SECURITY ARCHITECTURE AND ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN GHANA

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African Security Sector Network (ASSN)

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

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INTRODUCTION

Ghana returned to constitutional rule in 1992 with an avowed desire to sustain and consolidate the Fourth Republic. The transition. Invariably, involved a shift from periods of political instability that had characterised the post-independence era until the 1980s (Aning & Lartey, 2008; Kwadjo, 2009). Some argue that the transition was necessary to reposition the country on the path of multiparty democracy (Jonah, 1998; Sithole, 2012). Thus, the transition also came with the prospects of upholding the rule of law and protecting human rights. A significant development, which has shaped the democratic trajectory of the country, is the elections that birthed and propelled the Fourth Republic, which has, subsequently, produced five elected presidents and a stable Parliament that is playing a critical oversight role in respect of the established security forces in the country.

Given the four-year electoral cycle, the country has conducted nine consecutive elections, which has yielded one significant outcome – the peaceful transfers of political power from one political party to another political party. Although Ghana is acclaimed as a multiparty democracy (Aning & Danso, 2012), the transfer of political power has been dominated by the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP). Parenthetically, both parties have enjoyed eight-year terms in office each time they assumed power. Moreover, both parties have variously 'supervised' elections, while security has often been a prominent feature in each election. The security agencies, especially the police, are often accused of being biased and lacking the capacity to handle electoral offences and violence effectively. There is also the accusation that the security forces are often used by incumbent parties to intimidate political opponents. Incumbents, however, usually rebut these claims, maintaining that they do not meddle in security operations; they only seek to retool the security agencies in order to make their operations more effective. The security agencies, on the other hand, often extol their core values of unbiased and professional conduct as the guiding principle for electoral operations.

Incidents of violence have occurred at different levels in past elections. First, all the nine previous general elections have witnessed pre-election and post-election violence, including the use of intemperate language, vandalisation of political and electoral materials and property, gun shots, and assault that sometimes lead to human casualties. Second, violence has characterised by-elections of which copious evidence is well publicised in the media. In particular, the violence seems to be spreading from one by-election to another as recorded in notable constituencies, such as Akwatia (August 2009), Chereponi (September 2009), Atiwa (August 2010), Talensi (July 2015), Ayawaso West Wuogon (2019) and Ablekuma North (2025).[1] Third, reported incidences of violent attacks during and after party primaries have also resulted in human casualties and property damage. Fourth, voter registration exercises (both general and limited registrations) have also become avenues for political violence (Aning & Danso, 2012).

In all these reported cases of electoral violence, the role of the police and their assurances of unbiased conduct in maintaining public safety have been questioned. This is partly because political party security elements have assumed prominent roles in major electoral activities, including general elections. Over the years, a number of active vigilante groups have emerged with sophisticated modus operandi that raise critical concerns among the security agencies and the general public. This development is antithetical to the democratic reform of the security sector and professional election security management, including the National Elections Security Task Force, which has the responsibility of overseeing the security of elections in the country. This paper discusses the

[1].See Oduro Fynn Charles, "Electoral Violence in Ghana's By-Elections and Reruns; A Democratic Red Flag". The Ghana Report. <https://theghanareport.com/electoral-violence-in-ghanas-by-elections-and-reruns-a-democratic-red-flag/?utm_source=chatgpt.com> Accessed: 16 January, 2026.

elections security architecture in Ghana in terms of its objectives and responses to political party security vigilantism, especially during elections.

Describing National Security Architecture in Ghana

Admittedly, a certain degree of apprehension is often associated with parallel security structures that operate outside and beyond state regulation, control and oversight (Laurie, 2009). Particularly in Ghana, the risk associated with a polarised and fragmented security sector portends a regression from the rule of law to a state of political fragility (Naila, 2020). State control mechanisms for the security sector have been placed both within constitutional and legislative frameworks.

