Youth Electoral Violence and the Socio-Economic Development of the Tamale Metropolis of Ghana

Roland Adatuu¹, Agnes Atia Apusigah²
University for Development Studies Tamale, Ghana
Corresponding Author: atia.apusigah@gmail.com

Abstract: Since the onset of the Fourth Republic of Ghana, successful elections have been held to deepen democratic participation. Despite its democratic achievements, Ghana has had its own share of electoral violence. During electoral seasons, Ghanaian youth who form the bulk of mass base of political parties are often drawn into various tense situations that erupt in violence. This paper examines the ways and extents of youth involvement in electoral violence in the Tamale Metropolis of Ghana. A cross-sectional survey research design involving the use of Questionnaire, Key Informant Interviews, Focus Group Discussions and literature review were used to generate data. A total of 183 participants from among youth, state agencies and political parties were engaged as respondents. Data generated are analysed and presented using qualitative and quantitative techniques. The analyses reveal that the key forms of electoral violence were insults of opponents, physical attacks, clashes with security agencies and electoral officials, intentionally obstructing the electoral process and the prevention from voting. The causes of the violence were found to be difficulty in exercising franchise, long queues, delays in electoral process, suspicion of underage voting and destruction of paraphernalia. There were impacts such as living in a state of emergency, loss of lives and property, stagnation of businesses, and creation of fear and panic. In conclusion, youth electoral violence affects the socio-economic activities of people and communities and thus contribute to stalling development. Multi-stakeholder dialogues and peace education are recommended.

Keywords: Youth, Elections, Violence, Governance, Development.

1. Introduction

The third wave of democratization sweeping the globe has increasingly pressured regimes considered undemocratic to democratize by embracing the use of the ballot box (i.e., elections) as a way of choosing their leaders (Huntington, 1991). According to the International Peace Institute (IPI, 2011), Africa has made significant gains on the path to democracy as elections in various countries open up governance and make power more accessible. Adele (2012) argues in line that within the context of a complete break away from one-party and military dictatorships, since the 1990s, African countries have dived into competitive multiparty elections. By extension, African countries are increasingly democratizing their politics by adopting systems and processes that allow for the mass participation of citizens in the choice of leaders and governments. In many African countries, the ballot box has not only become the preferred tool for selecting leaders but an acceptable way for ascending to power. In Benin, Cape Verde, Ghana, Niger and Nigeria, among others, elections have produced encouraging outcomes (IPI, 2011; Adele, 2012).

In the case of Ghana, since the ushering in of the Fourth Republic in 1993, successful elections have been held in 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012 and 2016 resulting in the peaceful transfer of power from one regime to another. There have also been gradual but incremental improvements in the performance of electoral institutions such as the Electoral Commission (EC), Judiciary Service and Security Forces regarding elections management. In particular, the peaceful transfer of power from one party to another after the 2008 and 2016 elections has been taunted for deepening electoral democracy in Ghana, even though they each had their own challenges. Even in 2012, when the election results were challenged, it was the courts rather than the streets that determined the verdict leading to peace in the country. In particular, Observer Missions on the 2008, 2012
and 2016 Elections acknowledged Ghana’s improving electoral processes as contributing to deepening democracy with dividends for all. The Commonwealth Observer Group (2016:1), led by former president Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, thanked “the people of the Republic of Ghana for the peaceful and orderly manner in which they exercised their right to vote on 7 December 2016.” While celebrating such democratic gains, one cannot afford to gloss over the pockets of violence that sometimes attend elections. Bekoe (2011:3), commenting on the African electoral situation, particularly in the cases of Port Gentil and Libreville of Gabon, the Northern Region of Ghana, Niger Delta of Nigeria, Lome of Togo and Nairobi in Kenya, noted that there have been scenes of repeated electoral violence. In Kenya, DRC and South Sudan, among others, electoral violence and its aftermath continue to threaten the peace and security of the people. The uneasy calm and periodic violent eruptions affect both governments and citizens as well as governance and livelihoods. Yet, the carnage of one electoral cycle has not been deterrent enough to avert another. In the case of Ghana, the Commonwealth Observer Group (2016:1) had noted:

...we were informed that the atmosphere at campaigns was vibrant and largely peaceful with a few incidents of violent clashes between the two main political parties. The campaign rallies of the major political parties were highly visible in various parts of the country. However, we were informed about the use of vigilante groups by some political parties.

