

## Research Article

# Political Parties: Builders and Destroyers of Ghana's Drive to Democratic Consolidation

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## Abstract

Despite a very checkered political history, Ghana's Fourth Republic has so far performed relatively better, surviving through eight election cycles. Though political parties are objects of massive supports in Ghana's drive to democratic consolidation, nevertheless, questions have been raised about the ways in which parties operate in practice. Through the use of concurrent mixed methods design, the study examined the view that Ghanaian political parties are not agents of democracy due to some irresponsible and self-interested actions they usually pursue. The study found that Ghana has made significant progress towards democratic consolidation partly because political parties actively perform the functions of voter mobilization and forming the government. However, despite the strong support for multiparty democracy from Ghanaians, their hopes and expectations have proved illusionary due to persistent poverty and socio-economic inequalities. This has the potential to disempower the poor majority and make democracy the property of few wealthy politicians. Additionally, policy discontinuity and the activities of political vigilantism championed by political parties were identified as notable threats to Ghana's democratic gains. The study recommended that both the intrinsic and instrumentalist approaches to politics are critical for democratic consolidation and maturity in Ghana.

## Keywords

Political Parties, Democracy, Democratic Consolidation, Poverty, Ghana

## 1. Introduction

Despite a very checkered political history, Ghana's Fourth Republic has so far performed relatively better, surviving through eight election cycles. The keenly contested 2016 elections resulted in the third democratic and peaceful transfer of power since the advent of the Fourth Republican Constitution in 1992 [5, 12]. Indeed, Ghanaians have made concerted efforts not only to embark on democratization process but also democratic consolidation and maturity after the 'third wave' [8, 34]". Though political parties are objects of massive supports in Ghana, nevertheless, questions have been raised about

the ways in which parties operate in practice [15, 33], particularly after they successfully captured power and formed the government. As a consequence, many scholars hold the view that political parties in Africa have helped undermined democracy through their irresponsible and self-interested actions [22, 44]. Thus, African parties are presented as 'weak' parties [43]; they make vague promises of fighting corruption and improving citizen's welfare [50] and do not mobilize citizens along substantive issues of national cohesion [14].

However, the findings from the Afrobarometer Surveys

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**Received:** 6 May 2024; **Accepted:** 6 June 2024; **Published:** 27 June 2024



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show strong support of Africans for democracy. In Ghana, the 1999, 2002, 2005, and 2008 surveys suggest overwhelming support for democracy among adult Ghanaians. The 2008 survey Round 4 suggests that 79% of Ghanaians expressed preference for democracy than any other forms of government. Thus, about 84% of the respondents strongly rejected dictatorship, 81% denounced single party rule, and 79% opposed to the military rule [3]. The unflinching support democracy enjoys from Ghanaians is seen not only in opinion surveys but also demonstrated in high voter turn-out which have consistently exceeded 60% by international standards [1, 15]. Although the surveys find popular support for democracy in many 'third wave' countries, less satisfaction is found with performance of elected governments [3, 16]. In Ghana's report, about 59% of adult citizens indicated that the condition of national economy is in bad shape and Ghana is heading in a wrong direction, with 40% expressed the view that Ghanaians are worse than citizens of neighbouring countries [3, 32]. Theoretically, why are Africans show massive support for democracy, but feel discontented with the performance of elected governments? Is it the case that multiparty democracy in Africa belongs to the affluent and the powerful so that majority of poor people are disempowered and punished? This study contends that the ability to guarantee both the political rights and improvement of social welfare of majority of citizens is profound for the consolidation of democracy. This is important because consolidating democracy will depend in part on improving citizens' welfare by taking up the issue of poverty and inequality, not only because democratic discourse that is divorced from economic goods is socially meaningless, but because improved socio-economic conditions will enhance the capacity of the poor to actively participate in the democratization process [38, 43].

Given that political parties, which are seen as fairly marginal players in the politics of many developing countries, this paper examines whether parties promote or undermine Ghana's drive to democratic consolidation. Extant literature on democracy, democratic consolidation, and elections examines Ghana's democratic transition [1, 30], and the performance of political parties in elections [12, 31, 48]. Scholars also shed light on ethnicity and voting behavior [2, 7, 27, 36], political party financing [4, 9], the role of civil society and state institutions [8, 52], and understanding political party duopoly in Ghana [5]. However, what political parties do that relate to democracy-building or destroying democracy seem missing in Ghanaian context. This paper represents an effort in that direction and contributes to the burgeoning literature on electoral politics in developing countries.

The Ghanaian multiparty democracy is dominated by the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP). For instance, the 7<sup>th</sup> Parliament after the 2016 closely fought elections had 275 elected members was wholly controlled by the two parties. While the NPP controlled the majority with 169 members, the NDC has 106 members. The NPP presidential candidate won by taking 53.9% of the votes

and defeated the incumbent NDC presidential candidate who polled 44.44% of the votes [12]. Furthermore, the December 7, 2020 general election has also been described as the 8th milestone in Ghana's electoral politics [6]. The election was highly competitive for several reasons, including the fact that it was the first time the country's parliamentary elections produced a 'hung' parliament of which both NDC and NPP parties obtained 137 members each with only one independent member [10, 29]. Of the eight elections held under the Fourth Republic, the NDC has won four (1992, 1996, 2008, and 2012) and the NPP also has won four (2000, 2004, 2016 and 2020). Ghana has one of the few de facto two-party systems in Africa with two major parties of almost equal strength [43]. This makes Ghana an ideal case to examine the practices of parties, especially when they are in Government. In other words, the paper examines what parties actually do that relate to building or destroying Ghana's transition to democratic consolidation and maturity. The paper extends the literature on the intrinsic and instrumentalist approaches to politics and proceeds as follows: the next sections discuss the theories underpinning democracy and democratic consolidation, political parties and democracy, and African parties and democratic consolidation. The methodology, findings, and conclusion are also discussed.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Democracy and Democratic Consolidation: Theoretical Discussion