Constitutional Arrangements

The return to democracy in 1992 meant decoupling the armed and security forces from the state political administration. This was to reverse the military autocracy that had captured state power in the past. Further, the decoupling also involved the need to ensure firm subordination of the state security establishments to an elected political authority (Hutchful, 1997). The principle of subordination and democratic control of the armed and security forces is provided for in Article 57(1) of the 1992 Constitution, which states: 'tTere shall be a President of the Republic of Ghana who shall be the Head of State and Head of Government and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ghana'. In the first instance, what this provision means, essentially, is that every political party, once elected, forms the government and will have its presidential candidate exercise democratic control of the armed forces as the commander-in-chief. In the second instance, the armed and security forces, especially the military and police, are both statutory institutions recognised under chapters 15 and 17 of the 1992 Constitution.

Apart from the constitution aiming to restore democratic control of the armed and security forces, it also legitimised the role of the Legislature as the only body capable of raising an armed or security force in the country. For instance, the Constitution states: 'No person shall raise an armed force except by or under the authority of an Act of Parliament' (Republic of Ghana, 1992).[2] With regard to the maintenance of law and order, the Constitution, again, stipulates: 'No person or authority shall raise any police service except by or under the authority of an Act of Parliament'.[3] Essentially, what these two provisions in the Constitution seek to achieve is to outlaw and/or disband any non-state / militia elements that had not been integrated into the mainstream formal security sector. By the same token of interpretation, however, any existence or formation of such groups outside Parliament is also deemed unlawful.

Beyond legislative authority, ministerial responsibility has also been incorporated in the Constitution to aid in the policy management and oversight of the security forces. Thus, for example, the ministries of defence and the interior have, among other responsibilities, the tasks of managing and overseeing the operations of the armed forces and law enforcement agencies, respectively. In many respects, also, the Ministry of Justice and Attorney-General's Department are well placed to protect human rights and support the criminal justice system, which complements law enforcement by the security agencies. In all of these, raising a private security outfit or groups for the exclusive protection of political parties without legislative authority is unlawful under the Constitution. Therefore, not even the president, the commander-in-chief of the armed forces can raise a special force or security that operates parallel to the mainstream armed forces outside of parliamentary authority.

[2]. Article 210 (2), 1992 Constitution of Ghana.
[3]. Article 200 (2), 1992 Constitution of Ghana.

Legislative Arrangements

Combining with the Constitution are some key legislative instruments that provide for the establishment and functions of the security sector institutions in Ghana. Three of these instruments deserve some elaboration. First, the Armed Forces Act, 1962 (Act 105) provides for the establishment and composition of the Ghana Armed Forces.[4] Significantly, even though this act was promulgated long before the 1992 Constitution, it recognises, first, the centrality of Parliament in setting up the military, stating: 'no armed force shall be raised except under the authority of an Act of Parliament'. Second, the Act reiterates that the president shall be the commander-in-chief (and the supreme commander) of the armed forces.[5] Here, again, it buttresses the argument for civilian and democratic control of the armed forces, while rejecting the temptation of turning the armed forces into a private and/or party military by the president or any incumbent political party. With these constitutional and legislative arrangements, a system of democratic, civil and civilian control of the military has been established (Cleary & McConville, 2006).

Second, and equally important, the Police Force Act, 1970 (Act 350) provides for the organisation and administration of the Ghana Police Service. Notably, section 1(1) stipulates the tasks of the Ghana Police Service as: to prevent and detect crime, to apprehend offenders and to maintain public order and the safety of persons and property' In most election-related matters, such as the conduct of political rallies, demonstrations and protests, the police have often relied on the Public Order Act, 1994 (Act 491) to maintain public order and the safety of persons and property. The Public Order Act also enjoins the police to seek a court order before restraining civil protests, a system the public believes has been subjected to abuse.[6]

