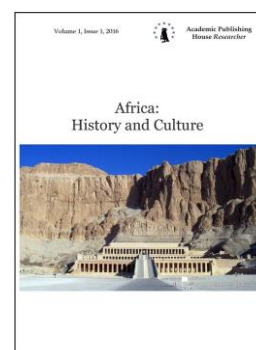


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## Political Party Vigilantism and Violence in Ghana: A Study of the Perceptions of Electorates in the Cape Coast Metropolis

Benedicta Incoom <sup>a</sup>, Enoch Kwame Tham-Agyekum <sup>b, \*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> School of Development Studies, University of Cape Coast, Ghana

<sup>b</sup> Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension, University of Cape Coast, Ghana

### Abstract

The views of electorates in the Cape Coast Metropolis were solicited on political party vigilantism and electoral violence in Ghana. The descriptive survey method was used to select 200 electorates via the snowball sampling technique. A questionnaire was designed to collect the data and analysed using descriptive statistics. The main findings of the research indicate that the electorates do not have any knowledge of vigilante groups in their constituency. However, they knew about vigilante groups in other parts of the country. The greatest cause of vigilantism in Ghana according to the study is the quest for political power. The greatest effect found of political vigilantism in Ghana is death and injuries. Political party vigilantism activities are dominated by young men and it is spearheaded by party executives. However, they engage in campaign activities before the election, protect ballot boxes during elections, and are employed if their party wins. Their activities affect voter turn-out during elections. The majority of the electorates would not consider being members of a political party vigilante group for financial gain neither do they know how political party vigilante groups are funded. Electorates asserted that political party vigilante groups should be disbanded and that they would not vote for a party that sponsors and supports vigilantism.

**Keywords:** electorates, party, perceptions, political, vigilantism, violence.

### 1. Introduction

The etymology of the word 'vigilante' is of Spanish origin, which means 'watchman' or 'guard', but its Latin root is 'vigil', which means, 'awake' or 'observant'. Rosenbaum and Sederberg (2016) defined political vigilantism as an organised effort outside legitimate channels to suppress or eradicate any threats to the status quo. In support of Rosenbaum and Sederberg, Amankwah (2017) described political vigilantism as an instance where organised armed or unarmed groups are deployed as private forces to safeguard the electoral prosperity of political parties. As stated by Johnston (1996), vigilante acts occur when people have taken the law into their own hands.

In many developing democracies, including Ghana, political activism and particularly, vigilantism, is commonly a violent display of brute-force to protect the interest of a group that one belongs to as argued by Rosenbaum and Sederberg (2016). Bob-Milliar's studies on party youth activists and electoral violence in Ghana brought to fore, what the author perceived as low-intensity electoral violence by youths affiliated with political parties in Ghana (Bob-Milliar, 2012, 2014). In several Sub-Sahara African countries, electoral mobilisation and campaigning as part of political

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\* Corresponding author

E-mail addresses: [donsprakels@gmail.com](mailto:donsprakels@gmail.com) (E.K. Tham-Agyekum)

activism are undertaken by party “foot soldiers”. These youthful party “foot soldiers” have certain characteristics as described by Bob-Milliar as being mostly men between the ages of 18 and 35, generally unemployed or underemployed, and uneducated or with only basic formal education. Most are zealous sympathisers of a particular candidate but some are card-bearing members of a political party (Bob-Milliar, 2014). Again the author stated that foot soldiers undertake various tasks for their political parties and or candidates, which includes but not limited to, attending rallies, taking part in anti-government demonstrations, or helping a party and or candidate during and after elections. The vigilante individuals usually have biological and physical features that enable them to undertake such security functions; popularly called ‘macho men’. They are often only known by a few party executives (Amankwah, 2017).

