POLICY PAPER

Why Ghana? Explaining Political and Social Stability in a Region of Insecurity

Subject: West-African stability, democracy, institutional resilience, conflict prevention, traditional chieftaincy and leadership, social cohesion

Date: November 2026

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OVERVIEW

This paper examines why Ghana has maintained political and social stability despite intensifying insecurity across West Africa. It identifies economic resilience, social cohesion and strong democratic institutions as the key foundations of Ghana's stability. However, the spread of extremist violence into coastal states highlights the need for continued preventive action. The paper provides policy recommends, namely strengthening regional security cooperation, addressing socioeconomic inequalities and protecting democratic institutions to ensure Ghana's stability endures.

Introduction

Over the last decade, West Africa has become one of the world's most volatile regions. Since 2020, nearly three-quarters of the coup attempts recorded worldwide have been in West Africa or the Sahel.[1] The 2026 Global Terrorism Index (GTI) found that the Sahel accounted for more than half of all terrorism deaths worldwide in 2025.[2] By mid-2026, nearly four million people had been displaced across Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, roughly double the number in 2020.[3] On the 2024 Fragile States Index, which scores states on a 0–120 scale (where higher scores indicate greater fragility), five states in the region (Mali, Nigeria, Guinea, Niger and Burkina Faso) fall within the "Alert" category (90–100).[4]

Against this turbulent backdrop, Ghana has remained comparatively stable, scoring 60.8 on the same index, well below many of its neighbours.[5] Although the country experienced decades of coups and military rule following its independence in 1957, it has held nine consecutive general elections since 1992 and power has alternated peacefully between the two major political parties four times. In contrast to its neighbours, Ghana is also one of the few West African countries that have never suffered a major terrorist attack on its soil.[6]

Nonetheless, Ghana faces many of the same challenges as its neighbours. High youth unemployment, regional inequality and heavy dependence on commodity exports have contributed to coups and the rise of terrorist groups elsewhere in West Africa. Ghana, however, has so far avoided these outcomes. This paper therefore asks: why has Ghana remained more politically and socially stable than its neighbouring countries, despite facing similarly pressing challenges?

The paper proceeds as follows. The first section examines the relationship between economic hardship and democratic resilience in Ghana and explains why economic shocks have not translated into instability. The second section turns to the socio-cultural factors underpinning the country's stability, namely education, religious tolerance and traditional authorities. The third section analyses how Ghana's political and constitutional framework has sustained this stability. The conclusion summarises these findings, reflects on the risks that may challenge Ghana's stability in the years ahead and offers policy recommendations to address them.

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[1] John Joseph Chin, "Guinea-Bissau's Military Takeover Highlights the Nation's Sorry History of Coups and a Deepening Crisis across the Region," *The Conversation*, December 1, 2025, https://theconversation.com/guinea-bissaus-military-takeover-highlights-the-nations-sorry-history-of-coups-and-a-deepening-crisis-across-the-region-270958.

[2] Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2026: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism* (Sydney: Institute for Economics & Peace, 2026), 4, https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Global-Terrorism-Index-2026-Report.pdf.

[3] UNHCR, "UNHCR Calls for Urgent Investment as Displacement Crisis Deepens across Central Sahel," briefing note, October 9, 2026, https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing-notes/unhcr-calls-urgent-investment-displacement-crisis-deepens-across-central-sahel.

[4] Fund for Peace, *Fragile States Index Annual Report 2024* (Washington, DC: Fund for Peace, 2024), 7, https://fragilestatesindex.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/FSI-2024-Report-A-World-Adrift.pdf.

[5] Fund for Peace, *Fragile States Index 2024*, 6.

[6] OECD/SWAC, *Roads and Conflicts in North and West Africa*, West African Studies (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2025), 103, https://doi.org/10.1787/77474489-en.

Economic Hardship and Democratic Resilience

Ghana's economy has been one of West Africa's most dynamic and resilient. From 2014 to 2024, Ghana recorded average real GDP growth of 4.3%, outpacing the Sub-Saharan African average of 3.7%.[7] Today, it ranks second in West Africa on the Human Development Index and third in GDP per capita.[8] However, despite these strengths, Ghana's economy remains vulnerable. Like many other West African countries, it suffers from heavy dependence on commodity exports, high youth unemployment and regional inequality. Yet economic hardship has not translated into political and social instability. Two factors help explain this, namely regular elections that allow voters to punish governments for underperformance and the long-term development gains Ghana has made under democracy.

Economic Vulnerabilities

In 2022, Ghana faced a large-scale crisis that exposed several structural threats to its economy. The economic collapse originated in unsustainable public borrowing and was aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war, with inflation eventually peaking at 54.1%.[9] This ultimately led to a sovereign debt default, a restructuring of Ghana's debt and a US$3 billion IMF loan programme.[10] Despite the severity of the crisis, the economy has since rebounded strongly, with 5.7% economic growth in 2024, and a significant decline in inflation since its 2022 peak.[11] Beneath this recovery, however, structural problems remain. First, the Ghanaian economy is heavily dependent on commodity exports, notably oil, gold and cocoa, which leaves it exposed to global price shocks.[12] Second, wealth is unequally distributed. Economic activity is concentrated around Accra, while the

[7] FocusEconomics, "Ghana GDP," accessed October 28, 2026, https://www.focus-economics.com/country-indicator/ghana/gdp-nominal.

