into Local Government and Electoral Reforms by the Military regime of the National Liberation Council (NLC). It was in 1968 that the Interim Electoral Commission was established as an independent body responsible for registration of voters, and the conduct and supervision of elections following recommendations by the Siriboe Committee. The first election supervised by the Commission was the 1969 election under the leadership of Justice V.C.R.A.C Crabbe, who was appointed Interim Commissioner in 1968. In 1971, the Commission was made a permanent and independent institution, namely, Electoral Commission, Ghana. Undoubtedly, the most enduring phase in the life of the Commission is the 4th Republic. Since 1992, the Commission has successfully organized eight elections with every election seen as an improvement over the previous. However, independence and effectiveness of an Election Management Body (EMB) is determined mostly by the mode of appointment and the composition of its members. Accordingly, Pastor (1999) conceptualized EMBs into five categories (see figure 1), thus providing the basis and context for assessing the independence of EMBs.

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) has classified the models along three main characteristics, namely, independent, government and mixed models (IDEA, 2006). This classification helps to determine the powers, formal accountability, terms of office and budget of EMBs. Based on this background, one can conclude that Ghana's Electoral Commission is within the first model since it is independent and accountable to the citizens through Parliament. Notwithstanding, events in the election management body leading to the 2020 elections created doubts in the minds of many over the independence of the institution to conduct free, fair and transparent elections. For example, following the alternation of power in the 2016 elections, President Akufo Addo dismissed the Commission's chairperson in 2018—who was appointed by his predecessor—over management and administrative lapses. This dismissal was an unprecedented development in the annals of the

<sup>1</sup>The Inter-Party Resistance against New Voters' Register, a group made up of some political parties, embarked on demonstrations against the Electoral Commission's decision to compile a new biometric voters' register for the 2020 General Elections. Source: [www.ghanaweb.com](http://www.ghanaweb.com). Accessed 09.03.2022



**FIGURE 1**

Source: (Authors, based on Pastor's conceptualization of EMBs)

nation's governance since multiparty democracy was restored three decades ago. The decision of the new management to compile a new voters' list for the 2020 election further escalated the mistrust over the independence of the Commission among some Ghanaians particularly the main opposition party. Thus, the prodigious dismissal of the chairperson of the Commission by the President, subsequent compilation of a completely new voters' register for the 2020 elections and the violence that marred the by-election were among some of the events that waned public confidence over the independence of one of the revered EMBs in the West African sub-region.

## 1.2 | Objectives

The study achieved the following objectives.

1. Assessed the state of preparedness of the Electoral Commission leading up to the 2020 general elections.
2. Ascertained whether the Covid-19 outbreak affected the compilation of the new voters' register for the 2020 general elections.
3. Undertook an assessment of the likelihood of electoral violence in the 2020 general elections based on the Ayawaso West Wuogon by-election episode.

## 2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the key features of democracy is the periodic holding of elections (Dahl, 1971:257). Elections are therefore, among the most ubiquitous of contemporary political institutions, and voting is the single act of political participation undertaken by most adults in a majority of the world's nations today (Rose and Mossawir, 1967). Multiparty elections have become a global norm as they provide legitimacy for the governing and give voice to citizens as opposed to narrow political or sectional elites (Kerr and Luhrmann, 2017). This makes the role of EMBs critical, particularly in unconsolidated democracies where democratic

institutions are not yet firmly established. Election Management Bodies are constitutionally established non-partisan bodies that determine election procedure, demarcate electoral boundaries and supervise the conduct of elections. In other words, EMBs are strictly non-partisan and do not pander to the whims and inclinations of those in power at the expense of opponents (Chukwu, 2005). Thus, an overriding characteristic of EMBs is their independence, which is vital for ensuring the sanctity of the electoral process so that election outcomes do not result in electoral disputes. Several studies have identified various benchmarks for assessing the quality of an electoral system. These include a system with an independent judiciary to interpret electoral laws fairly, competent, non-partisan administration to conduct elections and where political parties are able to market their candidates and put their policies across to influence electoral decisions.

