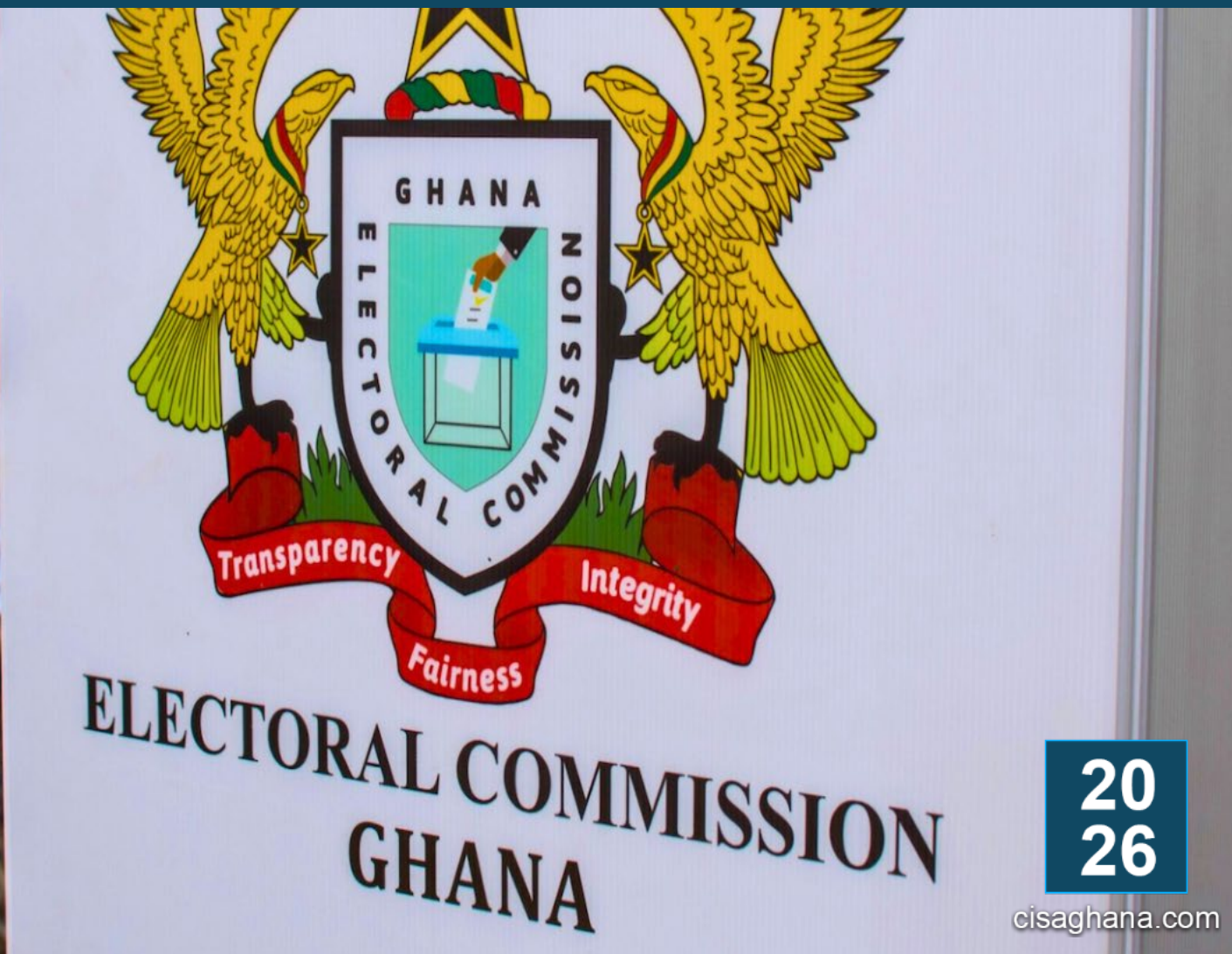


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**Election Security Ahead of the Next Polls:  
What Could Go Wrong?**



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## **INTRODUCTION**

In August 2026, President John Dramani Mahama confirmed that Ghana will hold a national referendum on proposed constitutional amendments alongside the 2027 District Assembly Elections, combining a local government poll with a first-of-its-kind national vote on entrenched constitutional provisions (MyJoyOnline, 2026). That same month, the National Peace Council convened an Inter-Party Dialogue in Accra with the Electoral Commission, political parties and civil society partners to strengthen trust and communication ahead of the country's next electoral cycle (National Peace Council, 2026). The two developments sit side by side but address different problems. One is a logistical and constitutional undertaking of unusual scale. The other is a trust-building exercise that has, in various forms, preceded every recent Ghanaian election. This article asks what could realistically go wrong in the run-up to and during the 2027 polls, drawing on the documented failures of the 2020 and 2024 election cycles and on the specific limits of dialogue-based prevention as currently practised.

