

In Search of ‘Honorable’ Membership: Parliamentary Primaries and Candidate Selection in Ghana*

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Introduction

Ghana’s democratic achievements have become a cause for celebration in Africa. Perhaps the country’s most notable achievement has been the progressive improvement of election management and the increasing acceptance of election results as ‘free and fair’ by the contestants, their supporters, and by domestic and international observers alike. Ghana is now endowed with a more open political system and a number of stable democratic institutions. Five successive general elections have been held: the National Democratic Congress (NDC) won the 1992 and 1996 elections, but lost power in the 2000 elections to the New Patriotic Party (NPP), which secured another victory in the 2004 elections (see Daddieh, 2009; 2011; Gyimah-Boadi 2009a; Whitfield 2009). The 2008 elections ushered in a second alternation of a ruling party, with the NDC regaining the reins of power. The country has witnessed five successive multi-party elections since the return to constitutional rule in 1992. This constitutes the longest timeframe in Ghana’s history over which we can observe parliamentary primary elections within a single civilian regime.

A crucial function of political parties concerns their gate-keeping role in nominating candidates for office. This key function of political parties has potential implications for levels of intra-party conflict and the composition of

parliaments as well as emerging governments (Norris, 2006). The major political parties in Ghana have been democratizing their candidate selection process, allowing candidates to be freely selected through primary elections.¹ Nevertheless, the procedures employed by the parties to fill internal party positions or how they select candidates for parliamentary and presidential elections have not attracted the level of scholarly attention they deserve. Indeed, in a preface to one of the few extant studies of candidate selection in sub-Saharan Africa and other new democracies, Gyimah-Boadi (2002) lamented the dearth of empirical research in this area. This article makes a modest attempt to bridge this knowledge gap.

In the early years of Ghana's Fourth Republic, competition for nomination to represent parties in the legislature was hardly keen. In fact, some of the pioneer Members of Parliament (MPs) had to be cajoled by their local communities and other power brokers to run for the office.² The major political parties conducted primary elections irregularly and the nomination process was generally undemocratic. The NDC imposed candidates on constituencies and then claimed the nominees were the 'consensus' candidates. The NPP, for its part, organized constituency primaries to select candidates for parliament but the process was not without controversies or its detractors. Since then, parliamentary primaries have assumed greater importance and have become the scenes of bloody contestations, partly because of the growing recognition that the office of MP carries with it not only status and prestige but also certain privileges, including financial perks and even power, especially for the fortunate few who get tapped for ministerial positions.³ Not surprisingly, as District and Municipal Chief Executives (DCEs and MCEs) and other government functionaries have become interested in the office, it has created intense rivalries and even animosity between them and incumbent MPs. Incumbent MPs feel a sense of entitlement. As such, they view the challenge posed by these other officeholders in primary contests not as a sign of a more vibrant democracy but as tantamount to usurpation of their rights as 'honorable' MPs. Nevertheless, parliamentary primary elections are becoming so keenly contested and so expensive that these days both aspiring MPs and incumbents raise their campaign funds overseas (Lindberg 2010). Some candidates have allegedly gone to such great lengths as resorting to the use of black magic (or juju) to eliminate potential rivals.⁴ There have been numerous reports of decidedly undemocratic practices being employed during primary elections for selection of candidates for parliament. Party leaders have been accused of preventing primaries from taking place in some constituencies and, in others, poorly-run or flawed primaries created conflicts that proved electorally costly to both major parties in general elections.⁵

This chapter focuses on the conduct of parliamentary primaries by the two leading parties in Ghana, the NDC and NPP. It interrogates the nature of parliamentary primaries, how they are conducted in Ghana by the political

parties, the factors that determine their conduct, and the degree to which they enhance or undermine democratic norms. The article also tries to confront the increasingly acrimonious nature of these parliamentary primaries and how they may be influencing general election outcomes. It provides a tentative assessment of the degree to which such primaries are promotive of Ghana's democratic experiment or act as a drag on it. The balance of this article is divided into six sections. The opening section provides a theoretical overview of the subject of candidate selection. Next, we examine Ghana's emergent two-party system followed by the dynamics of primary elections. We then problematize primary elections in Ghana, interrogating whether, as currently practiced, they enhance or weaken our democracy. Finally, we shine the spotlight on the office of MP itself, the object of desire of primary contestants. We then draw some general conclusions from the study of primary elections in Ghana.

Primary Elections and Candidate Selection: An Overview

Political parties in both presidential and parliamentary systems the world over rely increasingly on primary elections to select candidates for public offices. Where they are adopted, primaries are generally touted as ensuring 'openness and internal party democracy.' Nonetheless, United States (US) scholars have suggested that primaries select candidates who are weaker in general election competition than other selection methods (Carey and Polga-Hecimovich 2006). They contend that primary voters are more myopic in their choice of nominees than the seasoned party leaders who controlled nominations in the good old days before the advent of primaries. This 'primary penalty' argument is predicated on the nature of the primary process. It maintains that primaries that are fiercely contested leave even their winners 'scarred from political battle, exhausted (financially, at least), and therefore weaker in the general election' (Carey and Polga-Hecimovich 2006:530). And yet the authors posit that the electorate values openness, transparency, and internal party democracy in the selection of candidates. Primary elections deliver these qualities in larger measure than other candidate selection procedures. In this context, primaries will provide a 'stamp of legitimacy that is an asset to candidates relative to rivals selected by other procedures' (Carey and Polga-Hecimovich 2006:534).

