

Infrastructure for Peace and Peaceful Elections in Ghana: 2012–2020

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Abstract

Ghana's democratic progress in the Fourth Republic is often linked to the management of peaceful elections, successful political alternations, and some public trust in democratic institutions. However, pockets of violence have also marred and derailed some progress. While the capacity to reduce political tensions and resolve electoral disputes has gained significant scholarly attention, scholars still overlook the role of infrastructure for peace (I4P) in the analysis. Focusing on the Ghanaian National Peace Council, this qualitative study examines the extent to which I4P prevents electoral disputes, what its strengths and challenges are, and how the ongoing challenges might be remedied. Findings on peace accords, election observation, and policy dialogue processes were significant before, during, and after electoral manifestations. A formalized I4P was also productive through institutional partnerships. However, institutionalization within governmental structures and its consequential budgetary limitations necessitate prudent management of its peace fund to facilitate emergent conflict situations.

Keywords

peacebuilding, infrastructure for peace, national peace council, elections, Ghana

Introduction

Over the past three decades, the notion of infrastructure for peace (I4P) has developed as an internal approach to long-term peacebuilding (van Tongeren et al., 2012). I4P is often characterized by a consultative platform of multiple stakeholders who develop a problem-solving approach to country-specific conflicts (van Tongeren, 2011), using modalities that include peace committees, peace secretariats, a national peacebuilding platform, conflict analysis, early warning and response systems, and insider mediators (van Tongeren, 2012,

pp. 3–4). As early as the 1980s, Central America saw a heavy reliance on commissions in peace negotiations (Lederach, 2012). In Nicaragua, for example, the personal involvement of John Paul Lederach and others influenced the conceptual interpretation of the internal intermediary. Hence, Wehr and Lederach (1991) formulated the term “insider-partial” to describe the role

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of insider mediators whose significance in conflict resolution was rooted in connectedness and trusted relationships. They also predicted that such attributes would likely be helpful outside of Central America. Decades later, following the passage of the 818th Act of the Ghanaian National Peace Council (NPC), eminent persons with faith-based good offices have been carefully selected from different Christian denominations, Muslim clerics from Islamic groups, African traditional religious leaders, and chiefs including other civil society groups to tackle various forms of disputes that threatened the peace of the country. While the Ghanaian NPC is dominated by inter-faith leadership, there are broader I4P modalities for resolving contentious matters. This is what motivates my focus on the role of Ghana's I4P in fostering peaceful elections in the country.

There are significant studies on I4P, but its role in the maintenance of peaceful elections in Ghana is often neglected in the analysis (Alidu & Braimah, 2014). Odendaal (2010) comparatively discussed different I4P cases as an architecture for building peace at the local level. In a cost and benefit observation, van Tongeren (2011) cited an estimation by the Ghana Investment Promotion that between mid-2008 and mid-2009, direct foreign investment surged by 90%, in part as a result of the country's peaceful general election in December 2008. The NPC's peacebuilding efforts included around 2 million U.S. dollars in financial support from the UNDP (van Tongeren, 2011). The intermediary role of the NPC in averting expected turbulence in the 2008 election has also been documented (Kumar & De la Haye, 2012; Odendaal, 2010; van Tongeren, 2011, 2012). In Kenya, however, it was observed that leading business associations suffered enormous economic losses from the 2008 postelection violence, amounting to around 3.6 billion U.S. dollars (van Tongeren, 2011). Yet, an estimated 5 million U.S. dollars from the UNDP supported efforts to prevent violence, build consensus on a newly drafted constitution, and establish early warning and response systems in Kenya (Kumar & De la Haye, 2012; van Tongeren, 2011). Another related study examined the role and difficulties of peacebuilding institutions such as Ghana's NPC in promoting peaceful elections in 2012 (Alidu & Braimah, 2014). However, little is known beyond the 2012 election. Therefore, my research adds to the body of existing knowledge on long-term peacebuilding by examining the extent to which Ghana's I4P prevented electoral disputes between 2012 and 2020, what its strengths and challenges are, and how the ongoing challenges might be remedied.

This research used elite interviews, official documents, media reports, peer-reviewed articles and books on the subject matter as part of qualitative research conducted between January and October 2021. A purposive sampling technique was used to gather adequate data from respondents relevant to the study. Since the study focuses on national elections, local peace processes were excluded from the study. The COVID-19 pandemic and other resource limitations also led to the use of both face-to-face and virtual interviews based on the preferences and accessibility of the respondents across the country.