[8] United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2025: A Matter of Choice: People and Possibilities in the Age of AI* (New York: UNDP, 2025), table 1, https://hdr.undp.org/content/human-development-report-2025; World Bank, "GDP per Capita (Current US$)," World Development Indicators, accessed October 29, 2026, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD.

[9] Christian Akorlie, "Ghana's Economy Grew 3.1% in 2022, 3.7% in Fourth Quarter, Statistics Office Says," Reuters, April 19, 2023, https://www.kitco.com/news/off-the-wire/2023-04-19/ghanas-economy-grew-31-2022-37-fourth-quarter-statistics-office-says.

[10] Kent Mensah, "How Ghana, Africa's Rising Star, Ended Up in Economic Turmoil," *Al Jazeera*, December 31, 2022, https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2022/12/31/how-ghana-africas-rising-star-ended-up-in-economic-turmoil; International Monetary Fund, "IMF Executive Board Approves US$3 Billion Extended Credit Facility Arrangement for Ghana," press release no. 23/151, May 17, 2023, https://www.imf.org/en/news/articles/2023/05/17/pr23151-ghana-imf-executive-board-approves-extended-credit-facility-arrangement-for-ghana.

[11] Emmanuel Bruce, "Economic Growth Rebounds to 5.7% in 2024," *Daily Graphic*, March 11, 2025, https://graphiconline.com/business/business-news/economic-growth-rebounds-to-5-7-in-2024.html; Kweku Zurek, "Ghana's Inflation Rises to 5.2% in September," *Daily Graphic*, October 7, 2026, https://www.graphic.com.gh/business/business-news/ghanas-inflation-rises-to-5-2-in-september.html.

[12] Jibril Abdul Mumuni, "Gold, Cocoa and Oil Constitute 83.4 Per Cent of Ghana's Export – GSS," Ghana News Agency, March 8, 2025, https://gna.org.gh/2025/03/gold-cocoa-and-oil-constitute-83-4-per-cent-of-ghanas-export-gss; International Monetary Fund, "IMF Executive Board Approves US$3 Billion."

northern regions face high poverty and youth unemployment of up to 39%.[13] Third, a large informal sector limits tax revenue and therefore the fiscal space for public spending. As a result, social services and infrastructure in Ghana are underfunded, particularly in the northern and more rural regions of the country.[14]

During the crisis in 2022, protests did occur, most notably in Accra when demonstrations against rising living costs ended in clashes with police.[15] Nonetheless, these challenges did not translate into large-scale civil unrest or a violent transition of power as they have elsewhere in the region. Two factors help explain why:

Factor 1: Regular elections allow voters to punish economic underperformance

Ghana's regular elections provide citizens with a democratic means of expressing dissatisfaction with economic mismanagement. Power has alternated peacefully between the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) four times since 1992 (in 2000, 2008, 2016 and 2024). In the 2024 general election, the governing NPP suffered a decisive defeat, with the state of the economy a central issue in the campaign.[16] Former president John Mahama won the presidency with 56.55% of the vote against 41.61% for Vice President Mahamudu Bawumia, and the NDC secured a large parliamentary majority.[17] Bawumia conceded the morning after the election, illustrating how economic discontent was expressed through the ballot box and absorbed by a peaceful transfer of power rather than by challenges to the system itself.

This sets Ghana apart from many of its neighbours. In Togo, the Gnassingbé family has held power since 1967,[18] while in Côte d'Ivoire leading candidates are frequently excluded from participation, and elections are often marred by political violence.[19] In Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, peaceful transfers

[13] "Six North East Districts Poorest in Ghana despite National Poverty Decline – GSS," *Citi Newsroom*, May 18, 2026, https://www.citinewsroom.com/2026/05/six-north-east-districts-poorest-in-ghana-despite-national-poverty-decline/; United Nations Development Programme Ghana, "Youth Unemployment Is the Most Common Driver of Vulnerability to Violent Extremism and Radicalisation in Northern Regions of Ghana – New UNDP Ghana Report," press release, June 30, 2023, https://www.undp.org/ghana/press-releases/youth-unemployment-most-common-driver-vulnerability-violent-extremism-and-radicalisation-northern-regions-ghana-new-undp-ghana.

[14] "Ghana's Tax Gap: New Levies Loom in Mid-Year Budget," *MyJoyOnline*, accessed October 29, 2026, https://www.myjoyonline.com/ghanas-tax-gap-new-levies-loom-in-mid-year-budget/.

[15] "Protests over Economic Woes Enter Second Day in Ghana," *Al Jazeera*, June 29, 2022, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/6/29/protests-over-economic-woes-enter-second-day-in-ghana.

