

Organizational resilience for better service delivery: The case of Ghana's Electoral Commission

Joshua Jebuntie Zaato * and Michael Akoto 

Abstract

Organizational resilience remains paramount to the effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery by public institutions. This is because it allows organizations to effectively respond to and recover from crises and disruptions. By focusing on resilience, organizations can enhance their ability to withstand uncertainties, ensure institutional continuity, and sustain long-term success in a dynamic and unpredictable environment. These characteristics are fundamental to the success or otherwise of any learning organization, especially those deemed as guardians of democracies. In Ghana, the Electoral Commission (EC) is the main guardian of democracy and one of the leading institutions of elections in Africa and all developing countries. It has successfully conducted elections resulting in four successful turnovers in the last three decades (2001,2009,2017,2025). Nevertheless, the EC has faced a diverse array of challenges that have tested its resilience across various fronts. These include electoral violence and political vigilantism during voter registration and by-elections. Others include political interference in its work. But no other event challenged the EC as much as the COVID-19 pandemic, which required additional security measures and the adoption of reforms like continuous voter registration. In this study, we developed (from the extant literature) a theoretical framework for building resilient organizations and use it to study and analyze Ghana's EC. This study will be beneficial to other Electoral Commissions in developing countries, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. It will also be beneficial to all other public organizations that aspire to provide better and more efficient public services to citizens in a democracy.

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¹ Department of Political Science, School of Social Science, University of Ghana, Legon, Ghana.

***Corresponding author:** Department of Political Science, University of Ghana, Legon, Ghana.

Email: jjzaato@ug.edu.gh / akotomichael15@gmail.com

Introduction

In today's volatile, uncertain, and complicated environment, resilience is essential for the survival of any organization. Zaato and Ohemeng (2015) situate organizational resilience within the framework of improving service delivery while under difficulties. They highlight the significance of resilience as an essential competency for businesses to foresee and adjust to changes, recuperate from detrimental occurrences, and succeed in unpredictable and frequently volatile settings. In the realm of organizational survival, resilience encompasses more than merely reverting to a pre-crisis condition. To ensure its survival, an organization needs to foster resilience in various areas, including leadership, staff, systems, and external partnerships (Hillmann & Guenther, 2021). Ma et al. (2018) assert that contemporary organizations must develop dynamic resilience, enabling them to not only recover from disruptions but also to learn and adapt in response to such challenges. This entails cultivating agility, flexibility, and adaptability within the organization. A resilient organization anticipates risks, proactively strategizes for probable challenges, and has procedures that provide swift responses to unexpected events (Barasa 2018; Ruiz-Martin et al., 2018). Thus, resilience is interwoven with strategic vision and the capacity to adapt to evolving conditions, which, when adopted and implemented by organizations, especially in the public sector, would ensure greater service delivery.

Election Management Boards (hereafter, EMBs) are some of the most critical and crucial public sector organizations that need to be resilient precisely because of the roles they perform in a democracy. The work of EMBs in a period characterized by political instability, technological upheavals, and rising distrust in electoral processes has become crucial. Thus, their work must be enhanced to ensure their resilience is built to endure both internal and external pressures. Merkel and Lührmann (2021) assert that for EMBs, resilience encompasses not only overcoming critical electoral crises but also adapting to changing political environments, preserving electoral process integrity, and maintaining public trust over time. Boin and Van Eeten (2013) also assert that resilience in public organizations, such as EMBs, encompasses the capacity to foresee disturbances, respond adeptly to crises, and swiftly recuperate while preserving fundamental operations.

EMBs encounter significant pressure to uphold public confidence, oversee intricate logistical operations, and guarantee openness and equity in elections. These institutions function in extremely dynamic situations, frequently encountering political difficulties, public scrutiny, and technical challenges (Przeworski, 2024). Therefore, cultivating resilience is not simply a survival tactic but a strategic necessity that guarantees its enduring efficacy and legitimacy. The necessity for resilience is increasingly evident in the contemporary global environment, when disruptions like political instability, technological progress, global disasters like COVID-19, and evolving voter expectations require adaptable and strong electoral institutions.

The Electoral Commission of Ghana (hereafter, EC) in line with its activities, has implemented a series of reforms to enhance its institutional and operational frameworks. As one of the foremost EMBs in the developing world, the EC has over the years delivered on its mandate and its officers have traveled across Africa and other UN countries to monitor and train other EMBs. The EC Act, 1993 (Act 451) and Article 43 of the 1992 Constitution outline the responsibilities of the EC to include the conduct of all public elections and referenda, oversight of voter registration, electoral education, supervision of political parties, and advisory roles to government on electoral matters (EC, 2024). Though the EC has played a key role in Ghana's democratic stability, it is still faced with pressures of political competition, accusations of bias, inconsistencies in voter registration, and results tallying. Despite these, the EC has not been examined academically with a systematic framework to scientifically evaluate its resilience. This absence of conceptual and empirical grounding is the basis for this study.

Thus, it is important to critically assess and analyze the resiliency of the EC to determine if it is fit for purpose. Some of the critical questions guiding the study include: How resilient is the EC to contemporary changes in citizen expectations? How has the EC responded to the demands of political parties, civil society organizations and ordinary citizens for better and more efficient reforms in the electoral system? What lessons can other EMBs learn from the example of the EC? In this paper, our primary objective is to develop a framework for assessing and analyzing organizational resiliency in public organizations and to apply it to examine the EC's resiliency in Ghana. This is critical because existing organizational resilience frameworks vary and typically focus on capabilities, processes, or performance outcomes in generic institutional settings. These frameworks do not fully address the unique electoral governance demands placed on EMBs, such as Ghana's EC, creating a need for a context-specific framework. Using this framework, this paper examines whether the EC's reforms demonstrate its commitment to establishing a robust institution that can endure electoral challenges while maintaining the integrity of election procedures.

