

ELECTIONS COMMUNICATION GUIDE

Edited by Dr. Gilbert Tietaah



with thanks to:



Co-funded by
European Union



ELECTIONS COMMUNICATION GUIDE

Edited by Gilbert Tietaah



&



with thanks to:



Funded by the
European Union

Published in Ghana

by

Media Foundation for West Africa

P O Box LG 730, Legon, Ghana — West Africa

Tel.: 233 (0)302-555327

E-mail: info@mfw.org

Website: www.mfw.org

© Media Foundation for West Africa 2020

With funding support from:

Open Society Initiative of West Africa (OSIWA) & STAR-Ghana Foundation

with thanks to UK Aid & the European Union



&



with thanks to:



provided by the
European Union

Table of Content

SECTION A

1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Purpose of the Guide	5
1.3 Actors and Roles in the Political Communication Process	5
Political party officials and agents.....	6
The electorate and general public.....	7
The Media and Practitioners	9

SECTION B

2.1 Definitions and Illustrations of Indecent Expression.....	11
2.2 Categories of Indecent Expressions.....	12
a) Insult.....	12
b) Hate speech.....	12
c) Ethnic slurs and Stereotyping.....	12
d) Prejudice and bigotry.....	13
e) Inflammatory expressions.....	13
f) Incitement.....	13
g) Expletives.....	13
h) Unsubstantiated allegations.....	14
i) Gender Specific Insult.....	14
j) Divisive expressions.....	14
k) Innuendo.....	14
l) Threats.....	15

SECTION C

1.1 Conclusion.....	16
1.2 Recommendations.....	17
3.3 In a time of crisis.....	20

APPENDIX

Examples of Indecent Expressions Used on Radio.....	22
---	----

REFERENCES.....	28
-----------------	----

SECTION A

1.1 Introduction

The link between communication and politics flows from the idea that a healthy democratic culture is built on the contest of ideas and opinion in free and open discourse. This health metaphor has been brought into stark reality by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic within an election year in Ghana and other West African countries. First, the metaphor enables us to easily express and explain the concern that an elections campaign that is characterised by insults and direct personality attacks cannot be relied upon to produce or promote a healthy democracy. Secondly, the extreme polarisation of issues, and the media in Ghana along partisan lines could well worsen what has already been described globally as the “massive infodemic” (WHO 2020) of myth, misconception and misinformation about COVID-19 (MFWA 2020). Third, and incidentally, the restrictions imposed on physical engagements by the pandemic have also expedited the relevance and reliance on media for political campaign activities. This Elections Communication Guide (ECG) is a response to the implications and insights of this context to efforts of the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) to promote decorous, facts-based and issues-driven elections campaigns in Ghana and West Africa.

The public communication activities that are carried out by individuals and groups for partisan political purposes, particularly during election seasons, are referred to as political campaigns; or electoral campaigns. In a multiparty political system of governance, such communication efforts are intended or expected to:

- (1) afford candidates and parties the opportunity to present to, and persuade an electorate or population about the superior credentials or manifesto propositions of the candidate and party; and
- (2) enable the electorate or population to decide who should govern or represent them, based on a free, fair and informed consideration of competing claims and promises.

Central to this process is the instrumentality of information and communication as the so-called oxygen of democracy – and the consequential role of the media in bringing candidates and citizens into contact and conversation about their development needs and priorities (Tietaah 2013). This role has become even more pertinent within the current media ecosystem in which what was previously diagnosed as information overload has mutated into a pandemic of fake news and disinformation. With the current coronavirus crisis creating also an unusually high news consumption culture, it is important to ensure that the information upon which electorate are called upon to make a choice among competing candidates is both ethically decorous and factually reliable.

What we can distil from this context is that there are three distinct groups of factors or actors in the elections' communication equation:

- (1) parties/candidates;
- (2) public/citizens;
- (3) journalists/media.

During elections campaign periods, rival political parties and candidates need and seek different public spheres and media platforms on which to draw attention to themselves, and to sell their messages to the electorate. In this endeavour, the media become a uniquely important ally. Aware of the agenda setting capability and power of the media to provide visibility and influence public opinion, political power-seeking parties and candidates need and use the media. Through the media, they are able to explain to the electorate why they are better than their rivals, and what they would do to resolve their *kenkey and fish* concerns.

Similarly, since a bridge is not crossed in only one direction, the media become the means by which individuals and organised groups are able to express their expectations and exact redeemable promises from those who seek their mandate. The electorate also rely on the media for the information they need to form or adjust their opinions, and make choices among the contending candidates and parties.

The media are the arbiter between candidates and the electorate. They enable discussion and debate on the social and economic development options and priorities; such as education, health, employment, and so on. By giving or enabling candidates and citizens access to each other, the media play the uniquely important role of influencing the quality of public discourse, and promoting civic awareness and political participation (Tietaah 2015). This interlocking relation among candidates, citizens and the media is what promotes the values and expression of freedom and choice, and enables and sustains the culture of democracy, peace and development.

The reality, however, is that elections in Ghana – and much of the neighbouring countries of West Africa – are not just about the competition of ideas in the so-called marketplace of information and opinion. They are also, inherently and importantly, about the appropriation and allocation of resources. In the developing country context, this collateral consequence of controlling the disbursement of public resources has made electoral contests particularly feisty; even sometimes flagrantly abusive; and contrary to the ethos of decorum that are expected to characterise traditional social and political discourse in Ghana and West Africa. With increasing certitude, successive elections in Ghana have been characterised by the resort to blatant insults and inflammatory remarks – intended to either provoke hatred towards the opposition, or inspire a climate of antipathy towards the electoral process as a whole. And there is enough of it to apportion among all the political party functionaries and their fanatic followers and ‘serial callers’ – but especially between those of the two leading political parties in Ghana: the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC).