In their study of parliamentary nominations of the NDC and NPP for the 2004 and 2008 elections, Ichino and Nathan (2010) found evidence to support an 'aspirant demand' explanation for primaries. The underlying assumption is that party leaders are not interested in the policy positions of potential nominees. They demonstrated that, contrary to claims in the literature, primaries are not more likely in competitive constituencies or weaker parties. Instead, the probability of primaries increases with the predicted success of the nominee in the general election. Elsewhere, empirical research has shown that candidate selection has

wide-ranging and significant implications for political parties, party members, leaders, and democratic governance (Hazan and Rahat 2006). Indeed, Gallagher (1988:2) identifies candidate selection as the 'key stage' in the recruitment process of political parties.

If we accept the argument that candidate selection takes place almost entirely within political parties, then we must be more concerned about the machinations of the candidate selection process. In emerging democracies in sub-Saharan Africa, this most crucial of links between democratic selection and democratic governance has not always been fully appreciated. While candidate selection has not attracted enough scholarly attention in sub-Saharan Africa, the subject has been extensively studied in Western democracies (see Gallagher 1980; Gallagher and Marsh 1988; Hazan and Rahat 2006; Rahat 2008; Rahat and Hazan 2001; Ranney 1965). Sartori (1976:64) has observed that the selection of candidates is the core activity that globally distinguishes parties from other organizations.

Further, as Schattschneider (1942:101) observed in *Party Government*, 'the nominating process has become the crucial process of the party. He who can make the nominations is the owner of the party.' Ranney (1981:103) affirms this observation by suggesting that what is at stake in candidate nominations 'is nothing less than control of the core of what the party stands for and does.' Candidate selection has also become an important test of the internal democratic strength of party organizations. According to Gallagher (1988: 1) 'the way in which political parties select their candidates may be used as an acid test of how democratically they conduct their internal affairs.' Bille (2001:363–364) advanced two reasons why it is important to study how parties select candidates for election to the representative assemblies of a political system and whether the selection process has become more democratic. On the one hand, the candidate selection process is very crucial to any party, whatever the type. The way parties are organized is an important indicator when trying to characterize and understand the functioning of a democratic regime. On the other hand, a democratization of the candidate selection process might promote an increased sense of involvement of either members or voters. Furthermore, the importance of candidate nomination goes beyond the borders of the political party. Crotty observed that:

The party in recruiting candidates determines the personnel and, more symbolically, the groups to be represented among the decision-making elite. Through recruitment, the party indirectly influences the types of policy decisions to be enacted and the interests most likely to be heard. Candidate recruitment then represents one of the key linkages between the electorate and the policy-making process (1968:260).

In Ghana, Ichino and Nathan (2010) report that party leaders do not value the policy positions of their legislative candidates. The Ghanaian political system is weighted heavily in favor of the executive branch of government. As a result of this

presidential or executive dominance, the policy views of parliamentary candidates are less important, especially given the lack of opportunity for ordinary MPs to initiate private members bills. In that case, all bills submitted to parliament emanate from the executive. To sum up this brief overview, first, Gallagher insists that political parties serve as vehicles for popular participation. Second, Schattschneider (1942) and Ranney (1981) have argued that candidate selection is one of the core functions of political parties. We argue that these observations provide a powerful universal justification for the significance of parliamentary and presidential nomination contests in Ghana as elsewhere.

We hasten to confess, however, that as the dominant mode of candidate selection, primary elections fall squarely within the liberal representative democratic tradition. We concede that this is certainly a far cry from direct participatory democracy; neither does it resemble an African community-centered democratic project which traditionally took place under the baobab tree or village square and which involved broader participation and consensual decision making. Besides its participatory and consensual limitations, the process may produce outcomes that favor elites and harm or ignore the interests of peasant majorities and the working poor in Africa. It must be recalled that Flt. Lt. Jerry John Rawlings, the military strongman who had come to power for the second time via another successful coup d'Etat, had to be pushed by a combination of sustained domestic pressure and at least an international nudge before he reluctantly accepted this liberal democratic arrangement. In that regard, parliamentary candidate selection via primaries is compatible with the interests of elites and international democracy promoters alike.

Ghana's Emergent Two-Party System

Following extensive constitutional deliberations between 1988 and 1992, a plurality electoral system in single-member constituencies was adopted in Ghana. In the contested and highly flawed first multi-party elections in 1992, the main opposition parties led by the NPP boycotted the parliamentary elections, rendering the first parliament of the Fourth Republic an essentially 'rubber-stamp' institution (see Jeffries and Thomas 1993; New Patriotic Party, 1993; Nugent 1996). The second multi-party elections, held in 1996, were essentially free and fair, and with only minor irregularities. The third consecutive round of elections in 2000 continued the positive trend and was judged free and fair with all parties and a number of independent candidates participating (see Ayee, 2002). The 2000 elections produced an alternation of power, with John Agyekum Kufuor and the NPP emerging victorious in the run-off presidential election. In 1992, 463 candidates ran for office of MP. The overall turnout was 29 per cent in the parliamentary poll. In 1996 and 2000, 780 and 1,078 candidates respectively competed for the 200 parliamentary seats on offer. The overall number of candidates running for office has since increased. In 2004, the electoral

commission (EC) used its redistricting powers to create 30 new constituencies bringing the total number of parliamentary seats to 230. However, only a total of 953 candidates ran in the 2004 election. The general election of 2008 witnessed a significant increase in the number of candidates. A total of 1,062 candidates competed. Moreover, even though the Ghanaian political system features multiple parties, the NDC and the NPP have appropriated and monopolized the entire electoral space. By sucking the political oxygen from the other parties, they have managed to create a *de facto* two-party system. Only roughly 5 per cent of the votes is divided among several smaller parties including the Nkrumahist-inspired Convention People's Party (CPP) and the People's National Convention (PNC) and independent candidates.

