
Elections and Representation in Ghana's Democracy

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Introduction

An *election* constitutes an important principle in liberal democratic ideology; on it hinges the very notion of democracy as a form of government that embodies the rights and freedoms of the citizen, and affirms their capacity to make decisions after careful reflection of alternatives regarding what is good in the long run and what is for the good of society. As David Held (2006) has pointed out, this notion of democracy raises many questions, including the 'categories of people who might be entitled to participate in politics', and the 'many substantive areas where democracy might be legitimately extended.' The challenge facing democratic practice is rather to implement procedures that would facilitate the formulation of reasonable alternatives that reflect the will of the people and constitute the basis for 'a sound and reasonable political judgment' (Held 2006:233). An election has become the framework within which citizens are expected to exercise such reasonable judgment as well as the moment when they assert their sovereign power for self-government.

Logically therefore it could be argued that by turning out in their numbers to vote at general elections since the country returned to democratic rule under the 1992 Constitution, Ghanaians are demonstrating their capacity to make rational choices between policy alternatives, and mandating their elected representatives to govern in accordance with their policy preferences. Indeed, voter turnout in Ghana's presidential elections since 1996 has surpassed the 50 per cent mark: 1996 – 78.2 per cent; 2000 – 61.7 per cent; 2004 – 85.1 per cent; and 2008 –

72.91 per cent. In a liberal democracy, where the traditional *promissory form of representation* prevails, the vote defines a dyadic relationship between the voter and the representative (Mansbridge 2003).¹ The electorate use the power of the vote to demand accountability from their representatives whose responsibilities are embedded in the promises they make either explicitly during the election campaigns or implicitly when the representative accepts the trust of the voter expressed through the ballot. Periodic elections provide an opportunity for voters to exercise the legal and moral power inherent in the right to vote to control their representatives by demanding accountability from them. Failure to give satisfactory account is punished. Does such a dyadic relationship govern elections in Ghana? Further, does the fact that Ghanaian voters turn out in impressive numbers at the polls suggest that Ghanaians believe in the efficacy of elections as the expression of their sovereign power to choose and change who is to govern them?

Earlier studies of Ghanaian electoral politics pioneered by the veteran student of Ghanaian politics, Dennis Austin, have consistently drawn attention to the predominance of peasant and small town society culture in Ghana's political economy and how this affects political behaviour, particularly electoral choices.² More recent studies, including those conducted by the Department of Political Science at Legon from 1996, shift the explanatory variables from local or community factors to the rationality of the voter who punished the National Democratic Congress (NDC) in the 2000 elections for failure to keep the electoral promise of growing the economy and improving their living conditions, and rewarded the New Patriotic Party (NPP) with 56.90 per cent of their vote, and again voted to retain it in power in the 2004 presidential elections with 52.45 per cent of the votes.³ Lindberg and Morrison (2005:1-22) have made a similar claim, arguing that the electoral choices of the Ghanaian voter are shaped by a mixture of objective socio-economic factors such as level of education, income, occupational status, as well as rural/urban factors. In my view, the Ghanaian voter may exhibit a measure of rationality at the polls; however being rational does not mean that they vote on the basis of the policies of the competing political parties.

Jonah (1998:229-257) on the other hand has argued that ethnicity is a salient factor shaping voter choices at the polls more than socio-economic factors. According to him, ethnicity is a major explanatory factor in what he describes as 'structural shifts in voting patterns' in 1992 and 1996, which became pronounced in the 2000 and 2004 elections. The growing saliency of ethnicity in Ghana's electoral politics prompted Gyimah-Boadi (2001:67-68) to warn against the potentially destabilizing consequences of ethnic voting, especially when ethnic voting appeared progressively to coincide with regional voting. Fridy (2007:281-305) does not dispute the saliency of socio-economic influences in the choices made by the Ghanaian electorate. He nonetheless assigns a determinate role to

ethnicity. According to him many voters take 'ethnocentric information about the parties behind the polling station security screens than anything resembling socioeconomic distinctions' (ibid.: 300; see also Frempong 2006).

In this chapter, I argue that existing studies of why Ghanaians enthusiastically vote have generated explanations and conclusions that are formal, often contradictory and most of all reduce a complex relationship between citizens and their representatives to the usual *authorization and accountability functions*. As Friday (2007:298) has argued, such conclusions that are based on responses to questionnaires and observations of trends in voting behaviour, and concerned about the meaning of elections and representation, are 'notable for their dearth of content.' Indeed the essence of electoral politics, which is the expression of the rights and freedoms of sovereign citizens to choose their representatives, is mediated by a number of social, political and economic factors and developments within and outside their immediate environment. Such factors may distort the meaning of representation and the processes leading to electoral outcomes. To gain a better understanding of the relationship between citizens and their representative, as expressed through elections, would require that we depart from the study of formal structures by which the electorate choose their representatives to 'a more abstract and normative evaluation of the institutional forms' that representation may take. 'The norm (of representation) should be divorced, at least in the first instance, from any particular institutional arrangement, so it is possible to identify representative relationship within a variety of possible institutions and practices, and then to judge them in terms of their contributions to democracy' (Castiglione and Warren 2006:3).

In Ghana, factors mediate the relationship between the citizen and the representative. First is the domination of the capitalist state and economy over a largely peasant economy and society. The two dominant instances (the state and economy) shape the latter's norms and attitudes at the level of politics where the interface between the electorate, who operate largely in a peasant based society, and the political class who control the capitalist economy and the state, is mediated by poverty.