## 2.1 | Election Quality Framework

Measuring election quality is a herculean task, a key reason why most studies have had to rely on scanty reports by international election observer groups (van Ham, 2014). However to avoid such a trap, the study consequently the study relied on the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) approach on election quality as a framework to assess the confluence of perceptions and the autonomy of the Electoral Commission in managing fair and transparent elections in the country thus, the framework outlined below makes it possible to identify patterns of success and failure in the fairness of elections, which will enable policymakers and researchers to spotlight the weak areas of election administration and where to focus on to improve the quality of subsequent elections (Elklit and Reynolds, 2005).

As the objective of the paper is to assess the quality of elections in Ghana using the 2020 general elections as a case study, we employed the V-Dem model as it provides a unique approach that conceptualizes and measures democracy, distinguishing between five high-level principles of democracy including electoral, liberal, participatory, deliberative, and egalitarian, and collects data to measure them<sup>2</sup>. The V-Dem project thus provides a novel approach to measuring principles of democracy and different areas of the political life of which electoral systems are an integral component (Knutsen et al. 2019). In other words, the focus of this paper is not to assess the whole broad spectrum on the qualities of democracy embedded in the V-Dem approach, but rather to disaggregate and narrow down on election. The component taps into electoral credibility based on certain measurable indicators. Thus, the indicators pertaining to this latent trait include the (a) autonomy and capacity of the election management body (EMB), (b) registration irregularities, (c) ballot fraud and intentional irregularities, (d) vote buying, (e) government-induced intimidation of opposition candidates and (f) other types of election violence (not instigated by the government or ruling party) (Lindberg et. al 2016). However, only variables a, b and f are applied in the context of this paper.

## 2.2 | Autonomy of Election Management Bodies

A major determinant of a credible election is the presence of an independent and autonomous electoral system. As countries globally embrace multiparty democracy as a norm, trust in elections and EMBs is not only vital for strengthening unconsolidated democracies, but also, necessary for regime legitimacy (Moehler, 2009; Rose Mishler, 2009; Norris, 2014). The role of EMBs in multiparty democracy is therefore very crucial as they are seen as “institutions that provide both vertical and horizontal accountability during elections by holding elites accountable to the rules of the electoral game and ensuring that citizens’ right to vote is not violated during various stages of the electoral process” (Kerr and Lührmann, 2017). Therefore, a system where the EMB is biased becomes a tool for manipulation. In this respect, Mozaffar (2002), Pastor (1999), and Elklit Reynolds (2002) argue that the presence of an autonomous EMB is the hallmark of electoral credibility.

The actions of governments or incumbents can seriously hamper the independence of EMBs in emerging democracies. For example, case studies in Tanzania and Burundi have revealed that the EMBs in these countries lack sufficient independence. Even though there are legislations protecting their autonomy, the EMBs operate in an atmosphere that affects their independence (Makulilo et al. 2016). One of the events that besmirched the independence of Ghana’s Electoral Commission with the ascension into office of the NPP led administration in 2017 was the dismissal from office of the chairperson of the Commission. Although the executive provided grounds for the dismissal, some two years into a major general election, many people viewed this unprecedented development as an attack on the independence of the Commission. That is to say, the sacking of the

<sup>2</sup>Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) is a unique approach to conceptualizing and measuring democracy by providing a multidimensional and disaggregated dataset that reflects the complexity of the concept of democracy as a system of rule that goes beyond the simple presence of elections. The V-Dem project distinguishes between five high-level principles of democracy: electoral, liberal, participatory, deliberative, and egalitarian, and collects data to measure these principles. Source: [www.v-dem.net](http://www.v-dem.net) Accessed 11.03.2022

Commission's chairperson over administrative and management indiscretion became a major incident that affected the autonomy of the institution going into the crucial election in 2020. As observed by Makulilo et al. (2016), the system for appointment and removal of Election Commissioners has not assuaged anxieties about the independence of EMBs from the control of the executive in many fragile democracies.

### 2.2.1 | Registration Irregularities

The value of elections in democratic consolidation is unambiguous. For example, Diamond (2002) and Luqman (2009) maintain that elections are so central to democratization that there can be elections without democracy but there can never be democracy without elections. Despite the critical role elections play in contemporary democracies, activities in the electoral process such as the compilation of a voter list can affect the quality of electoral outcomes. Voter registration is a critical step in election administration as voters' albums are used in establishing eligibility to vote as well as information in relation to where and when elections occur.