Third, the Security and Intelligence Agencies Act, 2020 (Act 1030), which replaced the previous Act 526 of 1996, makes provision in respect of the establishment and functions of the national security and intelligence architecture (also enshrined in articles 83 and 84 of the 1992 Constitution). Act 1030 also provides for the establishment of the National Security Council (NSC), the Minister of National Security, the National Security Coordinator and the Regional and District security committees (REGSEC and DISEC). It specifies some of the state agencies responsible for implementing government policies on the security of the state and other pertinent issues relating to both internal and external security of the country. In this wise, there is a separation of mandate – albeit coordinated under the overall umbrella of the NSC – between internal and external intelligence. The National Investigations Bureau (NIB) handles internal intelligence, while the Research Department takes charge of external intelligence (see Kwadjo, 2009). In terms of Executive oversight, the NSC is chaired by the president, whereas the REGSECs and DISECs are chaired by the regional ministers and the district chief executives, respectively. Additionally, this aspect of the Constitution prohibits the raising and existence of any organisation dealing in matters of national security without the authority of Parliament. For instance, Article 85 of the Constitution provides: 'No agency, establishment or other organisation concerned with national security shall be established except as provided for under this Constitution".

There appears to be some schism when the national security architecture is imposed on election-related security. This is when the heads of the various security councils – the president, regional ministers and MMDCEs - become candidates in elections. Conflict of interest often arises when their

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4. See articles 1 and 2 of the Armed Forces Act 105 (1962) which provides for the organisation of the Armed Forces of Ghana.
5. See Article 8 of the Armed Forces Act, Act 105 (1962).
6. Gadzekpo Elikem, Balancing Rights Against Public Order: Ghana Police and the Use of the Public Order Act in Response to Civil Protests and Demonstrations. Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana). < https://cddgh.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/CDD-Blog.-Balancing-Rights-against-the-Public-Order-Act-w_-Elikem-Gadzekpo-.pdf> Accessed: 16 January, 2026.

roles as political party leaders and candidates clash with their roles as political heads of security at the various levels. However, in many regards, rather than viewing this as a conflict of interest, it is often characterised as an advantage of incumbency which can be exploited by either side of the political divide. The Elections Security Taskforce is an operational security mechanism that is aimed at addressing such conflict of interest. However, its remit is also limited to the extent that: (a) it is an ad hoc structure (only activated during general elections); (b) it does not have any specific legal backing, and (c) its activation does not limit or stop the NSC, REGSECs and DISECs from performing their functions during elections (Agordzo & Osei-Tutu, 2016).

Political Party Security Structures: A Source of Protection or Violence?

In spite of the elaborate state security architecture in the country, political parties have felt that the state security mechanism is inadequate to safeguard their political and electoral interests. First, there is the perception (at least among the main opposition parties) that the state security agencies work against their (opposition parties) political interests, especially by "behaving in ways that allow the incumbent party to 'steal' the ballot".[7] A notable instance is when the police fail to deal decisively with thugs who engage in ballot box snatching, intimidation and violence during elections. The police sometimes appear helpless when such incidents occur in so-called party strongholds. Second, personal safety concerns of key politicians may raise the stakes for extra security protection by political parties. For example, going into the 2016 general elections, some Members of Parliament (MPs) expressed the need for extra personal security protection. This followed the direct targeting of eight members (from 2013 to 2016) through armed attacks at their private residences, in which one MP tragically lost his life.[8]

In their bid to position themselves toward elections, political parties in Ghana, especially the NDC and the NPP, have sought to strengthen key components of their political operations. Whereas security remains a key focus of these political party operations, a notable trend has been the emergence of various vigilante groups which serve as private security operatives for the political parties. The operations of these so-called party vigilante groups have raised some legitimate concerns from both security professionals and experts about their irregular nature, potency to cause harm and support base.[9]

A fuller appreciation of these political party vigilante groups will require an examination of the internal security structures of these political parties. Moreover, it has to be argued that there is no prescribed internal political party security structure in Ghana. Under the law, political parties are registered as civil entities and are to conduct their affairs, including security operations, as the law requires. Members of political parties enjoy the same security rights as citizens under the Constitution. This paper only highlights what has been discerned from observed practices within political parties in Ghana over the past few years. Two levels of engagement can be distinguished relative to political party security structures: strategic and operational levels.

