

Three Decades of Electoral Reforms Under Ghana's Fourth Republic: Improving the Quality of Elections from 1992 – 2022

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to explain Ghana's success story regarding the quality of her general elections from the perspective of electoral reforms put in place by the stakeholders that matter. From a flawed start in November 1992 presidential elections which led to the opposition boycotting the December parliamentary elections the same year, Ghana now prides itself in seven (7) successful, peaceful, free, fair and transparent elections. Relying heavily on published materials and elites interviews from officials of the Electoral Commission (EC), top party executives from the two main political parties in Ghana: the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP), this paper argues that though Ghana started very badly in 1992, she has been able to improve tremendously upon the quality of subsequent elections in general, but in particular, the organisation of each election is always an improvement upon the previous one. All these became possible due to numerous electoral reforms, such as the transformation of the Interim Nation Electoral Commission (INEC) into a permanent and independent EC, replacing thumb-printed voter ID cards with photo IDs, the replacement of opaque ballot boxes with transparent ones, the introduction of Biometric Verification Machines, the creation of sixteen (16) regional collation centres to replace the two hundred and seventy-five (275) and many others. The paper concludes that, though Ghana has done so well regarding elections, especially compared with her neighbours within the ECOWAS sub-region, she cannot claim to have arrived because sporadic electoral violence, abuse of incumbency, and vote buying persist. Their presence does not only threaten the electoral process but also disempower the individual citizens who are the principal actors in the democratic process for whom these elections are conducted.

Keywords: Elections; Reforms; Democracy; Fourth Republic; Electoral Commission.

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INTRODUCTION

In democracies worldwide, elections allow ordinary citizens to participate in decisions that affect their lives and hold their elected government officials responsible for results (Alan & Rieu-Clarke, 2010). This is so because, in every functioning democracy, the government derives its power from the will of the citizens, who have the sovereign power to elect leaders to be responsible to them.

Ghana is one of the emerging and promising democracies in Africa, whose democratic credentials have been touted all over the place (Debrah, 2008/9; Arthur, 2010; Aggrey-Darko, 2013) for being able to organise successful elections (Akuamoah, 2017; Ayee, 2017). These elections became successful partly due to several electoral reforms carried out by the state. From a flawed start in November 1992 presidential elections which led to the opposition boycotting the December parliamentary elections the same year, Ghana now prides itself in seven (7) successful, peaceful, free, fair and transparent elections within its thirty years of Fourth Republican journey.

Indeed, since the beginning of the Fourth Republic, that is, from 1992 up to 2022, which spans thirty (30) years, Ghana's electoral processes have undergone many reforms as a result of elite instigations and consensus (Debrah, 2015; Gyampo, 2017). Also, Gyampo (2017) purported to fine-tune the electoral processes to ensure that problems of previous elections are addressed to improve the quality and outcomes of future elections.

This paper makes the case that the enviable position chalked by Ghana as one of the Countries within the West African Sub-region that organises relatively free, fair, transparent and acceptable elections in recent times is largely partly due to several electoral reforms undertaken by the state. In other words, this paper argues that though Ghana started very badly in 1992, it has improved tremendously in the quality of subsequent elections, with the organisation of each election being an improvement upon the previous one. All these became possible as a result of numerous electoral reforms that have been implemented. For instance, the Interim Nation Commission (INEC) transformed into a permanent and independent EC replacement of thumb-printed voter ID cards with photo IDs, the replacement of opaque ballot boxes with transparent ones, the introduction of Biometric Verification Machines, the creation of sixteen (16) regional collation centres to replace the two hundred and seventy-five (275) and many others.

By electoral reforms, we refer to any changes, whether major or minor, made to an electoral process to improve the quality of elections in Ghana (Jacobs & Leyenaar, 2011; International IDEA, 2006). By the quality of elections, we are

referring to the extent to which the elections were free, fair, transparent, peaceful, acceptable, convenient, image-redeeming, timely, and cost-saving. It is only sometimes the case that all these ingredients must be present in every election to be considered a quality one, but most must be present. Except for the first election – in 1992, all other elections within the thirty years of Ghana's Fourth Republic have possessed the majority of these ingredients in enough quantities.

As a human institution, there is no way the Ghanaian elections would be perfect. There have been few noticeable flaws, and they will continue to be flawed. That explains why electoral reforms have continued since the Fourth Republic's inception. An election is not an event but a process which needs best practices. Thus, the continues need for electoral reforms.