Therefore, voter registration is vital in validating people and auditing elections (Ansolabehere Hersh, 2010). Research shows that a large portion of electoral irregularities in developing countries stem from registration and administrative deficiencies rather than deliberate fraud, particularly when it comes to voter registration and identification (Piccolino, 2016). Thus, the quality of a voter list depends largely on the existence of effective mechanisms to register citizens, which may be lacking in many developing countries. Sound electoral contests are marked by comprehensive voter registration, ballot security, accurate counting and tabulation, making election security a multifaceted phenomenon (Morrison Savun 2022). Therefore, irregularities or mismanagement at any stage of the electoral cycle cast doubts on the integrity of the results.

The decision by the Commission to compile a new voters' register for the 2020 elections using only the Ghana Card and Passport as source documents to get onto the voters' roll was met with allegations of voter suppression claims by the main opposition NDC<sup>3</sup>. The NDC, which draws its main support from rural areas, saw this action by the Commission as an attempt to suppress votes in its main support base. Although the court ruled in favor of the Commission, the main opposition party still held that the compilation of the new voters' list using only the two source documents as proof of nationality was part of a grand scheme to disenfranchise its members and manipulate the elections in favor of the incumbent.

### 2.2.2 | Electoral Violence

Birch and Muchlinski (2018) define electoral violence as coercive force, directed towards electoral actors and/or objects that occurs in the context of electoral competition and can occur before, during or after elections. Electoral violence can target a variety of actors, including candidates, activists, poll workers, journalists and voters. Electoral violence can also be considered as a subset of political violence and has become one of the tools available to elites to influence election outcomes (Birch, 2020; Ruggeri, et al. 2019). Electoral contests in emerging democracies can be very contentious and most often lead to violent clashes between political opponents or state security and opposition elements. In domestic politics, there is evidence that electoral misconduct results in consequences that contribute to violent conflicts, leading to a declining public confidence in the regime (Norris, 2014). A major source of electoral violence is voter intimidation, such that supporters of incumbents and state security can be used to intimidate or harass members of the opposition in order to gain electoral advantage as violence reduces turnout (Bratton, 2008). van Ham and Lindberg (2015) have documented this phenomenon during elections in Africa. Straus (2012) adds that subtle forms of electoral violence in the context of harassment and intimidation are common in Africa and are more lethal than violence. This does not only make voters shy away from voting but also constitute a potential source of violent conflicts as election creates time-inconsistency problems that keep parties from adhering to peace settlements particularly in post-conflict settings (Nooruddin and Flores, 2012). As previously stated, there was a cloud of uncertainty among the populace going into the elections following the violent nature of the by-election that took place earlier. As one of the V-Dem indicators for measuring election quality, the study assessed how voters perceived the violent incidents in the by-election with respect to election security in the run-up to the general elections.

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<sup>3</sup>A report by citinewsroom quoted John Mahama (leader of the opposition) with respect to the compilation of the new voters' roll as saying, "Our party has been the vanguard of the fight to prevent the disenfranchisement of a section of the citizens of this country. We recognize that our opponents are determined to suppress votes in areas of the country they deem not to be their strongholds, otherwise it is difficult to understand some of the restrictions being put in the way of a wider disenfranchisement of all eligible Ghanaian voters" Source: [citinewsroom.com](https://www.citinewsroom.com). Accessed 11.03.2022

### 3 | MATERIAL AND METHODS

#### 3.1 | Study Selection

The study used primary data, conducting a survey in all sixteen administrative regions of the country. To ensure fairness in the representation across the country, the study selected equitably more constituencies from regions embodied relatively higher number of constituencies. For example, Ashanti and Greater Accra (most populous regions) had the highest number of fifteen constituencies in the survey, while Volta and Savannah Regions had one and two respectively, in all, the study selected 116 constituencies across the country for participation in the survey with one hundred voters interviewed in each constituency. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the regional representation of constituencies selected for the survey.

