

Offensive Language As Threat To Peaceful Co-Existence: Serial Callers In Perspective

Damasus Tuurosong²

Abstract

This study set out to examine the extent to which radio stations use offensive language, reasons why serial callers use such language and how this threat to Ghana's peace can be curtailed within the Tamale Metropolis. The study adopted the mixed method approach to data collection and analyses with content analysis, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions as methods of data collection. Relying on the above methods, four radio stations, two of which were commercial radio stations, one community radio station and a state-owned radio station, out of 17 on-air radio stations within the Tamale Metropolis, were sampled using the quota sampling technique. Based on the data collected the study found that among the political communicators on radio, serial callers used the most offensive language with a view to defending either the New Patriotic Party (NPP) or the National Democratic Congress (NDC). The two parties sponsor the activities of these callers who, in return for stipends from politicians, fearlessly denigrate opponents while trumpeting their parties' achievements. Unsubstantiated allegations against political opponents emerged as the most frequently used offensive pronouncement by serial callers who admit to the dangers of their conduct for peaceful co-existence, but insist they must do everything possible to ensure victory for their parties. The study concludes that in spite of the threat posed by serial callers to peaceful co-existence, employing extra security measures to contain the situation is not an option. Instead, the study recommends that radio stations field technocrats in place of political party representatives to review newspaper headlines during Morning Show programmes.

Key Words: Offensive language, peaceful co-existence, serial callers, radio, political parties

2 Simon Diedong Dombo University of Business And Integrated Development Studies, Wa, Upper West Region, Ghana, dtuurosong@ubids.edu.gh

Introduction

Long before independence, Ghana, then Gold Coast, discovered the essence of radio as a tool for development. Governor Sir Arnold Hodson established the first radio station in the Gold Coast in 1935. Named 'Station ZOY', the radio station was a public service tool that brought news, entertainment and music into the homes of its initial subscribers. From 1939, the station was used to support classroom instruction and to spread British propaganda during World War II. Initially an offshoot of the Public Relations Department, the station became a full-fledged department in 1953. A year later, the Gold Coast Broadcasting System was set up. This was renamed the Ghana Broadcast Corporation (GBC) after independence in 1957 (GBC, 2016). In the ensuing years, GBC went through various stages of growth to the extent of setting up re-diffusion stations in district centres to expand broadcasting from Accra.

All this while, radio broadcast remained a state monopoly. Even when the 1992 Constitution provided for liberalization of the airwaves, no frequencies were allocated to private radio stations until the mid-nineties. GBC's monopoly of the airwaves was, however, broken in 1994 when opposition politician, Charles Wereko-Brobby, commenced a series of pirate broadcasts with the establishment of Radio Eye, which was later closed down and its equipment confiscated by the security agencies. Wereko-Brobby's provocative action, however, pressured the government to liberalise the airwaves for private participation (ghanaweb.com, 2005). Therefore, in 1995, the government began allocating licenses and frequencies through the Frequency Registration and Control Board, with Radio Univers being the first beneficiary. The University of Ghana's Voice of Legon, now Radio Univers, commenced broadcasting in 1995. In 1996, the National Communication Authority (NCA) Act 524 was passed establishing the National Communications Authority (NCA) with a mandate to regulate communications by wire, cable, radio, television, satellite and similar means of technology for the orderly development and operation of efficient communications services in Ghana, and to provide for related purposes (NCA, 2016). This expanded the frontiers of broadcasting to a stage where the NCA has given frequency authorisations

to 629 FM broadcasting stations, out of which 459 were in operation as at March, 2021. A classification of the authorized stations is as follows:

- 31 Public Radio Stations;
- 5 Public (Foreign) Radio Stations;
- 96 Community Radio Stations;
- 23 Campus Radio Stations; and
- 474 Commercial Radio Stations (NCA, 2021).

Like other parts of the country, Northern Region has benefited from liberalisation of the airwaves with the number of radio stations currently standing at 17.

Kwakwa (2012) identified radio as the most significant instrument for development in Ghana. The study, conducted in the Eastern Region of Ghana, showed that the variety of programmes aired on radio in the form of talk shows, music, drama, news, announcements and education provide useful information to the listeners. FM channels inform the youth about the current social and political issues in their localities, thereby assisting to promote social and political awareness among the youth and the general populace (Kwakwa, 2012). No wonder that in spite of the huge influence of social media, radio remains the most consumed medium in Ghana, with a penetration rate of about 90%. A 2018 Afrobarometer report puts radio listenership at 56%, television at 42%, internet access at 13% and social media patronage at 15% (Nyarko, 2020).

Such high patronage explains why radio continues to impact development in Ghana. In the area of health, the broadcast medium has facilitated communication of health messages especially during emergencies. Health education on HIV, Ebola, polio, malaria and COVID-19 has been successfully executed. Radio's effectiveness has enhanced plurality through the use of multiple Ghanaian languages, thereby facilitating the expression of diverse viewpoints. The impact of radio is further enhanced through its integration with social media. Today, most radio stations own websites and stream their broadcasts on social media platforms, thereby,

enhancing a two-way discourse that employs phone-ins and online postings (Nyarko, 2020).

Use of Offensive Language on Radio

While radio programmes provide a platform for reaching out to the electorates, some politicians and activists resort to radio to verbally abuse and provoke opponents. Such offensive language on radio, which sometimes include insults, hate speech and ethnocentric slurs, has the potential of inciting people to violence, especially during election periods (Media Foundation for West Africa, 2016; Marfo, 2012). Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), which monitors the use of offensive language on radio during national electioneering periods, defines hate speech as insulting and offensive comments, unsubstantiated allegations against a political opponent, remarks endorsing violence, provocative remarks, remarks inciting violence, divisive comments and tribal slurs (MFWA, 2016). In this study, offensive language, hate speech and indecent language are used interchangeably.