Last but not least, it is worth reflecting on the gender mix of parliamentary candidates, albeit only briefly. Even though females constitute roughly 52 per cent of Ghana's population, the vast majority of the candidates were male. This gender reality flies in the face of the solemn pledges made by all the political parties to promote gender equality as well as increased female representation in the legislature. For example, the number of women who contested the parliamentary elections in 1992 was a mere 23 and 16 won, while in 1996, 18 out of the 57 female candidates were elected to the 200-member legislature (see Electoral Commission 2009). In 2000, 95 women contested out of which only 19 won, while 25 out of the 104 women who competed in the 2004 parliamentary elections emerged victorious (Ibid 2009). Clearly, Ghana's electoral landscape is dominated by the NDC and the NPP as well as by male candidates, making the Ghanaian state highly gendered.

The Dynamics of Primary Elections

To begin with, political parties are enjoined to practice and promote internal democracy. To this end, article 55 (5) of the 1992 constitution states that 'the internal organization of a political party shall conform to democratic principles and its actions and purposes shall not contravene or be inconsistent with this Constitution or any other law.' The general assumption among democratic theorists is that the greater the role of the individual party members, the more democratically the party conducts its internal affairs and, additionally, the more decentralized the procedure, the greater the possibilities for individual party members to play a role (Bille 2001:363).

Unlike the president, who is restricted by the 1992 constitution to two consecutive terms of office, parliamentary incumbents are only limited by the favorable or unfavorable verdicts of the voters. However, in constituencies in which a party already held the seat, potential aspirants had to wait and ascertain the intentions of the incumbent MP before they were able to weigh their options to run or to sit out an election. As suggested earlier, increasingly there is mutual

suspicion between MPs and the government-appointed DCEs and MCEs. The former view the functions of the latter in the constituency as creating an enabling environment for a run for their seats. Theoretically, District and Municipal Assemblies and the office of DCEs and MCEs provide fertile breeding grounds, if properly cultivated, to enable many a DCE/MCE to unseat incumbent MPs. The decentralized nature of the Ghanaian political system is such that it imposes collaboration on local officeholders and MPs. The development of the constituency is supposed to be fostered through collaboration between local governments and MPs. Funds are allocated to District and Metropolitan/ Municipal Assemblies to be used for development at the local or constituency level.

In this arrangement, development is the joint responsibility of MPs, assembly members, and DCEs or MCEs. However, DCEs and MCEs who harbor ambitions of becoming future MPs themselves have been known to act in ways that deliberately undermine and frustrate the incumbent MP. To illustrate our point, MPs have access to a modest 'common fund' to be used to initiate development projects in their constituencies. In instances where there is rivalry between the two parties, projects designed by an incumbent MP for the assembly's approval are either ignored or rejected. While this is calculated to make the MP look incompetent and ineffective in the eyes of the constituents, it is ultimately the people of the constituency who suffer. They are deprived of potentially beneficial development projects that are shelved or their constituency funds may be misappropriated or inefficiently utilized to promote politically-expedient or misguided projects. This situation is worst if the MP is from an opposition party. The convention is that unsuccessful parliamentary aspirants of the ruling party are the ones the president usually appoints as DCEs and MCEs. In such situations, the DCEs and MCEs who are hungry for election to parliament would take credit for any development projects that are executed by the assembly in their constituencies. Notwithstanding this, it is also important to note that there are plenty of instances where incumbent DCEs and MCEs have lost their bids to become MPs even after securing their parties' nominations, a testament to the growing sophistication of the Ghanaian electorate.

Meanwhile the number of candidates running for the two major parties increased in the 2000 and 2008 elections. These were transitional elections in the sense that they coincided with the end of presidential terms. While in 2000 1,078 nominations were certified by the EC to run for the 200 parliamentary seats, the 2004 elections registered a total of 953 candidates; the NDC presented the highest number of candidates for the parliamentary elections. Ashanti region, which has 39 constituencies, recorded the highest number of contestants. Generally there were no unopposed candidates (Electoral Commission 2005). These figures underscore the competitive nature of the parliamentary contest during this period. The highest number of candidates for a constituency was seven in Upper West

Akim constituency in the Eastern region and the lowest number of candidates was two in Akrofrom and Ahafo Ano South constituencies, both in the Ashanti region (Electoral Commission 2005). The NPP and the NDC had serious problems in some constituencies during the selection of parliamentary candidates. Some of the aspiring MPs who failed in their bid but who assumed that they had a large enough following, ran as independent candidates. There were also instances of violent demonstrations staged by disgruntled activists that destroyed party property. We recall here the furor over the defeat of Clement Eledi, the popular choice of the party activists, by Adama Kegliah, the Chairman's preference, in the Wa Central constituency during the 2004 NPP primary. The defeat of Eledi provoked a backlash: party activists⁶ adopted the strategy of 'shirt and blouse.'⁷ They deserted their own party and voted for president JA Kufuor in the presidential elections and for Bernard Mornah, the parliamentary candidate of the PNC.