Following the 'third wave' of democratization (Huntington, 1991), the process involved in consolidation of democracy has been much debated and remains an issue for political theorists. Even with the persistent recognition that democratic consolidation follows a successful democratic transition, is still a long and complex process and promises no guaranteed destination [41, 45]. It is compelling to note that democratic consolidation, in its entirety, cannot be accounted for by one set of theory or variables. As Schedler [45] posited that sustaining democracy is often considered as a difficult task as establishing it. Initial discourse on what constitute consolidation focused on free and fair elections, successful installation of democratic government, and the sustainability and durability of the democratic regimes to resist undemocratic shocks [1, 24]. These discussions resulted in minimalist and maximalist conceptualizations of democracy. The minimalist views were exemplified in Huntington's two-turnover-test of political transition and Dahl's [21] concept of polyarchy - where elections were prioritized over other dimensions of democracy. Dahl for instance, privileged such tenets like active political participation, equal voting rights, citizens' understanding of political processes, and the inclusion of the adult citizens in the decision-making process.

However, Schedler [45] contends that democratic consolidation was originally used to describe the challenge of making

new democracies secure, of extending their life expectancy beyond the short term, of making them immune against the threat of authoritarian regression, of building dams against eventual ‘reverse waves’. The original mission that was purported to make democracy the ‘only game in town’ added laundry list of conditions for democratic consolidation beyond recognition. Thus, democratic consolidation has been stretched to encompass multiplicity of items like economic stabilization, the decentralization of state power, judicial reform, introduction of mechanisms for direct democracy, party building, the organization of functional interests, the stabilization of electoral rules, poverty alleviation, civilian supremacy over the military, diffusion of democratic values, popular legitimacy, and the elimination of authoritarian enclaves [45, 46]. Consequently, democratic consolidation became broad and suffered from identity crisis [45].

Linz and Stepan [37] provide a comprehensive meaning of a consolidated democracy as the ‘only game in town’ behaviorally, attitudinally, and constitutionally. Behaviorally, democracy is consolidated when political actors do not spend resources to achieve their political goals by creating undemocratic regimes. They argue further that, attitudinally, a consolidated democracy is the one in which a strong majority of public opinion, even in the midst of major economic problems and deep dissatisfaction with incumbents, holds the belief that democratic procedures and institutions are the most appropriate way to govern, and that political change must emerge from within the parameters of democratically provided space. Constitutionally, a consolidated democracy occurs when the actions of state and non-state actors are subject to specific laws, and conflict resolution occurs within procedures and institutions sanctioned by the new democratic order. These elements are important because it is only under these parameters that a transition to a civilian rule and democracy can be wholly consolidated [1].

Conversely, Linz and Stepan further delineated what they termed ‘arenas of consolidation’ – which must be present for a democratic consolidation equation to be balanced. These include; a free and lively civil society, a relatively autonomous political society, rule of law to ensure legal guarantee for citizens’ freedom and associational life, a stable bureaucracy that is usable by a democratic government, and an institutionalized economic society [37]. Certainly, these five arenas take us beyond minimalist conception of democratic consolidation, but judging it from Ghanaian perspective, it could be argued that Ghana has passed the test; having instituted a stable political governance predicated on guaranteed political rights, a vibrant civil society sector, and the media pluralism [1, 8]. However, what appears to have contradicted Ghana’s current status is what Linz and Stepan termed an ‘institutionalized economic society’ and an ‘autonomous political society’. By ‘economic society’, they refer to ‘a set of socio-politically crafted norms, institutions and regulations that mediate the state and market [37]. Thus, ‘public con-

testation concerning governmental priorities and policies’ for the provision of public goods and ‘safety nets for its citizens hurt by major market failures, and alleviation of gross inequality’, are among the many reasons why state interventionism in free market economy is profound for sustained democracy. The key question is how is Ghana faring with regards to an ‘institutionalized economic society’?

Indeed, the arena of an ‘economic society’ as an element of democratic consolidation remains a hotly contested issue among democratic theorists. The underlying assumption is that democratic consolidation and sustainability require policy-making that benefits majority of the citizens, especially those who are relatively poor. This challenges the ‘procedural notions of democracy which focus on decision-making processes where policy outcomes are irrelevant and resonates with substantive notion where policy content is critical [1]. The assumption further wades into a more contested intrinsic-instrumental conundrum – where democracy is adjudged intrinsically as an end in itself or instrumentally as a means to alleviation of poverty and the improvement of living standards [16]. However, Bratton and Matters assert that practical resolution of intrinsic-instrumental conundrum has direct impact on regime consolidation. They argue that intrinsic support for democracy has the ‘potential to sustain a fragile political regime even in the face of economic downturn. And instrumental view - where citizens may lend support for a democracy due to the state’s capacity to deliver economic goods or alleviate poverty and material inequalities even if political liberties will be sacrificed [16, 47]. At this moment, while some theorists point to the effectiveness of government at the delivery of economic goods as the foundation for democratic consolidation, others view the ability of citizens to exercise basic political rights as the lifeblood of any consolidated democracy.