With a total of 42 interviewees, I interviewed 13 respondents constituting eminent personalities and administrative secretaries of the NPC. Respondents in 9 out of 12 national and regional peace councils participated in the study, which is in part a manifestation of the NPC Act. This also supports Lederach's (1997) notion of lasting I4P structures at all levels of society. I also interviewed 6 public sector respondents from the Electoral Commission of Ghana (ECG), the National Commission for Civic Education, the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice, the Court, the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs, and the Police. Their respective mandates are election management, civic education, ombudsman, adjudication, legislation, and law and order. These functions also contribute to the consolidation of peace and security in the country. I further interviewed 15 respondents from two civil society organizations (CSOs), as well as academics from three academic research institutions. The respondents were either peacebuilding practitioners or researchers in Ghana. Subsequently, 4 respondents were interviewed based on their credentials as past or current representatives of political parties in the country. Lastly, I interviewed 4 other respondents from two international actors working in Ghana in order to understand the perspective of external actors.

I further took notice of the risks associated with the study on contentious electoral matters and therefore implemented certain steps to mitigate some risks to the respondents, the investigator, and society. I maintained the voluntary participation of the respondents; upheld the right of respondents to refuse to answer any question they deem inappropriate; ensured their right to withdraw from the interview at any time and respected interview confidentiality and anonymity in the data analysis process. These ethical procedures were also applied in accordance with institutional ethical clearance for a broader doctoral project.

This introduction is followed by a conceptual analysis of I4P, a literature review on democratic consolidation and I4P in Ghana, data analysis and discussion on three mechanisms facilitated through the I4P platform, and the conclusion of the paper.

Conceptualizing I4P

The capacity to adequately deal with ongoing and potentially violent conflict has been one of the major challenges for many conflict-prone societies. Particularly in developing democracies, the challenges include dysfunctional internal institutions and structures and a lack of commitment to peace by potential conflict parties (van Tongeren, 2012). I4P's development, which adds to the theory of conflict transformation, aims to further promote discussion about sustainable peacebuilding based on the use of longer-term domestic intermediary structures rather than relying on impermanent peacebuilders from outside (Lederach, 2012).

I4P also gained significant attention as a result of its criticism of international peacebuilding and, particularly, the short-to-medium-term effect of external peacebuilding (Githaiga, 2020; Mac Ginty, 2011). While resources are allocated to external organizations and other global North experts to promote international peacebuilding (Kumar & De la Haye, 2012; Lederach, 2012; van Tongeren, 2012), international peacebuilders are also too often characterized by top-down engagements with national elites while neglecting local preferences (Mac Ginty, 2011). Hence, I4P sought to localize peacebuilding within a domestic peace architecture and promote conflict resolution through negotiation, dialogue, mediation, accords, and other indigenous mechanisms.

I4P has significant practical applications throughout the world, but the nature of development varies from country to country. To describe a few, in Nicaragua, peace commission development was inspired by a regional peace initiative—the 1987 Esquipulas Peace Accords brought together Central American Heads of States in an effort to end civil wars in Nicaragua, El-Salvador, and Guatemala (Odendaal, 2010). Subsequently, marginalized and war-affected communities and religious CSOs organized commissions to confront violence that bridged different sectors and levels of society. With external assistance, the grassroots initiative developed into a national I4P and further evolved into sociopolitical contexts. The immediate concerns of addressing armed conflict and mediating between warring parties to protect civilians led to the maintenance of lasting structures against a broader range of conflicts (Mouly, 2013). Similarly in Nepal, a centralist civil war affected the country to a varying national degree (1996–2006). But in this case, civil society efforts at the local level did not create local peace committees (LPCs). I4P in Nepal was rather highly top-down in nature, through negotiations and adversarial political processes, and the signing of a Comprehensive Peace Accord in 2006 to end the conflict. The establishment of a Ministry of Peace and Reconciliation in 2007 also oversaw the implementation of the peace agreements, the formation of LPCs, a peace fund, and other transitional justice processes (Kovács, 2019).

In Africa, a top-down approach in South Africa was formed during the troubled years of violence and killings that preceded the elections in 1994. After the signing of a National Peace Accord in 1991 between the primary protagonists in the Apartheid conflict, LPCs were formed in affected areas with significant input from CSOs. While the LPCs contributed to containing the spiral of election-related violence in 1994, they did not prevent all violent incidents (Odendaal, 2010; van Tongeren, 2011). In Kenya, a bottom-up approach is often cited at the initial stages (van Tongeren, 2011). In 1993, a group of women in the Wajir district of Northern Kenya embarked on a grassroots initiative that led to their engagements with different clans in an attempt to resolve pastoral and border disputes. Subsequently, other educated members of the clans came on board to support the initiative (Kovács, 2019), which was replicated in other northern

districts of the country. Further, voluntary LPCs were then institutionalized into state administrative structures as national policy. The Kenyan I4P has also been commended for helping to prevent election-related violence in some parts of the country (Githaiga, 2020; Kovács, 2019; Kumar & De la Haye, 2012; van Tongeren, 2012). In February 2010, in Naivasha, Kenya, African and foreign representatives agreed on a common definition of I4P: “dynamic network of interdependent structures, mechanisms, resources, values and skills which, through dialogue and consultation, contribute to conflict prevention and peacebuilding in a society” (van Tongeren et al., 2012,

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p. 2). Similarly, on September 10, 2013, a continental consensus declaration in Accra, proposed I4P formation in member states within three years (Verzat, 2014). The practice of I4P in Ghana, which began in 2005, appears to have preceded global attention in Africa. This confirms how some practical cases of I4P in addressing conflict have rather influenced conceptual development. In Ghana, I4P became significant amid failed inter-ethnic and chieftaincy conflict resolution, but progress in election management within Africa. I review the literature on democratic consolidation and Ghana’s development of I4P in the next section.

