

**ETHICAL VIOLATIONS IN PRESS COVERAGE OF 2012 ELECTIONS****Damasus Tuurosong**

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**ABSTRACT**

In the wake of the 2012 elections, the National Media Commission (NMC), GJA and civil society organizations were worried that unprofessional coverage of the elections could lead to violence. This study analysed the content of political stories which appeared in newspapers during the most serious campaign season from 1<sup>st</sup> November to 6<sup>th</sup> December, 2012. It was meant to investigate the extent and nature of ethical violations, the nature of coverage accorded political stories and the amount of news-hole devoted to the various political parties. The study found that newspapers routinely violated Article 1 of the GJA Code on balanced and fair coverage since they often published allegations made by one political party against another without first obtaining a response from the accused party. There were also few violations of Articles 6, 11 and 17 related to respect for national and ethnic values, separating comments from facts and headlines and sensationalism. The privately owned papers committed majority of the ethical violations. Also, while the private papers concentrated on covering the campaigns of the opposition NPP, the state papers accorded more coverage to the ruling NDC. The study recommends strengthening of in-house ethical standards for newspapers, training of journalists and punitive measures by the Ethics Committee of GJA as ways of enhancing professional conduct.

**Key Words:** *Ethical Violations, Press Coverage, Elections, Political Stories and Newspapers*

**Introduction**

The role of the mass media in the governance process has long been established. Both Akinfeleye (2008) and Yankah (2004) have agreed that the media are seen as the mediating factors in a democratic setting. They are not only regarded as the Fourth Estate of the Realm but as essential social forces that help to lubricate the engine room of democracy. The media do not only monitor governance and hold government accountable to the people. They are required to check and

balance, watchdog and gate-keep the doors for sustainable democracy in terms of information flow, direction and intensity. Added to this is the fact that the media is duty-bound to expose corrupt acts (Akinfeleye, 2008). For Yankah (2004), the media are responsible for fostering transparency and accountability.

The media promotes economic development by providing economic information to the citizenry and enabling them to make better informed choices on economic matters. The media is also expected to educate the public on issues relating to health, the environment, women, children and minorities (Graves, 2007). However, the media can only be effective tools for national development when they give representative, unbiased and accurate picture of the aspirations and socio-philosophical foundation of the society in which they operate (Akinfeleye, 2008). Graves (2007) expressed the need for the media to provide reliable sources that citizens can trust to meet their needs for trustworthy information about issues that affect their daily lives. Thus, media persons can only act as development agents by performing their duties ethically and in line with the legal environment within which they operate.

The term ethics comes from the Greek word “ethos” which means custom, habit, character or disposition. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Ethics Guide (2012) defines ethics as “a system of moral principles and a branch of philosophy which defines what is good for individuals and society”. Ethical issues cover many challenges of life including how to live a good life, people’s rights and responsibilities, the language of right and wrong and moral decisions regarding what is good and bad (BBC Ethics Guide, 2012).

Modern notions of ethical journalism commenced more than 150 years ago when some leading journalists strongly articulated the rights and responsibilities of journalists. This occurred at a time when there was a confrontation between The Times of London and the British government. John Thaddeus Delane, the editor, responded to government criticism of the paper by coming up with the basic philosophy and principle which guides journalism: “The duty of the journalist is the same as that of the historian — to seek out the truth, above all things, and to present to his readers the truth as he can attain it”. According to him, journalism is independent of government, as it “perform its duties with entire independence, the press can enter into no close or binding relations with the statesmen of the day, nor can it surrender its permanent interest to the convenience of the power of any government.” (White, 2008:23).

However, ethical issues were not paramount in media coverage until the Watergate scandal in the United States when journalists discovered the extent of the power which they wielded. The scandal, which brought down Richard Nixon as United States President, opened the floodgates for investigative journalism, with many journalists aspiring to either bring down a president or achieve a ground breaking feat in investigative journalism. The increasing power of journalists motivated the introduction of newspaper censorship in 18th century. Eventually, the media realized that if ethical standards were not set for practitioners of the profession, external control

could threaten the sustenance of journalism. This led to the formation of numerous professional associations and the formulation of ethical codes in various countries (Kunczik, 2000).