Based on these controversies, O’donnell, [41] asserts that it is, however, impossible to state when a democracy has become consolidated. Nevertheless, the paper argues that although political governance is a necessary crucible for sustaining economic governance, disregarding the latter has negative consequences for democratic consolidation and maturity. In this paper, I conceptualized democratic consolidation as where guaranteed maximum political rights and improved socioeconomic conditions of majority of citizens are in equilibrium. It is acknowledged that established and agreed political arrangements and institutions that guarantee political rights and participations is the only legitimate means for political contest and a necessity for democratic consolidation, however, I contend that such contestations should transcend into an improved socioeconomic welfare of majority of citizens. This is important because political parties and democracy exist to improve social welfare and relegating this means ‘democratic gains may turn out to be a rather hollow triumph’ [1, 25].

## 2.2. Political Parties and Democratic Consolidation

There is a wide-range democracy-building functions that parties are thought to perform. Diamond and Gunther [25] catalogued seven key functions - forming and sustaining government, social integration, electoral mobilization, interest aggregation, issue structuring, candidate nomination, and societal representation. Von Beyme identifies agenda setting – ideology and programme, interest articulation and aggregation, mobilization and socialization, elite recruitment and government formation [51]. By policy formulation and issue structuring, political parties structure the choices and alternatives of electorate along different issue dimensions; by societal representation and interest aggregation, parties are supposed to represent the diverse interests of the people [6,47]. This takes place in the legislative space and they do this by ensuring that needs and aspirations are clearly articulated and factored into the policy stream of the government. Furthermore, parties play the function of electoral mobilization and social integration. Thus, they motivate electorate to support their candidates and policies as well as facilitate their active participation in the political process. Also, candidate nomination and forming the government or opposition are crucial for parties to perform. Thus, parties recruit candidates to win and form the government of the day. However, where they are not in government, they keep the ruling government on track by acting as opposition [35, 39, 44].

## 2.3. African Parties in Practice and Democratic Consolidation

There is a clear consensus in extant literature that African parties are not agents of democratic consolidation [17, 23, 44, 49]. What is clear is that the actions of African parties violate the ideal of effective parties where parties are supposed to have a strong central organization, be internally democratic, a well-defined membership base and cooperative relations with civil society organizations, have clear ideologies, and transparent and adequate funding stream [17]. Parties in Africa are thought to have a weak link in a laundry list of items that constitute democratic consolidation, and that they appear to have helped thwarted the efforts toward democratic maturity [44]. Conversely, De Walle & Butler [23] assert that parties in Africa are weak in terms of organizational structure, low level of institutionalization, and weak links to the society whose interests they are supposed to represent and aggregate.

Furthermore, the argument that African-oriented parties perform the function of interest aggregation cannot be substantiated. For instance, De Walle and Butler [23] contend that parties only serve a representative role in the context of clientelistic and patrimonial political culture. Chabal and Daloz [18] shared similar sentiment and argue that people do not vote because they support the ideas, even less read the programmes, of a particular party, but because they must placate

the demands of their existing putative patron. According to Van de Walle [50], parties are used as a veneer reinforced by clientelism and patronage politics to feed the parochial interest of the political elite – where material gains are confined to the elites whose appeal are undergirds by shared ethnicity.

Another area of contention in the literature of party politics in Africa stresses the lack of ideological competition and the aggregation of societal interests. As Randall and Svåsand [44] point out, parties care little about presenting clearly distinguishable policy platforms, and that if, they do, the platform has little relevance to what the party does once in office. This assertion is a clear testament that it is still not clear what parties in Africa actually do when they form government. At best, campaign platforms are inundated by personality issues and claims and counter-claims as to the merits of policy positions – which are distant from the interest aggregation [44].

Young [53] shared the same sentiment and adds that electoral discourse is limited to vague slogans of change and opposition to the incumbent. Thus, change is one of the most common promises and in many cases the only one – depicting their lust for power [6]. Even where the parties find themselves in opposition, they still do not offer policy alternatives [13, 26]. In some cases, the opposition parties are typically small and highly fragmented. Parties have also proven to be very weak [42] when it comes to reaching out to people in the rural areas where majority of the population are concentrated.

## 3. Methodology

The study adopted a mixed methods approach which allowed the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data to answer the research questions. In the light of that descriptive statistics design was employed which was supplemented by in-depth interviews. The qualitative data was collected from the leaders of political parties (NDC and NPP), officials from the civil society, academia, and the development practitioners. The descriptive statistics on the other hand allowed the researcher to survey the views of Ghanaians to make inferences of the sample that is representative of the population. The study is a cross-sectional study based on a national sample survey. The district offices of the National Commission on Civic Education (NCCE) in ten (10) regions out of the sixteen administrative regions of Ghana were contracted to collect the survey data on the role of political parties, while the researcher conducted the in-depth interviews. A sample size of 3,200 was decided upon for the survey to produce the quantitative data and a confidence level of 95% and a confidence interval of two (2). Primary data collection involved questionnaire administration on 3,200 voters from the ten (10) out of sixteen (16) regions in Ghana. A multi-stage cluster sampling techniques was used. The first stage involves a combination of probability and non-probability sampling techniques to select the regions. First, purposive sampling technique was used to select the national capitals of the regions. Second, the cluster sampling was used to group the 16 regions into four (4) clusters of four