Strategic Level Party Security Structure

At the strategic level, two main categories of security actors can be identified:

Experts /Advisors: Experts are individuals, usually with high level of security expertise acquired mostly through previous professional careers with state security institutions such as the military,

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7. Interview, former government security official, Accra, 19 March 2016.
8. See Taylor, M. E, 'Security for Ghana MPs: List of Attacked Political Figures', Pulse.com.gh. < http://bit.ly/2e4hB8N. Accessed: 2 July 2016. See also Quicknewsgh, 'Two MPs Attacked by Armed Robbers'. < http://quicknewsgh.com/2016/02/15/two-mps-attacked-by-armedrobbers> Accessed: 12 October 2016.
9. See GhanaWeb. 'IGP: Vigilante Groups to be Disbanded'. <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/IGP-Vigilante-groups-to-be-disbanded-405059> Accessed: 16 January 2026.

police, intelligence and immigration, but who are no longer in active service. While they may be active members of political parties and often provide invaluable insights into party security operations (such as expert inputs into security details of candidates and party security committees), those affiliated with opposition parties may have their activities monitored closely by state security agencies. Often, monitoring such persons could serve as useful intelligence for ruling parties. For example, in September 2008, the NPP administration banned former President Rawlings and seven former military and police service commanders from all military and security installations in Ghana. The ban followed a meeting of the seven with Rawlings at his residence, where national security concerns were raised.[10] The then opposition NDC, which did not take kindly to the action, described the ban as part of the government's electioneering gimmicks aimed at sowing seeds of fear and intimidation among the voting public.[11] Such controversies are not uncommon, given the country's political experience since independence in 1957 (i.e., the fear of "unscrupulous" individuals conspiring to overthrow the government).

Other roles performed by such individuals include advising, especially presidential and parliamentary candidates, on alternative security policy uptions. Such expertise usually finds expression in party manifestoes and is articulated as party positions on security matters. Their role may be elevated and they may be rewarded with official government appointments when their party retains or assumes power. In government, often in the past, official security advisors' roles have sometimes clashed with substantive security ministerial roles. Similarly, political incumbency often tends to blur such advisory and substantive security roles, especially between party and governmental levels of security operations. In the case of the banned security commanders, some of them received official government appointments as ministers of state and security advisors after the NDC was elected into office in 2008.[12]

Consultants: Consultants are private individuals and organisations – they may include private security companies – who provide analytical and professional security services, especially in the areas of advice, research and training, to political parties, usually for a fee (or for profit). This is a specialised area which requires a combination of professional, policy and academic expertise. Similar to advising, there are also political risks and controversies associated with consultancies that deliver research and training on security matters for the consumption of political parties. Research and training in these areas of security, often seen as sensitive, require tact because they may be misconstrued as undertakings to undermine state security and, thus, be closely scrutinised by state intelligence agencies.

The infamous 'SA 3' case immediately resonates with this typology of security engagements within political parties in Ghana. In March 2016, state security officials arrested three South African security consultants who were reportedly invited into the country to offer special security training for some 15 NPP security detail. The arrest caused the NPP to issue a press statement noting the concern:

> *Known security detail belonging to the NPP's presidential and vice presidential candidates were being given routine training by these [South African] security experts specialised and licensed to offer VIP Protection*.[13]

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[10]. See for example, Essel, I. 2016, 'Banning of Ex-Capos: Ayariga Wants Explanation from Mpiani', Modern Ghana. < http://www.modernghana.com/newsthread1/185274/2/34977> Accessed: 19 August 2016.

[11]. See for example, Myjoyonline, 'Rawlings: Security ban absurd, Modern Ghana. <https://www.modernghana.com/thread/33493/182953/1>. Accessed: 16 January 2026.

[12]. Notable appointments include Brigadier General Nunoo Mensah, who became the National Security Advisor to the President, and Vice Admiral E. O. Owusu-Ansah, who assumed temporary responsibility for the Defence Ministry when the NDC took power in 2009. See Ghana News Agency, 'Brigadier-General Nunoo-Mensah named National Security Advisor', Ghanaweb. <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/election2008/artikel.php?ID=155912> (Accessed: 16 January 2026).

[13]. See New Patriotic Party, 'Statement: NPP Responds to Arrest of 3 South African Nationals'. <http://www.peacefmonline.com/pages/politics/politics/201603/274033.php>. Accessed 19 August 2016.