Before Ghana's Parliamentary and Presidential elections in December 2016, MFWA monitored selected radio stations in the country and found that hardly a day passes by without political leaders and their supporters engaging in politics of insults or indecent expressions. Indeed, a total of 343 indecent expressions were recorded over a three-month period. It emerged from the study that officials, supporters and affiliates of eight major political parties were guilty of using abusive expressions. The parties are the New Patriotic Party (NPP), the National Democratic Congress (NDC), Progressive People's Party (PPP), National Democratic Party (NDP), People's National Convention (PNC), Conventions People's Party (CPP), Ghana Freedom Party (GFP) and New Labour Party (NLP). Out of the 343 indecent expressions recorded, 232 were uttered by affiliates of the eight political parties while the remaining 111 indecent expressions emanated from persons whose political party affiliation could not be established on the programmes monitored (MFWA, 2016). The research showed that insults and unsubstantiated allegations by politicians

were paramount in the build up to the 2016 general elections. The MFWA blamed presenters of radio programmes for allowing indecent expressions to be used on their programmes and directed the National Media Commission (NMC), the Ghana Independent Broadcasters Association (GIBA) and the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA) to take remedial actions aimed at curtailing the situation. Similarly, Ofori (2016) found that insults in politics have reached an all-time high, often characterised by personal attacks, vilifications and bickering. Earlier, Coker and Nartey (2012) had established that insults could be classified into two major matrices: denotative insults and presupposed/inferential insults. According to the authors, users of intemperate language have little or no knowledge of social mores since in certain societies these utterances are taboos.

Marfo (2012) found that the liberalisation of the airwaves coupled with the abolition of the criminal libel law, had made every Ghanaian to express him/herself on any matters of political interest which were considered unthinkable in the military regime. He stated that such freedom was gradually breeding all forms of deadly pronouncements, blatant incitement and reckless resort to hate speech by leading politicians and their supporters. According to him, a political opponent in Ghana was largely considered as a sub-human who needed no recognition and sympathy.

In Ghana's Fourth Republican dispensation, there is abundant evidence of offensive language in the media. For instance, during a *Kessben FM* programme aired on 17th March 2015, the then Deputy Attorney General lost his temper and said; *"you are asking me stupid questions and I am not ready to tolerate that nonsense... my friend, if you misbehave, I will drop the line"*, which he subsequently did. On the same radio station, a "serial caller" (frequent contributor to political programmes on radio) told a panellist to stop talking like a fool and wise up (Fordjour, 2016). Also, on 9th March 2015, a member of the Communication Team of a leading political party in Ghana used words such as "bullshit", "bogus" and "useless" on Kumasi-based *Angel FM* to describe the President's State of the Nation Address. On the same media network, a Member of Parliament (MP) described

his own party members as “...*foolish people who do not have an iota of common sense*” (Fordjour, 2016: 4). The same MP was reported to have insulted the Chairperson of the Electoral Commission on air, alleging that she assumed her position by giving sexual favours (Myjoyonline.com, 2016). Additionally, a popular radio presenter and his two panellists were convicted on account of comments they made on *Montie FM*, an Accra based radio station, threatening to kill Justices of the Supreme Court following their handling of a lawsuit that challenged the credibility of Ghana’s voters’ register (Citifmonline.com, 2016).

Fordjour (2016) cautioned that the use of offensive language on radio during political broadcast was becoming so rampant that, appropriate measures had to be put in place to avoid unforeseeable occurrences. He explained that with the encouragement and support of audiences, some media practitioners use foul language to spice up their messages. According to him, in an era of a liberalised media, the use of offensive language is a revolution against the cultural prohibition of foul language, and the culture of silence that preceded promulgation of the 1992 Constitution. It emerged that some radio presenters deliberately asked public figures provocative questions to elicit abusive words from such personalities. Most of these foul utterances were used as programme promos with the motive of entertaining the audience or exposing the ignorance, incompetence and the narrow-mindedness of some public figures (Fordjour, 2016). In a newspaper headline, “**Halt Illegals on Radio**”, Professor Kwame Karikari lamented that due to the lack of clear rules and guidelines governing the operations of radio stations in the country, operators had resorted to all kinds of illegal activities that endanger the health of the people and distorted their cultural values and ethics. He was of the view that, the use of offensive language on radio was becoming so rampant that it should be curbed to avoid unforeseeable occurrences (Karikari, 2014).

Many earlier studies into indecent language during electioneering periods (MFWA, 2012 and 2016; Marfo, 2012 and Fordjour, 2016) adopted content analysis as a method of data collection. Such studies attempted to undertake nationwide monitoring of sampled media houses. However, no study has focused on one of Ghana’s political hotspots and violent prone

regions, Northern Region. The nationwide spread of earlier studies made it impossible to delve deeper into the potential threat that indecent use of language on radio poses to peaceful co-existence in the region. Besides, earlier research into offensive language used on radio focused on analysing the content of media programmes without seeking the views of the main architects of intemperate language. While content analysis may expose the frequency and types of offensive language used, this data collection method does not capture the complete picture of the language challenge. Aside analysing media content and interviewing media managers, this study goes further to interview major violators of language decency, serial callers. This holistic approach was aimed at examining the extent to which radio stations use offensive language, reasons why serial callers use such language and how this threat to Ghana's peace can be curtailed within the Tamale Metropolis.

Serial callers

With increased plurality, radio programming has become more diverse, with audience participation an imperative. In particular, talk programmes that emerged in the early days of media plurality attracted audiences by introducing phone-in segments to enhance audience participation. These programmes took advantage of massive mobile telephony penetration in the country to engage audiences through voice calls, voice messages, text messages and social media (Tettey, 2011 and Yankah, 2004). The provision of feedback opportunities to audiences, created what is referred to as the “***serial caller***” phenomenon in Ghana's talk show radio. Serial callers are individuals who regularly participate in public debate through multiple calls to various radio talk shows. Their assignment is to monitor different radio on-air discussions, hijack radio phone-lines among various blocs of caller groups and set an agenda for media discussion by actively influencing the debate with their politically jaundiced opinions (VOA News, 2009, cited in Nunoo, 2015).

Serial callers operate as “***hired guns***” whose entry into public debate was to announce a scandal, repeat a scandal or take turf in the debate for the particular political party that hired them. Nunoo (2015) found that

'hijacking' and 'skewing' were major strategies employed by serial callers to influence their audiences and set the agenda for public discussion. The study established that some media gatekeepers assisted serial callers to gain easy access to phones lines during caller sessions of programmes. Talk show hosts pave the way for serial callers in order to attract greater participation of audience and to satisfy advertisers. In doing so, however, these programmes hosts sacrifice professional ethical codes and standards on the altar of audience participation (Nunoo, 2015).

