

## **An Analysis of the Media in the Generation of Electoral Conflict Behaviours among Voters in the Western North Region, Ghana**

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### **Abstract**

*The study investigated the media in the generation of electoral conflict behaviours among voters in the Western North Region, Ghana. It sought to ascertain how the media generate electoral conflict behaviors among voters in the Western North Region and to suggest ways of minimizing such conflicts. The mixed research design was used in the study. Questionnaires and interview guides were used to collect data for the study. The study revealed that the media are to blame for generating conflicts among voters in the Western North Region through the promotion of 'hate-speech', biasness and false reportage, mudslinging, improper checking of facts, encouragement, and usage of unsavory language, as well as unprofessional conduct of some journalists. It was also revealed that respect and adherence to media ethics, the establishment of media watchdog committees, avoidance of biased reportage, provision of effective security before, during, and after elections, as well as discouragement of hate speech and avoidance of incessant verbal attacks, could prevent electoral conflicts generated by media in the Region. The study recommended that media owners, especially television and radio owners, should develop the capacities of their journalists to ensure that they fact-check their stories before publishing so as to reduce political tensions and tackle hate speech in the Region before, during, and after elections. Ethical journalism is encouraged.*

**Keywords:** Conflict, Election, Ghana, Media, Voters, Western North.

### **Introduction**

According to [1], the impact of media on conflict resolution is a relatively new topic that has gotten little attention due to a lack of multidisciplinary models and concepts that provide more insight into the function of media in peace and conflict. The vast majority of violent clashes are asymmetric, and the vast majority of them take place within state borders.

It's vital to remember, particularly in terms of the media's role, that winning people's "hearts and minds" is critical. Non-state actors rely more on psychological warfare, which entails influencing a population's attitudes and

opinions, such as through the media because states are usually militarily superior [2]. Political decision-makers and the military, unfortunately, often underestimate the media's multidimensional role. Decision-makers regularly assert that the media has a huge impact. Political practitioners and even specialists typically presume that the media has an impact on political disagreements. According to a 1995 study, 64% of American military officers believed the media was mostly to blame for the Vietnam war effort's failure [3]. Given this, it's surprising, if not alarming, that so little research and funding has gone into better understanding the role of the media in

armed conflicts and government democratization [3].

The media has been used to promote peace and reconciliation before, during, and after elections on several occasions. In Northern Uganda, for example, the media has been used to foster peace by promoting the common good for the people (primarily voters) [4]. Evidence also suggests that the media has a key role in encouraging citizens to vote in big numbers during elections. [4] continued, “voters are encouraged to listen to media stations for radio phone-in chat shows and to have regular conversations with government and civil society leaders, which is a positive step toward peace-building. In the areas of news broadcasting, special features, round-table discussions, telephone call-ins, and music, the hiring of an ethnically diverse team of journalists to produce high-quality radio programs that promote reconciliation, dialogue, and collaboration will ensure credibility and unbiased programming [5].

Contrary to promoting peace, [6] argued that the media could increase divisions by failing to reflect pluralism in social and political processes. This could be done by acting as a spokesperson for ethnic and political power circles, thereby assisting in the creation of a critical citizenry inside a country. As a result, [6] concluded that the deliberate manipulation of news coverage for specific reasons exacerbates tensions between opposing factions and is the main driver of violent conflict in democracies. This is an example of the media’s persuasive ability to influence perceptions and decisions towards conflicts. The media has a history of inciting people to violence. Hitler exploited the media to incite anti-Semitism [7].

As [1] argued, not much work is done on the media, conflicts, and elections. This is particularly the case when relating the media and conflicts to voter behavior in elections, as literature search does not reveal much on such studies. It is against this backdrop that this study sought to ascertain how the media

generate electoral conflict behaviors among voters in the Western North Region, Ghana, and suggest ways of minimizing such conflicts.

## **Objectives of the study**

The study aimed to ascertain how the media generate conflict behavior among voters in the Western North Region of Ghana. It also suggests ways by which to deal with electoral conflicts generated by the media in the Region.

## **Literature Review**

Empirically, local communities were splintered to the point where violence was recognized as a valid way of problem resolution [7]. According to the Office of the High Representative’s (OHR) early evaluations of the Bosnian conflict, all three parties exploited radio and television programs to achieve their conflict goals and disparaged their opponents [8, 9]. On the African continent, there have been a few political revolutions in Arab countries. Viggo explored the role of the media in modern wars using the civil unrest in Libya as a case study [10].

The media’s inadequacies in conflict reporting and analysis were highlighted, emphasizing the media’s double standards by drawing parallels between the crises in Iraq and Libya to expose the media’s numerous blunders. Even while the media utilized “oppositional metaphors” to split the country into rulers and political elites (“us” vs. “them”), the impact on socioeconomic status, gender, age groups, and other human factors was not openly highlighted.

During Côte d’Ivoire’s general elections in 2010, the media environment was filled with political hyperbole, disinformation, and incitements to violence from opposing sides, while journalists were routinely assaulted and intimidated [11]. Both presidential candidates Laurent Gbagbo and Alassane Ouattara used the print media and public television to propagate propaganda and rally their electorates against their opponents during the post-election

unrest that followed the announcement of the presidential results [12]. The media played a key role in the post-election instability and subsequent civil war, which resulted in the displacement of over a million people, the effective termination of many government services in some areas, and a protracted period of economic deterioration [12]. The Ivorian civil war saw a power struggle for control of the media between factions supporting Gbagbo and Ouattara. The Ouattara camp founded Television Côte d'Ivoire (TCI) in early 2011 in response to the state-run Radio Télévision Ivoirienne (RTIpro- Gbagbo's) prejudices. Both television stations incited violence against their rivals and assaulted their opponents' media outlets or journalists. Certain media sources are largely regarded to have played a crucial part in the country's political, social, and ethnic problems [13].

