

# The Dominance of Two Parties in the Politics of Ghana's 4<sup>th</sup> Republic: The Electoral System a Factor?

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**Abstract:** *The paper presents why there has been domination of two parties in the country's fourth republic. Ghana has gone through a myriad of electoral reforms and elections in the fourth republic resulting in two-party system which is at variance with the constitutional provisions of multi-party democracy. There have been varied views as to the cause of the two-party dominance attributable to efficient and workable manifestos, lack of state funds of parties to have equal measure of strength and ethnic dimensions to voting pattern. The focus of the paper is to examine whether the electoral system of majoritarian and plurality rule has contributed to the dominance of two parties with scholarly articles as a source of secondary data. The study found out that the de-facto two party systems in Ghana is as a result of electoral system which translates votes cast into seats or executive power.*

**Keywords:** electoral system, dominance, parties, Ghana

## 1. Introduction

Ghana's fourth republic has undertaken its 7<sup>th</sup> set of parliamentary and presidential elections in December 2016 with a closely fought contest and alternation of power between two main political parties; the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) (Abdulai and Crawford 2010). Each government comes to power with its majority seats in parliament showing a unified government (Ichino and Nathan 2012).

According to Brierley (2012) since 1992, elections have been a competition between two major political parties dominating the political landscape. These two parties have captured over 94% of parliamentary seats, operating majoritarian seats in the country's legislature.

Number of representative seats for political parties in the 4<sup>th</sup> republic

Party	Election year	Number of seats	Percentage (%)
NPP	1992	No representation	
NDC	1992	189	94.5
Others	1992	11	5.5
Total		<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>
NPP	1996	62	31
NDC	1996	132	66
Others	1996	6	3
Total		<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>
NPP	2000	100	50
NDC	2000	92	46
Others	2000	8	4
Total		<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>
NPP	2004	128	55.7
NDC	2004	94	40.9
Others	2004	8	3.4
Total		<b>230</b>	<b>100</b>
NPP	2008	107	46.5
NDC	2008	116	50.4
Others	2008	7	3.0
Total		<b>230</b>	<b>100</b>
NPP	2012	122	44.4
NDC	2012	148	53.8

Others	2012	5	1.8
Total		<b>275</b>	<b>100</b>
NPP	2016	169	61.5
NDC	2016	106	38.5
Others	2016	0	0
Total		<b>275</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: compiled by author

The presidential election results of the 4<sup>th</sup> republic

Year	parties	Percentage of votes %
1992	NDC	58.4
	NPP	30.3
	Others	11.3
1996	NDC	57.4
	NPP	39.6
	Others	3.0
2000	NDC	44.8
	NPP	48.4
	Others	6.7
2004	NDC	44.6
	NPP	52.5
	Others	2.9
2008	NDC	47.9
	NPP	49.1
	Others	3.3
2012	NDC	50.6
	NPP	47.8
	Others	1.4
2016	NDC	44.4
	NPP	53.9
	Others	1.8

Source: Electoral Commission

According to Brierley (2012) and Morrison (2004), the competitive nature of Ghana's politics since 2000 and strong party identity has culminated the intense division of majority and minority politics in parliament and the presidential race; she says two party systems has enormous barriers to the creation of a successful third party. It is therefore recognized by Brierley and Morrison that Ghana enjoys two party systems.

Ghana is one of the few countries in Africa with two-party system with two parties of equal strength. Afro barometer reports indicate that roughly, two-thirds of Ghanaians feel close to one of the dominant political parties in terms of party identification not membership and it is a result of historical political polarization between UGCC who were seen as wealthy and educated and the CPP led by Nkrumah of which the current NPP and NDC traces their root respectively. (Osei 2012).

Smith (2002) has argued that the results of the 2000 presidential and parliamentary elections has shown the weakness of minor parties in terms of electoral fortunes and need a great deal of rebuilding to become electorally competitive.

It is with this prevailing situation that this paper, is examining theoretically as to the notable reason behind the consolidation of two-party system evidenced in numerous elections Ghana has conducted since 1992 and why power changed hands only between the New Patriotic Party and the National Democratic Congress.