## **A GENUINELY NEW CONFIGURATION**

The 2027 polls break from the pattern of previous district assembly elections. Under the proposal, voters will simultaneously elect assembly members and decide whether to amend entrenched provisions of the 1992 Constitution, including the extension of presidential and parliamentary terms from four to five years (Graphic Online, 2026). A referendum on entrenched provisions requires a turnout of at least forty percent of registered voters and the support of at least seventy five percent of valid votes cast (MyJoyOnline, 2026). The government has indicated that the two implementing bills should be ready by October 2026, leaving a compressed window for the Electoral Commission to design a dual ballot process, retrain officials and communicate an unfamiliar procedure to voters at every polling station in the country (Graphic Online, 2026). District assembly elections have historically drawn lower national attention and turnout than presidential and parliamentary contests, yet they are also historically prone to localised violence tied to chieftaincy disputes and land conflicts. Layering a nationally contested referendum onto that pattern creates a genuinely new risk profile rather than a routine repetition of past practice.

## **LESSONS FROM 2020 AND 2024: WHERE THE SYSTEM BROKE**

Ghana's most rigorous accounting of recent election violence comes from a Special Investigation Task Force established within the Criminal Investigations Department following a presidential directive on 10 January 2025. Its findings, reported in November 2025, confirmed fifteen deaths and thirty-nine injuries across the 2020 and 2024 election cycles combined (Graphic Online, 2025). The causal breakdown is instructive. Three cases resulting in four deaths were traced to firearm use by armed police patrol teams.

Military personnel were found responsible for three further deaths when intervening to restore order in chaotic crowds. Four cases resulting in five deaths occurred when party enthusiasts used firearms against political opponents (Graphic Online, 2025). In the Techiman South case from 2020, ballistic investigation could not identify the weapon responsible because spent shell casings were never retrieved from the scene, an evidentiary failure that has left one of the most prominent election deaths of that cycle without a clear line of accountability (AllAfrica, 2025). By August 2026, the Interior Minister reported that twenty-five suspects were facing trial in connection with the two election cycles while fourteen others remained at large and were being actively pursued (Ghanaian Times, 2026). The government has separately committed to compensating bereaved families and injured victims (AllAfrica, 2025).

The December 2024 to July 2025 dispute over the Ablekuma North parliamentary seat illustrates how quickly a coalition failure can escalate. The Electoral Commission was unable to complete collation for the constituency after results from sixty-two polling stations went uncollated, prompting the Commission to nullify an earlier declaration and, ultimately, to order a rerun across nineteen polling stations on 11 July 2025 (Dubawa Ghana, 2025). The rerun itself was marred by armed men forcing entry into at least one polling station and assaulting bystanders, with gunshot injuries recorded among eighteen people, including a sitting Member of Parliament (Dubawa Ghana, 2025). The Coalition of Domestic Election Observers criticised the police for standing by despite a visible security deployment and prior warnings of potential violence. They further noted the presence of unauthorised individuals believed to be political vigilantes moving freely near polling stations in unregistered vehicles (CODEO, cited in Modern Ghana, 2025). Security analysts convened by Graphic Online after the incident called explicitly for stronger vetting of deployed personnel, a more independent and transparent Electoral Commission, and legal accountability mechanisms for political actors who incite violence (Graphic Online, 2025).

## **THE TRUST DEFICIT UNDERLYING THESE RISKS**

These operational failures sit atop a longer-term erosion of institutional trust. Afrobarometer's most recent pre-2024 survey found that only thirty-three percent of Ghanaians trusted the Electoral Commission somewhat or a lot, the lowest level recorded in more than two decades of surveying. Sixty-four percent still judged the 2020 election to have been generally free and fair (Afrobarometer and CDD-Ghana, 2024). That survey predates the Ablekuma North collation crisis and its violent rerun, developments that are unlikely to have improved public confidence in the Commission's capacity to manage a dual ballot process under greater logistical strain. This matters specifically for the referendum. A measure requiring forty percent turnout and seventy-five percent approval is vulnerable not only to organised opposition but to generalised public disengagement

or distrust of the process itself, a distinct legitimacy risk that does not arise in the same way for a standard first-past-the-post contest.