Democratic Consolidation and I4P in Ghana

Ghana has had a tumultuous political evolution since independence on March 6, 1957. The postindependence period was rather a checkered history of different military overthrows of civilian republics, specifically in 1966, 1972, and 1981. The current 1992 Fourth Republican Constitution is the most enduring since independence, culminating in eight successive presidential and parliamentary elections organized every 4 years in 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2016, and 2020. Hence, the scope of the review within this era also deepens the democratic focus of the study.

Elections have featured prominently in studies on democratization in Ghana. In relation to democratic consolidation, a minimalist and maximalist debate is imperative (Alidu & Ame, 2012). Reference is often made to the transition election of 1992 after 11 years of military rule between December 31st, 1981 and January 7th, 1993. Jeffries and Thomas (1993), in their early diagnosis, revealed that although the opposition party disputed the 1992 presidential election and subsequently boycotted the parliamentary election, the procedural irregularities did not necessarily affect the relatively free and fair outcome. Oquaye (1995), however, argued that the recognition of transitional challenges, including a defective electoral register, military incumbency, human rights abuses, and poor election observation, and improving them were essential to safeguarding future elections.

In a millennial contribution, Gyimah-Boadi (2001) acknowledged the improvement made in Ghana’s electoral system between 1992 and 2000. They include the compilation of a new voter register and the introduction of an interparty advisory committee for electoral consensus building. This subsequently improved the credibility of the ECG in its supervision of the 2000 elections, which were concluded through a run-off. Gyimah-Boadi (2001, 2009) and Graham et al. (2017) examined the 2000, 2008, and 2016 elections, respectively. They emphasized the alternation of political power between the two major political parties in Ghana, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP), as a beacon of hope for democracy in Africa. Graham et al. (2017) went further to state that, from the minimalist point of view, Ghana appears to have also passed Samuel Huntington’s turnover test to democratic consolidation when political power alternated three times between the NDC and the NPP in 2001, 2009, and 2017.

Arthur (2010) also conceptualized democratic consolidation in the context of free and fair elections, the peaceful alternation of power, and some public trust in democratic institutions. Therefore, the institutional progress in Ghana’s democratic consolidation includes an independent election management role, court adjudication, the political reporting of the media, and the research and advocacy role of

CSOs (Arthur, 2010; Awinador-Kanyirige, 2014). Arthur (2010), however, highlighted a number of challenges that needed attention, such as funding constraints that affect democratic performance, media bias, the rate of political tension and violence in the country, as well as perceived political interference in constitutional statutory bodies. In another discussion, Botchway (2018) revealed that CSOs have a favorable influence on Ghana's democratic consolidation through electoral monitoring, public advocacy, peacebuilding, civic education, and capacity building. Adams and Asante (2020) examined postelection disputes in Ghana and comparatively argued that although some postelection conflicts in Africa have led to mass civil violence, Ghana's democratic consolidation through conflict resolution is further deepened by the persistent use of the courts by politicians to settle electoral disputes rather than resorting to vandalism and violent protest. Graham et al. (2017) further concluded that Ghana's upholding of democratic tenets, including the rule of law, a thriving civil society, and the preservation of individual liberties, in addition to a free and fair election, also appears to help the country inch toward the maximalist view on democratic consolidation.

The role of I4P in maintaining peace in Ghana's constitutional democratic era was also driven by many exigencies. According to van Tongeren (2011, 2012), Ghana's I4P formation was affected by the many intractable community-based and interethnic conflicts in the country. Such was the case with the 1994–1995 Konkomba–Nanumba armed conflict, which led to human casualties in the 1000s. A study commissioned by Ghana's Ministry of Interior and cited by van Tongeren (2012) also identified several local conflict dynamics that necessitate such a body: “chieftaincy, civil and labour unrest, inter/intra-political party conflicts, land-, religion-, ethnic/ identity conflicts, minerals and economic resources” (van Tongeren, 2012, p. 95). State judicial processes were sometimes derailed by bureaucracies and regulatory delays. Successive governments often lacked the political will to enforce the recommendations of the official Commissions of Inquiry they established to investigate a conflict (van Tongeren, 2011). After the slaying of the king of Dagbon and about 40 other elders in a chieftaincy succession conflict in 2002, the failure of state approaches led to the establishment of the Northern Regional Peace Advisory Council, as well as the Committee of Eminent Chiefs chaired by Ghana's subnational Ashanti king (“*Asantehene*”) in mediation and peace restoration. Following the success of such initiatives, the government, in collaboration with the UNDP and other CSOs, extended the eminent NPC concept to other parts of the country, leading to the formation of an informal I4P in 2005 (Awinador-Kanyirige, 2014; van Tongeren, 2011).