In Ghana, the National Council of the GJA came up with a Code of Ethics in 1994 to serve as ready guide to members of the Association in the state-owned media, private media and local freelance journalists. The Code was also meant to provide a frame of reference to the National Executive and the Disciplinary Committee and members of the Association when it became necessary to initiate disciplinary action against any member who flouted any article of the Code. According to the GJA, the Code was meant to ensure that members adhered to the highest ethical standards, professional competence and good behaviour in carrying out their duties (GJA Code of Ethics, 1994).

### **Problem Statement**

Many years after the GJA Code came into force, journalists in Ghana continued to violate the ethics of the profession on a daily basis. Repeal of the Criminal Libel Law appeared to have led to deterioration in the ethics of practitioners (Owusu, 2012). This has led to low public perception of the Ghanaian media as evidenced in a 2011 survey conducted by the Ghana Integrity Initiative (GII), where the media was rated as one of the most corrupt institutions in Ghana (GII, 2011).

Some journalists were also accused of openly mounting political platforms to campaign when they have a code of ethics to protect. The GJA Code of Ethics stipulates the parameters within which journalists can operate but this has been persistently flouted. Truth appears to be a tool of convenience and not a fundamental component of journalism in Ghana (Owusu, 2012). According to the Chairman of the National Media Commission, the society which endorsed media freedoms is now calling for the re-introduction of laws that curtail such liberties (Blay-Amihere, 2011). Some contributors to the Constitutional Review Commission, the body set up in 2010 by the government to recommend possible ways of amending the 1992 Republican Constitution, advocated for sanctions against the media (Constitution Review Commission, 2010).

Public dissatisfaction with media reportage is gaining expression in intolerance and violence against the media. The 2011/2012 latest worldwide index released by Reporters Without Borders found that several journalists were physically attacked by political militants during the year (Reporters Without Borders, 2012). It is not for nothing that the Ghanaian public is concerned about unethical journalistic practices by some journalists. After all, unethical practices contributed to violence in some parts of Africa, especially Rwanda, in 1994, and Kenya in 2007 (Human Rights Watch, 1999).

During the 2012 elections, many Ghanaians expressed fear that if the media were not checked, they could ignite conflict. At a Unilever Media Interaction, the President of the GJA cautioned

the media to eschew reckless reportage in the run-up to the elections. He reminded the media that in 2008, the country was nearly on the brink owing to media coverage of the elections, and encouraged irresponsible journalists to change (Tetteh, 2012). With the 2012 elections over, the question that arises is whether the mass media heeded warnings to report responsibly and in accordance with the ethics of journalism.

Therefore, the paper sets out to investigate the extent and nature of unethical practices which the Ghanaian press engaged in during the campaign period leading up to the 2012 elections. It also sought to establish the nature of coverage accorded political stories and the amount of news-hole devoted to the various political parties.

### **Review of Ethical Theories**

Merrill (1997) came up with two categories of traditional ethical theories. The first category was made up of theories based on ethical reasoning approaches which are rational theories that include duty-emphasized deontology. The second category referred to consequence-emphasized teleology and non-rational or an actor's virtue-emphasized personality theories. Alternatively, ethics theories can either be communitarian or libertarian. Communitarian theories refer to those which are guided by group interests whereas libertarian theories refer to those that are based on individual interests.

Deontological sets definite rules, maxims, or principles that journalists must follow in order to satisfy ethical codes. When a journalist abides by such rules, he is considered ethical. Breaking the rules on the other hand, makes one unethical (Merrill, 1997). Deontology theory argues that an action could only be morally justified where it is conducted from duty, the consequences notwithstanding. The theory talks about categorical imperative which concerns itself not with the presumed results of a course of action but with the principle behind the course of action (Kant & Paton, 1948).

On the contrary, teleological ethicists are more concerned about the end (telos) to a cause of action. Since they pay more attention to the consequences of an action rather than rules governing that action, they are referred to as consequentialists who speculate about the results of their actions. They may not be against duties and universal laws. However, they abide by moral laws or violate them according to the projected results. A group of teleologists who intrinsically doubt fundamental beliefs and always examine the truth or ethics of a subject by experimenting and observing consequences are known as pragmatists (Merrill, 1997).