Parliamentary Primary Election System

Candidate selection is, according to Ranney (1981:75), the 'process by which a political party decides which of the persons legally eligible to hold an elective office will be designated on the ballot and in election communications as its recommended and supported candidate or list of candidates.' Under the 1992 constitution, general elections are held in Ghana every four years, starting from 1992. The electoral law permits both party-sponsored and independent candidates. To be elected, a parliamentary candidate requires only a plurality of the valid votes cast (first-past-the-post); a presidential candidate requires a clear majority (any figure above 50%). Who are eligible to seek the nomination for parliament in Ghana's two major parties, the NDC and NPP? Candidates seeking nomination on the ticket of the NDC and NPP formally go through four stages: nominations, certification, campaign, and elections. The certification process, defining who is eligible to pursue the nomination for MP, is influenced by a number of factors. In the last two general elections, the NDC and NPP parliamentary nominations generally adhered to the following prescriptions contained in their constitutions.

Article 42 of the Constitution of the National Democratic Congress (2002: 38–39) regulates the nomination of candidates for parliament and the conduct of parliamentary primaries. The National Executive Committee (NEC) is mandated to notify all Constituency Executive Committees (CECs) as to the timing of the opening of nominations for the conduct of primaries for the parliamentary seat in each constituency. When the information reaches the CEC of each of the 230 constituencies, the CEC is expected to send a circular within seven days to all polling divisions inviting nominations from prospective candidates. The CEC then fixes a date which shall not conflict with the overall national party calendar of political activities. A meeting is convened by the CEC and all prospective

candidates who meet the eligibility criteria of the party are invited for the selection of the candidates. At the regional level, the Regional Executive Committee (REC) is mandated to supervise the selection process for parliamentary candidates at the constituency level.

After the selection of prospective candidates who meet the eligibility criteria, the REC and CEC are required to forward the details of such candidates to the party headquarters for consideration by the NEC. The NEC is required to do proper due diligence on all lists of candidates submitted by the REC and CEC. This is to ensure that such candidates are qualified to contest the constituency primaries. The NDC constitution further stipulates that a member shall not be qualified to contest primaries for any parliamentary seat if he/she is disqualified under national electoral laws from contesting a parliamentary seat; is not an active member of the party at the constituency level for the two years immediately preceding the date of filing nomination; and is for any reason disqualified from being a party member as spelt out under article 8 of the NDC constitution. Only after certification by the NEC can parliamentary primaries be conducted in a constituency. However, if a candidate fails to meet the eligibility criteria, the NEC shall communicate this to the CEC. In addition, NEC issues guidelines regarding the selection of parliamentary candidates. When the primary election is held, any candidate who wins by a simple majority of votes cast is duly elected as the party's parliamentary candidate.

The NPP, for its part, bases the selection of parliamentary candidates on article 11 of its constitution (New Patriotic Party 2009:52–54). On the issue of eligibility, the party's constitution states that no member shall be nominated or endorsed as the official candidate in any parliamentary election unless the member has been selected in accordance with the provisions of article 11. The selection of parliamentary candidates is advertised for 18 months prior to the date of the national election and parliamentary candidates are to be elected at least 12 months before the national general election. The NEC is mandated to determine separate dates for elections in constituencies with incumbent MPs.

Any NPP member may, prior to the expiration date of the period set out in article 11 (2), submit an application for nomination as the party's parliamentary candidate. No member is entitled to apply for nomination as the party's parliamentary candidate for any constituency unless he or she is a known and active member of at least two years; is a registered member and a voter in the constituency which he or she seeks to represent, although in appropriate cases the CEC may suspend the requirement; is of good character; is otherwise of good standing; has paid the pre-scribed fees for a parliamentary candidate by the deadline set by the NEC; qualifies under the electoral laws to be a parliamentary candidate for the constituency; and has signed the 'undertaking for parliamentary candidates.' It is incumbent upon the member seeking nomination as the party's

parliamentary candidate to satisfy all three tiers (CEC, REC and NEC) of the organizational structure of the party that the conditions stipulated in article 11 (4) have been fulfilled. An application that did not comply with these conditions was to be rejected.

The rules guiding the selection of parliamentary candidates in both parties are fairly standard and uncontroversial. An interesting difference between the official positions of the two parties is that the NDC leaves the determination of the timing of parliamentary primaries entirely in the hands of its CEC; it has no set dates for the holding of primaries. By contrast, the NPP runs an advertisement 18 months prior to the national elections and primaries must be held at least one month to the national elections. Another instance in which the parties differed is that there is a higher burden of proof in the NPP than the NDC. As noted earlier, an NPP aspirant must first satisfy the CEC, then the REC and finally the NEC. Nevertheless, there is a convergence around the duration of membership in both political parties insofar as to be considered for nomination in the NDC and NPP a candidate must have been a registered member for at least two years.

The primary election system used by the parties has evolved over time. Initially, the NDC and NPP adopted different procedures for selecting parliamentary candidates. The NDC operated like an electoral machine resurrected every four years to win elections and then went into hibernation.⁸

NDC parliamentarians in the first parliament of the Fourth Republic never faced any real challenges as the party held few primary elections. The NDC's procedure for selecting candidates for parliament as well as for the presidency remained 'informal' until after the 2000 election. The party's revolutionary ideology and populist rhetoric predisposed it to a preference for bottom-up processes and for consensus building in its operations. In this context, article 48 of the NDC constitution (2002: 43) states that '[e]xcept as otherwise provided in this constitution, at any party meeting decisions shall be reached by consensus and in case of failure to reach a consensus, by a majority of the votes cast.' In addition, the party claimed that the old procedure it had adopted was based on a time-tested African tradition – selection based on consensus of the key actors in a constituency. Accordingly, nominees were endorsed when there was overwhelming support from all politically-relevant people in the constituency.