Ghana has two major political parties; the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC). The activities of these political party activists from are often based on the notion of reciprocity and the provision of personalised goods. Similarly, these party activists operate within a clientelism environment where there is the notion of the party in government using state power and authority to dispense patronage (Bob-Milliar, 2014). Those who are easily recruited into these groups variously believe that public office holders (patrons) are wealthy and control massive resources. Consequently, they expect the political elite to share the state resources with them once they are in government. In expectation, they work beyond the call of duty to win and retain power for their political elite. They, thus, feel entitled to jobs and all the resources conferred by power. This category of political activists, therefore, resort to all means to forcibly capture state resources, property, and opportunities, especially when there is a feeling of delay on the part of their patrons in meeting the needs of their clients (vigilante groups) within the framework of patron-client relations (Gyampo et al., 2017).

The phenomenon of political party vigilante groups and their activities have been an aberration in Ghana’s politics, especially in the Fourth Republic. Over the years, the level of violence that has characterised the activities of party vigilante groups during each phase of the electoral cycle has increased, especially since the 2000s. The 2016 Presidential and General Elections of Members of Parliament were without exception. The immediate post-election phase also witnessed some incidents around the political transition, nearly marring the almost smooth process. Unfortunately, the manifestations of political party vigilante groups have continued from the transition and into the governing period (Coalition of Domestic Election Observers, 2017). Political party vigilantes employ tactics such as harassing and beating-up anyone perceived to be obstructing their interests. Lately, they have resorted to illegal acts; causing a disturbance during elections, confiscation of both private and state property, forcible eviction and the ejection of state officials from their apartments and offices, physical assault of former government appointees, and other human rights abuses. Their illegal acts, especially, during elections have filled Ghana’s body politic with tension and bitterness. Gyampo states that the potential of these groups and their patrons to lead Ghana on the path of chaos is beginning to dawn on Ghanaians – and, in fact, on non-Ghanaians who have an equal stake in the peace and stability of Ghana (Gyampo et al., 2017). This situation violates human rights because citizens must be totally free from violence of any kind (Buur, 2008). Political party vigilante groups pose a great danger to the country’s electoral politics and democratic development (Paalo, 2017).

Over the years, the level of violence that has characterised the activities of party vigilante groups during each phase of the electoral cycle has increased, especially since the 2000s. The 2016 General Elections – Presidential and Parliamentary elections were without exception. The immediate post-2016 election phase also witnessed some incidents around the political transition, nearly marring the almost smooth process. Unfortunately, the manifestations of political party vigilante groups have continued from the transition and into the governing period. The potential of vigilantism to destroy the peaceful democratic culture of the nation and especially in the run-up to the 2020 elections is very high.

Although literature abounds in the area of vigilantism, few studies have been conducted on vigilantism in the Cape Coast Metropolis. By conducting this study, this research seeks to examine the views of electorates in the Cape Coast Metropolitan Area on political party vigilantism and violence in Ghana.

## 2. Research Questions

- i. What is the perception of electorates on the incidences of political party vigilantism in Ghana?
- ii. What are the reasons why vigilante groups become violent during elections?
- iii. To what extent does political party vigilantism influence outcomes of elections?

## 3. Method

### *Design*

Cohen et al. (2007) stated that research design is governed by the notion of “fitness” for purpose and therefore the purpose of the research determines the methodology and the design of the research hence there was the need to employ in this study the quantitative research. The method was used in describing and understanding vigilantism and political violence in the community under study so as to gain an insider perspective of the respondents’ social reality (De Vos et al., 2011). The descriptive survey method was utilised.

### *Instrument*

For the purpose of this study, the researcher used a questionnaire to collect primary data from the field. The study used descriptive statistics for data presentation and interpretation of the analysis (Babbie, 2005; Creswell, 2009). As a result, for the field data, the Statistical Package for Social Science software version 20 was used to capture data.