The Ghanaian media, the metaphorical bridge between the parties and the public, have been widely eulogised for their role in the relative success of elections under the current (1992) Constitution. These eulogies, however, may be masking important fault lines in the extremely polarised political and media landscape. As the momentum of the campaign process gathers steam, the media become easy pawns, and even sometimes witting allies, for the amplification and perpetration of insults and divisive utterances. The examples of how the media in Kenya (in 2007/2008)

and Cote d'Ivoire (in 2009/2010) were implicated in the post-election conflicts that afflicted those countries suggest that the role of the media in electoral contests can sometimes be counterproductive (Tietaah 2015). While the country has successfully gone through seven successive electoral contests since 1992, each ensuing elections (1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2016) has been characterised by increasing incidences of the use of hate speech, insults, ethnic/sectarian incitement and other forms of divisive language. The media (radio, television, newspapers and internet) have been the main and most influential forums for the trading of such indecorous expressions and personal attacks. With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and since the coronation in 2016 of "post-truth" as "Word of the Year" by the *Oxford English Dictionary* (cf. Lockie 2017; Strong 2016), the already toxic brew of intemperate campaign discourse is bound to be further mixed into a cocktail of deliberate disinformation and fake news.

Since the 2012 general elections, the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) has executed an elections communication project designed to enable an issues-driven democratic polity and electioneering process in Ghana. The evidence suggests a slow but steady effort among stakeholders to embrace a decorous and issues-oriented elections campaign culture. The 2012 elections campaign language monitoring project reported a total of 509 indecent expressions recorded on 2,850 programmes from 31 radio stations across Ghana. The lessons of the 2012 experience inspired a renewed commitment by the MFWA to carry out a similar project for the 2016 elections. Interventions included series of stakeholder engagements and capacity building workshops for journalists and political party communicators, logistics support to some radio stations, the production of an Elections Communication Guide (ECG), and a monitoring exercise to name and shame media institutions and party functionaries that peddled insult and incendiary speech during the 2016 elections campaigns. For the nine-month monitoring period, 16,006 programmes were monitored on the 70 radio stations selected for the project. A total of 464 items were coded as carrying or conveying insulting or incendiary content. The 2020 edition of the ECG is part of programme activities aimed at promoting and further consolidating gains made in the past for the 2020 elections. Ultimately, the MFWA hopes to contribute towards a

culture of civil political discourse and issues-driven elections campaigns in Ghana and West Africa generally.

1.2 Purpose of the Guide

The purpose of this guidebook is to contribute to the practice of decorous, issues-driven, and facts-based elections campaigns that enable the electorate to make their political choices through informed considerations of divergent views and policy alternatives. It provides a brief guide on the principles of the practice of political campaign communication; based, essentially, on experiences from the monitoring of past (2012 and 2016) campaign language on radio. This guidebook, therefore, has two key goals.

First, it serves the interest of disclosure. It brings transparency to the range and nature of expressions that are considered and coded as indecent under the MFWA campaign language monitoring project. Actors within the elections campaign communication chain (parties/activists, media/journalists, and public/electorate) thus get to know precisely what is being judged, why it matters, and how a verdict is reached.

Secondly, it serves the interest of advocacy. It offers a way to sustain the campaign for a deliberative, issues-driven, political communication culture in Ghana. It provides a brief guide on the need for, and ways of, avoiding insult and other indecent expressions in elections-related and general political communication – and to repudiate those who might indulge in such conduct.

1.3 Actors and Roles in the Political Communication Process

The 2012 and 2016 monitoring projects each produced a publication entitled *Watching the Watchdog: Spotlighting Indecent Election Campaign*

Language on Radio. As suggested by the title, those publications were concerned, primarily, with awareness-surveillance – bringing to stakeholders’ attention, the incidents and perpetrators of indecent language in the political campaign processes.

The present publication – the *Elections Communication Guide* – has a more instrumental-surveillance function – enabling stakeholders to appreciate and employ decent language in the political campaign process. This section briefly addresses, in turns, the interrelated roles of political party communicators, the members of the public, and more importantly, media owners and practitioners in promoting civil political discussions, in prosecuting issues-based campaigns and ultimately, in ensuring the efficacy and sustainability of Ghana’s democracy. The *Elections Communication Guide* and *Watching the Watchdog* are complementary documents, however, and a more comprehensive appreciation and application of decent political communication is gained by reading both publications.

Political Party Officials and Agents

Political party actors and agents have an inherent interest and obligation to contribute to a culture of decent, issues-driven elections campaigns because:

- (1) There is an implicit constitutional obligation on political parties and candidates to contribute to enlightened public opinion and stimulate political participation and democratic governance through the informed consideration of divergent views and policy alternatives (see, in particular, Article 55 (3), (10), (11), (12), (13));
- (2) It serves the interests of parties to preserve and promote the efficacy of the democratic system of governance. Political theorists suggest that an electoral contest that is waged on the platform of insults and personality attacks undermines trust in political leaders, produces a loss of confidence in democratic institutions and results, over time, in loss of satisfaction with democracy itself; and
- (3) It is a matter of electoral expediency. The resort to incendiary language, or a generally negative campaign pitch does not only lead to

the heightening of political cynicism; it also suppresses voter turnout, and in terms of electoral outcome, generally produces a boomerang effect – in that it hurts the electoral fortunes of the subject, rather than the object, of the attack.