Poverty is a major feature of Ghana's social structure, and remains a powerful determinant of the attitudes of the mass of the electorate toward the political class. Even during the 1950s and 1960s when the country experienced accelerated socio-economic development, it was only the minority of workers engaged in administration, manufacturing and commerce who recorded improvements in their material conditions: the rest experienced 'lower income levels and average standards of living'. In 'the late 1970s and early 1980s absolute poverty', according to a UNICEF study, 'rose from around 60/65 per cent to 65/75 per cent in rural areas'. The UNICEF study further 'showed that the deprivation was significantly worse for people who lived in those parts of the country ... that are characterized by structural and endemic poverty, difficult environmental conditions, and poor social infrastructure and services...' More recent studies affirm that poverty

is pervasive, and though the people in all the ecological zones of the country experience pockets of poverty, those living in rural savannah, rural forest, and rural coastal areas, export crop farmers, food crop farmers, and non-farm self-employed workers (those in the informal sector) fall within the bracket of the poor and very poor. In all these areas people engaged in agriculture, especially food agriculture, and in informal sector activities are the poorest: they live below the poverty line⁴. It is this pervasive poverty that defines the relationship between the electorate and the political class, and is the supreme determinant of the dependency relationship of the electorate with the political class generally, and their elected representative in particular. In this era of democratic politics elections provide the institutional and ideological framework for legitimising this relationship.

The second mediating factor is the community or ethnic identity. Austin, Chazan Dunn, and Twumasi, for example have argued that local factors and similar considerations influence the choices voters make at the polls.⁵ At any particular time an individual belongs to multiple territorial boundaries – the nation, region, tribe and local community - within which she functions as a citizen capable of exercising her democratic rights. The local or community factors constitute a local tradition that is re-lived during each election period. During elections the boundaries of the local community tend to become coterminous with the ethnic group or region, depending on the group's definition of which citizenship identity promises greater material advantage in accessing public goods. Ultimately the choice of membership of a particular political territory depends on the citizens' perception of the domain where decisions about access to public goods benefit her most.⁶ For Ghanaians, especially the poor who live in rural communities, access to public goods such as piped water, health facilities, schools, tarred roads and jobs are crucial for improved quality of life. An election is about choices of immense public import because its outcome impinges on the wellbeing of the local community or ethnic group insofar as its outcome shapes the distribution of public goods. I would argue in this regard that the pervasive poverty among rural dwellers induces a strong community/ethnic solidarity and identity that determine who the members of the collective should vote for.

Elections and Elite Interest

Do elections produce parliamentary representatives who act to promote the interest of those who elected them, including facilitating their participation in the choices made at various levels of the governance structure; that is, the people's participation in the decision-making process such that policy outcomes would be seen to benefit them? For Ghana's political class elections have become a very lucrative arena for competitive politics. It has become a business sector where the return on investment is usually good. Consequently, the number of candidates competing in parliamentary elections has been increasing since 1992 (see Table 1 below.)

Table 5.1: Candidates Competing in Constituencies 1992 - 2012

Election Year	No. of Candidates	Increase	Percentage Increase	No of Constituencies	Increase	Percentage Increase
1992	463	–	–	200	–	–
1996	778	315	68.03	200	0	0.0
2000	1074	296	38.05	200	0	0.0
2004	951	-123	- 11.45	230	30	15.0
2008	1060	109	11.46	230	0	0.0
2012	1332	272	25.64	275	45	19.57

In the 2012 parliamentary elections the numbers, according to provisional figures released by the Research and Monitoring Department of the Electoral Commission (see *Daily Graphic and Ghanaian Times* of 29 October 2012), show an increase in the number of candidates contesting the 275 parliamentary seats to 1,332. On the surface of things the increase does not look substantial, especially given the fact that the number of constituencies has increased from 200 in 1992 to 230 in 2004 and to 275 in 2012. These increases do not show the intense scramble for nomination to contest parliamentary seats that occurs during the primaries of the various political parties. On the other hand, the record of contestants for parliamentary seats since 1992 shows how aggressive the competition for parliamentary seats has become: 1992 = 463 (for 200 seats); 1996 = 778 (for 200 seats); 2000 = 1,074 (for 200 seats); 2004 = 951 (for 230 seats); 2008 = 1,060 (for 230 seats); and 2012 = 1,332 (for 275 seats). In 1992 the average number of candidates per constituency was 3. For the 2008 and 2012 elections the average number of candidates per constituency was 5. Table 2 shows how the political class has intensified the competition for parliamentary seats.

Table 5.2: Regional Breakdown of Candidates Vying for Parliamentary Seats in 2012

Region	No. of Candidates	No. of Parliamentary seats
1. Ashanti	228	47
2. Greater Accra	202	34
3. Eastern	152	33
4. Northern	155	31
5. Brong Ahafo	129	29
6. Western	111	26
7. Volta	125	26
8. Central	107	23
9. Upper East	63	15
10. Upper West	60	11

Why has the Ghanaian political class shown exceptional interest in *politics as a vocation*? I would argue that the rising level of elite competition for parliamentary seats is due to the prevailing view of elections as a means to control the state for accumulation of private wealth, and a market place where the electorate exchange their vote for material benefits: small gifts but primarily for development projects in their community or their ethnically defined territory where the benefits will accrue to all the members (citizens) equally. A relationship of exchange between citizens and their elected representatives, described by Clapham as patron-client relationship,⁷ is forged. The notion of patron-client relationship immediately modifies the voter-representative relationship that is implied in democratic elections, and poses the question as to what the elected representative represents.