## **WHAT THE PEACE COUNCIL'S DIALOGUE EFFORT IS AND IS NOT**

The National Peace Council's inter-party dialogue programme, convened with Catholic Relief Services, the Ghana Center for Democratic Development, the National Media Commission and UNDP Ghana, forms part of a broader Political Party Trust Building Programme adopted under the Ada Recommendations (National Peace Council, 2026). Its stated purpose is to strengthen responsible political communication, address inflammatory rhetoric and improve cooperation on peace and electoral security among party actors and institutions (National Peace Council, 2026). The approach has a track record. Ahead of the Ayawaso East by-election in March 2026, the Greater Accra Regional Peace Council convened Inter-Party Dialogue Committee sessions explicitly to reduce the risk of vigilantism and electoral violence in a constituency the Council itself acknowledged already faced such threats (National Peace Council, 2026). What this model does not directly address is the specific, documented cause of most 2020 and 2024 fatalities: the discipline and rules of engagement governing police and military firearm use during crowd control, and the operational integrity of the Commission's own collation process. Dialogue can lower the temperature between political actors. It cannot, by itself, retrieve spent shell casings from a crime scene, retrain a patrol officer's use of force, or guarantee that a collation centre is adequately protected against a coordinated attack.

## **WHAT COULD GO WRONG**

Five risks stand out on the evidence assembled here. A collation dispute resembling Ablekuma North could recur simultaneously in multiple districts rather than in one constituency, since the referendum multiplies the volume and complexity of ballots the Commission must process nationwide within a compressed preparation window. There is also a legitimacy risk unique to the referendum itself: if turnout falls short of forty percent or the campaign becomes entangled with partisan district races, the result could be contested regardless of the outcome, in a way ordinary election-day violence does not produce. A third concern is accountability. Fourteen suspects from the 2020 and 2024 cycles remained at large as of August 2026, and that alone signals an inconsistency that may fail to deter future perpetrators (Ghanaian Times, 2026). Fourth, and perhaps most directly addressable, is the absence of revised rules of engagement for crowd control. Security personnel discharging firearms is the specific pattern responsible for at least seven of the fifteen confirmed 2020 to 2024 deaths, and it remains unaddressed in the public record reviewed for this analysis. Finally, the district assembly contests layered beneath the referendum carry their own history of localised, chieftaincy-linked tension,

one that is distinct from, and could interact unpredictably with, the more partisan dynamics of a national constitutional vote.

## **CONCLUSION**

Ghana's approach to election security ahead of 2027 currently rests on two separate tracks that have not yet been fully joined. One track, led by the National Peace Council and its partners, addresses the relationships and communication between political actors. The other, led by the Police Service and the Electoral Commission, addresses the operational mechanics of casting, protecting and counting ballots. The evidence from 2020 and 2024 indicates that Ghana's most serious election security failures have occurred on the operational track, in firearm discipline and in collation security, and that the dialogue track, however valuable, has not been able to prevent their recurrence in every case. The referendum planned for 2027 raises the stakes on the operational track specifically, by adding logistical complexity and a distinct legitimacy threshold that ordinary elections do not carry. Whether Ghana's next polls proceed more safely than its last two will depend less on whether dialogue continues, which it will, and more on whether the specific, documented operational failures of 2020 and 2024 are corrected before voters next go to the polls.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Publish revised rules of engagement for police and military personnel deployed to polling and collation centres well ahead of the 2027 polls, given that security personnel firearm use accounted for at least seven of the fifteen confirmed deaths across the 2020 and 2024 cycles.

Complete and publicly report on the outstanding prosecutions and the pursuit of the fourteen suspects still at large from the 2020 and 2024 cycles before the 2027 polls, since visible accountability is itself a deterrent that dialogue programming cannot substitute for.

Design and test the dual ballot and collation procedure for the referendum separately from, and well before, the district assembly voting process itself, given the compressed timeline between the expected October 2026 legislation and the 2027 poll date.

Extend Inter-Party Dialogue Committee engagement beyond high-profile constituencies with known vigilante activity to cover the full set of districts where both a local contest and the referendum will be decided simultaneously.

Commission an independent, published assessment of Electoral Commission collation security protocols specifically, distinct from broader inter-party trust building, to close the operational gap that both the Ablekuma North and Techiman South cases exposed.

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