



The Church and the Quest for Peaceful and Credible Elections in Ghana

Kwabena Opuni-Frimpong¹ 

¹ Department of Religious Studies, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi – Ghana.

ABSTRACT

The article is a critical reflection on the role of the church in the search for credible and peaceful elections in Ghana. Ghana has had eight general elections under the 4th Republic since 1992. The elections have been characterised by violence, cheating, and loss of property and in some instances lives. The church, civil society organizations, advocacy groups, donor agencies, etc. have played various roles to ensure free, fair, and credible elections. The general elections in Ghana however are not devoid of electoral challenges. The article argues that despite the challenges associated with general elections in Ghana, the church's contribution over the years is still relevant and inevitable and therefore must be deepened for future general elections. The article pays attention to reports on general elections in Ghana by key organizations like the Electoral Commission of Ghana, the European Union, the African Union, the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO), and the Alliance for Christian Advocacy Africa on elections in Ghana. The article concludes with a recommendation that the church must deepen its programmes, resources, and capacity of its personnel for future elections as the nation keeps searching for lasting solutions to its electoral challenges. The quest for credible and peaceful elections should be done on the principles of dialogue, consensus building, and the very Constitution which governs the nation. The church must deepen its public education, mediation, reconciliation, and spiritual support dimensions to the electoral process.

Correspondence

Kwabena Opuni-Frimpong

Email: opuni@hotmail.com

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INTRODUCTION

Credible and peaceful elections have remained a major source of concern in Ghana for the churches. General elections have been characterised by incidents of violence and allegations of electoral irregularities, which have been investigated by the Electoral Commission and the courts. The Ghana Police Service reported the deaths of eight people due to election-related violence in various electoral communities during the 2020 general elections.¹

The church in Ghana has played various significant roles including peace campaigns, public education, mediation, reconciliation, and as an institution of calm. Churches have participated in information sharing on the elections and the roles that church members and society, in general, must

¹ African Union's Report on the 2020 General Elections on Dec 9, 2020.

play toward peaceful and credible elections. Moreover, some congregations have supported the electoral process by offering their facilities including the church premises, tables, chairs, canopies, etc.

The quest for credible and peaceful elections has remained a constant desire of the church and ordinary Ghanaians. The church therefore is required to review its roles during general elections and rediscover its resources and capabilities to be repositioned in playing more significant roles in the quest for credible and peaceful elections. General elections in Ghana are important events in the country's democratic process, as they provide the opportunity for citizens to exercise their rights to vote, choose their leaders, and subsequently participate in the crucial role of determining the future direction of the country. The general elections in Ghana are typically held every four years and involve the elections of the President and Members of Parliament (MPs) for the various constituencies across the country. The elections are usually held on 7th December, and the winner is determined through a simple majority vote. The presidential elections are held using a two-round system, where the candidate with the majority of votes in the first round is declared the winner. If no candidate receives the majority of votes in the first round, a run-off election is held between the top two candidates. The parliamentary elections are held using a first-past-the-post system, where the candidate with the most votes in each constituency is declared the winner.²

The most recent general elections in Ghana were held on December 7, 2020. President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) was re-elected for a second term with 51.6% of the valid votes cast. The main opposition candidate, John Dramani Mahama of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), received 47.4% of the valid votes cast. The NPP also won a majority of seats in parliament, with 137 out of 275 seats.³ The election was largely peaceful and was observed by both local and international observers.

The country has been able to organise eight successful elections under the fourth republic for the past 30 years i.e., 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2016, and 2020. Even though there are quite a number of political parties, only two have ruled the country under the fourth republic. They are the National Democratic Congress and the New Patriotic Party. There have been five Presidents in the history of the 4th Republic; Jerry John Rawlings, John Agyekum Kufuor, John Evans Atta-Mills, John Dramani Mahama, and Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo with peaceful transfers of power from a governing to an opposition party on three separate occasions. Ghana has seen relatively peaceful elections and transitions of power for the past 30 years but not without challenges. There is a powerful desire for sustainable peace, democracy, and development among the citizens. The electoral challenges associated with elections in Ghana highlight the calls for reforms and improvements in the electoral process in order to ensure that elections are conducted in a free, fair, and transparent manner and that all citizens are able to participate in the process without fear and intimidation.

METHODOLOGY

The study used the qualitative method in its gathering of information. Available library information especially reports on general elections by accredited institutions like the Electoral Commission of Ghana, the European Union, the African Union, CODEO, and Alliance for Christian Advocacy Africa were critically examined to ascertain the challenges of conducting general elections in Ghana and the significant contribution of the church towards credible and peaceful elections. Moreover, interviews were conducted with some individuals who are key players in electoral management in Ghana and church leaders who have played roles in the church's contribution to ensuring peaceful and credible general elections.