Methodology

The research relied heavily on published works. It reviewed literature exclusively about electoral reforms in Ghana from 1992 to 2022. Ideas from the existing literature on Ghana elections formed this paper's basis. However, there are few instances where published materials on electoral reforms outside Ghana are selectively cited to support what electoral reforms seek to achieve in countries such as Italy, France, Australia, Singapore and the US. Again, the paper minimally perused and used unpublished documents such as rulings, proposals, and reports from the Supreme Court, Institute for Economic Affairs (IEA) and the Electoral Commission of Ghana (EC), respectively. The supreme court ruling on the 2012 presidential election petition is cited because it was a landmark case. Secondly, the supreme court ruling has a more significant implication for the other courts. The IEA is the leading Think Thank in Ghana that takes a keen interest in championing calls for electoral reforms, which is why it is a part of this essay. Again, the EC is a focus of study in this paper due to its responsibility as the institution for managing elections and implementing all proposals for electoral reforms. Additionally, elite interviews were conducted with top officials of the two major political parties, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP), and the head of the Research Unit at the EC's Head Office in Accra.

On the part of the NDC, the former Deputy Director of Elections granted the interview. However, regarding the NPP, getting a National Executive member to grant the researcher the needed interview took much work. The researcher settled on the Upper East Regional Chairman of the NPP to give his views on Ghana's electoral reforms. The reasons for this switch are not farfetched: first, time was of the essence since several attempts to reach out to the National

Party Executives proved futile; secondly, the Upper East Regional Chairman is based in Accra and is closed to most National Party executives, and so he is well versed with the NPP activities and traditions; and lastly, he is a practising legal person and therefore in a better position to grant an effective interview on electoral reforms. Additionally, apart from making documents available for the researcher to go through and peruse, the Head of the Research Unit of the EC also granted an interview on the topic. Though there are many political parties in Ghana, the NDC and NPP are chosen because they are the only two parties under the Fourth Republic that have ever won elections.

The research adopted a qualitative research approach (as a standard norm, the author must state and explain the strand of qualitative research approach used and its relevance). The researcher believes the topic requires expert data to provide meaningful information to the reading audience. The qualitative approach is also suitable for analysing published material and expert views. Primary data for this research was gathered from elite interviews and reports, while secondary data was sourced from published materials.

This paper assesses the contribution of three decades of electoral reforms to the quality of Ghanaian elections under the Fourth Republic.

In terms of format, this paper is in eight (8) parts. Part one handles the introduction, which explains what constitutes electoral reform and the quality of elections. Part two throws light on the methodology. Part three looks at what electoral reforms seek to achieve. Part four examines the factors that necessitate electoral reforms in general. Part five briefly discusses the forms of electoral reforms, part six (6) reviews the literature on electoral reforms in Ghana as a way of situating this paper within the electoral reforms discourse, part seven (7) analyses the results of electoral reforms in Ghana within the thirty years of the Fourth Republic, and the eighth part concludes the paper.

Aims of Electoral Reforms

By aims of electoral reforms, we are specifically looking at what electoral reforms seek to achieve. Electoral reforms are not carried out in a vacuum but to achieve a specific goal. Indeed, electoral reforms serve several purposes. However, the foremost goal of electoral reforms is to create an even playing field for all stakeholders in the electoral process to participate in free, fair, transparent and inclusive elections. Apart from this, other specific aims may be exemplified in the electoral reforms in the following countries.

a) Italy

Electoral reforms in Italy are rare, attributable to the proportional representative system (Glanfranco, 2011). Because of this, electoral reforms aimed at reshaping the proportional representative party system and the government formation process into a more majoritarian vision of democracy (Chiaramonte, 2015). In this case, the reforms do not aim to create convenience for the electorate but rather how to make things easier for the political elites to form a government. An indication that the political elites in Italy drive electoral reforms and tilt things in their favour.

b) France

In France, it aims at ensuring proportional representation to satisfy the varied needs of the three dominant political parties; the Leftist, Communist, and Socialist (Neumann, 2013). The reforms' targets in India are to make the democratic process more inclusive by bringing more people under the electoral process, reducing corruption and making it more citizen-friendly (Reddy, 2020). Interestingly, though the political elites lead electoral reforms in India, they also consider the interests of the electorate and the nation to eliminate corruption.

c) Australia

In Australia, though voting is compulsory, electoral reforms turned out to be discriminatory by the government to achieve certain purposes. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, electoral reforms in Australia favoured rural people, who are believed to be the brain behind the nation's wealth, compared to city dwellers. Again, rather than extending the franchise of voters, reforms turned to restrict who qualified to vote. Furthermore, instead of being seen as a responsibility, voting has become a right exercised by those chosen by the government (Kelly, 2007).