[16] Theophilus Acheampong, "Ghana Heads to the Polls: Why the Economy Is the Biggest Issue for Many Voters," *The Conversation*, December 6, 2024, https://theconversation.com/ghana-heads-to-the-polls-why-the-economy-is-the-biggest-issue-for-many-voters-245374.

[17] Francis Kokutse and Monika Pronczuk, "Ghana's Ex-Leader Is Declared the Winner of the Presidential Election," Associated Press, December 9, 2024, https://rdnewsnow.com/2024/12/09/ghanas-ex-leader-is-declared-the-winner-of-the-presidential-election-2/.

[18] Reuters, "Togo Leader Gets New Role without Term Limits, Opposition Calls It a Coup," May 6, 2025, https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/africa/2025-05-06-togo-leader-gets-new-role-without-term-limits-opposition-calls-it-a-coup/.

[19] CIVICUS, "Democracy Confined: Côte d'Ivoire's Elections," *CIVICUS Lens*, January 6, 2026, https://lens.civicus.org/democracy-confined-cote-divoires-elections/.

of power have been rare and power has more often changed hands through coups.[20] This matters because if dissatisfaction with socioeconomic conditions cannot be expressed through voting, it tends to find other outlets, such as protest and military intervention. Across West Africa, attempts to stay in power beyond term limits have frequently led to unrest, violence and military intervention.[21] In contrast, Ghana has established a tradition of respecting term limits, as no president has sought to run for a third term since its democratic transition.

Factor 2: Long-term development gains under democracy sustain public support

Although Ghana faces economic challenges, its democracy has delivered more than most of its neighbours in terms of growth, human development and political stability. Ghana's GDP growth has remained strong after the 2022 recovery, and research has found that support for democracy grows mainly where democracies deliver stability and development.[22] This may help explain why support for democracy in Ghana has remained relatively high. In Afrobarometer's 2024 survey, 73% of Ghanaians said democracy is preferable to any other kind of government. That is above the 38-country average of 64% and higher than in neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire (70%) and Togo (58%), as well as Chad (69%) and Mali (40%).[23]

Over three decades, Ghana's democracy has delivered steady gains in human development and a consistently growing economy. In the Sahel, human development has remained far lower. Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger rank among the least developed countries in the world, with Human Development Index scores of 0.459, 0.419 and 0.419 respectively, against Ghana's 0.628, and Mali and Niger have made almost no progress in the last decade.[24] Instability has also reversed earlier gains. For instance, the 2012 Tuareg uprising in northern Mali and the subsequent coup resulted in economic contraction,[25] and the public's support for democracy fell significantly in the following years.[26] The 2012 crisis did not come out of nowhere. It was the fourth Tuareg rebellion since independence, rooted in long-standing grievances over the marginalisation of northern Mali and triggered by the return of fighters from Libya after the fall of Gaddafi.[27] This shows how regional and ethnic divisions

[20] Megan Duzor and Brian Williamson, "By the Numbers: Coups in Africa," Voice of America, last updated October 3, 2023, https://projects.voanews.com/african-coups/.
[21] Ines Schultes, *Western Africa's Recent Coups Highlight the Risk of Trading Off Development for Security, the Rule of Law and Rights* (London: Mo Ibrahim Foundation, April 2022), 8, https://mo.ibrahim.foundation/sites/default/files/2022-04/western-africa-coups.pdf.
[22] Daron Acemoglu et al., "(Successful) Democracies Breed Their Own Support," *Review of Economic Studies* 92, no. 2 (2025): 621–23, https://doi.org/10.1093/restud/rdae051.
[23] Robert Mattes, Suhaylah Peeraullee, and Rehan Visser, *Democracy: Faltering Demand in Africa?*, Afrobarometer Policy Paper No. 106 (Accra: Afrobarometer, 2026), 6, https://www.afrobarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/09/PP106-PAP17-Is-demand-for-democracy-faltering-in-Africa-Afrobarometer-9sept26.pdf.
[24] United Nations Development Programme, "Human Development Index (HDI)," Human Development Reports Data Center, accessed November 17, 2026, https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/human-development-index#/indicies/HDI.
[25] International Monetary Fund, "Mali: IMF Executive Board Concludes 2012 Article IV Consultation," Public Information Notice no. 13/15, February 8, 2013, https://www.imf.org/en/news/articles/2015/09/28/04/53/pn1315.
[26] Mattes, Peeraullee, and Visser, *Democracy: Faltering Demand*, 11–13.
[27] Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2014 – Mali Country Report* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014), 4, 6, https://bti-project.org/fileadmin/api/content/en/downloads/reports/country_report_2014_MLI.pdf.

turn into armed conflict once a state is weakened. Whether such divisions escalate depends in large part on the strength of a country's social cohesion and national identity. The next section examines how these have developed and fostered stability in the case of Ghana.