The arrest, which triggered several arguments from experts, both for and against the ruling NDC government's action, underlies how far-reaching the consequences of such undertakings can be for individuals and political parties involved if they are not handled with tact. In the process, the three South African security experts were charged in court, but the case was later withdrawn, allowing them to be deported to their home country. The NPP statement further noted:

> *It is our firm conviction that the security agencies, if they are to enjoy the confidence of the people, must always be seen to be nonpartisan and professional in the discharge of their constitutional mandates*.[14]

As already argued, such frictions between political party internal security operations and state security engagements often ride on suspicion, partly because of Ghana's political history, normally characterised by hostility between ruling parties and opposition parties. Nonetheless, consultants may only have loose and distant partisan affiliation since their foremost interest is one of profit as opposed to politics (i.e., capturing political power).

Operational Level Party Security Structure

At the operational level, there are two distinct types of security actors that deserve further elaboration:

Officers: The officers include state security personnel (usually from the police) who are assigned to perform close protection duties for the party's presidential candidate and runningmate.[15] Although the intention of assigning state security personnel is to prevent political parties from hiring their own bodyguards, their deployment may not constitute full integration into the core security detail of the political parties. This is because security assigned to political parties does not cover the entire party structure and activities; it is not done on a permanent basis either. Rather, it only becomes desirable when elections are approaching. Since their presence is assumed to be for professional security reasons, rather than party politics, officers are to appear in police uniform at all times.[16] Notably, their complementary role is seen as part of the broader national conversation on state support, including funding for political parties (Ayee, 1993; Ghana Centre for Democratic Development, 2005).[17]

Previously, the numbers assigned were not clearly ascertained, but depending on requests, threat levels and negotiations between the police and political parties, an agreed size and personnel could be assigned, sometimes on a rotational basis until the elections were over.[18] However, in more recent times, the Police Administration has provided specific details about security personnel assigned to political parties, especially since 2016. The Police Administration noted in 2016 that 'each political party has been assigned six security persons – four to ensure the safety of flag bearers and two to protect their running mates.'[19] The authorities further noted that the officers assigned have been given special training in elite protection. Political parties were also issued specific guidelines on how to engage the officers. The NPP, NDC, Independent People's Party (IPP), Ghana Freedom Party and All People's Congress (APC) have been assigned security details by the state during elections.[20]

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[14]. New Patriotic Party, op cit.

[15]. Opposition parties tend to be the main beneficiaries of this type of state security support. This is because government officials already enjoy state security protection.

[16]. Interview, senior security expert, Accra, 16 March 2016.

[17]. There is an ongoing discussions in the country about whether political parties should be allocated public funding to run their administration and election campaign.

[18]. Interview, senior police officers, Kumasi, 18 March 2016.

[19]. See Myjoyonline.com. 'Security detail assigned presidential candidates, running mates ahead of general polls'. < https://www.myjoyonline.com/security-detail-assigned-presidential-candidates-running-mates-ahead-of-general-polls/>. Accessed 16 January 2026.

[20]. See also GhanaWeb, 'Police assign security detail to Akufo-Addo, Ayariga and three others. < https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Police-assign-security-detail-to-Akufo-Addo-Ayariga-and-three-others-456875>. Accessed 16 January 2026.

Operatives: The operatives are mainly individuals or groups, especially of the youth, who are recruited and hired as affiliates or members of the political parties. They may possess strong personal loyalties, special physical attributes, and, perhaps, skills that enable them to perform such roles, such as variously described in the media and by security professionals and experts, as macho men, bodyguards, private security forces and vigilante groups within their respective political parties. In recent times, the notable operatives include the Bolga Bulldogs, Azorka Boys, Kandahar Boys, and Invincible Forces.[21] Though further research may be required to trace the exact origins of political party elements of vigilantism, some experts have already rationalised their emergence into the political arena from where they operated as private, unofficial land guards (Amankwaah, 2013). Their proliferation seems to have evolved along with the increased intra and inter-party political and electioneering rivalries, which have placed obligation on candidates and parties to provide extra security beyond what the state can provide to safeguard their political interests (see Attuquayefio and Darkwa, 2016).

