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A Comparative Analysis of Ghana's First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) Electoral System and the Proportional Representation (PR) System

Joseph Kingsley Adjei

Electoral systems translate the votes cast in a general election into seats won by parties and candidates. The choice of an electoral system is one of the most important institutional decisions for any democracy. In fact, the choice of a particular electoral system has a profound effect on the country concerned. Yet, once an electoral system has been used for some time, its impact on the political life of the country may be less recognized. Against this background, this paper provides an analysis of Ghana's First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) electoral system and juxtaposes it against the Proportional Representation (PR) system to see its strengths and weaknesses. How effective is the FPTP in terms of representation of the people by parties? Would Ghana be better off if the country adopted the PR system?

Introduction

Ghana gained political independence from the British on March 6, 1957. As a prelude to independence, the first multiparty democratic elections were held in 1954 to elect representatives to the Legislative Assembly. Six political parties contested the elections. They included the Convention People's Party (CPP), Northern People's Party (NPP), Muslim Association Party, Togoland Congress, the Ghana Congress Party (GCP), and Anlo Youth Party (AYA). In 1956 another general election was conducted. Again, all the parties that had contested in 1954 came back to contest. In addition, the Federation of Youth (FY) joined the contest. In 1960 when Ghana gained a republican status, only two parties, the CPP and United Party (UP), contested the elections. This was because the smaller parties merged with either of the two parties on the basis of ideological preferences. In all these elections the CPP led by Kwame Nkrumah won. It must be noted that all these elections were conducted under the first-past-the-post system (FPTP). This is a plurality voting system in which the candidate who wins the most votes in each constituency is elected.

Ghana's multiparty democracy was jolted when then-President Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah declared a one-party state in 1964. The situation was further aggravated when Nkrumah and his government were overthrown in a coup d'état in 1966. In 1969 Ghana ushered in a second republic when a new constitution was promulgated. Again, the constitution provided for the first-past-the-post system. In the democratic elections that were held, the Progress Party (PP) won. Other parties that contested the elections were the National Alliance of Liberals, United National Party (UNP), People's Action Party (PAP), and All People's Republican Party. The military intervened again in 1972 and ruled the country until 1979 when constitutional democracy was reintroduced.

Democratic elections were held in the same year and the People's National Party won against five other political parties. The electoral system remained the FPTP. In 1981 the constitutional dispensation was abrogated by another coup d'état that kept the country under military rule for more than a decade. Thus with the exception of the First Republic under Nkrumah (1960-1966), the interludes of civilian governments under the Second (1969-72) and Third (1979-81) Republics had been short-lived, unable to survive for up to three years without being overthrown in a coup d'état. Consequently, it is difficult to assess the real impact of the electoral system on the political parties and the people from the First Republic to the Third Republic.

In the late 1980s, after more than a decade of quasi-military rule under the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC), strong internal and external pressures on the government led to the promulgation of a liberal constitution in 1992 and the inauguration of a multiparty democracy in 1993, ushering Ghana into its Fourth Republic. The constitution also provides for the adoption of the FPTP system. Since 1992, Ghana has held six successful parliamentary and presidential elections—1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, and 2012—and peacefully changed ruling governments twice: in 2000 the NPP defeated the ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC) and in 2008 the NDC regained power from the NPP and retained it in 2012. These two feats clearly demonstrate how far Ghana has traveled along the path towards democratic consolidation over the past two decades. The national constitution provides for multiparty democracy and peaceful transfer of power through elections every four years. To date, there is considerable evidence of political liberalization which allows Ghanaians to enjoy a much wider range of rights and liberties, as well as the emergence of a vibrant civil society and a free and independent media that increasingly holds government accountable on behalf of citizens. Indeed, with these significant developments, Ghana's democratization has been touted as one of the political success stories in Africa (Gyimah-Boadi, 2008; Ninsin, 1998; Whitfield & Jones 2008).