This study further analyzes the challenges at the EC in accordance with the traits of resilient organizations to develop the EC as a resilient entity. This analysis is very important due to the critical calls by students of modern public organizations for resilient organizations. It is also important and timely due to the strategic role of the EC in the sustainability and maintenance of democracy and the peaceful transition of power in Ghana. This seven-section paper consists of an introduction followed by six additional sections. The subsequent part following the introduction delineates and conceptualizes resilience. This is followed by a segment on organizational resilience and its conceptualization. Subsequently, a framework is generated from the extant literature to assess the EC as a resilient organization. This is followed by the methodology, which outlines the data collected, how the data was analyzed, and how it was presented. The next section of the paper used the framework generated to examine the EC as a resilient organization. The final section presents a conclusion to this work.

Literature review: What is resilience?

Various disciplines have used the notion of resilience and have applied it to numerous contexts. The need therefore arises to establish a definition and conceptualization of resilience within the literature and in this paper. The definition of resilience is fundamentally based on the premise of organizations enduring and prospering. Zaato and Ohemeng (2015) categorize the various definitions into two primary types: the reactive capacity for recovery following a disaster and the proactive capacity for disaster preparedness, referred to as anticipatory adaptation, which entails measures to mitigate organizational vulnerability before adverse events.

Mallak's (1998) definition of resilience emphasises design, characterising it as the capacity of an individual or organization to swiftly devise and execute positive adaptive behaviors suitable for the immediate context while experiencing minimal stress. It encompasses the ability to recover from obstacles, failures, and adversity, exhibiting resilience, ingenuity, and fortitude in challenging situations (Mallak, 1998). Riolli and Savicki (2003) elaborate on this definition, asserting that resilience encompasses the capacity of individuals, groups, organizations, and systems to respond effectively and adapt favorably to substantial changes, interruptions, or adversities without resorting to persistent regressive behavior. It encompasses the ability to rebound, recuperate, and flourish amidst challenges, uncertainties, and pressures.

Lengnick-Hall et al. (2011) and Hills (2000) define resilience as an ability. To them, organizations possess the capacity to effectively absorb and develop context-specific responses by ultimately engaging in transformative activities to leverage disruptive surprises that may jeopardize their survival. It encompasses the ability to recover from unforeseen, difficult, and adverse circumstances, not only reinstating prior performance levels but also cultivating new competencies and opportunities (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011, p. 2).

Accordingly, resilience transcends simple recovery to include renewal, change, and dynamic creativity originating inside the organization. The definitions of Ruiz-Martin et al. (2018) and Vogus and Sutcliffe (2007) characterize resilience as an intrinsic attribute, capability, or result of an organization, emphasising its ability to manage disruptions and emerge more robust. They highlight that resilience is an intrinsic quality, stressing their capacity to effectively manage disruptions and emerge stronger. Vogus and Sutcliffe (2007) define resilience as the preservation of beneficial adaptation in the face of adversity. This quality allows organizations to emerge from disasters stronger and more resourceful (Vogus & Sutcliffe, 2007).

Barasa et al. (2018) also offer a comprehensive view by defining resilience as a system's capacity to sustain performance and achieve objectives in the face of adversity. Their definition emphasises that resilience involves not only recovering from shocks but also adapting and evolving to prosper in challenging circumstances. In this context, resilience refers to a system's ability to absorb disturbances, acquire knowledge from them, and re-

organise them to maintain functionality. In health systems, this signifies the capacity to prepare for and respond adeptly to emergencies, thereby guaranteeing the continuity of key healthcare services.

On a similar broader note, Kim et al. (2021) define resilience as the ability of a system, organization, or individual to endure and recover from adversity, shocks, or disruptions. This includes the capacity to adapt and recover, as well as the aptitude to thrive amidst evolving challenges or shifting circumstances (Burnard et al., 2018; Ma et al., 2018). Asare-Kyire et al. (2023) support this definition by explaining resilience as the capacity of individuals, organizations, or systems to withstand, adjust to, and recuperate from adversity or disturbances. They contend that resilience encompasses the ability to recover, sustain functionality, and even prosper under adverse circumstances or unforeseen occurrences.

The diverse definitions of resilience are in line with the idea that it is a dynamic and varied capability. This capacity includes the ability to endure and recuperate from difficulty, as well as the aptitude to learn, adapt, and prosper in future challenges. Thus, affirming the definition of Zaato and Ohemeng (2015). In this light, this paper adopts Zaato and Ohemeng's (2015) definition of resilience, which divides resilience into two components: the reactive capacity for recovery after a disaster and the proactive capacity for disaster preparedness, also known as anticipatory adaptation, which involves measures to reduce organizational vulnerability before the onset of adverse events. We will use this to evaluate the EC of Ghana.

Organizational resilience

Resilient organizations, irrespective of their size or sector, exhibit the ability to adapt, innovate, and prosper under challenges (Mallak, 1998). Consequently, for organizations, resilience is regarded as a characteristic, skill, or capacity that may be enhanced over time. They are distinguished by their capacity to detect subtle signals, address minor inconsistencies, perceive disruptive occurrences as chances for development, and foster competence and effectiveness among their employees (Zaato & Ohemeng, 2015).