In 2013, a sectarian atmosphere in the Central African Republic was worsened by hate speech propagated through the media, as well as targeted assaults, culminating in the displacement of about one million people and 75,000 refugees, which was unprecedented [14]. Hatred propagated through the media may have an impact that goes beyond prejudice to more overt expressions, such as the inter-ethnic conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo [14]. The Rwandan Radio-Télévision Libre des Milles Collines had a key role in the genocide of 1994, which claimed the lives of over 500,000 people in less than 100 days. The genocide is said to have been assisted by radio broadcasts directly urging for the slaughter of the Tutsi people [15, 16]. In Uganda, the lack of media coverage of the fight between the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) and the Lord Resistance Army (LRA), which has lasted for more than two decades without being thoroughly chronicled, has been blamed for the violence in Northern Uganda [17]. As a result, interfering with the international community has been difficult. [17] accused the international media of failing to fully report on Rwanda's

unfolding crisis, which led to the international community's failure to respond quickly. Okumu believes that more thorough and objective coverage of the Rwandan conflict could have prevented the genocide in 1994. Through misleading coverage, the media projected a chaotic political atmosphere characterized by abhorrence, violence, and a tight race between two protagonists in Kenya's 2007 general election.

Moreover, major news organizations such as NTV and KTN warned that the election would be rigged and tilted in favor of the ruling party. As a result, the Electoral Commission of Kenya's (ECK) alleged attempt to tamper with the vote-counting process only served to confirm the media's prediction [18]. When there is a lack of knowledge, tensions could rise [19, 20].

In Ghana, the 1992 constitution mandated that power be transferred every four years through elections. Ghana has managed to hold seven elections without interruption, including the 2016 elections. These elections exacerbated tensions between political parties, creating an unstable environment in which some individuals or groups are prone to participating in political and electoral violence on the smallest pretext or provocation, mostly fueled by the media [21]. Ghana has not had the same level of political or electoral violence as Cote d'Ivoire (2000, 2010), Nigeria (2003, 2007, 2011), Zimbabwe (2008), or Kenya (2007). However, since the Fourth Republic's foundation in 1992, grassroots violence or isolated incidences of electoral violence as a result of angry speeches or intemperate political rhetoric have become a recurring feature in Ghana's Presidential and Parliamentary Elections [22].

## **Methods**

### **Research Design**

According to [23], the research design is a detailed strategy for addressing a research challenge. "It is the plan, structure, and method

of investigation designed to get answers to research questions and control variance [24]. The study looked at how the media influence voting behavior in Ghana's Western North Region using quantitative and qualitative research approaches. Using the mixed research design, the researchers were able to examine the research problem from multiple perspectives, resulting in a more comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand [25].

### **Profile of the Study Locality (Sefwi Wiawso Municipality)**

The Sefwi Wiawso Municipality was established in 1988. Both the Sefwi-Wiawso Municipal and the Western North Region have administrative offices there in Sefwi-Wiawso. To the north, it is bordered by the Brong Ahafo Region, which is located in the Region's north-eastern corner. Juaboso and Bia Districts are to

the west, and Aowin/Suaman Districts are to the south. To the north and south, it is bordered by Bibiani-Ahwiaso-Bekwai and Wassa Amenfi, respectively. The Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly is the political and administrative centre of the Municipality. The Assembly's offices are in Sefwi Wiawso. Sefwi Wiawso Municipal had a total population of 151,220 people as of the 2021 Population and Housing Census, with men and women accounting for 50.2 and 49.8% of the population, respectively [26]. The household population was estimated to be 147,162, with 41,513 households, according to the survey. The average household size is 3.5 individuals.

Figure 1: displays the Map of the Sefwi Wiawso Municipality of the Western North Region.



**Figure 1.** Sefwi Wiawso Municipal of the Western North Region

Source: Electoral Commission of Ghana Final compilation of voter population figures (2020)

### **Sampling Size, Data Collection, and Data Analysis**

Questionnaires and interview guides were used to gather data for this investigation. Participants in the study were from the Sefwi

Wiawso Municipality. The survey population included 65,497 persons aged 18 and up who registered and voted in the Sefwi Wiawso Constituency during the December 7, 2020, General Elections.

*Yamane Formula,*

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

It was used to calculate the sample size.

The sample size for the study is *n* number of people. Thus, the current voter population studied in the Region. *N* is the number of voter population in the area, where *I* is a constant number, and *e* is the margin of error. The formula used a 95% confidence level, and *P* =0.05 are assumed. Given this, the sample size was determined as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where n=the sample size.

N=the population size (65,497).

e=the margin of error (0.05).

Hence,

$$n = \frac{65,497}{1 + 65,497(0.05)^2} = 398$$

The convenience sampling strategy was used to select the sample for the questionnaire administrations. The technique allowed for the identification of voters who met the study's requirements. Those who agreed to participate in the study were picked. According to [27], if the cost of a probability sample is extremely high in relation to the type and quality of data gathered, a non-probability sample should be considered (1997, p.62). The questionnaires

were administered to 438 eligible voters in total. To account for expected attrition, the sample was increased by 40 eligible voters (10% of 398). According to [28], oversampling decreases the impact of a high attrition rate on numerical analysis while simultaneously increasing the results' validity. At the end of the questionnaire administration, 404 questionnaires were retrieved and processed. The purposive sample method was utilized to choose 10 eligible voters for the qualitative segment interviews. To obtain qualitative data, according to [29], sampling should be done with purpose. Purposive sampling enabled the researchers to select the optimal sample for collecting the data required. Both convenience and purposive sampling methods were used in this investigation. Data were analyzed and discussed at the same time. The survey data were entered into Excel and structured into tables, charts, and graphs. For emphasizes, data from the interviews were presented in narratives and direct quotations. The findings were then discussed.

