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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE PROS AND CONS OF THE ELECTORAL PROCESSES ENCOMPASSING DEMOCRACY IN GHANA

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ABSTRACT

The birth of 1992 democracy in Ghana has called for a multi-party participation in Ghana's electoral system. This also marks the emergence of the fourth republic, the longest republic after the attainment of independence in 1957. To have a successful administration of elections in Ghana, there are some key processes followed by the Electoral commission in the administration of the free, fair and transparent elections. This study seeks to look at Ghana's multi party electoral processes and electoral challenges, with regards to past seven general elections held under the fourth republic. The study employed quantitative approach with Primary data from political party activists, civil society organizations, EC officials and the citizenry totaling (45) respondents, secondary data is achieved from published books and journals of related manuscripts.

Key words: Pros, Cons, Electoral, Election, Republic, Vigilante, Processes, Democracy, Ghana

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INTRODUCTION

Elections are the core feature of democracy worldwide. As quoted by international IDEA in 2017, a total of 132 presidential elections were held in 2016. In order to meet the regional and the global standards, electoral processes must have the accepted attributes such as credibility, free, fair and transparency projecting a clear picture of democratic dispensation. In Africa today, elections are more of an anti-corruption strategy used by citizens over the years to get rid of suspected corrupt governments and its officials. Ghana conducts its elections every four years to elect its president and parliamentarians. Ghana's election over the years were applauded by the international communities and the international observer groups due to its free, fair and transparency. For the achievement and the sustainability of the free, fair and transparent periodic election, a legally constituted body called the electoral commission is charged to conduct this periodic election. According to (Gutman, 2000) An election is the process by which citizens elect the people to run government and political offices at all levels in a democratic government, elected officials are chosen by the people and serve for a specific time called a term of office. Depending on the constitution, an official may run for reelection once the term is over (Christopher 1996). Election has been the usual mechanism by which modern representative democracy has operated since the 17th century (Encyclopedia Britannica 2009).

Scholars such as Sandbrook (1998; 2000), Diamond, Linz and Lipset (1989) and Sorensen (1993) have placed elections as the pivot around which democracy revolves. For Sandbrook (1998; 2000) Diamond, Linz and Lipset (1989) and Sorensen (1993), liberal democracy can be identified as a political system that allows regular and free elections by virtually all adult citizens who have the right to vote and also guarantees a range of political and civil rights. The key properties or elements of liberal democracy, their contentions; political participation of the citizens, competition among political parties, and the granting of civil and political liberties; which include freedoms of expression, association and the press, necessary to promote the integrity of political competition and participation. According to Clark *et al.* (2007) democratic elections are not merely symbolic, but they are also competitive, periodic, inclusive elections in which the chief decision makers in a government are selected by the citizens who enjoy broad freedom to criticize government, to publish their criticism and to present alternatives for a way forward. First, opposition must enjoy the freedom of speech, assembly and movement needed to voice their criticism of the government openly and to bring alternative policies and candidates to the voters. According to a former United Nations Secretary- General, Kofi Annan (Global Commission 2012) since 2000, all but 11 countries in the world have had national elections. These elections, he added, although "have never been more universal and important, their benefits are by no means assured". Thus, if we count democracies very conservatively in this way, electoral democracy is now the predominant form of government in the world (Diamond, 1999; Freedom House, 2006). Princeton (2005) proudly opines that "whatever else is essential to make democracy effective and sustainable,

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elections are the lifeblood of the system, the constant affirmation of legitimacy for its leaders and the bond that links the leaders with the people”.

Composition and functions of the electoral commission: In accordance with article 43 clause 1 of the 1992 Constitution, the electoral commission shall consist of;

- A Chairman
- Two deputy Chairmen
- Four other members

The electoral commission as established by law is charged with the following responsibilities:

- To compile the register of voters and revise it at such periods as it may be determined by law
- To demarcate the electoral boundaries for both national and local government elections
- To conduct and supervise all public elections and referenda
- To educate the people on the electoral process and its purpose
- To undertake programs for the expansion of the registration of voters
- To perform such other functions as may be prescribed by law.

In addition to the above mentioned constitutional responsibilities by the electoral commission, there are other steps taken by the commission to ensure a level playing ground for all citizens and the contesters and also to secure a successful administration of elections including;

- An effective electoral framework including an independent electoral administration
- A comprehensive plan of administration and procedural matters.

Ghana's elections and processes are guided by number of domestic laws such as

- 4th Republic Constitution of Ghana 1992
- Representation of the People Act 1992
- Presidential elections Act 1992
- Electoral Commission Act 1993
- Political Parties Act 2000
- Political Parties Code of Conduct 2012
- Public elections Act C1 75 (2012)
- Public Elections (Registration of voters) Regulation 2012

Features of Ghana's electoral system

- Universal adult suffrage
- Voluntary participation in registration and voting
- Use of identity Card issued by EC to establish identification for the avoidance of impersonation
- Periodic registration of qualified voters
- Presidential and parliamentary elections held in the same day
- Where you register is where you vote
- No minimum voter turnout required at public elections

- Run-off, if no winner emerges in the first round of a presidential election

Elections are the central institution of democratic representative governments. This is because, in a democracy, the authority of the government derives solely from the consent of the governed. The principal mechanism for translating that consent into governmental authority is the holding of free, fair and transparent elections.