Nevertheless, in 1996, a selection system based on constituency congresses was attempted by the NDC. This minimalist attempt at democratizing the candidate selection process backfired as evidenced by the high level of dissatisfaction within party circles. Two main issues of contention emerged. First, the open system of parliamentary selection introduced the use of money in the process, thus indirectly disqualifying candidates without deep pockets. The excessive use of money in parliamentary primaries, many NDC activists argued, threatened the very foundations of the party's status as the party of ordinary Ghanaians. Second,

too few of the old MPs were retained and the new candidates selected lacked parliamentary experience. A former MP succinctly described the situation in the following terms:

We entered a one-sided parliament in 1992, many of us with no experience of parliamentary proceedings. Majority of us [sic] came from working class backgrounds, e.g. pupil teachers, clerks and farmers but we were fortunate because the NPP and the other Nkrumahist parties boycotted parliament. In the run-up to the 1996 elections, the NPP big lawyers and PhD titleholders dominated the print and electronic media and they almost won the debate on the economic front. We were told parliament would be a battleground and that the party needed to run primaries and also get some titleholders to match the NPP. (Interview with a former MP, Accra, 18 May 2009)

The views of the MP lend credence to Nugent's (1998: 14) observation that the NDC wanted more 'big men in parliament who could hold their own against the heavyweights of the NPP. The fact that the party appeared content to let loyal foot soldiers go to the wall in the process did not reflect well on the leadership.' Some nominees for parliament were elected at poorly-organized constituency congresses while others were chosen directly by the Regional Executive Committee for the endorsement of the National Executive Committee. The National Executive Committee of the NDC decided which constituencies would be allowed to hold primaries and which would have nominees selected by the national leadership. This decision appears to have been motivated by two considerations. On the formal level, incumbent MPs were evaluated before a decision was taken about whether they should be allowed to seek reelection. This decision was clearly based on the NDC's perceived need to have more qualified individuals represent it in parliament. Unofficially, the national and regional executives wanted loyalists to stand unopposed in safe seats (Interview with a former Lawra-Nandom MP, 17 September 2009).

In contrast to the rather lax rules used by the NDC, the NPP constitution laid out a more explicit procedure for parliamentary candidates to be elected in constituency primaries by local party activists. The NPP held primary elections in many constituencies fairly consistently from 1996 to the present. Nonetheless, there was still some amount of 'imposition' from the National Executive Committee, with the result that some constituencies did not hold competitive primaries. Overall, however, primaries have become increasingly common and more keenly contested in recent years. The NDC, whose parliamentary and presidential candidates were initially not selected through primary elections, was put under the microscope and it began to receive criticism for the way it handled its selection process which was considered undemocratic. The NDC began to take internal party democracy seriously after it lost to the NPP in 2000, partly because a post-mortem revealed that the centralized approach to candidate selection had

undermined the party by creating internal discontent (Interview, Accra, 18 May 2009). Subsequent constitutional amendments in 2002 saw the party move to a system that more closely resembled that of the NPP.

Both parties went into the 2004 and 2008 elections having conducted parliamentary primaries based on similar formal procedures. In the majority of cases, the nominees were selected by a constituency-level electoral college made up of polling station executives. In essence, Ghanaian parliamentary and presidential primaries remain restrictive and closed rather than open. Only certain categories of voters or individuals within the party are allowed to participate in the process.⁹ Meanwhile, a new trend that augurs well for political party development is that, notwithstanding the sometimes acrimonious and polarized nature of Ghanaian politics, party executives from the different political traditions are invited to witness primaries at the presidential level; at such functions they are given an opportunity to deliver solidarity messages.¹⁰ In 2004, some civil society organizations (CSOs) became involved in the organizing and supervision of parliamentary primaries.¹¹ However, as already indicated, the existence of explicit formal procedures did not prevent manipulation by party executives and other interested agencies. Some nominees continued to be selected without competitive elections. The size of constituency electoral college – eligible voters are the chairpersons of each polling station executive committee and the constituency executive – has attracted criticism because it is fairly easy for aspirants to manipulate the results by paying off individual voters (Lindberg 2010).

Campaign financing also heavily influences primary election outcomes. The call for 'clean politics' has resulted in many democracies adopting regulatory mechanisms to police the behavior of politicians and the parties they represent. Elsewhere, laws have been enacted to limit the amount of cash donations individuals and/or special interest groups can make to political parties. More stringent disclosure, reporting and auditing requirements have also been instituted for both the political parties and the donors (see Ferdinand 2003; Nassmacher 2003). In Ghana, the constitution mandates the EC to regulate the behavior of political parties. However, the EC's monitoring and the regulation of the behavior of political parties and of their financing has not been robust (see Bob-Milliar 2011). Indeed, the conclusion reached by the 2004 *Global Integrity* report is that the lack of transparency regarding the financing of Ghana's political parties has given rise to abuse and corruption. Broadly, Saffu (2003) has observed that political financing is relatively under-regulated in Africa. He concluded that 'the raising of funds by parties and candidates is a matter of unregulated self-help' (Saffu 2003:21).