## Results and Discussions

The age and educational level of respondents were analyzed as important variables in the study. Findings on the study objectives were also presented and discussed here.

**Table 1.** Ages of Respondents

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
18 – 25 years	59	14.6	14.6
26 – 35 years	150	37.1	37.1
36 – 45 years	173	42.8	42.8
46 years and above	22	5.4	5.4
<b>Total</b>	404	100	100

Source: Field Data (2021)

According to Table 1, 42.8 % of the sampled respondents were between the ages of 36 and 45. Respondents between the ages of twenty-six (26) and thirty-five (35) years made up 37.1% of the sample, while those aged eighteen (18) and twenty-five (25) years, as well as those

aged 46 and over, made up 14.6% and 5.4%, respectively. [30] argued that voters' perspectives on specific topics are shaped in part by their age. Diverse age groups may have different opinions on issues, including the media and electoral conflict behaviors.

**Table 2.** Educational Level of Respondents

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Primary	0	0	0
JHS	13	3.2	3.2
SHS	123	30.4	30.4
Tertiary	264	65.3	65.3
No Education	4	1	1
Total	404	100	100

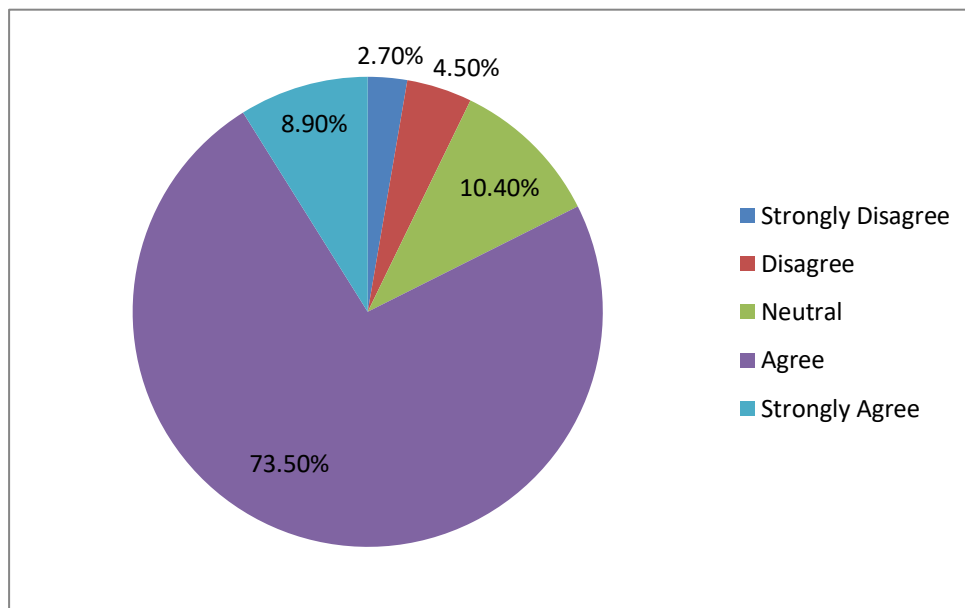
Source: Field Data (2021)

Table 2 shows that 3.2 % and 30.4% of respondents, respectively, completed Junior High School (JHS) and Senior High School (SHS). As shown in the Table, the majority (65.3%) of the study respondents had completed university education at the time of voting, while only 1% (4) had no formal education. This reveals that the majority of respondents (65.3%) in the study Region had tertiary qualifications, indicating their level of appreciation of issues, including the problem

under study, and hence their ability to provide the needed data. The Media and Generation of Electoral Conflicts Behavior among Voters in the Western North Region.

### **Media Personnel Promote Hate Speech during Elections**

The study sought to establish whether media personnel promote hate speech during elections, and Figure 2 provides data in support of the argument.



**Figure 2.** Media Personnel Promote hate Speech during Election

Source: Field Data (2021)

Data in Figure 2 provides insights into the sampled respondents' level of agreement regarding the promotion of hate speech during elections by media personnel. From the study, the majority (73.5%) of the respondents agree and strongly agree (8.9%) that media personnel

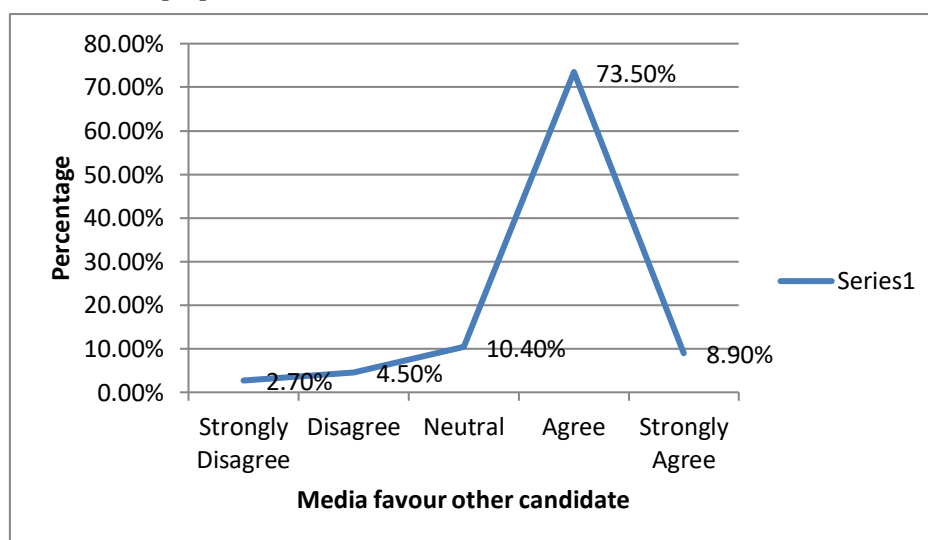
promotes hate speech during elections, whereas 4.5% and 2.7% disagree and strongly disagree, respectively. About 10.4% remain neutral on whether they agree or disagree with the claim.