In many respects, while their motives, branding and scope of operation appear to be safeguarding the electoral fortunes of their parties during elections, their affiliations, especially for mobilisation, may have deep roots in advancing personal and, to some extent, factional interests within political parties.[22] Thus, they may have counter operational pursuits toward other identifiable groups, even within the same political party to which they belong. In this case, they are seen to have dual operational roles of advancing personal and factional interests of their patrons within parties, while also safeguarding the electoral fortunes of their parties during general elections. At the fundamental level, this presents a much broader discussion about emerging democracies, such as Ghana, where the electorate, and even some members of the security forces, have conflicting loyalties between their political patrons, parties and the state.[23]

Notably, their informal status indicates a structure without a stable hierarchy of command, and only a few key party functionaries may know their real identity and organisation.[24] However, some election analysts have attempted to identify their sources of recruitment and motivation. In terms of their sources of recruitment, one analyst has argued that the so-called Zongo communities, due to their deprived conditions, have become common sites to recruit vigilante groups. Motivation for their recruitment could also be disruptive, as depicted by the analysts:

> *[The] Zongo and urban northern Ghanaian cities, such as Tamale, are places where political leaders at the local and national levels (who are commonly southerners) recruit security personnel and macho men to disrupt elections*.[25]

Generally, and as noted earlier, vigilante groups are often recruited to safeguard the electoral fortunes of their political patrons; they do so by providing security at mass gatherings, such as political party primaries, congresses, rallies and demonstrations. However, they are also known for their disruptive roles where they are hired as thugs during elections to snatch ballot boxes and other electoral devices, as well as intimidate voters at polling stations.[26] Until the 2020 elections, their proliferation has incorporated some armed elements, enabling them to cause violence at party functions and during elections.[27] Until the 2020 elections, when the anti-vigilantism law had come

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[21]. Kwarkye S. 2018. "Political vigilantism threatens stability in Ghana". ISS. < https://issafrica.org/iss-today/political-vigilantism-threatens-stability-in-ghana?>. Accessed: 16 January 2026.

[22]. Interview, political party national executive member, Tamale, 17 March 2016.

[23]. See Utas, M. cited in Amankwaah C. 2013, op cit.

[24]. Interview with a former political party senior executive member who confirmed that although he is aware of the existence of some of these groups in his party, he has no idea where they are recruited and mobilised from.

[25]. Amankwaah C. 2013, op cit.

[26]. See GhanaWeb, 'Election Security a Challenge for EC in 2016 Polls-Says CADA'. <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/Election-Security-a-challenge-for-EC-373418 > Accessed 16 January 2026.

[27]. See comments made by Emmanuel Sowatey in an interview with Chief Jerry Forson on Accra FM's Wonsom Breakfast Show on 4 January 2016. <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/

into effect (in 2019)[28], and somehow visible instances of vigilantism had submerged, the vigilantes had acquired and retained a vicious, destructive capacity which inspired them to intimidate and assault political opponents; seize or destroy electoral materials; assault electoral officials; vandalise registration centres; forcibly take over government offices and properties, and violently resist new government appointments.[29] More significantly is the human fatality, which is reported as, at least, 10 deaths and over 60 injured, during by-elections and re-run elections alone between 2000 and 2025.[30] In spite of the 2019 anti-vigilante law, and the seemingly dimished role of political party vigilante groups, a new party security group (known as "Lions of NPP") was launched in the Upper East Region in July 2026 with the aim to "support the party's organisational activities and enhance security during political engagements". The security group, which is said to operete under the motto: "Be Bold to Do the Right Thing", is expected to help prevent harassment and misconduct during political activities.[31]

The sharp propensity to form rival groups, even within the same political party, makes them ad hoc and random in their operations –especially concerning the use of arms and violence. The connection between the operatives, on the one hand, and the advisors and consultants, on the other hand, is not clearly ascertained. However, as argued by one security analyst, the vigilante groups do not operate in a vacuum. It is thought that they benefit from political and social networks, which insulate them from law enforcement agencies. For instance, vital services provided to safeguard personal ambitions linked to interests and succession in chieftaincy and land allow them to enjoy protection from traditional authorities, politicians and business people.[32] As a result, they often tend to escape investigation and prosecution by law enforcement agencies when they violate the law.