Ghana electoral process: Electoral process by definition is a seamless ceremony covering period that is much longer than a day or two. It starts from the consideration of whether the existing demarcation of constituencies is fair on population founds through registration of new voters or ensuring that the current voter's register is accurate to the conduct of the election campaigns, casting and counting of votes and the declaration of results (Aye 1996), Ghana's electoral process which forms the basis for ensuring proper conducts of elections both the local and the national levels involves demarcation, registration of voters, exhibition of voters register, public education and the conduct of the election among others.

Demarcation: According to Article 47 of 1992 Constitution, the EC is charged with demarcating and apportioning constituencies based on population figures from the national population census. The following are the stipulations of the article;

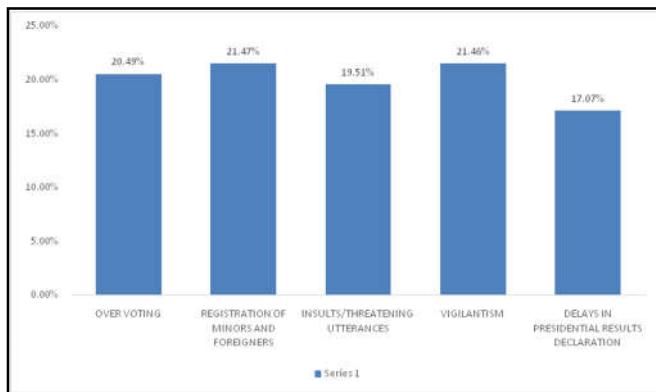
- Ghana shall be divided into as many constituencies for the purpose of election of members of Parliament as the Electoral Commission may prescribe, and each constituency shall be represented by one Member of Parliament.
- No constituency shall fall within more than one region.
- The boundaries of each constituency shall be such that the number of inhabitants in the constituency is, as nearly as possible, equal to the population quota
- For the purposes of clause (3) of this article, the number of inhabitants of a constituency may be greater or less than the population quota in order to take account of means of communication, geographical features, density of population and area and boundaries of the regions and other administrative or traditional areas.
- The Electoral Commission shall review the division of Ghana into constituencies at intervals of not less than seven years, or within twelve months after the publication of the enumeration figures after the holding of a census of the population of Ghana, whichever is earlier, and may, as a result, alter the constituencies
- Where the boundaries of a constituency established under this article are altered as a result of a review, the alteration shall come into effect upon the next dissolution of Parliament
- For the purposes of this article, "population quota" means the number obtained by dividing the number of inhabitants of Ghana by the number of constituencies into which Ghana is divided under this article

Public education: According to Akintyo (2010) the role of voter education in any electoral process cannot be underestimated. Voter education is to make information available and accessible to all constituents. Voter education campaigns should seek to achieve universal coverage of the electorate.

Table 1.

Challenges	Frequency	Percentage
Over voting	42	0.2049
Registration of minors / foreigners	44	0.2147
Insults / threatening utterances	40	0.1951
Vigilantism	44	0.2146
Delays in declaration of results	35	0.1707
Total	205	1

Field data (August 2018)



Graph 1.

In Ghana, the national commission for civic education in collaboration with the electoral commission are tasked to educate voters on key pertinent issues. Forum were created over the years by these agencies in educating the voters. Also, each and every political party or candidates contesting in an election has the right to educate the citizenry on what they intends to offer when voted into power. They organize this through community, constituency, regional and national rallies, billboards, text messages.

Voter registration: To be qualified a voter in Ghana, one must be a Ghanaian of sound mind and at the age of 18 as stipulated under the article 42 of the 1992 constitution. Publications are made for registration of hero voters prior to any several elections. The registration of new votes utilizes the same place of voting: there trained staff from the electoral commission with observing representatives the voting various political party representatives are there to monitor and challenge any unqualified person registering onto the register. During the exercise, the registration staff will complete the registration form with information provided by the person to be registered. The bio data and the photograph details of the person to be registered are taken. A voter I D card is issued after the process. Any unqualified person, who is included in the register, can be challenged by any citizen or the political party agents for their inclusion in the register. And this can be done in the District Magistrate court and also can take appeal to the High court upon any dissatisfaction with the proceedings of the case or the verdict of the case. This voter registration is therefore not conducted in a vacuum but has a specified time frame indicated by the electoral commission and failure to register within the allotted time rules the individual out of general election. As (Aphu E. S. 2015) propounded, in the event that you infuse time as a remedy in your everyday dealings, you will dependably have solid minutes cum productive outcomes. Thusly, time should be clung to in as much as one is locked in to execute an obligation for an authoritative execution, accomplishments and subsequently exemplifying productivity. (Aphu E.S 2018).