regions each. In all, ten (10) regions were purposively selected and used for the analysis. The regions selected represented the original regions before 6 new regions were created in 2019. The regional capitals of the original ten regions were cosmopolitan in nature and captures the views of citizens in the newly created regions. Moreso, a constituency in each regional capital of all the 10 regions was purposively selected because it is the microcosm of the region and form part of urban population of the sample. Additional two constituencies outside the regional capital were selected using stratified (urban and rural) sampling technique. In all 33 out of 275

constituencies were selected. In each of the selected constituency, an equal number of respondents was selected from rural and urban areas in proportion to regional votes cast in 2020 presidential election. In terms of the distribution of the survey questionnaires, a total of 3,200 were allocated based on the region's proportionate share of the national results of the total votes cast in the 2020 general elections. In view of this, Ashanti region had the highest percentage (22%) while Upper West had the lowest percentage (3%). In all, 3,160 questionnaires were returned and analyzed. This represents 98.8% response rate (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Sample Distribution of Respondents.

Regions	Total No. of Constituencies	Sample Allocation	Sample surveyed	Response Rate
Ashanti	47	704	696	98.8
Brong	29	288	288	100
Central	23	288	280	97.2
Eastern	33	320	316	98.8
Gt. Accra	34	416	408	98
Northern	31	352	346	98
Upper East	15	160	160	100
Upper West	11	96	96	100
Volta	26	256	252	98.4
Western	26	320	318	99
Total	275	3,200	3,160	98.8

Source: Survey Data, 2021

All Ghanaians who voted during 2020 general elections had an equal chance of being selected as a respondent for the study. The household is the primary sampling unit for this survey and respondents interviewed were individuals who voted during 2020 election. The Household Selection Kish Grid was used to select households based on a specific interval of three and five for rural and urban areas respectively. The respondent Kish grid was further used to select one respondent from each household where there were more than qualified respondents. To ensure gender balance, the research assistants were tasked to repeat the process until they have equal number of females and males of 1,580 respondents. The study also randomly selected equal number of 1,580 respondents from rural and urban settings of the constituencies.

On the other hand, the adoption of qualitative approach to data collection allowed the researcher to obtain reliable information with regards to values, opinions, behaviors, and social contexts of a particular population [20]. In addition, it also empowered the participants to share their views based on their knowledge and experience as well as affording the re-

searcher the opportunity to probe further into issues that were not clear and required further questioning [20]. In-depth interviews and documentary analysis were the key primary data collection tools. Purposive sampling technique was used to select key informants for the qualitative study. The sample size of 20 provided a strong basis for deeper qualitative analysis because the point of data saturation was reached on the 19<sup>th</sup> interview. Guest et al. [28] have argued that the point of data saturation can be reached within the first 12 interviews. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed.

#### *Data Analysis*

The quantitative data was analysed with the use of logistics regression since the dependent variable - performance of political parties (YES/NO) responses is binary. Thus, the performance of political parties was measured by a statement "You always vote for a political party based on its voter mobilization effort, public education, government performance and provision of alternative government among others. On the other hand, thematic data analysis approach was employed to analyse the qualitative data. According to Miles and Huber-

mans [40], this approach is used when common themes are identified and verified by reflecting on the data and the field notes. Specifically, the thematic analysis follows the seven steps suggested by Clarke and Braum [19]: transcription, reading and familiarization, coding, producing themes, re-viewing themes, defining and naming themes and completing the analysis.

## 4. Findings of the Study

The discussion of findings of the study is divided into two main parts: the descriptive statistics of the nationwide survey and the key informant interviews.

### 4.1. Descriptive Statistics: Performance of Political Parties

A set of substantive questions measured respondents' opinions regarding how effective political parties have performed their traditional functions as identified in the literature. On the scale of 1 (least effective) to 5 (most effective), respondents were asked to rate each of the factors. Table 2 below shows the summary of the results. The findings show that majority of the respondents believe political parties under the Forth Republic of Ghana are effective to the extent that they are proactive in mobilizing massive political support during elections (30.34%).

**Table 2.** The best performed functions of political parties.

Factors	Frequency	Percentage
Voter mobilization	905	30.34
Public education	574	19.24
Form government	457	15.32
Policy formulation and issue structuring	301	10.09
Government performance	298	9.99
Interest aggregation	245	8.21
Provide alternative government	203	6.81
Total	2,983	100

Source: Survey Data, 2021

The logistic regression results of functions performed by political parties explain the respondents' voting behavior. It shows that there are two significant determinants that explain their voting behavior. They mobilize support for elections and public education which are among the best performed functions of political parties considered by the respondents, (see

Table 3). These two functions, when they are well performed, are more likely (odds ratios > 1) to affect the respondents' voting behavior. They will be an increase of about 9% of the odds of voting for the same party. Moreover, Ghanaians in the urban area, and from Ashanti are more likely to vote for the same party.