Over a period of time, serial callers have graduated to higher levels of scandal peddlers and sophisticated political communicators who engage in emotive arguments for or against particular political ideologies (allAfrica, 2014, cited in Nunoo, 2015). Their functions have gone beyond expressing opinions on air to becoming political lobbyists who use strikes and protests to attain both political and material gains (Ghanaweb, 2012, cited in Nunoo, 2015). For instance, Ghana News Agency (GNA, 2021) reported of a function organized by the *Western North Regional Chairman of the New Patriotic Party (NPP)* at which he presented smartphones to serial callers of the party in the Sefwi Bibiani Anhwiaso Bekwai Constituency. At the event, he announced that all 80 serial callers in the Region would be provided with monthly airtime packages as a way of acknowledging their contributions to the party and effectively resourcing the serial callers to work towards retaining the party in power in the 2024 general elections. The party chairman indicated that, though serial callers played a key role in the party, they were often not motivated, hence the decision to provide them with smartphones to acknowledge their efforts.

Whenever they felt neglected, serial callers found ways of drawing attention to their needs. Kojo (2018) reported that to show their disdain for being neglected by the NPP, serial callers gathered and burnt mobile phones provided by the party. The serial callers warned their colleagues to desist from further calling or texting into local radio stations to defend the government of President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo. Similarly, Annang (2021) reported of a strike by serial callers within the Bono Region of Ghana. According to the Sunyani East Constituency Communications Officer of the NPP, the callers in the region decided to embark on the

strike because the disbursement of the monthly stipends of three hundred Ghana cedis (GH¢300) and two hundred Ghana cedis (GH¢200) paid to party communicators and serial callers respectively, was riddled with petty corruption and nepotism. The King of Ashanti, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, had occasion to express his grave concern about the activities of serial callers and other party communicators:

From the morning to midnight, all that you hear on radio and TV are these cacophony of noises on air which has no structure, no organization, no logic in it and proffers no solutions. It is jumbled, nonsensical, and just people going at each other and using unprintable words against each other on air...facilitated by mediocre radio and television presenters...The polarized political atmosphere has given rise to a new profession of serial callers, resident praise singers and attack dogs... The media houses in Ghana today have contributed to this poisoned culture of abuse and spewing of malicious political gossips and use of abusive language on air...that defies common sense... resulting in a situation where perpetrators jump in glee while, victims fret with anxiety..." (Daily Graphic, 2014).

A former Chairman of the National Media Commission, Kabral Blay-Amihere, also called on editors and radio station managers not to allow serial callers to set the agenda for public discourse since the practice was not good to the journalism profession and portends ill for Ghana's democracy (Ghanaweb, 2012). Some believe that the activities of serial callers have become a security threat for which reason national security intervention is required.

Theoretical Underpinning

The Securitisation Theory was developed by the Copenhagen School during the 1990s and operates under values and norms determined by securitising actors, speech acts and referent objects. Buzan, Waever and de Wilde (1995, cited in McDonald, 2008: 563) identify securitisation as a form of, "*linguistic representation*," by which an issue is presented as an existential threat. A "*securitising move*" is a discourse that establishes the presence of a threat, provided there is an audience present to accept the

discourse. Thus, the speech act constructs the security threat. Security is not a part of normal politics; instead, the process of securitisation indicates a failure of normal politics. The ultimate result of successful securitisation is the suspension of 'normal' politics and introduction of extra-normal measures through which to deal with the 'threat'.

However, it is argued that securitisation rests on political choices. "Security can never be based on the objective reference that something is in and of itself a security problem. That quality is always given to it in human communication" (Buzan and Waever, 1997: 246). Therefore, the threat can be used to legitimise political action which might not otherwise appear as legitimate. The Copenhagen School differentiates securitisation from politicisation whilst recognising both processes as inter-subjective (Buzan et al., 1998: 30). The politicisation of an issue makes it a matter of public choice, which is part of the normal politics of public deliberation. On the other hand, securitisation of an issue removes it from the context of normal politics and justifies the necessity of emergency politics and leaves it to the decisive action of securitising actors. Proclaiming an issue to be a security threat can confer legitimacy on the methods employed by the state to protect citizens from such threats. That is to say, securitisation justifies introducing security practices and technologies, which would not be introduced under normal conditions (Fierke, 2007:108).

The overriding importance of this theory suggests how language is inadvertently used to stimulate action from an individual or a group of people. The process of securitisation endorses the use of language as a '*speech act*', which draws on the notion of a meaningful utterance, eliciting a certain unassuming force which is backed by some action from an audience (Waever, 2004). Consequently, Securitisation Theory presents an opportunity for any securitising actor (this could be political communicators) to convince an audience (radio listeners) through a speech act (radio programmes) and the use of extraordinary measures (arrests or closure of radio stations) to deal with existential threats that are perceived to be inimical to the very survival of the state (Taureck, 2006).

The process of securitisation highlights politics of insults and inciting

language as a threat to be contained. Has the general public's (audience) growing concern over the state of Ghana's political discourse pushed the phenomenon of politics of insults into a level of 'existential threat' that requires the use of exceptional security measures to handle it? If one argues that the current political discourse threatens the existence of Ghana's democratic dispensation, then political elites, being the securitising actors, have the responsibility to adopt extraordinary measures to protect and consolidate the survival of the present democratic process. Definitely, political elites and governments have an overwhelming influence on other actors when it comes to the execution of extraordinary measures in dealing with language that has the propensity to incite violence (Columba and Vaughan-Williams, 2010).

The Copenhagen School's approach mentions political, societal, environmental and human security as areas most likely to be subjects of securitisation. Also, social groups, especially ethnic and religious groups, are considered by the Copenhagen School to be equally important as distinctive referent objects of security. For purposes of this study, serial callers are the subject of securitisation. However, a speech act can only be securitised once the relevant audiences are convinced that it poses an existential threat (Waever, 1995: 56). In other words, the process of securitising language can only be successful when there is a general consensus that political language, which is insulting or intemperate in nature, is threatening the advancement of democracy and rule of law in Ghana, hence, the need for extra resources and measures to deal with the problem. Emmers (2007) and several others acknowledge that in terms of translating the theory into reality, security actors can meddle in civilian activities, curtail certain civil liberties, and also hijack the whole securitisation process.

