



## The Ghana Police Service and the dilemma of a politically polarised system

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the politicisation of the Ghana Police Service (GPS), focusing on accusations of bias from opposition parties. It employed a qualitative design to explore the impact of political partisanship on the GPS. Conducted across Ghana's sixteen regions, the study purposively selected forty-three (43) participants, including active and retired police officers, political analysts, policy stakeholders, security analysts, and citizens, ensuring broad geographic and socio-political representation. Snowball sampling complemented this approach to reach additional participants, particularly retired officers and citizens. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, and analysed thematically to identify key patterns. The findings reveal, firstly, the profound dilemma faced by the GPS as it struggles to maintain professional neutrality amid intense political interference. Secondly, this interference significantly undermines the GPS's impartiality, professionalism, and public trust, especially during elections. Thirdly, political patronage permeates recruitment, promotions, and law enforcement practices, thereby perpetuating a cycle of mistrust between political parties and the police. Consequently, the study recommends constitutional reforms to guarantee police autonomy, merit-based recruitment, and strengthened oversight mechanisms to shield the service from political interference, thereby restoring professionalism, impartiality, and independence, while enhancing public confidence and operational effectiveness.

**Keywords:** Electoral Violence, Ghana Police Dilemma, Politicisation, Public Trust, Neutrality, Police Credibility

### I. INTRODUCTION

The Ghana Police Service (GPS), by constitutional mandate, is expected to play a vital role in maintaining law and order, protecting citizens, and enforcing laws impartially. Globally, police services in democratic societies are tasked with upholding the rule of law in a fair and unbiased manner (Modise, 2022). In Ghana, the 1992 Constitution, particularly Articles 200 and 201, establishes the GPS as a professional institution with the responsibility to maintain public peace, ensure security, and safeguard citizens' rights without political allegiance. Article 201 specifically requires the GPS to remain impartial, demonstrating loyalty solely to the state and its laws, rather than to any political party, group or individual. However, the GPS's capacity to fulfil these constitutional responsibilities appears increasingly threatened by politicisation, which undermines public confidence in its neutrality and professionalism. This challenge has persistently marked Ghana's political environment, particularly in the interactions between ruling and opposition parties.

The politicisation of Ghana's police service can be traced back to the military era under President Jerry John Rawlings, from 1981 to 1992, during which the police and military were reportedly used to suppress opposition and consolidate power (Haynes, 2022). This pattern continued into the democratic era, with both major political parties accusing the police of partisanship. During the New Patriotic Party (NPP) administration from 2000 to 2008, the National Democratic Congress (NDC), then in opposition, alleged police bias, particularly during the 2000 and 2004 elections. Similar accusations emerged when the NDC returned to power in 2009 under President John Evans Atta Mills, with the NPP criticising the police for perceived partisanship during incidents such as the 2010 protests and the 2012 elections. These allegations persisted under President John Mahama, especially following the 2012 post-election violence and the 2015 local elections, where opposition parties accused the police of complicity in electoral irregularities (Asamoah, 2020; Gyampo et al., 2017).

However, the Ayawaso West Wuogon by-election in January 2019 brought renewed attention to concerns about the politicisation of the police in Ghana (Graphic Online, 2019). Triggered by the death of the sitting Member of Parliament, the election was marred by violence and allegations of police complicity, particularly their failure to prevent assaults by armed individuals reportedly affiliated with the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP). Opposition members,

including MP Sam George, were among those attacked, sparking widespread condemnation from civil society and the general public, who perceived the police as politically biased (MyJoy Online, 2020). As Ghana approached the 2024 general elections, mistrust between political parties and the police persisted, with both the NPP and the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC) accusing each other of manipulating the police for political advantage (Gyampo et al., 2017). In this context, calls for police reform and greater impartiality remain central to discussions on democratic governance, as the perceived political alignment of the police continues to erode their credibility and capacity to enforce the law without fear or favour.

The Ghana Police Service (GPS) faces a critical challenge as it finds itself caught between competing political interests. This situation undermines effective law enforcement and national stability, resulting in a fractured relationship between the police and civilians (Ibrahim, 2023). Bowling et al. (2019), argue that a politicised police service erodes public trust, thereby diminishing its credibility and capacity to maintain order. In Ghana, this erosion of trust has contributed to rising lawlessness, as evidenced by increasing incidents of mob justice, vigilante activities, and attacks on police personnel and stations (Ateng et al., 2024; Bayor, 2018; Papa Bentil et al., 2024). Notable instances of public unrest, such as the post-election violence in 2008 and 2016, involved party foot soldiers targeting public facilities and political opponents (Meissner, 2010; Bukari & Tandoh-Offin, 2019). Similarly, in the aftermath of the 2024 elections, civil unrest led to the looting of public offices and attacks on institutions such as the Techiman Police Station and the Electoral Commission's collation centre in Damongo. These incidents were fuelled by allegations of electoral malpractice and police partiality, alongside the ransacking of storehouses across the country (Ghana Web, 2024; Ankrah, 2024; Suleiman, 2025). These events highlight some of the grave repercussions of the current challenges facing the Ghana Police Service.

The politicisation of Ghana's police service and the resulting erosion of public trust often compel politicians to deflect blame onto the police. For instance, following the post-election violence in 2024, a government official criticised the Inspector General of Police and his officers, rather than addressing the underlying political tensions (Duah, 2024). During a parliamentary session on 16 December 2024, Defence Minister Dominic Nitiwul absolved the government of responsibility for the security lapses that resulted in two deaths, citing concerns about potential conflicts of interest if the Executive intervened in security matters (Duah, 2024). This scenario underscores the police's dilemma of navigating intense political pressures while being expected to enforce the law with impartiality. Frequently caught between competing political demands, the police are often left to shoulder the blame for security failures; revealing deeper challenges of governance, accountability, and institutional independence.