It must be noted, however, that Ghana's electoral successes since 1992 and its current enviable democratic credentials could not have succeeded without an effective electoral system. This paper therefore sets out to examine Ghana's FPTP electoral system, comparing it with the proportional representation (PR) system. PR is a system in which a party's share of the national vote corresponds with its share of seats in parliament. In other words, if a majority party wins 50% of the votes, it should win approximately 50% of the seats, while a minor party with 15% of the votes should also gain 15% of the parliamentary seats (Reynolds, Reilly, & Elis, 2005). In simple terms, votes won by parties are proportional to seats gained in parliament. The major questions calling for attention are: How effective has the FPTP been in terms of representation of the people by parties and how would it be if Ghana adopted the PR system? and, What is the relative advantages and disadvantages of the FPTP system as compared with the PR system? The paper is structured in five complementary parts: it begins with a brief discussion of electoral systems in general before looking at Ghana's system followed by a discussion of Ghana's electoral system comparing the FPTP with the proportional representation system, then an examination of the factors that have made the FPTP system effective in Ghana, and finally an analysis of other effects of FPTP system on the country before concluding with brief suggestions for the way forward.

Brief Discussion of Electoral Systems

What is an electoral system? For Reynolds, Reilly, and Elis (2005), “at the most basic level electoral systems translate the votes cast in a general election into seats won by parties and candidates” (p. 5). In other words, electoral systems are the processes and means through which the electorate selects their political representatives. Since the seminal work of Duverger (1954) and Rae (1971), an extant literature has been devoted to the classification of the main types of electoral systems and the study of their impact. This is because the choice of an electoral system is one of the most important institutional decisions for any democracy (Farrell, 2011). Yet most electoral systems are not consciously and deliberately chosen.

Reilly (2001), concurring with this view, argues that “often, the choice of electoral system is essentially accidental: the result of an unusual combination of circumstances, of a passing trend, or a quirk of history” (p. 14). He opines that the impacts of colonialism and the effects of influential neighbors are often the most important factors especially in shaping the electoral system a country adopts. (For countries that did not experience colonialism, the most important factors are the influential neighbors). It is however significant to note that in almost all cases the effects of a particular electoral system, once chosen, tend to remain unchanged for long periods as political interests quickly congeal around and respond to the incentives presented by the system (Reilly, 2001). When accepted, electoral systems are normally provided for by a country’s constitution. The creation of constituencies is usually done by independent electoral bodies to ensure fairness and avoid gerrymandering—a situation in which constituencies are created to favor particular parties or groups of people to enable their parties to win elections. In the next section, the electoral systems are classified and explained.

Classifying Electoral Systems

One standard approach to classifying electoral systems is to group them according to how proportional they are, that is, how closely the ratio of votes to seats is observed in electoral outcomes (Reilly, 2001). This approach gives three broad electoral families: plurality-majority systems, semi-proportional systems, and PR systems. The plurality-majority system, which is a major focus of this paper, can be divided into two plurality systems and three majority systems. The two plurality systems comprise FPTP and the block vote with the three majority systems being the two-round run-off, the alternative vote, and the supplementary vote.

The FPTP system is the simplest form of plurality/majority system. The process, as indicated earlier, involves the use of single-member districts and candidate-centered voting. In other words, the voter is presented with the names of the nominated candidates and votes by choosing one (and only one) of them. The winning candidate is the one who gains more votes than any other candidate, even if this is not an absolute majority of valid votes (Reynolds et al., 2005). The system uses single-member districts and the voters vote for candidates rather than political parties. It must be noted again that this is the system Ghana has adopted.

Unlike FPTP, the Party Block Vote (PBV) system involves multi-member districts in which voters cast a single party-centered vote for a party of their choice, and do not

choose between candidates. The party with most votes wins every seat in the electoral district, and its entire list of candidates is duly elected. The PBV shares some characteristics with the FPTP system with particular reference to the fact that there is no requirement for the winner to have an absolute majority of the votes. Cameroun, Chad, Djibouti, and Singapore are countries that come into focus with the PVB electoral system (Reynolds et al., 2005).

Next is the Two-Round System (TRS). The central feature of the TRS is that it takes place in two rounds, often a week or a fortnight apart. The first round is conducted in the same way as a single-round plurality/majority election. A second election is held if no candidate or party achieves a given level of votes, most commonly an absolute majority (50% plus one) in the first election round. A TRS may take a majority-plurality form—more than two candidates contest the second round and the one who wins the highest number of votes in the second round is elected, regardless of whether they have won an absolute majority—or a majority run-off in which only the top two candidates in the first round contest the second round. Two-round systems are common in many of those countries with directly elected presidents (Blais&Massicotte, 1996; Jones, 1995, 1997). Austria, Bulgaria, Chile, Columbia, and Portugal, among others, are counted among countries that use this system (Reynolds et al., 2005).