Many studies on the Securitisation Theory have been Eurocentric. Wilkinson (2007) has criticised the Copenhagen School's style of analysing security as being Eurocentric in nature since it does not reflect the concerns and dynamics of questions raised by the issue of security in other parts of the world. This study brings the theory to the African and

Ghanaian contexts by establishing the extent to which the utterances of serial callers on the airwaves of Tamale Metropolis can be securitised.

Methodology

The study adopted the mixed method approach to data collection and analyses with content analysis, interviews and focus group discussions as methods of data collection.

Sampling

Out of 17 on-air radio stations within the Tamale Metropolis, quota sampling techniques were used to select four radio stations, two of which were commercial radio stations, one community radio station and a state-owned radio station. *Radio Savannah* is a public radio station located in Tamale, the capital town of the Northern Region of Ghana. Established on 2nd December, 1996 with aim of promoting the cultural and socio-political needs of the people of the Northern Region, the station is owned and run by the state broadcaster, *Ghana Broadcasting Corporation* (GBC). It is one of the most-listened to stations within the Northern Region and transmits on 91.3MHz frequency modulation with programmes mostly in Dagbani, Gonja, Twi and English (GBC, 2012). The station was purposively sampled as the only state-owned station within the Northern Region which is expected to exhibit responsible journalism by ensuring the use of decent language aimed at promoting peace and development within the Tamale Metropolis. Also, purposive sampling technique was used to select *Tawasul FM*, the only community-based radio station within the Metropolis at the time the research was conducted. Established by Tawasul Multimedia Association, the station broadcasts on 95.7 MHz mainly in Dagbani and Gonja languages. Tawasul FM commenced operations on 21st July 2011 with the aim of supporting communal activities and small businesses within the Tamale Metropolis. As a station geared towards serving the needs of marginalised communities, and in keeping with the principles of the Ghana Community Radio Network, one would hardly expect it to tolerate offensive language on its airwaves.

As a means of comparing the language used on the two non-profit stations with that of profit-oriented radio stations, simple random sampling techniques were used to select two commercial radio stations within the Metropolis, Fiila FM and North Star Radio. Fiila FM (89.3 FM) was established on 8th March, 2002 with the aim of promoting peace and development in the Northern Region. The station is owned by Acapella Media Company Limited which is located in Tamale. It transmits programmes on 89.3 FM mostly in Twi, Gonja and English (Ghana Media Information, 2016). Like Fiila FM, North Star Radio (92.1 MHz) is a commercial radio station which was established on 1st March, 2002 with the aim of producing and broadcasting programmes geared towards promoting peace and development of the Northern Region, as well as complementing the activities and businesses of individuals, communities, institutions and agencies. It is owned by Northern Star FM Limited which transmits programmes in English, Akan, Gongga and Dabgani.

The heads of programme and morning show hosts of the four (4) media houses were selected purposively for interviews. As major gatekeepers of the content of their stations, the programme heads and Morning Show hosts are experts on programming and would be better informed on the reasons for the use of indecent language on their various networks. The Regional Communication Officers and Media Monitors (Serial Callers) of the two leading political parties, the NDC and NPP were also purposively sampled for focus group discussions. The two biggest parties have consistently been identified as the worst perpetrators of offensive speech on the media (MFWA, 2016). Therefore, those who directly and actively engage in communications on behalf of these two parties, that is the Communication Officers and Serial Callers, are best suited to explain the rationale behind indecent language usage and proffer solutions to the scourge.

Also, morning show programmes aired between 1st November and 31st December, 2016 on the selected radio stations were purposively sampled. The selected period is considered to be the peak of the political season in the run-up to the 7th December 2016 elections, and the immediate post-election period. Therefore, politicians were more likely to use indecent

language on their opponents during this period. Morning shows are not only aired during peak listening hours, making them the most listened to radio programmes within the Tamale Metropolis, the programmes also feature a newspaper review segment during which political party communicators are featured to run commentary on newspaper headline stories. The radio phone lines are also activated for listeners to contribute to the discussions, with political party serial callers often dominating the calls.

Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

Kuranchie (2016) states that the goal of a comprehensive interview is not to get answers to predetermined questions but rather to find out the perspective of the participants and their experience in the issue at stake. Interviews were conducted with heads of programme and morning show hosts of the sampled radio stations. The interviews, which sought to establish the reasons for using unacceptable language and ways of curbing hate speech on the airwaves, each lasted an average of 43 minutes. Two focus group discussions were also held with six Media Monitors and Regional Communication Officers each for the NDC and NPP. The discussions each lasted an average of 58 minutes. Responses from the interviews and focus group discussions were recorded, transcribed, coded and subjected to narrative, descriptive and thematic analyses.

The researcher aimed at recording all 168 morning shows aired on the four radio stations within the sampled period. However, he managed to record only 161 programmes. The programmes were transcribed and in some cases, translated from Dagbani and Gonja into English Language before being coded and classified. First, the programmes were categorised into two broad areas, those that contained offensive language and those that did not contain any offensive expressions. Programmes which contained offensive language were further coded as follows: political party/actor involved, type of indecent expression used and the theme of the discussion. Major themes were built by linking categories that were alike and maintaining the original, smaller categories as minor themes. The researcher then perused

the minor and major categories of data and compared and contrasted the various categories to fine tune the elements in the main and subthemes. The process was repeated for each transcript until all the transcripts were analysed and themes developed for each. Upon completing the teaming of each transcript, the researcher proceeded to combine the information on all the transcripts thereby obtaining one document, with all identified themes categorized in order to avoid repetitions.

Findings and discussion

This study set out to examine the extent to which radio stations use offensive language, reasons why political actors use such language and how the use of such unacceptable language could be curtailed within the Tamale Metropolis.

Frequency of the use of offensive language

The study tried to examine how frequently intemperate language was used on radio during political broadcasts in the Tamale Metropolis. Having examined the 161 recorded morning show programmes, it emerged that 114 (70.8%) contained foul language, with the commercial radio stations, *North Star Radio* (42.10%) and *Filla Radio* (28.08%), being the worst culprits. State-owned *Radio Savannah* was the most decent in language usage, as contained in **Table 1** below.