Political interference in security institutions is a global concern, particularly in developing democracies, where it undermines impartiality, erodes public trust, and compromises national security (Caparini, 2016; Setty, 2017). This challenge is especially pronounced in Africa, where political instability and weak governance structures have facilitated such interference. Similar patterns have also been observed in parts of Latin America and Asia (Caparini, 2016). The politicisation of security forces often results in biased law enforcement, human rights violations, and the gradual erosion of democratic norms and principles (Setty, 2017).

In countries such as Nigeria, Uganda, and Zimbabwe, political interference has compromised the credibility of police institutions, resulting in impunity, human rights violations, and social unrest (Choi, 2015; Ivkovich et al., 2020; Mutanda, 2019; Tremaria, 2022). For example, Nigeria's 2019 elections and the 2020 #EndSARS protests exposed police complicity in electoral violence and voter suppression. Similarly, Uganda's 2021 elections were marked by violent crackdowns on opposition members, further deepening public mistrust (Ebele and Elekwa, 2023; Human Rights Watch, 2021; Udenze et al., 2024). Comparable trends have been observed in Ghana, with the 2019 Ayawaso West Wuogon by-election raising serious concerns about police neutrality. In contrast, efforts to rebuild public confidence such as community policing initiatives in Rwanda have achieved some success (Rwamuhizi and Irechukwu, 2022). Nonetheless, addressing police politicisation requires systemic reforms that include depoliticisation, merit-based recruitment, and strengthened accountability mechanisms. These reforms are essential to restoring institutional legitimacy and ensuring that security agencies uphold the rule of law. In the absence of such measures, politicised policing will continue to destabilise societies and undermine democratic processes (Shane, 2021).

Several studies have examined the Ghana Police Service (GPS), focusing on political impartiality, resource constraints, and performance disparities (Osei-Adubofour, 2017; Jedidigah et al., 2020; Aubyn, 2022). However, there is limited research on how political pressures from the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) influence the GPS's professional neutrality and the public's trust. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating the extent to which political party influence shapes the operations of the GPS and the implications for law enforcement effectiveness and national stability.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Although several studies have examined the Ghana Police Service (GPS) in relation to political neutrality, resource challenges, and institutional performance (Osei-Adubofour, 2017; Jedidigah et al., 2020; Aubyn, 2022), they

fall short in two critical areas. First, they do not directly investigate how political interference from the country's two main parties, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC), affects the professional neutrality of the police and public trust. Second, they overlook the institutional dilemma this interference creates, where officers must navigate political pressures while upholding their professional responsibilities. Moreover, most of these studies concentrate on specific areas such as Accra, without accounting for how political influence on policing may vary across different regions. This study seeks to address these gaps by examining how political interference affects police professionalism and public confidence across Ghana's Northern, Middle, and Southern zones, thereby offering a more comprehensive and contextually grounded understanding of the issue nationwide.

## 1.2 Research Objective

To examine the influence of political partisanship on the operational challenges faced by the Ghana Police Service.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theoretical Review

#### 2.1.1 Securitisation Theory

Securitisation theory, developed by Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998), explains how issues are constructed as security threats through discourse. It posits that securitisation occurs when an actor persuades an audience that a particular issue constitutes an existential threat, thereby warranting extraordinary measures. This framework highlights the role of political elites in shaping security narratives, especially in contested contexts (Buzan et al., 1998). Applied to the Ghana Police Service (GPS), securitisation theory reveals how political actors frame police operations as matters of national security, influencing both public perception and police neutrality. However, critics argue that the theory is overly focused on elites (McDonald, 2008) and Eurocentric (Hansen, 2000), which raises questions about its applicability to non-Western contexts such as Ghana, where traditional security structures also exert significant influence. Nonetheless, securitisation theory remains valuable for analysing how political narratives shape security institutions. In Ghana, it explains how political interests define threats selectively to justify biased law enforcement, thereby undermining police impartiality. This manipulation of security discourse legitimises partial policing and fuels public mistrust, reinforcing institutional challenges within the GPS.

#### 2.1.2 Institutional Theory

Institutional Theory offers a framework for understanding how security institutions (Greenwood et al., 2014), such as the Ghana Police Service (GPS), operate within societal norms, cultural expectations, and political pressures. It suggests that both formal structures and informal practices are shaped by broader socio-political dynamics, which influence institutional behaviour and decision-making (Kauppi, 2022). In Ghana, the GPS's policies and operations often reflect political interests, compromising neutrality and professionalism (Pache & Santos, 2013). Political actors may influence police decision-making, shaping resource allocation and enforcement priorities (Bitektine, 2011). Over time, such practices become institutionalised, reinforcing patterns that prioritise political agendas over impartial law enforcement (Greenwood et al., 2014). Additionally, societal expectations and external pressures may drive policing strategies that serve political elites rather than public security needs (Kauppi, 2022). Institutional Theory also highlights resistance to reform, even when change is necessary for efficiency and professionalism (Pache & Santos, 2013). In Ghana, this resistance perpetuates ineffective or biased policing, undermining public trust and reinforcing perceptions of the police as an instrument of political control rather than an impartial authority (Bitektine, 2011). Through examining these institutional dynamics, the theory provides insight into the structural challenges facing the GPS, particularly in maintaining autonomy and professionalism in a politically charged environment (Butzbach, 2022).