Several scholars have defined resilience within the framework of organizations. Earlier scholars of resilience, such as Mallak (1998) and Home III and Orr (1997), offer a unique viewpoint on organizational resilience centred on adaptability and flexibility. Mallak (1998) characterizes organizational resilience as the capacity of a system to foresee, plan for, react to, and adjust to gradual changes and abrupt shocks to ensure survival and prosperity. It pertains to an organization's ability to efficiently navigate and recuperate from challenges, uncertainties, and crises while sustaining critical operations and services (Mallak, 1998). According to Home III and Orr (1997), organizational resilience is the ability of an organization to foresee, react to, adjust to, and recuperate from disruptions, difficulties, and changes while preserving its fundamental functions, integrity, and values. It encompasses the capacity to endure stress, uncertainty, and

difficulty, along with the ability to recover, derive lessons from experiences, and emerge more resilient in the face of challenges (Home III & Orr, 1997).

Riolli and Savicki (2003) describe organizational resilience as the capacity of an organization to foresee, react to, adjust to, and recuperate from shocks, difficulties, or crises while preserving its fundamental functions, integrity, and viability. Lengnick-Hall et al. (2011) and Vogus and Sutcliffe (2007) further expand this definition. They note that organizational resilience is a firm's capacity to effectively absorb, formulate situation-specific responses, and ultimately undertake transformative actions to leverage disruptive surprises that may jeopardise organizational survival.

Recent scholars, Asare-Kyire et al. (2023), Ducheck (2020), Kim et al. (2021), and Zaato and Ohemeng (2015), have defined resilience in the context of a transforming world. According to Kim et al. (2021), organizational resilience is the capacity of an organization to sustain its essential operations, adjust its competencies and resources, and recuperate from a disaster or disruption. In a similar perspective, Ducheck (2020) assert that organizational resilience encompasses an organization's capacity to foresee possible dangers, manage bad events proficiently, and adjust to evolving circumstances. This description integrates the viewpoints of active response, encompassing intentional coping and adaptation, with the anticipatory perspective. Asare-Kyire et al. (2023) also note that organizational resilience is the ability of an organization to foresee, react to, adjust to, and recuperate from disruptions, difficulties, or crises while preserving its essential functions, integrity, and viability.

Zaato and Ohemeng (2015) offer a concise explanation of organizational resilience as they note its ability to foresee significant events arising from emerging trends, consistently adjusting to changes, and swiftly recovering from disasters when they transpire. They assert that a resilient organization must be capable of precisely identifying opportunities and crises, comprehending the underlying triggers of crises, and flourishing despite bad and unstable situations.

With these definitions, organizational resilience denotes an organization's capacity to foresee, react to, adjust, and recuperate from interruptions or crises while preserving essential operations. It entails proactive risk management, ongoing learning, adaptability, and the ability to excel in adversity through the development of new competencies. Resilient organizations not only endure shocks but also capitalise on opportunities to strengthen, cultivating a culture of adaptability and innovation that improves long-term sustainability and performance. In the next section, we develop a theoretical framework for analysing organizational resilience.

Framework for organizational resilience

Frameworks are frequently used in studies in the social sciences and in public administration in particular. Unlike a theory, which explains causal processes, or a model, which mathematically captures relationships, a framework provides a structured

way to allow for empirical assessment. According to Lindquist (2011), a framework encompasses the conditions and values that animate a system while identifying the forces affecting key variables within that system. He further postulates that a framework should facilitate the monitoring and evolution of key variables, practices and principles of the subject being studied; show how different influences, factors, and elements relate to each other; and allow a debate on which norms, values, and even ideas to project and why (Lindquist 2011, p.4).

While resilience has been extensively studied, a framework for analyzing EMBs has not been established, particularly one that adapts the resilience discourse for examining EMBs in African democracies. Thus, this framework contributes to the scholarship on resilience by providing an evaluative framework for applying to EMBs and African political institutions.

We lean on this perspective to propose a framework for organizational resilience and use that framework to study the EC of Ghana. One of the benefits of frameworks is that they enable reformers, scholars, and different intellectual traditions and ideological orientations to be selective in emphasizing and projecting certain variables, norms, and values above others in the reform process (Lindquist, 2011). The framework for organizational resilience has been drawn from the extant literature and categorized into four distinct themes: learning and adaptability, collaboration and innovation, organizational culture and leadership, and dynamic capabilities and situational awareness.

Learning and adaptability are key to the survival of organizations. Adaptability and the capacity to learn from past experiences to improve preparedness for future challenges are the defining characteristics of resilience at the organizational level (Riulli & Savicki, 2003). Within the learning and adaptability, transformation exists. Lengnick-Hall et al. (2011) introduce a transformational perspective on resilience, emphasizing that resilience encompasses the ability to flourish by acquiring new capabilities and seizing opportunities, in addition to merely recovering from adversity. As a result, scholars (Kim et al., 2021; Mallak, 1998; Ruiz-Martin et al., 2018) have expanded the concept to include antifragility, in which resilience is not limited to the recovery to the pre-crisis state but also the attainment of a more robust, stable position, emphasizing development through adversity.

Another aspect embedded in our framework of resilient organizations is collaboration and innovation. For organizations to be resilient, it has to discover ways and means of collaboration and innovation to evolve in an attempt to meet the challenges of progress. This is categorized in two forms: operational and strategic (Leflar & Siegel, 2013). Leflar and Siegel (2013) employ a multidisciplinary systems approach to organizational resilience, recognising it as a strategic and operational attribute that enables organizations to improve their adaptive capacity and mitigate risks. They differentiate between operational resilience, which concentrates on the recovery from crises, and strategic resilience, which enables organizations to not only endure disruptions but also convert them into opportunities for innovation and economic growth.