The elected representative functions at two levels. First, he represents himself at the highest level of the state to promote his private material interests in conjunction with other representatives. It is significant that since the attainment of political independence, not a single faction of this class has left office without being tainted with corruption.⁸ Politics has become a theatre of accumulation of private wealth. Second, he represents his constituents by lobbying for development projects according to their expressed needs and interests, or as framed and articulated by him during the election campaign.

Because politics has become business, parliamentary candidates invest huge sums of money in it just to get elected to parliament; and their political parties spend astronomical amounts of money to win the presidency. The 2008 and 2012 elections dramatized the overwhelming power of money in Ghanaian politics. Political parties, especially the leading ones, organized lavish campaign activities. They mobilized and bussed people from one constituency to another to register to vote or transfer their vote; they organized expensive campaign rallies to mobilize electoral support; party primaries and congresses were characterized by conspicuous buying of votes. According to the Centre for Democratic Development (Ghana), money was splashed about to influence people at various levels of their campaigns, but more openly during both presidential and parliamentary primaries.⁹ Much greater extravagance was evident in campaign advertising by political parties: the leading ones went to every length to outdo each other in print and radio or television advertising. The use of expensive campaign billboards underscored the determination of each of these political parties to win electoral votes over the other. It was clear from the huge sums of money which the political parties poured into their electioneering campaigns that winning political power had become an obsession, and each of them would use every means to win it.

The heavy financial investments that the two leading political parties made in the last elections, and of course in previous ones, and the ferocious competition for votes, which would start about a year before the election month, were driven by the expectation that victory would bring with it the right to pillage the state

for themselves, and for the benefit of family members and friends as well as party supporters. According to J.L.S. Abbey the business associates of the political class also invest substantial sums of money in the campaign activities of their affiliate political parties. In fact, the private sector accounts for much of the spending during an election year. For them also politics has become business, and their expenditure on elections is an investment from which they expect profitable returns. Abbey elaborates his claim in the following terms.

In 2008 we borrowed 25% more than the previous year Twenty five (25) per cent was borrowed by the private sector not to invest but to support their political parties. When you see these huge rallies, they say politics is a game of numbers. Everybody knows that the swing voter wants to be with the likely winner; so the politicians will endeavour to show huge numbers at every rally, with every one of them claiming to be a winner. All the parties, even the smaller ones, will bus people from far places to one venue. [...] so everybody has enough numbers; and petrol will be bought for a fleet of vehicles, drivers must be paid; ... and then food will be bought and wasted. ... People will be given out of pocket allowances for coming at all, apart from the selected drinking places which will serve those attending the rallies. So the people attending the rally go out and spend.¹⁰

Being a President, Cabinet Minister or Member of Parliament promises huge financial benefits, in terms of monthly salary and as ex-gratia award after four years in any of these positions, either elective or appointive. On Wednesday 31 October 2012, that is barely a month to the next general elections, MPs decided at a closed session to approve an increase in the monthly salary for the President (GH¢12,000), Vice President (GH¢10,500), Ministers of State and their Deputies (between GH¢8,000 and GH¢9,000) effective 2009. A few months earlier the President had approved a monthly salary of GH¢7,200 for MPs. For the 2009-2012 period, they would earn roughly the following hefty income: President (GH¢5.76 billion cedis), Vice President (GH¢5.04 billion), Ministers (about GH¢4.52 billion), and MPs might take about GH¢3.45 billion each) for the 4-year period. Some sources have calculated the gross payment for their four-year service (2009-2012) at GH¢1115.2 billion.¹¹ These colossal monthly salaries exclude the controversial ex-gratia payments that have also become the subject of public fury and remonstrations. The ex-gratia awards proposed by the Chinery-Hesse Committee (CHC), which were generally regarded as lavish, naturally provoked much public outcry. The Committee had recommended that

former presidents should be provided with 6 fuelled and chauffer-driven vehicles to be replaced every 4 years; offices and residential accommodation in and out of the capital; 3 professional assistants; annual all-expenses paid overseas travel/vacation; a non-taxable ex-gratia award plus pension benefits; entertainment of guests at the expense of the state, and US\$1 million for a foundation; twelve months consolidated salary for each full year of service, and where the ex-president served 2 consecutive

terms he should be paid an additional non-taxable resettlement grant equivalent to 6 months of consolidated salary for each full year of service, plus a non-taxable ex-gratia payment equivalent to 12 months of consolidated salary for each year. There were also miscellaneous benefits, including medical and dental care, police escort during his drive in town and the provision of 24 hours security.¹²

The CHC Report was caught in another quagmire. Was there a document that could be legitimately called the CHC Report? Was there one version of it or several versions? etc.¹³ Was *the* CHC Report approved by Parliament as required under Article 71 of the Constitution? The fact that, as late as 6 January 2009, hours before Parliament was dissolved, MPs in the 2004-2008 parliament deemed it appropriate to allegedly approve such extravagant awards for ex-presidents when millions of Ghanaians did not enjoy access to basic social services to enhance their human dignity, was another source of public concern. For many Ghanaians, the MPs' behaviour spoke volumes about how they perceive their role as representatives of the citizens of the country.