Table 1: Use of offensive language on radio stations

Radio Station	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Radio Savannah	13	11.40
Filla Radio	32	28.08
North Star Radio	48	42.10
Tawosul Radio	21	18.42
Total	114	100.00

Authors Field Data, 2021

When confronted with results of the content analysis, heads of programme of the two commercial radio stations admitted to the use

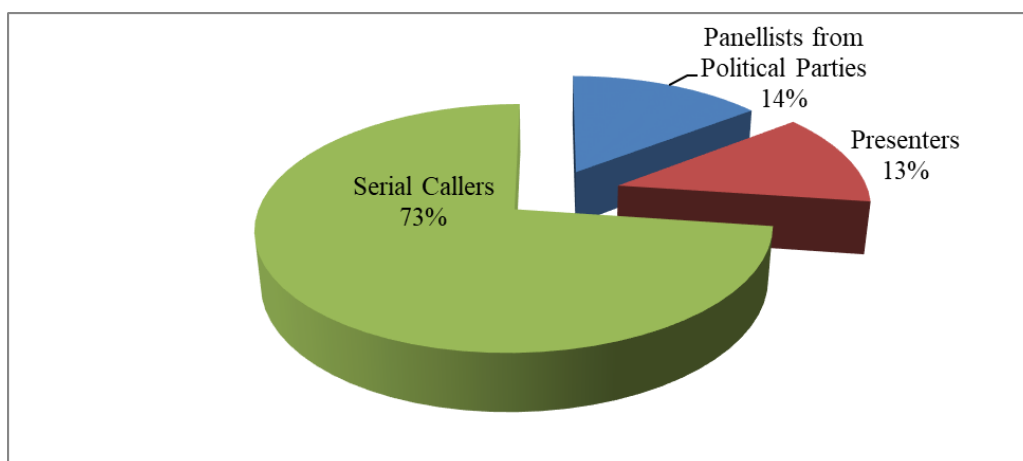
of offensive language on their airwaves and blamed it on recalcitrant party communicators and serial callers. According to the gatekeepers, programme hosts usually try unsuccessfully to rein in the communicators and callers during political discussion programmes. The Head of Programmes of *Filla FM* had this to say:

It is perceived by most people that we those in the private radio stations do not regulate our programmes, but the fact is that, we usually devote a lot of time for the political show discussions where young politicians are also given the chance to participate in the discussions. We sometimes discuss controversial issues which sometimes lead to heated arguments resulting in some of the panellists going overboard (*In depth Interview, December 2020*).

Violators of Decent Language Usage

An analysis of the recorded morning shows revealed that nearly three-quarters (73%) of all intemperate language used on morning shows could be attributed to serial callers, as indicated on **Figure 1** below.

Figure 1: Group of persons who use indecent language most



Source: Author's Field Data (2020)

Results of this study confirm Nunoo (2015) and Daily Graphic (2014) that serial callers are major perpetrators of indecent language used on radio. The serial callers themselves admitted that their contributions on

air have the potential of breaching peaceful co-existence in Ghana. At a focus group discussion, a serial caller had this to say:

Whenever I switch my radio on, particularly this campaign time, most callers use indecent expressions. For instance, last week one serial caller described another caller's views as "nonsense" and "foolish". For me, this is dangerous and as a country we have to do something before things become worse, like it happened in other countries where they experienced wars (Focus Group Discussant, December 2020).

The Morning Show host of Radio Savannah was equally concerned about the breach of language decency on air by serial callers:

Some serial callers of political parties do not speak well at all on the private radio stations. Because Radio Savannah is for the government, you cannot talk anyhow while on air. Sometimes, I cut the line if you do not talk well. One man phoned in during a political discussion and had to be cut off the line when he began to make statements which could not be substantiated. He became annoyed and threatened to burn down the station (*In-depth Interview, December 2020*).

Even as programme hosts blamed serial callers for raising the stakes with offensive language, the callers also felt panellists and the programmes anchors themselves were part of the problem. At a focus group discussion, a caller asserted:

Sometimes it is very disheartening to hear the insults and unsubstantiated allegations some of the panellists and hosts of programmes peddled on air. In fact, the least talk about them the better. Just last week, the host of Filla in a discussion programme wanted to restrain a serial caller from making an unsubstantiated allegation, but ended up calling the serial caller a bastard (*Focus group discussion, December 2020*).

Another serial caller asserted:

Look, the situation is serious, listening to a North Star presenter on Tuesday, I was very surprised that a whole Presenter insulted a serial caller on an issue. The host of North Star morning show usually does not speak well. How can you

refer to human beings as objects? I heard this on one of the shows (*Focus group discussion, December 2020*).

A party Communications Officer lamented about the extent to which intemperate language is used by other political party communicators. According to him, because some radio stations do not have stringent measures to check the use of intemperate language, most people say whatever pleases them. He explained further:

We have children here and if we choose to tune to radio stations that use foul language like North Star and Fiila, the children will learn the wrong things. It [radio should] helps us and educate our children by instilling in them moral values and cultural identity (*Focus group discussion, December 2020*).

Discussants at a focus group were unanimous in blaming communicators of the two main political parties, the NPP and NDC, as the worst offenders of indecent language usage. One Morning Show host, however, felt that the extent to which indecent language is used on radio stations is on the decline.

I cannot deny totally that there has been the use of some vulgar words on radio but I think unlike 2012 and 2016 election campaign seasons, this years' election [2020] has seen some level of decency in the use of abusive and provocative words. It seems the radio stations are putting some regulatory mechanisms in place to curtail that behaviour by the politicians (*In depth Interview, December 2020*).

Managers of the four selected radio stations admitted that the use of indecent language on their airwaves was a challenge to the security of the country. They confirmed that newspaper reviews on morning show programmes during which representatives of political parties took turns to run commentary on news stories often led to the use of unacceptable language. Like programme editors and hosts of the morning shows, the station managers appeared helpless in dealing with the situation. As expected, station managers defended their stations' actions with respect to giving access to politically partisan personalities to pollute the airwaves with hate speech. They found nothing wrong in doing so and believed their

stations were not breaching any broadcasting code of conduct. To them, the media has an obligation to provide access to party representatives to express their opinions.

Once that opportunity is provided, the party communicators are expected to be decorous in the use of language. They conceded to the fact that radio stations should go beyond handing over their airwaves to political communicators and ensure decent use of language by the communicators. They, however, insisted that controlling what someone says on air is a difficult task which programme hosts have been grappling with. All the station managers claimed to have installed transmission software which delay for 10 seconds the utterances of guests on their radio programmes to enable the hosts edit any indecent expressions.