Social Cohesion and National Identity

Alongside these economic factors, Ghana's comparative stability stems from deeply rooted social and cultural values. Kwame Nkrumah, who led the government from 1951 until 1966, prioritised the deliberate development of a unified Ghanaian identity.[28] Successive governments have built on this legacy, and Ghana's unity now rests on three pillars: education, religious tolerance and local chieftaincy structures. These three factors help to explain how Ghana's leaders have decreased the risks of social fragmentation that could otherwise undermine national cohesion and political stability.

Factor 1: An educational system built to reduce inequality

In Ghana, the education system was built with the intentional goal of bringing young people from different backgrounds together. In the years around independence, Nkrumah quickly recognised that education offered a significant opportunity to cultivate a shared national identity and pass it on across communities and generations. Ghana's existing colonial boarding school system laid the foundations for this goal.

However, education in Ghana had been very limited under colonial rule. Schools were concentrated in the coastal south, where an elite was educated according to a colonial curriculum.[29] From 1951 onwards, Nkrumah's government gradually expanded access through the Accelerated Development Plan for Education, which abolished tuition fees for primary education. The Education Act of 1961 then made primary education compulsory.[30] As a result, enrolment rose sharply. Between 1951 and 1966, primary enrolment grew from about 153,000 to more than 1.1 million, middle-school enrolment from about 66,000 to 267,000, and the number of students in secondary and technical schools from around 5,700 to more than 47,000.[31] This expansion gave Nkrumah's government the chance to build a national educational system that addressed longstanding inequalities between classes, regions and ethnic groups.

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[28] Harcourt Fuller, *Building the Ghanaian Nation-State: Kwame Nkrumah's Symbolic Nationalism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 189, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137448583.

[29] La Verle Berry, ed., *Ghana: A Country Study*, 3rd ed. (Washington, DC: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1995), "Education," https://country-studies.com/ghana/education.html.

[30] Joseph Yaw Dwamena Quansah, Dacosta Aboagye, and Alaric A. Alagbela, "Trend Analysis of Admission, Enrolment, Completion, and Transition Rates in Primary Education in Ghana," *Journal of International Cooperation and Development* 7, no. 3 (2024): 2–3, https://doi.org/10.36941/jicd-2024-0011.

[31] Kwame Akyeampong et al., *Access to Basic Education in Ghana: The Evidence and the Issues*, CREATE Country Analytic Report (Falmer, UK, and Winneba, Ghana: Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity, 2007), 6.

Nkrumah's government built secondary schools and introduced regional quotas for "national" secondary schools. It also sought to bring students from different regions together by maintaining the colonial-era Northern Scholarship Scheme, which covered feeding costs for northern pupils.[32] Boarding was central to this design.[33] By removing teenagers from their home communities for three years, boarding schools placed pupils from different ethnic, linguistic and regional backgrounds in the same dormitories, dining halls and classrooms at the age when adult identities are formed.

Later reforms preserved this logic. A 2026 study of 1,400 boarders in ten schools found that orientation programmes explicitly prepare students to live alongside peers from other ethnic groups, and that students describe sharing food, languages and stories, while joking about their differences without conflict.[34] This effect should not be overstated. The same study documents ethnic cliques and finds that ethnic and regional affiliations often shaped peer acceptance.[35] In addition, students from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to choose schools closer to home, which limits regional mixing.[36] Nevertheless, by bringing generations of young Ghanaians into sustained daily contact across ethnic lines, the boarding system provides a shared formative experience that complements and reinforces Ghana's cross-cutting identities.

Factor 2: Institutionalised religious co-existence

Religious coexistence in Ghana forms a second pillar of social cohesion. Around 71% of Ghanaians identify as Christian and around 20% as Muslim,[37] and relations between the communities have remained notably peaceful. Major Christian and Islamic holidays are both national public holidays. In 2025, Shaqq Day, the day after Eid-ul-Fitr, was added to the list.[38] Religious leaders also play a visible role in promoting interfaith dialogue, including through the National Peace Council. Symbolic gestures, such as the National Chief Imam attending Easter Mass at a Catholic church in Accra in 2019, have reinforced the norm that religious identity is not a basis for political division.[39]

Importantly, this coexistence is supported by the fact that ethnic and religious identities in Ghana largely cut across one another. Many ethnic groups include both Christians and Muslims, and although