Resilient organizations possess a culture and leadership that remain crucial in ensuring success. Resilience is not a static characteristic, but rather a dynamic process that involves continuous learning, adaptation, and innovation, requiring a culture and leadership that will aid in its navigation. In this framework, culture and leadership resilience are the cultivation of a resilient mindset among the workforce, and the integration of resilience considerations into long-term planning. Hillmann and Guenther (2021) also contend that resilience can be conceptualised as a latent construct, emphasising its profoundly embedded and inherent quality that can be evaluated with varying degrees of precision. Bonanno (2004) explains culture and leadership as the ability to maintain a stable equilibrium and healthy functioning in the face of adversity, whereas recovery typically entails a temporary transition to subthreshold psychopathology before reverting to pre-event levels.

The proactive and strategic aspects of resilience within organizations are highlighted within the existing literature. This leads to the last aspect of the framework which is centred on organizations being dynamic in their capabilities and situational awareness. Burnard et al. (2018) expanded the conceptualisation of resilience by associating it with dynamic capabilities and situational awareness. Dynamic capabilities involve the continuous integration and reconfiguration of internal and external resources to address changing conditions, while situational awareness refers to the active surveillance of the environment to identify potential threats and challenges. In this regard, Ruiz-Martin et al. (2018) define resilience as a dynamic and intricate phenomenon that encompasses a variety of components that enhance an organization's capacity to detect disruptions. They suggest that resilience can be quantified as a blend of capacities, abilities, and characteristics, emphasising a maturity model in which organizations transition from fragile to more adaptable and resilient states over time.

The multidimensional nature of resilience is collectively highlighted by these diverse perspectives, emphasising its importance as a critical attribute in a variety of domains. Whether at the individual, organizational, or societal level, resilience is not limited to the capacity to recover from disruptions; it also incorporates the ability to adapt, learn, and transform, resulting in long-term sustainability and sustained success. Thus, a framework for assessing organizational resilience must be built around these four cardinal concepts. These are (a) Learning and Adaptability, (b) Collaboration and Innovation, (c), Culture and Leadership and finally (d) Dynamic Capabilities and Situational Awareness. In the section below, we will use the above framework to study and analyze the EC of Ghana to determine its resiliency. But before that, we explain how we collected and analyzed the data for the study.

Methods

For this study, the qualitative research approach was adopted. According to Patton (2014), qualitative research explains personal experiences, behaviour, interactions and

social contexts. Thus, qualitative research illuminates the subjective meaning by giving privileges to research participants. With this established, the study used both primary and secondary data. Patton (2014) notes that qualitative research involves three kinds of data collection when it involves human beings, and these data collections are in-depth, open-ended interviews, direct observations and written documents.

To achieve comprehensive data, the purposive sampling techniques were used in selecting respondents for interviewing. Taherdoost (2016) notes that the choice of sampling technique has an impact on the reliability and validity of the data collected and analyzed. Thus, the choice of purposive sampling was to ensure the right respondents were selected for the study. With purposive sampling technique, the study sampled 25 respondents (which included permanent staff and temporary staff; district officers, returning officers) of the EC from two districts (constituencies). We also spoke to some representatives of political parties, civil society organizations, and election monitoring teams.

The two constituencies that were purposively selected were Dome-Kwabinya and Ayawaso West Wuogon. Dome-Kwabinya was selected because it is the largest constituency by voters in the country and also was part of the constituencies that were contested and re-collation expected in the 2024 parliamentary election. Ayawaso West Wuogon was also selected because it has experienced some form of electoral violence over the years including the by-election violence in 2019. These two constituencies are also diverse and mirror the general population of Ghana. Both constituencies are characterized as affluent, especially East Legon, but they also include pockets of lower-income households, creating a diverse mix of lower-, middle-, and upper-class voters. They also have residents from all over the country living in them. There is also a good representation of Ghana's major religious, cultural, and ethnic groups in these constituencies. These constituencies can therefore be regarded as microcosms of the general population of Ghana. Considering that the EC is a centralized state institution with uniform laws and policies, standards, procedures and operations applying across, the need to sample two constituencies and achieve the same results is certain.

We used a semi-structured interview guide to allow free flow of information. The questions were used as a guide and not rigid as to allow flexibility. This allowed the respondents to fully express themselves and to provide full and complete information. It also enabled us to have follow up questions and to seek clarifications when the need arose. The interviews were held at the various organizations and each lasted for about 45 minutes to one hour. They were recorded on a tape recorder and later transcribed.

The data gathered was thematically analyzed to reflect the framework designed from the extant literature. The crucial nature of primary data serves as a justification for in-depth analysis. Additionally, quotations were provided to illuminate both the framework assessment and the secondary data within the primary data. Quotations allow researchers to ground their interpretations in real participant experiences, which helps to avoid overgeneralization and misinterpretation.

Reforming the Electoral Commission: A resilient approach?

The EC has evolved and adjusted to the changes in Ghana's political environment since its initial establishment in 1968 and its permanent recognition the same year. It has undertaken several reforms and initiatives, been criticized, all aimed at ensuring the effective administration of elections in Ghana. These reforms, initiatives and activities and criticisms have been situated within the framework designed to determine their resilient nature. In this section, we used the resilience framework we developed above to study and analyze the EC. It encompasses; (a) Learning and Adaptability, (b) Collaboration and Innovation, (c), Culture and Leadership and finally (d) Dynamic Capabilities and Situational Awareness.