Teleological journalists could also be the utilitarians who are of the conviction that consequences of actions are crucial in determining that which is ethical and that which is not. For instance, utilitarians believe that it is ethical to hurt one person for the good of a large group. This is the moral justification for investigative reporting (Patterson & Wilkins, 2004). Indeed, the influence of teleology in the journalism profession can be observed from the Hutchinson Commission

Report which posited that if the press failed to report in a more responsible way, its freedom could be curtailed through government interference (The Commission on the Freedom of the Press, 1947).

According to Grcic (1989), teleology theories hold that the ultimate criterion of moral goodness is either the sum total of good over evil consequences that the action brings about or whether it promotes individual functions and development. On the other hand, a deontologist would argue that the morality of an action is not primarily determined by its consequences but by certain intrinsic features of the intention or mental aspect of the contemplated action. For the deontologist, doing one's duty and the nature of our motives and intentions are more significant than the consequences that may result from one's action.

Championed by Aristotle (1961), personalism is another ethics theory which bases its ethical decision making on subjective matters including intuition, spirituality or emotive actions, or what some refer to as conscience (Merrill, 1997). Aristotle was of the view that moral excellence, or virtue, is the disposition of choosing the middle course between the deficiency and excess, as determined by a man with practical wisdom, and that virtue lies between a range of behaviors that vary between two extremes. For him, people must avoid actions which are palpably evil, since such actions are not at the middle point of moral decision-making (Aristotle, 1961 cited from Merrill, 1997).

People's ethical loyalties can also be categorized as either communitarianism or libertarianism. Often referred to as group-orientated ethicists, communitarians argue for the common good of society and base personal ethical values on societal desires and expectations (Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng, & White, 2009). The communitarian journalist places priority on harmonious and agreeable society, maintaining that social justice is the predominant moral value. On the contrary, the libertarians extol diversity in order to fulfill the balanced development of individuals (Patterson and Wilkins, 2004). Christians, Rotzoll & Fackler (2005) came up with five entities to which people usually owe moral duty. These are the people themselves, their clients/subscribers/supporters, organizations for which the people work, professional colleagues and society.

Taras (1995) examined journalists' moral duties from external factors and proposed levels at which journalistic morality could be observed namely the national level, news organization level, and individual level. For Ward (2005), the world is now a global village where there is a movement toward global ethics for journalism. To this end, Callahan (2003) proposed that in the new global world, journalism should pose basic questions such as: What is journalism, and what is it for? What ethics presently govern journalism, and why? In the future, can there be universal ethical standards for journalism to meet the challenges of globalization?

Political journalism has the potential for conflict for which reason this study focuses on ethics based on set rules which journalists must abide by. Since GJA has code of ethics which serve as indicators for measuring ethical behavior for journalists, the study measures the performance of journalists against the ethical codes. Therefore, this study relies mainly on the deontological ethical theory which sets definite rules, maxims, or principles that journalists must follow in order to be adjudged professional practitioners.

### Research Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research method, namely content analysis, to gather data on ethical issues regarding newspaper coverage of the 2012 General Elections in Ghana. The main tool employed to gather data was a specially designed coding sheet. In the coding process, four basic journalistic ethical requirements, taken out of the GJA Code of Ethics, were considered.

Four Ghanaian daily newspapers were purposively selected for the study. Two state-owned newspapers - Daily Graphic and Ghanaian Times, were selected because of their national reach and readership as well as the fact that as state-owned papers, they are expected to be more responsible in their coverage of elections. For comparative purposes, we also selected two privately owned papers - The Chronicle and Daily Guide. These two papers have carved out a niche for themselves as being prominent in reportage on political issues and discourse. They are also the most widely read private newspapers in Ghana, with Daily Guide leading with a circulation of about 25,000 copies (Diedong, 2013).

The study was carried out between 1st November and 6th December, 2012, this being the most active political campaign period when the press was expected to cover the intensive campaigning prior to the 7th December elections. The units of analysis for the study were hard news stories, which have political parties or party presidential and parliamentary candidates as subjects or major sources of such stories. Political parties here referred to the seven political organizations that contested the 2012 presidential elections namely National Democratic Congress (NDC), New Patriotic Party (NPP), Peoples National Convention (PNC), Convention People Party (CPP), the Progressive People's Party (PPP), the United Freedom Party (UFP) and the Great Consolidated Popular Party (GCPP).