In Singapore, because of one-party dominance, electoral reforms are merely meant to satisfy the political needs of the ruling government (Mutalib, 2007).

d) United States of America (USA).

In the USA, electoral reforms geared towards increasing turn-out by easing restrictions and the cost of ballot casting (Berinsky, 2005). In Ghana, reforms aimed at creating an equal playing field for free, fair, transparent and inclusive elections (Gyampo, 2017). Again, electoral reforms in Ghana also aim to satisfy the elites' needs in the two dominant political parties, the NDC and the NPP,

especially when creating new constituencies. Each of these parties tries to create more constituencies in their strongholds when needed, and they are in power to influence decisions (Interviewee 2, 2022). Lastly, Ghana's electoral reforms aim to ensure an easy transition from one government or President to another. They avoid confrontations between outgoing and incoming governments (Interviewee 2, 2022).

Triggers of Electoral Reforms in General

As mentioned earlier in this paper, electoral reforms do not just happen in a vacuum. Certain things pre-empt the need for electoral reforms to be undertaken. By triggers of electoral reforms, we refer to what could necessitate electoral reforms in Ghana and the world. These factors, generally referred to as triggers of electoral reforms, are the compelling reasons that inform stakeholders of the need to reform the electoral process.

According to (Interviewee1, 2022), some issues or factors trigger electoral reforms. These triggers can be called road signs or red flags that signal the necessity and urgency of electoral reforms. However, it must be noted that all these triggers may not apply to Ghana, but they are the general issues that trigger electoral reforms worldwide. These triggers include but are not limited to the following:

First, threats of boycotting the elections or the electoral process from any major stakeholders can trigger electoral reforms. The electoral process involves several stakeholders ranging from the EC, Government, political parties, the electorate, observers, the general citizenry and many others. Anytime major stakeholders, especially the contesting political parties, threaten to boycott the electoral process because certain things are incorrect. It forms an excellent basis for reforming the electoral process. This has become so because every electoral process's credibility depends on stakeholders' willing participation and acceptance of the outcome. However, the ability of a stakeholder to threaten a boycott and attract the attention of the powers that be in order to trigger electoral reform depends on the genuineness of the issues involved and the weight of the stakeholder in the electoral process. For instance, the NPP, as the major opposition to the NDC in the 1992 elections, threatened to boycott future elections unless there were satisfactory electoral reforms. The party insisted that the electoral process be overhauled because it was fraught with many anomalies. Eventually, it led to replacing opaque ballot boxes with transparent ones, rectifying the electoral register, holding both presidential and parliamentary elections on the same day instead of separate days and many others (Gyampo, 2017).

Secondly, potential conflict situations could also trigger the reformation of an electoral process. If the stakeholders have any good grounds to think that something has the potential of creating conflict at present or in the future, then the electoral process would be revisited. Democracy thrives well in an environment with few conflicts, and so stakeholders would want to avoid as much as possible issues that have the potential to create conflicts as possible (Interviewee 1, 2022).

Thirdly, judicial Process or Court cases can signal electoral reforms. This is so because an individual, a group, or an institution can bring any issue concerning the electoral process to court for either adjudication or interpretation. In discharging its duty, the court may make recommendations or give directives to the EC to reform certain portions of the electoral process. For example, Supreme Court (2013) made a lot of recommendations to the EC for Electoral reforms towards the 2016 general elections.

In addition to the above, recommendations from foreign missions, Committees, Citizens, Political Parties or any other legitimate entity to the government of Ghana or the EC concerning certain pitfalls within the electoral process are signals enough to trigger electoral reforms. In such a situation, the EC would have to examine the legitimacy of these recommendations, ascertain any merits therein, and take concrete actions to reform the electoral process. This is exemplified in the proposal to the EC in 2013 by the Institute for Economic Affairs (IEA) to include in the elections that presidential election petitions should only travel up to three months (IEA, 2013). This was born out of the fact that the presidential election petition by the NPP against John Dramani Mahama in the 2012 general elections travelled for eight good months, which created a lot of uncertainties, anxiety, fear and panic. This proposal was accepted and implemented. As a result, the 2020 presidential election petition by the NDC against Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo travelled less than three months (Interviewee 1, 2022).

External pressure can also inform a country to reform its electoral process. The external pressure can come from an international organisation of which that country is a member, a significant trading partner or a former colonial master. The pressure could be in the form of a threat of suspension or sanctions, cuts in budgetary support, or a mere suggestion from an entity that the country in question cannot ignore.