Learning and adaptability

Learning and adaptability are key within the resilient framework of organizations. As noted by Ma et al. (2018), adaptability is fundamental to the progress of organizations as it helps organizations adjust their strategies to accommodate changing circumstances. Similarly, Mallak (1998) emphasises the significance of learning as a proactive strategy, in which organizations identify potential obstacles in advance and prepare accordingly.

The EC's adoption and implementation of reforms demonstrate its flexibility in adjusting strategies to meet emerging electoral challenges. The implementation of continuous voter registration and the use of Biometric Verification Devices (BVD) for exhibition of the provisional register (EC, 2020b) reflects the EC's responsiveness to technological advancements and the need for more transparent electoral processes.

Again, the decision to reduce the number of electors per polling station is rooted in the lessons learnt from previous elections, which led to voting delays and logistical challenges as a result of overcrowded polling areas. The EC has improved the efficiency of the voting process by implementing these lessons, thereby reducing the likelihood of voter disenfranchisement due to protracted wait times and facilitating the smooth submission of ballots by voters.

Also, the EC's decision to partially implement reforms, such as expanding the list of special voters and continuous voter registration (EC, 2020b), shows that the organization is still in the process of learning and adapting. The partial implementation suggests that the EC is taking incremental steps, possibly testing these reforms before full-scale application, allowing for adjustments based on feedback and unforeseen challenges. The reforms yet to be implemented, such as holding elections on 7th November and publishing polling station results on a station-by-station basis (EC, 2020), indicate that the EC is aware of further potential improvements but has yet to execute these changes fully. This suggests an ongoing learning process where the EC assesses the feasibility, stakeholder impact, and resource requirements of these reforms before they are fully integrated.

Additionally, not only has the EC prioritised training of election officials, it has also prioritised feedback from district officers trained (Field Data, 2024). A respondent asserted:

Prior to the 2024 general elections for presidential and parliamentary the EC received feedback from district and returning officers on training for previous activities. For example, the EC asked for feedback on the 2023 Assembly and Unit Committee elections. This was done both online and face to face”.

A respondent backed this by noting:

Online workshops have been implemented very well. Previously I do not really know, but myself since 2016, leading to 2024, the online workshops keep on improving.

Within these learning approaches and changes, the EC has shown some level of adaptability, especially with the adaptability to technology. For instance, the EC has in the last decade engaged in online workshops and training for returning and district officers. A respondent opined:

For instance, in 2020, the EC began with an online training that was held with all temporary staff that were to be involved in the exercise. Aside from that there was a face-to-face workshop that we had with respect to registration. After registration, there was also another training organized specifically to train permanent and temporal staff on the exhibition of the voters’ register.

In addition, a major challenge the EC faced in previous elections was election officers not showing up on election day (Field Data, 2024). To end such a situation, the EC has resorted to training extra presiding officers (about 150 per constituency) who are expected to handle different positions should the need arise (having worked with the EC for years and have at least a degree) (Field Data, 2024). To this, another respondent asserted:

We have the tradition of some trained officers not showing up on election day so based on that normally when we are recruiting temporary staff, what we do is that we have a backup of people that we also recruit and train alongside. Assuming we need 400 people to work for example as presiding officers, meaning we have to train about 140 or 150 people as backup. Should an officer not show up on election day, we then replace quickly within the hour.

While the EC has learnt and adapted to some challenges, it falls short within the transformative nature of learning and adaptability as articulated by Kim et. al., (2021) and Mallak (1998). Within the transformative nature, Lengnick-Hall et al. (2011) emphasize that resilient organizations should flourish through the acquisition of new capabilities and seizing opportunities, in addition to merely recovering from adversity. These have not been met by the EC due to inconsistencies in adaptation and the slow pace of reformation.

Collaboration and innovation

Collaboration and innovation are critical elements to creating a resilient organization. Leflar and Siegel (2013) observed the importance of cross-functional collaboration, which enables the elimination of silos and enables collective problem-solving. In the context of the EC of Ghana, these characteristics of resilient organizations are evident in its operational adjustments and reforms, which are intended to improve the transparency and integrity of the electoral process. For example, the establishment of the Inter-Party Advisory Committee (IPAC) serves as an illustration of cross-functional collaboration, which Leflar and Siegel (2013) identified as a critical component of organizational resilience.

Through IPAC, the EC engages with political parties and civil society, fostering a collective approach to electoral management (Rahman, 2023) and demonstrating a willingness to involve multiple actors in decision-making (Van Gyampo, 2017). This collaboration enhances transparency and trust in the electoral process, ensuring that various stakeholders contribute to decision-making, thereby reducing the risk of conflict or disputes during elections. Furthermore, the reform to expand the list of special voters to include accredited media personnel and election observers reflects the EC's recognition of the need to engage key external stakeholders such as the media and observers who play a critical role in ensuring the transparency of elections. The incorporation of these groups into the special voters list demonstrates the EC's commitment to inclusivity and cross-functional cooperation, which enhances the credibility of the electoral process. This guarantees the involvement of diverse stakeholders in the decision-making process, thereby decreasing the probability of conflict or disputes during elections. Thus, absorptive capacity, which is the ability to absorb disturbances and maintain functionality (Zaato & Ohenmeng, 2015), is ensured by the EC. Additionally, the EC at certain times has organised training workshops for election partners such as observers (CSOs) and the media (Field Data, 2025), signifying a greater collaborative effort. A respondent asserted:

At the district level (sometimes), these partners (CSOs and the media) also have temporary staff that they recruit to serve as election observers monitors and they collaborate with the EC to provide hands-on training for them.