Voter register exhibition: The EC exhibits the voter register after the registration of new voters. This exercise is performed to enable those registered onto the register check their inclusion and correction of any wrong personal information captured in the system. During the voters register exhibition period, citizens are allowed to reveal to the electoral commission officials at the various exhibitions' centers of any suspicion of a minor or foreigner on the voters register and any person who has died over the past period but still exist as a voter on the register. Documents relating to the death of the alleged person on the register must be provided as a proof at the station. Minors, foreigners and ghost names are removed during this exercise.

Voting: Voting in Ghana is by a secret ballot. Secret ballot in this paper refers to a voting method in which a voter's choice in an election or referendum are anonymous. The main aim of Ghana using this method of voting is to achieve a political priority. Due to this booths are provided at all various polling stations to enable the voter to write or choose on the ballot paper the candidate of his/her choice without others being able to see what exactly the voter choose. Voting under the fourth republic starts at 8:00am by the use of thumbprint with a blue ink. Printed ballot papers are issued with the photo graphs and names of candidates contesting in the election clearly printed with an additional space for the voters' thumbprint. A voter in Ghana has to be verified by a verification device by the Electoral Commission Officials at the polling stations to ascertain his/her voter validity before the ballot paper is issued. Because of the transparent nature of Ghana elections, transparent ballot boxes are provided at the various polling stations with seals from the various political parties and candidates contesting in the election.

Counting: Counting of votes immediately begins after voting closes at 5:00pm with all political party and candidates contesting in the elections representatives present. The results for the various candidates in the contest are clearly written on a board at the polling stations. The various results in the various polling stations are transferred to the constituency collation center under which the polling stations fall for further collation and declaration of only the winner of the parliamentary election. The presidential election results are transmitted through the regional collation center to the Electoral Commission, National head office which is the national collation center for the returning officer (the chairperson of the commission) of the presidential election to declare within 72 hours.

Challenges of ghana's electoral system: Each and every stage of the electoral process is associated with some challenges, in the diagram illustrated below as a result of the survey conducted, the registration of voters' process is challenged over the years by the registration of foreigners and minors onto the register. Also, over the years, there was a low turnout of voters, those registered onto the register for verification of their eligibility during the voter register exhibition exercise. This makes it difficult for identification of those people in the register during the voting day. Over voting is a major challenge encountered during the voting process over the years. This has been a major concern identified by the respondent in the survey. For example, a polling station with 2,900 qualified registered voters counted a total votes cast of 3500. This happened in most polling stations across the country over the election years. Furthermore, insults,

threatening utterances during election campaign has a greater domination among all parties involved in the electoral process over the years. Again, the emergence of political terrorism in Ghana over the period which is termed as political vigilantism has taken entrenched position. Specifically, the two major political parties employed the services of heavy body-built men (macho men) in orchestrating violent attacks. Some of these actions by the groups include, snatching of ballot boxes, disobedient of law and order, attacks on opponent party supporters, seizure of certain lucrative ventures like the NADMO offices, passport application offices, Driver and Vehicle licensing authority among others. If this is not addressed and amicable solutions find to it can results to mass havoc situations in the future. Per the 1992 constitution, the returning office of the presidential election results is the chairperson of the EC. And this result must be declared within 72 hours. This is not so in most elections held in Ghana. Ghanaians expectations and fears during awaiting results declaration looks much tensed over the years. This the officials of the EC explained was due to issues surrounding the results and also their means of resolving it. Challenges associated with Ghana's electoral process.

Conclusion and Recommendation

It is clear from the study that, Ghana's electoral process is free fair and transparent, each and every process is conducted in clear and collaborative manner with the various political parties and candidates contesting in the various elections. Ghana recorded persistent occurrence of some challenges associated with the various stages of the electoral process. The agencies responsible for handling electoral related issues were over the years unable to effectively tackle those issues and finding amicable solutions. For example, the political vigilantism group's vandalism, seizure and hijacking of public offices persisted over the various election years. Members of these vigilante groups who were involved in these acts were allowed to walk freely without arrest and prosecution due to their political affiliations. Also those politicians who cause fear and panic in the citizenry through their threatening utterances were also not arrested and prosecuted. The results of the polling stations with over voting were considered instead of rejection. The Ghana police service and other security agencies must be proactive and collaborate with the electoral commission in all the electoral processes to maintain law and order. Parliament must enact laws and explicitly mention punishments for the various electoral offences. Polling stations with results more than the total number of valid registered voters must be canceled and declared null and void. Political parties with the various vigilante groups should be prevented from taking part in any election.

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