Challenges of General Elections

There are several challenges that Ghana faces during its general elections. Some of the most common challenges according to Serebour Quaicoe include ensuring that all eligible voters are registered and

² Electoral Commission of Ghana' Report on the 2020 General Elections Dec 9, 2020.

³ Electoral Commission of Ghana's Report on the 2020 General Elections on Dec 9, 2020.

able to vote. This involves addressing issues such as voter registration fraud, voter identification and ensuring that polling stations are accessible to all. Ensuring security during elections is a major challenge. It involves preventing violence and ensuring that voters and polling stations are protected.⁴ Elections in Ghana have been marred by allegations of vote buying, vote rigging, and other forms of electoral fraud according to the African Union report on the 2020 general elections.⁵ These issues undermine the credibility of the elections and lead to disputes and violence. Emmanuel Asante has indicated that ensuring that disputes are resolved in a fair and transparent manner is very essential for maintaining peace and stability during and after the elections.⁶

The lack of infrastructure, particularly in rural areas also poses challenges during elections. Poor roads, lack of electricity, and other such issues make it difficult to deliver voting materials and ensure that polling stations are accessible to all. The Alliance for Christian Advocacy Africa observed in its report on the 2020 general elections that some polling stations in Ghana lack basic infrastructure such as electricity, communication facilities, good roads, water, and proper sanitation facilities, making it difficult to conduct elections in a safe and efficient manner in such polling centres.⁷

There are also concerns about electoral fraud, where election officials or political parties manipulate the vote count or engage in other forms of fraudulent activity. There have been allegations of electoral fraud and irregularities in past elections in Ghana, including issues with vote counting, ballot stuffing, and falsifying of results. These undermine the credibility of the electoral process and lead to political instability. CODEO has observed that vote buying is a challenge that the general elections in Ghana face.⁸ Vote buying is a situation where political candidates offer money, bribes, and other incentives to voters in exchange for their votes. The action compromises the integrity of the electoral process and leads to a lack of trust in the outcomes. It involves candidates or their supporters offering gifts or money in exchange for votes, which can undermine the fairness and integrity of the electoral process.

There have been instances of violence and intimidation during elections often perpetrated by supporters of rival political parties. Electoral violence, including clashes between rival political supporters, has been a major challenge in Ghana's general elections. This has resulted in the loss of lives and property. This discourages people from voting or participating in the electoral process as it deters voters from coming out to vote. Despite the efforts of various stakeholders, some Ghanaians still exhibit voter apathy. This means they are not interested in the political process and do not come out to vote. This affects the outcome of the elections and leads to a lack of legitimacy for the winners. Organizing elections can be expensive, and Ghana has often struggled to secure adequate funding for its electoral process, leading to delays and logistical challenges.⁹ The 2020 general elections, however, were fully funded by the Government of Ghana without any donor support according to the Electoral Commission of Ghana.¹⁰

The general elections are conducted by the Electoral Commission of Ghana, which is an independent body responsible for managing all aspects of the electoral process. The commission is supposed to ensure that the elections are free, fair, transparent, and credible, a task which has come to frequent attacks mainly from the various political parties.

Addressing Electoral Challenges

The Alliance for Christian Advocacy has observed that the electoral challenges associated with elections in Ghana highlight the calls for reforms and improvements in the electoral process in order

⁴ Excerpts of an Interview with Dr. Serebour Quaicoe on Preparation Towards December General Election November 5, 2020.

⁵ African Union's Report on the 2020 General Elections on Dec 9, 2020.

⁶ Excerpts of an Interview with Most Rev Prof Emmanuel Asante on Religion, Peace and Security in Ghana October 21, 2019.

⁷ Alliance for Christian Advocacy African's Report on the 2020 General Elections on Dec 10, 2020.

⁸ CODEO's Report on the 2020 General Elections December 9, 2020.

⁹ African Union's Report on the 2020 General Elections on Dec 9, 2020.

¹⁰ Electoral Commission's Report on the 2020 General Elections.

to ensure that elections are conducted in a free, fair, and transparent manner and that all citizens are able to participate in the process without fear and intimidation.¹¹ Addressing the challenges is crucial to ensuring that elections in Ghana are free, fair, and transparent and that the results are accepted by all parties. The European Union has recommended that the quest for credible and peaceful elections in Ghana requires the collective effort of all stakeholders, including the Electoral Commission, government, political parties, civil society organizations, the electorates, the media, and the church, among others, to ensure that the electoral process is credible, transparent and peaceful.¹² The African Union recommended in its report that the quest for credible and peaceful elections will include improving voter education and registration, promoting peaceful and nonviolent elections, and strengthening the institutions responsible for organizing and overseeing the electoral process. It further requires a commitment to democratic principles, transparency, and accountability, as well as the willingness to work together to ensure that the electoral process is free, fair, and peaceful.¹³ These challenges further highlight the calls for the participation of the churches in reforms and improvements in the electoral process in order to ensure that elections are conducted in a free, fair, and transparent manner.¹⁴