Regarding the 2008 General Elections of Ghana, Zoumenou (2009) has noted that violent incidents did indeed occur in Tamale and Accra resulting in the killings of supporters of the two major political parties, National Democratic Congress (NDC) and New Patriotic Party (NPP), the use of inflammatory language, vandalization of registration centres and the defacement of campaign posters. These resulted in the formation of the so-called vigilante groups comprising largely the youth to defend the perceived territories, property and integrity of their respective political parties thus fueling fear and panic among citizens. Similarly, Hoetu and Applerh (2012) recall that even though Ghana has not regressed into large scale violence, there have been reported incidents of isolated armed violence at certain flashpoints in the past. They cite the bye-elections in the Chereponi, Atiwa and Akwatia constituencies which occurred at different times as cases in point. They also point out that the 2012 biometric voter registration witnessed about seven gun-related incidents at polling stations and communities some of which temporarily disrupted the registration exercise. More importantly for this study, they further asserted that at the centre of this electoral violence was the Ghanaian youth. Even when the violent ideas have been orchestrated by older elite politicians, party stalwarts and enthusiasts, they have been executed by the youth of their mass followings.

This study has thus sought to understand the nature, extent and effects of youth electoral violence in Ghana using the Tamale Metropolis as a case. The key questions driving the analysis are: To what extent do the youth understand the electoral processes? What are the causes/factors leading to youth involvement in electoral violence? How has youth involvement in electoral violence impacted on socio-economic activities and affected the development of people and/or communities? The analyses presented below are based on conceptual and contextual analysis and supported with empirical findings from the Tamale Metropolis from which conclusions are drawn and recommendations made.

2. Methodology

The Northern Region is a prime conflict area in Ghana. Although recently named the fastest growing city in West Africa, Tamale, the regional and metropolitan capital, has an established reputation as a conflict hotspot. Both the 2012 and 2016 elections observer reports identified Tamale as either a trouble/conflict hotspot and/or reported incidences of violence (Zoumenou 2009; Bekoe, 2011). Consequently, the Tamale Metropolitan area became an attractive location of focus.

A cross-sectional descriptive design was adopted involving the use of questionnaire survey, which target the youth; focus group discussions (FGDs) which target community members; key informant interviews (KIs), which targeted electoral agency actors and supported with documents review to generate the data analysed and presented here in the discussions. A multi-stage sampling procedure was employed to select individuals, political party activists and institutions for participation. For a start, the Metropolis was divided into three clusters and individual participants from among the youth sampled from each cluster. They were selected using a gender sensitive simple random sampling technique. For each cluster, 40 respondents comprising 20 males and 20 females were selected making a total of 120 youth comprising 60 males
and 60 females. In addition, purposeful sampling was used to target agency actors such as EC, NCCE, DA and political parties for interviews. Seven KIIs were conducted comprising four (4) males and three (3) females. Last but not the least, 56 political party activists were involved in seven FGDs, each comprising four males only and three females only. In all, a total of 183 respondents participated in the data collection. See Table 1 below.

### Table 1: Research tools and respondents covered in the sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Tool</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGDs</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7 (56 individuals)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KII</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Data (2016).

The data was analyzed using qualitative and quantitative techniques. The qualitative analysis took the form of thematic discussions of coded data and supported by literature. The Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) software was used to facilitate the generation of some quantitative data in the form of simple statistical averages that are presented in tables and figures.

### 3. Conceptual and Contextual Basis

#### 3.1 Violence

Atta-Boahene (2012:2) has stated that “violence involves using intentional physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, lack of development or deprivation.” Going by that definition, violence is not only harmful to its victims, but also families, friends and communities/societies. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2000) also defines violence in line with the above by viewing it as an intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, lack of development or deprivation.