The paper focuses on electoral system as one of the key institutions which dictates how votes cast are counted as the influential factor in the determination of two-party system and whether this has led Ghana in experiencing two dominant party system in our 4<sup>th</sup> republic making smaller or third parties insignificant in the electoral arena.

## 2. Method and Materials

All the data gathered are secondary data. The paper gleaned information from relevant publication articles from scholars on elections and electoral systems and the 1992 constitution of Ghana. This was used to have more insight of the influences of electoral system on party functionality and whether it has influenced Ghana's two-party electoral system.

## 3. Historical Development of Two-Party Systems

Party organisation and its processes in Ghana have reflected two main cleavages. The United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) was the first political party who were prominently featured by businessmen and intellectuals as members. It was inaugurated on 4<sup>th</sup> august 1947 to wrestle power from the British through constitutional means in a "shortest possible time" as their slogan (Morrison 2004).

The New Patriotic Party (NPP) traces their root to the UGCC which reflects in their liberal, market-oriented development path and its property-owning democratic principles. Its enduring cleavage was termed Danquah-Busia group (Morrison 2004, Aye 2008, and Whitfield 2009).

The other cleavage was circled around Kwame Nkrumah and the Convention Peoples Party (CPP) which was established on 12 June 1949. It shifted its slogan from the already existing one to "self-government now". It featured workers, women, school leavers etc. The CPP was outlawed which

split the common front of the party. We then came to have Peoples National Party (PNP). The Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) which has ruled for 19 years under authoritarian regime since 1981 paved the way for democratic transitioning that brought in National Democratic Congress (NDC) in 1992. The NDC rose up on the ideals of Nkrumah and for that matter CPP. This political strategy drew more members from the "Nkrumahist" to the party. Therefore, the current party landscape reflects the two traditional cleavages, the liberal NPP and the populist NDC (Morrison 2004).

## 4. Why Domination of Two Parties

The two dominant parties in Ghana's forth republic electoral misfortunes have been commonly attributed to factors such as complacency, corruption (Frempong 2012). But what has really gone right for the cycling and adoption of one of the two parties even after a defeat in previous elections. It gives me an indication of lack of options of parties the electorate chooses. But since 1992, not less than 4 parties have contested elections.

Some scholars have studied the dynamics of elections in Ghana and proffered reasons for the domination of these two parties.

According to Linberg and Morrison (2005) in studying voting alignment in Ghana that features low voter volatility among political parties, they underscored that rural-urban is one of the major factors to voting alignment, hence the domination of two political parties. They further assert that the ideological principles of social democracy and capitalism of these two parties is the factor to voting alignment.

The influences of structural-historical cleavages of Lipset and Rokkan in 1967, Downs rational choice in 1957, Fiorina 1981 determination of choice due to prevailing circumstances that benefit the voter and socio-psychological characteristics espoused by Campbell et al in 1960 like education, class, gender and age are some of the basis for voting Linberg and Morrison (2005).

However, in the study of Linberg and Morrison (2005) they realized that some of voters refrain from the descriptions above and votes on the basis of performance evaluation of the government and the party candidate. They constitute 18% of the electorate and considered as swing voters while the core voters display stable pattern of votes constituting 80%. They further gave an indication that the 18% of votes brings competition in Ghana's elections and has resulted in government turnover which may also occur in future elections.

Assessing the work of Linberg and Morrison, the 18% of votes that is seemed to be swing votes are restrictive to the two main political parties because the minor parties have been getting less than 18% of elections in the 4<sup>th</sup> republic especially the presidential elections.

Ayee (2011) examines how manifesto of political parties influences electoral outcomes of political parties in Ghana. He argues that manifestos influence voters and there is a significant and positive relationship between manifestos of parties and their electoral outcomes or fortunes.

Manifestos by Ayee (2011) are documents outlining detailed policies or programmes a party proposes to pursue if elected to power. It gives a platform for parties to espouse their development strategy and policy answers to the demands and needs of the people or the electorate. Parties in the 4<sup>th</sup> republic of Ghana have adopted manifestos to influence their electoral outcomes. Electoral successes and failures of the two main political parties are linked to their manifestos. He posits that, both major and minor parties in Ghana's forth republic have written manifestos to contest elections. But the question is, why are manifestos of minor parties haven't reaped electoral fortunes?