#### 2.1.3 Role and Constitutional Mandate of the Ghana Police Service

*Historical Evolution of the Ghana Police Service (GPS):* The legal foundation of the Ghana Police Service is enshrined in the 1992 Constitution, particularly in Articles 200 and 201. Article 200 establishes the GPS as a professional body responsible for maintaining law and order, ensuring security, and protecting the rights of citizens (Government of Ghana, 1992). Article 201 further mandates the police to operate impartially, without allegiance to any political party or individual (Republic of Ghana, 1992). These constitutional provisions are reinforced by the Police Service Act (Act 350), which provides a legal framework for police operations, recruitment, and discipline. Additionally, the Police Service Regulations outline the ethical and professional standards expected of officers. Other legal instruments, such as the Criminal Code of Ghana and the human rights provisions in Chapter Five of the Constitution, further guide police conduct, ensuring accountability and adherence to due process (Osei-Adubofour, 2017). Despite these legal safeguards, practical enforcement of impartiality remains a challenge due to political pressures and resource limitations (Jedidigah et al., 2020).

*Constitutional Provisions and Legal Framework Governing the GPS:* The legal foundation of the Ghana Police Service is enshrined in the 1992 Constitution, particularly in Articles 200 and 201. Article 200 establishes the GPS as a professional body responsible for maintaining law and order, ensuring security, and protecting the rights of citizens (Government of Ghana, 1992). Article 201 further mandates the police to operate impartially, without allegiance to any political party or individual (Republic of Ghana, 1992). These constitutional provisions are reinforced by the Police Service Act (Act 350), which provides a legal framework for police operations, recruitment, and discipline. Additionally, the Police Service Regulations outline the ethical and professional standards expected of officers. Other legal instruments, such as the Criminal Code of Ghana and the Human Rights provisions in Chapter Five of the Constitution, further guide the conduct of the police, ensuring accountability and adherence to due process (Osei-Adubofour, 2017). Despite these legal safeguards, the practical enforcement of impartiality remains a challenge due to political pressures and resource limitations (Jedidigah et al., 2020).

*Expectations of Neutrality and Professionalism in Law Enforcement:* As a key institution in Ghana's democratic framework, the police service is expected to uphold neutrality and professionalism in its operations. Neutrality implies that the Ghana Police Service (GPS) must function without political bias, ensuring the equal application of the law regardless of political affiliations (Bowling et al., 2019; Ateku & Bawa, 2024). Professionalism, on the other hand, encompasses adherence to ethical standards, respect for human rights, and the use of modern policing techniques to maintain law and order (Setty, 2017). International best practices emphasise community policing as a strategy to build public trust and improve police-citizen relationships (Diphorn & van Stapele, 2021; Kagame et al., 2023). However, in Ghana, the perception of police bias, particularly during electoral periods, has undermined confidence in the institution (Graphic Online, 2019). Cases of alleged police complicity in political violence, such as during the Ayawaso West Wuogon by-election, highlight the challenges in maintaining police neutrality (MyJoy Online, 2020). These concerns are linked to political influence on the police service, which affects its credibility as a trusted institution for all Ghanaians.

## 2.2 Empirical Review

Several studies align with the focus of this study. The most pertinent works include those by Osei-Adubofour (2017), Jedidigah et al. (2020), and Aubyn (2022). Osei-Adubofour (2017), investigated the political impartiality of the Ghanaian police and its impact on public trust, legitimacy, and cooperation. Using a quantitative survey methodology, data were collected from 584 adults across Ghana. The study explored how perceived political bias within the police service influences citizens' willingness to cooperate and their trust in the institution. Findings revealed widespread perceptions of political bias, significantly undermining public confidence in the police. Interestingly, despite mistrust, a segment of the population still exhibited a willingness to cooperate with the GPS. The study concluded that the politicisation of the police erodes legitimacy and recommended reforms grounded in procedural justice and constitutional safeguards for institutional independence. However, while the study effectively quantified public perceptions, it offered limited qualitative insight into how political polarisation is experienced and negotiated within the police service itself, particularly by officers whose professional identity may be in tension with partisan expectations. This gap makes it difficult to grasp the internal dilemmas of the service in a politically divided system, which this current study seeks to explore.

Furthermore, Jedidigah et al. (2020), examined Ghana's key security challenges and assessed the Ghana Police Service's (GPS) capacity to address them. The research employed a mixed-method approach, combining surveys, interviews, and secondary data. It identified challenges such as armed robbery, cybercrime, and political vigilantism, noting that political interference and institutional resource constraints significantly impede the effectiveness of the GPS. These conditions were linked to public mistrust and the erosion of institutional credibility. The study recommended depoliticisation, better resourcing, and capacity-building measures. Nonetheless, the study's broad focus on security threats only briefly engages with the structural and systemic nature of political interference. It does not delve into how officers and administrators within the GPS interpret and navigate the tensions arising from operating under a politically polarised state. The present study builds on this by providing an in-depth qualitative examination of how political allegiances and pressures shape operational dynamics and internal morale within the service.

Aubyn (2022) investigated the contrasting performance of the Ghana Police Service (GPS) in domestic versus United Nations (UN) peacekeeping contexts. Drawing on in-depth interviews and assemblage theory, the study attributed performance disparities not to skill gaps but to contextual factors such as colonial legacies, resource limitations, political interference, and legal frameworks. It found that while GPS personnel are highly regarded in international spaces, their domestic performance suffers under institutional constraints and governance weaknesses. Yet, despite its insightful analysis of performance disparities, Aubyn's study stops short of critically unpacking the political culture in which domestic policing is embedded. The influence of partisan alignments, regime loyalty, and internal political patronage is under-explored. This study responds by foregrounding the daily realities and professional dilemmas faced



by police personnel who must maintain neutrality in a system fraught with political division and competing party interests.

The studies by Osei-Adubofour (2017), Jedidigah et al. (2020), and Aubyn (2022), highlight key challenges facing the Ghana Police Service, including political bias, systemic constraints, and contextual factors affecting performance. Building on these insights, this study examines how political partisanship, particularly the influence of the NPP and NDC, impacts police neutrality, efficiency, and public trust, focusing on the GPS's struggle to maintain professional integrity in a highly polarised political landscape.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to examine the relationship between political partisanship and the operational challenges of the Ghana Police Service (GPS). As Creswell (2014) highlights, qualitative methods effectively capture the perspectives of affected stakeholders, providing rich, descriptive data on complex social processes. This approach facilitated an in-depth exploration of political interference and its impact on police operations, professional integrity, and public trust.