In the specific case of Ghana, the legal framework of party financing includes constitutional provisions, laws governing political parties and their financing as well as those governing election campaigns as enshrined in Act 55 (14) of the

1992 constitution and the Political Parties Act (Act 547) of 2000. These two acts leave political party financing completely unregulated, with the sole exception of banning non-citizens and foreign corporate entities from making donations, in cash or in kind, to parties. Neither the constitution nor the acts impose limits on donations from citizens, including corporate citizens; there are not disclosure laws that allow us to follow the flow of monies. There are also no limits on the amount of money individual candidates or the parties can spend on elections. As a result, the NPP made elections 2004 and 2008 Ghana's most expensive elections on record. The party shelled out a whopping (by Ghanaian standards) US\$30 million and US\$100 million¹² of its 'own' money on advertising and entertaining supporters (*Africa Confidential* 2004:5). It is not just political parties that can engage in this feeding or spending frenzy. Political candidates are also free to raise unlimited amounts of money without questions being asked. As money is the holy grail of politics, it is not hard to imagine how unregulated financing of campaigns can determine the outcome of crucial primaries or general elections. It is also significant to note in the Ghanaian case, especially if the experience of Alan Kyerematen is any guide, that there is a limit to how many votes money can buy. As an NPP presidential candidate for the December 2007 primary, Alan 'cash,' as he became famously known, raised GH¢15 million (or US\$13 million) in a single night (see Bob-Milliar and Bob-Milliar 2010; Bebli 2007:1, 15). More importantly, he failed to win the nomination. He lost to his nemesis, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo who, in turn, lost the December 2008 general election to the current president, Professor John Evans Atta Mills.

Problematizing Primary Elections in Ghana: Democracy Promotion and Deficits

Given the evidence presented thus far about primary elections in Ghana, how sanguine can we be about this aspect of the Ghanaian democratic experiment? In other words, is the parliamentary primary selection process employed by the two leading political parties in Ghana contributing to further democracy promotion in the country or acting as a drag on it? As a general proposition, political parties the world over employ primaries presumably to make the selection process more open, transparent, and democratic. To the extent that this is true, primaries may be general election assets rather than liabilities. However, in the case of Ghana, the two main parties ran primaries in which only the local party executives were enfranchised, giving them enormous leverage to extract personalized goods from candidates. According to Ichino and Nathan (2010:23), parliamentary primaries in Ghana are 'demand-driven.' In this context, the demand for a primary election in a safe seat is usually high and party leaders are more likely to allow a primary to proceed in such situations.

Party executives continue to intervene selectively, deliberately forcing out aspirants in order to pave the way for their favorite candidates to sail through unopposed.¹³ Party leaders become involved in a primary election when there are only two aspirants seeking the nomination. It is much easier to construct attractive incentives for one aspirant to drop out of a race than to do so for multiple aspirants. However, democracy suffers when political contestation is short-circuited in this way. Imposing candidates is not without inherent political risks since it has the potential to alienate local activists and other power brokers; it may also produce angry supporters who may take out their anger on the party at the polls or fail to turn up to vote for the party in the general election. Similarly, contested primaries run the same risk, particularly if the election is poorly organized or is perceived to privilege a particular candidate. Furthermore, primaries can drive disgruntled losers to stand as independent candidates and take their supporters with them as was the case in many poorly-run NPP primaries. Much of this reflects the fact that the competition for parliamentary seats had never been keener.

Party executives play a very important role in this process. Vetting is one of two ways in which party leaders could prevent contested primaries from taking place without suspending the formal procedures for these elections. For instance, many constituencies, especially in rural areas, face resource constraints. As a result, during the parties' primary season there are usually several failed attempts and postponements. Such situations place the national party (headquarters) at the center of organizing primary elections. Where the national party cannot provide support for a constituency to organize primary elections, local party patrons usually step in to perform this role. This process is operationalized on two levels: an aspirant who can financially support a constituency for the primaries is viewed more favorably and generally has an advantage over rivals. The second dimension involves the parliamentary candidates themselves trying to influence the decision of the electorate by 'hosting' them, providing 'transportation' and 'refreshment' money and sometimes resorting to outright bribery on election day. While some local executives benefit from and encourage the process, some have always defended their prerogative from direct interference from Accra. Meanwhile, the central and local levels have sometimes collaborated in the nomination of 'good aspirants,' not least because of an obvious mutual interest in ensuring that a candidate who emerges victorious at a party's primary election is also electable in the constituency (Interview, Accra, Kokomlemlle, 14 January, 2008).

The vetting process gives party executives (national and constituency) room to exercise veto power over the slate of candidates who may contest the primaries. Disqualified aspirants and their supporters frequently complained that the vetting committees had invented phantom or 'non-existent' clauses to push them out of the race or applied the rules unfairly to benefit preferred aspirants. A case in point is the 2008 NPP parliamentary primary election in the Tema West

constituency in which the aspirant, Irene Naa Torshie Addo, was threatened with disqualification. The constituency chairman appealed to the national executives to have the aspirant disqualified on the grounds that there was not sufficient evidence that the candidate was in good standing with the party. In her defense, Ms Addo claimed that her dues had been paid upfront covering four years (2005–8) even though entries in her membership card indicated payments were made at different times. The chairman countered that the card entries showing dues paid were not entered in the record books of the constituency. The chairman also revealed that the signatories in Ms Addo's card endorsing payment of dues were not authorized by the constituency executives to do so. In effect, there was no record of payment of dues in the books of Tema West constituency.¹⁴

What is indisputable is that Ms Addo was running against a very powerful incumbent, Abraham Ossei-Aidoo, Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and also the majority leader with 12 years standing in parliament.¹⁵ The evidence pointed to party leaders conniving to prevent the primary from taking place; however, they did it in such a way as not to tip their hand that they were protecting a politically-important MP. This kind of 'back room' manipulation of the primary outcome seems more common than overt intervention in the process.