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[32] "Impact of Free Education in the North," *Daily Graphic*, accessed October 30, 2026, https://graphiconline.com/news/general-news/impact-of-free-education-in-the-north.html; "Independence Day: Dr Nkrumah's Educational Legacies," Ghana News Agency, March 6, 2023, https://gna.org.gh/?p=263079.
[33] Kwaku Sakyi-Addo, "Ghanaian Schools System Eased the Ethnic Tensions That Ruined Many African Countries," *Sowetan*, January 2, 2007, https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/amp/news/2007-01-02-ghanaian-schools-system-eased-the-ethnic-tensions-that-ruined-many-african-countries/.
[34] Simon Kyei, "Boarding School Experiences and Identity Formation among Adolescents: Insights from Senior High Schools in Ashanti, Central, Greater Accra, and Western Regions of Ghana," *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 13 (2026): 805, 8, https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-026-07110-5.
[35] Kyei, "Boarding School Experiences," 9–12.
[36] Kehinde F. Ajayi, "School Choice and Educational Mobility: Lessons from Secondary School Applications in Ghana," *Journal of Human Resources* (2022), 4, https://jhr.uwpress.org/content/wpjhr/early/2022/03/31/jhr.0417-8714R2.full.pdf.
[37] Ghana Statistical Service, "2021 Population and Housing Census: Religion," GSS Microdata Catalog, accessed October 30, 2026, https://microdata.statsghana.gov.gh/index.php/catalog/110/variable/V1097.
[38] Ministry of the Interior, "Statutory Public Holidays and Commemorative Days in the Republic of Ghana for the Year 2026," accessed October 30, 2026, https://www.mint.gov.gh/statutory-public-holidays/.
[39] Catholic News Agency, "To Promote Peace, Ghana's Chief Muslim Cleric Goes to Mass," *Catholic Online*, May 14, 2019, https://www.catholic.org/news/international/africa/story.php?id=81029.

Muslims are more concentrated in the north, large Muslim communities live throughout the south.[40] Although ethnicity and region do partly coincide, these differences have not combined into a single dividing line, limiting the potential for political mobilisation on the basis of ethnicity or religion. It also sets Ghana apart from other West African countries such as Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria, where north–south divisions largely overlap with religious and ethnic identity, leading to violent conflict.[41]

Factor 3: Enduring traditional structures of governance

Traditional authorities provide a third pillar of stability. Chiefs derive their legitimacy from custom and tradition rather than from elections, and they enjoy considerable respect in society. Afrobarometer data reveals that traditional leaders are among the most trusted public figures throughout the country.[42] Ghana's 1992 Constitution guarantees the institution of chieftaincy and establishes the National and Regional Houses of Chiefs, but it gives chiefs only a limited formal role and bars them from active party politics.[43]

In practice, chiefs are custodians of around 80% of the country's land[44] and act as mediators in local disputes, often resolving conflicts before they reach the courts. Senior chiefs also mediate at the national level. For instance, the Asantehene has led mediation in both the Dagbon succession dispute and the Bawku conflict.[45] Chieftaincy and the formal state therefore coexist rather than compete, as chiefs provide governments with a channel of communication and legitimacy at the local level. While succession disputes and land conflicts related to chieftaincy do remain a source of tension and conflict in Ghana, these conflicts have tended to remain localised. On balance, chieftaincy functions as a centuries-old institution that anchors legitimacy and mediates conflict beyond the reach of electoral politics.

Yet Ghana's social governance cannot be attributed to traditional institutions alone. Following independence, the country experienced prolonged periods of authoritarian rule and repeated military coups. The transition to constitutional rule in 1993 marked a turning point, establishing a democratic framework that has since underpinned the country's political stability.

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[40] Stephen Owoahene-Acheampong and Charles Prempeh, "Contemporary Zongo Communities in Accra Interfaith Marriages: The Case of Muslims and Christians in Accra," *African Studies Quarterly* 19, no. 1 (February 2020): 24, https://asq.africa.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/168/V19I1a2.pdf.

[41] Arnim Langer and Frances Stewart, *Regional Imbalances, Horizontal Inequalities, and Violent Conflicts: Insights from Four West African Countries* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2015), 24, 35, http://hdl.handle.net/10986/22514.

[42] Afrobarometer and CDD-Ghana, "Views on Trust in Institutions, Corruption and Elections: Highlights from Afrobarometer Round 10 Survey in Ghana" (presentation, Accra, October 25, 2024), 15, https://gna.org.gh/web/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Afrobarometer-Round-10_October-2024_Trust_Corruption_Elections.pdf.

[43] Constitution of the Republic of Ghana (1992), arts. 270–71, 274, 276(1).

[44] Janine M. Ubink, "Legalising Customary Land Tenure in Ghana: The Case of Peri-Urban Kumasi," in *Legalising Land Rights: Local Practices, State Responses and Tenure Security in Africa, Asia and Latin America*, ed. Janine M. Ubink, André J. Hoekema, and Willem J. Assies (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2009), 165.

[45] "Dagbon Youth Honors Asantehene for Mediating Protracted Chieftaincy Feud," *Modern Ghana*, April 4, 2022, https://www.modernghana.com/news/1149764/dagbon-youth-honors-asantehene-for-mediating-protr.html; Presidency, Republic of Ghana, "Gov't Accepts Asantehene's Bawku Conflict Mediation Report," press release, December 20, 2025, https://presidency.gov.gh/govt-accepts-asantehenes-bawku-conflict-mediation-report/.

The Political and Constitutional Framework

As previously outlined, Ghana's ability to absorb economic shocks rests largely on its democratic institutions. Since its 1993 return to constitutional rule, three factors have allowed Ghana to avoid the military takeovers that have affected other states in the region: regular peaceful transfers of power through competitive elections, constitutional rules and incentives that push parties to build broad national coalitions, and the professionalisation of the military.