#### 3.2 | Demographic Composition

In terms of the demographic composition of the respondents, males constituted 50.6% while 49.4% were females. Those below the age of 40 was 64.1% with the rest being more than 40 years. In terms of religion, the majority (73.01%) of respondents were Christians followed by Muslims with (21.33%), Traditionalists (3.08%), non-religious (2.54%) and Other (0.4%). For education, close to 80% of respondents have had some level of education with the majority having basic or secondary school level education. For income distribution, sixty-one percent of the respondents earned below GHS 500 monthly; 25.5 percent earned between GHS 501–GHS 1,000; 9.7 percent earned between 1,001–2,000; 3.2 percent earned between 2001–3,000; and 0.18 percent earned GHS 4,000 and above monthly. Finally, on employment, an overwhelming majority of respondents (61.7%) were self-employed; 14.9 percent were employed in the formal sector; 20.6 percent were unemployed, and the rest were either retired or did not disclose their employment status.

**TABLE 1** Regional Distribution of Constituencies

Name of Region	Number of Constituencies
Western	8
Central	14
Greater Accra	15
Volta	1
Eastern	10
Ashanti	15
Western North	6
Ahafo	3
Bono	7
Bono East	8
Oti	6
Northern	8
Savanna	2
North East	3
Upper East	5
Upper West	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>116</b>

Source: Authors Compilation

It can be observed from table 1 that the survey was conducted in all the sixteen administrative regions. However, the number of constituencies selected for the survey was not uniform. Aside from the population size, we also looked out for swing regions in selecting the constituencies for the survey. For example, Volta had just one constituency because the region had always voted one way. Thus, the region gives at least 80% of popular votes to the National Democratic Congress (NDC) since the return to multiparty democracy in 1992. In terms of Parliamentary elections, the NDC has equally won all seats in the region since 1992.

The New Patriotic Party (NPP) could not keep beyond one term when the party won the Akan and Nkwanta North constituencies in the 2000 and 2008 elections respectively.

**TABLE 2** Regional Breakdown of Constituencies

Name of Region	Number of Constituencies
Western	17
Central	23
Greater Accra	34
Volta	18
Eastern	33
Ashanti	47
Western North	9
Ahafo	6
Bono	12
Bono East	11
Oti	8
Northern	18
Savanna	7
North East	6
Upper East	15
Upper West	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>275</b>

Source: Authors Compilation

Another issue that influenced the regional selection of constituencies was the creation of new administrative regions prior to the election. We wanted to find out if the creation of the six new regions could potentially affect voting patterns in these new regions. As shown in table 2, it can be observed that new regions such as Western North, Bono, Bono East and Oti had more constituencies included in the survey than some of the traditional regions.

### 3.3 | Data Collection and Analysis

The study used semi-structured interviews guide for the qualitative data collection and the questionnaire for the quantitative in the context of mixed methods methodology. Data collection instruments were systematically structured into specific thematic areas to ensure comprehensive coverage of specific issues and to facilitate efficient, effective and structured data capture, analysis and presentation. The various responses to specific questions were entered into separate spreadsheets designed for each question. The responses were numbered, and then coded for broad thematic issues. Data was analyzed, tables and charts generated using Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS). The output of this process resulted in a data set that responded to the objectives of the study as input into drafting of the study's findings and drawing of conclusions.

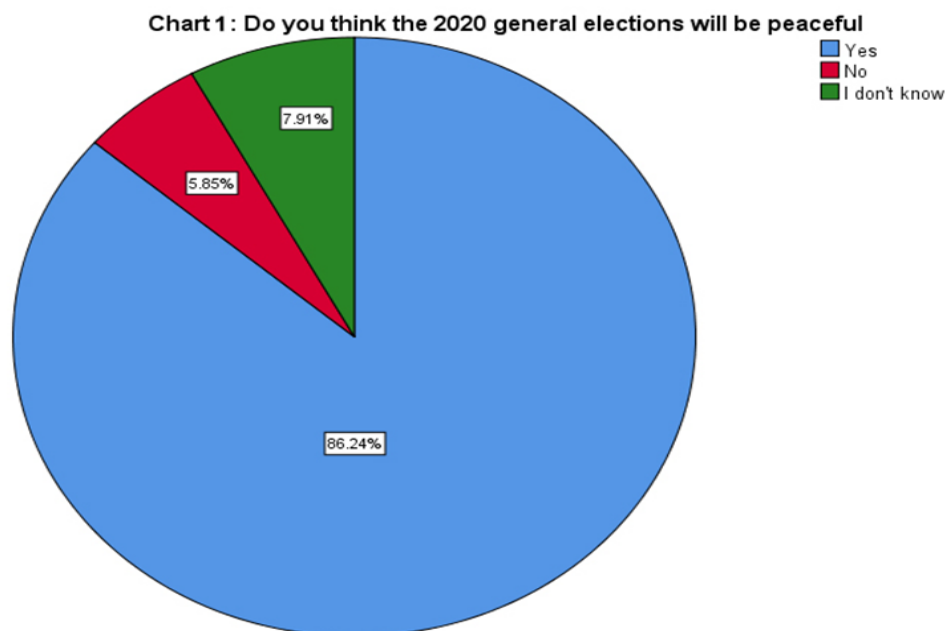
## 4 | FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 | Electoral Violence