What about the Alternative Vote (AV)? The AV is a preferential plurality/majority system used in single-member districts. Voters use numbers to mark their preferences on the ballot paper. A candidate who receives an absolute majority (50% plus one) of valid first-preference votes is declared elected. If no candidate achieves an absolute majority of first preferences, the least successful candidates are eliminated and their votes reallocated according to their second preferences until one candidate has an absolute majority. Voters vote for candidates rather than political parties.

Last but not least of the majority system in this paper is the supplementary vote. This system is used to elect one person with the aim that he or she should have over 50% of the vote. Each elector has two votes: a first and second preference. Once all the votes have been cast, the first choice preferences are examined; if one candidate has gained more than 50% of these votes then he or she is automatically elected. If, however, no candidate gets 50% on first preference votes, the two candidates with the highest percentages of first preference votes go through a second round. Here, second preference votes of all the other candidates are examined, and where they are for one of the top two candidates, they are added to the pool of first preference votes. The process of allocating second preferences continues until one of the top two candidates has more than 50% of the votes (Farrel, 2011).

Reilly (2001) and Ninsin (2006) agree that the main distinguishing feature of all majority systems is that they are structured so as to ensure that the winning candidate gains a simple majority or an absolute majority, that is, 50% plus one. Since Ghana uses the FPTP system, this paper analyzes parliamentary results at the national level and discusses how effective the parties would be if Ghana uses the PR system. One of the claimed virtues for FPTP voting arrangements is that the system is simple—a single vote is registered, the candidate with the largest number of votes wins, and the margin of votes is irrelevant.

PR, on the other hand, has three main variants: party list PR systems, mixed member proportional (MMP), and the single transferable vote (STV). The principle of

proportional representation is that the seats in a constituency are divided according to the number of votes cast for party lists but there are considerable variations in how this is implemented in different systems (Norris, 1997). Party lists may be open as in Norway, Finland, the Netherlands, and Italy. In this case, voters can express preferences for particular candidates on the list. There is also the closed system as in Portugal, Spain, and Germany, in which case voters can only select the party, and the political party determines the ranking of candidates. Party lists may also be national as in Israel, where all the country is one constituency divided into 120 seats. However, it is noted that most party lists are regional, as in Belgium where there are seven regions each subdivided into between two and 34 seats (Norris, 1997).

Electoral systems have four properties: the electoral formula, district magnitude, the electoral threshold, and the size of the representative body (Lijphart, 1994). In simple terms, electoral formula is that part of the electoral system dealing specifically with the translation of votes to seats. For example, if a party scores 20% of the votes in an election, how many seats does the party get in parliament? District magnitude (M) refers to the number of representatives elected in a constituency. Broadly, the larger the constituency and the more representatives it elects, the more proportional the result is likely to be, so Britain's $M=1$, for example, is a major source of disproportionality between votes cast and seats won. This means that in Britain each constituency elects one representative as the case is in Ghana. All electoral systems have thresholds of representation: that is, the minimum level of support which a party needs to gain representation. Thresholds can be legally imposed (formal thresholds) or exist as a mathematical property of the electoral system (effective or natural thresholds). Formal thresholds are written into the constitutional or legal provisions which define the PR system. Striking examples can be found in the Netherlands and Turkey where the thresholds are set at 0.67% and 10% respectively. Any party which gains less than the threshold is excluded from the count (Reynolds et al., 2005).

Ghana's Electoral System and Political Parties Since 1992

The 1992 Constitution of Ghana declares Ghana to be a republic with sovereignty residing in the Ghanaian people and it establishes a presidential and legislature system of governance with a president, parliament, and local government assemblies all elected on the basis of universal suffrage. Ghana practices a multiparty democracy. The Parliament of Ghana is unicameral and has 275 members plus a speaker who is presented by the ruling party and elected by members. The speaker's term of office runs concurrently with that of the members. Members are elected through the FPTP system for a four-year term in single-seat constituencies. A member of parliament is either elected as representative of a political party and a constituency or as independent candidate from a constituency. The president is elected by direct popular vote by two round (run-off) system in a single national constituency for a four-year term. What this means is that to be elected president a candidate must receive above 50% of valid votes and in the event that any single candidate fails to receive the number of votes to cross this threshold in a first round election, a second round presidential run-off election is called between the two candidates with the largest percentage of votes in the first round of elections.