Reasons for Use of Intemperate Language

Certainly, radio station managers and programme hosts are not as helpless as they claim in preventing the use of offensive language on their networks. Even if the delayed transmission software is not effective in intercepting indecent language before it is aired, many other options exists, including disallowing party communicators from appearing on newspaper reviews. So why are the stations failing to tackle this indecent language scourge? The researcher tried to examine reasons why serial callers and party communicators use intemperate language on radio programmes.

It emerged from focus group discussions and in-depth interviews that what an NPP communicator describes as the need for “Victory at all cost” was the leading motivator for indecent language usage on the airwaves. Discussants at a focus group session indicated that their job was to defend their parties at all cost to ensure victory at elections. One serial caller remarked: *“To achieve our victory, we will do whatever possible”*. Of course, it is not for nothing that serial callers “do whatever possible” to ensure victory for their parties. Serial calling has become a paid job, as GNA (2021), Kojo (2018) and Annang (2021) established. At a focus group discussion, NPP serial callers confirmed that their party gave them monthly stipends as motivation to enable them to monitor radio stations

and phone in to push the parties' messages across to listeners. The ruling party callers were also given smart phones and mobile phone credit as working aids. Though NDC serial callers were not accorded any regular monthly allowances, they were occasionally given motivational stipends, smart phones and mobile phone credit. As a result of the perks serial callers receive, they would go any length to defend their parties. In the words of one of the serial callers, *"For me, the party is first and any other thing is second. We need to defend our own and nothing else"*.

Indeed, there is love-lust³ between serial callers and the radio stations. The stations do not just accord these party communicators airtime to ply their political trade. Radio station managers and Morning show hosts cultivate serial callers and sometimes stoke the fires of indecent language. Asked why they would not stop serial callers and other party communicators from reviewing the news, one station manager retorted, *"They [party communicators] spice up the station. It is difficult getting technocrats to sacrifice time and resources to regularly do the [newspaper] reviews. Only the politicians are ready to do so every day because they project their parties through that"*. The Station Manager was of the view that, every party must be offered an opportunity to air its messages, since preventing them from airing their views amounts to denying them free speech. A popular radio presenter indicated that some of his colleague presenters try making their morning shows popular by hosting political party communicators who use provocative statements that end up drawing sharp rebuttals from serial callers from opposing parties.

The foul utterances of these party communicators and serial callers are then used as jingles or programme promos to draw listeners to their programmes. This is in consonance with findings of Nunoo (2015) to the effect that some media decision-makers in Ghana throw professional ethics to the dogs and encourage serial callers to gain access to their programmes via phone as a means of attracting greater participation of audience and to satisfy advertisers. No wonder that majority of respondents to this study preferred listening to the two selected privately-own radio stations which recorded higher cases of indecent language, as compared to state-owned

3 A middle ground between love and lust.

Radio Savannah and the community station, *Tawosul Radio*. A focus group discussion captured this fact elaborately:

...for that station, [North Star FM] you can talk your mind but for the others [Radio Savannah and Tawosul Radio] they behave as if they always want to cover up the bad deeds of people. The private stations are ready to tell what is exactly happening in this country and we can express our opinion without any fear of intimidation (*Focus group discussion, December 2020*).

A station manager blamed the use of indecent language on the big wigs of the NPP and NDC. According to him, when political leaders use intemperate language, their followers emulate the bad examples set by such leaders. He continued:

Sometimes our leaders are the cause of this rampant use of intemperate language on our airwaves. For instance, our former president, Jerry John Rawlings, ironically referred to his fellow former president, John Agyekum Kufour, as 'Ata Ayi' [a notorious armed robber in Ghana]. He did not even apologise or justify his statement which caused some supporters of NPP to reply this comment by raining insults on former president Rawlings and the leaders of the NDC party. I believe if our leaders desist from this behaviour their supporters will follow suit (*In depth Interview, December, 2020*).

Another station manager expressed similar sentiments regarding the role of political leaders in the pollution of the airwaves with indecent language:

We have witnessed a series of offensive and abusive words by our key political leaders in this country without the laws taking them on. No party faithful should be given too much chance to insult people on radio to jeopardize our hard won peace (*In depth Interview, December, 2020*).

Categories of Offensive Language

In keeping with MFWA (2016), this study grouped offensive language under seven categories namely, unsubstantiated allegations, insulting and offensive comments, provocative remarks, remarks endorsing violence,

remarks inciting violence, divisive comments and tribal slurs. As Table 2 below indicates, unsubstantiated allegations and insulting and offensive comments topped the list of violations. This mirrors MFWA (2016) which also found unsubstantiated allegations and insults as the two main categories of indecent expressions.

Table 2: Categories of Indecent Expressions

Category of Indecent Expression	Percentage
Unsubstantiated allegations	45.5
Insulting and offensive comments	24.6
Remarks endorsing violence	11.9
Provocative remarks	8.2
Remarks inciting violence	7.5
Divisive comments	1.5
Tribal slurs	0.8
Total	100.0

Source: Extrapolated MFWA Data (MFWA, 2016)

Allegations of corruption levelled against political opponents accounted for the 45.5% unsubstantiated allegations. NPP and NDC political communicators, especially serial callers, traded accusations of corruption against each other. The recurring allegations made against the NPP Government by serial callers who are sympathetic to the NDC were as follows:

- 500 seized galamsey excavators disappear
- President dashes state money amounting to Gh¢227,000 to his daughters to form a company
- CEO of Zongo Development Fund in Gh¢5 million procurement deal
- Energy Ministry unable to account for Gh¢20 million spent on street lights
- Akuffo-Addo grants \$24 million tax waivers to his in-law to build a private hotel in the plush airport area

- 700 motorbikes, 600 tricycles missing at Northern Development Authority
- President blows 62 million on foreign travels in 9 months in 2019
- Government demands 25% cut from contractors on debts owed them before payment is made.
- Government buys Daewoo buses valued at \$75,000 for \$175,000 for Metro Mass Transit
- Zongo, Upper East Regional Ministers blow Gh¢1.2 million on green grass under the guise of building Astroturf

Serial callers and communicators of the NPP were not to be outdone by their NDC counterparts. The NPP sympathisers cited six main corruption allegations against NDC namely the **“Smartty’s Bus branding saga”, the “GYEEDA and SADA Scandals”, the “Ford Saga” and the “Woyome scandal”**. The NPP constantly referred to an allegation by the Northern Regional Chairman of the NPP that Ibrahim Mahama, a brother of former President John Mahama, offered him the Regional Chairman a sum of GH¢3.3 million and a V8 Land Cruiser as a form of bribe so he could denigrate the reputation of Nana Akufo-Addo as a tribal bigot.