Aside from these, the EC also collaborates with traditional leaders across the country to ensure their activities do not coincide with traditional events (Field Data, 2025). A respondent noted:

We have other stakeholders in the communities among which traditional authorities. These people are consulted because there are a number of traditional activities that the electoral commission has to consider when drawing up its calendar.

Within the collaboration of the EC, there exists collaboration with individual citizens where the EC recruits and trains (temporary) for EC activities such as registration of

voters, exhibition of the voters register and elections. The nature of this relationship demands compensation. However, the compensation for such voluntary exercises is often delayed due to the “extended” process it has to go through and this does not enhance collaboration on the part of the EC (Field Data, 2025). A respondent asserted:

After 2020, the EC centralized payment in a way that series of auditing are undertaken across district, regional and national levels. These processes lead to delay in payment and affects collaboration in subsequent activities.

For innovation, the EC, to improve service delivery has implemented several measures such as the use of Biometric Verification Devices (BVDs) for exhibition of the provisional register which highlight the EC’s efforts to modernise election management through technology. Furthermore, the redesign and simplification of the statement of poll and declaration of results forms and the serialization of these forms suggest a proactive approach to minimizing errors and ensuring greater efficiency in result transmission. Also, the establishment of a National Collation Centre to replace the traditional Strong Room represents an effort to improve the credibility and transparency of election results, showing the EC’s commitment to adopting better electoral management practices.

However, despite these innovative measures, the EC has faced countless challenges in results collation with the EC declaring re-collation of the results of twelve (12) parliamentary seats in the 2024 elections after the leading parties, New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) challenged the results (see EC, 2024). This was due to missing and burnt pink sheets (see EC, 2024). Subsequently, the lack of coordination as well as the appropriate transfer of the statement of poll and other election materials from the polling station to the collation centres contributed greatly to the major challenges faced. Thus, innovative ways must be implemented by the EC for the transfer of the statement of poll and other election materials.

The EC’s “fluctuating” collaborations and innovations fall short of our framework’s collaboration and innovation at both the operational and strategic perspectives. A resilient organization according to Leflar and Siegel (2013) and Kim et. al. (2021), embraces a multidisciplinary, collaborative and innovative approach. Thus, it has to discover ways and means of collaboration and innovation to evolve in an attempt to meet the challenges of progress.

Culture and leadership

Mallak (1998) and Ma et al. (2018) recognised the critical role of positive organizational culture and strong leadership in driving organizational resilience and navigating challenges. The dynamic nature of resilience ensures continuous learning, adaptation, and innovation, which reflects the positive nature of the culture of any organization. The acceptance and implementation of electoral reforms demonstrate a positive organizational culture characterised by collaboration, inclusivity, and professionalism, underpinned by strong leadership of the EC. Within the EC, leadership is evident in the

improvement of training for election officials (EC, 2020b), showing a commitment to professional development and employee satisfaction.

A respondent averred:

Prior to registration of voters, staff members are trained and this creates a lot of opportunity for them to also ask certain questions and make certain contributions as to how some previous activities have been conducted, the challenges and how such challenges were rectified. This is incorporated by leadership.

Additionally, reforms such as publishing election results transparently highlight leadership's focus on accountability and trust-building. Also, the creation of new polling stations and the setting of a threshold per polling station at 749. For instance, in the 2020 elections, the EC increased polling stations from about 33,000 in 2016 to 38,622 in 2020 (about 5,000 new polling stations). Again, in 2024, the EC increased the polling stations to 40,976 (EC, 2024a) which consisted of a significant rise in the special voting polling stations to 328 (EC, 2024b). This reduction of voters and setting a threshold per polling station demonstrates a focus on service quality and operational efficiency, highlighting a positive organizational culture.

However, despite these reforms, certain actions and omissions raised concerns about the EC's organizational culture and leadership. A notable instance that undermined confidence in the institution was the handling of the 2020 presidential election results, where the EC revised the total valid votes cast and the percentage calculations at least thrice. This inconsistency raised serious doubts about the EC's accuracy, credibility, and preparedness. A well-functioning EMB with strong leadership should ensure that election results are thoroughly verified before public announcements to prevent confusion and mistrust. The frequent alterations in figures not only exposed weaknesses in the collation and verification process but also suggested a lack of institutional control, precision, and accountability. Additionally, in the same elections, the EC disenfranchised the Santrokofi, Akpafu, Likpe, and Lolobi (SALL/Guan Constituency) communities in the parliamentary elections. In response, the EC classified the claim as misinformation. Furthermore, the EC failed to assume responsibility but instead argued that the legal process required to create the new Guan constituency was completed too close to the election date, and as such, did not provide the EC with sufficient time to organize parliamentary elections. However, this explanation by the EC is only procedural and does not entirely address the concerns, particularly regarding why alternative arrangements were not made to safeguard their voting rights. This also raises serious concerns about the EC's leadership culture. The incident eroded public trust in the EC's impartiality and commitment to inclusiveness, reinforcing perceptions that leadership decisions are insufficiently sensitive to their broader democratic implications. For an institution whose credibility depends heavily on impartiality and fairness, the inability to safeguard representation undermined confidence in its organizational culture and leadership ethos and by extension its resilience.