The Church and General Elections in Ghana

Anquandah has posited that the church plays a very significant role in general elections in Ghana as a voice of influence and guidance for its members.¹⁵ In the effort to identify some specific roles of the churches during general elections, Aboagye–Mensah has noted that the churches encourage their members to participate in the electoral process by registering to vote and voting on election days. They provide civic education and awareness programmes to educate members on their rights and responsibilities as citizens, including their rights to vote and the importance of choosing leaders who will uphold democratic principles and promote the common good. Furthermore, during the actual election period, some churches offer their facilities as polling stations and temporary offices for electoral officials. The church also plays a key role in promoting peaceful elections by calling for calm and urging political leaders to accept the results of the elections.¹⁶

According to the Alliance of Christian Advocacy Report, the churches moreover organize prayer meetings and intercessions for peaceful and successful elections during the election period. They encourage their members to pray for the country, the Electoral Commission, political leaders, and the electorates with the hope that the election process will be free from violence, intimidation and any other forms of electoral malpractice. Additionally, some church leaders have been known to publicly advocate for peaceful and nonviolent participation in the electoral process, urging political parties and candidates to respect the outcome of the elections and avoid any form of violence and post-election conflicts. They set up election observation teams to monitor the conduct of the elections, especially in areas noted for potential electoral malpractices, and promote the crucial role of peace before, during, and after the elections.¹⁷

In the run-up to general elections, some churches organize voter education programs and civic engagement activities to help their members understand the issues and make informed choices. They also advocate for peaceful and transparent elections and call on political parties and candidates to conduct themselves in a manner that reflects the country's democratic values. The churches continue

¹¹ Alliance for Christian Advocacy African's Report on the 2020 General Elections on Dec 10, 2020.

¹² European Union's Report on the 2020 General Elections.

¹³ African Union's Report on the 2020 General Elections on Dec 9, 2020.

¹⁴ Alliance for Christian Advocacy African's Report on the 2020 General Elections on Dec 10, 2020.

¹⁵ James Anquandah, *Agenda Extraordinaire: 80 Years of the Christian Council of Ghana, 1929-2009* (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 2009).

¹⁶ Excerpts of an Interview with Most Rev Dr Kwasi Aboagye Mensah on New Year, New Opportunities, Fresh Challenges January 1, 2020.

¹⁷ Alliance for Christian Advocacy African's Report on the 2020 General Elections on Dec 10, 2020.

to play a role in promoting peace and unity by organizing interfaith prayer services and other activities that bring together people from different political persuasions.¹⁸

It is important to note that the church in Ghana, like in any other country, should remain neutral in the political arena and not endorse or support any particular political party or candidate. This is to avoid polarizing its members and creating divisions within the congregations. The role of the church in general elections in Ghana should remain the promotion of civic responsibility, and democratic values, and to encourage its members to participate in the electoral process in a peaceful and responsible manner. This has remained a challenge as some church leaders keep making public declarations claiming victories for their favourite candidates. The church's involvement in the general elections in Ghana has helped to promote democratic values, encourage peaceful conduct during the elections and promote citizen participation in the electoral process. It plays an important role in promoting peaceful, free, and fair elections in Ghana by providing voter education, organizing prayer meetings, and advocating for peaceful participation in the electoral process.

Seeking God's Will Through Elections

The Bible encourages Christians to seek wisdom and discernment when making decisions, and this includes decisions related to politics and elections. James 1:5, for example, says, 'If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.' Seeking God's will is important when making important decisions, including participation in elections. This is because of the belief that God has a plan for mankind and for the world, and that seeking his guidance can help make decisions that align with his plans. Seeking God's will through elections is an important consideration for many Christians due to his sovereignty and ultimate control of all things, including the outcome of elections. As such, many Christians may pray for guidance and seek to discern God's will in their voting decisions.

Emmanuel Adow-Obeng has pointed out that seeking God's will through elections involves prayerfully considering the candidates, and prevailing issues and making informed decisions based on one's values and beliefs.¹⁹ Christians who seek God's guidance in elections believe that the choices that they make should be in line with God's principles and purposes. John Stott has indicated that God is interested in the affairs of human beings, including political processes and decisions, and guides and directs individuals in making wise choices.²⁰ The goal of seeking God's will in the context of elections, therefore, is to make choices that align with God's values and priorities that ultimately promote the flourishing of individuals and society as a whole. It involves reading the Bible and understanding what it teaches about issues such as justice, mercy, compassion, stewardship, integrity, sacrifice, and the common good. Christians seek to discern the character, values of the candidates, and their positions on various issues in such spiritual disciplines.

It is important to note that seeking God's will through elections does not mean that Christians will always agree on who to vote for or what policies to support. They, however, engage in respectful and constructive dialogue with one another and seek to understand different perspectives and opinions. Ultimately, seeking God's will through elections involves a deep commitment to prayer and discernment and a willingness to act on one's convictions while also respecting the diversity of opinions within the Christian community. It is important to note that while Christians may seek to discern God's will in elections, they should also be mindful of the need to respect the rights and opinions of others. Christians are called to love their neighbours and to seek the common good and this should be reflected in their attitudes and actions during the election process.