Additionally, the agenda from the government to reform the country's electoral system to achieve a particular goal is ground to trigger reforms from the EC. For example, in Ghana, from 1972-1992, it was the duty of the EC to

issue citizenship identification cards to Ghanaians. However, after 1992, the law was amended, which took away that role from the EC and paved the way for the government to create a new entity known as the National Identification Authority (NIA), whose duty is to issue national ID cards to citizens and non-citizens. Now the functions of the EC are limited to election issues, political parties and the demarcation of Constituencies and electoral areas (Interviewee 1, 2022).

Another important thing that can trigger electoral reforms is the need for more of a Legal and Administrative framework to deal with issues on the ground. Elections have the potential to generate conflicts; thus, if the legal regime is not adequate to deal with it, then some reforms are likely needed. For example, election disputes could take several years in court. In this regard, the legal system could be refined to ensure such disputes are expeditiously dealt with within three months, or special courts could be set up to deal with only election-related matters. Administratively, many more offices could be created to enhance productivity. In 1992, the Interim Electoral Commission (INEC) was manned by only one person, so the workload was too much on him in 2022; seven (7) Commissioners lead the Commission, and each is responsible for a particular task.

From the above, the failure of an Election to deliver acceptable results is one of the most substantial issues that can trigger reforms. Elections worldwide are expected to be peaceful, free, fair, and transparent to make the results acceptable. Any time an election fails to meet the above criteria, problems erupt. Under Ghana's Fourth Republic, the founding elections of 1992 were full of flaws to the extent that the opposition rejected the outcome of the results, which dented the image of Ghana. Therefore, moving forward into the 1996 elections, nine (9) reforms were effected to make the 1996 election successful.

Lastly, self – introspection from the Electoral Commission could also set the pace for electoral reforms. As Socrates intimates that the unexamined life is not worth living, it is for organisations. From time to time, every functioning organisation must pause to reflect on its activities to see what it has done well and what needs to be improved. On election day, there were so many complex forms to be filled by election officials, creating problems at the various polling stations. Through self-introspection, the EC identified and solved this challenge by simplifying all these forms into easy-fill carbonated ones, popularly known as pink sheets.

After examining the factors that trigger electoral reforms, it is proper to understand the types or forms of electoral reforms. No matter what factors trigger electoral reforms, all electoral reforms generally fall under three primary forms: structural, administrative, and constitutional.

Forms of Electoral Reforms

Aside from what could necessitate reforming the electoral process, how do the reforms take place? How electoral reforms take place is referred to as forms of electoral reforms. These forms are identified as three; structural, administrative, and Constitutional/legal (Interviewee 1, 2022)

a) *Structural*

The structural reforms deal with either the structure of the Electoral Commission or the structure of the electoral process. Regarding the EC, the structural reforms border on who is responsible for what reports on what, and to whom? In 1992, the Interim Electoral Commission had a sole Commissioner, but as of 1996, other deputies were appointed. The EC has one Commissioner with six (6) deputies, each in charge of a unit as of 2022. The President appoints all these seven (7) persons in consultation with the Council of State. Also, specific structural reforms deal with the electoral process itself. For example, in 1992, the structure of our general election was that the presidential election was held in November to be followed by the parliamentary in December. However, by 1996, this structure was reformed, allowing both Presidential and Parliamentary elections to be held on the same day in December.

b) *Administrative*

Aside from the structural, we also have administrative or operational reforms. These are reforms carried out by the Electoral Commission to improve the administration and operations of the electoral process. From 1992–1996, there used to be one (1) Returning Officer for each constituency, but from 2000, the number of Returning Officers has increased from one to three (3) because the workload involved is too much for one person. The creation of forty (40) new constituencies in 2004 and thirty-five (35) more in 2012 and the subsequent creation of more electoral areas and polling stations, the introduction of pink sheets to make counting of the ballots very easy, the use of Biometric Verification Device for registration and voting since 2012 to prevent impersonation and conflicts, the creation of sixteen (16) regional collation centres in 2020 to replace the one hundred and seventy-five (175) are all administrative reforms to increase the efficacy of the electoral process to ensure efficiency.

c) *Legal/Constitutional*

Added to the above is that electoral reforms could also be legal. Legal reforms mainly deal with the laws governing the EC or the electoral process. The laws governing the registration of voters have undergone many reforms since 1992.