This finding on media professionals encouraging hate speech during elections (73.5%) is consistent with Ebenezer Wikina's assessment at a panel discussion on "a youth-led open-source forum for policy ideas" that certain journalists were being utilized to propagate hate speech in society [31]. It was further asserted during the interview that hate speech targets, threatens, or degrades an individual or group, as well as inciting violence in society. While informing, educating, entertaining, and setting the agenda for public conversation, the media must guarantee that it does not advocate or promote hate speech leading to conflict or violence in society. This is why we recommend media owners engage in journalist capacity building so that they can fact-check stories, combat hate speech, and lessen political tensions [31].

Corroborating the hate speeches by journalists as one of the causes of electoral conflicts by the media, one of the study participants recounted this: *"Some of the media comments poured out for public consumption during elections are undignified, dehumanizing and above all frightening. These comments result in enflaming violence in some communities"* (Interviews, 2021).

### The Media Tend to Favor Some Candidates Over Others During Elections

This research sought to determine whether the Media tend to favor some candidates over others during elections or not. Figure 3 illustrates the results obtained from the sampled respondents.



**Figure 3.** The Media Tend to Favour some Candidates over others during Elections

Source: Field Data (2021)

According to the findings of the survey, the majority (73.5%) and 8.9% of the sampled respondents agree and strongly agree that the media favors some candidates over others during elections, compared to a few (2.7%) and 10.4%) who disagree and strongly disagree. This finding is corroborated by a similar outcome by [31], who observed that almost eight out of ten Americans (79%) believe news media favor one side when

reporting on political and social topics. In supporting how the media tend to favor some candidates over others, one respondent stated that:

*This is when party communicators are given opportunities to speak out against rival political parties in an unacceptably hostile manner in our culture. When the opponent hears this, they may respond by assaulting*

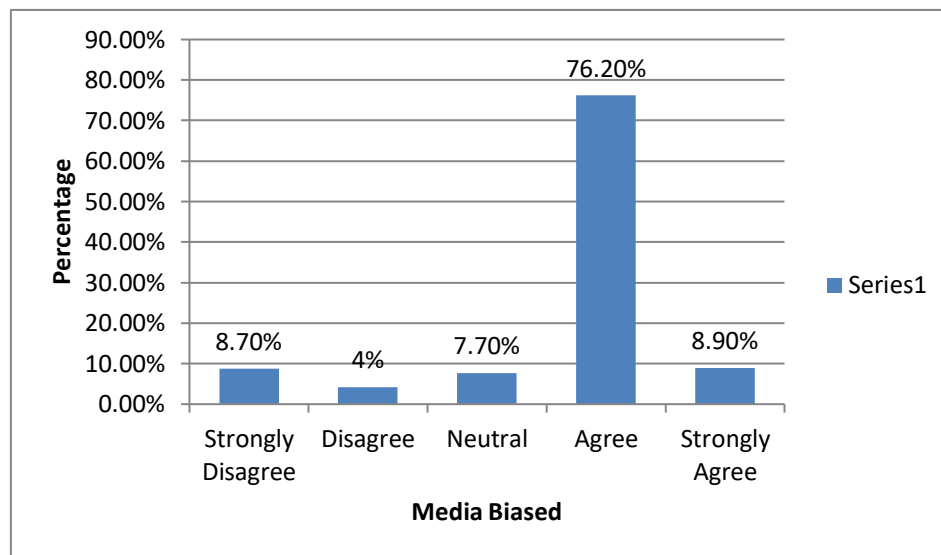


them, resulting in conflict in our society by their party supporters (Interviews, 2021).

### **The Media make Biased and False Reportage on Political Parties and Politicians During Elections**

The study sought to establish whether the media make biased and false reportage on political parties and politicians during elections, and the result of this is shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4 indicates that the majority (76.2%) as well as 8.9% of the sampled respondents correspondingly agree and strongly agree with the statement that the media make biased and false reportage on political parties and politicians during elections, while 5% and 2.2% disagree and strongly disagree respectively.



**Figure 4.** The Media make Biased and False Reportage on Political Parties and Politicians during Elections

Source: Field Data (2021)

The remaining 7.7% of them remained neutral. The findings in this regard were similar to the work of [32], who stated that the media biasness and falsity have also been used in politics to smear the free press for revealing embarrassing truths or speaking “truth to power”. The Oxford Internet Institute’s (OII) algorithmic propaganda project uses the umbrella term ‘junk news,’ which is characterized as “extremist, sensationalist, conspiratorial, disguised commentary” [33]. “Problematic information”, “information disorders”, and “fake news” are among other catch-all terms [34]. Corroborating the biased and false reportage made by the media, one interviewee said:

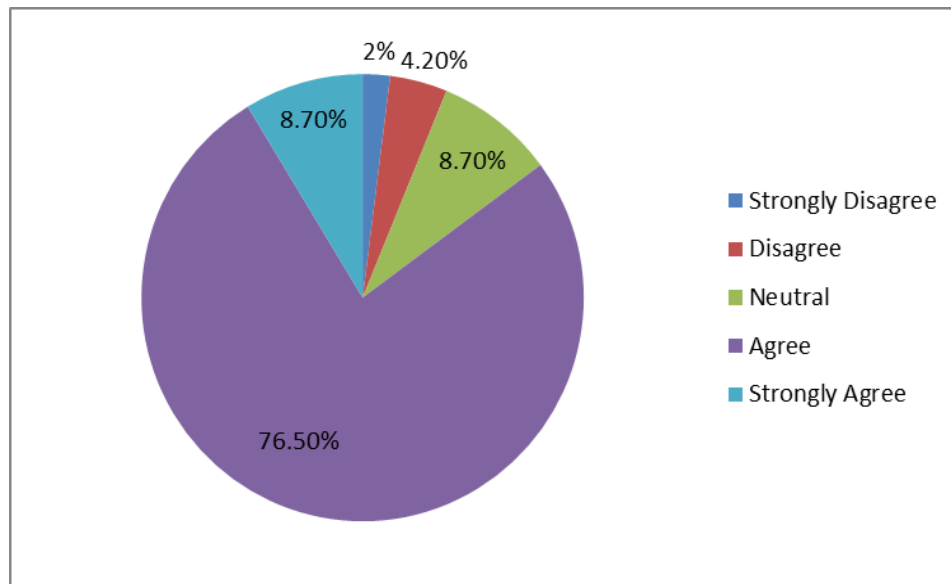
*The media generate conflicts among voters by speaking for one particular person or*

*throwing out wrong information on a candidate during campaigning sessions without speaking for the other people because they don’t give equal room to the participants to campaign on their platforms, and this creates conflicts during the election (Interviews, 2021).*

### **The Media Create an Atmosphere of Disunity, Mudslinging, and Animosity among Political Parties and Politicians**

The study sought to establish whether or not the media create an atmosphere of disunity, mudslinging, and animosity among political parties and politicians in the study area. Data in Figure 5 present results regarding the creation of an atmosphere of disunity, mudslinging, and animosity among political parties and politicians by the media.





**Figure 5.** The Media Create an Atmosphere of Disunity, Mudslinging and Animosity among Political Parties and Politicians

Source: Field Data (2021)

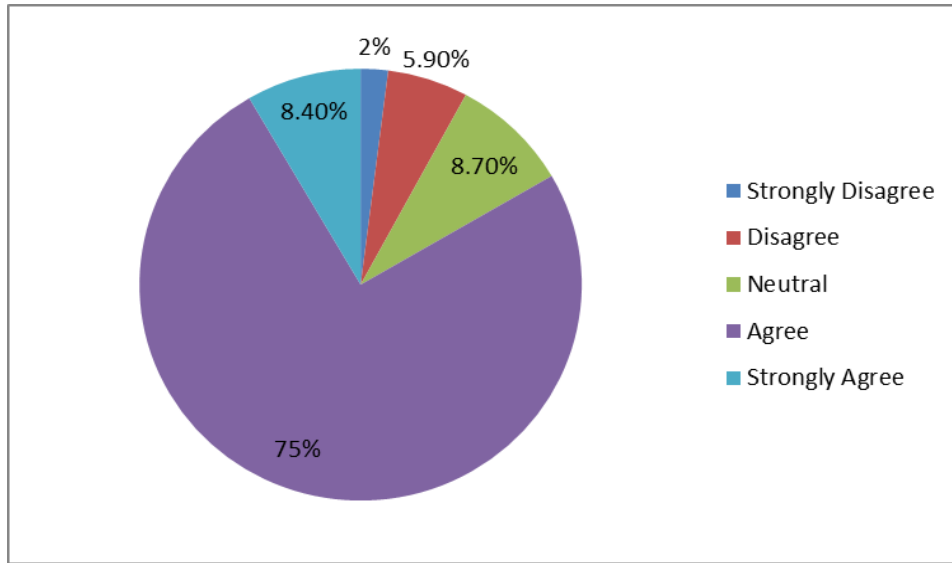
The study investigated into the creation of an atmosphere of disunity, mudslinging, and animosity among political parties and politicians by the media. It was discovered that the majority (76.5%), as well as 8.7% of the sampled respondents correspondingly agree and strongly agree with the assertion that the media create an atmosphere of disunity, mudslinging, and animosity among political parties and politicians, while 4.2% and 2% disagree and strongly disagree in that order. It was observed that 8.7% of the study participants remained neutral in responding to the claim. This finding supports the work of [35], who views the creation of an atmosphere of disunity, mudslinging, and animosity among political parties and politicians as the doing of when covering political events, journalists have a tendency to exaggerate negativity, assaults, and disputes. The finding is also consistent with the views of [36]. Journalists are getting more cynical about politics), or they want to attract more viewers/readers, therefore they strive to sell excellent stories with conflicts [36].

According to [37], there is a correlation between rising negativity in politics and the media. A respondent in an interview stated that:

*The media generate conflicts through personal verbal attacks, muggings, needless quarrels, and embellishment of political issues on opponents. These verbal attacks in a way have the tendency of angering their victims and thereby result in clashes among people from different political party divides insults and lies about the opponents (Interviews, 2021).*

### **The Media Do Not Do Fact-Checking of Polls and Other Information They Churn out During Elections Thereby Creating Conflicts**

The goal of the study was to ascertain if the media contributes to conflict by failing to fact-check polls and other materials they disseminate during elections. Figure 6 shows the effects of not fact-checking polls and other materials that are churned out during elections, which leads to conflict.