### *Population*

The research project was undertaken in the Cape Coast Metropolis. It covered areas such as Ola, UCC, Abura, Pedu, and Kotokuraba. Cape Coast is bounded on the south by the Gulf of Guinea, West by Komenda Edina Eguafo/Abem Municipal Assembly, East by Abura Asebu Kwamankese District and North by the Twifo Hemang Lower Denkyira District. The population of the Metropolis stands at 169,894 with 82,810 males and 87,084 females (Ghana Statistical Service, 2010).

### *Sampling*

The snow-ball sampling technique which is a non-probability sampling was employed in this study. Non-probability is a sampling technique where the samples are gathered in a process that does not give all the individuals in the population an equal chance of being selected (Unrau et al., 2007). According to Lindlof and Taylor (2002), sampling technique or strategy guides the researcher as to the choices of what to observe or whom to interview. They assert that an intelligent sampling strategy enables researchers to make systematic contact with communication phenomena with a minimum of wasted effort. This is because electorates prefer to hide their identity when it comes to party affiliations. The first respondent was one Assemblyman who was a resident of the Ola Community. He was located and was asked to help to locate other electorates. The step was repeated until the needed sample size was found.

### *Sample*

Bless et al. (2006) stated that population is all the people, events, case records or other sampling units with which the research problem is concerned. Also, Ngulube (2005) further adds that it is important for the researcher to carefully and completely define the population before collecting samples hence there is the need for the study to define its population. However, the population for this research was all electorates in the Cape Coast Metropolis of which 200 electorates were selected (see Table 1). Out of this total, 50 % are males and 50 % females to ensure a gender balance. The age range of electorates is between the ages of 18 years and 60 years. Sampling is the process of selecting participants for a research project. In terms of the marital status of the respondents, 45 % were single. For family size, the majority of the electorates (48 %) had a family size of 5 persons. Also, the level of education of the respondents showed a majority of them had basic education (36 %). In terms of occupation, educational workers dominated the distribution with 34 %.

**Table 1.** Bio-Data of Respondents

Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
Sex of Respondents		
Male	100	50.0
Female	100	50.0
Age of Respondents		
18-25 years	72	36.0
29-39 years	96	48.0
40-50 years	12	6.0
51 and above	20	10.0
Marital Status		
Single	90	45.0
Married	54	27.0
Separated	36	18.0
Widowed	20	10.0
Family Size		
1	41	20.5
2	30	15.0
3	13	6.5
4	21	10.5
5	95	47.5
Level of Education		
Basic	71	35.5
Secondary	60	30.0
Tertiary	69	34.5
Occupation		
Informal Work Sector	68	34.0
Construction Worker	12	6.0
Public Service	29	14.5
Educational Worker	33	16.5
Civil Service	19	9.5
None	39	19.5

#### 4. Results and Discussion

##### *Definition of Political Party Vigilantism in Ghana*

According to the respondents, vigilantism is an instance where organised members of a party take the law into their own hands to protect the ballot box, party members or advance their selfish interests. Other definitions include; “a group of party supporters take the law into their own hands, hide behind party colours and perpetuate violence in the name of shielding their own”, “it is the use of grassroots macho guys to forcibly take over government properties with the intent of support from their ruling party”, “it is a situation where leaders of political parties use individual persons to win elections through any dubious means”, “they are groups within political parties that perform violent acts during election times and afterward and are recruited and trained by the parties themselves”. From the definitions, it could be said that the study participants understood vigilantes to be persons or group of persons who use violence to intimidate their opponents, they are formed by political parties, they are armed, they use illegal means to protect their political interest and they help political parties to win power. The perception of the respondents on the definition of vigilantism is consistent with the definition by Rosenbaum and Sederberg (2016) who defined vigilantism as an organised effort outside legitimate channels to suppress or eradicate any threats to the status quo.