The core values of democracy which underpin the formation and activities of political parties may be summed up as the right to self-determination. A multiparty system and free and fair elections are generally regarded as the hallmark of a democratic society. Pursuant to these tenets, Ghana practices a multiparty democracy. The 1992 Constitution under which democratic rule was restored guarantees various political and civil rights, including the right to political associations, free speech, choose who governs the country, and participate in the government of the country in other forms.

Like their predecessors, the political parties that currently exist have been driven by the core values of democracy. The country's history with military dictatorship and abuse of human rights were compelling reasons for insisting on the freedom to form political parties which, from experience, are regarded as the embodiment of basic freedoms core to democratic political practice. The language of the civil society organizations that struggled against the Provisional National Defense Council affirmed the belief of the Ghanaian political class in these democratic principles, which ultimately formed the core of their demands for democracy, self-determination, and an end to the military regime (Ninsin, 2006).

Significantly, the Political Parties Law 1992 PNDC Law 281 and later the Political Parties Act, 2000 (Act 274) upheld the constitutional requirements on the formation and responsibilities of political parties, including the provision that no political party shall be formed "(a) on ethnic, regional, professional or religious basis; or (b) which uses words, slogans or symbols which could arouse ethnic, regional, professional, or religious divisions" (Article 55, p.48). The Act (274) further stipulates that a political party shall have among its founding members at least one member who is ordinarily resident in each of the administrative districts of Ghana, as well as a person from each administrative district on its national executive committee and/or secretariat. Additionally, the constitution provides that "the members of the national executive committee of a political party shall be chosen from all the regions of Ghana" (Article 55, Clause 9). Indubitably, these provisions are to ensure that no political party is formed on the basis of ethnic cleavages.

Since 1992, many political parties have been formed including the Democratic People's Party, New Generation Party, Ghana Democratic Republican Party, National Independence Party, Peoples Heritage Party, Every Ghanaian Living Everywhere, and National Convention Party. Others include the National Democratic Congress (NDC), New Patriotic Party (NPP), People's National Convention, People's Party for Democracy and Development, National Justice Party, National Salvation Party (Sounds religious but secular), Convention People's Party, Great Consolidated Popular Party, Popular Party for Democracy and Development, and Progressive Peoples Party. It is however important to note that out of the many parties listed here only four have been very vibrant and participated in at least four of the six national elections held since 1992. They are the NDC, NPP, PNC, and CPP. It also must be noted that since 1992, there have been many innovations and improvements in Ghana's electoral processes.

It is worth mentioning that Ghana's electoral processes have improved significantly since 1992. During the 1992 and 1996 elections opaque ballot boxes were used. Since 2004 this has been improved and upgraded to transparent electoral boxes together with color identification card for voters replacing the black and white cards used previously. In addition, the number of constituencies has been increased by the Electoral Commission

from 140 in 1992, to 200 in 2000, and 230 in 2004 to 275 by 2012. Furthermore, an electronic verification system has been introduced and was used for the first time in the December 2012 elections (Ghana Electoral Commission, 2012). The improvements in the electoral system have aimed to increase access, representation, and accuracy, therefore impacting a sense of fairness and confidence. It is in this regard that I look at Ghana's system in respect of the PR system in the next section.

Comparison of Parliamentary Results: FPTP and PR Systems

In this section I compare Ghana's FPTP system with the PR system using the 2000 national parliamentary elections. I use the Hare formula. The formula takes its name from Thomas Hare (England), the originator of the approach who is also one of four people associated with the origins of the PR system. The others are Victor d'Hondt (Belgium), Edward Hagenbach-Bischoff (Switzerland), and Andre Saint-Lague (France). The Hare formula or Hare Quota is a PR system which uses the largest remainder method, defined as the total valid vote divided by the number of seats to be filled in the electoral district plus one (Farrell, 2011). The reason I use the Hare formula is that it provides the easiest way to understand and presents a true picture of what representation in the FPTP (in Ghana) would look like if the PR system was used. This is demonstrated in the tables for comparison below. The significance of the comparison is to help evaluate the impact of Ghana's system on political parties and the electorate as a whole in terms of representation.