The WHO observes further that violence can be physical, psychological and emotional. Physical violence refers to the deliberate use of physical force with the potential for causing harm. This includes, but not limited to, hair-pulling, slapping, punching or hitting, use of a weapon (gun, knife, or other object), use of restraints or one's body, size, or strength against another person, scratching or biting, pushing or shoving, throwing, grabbing, choking or shaking, which have severe consequences including permanent disability or even death. Psychological violence occurs when there are threats that cause fear and panic. Psychological violence includes threats to harm, threats of violence, destruction of property, social isolation from family and friends, loss of life, verbal abuse, aggressive language and constant humiliation. Emotional violence occurs when someone says or does something to make another feel stupid or worthless. Emotional violence includes, but is not limited to, name calling, constant criticism, humiliating or belittling in front of others, using silent treatment, destroying another’s possessions, threats of all forms, intimidation, jealousy and making one to watch torture and killings, among others (WHO, 2000). Violence is also sexual and for that matter gender-based when it affects one’s sex or sexuality. Rape, defilement and transactional sex are common forms often meted out to women and girls as well as ‘queer’ individuals. Thus, violence of any form affects people directly and/or indirectly whether meted out to their person, someone related or known to them or even when it occurs from a distance. The effects of violence are not single and in isolation but multiple and complex. Physical violence results in both psychological and emotional violence. Psychological violence and emotional violence are intertwined and often present together. Sexual violence is also physical, emotional and psychological. The intent, tool and effects of violence are all damaging to their targets and even those not immediately targeted.

#### 3.2 Electoral Violence

According to Frempong (2007), elections constitute a platform for exercising core democratic rights such as freedom of speech, association, choice, movement and participation. For the masses, it is an opportunity for holding political elites and party leaders accountable while for the political class, it is one for rendering accounts of their stewardship. During elections, politicalс 1 are at their vulnerable lowest in the heat of competition for fresh or renewed mandate to hold political office. Such periods of keen competition might also become sites for perpetuating illegalities including violence. The UNDP (2011) notes that electoral conflict and

1. Political office holders or aspirants
violence have unfortunately become tactics in political contests; and usually involve the knowledge, ideas, know-how and the inventive minds of the youth who have been corrupted either by the money or power of an adult, lack education, bend to media sensationalism and/or seek spaces to deploy their untapped energies as unemployed, among others. Multiple factors drive the youth into electoral violence. Moveh (n.d) has stated that the term ‘electoral violence’ has been used generically in two strands of research. In the first instance, it is seen as a subset of activities in a larger political conflict. In that context, it becomes part of the trajectory of ethnic or communal violence in divided societies such as Kenya, Sri-Lanka and India - where violence intensifies around election periods (Hoglund, 2006). In the second instance, it is seen as the ultimate kind of electoral fraud; defined as clandestine efforts to shape election results (Hoglund, 2006).

In the view of Schwartz (2000), electoral violence is simply violence aimed at the electoral process geared towards winning political competition or power through subverting the ends of the electoral process. Schwartz notes that its tool of trade is the intimidation and disempowerment of political opponents. In the light of the above, electoral violence takes place not just at election periods but also in the periods before, during, and immediately after elections. The UNDP (2011) further this by observing that electoral violence is a subtype of political violence, but distinguishable by its timing (close to elections) and its goals (to impact elections, either by changing outcomes or to disrupt the elections themselves). It can be physical violence, but can also include threats and intimidation. Electoral violence can be aimed against people (candidates, voters, electoral officials) or objects (billboards, ballots or property).

In the case of Ghana, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (2016) has pointed out that since the beginning of the Fourth Republic every election in Ghana has experienced some form of electoral violence. Earlier, the NCCE (2011) had observed that although electoral violence in Ghana was less severe compared to other African countries, over the last 20 years there have been a total of 5,707 incidents, including assault/violent intimidation; seizure of public property; protests/public disorders; ballot box theft, party property/vandalisation as well as voter intimidation and harassment. The NCCE further asserts that one election that was nearly marred by electoral violence in Ghana was the keenly contested 2008 General Elections. However, it did not escalate into mass violence. Also, clear cases of election violence occurred in 2012 in Atiwa and Tein during the General Elections and during the bi-elections of Chereponi and Talensi. Furthermore, the COG (2016) in an interim statement on the 2016 General Elections noted that a phenomenon creeping and building up strongly in the election process of the country in recent years was the formation of vigilante groups by some political parties. The preoccupation of such youth groups has been to move from one polling station to the other with the aim to intimidate their opponents and end up scaring off the electorate with their nefarious activities.