#### 3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted across Ghana's sixteen administrative regions, strategically grouped into three geographic zones to reflect regional diversity and socio-political characteristics. The Northern Zone comprised the Northern, Savannah, North East, Upper East, and Upper West Regions. These areas included both urban and rural communities such as Tamale, Wa, Bolgatanga, Yendi, and Damongo, which are often shaped by decentralised governance, localised political influence, and limited policing infrastructure. The Middle Zone included the Ashanti, Bono, and Eastern Regions, with study sites like Kumasi, Techiman, Sunyani, and Koforidua. This zone represents a demographic and administrative median, balancing urban concentration with rural peripheries. The Southern Zone encompassed Greater Accra, Central, Western, Western North, Volta, and Oti Regions. It featured major urban centres such as Accra, Tema, Kasoa, Cape Coast, Takoradi, Ho, and Dambai, which serve as hubs of political activity, public institutions, and media presence. This zonal classification provided a framework for comparative analysis, allowing the study to explore how political interference in policing manifests across different socio-political, cultural, and geographic settings in Ghana.

#### 3.3 Target Population

The target population for the study consisted of individuals with direct or indirect engagement with the Ghana Police Service whose perspectives were considered essential to understanding the dynamics of political interference in police operations. These included active and retired police officials who provided first-hand accounts of institutional processes, operational challenges, and political pressures within the service. In addition, political analysts were selected for their critical perspectives on governance, party politics, and the politicisation of security institutions. The study also engaged policy stakeholders, including representatives from the Ministry of the Interior, political party operatives, and civil servants involved in internal security policymaking. To enrich the analysis with expert knowledge on law enforcement and governance, the study included security analysts drawn from academia, civil society, and think tanks. Finally, citizens from various socio-economic backgrounds were interviewed to assess public perceptions of police impartiality, trust, and the impact of political interference on community security. This diversified population ensured that the study captured a wide range of institutional, expert, and public viewpoints.

#### 3.4 Sampling and Sample Size

This study employed purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was used to deliberately select individuals whose professional roles, lived experiences, or expert insights aligned with the study's objective of interrogating political interference in the Ghana Police Service. This approach enabled the researcher to engage a wide range of stakeholders, including those with insider knowledge of police operations and external observers of political governance. Palinkas et al., (2015), argues that purposive sampling is highly effective in qualitative research because it prioritises depth and relevance of data over the aim of statistical generalisability. In addition, snowball sampling was employed to complement the purposive approach, particularly in identifying hard-to-reach participants such as retired police officers and ordinary citizens with relevant experiences. Through referrals from initial informants, the researcher was able to gain access to knowledgeable individuals who may not have been easily located through formal recruitment methods. According to Naderifar et al. (2017), snowball sampling is effective for reaching participants who are otherwise difficult to locate, making it particularly valuable in qualitative studies requiring in-depth insights. The



combination of these techniques enriched the dataset and enhanced the depth of analysis by including diverse and context-specific narratives.

A total of forty-three (43) participants were engaged across Ghana's sixteen administrative regions. Sampling was guided by a zonal classification that divided the country into Northern, Middle, and Southern Zones. This zonal approach facilitated a spread of respondents from different geographic and socio-political backgrounds. Of the forty-three participants, thirteen were drawn from the Northern Zone, eight from the Middle Zone, and twenty-two from the Southern Zone. Table 1 summarises the allocation of participants across the three (3) zones, showing the number of regions per zone and the corresponding sample size:

**Table 1**

*Participant Distribution by Zone and Number of Regions.*

Zone	Regions Included	Number of Regions	Participants Sampled	Percentage of Total Sample (%)
Northern Zone	Northern, Savannah, North East, Upper West, Upper East	5	13	30.2
Middle Zone	Bono, Ashanti, Eastern	3	8	18.6
Southern Zone	Greater Accra, Central, Western, Volta, Oti, Western North, Ahafo, North East	8	22	51.2
<b>Total</b>		<b>16</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Author (2024)

This distribution was informed by three considerations. First, the number of regions within each zone, with the South comprising more regions. Second, the population density and levels of urbanisation, particularly in Greater Accra where national institutions are concentrated. Third, the relative ease of accessing respondents in the southern part of the country within the research timeframe. The participant pool comprised twelve police officials, including four active and eight retired officers, seven political analysts from academia, civil society, and the media, six policy stakeholders associated with political parties and the Ministry of the Interior, six security analysts with backgrounds in law enforcement and governance, and twelve citizens from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Table 2 below presents the breakdown of the sample composition by stakeholder group and their distribution across the Northern, Middle, and Southern Zones.

**Table 2**

*Distribution of Sample Composition by Stakeholder Group and Geographic*

Stakeholder Group	Category Description	Northern Zone	Middle Zone	Southern Zone	Total
Active and retired officers of the Ghana Police Service	Serving GPS personnel	1	1	2	4
Political Analysts	Former GPS personnel	3	2	3	8
Policy Stakeholders	From academia, civil society, and media	2	2	3	7
Security Analysts	From the Ministry of the Interior and political parties	2	1	3	6
Ordinary Citizens	Experts in law enforcement, conflict, and governance	2	2	2	6
	Diverse socio-economic and regional backgrounds	3	2	7	12
<b>Total</b>		<b>13</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>43</b>

Source: Author (2024)

Although Ghana's population exceeds thirty-three (33) million (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021), the study did not aim for statistical generalisation. Consistent with qualitative research logic, which emphasises depth, richness, and thematic saturation, rather than numerical representation (Creswell and Poth, 2016), the sample size of forty-three (43) was sufficient to capture the key dynamics and perspectives relevant to the politicisation of the Ghana Police Service.