Factor 1: Peaceful transfers of power and competitive elections

The first pillar of Ghana's democratic stability is the consolidation of competitive elections as the accepted means of gaining and transferring political power. This represents a significant departure from the country's post-independence history, which was marked by authoritarian rule and repeated military coups. Although Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first president, remains widely revered, his government became increasingly authoritarian towards the end of his rule. After declaring Ghana a one-party state in 1964, he was overthrown in a military coup in 1966. The following decades saw repeated alternation between civilian and military governments, with further coups in 1972, 1978 and 1979. Jerry Rawlings seized power in June 1979, briefly handed over to an elected civilian government, but returned to power in a coup on 31 December 1981. He subsequently ruled for over a decade at the head of the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC).[46]

The transition to constitutional rule in 1993 marked a decisive break with this cycle of military intervention. Following the approval of a new constitution in a 1992 referendum, multiparty elections established a framework for regular political competition. Crucially, Rawlings respected the constitutional term limits and handed over power to the opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP) following the 2000 elections.[47] This marked Ghana's first peaceful transfer of power between democratically elected governments and established an important precedent. Since then, power has alternated peacefully between the NPP and the National Democratic Congress (NDC), including several instances in which incumbent governments have accepted electoral defeat. The repeated acceptance of election results by both political parties has gradually strengthened the legitimacy of democratic institutions and reinforced the expectation that political competition must take place within the constitutional framework. Elections have thus become the established route to power, significantly reducing the likelihood of military intervention.

Factor 2: Respected constitutional framework

Second, the constitutional framework and the electoral system in Ghana give political parties a strong incentive to build broad coalitions. A key part of this is that political parties are constitutionally required to be national rather than ethnic or regional in character. More specifically, membership in political parties may not be based on ethnic, religious or regional divisions. Second, parties must

[46] Maame Adwoa Gyekye-Jandoh, "The Role of the International Community in Ghana's Democratic Transition in the 1990s," *Legon Journal of the Humanities* 28, no. 1 (2017): 46–47, 49–50, https://doi.org/10.4314/ljh.v28i1.5.

[47] Jeffrey Haynes and Felix Kumah-Abiwu, "Looking Back at Three Decades of Ghana's Democracy," *Africa at LSE* (blog), January 10, 2024, https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2024/01/10/looking-back-at-three-decades-of-ghanas-democracy/.

maintain branches in all regions and in at least two-thirds of the districts of each region, while their national executives must be drawn from all regions.[48] Both major parties do retain strongholds in certain areas and among certain ethnic groups. For instance, Asante people traditionally support the NPP.[49] However, neither party can gain power on the votes of a single group, and both have drawn their leaders from different ethnic and regional backgrounds.

In Ghana, both major parties have regional strongholds, the NPP in the Ashanti and Eastern regions and the NDC in the Volta and northern regions, but neither can win a national election on those alone. In 2008, for instance, the NPP won over 74% of the vote in Ashanti but still lost the presidency.[50] Because presidential candidates need more than half of all valid votes, parties must compete for support in the swing regions, such as Greater Accra, Central and Western, as well as across ethnic and religious groups.[51] This is reflected in the practice of balancing presidential tickets. Running mates often differ from the candidate in regional and religious background, as with the NPP's 2024 pairing of Mahamudu Bawumia, a northern Muslim, with Matthew Opoku Prempeh, a Christian from Ashanti.[52] Although appeals to ethnic and religious identity have not completely disappeared from Ghanaian politics, the need to win across groups limits the effectiveness of such appeals and pushes both parties towards broad national coalitions.

Factor 3: Non-political and professionalised military

The third and perhaps most crucial factor in Ghana's continued democracy is the non-political nature of the military. Given Ghana's history of coups, the transition to democracy depended heavily on keeping the armed forces out of politics, and the 1992 Constitution addresses this directly. It makes the overthrow of the constitutional order an act of high treason and places the armed forces under civilian authority, with the President as Commander-in-Chief and Parliament exercising oversight over defence matters.[53] Furthermore, since the return to constitutional rule, the armed forces have become increasingly professionalised, gaining a high level of public trust and confidence in recent years.[54]

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[48] Constitution of the Republic of Ghana (1992), art. 55(4), (7), (9).

[49] Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre, *Politics of Ethno-Religious Identity and Its Implications for Democratic Stability in Ghana*, Policy Paper 3 (Accra: KAIPTC, December 2024), 2, https://kaiptc.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/POLICY-PAPER-3-DECEMBER-2024.pdf.

[50] "Explainer: What Percentage of Votes Does NDC Require in Volta and Ashanti Regions to Win Dec. 7 Elections?," DUBAWA Ghana, December 7, 2024, https://ghana.dubawa.org/explainer-what-percentage-of-votes-does-ndc-require-in-volta-and-ashanti-regions-to-win-dec-7-elections/.

[51] Constitution of the Republic of Ghana (1992), art. 63(3).