The goal of seeking God's will through elections is to ensure that Christians are fulfilling their civic duty as responsible citizens while also staying true to their faith and values. It is important to note

¹⁸ Alliance for Christian Advocacy African's Report on the 2020 General Elections on Dec 10, 2020.

¹⁹ Excerpts of an Interview with Rev Prof Emmanuel Adow Obeng on Towards Peaceful Elections November 19, 2020

²⁰ Kwabena Opuni-Frimpong, "Doing Public Theology in African Christianity: A Reflection on Communiqués by Churches in Ghana," *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies* 7, no. 11 (November 15, 2021): 190–200, <https://doi.org/10.38159/erats.20217111>.

however that seeking God's will in elections is not necessarily a straightforward process, and different Christians may have different interpretations of what God's will might be in a given situation. Moreover, Christians may have different political views and priorities and there may not always be a clear alignment between one's faith and one's political choices. Seeking God's will in elections requires a commitment to prayerful discernment and a willingness to engage in dialogue and reflections with others who may have different perspectives. It also requires openness to the possibility that a person's understanding of God's will may evolve over time as one grows in faith and understanding.

The Sacred Duty of Voting

Voting is a sacred duty. The sacredness of voting is demonstrated in the sense that God did not leave humanity to live in the state of nature after creation according to Asante.²¹ A state of nature means a situation where people have rights on their own to govern themselves. The moment people begin to live in that sense as in the rule of nature where everybody is a ruler unto themselves, there will be total chaos. God created the world in an orderly manner and he expects humanity to take care of the world that he has created in an orderly manner through the means of elections for the purpose of identification of leaders. During elections, the people see their sovereignty that God has given to them to a group of people so that they will ensure the orderliness and development of the nation. Voting is not just a civil responsibility. It is also a sacred responsibility. In Romans 13, the Scriptures say that it is God who appoints authorities, and therefore governance itself is a creation of God. Christians especially must consider voting, the process of identifying leaders, as sacred and serious Christian responsibility. In the estimation of Aboagye-Mensah, every election is about the future and it is safer and hopeful if it is done within the guidance and directions of God.²² The believer's song in such moments must remain, "Guide Me Oh Thou Great Jehovah." If elections are about the future, Jehovah must lead the way. Churches and nations continue to prepare for elections and therefore as the people prepare to vote, they should ensure that they do not deviate from the will of God for the nation for the days and years ahead. In the efforts to discern the will of God during elections, churches have been organizing programmes like prayer and fasting meetings. There are church members who participate in the prayer and fasting meetings that are organized towards elections hoping to discern the will of God as they participate in the electoral process.

Prayer and action go together. According to Adow-Obeng when believers fast and pray during elections, they hope that God in His grace will choose an individual or a group of people to take care of God's world and God's people.²³ He states "when we pray, we look forward for God to take full control over the nation. God is spirit and God will not come down by himself and say that I have lifted this person. God uses the ballots of voters to indicate his will for the people."²⁴ Voting becomes the answer to the believers' prayers and efforts to discover the will of God. After participation in church activities organised on elections, there is the need for people to make themselves available for God to use in the process of the identification of the leaders through voting. As the bible says "We wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers"(Eph. 6:12). The enemy will also want to seek the opportunity to take control and be in charge of the nation. In prayer, people must also exercise their franchise of voting, trusting that God through the sacred exercise of voting will select somebody that he has appointed to take care of the nation. God will use his people to answer the prayers during elections. Prayer and action have always moved together. When Christians fast and pray during elections, they must also participate in the process of voting.²⁵

²¹ Excerpts of a conversation with Emmanuel Asante.

²² Excerpts of a conversation with Aboagye-Mensah.

²³ Excerpts of a conversation with Adow-Obeng.

²⁴ Excerpts of a conversation with Adow-Obeng.

²⁵ Excerpts of a conversation with Emmanuel Asante.

Let Your Will Be Done

When Christians pray and ask God, “Let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”, they are also affirming their preparedness to allow God to use them as instruments to bring or to ensure that his will is established on earth. On the other hand, if the prayer “let your will be done on earth” is said and the people who said the prayer begin to do the very things that are not in keeping with what Scripture has taught, then obviously the prayers were just offered without expecting anything to happen. Thus, after praying “Let your will be done on earth,” the believer must also allow God’s will to be established through him/her and through their actions.

In the New Testament when the Apostles met, Judas lost his place because he had betrayed the Lord and therefore there was a need for him to be replaced. Quite a number of people qualified to be selected to replace Judas. The Apostles, however, prayed and said “God we have two people here, select among us the person that you want to take the apostolic responsibilities.” They nominated two persons and prayed over them and when they prayed, they also cast the lots after which God indicated the person that he had chosen (Acts 1:24-26). The person who was selected had the majority votes. It did not mean that the other person who lost did not have any votes. The majority chose Matthias and God has sided with this particular person.