### 3.5 Data Collection and Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a thematic approach, which is well suited to qualitative research as it enables the identification of patterns and key themes (Terry et al., 2017). Thematic coding categorised participants by geographic zones to capture regional variations. Key codes such as political interference, public trust, and police operations were identified, leading to broader themes that were refined and substantiated with participant quotes. This method provided critical insights into the socio-political factors shaping policing in Ghana.



### 3.7 Ethical Considerations

The study followed key ethical principles, including informed consent, voluntary participation, and confidentiality. Participants were clearly informed about the purpose of the research and their rights, including the option to withdraw at any time. All data were anonymised to protect participants' identities, and no formal review board was involved in the process.

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## IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Findings

This section presents findings on the influence of political partisanship on the operational challenges of the Ghana Police Service (GPS), based on interviews with police personnel, security experts, political party representatives, and Ministry of the Interior officials. Interviews were conducted across the Northern, Middle, and Southern zones of Ghana, with senior figures based in Accra. Using thematic analysis, as outlined by Terry et al. (2017), the study identified key themes such as political interference, its impact on law enforcement operations, and public perceptions of police professionalism. The findings underscore the significant role of political partisanship in shaping the GPS's effectiveness and neutrality.

#### 4.1.1 Political Interference and Police Neutrality

This theme examines how political interference compromises the neutrality and professionalism of the Ghana Police Service. Findings reveal that recruitment and promotions are heavily influenced by political allegiance rather than merit, thereby eroding professional independence. Officers and analysts across Ghana confirmed that political patronage plays a significant role in recruitment, especially during politically sensitive periods. A security analyst highlighted that:

*“Political patronage undermines the integrity of the recruitment process”* (Interview with KII, SA-S-01, Accra, 18/11/2024). Similarly, an officer noted: *“Recruitment often prioritises political connections over merit, with professional qualifications secondary to allegiance”* (Interview with KII, PP-S-01, Accra, 18/11/2024).

Political party representatives from the NDC and NPP admitted influencing recruitment as a way of fulfilling promises to their supporters. One NDC official stated:

*“... We have to ensure our party members are recruited into the police service because we promised them jobs”* (Interview with KII, PA-S-01, Accra, 18/11/2024).

Similarly, an NPP representative remarked:

*“... Political parties influence recruitment because we owe it to our supporters”* (Interview with KII, PA-S-02, Accra, 21/11/2025).

The data suggest that this politicisation extends to leadership appointments. Officers expressed frustration that promotions often depend on political loyalty rather than professional merit. One officer in Greater Accra lamented:

*“Promotions frequently hinge on which political party is in power, eroding public trust in our impartiality”* (Interview with KII, PP-S-01, Accra, 21/11/2024).

Another officer added:

*“It is disheartening to see individuals with limited experience elevated due to political connections”* (Interview with KII, PP-S-02, Tamale, 01/12/2024).

A senior officer noted:

*“Political backing for career advancement discourages dedicated officers, creating divisions within the service”* (Interview with Interview with KII, PP-S-04, Accra, 21/11/2024).

Security analysts emphasised the detrimental impact of political interference, particularly during elections. One analyst observed:

*“The neutrality of the police is crucial during political tension, yet incidents expose systemic vulnerabilities”* (Interview with KII, PA-S-01, Accra, 10/01/2025).

The data suggest that high-profile cases like the excessive force during the 2020 elections and the Ayawaso West Wuogon by-election reflect this trend. The analyst further remarked that:



*“Political affiliations often dictate leadership appointments, citing Abdul Razak Osman’s rapid promotion after Mahama’s re-election as emblematic of this issue”* (Interview with KII, SA-S-03, Accra, 10/01/2025).

The data reveal that the recurring accusations of bias by both NPP and NDC during elections underscore the public’s mistrust. A political analyst noted:

*“Both parties accuse the police of siding with the other during elections, questioning their neutrality”* (Interview with KII, PA-S-02, Accra, 12/01/2025).

A police officer admitted:

*“The political pressure during elections can be overwhelming”* (Interview with KII, PO-S-01, Kasoa, 11/01/2025).

The data further suggest that a “culture of fear” within the service prevents officers from acting against politically connected individuals. One officer revealed:

*“There is a real fear of retribution if we take action against politicians”* (Interview with KII, PO-N-02, Walewale, 22/11/2024).

Another officer explained:

*“Politicians often intervene in cases, and resisting their influence can lead to career repercussions”* (Interview with KII, PO-N-01, Tamale, 21/11/2024).

These findings highlight how political interference undermines professionalism, reduces morale, and erodes public trust in the police, particularly during politically charged periods.

The data demonstrate that political interference in the Ghana Police Service compromises its neutrality, as recruitment and promotions are driven by party allegiance rather than merit. Political actors from both the NDC and NPP admit to manipulating police entry and leadership appointments to reward loyalists and fulfil campaign promises. This has fostered distrust, low morale, and a culture of fear among officers, especially during election periods. This conforms with Securitisation Theory because political elites securitise the police by framing control over the service as vital to their political survival. The police are no longer seen as neutral protectors of public order but as instruments for safeguarding partisan interests, particularly during elections, justifying political interference in their operations and leadership. This also aligns with Institutional Theory because it reveals how informal political practices override formal institutional procedures. The persistence of political patronage and fear of retribution show how the police institution has adapted to external political pressures, normalising political loyalty over professionalism and weakening internal governance structures.

#### **4.1.2 Impact of Political Pressures on Law Enforcement Operations**

This theme explores the significant influence of political pressures on the daily operations of the Ghana Police Service. The findings from interviews and data analysis indicate that political interference frequently diverts police resources toward politically motivated tasks. Several interviewees pointed out how police officers are pressured to handle situations with leniency when it involves members of the ruling party, while adopting a more hostile or strict approach toward political opponents.