3.3 Development Impacts of Youth Electoral Violence

The youth as a human resource (actual or potential) corps form the backbone of development at any level (National Youth Policy, 2010). Atta-Boahene (2012) has argued that the youth of today are the future since they form the productive population on whose shoulders rest the responsibility of economic and social development and, whose decisions today impact on the lives of future generations. Yet, young people’s inputs are often ignored or overlooked during governance processes. As actual and potential activists and agents of change, the involvement of young people in political and development education and processes is a sure way of preparing them for active citizenship. Involving the youth in all manner of governance will help accelerate socio-economic progress by giving them a sense of purpose and self-worth. It enables them to acquire knowledge, skill and attitudes for effective and active citizenship. By so doing, it helps to reduce the deviant and anti-social behaviours often associated with youth violence. As the CODEO (2009) had noted direct clashes between opposing local party supporters, the burning and looting of property, seizure of ballot boxes by ‘macho men’ and unemployed youth constitute a formidable threat to the growth and consolidation of the country's fledgling democracy. Often, these acts of violence work together to produce the tense, volatile and unpredictable electoral atmosphere that results in the fears and insecurities that erupt in violence. Another impact is the loss of lives and property. Zounmenou (2009) and Bekoe (2011) have noted that violent incidents occurred in Tamale and in
parts of Accra which resulted in the killing of supporters and destruction of the property of the two major political parties, NDC and NPP in 2008. Such losses affect development. For the Tamale Metropolis, where the prolonged Dagbon Chieftaincy Conflict extends, electoral violence stirs-up old wounds and helps deepen existing tensions as well as easily metamorphoses into intra-ethnic crisis. The seeming partisan political divide between the two disputing royal gates of Dagbon is exemplary.

Undoubtedly, electoral violence has had adverse impacts on socioeconomic investments by making the environment unattractive for both local and foreign capital. Investors seek peaceful and stable investments destinations where are can be assured of continued growth and prosperity. The fear of loss of property and life make conflict and violent zones unattractive. This can in turn stagnate economic growth and development and further undermine the prospects for effective institution building and long-term democratic stabilization.

Furthermore, election-related violence has sociocultural consequences with implications for human development. The tensions, insecurities and displacements can result in the breakdown of social values, loss of social and family ties and loss of cultural identity, among others (Aning and Danso, 2012). Such situations can be dehumanizing. The feelings of helplessness and voiceless of the majorities thrust into the conflict is disorienting and indignifying even as it works against social cohesion, stability and progression.

4 Theoretical Explanations of Electoral Violence

Hoglund (2006) has identified three precipitants of polling related violence. The first is the nature of conflict societies, whereby the stakes involved in winning or losing elections are sometimes fundamental to the wellbeing of entire communities. High stakes tend to fuel tensions and inflame passions creating the volatile situations that often explode into violent conflicts. The second is the conflictive dimension of democracy, in which a prevailing assumption both within theory and practice has been that peace and democracy are mutually reinforcing. While more democracy is probably the answer to political violence in the long run, an expanding body of scholarly work has contended that the democratization process, particularly in post-conflict societies is highly conflictual. Indeed, under certain circumstances, democratization makes a return to war more likely. The cases of DRC and South Sudan are clear. The third is the design of electoral systems and administration. The electoral mechanisms i.e. electoral administration and electoral system design, are central to understanding the attractiveness of violence. Where the mechanisms are slow and non-transparent, delays, actual or real, cause the tense moments and suspicions that make violent reactions highly likely. The three arguments are very plausible in Ghana as a young democracy that is still working to grow its systems.

On his part, Schwartz (2000) has outlined a nature-nurture school of thought for examining the triggers of electoral violence. This nature-nurture school of thought is predicated on metaphysics and dialectics. On the metaphysical front, violence is seen as part of nature. This means that certain human beings are naturally violent and cannot be changed. Hence, the only way to deal with the problem is to get rid of the violent beings. Dialectically, however, violence is seen as a result of the prevailing environment. In this latter case, change is possible as the situation is amenable. By eliminating the factors, violence is also eliminated. Thus, the dialectical view encourages political dialogue and negotiations between competing parties. While one cannot claim an entirely nature-nurture dynamic in this study, it is possible to draw attention to the inherent conflict-proneness of the area of study and the attractions it holds for sparking off violence at the least provocation. Additionally, the persistent resource deprivation of northern Ghana in general makes it's a fertile place for venting anger at political leaders who use various incentives to procure support and provoke attacks against their competitors. At the same time, such political leaders who are perceived to have acquired ill-gotten wealth can easily attract the anger of the poor before who they flout their wealth.