The study found that unsubstantiated allegations of corruption often ignited heated arguments that provoked other forms of indecent expressions by party communicators and serial callers. For instance, on a *Filla FM* discussion, an NPP Communicator in defending allegations of corruption levelled against President Nana Akuffo Addo referred to a Supreme Court which granted former Attorney General, Martin Amidu’s request to orally examine businessman Alfred Agbesi Woyome from whom the state was trying to retrieve GH¢51.2 million which was wrongfully paid to him. Mr Amidu was forced to file the application after an Attorney-General under the NDC Government, Marietta Brew Appiah-Opong, filed processes to discontinue her own application for an oral examination of the businessperson. In the heat of the discussion, an NPP serial caller referred to Woyome as a fool. This was an insulting and offensive comment which led to a remark that incited violence. An NDC serial caller’s response to the insult on Woyome was:

We cannot sit back and watch the other parties insult us. We have to retaliate when possible. The NDC will defend itself and its supporters in the [Northern] region. On the issue of NPP supporters beating some of our supporters, we will do whatever possible to break down their vigilantism” (*Content Analysis, 2020*).

The NPP and NDC panellists on the radio programme each sided with their serial callers and almost ended up in fisticuffs in the studio of the radio station. Discussants at a focus group admitted that intemperate language was so rampant that no single day passed without party communicators creating ugly scenes on one radio station or another within the Tamale Metropolis.

Unsubstantiated allegations about attempts by the Electoral Commissioner to rig the 2020 elections in favour of the NPP were a recurring source of indecent language. On one such discussion, an NPP panellist alleged that a former Electoral Commissioner, Charlotte Osei, was in bed with former President John Mahama and rigged the 2012 elections for the former president. The NPP panellist indicated that a failed 2016 Presidential aspirant, Hassan Ayariga, was right in describing Charlotte Osei as a prostitute for disqualifying him as a presidential candidate. This drew the ire of the NDC panellist on the programme who made a remark inciting violence: “blood will flow if anyone insults JM [John Mahama] and Charlotte Osei”.

Political Parties Guilty of Offensive Language

From the content of recorded programmes, it emerged that the serial callers who use offensive language are invariably aligned to either the NPP or NDC. This supports the findings of MFWA (2012 and 2016) which showed the NPP and NDC leading the pack of political parties whose followers frequently used offensive language on air. Offensive language used by communicators of other political parties was negligible. As demonstrated on **Table 3**, NPP Serial Callers used indecent expressions more frequently than those of other political parties.

Table 3: Party affiliations and indecent expressions

Category of Indecent Expression	Affiliated Political Party							Total
	NPP	NDC	NDP	PPP	CPP	PNC	Radio Presenters	
Insulting & Offensive Comments	11	9	2	1	0	1	4	28
Unsubstantiated Allegations	19	17	4	3	1	1	7	52
Provocative Remarks	4	3	0	0	0	0	3	10
Remarks Endorsing Violence	7	3	0	2	0	0	1	13
Remarks Inciting Violence	2	4	1	0	1	0	0	8
Divisive Comments	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Tribal Slur	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Total	43	38	7	6	3	2	15	114

Source: Author's Field Data (2020)

Should Morning Shows be Securitised?

An analysis of the indecent expressions shows the content as being securitised rather than politicised. While bringing up allegations of corruption is a normal political discourse, when the discourse veers into insults, castigations and name calling, it ceases to be politicisation and rather becomes a security threat. Certainly, calling a member of an opposing political party a fool is not part of normal political communication. Also, the process of serial callers marketing their parties is part of normal politicisation. However, issuing threats of breaking down each other's vigilantism or threatening, on air, to spill blood or do everything within their power to win elections assumes the character of securitisation.

In the face of the reckless threat to security, Station Managers and Morning Show hosts appear helpless or unwilling to stem the indecent tirade on radio stations. A host of Filla FM exclaimed, “...*it is not easy at all. We always try but you know these our people. It is really difficult handling them [Serial Callers]*”. One would have expected media regulatory bodies, especially the National Media Commission (NMC), to step in and sanitise the airwaves. However, as respondents to this study observed, the NMC has proved ineffective in reining in or sanctioning stations

which allow serial callers to have a field day. Therefore, some, including the Station Managers, are suggesting something akin to censoring talk programmes on radio. Some are of the view that enforcing the law by arresting those who use indecent language may be the hitherto elusive solution to containing offensive language. A Host of the Morning Show at *Radio Savannah* indicated that sanctioning political parties is a solution to indecency on the airwaves: *"I recommend enforcing the law to the letter. In fact, all those who use intemperate language on radio should be given out by the radio stations for the law to take its course"*.

Therefore, some are wondering whether it is not time to take extra security measures to forestall any violence. In keeping with the securitisation theory, some have suggested that the security agencies be brought in to close down radio stations, or force such stations to stop morning shows which provide opportunities for serial calls. In other words, the serial callers' indecent language has become the linguistic representation of an existential threat (Buzan, Waever and de Wilde, 1995, cited in McDonald 2008: 563). Few participants at a focus group discussion and in-depth interviews agreed that serial callers were a threat since they have an audience of political party followers who swallowed hook line and sinker everything that these callers said on radio. Thus, the threat of serial callers provoking violence is being used to legitimise political action of stopping the airing of Morning Shows, an action which otherwise would be considered illegitimate (Buzan and Wrever, 1997).

However, majority of participants were against securitisation of Morning Shows, arguing that free speech must never be compromised in the name of ensuring peaceful co-existence. For such participants, preventing Morning Shows from being aired amounts to gagging the media. They argued that once security agencies are called in to control the use of offensive language, they could engage in excesses against the media and return the country to a state of dictatorship. This view is in line with Emmers (2007) who contends that security actors can meddle in civilian activities, curtail certain civil liberties, and also hijack the whole securitisation process. In a politically polarised country such as Ghana, securitising talk shows could provide an avenue for political elites and governments to influence

the security agencies into using extraordinary measures in dealing with language that has the propensity to incite violence (Columba and Vaughan-Williams, 2010).