At the beginning of the Fourth Republic, all that one needed to show to qualify to be registered on the voters' roll was the evidence that at least one of their parents was a Ghanaian. With time, the law demanded an ID card such as an Old Voters ID, a Ghanaian passport, and a birth certificate. Around 2008, the National Health Insurance card was added and was later dropped in 2016 because of the argument that the Health Insurance card was not accurate proof of Ghanaian citizenship. In 2020, those who could not provide the necessary documents could get five registered voters as guarantors. As of 2022, the EC is tabling a motion that, legally, the Ghana card should be the only primary document that should be accepted to register voters. All the structural and administrative reforms involved reforming the laws to accommodate the new changes. On this note, some reforms cut across all three or at least two. All the above reforms brought peace, accountability, efficiency, convenience and transparency into the Ghanaian elections since 1996 till date (Interviewee 1, 2022)

Review of Electoral Reforms in Ghana

This paper situates within the electoral reforms discourse in Ghana. Therefore, it is proper to do a brief literature review on related and prominent works already done in that area. The main aim for doing this is to locate the arguments of this article within the perspective of Ghana's electoral reforms conversation.

A Good number of published literature exist on electoral reforms in Ghana. For example, Debrah (2015) highlighted the lessons Ghana can learn from its electoral reforms from 1994 – 2015 and the way forward. He asserted that Ghana's electoral reforms, which started in 1994, especially with the formation of the Inter-Party Advisory Committee (IPAC), settled disagreements over the future of Ghana's Democracy which generated mass and elite confidence, he however quickly added that these reforms failed to address the issues of winner-takes-all and abuse of incumbency. Since the identification of winner takes and abuse of incumbency as problems in elections, the state has not done anything about it. The state is helpless in this situation because the people supposed to take action are the beneficiaries of these two ills. Based on this, Mensa-Bonsu (2021) opined that the winner takes makes corruption not only easy but also unpunishable. She recommended a consociation government to lessen electoral losses and achieve some accountability. Though this recommendation is laudable, it is practically impossible to implement in Ghana because we want to copy exactly what the Western world is doing, even though it may not work for us. Okrah (2015) examined how electoral reforms can deepen democracy under Ghana's Fourth Republic. In his findings, he agreed that electoral reforms have vastly improved the confidence, trust and participation of Ghanaian electorates in Ghana. On the

international scene, this has won Ghana much praise and made her a country of reference for emerging democracies. Despite this, Okrah (2015) still felt that the Ghanaian situation was imperfect because of other problems. Ghana is doing great in terms of electoral democracy. However, when it comes to institutional democracy, the country is far behind because we do not see much of democratic practices in public offices.

Gyampo (2017) looked at the state of electoral reforms in Ghana and asserted that, though so many reforms were proposed at the end of 2013 to guide the 2016 elections following the protracted 2012 election petition at the nation's supreme court, some were implemented whilst others were not. He concluded, based on this, that the success of the 2016 election was a mere miracle. It was a miracle because many of the recommendations made by the Supreme Court to ensure a successful 2016 election were not implemented. They were not implemented because the recommendations were not from the political elites who exerted much pressure on the EC. Again, Botchway & Kwarteng (2018) perused electoral reforms against democratic consolidation in Ghana by explicitly focusing on the Electoral Commission (EC) role. In their findings, they realised that while the EC plays a key role in electoral reforms, its efforts may not yield the needed result if it does not partner with other major stakeholders and that holding quality elections is a critical component of the democratisation process. This is an excellent observation because, though the EC is mandated to carry out electoral reforms, it must collaborate since the electoral process involves many stakeholders such as government, political parties, the electorates and many others. For electoral reforms to succeed, they must be supported and accepted by all or majority of the stakeholders in the electoral process. In many African countries, electoral reforms are led by ruling governments, and they mostly tilt things in their favour, creating the environment for democratic reversal (Kubasu, 2017)

Against the backdrop of many African countries struggling to democratise, Ghana's three decades of uninterrupted democracy is worth noting. This article argues that Ghana has kept reforming its electoral process within the past three decades and that these reforms have contributed substantially to the quality of elections in Ghana so far.

Results of Electoral Reforms Undertaken in Ghana (1992-2022).

All electoral reforms, be they structural, administrative, or constitutional, must bring something good, something beneficial, or some quality to the electoral management body or process. This section of the paper will examine the quality of the various electoral reforms conducted within the three decades of Ghana's

Fourth Republican journey. By the quality of elections, we mean the extent to which the elections were free, fair, transparent, peaceful, acceptable, convenient, image-redeeming, timely, cost-saving, and confidence-engendering.

From a flawed start in 1992, Ghana is now seen as a beacon of democracy in the African Sub-region. This is primarily due to several reforms carried out within these three decades.