[52] Reuters, "Ghana Presidential Candidate Bawumia Picks Energy Minister as Running Mate," July 4, 2024, https://in.marketscreener.com/news/latest/Ghana-presidential-candidate-Bawumia-picks-energy-minister-as-running-mate-47314723.

[53] Constitution of the Republic of Ghana (1992), arts. 3(3), 57(1); Naila Salihu, *Enhancing Accountability and Transparency in Ghana's Defence Sector*, Policy Brief 7 (Accra: KAIPTC, November 2019), 2–3, https://www.kaiptc.org/kaiptc-publication/enhancing-accountability-and-transparency-in-ghanas-defence-sector/.

[54] Abednego Eclaircie Shooter and Felix Danso, "Power, Perception, and Professionalism: Ghana's Evolving Military–Civilian Dynamics in the Fourth Republic (1993–2025)," *African Journal of Defence, Security and Strategy* 5, no. 1 (2025): 22–23, https://doi.org/10.66544/ajodss.v5i1.9.

Ghana's long-standing and extensive participation in UN peacekeeping missions has played a significant role in this. Since 1960, more than 80,000 Ghanaian personnel have served in over 30 UN missions,[55] exposing generations of officers to international norms of civilian control and giving the military a prestigious role outside domestic politics.[56] The military as an institution has not intervened in politics since 1993, and has respected every electoral outcome. When a coup plot involving a small number of soldiers and civilians was uncovered in 2019, it was exposed by a joint operation of military intelligence and civilian security agencies, and the accused were tried for high treason in civilian courts, which underlines the strength of civilian oversight.[57] This contrasts sharply with the Sahel, where Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger have all experienced military takeovers since 2020.

These three factors reinforce one another. Regular alternations of power ensure that both parties and their supporters trust the electoral system; the need to build national coalitions limits mobilisation along ethnic or regional lines; and a professional military that has stayed out of politics since 1993 significantly reduces the likelihood of a military coup. Nonetheless, this stability is not guaranteed. Trust in institutions has declined, and a growing number of Ghanaians see military intervention as legitimate when leaders abuse power.[58] So far, however, Ghana's political and constitutional framework has been more resilient than those of its neighbours.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As this paper has argued, Ghana's continued political and social stability in a region increasingly affected by coups, economic crises and terrorist violence is not the result of a single factor, but of the interaction between relative economic resilience, social cohesion and strong institutions. Economic hardship has not fundamentally undermined Ghana's democratic order because citizens retain a credible means of holding governments accountable through elections. A shared national identity, religious coexistence and traditional mechanisms of dispute resolution have further limited the potential for social divisions to escalate into widespread conflict. Meanwhile, the 1992 Constitution, competitive multiparty elections and the professionalisation of the armed forces have established a political system in which power changes hands peacefully. Together, these foundations have enabled Ghana to withstand challenges that have contributed to instability and coups elsewhere in West Africa.

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[55] Festus Aubyn and Kwesi Aning, "Contributor Profile: Ghana," Providing for Peacekeeping (New York: International Peace Institute, November 2015), 1, https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/ipi-pub-ppp-Ghana.pdf.

[56] "Ghana's Peacekeeping Efforts Abroad Have an Impact at Home," Danish Institute for International Studies, January 9, 2019, https://diis.dk/node/21540.

[57] "Group Planned to Destabilise Ghana – Information Minister," *Daily Graphic*, September 23, 2019, https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/politics/group-planned-to-destabilise-ghana-information-minister.html; "Court Convicts 6 Coup Plotters; ACP Agordzo, Two Others Acquitted," *Citi Newsroom*, January 24, 2024, https://citinewsroom.com/2024/01/court-convicts-6-coup-plotters-acp-agordzo-two-others-acquitted.

[58] Afrobarometer and CDD-Ghana, "Views on Trust in Institutions"; "More Ghanaians Endorse Military Intervention If Elected Leaders Abuse Power – 2024 Afrobarometer," Ghana News Agency, April 26, 2025, https://gna.org.gh/2025/04/more-ghanaians-endorse-military-intervention-if-elected-leaders-abuse-power-2024-afrobarometer.

However, Ghana's record of stability should not be mistaken for immunity from future threats. Although the country has not experienced a major terrorist attack on its soil, the regional security environment is changing rapidly. Terrorist violence is increasingly affecting the coastal states of West Africa, demonstrating that insecurity is no longer confined to the Sahel. In 2024, Togo recorded ten terrorist attacks resulting in 52 deaths; Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) claimed four of these attacks, which caused 41 deaths, up from 12 fatalities in 2023.[59] Meanwhile, Benin has faced an even more serious deterioration. In January 2025, attacks claimed by JNIM in the country's northern border region killed 28 soldiers,[60] and in April 2025 another attack killed 54.[61] These attacks show how vulnerable coastal West Africa is to the southward expansion of armed extremist groups. The OECD identifies northern Benin and Togo as particularly at risk, while northern Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana tend to be used as rear bases for these groups.[62]

These developments have important implications for Ghana. Its proximity to armed groups operating across its northern border, regional inequality and youth unemployment, combined with local disputes such as chieftaincy conflicts, pose risks to the country's continued security and stability. These risks can be mitigated, but doing so requires Ghana to address its vulnerabilities while reinforcing its strengths. The recommendations below set out how.