**Figure 6.** The Media do not do fact-Checking of Polls and other Information they Churn out during Elections thereby Creating Conflicts

Source: Field Data (2021)

The research looked at the idea that during elections, the media does not fact-check polls and other information they spew out, resulting in disputes. It was revealed that the majority (75%) and 8.4% of the sampled respondents agree and strongly agree with the premise that the media does not fact-check polls and other material they churn out during elections, resulting in disputes.

It was also discovered that 5.9% and 2% of the individuals disagree and strongly disagree with the assertion, respectively. Approximately 8.7% of the remaining respondents were undecided. It can be implied from the data presented in Figure 5 that it is critical to keep erroneous information under wraps, especially because it has the ability to disrupt and derail existing peace being enjoyed by the populace [38]. An Interview was done with one of the respondents on how media generate conflict during the election without doing proper fact-

checking and the respondents remarked as follow:

*The media generate conflicts through their talk shows and debates. During such debates, hosts of the programs do not do proper fact checking by putting out flawed information under shawls. Such information eventually goes along way to defaming a candidate or the personalities of their opponents and this results in attacks on them by political party members in their various localities (Interviews, 2021).*

### **Ways Media Generate Conflicts Among Electorates in the Western North Region**

The goal of the study was to figure out how the media in the Western North Region causes electoral conflicts. The responses in Table 3 depict the many ways in which the media contribute to electorate conflicts in the Western North Region.

**Table 3.** Ways Media Generate Conflicts among Electorates in the Western North

Item	Frequency	%
Bias in reporting	36	10
False reportage	53	13
Unguided utterance	36	9
Unfair constitution of panel members	44	11

When the media create a conducive environment for one party than others	4	1
Inability of media to do proper fact-checking	36	9
Misbehavior by some party members at panel discussions	40	10
Unprofessional behavior of some journalists	4	1
Unnecessary bastardization of parties	4	1
Unresolved issues among parties created the media	77	19
Encouragement and use of unsavory language	50	12
Political ideological differences arrogantly expressed via the media	20	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>404</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Data (2021)

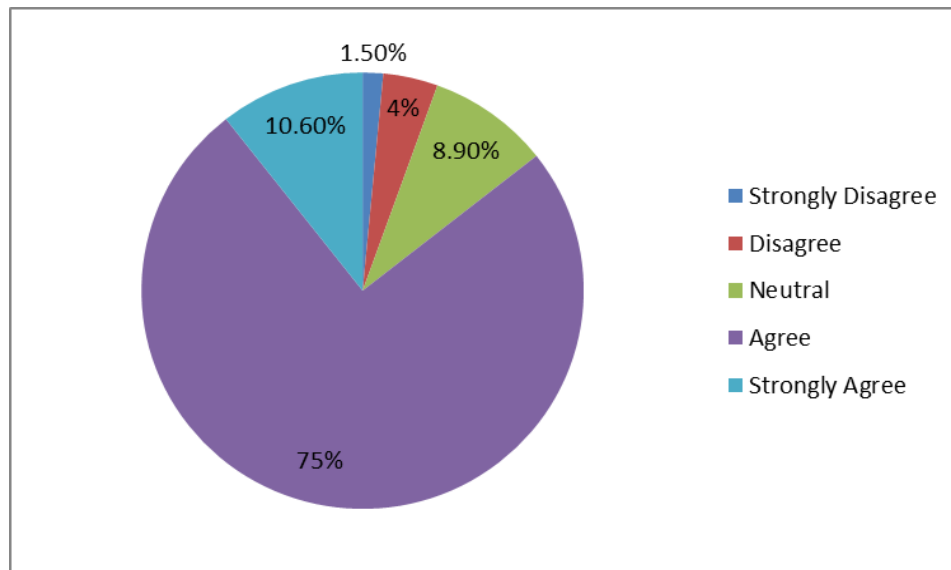
The findings from Table 3 reinforce [39] position, which contended that community radio may be a double-edged sword, used to communicate negative objectives that might disrupt a cohesive society, thus inciting violent disputes, by broadcasting intolerant words and falsehoods that generally influence residents to choose violence over peace. A classical case has been cited by [33] who reported that the 2007/2008 election violence in Kenya was mostly blamed on community radio stations that broadcast in the Vernacular. Similarly, in the case of the study area (Sefwi Wiawso Constituency in the Western North Region), community radio stations also broadcast in Local Languages for the digestion of the indigenous folks. Information disseminated through them carries heavy weight leading to election-related conflicts as a result of biased

reportage, misinformation, false news, the inability of media to do proper fact checking, unprofessional behavior of some journalists, and encouragement and use of unsavory language, among others.

### **Ways of Dealing with Electoral Conflicts Generated by the Media in the Western, North Region**

#### **Provision of Effective Security Before, During, and After Elections can Prevent Conflicts Generated by the Media**

The sampled respondents through a close ended questionnaire were asked to show their level of agreement on whether the provision of effective security before, during and after elections can prevent conflicts generated by the media in the study area.