Beyond salaries, allowances and other perks which factions of the political class within Parliament and the Executive organs of state are privileged generally to enjoy, MPs, top party executives and private sector business allies of the political party in power further have infinite access to various avenues, including membership of boards of public corporations, management of state enterprises, commissions and committees, and public contracts which rake in huge incomes as salaries, allowances, profit and other forms of income. For example, a new president has power to appoint people to fill offices listed under Article 71 of the Constitution. An equally important avenue where the spoils for the victorious party are rich and rewarding is appointments: appointments to membership of state/public boards, corporations, commissions, and ambassadorial posts. Between May and July 2009 alone the newly elected President made appointments to 59 such public boards, corporations, commissions, councils, etc. More appointments, including those he made to diplomatic posts followed later in the year. The number of appointments varied from one in a few cases to as many as ten in at least one instance.

Table 5.3: List of State/Public Boards, Corporations, Commissions, Councils, etc. to which the President made Appointments: May–July 2009 (Excluding Ambassadorial Appointments).

1. Agricultural Development Bank Board	8. Export Development Investment Fund
2. Bank of Ghana	9. Fair Wages and salaries
3. Bulk Oil Storage and Transportation Company Limited	10. Food and Drugs Board
4. Central Tender Review Board	11. Free Zone Authority
5. Council of Technical Education and Vocational Training	12. GAMA Film Company Limited
6. Driver Vehicle Licences Authority	13. Ghana Aids Commission
7. Energy Commission	14. Ghana Airport Company Ltd.
	15. Ghana Cylinder Manufacturing Company
	16. Ghana Education Service Council

17. Ghana Education Trust Fund	38. National Identification Authority
18. Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration	39. National Investment Bank
19. Ghana Investment Fund for Electronic Communications	40. National Pensions Regulatory Authority
20. Ghana Investment Promotion Centre	41. National Population Council
21. Ghana Maritime Authority	42. National Road Safety Commission
22. Ghana Oil Company Limited	43. National Service Board
23. Ghana Ports and Harbours Board	44. National Vocational Training Institute
24. Ghana Railway Development Authority	45. Plantation Development Board
25. Ghana Shippers Authority	46. Public Procurement Board
26. Greater Accra Regional Lands	47. Public Service Commission
27. Institute of Journalism	48. Public Utilities Regulatory Commission
28. Institute of Professional Studies	49. Revenue Agencies Governing Board
29. Irrigation Company of Upper Region (ICOIR) Limited	50. Securities and Exchange Commission
30. Korle Bu Teaching Hospital	51. Social Security and National Insurance Trust
31. Labour Commission	52. Statistical Service Board Limited
32. Law Reform Commission Board	53. Students Loans Scheme
33. Legal Aid Board	54. Tema Oil Refinery
34. Legal Service Board	55. The Lands Commission
35. Millennium Development Authority	56. University of Cape Coast Council
36. Minerals Commission	57. University of Development Studies Council
37. Ministry Tender Review Board	58. University of Education Winneba Council
	59. University of Mines Council Venture Capital Trust Fund

Source: Compiled from *myjoyonline.com*)

A key aspect of economic management is an efficient procurement system. 'Public procurement accounts for about 50 per cent -70 per cent of total government expenditure, represents 14 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and accounts for about 24 per cent of total imports' (Ministry of Finance 2003; quoted in Adu Sarfo 2011). Despite attempts to reform the public procurement system, the process has been tainted by widespread corruption usually implicating a network of politicians, top party leaders who have business connections and must have bankrolled the party during the electioneering campaigns, bureaucrats in strategic positions within the state bureaucracy, and political cronies in business. The construction sector which includes roads and buildings for educational institutions and health facilities, as well as the supply of various materials for public works and the provision of services for public use have become popular breeding grounds for corruption.¹⁴ According to The Auditor-General's Report for 2009 the nation lost GH¢2.5 billion in that year 'as a result of financial irregularities in the various ministries, departments and agencies'.¹⁵ The losses were incurred through payroll irregularities, 'store/procurement irregularities' and 'procurement irregularities. At the Ministry of Water Resources, Works and Housing, 114 contractors who received funds totalling GH¢1.2 million as mobilization fund did not execute their projects.' The persistence of such irregularities had become a source of concern to the Auditor-General: 'The irregularities have been recurring and they run through my report annually, a situation which I continue to find

very disturbing. Finding lasting solutions to the problems can save the nation millions of cedis to improve service delivery to taxpayers and strengthen public confidence and trust in the accountability process within the public sector.⁷

The spectre of 'judgment debt', that has emerged to haunt the nation, the political class their accomplices in the state bureaucracy, and local as well as their international business associates, illustrates the severity of the epidemic of corruption and highlights the extensive web of actors who are engaged in fleecing the country of its resources. Between 2001 and 2011 the government incurred GH¢642.0 million in judgment debt.¹⁶ GH¢117.0 million of this debt was paid in 2009, GH¢276.0 million paid in 2010 and GH¢231.0 million paid in 2011. The debt arose from diverse causes, but payments for breach of contract formed the majority. In 2010 alone 86 institutions and individuals, including Alfred Abgesi Woyome and CP, benefited from such payments. The payment of GH¢52 million to Alfred Abgesi Woyome would appear to capture the intricate web of public and private officials who collude either consciously or unconsciously to plunder the nation. For example, according to media reports GH¢52 million was paid to Woyome as judgment debt emanating from a business agreement entered into between the Republic of Ghana and Waterville Holdings (BVI) on 26 April 2006. Implicated in this judgment debt debacle are individuals; public and private institutions, both local and private; previous governments during whose tenure the contracts were signed; a former Attorney-General who allegedly 'stood by' when the case was brought against the Republic at the High Court; the High Court judge who in spite of the 'glaring facts entered a default judgment against the Republic of Ghana';¹⁷ a Deputy Minister and civil servants in the Attorney-General's Office, and civil servants in the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning; also Astro-Invest Management Ltd. who, together with Woyome, had sued the Republic for breach of contract. The proceedings of the Justice Apau Commission on judgment debt continue to reveal sordid cases of complicity by Ghanaian politicians, officials in the state bureaucracy and corporate executives operating in the country or abroad to defrauding the nation of huge sums of money.¹⁸