Tables 1 and 2 illustrate the comparison. The proportionality of election results, as shown in Tables 1 and 2 below, measures the degree to which parties share of seats corresponds to their share of votes (Norris, 1997). Previous studies have shown this to be significantly greater under PR than under majoritarian systems (Farrell, 2011; Reynolds et al, 2005). This is confirmed by the tables below. Table 1 shows how parties were represented in Ghana in the 2000 parliamentary elections with the FPTP system. Clearly, the two largest parties—NPP and NDC—together were represented by 191 seats in parliament as against nine seats for all the other four smaller parties and independent candidates. Thus the majoritarian system provides a winner's bonus for bigger parties, while penalizing others—an indication of disproportionality. This point is endorsed and practically demonstrated by Ghana's FPTP system in which the two largest parties, NDC and NPP, have alternated governance since 1992; the smaller parties are virtually relegated to political oblivion as far as representation is concerned. For example, National Reform Party had 146,942 votes making up 2.25% of total valid votes cast and yet was not represented in parliament. In fact, together with United Ghana Movement they had 179,596 representing 2.75% of the votes without representation. Is it pertinent to describe these votes as "wasted" under the FPTP system albeit arguable?

On the other hand, Table 2 shows how parties would be represented if Ghana used the PR system. From the table, the NPP and the NDC have 171 seats between them—20 seats less than the number of seats (191) under the FPTP system. In addition, smaller parties which were not represented under the FPTP are represented while those who won few seats now have the number of seats increased. For example, PNC's seats increases from three (under FPTP) to seven (under PR). Similarly, the CPP and Independents have their seats increased from one and four seats to four and thirteen seats respectively. In

addition, National Reform Party and UGM which had no seats under the FPTP would have four and one respectively if Ghana used the PR system. Indeed, it is important to note that UGM with as low as 0.5% of the total votes cast is also represented. Thus in the PR system, smaller parties are accounted for and thus representation is increased. This makes it possible for smaller parties to be included not only in the distribution of state resources both locally and nationwide but also in the decisions that affect the people. This is politically fair since the minority is represented. This reduces the winner-takes-all or zero-sum syndrome. A major positive effect of this is that smaller parties would be strengthened as defections from smaller to larger parties would be minimized.

Table 1: FPTP System (Ghana): Parliamentary Elections 2000*

Party	Number of Votes	% of Votes	Number of Seats (200)
New Patriotic Party (NPP)	2,937,534	44.98%	99
National Democratic Congress	2,691,325	41.21%	92
People's National Convention (PNC)	224,658	3.44%	03
Convention People's Party (CPP)	85,553	1.31%	01
National Reform Party (NRP)	146,942	2.25%	-
United Ghana Movement (UGM)	32,654	0.50%	-
Independents & Others*	411,438	6.30%	04
Vacant	-	-	01

*There were 200 seats but one seat was vacant, so the total number of contested seats was 199. Total Valid Votes: 6,530,757. Source: Electoral Commission of Ghana, 2000.

Table 2: Parliamentary Results for Ghana 2000 (FPTP) Showing How Parties Would Fare (be represented) Under the PR System*

HARE FORMULA—LARGEST REMAINDER

Party	Number of Votes	Full Quotas	Remainder	Seats + Remainder
New Patriotic Party (NPP)	2,937,534	89	16,732	89+0=89
National Democratic Congress (NDC)	2,691,325	82	249	82+0=82
People's National Convention (PNC)	224,658	6	27,750	6+1=7
Convention People's Party (CPP)	85,553	2	19,917	2+ 1= 3
National Reform Party (NRP)	146,942	4	15,670	4+ 0 =4
United Ghana Movement (UGM)	32,654	0	32,654	0+1=1
Independents & Others*	411,438	12	17,622	12+ 1=13
Total	6,530,757	-	-	199
Vacant	-	-	-	1

*There were 200 seats but one seat was vacant, so the total number of contested seats was 199. Quota = $6,530,757/199 = 32818$. Total Valid Votes: 6,530,757. Source: Generated from the 2000 (Ghana) Parliamentary Election Results (EC).