Another aspect of our framework recognises how proactive risk management strategy is key for organizations. Ma et al. (2018), characterised resilient organizations by continuous development and the effective use of available resources to overcome obstacles. This has been demonstrated by the EC through the use of BVD. The purpose of the preemptive measure of incorporating BVDs into the exhibition of the provisional voter register is to mitigate the risk of voter fraud and ensure the accuracy of the voter list (EC, 2020b). The incorporation of this technology by the EC not only enhances the integrity of the electoral process but also prepares itself to address potential challenges associated with voter identity verification, which has historically been a source of controversy in Ghana's elections.

Also, Ruiz-Martin et al. (2018) and Ma et al. (2018) emphasise that resilient organizations are adopting new technologies and solutions to address emergent threats. The EC's introduction of the "liveliness check" feature in biometric verification is a forward-thinking approach to preserving the integrity of voter verification processes. This reform not only improves the EC's management capabilities but also showcases its resourcefulness in leveraging advanced technological solutions to enhance operational security, thereby ensuring a more accurate and trustworthy electoral process by reducing the likelihood of fraud and mandating the collection of biometric data from live, present individuals.

However, primary data points to a lack of proactive strategy for both temporary officers on and off the field. This includes delay in feedback/prompt feedback and a reactive decision-making environment which leads to slower response to challenges, over reliance on leadership, inefficiency and reduced innovation on the part of field officers and other officers such as the returning and district officers. A respondent asserted:

The EC should develop certain strategies and roadmaps as to how certain issues are resolved. Working as a temporary staff, sometimes it becomes very uncomfortable with regards to how certain issues occur and how they are handled.

Another added that:

As a temporary staff (TS), you do not have any authority to decide on certain situations. There are situations that sometimes as a TS you have to deal with at the grassroot level and you have to wait for the commission's decision before you are able to make any major decision to react to that particular issue on the ground.

Compared to permanent staff like the Returning Officers, a respondent stressed that:

With the returning officer having individuals who look up to him/her, it becomes problematic and presents them as handicap leaders to those who depend on their directives to act. Although in some instances where a returning officer can act/know how to revolve it, without the approval of the EC, you become "Useless".

The imbalances highlighted confirm a lack of precision on part of the EC. As noted by Bonanno (2004) and Hillmann and Guenther (2021), culture and leadership is the

ability to maintain a stable equilibrium and healthy functioning; a stability the EC has failed to meet.

Dynamic capabilities and situational awareness

The last aspect of our framework looks at dynamic capabilities and situational awareness. The electoral reforms undertaken by the EC align closely with the dynamic capabilities and situational awareness. The system of continuous voter registration allows the EC to regularly update the voter register, as opposed to relying on periodic, large-scale registration exercises. This adaptable approach enables the EC to effectively resolve changes in the register, such as shifts in population demographics or voter migration, thereby ensuring that the voter register remains inclusive and current. This reform is of particular significance in a dynamic political environment like Ghana, where voter participation is essential for electoral credibility. However, this process by the EC has been reactive over the years. For example, prior to the 2024 elections, the EC admitted there were issues with the voter register after the opposition party, the NDC had claimed more than 243,000 alleged illegal transfers, over 15,000 unverified records and close to 4,000 voters documented in 2023 were missing from the 2024 provisional register (Dotse, 2024). This shows limited dynamic capabilities, a key aspect of a resilient EMB.

Within the EC's voter registration framework, a key aspect has to do with residency and what constitutes it. The EC's reforms defined the term "Ordinary Resident" which clarified voter eligibility criteria, enhancing the integrity of the voter registration process (EC, 2024). The clarity in the definition of who qualifies as an ordinary resident showcases the EC's situational awareness by recognising the need to address potential ambiguities that could lead to disputes over voter eligibility. This clarity contributes to a more accurate voter register, reflecting dynamic capabilities in managing and adapting legal definitions to meet the needs of the electorate.

In addition, the reform to reduce the number of voters per polling station enhances situational awareness by enabling better monitoring of voter turnout and behaviour at the polls, allowing the EC to quickly identify and address potential issues. This proactive approach helps identify potential threats and challenges to the electoral process, allowing for timely interventions. Also, the decision to give copies of the final voters' register to political parties 21 days before elections demonstrates an awareness of the need for transparency and accountability, allowing stakeholders to monitor the integrity of the electoral process actively.

Despite these reforms, the EC failed to uphold the constitutional rights of the people of Santrokofi, Akpafu, Likpe, and Lolobi (SALL/Guan Constituency) as they were disenfranchised in the parliamentary elections of 2020. This failure by the EC to anticipate and manage constitutional timelines to secure representation demonstrates shortcomings in dynamic capabilities and situational awareness within our framework. Collectively, these challenges reinforce the continuous integration and reconfiguration of internal and external resources to meet organizational constraints while ensuring

active surveillance to identify potential threats and challenges as noted by Burnard et al. (2018).

Discussion

The overarching objective of this paper is to examine the extent to which the EC of Ghana demonstrates resilience as an EMB. To achieve this, the paper developed a framework to examine the activities, initiatives, and, most importantly, the reforms of the EC. At this stage, the most obvious and important question to ask is, does the EC of Ghana qualify as a resilient organization?