Odendaal (2010) and Nganje (2021) have distinguished between informal and formal categories of I4P structures. Informal I4Ps are noted to be less indebted to governmental structures due to their voluntary composition and personal interest in peace. They are also viewed as being more flexible and creative in operations. Yet, they may lack political legitimacy in their operations. The Wajir district initiative is a typical example of informal I4P that inspired formalization in Kenya. Similarly, in Ghana, Verzat (2014) described the institutional composition of informal I4P (2005–2011) before the passage of the NPC Act in 2011. This included peace promotion officers appointed with a full-time role through the Interior Ministry who were connected to 10 regional peace councils and selected district peace councils. One respondent from the NPC stated that since the activities of the informal I4P lacked institutional legitimacy, there was no statutory obligation to fund the peacebuilding institution. It was also insufficient to have a single peace promotion officer in a region with several districts. In terms of remuneration, their paid stipends also primarily came from outside, sources like the UNDP (Field Interview, Regional Peace Council, June 2021). A peacebuilding researcher also stated that, without a legal framework, Ghana's informal I4P was an unsustainable body of eminent representatives resolving disputes (Field Interview, Academia, June 2021).

Conversely, I4P may be formalized by state recognition, national accord facilitation, legislation, or other statutory validation. For example, the National Peace Accord in South Africa was used to form LPCs; Under a 2002 legal framework on Local Self Government, the Committees on Intercommunity Relations were established in Serbia; and in Sierra Leone, the Political Parties

Registration Commission established the District Code of Conduct Monitoring Committees (Odendaal, 2010, p. 7). Like in Kenya, the success of the initial Northern Regional Peace Advisory Council model in Ghana inspired the formation of an informal I4P, which was gradually formalized through an Act of Parliament (van Tongeren, 2011).

Therefore, the NPC has been given the mandate of facilitating mechanisms for conflict prevention, management, and resolution as well as fostering enduring peace in the country (Field Interview, NPC, 2021). The ideal structure is a three-tier architecture at the national, regional, and district levels of the country. In other words, all 16 current regions and 261 districts in Ghana should have an established I4P. In practice, however, the headquarters has a Governing Council; a Peacebuilding Support Unit is within the Interior Ministry; there is an established Peace Fund; and a National Secretariat runs the Administrative Unit of the NPC. The Governing Council has a 13-member eminent representative with a 4-year mandate and is eligible for reappointment. Nine representatives are appointed by religious and traditional institutions in the country, with one member appointed from the Catholic Bishop Conference, Christian Council, Ghana Pentecostal Council, National Council for Christian and Charismatic Churches, Ahamadiyya Muslim Mission, Al-sunnah Muslims, Tijanniya Muslim Group, Practitioners of African Traditional Religion, and National House of Chiefs. The President of Ghana appoints two members at the national level, with an obligatory female nomination. The remaining two are members nominated by identifiable groups.¹ Although this structure is supposed to be replicated fairly at the subnational levels, due to budgetary and other human resource and logistical challenges, selected districts have satellite district peace councils compared to most regions (Verzat, 2014). At the time of the study, a fully constituted Governing Council of the NPC was assisted by 12 regional peace councils and three satellite district centers (Field Interview, February–July 2021). A respondent from academia also stated that “another benefit of the current formal structure is that members of the I4P have become identifiable groups in any call for institutional accountability”. Hence, successive governments will be obliged by law to work with the NPC and ensure that the body receives the needed budgetary support for paying remuneration, allowances, and undertaking peacebuilding activities (Field Interview, Academia, June 2021).

Studies by van Tongeren (2011, 2012); Verzat (2014) noted the significance of the NPC and its peace promotion officers in ensuring a peaceful electoral transition in 2008. For instance, a series of proactive meetings were organized with the ECG, political parties, and other stakeholders. This helped to diffuse tensions, as necessitated by the narrow margin of less than 50,000 votes between the winner and the loser after a run-off. These accomplishments also happened when the I4P operated informally. Elsewhere, Alidu and Braimah (2014) stated that the NPC can deepen peacebuilding and state-building measures to manage chieftaincy, land, and other ethnic disputes at the local level in light of a formalized I4P. The benefit of formalization also included its legitimate capacity to co-facilitate the first presidential peace accords in the 2012 election.

Despite what is known, there has been no thorough work in the area of elections since 2012, as in the 2016 and the 2020 elections. The peaceful management of elections deepens Ghana’s democratic consolidation, but a focus on I4P should take cognizance of peacebuilding initiatives. It appears that the present

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literature lacks a thorough assessment of peacebuilding initiatives in the context of elections. There are other questions that remain unanswered, including whether the opposition parties’ petitions to Ghana’s Supreme Court disputing the outcomes of the 2012 and 2020 elections damaged the efficacy of the peace accords that the NPC and other partners facilitated in both elections? How can we explain the I4P’s

attempts to foster peace in Ghana in light of election disputes? What mechanisms have been facilitated through the I4P platform to lessen election-related disputes in the country? What are the NPC’s strengths, limitations, and remedies? These questions are addressed in the remainder of the article.

