

**PEACE EDUCATION AND ELECTION-RELATED VIOLENCE IN GHANA'S**  
**2008 GENERAL ELECTIONS**

**Introduction:**

The December 2008 election was a watershed moment in the annals of Ghanaian politics. Never in the history of independent Ghana has a national election been so crucial to the people of Ghana and so closely watched by the international community. The stakes in this election were too high for three major reasons. In the first place, it was the first time in the country's democratic dispensation, under the Fourth Republic, that none of the political parties contesting the Presidential election was fielding a candidate who was the sitting Head of State, President, or sitting Vice-President. None of the Presidential candidates enjoyed the full benefits of political incumbency associated with the Presidency. All the Presidential candidates went into the election with real hope of winning. For the two main political parties in the country — the then largest opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the former ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) — it was more like a life and death situation. Having both won two national elections each (1992, 1996, 2000 and 2004 respectively), this election presented an opportunity for one of them to break the election victory tie and win the bragging right of being the political party with most election victories in the Fourth Republic.

Secondly, the recent discovery of oil in the country also contributed in raising the political stakes in this election. It was clear to all the Presidential candidates that the winner of this election will have the fortune of running an oil-rich economy. It is argued that there is an inherent political blessing for any political party that is lucky to be the ruling government when the country starts commercial oil drilling in 2010. The two

main political parties were very much aware of this calculation going into the December elections.

Finally, on the international front, the recent failed elections in Kenya and Zimbabwe put Ghana in the spotlight as the next likely candidate of failed democracies in Africa. The international community was holding its breath to see which way Ghana will go. There was heightened interest in the country's electoral process as Ghana was once again being thrust in the enviable position of proving the African pessimists wrong. As fate will have it, Ghanaians came out on the right side of history. The political contest lived-up to its bidding, and the country rose to the occasion. The good people of Ghana went through two general elections in one month and came out with flying colors. There were some difficulties and challenges along the way, but in the end, the country was credited by all international and domestic election observers and monitors for conducting credible, non-violent, free and fair elections.

It is against this background that this study seeks to examine the electoral process, with specific reference to the prevention and managing of election-related violence in the December 2008 elections.

### **Methodology**

The study will explore a potential correlation between peace education and election-related violence. It will cover the period before, during, and after the general elections.

It is often argued that peace education and peace activism during elections help in lowering the political temperature and reducing, if not eliminate, the possibility of

election-related violence. The study will look at four different areas in the electoral process, namely, law enforcement; civil society; the media; and Political Parties.

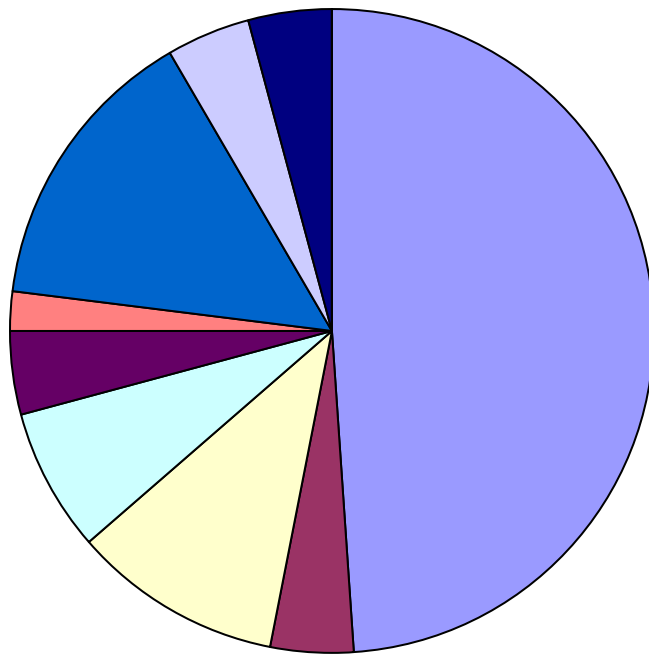
Data collected from twenty-five constituencies across the country by election-related violence monitors will be analyzed to determine if there is significant correlation to reject the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between peace education and election-related violence. The constituencies selected were based on a report by security experts identifying these constituencies as potential violence prone areas in the country. The study will categorize election-related violence in these constituencies and prepare frequency distribution to determine the frequency of election-related violence during the study period. If possible, regression analysis of the data will be run to predict the likelihood of election-related violence occurrence in future elections.

Secondary literature on election violence monitoring, peace education and electoral systems will be reviewed for the study. Ghana's electoral laws, Political Parties code of conduct and the country's Public Order Act will be analyzed to put the study in context.

### **Preliminary Findings:**

Eight (8) different categories of election-related violence were observed in the 25 constituencies. Some constituencies recorded all categories while others only witnessed some types of election-related violence but not all 8 categories. A total of ninety (90) incidents of election-related violence were recorded in the 25 constituencies throughout the election period

**Types of Violence (% of incidents involving each type)**



- Defacement**
- Threat of Physical Harm**
- Group clash**
- Verbal Harassment**
- Rumours**
- Property Damage**
- Physical Harm**
- Disruption of Rally**
- Slice 9**
- Intimidation**

Defacement of political party posters was a major national problem of election-related violence during the December 2008 elections. The practice was grave and widespread. Bawku Central constituency in the country's Upper East Region recorded the highest incidents of defacement. Political party bill-boards became victims of defacement in the constituency.

Activities of youth groups affiliated with political parties in the Tamale metropolis in the Northern Region created potential for actual election-related violence in the area. The youth groups were involved in cases of political intimidation and destruction of property in the immediate post-election period. Their activities seriously undermined the fragile peace prevailing in the area.

Ethnic conflicts and chieftaincy disputes in the country's three regions of the 'North' assumed political dimensions during the election period. In the Upper Region, the Mamprisis largely supported the New Patriotic Party (NPP) while the Kusasis pitched camp with the National Democratic Congress (NDC). In the Dagbon Traditional Area of the Northern Region, the Abudus aligned themselves with the NPP while the Andanis supported the NDC. This phenomenon increased the potential for election-related violence in the area, largely motivated by ethnic or chieftaincy differences. In Bawku, for example, some strongholds of the two parties were no go areas for the opposition. This hampered political campaigning in the area.

Most of the election-related violence incidents recorded in migrant communities populated by internally displaced persons from conflict zones were characterized by the Abudu/Andani or Mamprusi/Kusasi divide. The politicization of conflicts during general elections normally manifest in election-related violence.

Throughout the election period, there were heightened incidents of election-related violence recorded during periods of national exercise conducted by the Electoral Commission (EC). There were two major exercises conducted by the EC before the December 7, 2008 first round general elections. The Commission opened the register for new voters to put their names in the register. The final register to be used for the 2008 general elections was exhibited for prospective voters to check and make corrections.

These two national exercises were characterized by violence.

Finally, the 2008 general election was characterized by a disturbing practice of political interference in the justice system. This phenomenon contributed to a growing culture of impunity in the country. This seriously hampered the adjudication of election-related violence offence cases.