The stakes for the 2020 elections were particularly high. The main contenders for the presidency, thus the governing NPP and the opposition NDC presidential candidates had each served a four- year term in office and were hoping for an opportunity for a final term. There was, however, a cloud of fear as to whether the elections would be peaceful following the militarization and the violence that characterized the by-election, which took place a little over a year prior to the general elections. This notwithstanding, an overwhelming majority of respondents believed that the 2020 general elections would be peaceful irrespective of

the violence in the by-election. Thus, 86.24% of respondents believed that the election would be peaceful and further opined that party vigilantes could only cause confusion and chaos at some polling stations and that could not be enough to suggest that the elections would not be peaceful. Further, a recurring reason for the overwhelming affirmation that the election would be peaceful by respondents was their belief that Ghana was a peace-loving country, and that the election will be peaceful because previous elections had generally been so.

Meanwhile, a sizeable minority of respondents believed that electoral violence instigated by vigilantes would disrupt the election. Thus only a minuscule 5.9% of respondents were of the view that the election would not be peaceful, while another insignificant proportion of 7.91% expressed indifference or did not indicate whether the election would be peaceful or not. The findings imply that, although there were concerns that violence could ruin the 2020 general elections, people still believed that the election would take place peacefully. Further, owing to the peaceful conduct of previous elections in the 4th Republic, respondents were of the view that the country had the capacity to organize a peaceful poll. Chart 1 summarizes the views of respondents on the question of whether the 2020 elections would be peaceful.



**FIGURE 2**

Source: (Authors calculation based on field data)