In the 1992 elections, the opposition took part in the presidential elections. Nevertheless, due to electoral malpractices, they boycotted the parliamentary elections in December of the same year. The opposition, led by the New Patriotic Party (NPP), claimed that a lot of electoral malpractices were meted out by the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the Interim Electoral Commission (INEC) to their party officials and candidates and that explains why they boycotted the parliamentary elections. The parties that lost the 1992 elections threatened to abstain from all future elections unless there were satisfactory reforms (Gyampo, 2017). Many reforms were undertaken to get the opposition to return to the electoral process. Nine (9) electoral reforms were undertaken before the 1996 elections (Gyampo, 2017). They include but are not limited to the following:

First and foremost, there was an urgent need to reform and strengthen the Electoral Management Body responsible for elections. So, Parliament passed Act 451 in 1993, establishing the Electoral Commission of Ghana (EC). This was made permanent and independent to replace the Interim Electoral Commission (INEC). Additionally, the Electoral Commissioner and his deputies were appointed, and their appointments were permanent. They could only be removed on gross stated misbehaviour, which must follow a constitutionally laid down procedure. This means that the officials of the EC could take bold decisions without fear of being capriciously removed from office. This engendered much confidence, not only from international observers but also from both the opposition and incumbent, to obey the instructions, directives, and leadership from the EC. It also paved the way for the EC to lead the reforms.

In March 1994, the Inter-Party Advisory Committee (IPAC), formed and institutionalised in 1995, discussed and resolved most of the thorny issues, though only an advisory body. Because all significant issues were discussed at this forum, it went a long way to engender confidence in all the parties involved, reducing tensions and conflicts at elections. The voters register that was used in 1992 was reformed because it contained inaccurate data (Gyampo, 2017). Indeed, the 1992 register was more or less a voting list without much biodata, and the form of identification was just a voting paper without any picture so that people could vote multiple times. This time, voter ID cards were issued with white and black pictures for urban centres and thumbprints for rural areas. This was so because

there were not enough cameras for the entire country. This brought some level of sanity because it drastically reduced the impersonation and multiple voting in 1992. Again, in 1992, the political parties did not know how the ballot papers were printed, but running up to the 1996 elections, the EC involved the representatives of the political parties in printing the ballot papers by inviting them to witness the printing at the printing houses.

In addition to the above, the EC gave a copy of the register to the political parties to know the registered voters who would be participating in the elections ahead of time. It was also agreed to hold both Presidential and Parliamentary elections on 7 December to prevent unfair advantage to any political party and reduce cost. Transparent ballot boxes replaced opaque ones used in 1992, and voting done in classrooms in 1992 was now done in the open in the full glare of everybody, with cardboard serving as a shield. Unlike 1992, when the political parties were kept in the dark, this time, the EC involved them in all the electoral processes right from registration to voting and declaration of results, and also to curb problems at the various Regions and Districts, the Regional Inter-Party Advisory Committee (RIPAC) and the District Inter-Party Advisory Committee (DIPAC), and the District Registration Committee were introduced. Whilst District Registration Committee hold meetings to handle problems relating to voter registration, RIPAC and DIPAC hold meetings to discuss best practices towards impending elections and to take stock of what happens after elections.

These reforms improved the quality of the 1996 elections in the following ways:

First, it removed that blot on Ghana's first parliamentary of the Fourth Republic, which was one-sided due to the opposition boycotting the 1992 parliamentary elections (Interviewee 1, 2022). Though NDC was still in the majority, many opposition members of Parliament gave it a national character. However, when it came to decision-making, the minority had their say, whilst the majority had their way.

Secondly, the 1996 election was more transparent than in 1992 since voter ID cards with pictures and transparent ballot boxes were used. As in the previous case, the voter ID cards eliminated multiple voting and impersonation, and voting was done in open spaces instead of classrooms. The 1996 elections gained the stakeholders' trust because the process was more open and transparent. It, therefore, led to inclusiveness, with the opposition fully participating. This is a clear indication that the conduct of the 1996 elections received marked improvement upon its previous 1992 counterpart.

Even with the improvement of the 1996 general election, it was not a complaint-free election. The opposition bemoaned the bridled abuse of incumbency, which put them in a much more disadvantaged position.