### ***Knowledge and Personal Experience of Vigilante Groups***

As shown in [Table 2](#), about 77 % of the respondents indicated that they did not have knowledge of vigilante groups in their constituency while 23 % claimed they knew of vigilantes in the constituency. However, when asked about the names, they only mentioned names of groups that were outside their constituency; Azoka Boys and Delta Force. It may seem that these two groups are very popular among people in the country, to the extent that people perceive that they may even be present in their communities. The implication is that in the Cape Coast Metropolis, there may not be any known vigilante group there as at the time this research was being carried out.

Approximately 70 % of the respondents indicated that they had knowledge of vigilante groups in other parts of Ghana. The examples they gave included groups such as Invisible Forces, Azorka Boys in Tamale, Bolga Bulldogs in Bolgatanga, Delta Force in Kumasi and the Hawks. The majority of the respondents (73 %) have not had any personal experience of political vigilante groups. A further explanation showed that most of those who had had personal experiences of political vigilante groups had it through attacks and assaults during an election outside their constituency. Another experience was an open confrontation between thugs who attacked the community's public toilet demanding that the managers should hand over to them because there was a change of government.

**Table 2.** Knowledge and Personal Experience of Vigilante Groups

Responses	Constituency		Other Parts of Ghana		Personal Experience	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Yes	92	23.3	106	70.0	93	26.7
No	108	76.7	94	30.0	107	73.3
Total	200	100.0	200	100.0	200	100.0

### ***Causes of Vigilantism in Ghana***

According to the respondents in [Table 3](#), the greatest cause of vigilantism in Ghana is the quest for political power (12.5 %). The other causes are as follows; unemployment (12 %), retaliation (11.5 %), absence of trust in the security system (11 %), protection of votes (11 %), corruption (11 %), poor educational system (10.5 %), poor enforcement of laws (10.5 %) and drug trade (10 %). The findings from the study of Straus and Taylor (2012) confirm the results found in this study. They also claimed that electoral violence is primarily the result of incumbents manipulating the electoral procedure to maintain power. This means that the mechanisms that help to explain the occurrence of contentious politics within a polity are linked to changes in political opportunities. Oduro (2012) also asserted that electoral violence is largely due to the reluctance of the security services to investigate and prosecute crimes caused by vigilantism. This has caused a series of unresolved chaos and confusion resulting in mistrust in the security systems. Illiteracy and unemployment are also cited by some authors as key causes of vigilantism ([Agbiboa, 2018](#); [Musa et al., 2017](#)).

**Table 3.** Causes of Vigilantism in Ghana

Causes	Frequency	Percent
Poor educational system	21	10.5
Quest for political power	25	12.5
Drug trade	20	10.0
Poor enforcement of laws	21	10.5
Unemployment	24	12.0
Retaliation	23	11.5
Absence of trust in the security system	22	11.0
Protection of votes	22	11.0
Corruption	22	11.0
Total	200	100.0

### ***Effects of political vigilantism in Ghana***

According to the respondents, the greatest effect of political vigilantism is death and injuries (12.5 %). The other effects are as follows; leads to fear and chaos (12 %), delays development (12 %), break-in morality (11 %), instability and insecurity (10.5 %), promotes discomfort (11 %), and destruction and loss of properties (11 %). According to Levine (2011), acts of vigilantism reinforce mistrust, hatred and tensions in society such that it spreads a cycle of violence and a culture of fear. Buur (2009) noted that vigilantism disrupts the democratic process which further delays development in the country.

**Table 4.** Effects of Political Vigilantism in Ghana

<b>Effects</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Break-in morality	22	11.0
Infringement on rights of the citizenry	20	10.0
Instability and insecurity in the country	21	10.5
Promotes discomfort in society	22	11.0
Leads to fear and chaos	24	12.0
Leads to civil unrest in the country	20	10.0
Death and injuries	25	12.5
Delays development in society	24	12.0
Destruction and loss of properties	22	11.0
Total	200	100.0

### ***Perception of Electorates on Vigilantism in Ghana***

The respondents were asked about their perceptions concerning vigilantism in Ghana (see Table 5). The statement with the highest rank was the fact that political party vigilantism activities are dominated by young men (Mean = 3.90) while the least rating was given to the fact that political party vigilantism complements the activities of the security services (Mean = 1.00). Historical evidence as given by Gyampo et al., (2017) shows that political party vigilantism began as youth activism in politics, and in addition, they have been engaged before, during, and after elections.

