This policy brief explores the activities of political vigilante groups in Ghana in relation to the Vigilantism and Related Offenses Law, 2019. It notes that contrary to the widespread perception of political vigilante groups as violent political actors, they contribute to Ghana’s stability and democratic peace. It therefore comes up with recommendations for integrating them into Ghana’s political and democratic architecture.

Political vigilantism in Ghana dates back to the struggle for independence and the First Republic. The earliest of such groups, the Veranda Boys, was formed by Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana’s first prime minister and president. Political vigilante groups have featured in Ghana’s Four Republics (1960-1966; 1969-1972; 1979-1981 and 1993-Present). However, due to the short-lived nature of the first three Republics, their impact on the governance system could not be fully examined. Since the Fourth Republic has endured for over two decades, its longevity has provided adequate time for political vigilante groups to evolve and situate themselves firmly in the political process. In the Fourth Republic these groups have coalesced around the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and National Democratic Congress (NDC).

This policy brief argues that political vigilante groups cannot be branded only as violent and disruptive groups and disbanded on that basis. Rather they should be recognized as political actors with certain

**Recommendations**

- Recognition of political vigilante groups as political actors operating within registered political parties.
- Training of political vigilante groups on citizenship rights, electoral laws, processes, and good governance by the National Commission for Civic Education.
- Political institutions and security agencies should develop programs that define the rules of engagement of political vigilante groups on conflict prevention and party activities particularly when their party is in power.
- Political party leaders and elites must desist from inciting political vigilante groups ahead of local by-elections.
- The government should revisit the definition of political vigilante groups in Vigilantism and Related Offences Act, 2019 in light of recommendations 1 to 3 above.

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1 Political vigilantism is defined here as the activities of political party members or sympathizers that aim at contributing to the political growth of their political parties in building the nation-state without negating the application of force or violence.

2 Political vigilante groups are sections of political party members that come together to fight for their own political interests and that of their political parties.

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interests that are compatible with democratic governance in Ghana. Their activities are pertinent to the enhancement of peace and democratic growth especially at the local government level.

**ACTIVITIES OF POLITICAL VIGILANTE GROUPS**

The discourse on political vigilantism in Ghana largely frames political vigilante groups as a threat to democratic governance and security because of their association with collective or group violence. The President of the Republic of Ghana signed the Vigilantism and Related Offenses Bill into law in September 2019, making political vigilantism a criminal offence. Findings from recent fieldwork in Tamale and Kumasi during my research project on political vigilante groups like the Kandahar, Azorka Boys, Aluta Boys, Al Jazeera, Bawumia Boys, Samira Boys, NDC Task Force, Invincible Force, and Delta Force, indicate that violent acts by such groups do not constitute the core of their day to day activities. There is evidence that political vigilante groups are engaged in the mobilization of people at the district and community level for political participation and representation, community engagement in development activities and the provision of security for political elites and during political party activities. Other roles include liaising with political elites for citing development projects within local communities and the creation of employment opportunities for members of their group, relatives and friends. A respondent recounted how they came together as a political vigilante group:

“In 1992 when democracy started, we were trading in the market, but we realized that in politics we need people. We formed the Central Defense Movement because we identified that we could only make demands if we came together. We became the mouthpiece of the grassroots in seeking for jobs and addressing some of their socioeconomic problems. We therefore attracted many members to our group.” (Interview on September 20th, 2019)

Political vigilante groups do not directly oppose the state, rather they mobilize to gain access to public resources, or power over the distribution of state-controlled resources. Some of the respondents recounted the advocacy roles that they play in shaping democratic governance in Ghana:

“The road here is tarred because of the presence of Aluta Boys. We advocated for the construction of roads in our vicinity.” (Interview on October 19th, 2019)

Another member of one of the political vigilante groups also reiterated that:

“The road here is well constructed because of the lobbies that we made (sic) with our Member of Parliament and the minister for roads. We have also ensured that our children go to school so that they can be like you (the researcher). Some of our members have gotten scholarships to further their education.” (Interview on September 2nd, 2019).

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Evidence from the field show that political vigilante groups should not be only seen as irrational or disruptive actors whose activities are antithetical to democratic governance and peace in Ghana. It remains to be seen if the activities of these political actors can be curtailed with legislative and executive instruments. In this regard, the following recommendations are made to facilitate their effective incorporation into Ghana’s political and democratic architecture:

- Recognition of political vigilante groups as political actors operating within registered political parties.
- Training of political vigilante groups on citizenship rights, electoral laws, processes, and good governance by the National Commission for Civic Education.
- Political institutions and security agencies should develop programs that define the rules of engagement of political vigilante groups on conflict prevention and party activities particularly when their party is in power.
- Political party leaders and elites must desist from inciting political vigilante groups ahead of local by-elections.
- The government should revisit the definition of political vigilante groups in the Vigilantism and Related Offences Act, 2019 in light of recommendations 1 to 3 above.