5 Empirical Studies

5.1 Youth Knowledge of the Electoral Process in Ghana

A knowledge of the electoral process is crucial for appreciating the complexities of elections. Such appreciation enables stakeholders to remain calm as the process unfolds and especially hold aye their fears and contentions. In the case of Ghana, although the policy is clear on the wait time, voters tend to expect the declaration of election results almost instantly and thus become apprehensive during the wait period when the EC has to undertake its normal internal verification and validation processes ahead of declaration. The case of the NDC massing up at the EC headquarters during the 2012 election is evident.
For this study, it was imperative to determine the level of understanding of electoral processes of the youth. The questions focused on the nature and functions of the EC in the organization of elections. From the survey, 86 of the participants forming 71.7% describe the EC as an electoral body which operates under a three-tier structure. The respondents stated that the EC’s structures comprise of the Head Office, Regional Offices and District Offices. While the participants could not provide the structural details during the face to face interactions, the documentary evidence showed that the EC had two major functional divisions; Operations and Finance and Administration, each headed by a Deputy Chair. Under the two Deputies were two Coordinating Directors in charge of Operations and Finance and Administration, respectively. The next in command are seven (7) Head Office Directors in charge of Research, Monitoring and Evaluation, Elections, Electoral Training, Human Resource and General Service, Finance and Information Communication Technology as well as ten (10) Regional Directors.

Another important line of questioning was on the functions of the EC. Majority of the participants rightly said that the EC was the primary body responsible for conducting elections in the country. However, a significant number, 34 forming 28.3%, did not know of the EC as an electoral body. In terms of how elections were organised, 67 (55.8%) of the respondents could explain the process accurately as entailing the recruitment of electoral staff; training of electoral staff; registration of voters; exhibition of voter register; registration of political party candidates; conducting and supervising voting on election days; counting and declaring results and swearing-in winners. Also, eighty-five (70.8%) of the respondents were able to identify the key stakeholders of the electoral process to include Political Parties; security agencies; NCCE; District Assemblies (DAs) and voters.

The results demonstrate that Ghanaian youth were aware of the electoral system and its processes. Hence, ignorance could not be assumed and staked to explain their involvement in electoral violence. Ironically, it can be said that their negative reactions during elections have been informed by their knowledge of the process rather than the lack of it. However, the choice to use that knowledge for good or bad is dependent on the individual and their parties. In the past those who had besieged the EC offices were not just a bunch of ignorant youth but also party leaders and stalwarts, who manipulate the rather tense situation during the wait time to gain advantage. Above all, such violence has always been started by a few irate youths and not all.

5.2 Nature and Extent of Youth involvement in Electoral Violence

Beyond knowledge of the electoral process, the study also sought to understand the nature and extent of youth involvement in electoral violence. Both the documented and empirical evidence reveal that the youth have always been involved in electoral violence; in 1992, 1996, 2000, 2008, 2012 and 2016 General Elections and even the 2010 District Assembly elections. Majority of the respondents involved in the survey, 110 (91.7%), stated that the youth have been involved in electoral violence. This corroborates the observation of a male politician in a KII that:

*Usually, since I began this ambition as a politician and voting since the 1992 Presidential and Parliamentary election, this Metropolis has always had youth electoral violence issues in one way or the other. Sometimes, it appears the town is going into a war situation. You see, I don't want to talk much but the issue is becoming serious these days. Similarly, in a FGD with men, the participants concurred that: The youth involving themselves in electoral violence is becoming too much in this area over the years. We are tired and hope that you people will tell the government to address the issue during election years.*

The above revelation is in line with Inokoba and Maliki’s (2011) findings that the predominant types of violent conflicts in Ghana include “electoral violence”, which is centred on the democratic process of electing leaders in the country. Relatively, it has been observed that though the perpetrators of electoral violence vary, the youth are often directly involved.

5.2.1 Nature/Extent

The involvement of youth in electoral violence has been increasing over time. While the 1992 election recorded one incident just as in the case of the 2000 Presidential and Parliamentary election, the number increased to two (2) in the 2004 elections and increased further to 60 in the 2008, 70 in 2012 and 85 in 2016. Thus, from one incidence, the level of violence has leapfrogged to 85. Table 2 indicates the number of youth electoral violent incidents by election year, depicting a growing trend.