The I4P Platform in Preelection Peace Accords

As stated in Article 45 of Ghana's 1992 Constitution, the ECG has a direct responsibility to oversee the conduct of all forms of public elections in the country. Despite this, the management of peaceful elections in the country involves the contributions of different state and nonstate actors. But the extent of such institutional roles in the case of I4P has gained little attention (Alidu & Braimah, 2014). Under a formalized NPC, there was a proper I4P peacebuilding platform, which led to the facilitation of preelection peace accords before the 2012, 2016, and 2020 elections. The peace accord concept was also driven by an effort to reduce political tensions and manage disputes, which have too often led to pockets of violence in most elections since 1992. Ijon (2020) has also acknowledged lessons on election-related disputes in other African countries such as Kenya in 2007, Zimbabwe in 2007, and La Côte d'Ivoire in 2010 among others. With these few examples, the rancorous nature of political polarization, intimidation, threats, and postelection disputes resulted in mass civil violence and democratic reversals. In Ghana, past election records also exposed the challenges of building political communication, consultation, and dialogue across institutions, political parties, and the public in the management of a highly polarized and tensed electoral climate that manifests before, during, and after elections. In terms of transition, the tense atmosphere in 2001 and 2009 provided a stark reminder of the challenges of managing the postelection situation (Second High-Level Meeting of National Leaders, 2016, p. 3).

Therefore, the first presidential peace accord, popularly known as the "Kumasi Declaration," went into effect on November 27, 2012, just a few days before the sixth national election in Ghana's Fourth Republic, normally scheduled for December 7th. With this accord, eight contesting presidential candidates publicly denounced "electoral violence, impunity, and injustice" (Alidu & Braimah, 2014, p. 180). A respondent from UNESCO Ghana stated that since the Kumasi Declaration represented the first presidential peace accord in the Fourth Republic: "it became a good reference point for peace matters in the country, out of which other accords have been predicated." (Field Interview, March 2021). Consequently, the 2016 presidential peace accord took place few days before the election-day, and seven political parties contesting that election signed the accord in Accra, similarly declaring their commitment to "strengthening Ghana's democratic stability, peace, and national unity" (Second High-Level Meeting of National Leaders, 2016, p. 3). Another preelection peace accord organized few days before the December 7, 2020 election—this time signed by the presidential candidates of the two leading political parties—was also held in Accra, with a formal commitment on "eradicating electoral violence in Ghana's democracy: the role of political leadership" (Concept Note for Presidential Elections Peace Pact, 2020, p. 1).

Further similarities between the three peace accords can be identified, such as the secondary stakeholders who convened or witnessed the formal commitment to peace by the primary political parties. For instance, the 2012 peace accord was facilitated by the NPC through its Chairperson in collaboration with the Institute of Democratic Governance (IDEG), as well as the co-convening role of the Manhyia Palace led by His Majesty Otumfuo Osei Tutu. Similarly, the NPC and the IDEG utilized the co-convening roles of the National House of Chiefs and that of the Office of the National Chief Imam in the 2016 and 2020 peace accords, respectively. The other statesmen who have participated in most of the accords include former Presidents, sitting Presidents, opposition political candidates, the Chief Justice; the Inspector-General of Police, chiefs, international observers, the media, and the general public (Field Interview, February–July 2021). Having provided both financial and technical support to this initiative, the UNESCO Ghana also stated that the idea of co-convenors in the 2012 accord demonstrated "the convening power of culture and traditional authority in national development." In all three peace accords, the convening roles of the Asantehene, the House of Chiefs, and the Chief Imam, as well as the presence of the heads of other democratic and security institutions and statesmen, also

support the argument that democratic consolidation through peaceful elections in Ghana is a shared responsibility of different stakeholders.²

Despite the aforementioned, the outcomes of the elections in 2012 and 2020, in particular, and the attendant postelection litigation tend to challenge the effectiveness of peace accords and the consequential nexus between I4P and democratic consolidation. For instance, although the ECG declared John Dramani Mahama and the NDC the winners of the December 7, 2012 election with 50.70% of valid votes cast and a victory margin of more than 300,000, the main opposition candidate Nana Akufo-Addo and his NPP party contested the results and claimed that the process was flawed by anomalies and manipulation. They only formally conceded defeat after losing the case in Ghana's Supreme Court (Alidu & Braimah, 2014). Similar to this, in the 2020 election, the incumbent President Nana Akufo-Addo, who won reelection with 51.30% of the vote and a margin of victory of over 500,000 votes, had his victory confirmed by the Supreme Court following an opposition election petition. Based on this, Adams and Asante (2020), expressed a favorable response to the role of the courts in postelection conflict resolution in Ghana. They argued that since many postelection conflicts in Africa have had dire consequences for its citizens, a few examples being Kenya, Zimbabwe, and La Côte d'Ivoire, the ability of the courts in Ghana to settle postelection disputes remarkably strengthens democratic consolidation.