It has to be acknowledged that the use of indecent language has a way of inspiring or motivating some members of the electorate. But these are usually the most passionate members or supporters of the party or candidate. They are not (or ought not to be) the primary focus of a public political campaign effort. That would amount to preaching to the converted; they are already inclined to vote for the party. On the contrary, the primary purpose of the political campaign and communication effort is (or ought to be) to persuade or inspire the so-called “floating voters” and, to a lesser extent, those who have a latent leaning towards the party or candidate. For such members of the electorate, insults and personal attacks have a “dumbing down” effect (Newton 1999; Norris 2000). They may either decline to vote (especially if they must take the trouble to do so) or even turn towards the more rational, and less insulting, alternative message and candidate.

Bottom-line: It pays more for the party and candidate to prosecute a decent, issues-based campaign.

The Electorate and General Public

Democratic citizenship confers on the electorate and members of the public the right and duty to be well-informed of, and participate fully in, decisions and actions that protect and promote the culture of decent, issues-driven elections campaigns. This is because:

- (1) It is a constitutional right and mandate. The opening words of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana repose sovereignty in the citizens “in whose name and for whose welfare the powers of government are to be exercised....” (Article 1 (1), Article 35 (1)). This implies that the authority and legitimacy to govern is the prerogative of the electorate. It is the duty of citizens to assert and exercise this fundamental right to choose their leaders in a free and peaceful manner;

- (2) It serves the interests of good governance to confer the mandate to govern upon candidates based upon a free and objective determination of their strengths; rather than on antipathy or hatred for the opponent, or on subjective or sectarian considerations. As the popular saying goes, “In a democracy people get the leaders they deserve.” Good governance benefits citizens by ensuring that those who control the public purse do so efficiently and responsibly; and
- (3) It ensures that citizens are able to participate freely in decision making; and to peacefully pursue and exercise their civic and cultural rights and responsibilities under the law. It also ensures that rational debate and decisions produce and promote policies that benefit citizens economically and socially.

Electing candidates to public office is one of the most important decisions the electorate can make. The consequences of the decision are also far-reaching, in that they directly affect the quality of life and rights of citizens. Citizens and the public have more power to contribute to decent political discourse than they seem to acknowledge or exercise. The notion of the “court of public opinion”, and even the practice of public opinion polling, suggest the capacity of the electorate to contribute to decency in electoral campaigns and political communication generally. In practical terms, they can do this by publicly expressing disfavour, or voting against parties and candidates that indulge in insult and hate in their communication – and even the media that repeat and amplify such expressions. They can also denounce other members of the public – including serial callers – who call in to programmes and use foul language. They can also set the agenda of public discourse by actively participating in discussions – questioning, examining, and comparing party manifestos and candidates on their attributes and their demonstrable abilities to address the issues that matter most to them.

Bottom-line: Citizens and the electorate can (and should) define the topics and terms of campaign discourse by bringing the weight of their collective voice to bear on the conduct of candidates and the media.

The Media and Practitioners

The media and media practitioners have a particularly important capacity and responsibility to contribute to a culture of decent, issues-driven elections campaigns because:

- (1) It is a constitutional right and responsibility of the media to help the electorate make their political choices through an informed consideration of divergent views and policy alternatives (see Chapter 12, and in particular, Article 163). Furthermore, the report on the Committee of Experts on the 1992 Constitution expressed the expectation that a free and independent media system would enable the dissemination of “different and opposed views” and ensure that “enlightened public opinion is formed and political consensus mobilised” (Report of the Committee of Experts (Constitution), 1991, p. 85);
- (2) It is a key professional journalistic obligation. The Ghana Journalists Association (GJA) Code of Ethics (and similar normative principles of professional practice) contains several articles of faith by which journalists and the media are expected to represent and reflect the public interest (see, especially, Article 1 (*i*), (*ii*), (*iii*); Article 2; Article 3; Article 6; Article 10; Article 11; Article 13; Article 17). This public interest is best served when the media perform their role as the so-called fourth estate of the realm; and
- (3) It is a matter of operational prudence. The media and journalistic practice thrive best in a regime of democratic freedom and social peace. The political history of Ghana shows that media rights, and freedom of expression generally, are the first and perhaps most victimised casualty whenever the peace and constitutional order are subverted. Besides, political communication theorists suggest the possibility of a media malaise effect, which happens when the blatant trading of insults in the media leads to a lack of trust in and “dumbing down” of the media.

The media are central to the promotion and preservation of a culture of decent campaign discourse. This is primarily because they exercise a gatekeeping function over the number and nature of mass mediated exchanges between candidates and citizens. They can help determine

what party activists say and what the audiences read, hear or see. They have the capacity to frame the terms by which candidates define their characteristics and defend their claims; and the perspectives from which citizens are able to evaluate the policies that rival parties and candidates are proposing or opposing. By setting an issues-driven campaign agenda, therefore, the media can contribute significantly to ensuring that the elections campaign process is decorous by disallowing the use of abusive or incendiary language in the media, and by condemning those who use such language on other platforms.