Generally, several people vie for vacant positions like the presidency, members of parliament, church leadership, etc., during elections. The populace is not very certain who will be the best for the church and the nation even though voters have their preferences. After prayers, voters trust that God will use the majority to select one person to be the president, members of parliament, and church leaders. Asante adds that “when we surrender our will to God during elections, we must also accept the outcome of the electoral process as discovering the will of God for the church and the nation.”²⁶

Seeking God’s will in elections demands that the electorates must avoid any form of manipulation and inducements. John Wesley was very committed to the participation of Christians in elections. He admonished, however, that Christians refrain from taking anybody’s money so that the money will influence their preferences and choices of candidates during elections. In other words, “Do not be induced by money to elect somebody. Pray and seek divine direction and listen to the inner voice and vote as you are led. What Wesley said in his days in the 17th century applies to our times too.”²⁷

Some people when they go into the poll even want to take pictures so that they can show it to the person whom they have taken money from to demonstrate that they have voted for them. There is no good reason for people to do that. Some people take money from politicians and make vows as they even invoke curses on themselves if they fail to honour the vows to vote for them.²⁸ Voters must use their free consciences without any form of manipulation or financial inducements. They are to pray to the Lord and allow him to speak to them and vote as they are led in the effort to exercise their franchise without any financial influence and manipulation.

It must be noted that the person that was not voted for must not be considered an enemy. There is no need to say evil things about the person that one has decided not to vote for. In Psalm 37:5, Scripture admonishes Christians to commit their ways to the Lord and trust in him. Voting must be done with the fear of the Lord as a sacred duty. At the end of the day the Lord should take control over all the elections that have been done. According to Asante, Christians should say this prayer; *I’m committing my vote into the hands of the Lord. I’m committing the entire process into the hands of the Lord and he will take care of us, that is the way to go about it during elections. It should not be that I voted for this person, but the Lord did not choose him/her so I will not support him/her. I will support anyone who emerges as a winner at the end of the elections as the will of the Lord.*

When it became necessary for Israel to have a king, there were greater, stronger, and more handsome men available for selection. God, however, had his own criteria for the selection. It must be noted that the criteria were not the same. In the case of the replacement of Judas, the most

²⁶ Excerpts of an Interview with Emmanuel Asante.

²⁷ Excerpts of an Interview with Emmanuel Asante.

²⁸ Excerpts of an Interview with Serebour Quaicoe.

experienced and mature persons were selected. In the case of the selection of David on the other hand, the selection criteria favoured the least among the siblings.

Competence and Capacity to Perform

The character and morals of the person that is to be voted for must be essential. Christians should, however, be mindful that all have sinned and that there is no perfect human being on earth. If the electorates are looking for perfect persons to vote for then it is Jesus as noted by Aboagye-Mensah.²⁹ But Jesus is not one of the candidates voted for during elections. Anyone that is voted for certainly has certain challenges. It may be helpful for such candidates to accept their humanness, and accept criticisms and corrections. People who assume that they have been elected because they are perfect due to their own merit according to Asante may not go very far with the assumption of power as their weaknesses will definitely emerge.³⁰ People who are in leadership positions must always accept that they are there not just on their own merit only but also by the grace of God. God graciously chooses people to serve. They must therefore humble themselves and allow God to use them to serve the church and the nation.

One very paramount criterion that voters must look for in candidates during elections is competence and capacity to perform. The apostle who was elected to fill the vacancy had been with Christ. He was equipped for the office of an apostle and had the requisite knowledge for the service. Squire pegs in round holes must always be avoided if possible during elections. People who have not been adequately prepared for the offices they occupy are a demonstration of leadership deficiencies.

Loss of Elections

The fact must be accepted by all that it is the Lord who chooses. What it means is that one may have prayed and the results, however, indicate that his/her preferred candidate is not the one who has been chosen. Such a person must accept it in good faith and say that “your will be done oh Lord.” That is the greatest prayer that anybody could ever pray. People may have our desires but as Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, he looked at the depth of the suffering and said “Father, if it is possible this cup let it pass by me, I came to do your will, but if it is possible, the way I look at it, let it pass by me, nevertheless, not my will, but let your will be done”(Matt 26:39). This scripture can be twisted a bit further; “if it is possible let me be elected to serve your people. I’m ready to serve your people but having said that I say let your will be done.”