**Table 3.** Logistic regression results.

Dependent variable: Always vote for the same party (Yes=1, No=0)

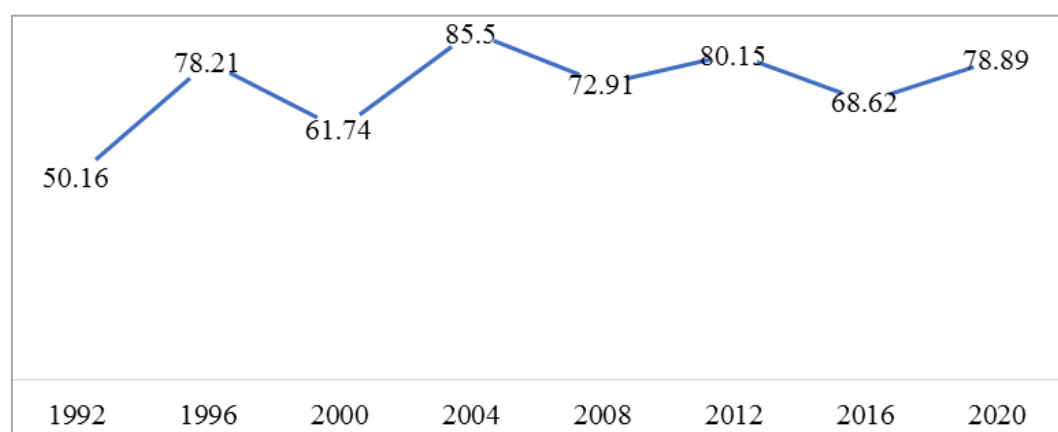
	Variables	Category	OR	Std. Err	p-value
1	Gender	Male	0.890	0.068	0.123
2	Age (Years)	Old (>40)	0.979	0.081	0.802
3	Marital status	Married	0.935	0.078	0.422
4	Level of education	Post-secondary	0.768***	0.061	0.001
5	Employment status	Employed	1.051	0.097	0.590
6	Location	Urban	1.181**	0.089	0.028

	Variables	Category	OR	Std. Err	p-value
7	Religious group	Christian	0.856*	0.078	0.087
8	Ethnicity	Ashanti	1.382***	0.130	0.001
Independent variables (functions performed)					
9	Mobilize support for elections		1.101***	0.040	0.008
10	Provide alternative government		0.987	0.037	0.732
11	Provide leadership		1.042	0.040	0.292
12	Provide policy alternatives		1.009	0.039	0.817
13	Public education		1.090**	0.037	0.010
14	Shape the political will of the people		0.988	0.035	0.729
15	Form government		1.001	0.034	0.985

N = 3,038; Pseudo R<sup>2</sup> = 0.0156; Significance level: \* p<0.1; \*\* p<0.05; \*\*\* p<0.01

After the ban was lifted on political activities, there has been fierce competition between the NDC and NPP over the control of voters in Ghana's Fourth Republic. At urban centers, the two parties take advantage of the media pluralism and sell their policies and programmes to the people. However, strategies such as house-to-house campaigns are key instruments for the mobilization of votes at the rural areas and we usually accompany these with gifts like money, rice, salts, soap and other consumables<sup>i</sup>. Local politicians also take advantage of societal gatherings like funerals, religious programmes, weddings and naming ceremonies, festivals, and others to launch support for their respective parties<sup>ii</sup>. It emerged that political parties, especially, constituency executives and Members of

Parliament offer support such as payment of hospital bills, schools fees, provide farms implements to farmers, organize football matches for the youth and many more just to foster goodwill and ensure closeness of their parties to the people. Though these approaches could be successful in voter mobilization, it raises questions of vote-buying, clientelistic and patrimonialistic type of politics in Ghana, which has the potential to undermine efforts at democratic consolidation. The net effect is that people would become mere consumers of politics rather than being actors in the democratization process. Nevertheless, voter mobilization has been successful as reflected in Electoral Commission's data (figure 1) on national elections.



Source: Electoral Commission of Ghana

**Figure 1.** Voter turn-out (%) in Ghana since 1992.

The figure 1 shows that after the 1992 elections, voter turnout in Ghanaian elections exceeds 60% international standards. Again, the survey results reveal parties in Ghana

fulfil the function of public education (19.24) and form the government (15.32). Though there is a body like the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) mandated by the

1992 Constitution of Ghana to carry out voter education, parties organize mammoth rallies, television and radio programs to sensitize the public on party activities<sup>3</sup>. However, interview with a lecturer at the Political Science Department of the University of Ghana reveals otherwise that:

*Yes, apart from this mobilization of people, they don't often educate the people. They wait till election time, as soon as the election is over, we don't see them again. I don't know whether it is because our laws do not permit campaigning during inter-election periods. We don't see that. They only come out to issue statements. These are piecemeal and adhoc. They don't do enough education and for me this is not good for our democracy.*

However, because the two major political parties are well organized and embark on voter education, their presence is well felt at the rural areas. They have a network of party branches as required by the Constitution. The offices of the parties are decorated with respective party colours and symbols – which are found everywhere including major roads in towns and villages. The two political parties have nationwide presence and have parliamentary candidates at the constituency levels. They also put-up presidential candidates to form the government. Nevertheless, in some cases the selection processes are not transparent raising critical questions about intra-party democracy. The imposition of parliamentary and presidential candidates is predominant. Thus, there are many instances where national leadership had to intervene by imposing a preferred candidate who are mostly wealthy individuals. For example, the late Former president Rawlings handpicked the late president Evans Atta Mills for 2000 elections<sup>4</sup>. This led to mistrust and key members broke away from the party. The imposition of parliamentary candidates is rampant and deny the electorate of their obvious choice. This suggests that although parties in Ghana fulfils the function of candidate nomination and forming the government, they do not always present candidates who are capable, but rather those who are rich enough to be able to support the party financially. It is, however, not surprising that respondents expressed the view that parties tend to perform poorly with regards to policy formulation (10%), performance of the government (10%), interest aggregation (8%), and ability to offer alternative government (6.8%). In Ghana, although political parties appeal to certain groups – ethnic, regional and religious enclaves, they do that to maximize votes and this does not mean that they represent these groups in terms of acting for them or aggregate their interests<sup>5</sup>.