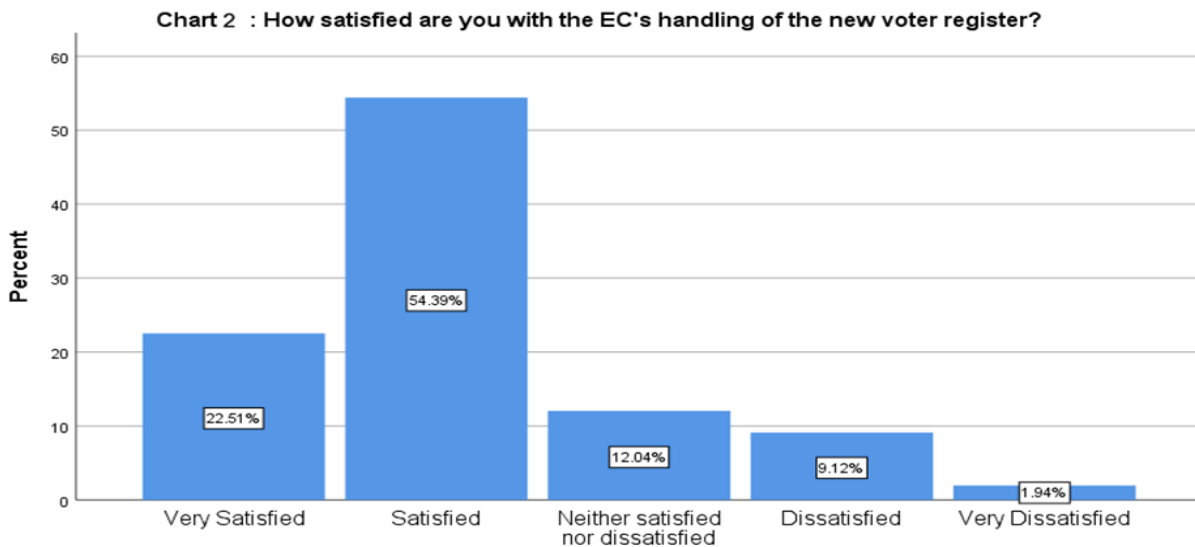
## 4.2 | Voters' Registration

The role and independence of Election Management Bodies is vital to nurturing and sustaining fragile and emerging democracies. Indeed, the conduct of EMBs directly affects the legitimacy of elected leaders, politicians and for that matter the public office. An EMB perceived to be compromised is unlikely to confer credibility on a contested election and therefore undermines institutional building and legitimacy of the wider democratic culture. In essence, due to the important role EMBs play as neutrals in the electoral process, their activities and conduct are always under the strict scrutiny of the public. Ghana's Electoral Commission has been touted as credible and one of the best on the continent largely due its record of managing free, fair and transparent elections over the years. Indeed, the Commission has managed elections that resulted in incumbents losing power to the opposition leading to the peaceful transfer of power from one political party to another.

However, the compilation of a new voters' register by the Commission for the 2020 election was rancorously rejected by the main opposition party (NDC) with the claim that it was an exercise targeted at suppressing votes in its strongholds. These did not augur well for the integrity and independence of the Commission. Nonetheless, an overwhelming 76% of respondents expressed satisfaction with the conduct of the registration process. Only 11% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the process with



the rest expressing neither satisfaction nor dissatisfaction. The implication is that, despite the claims of voter suppression and the misgivings expressed by sections of the public and the main opposition party, an overwhelming majority of voters expressed satisfaction with the manner the Commission handled the issue of the new voters' register. Chart 2 summarizes the opinions of respondents on whether they were satisfied with the way the Commission handled the issue of the new voters' register.



**FIGURE 3**

Source: (Authors calculation based on field data)

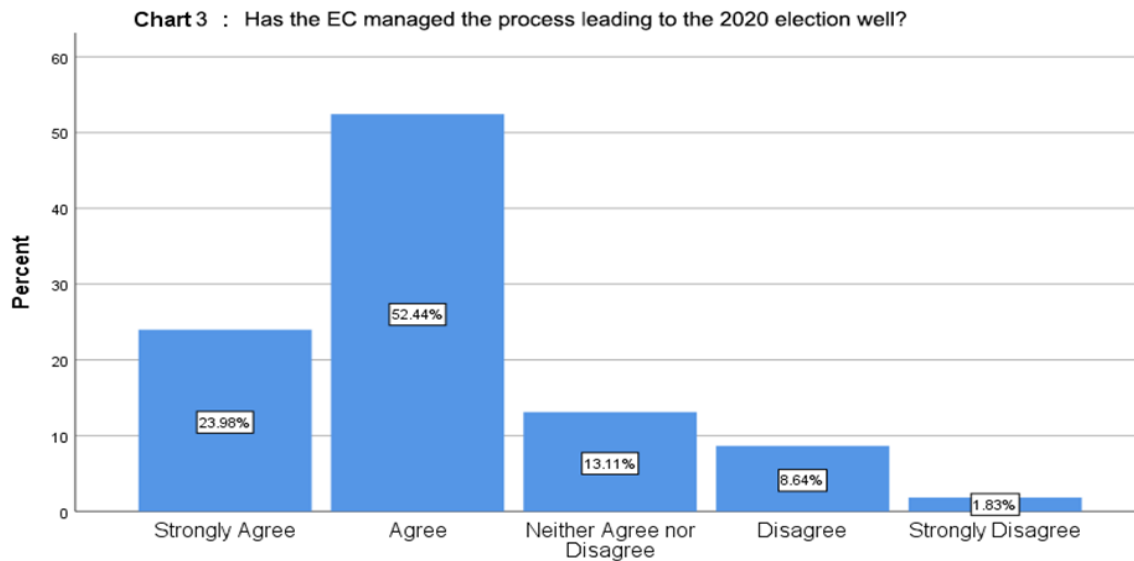
### 4.3 | Autonomy and Planning

One of the events that undermined the independence of the Commission was the decision of the executive to remove its chairperson from office over alleged management and administrative malice. In other words, beyond the security challenges heightened by the violence that characterized the by-election and the extreme political activism that infuriated passion head of the general elections in 2020, the unconventional dismissal of the Commission's chairperson and subsequent appointment of a new leadership raised questions about its autonomy with some even alleging that the whole process was a ploy to influence future elections in favor of the incumbent.