However, proponents of the NPC noted that the rule of law mandate of the judiciary in dealing with electoral disputes was vastly different from the mediation mandate of the NPC, whose rationale for co-facilitating peace accords was based on moral suasion over leaders of political parties using their formal commitments and the social leverage of eminent personalities and institutions (Field Interview, February–July 2021). According to the IDEG, the eminent personalities were also carefully chosen to “inspire absolute trust and confidence of the signatories, and deference to his/her authority” (Concept Note for Presidential Elections Peace Pact, 2020, p. 2). The religious demographics of Ghana, a country with a total population of 30.8 million inhabitants in 2021, also support this assertion. For example, the 2021 population and housing census (urban/rural areas: Christianity, 70.4%/66.9%; Islam, 20.4%/19.2%; Traditional, 0.8%/6.5%), justifies the NPC's inter-faith approach to selecting its eminent personalities.³

A conflict management and resolution officer of the NPC also described other institutional relevance of the peace accord:

We had actors like the Chief Justice in the signing event for strategic reasons. We wanted the head of the judiciary to also witness the commitment to peace by candidates of competitive elections in the country. And the judiciary in such occasions have assured of their capability to settle any eventual election disputes through legal means. The intention was also to morally dissuade the use of vandalism and violent protests that may destabilize the peace of the country. (Field Interview, NPC, May 2021)

On the contrary, an interview with an official from CSOs stated that although the peace accord initiative is a good moral signal among supporters of political parties to mitigate immediate political tension in the country, the signing document has no legal binding on the actions and inactions of political parties (Field Interview, CSO, March 2021). Commenting on the same subject, an academic researcher noted:

...the initiative, which is normally aired on national television, makes minimal contribution to the electoral process. It is just a funfair to let people know that it is possible for the leadership of political parties to meet, engage one another, and hug in warm memories. But the lack of proper research assessment of the weight it carries in shaping the behavior of citizens, makes us describe it as just a symbolic gesture. (Field Interview, Academia, June 2021)

Nonetheless, a peace accord in Ghana also symbolizes the desire for a peaceful environment irrespective of pockets of violence, election outcomes, and political disputes partly attributable to closely contested elections (Alidu & Braimah, 2014). It is also important to distinguish between the rule of law mandate of the court in relation to election-related disputes and its potential win-lose outcome from the underlying assumption of I4P embedded in the NPC's mandate that requires the building of bridges among competing parties.

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The Good Offices of I4P on Election-Day

Election observation was also enhanced through the good offices of the eminent persons of the NPC. It is a common practice for civil society groups to use this mechanism to mitigate real and potential threats of violence during elections in Africa. In Ghana's Fourth Republic, notable observers have been visible in the country, the Network of Domestic Election Observers, Coalition of Domestic Election Observers, Civil Society Forum in collaboration with the Center for Democratic Development, Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice, Kofi Annan Peacekeeping and Training Center, and the West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), including external observers from the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Commonwealth Observer Group, and the European Union (EU), among others.⁴ Based on this, I4P's contribution, which occurred during the 2016 and 2020 elections, may not be considered new. However, while the conventional goal of election observation often renders a postelection assessment, a peace-building approach could manage peace during the polls. This initial remark is consistent with Lederach's (2012) claim that, unlike a mainstream postconflict project, I4P can be effective in a politically tense environment when peacebuilding initiatives are not limited to one stage of the potential conflict cycle.

The I4P approach to election observation, also called the Election Situation Room (ESR), is part of a broader WANEP project on building national early warning systems in the West African Subregion undertaken in partnership with the ECOWAS and the UN Office for the West Africa and Sahel, with funding from the EU (ESR Preliminary Declaration for Ghana's National Election, 2020, p. 1).

A WANEP official also stated:

Although the NPC has staff in the regions, they are not enough for this initiative. They also rely on our technical expertise, funding, and other technologies in the design and operation of the project. With our effort and other stakeholders in the electoral space, the NPC gets the right information to act. (Field Interview, WANEP, February 2021)

In terms of operations, the 2016 ESR necessitated the deployment of 750 trained field observers across the country in an election conducted at 28,992 polling stations. A Central Coordinated ESR was created in Accra, with satellite ESRs in two regions, Ashanti and the Northern Region, considered key hotspot regions.⁵ In the 2020 election, 350 observers were also deployed in 168 prioritized hotspots, utilizing structured checklists across the 16 regions of the country in an election conducted at 33,367 polling stations. The deployment was complemented by the National Commission for Civic Education, a state agency, which deployed observers to cover 2,341 polling stations within 275 constituencies. A Central Coordinated ESR remained in Accra, whereas the satellite ESRs were in Ho, Tamale, and Kumasi simultaneously (ESR Preliminary Declaration for Ghana's National Election, 2020, p. 1).