#### Are Parties Undermining Efforts Aimed at Democratic Consolidation?

Extant literature asserts that African parties are not agents of democratic consolidation and Ghanaian political parties are not exempted. This section examines what Ghanaian parties do in practice that amount to promoting or undermining efforts at democratic consolidation. Analysts contend that parties in Africa lack ideological competition. However, in Ghana, while the NDC views themselves as a socialist party (cen-

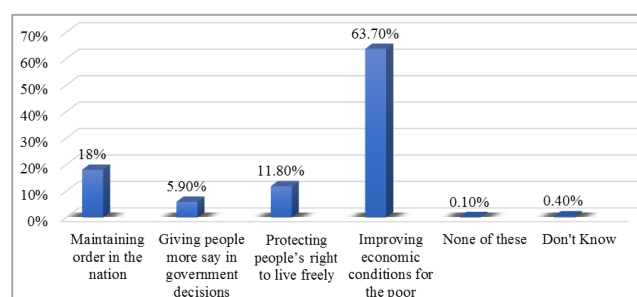
ter-left), NPP has a more capitalist orientation (center-right). Within the NPP, the interview partners reveal that:

*The party believes in liberal democracy, we support the private sector growth and allow individuals to own their property – property owning orientation. We believe in rule of law, good governance and freedom of every individual.*

Within the NDC, the interview partners claim:

*We are the social democrats. We exist for the poor, the vulnerable, and disadvantaged people. We believe in distributive justice. We seek to blend the market efficiency and private initiative with intervention of the state to protect the poor and marginalized groups in the society.*

While the NPP is known by phrases such as 'golden age of business' and 'Ghana beyond aid', the NDC on the other hand, is known by 'better Ghana' and 'defending the poor'. Although political parties in Ghana seem to be ideologically different, what is not clear is how these beliefs are articulated in practice. Naturally, a center right party as NPP claims should not be concerned about social programmes. Yet, the social policies – National Health Insurance Scheme, School Feeding programme, Capitation Grant, and the recent Free Senior High School<sup>6</sup> as implemented by the NPP government – are more tailored to social democracy than to radical market liberalism. This resonates with the notion that there is consistent rise in left-wing policies in party manifestoes [35]. However, NDC is known to have implemented neoliberal economic policies<sup>7</sup> such as structural adjustments programmes that made Ghana the 'pampered child' of the international Monetary Fund. Though the position of the NDC and NPP in terms of ideology is congruent in practice, the 'rough' ideological orientation tells a bit of what the parties claim to stand for. Beyond that, it is argued that political parties must be underpinned by clear ideological foundation which informs the quality of peoples' life in many facets. The 2008/2009 Afrobarometer report (Figure 2) on national development priorities in Ghana showed that majority of respondents prioritized poverty reduction and economic inclusion of people (63.7%) compared to other issues. This shows that poverty and socio-economic inequalities are widely shared social problems among Ghanaians.



Source: Afrobarometer Survey Round 4, 2008/2009.

**Figure 2.** Ranking of Government Priorities.



Some of the interview partners expressed the view that although issues like provision of infrastructure, better health delivery, quality education, less corruption, jobs, and improved living conditions for all often dominate campaign messages, parties fail to fulfil their terms of the social contract. Official from the Civil Society disclosed:

*You see, governance is a social contract. Parties campaign for votes so that they can provide jobs and improved the living conditions of the people. But they fail to do that after they win elections. Today, majority of Ghanaians, especially the youth have no jobs. Majority are poor, and inequality is increasing. Few politicians are benefiting from national resources.*

Another informant explained that:

*Politicians pay lip service. They will promise the people, but they forget when they win elections and form the government. That is why people keep changing them. But both the NDC and NPP are the same. We need a new party. The old ones have failed Ghanaians (Interview with Development Practitioner).*

Conversely, in 2017, the Afrobarometer report in Ghana (Round 7) shows that majority of Ghanaians (59%) rated their personal living conditions as very bad. Ghanaian party politics is moving from the conventional 'ethnic census' to programmatic or instrumentalist approach to politics. Data from Afrobarometer shows that about two-thirds of Ghanaians feel close to the NDC and the NPP<sup>8</sup>, yet, this commitment seem not to translate into improved social welfare. This implies that Ghana's effort at democracy consolidation may be thwarted because poverty and deprivation tend to disempower people to actively engage state institutions in the democratization process.

## 4.2. Policy Discontinuity

The Directive Principle of State Policy contained in the Chapter 6 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana is supposed to guide state institutions and political parties to implement policy decisions in order to create free and just society. Article 35(2) states 'as far as practicable, a government shall continue and execute projects and programmes commenced by the previous government'. However, it appears governments and political parties tend to disregard the Constitutional requirement of policy continuity. For political gain, each party comes up with its own development agenda and such plans are usually abandoned when there is a change of government. Interview with the development expert reveal that it was the 10-year Development Plan (1920-1930) implemented by the Sir Gordon Guggisberg (former British Governor of Gold Coast) in 1916 that led to the establishment of Korle-Bu teaching Hospital, Takoradi Harbour, and some defunct railway lines<sup>9</sup>. He indicates that the 7-year Development Plan by Kwame Nkrumah (first president of Ghana) in 1964 produced Akomsom Dam, Tema Harbour, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Adomi Bridge, and other projects.