The EC of Ghana's reforms, initiatives, and activities illustrate a commitment to improving the resilience of its operational framework. Thus, the EC exhibits capabilities characteristic of a resilient organization. The analyzed data shows that the EC has incorporated attributes such as adaptability, proactive risk management, collaboration, and, to an extent, a leadership that can be described as robust. The EC has significantly enhanced its capacity to withstand electoral challenges and maintain credibility in a dynamic political landscape. Ma et al. (2018) and Mallak (1998) argue that organizations that demonstrate strategic flexibility, learn from past experiences, and effectively engage stakeholders are more competent at managing complex risks and adapting to unforeseen circumstances.

The EC's proactive and collaborative strategy in electoral administration is exemplified by the formation and maintenance of IPAC and the implementation of continuous voter registration, which address both current and future challenges. However, IPAC has been plagued with inconsistent representation over the years with the recent being the absence of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) for about 2 years after boycotting it since March 2021 and rejoining in March 2023 (National Peace Council, 2023).

Resilience, as defined by Leflar and Siegel (2013), does not merely involve the ability to endure unfavourable events; it also involves the organization's ability to thrive in a manner that prepares it for future challenges. The EC's prioritization of the training and compensation of election officials, in conjunction with the implementation of biometric verification devices, illustrates an organizational culture that prioritises innovation and continuous improvement, which are essential elements of resilience. The EC has improved its operations by analysing previous electoral processes and implementing specific changes, thereby ensuring its ability to quickly recover from disturbances and withstand shocks, a fundamental characteristic of organizational resilience as established by Zaato and Ohemeng (2015).

However, despite these significant advancements, numerous aspects of the reforms remain unimplemented, operations and activities of the EC still require additional attention to ensure long-term resilience. For instance, in the recently held general elections of 2024, the EC had to plan a re-collation of 12 constituencies, which was later reduced largely due to missing and burnt pink sheets. This questions the adaptability and learning, proactiveness and leadership of the EC within our framework.

Conclusion

EMBs are critical institutions for democratic processes. Considering the volatility of the current democratic systems, especially in Sub Saharan Africa, it is crucial to assess their resilience. The question remains; how do we evaluate EMBs as resilient organizations? In this paper, we first conceptualized organizational resilience as organization's capacity to foresee, react to, adjust, and recuperate from interruptions or crises while preserving essential operations. It entails proactive risk management, ongoing learning, adaptability, and the ability to excel in adversity through the development of new competencies. Underpinned by this conceptualization, we developed a framework which encompasses learning and adaptability, collaboration and innovation, a culture and leadership, dynamic capabilities and situational awareness. Learning and adaptability is the capacity to learn from past experiences to improve preparedness for future challenges. Collaboration and innovation refer to the operational and strategic approach to recognizing the strategic and operational attribute that enables organizations to improve their adaptive capacity and mitigate risks. Dynamic capabilities refer to the continuous integration and reconfiguration of internal and external resources to address changing conditions, while situational awareness refers to the active surveillance of the environment to identify potential threats and challenges. With the framework designed, we assessed the EC with document analysis and primary data collected.

Based on the discussion, we recommend that the EC's capacity to address future challenges be enhanced by formalizing procedures for addressing real-time voter concerns and enhancing the technology infrastructure to facilitate the timely dissemination of electoral information. The EC should advance by strengthening its emphasis on collaboration with institutions such as the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE), the National Media Commission (NMC), and CSOs like the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) and the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD). These partnerships should be designed to enhance civic education, combat misinformation, and strengthen transparency in electoral processes. This will improve EC's learning-oriented approach. Additionally, the EC should collaborate with the National Identification Authority (NIA) to harmonize voter registration with the national identification database to improve accuracy and eliminate duplication.

Moreover, we recommend that the position of IPAC be entrenched into law. That way, IPAC can have real powers to hold the EC accountable for lapses and further ensure some much-needed transparency and accountability in the rather opaque administrative, managerial, financial and technological activities of the EC, especially during elections. Also, the Commission must prioritise the comprehensive implementation of pending reforms, such as the rescheduling of election dates and the dissemination of polling station information. The implementation of these measures will guarantee the EC's adaptability to future political upheavals and increase operational transparency. The EC of Ghana can ensure the sanctity of the nation's electoral procedures in the face of new challenges by

strengthening its commitment to resilient methods. For proactive and strategic capacity, the EC should work with the Ministry of Communications, Digital Technology and Innovations, the National Security, and partners like the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to develop risk assessment systems, crisis management protocols, and secure digital platforms. These measures would enhance situational awareness and safeguard electoral integrity.

Furthermore, what does this mean for other EMBs, especially those in developing countries that seek to improve their democratic process by mastering their election processes? For these other EMBs, they can learn a lot from the EC of Ghana. First of all, they have to learn to share power. The EC of Ghana shares power with the IPAC. This has created a forum for them to collaborate, share ideas, listen and learn from each other. Through this collaboration, both the EC and IPAC have become better and more efficient organizations. Like the EC of Ghana, others in developing countries must also embrace the hybridity of technology and old-school traditional ways of doing things. Where possible, the EC of Ghana has used modern technology. But it has also always kept and even improved its traditional ways of counting votes, conducting votes and displaying results. All these make it a flexible and dynamic organization and others can learn from them.

Finally, the study was limited to mostly secondary sources with data collected from two constituencies in the Greater Accra region. This may limit the scope of our primary data and our analysis on dynamic capabilities and situational awareness. Future studies could increase the number of constituencies to include constituencies outside of Greater Accra. Future studies may also consider collecting both primary and secondary data to examine the experiences of voters on the resiliency of the EC.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Joshua Jebuntie Zaato  <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-8476-8870>

Michael Akoto  <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-4203-8396>

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