**Figure 7.** Provision of Effective Security before, during, and after Elections can Prevent Conflicts Generated by the Media

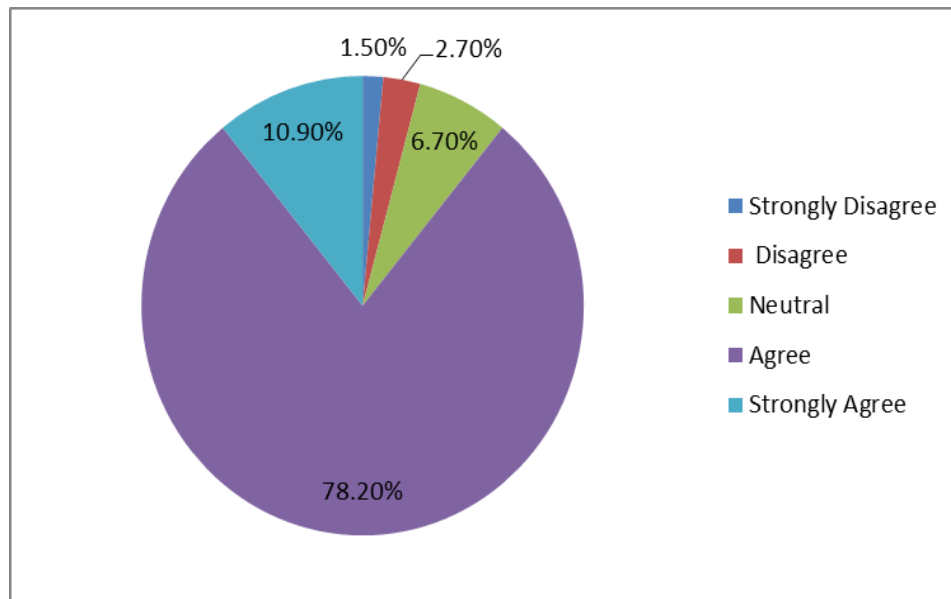
Source: Field Data (2021)

From the data obtained in Figure 7, 75% and 10.6% of the sampled respondents respectively agree and strongly agree that effective security before, during, and after elections can help to avoid media-driven disputes. However, 4% and 8.9% of them disagree and strongly disagree, respectively with the assertion. Policy makers on Security should be able to make well-informed decisions about how to create a peaceful atmosphere by deploying early security warning systems and personnel appropriately and educating the media about how their activities may cause violence. Media professionals should be urged to follow established regulations and ethical standards that govern the industry's behavior [39]. An interviewee in the Region stated this as a response.

*Conflict can be prevented in the Western North Region during elections by ensuring effective operations by law enforcement agencies. In this, I mean providing effective security personnel before, during, and after the election in some flagships point areas to deter any ensuing violence in the Region (Interviews, 2021).*

### **The Institution of Media Watchdog Committee During Elections Will Help Prevent Conflicts Generated by the Media**

The study investigated the claim that the institution of a media watchdog committees during elections will help prevent conflicts generated by the media. Figure 8 illustrates the results from respondents on this claim.



**Figure 8.** The Institution of Media Watchdog Committee during Elections will help Prevent Conflicts Generated by the Media

Source: Field Data (2021)

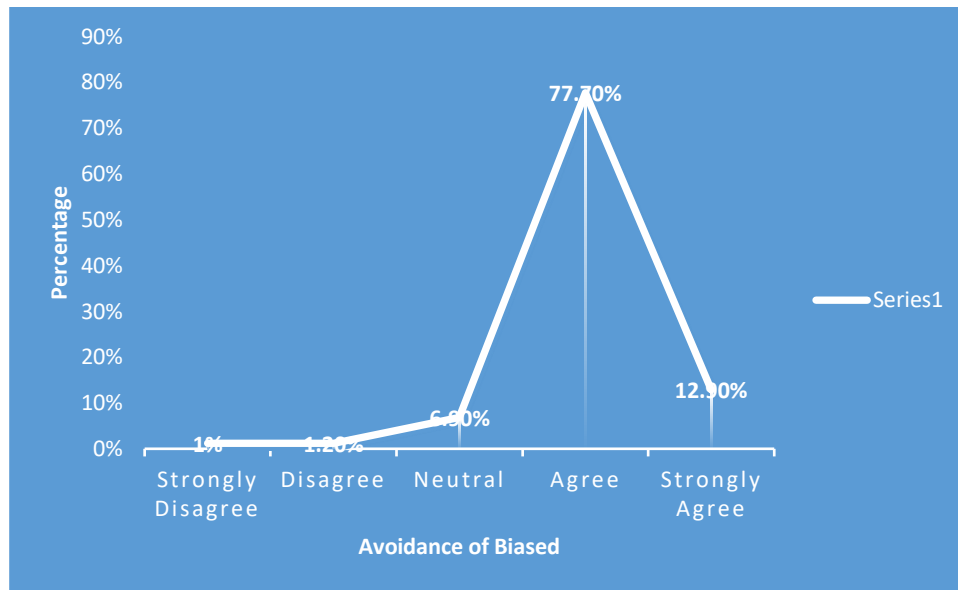
From Figure 8, it was revealed that the majority (78.2%), as well as 10.9% of the sampled respondents, respectively agree and strongly agree with the assertion. It was also observed that 2.7% and 1.5% of the participants correspondingly disagree and strongly disagree with the claim that the institution of a media watchdog committee during elections will help prevent conflicts generated by the media. About 6.7% of the remaining respondents remained neutral. It can be inferred from this finding that in modern politics and culture, the media is critical to maintaining democratic process transparency. This is known as its “watchdog” function [40]. In an interview, an interviewee said this:

*Institution of watchdog committees will help prevent conflict generated by the media by*

*ensuring that responsible behavioral standards, ethics, and codes of conduct will be outlined to media industries for strict adherence and conformity during electioneering period. And I am sure when this is done, the rate at which the media create conflict during elections can be minimized (Interviews, 2021).*

### **Avoidance of Biased Reportage by Churning Out Accurate Information Will Prevent Conflicts Generated by the Media**

The study investigated the claim that preventing biased reporting by churning truthful data will reduce media-related conflicts as shown in Figure 9.