However, the subsequent governments after Nkrumah have failed at drawing and executing a comprehensive plan for the development of the nation, and for those did, execution has proved futile or abandoned after change of government<sup>10</sup>. Thus, the rural development plan (1971-1972), Ghana Vision 2020, Ghana poverty reduction scheme (GPRS 1 & 2), and Ghana shared growth and development agenda (GSGD I&I). Although some of these policies have achieved some level of success, they were rather short-lived due to poor execution and change of government<sup>11</sup>.

Other interview partners share the same sentiments:

*The 1992 Constitution is clear that government must be able to continue from where previous government left. If you go around the country, you will see government projects meant to improve peoples' lives lying idle and becoming white elephants because the current government does not want to give credit to the past administration. Recently, I traveled to Volta region and had to cover myself because of dust. The road has been abandoned by the current government (Lecturer, Political Science Department, University of Ghana).*

Another informant lamented:

*Political parties tend to behave differently when they in government. Both the NDC and NPP are guilty. The affordable housing project has been abandoned. The housing projects in all the district capitals have been abandoned. The STX housing project is ditched. Currently, most of the community schools built by previous government have been abandoned and I am very certain that most the ongoing road construction project by the Akuffo Addo's government too will be abandoned if there is a change in government after the 2024 general elections (interview with an official from Civil Society).*

The Development Expert collaborates that:

*Parties don't continue from where previous government left off. It is a big problem and it is affecting our development big time. If you look at the manifestoes that political parties bring to action, you will realize that they are thought through properly. However, when they win election and form the government, implementation becomes a problem. Political parties lack research bodies that can examine the country's challenges and design suitable policies.*

The abandoned and unused projects cost the Ghanaian taxpayer huge amount of dollars. For instance, the world Bank reports that the cost of abandoned projects is estimated at US\$25 million annually<sup>12</sup>. The report by the Auditor General also shows that abandoned and unused projects of at least forty 40 Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies (MMDAs) cost the state over Thirty (30) million Ghana cedis in 2017<sup>13</sup>. Furthermore, the education sector, especially the secondary education is being tossed 'back and forth' by both the NDC and the NPP for the past 16 years. Thus, the 3-year system was altered to 4-year system by former president Kufour's administration under the NPP in 2003 and was again reversed to 3 years by the NDC government after 2008 elec-

tions<sup>14</sup>. However, we have the double track system being introduced by the current government after the 2016 elections. Another area where parties tend to undermine Ghana's fledgling democratic gains is the election year. An interview partner explained that:

*They need power by hook or crook. So, they don't care if they have to destroy the economy. They waste resources and engage in frivolous expenditure. The measures that they take when they are in office are very different when they are getting to election. If you look at what we call 'the political business cycle', where they misuse scarce national resources to win power, my view is that, if we don't take care we won't be able to build any economy because there is always the effort to destroy when we are getting to elections. In 2008 elections, the NPP lost power because Kufuor was not prepared to destroy the economy. Party people will always tell you to destroy the economy and let us have power, and we will rebuild It (Lecturer, University of Ghana).*

### 4.3. Activities of Political Vigilantism

The patron-client relationships in Ghanaian party politics have taken a new dimension in the Forth Republic, where political parties rely on vigilante or sectarian groups to win elections. Parties engage the services of these groups to help in campaign activities and secure the ballot boxes on election day on condition that they would be rewarded if the party wins power. Although the Vigilantism and Related Offences Act was passed in 2019, some interview partners confirmed that the groups are still in operation and expressed the view that the activities of these informal groups do not only tend to threaten Ghana's peace and security, they also undermine efforts aimed at democratic consolidation. The following extract reveals activities of these groups:

*Both the NDC and NPP still use vigilante groups. After elections, these groups go on rampages vandalizing and seizing public offices perceived to be occupied by the officials of previous government as a sign of post-election victory. Those who refuse to exit their offices are locked up (Interview with Development Practitioner).*

Another interview partner collaborates that:

*The menace of political vigilantisms is still a threat to our democracy. When NDC won power in 2008, vigilante groups went and seized locked up public offices, seized toll boots, toilets, and vandalized public properties. In 2016, when NPP won power, the same thing happened. Recently, NPP vigilante groups stormed the court and freed their colleagues who were being prosecuted for various offences. You saw the violence that characterized the Ayawaso by-election some time ago. Looking at how crucial the 2024 election is going to be I am not sure that we can go through the elections peacefully if these groups are not completely disbanded (Interview with an official from the Civil Society).*

Indeed, some commentators posit that the activities of vigilante groups have become a 'time bomb' that is waiting to explode. In Ayawaso by-election incidence which occurred on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2019, there was masked security operatives at polling stations, and believed to be affiliated to the ruling NPP government – engaged in intimidation and violent incident, including shooting incident<sup>15</sup>. In some instances, the national police officials who were deployed on the by-election day were assaulted by the masked security personnel<sup>16</sup>. The violent attracted condemnation by domestic and international election observers to the extent that the President introduced a legislation to Parliament which was passed into law in 2019. The 2019 Vigilante and Related Offences Act is meant to proscribe the activities of vigilante groups. However, it is widely reported that the groups are still operating under-cover. Besides, it must be noted that because of unemployment the youth are usually lured by politicians to take the law into their own hands and display violent brute-force to protect the interest of political parties. The clientelism and neopatrimonialism in Ghana's party democracy have the tendency to reverse the country's democratic gains.