It is important at this stage to explain how the Hare Formula works using Table 2. The total vote cast for all the parties is 6,530,757. This is divided by the total number of seats which is 199 and the result, as indicated, gives a quota of 32,818. How are the seats distributed? The first stage of the counting process consists of sorting the votes into different piles for each of the parties. It is seen that the votes received by the NPP (2,937,534), NDC (2,691,325), PNC (224,658), CPP (85,553), NRP (146,942), and Independents (411,483) exceed the quota of 32,818. Next, each party's total votes is then divided by the quota (total votes cast/seats = 32,818). For example, NPP's 2,937,534 is divided by 32,818. This gives the party 89 seats and a remainder of 16,732. Similarly, NDC's 2,691,325 gives the party 82 seats using the same modus operandi. This is done for all the other parties and the remainders are recorded for a second round. The total seats for the first round sums up to 195 distributed as follows: 89 for NPP, 82 for NDC, PNC gets six, CPP gets two, NRP obtains four while Independents and Others get 12 seats corresponding to their total votes. Thus four seats remain to be distributed in the second round. It is noted that UGM had no seat in the first round of the distribution because its total votes of 32,654 is less than the required quota of 32,818. In the second round, parties with the highest remainders are the first to be considered. In this regard, UGM becomes the first to be allotted a seat because it gets the highest of the remainders. PNC which has the next highest remainder of 27,750 also gets a seat followed by CPP with 19,917 and Independents with 17,622 as the next highest remainders respectively. Thus the four seats left after the first round are exhausted in the second round and the NPP, NDC, and NRP do not get any seat in the second round because their respective remainders fall below the remainders of each of the four parties that gained a seat each in the second round. It would be seen that, as indicated earlier, smaller parties such as UGM which would not have had any representation in parliament under the FPTP system gets a seat and becomes better-off under the PR system.

Impact of the FPTP System on Ghana's Socio-Political Development

The FPTP system has made the voting process easier as voters are limited to choosing only one candidate from a constituency. This point is particularly significant in view of the fact that a sizeable proportion (29.5%) of voters in Ghana is illiterate (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013). Being simpler, the FPTP system saves voters from ranking their candidates or having to deal with complex voting processes as exists in the proportional representation system. For example, as found in the United Kingdom (and Ghana for that matter), the District Magnitude is one, meaning that voters select only one candidate and not multiple candidates from a list of candidates as the case is with the PR system.

Also, the system makes it easier for voters and the people at large to identify who should address their problems since only one Member of Parliament represents a constituency. The majoritarian/plurality system is also considered more stable in terms of change of government or rather transfer of power; hence, Ghana has changed two ruling parties through the FPTP without major disturbances.

However, the system has some inherent flaws that need to be addressed. The first is the burden placed on a Member of Parliament to serve too many people and resolve too many problems. In effect, some people are either not attended to or suffer from official

neglect. Another major negative impact which is a corollary of the aforementioned has been the “ethnicization” of political parties. This is because the winner-takes-all system practiced by the country has created space for manipulation of resources and abuse of incumbency by political leaders. Hence, support for the two main parties, the NPP and NDC, has transcended the party support line and become increasingly split along Akan versus non-Akan lines in spite of laws that require political parties to have offices in two-thirds of Ghana’s 216 districts in addition to representation of their founding members coming from different parts of the country. Though this system may occur in countries using the PR system, for a fledgling democracy in Africa where ethnicity easily enters politics and changes the beautiful color of democracy to an unattractive one of anocracy and in some cases resulting in ethno-political conflicts, ethnicization of parties and voting behavior calls for concern.

Furthermore, the plurality system practiced by Ghana has rendered many politicians whose expertise could have helped to develop the country redundant. This is because the system supports a winner-takes-all approach to governance. In other words, all government functionaries are appointed by the president from the winning party (his party) to fill political offices. Thus all politicians other than those belonging to the ruling party and particularly those in small parties either have to go into alliance with one of the bigger parties or forever remain on the sidelines. On the other hand, a PR system would ensure that parties which meet a certain percentage threshold would be represented in parliament. It must however be mentioned that this does not affect appointments in the civil service.

Finally, the FPTP system and its resultant zero-sum game has intensified the urge for parties and candidates to win at all cost. This urge has increased the frequency of electoral conflicts and violence. For example, after the result of the 2012 presidential elections had been announced in favor of the NDC candidate, the NPP candidate who had lost the election together with his running mate and the chairman of his party refused to accept the result. Consequently, they took the Electoral Commission to the Supreme Court of Ghana seeking to annul or pronounce the NPP candidate the winner. The country was held spellbound for eight months by this legal tussle. The court finally ruled in favor of the incumbent to confirm the original results delivered by the EC. Why then is Ghana succeeding?