All stories within the sampled editions of the papers were studied to identify political stories which were then coded as either ethical or unethical stories. Ethical stories were stories which did not violate selected Articles of the GJA Code of Ethics, while unethical stories were considered as those which went contrary to the following selected GJA ethical codes:

**Article 1: People's Right to True Information** - Public has right to unbiased, accurate, balanced and comprehensive information.

**Article 6: Respect for National and Ethnic Values** – A journalist should not originate material which encourages discrimination on grounds of ethnicity, colour, creed, gender or sexual orientation.

**Article 11: Separating Comments from Facts** - While free to take positions on any issue, journalists should draw a clear line between comment, conjecture and fact.

**Article 17: Headline and Sensationalism** – Stories should give accurate picture of events and not highlight incidents out of context (GJA Code of Ethics, 1994).

The study operationalized the terms accuracy, impartiality and fairness according to the definition of the Kenya Correspondents Association (2007). To achieve impartiality, media correspondents must give reasonable opportunity to all parties to and sides of an issue to state their sides of a story. It also mandates journalists to strive to obtain comments from anyone who is mentioned in an unfavorable context in a story. Moreover, looking for more than one opinion, voices or diverse views helps overcome the appearance of bias or favouring only one side. A story is balanced and fair when it gives more emphasis or more attention to one candidate over another in a news story because of the significance of the candidate's words or actions at that event, or at that time. Fairness also means that media correspondents must ensure that stories filed for publishing are not oriented towards personality, party or ethnic positions as opposed to issue oriented news.

### Research Findings

The study set out to investigate ethical violations by the Ghanaian press in their coverage of the 2012 election campaigns and to determine the nature of coverage accorded political stories during the campaign period, as well as the amount of news-hole accorded the various political parties.

### Extent of Ethical Violations

In all, 597 political stories were analyzed from the four selected newspapers. Out of this, Daily Graphic carried 251 stories (42.0%), Daily Guide had 140 stories (23.5%) while Ghanaian Chronicle published 104 stories (17.4%) and Ghanaian Times came up with 102 stories (17.1%). Out of the 597 stories, 43.6% were found to be unethical as against 56.4% which respected the ethics of journalistic reportage. The Daily Graphic respected the ethics of the profession more than the other newspapers as Table 1 shows.

From Table 1 it is clear that the state-owned newspapers are more responsible in their reportage of political issues than their privately owned counterparts.

**Table 1: Number of ethical and unethical stories**

Newspaper	Ethical consideration	
	Ethical	Unethical
Daily Graphic	82.5%	17.5%
Ghanaian Times	60.8%	39.2%
Ghanaian Chronicle	42.3%	57.7%
Daily Guide	40.0%	60.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

### Types of Ethical Violations

The ethical violations were categorized into unbalanced and biased stories (Article 1), respect for national and ethnic values (Article 6), separating comments from facts (Article 11) and headline and sensationalism (Article 17). The study showed that unbalanced and biased stories constituted the highest number of ethical violations as Table 2 testifies.

**Table 2: Type of ethical violations by newspapers**

Newspaper	Type of Ethical Violations				Total
	Article 1	Article 6	Article 11	Article 17	
Graphic	17.9	0.4	0.0	0.4	18.7
Times	14.8	0.0	0.0	0.4	15.2
Guide	30.6	1.4	1.7	4.8	38.5
Chronicle	17.9	1.4	1.7	6.6	27.6
Total	81.2	3.2	3.4	12.2	100

### Unbalanced and Biased Stories (Violations of Article I)

Majority of the ethical violations were related to an aspect of Article 1 of the GJA Code of Ethics which indicates that the public has a right to unbiased, accurate, balanced and comprehensive information. For instance, on 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 2012, Daily Graphic published a story titled “Ayariga accused of damaging fortunes of PNC”. According to the story, some aggrieved PNC executives organized a press conference during which they criticized their flag bearer for diminishing the fortunes of the party by abandoning the manifesto of the PNC to adopt his paymasters’ (NDC) manifesto. Before publishing such serious allegations which could reduce the chances of a candidate at the elections, the reporter should have sought a reaction from either the PNC Presidential candidate or his spokesperson. However, this was not done. Instead, Daily Graphic repeated similar allegations on 27<sup>th</sup> November, 2011 in an article titled, “PNC National Youth Organiser campaigns for Akufo-Addo”. The story indicated that at Mankesim rally, the

PNC National Youth Organiser accused his presidential candidate of campaigning for the NDC rather than seeking victory for the party. Once again, the paper did not balance the story with a response from the PNC Candidate.