Bottom-line: the media can (and should) contribute to building a culture of civil campaign communication by providing the platform for enlightened engagement and exchange of ideas.

SECTION B

2.1 Definitions and Illustrations of Indecent Expressions

This section presents and explains the range of expressions that are considered and coded as indecent. These expressions were identified and developed into a comprehensive Campaign Language Monitoring Instrument with the support of language experts and consultants from the Department of Communication Studies and the Department of Linguistics of the University of Ghana, and the Bureau of Ghana Languages. They were later validated by a public stakeholders' forum made up of representatives from the National Media Commission, Ghana Independent Broadcasters Association, Editors Forum - Ghana, Ghana Journalists Association, National Peace Council, Electoral Commission, National Commission for Civic Education, Political Parties, the Media and Civil Society Organisations.

The team of language experts and consultants defined or considered an indecent expression to include any or all of the following:

- (a) any statement or institution that seeks to attack, impugn or damage the reputation of an individual, political party or ethnic group;
- (b) any statement that could provoke the target of the expression to react in an unpleasant or offensive manner;
- (c) any statement that could offend the sensibilities of members of the public.

The nature and type of language – remarks, expressions, comments used in campaign language, political discourse or current affairs discussion on radio – were carefully considered and categorised in terms of whether the language used:

- (a) was provocative or conciliatory;
- (b) was civil or controversial;
- (c) was insulting and offensive or otherwise;

- (d) promoted prejudice/bigotry or otherwise;
- (e) divided or united people;
- (f) was capable or not of provoking or engendering violence – physically, verbally or otherwise.

2.2 Categories of Indecent Expressions

The following categories of expressions were defined and operationalised as amounting to indecent language.

A. Insult:

These are defined as words, expressions or language meant to disrespect, degrade or offend others. Insults involve the use of words and expressions such as:

- *educated buffoon*
- *foolish idiots,*
- *greedy bastards*
- *unintelligent people.*

B. Hate speech:

Communication that espouses or expresses animosity or prejudice toward or against a person or group, based on some identity construct – such as ethnicity, religion, or (perceived) political preferences – and intended or tending to degrade and/or offend them, hold them out to public scorn and hatred, or expose them to physical violence and violation of their human rights.

C. Ethnic/Tribal slurs and stereotyping:

Expressions or insinuations of intolerance or bigotry towards someone on account of some prejudiced pre-notions about ethnicity, religion, or other exclusion criteria. Examples include:

- *That is Zongo behaviour*
- *Kookoase kurasini* – literally, a ‘villager’; from the cocoa-farming hinterland

D. Prejudice and bigotry:

These are defined as remarks that express instinctive views or biases against someone or group based on preconceived ideas and/or unreasonable dislike for the person or group. Bigotry also encompasses intolerance of the views of others. Specific examples include the following:

- *“Ewes are backward and inward-looking”*
- *“Ashantis are proud people”*
- *“Akyems are arrogant people”*
- *“What else do you expect from a Northerner?”*

E. Inflammatory expressions:

These are defined as statements likely to provoke anger in others and/or promote violence in society. Specific examples include the following:

- *“Ghana will burn if we don’t win”*
- *“Ghana will be like Kenya ...”*

F. Incitement:

These are defined as remarks or statements which provoke immediate action by others and can lead to violence. Specific examples include the following:

- *“Go and besiege the EC office with implements to prevent our opponents from cheating”.*
- *“Slap any opposition member who annoys you”*
- *“Confiscate suspicious ballot boxes”, etc.*

G. Expletives:

These are swear or smear words or rude and unsavoury expressions unfit for publication/broadcast but used in reference to others, nonetheless. Examples:

- *arrogant spoilt brat!*
- *“who born dog!”*

H. Unsubstantiated allegations:

These are statements or expressions meant to offend and impugn the integrity of a person and calculated to bring them to public ridicule usually without evidence. Examples are:

- *thieves and nation looters*
- *wee smoker*

I. Gender Specific Insults:

These are offensive words, statements or expressions directed at someone based on the person's gender or sexuality. Specific examples include the following:

- *“You are a prostitute or a witch”; or*
- *“Only prostitutes enter into male domains”.*
- *“No decent woman will speak the way you speak”.*
- *“Any man worth his salt will be bold enough to enter the presidential race or debate”.*
- *“When we are talking about men, we do not include the likes of you or him”, etc.*

J. Divisive expressions:

Any expression that seeks to create division among groups of people or communities on the basis of party affiliation, religion or ethnicity. It could also be based on other such groupings as alluding to previous conflicts which exist or have the potential to ignite old disputes among identified groups of people or create ill-feeling. Specific examples include the following:

- *“A Muslim cannot be President of Ghana”*
- *“A Fanti cannot lead this nation.”*

K. Innuendo:

Indirect references of something rude and unpleasant. Examples are:

- *poodle,*
- *professor do little*
- *fruitcake*

I. Threats:

Any statement or insinuation of an interest in, intention of, or instigation to harm a person because of what they say, do or represent. Any such direct declaration or reasonable deduction of intended injury or damage to another for purposes of political advantage amounts to, and would be coded as, an indecent expression. Example are:

- *I dare you to try this again, I will deal with you*
- *I am going to destroy you*
- *Your life will be miserable, don't dare me*