Secondly, there were still complaints of multiple voting and impersonation in certain areas where thumb-printed IDs were used. Going forward into the 2000 elections, something needed to be done. The EC was quite aware of the incumbency advantage to the NDC, but there was nothing the Commission could do about it. However, for the voter IDs, the Commission provided coloured picture voter IDs to urban dwellers and black and white for those in rural particular. If for nothing at all, providing voter IDs with the bearer's pictures on them minimised the multiple voting and impersonation and created relatively fairer grounds for both the incumbent and the opposition. Even though the incumbent party's candidate, Prof. John Evans Atta-Mills, had all the state resources at his disposal, he still lost the elections to John Agyekum Kufuor of the NPP simply because the economic indicators at the time were not good. This lent credence to the assertion by Debrah (2008) that when it comes to elections, the economy is the primary determinant factor. The results of this election were generally acceptable, and both domestic and international observers described it as free and fair. The loss of an incumbent to the opposition in Ghana created history since it was uncommon to see the opposition winning elections in Africa. So this singular act of Ghana popularised her on the world stage as a country in Africa that organises fairer elections that give equal opportunity to both incumbent and the opposition.

Despite the free, fair, transparent and generally acceptable nature of the 2000 elections, there were still massive complaints about ghost names on the electoral roll. As a listening and functioning institution, the EC seriously revised the voters register to pave the way for the 2004 elections by removing names of unqualified and dead people's names from the electoral roll. All stakeholders accepted the revised register as credible for the 2004 elections. So the election results that were declared based on that register were generally accepted (Interviewee 2, 2022). Additionally, the EC also created forty (40) more new constituencies to bring the total number to two hundred and forty (240) (Gyampo, 2017). This was done to increase people's representation in Parliament. Though the EC has to create new constituencies, the actual decision is taken by politicians behind the curtains. In this case, the EC is seen as a mere implementer of the politician's decisions. Though some argued that creating the additional forty constituencies amounted to gerrymandering, it allowed some people to be appropriately represented. Again, no matter the situation, creating new constituencies brought the 2004 election closer to the doorsteps of some Ghanaians who voted quickly. Overall, the 2004 elections improved on previous ones since both domestic and international observers indicated that it was free, fair, peaceful and transparent (Botcway & Kwarteng, 2018).

The complaints about the ghost names kept recurring after every election, so after the 2004 elections, the NDC complained about over-voting, especially in the Ashanti Region. This forced the EC to exhibit the voters register to eliminate ghost names before the 2008 elections. Though there were not many new reforms, the 2008 elections met the criteria of a standard election which saw, for the second time, an incumbent losing to the opposition since the inception of the Fourth Republic. This means that at this stage, Ghana has passed the two-turn-over litmus test proposed by Huntington as the minimalist explanation of democratic consolidation. Indeed, many earlier reforms have come to stay and continue to impact the quality of our elections. Notable amongst them was the independence of the EC. In the 2008 elections, the ruling NPP brought complaints about electoral malpractices in the Volta region for the EC to adjudicate. After reviewing the case's merits, the EC ruled against the incumbent. This shocked the entire world since ECs are not independent of the ruling government in Africa. Admittedly, the free, fairness, transparency and general acceptability of the 2008 election were not in doubt.

As indicated earlier in this paper, ghost names appear during every election. To make the 2012 election memorable, the EC introduced the biometric verification machine to sanitise the electoral roll and prevent complaints. The biometric verification machine verified to be sure that the people who turned up to vote were indeed those on the electoral roll. The biometric machine eliminated multiple voting and gave evidence to one man, one vote, ensuring fairness. (Interviewee 3, 2022). The poll officials took an oath before a magistrate to show how serious their roles were. The previously complex electoral documents have been simplified into carbonated booklets for recording and accounting ballots, making it easier and faster to save time. The educational qualification for poll officials was raised to a first-degree level. The EC also reduced the number of voters in a polling station from 1500 to 850, so the long queues that used to characterise previous elections were absent. More priority was also given to people with disability, and the EC also extended the notice of poll from 14 to 21 days. Furthermore, lastly, thirty-five (35) more new constituencies were created before the 2012 elections (Interviewee 1, 2022).

No doubt, the introduction of the biometric verification machine halted, to a large extent, electoral fraud, making the elections very transparent. The slogan, no verification, no vote, emerged and became popular. However, the problem it created was that they were disenfranchised in some polling stations where the machine needed help to pick the fingerprint of voters—giving priority to people with disability led to inclusive democracy. Again, reducing voters at polling stations from 1500 to 850 reduced long queues; thus, voting ended in good time

for the results to be declared before darkness. Generally, there was efficiency, transparency, fairness, and inclusiveness (Interviewee 2, 2022). Despite all these, the NPP was unsatisfied and decided to challenge the results at the Supreme Court. After eight (8) months of protracted litigation at the Supreme Court, the case was ruled in favour of the NDC's candidate, John Dramani Mahama. Aside from declaring John Dramani Mahama a winner, the supreme court suggested possible electoral reforms.