Another object of plunder by the network of politicians, their relatives, cronies and friends, bureaucrats and foreign accomplices is state lands. Recent reports¹⁹ have revealed that public servants operating at the Lands Commission, Ministry of Works and Housing, and the Town and Country Planning operated a scheme for allocating state lands and government bungalows to politicians, other government officials and their friends. This scheme was operated outside an official one initiated by the Rawlings government in 1996 and continued by the Kufuor government. Plots of land in prime areas of especially the capital city were sold for a paltry sum of money, and did not take into account the public interest to preserve land for future use.

The provision of public goods such as houses has also become the object of appropriation by the political class and their associates. On Thursday 8 November 2012 Enoch Tei Mensah, Minister of Water Resources, Works and Housing, reported at a news conference that 'About 10% of the (completed houses built under so-called low-income housing projects) were allocated free of charge to persons close to the NPP administration while huge sums were paid to the contractors with very little or no work done.'²⁰ This is not an isolated practice. Because of corruption and other malpractices in the housing sector the country's housing deficit has become almost intractable: it currently stands at about 1.6 million and is projected to double in 10 years if not addressed immediately. This situation has left the poor in urban towns like Accra, Kumasi, Tema, Sekondi-Takoradi and Tamale to rely on 'make-shift facilities – kiosk, tents, cargo containers, attachment to shops and offices for shelter.' There are also the homeless who live on the streets, lorry parks and markets (Addai-Boamah 2010).

In general, the distribution of the spoils of victory within the rank and file of the victorious political party is done disproportionately. At the lowest levels of state i.e., the district and community levels, the local elite (also called 'foot soldiers') fight for control over markets and toilet facilities from which they could generate an income;²¹ district level appointments at the NHIS, NADMO, National Youth Employment Scheme, and others are also appropriated by this local elite of the victorious political party. Small procurement as well as construction and building contracts become the preserve of such elite. The ruling class distributes the leftover of the 'war booty' to the masses in the form of jobs and other material benefits as reward for their support (see Lindberg 2010).

Political Power and the Vote

Politics has not just become a moneymaking vocation. It is the means to control state power for purposes of gaining access to public resources by which 'small boys' could transform themselves into 'big men' (Nugent 1995:4-6)²². The lucrative nature of political power, for either MPs or members of the President's team (ministers and a host of other political appointees) has transformed electoral politics into an intense competition in which fair or foul tactics are freely employed just to gain political advantage over the opponent. I have noted above the growing intensity of the scramble for parliamentary seats. In this competition money has become a major weapon; violence is another. It is the growing menace of violence in electoral politics, as an instrument for winning political power that prompted one Minister of State to warn that 'Elections are not about head-cutting but head counting'.²³ The fact is that politics has been divorced almost entirely from its moral purpose; and elections have become a means for securing the authorization of the citizens to become elected representatives. This is why the overriding impetus of elections is for a political party to secure the highest possible number of votes, and why

electoral competition has been reduced to a game of numbers in which the number of votes that each party would win in the elections is the most salient in the power calculus. The controversy that surrounds the voters' register during each election year underscores this point. In 2008, for example, midway through that election year, the National Democratic Congress (NDC), which was in opposition, alleged to the Electoral Commission (EC) that the voters' register for 13 constituencies in the Ashanti Region was bloated while the registered voters' population for 3 constituencies in the Eastern Region had declined in both instances since it was last updated in 2006. One of the smaller political parties made similar allegations in respect of the voters' register in the Ashanti Region. The NDC implicated unnamed staff of the EC and immediately raised doubts about the integrity of the EC. The New Patriotic Party (NPP) entered the fray on the side of the EC, and in doing so politicized an allegation about the credibility of the voters' register for a few constituencies, which normally the EC is able to rectify administratively. The matter became the subject of a heated partisan dispute between the two leading political parties: the NDC and NPP, and between the NDC and the EC. This controversy over the bloated register did not subside even after the EC's investigative committee had cleared the air about the allegation.

Two election-related activities organized by the EC exposed the intentions of the two leading political parties in the unfolding electoral contest to win power in the 2008 elections by any means. The first was the decision to update the existing voters' register through a limited voters' registration exercise, which was held from 31 July to 12 August 2008, to enable those who missed the last registration exercise to register for the 7 December elections. Rather than allowing qualified citizens to register voluntarily as their civic duty, the political parties, especially the NPP and NDC, mobilized their supporters: adults (including persons who had already registered), under-aged persons, and aliens, to register. Their direct intervention mobilized a large number of unqualified people to register. The result was a total registered voter population of 12,822,515, an increase of about 50 per cent over the EC's projected total of between 600,000-1,000,000 new voters. The second event was the period set aside for the transfer of votes from a voter's previous constituency to his or her current constituency. On this second occasion, the two leading political parties bussed their supporters from one constituency to another; some including university students were allegedly paid per diem for transport and a day's expenses to enable them to transfer their votes. The mobilization for 'transfer votes' was often done to influence voting in one or the other constituency. It was virtual gerrymandering, and could change the configuration of the voting population in a constituency. The outcome of the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections that the NPP contested on the strength of its overwhelming electoral support in just two regions (Ashante and Eastern) out of 10 shows the value of numbers in Ghana's electoral politics. This is partly why intense voter mobilization has become a permanent feature of Ghanaian politics.