## 5. Discussion of Results

Extant literature contends that African parties are not agents of democracy [17, 44]. This paper provides empirical evidence by drawing insights from the Ghanaian party politics. Based on Diamond and Gunther's [25] framework, the paper found evidence that parties in Ghana are active in voter mobilization, nominate candidates and form the government. Contrary to the view that African parties are 'extremely weak' in reaching out to the rural population [42], the NDC and NPP in Ghana adapt their mobilization strategies to the remotest villages. They have offices at the national, regional and district levels, and their party symbols inundated major streets in towns and villages. About two-thirds of Ghanaians feel close to NDC and the NPP [3]. Nevertheless, parties do not aggregate group interest, but rather involve in clientelistic relations. Ghanaian parties have some level of ideological foundation which attempt to give voters some orientation, but the ideologies are not informed by the quality of peoples' life. Thus, Ghanaians feel their conditions are not improved and they are worse than neighbouring countries. Poverty and gross socioeconomic inequalities still persist especially at the rural areas. This is likely to thwart any effort aimed at democratic consolidation because majority of the people, particularly the poor may be disempowered - thereby depriving their active involvement which is key to democratic consolidation [43]. More so, in many instances, party leadership intervenes in the selection and parliamentary and presidential candidates, and most of whom are not the obvious choice of the people. Although Ghana's party democracy guarantees active voting rights or intrinsic approach to politics, it has fallen short of instrumentalist approach [16] as it fails to 'institutionalized economic society' as developed by Linz & Stepan [37]. Thus,

participation in democratization process shows serious deficits as positions in parties is limited to the highest bidder. What political parties do amounts to organizing and legitimizing the rotation of elites in state positions [43]. Access to positions is restricted to few wealthy individuals who can finance the party, and they legitimize it through ethnic, regional, and other sectional orientations.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, it has been established in the study that there is no concrete development plan in Ghana, parties form the government with ill-conceived policies and programmes. One area that has the potential to reverse democratic gains is policy discontinuity and the desire to abandon projects started by the previous administration. Policy discontinuity is a predominant phenomenon in African politics [11]. The interview partners revealed that both the NDC and NPP are culpable despite the fact that the Directive Principle of State Policy contained in the 1992 Constitution mandates policy continuity by successive governments. The paper found that projects started by the previous governments are discontinued when there is a change of government. These attitudes by governments and their parties can only undermine democracy rather than promote it. The emergence of the phenomenon of political vigilantism in Ghanaian body politics is yet another issue that threaten the sustainability of Ghana's democracy. Thus, because these informal groups have the backing of politicians and their respective parties, they are emboldened to forcibly evict and eject state officials from their apartments, physically assault former appointees, and engage in other human rights abuses with impunity. Usually, their illegal activities fill Ghana's body politics with the tension and rancor, especially within the first few months of change of government. This boils down to critical issues of unemployment, poverty, and inequalities that exist in the country. Perhaps, if they have jobs and are actively working, politicians will not get any reason to recruit and use them as political tool to win power. Although Ghana has made strides in its electoral politics, the inability to improve the socioeconomic welfare of the people and reduce inequality has the potential to undermine democratic consolidation process. It is therefore recommended that both the intrinsic and instrumentalist approaches to politics are critical for democratic consolidation and maturity in Ghana.

## Abbreviations

NDC	National Democratic Congress
NPP	New Patriotic Party
NCCE	National Commission on Civic Education
MMDAs	Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies

## Funding

The author received no financial support for the research/or the publication of this article.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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i Both the NDC and NPP Interviewees revealed house-to-house campaigns and gifts as strategies for voter mobilization in at the rural areas.

ii Interview with NDC General Secretary and confirmed by NPP party officials.

3 Officials from both the NDC and the NPP confirm that they complement the effort of the NCCE in carrying voter education.

4 Interview with a lecturer at Political Science Department, University of Ghana.

5 Interview with an official of civil society organization.

6 Officials from the Civil Society

7 Arthur, P. (2002). Ghana: industrial development in the post-structural adjustment program (SAP) period. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies/Revue canadienne d'études du développement*, 23(4), 717-742.

8 The question asked in the Afrobarometer survey: 'Do you feel close to one of the political parties in your country?' In 2005, only a minority of 33.7% of the respondents were not feeling close to one of the parties. 43.2% were close to the NPP, 20.5% to the NDC, 1.5% to the CPP, 0.9% to the PNC, and 0.3% to the NRP.

9 Interview with Development Expert at the Department of Development Studies, University of Ghana.

10 Ibid

11 Ibid

12 World Bank Spatial Infrastructure Data on Ghana

13 Auditor General's Report on the Utilization of the District Assemblies' Common Fund.

14 Interview with an official of civil society.

15 Albert Arhin, National Coordinator, the report by Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO), 1st February 2019.

16 Report by CODEO. The report can be retrieved from this link: <https://bestnewsgh.com/details-full-report-by-codeo-on-ayawaso-west-wuogon-by-election/>