SECTION C

3.1 Conclusion

Political debate and ideological disagreement are an inevitable – and even necessary – part of multiparty electoral contests. At the same time, and especially within the African and Ghanaian social and political milieu, an electoral contest that is waged on the platform of divisive media attacks and blatant insults not only perverts the values of democracy but could ultimately subvert the peace and security of the country. Recent examples of elections-related violence in some African countries provide sufficient grounds for proactive interventions to support and nurture the culture of free, fair and peaceful elections in Ghana. The objective of this guidebook is to contribute to the cultivation and consolidation of the culture of democracy and good governance in Ghana. Specifically, it seeks to complement MFWA’s ‘name-and-shame’ campaign by encouraging and enabling actors involved in the elections/political communication process to disavow incendiary expressions, and adopt instead, civil, issues-driven campaigns. And for an elections campaign process that is prosecuted in the context of a raging public health crisis, there is an urgent need for the rhetoric to reflect the exigencies of the time and respond to the concrete conditions of life under COVID-19.

Every exercise of the rights of free expression and choice also entails responsibilities. The preceding sections sought to (1) demonstrate the link between the nature of elections campaign discourse and the efficacy and sustainability of Ghana’s democracy; and (2) present a breakdown of the nature and components of language – remarks, expressions, comments – considered and coded as indecent in the MFWA Language Monitoring Project. They emphasised the varied but interdependent roles of the different actors or subjects within the elections’ communications chain in promoting and practising civility in the political campaign process.

3.2 Recommendations

This section provides brief recommendations on how each of the different groups of actors in any conduct of political campaign activities could contribute towards minimising the incidence of indecent language and institutionalising and promoting the culture of decent, issues-driven campaigns.

Media Practitioners

As early as 1934, Magnus Sampson, probably the first indigenous journalism historian, praised the political role of the Gold Coast press, noting that “it is the press which educates public opinion and which also, by its agitations, is capable of dismissing Governments from power and parliamentarians from their seats.” The following are some recommendations on how media practitioners might contribute to a decent, issues-oriented campaign:

- Establish and explain ground rules on the type and nature of political communication to be allowed/disallowed in the media;
- Exercise professional awareness and diligence in editorial decisions on the nature and language of campaign;
- Use delay technology or other screening mechanisms to edit or exclude polemical comments/contributions from call-ins, SMS, WhatsApp, twitter, Facebook or other social media platforms;
- Investigate or challenge communicators to support or provide evidence for unverified controversial or potentially defamatory allegations; or else withdraw such claims and apologise to the objects of such claims;
- Exclude from future participation in panel discussions or contributions to programmes party officials and their agents, serial callers and members of the general public who persistently violate ground rules;
- Constantly check your own implicit biases, and endeavour to separate your personal sentiments and opinions from the facts and candidates/parties involved;

- Be acquainted with, and follow ethical/professional injunctions of the GJA code of ethics and other guidelines on political communication; such as by the NMC and MFWA;
- Promptly issue the necessary apologies in the event of the use of abusive, divisive or defamatory expressions;
- Include in programming and presentations, campaigns and statements that promote decent election campaigns and repudiate indecent expressions; encourage the public and other political actors to do so;
- As a public interest contribution, include in programming and presentations, campaigns and statements that promote adherence to COVID-19 protocols. Immediately verify and debunk any misinformation and conspiracy theories about or related to COVID-19 that comes to your attention. Ensure that your team and guests are also constantly reminded to observe the standard recommendations on personal protection.

Political Parties

Empirical research has established that the resort to mudslinging and other indecent expressions is a net liability in terms of political support and vote counts. Political communication scholars advise that although in terms of news value, controversy generally draws public curiosity and interest, in terms of electoral outcome, going negative harms those who employ such a strategy (Lau, Sigelman & Rovner 2007). Besides, as the saying goes, “You catch more flies with honey than you do with vinegar.” Political party communicators and their agents can contribute towards the culture of positive, issues-oriented campaigns by:

- Focusing primarily on positive attributes of their own candidate rather than personal attributes of the opponent;
- Comparing and contrasting personal traits and policy positions with those of rival parties and candidates without using or promoting stereotypical slurs and stigma and other divisive expression;
- Acquainting party communicators and agents with the manifesto and

issue positions of their party and candidates, as well as those of other parties;

- Orienting or training party communicators and supporters on avoiding indecent expressions; including refraining from retaliating against insults and other divisive or provocative expressions;
- Presenting alternative facts/evidence in response to false and misleading claims;
- Asserting the right to a rejoinder and apology;
- Employing the complaints settlements/remedies of the NMC, GJA or other recognised intuitions/agencies;
- Ensuring to include, at every campaign or public communication activity, a statement of empathy and a reminder for people to observe COVID-19 protocols. All party communicators and agents should be constantly aware of, and observe the standard recommendations on personal protection. They should refrain from politicising any efforts to stem the spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

Electorate & General Public

Political parties and the media both depend upon and respond to the weight of public opinion. The public can discourage or encourage the use of indecent language by and in the media by either lending or withdrawing support for parties/candidates and media/practitioners that use or encourage such expressions. There is a classic metaphor, attributed to Abraham Lincoln, which says that “Elections belong to the people. It is their decision. If they decide to turn their back to the fire and burn their behinds, then they will just have to sit on their blisters” (cf. Durrett 2009).

The following are some ways by which the public might contribute to promoting civility in political campaign communication in Ghana.