If the results are declared and even in situations where someone has manipulated things, God works in mysterious ways, he uses different means for his own purposes. Service to the nation is not just only becoming the president of the nation or parliamentarian. Opoku Onyina has admonished that if “we have the hearts to serve, he will create the opportunities for us to serve him and God’s people.”³¹ Officials manning elections have the responsibility to ensure that there is free, fair, and credible conduct of elections. Electoral bodies must avoid allowing themselves to be used by the devil to cause electoral violence and bloodshed. Nevertheless, those who are contesting elections must equally understand that in elections a contestant may either win or lose. Losers in elections need not be inciting people to disturb the peace of the nation. According to Okudzeto, contestants who lose and presume that they have been cheated in elections must use the available prescribed avenues for redress.³² Redress must be sought from the courts and other peace-negotiating bodies. If people go to elections with the mindset that if they lose the elections, it is because the elections have been rigged, they unreasonably undermine the maturity and credibility of the elections. Such people can easily incite people to cause trouble.³³

²⁹ Excerpts of a conversation with Aboagye-Mensah

³⁰ Excerpts of a conversation with Emmanuel Asante.

³¹ Excerpts of a conversation with Apostle Prof Opoku Onyina on Managing Uncertainty in Life April 23, 2020.

³² Excerpts of a conversation with Lawyer Sam Okudzeto on National Interest February 13 &20, 2020.

³³ Excerpts of an Interview with Serebour Quaiocoe.

Post-Election Celebrations

There are post-election losers and winners. While others count their losses, others definitely will celebrate their victories sometimes in the same communities and congregations. In certain cases, one may find some pastors who even though are supposed to maintain their neutrality, directly or indirectly depict that they are on the side of the victor or the loser by their mood of celebrations. Churches quickly associate with winners of elections without considering the losers not even in their prayers.

The churches need to be very careful and circumspect in post-election celebrations. The manner in which congregants jubilate can incite others to react in underhanded ways according to Asante.³⁴ Adow-Obeng states “We admonish those who have lost not to resort to arms and do things that will undermine the peace of the country, so also those who win must not allow their jubilations to undermine the peace of the country. There is a need for circumspection in celebrations having in mind the pain of others.”³⁵

Common Drivers of Electoral Conflicts in Ghana/Africa

There are major challenges that have confronted elections in Ghana before, during, and after elections. Despite the peaceful and electoral credibility advocacy by the church and other civil society organizations since 1992 the report of the Alliance for Christian Advocacy Africa on the 2020 general elections identified that the common drivers of electoral conflicts in Ghana have remained cheating, violence, ethnocentrism and dictatorship of the majority.³⁶ Cheating starts with the registration of electorates. It involves the problem of registering minors and bloating the register in areas that are considered strongholds for political parties. Cheating occurs at the polling stations, i.e., over-voting and preventing those considered as opponents from voting. Snatching of ballot boxes is a major way of cheating during elections. Cheating also occurs during the collation of results, i.e., manipulation of electoral results and manipulation of figures.

Violence in Ghanaian politics is both intra and inter. Thus, violent acts are seen within political parties and between the two main political parties. Violence occurs in the form of insults and abusive language. There are lots of insults in political discourse in Ghana. Violence occurs in the form of physical torture. Some people especially young people have lost their lives and others have been deformed through political violence. There is a spiritual dimension to violence where people curse political opponents and call on deities and river gods to kill their opponents. Sometimes their opponents are within their own political parties. Post-election violence has led to an emerging phenomenon of vigilante groups in the country.

The two main political parties play the ethnic card by employing ethnic groups where their candidates come from to vote on the basis of their tribal lineage. Some politicians make derogatory remarks about particular ethnic groups. This attitude has the propensity to spark ethnic tension. Voting on ethnic lines even if there are other better candidates is a mark of immaturity in democracy.

The dictatorship of the majority is demonstrated in elections through the manipulation of constitutions, security agencies, judiciary, electoral laws, and election results by political parties and governments in power due to the fact that they have the numbers and the advantage to do so. Terms of office in some African countries have been abused over the years due to the fact that the majority of the government supported it.

The Quest for Peaceful and Credible Elections

Elections are a major process for leadership identification and selection. People who participate in electoral processes are supposed to be mature and discerning. They are therefore considered to be trusted to make independent and wise decisions when given the required environment. Contrary to the free will in exercising of citizens’ franchise during elections, some African countries including Ghana have been characterized by tensions, civil wars, and bloodshed during elections. As a result of electoral

³⁴ Excerpts of a conversation with Emmanuel Asante.

³⁵ Excerpts of an Interview with Emmanuel Adow Obeng.

³⁶ Alliance for Christian Advocacy Africa’s Report on the 2020 General Elections.

tensions and fear of the unknown, some individuals pile up essential items like water, food, and fuel and withdraw monies from Banks. Others who can afford to relocate and settle in foreign countries with their families until they can guarantee the aftermath peaceful atmosphere of national elections also make the move.

The desires of most citizens have remained that such unnecessary political tensions must stop. There are other countries that also go through electoral processes in leadership identification and selection. However, a visit to such countries from their airports into the cities does not show any signs of elections not to mention tensions. Leadership is service. Those who aspire to provide public services seek such opportunities to serve. Why then should some innocent young people who normally fall prey to the hands of such politicians who manipulate them for political gains get maimed and sometimes killed?