A retired police officer (PP-S-04) shared an example of political figures exerting undue influence over law enforcement activities, stating:

*“In some cases, even those within the government influence police officers to act against their own party members. When elections are around, police priorities shift, and instead of handling regular duties, we are tasked with ensuring political rallies go smoothly. But there’s a clear difference when we handle rallies for opposition parties versus those for the ruling party”*. (Interview with Retired Police Officer, PP-S-04, Tamale, 18/01/2025).

The retired officer’s statement shows how political influence shifts police duties during elections, favouring the ruling party. This reflects securitisation theory, where political events are framed as security issues to justify partisan control. It also aligns with institutional theory, as ongoing political interference becomes normalised within police culture, undermining professionalism and neutrality.

Similarly, a political analyst (PA-S-03) discussed how political pressures skew law enforcement, stating:

*“There is a widespread belief that the police mainly serve those in power. Investigations involving opposition figures are often delayed or neglected. Take the 2016 murder of Abuakwa North MP J. B. Danquah Adu. The perpetrators remain unknown which many see as a sign of political interference. Yet after President Mahama returned to office just barely a month now, arrests were suddenly made implying the police previously held back due to political interests.”* (Interview with Political Analyst PA-S-03 Tema 18/01/2025).

The analyst questions why the ruling NPP, despite using the case in their 2016 campaign, did not ensure justice if they had no vested interest in the matter. This statement aligns with securitisation theory as it reveals how political interests shape the framing and prioritisation of security issues. The police’s selective attention to investigations,

influenced by those in power, shows that certain cases are securitised or ignored based on political convenience rather than objective security needs. This manipulation of law enforcement resources reflects how political actors use securitisation to control narratives and maintain power.

Further, another political analyst (PA-S-02) highlighted the murder of nine individuals during the 2020 elections in Techiman and the brutalities inflicted on opposition members during the Ayawaso West Wuogon by-election as stark examples of political pressures skewing law enforcement. The analyst elaborated:

*“(...) During the 2020 elections, the police were heavily criticised for their role in the deaths of nine civilians in Techiman. These were not isolated incidents but rather a reflection of how political actors influence law enforcement to serve their agendas. Similarly, the Ayawaso West Wuogon by-election revealed a troubling pattern, with thugs reportedly backed by political figures attacking opposition members. These events demonstrate how political interference undermines the neutrality and professionalism of the police, eroding public trust in their ability to act impartially (...)”* (Interview with KII, PA-S-04, Accra, 15/01/2025).

These observations underscore how political dynamics distort the role of law enforcement, prioritising political interests over justice and fairness. Representatives from the two major political parties, the NPP (PPR-S-01) and the NDC (PPR-S-02), acknowledged the pervasive influence of political dynamics within the police force. The NPP representative remarked:

*“During our tenure, police forces were undoubtedly under pressure to act in ways that favoured the ruling party, but the same could be said about opposition parties when they are in power. It’s an unfortunate cycle of politicising law enforcement, leading to bias in how the police respond to situations...”* (Interview with KII, PPR-S-01, Accra, 12/01/2025).

The NDC representative echoed similar sentiments, stating:

*“(...) This culture of political interference in the police is not new. Even in our time, the police faced challenges in maintaining neutrality, especially during politically sensitive events. The police end up walking a tightrope, trying to balance loyalty to the government of the day while avoiding alienating the opposition (...)”* (Interview with NDC Representative, PPR-S-02, Accra, 14/01/2025).

These insights illustrate the deeply rooted nature of political pressures in Ghana’s law enforcement system, with a cyclical pattern of politicisation that persists regardless of the ruling party. Additionally, a security analyst (SA-S-03) emphasised how these politically driven actions compromise the police’s professional neutrality, stating:

*“(...) When police officers are tasked with prioritising politically motivated assignments, such as ensuring the security of ruling party rallies, it detracts from their core duties. This leads to an erosion of public trust and undermines the impartiality that law enforcement should uphold (...)”* (Interview with KII, SA-S-03, Tema, 14/01/2025).

The analysis reveals a clear pattern where political pressures distort the priorities of the police, leading to uneven application of law enforcement and contributing to a public perception of bias. This not only compromises the integrity of the police service but also diminishes its ability to function independently and fairly, particularly during politically sensitive periods.

#### 4.1.3 Public Perception of Police Professionalism

Public perception of police professionalism is profoundly shaped by the political context, with varying experiences across different regions and communities. In urban areas of the Northern Zone, citizens frequently referred to the police as “agents of political elites,” undermining their credibility and trustworthiness. Community members expressed frustration over the perceived lack of independence within the police, suggesting they served political interests irrespective of the ruling party. One community member from the Northern Zone noted:

*“The police are not neutral in their work here. They serve the politicians, not the people. This has made many of us lose faith in them.”* (Interview with Citizen, OC-N-02, Yendi, 16/01/2025).

The community’s view reveals how political pressures have become deeply embedded in the police institution, causing it to prioritise political interests over impartial law enforcement. Institutional theory explains this as the organisation adapting to external influences, which undermines its formal role and erodes public trust. This disconnect between official duties and actual practices weakens the police’s legitimacy and effectiveness.

Further, In the urban centers such as Kumasi and Accra, public sentiment reflected a Polarised view. Business owners in opposition strongholds consistently accused the police of selective law enforcement, claiming preferential treatment for ruling party affiliates. Both NPP and NDC supporters alleged political favoritism when their respective parties were not in power. A resident from the Middle Zone commented:

*“(...) It is clear that during opposition times, the police focus more on the strongholds of the ruling party, leaving us vulnerable. The bias is obvious and unacceptable (...)”* (Interview with Citizen, OC-M-01, Kumasi, 15/01/2025).