If the admonition of Buzan, Waever and de Wilde (1995) that the process of securitising language can only be successful when there is consensus to that effect is anything to go by, Ghana is not ready for securitisation of serial callers' utterances on radio since this study did not find consensus among respondents on the need for security involvement in containing the use of indecent language.

Conclusions

This study confirms earlier studies that serial callers are a major source of offensive language usage on radio. Evidently, their activities pose a threat to peaceful co-existence in volatile areas such as the Tamale Metropolis. Therefore, preventing serial callers from hijacking phone lines during Morning Shows will sanitise the language used on the airwaves. However, curtailing the activities of these callers is a difficult assignment which programme hosts and Station Managers are unwilling to handle. The study concludes that radio Station Managers and hosts of Morning Shows are complicit in aiding serial callers to use offensive language, since these callers are perceived to increase the radio stations' listenership. Unfortunately, media regulatory bodies have not also gone beyond admonishing stations which allow the use of offensive language on their networks. In spite of the threat posed by serial callers and the inability of media stakeholders in reining in their activities, employing extra security measures to contain the situation is not a popular option.

Recommendations

It emerged from the study that much as all respondents condemned the use of indecent language and recognised its potential for igniting violence, no initiatives appeared to have been taken to curb the use of such language. Yet lack of action on the part of the various stakeholders is not for want of knowledge on the steps required to tackle the menace. Majority of

respondents to the study indicated that to deal with the use of intemperate language, there is the need to enforce the law. This study recommends that the National Communications Authority (NCA) revoke the licenses of radio stations found culpable of using offensive language. Radio stations must consider changing the format of newspaper reviews. In place of inviting political party representatives to run commentary on news stories, the stations should either field technocrats, media personalities or experts in various sectors of development to give expert opinions on the news stories. Alternatively, the stories could be read to listeners without any panellists proffering opinions on such stories. No callers should be entertained on newspaper reviews.

In the lead up to national elections, the NMC, respected statesmen such as the Asantehene and NGOs, especially the MFWA, must prevail on leadership of the NPP and NDC to either disband or rein in their serial callers. The callers' linguistic weapons are sharpened through the logistical support of political godfathers. Therefore, once the sponsorships dry out, the callers' vitriol will lessen. Additionally, Morning Show hosts should be encouraged to use the delayed transmission devices installed on their stations to prevent the airing of offensive statements on radio.

References

- Ajaebgu, H. I., Akintayo, R. & Akinjivan, E. (2015). *Nigeria: A People United, a Future Assured* (ed.), Bauchi State.
- Annang, E. (2021). "Npp Serial Callers In Bono Region Strike Over Unpaid Allowances", Retrieved from: <https://www.pulse.com.gh>, 26th February, 2022.
- Buzan, B., Waeber, O. & De Wilde, J. (1995). *Security: A new framework for analysis*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Columba, C. & Vaughan-Williams, N. (2014). *Critical security studies: An introduction*. Routledge.
- Daily Graphic. (2014). Otumfuo and the NCCE's memorable 2013 Annual Democracy Lecture, Retrieved from: <http://graphic>.

- com.gh/features/features/22554-otumfuo-and-the-ncce-s-memorable-2013-annual-democracy-lecture.html#sthash.nxjGMgRC.dpuf (Accessed 23-06-2021)
- Emmers, R. (2007). Securitization. *Contemporary security studies*, 109-125.
- Fierke, K. M. (2009). Terrorism and trust in Northern Ireland. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 2(3), 497-511.
- Fordjour, E. A. (2016). Foul Language in the Ghanaian Electronic Media: a Case Study of Some Selected Radio Stations in Kumasi, Ghana.
- Ghana Broadcasting Corporation. (2012). *www.gbcghanaonline.com*. Retrieved 17th February, 2022
- Ghana Broadcasting Corporation. (2016). Radio Stations and Regulations in Ghana. Retrieved from: <http://gbcghana.com> (Accessed 18-12-2020)
- Ghana News Agency. (2021). "NPP serial callers in Anhwiaso Bekwai received smartphones". Retrieved from: <http://www.ghanamedia> (Accessed 26-02-2022).
- Karikari, K. (2014). "Halt illegalities on radio", *The Mirror*, November, 14-20, 2014.
- Kojo, E. (2018). "Nana Addo condemns unlawful seizure by NPP supporters", Retrieved from: <https://www.pulse.com.gh> (Accessed 26-02-2022).
- Kwakwa, P. A. (2012). Mobile phone usage by micro and small scale enterprises in semi-rural Ghana. *International Review of Management and Marketing*, 2(3), pp. 156-164.
- Marfo, S. (2013). Thinking of Peace, Democracy and Politics of Insults in Ghana: the paradox of freedom and culture of violence.
- McDonald, C. (2008). Social Media for International Students – it's not all about Facebook. *Library Management*, 34(3), 156-174.

- Media Foundation for West Africa. (2016). Monitoring of Indecent Campaign Language on Radio, *Quarterly Report* (April to June, 2016).
- National Communication Authority. (2016). Radio Stations in Ghana. Retrieved from: www.nca.org.gh. (Accessed 22-10-2020)
- Nunoo, F. E. (2015). The 'Serial Callers' of Ghana: how 'serial callers' influence public debate on talk radio and the implications for Ghana's public sphere, MA Thesis: University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa, Retrieved from: <http://hdl.handle.net/10539/19396> retrieved 3rd March 2020
- Ofori, K. S., Larbi-Siaw, O., Fianu, E., Gladjah, R. E., & Boateng, E. O. Y. (2016). Factors Influencing the Continuance Use of Mobile Social Media: the effect of privacy concerns. *Journal of Cyber Security and Mobility*, 4(3), 105-124.
- Taureck, F. (2006). Securitization: A new approach to the framing of the "war on terror". *Journalism Practice*, 4(1), 33-47.
- Tettey, W. J. (2011). 'Talk Radio and Politics in Ghana: exploring civic and (un)civic discourses' In Liz Gunner, Dina Ligaga and Dumasini Moyo (eds.). *The 'Public Sphere' in Radio In Africa: Politics, culture, communities*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press
- Yankah, K. (2004). Language, the Mass Media and Democracy in Ghana. Accra: Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences (GAAS).
- Wilkinson, S. I. (Eds.). (2007). *Patrons, clients and policies: Patterns of democratic accountability and political competition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.