The case of Ms Vicky Bright, a Deputy Minister at the Office of the President, is equally revealing. She filed her nomination papers to contest the NPP parliamentary primary in the Okaikoi-South constituency but was disqualified by the vetting committee on the grounds that she had not 'nurtured the constituency.' In political parlance, a prospective MP must 'nurture the constituency' for which he or she intends to seek the nomination. 'Nurturing a constituency' simply means providing all kinds of social amenities and related services such as community toilets, roofing sheets, street lights, paving of streets, paying school and medical bills of constituents, attending festivals, funerals and other social gatherings, and making substantial financial donations. In some cases, the prospective candidate provides funds for the running of party activities in the constituency. In short, 'constituency nurturing' implies a commitment to the party and its programs and taking good care of constituents like any good nurturer. Laying claim to constituency nurturing, Nana Akomea, the incumbent MP, had his nomination confirmed by popular acclamation. However, the Greater Accra Regional Chairman of the NPP, Sammy Crabbe, invalidated the acclamation of Nana Akomea as Okaikoi-South parliamentary candidate. According to the chairman, the process of acclamation violated the party's constitution. 'I know that we have procedures in this party, we have a constitution which governs the way we conduct ourselves including the selection of parliamentary candidates' (Bebli and Kamal, 2008:1). He went on to reiterate that the meeting that acclaimed Nana Akomea's candidature was not properly constituted. 'I believe that what happened was illegal and that any decision coming out of what happened is null and void' (Bebli and Kamal, 2008:1).

The National Chairman of the NPP, Peter Mac Manu, upheld the acclamation procedure. The disqualification of Ms Bright, argues Mac Manu, was right since quite a number of the executives of the party claimed they 'did not know her.' In other instances, all aspirants but one dropped out after passing through vetting, allowing the nominee to emerge unopposed. It is quite likely that some of these cases involved behind-the-scenes manipulation to ensure a particular outcome, including payments to aspirants to drop out of the contest. In another celebrated case, an aspirant was disqualified to maintain party unity. Barely two months to the 2008 general election, the popular MP and Minister of Finance, Kwadwo Baah Wiredu, suddenly passed away in South Africa where he was receiving medical treatment. Six aspirants were vetted for the Asante-Akim North constituency. Kwame Appiah Kubi, a contestant in the previous primary, had his nomination rejected because he was alleged to have used juju (or black magic) to kill the popular minister. Party activists staged demonstrations in the constituency and later at the party headquarters in Accra with placards, some of which read, 'Andy the murderer' (see *Chronicle* 2 October 2008:1, 15). Party leaders asked the aspirant to withdraw his nomination for security reasons. The constituency executives argued that it would be difficult for the aspirant to campaign at Agogo, a town where Baah-Wiredu hailed from, because he 'failed to attend the one-week observation of the death of Baah-Wiredu at Agogo' (see Boadu 2008:1, 3).¹⁶

The Office of Member of Parliament in Ghana: A Coveted Trophy

We turn finally to the object of such intense interest and desire among the Ghanaian political class. Successful party nomination is only the first but crucial step in the search for 'honorable' membership in the august body called the Ghanaian Parliament. There is a popular Ghanaian saying that 'once an honorable member always an honorable member.' This saying best captures the perceived importance of the office of 'MP.' When the occupants of the office exit parliament either voluntarily or from suffering defeat at the polls, they still expect to be addressed by the title 'honorable.' Indeed, Lindberg (2010:117) asserts that the institution of the office of MP in Ghana is strongly influenced by 'informal norms in ways that favor the provision of private goods in clientelistic networks.'

The office of MP has its powers embedded in two constitutional provisions. First, the constitution stipulates that the president must appoint at least half of the ministers of state from the legislature (parliament), thus undermining the separation of powers and providing the executive with a powerful instrument of co-optation and subordination of MPs (see Lindberg 2009a). This provision has so far served both government and party well. Even though the risk of a hung parliament has been averted since the new constitution came into effect in 1992, the convention of appointing ministers from the parliament compromises the independence of the legislature. For instance, NPP MPs were under severe and

constant pressure from the executive to toe the national party line. The sanctions for errant MPs included the denial of constituency development projects as well as denial of seats on lucrative tender boards. Lindberg (2009b) reports that, during the administration of the NPP, President Kufuor created 147 lucrative seats on procurement and tender boards that he could distribute to MPs on the basis of loyalty to him. In this context, the office of MP becomes very attractive and coveted. For instance, a teacher whose annual salary is equivalent to the sitting allowance of an MP would view the office very favourably.¹⁷ But in order to be considered, one had to demonstrate party loyalty by supporting and defending the government's legislative agenda, and not engage in any real executive oversight activities (Lindberg 2010:131).

Second, as indicated earlier, legislators in Ghana are entrusted with some form of local development funds for constituency development. The national Government sets aside 7.5 per cent of revenues into the District Assembly Common Fund (DACF) to be spent on local development by the District Chief Executive (DCE) and the district assembly in each of 170 districts. The MP for each constituency has spending authority over a 5 per cent share of that local fund. Each MP had at his or her disposal the equivalent of about US\$34,000 annually from this source (Lindberg 2010:121). In addition, when Ghana subscribed to the Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) initiative towards the end of 2001, development funds accrued from this initiative. The same decentralized sharing formula was applied to the HIPC funds, generating an additional US\$9,000 per year. The annual salary including allowances for MPs is currently about US\$24,000 (Lindberg 2010:121). As we suggested earlier, although these figures are modest, by current Ghanaian standards they are alluring enough. Added to the other perks and the psychic satisfaction of the status symbol of 'honorable' MP and one has the makings of a coveted position, which aspirant politicians and political parties have every incentive to struggle to conquer in competitive primary elections.