Responses to Party Security and Vigilantism

Though there are notable controversies involving the use of security advisors, experts, and officers at the party level, scenarios, such as using violence and intimidation to safeguard the electoral fortunes of political parties, have been a key characteristic of party vigilante groups in Ghana. The tactic of disrupting political and electoral operations at voter registration and voting centres, campaign / rally grounds, including vandalisation of party and public property, is deemed to undermine the established security arrangements that oversee elections in Ghana.

Given the multifaceted nature of election security, the National Elections Security Taskforce has been encumbered with the responsibility of safeguarding elections in Ghana. The taskforce comprises the Ghana Police Service, Ghana Armed Forces, Ghana Immigration Service, Ghana National Fire Service, Customs Division of the Ghana Revenue Authority and representatives of the Electoral Commission (EC), Research Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration, and Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development.[33] This structure is replicated at the regional and district levels to ensure that security operations are spread to cover all levels of electoral operations, including voting, counting, tallying and declaration of the national ballots (Aning & Lartey, 2012).

NewsArchive/IGP-Vigilante-groups-to-be-disbanded-405059>. Accessed 16 August 2026.

[28]. The Vigilantism and Related Offenses Act of 2019 has sought to dismantle and outlaw vigilante groups and their activities in Ghana.

[29]. Agbove, P. T. 2025. "Political Polarisation, Vigilante Groups and the Security Agencies' Excessive Use of Force have Fed the Turmoil". Institute for War and Peace Reporting. < https://iwpr.net/global-voices/blood-ballot-election-violence-ghana?utm_source=chatgpt.com> Accessed: 16 January, 2026.

[30]. Oduro Fynn Charles, op cit.

[31]. See Asima C. K. 2026. *Upper East NPP launches 'Lions of NPP' security group*. Citi newsroom < https://www.citinewsroom.com/2026/07/upper-east-npp-launches-lions-of-npp-security-group/>. Accessed: 7 July, 2026.

[32]. Comment made by Emmanuel Sowatey, op cit.

[33]. Ghana News Agency, 'Elections Taskforce Inaugurated'. < https://www.modernghana.com/news/669620/elections-taskforce-inaugurated.html>. Accessed: 16 January 2026.

Indeed, the election security body is tasked to perform the following specific functions:

i. Provide security at printing houses where ballot papers are printed;
ii. Provide security for the transportation of sensitive election materials;
iii. Provide security at the polling centres;
iv. Provide security at the collation centres;
v. Escort election materials on polling day to polling stations, and
vi. Escort material on polling day to collation centres (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2008).

The taskforce has sub-committees, overseeing legal, prosecution, intelligence and investigations; personnel mobilisation and deployment; ballot security, and logistics and transport. There are also sub-committees on media and communication; finance and budget, and medical and welfare.[34]

Since these responsibilities fall squarely within the domain of the task force, any private or parallel security arrangement that seeks to disrupt these operations is deemed to undermine the security of the elections and, by extension, the security of the state.[35] In order to perform these duties adequately, the taskforce has sought to engage stakeholders, such as political parties, EC, media, National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE), National Peace Council (NPC), and religious leaders. The taskforce is involved in the identification of potential flashpoints[36] – areas where the taskforce usually adopts more robust, professional and assertive security protocols and deployments to deal with any potential threats to national security during elections. The Police Administration argues that every polling station is a potential hot spot during elections. Hence, it is "ready to deal with criminal elements and politicians who will want to take the law into their own hands and misbehave."[37] With respect to the engagement with the political parties, the focus of the taskforce has been on the following key security issues:

1. *Ways to disband party security and vigilante groups*: the Police Administration maintains that these vigilante groups are illegal and unlawful and must be disbanded prior to the elections.[38] Their renunciation by the political parties will enable the police to deal with such groups purely as criminal entities should they continue to engage in intimidation and violence during the elections. At the policy level, activities of vigilante groups have sparked stern reactions, such as "We cannot afford to leave the safety and security of this country and its people in the hands of faceless individuals and groups", that have emanated from officialdom.[39] The Police High Command contends that "no matter which political divide you [vigilante groups] come from, if you [vigilante groups] breach the law, then we [police] have no other option than to use the full rigours of the law at our [police] disposal".[40]