Another example of an unbalanced story which favoured the NPP was a Daily Graphic story of 14<sup>th</sup> November, 2012. Captioned, “NDC, NPP battle for Kumbungu seat”, the writer attempted analyzing the chances of NDC and NPP candidates for the Kumbungu Constituency. Rather than interview both candidates to establish the extent of their contribution to the Constituency and enable them assess their chances, the writer interviewed only the NPP candidate who enumerated the various contributions he made to the development of the Constituency. The writer also interviewed discontented NDC members who made several allegations against the NDC candidate. Again, no response was sought from the NDC candidate on the allegations made against him. Similarly, the Deputy Communications Director of NPP accused a leading NDC member, Dr. Tony Aidoo, of corruption in the purchase of a state vehicle. The writer copiously quoted the NPP member’s allegations against Tony Aidoo describing his action as “corrupt”, “evil”, “criminal”, “unethical”, “naked robbery” and “Machiavellian”. Not only was the language used unsuitable for publication, the story failed to give Dr. Tony Aidoo an opportunity to respond to the serious allegations leveled against him.

In the Ghanaian Chronicle of 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 2012, the Member of Parliament (MP) for Manhyia accused the NDC of hatching a clandestine plan to cause chaos in Manhyia during the polls. Captioned “NAPO fires back at NDC... says their plan will not succeed”, the story alleged that a member of the National Security spearheaded an attack on the MP. The fact that the paper published these serious allegations against the NDC and the National Security member without hearing their side of issues was unethical. Another unbalanced story from the Ghanaian Chronicle was published in the 27<sup>th</sup> November, 2012 edition of the paper with the caption, “Na laptops no wòhene?” The story featured the NPP Presidential Candidate accusing NDC Government of distributing laptops and cars to tertiary students to win votes. Getting the NDC’s response to the allegations prior to publication would have balanced the story.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 2012, the *Ghanaian Chronicle* again came up with the story “Suspected NDC thugs attack boy, 10”. In the story, the reporter intimated that NDC’s violent conduct had led to a minor being wounded. Having obtained information from the opposition NPP regarding the incident, the reporter failed to get NDC’s side of the story.

In the *Daily Guide* of 26<sup>th</sup> November 2012, a story titled, “GIPC Funds NDC Boys” makes serious allegations against Volunteers for Mahama to the effect that the group pressurized state institutions including the Ghana Investment Promotions Centre (GIPC) into donating monies for them to campaign for the NDC Candidate. The story further indicated that the youth group was distributing cars to students, mostly ladies, in university campuses. No opportunity was provided for either the accused group or the GIPC Deputy Director in charge of Finance to respond to the allegations. In the same issue of the paper, a story titled, “NPP writes to Interior Minister – On

rigging project” reported that the NPP Chairman of Security Committee wrote to the Interior Minister stating his party’s suspicion that NDC had planned to unleash violence on NPP strongholds with a view to minimizing NPP votes. The allegations were so serious that NDC side of the story should have been sought.

In a similar manner, the 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2012 edition of the Ghanaian Times, carried two stories titled “Nana: I’m against bloodshed” and “I will re-write history of Upper West Region”. In the first story, the NPP Presidential Candidate alleged that NDC members had attacked and wounded some NPP supporters. The second story also featured the NPP candidate accusing NDC of mismanagement of state funds, propaganda and failure to implement the Savanna Accelerated Development Authority (SADA). Neither story carried the NDC reaction to the allegations.

The NPP was also at the receiving end of unethical reportage. In the 28<sup>th</sup> November, 2012 edition of Daily Graphic, a story titled “2 NDC supporters injured at Kyebi” claimed that some NPP supporters attacked NDC members injuring two of them. The story was based solely on allegations made by the NDC, whereas soliciting the NPP side of what transpired could have resulted in a more ethically balanced story. Also, “Vote against NPP candidates – Nketia” is an unethical story which appeared in the 29<sup>th</sup> November, 2012 issue of Daily Graphic. Addressing a rally at Jinijini, the NDC General Secretary told voters in the area not to vote for any NPP candidate since the party’s MPs had opposed the creation of constituencies in the area. No NPP MP was contacted to balance the story with their views on the allegation.