Support for the Success of Ghana’s Electoral System

In spite of the aforementioned flaws Ghana’s plurality-majoritarian system has been largely successful due to the support the system has and continues to receive from the Electoral Commission, strong civil society organizations, and other democratic institutions since 1992. This section therefore looks at a few of them.

The Electoral Commission

The Electoral Commission of Ghana (EGC) was established to replace a largely inefficient and widely discredited Interim National Electoral Commission (INEC) put in place by President Rawlings’s PNDC. Its mandate extends far beyond the ballot box. The Commission is responsible not only for voter registration, the demarcation and re-

demarcation of electoral constituencies, and voter education, but may also assist in resolving conflicts between and within political parties. The ECG helps to establish and strengthen internal democratic procedures within the parties by supervising their primaries and certifying the outcomes of internal electoral processes (Republic of Ghana, 1992).

Though the president appoints the seven members of the Commission, the ECG has, over the years, positioned itself as an independent and credible institution whose role has contributed significantly to the democratic process in Ghana. It must be noted that it is the professionalization of the electoral machinery in Ghana that ensures the fairness and the transparency of the electoral system in general, and voting in particular. In addition to the high court judges' status conferred on the commissioners, the Electoral Commission works with key permanent staff who are not political appointees and are therefore better able to resist pressure from political actors and to fulfill their task independently. Indeed, the electoral commission has come to symbolize fair play, transparency, accountability, honesty, justice, independence, integrity, selflessness, openness, objectivity, and strong leadership, and is therefore highly regarded by many institutions in Ghana and in Africa. The Electoral Commission has developed an effective communication strategy that has brought it close to the public. The institutionalization of the Inter-Party Advisory Committee (IPAC) by the Commission has provided a framework for the continuous generation of ideas on how to improve the performance of the electoral system (Zounmenou, 2009).

Reforms in the Electoral Process over Time

There is general agreement that successive elections, and the processes preceding them, have been characterized by a progressive improvement in terms of “free and fair” criteria (Ayee, 1997; Ayee (Ed.), 2001; Gyimah-Boadi, 2001; Lyons 1999). Moving from the low starting point of the 1992 elections in which the opposition parties disputed the result of the presidential election in November and boycotted the parliamentary elections held soon after, subsequent election results have been generally accepted. The Electoral Commission can take considerable credit for the improvements achieved in the electoral process.

Since the first presidential elections in 1992, many significant reforms in the electoral system have been made and implemented by the electoral body to deliver credible and transparent elections. The first of these reforms was the replacement of the black and white voter identity card with a color voter photo ID. Secondly, the biographical data on the voter ID has been modified to include personal photos that correspond with each individual voter on the register (Gyampo, 2008). Thirdly, since 1996, the system used in 1992 where parliamentary and presidential elections were held on separate days has been modified and both elections are now held concurrently on the same day and date. Perhaps the most significant reform is the introduction of transparent ballot boxes since the 1996 elections to replace the opaque ones as well as the most recent introduction of biometric registration which was used in the 2012 national elections.

Nevertheless, problems remain for the Electoral Commission to address, notably the bloated Voters' Register and the mal-apportionment of the parliamentary seats also

known as gerrymandering (Sisks & Reynolds, 1998), with failure to do so potentially threatening the legitimacy of future elections. In other words, the Electoral Commission should make sure that the voters register does not contain “ghost” names or a list of voters over and above the actual voting population. The Electoral Commission’s ability to implement these reforms depends largely on its capacity largely in terms of resources, principally determined in turn by Government funding, regarded as “well below the requirements and subject to unpredictable timing” (Map Consult, 2002, p. 6).

Political Parties’ Code of Conduct

The adoption, revision, and implementation of the Political Parties’ Code of Conduct have contributed immensely to the success of the polls. The roots of a thriving democracy are found in peace, stability, rule of law, multi-party system, and vibrant civil society as well as compliance by all stakeholders with well-defined electoral laws and codes (Institute for Democratic Governance (IDEG) (2007). In 2004, recognizing that tolerance and pluralism are necessary for an effective democracy, and determined to realize the objective of a model democracy and to consolidate democratic governance in Ghana, the Political Parties Code of Conduct 2004 was adopted and signed by all the political parties. It has been used as a guide in ensuring free, fair, and credible elections since 2004 (Gyampo, 2008). The highlights of the code include the need for parties to conduct their political campaigns on the basis of civility, decorous behavior devoid of mudslinging, and antagonistic posture.