Article 146(3) of the 1992 constitution mandates the President to seek advice from the Chief Justice in relation to the removal of heads of independent state institutions like the Electoral Commission. However, that also has legal implications. Indeed, a declaration for determination was sought at the Supreme Court by a private citizen that the Chief Justice, pursuant to Article 146 of the Constitution for the removal from office of the chairperson of the Electoral Commission was inconsistent with Article 130(a) of the Constitution. Therefore, such a determination by the Chief Justice amounted to usurping exclusive jurisdiction and power of the Supreme Court. Aside from the legal arguments, some governance experts equally thought that dismissing the Commission's chairperson by the executive based on management and administrative indiscretion, which had no effect on the Commission's core mandate of conducting transparent and credible elections, blighted the institutional autonomy of the Commission. Events such as these, combined with the compilation of the voters' list and the associated court cases did not only have the potential to derail the independence of the Commission, but also affect its preparation for the general elections.

Among the indicators in the V-Dem approach in analyzing the credibility of an election is the overall assessment of whether an election, all things being considered, could be considered "free and fair" (Lindberg, et al. 2016). In this regard, the survey sought the views of electorates whether the Commission had managed well the processes leading to the 2020 general elections considering all the challenges that had bedeviled the institution. The results as presented in chart 3 reveal that electorates were

generally of the view that the Commission was adequately prepared for the elections irrespective of the challenges it encountered initially. Thus, the findings imply that despite the challenges, most voters were generally satisfied with the processes put in place by the Commission toward the general elections in 2020.



**FIGURE 4**

Source: (Authors calculation based on field data)

## 5 | CONCLUSION

Prior to 2020, Ghana had held seven successful consecutive elections since the inception of the 4th Republic in 1992. However, the 2020 general elections were peculiar in many respects. The removal of the chairperson of the Electoral Commission and the compilation of the new voters' register during the Covid-19 outbreak against protestations and dissent by sections of the public were among events that created a "credibility gap" for the Commission. This study sought to ascertain whether these developments could lead to electoral violence and or hamper the overall conduct of the elections. The outcome of the elections confirmed the conclusions of the study that the elections were credible. Indeed, the Supreme Court equally validated the declaration by the Commission when the defeated opposition leader (John Mahama) challenged the result in court. Nonetheless, the aftermath of the elections contradicted the findings on electoral violence as eight Ghanaians were killed on account of electoral violence, the first of its kind since the inception of the 4th Republic.

### 5.1 | Policy Implications

With respect to policy implications, the paper finds that the provisions as contained in the Article 70 (2) of the 1992 constitution do not provide enough guarantees for the independence of the Electoral Commission. It states that; "The President, acting on the advice of the Council of State appoints the Chairman, Deputy Chairmen and other members of the Commission". This is problematic. The Council of State is a small body of prominent citizens, analogous to the Council of Elders in the traditional political system that advises the President on national issues. Its membership currently stands at thirty out of which, eleven are directly appointed by the President while sixteen members are elected to represent the sixteen regions. There are also three ex-officio members, thus a former Chief of Defence Staff, a former Chief Justice and a former Inspector General of Police. These three individuals are also appointed by the President.

It is further instructive to note that although the regional representatives to the Council are elected, the overbearing executive influences, albeit informal, the kinds of people elected in the regions to the Council. Accordingly, the paper argues that the current arrangement does not convey sufficient scrutiny in terms of institutional oversight on the appointments of Commissioners to such a sensitive state institution. For instance, the President can choose to fill the Commission with relatives, friends or sympathizers of his/her party due to weak checks and balances embedded in the current procedure of appointing individuals to head the Commission. In view of the foregoing, the paper suggests that appointments of members of the Commission need to be thorough and competitive including Parliamentary vetting and approval just as is done for Judges appointed to the Supreme Court and the Office of the Special Prosecutor (OSP). This will erase the suspicion of bias and make the Commission independent in both theory and practice. It would also reduce electoral violence in future elections as a truly independent election management body engenders trust and confidence of political actors and the public in general. In terms of originality, the main value of the paper to the research field is using the quality election framework of the V-Dem approach to analyze the autonomy of EMBs and citizens' perceptions of election quality using Ghana's 2020 general elections as a case study.

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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