Having defected to the NDC, some NPP members accused the NPP MP for Agona West Constituency of doing nothing over the past 12 years to develop the area. They felt he did not live up to expectation as an MP during his tenure in office which was the reason for their defection to the NDC. Captioned “200 NPP members defect to NDC”, this Daily Graphic story of 10<sup>th</sup> November, 2012 was carried without seeking the NPP MP’s reaction to the allegations. Also, in the *Ghanaian Chronicle* of 27<sup>th</sup> November 2012, a former MP for Kumawu Constituency was accused of supporting an independent candidate for the Constituency to the disadvantage of the NPP candidate. However, the accused MP was not given an opportunity to either refute or confirm the allegations.

### Stories Likely to Evoke Ethnic Sentiments (Violations of Article 6)

Aside stories not being balanced, some stories had the potential of whipping up ethnic sentiments. The Daily Graphic story of 13<sup>th</sup> November, 2012, which featured a leading member of the NPP accusing President Mahama of playing the ethnic card by calling on people of Nakpanduri to vote for a Northern president is an example of a story which violates Article 6 of the GJA Code. By repeating and actually quoting what the President said to the effect that Northerners deserve better than the Vice Presidency and calling on his kith and kin to vote for him, the story could whip up ethnic sentiments. Daily Guide published a story the same day, on

the same incident. Titled “Mahama plays tribal card”, the story repeated some statements made by the President which could anger people who are not of Northern origins.

As politicians in the opposite camp took advantage of the President’s plea for Northerners to vote for him, newspapers threw ethical values aside and repeated tribalistic sentiments. For instance, the 4<sup>th</sup> December, 2012 issue of Daily Guide repeated the ethnocentric statements which an MP had attributed to President Mahama. Another story in the same newspaper was published on 6<sup>th</sup> November, 2012 with the caption, “Volta youth campaign for Mahama”. The story accused Akufo Addo of ethnocentrism and the NPP of tribalism. It also accused the NPP leadership of failing to condemn its members for making tribal comments. Also, the Daily Guide of 7<sup>th</sup> November, 2012 carried a story which could inflame tribal sentiments. Headlined, “Ayariga spreads tribal cancer”, Mahama Ayariga was reported to have campaigned on the bases of tribe. The story gave details of some potentially sensitive tribal feelings that the parliamentary aspirant for Bawku Central raised. In doing so, the publication could cause tribal disaffection against the aspirant and his ethnic group.

### **Separating Comments from Facts (Article 11)**

Few stories also departed from the journalistic practice of being objective, non-judgmental and separating comments from facts. The study brought to the fore various instances when journalists used their personal comments and conjecture in a manner that made it appear as though they were stating points of fact. For instance, the Ghanaian Chronicle of 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 2012, carried a story captioned, “Debates confirm Nana Akufo-Addo as battle-ready for Jubilee” where the writer gave his personal perspective of the outcome of the debate in a story that was meant to be a factual narration of the event. According to the writer, the debate, “confirmed the battle-readiness of Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo Addo to take on the mantle of leadership of the nation. The NPP candidate has one foot already at the gate of Jubilee House”. The Daily Guide of 5<sup>th</sup> December, 2012 also carried a story titled, “NDC rally flops”. The story only sought to paint the picture of an NDC which was losing ground in the Volta Region to the NPP. In trying to achieve this, the writer gave his personal judgment on the electoral fortunes of the two parties in the Region.

### **Sensationalism (Violation of Article 17)**

The study also revealed that some newspaper headlines were sensational. On 16<sup>th</sup> November, 2012, Daily Graphic published a story headlined, “Prez Mahama ‘mocks’ Akufo-Addo”. This story violates Article 17 of GJA Code of Ethics since the content of the story does not support the headline. The headline gave an impression of a President who made fun of his main opponent at the elections whereas all that the President did, according to the body of the story, was to point out that the NPP’s Candidate felt that free education could solve all of Ghana’s problems.