As opined by Okudzeto, people who seek public office do so with the intention to serve their societies. The selection processes need not be destructive as sometimes is the case. The very people that potential leaders seek to serve need not be destroyed in the electoral process. Electoral tensions suggest the need for electoral reforms to improve the whole electoral system. Electoral reforms include the legal framework, attitude of politicians, media, and level of knowledge of the electorates on the electoral process.³⁷

The pursuit for change in the electoral system, political parties, homes, traditional communities, and organizations that have been characterized by violence is inimical to personal and national development. The Alliance for Christian Advocacy Africa report recommends that the electorate must pursue the change it wants in the electoral system, in governance, churches, political parties, family, and communities without violence. The quest for credible and peaceful elections should be done on the principles of dialogue, consensus building, and the very Constitution which governs the nation. The church must deepen its public education, mediation, reconciliation, and spiritual support dimensions to the electoral process.³⁸ The electorate must ensure that it pursues change without violence with the supreme interest of the family, community, and the nation at heart.

Concerns of the Churches in Ghana

The churches in Ghana have demonstrated ample concerns about the tensions associated with general elections. The concerns include how to create awareness among the electorates on the consequences and dangers of violence in electoral processes and to avoid electoral violence. An election is about leadership identification. There should not be destruction of lives and properties in the process as indicated by Adow-Obeng.³⁹ The church leaders moreover are concerned about how to get Christians to bring their faith values and Christian principles into public service. Christians who hold political and other public offices must portray Christ in those positions. How can institutions of state like the Police Service, Electoral Commission, media, etc., be professional in their dealings with the electoral process?

The concern of having all people and political parties treated equally under the laws governing elections in the nation, etc. has been expressed in the public statements of the leaders of individual and ecumenical bodies.⁴⁰ Getting elections to shift focus and attention from violence, insults, etc., into a contest of ideas where the focus is on competence, and not on one's tribe, inducements, etc., is a concern that has constantly been expressed by the churches and their leaders. Democracy must contribute to National Development and the common good.

Contribution of the Church to Peaceful and Credible Elections

The church is well positioned to continue making significant contributions towards the quest for peaceful and credible elections in Ghana despite the electoral challenges over the years. The church's

³⁷ Excerpts of a conversation with Sam Okudzeto.

³⁸ Alliance for Christian Advocacy Africa's Report on the 2020 General Elections.

³⁹ Excerpts of an Interview with Emmanuel Adow Obeng.

⁴⁰ Communiqué by the Christian Council of Ghana and the Ghana Catholic Bishops Council.

contribution towards peaceful, free, and fair elections, however, must be informed and guided by the church's history, credibility, and niche. The church has functioned in the election management process as an institution of calm and advocacy, public education and sensitization, media engagements, and organization of eminent personalities for interventions, mediations, and reconciliation. It has participated in the electoral process with the Electoral Commission and made provision for Christian ministry and spiritual support. The church does not need to deviate from the practice but must rather deepen those efforts.

The Church as an Institution of Calm and Advocacy

The role of the church as an institution of calm and advocacy generally is done through networking among ecumenical partners e.g. Christian Council of Ghana (CCG), Ghana Catholic Bishops Conference (GCBC) and Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council (GPCC). There is also a corporation among the various religious bodies (Faith-Based Organizations) e.g. CCG, GCBC, Office of National Chief Imam, Ahmadiya Movement, etc. These partnerships are aimed at presenting a united religious front in matters of national cohesion. Their positions are presented through collective engagements with the various stakeholders and the issuance of joint communiqués before, during, and after elections.⁴¹ The Presbyterian Church of Ghana for instance assigned some high-profile church members as Peace Ambassadors to embark on Peace Campaigns during the 2020 elections.⁴²

Public Education and Sensitization

Churches assist in awareness creation both among their members and in the public to sensitize electorates on the electioneering processes. Preparation and publication of educational materials on the elections and national issues are done for the usage of the members of the churches. They further pursue the organization of capacity-building workshops, seminars, etc., for church leaders who have specific roles to play in the electoral process across the country for both lay and ordained.