2. *Assigning security detail*: The Police Administration now has a standing protocol with the political parties to assign a minimum of six security personnel to form the security detail of the presidential candidate and runningmate, especially of the opposition parties. The officers are to offer close security protection for the candidates involved. This arrangement is to discourage political parties from recruiting machomen and other vigilante groups for

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[34]. Joy Online, '2016 Polls: Kofi Boakye Warns Election 'Bad Boys'. <https://www.myjoyonline.com/2016-polls-kofi-boakye-warns-election-bad-boys/ >. Accessed: 16 January 2026.
[35]. Ghanaweb, 'IGP: Vigilante Groups to be Disbanded'. <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/IGP-Vigilante-groups-to-be-disbanded-405059>
Accessed: 16 January 2026.
[36]. See Myjoyonline, '5,000 Election Flash Points Identified'. < https://www.myjoyonline.com/5000-election-flash-points-identified/>. Accessed: 16 January 2026.
[37]. Graphic Online. "Police Reactivate Elections Task Force". <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/politics/ghana-news-police-reactivate-elections-task-force.html> Accessed: 16 January 2026.
[38]. Ghanaweb, 'IGP: Vigilante Groups to be Disbanded'. <http://ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/IGP-Vigilante-groups-to-be-disbanded-405059>. Accessed 16 January 2026.
[39]. ibid.
[40]. ibid.

their electoral campaigns. Prior to the 2020 elections, the Police Administration maintained that the arrangement was part of broader security measures to disband the so-called vigilante groups.

3. *Streamline political campaigns to avoid possible clashes between political parties*: As the lead agency of the election security taskforce, the Police Administration is obliged to provide impartial security to all political parties. Therefore, the Elections Security Task Force, in addition to ensuring the safety of electoral materials, has a mandate to safeguard the campaign activities of political parties. More importantly, the election security taskforce has emphasised the need for the political parties to inform the police at all times of their electoral activities, especially rallies and political gatherings. This is to enable the Ppolice Administration provide adequate security and a map-out strategy to avert clashes between political parties during the campaign period.

All these measures are geared towards creating an atmosphere of peace and security before, during and after the elections.

Conclusion

Political parties have found, as inadequate, the protection offered to them by state security agencies. This is because they may have other security needs beyond what the state security agencies can legitimately provide. The motivation that drives political parties to seek alternative security arrangements is not immediately ascertained. Coincidentally, however, parallel party security structures have evolved in which security advisors, experts, officers and operatives have emerged with different configurations of influence and capacity, even within the same political parties. While the use of these structures may present different dilemmas within the private (informal) political spaces, it offers opportunities for more formalised engagements of these actors when parties are in government.

Relying on private security and vigilante groups seems to satisfy the partisan loyalty criteria which political parties often require to safeguard their electoral fortunes. Interestingly, though, such partisan affiliation and interest cannot be obtained from state security agencies. Specifically, although the elections security architecture has been assigned the task of protecting electoral materials and installations, its mandate is equally extended to areas, such as the disbandment of party security and vigilante groups: provision of security details to top party candidates, and streamlining of political campaigns to avoid possible clashes between political parties.

Although election security falls within the purview of the security taskforce, the police play a lead role in exercising its mandate. It has, therefore, been at the forefront of engaging the political parties in the bid to address the issue of the so-called vigilante groups. It appears, though, that the network system built around the groups may make the task of dismantling them even more difficult, if not impossible. But their disappearance in the 2020 and 2024 elections could indicate their disbandment due to the anti-vigilantism legislation promulgated in 2019. However, with the violence which took place in the Ayawaso West Wuogon by-election and the 2020 elections, coupled with the 2025 Ablekuma North re-run, vigilantism (and not vigilante groups) still remains a threat in Ghana's elections, even in the ways state security applies the use of force and party supporters engage in acts of vandalism.

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