- Avoid hate speech via all forms of media – traditional, social media and new media
- Be critical of the nature of communication engaged in by political actors and the media;

- Be critical of indecent expressions uttered by other members of the public
- Express support for parties/candidates and media/programme hosts that promote decent campaigning; express disfavour towards those that use abusive language or hate speech;
- Avoid media and candidates that peddle indecent language;
- Challenge parties/candidates to state policy positions on development priorities; such as public health pandemics, education, employment, environment, and security;
- Remember to constantly adhere to the public health protocols on COVID-19 prevention and treatment; including physical distancing, hand hygiene, and wearing appropriate masks and shields. Wherever the opportunity arises, require candidates and party functionaries to clearly commit to keeping the public safe, and call out any party that may be found to engage in campaign activities that put the public at avoidable risk of COVID-19 infection.

3.3 In a time of crisis

Whatever our individual and collective role in the elections campaign process, we must all keep ourselves, our team members, and the general public safe – by not contracting or contributing to the spread of COVID-19. The following are five key reminders of recommendations for journalists/media, parties/candidates and the public/citizens to ensure they keep themselves and others safe while engaged in election campaigns and general political communication activities.

1. Physical distancing:

Avoid direct contact with persons, equipment and surfaces that may have been exposed to the COVID-19 virus. Where physical gatherings are desired or inevitable, keep a minimum distance of two meters

2. Mediated communication:

Use the traditional media – radio, TV, newspapers, etc. – digital technologies and social media platforms – Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, etc. – and other community-based media – *gong-gong*, “community centre”, mobile vans – where possible.

3. Avoid ‘MEN’:

Public health experts recommend that you avoid touching your mouth, eyes, nose – or other mucus membranes – as these are the primary means by which COVID-19 infections are thought to enter the body.

4. Hygiene routines:

During and after a reporting assignment, or political campaign activity, wash your hands with soap under running water; or use recommended sanitizers, gels and wipes.

5. Appropriate gear:

In high-risk sites and situations, journalists and party communicators should use appropriate gear; such as easy-to-wipe/wash clothes, certified face masks, and pole-mounted microphones.

APPENDIX

Samples of Indecent Expressions Used on Radio

Examples from 2012

1. "... if you go to the Castle, you will see [Koku Anyidoho], wobbling like an Atebubu chicken...such a confused non-entity who is now a [Communications Director] for the people of Ghana..." (Ernest Owusu Bempah (NDC); on *Oman FM's* "Boiling Point" programme; June 7).
2. "...Koku Anyidoho pays women to penetrate his anus with vibrators..." (Ernest Owusu Bempah (NDC); on *Oman FM's* "Boiling Point" programme; June 7).
3. "[Jacobs Allotey], now your life has changed for good. I know you very well. President Mills once told you in Cape Coast that he will not include you in his campaign because of issues concerning some paint and cement." (Ernest Owusu Bempah (NDP); on *Adom FM's* "Dwaso Nsem"; July 17).
4. "[Owusu Bempah], I think you smoked wee before coming here this morning." (Jacobs Allotey (NDC); in response to Owusu Bempah above on the same programme).
5. "President John Evans Atta Mills is the most useless President Ghana has ever had." (Abu Gyinapo (NPP); *Adom FM*; "Dwaso Nsem"; July 19).
6. "*Mentra ho na wondidi me President atem se oye useless*. Hopeless gay like you..." [I will not allow you to insult my President that he is useless]. (Anita De-Sousa (NDC national women's organiser); in response to Abu Gyinapo above on the same programme).
7. "...shut up! Bullshit! My friend shut your fucking mouth! (Kwabena Sarpong (NPP communications team); to Agbesi Nutsu (of NDC); *Hot FM* programme, "Maakye"; August 28).
8. "[Former president Rawlings] is suffering from temporal madness." (Mike Nagumo (NDC); on *Radio Upper West* programme, "Common Course"; June 4).

9. "...Okudzeto Ablakwa *ɔye awi paa! Fiifi Kwetey! me se ɔye awi paa; ne ho bɔn wɔ mu kankankan ɛwɔ corruption nti mma ommue n'ano koraa. Se Ghana ha se yeete society for Ataa Ayi ... yɛbɛma mo executive members. Aban wei sei no yeɛpe minister of lies a, Fiifi Kwetey ka ho, Okudzeto Ablakwa no nso ka ho...*" [Okudzeto Ablakwa is a thief! Fiifi Kwetey! I say he is also a thief. He's very involved in corruption and so he should keep quiet. If a society for Ataa Ayi [convicted robber] were to be set up in Ghana, they will be made executive members. If we were to name a Minister of lies in this government, Fiifi Kwetey will be one of them, and so will Okudzeto Ablakwa]. (Maxwell Kofi Djumah, (NPP MP); on *Adom FM's* "Niamehunu Dwumadie" programme; September 26).
10. "Three years ago Nana Akuffo Addo said that the people of Bawku should be allowed to kill themselves so that their place could be used for a palm plantation." (Osman Mohammed Konwieh (NDC); on *Classic FM's* "Big Breakfast Show"; August 2).
11. "Zongo people and northerners are violent." (Eric Bawa (NPP) on *Classic FM's* "Big Breakfast Show"; August 28).
12. "It is an open secret that [Anita De-Souza] is a prostitute..." (Ernest Owusu Bempah (NDC); on *Adom FM's* evening news; May 24).
13. "...[Yaw Boateng Gyan] *ena organise nkrɔfoɔ ma ye twe nkontimmaa ɛkɔ chase Mrs. Rawlings ɛwɔ Cape Coast.* [Yaw Boateng Gyan was the plan behind it...he organised people to chase Mrs. Rawlings with clubs in Cape Coast. [Yaw Boateng Gyan] was the plan behind it...]. (Ernest Owusu Bempah (NDP); on *Oman FM's* "Boiling Point" programme; September 6). The host (Kwabena Kwakye), interjected and asked Owusu Bempah to provide evidence but he did not. The host then announced that he was disassociating himself and the radio station from the statement made).
14. "...[Yaw Boateng Gyan] joined NDC under duress... *Ɔkɔ wia cocoa bɔtɔ ena ye kyeree no* and that was what happened ..." (...[Yaw Boateng Gyan] joined NDC under duress... He was arrested for stealing a sack of cocoa...). (Ernest Owusu Bempah (NDP); on *Oman FM's* "Boiling Point" programme; September 6). The host (Kwabena Kwakye) interjected and asked Owusu Bempah to provide evidence but he did not. The host announced that he was disassociating himself and the radio station from the statement made).