Before the 2016 elections, the function of IPAC was enhanced as minutes were taken and shared among members, which had never happened before. Facial identification was added to the biometric verification for those machines that could not verify their fingers. This was a much more improvement than the 2012 elections, where people paid much attention to only finger verification. The EC also partially implemented continuous registration at the District offices. Collation Officers were appointed to assist the returning officers in reconciling their figures well, facilitating a more effortless and faster coalition of the 2016 election results. The National Collation Centre was set up to replace the Strong Room in 1992. This National Collation Centre was large enough to contain party members, journalists and observers, and so many more people had the opportunity to observe how the results were collated. This made the coalition and declaration of the results more open and transparent. In all these things, efficiency was achieved. The quality of these elections was cumulative and added up from election to election.

Even with the generally peaceful nature of the 2016 election, which witnessed the third transfer of power from one government to the other, people still needed help with the time from the close of polls and the declaration of the presidential result. To curb this, the EC collapsed all 275 constituency coalition centres into 16 Regional coalition Centres to save time and cost.

Lastly, the EC extended the number of days for filing nominations from 2 to 5 days to give ample time to candidates to file their nominations. At the end of everything, the presidential results were declared within 24 hours instead of the usual 48.

From the above analysis, it is clear that the numerous electoral reforms from 1992 to 2022 continuously bring best practices into the Ghanaian elections, as these reforms keep on increasing the credibility, fairness, inclusiveness, acceptability, cost saving and general acceptability of the very elections that these reforms aim.

CONCLUSIONS

From a flawed start in 1992, Ghana improved tremendously in the quality of its general elections due to numerous electoral reforms being initiated and

implemented. These reforms have resulted in the quality of Ghanaian elections, especially regarding transparency, fairness, convenience, and overall general acceptability. Indeed, Ghana has done so well regarding elections, especially within the ECOWAS sub-region. Nevertheless, she cannot claim to have arrived because of three (3) ills; sporadic electoral violence mostly perpetuated by political vigilantism, abuse of incumbency, and vote buying, which persist.

Though the state claimed to have disbanded political vigilantisms, they still unofficially manifest differently. The difficulty in eradicating political vigilantism stems from politicians who have to make the state security work professionally and adequately losing trust in the state's official security, especially the opposition. Political vigilantes carry out instructions and deliver results timeously and according to specifications compared to state security. Again political violence continues to persist because many people with no reliable means of survival depend on those in power. So elections become do or die affairs because of the winner takes all formula in Ghana (Interviewee 3, 2022).

Regarding abuse of incumbency, people only complain when their party is in opposition but see nothing wrong with it when they are in power. For that matter, abuse of incumbency is seen as a beneficial weapon at certain times. Hence there is no need to destroy it. More so, abuse of incumbency seems to tally with the Ghanaian culture, where the chief must display public wealth to show his capability. So incumbent governments would use state resources to campaign to show they can continue (interviewee 3, 2022).

The easiest ills for politicians regarding usage, but the worst amongst them, is vote buying. It is the easiest because politicians cannot provide their citizens with the necessary development. The only way to get most citizens to vote for them is to bribe them or buy their conscience. Again, vote buying has also become the easiest because the citizenry sees politicians as people who loot from the public purse. Therefore, election periods are times for voters to get their share of the looted booty. More importantly, vote buying is a function of poverty and ignorance (interviewee 2, 2022).

Unfortunately, vote buying has become the worst because it deprives communities of the needed resources for development since politicians use what would have been used for development purposes instead to buy votes. Again, it has become the worst because politicians do not see any wrong in vote-buying or the recipients. This indicates corruption has reached dizzy heights and assumed paralytic status in Ghana. These ills have become deeply rooted. Thus, the political will to deal with them is so weak because of the purpose they serve. Instead of becoming the aberration, they have become the norm, and this explains why the EC finds it challenging to come out with reforms to deal with these ills

conveniently.

The presence of these three ills not only threatens the electoral process but also disempowers the individual citizens who are the primary actors in the democracy for whom these elections are conducted.

NOTES.

- (Interviewee 1, 2022) Interview with the Head of Research Unit, EC's Head Quarters Accra, on 10/02/22.
- (Interviewee 2, 2022) Telephone interview with former NDC's Deputy Director of Elections, a lawyer and MP for Lawra, on 13/02/22
- (Interviewee 3, 2022) Telephone interview with Upper East NPP's Regional Chairman, a legal practitioner, on 15/02/22.

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