A former NPC member also noted that field observers were supplied with mobile phones with an SMS system linked to coordinators in the ESRs. He summarized the checklists:

The field observers pick up information based on a set of variables we give them ... what time did the ballot papers arrive, what time did they open it, what time did people start voting, were there any skirmishes or disagreement. (Field Interview, NPC, February 2021)

As a result, the ESRs were positioned as situational analysis platforms that obtained and reviewed data on the development of polls through internal gathering, analysis, and decision-making, which culminated with stakeholder communication utilizing the NPC. The usefulness of the ESR through the I4P platform and the NPC's capacity in particular was based on the use of their good offices to resolve identified threats and mitigate their impacts through preventive diplomacy (The ESR Preliminary Declaration for Ghana's National Election, 2020, p. 2).

For example, both the 2016 and 2020 elections showed incidents of violent threats, alleged voter corruption, lack of compliance with agreed and institutionalized electoral rules and procedures, and other human rights abuses that affected past elections. In the 2020 election, for example, after a reported gunshot incident in Kasoa was analyzed through the Accra ESR, action was taken through the decision room of the NPC. Eminent members of the body engaged the parliamentary candidate to remain calm following the incident. The police commander in the area was also engaged and assured of their resolve to find the alleged perpetrators and bring them to justice. A similar incident in the Odododiodio constituency in Accra prompted an engagement between the NPC and the police on the need to increase police presence in the area. Two reported incidents regarding the tampering of presidential ballot boxes in Awutu Senya East constituency and other areas in the Upper West Region also prompted an engagement between the NPC and the ECG, out of which the ECG indicated an action taken to replace the official and the issuance of a press release on the matter. Other prompt NPC actions through the ESR system included engagement with the ECG to address the delay in the electoral polls in some areas, follow-up on the veracity of alleged malpractices and other viral social media allegations bordering on national security, and the deployment of members of the eminent groups to mediate in reportedly tensed and marginalized areas (ESR Preliminary Declaration for Ghana's National Election, 2020, pp. 3–6).

Local and foreign observers have both participated in Ghana's elections since 1992. However, given the dominance of Ghanaian institutions in the ESR system, it is imperative to describe the profound nature of domestic observers in I4P conceptions. The above actions support the assertion by Wehr and Lederach (1991) about some advantages that insiders have over outsiders due to their in-depth knowledge of local political dynamics and established intermediary relationships with electoral localities. However, Oquaye (1995) and Boahen (1995) argued that election observation in Ghana cannot be a comprehensive mechanism for determining a free, fair, transparent, and peaceful election, in part because the number of observers deployed is frequently much lower than the number of polling places where the actual election was held. In the 2020 election, the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in lockdowns, physical isolation, and restrictions on public movement, also had an impact on the few observers deployed. In this context, Berger et al. (2020) indicated the negative impact of global pandemics on electoral democracies, which partly explains the limits of election observation during pandemic times. Another unsustainable issue is the general challenge of financial independence in election administration in Africa, and the NPC's reliance on the ESR of WANEP and, consequently, external funding. There are other awful incidents that mar Ghana's advances in democracy. For instance, the 2020 election witnessed eight human casualties that were directly tied to the election, in addition to other pockets of violence and injuries attributed to sporadic gunshots in certain constituencies.⁶

In light of this, an I4P strategy for peacebuilding based on election observation is insufficient to address the tense nature of Ghana's elections before, during, and after the polls. Since the management of peaceful elections includes the actions of other major stakeholders like political parties, the ECG, and the security agencies, these actors should be more responsive and patriotic in their activities. I4P should be seen to complement the management of peaceful elections rather than substituting the responsibility of primary electoral stakeholders.

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I4P Policy Dialogue After Electoral Violence

A 2019 televised by-election violence linked to political vigilantism prompted a number of remedies in Ghana, particularly a commission of inquiry, legislation, and I4P dialogue. This was not the first by-election in the Fourth Republic to be marred by violence. In 2009, the Chereponi by-election won by the then-ruling NDC also witnessed alleged state security violence. In 2010, the Atiwa by-election was won by the then-opposition NPP, but the mayhem at the polling station and violence were alleged to have been caused by national security operatives and party vigilante groups (Ijon, 2020). Following the death of a sitting Member of Parliament (MP) in the Ayawaso-West Wuogon Constituency in the Greater Accra Region, the ECG by law organized a by-election, which was slated for January 31, 2019. Over an hour into voting, chaotic scenes occurred at the La Bawalashie Presbyterian School voting center, with armed men posing as national security personnel attacking persons believed to be NDC agents, including a sitting MP for Ningo-Prampram, Sam George. While citing the violent incident as its reason, the opposition NDC pulled out of that election. The ECG nonetheless continued the polls, resulting in a victory for the incumbent NPP.⁷