Emerging Democratic Culture

Ghana’s ability to manage the 2008 and 2012 election conflicts, as examples, can be attributed to a number of processes and strategies that the country initiated before, during, and after the elections. The first is the emerging democratic culture or democratic nature of the Ghanaian society. The Ghanaian population has since the establishment of the Fourth Republic acquired a highly developed consciousness of and a certain pride in the advances in democracy that the country has achieved. This is suggestive of the fact that the democratic system has been consolidated to the extent that those in power no longer seek to exploit their power by constitutional means to extend their term of office beyond the two terms provided for under the constitution. The will of the electorate has become supreme.

The Role of Civil Society Groups

It is important to emphasize the role of key actors and institutions in providing leadership in managing the electoral conflicts and preserving the credibility of the elections by spreading a message of tolerance and peace. Ghana has witnessed the emergence of vibrant and competent civil society organizations, whose members take the lead in civic and political education and remain vocal about the responsibility of political actors and their followers to respect state institutions and the electoral code of conduct. For example, the debates organized by the Institute for Economic Affairs (IEA) and its involvement in drawing the code of conduct for political parties have helped to shift the

focus of campaigning away from personal rivalry between party leaders to issues of interest to the citizens. The workshops on political behavior organized by the Center for Democracy and Development (CDD) and the involvement of representatives of civil society groups on radio and television programs have also created awareness among the population on the electoral system and the need to uphold it. In particular, discussion of other African elections, such as those in Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Nigeria fostered a strong awareness of the risks involved in resorting to conflict and violence (Meissner, 2010).

The Way Forward

Some writers believe that the FPTP electoral system practiced in Ghana, based on single-member constituencies, should be reviewed with a view to introducing some form of proportional representation in order to increase the representation of minority political parties. However, it is the submission of this paper that the system should not be radically altered in view of the fact that it has received widespread acceptance by the Ghanaian society. In addition, a switch to another system could have huge implications for financial expenditures on building new structures (e.g. enlarging the physical capacity of parliament to absorb increased members), training and imparting new skills to immediate stakeholders and the electorate at large, among others. Still, the paper proposes a system in which the zero-sum system could be modified slightly so that politicians from smaller parties are given some governmental representation and responsibility. It is also proposed here that the country should take a critical look at the system in which political appointments are largely influenced by ruling party affiliation rather than competence. Indubitably, it is this system that provides a clear manifestation of the winner-takes-all trajectory espoused by the FPTP electoral system. Thus, if the system is reviewed to focus basically on competence, elections would be seen as means to developing corporate Ghana and the country's development agenda would not be the task of a single ruling party. This way, the country's socio-political environment would be devoid of the current situation in which an 'Almighty' ruling party is surrounded by redundant politicians and so-called experts, who can only bark but not bite with their criticisms or at best forced by circumstances to swallow their criticisms in frustration, envy, and pride.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to analyze Ghana's electoral system since the reintroduction of multiparty democracy in 1992. The paper discussed electoral systems with particular reference to plurality and proportional systems as they pertain to Ghana. The paper then looked at Ghana's electoral system and its socio-political impact on the country. From these the paper has drawn the following conclusions. The proportional representation system gives more room for small parties to be represented than the plurality system practiced by Ghana. In Ghana members of both smaller and big parties which fail to win elections are discriminated against in political appointments irrespective of their recognized political experience, excellent functional capacity and unchallenged competence. No doubt, this discriminatory stance by ruling parties since 1992 is due mainly to their inability to subsume ideological differences for the common good, mistrust of political opponents, and false claim of exclusive right to the perks of power

and governance after the hustle and bustle of elections. Consequently, governance in Ghana is exclusive to winners of elections.

However, Ghana's FPTP system has been relatively successful in Ghana particularly because it is easier to understand and operate in a society with a sizeable number of the electorate being illiterate. Most importantly, it has worked well in Ghana due to the country's unwavering commitment to democracy, the Electoral Commission's independence and innovativeness as well as having critical support from civil society organizations and the cooperation of political parties.

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