In the 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 2012 issue of the Ghanaian Chronicle, a story was published under the headline “‘Dziwo fie asem’ has dented our image”. The content of the story was not related to

the headline. Another story which was sensational appeared in the 26<sup>th</sup> November, 2012 issue of the same newspaper with the headline, “Rawlings Dribbles NDC”. The Ghanaian Chronicle of 28<sup>th</sup> December, 2012, also published the story, “Dr. Rawlings Prescribes Ayaricough... And Otumfuo smiles”, which violates Article 17 of the GJA Code of Ethics because the headline gave the impression that former President Rawlings condemned Ayariga for coughing during the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) debate whereas the former President actually said he respected all the presidential candidates including Ayariga, and referred to the PNC candidate’s “designer cough” during the debate.

Daily Guide covered the same story in its 28<sup>th</sup> December edition with a sensational title, “JJ bashes Ayariga cough”. The story failed to show that the former President condemned Ayariga as the headline implied. In the same issue of Guide, another sensational headline read, “Kunbour protects NDC hoodlums”. The headline gave an impression that the then Attorney General was protecting hoodlums whereas the content of the story only pointed at the failure of the Attorney General’s Department to prosecute NDC members suspected of having engaged in multiple registration and violent acts. Also, in the 29<sup>th</sup> November, 2012 issue of the Daily Guide, “Mahama in tears – over media reports” clearly violated Article 17 of the GJA Code of Ethics since it connoted a weeping president, whereas the story itself reported that the President expressed displeasure with some untrue media reports against him, and urged journalists to stick to the tenants of the profession.

### Nature of Political Coverage

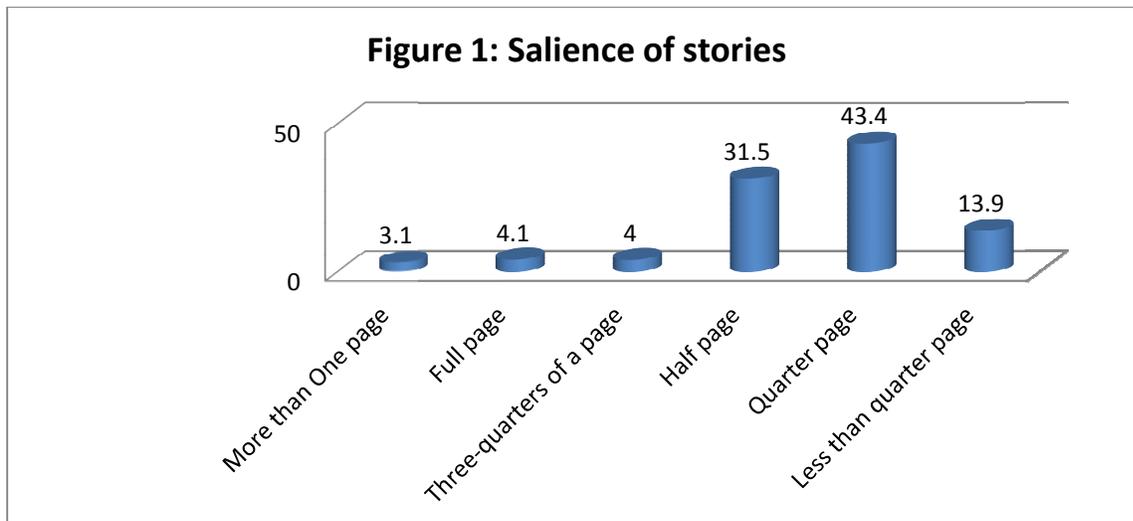
With regards to the nature of coverage, the study sought to determine the level of story placement, enhancement and salience. The study was interested in the number of political stories which found their way onto front pages of the selected newspapers, since front page stories are usually more attention grabbing than those published in the back or inside pages of the newspapers. It emerged from the study that only 16.6% of political stories were placed on the front pages of the newspapers. The *Ghanaian Chronicle* placed more priority on political stories since 31.7% of the paper’s stories made it to the front page as against *Daily Guide* (19.3%) or *Ghanaian Times* (10.8%). *Daily Graphic* gave the least priority to political stories with only 4.4% finding their way to the front page of the newspaper.

Aside story placement, a story also communicates better when enhanced with a photograph or some other diagrammatic representation. To this effect 77.3% of the stories studied were accompanied with photographs while 22.7% were not. As indicated in Table 3, Daily Guide carried more political stories with photographs than the other newspapers.