Examples from 2016

1. “*Officer biara a ye de wobeto polling station, na se wo wie na se wo se wonsign, oh nka yebebo wo. eno dee dabiara me ka. Nka yebebo wo. Wo EC officer biara a wobegyina polling station, as election officer, na yen akan awie na sign pink sheet na obia nnye ne dee, na se wo se wonsign a, yebe bowo. enee omomfa macho, omomfa policefuor paa*” [Every Officer placed at a polling station, who refuses to sign after we finish, oh like we will beat you. I always say that, like we will beat you. Every EC officer who will stand at polling station as election officer and refuse to sign the pink sheet for us after we count, we will beat you. Then they should hire macho men, they should take police personnel]. (Joe Donkor of the NPP; in a studio discussion on *Happy FM*; August 8).
2. “*I believe de, Party biara mmɔ ne ho ban. The party vigilantes no, ewo de ye hye mu kena. NPP yenpe menyinfo, yen pe mesiafo a won ani ye den. Afei nso ntokwa hwehwam na NDC ede ba no, yen bɔ yen ho ban. NPPni biara mfa ne ho adwen, sebe nye kokrokona wo de dzi man, ena enye macho na wode ko, se pregoo na ebenya o, se pin na ebenya o, se daadze na ebe sew o, fa hye wo kotoku mu. All die be die. ɔba na se obebo wo a, fa wɔ no ma ompira.*” [I believe that all parties should protect themselves. The Party vigilantes should be encouraged NPP Should look for strong party men and women. Now we should all protect ourselves because of the interesting fight NDC is coming up with. Because we don’t govern a nation with giants and we don’t fight with macho. If you get a nail, a pin, or a machete, sharpen it and keep it in your pockets. All die be die. If anyone comes to beat you, stab him with it). (Uncle Ebo of the NPP on “Democracy” programme on *Happy FM*; May 9].
3. “*...it is so sad when they start getting up and talking about oh ena yabulde infrastructures, ya ye sei. Akourba, that is a cock and bull story I’ve ever heard in my life, because any idiot can build an interchange, any fool can build a school...*” [...it is so sad when they start getting up and talking about oh and we’ve built infrastructures, we’ve done this and that Akourba, that is a cock and bull story I’ve ever heard in my life, because any idiot can build an interchange, any fool can build a school...] (Ernest Owusu Bempah of the NDP; in a studio discussion on “A.M. Drive” on *Atinka FM*; August 11).

4. “...*eye me nwanwa se President Mills dee omo amfa amba. omo nka ho asem se yese President Mahama na akum no...*” [... I am surprised they never spoke about President Mill’s death. They didn’t speak about the news that President Mahama killed him...] (Maxwell Ofofu Boakye of the NPP; in a studio discussion commenting on the petition to President Mahama to free “Montie 3 panellists”; “Angel in the morning” on *Angel FM*; August 3).
5. “*Me nim opanyin a oye NDCni mapa a ogyae NDC. ono ankasa, nyame adom, wahyehye ne party na okakyere me de NDC enwiini aba da wawia, NDC wia. Nanka Mahama betum adi President. Mahama, John Dramani Mahama less than six months, oye ide bii kekε, okyeakyea n’an,o na w’akum Mills awia ne sika. NDCfo ye akronfo too much, wo ye awifo too much, wo ye nsombore, woye so so som-bore*” [I know a true NDC man who by God’s grace formed his own party after he left NDC. He told me that NDC never win an election; they always steal. If not so John Dramani Mahama would never be president. In less than six months he used to turn his mouth to say *edey bee kekε*. He killed Mills and stole his money. NDC’s are thieves too much, they are thieves too much, they are ticks, they are ticks]. (Uncle Ebo of the NPP; on “Democracy” programme on *Happy FM*; May 9).
6. “*Bawumia nako rubber de ashi be midzor coins viade name, ne miva miana miagawor galamsey... Woyi de Chinavimawo gbor be newo dzi coins viade naye ko woagatrorgbor va Ghana... Egborvi kple agbo dey vovototo le eme*” [Bawumia went begging for coins from galamsey operators with the promise of giving them the nod to operate when they come to power. They [NPP] went to those extradited Chinese men to collect money with the promise to make them come back to Ghana. He concluded with a proverb with literally means “There is a difference between a goat and a ram”] (Angelo Agbeshie of the NDC; on *Jubilee FM*’s programme, “*Aguadze*”; July 14).
7. “...*NDCfo a starte omo adee no biom, titriw ne Ashanti Region, Brong Ahafo Region ene Eastern Region, se yeebeyee election, omo kyekye mayafe ne adeade, me sere, me dee, se police ben a, wɔnfa no nkɔ, but mo hwe paa na se policefoɔ enben mo na mo bebo no a, mobo no... me dee meka ne se, nokwareni, se wo ye kayayooni na obi ba na ɔse oye Asanteni na akasaa nsemfo na, y’abo no paa, monfa pan mbono, I’m telling you, me kɔ Kumasi akoye saa campaign yi*”