**Table: 2 Incidence of Reported Youth Involvement in Electoral Violence by Election Year**
Table 2 above shows that from a percentage increase of 100 in the incidents of youth violence in 2004, in 2008, the percentage increment rose from 100 to 3000. It further rose to 3500 in 2012 and 4250 in 2016. Figure 1 shows the percentage increase of youth electoral violence by election year in the Tamale Metropolis.

Figure 1 Percentage increase of youth electoral violence by election year in the Tamale Metropolis

Source: Field data (2016)

Fig. 1 above indicates that there has been a great percentage increase from 100% in the 2004 election to 3000% in the 2008. The percentage of youth violence further increased to 3500% in the 2012 election. In the 2016 election, the percentage increased to 4250%. By implication, this shows that the issue of youth involvement in electoral violence has been worsening over election years in the Tamale Metropolis.

Also, from the survey, 85 (70.8%) of the respondents stated that youth electoral violence was on the rise and increasingly blatant and sophisticated in tactic and form. Some explained that the young people are getting access to sophisticated weapons with some even trained by their political parties to perpetuate violence. A case was made of some three South African mercenaries who were brought in by the NPP to train vigilante groups ahead of the 2016 elections. This they said, these embolden irate youth to attack and destroy with impunity. With the coughing and backing of political, the youth were becoming fearless in their tactics. Like the general elections of 2000, 2008 and 2012, the stakes were high in 2016. As such all forms of tactics were deployed by political parties to gain advantage. Here, Hoglund’s first precipitant manifests. The analysis also revealed a gendering of youth involvement in electoral violence. All the respondents, 120 (100%) showed that in terms of gender youth participation, it is only the male youth that engaged themselves in electoral violence during elections. This confirms Inokoba and Maliki’s (2011) findings that found that male, more than female, youth engagement in crime and violence usually rises in the early teens to mid-teens. There is however a cultural dimension to this in our male-dominated political space where patriarchal norms ascribe roles and responsibilities. In that space, where the male-dominated political space tends to contract youth services male bodies tend to be in high demand. Above all, the tendency to reify violence becomes part of the show of masculinity with its machismic tendencies thus rendering it more attractive to male youth. Here, Schwarz’s dialectics comes to play.

5.2.2 Reasons for Youth Involvement in Electoral Violence

Drawing from Hoglund’s (2006) analysis above, one finds an interplay of all three precipitants in the case of the Tamale Metropolis. As already noted, Tamale has been the home of many inter and intra-conflicts. The competitiveness of elections only rekindles such conflicts while perceived delays in the declaration of election results grows anxiety and suspicion of results manipulation leading to the violent outbursts. From the survey, ninety (75%) of the youth respondents said they got involved in electoral violence because opponents insulted their party and its policies. Sixty-five (54.2%) cited delay in the counting and declaration of election results, 60 (50%) cited intention of obstructing the electoral process because a favourite candidate was likely to lose the election in that polling station while 60 (50%) cited the destruction of their party paraphernalia and billboards by their opponents. Thus, in all cases, the youth acted in favour of their party, thus suggesting that political parties can play key roles in averting electoral violence. In practice, however, they tend to subvert the systems and structures in their favour. When leaders call for war drums rather than peace they unleash violence unto electoral processes.
5.2.3 Forms of Youth Electoral Violence

The study also sought to determine popular forms of violence and found three main ones: The violence was directed at political opponents and often took the form of the throwing of stones at political opponents, burning down, breaking into and ransacking of opponents’ houses and other property/defacing/destroying billboards, burning of used car tires on roads and other public spaces and, the random firing of guns into the air or at targets. It also included disrupting rallies, attacking and beating up known opposing political figures and even preventing them from voting on election day. Another important form involved the youth actors themselves. It tended to be physical and took the form of face-to-face combat involving the use of machetes, sticks, iron rods, fists and/or guns, which often lead to injuries and loss of lives. Yet another is that which targets the electoral system. It took the form of attacks on electoral officials, seizure/stealing of ballot boxes, picketing at EC offices and/or vandalizing EC property.