Media Engagement

The churches have made significant contributions to peaceful elections in Ghana through media engagements that deliberately seek to get their messages across to church members and the citizenry. Issuance of pastoral letters, communiqués, press releases, etc. on specific issues has remained the key media outlets strategies of the church leaders. Young people are specifically targeted on social media with peace messages and issues of national concern. Moreover, posters, banners, billboards, fliers, T-Shirts, stickers, etc. of some major aspects of the elections are prepared for church members and the general public.⁴³

Organization of Eminent Personalities for Intervention, Mediation and Reconciliation

Organization of eminent personalities for interventions, mediation, and reconciliation has served as a major contribution to peaceful elections before, during, and after the elections. The churches together with the National Peace Council, National House of Chiefs, Muslim leaders, etc. have sustained the practice which has come to be considered a unique contribution to national cohesion. The membership includes former Heads of State, pastors, traditional leaders, Muslim leaders, statesmen, women, etc. Such interventions have helped to quench violent uprisings during elections. Presidential Candidates are made to sign Peace Accords in public to commit to peace which has remained a key reference document for peaceful negotiations before, during after elections. The Electoral Commission of Ghana during the 2020 general elections similarly put together such eminent persons committee to provide advisory roles to the EC and other stakeholders on the elections.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Communiqué by the Christian Council of Ghana and the Ghana Catholic Bishops Council.

⁴² Excerpts of a conversation with Adow-Obeng himself a member of the PCG Peace Campaign Team of the PCG.

⁴³ Alliance for Christian Advocacy African's Report on the 2020 General Elections on Dec 10, 2020.

⁴⁴ Alliance for Christian Advocacy African's Report on the 2020 General Elections on Dec 10, 2020.

Participation in the Electoral Process of the Electoral Commission

Churches engage the Electoral Commission to ensure free and fair elections most often in closed-door meetings. Church leaders are offered accreditation to undertake electoral monitoring and observation throughout the process. Moreover, the EC provides invitations to some church leaders to attend Inter-Party Advisory Committee (IPAC) and other EC meetings. Churches further provide their church facilities like chairs, tables, canopies, church premises at polling stations, etc. to support the electoral processes. Churches collaborate with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) e.g. Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), Institute for Democratic Governance (IDEG), NCCE, and National Peace Council, etc. to speak to issues of national interest during general elections.

Provision of Christian Ministry and Spiritual Support

Churches provide Christian ministry and spiritual support to all Ghanaians, including politicians. Churches undertake certain activities with the aim of bringing the God factor into party politics and governance during general elections through spiritual disciplines like prayer and fasting meetings, preaching, workshops, and peace campaigns.⁴⁵ Pulpits are used as platforms to preach peace, tolerance, forgiveness, seeking divine directions, etc. Church leaders provide counselling and other spiritual support for both winning and losing candidates.

SUMMARY

Christian services and ministries function best in peaceful and secure environments. Some of the affected people involved in electoral violence and insecurity are members of the church a fact that must be a major concern to the church at all times. The public trust and confidence in the church and its leaders that have been established in the history, credibility, and niche in elections are the factors that have sustained the acceptance of the church in the general elections process. The protection of the public trust, credibility, and niche of the Church must remain very paramount at all times to facilitate the Church's contribution towards credible and peaceful elections.

CONCLUSION

This article has analyzed the role of the church in the search for credible and peaceful elections in Ghana. The effectiveness and efficiency of the church leaders in the contribution of the church in the electoral process largely depend on the capacity of the church leaders. The capacity building of church leaders is needed to ensure the best service by the church to the nation. The church must strengthen its Christian public witness, and pay attention to Christian advocacy ministry, and national cohesion, with the mindset that credible and peaceful elections are a collective responsibility. The pursuit for change in the electoral system, political parties, homes, traditional communities, and organizations that have been characterized by violence is inimical to personal and national development. The electorate must pursue the change wanted in the electoral system, in governance, churches, political parties, family, and communities without violence. The quest for credible and peaceful elections should be done on the principles of dialogue, consensus building, and the very Constitution which governs the nation. The church must deepen its public education, mediation, reconciliation, and spiritual support dimensions to the electoral process.

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⁴⁵ Alliance for Christian Advocacy African's Report on the 2020 General Elections on Dec 10, 2020.

APPENDIX

A: REPORTS

Alliance for Christian Advocacy African's Report on the 2020 General Elections on Dec 10, 2020

African Union's Report on the 2020 General Elections on Dec 9, 2020

CODEO's Report on the 2020 General Elections December 8, 2020

Electoral Commission of Ghana's Report on the 2020 General Elections on Dec 9, 2020

European Union's Report on the 2020 General Elections

B: INTERVIEWS

Most Rev Prof Emmanuel Asante on Religion, Peace and Security in Ghana October 21, 2019.

Lawyer Sam Okudzeto on National Interest February 13 & 20, 2020.

Most Rev Dr Kwasi Aboagye Mensah on New Year, New Opportunities, Fresh Challenges January 1, 2020.

Dr Serebour Quaiocoe on Preparation Towards December General Election November 5, 2020.

Dr Serebour Quaiocoe on Free, Fair, Credible and Peaceful Elections November 26, 2020.

Rev Prof Emmanuel Adow Obeng on Towards Peaceful Elections November 19, 2020.

Apostle Prof Opoku Onyina on Managing Uncertainty in Life April 23, 2020.

ABOUT AUTHOR

Kwabena Opuni-Frimpong (PhD) is Senior Lecturer in African Christianity at the Department of Religious Studies, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi – Ghana.