**Table 5.** Perception of Electorates on Vigilantism in Ghana

<b>Statements</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>
Political party vigilantism activities are dominated by young men	3.90	1.03
Political party vigilantism threatens the political stability of Ghana	3.80	1.42
Political party vigilantism is founded mainly within the NPP	3.07	1.34
Political party vigilantism is founded mainly within the NDC	3.00	1.44
Political party vigilantism contributes to the electoral success of political parties in Ghana	2.93	1.70
Political party vigilantism occurs in all regions	2.63	1.50
People join vigilante groups mainly for financial gain	1.80	1.27
Political party vigilantism activities are always violent	1.63	0.81
Political party vigilantism activities are dominated by young women	1.07	0.25
Political party vigilantism complements the activities of the security services	1.00	0.00

### ***Organisation of Political Party Vigilante Groups***

Concerning how political party vigilante groups are organised, most of the respondents (20 %) indicated that they are organised by party executives. The rest are as follows; party sympathisers (18 %), youth organisers (17.5 %), prominent people in society (17 %), and flag bearers (13 %). Amankwah (2017) gives credence to the fact that vigilante individuals are usually known and championed by party executives.

**Table 6.** Organisation of Political Party Vigilante Groups

Organisation	Frequency	Percent
Party sympathisers	36	18.0
Party executives	40	20.0
No idea	29	14.5
Flag bearers	26	13.0
Prominent people in society	34	17.0
Youth organisers	35	17.5
Total	200	100.0

### ***Role of Vigilante Groups in the Political Party Structure***

From the results, it could be said that vigilante groups do not play any role in the structure of political parties (17 %). It is clear from the results that political vigilante groups are not officially recognised by the political parties. This confirms the assertion that they are informal groups who engage in illegal activities by helping their patrons to gain political power (Agbiboa, 2018; Musa et al., 2017; Rosenbaum, Sederberg, 2016).

**Table 7.** Role of Vigilante Groups in the Political Party Structure

Roles	Frequency	Percent
They do not play any role in Ghanaian politics	34	17.0
Provide money to community members	15	7.5
Secure political victories for their parties	20	10.0
Cause chaos in places that are not their strongholds	19	9.5
Protect the ballot boxes	24	12.0
They make the party visible to the community	16	8.0
They protect party executives	15	7.5
They protect the party members	10	5.0
They provide backup for the security in the party	13	6.5
Serve as assassins to the ambitions of political leaders.	23	11.5
Ensure security	11	5.5
Total	200	100.0

### ***Role in Elections***

In terms of the role of vigilantes before elections, majority of the respondents (29.5 %) indicated that they engage in campaigns and keep-fit activities. In terms of the role of vigilantes during elections, majority of the respondents (33 %) indicated that they protect the ballot boxes. In terms of the role of vigilantes after elections, majority of the respondents (38 %) indicated that they are employed if their party wins. The result is an admission by the respondents that political party vigilantism occurs before, during and after elections. The blame was squarely placed at the doorsteps of the two major political parties in Ghana; NDC and NPP.