[...NDC has started their things again especially in Ashanti Region, Brong Ahafo Region and Eastern Region, whenever elections are coming up, they distribute scarf and others. I am begging, if the police are close, hand them to the police, but if you check and the police are not close to you, you should beat them... if you are a head porter (*Kayayoo*) and someone comes that he is an Asante and speak nonsense, then the person is contracted, you should use the basin to hit him, am telling you am going to do this campaign in Kumasi”] (Yaw Adomako Baafi on “Boiling Point” on *Oman FM*, July 19).

8. “.... *me se Ghana, y’anhwe yie a, 7th January, mon marke nto ho... 7th January 2017, constitutional crisis ena ye pe ewo ha*” (“...I am saying that Ghana if we are not careful, 7th January, mark it, 7th January 2017, constitutional crisis is what we want here.”) (Mugabe Maase, host and supporter of NDC on “Pampaso” on *Montie FM*; June 24).
9. “...*enti se yee pe meema ma omo akasa ewo Ghana ha a, na omo a omoho aye fi a ewo se, ee, sebe sebe, ye ma omo sapo ne samina, yede sapo ne samina, yede hye Appiah Stadium nsam... Carl Wilson ewo se yede sapo ne samina yede hye Appiah Stadium nsam, se Appiah Stadium e, Carl Wilson ne ho aye fi, nti dware no wo badwam... who born dog, greedy bastard, Carl Wilson greedy, greedy, greedy, greedy...*” [...so if we want men to talk in Ghana, then those who are dirty, excuse my language, give them sponge and soap, we will give sponge and soap to Appiah Stadium... Carl Wilson, we ought to give sponge and soap to Appiah Stadium and tell him that you are dirty so he should bath you in public, who born dog, greedy bastard, Carl Wilson greedy, greedy, greedy, greedy...] (Mugabe Maase, host and supporter of NDC on “Pampaso” on *Montie FM*; June 9).
10. “... *this same Bawumia, the liar, has come out to lie and say se they will not take any more loans because President Mahama egyegyegyegye loans dodo, the same Bawumia, the liar, has come out to say se, omo dee omongye tax because we are overtaxing Ghanaians, enti ono Bawumia dee, oba a, all the taxes that are in place, obeyiyi ne nyinaa afriho...this same Bawumia the liar*” [...this same Bawumia the liar has come out to lie and say that they will not take any more loans because President Mahama has taken too many loans, the same Bawumia the liar has come out to say that they will not be taking taxes because we are overtaxing Ghanaians, so he Bawumia, when he comes, all the taxes that are in place, he would eliminate

all of them...this same Bawumia the liar] (Koku Anyidoho of NDC in a phone interview on “Adekyemusem” on *Montie FM*; July 27. Koku had been called to react to NPP and Nana Addo’s claim that their manifesto is not yet out because, if it comes out now, it would be copied by the NDC).

REFERENCES

- Durrett, D. (2009). *Right to Vote*. Infobase Publishing.
- Ghana (1992). *Constitution of the Republic of Ghana*. Accra: Assembly Press.
- Lau, R. R., Sigelman, L., & Rovner, I. B. (2007). The effects of negative political campaigns: a meta-analytic reassessment. *Journal of Politics*, 69(4), 1176-1209.
- Lockie, S. (2017). Post-truth politics and the social sciences. *Environmental Sociology*, 3(1), 1-5.
- MFWA (2020). Top 5 Tips for Reporting on COVID-19 (<https://www.mfwa.org/top-5-tips>)
- MFWA (nd). *The Ivorian media: Victim and Unwitting Pawn*. Zongo-Giwa. 2(3), 3.
- Newton, K. (1999). "Mass Media Effects: Mobilization or Media Malaise?" In *British Journal of Political Science* 29(4), 577–99
- Norris, P. (2000). "The impact of Television and Civic Malaise." *Disaffected Democrats: What's Troubling the Trilateral Countries?* ed. S. J. Pharr, R. D. Putnam, pp. 231–51. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press.
- Sampson, M. (1934). *A Brief History of Gold Coast Journalism*
- Strong, S. I. (2016). Alternative facts and the post-truth society: Meeting the challenge. *U. Pa. L. Rev. Online*, 165, 137.
- Tietaah, G. (2015). Abusive language, media malaise and political efficacy in Ghana. In K. Ansu-Kyeremeh, A. Gadzekpo & M. Amoakohene (Eds.), *A Critical Appraisal of Communication Theory and Practice in Ghana* (pp. 155–167). Social Sciences Series, Vol. 10. University of Ghana: Digibooks
- Tietaah, G. (2013). Negative political advertising and the imperative of broadcast regulation in Ghana', *Journal of African Media Studies*, 5 (2), 203–217
- WHO (2020). *Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)* www.who.int/docs/default-source