In 2012, a policy Think Tank, Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) held a programme dubbed "presidential encounter" where contesting parties of the 2012 presidential elections were allowed to showcase their intent for the country via their manifestos to the electorate, the Convention Peoples Party (CPP) led candidate Abu Sakara Foster was by public opinion including Director of Research of Policy Institute of Trade Union Congress (TUC) adjudged him the best performing candidate with good message among the rest. But the question is why couldn't he wrestle power from the major parties if there is a correlation between manifestoes and electoral outcomes? It means there are other variables which are the key deciding factor to electoral outcomes (Peacefonline).

Arthur (2009) assessed how ethnicity influences voting in Ghana since 1992 and opined that it has been the most important variable in African politics and influences voter choice. He argues voting on ethnicity in Ghana is determined by the ethnicity of the candidate and ethnicity of the party and has resulted in two dominant parties because of their association with various ethnic groups in Ghana. He however indicated that electoral outcomes based on ethnicity is simplistic but attributes other factors such as corruption, bad policies, deteriorating economy and complacency are other factors which influences the electoral choices of voters and that has manifested in Ghana forth republic elections and electoral outcomes.

In my view on ethnic factors in voting, the variable is manifested only in the Ashantes and Voltarians side of the political divide of NPP and NDC respectively. Their vote however is insignificant in the determination of electoral outcomes. Other regions are inhabited by Akan ethnic groups like the Fantes in the Central region, the Bono in the Brong-Ahafo region and the Sefwi in the Western region, who form part of the Akan enclave, have shown swing voting pattern in the fourth republic.

Presidential results of the 3 swing regions in 2012 and 2016 elections (Brong Ahafo, Western and Central)

Year (2012)	NPP (percentage votes)	NDC (percentage votes)
Brong Ahafo	47.3	51.5
Western	43.8	54.4
Central	45.5	52.1
Year (2016)	NPP	NDC
Brong Ahafo	54.1	44.6
Western	51.8	45.9
Central	53.2	43.4

Source: Electoral Commission

Again, PNC which is considered a minor party was dominating in the upper regions which manifested in some parliamentary seats in Sisala and Builsa constituencies in 2008 and 2012 elections have conceded all to the NDC which I think is due to intense political mobilization as a result of the electoral system that do not support or make significant smaller parties in the electoral arena.

Political party's inactiveness is a result of the huge cost associated with its running and operations. This has hindered the smaller parties their constitutional mandate in filling candidates for elections, embarking on public education and leadership training. The ineffectiveness has led to decline of membership monthly subscriptions. (Gyampo 2015).

However, there has been support of the state through the electoral commission donating vehicles to political parties contesting elections. The electoral commission donated 50 vehicles to political parties that fielded parliamentary candidates in more than 10 constituencies. Also, the cost of advertisement and public campaigns in state owned media has also been catered for which is evidenced in the free airtime provided by Ghana Broadcasting Corporations since 1996 which the smaller parties benefited (Ayee 2008, Gyampo 2015). How come with these opportunities, the smaller parties have not been able to rock-shoulders with the bigger ones since 1992?

According to Gyampo (2015) if political parties are not funded, elections will be competitive between two parties who have the financial resources and are able to embark on party operations effectively which I believe will be NDC and the NPP furthering the argument of two-party domination in Ghana's politics. However, is public funding the cause of two-party domination in Ghana 4<sup>th</sup> republic?

The defeat of incumbent parties in 2000 and 2008 elections are partially attributed to the extravagant expenditure of government with state resources (Frempong 2012) which means access to state resources thus monies to embark on party operations is not a guarantee to electoral victory so public funding may not be the antidote or panacea to curb the domination of NDC and NPP in Ghana's democratic development.

According to Meissner (2010) Convention Peoples Party (CPP) which many people in Ghana are affiliated to because of their trace to Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first president has suffered to gain momentum due to internal party

struggles. This has affected their quest of being a third force because of their programmes and the caliber of their candidates. I see this explanation not to be adequate in explaining the failure of the party since as I indicated the CPP candidate for the 2012 presidential election was seen as the best performing candidate among the rest of competing candidates and internal wrangling is not peculiar to the CPP. I therefore say that the electoral system is a factor of ineffectiveness of third force or smaller parties in Ghana.