**Table 8.** Role in Elections

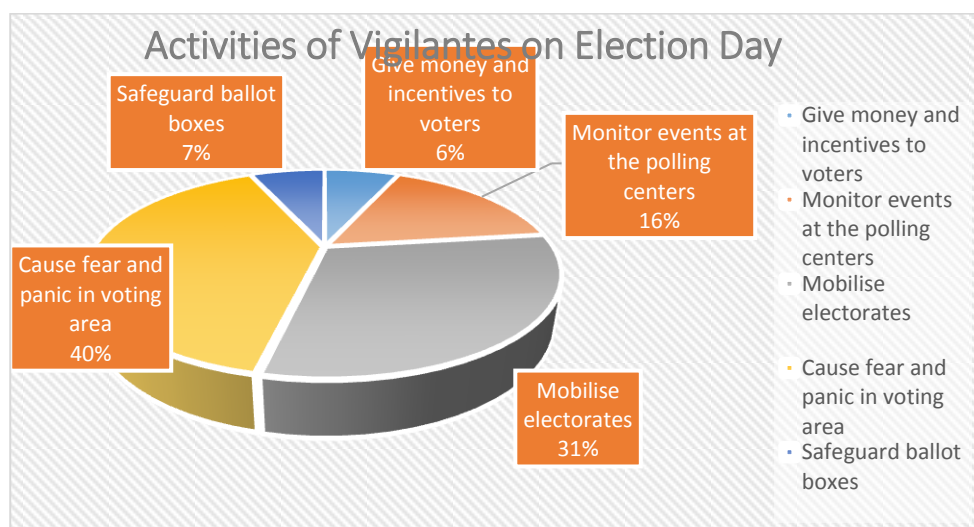
Roles	Before		During		After	
	Freq.	Per.	Freq.	Per.	Freq.	Per.
Campaign and keep-fit activities	59	29.5	-	-	-	-
Internal security operatives for the party	21	10.5	-	-	-	-
Go on errands	25	12.5	-	-	-	-
Prevent dissenters from exposing the party	11	5.5	-	-	-	-
Protect the party executives wherever they go	8	4.0	-	-	-	-
Destabilise primaries and rallies of their oppositions	35	17.5	-	-	-	-

Trained on polling stations operations	41	20.5	-	-	-	-
Protect the ballot boxes	-	-	66	33.0	-	-
Monitor elections at the polling stations	-	-	14	7.0	-	-
Torment opponents	-	-	41	20.5	-	-
Do all the dirty works in the party	-	-	32	16.0	-	-
Encourage party supporters to vote without fear	-	-	32	16.0	-	-
Mobilise voters	-	-	15	15.5	-	-
After elections, they are not recognized	-	-	-	-	62	31.0
Chase civil servants out of their offices	-	-	-	-	13	6.5
Cause confusion if electoral results do not favour them	-	-	-	-	4	2.0
Scramble for positions if their party wins	-	-	-	-	33	16.5
Jubilation after elections	-	-	-	-	12	6.0
They are employed if their party wins	-	-	-	-	76	38.0

### Political Party Vigilantism and Outcome of Elections in Ghana

The activities of vigilante groups based on some knowledge the respondents have about them include the following (see [Figure 1](#)); monitor events at the polling centers (16 %), mobilise electorates (31 %), cause fear and panic in voting area (40 %), safeguard ballot boxes (7%) and give money and incentives to voters (6 %). Straus and Taylor (2012) confirmed that vigilante groups engage in activities that influence electoral fortunes before, during and after election day. According to results, the majority of the respondents (63.3 %) perceived that the activities of political party vigilantes affect voter turn-out during elections while 36.7 % of the respondents perceive that the activities of political party vigilantes do not affect voter turn-out during elections. The reasons include the fact that if people go out to vote, they may meet violence and end up getting injured and as such, eligible voters would prefer to stay away from polling centres to avoid possible harm to them.

Furthermore, about 164 of the respondents indicated that they would not consider being members of a political party vigilante group for financial gain while 36 of them indicated that they would consider joining a political party vigilante group for financial gain. When asked about the disbanding of political party vigilante groups, 187 of them indicated that they should be disbanded while 13 of them indicated that they should not be disbanded. Those who suggested its disbandment are of the view that vigilantism of any kind destabilizes the country, they are not legitimate and not recognized by the laws of the land, their activities are getting out of hand and not good for national integration, they are a threat to the country's democracy, they are not serving any purpose in the country and they disturb peace in society.