The above corroborates Inokoba and Maliki’s (2011) study that electoral violence includes the stealing of ballot boxes, killing of participants, destruction of party properties such as infrastructure, billboards, posters and vehicles. The destruction/removal of billboards and seizure or stealing of ballot boxes are becoming common in recent time. These have happened during general elections, party primaries, local government and council of state elections. During the FGDs and KIIs, it was revealed that such violence had happened before, during and after elections. This situation has even been extended to the choice and appointment of ministers and other public officers with both parties complacent. Party political youth groups from both NPP and NDC are known to have vandalized public properly, disturbed public peace and locked out existing officials in the interest of their parochial party preferences. It can therefore be argued that electoral violence has been aimed at people (candidates, voters, electoral officials) or objects (for example, ballots or electoral facilities). It has also targeted three groups: opponents, youth themselves and electoral system.

5.2.4 Impact of Youth Electoral Violence on Socio-Economic Development

Frimpong (2012) and Ugiagbe (2010) stated that electoral violence in Africa manifest in various forms including physical assaults and murder. In the case of the Tamale Metropolis, it was clear that youth involvement in electoral violence impacted negatively on the social life of the Metropolis. The respondents were unanimous that electoral violence impacted society and its development negatively. When asked why they engaged in violence knowing its negative consequences, the youth respondents said it was in defence of the party’s integrity and their own dignity.

Ninety (60%) respondents stated that youth involvement in electoral violence created a state of panic, tension and conflict in the process. This situation has triggered states of emergency resulting in the suspension of socio-economic activities. As a result of such violence, states of emergency were often declared in the affected areas while others engaged themselves in insults. This confirms Aning and Danso’s (2012) observation that the police at a point had to impose a 12-hour curfew in the Northern region in 2008 together with the deployment of joint military and police patrols to bring under control the escalating violence resulting from the general elections.

Also, in light of the already existing Dagbon chieftaincy crisis, such electoral violence has also served to escalate an already volatile situation. Electoral violence has sometimes been an unfortunate trigger widespread violence. Grieving and opposing groups quickly take advantage of them to take revenge. It has often offered that quick window of opportunity no manner how ill-intended for the aggrieved persons and/or groups to take extra judicial actions against their opponents. The actions have varied including vandalizing and/or looting property, inflicting wounds on persons or even killing opponents.

The loss of lives and property has been another issue of social consequence. For those who lost relatives they were thrown into a state of mourning and had to mobilize resources, human and material to bury their dead, mourn and perform the funeral. Their families had also lost not just members but also their social contributions to the family such as bearing and defending the family name and dignity. Twenty-eight (23.3%) respondents mentioned loss of lives and property. Property loss through burning could affect not just physical structures but also food and clothing. Thus, the one act of burning takes away from their affected three basic needs of life: food, shelter and clothing. Since such burning is not expected, the affected are often left with only what property they had at the time of the destruction. When an entire house is burnt, entire families and households have to relocate either temporarily or permanently. This life-changing experience is very distractive, emotionally and socially. Figure 2 presents the social impact of youth involvement in
6.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, although elections are meant to promote democratic participation, when tainted with violence they erode human rights and stall development. For young people who are in the prime of their lives, electoral violence infringes on their fundamental freedoms and liberties. The destruction and losses that attend electoral violence can be immediate but also far-reaching. As a group considered the future of society and families, the youth like everyone else in their communities are entitled to peace and prosperity. Yet, the involvement of youth in perpetuation of electoral violence in itself negates their entitlements. In the case of the Tamale Metropolis, a conflict and violence hotspot in Ghana, panic and fear becomes the lot of many. Often spurred by elite and older politicians, the youth become pawns for seeking parochial party interests to the peril of the youth themselves and their communities. As an act of patronage, the motivations for and effects of youth involvement in electoral violence are many and targeted at the youth themselves, party political opponents and the electoral system. The violence puts people in states of panic and fear as well as help stagnate businesses, increase the burden of health care, stall community development activities and spread hunger and disease. The findings also confirm the theoretical underpinnings of the precipitants of electoral violence as conscribed by the nature of conflict societies, the conflictive dimension of democracy and the design of electoral systems and administration. Finally, although metaphysical claims for the violence could not be established, it was clear that dialectical factors and forces were rife.

7 References