To mitigate the widely condemned incident, the government established a three-member commission popularly named after its chairman as "Emile Short Commission" to investigate and make recommendations on the incident in accordance with Article 278 of the 1992 Constitution. The report of the commission was delivered to the President on March 14, 2019. The government also initiated the Vigilantism and Related Offences Law 2019 (Act 999), criminalizing acts of vigilantism in all their forms.⁸ Subsequently, a government white paper was issued on the report with a Gazette notification on September 13, 2019. The white paper rejected some recommendations of the commission's report, such as revising security system reporting and police recruitment, but acknowledged the presence of political hooliganism and the need to prosecute perpetrators.⁹

The NPC subsequently facilitated a formal dialogue after the by-election violence involving the NDC and the NPP, with the support of other national and international partners. The successful dialogue generated a policy framework for disbanding political vigilante groups, prohibiting their association with party activities, and collaborating with state agencies to eliminate their role in electoral violence. After initial concerns and disagreements, both the NDC and the NPP accented to the implementation of the policy (Roadmap and Code of Conduct for the Eradication of Political Vigilantism in Ghana, 2020, p. 3). For instance, interviews with NPC members indicated the active participation of some political youth groups at the local level in the sensitization efforts of the NPC to discourage the use of political vigilantism to cause mayhem in the 2020 election (Field Interview, NPC, February–July 2021). Similarly, an official from the Ghana Center for Democratic Development indicated how CSOs complemented the NPC's efforts by facilitating a ball game initiative in some hotspot constituencies targeted at the youth to explain the need to avoid political vigilantism. Participants played the game together, which aimed to orient them on the apprehensive clauses in the law for vigilantism perpetrators and the need to promote dialogue and mediation, and potentially prevent violence (Field Interview, CSOs, March 2021).

While the 2020 election was conducted peacefully across the country, a few constituencies were challenged by intimidation and harassment by national security operatives; unauthorized persons at some polling stations; gunshots around polling and collation centers; and destruction and theft of electoral materials, among others.¹⁰ Therefore, such direct interventions to curb political vigilantism could be regarded as inadequate to prevent the level of tension and violence in isolated constituencies. This may

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be partly attributed to the challenge of implementing the complete policy framework of the roadmap, which requires the additional responsibility of other governmental and nongovernmental stakeholders in achieving other maximalist democratic issues in the context of building sustainable peace (Graham et al., 2017). However, the role of the

NPC in this context also supports the claim that the interest in I4P evolved in Ghana in part due to the absence of political will in conflict resolution (van Tongeren, 2011). The standard of I4P on dialogue and noncoercion is also fundamentally different from the state's prioritizing of order, security, and coercion (Mac Ginty, 2011). In a polarized political environment, the ability to assemble political parties to mediate in order to find a solution to a contentious issue is a significant dividend for the Ghanaian I4P. While political parties are divided by their quest for political power, an I4P platform that achieves policy consensus strengthens the value of intermediary peacebuilders.

Concluding Remarks

The findings confirm that Ghana's I4P is productive before, during, and after electoral manifestations (Lederach, 2012). This provides the basis to identify some strengths and contributions. First, Ghana's formalized I4P provides the NPC with legitimacy and sustainability, which is consistent with a notable I4P notion on long-term internal peacebuilding structures (Lederach, 1997). Second, the eminent good offices and inter-faith leadership within the NPC strengthen the significance of local, customary, and traditional peacebuilding in a polarized environment. Third, though limited, regional and satellite district peace councils can support local inclusion, while the NPC manages national peacebuilding affairs (Mac Ginty, 2011). Fourth, the role of operational partnerships in the NPC's activities bridges its human and financial capacity limitations. Overall, these strengths add to the existing literature on conflict transformation, where mid-level leaders are central to building sustainable peace because of their intermediary significance between top-level actors and the grassroots (Kovács, 2019; Lederach, 1997).

Despite these strengths, concerns have been expressed about the NPC's presence in governmental structures, including the Interior Ministry, which is headed by a political appointee of the President of Ghana. At the subnational level, regional peace council offices could be located within governmental regional coordinating council buildings. The unambiguous legal provision on the independence of the NPC and the practice of I4P in Ghana partly refutes the perception of political manipulation. However, another hurdle is the budgetary allocation to the NPC from the Interior Ministry. Significantly, in October 2021, the implementation of clause 20 in the NPC Act led to the launch of a peace fund. Since the fund legitimizes voluntary contributions from local and international sources, I further argue that the NPC's significance and its ability to facilitate peacebuilding projects will be further tested by the prudent management of the funds to particularly address emergent conflict situations.

Finally, scholars and policymakers should focus on the I4P's partnership potentials to deepen electoral civic education and consensus building, improve professional security and journalism, curtail the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, and facilitate the efforts around the distribution of economic and social resources to conflict- and crisis-affected communities.

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