**Table 3: Story enhancement**

Newspaper	Enhancement	
	Photograph	No photograph
Daily Graphic	76.5%	23.5%
Ghanaian Times	60.8%	39.2%
Ghanaian Chronicle	89.3%	10.7%
Daily Guide	82.7%	17.3%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

The researchers were also interested in the salience of political stories or the amount of newspaper space devoted to such stories. Since the selected stories were exclusively hard news stories, majority of them (43.5%) covered one quarter of a page, with only 3.1% being longer than a page



The Ghanaian Chronicle devoted more space to political stories with 6.8% of them being more than one page long as compared to Ghanaian Times (2.9%), Daily Guide (2.1%) and Daily Graphic (0.4%). However, Graphic carried more full page political stories (10.0%) than either Chronicle (4.8%) or Daily Guide (1.4%). The Ghanaian Times did not carry any full page political story.

**Amount of News hole Devoted to Parties**

Earlier studies had established that the state-owned newspapers accorded more coverage to the party in power, the NDC, compared to the opposition parties while the privately owned newspapers devoted more space to the main opposition party, the NPP. For instance, in a National Media Commission (NMC) study between October 1 – 23, 2012, Daily Graphic accorded NDC 35.5% coverage, NPP 19.5% and PPP 13.5%, CPP 11.4%, PNC 10.1%. On the other hand, Daily Guide gave the NPP more coverage (57.9%), compared to NDC (15.8%), NDP

(10%), CPP (6.3%) and PPP (4.2%) (Daily Graphic, 8<sup>th</sup> November, 2012). The present study showed a similar trend, as in Table 4.

**Table 4: Newspaper space devoted to political parties**

Political Party	Graphic	Amount of Newspaper Space		
		Times	Guide	Chronicle
NDC	31.5	45.0	34.0	38.1
NPP	22.9	23.5	54.3	42.5
CPP	14.1	11.6	4.3	9.0
PNC	13.5	4.7	5.6	7.7
PPP	12.2	10.5	1.2	1.3
GCPP	3.3	1.6	0	0.7
UFP	2.5	3.1	0.6	0.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Daily Graphic was more even in its coverage of the political parties compared to Daily Guide which gave NPP more than half of its space for political stories while according GCPP no coverage at all.

### Conclusions

During the 2012 electoral campaign coverage, the Ghanaian press failed in the test case of balanced and fair coverage. The press appeared unwilling to go the extra mile of getting both sides of a story before going to press. From the slant and volume of stories published by Daily Guide and the Ghanaian Chronicle, it was obvious that they supported the campaign efforts of the New Patriotic Party. In this regard, they deliberately committed some ethical violations in order to project the image of the main opposition party while casting the governing party in bad light. The Ethics and Disciplinary Committee of the Ghana Journalist Association (GJA) is yet to stamp its authority in enforcing compliance with the ethics of the profession.

On the other hand, state-owned Daily Graphic and Ghanaian Times are yet to give all parties the equity in coverage that the 1992 Constitution prescribes. This is a result of the fact that both papers merely engaged in coverage of planned political events, mainly campaigns rallies, rather than proactively pursuing the political parties to discuss issues of relevance for the 2012 elections. Since the minority opposition parties held fewer campaign rallies, they also got less coverage compared the NDC and NPP.

## Recommendations

To ensure compliance with the GJA Code of Ethics and improve upon political coverage, the following recommendations are worth noting:

1. The Ethics and Disciplinary Committee of the GJA need to step up monitoring of press houses to ensure strict compliance with the Code of Ethics;
2. Aside the Committee's regulation of the industry, press houses themselves must set up databanks of their publications to monitor violations of Ethical Codes;
3. Besides, press houses must have in-house ethics for employees and activate their in-house gate keeping roles to reduce unethical violations;
4. The GJA with the support of media friendly partners and the individual press houses must continue to update the knowledge and skills of journalists on political reporting and ethics of the profession.

In view of proliferation of broadcast media in Ghana and level of influence that such media are currently exerting on their audience's, future research could expand the current study beyond print media to include the electronic media. Subsequent studies could also extend the analyses beyond the selected four ethical issues to include other common ethical violations.

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