**Figure 9.** Avoidance of Biased Reportage by Churning out the Accurate Information will Prevent Conflicts Generated by the Media

Source: Field Data (2021)

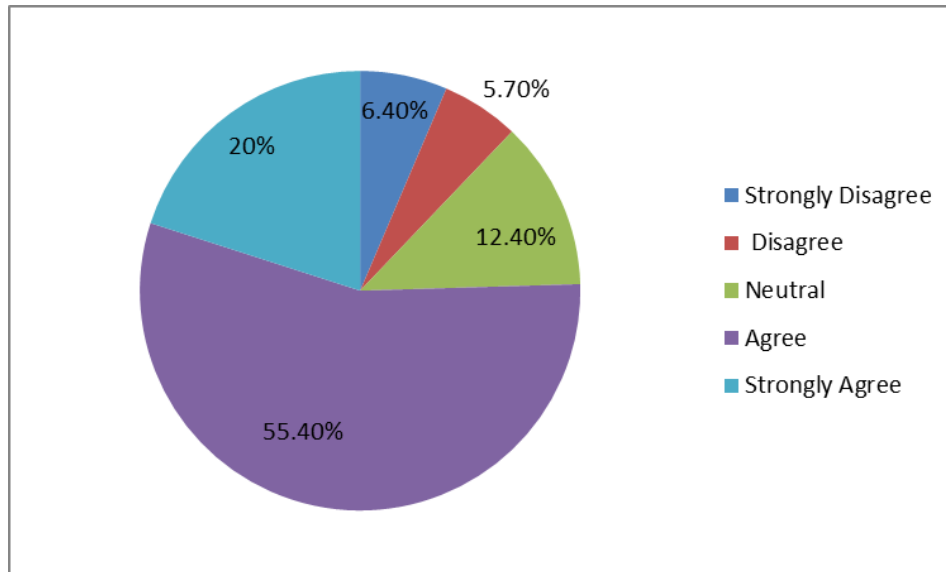
Data in Figure 9 revealed that most (77.7%) and 12.9% of the sampled respondents agree and strongly agree respectively that by avoiding biased reporting and putting out reliable data, the media will less likely cause disputes. This finding has been emphasized by [41] that by abstaining from employing terms and phrases that stereotype parties in a dispute, the media can contribute more to crisis de-escalation. The study also revealed that 1.2% of the study participants each disagreed and strongly disagreed with the claim, in addition to 6.9% who chose to remain neutral. In supporting the remedy for biased reportage churned out by the media, a respondent interviewee said:

*The media should be regulated or have some rules and regulations for panel members. The*

*hosts of programs must monitor their activities and comments throughout their programs by ensuring that information put out contains facts and enough background checks done to ensure they are devoid of inaccuracies and falsity (Interviews, 2021).*

### **Discouragement of Hate Speech and Avoidance of all Forms of Incessant Verbal Attacks by the Media will Prevent Electoral Conflicts**

The study sought to ascertain whether if hate speech is discouraged, and the media avoided all sorts of constant verbal attacks, it would prevent media-generated disputes before and during elections. The result of this is reported in Figure 10.



**Figure 10.** Discouragement of Hate Speech and Avoidance of all Forms of Incessant Verbal Attacks by the Media will Prevent Conflicts Generated by the Media during Elections

Source: Field Data (2021)

From Figure 10, the study revealed that most (55.4%) and 20% of the study participants agree and strongly agree correspondingly that media-generated controversies will be prevented before and during elections if hate speech is prohibited and the media avoids all kinds of relentless verbal assaults. Contrarily, 5.7% and 6.4% of the respondents disagree and strongly disagree, respectively, with the claim, with 12.4% remaining neutral. Thus, beyond its conventional functions of informing, educating, and entertaining, the media serve as an interactive platform for political parties and the voters in a democratic process, allowing for democratic election by ensuring a peaceful atmosphere and co-existence [42] if well managed. One of the participants in the interviews recounted this:

*There should be a guideline that directs the hosts and panelists that are invited to their different studios on how to communicate their thoughts without using hate speech or launching personal attacks. This in a way, can bring media sanity to political space by creating violence-free speeches to all listeners and hence avoid conflict among political*

*parties' members in various places (Interviews, 2021).*

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The use of the media in politics is on the rise. The study found that some journalists are being used to fuel electoral conflicts. The study revealed that the media is to blame for promoting hate speech in favor of one candidate over others, producing biased and false reporting on political parties or politicians, mudslinging, failing to conduct fact checks, the unnecessary bastardization of parties, encouraging and using unsavory language, and unprofessional behavior of some journalists during elections which contribute to electoral conflict behavior among voters in the Western North Region of Ghana. The study concluded further by encouraging media personnel to respect and adhere to the industry's established norms and ethical standards, establishing media watchdog committees during elections, avoiding biased reporting, establishing legislative frameworks to regulate media content, and deploring security agencies to enforce serene and tranquil atmosphere before and during elections can help prevent potential



electoral conflict behaviours of voters triggered by the media.

The study recommended that owners of media establishments, particularly television and radio stations, should invest in the capacity development of their journalists to ensure that they fact-check their stories before publishing to reduce political tensions and combat hate speech in the study area before, during, and after elections. Also, security officials should be able to make well-informed judgments on how to foster a peaceful atmosphere, such as implementing early warning systems and educating the media about how their activities may contribute to violence to reduce

contradictory circumstances in our body politics. More so, journalists should be trained to acquire more knowledge on media operations and conflict management as well as advancement in peaceful journalism on the need to avoid media-generated conflicts.

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## Conflict of Interest

In relation to this paper, there is no potential conflict of interest.

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