Additionally, Security experts observed that public trust in the police reached its lowest levels during periods of political transition, with both NPP and NDC members openly accusing the police of unprofessional conduct. Allegations of partisanship and bias were most pronounced during these times, further eroding public confidence in the police force. A retired police officer reflected:

*“(...) The police always face criticism during political transitions because their actions are viewed through a political lens. Allegations of bias, whether true or not, damage the relationship between the police and the public (...)”* (Interview with Retired Police Officer, PP-S-04, Kumasi, 14/01/2025).

These findings underscore the challenge of maintaining police professionalism and public trust in the face of deeply entrenched political influences. Due to these the public loss trust in the police neutrality and professionalism thereby trust in reporting cases to the media and most cases taking the laws into their own hands.

#### 4.1.4 Institutional Challenges and Coping Mechanisms

This theme explores the institutional challenges faced by the Ghana Police Service (GPS) in maintaining neutrality amidst political pressures. The data reveal that both the NPP and NDC have historically used the police to advance their political agendas, while accusing the service of partisanship. One senior officer shared that during the NDC era, police were often tasked with politically motivated operations, which continued under successive regimes:

*“(...) Across all political regimes, we were frequently tasked with politically motivated operations, and this pattern persisted under successive administrations, with the police often being the first to be blamed (...)”* (Interview with KII, PO-N-01, Accra, 21/11/2024).

The data reveal that mistrust between the police and political parties deepens when opposition parties, having once used the police for political gain, now accuse the service of similar bias when in power. This creates a cycle of suspicion, further strained by officers seeking favour from political figures for personal gain.

A security analyst pointed out that prioritising political allegiance over professional duties causes the institution to lose credibility, undermining law enforcement independence and eroding public trust:

*“(...) Political pressures divert police resources to politically motivated tasks, like securing rallies, undermining professionalism and eroding public confidence in the police’s impartiality (...)”* (Interview with KII, SA-S-03, Accra, 10/01/2025).

Furthermore, the data suggest that political interference fosters a culture of corruption within the Ghana police force, as officers are often directed to serve political interests, compromising their integrity and decision-making capabilities as a political analyst stated:

*“(...) Political influence complicates accountability, as misconduct is often excused when police actions align with political interests or national security concerns (...)”* (Interview with Accra, KII, PO-N-01, 21/11/2024).

Another police officer added that the politicisation of the institution has eroded trust within the police service, as some officers engage in acts of sabotage against their superiors for political gain. The officer cited a similar situation involving the current Inspector General of Police (IGP), Dr George Akuffo Dampare, and his former secretary, Peter Lanchene Toobu, now a retired Superintendent of Police in Ghana. As he stated:

The politicisation of the police service has deeply undermined trust within the institution. Officers are no longer solely focused on professionalism but are instead engaging in internal sabotage to advance political ambitions.

*“We have seen this happen in the past, including with IGP Dampare and his former secretary, Peter Lanchene Toobu. The IGP trusted him, yet he allegedly manipulated recruitment lists for his own political gain. Such actions compromise the integrity of the police service”* (Interview with KII, PO-N-05, Accra, 21/11/2024).

According to the officer, the IGP placed significant trust in Toobu; however, each time he submitted a list for police recruitment, Toobu allegedly removed half of the names and replaced them with his own preferred candidates. The officer claimed that this was part of a broader effort to undermine the IGP for personal political ambitions. Toobu has since transitioned into politics and currently serves as the Member of Parliament for Wa West.

The data further highlight how political pressures undermine the GPS’s neutrality. Officers are often distrusted by political parties, who believe their actions are driven by political loyalty. This distrust, irrespective of which party is in power, exacerbates the challenges of impartial law enforcement. The findings suggest that political pressures severely undermine the GPS’s independence and professionalism, reducing its ability to serve the public impartially and eroding its credibility. Additionally, the data identified two institutional challenges are linked to political pressures: the Executive Instrument (E.I. 65) and the concentrated powers of the Inspector-General of Police (IGP).

##### 4.1.4.1 Executive Instrument (E.I. 65)

The Executive Instrument allows the ruling government to exert control over the police, which contradicts the constitutional provision for an independent police service. A senior officer noted that during both the NDC and NPP

eras, orders given under the guise of national security often seemed politically motivated, demonstrating how the Executive Instrument undermines police neutrality:

*“These politically motivated orders were not isolated to one regime; they continued under subsequent governments, revealing the persistent influence of political interests over the police operations.”* (Interview with KII, PO-S-01, Accra, 11/01/2025).

#### 4.1.4.2 The Powers of the IGP

The concentration of decision-making powers in the hands of the IGP limits the autonomy of lower-ranking officers and contributes to inefficiencies. A retired officer highlighted that when directives from the IGP were politically driven, officers were left with little choice but to comply, undermining the professionalism of the police service:

*“(...) The concentration of power in the IGP’s hands meant that when political motives influenced decisions, officers had no autonomy and had to follow orders, regardless of their professional judgment (...)”* (Interview with KII, PO-S-02, Accra, 11/01/2025).

The institutional challenges described here demonstrate a complex interplay between securitisation and institutional theories. From a securitisation perspective, the concentration of power within the Inspector General of Police’s office and the use of the Executive Instrument can be understood as mechanisms through which political authorities frame policing as an urgent security matter requiring centralised control. This framing justifies political dominance over the police, ostensibly to maintain order, but in practice allows partisan interests to dictate police operations. Institutional theory further elucidates how such political control becomes entrenched within the police organisation’s structures and norms. The formalisation of executive influence normalises political interference, gradually reshaping institutional practices and values away from impartiality towards loyalty to political leadership. This institutionalisation of bias undermines the Ghana Police Service’s legitimacy and public trust, creating systemic barriers to restoring its credibility and professional independence.