There has been breakaway of factions within the two dominant political parties in forming new parties. The NPP suffered a split of a party named United Ghana Movement (UGM) leading up to the 2000 elections and the leader contested the presidential elections. In the same vein, the NDC also suffered a split in 2005 led by their party chairman to form Democratic Freedom Party (DFP) in 2006 contesting the 2008 presidential general elections. In the run-up to the 2012 elections, another split occurred led by NDC vice chairperson and named their party National Democratic Party (NDP). All these parties were insignificant in terms of electoral outcomes. The effect is, DFP, and UGM had to reconcile their differences with the mother party and to reunite; unlike NDP who continue to show insignificant numbers in terms of votes both in presidential and parliamentary elections since its inception.

These traces of incidence show how difficult and impossible smaller or third parties can enroll in Ghanaian body politic especially contesting and winning elections making it de-facto two party system. So, we still ask ourselves whether the electoral system is responsible for the dominance of two parties in Ghana.

## 5. Conceptual Issues

Electoral systems have proved one of the most important democratic institutions. They are the rules and regulations governing the administration of elections including the way votes are translated into seats (Colomer 2007).

Scholars like Maurice Duverger and Douglas Rae have classified the main types of electoral systems. They are the electoral formulas which form part of the electoral system including majoritarian, semi-proportional, proportional representation and a mixed system of proportional and majoritarian elements. There is a debate whether electoral systems influence the number of political parties. The origin of political parties is found within mechanism of elected legislature that embodies the incentive to form enduring voting coalitions or consensual voting (Colomer 2007)

This according to Schattneider (2017) led to caucus formation until intensification and expansion of competition from parliament to a larger electorate which gave rise to party organisation. He says the nature of party system is influenced by the nature of election system which includes the kind of offices made elective, the way votes are counted, the system of representation etc. he says two party systems is run on a winner-takes-all basis thus majoritarian.

Colomer (2007) also argues that traditional elections which were commonly run in the 13<sup>th</sup> century English town meetings and Shires, Courts, Germany and Swiss Communes and Cannons were multi-member district, open ballot and plurality rule resulted in creation of political parties. There was a realization that single member district with majoritarian rule is associated with two-party system and multi-member district with proportional representation rule associated with multi-party system. There is a wide view that voters would not waste votes on parties with little chance of gaining representation and that parties that failed to mobilize votes would be discouraged and disband. He argues that, in a multi-member district, seats are allocated by proportional representation and produces systems with three or more parties depending on the number of seats in the district and the minimum number of votes required gaining any legislative representation.

However, Cox (1984) posits that electoral rules interact social diversity to determine effective number of parties in a system. He questions why national party system repeats the same two-party systems as in the single member district with simple majority? He then suggests that some pre-existing group that is already of national scope seeks to accomplish a task that requires the help of large number of legislators from many different districts to meet the demands of larger organisation. These groups may include labour unions, religious sect, ethnic group and regional interest. The prominence of one group or another is not caused by electoral systems.

### 5.1 Proportional Representation

Proportional representation is an electoral system for selecting leaders into parliament. It is the percentage of vote translated into seats in the legislature. This electoral system according to him brings about consensus in decision making because it gives provision for the marginalized which include smaller parties to be part of the decision-making process (Lijphart and Grofman 1984.).

Proportional representation electoral system tends to facilitate the growth of smaller parties while single member district suits the growth of larger parties. The two dominant parties in Ghana has taken advantage of the electoral system which has made the smaller parties ineffective and inefficient, exploiting the winner-takes-all system in every civilian rule in the history of the country (Morrison 2004).

### 5.2 Majoritarian Rule

Majoritarian rule is the oldest electoral system and the simplest. It is either plurality which also means simple majority or absolute majority which a winner is determined by 50% plus one vote. In this electoral system, countries are divided into territorial single-member constituencies; voters have a choice of a single vote on one candidate. The candidate with the most votes captures the seat of the constituency (Norris 1997).

According to Norris (1997), majority run-off system explains how candidates of two candidates with highest votes clinch to victory with a second round of votes which is determined by simple majority if they fail to obtain the voting threshold of 50% plus one vote. Plurality rule of elections favours a two-party system. Maximum threshold of votes in proportional system has an effect on the inclusion of minor parties. The turnout of votes is higher in proportional system because there are no wasted votes and that entices people to be part of the electoral process in deciding election outcomes.