Democracy and the Poor

Can 'electoral' democracy bring improvements to the life of the poor? Michael Ross (2006: especially 860-865) has reviewed the literature on democracy and pro-poor spending by the state. This literature emphatically correlates the citizens' freedom to choose their own representatives with pro-poor spending by the state. The analysis of 44 African countries by Stasavage (2005) corroborates this claim. He argues with particular reference to access to education that recent democratic regimes in Africa have increased spending on education to benefit the poor whose children had hitherto not had access to basic education implying, as Halperin, Siege and Weinstein (2005) do, that democracy has the inherent advantage to promote prosperity, welfare, and peace.²⁴

Recent election studies by the Department of Political Science, Legon also seem to give credence to these views that in liberal democracies the electorate use their voting power to punish governments that do not manage the economy well enough to improve their material conditions.²⁵ Claims such as these are premised on the assumption that the universalization of political rights empowers the poor to exercise such rights purposely to influence government policies.

Earlier studies on Ghanaian elections contradict such claims: they do not attribute substantive rationality to Ghanaian voters. Rather they postulate a link between the electoral fortunes of a candidate and the development expectations of the community or the region of the ethnic group. For example, Naomi Chazan claims that 'Elections essentially have to do with linkages: with the connection between state and society, between the local community and the national arena, between the economy and the polity, and between the non-formal processes and formal institutions' (Chazan 1987:62). The choice of the voter may be described as the exercise of bounded rationality: bounded by a number of subjective factors. A recent study by Lindberg would appear to confirm the exercise of bounded rationality by the Ghanaian electorate. That study concluded that 'a vast majority of voters put the main emphasis (regarding why they voted) on a narrow form of what are nevertheless collective goods; that is, local development goods for the community' (Lindberg 2010:7). In fact Lindberg considers elections as an exchange between two parties (the electorate and the political class) and that the 'rational politicians in an era of free and fair elections (know that they) gain many more votes seeking to further constituency development (a collective good) than they lose by disengaging from clientelism' (Lindberg 2010:14). Lindberg's conclusion is corroborated by a reported statement by the Paramount Chief of the Aflao Traditional Area, Togbui Amenya Fiti V, that the people of Ketu South Constituency voted for the NDC in the 2012 elections as 'a bargaining chip' for the development of the area.²⁶ It may thus be argued that in the developing countries democracy has rather provided the institutional mechanism for brokering an agreement between the political class and the masses to enable the former to exercise political hegemony over society. This

hegemonic position enables the political class to control not just society but also its resources. The exchange relationship between voters and their representatives would naturally benefit the representatives than the voters, and what accrues to the latter would have little or no impact on their material wellbeing. The rules of democratic politics legitimize this transaction between citizens and their elected representative, and its outcome.

The exercise of political power to dominate society rather than govern has implications for distributional politics. The faction of the political class, acting in their capacity as representatives of the people, distributes public goods in two ways both of which are in accordance with the logic of their relationship as briefly described above. The first is symbolic distribution, which purports to improve the material conditions of the poor when it is rather intended to merely mitigate their appalling material conditions. After all, governments pursue pro-poor policies under compulsion by development partners and to meet the standards set by international declarations such as the UN Millennium Development Goals, and not out of conviction. As Michael Ross (2006) points out, the pro-poor policies (in education, health, agriculture, employment, etc.) invariably benefit the ruling fraction of the political class and their allies.

Since the coming into force of the 1992 Constitution governments have initiated several pro-poor policy interventions aimed at addressing the crunching poverty of the masses. Between 1992 and 2003 not less than nine (9) poverty alleviation policy initiatives were launched (see Ninsin 2007:98), in particular from 2001 when the Government acceded to a HIPC status major policy frameworks such as Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy I and II and the Millennium Development Goals have given policies a pro-poor content and direction. The Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE), Capitation Grant, and School Feeding Programme have been implemented in the education sector; the High Impact Rapid Delivery (HIRD) and several others have been supplemented with the National Health Insurance Scheme to improve access to quality health care and achieve the MDGs. Investment in housing, slum upgrading and affordable housing projects have also been initiated to ensure access to safe and affordable housing; and a low income workers housing project aimed at providing 4,792 affordable houses in selected regional capitals was initiated in 2007. The National Youth Employment Programme (renamed Ghana Youth Empowerment and Entrepreneur Development Agency – GYEEDA) was designed to tackle youth unemployment; and the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty programme was designed to assist selected poor households with small amounts of money. However, as ISSER (2008) has pointed out the issue is not about government intentions, but the outcomes of such policy initiatives. Despite increased budgetary allocations towards various poverty alleviation interventions the poverty of the poor has not gone away. And the problems of education, access to potable water, health and environmental hygiene, unemployment and a severe housing shortage

continue to scourge the nation.²⁷ Eugene Yirbuor²⁸ is right in arguing that the problem of failed pro-poor policies is due largely to implementation bottlenecks. Recent reports attest to this. For example, the 2008-2010 reports on the School Feeding Programme and the National Health Insurance Scheme revealed that massive corruption has played a big role in the failure of such pro-poor policies.²⁹ Even HIPC funds were misapplied despite the strict monitoring systems which the donors put in place, and so it failed to achieve its intended purpose of reducing poverty in the target communities.³⁰ In 2008 reports of widespread corruption led to the dismissal of the administrator of the school feeding programme. A participatory study of the programme in selected communities throughout the country which was undertaken by SEND Foundation Ghana also exposed widespread corruption and patronage in the implementation of the programme.³¹ Naturally, corrupt officials find policy implementation the most fertile arena to indulge themselves profusely and frustrate the efficient implementation of policies. They are encouraged by the failure of accountability institutions, such as Parliament, which have to ensure the implementation of the Auditor-General's findings and punishment for corrupt public officials (Ninsin 2009:70-71).