Conclusion

The objective of this chapter has been to examine the conduct of parliamentary primaries by the two leading parties, the NDC and NPP. Candidate nomination is widely recognized as one of the most consequential functions political parties perform in representative democracies. It is also considered an essential element of any definition of a political party. Furthermore, the methods by which candidates are nominated have a powerful effect on the types of people who are elected as well as influence how these people behave once in office. Finally, a party's candidate selection process can provide invaluable insights into how the party functions internally and more generally on where political power is located in a country.

As a mode of parliamentary and presidential candidate selection, primaries have grown in importance in Ghana. Initially, the NDC's method of selecting candidates for the office of MP lacked transparency and a democratic veneer. Nevertheless, it served the party's leadership interest and so the process was generally condoned. However, as the country deepened its democracy and institutionalized selection processes, the NDC abandoned the consensus method of nominating candidates for parliament. The NPP, on the other hand, instituted a more formal procedure for parliamentary candidates' selection but it was not unproblematic. Parliamentary seats are keenly contested. All parties now have well-defined formal procedures regulating the conduct of parliamentary primaries. However, the existence of formal rules does not prevent executive manipulation of the election system.

The constituency and national executives continue to influence the conduct and outcome of primaries. The relative size of the primary electorates or caucuses makes it possible for formal rules to be narrowly interpreted to give some contestants undue advantage. Again, the ill-defined roles of the MP and the MCE/DCEs at the grassroots continue to affect the conduct of primaries for better or for worse. Indeed, the Asantehene acknowledged as much when he said: 'Politics has become the shortest route to riches and people will do whatever is necessary to get there... the practice of occultism is rife in our politics... Ritual murders, burying of cows alive and various nefarious activities, I am told, have become part of the repertoire. It is to win and lord over the people but not to change the destiny of the people' (see *Daily Guide*, 8 December, 2010.) While significant progress has been made in the selection process by both major parties, there is plenty of room for improvement to make it more empowering of voters in the constituencies and therefore truly democratic. There is a need for a continued push toward the opening up of the primary process to involve more registered voters, as well as greater institutionalization and decentralization of the process to permit greater local control. Finally, although the Ghanaian public had previously revealed itself to be either ambivalent or hostile to state funding of political parties (see Gyimah-Boadi 2009b; Center for Democratic Development [CDD]-Ghana 2005a, 2005b), the time may have come to reengage the public on this issue along with the enactment of more robust legislative and legal instruments to regulate campaign financing and spending. Left unaddressed, campaign financing and expenditures may have a more corrosive effect on candidate selection and democratic governance down the road.

Notes

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1. The media hype surrounding presidential primaries makes them more prominent in Ghana; however, it is only the NPP that had selected all its presidential candidates through competitive party primaries. The NDC adopted competitive primary election for its presidential candidate fairly late in 2002.
 2. Interview with a former Lawra-Nandom MP, 17 September 2009.
 3. See Akwefey, 2008: 1, 15.
 4. See 'Allegation of using Juju to kill Minister,' *Chronicle*, 2 October, 2008.
 5. For example the poorly-run NPP primaries in Bekwai and Suhum caused the party to lose the safe seats to independents.
 6. Over 500 foot soldiers from the Sokpayiri section of the Wa Central Constituency defected from the NPP to the People's National Convention (PNC). They attributed their defection to the 'undemocratic manner in which Mr Clement Eledi was kicked out of the parliamentary race for Wa Central,' *GNA*, 26 October 2004.
 7. It means voting for a party's presidential candidate and voting for the opposing parliamentary candidate or vice versa.
 8. Vincent Asiseh, former NDC secretary, speaking on a Joy FM programme, 16 July 2001. The story appeared as 'NDC is not a political party- Vincent Asiseh declares' in *Chronicle*, 17 July 2001:1 and 8.
 9. In 2009, the NPP's National Delegates' Conference approved the expansion of the electoral college for the selection of the party's parliamentary and presidential candidates as well as other party officers from 2,340 delegates to about 115,000 delegates.
 10. Authors' observation of the National Congresses of the NDC and NPP.
 11. See report on CDD-Ghana's 'Candidates' debate forum for aspiring parliamentary candidates – 2004 General Elections.' Available at: http://www.cddghana.org/documents/Report%20on%20Candidates%20debate%20forum_elect_2004.pdf (accessed 22 January 2008).
 12. The total election expenditure could exceed US\$100 million, according to a senior party executive interviewed in Accra on 16 July 2010.
 13. For example, in the recently-held (30 April 2011) NPP parliamentary primary to select candidates for the 2012 general elections, filing fees paid depended on incumbency and gender. A male aspirant paid GH¢10,000 for contesting against an incumbent MP and a female aspirant who competed against an incumbent MP paid GH¢5,000. In addition, all male aspirants paid a filing fee of GH¢6,000 compared to female aspirants who paid GH¢3,000 each. In total, a male aspirant who competed against an incumbent MP paid a total of GH¢16,000 and a female aspirant who competed against an incumbent MP paid a total of GH¢8,000. A male aspirant running in an orphan constituency (i.e. a constituency whose current MP is not from the NPP) paid a total of GH¢6,000 and a female aspirant paid a total of GH¢3,000.

14. See Atteukah, 2008: 14.
15. See GNA, 2008.
16. Appiah Kubi refused the directive from the Constituency Executive Committee (CEC). The CEC recommended to the National Executive Committee (NEC) that his nomination should be rejected and the NEC complied. He threatened his accusers with a lawsuit.
17. For a powerful satirical account of the allure of a parliamentary and cabinet salary for a poor pupil teacher, see Achebe (1967).

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