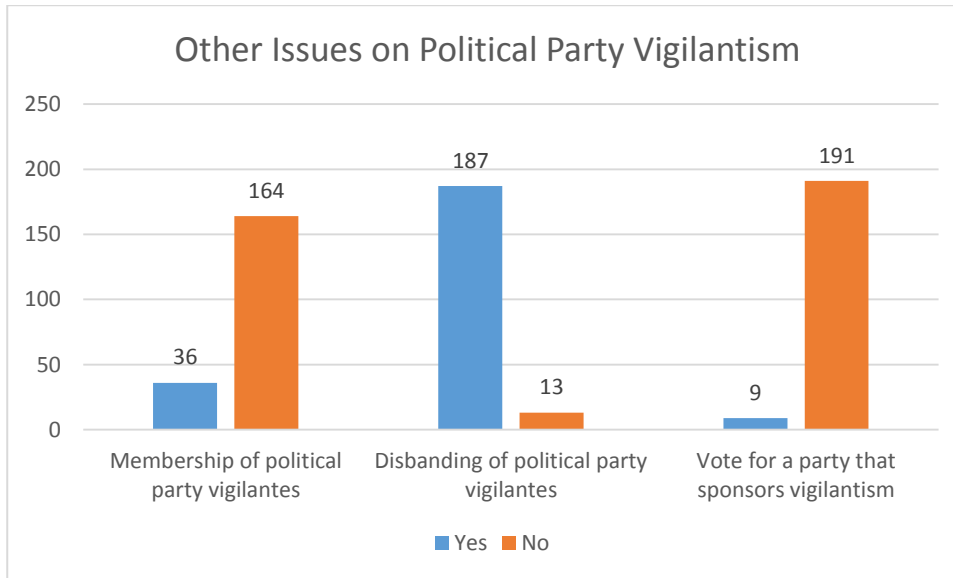


**Fig. 1.** Activities of Vigilantes on Election Day



### Additional Issues in Political Party Vigilante Groups in Ghana

About 191 of the respondents indicated that they would not vote for a party that sponsors and supports vigilantism while 9 of them indicated that they would vote for a party that sponsors and supports vigilantism. Those who indicated that they would vote for such parties indicated that all political parties have such groups so it does not matter. Those who claimed that they would not vote for such parties indicated the following reasons; they cannot vote for a political party that does not use the state provided security forces, such groups fuel conflicts, they tend to be derailed by their echoed promises and assurances given by their patrons and they create confusion and chaos.



**Fig. 2.** Other Issues on Political Party Vigilante Groups

### 5. Conclusion

The electorates do not have any knowledge of vigilante groups in their constituency. However, they knew about vigilante groups in other parts of the country. Very few had had personal experiences of political vigilante groups and it was through attacks and assaults during an election conducted in other Constituencies. The greatest cause of vigilantism in Ghana is the quest for political power. The greatest effect of political vigilantism in Ghana is destruction, injuries, and death.

Political party vigilantism activities are dominated by young men and it is spearheaded by party executives. Vigilante groups do not play any role in the structure of political parties. However, they engage in the campaign and keep-fit activities before an election, protect ballot boxes during elections and are employed if their party wins after elections. Their activities affect voter turn-out during elections.

The majority of the electorates would not consider being members of a political party vigilante group for financial gain, and they do not know how political party vigilante groups are funded. Electorates asserted that political party vigilante groups should be disbanded and that they would not vote for a party that sponsors and supports vigilantism.

### 6. Recommendations

Considering the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made;

Since the existence of political party vigilante groups is illegal, the Government should ban these groups immediately as a matter of national security.

The leaderships of both the NPP and the NDC who are largely responsible for the emergence of these groups should own up to their responsibilities and work together with the nation's security to disband all politically affiliated vigilante groups.

## 7. Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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