Leo Ocran (then Minister for Education) was reported in *The Ghanaian Times* (Saturday, September 19 2009 page 9) as saying: 'Politics is like war ... when you win there are spoils to share.' This statement summarizes the second aspect of the politics of distribution that is embedded in Ghana's electoral politics, which is notoriously described as the 'winner takes all' rule. As the discussion in the section captioned '*Elections and elite interest*' above shows, the political class benefit disproportionately from the distribution of the 'spoils of war'. This is consistent with the proprietary culture that drives the political class to secure election to parliament or to the highest executive office of the land. The masses are unable to restrain the political class because this patron-client relationship weakens the power to demand accountability from their leaders – the political class which is embedded in their citizenship and expressed in various form of political participation, including voting. In a democratic society where political transactions are governed within the framework of patron-client relations, an election simply legitimizes the exercise of this kleptocratic culture of power, and gives members of the victorious political parties justification to employ state power to plunder resources of society for themselves and their supporters.³²

Conclusion: A Vote for Democracy?

The starting point of this essay is that existing election studies have been premised on the assumption that elections give legitimate authority to state-centred representative institutions to govern, as well as affording citizens the means to demand accountability from such representatives. Accordingly, once the integrity of an election is guaranteed as having performed these functions, citizens are deemed to have voted for

democracy.³³ I have argued that in Ghana a number of factors have reshaped the meaning of citizenship and *de-centred* the political frameworks within which citizens could seek their interests. Citizens see themselves in different identity frameworks, as belonging to the local community or ethnic group or region, depending on their perception of the issues pertaining to their wellbeing and the delivery of public goods to meet their interests. This has in turn affected the political relations between citizens and their representatives. Both the political class and the citizens have constructed a patron-client relationship that enables the representatives to satisfy their material interest and at the same time meet the public goods expectations of the citizens. To this extent members of the political class, as candidates in an election, deal with voters who are not the usual citizens able to exercise sovereignty and enforceable rights and entitlements. The elected representatives are mandated with a limited responsibility to address the poverty needs of those who voted them to power; yet the citizens have limited capacity to demand accountability.

The power of accountability of the citizens is circumscribed by the logic of patron-client relationship, which is dictated by poverty and lack of a learning process that enable the citizen to exercise 'rational' or 'enlightened' political judgment (Held 2006:232; paraphrasing Claus Offe and Ulrich Preuss). As argued by Castiglione and Warren (op cit:8), the transaction cost of accountability is high: 'it requires monitoring regimes' which fall far outside the reach of the citizen-voter; because he lacks the enlightened information necessary for effective performance. Therefore trust becomes a more efficient basis of the relationship between the citizens and the elected representative; and trusteeship becomes a more plausible 'feature of *democratic* representation'. Trusteeship is compatible with democratic governance because the socially constructed relationship between the citizens and their elected representatives is based on the 'congruence of interests and/or values between the truster and the trustee' (ibid.). There are other forms of democratic representation, but I would argue that Ghanaian voters elect representatives whom they trust would ensure that public goods would be distributed in a manner that would, more or less, address their own material concerns: they vote trusting that their representatives would pursue their interest. The problem with Ghana's democracy is that the political class, members of whom seek the mandate of the citizen-voter through periodic elections, is undermining the moral basis of the trust through unregulated monetization of politics in their insatiable quest to control state power, which has become central to the intra-class struggle for private accumulation of wealth.