## 4.2 Discussion

This study examines the impact of political interference on the neutrality of the Ghana Police Service (GPS), using Securitisation Theory (Buzan et al., 1998) and Institutional Theory (Kauppi, 2022) as frameworks. Securitisation Theory explains how political actors politicise security issues, turning the police into tools for securing political power rather than addressing public security needs. The findings reveal that political loyalty shapes appointments, promotions, and police conduct, leading to selective law enforcement and compromised impartiality. Institutional Theory highlights how political pressures, both formal and informal, influence police operations by altering policies and practices, with political loyalty often outweighing professional competence in leadership appointments, weakening the force’s integrity and neutrality.

The data analysis reveals that political interference within the Ghana Police Service undermines its internal culture, demoralising officers and eroding public trust. The lack of institutional independence compromises the police’s effectiveness, reinforcing the view of the police as a tool of political power rather than impartial law enforcement. Institutional Theory suggests that such interference weakens an organisation’s core values and standards. This aligns with Gbambu et al.’s (2023) study, which found that communication breakdowns between the police, the public, and security agencies contribute to a loss of trust, fostering information disorder and further damaging the police’s credibility.

The analysis supports both Securitisation Theory (Buzan et al., 1998) and Institutional Theory (Kauppi, 2022), highlighting the impact of political interference in the Ghana Police Service (GPS). Interviews reveal that police appointments are often based on political loyalty rather than professional qualifications, undermining neutrality and turning the police into a political tool. The data show that political interference erodes the professional culture, with promotions influenced by political connections. This shift aligns with Institutional Theory, illustrating how external pressures destabilise core functions. Both theories highlight the negative effects on public trust, with many citizens expressing a lack of confidence in the GPS, as political bias undermines its legitimacy and professionalism, impacting national security and governance.

This study confirms the findings of Osei-Adubofour (2017) and Jedidigah et al. (2020) on the harmful effects of political interference on public trust and the legitimacy of the Ghana Police Service. It highlights political bias and systemic issues such as resource constraints, while offering a new perspective by examining the impact of competing political parties, particularly the NPP and NDC, on the GPS’s neutrality, an area not addressed in prior research. In contrast to Aubyn (2022), which focuses on broader socio-political dynamics, this study contributes fresh insights into the domestic political partisanship affecting the GPS.



## V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusion

This study offers a compelling examination of the Ghana Police Service's predicament within the highly polarised political landscape of Ghana. It rightly foregrounds political interference as a fundamental barrier to the police service's professionalism and impartiality. The depiction of cyclical mistrust where major political parties alternately manipulate and condemn the police depending on their position in government captures the essence of a political system where institutional neutrality is severely compromised. This observation is critical as it situates the police not merely as an operational law enforcement body but as an instrument frequently wielded for partisan advantage, thus eroding public confidence.

Moreover, the analysis recognises the multifaceted nature of the challenge by identifying regional disparities and institutional deficiencies as significant aggravating factors. The absence of robust safeguards to shield the police from political influence creates an environment where officers' loyalties may become divided between professional duty and political allegiance. The referenced leaked tape incident serves as a concrete example of this tension, highlighting how internal fractures within the police force itself can deepen governance challenges. This insight aligns with broader literature on policing in transitional democracies where state security apparatuses are often caught between competing political interests and the imperative to maintain order (Bayley, 2008).

The centralisation of power in the office of the Inspector General of Police, alongside the effects of the Executive Instrument (E.I. 65), underscores institutional vulnerabilities that facilitate political control. This critique is particularly pertinent as it points to structural reforms beyond individual behaviour, emphasising the need to redistribute authority to enhance accountability and autonomy. The study's recommendation for decentralisation and governance restructuring is thus well founded and echoes global best practices where police independence is critical to democratic consolidation (UNODC, 2011).

However, while the call for reform is necessary, the analysis could benefit from a deeper exploration of the practical obstacles to such change within Ghana's political culture. The entrenched nature of political patronage, coupled with the high stakes of partisan control over security forces, means that reforms face significant resistance from within both the police and political elites. This reality calls for a strategic approach that incorporates not only institutional restructuring but also cultural and behavioural change within the police service, supported by sustained political will and civil society engagement.

### 5.2 Recommendation

In order to address the pervasive political interference in the Ghana Police Service (GPS) and enhance its professionalism and neutrality, several recommendations are proposed. A constitutional review should be undertaken to restructure the Ghana Police Service, enhancing its autonomy and safeguarding it from political interference. This reform requires revisiting the legal and institutional frameworks governing the police to ensure operational independence. Parliament should strengthen its oversight of the GPS, revising the powers of the Inspector General of Police (IGP) to prevent undue political influence while maintaining accountability. These measures aim to protect the integrity and neutrality of the police, enabling it to fulfil its mandate impartially and effectively.

Restoring public trust in the GPS demands its depoliticisation. Political appointments and interference in police operations should be minimised or eliminated. Establishing transparent, merit-based procedures for officer appointments and promotions will ensure that competence and professionalism, rather than political loyalty, drive personnel decisions. Strengthening the institutional independence of the GPS will prevent it from being used as a tool for political agendas, reinforcing its commitment to upholding the rule of law.

Reforming the recruitment process is essential to building a competent and impartial police force. Parliament should develop and enforce a policy prioritising merit-based recruitment, with rigorous physical and academic qualifications as key selection criteria. Through eliminating political affiliations from recruitment considerations, the GPS can attract highly skilled officers capable of maintaining professionalism and neutrality. This approach will enhance the service's effectiveness in maintaining law and order and fostering public confidence. Collectively, these reforms will create a more autonomous, professional, and impartial Ghana Police Service, better equipped to serve the nation without undue political influence.

### Declaration of Non-Conflict of Interest

The researcher declares non-conflict of interest.



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