Ghana has experienced run-off voting in 2000 and 2008 and confirms the fact of a majoritarian rule in our body politic. There is a documentary evidence to the effect of these electoral rules which include Ghana's 1992 constitution article 50 (1)(a) which dictates parliamentary rule with a division of 275 single member constituencies with an electoral rule of simple first past the post or plurality voting system. Article 63(3) also prescribes the majoritarian rule in selecting the president of Ghana.

Carter and Farrell (2009) in their study of electoral system and its influence on party system, they realized that most countries they studied that use single member plurality (SMP) systems, the effective number of parties in parliament is low compared to countries that use proportional systems being it list proportional representation, single transferable vote (STV) tend to have high parties in parliament.

In Ghana, there is massive turnout of votes in a plurality system negating Norris assertion. There is intense mobilization of votes by the prospective parties who stand the chance to win elections and voters on the other hand are also particular to make their vote counts and so end up not considering in voting for the minor parties who may not have the chance to win seats or hold on to the executive office.

Downs (1957) in his analysis of voting in a multi-party system holds that those who prefer a third party might sometimes vote for another party. If citizens believe the party of his/her choice is not part of the range of choice by the electorate, then rationality commands them to vote for other parties. This range of choice to me is determined by electoral system more specifically majoritarian rule which fosters the existence of two-party system.

### 5.3 Is there a need for reforms?

Ghana since 1992 has embarked on electoral reforms to install confidence in the electorate the credibility of our electoral processes (Gyekye-Jandoh 2013). It includes the use of transparent ballot boxes, issuance of voter's identity cards by the electoral commission, voting the same day of the presidential and parliamentary elections, the use of biometric register and biometric verification device (BVD) etc (Frempong 2012).

In 1994, New Zealand adopted a wholesale change in their electoral formula, moving from first-past-the-post to a more proportional system. It freed the system for small parties to

benefit hitherto characterised by traditionally dominant players in their politics (Miller 2015).

However, little has been done on the electoral system itself in Ghana which has over the 4<sup>th</sup> republic benefited two parties. Based on this perspective, Rahat and Hazan (2011) agree that countries will want the status-quo of the electoral outcome to be maintained if the desired results are achieved. I take from this cue that, so far as either of the two dominant parties is likely to win elections from this electoral system, it will be difficult to call for alterations.

The level of trust in the electoral system is also determined by the level of understanding the voters have in the electoral processes, institutions and outcomes. There are always suspicions if voters are ignorant of electoral rules rendering electoral results illegitimate (Karp et al 2018). Ghana having 7 times relatively stable elections presupposes the trust, confidence and understanding they have for the electoral system hence making it difficult for its adjustment to an electoral system that will be complicated but compensate minority parties.

## 6. Conclusion

The 4<sup>th</sup> republican system of elections has been dominated by two parties without any law barring other parties to contest and win elections unlike the USA where two major parties are legally sanctioned to contest and win elections making it de-jure two party state (Schneider 2017). There have been varied explanations as to the success of these parties in Ghana which includes a solidified voting bloc backing the organisation and operations of these two parties, crafty and convincing campaign promises via manifestoes, the resources at the disposal of these two parties etc. which smaller parties are disadvantaged of.

The less chance a political party has in winning elections, the greater voters will switch their vote to a party that has a good chance (Downs 1957).

Ghanaian voters are sometimes crippled between two choices because they want their votes to be counted. They however do not realize the prudence in voting for smaller or third parties knowing well of their impossibility of a win. This is a clear indication of an unseen influence of voter behavior which lies in the electoral system which many people have not noticed.

It is therefore imperative for the adoption of electoral system where all votes cast will be counted. According to Norris (1997) proportional representation features "no wasted votes" which people may be willing to participate in elections and together vote for preferred party irrespective of how popular, big or small the party is if only there will be true representation.

Should we hide behind majority rule as a feature of democracy which makes decisions by aggregating votes of more than half of eligible voters to solidify the two-party system? This position is often contested and defines

democracy to involve some means of aggregating the equal preferences of individuals (Schmitter and Terry 1991).

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