Notes

1. See Jane Mansbridge's full article for a discussion of the different forms of representation.
2. The influence of local society – its politics, economy and mores – on the political choices of the Ghanaian citizen was a principal theme of his writings on Ghanaian politics, starting from his pioneering work *Politics in Ghana 1946-1960* Oxford: OUP, 1970. See also his introduction to Dennis Austin and Robin Luckham (eds.) (1975).
3. See for example Ayee (ed.) (2001) and Bofo-Arthur (ed.) (2006).
4. The data, some of which come from the UNICEF study, are taken from Kweku Appiah et al. (2000:306-310).
5. See for example, Austin (1975), Chazan (1987), Dunn (1975) and Twumasi (1975).
6. This is how Castiglione and Warren (2006) formulate this complex problem: 'Implied in this kind of boundary is a complex form of citizenship in which individuals have multiple memberships, depending upon the nature and domain of collective decisions' (page 4).
7. Refer to Clapham (1985: Chapter 3) for various levels at which this unequal exchange relationship is manifested.
8. See the reports of the various commissions and committees of enquiry appointed after the overthrow of each regime; for example, Ghana, 1965; Ghana, 1967; Ghana, 1968; Ghana 1975; also Ninsin 2000.
9. In 2008 the Centre for Democratic Development Ghana (CDD - Ghana) monitored the campaign activities of the various political parties; it found several cases where people had been induced with money to vote for particular candidates at the party primaries.
10. Dr Abbey was contributing extempore to a seminar on 'Economic Management During Political and Administrative Transitions' organized by the Institute for Democratic Governance (IDEG) on 11 April 2012. For a full report on this seminar see IDEG, *Policy Brief No 8 June 2012* page 13.
11. See *Public Agenda* No. 850 5 November 2012 Front Page continued at page 4.
12. I have paraphrased these awards from various sources listed on the internet.
13. For the various doubts cast on the CHC Report, see Masahudu Akilu Kunateh (2009).
14. Kwabena Amankwa, writing in *The Statesman* of 30 October 2012, alleges that because of rampant corruption in the award of contracts, the Minister for Finance and Economic Planning has not been able to submit reports of the operations of the Procurement Board to Parliament 'even though the Public Procurement Board has been submitting reports to' the Minister in accordance with Section 13 of the *Public Procurement Act (Act 663)*.
15. The information from the Auditor-General's Report that is reported in this section is taken from <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchives/artikel.php?ID=202145>
16. The source of these judgment debt figures is the Deputy Minister of Information, Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa as reported in Daily Graphic <http://www.graphic.com.gh/dailygraphic/page.php?news=17774> dated 30 December 2011. See also the Auditor-General's Report 2010. In his testimony before the Justice Yaw Apau Commission on Judgment Debt on Wednesday 28 November 2010, the Chief Director of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, Enoch H. Cobbinah, said that about GH¢158.269 million in judgment debt is awaiting payment by the state. The Auditor-General, Richard Kwatei Quartey, also reported that his office noticed the size of judgment debt payment

had increased in 2009, 2010 and 2011; hence the decision to highlight it in its report to Parliament. See *Daily Guide Thursday 29 November 2012*, pages 3 and 4; *Daily Graphic Thursday 29 November 2012* pages 1 and 3.

17. A former Attorney-General and Minister of Justice, Martin Amidu, had strong reasons to entertain such serious doubt about the payment of judgment debt to Alfred Abgesi Woyome that he filed a suite at the Supreme Court in which he asked the court to declare the payment of the judgment debt to Woyome null and void. In his Supreme Court suit the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, Waterville Holdings (BVI) Astro-Invest Management Ltd and Woyome are parties. For details about the suit see a report in *The New Crusading Guide* 28 August 2012.
18. Reports of the proceedings of the Justiced Apau Commission on Judgment Debt have been carried in various issues of the Ghanaian print media since 2010.
19. See Timothy Gobah 'Politicians, Public Servants Connive' in *Daily Graphic* Wednesday 30 May 2012. Also CJA Press Conference on 'The Grabbing of Government Lands and Assets in Prime Areas by Individuals' <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchives/Artikel.php?ID=240414> dated 24 October 2012.
20. Reported by CitifmOnline.com/Ghana at www.citifmonline.com/index.php?id=1.1136424. Dated 9 November 2012 at 9.50 am
21. For a case study of such struggles to control local resources, see Joseph Ayee and Richard Crook 'Toilet wars': urban sanitation services and the politics of public-private partnerships in Ghana (December 2003) IDS Working Paper 213. See also Sodzi Sodzi Tettey, 'Long Live Human Waste' *Daily Graphic Monday 27 July 2009: 27* for a satirical essay on how these local elites struggle to control toilets which are considered a source of income at the local level.
22. Maxwell Owusu (2008) has argued that the Ghanaian political class employs money to win state power, which has become an instrument for private accumulation and for gaining access generally to state controlled resources.
23. This caution is attributed to Clement Kofi Humado, Minister for Youth and Sports. See *Daily Graphic* Wednesday 30 May 2012, page 22.
24. Herbert (2009) attributes such grand claims to Halperin et al. (2005).
25. See for example Ayee (2001) and Bofo-Arthur (2006).
26. See Victor Kwawukume, 'Our votes, bargaining chip for development – Togbui Fiti' *Daily Graphic* Saturday 14 December 2013, page 19.
27. For evidence on factors that undermine effectiveness of the education reform initiatives, see *Ghana: Effective Delivery of Public Services: Focus on Education* (a review by AfriMap and the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) (October 2009). The study was conducted for AfriMap and OSIWA by the Institute for Democratic Governance.
28. See his 'Electoral Promises on Pro-Poor Policies and Programmes: Implementation Fiasco' in *Citizens' Watch July-September 2012 Vol. 12 No. 25* Accra: A SEND Foundation Publication.
29. See *Whose Decision Counts? (A Monitoring Report on the Ghana School Feeding Programme* (2008).
30. See SEND Foundation, *Where Did Ghana's HIPC Funds Go? Assessing HIPC Expenditures on Poverty Alleviation 2002-2004*. (Accra 2006).

31. SEND Foundation, *Whose Decision Counts? A Monitoring Report on the Ghana School Feeding Programme*. Accra, April 2008.
32. A recent case in which supporters of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) besieged the Bureau of National Investigation (BNI) (and later the courts) to protest the detention for questioning of Asamoah Boateng, former Minister of Information in the NPP government seems to suggest a previously unknown aspect of mass political culture, which is that the masses are now moving beyond voting to embark on political action (violent protest, in this case) to legitimize the use of state power for self-enrichment. Asamoah Boateng was being investigated by the BNI for allegedly breaching the Procurement Act in the awarding of contracts for the renovation of a section of the Ministry of Information building.
33. This is the principal claim in a recent publication by the Department of Political Science, University of Ghana, based on a study of the 2004 elections and titled *Voting for Democracy* Vols. 1 and 2 (Boafo-Arthur 2006).

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