Recommendations:

Economic Resilience

Although Ghana's economy has demonstrated resilience in recent years, its macroeconomic recovery has not sufficiently improved the lives of vulnerable youth in the northern regions. In addition, the high dependence on commodity exports leaves these communities exposed to global price shocks. Therefore, Ghana must:

- Expand access to low-interest start-up credit for youth entrepreneurs.
- Recruit local youth for infrastructure projects in the northern regions; if necessary provide training to them.
- Boost formal economic activity of local businesses in the north by linking credit access to registration. Formalisation would also help reduce Ghana's dependence on commodity exports. A broader domestic tax base would make public finances less vulnerable to falling gold, cocoa and oil prices, while registered businesses with access to credit are better placed to move into processing and manufacturing, such as shea processing.

[59] Security Council Report, "West Africa and the Sahel," *April 2025 Monthly Forecast*, March 31, 2025, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2025-04/west-africa-and-the-sahel-14.php.
[60] Security Council Report, "West Africa and the Sahel."
[61] Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2026*, 9.
[62] OECD/SWAC, *Roads and Conflicts*, 84; Reuters, "In Ghana, Sahel Militants Find Refuge and Supplies, Sources Say," October 24, 2024, https://www.arabnews.pk/node/2576690/world.

Social Cohesion:

Ghana's strong social cohesion and tradition of religious and ethnic coexistence have helped to prevent local disputes from escalating into wider conflict. However, as long as local conflicts remain unresolved, they present a continuous risk of destabilisation. Therefore, Ghana must:

- Guarantee long-term funding for the National Peace Council (NPC). By November 2025, only about half of its GH₵5 million budget for that year had been released. The NPC has 83 permanent staff, while its chairman estimates that around 400 are needed for regional coverage. As a result, more than 300 disputes remain unresolved.[63] Stable funding would allow the NPC to properly staff and fund district peace councils in the north, so that local disputes can be mediated before they escalate.
- Ensure that district peace councils include Muslim, Christian and traditional religious leaders nominated by their own communities, including younger imams and teachers, since religious leaders are among the most trusted figures in communities affected by extremism.[64]

Political Stability:

Ghana's continued political stability rests on its ability to increase public trust in its democratic institutions. Therefore, Ghana must:

- Amend the Public Office Holders (Declaration of Assets and Disqualification) Act, 1998 (Act 550), so that public officials' declarations are verified and published. At present, the law requires officials to declare their assets, but not that the declarations be checked.[65] Compliance should be monitored by an independent anti-corruption body, such as the planned Public Ethics Commission.[66]
- Stop using the military for crowd control during elections, as happened in Techiman South in 2020.[67] Electoral security should be guaranteed by the police, and the military used only as a last resort.

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[63] Gertrude Ankah, "National Peace Council Struggling with 300 Unresolved Conflict Cases amid Staffing Shortages," *Daily Graphic*, December 1, 2025, https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/national-peace-council-struggling-with-300-unresolved-conflict-cases-amid-staffing-shortages.html.

[64] United Nations Development Programme, *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Pathways to Recruitment and Disengagement* (New York: UNDP, 2023), 18, https://www.undp.org/publications/journey-extremism-africa-pathways-recruitment-and-disengagement.

[65] Dennis Peprah, "GACC Advocates Amendment of Asset Declaration Act for Realistic Enforcement," Ghana News Agency, August 11, 2026, https://gna.org.gh/2026/08/gacc-advocates-amendment-of-asset-declaration-act-for-realistic-enforcement/.

[66] "Full Text: Government's Position on Recommendations of Constitution Review Committee," *MyJoyOnline*, July 30, 2026, https://www.myjoyonline.com/full-text-governments-position-on-recommendations-of-constitution-review-committee/.

[67] Abdul Gafaru Ayamdoo Salifu, "State-Sponsored Killings? Here's How the Victims of Election 2020 Died," Fact-Check Ghana, May 15, 2024, https://www.fact-checkghana.com/state-sponsored-killings-heres-how-the-victims-of-election-2020-died/.

- Adopt the Constitution Review Committee's proposals for appointing the Electoral Commission's leadership. Candidates would be selected through an open, competitive process and approved by Parliament, and would serve a single, non-renewable ten-year term.[68] Their appointment would no longer depend on the sitting president, which would strengthen trust in the Commission (28% in 2024).[69]

[68] "CRC Report: Appointment, Tenure and Removal of Commissioner and Deputies of the EC," Ghana News Agency, December 23, 2025, https://gna.org.gh/2025/12/crc-report-appointment-tenure-and-removal-of-commissioner-and-deputies-of-the-ec/.
[69] Afrobarometer and CDD-Ghana, "Views on Trust in Institutions," 15.

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