

POLITICIANS' REACTIONS TO ELECTION RESULTS IN GHANA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC: A MODEL TO DEMOCRATIC ACQUIESCENCE?

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ABSTRACT

Ghana has witnessed three decades of uninterrupted democratic governance since 1993. This feat has been marked by eight (8) successive multiparty elections, laced with three peaceful alternations of political power. Despite this milestone achievement, some practices have almost marred a peaceful transition of power. For instance, central to the alternation of power is the acceptance of electoral defeat by the losing candidate. However, presidential election results since 1992 have been greeted with mixed reactions by defeated presidential candidates. Effects of three out of the eight successful presidential elections (i.e., 1992, 2012, and 2020) have been outrightly rejected, protested, failed to concede defeat, and petitioned by defeated candidates. Against this background, this paper sought to explore the actions and inactions of defeated political parties, their losing presidential candidates and their impact on democratic consolidation in Ghana. The paper adopts the qualitative approach and gleaned data via interviews with Political Science and Electoral Politics experts, leaders of political parties and policymakers, and analysis of extant literature. The paper argues that perceived rigging, mistrust in the election management body, margin of defeat, and winner-takes-all politics imbibed in Ghana's democratic governance linger and manifest defeated presidential candidates' reluctance to concede defeat. Such tendencies predicate a rocky and bumpy road to Ghana's democratic consolidation.

Keywords: Elections; election results; electoral defeat; party reactions; democratic consolidation.

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INTRODUCTION

Multiparty elections have been regarded as the acceptable means of changing regimes in Ghana (Boakye, 2018). Thus, frequent and competitive elections are designed to confer legitimacy and responsiveness to governance in Ghana (Kumah–Abiwu and Darkwa, 2020). Since 1993, Ghana has experienced eight successful elections (1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2016, and 2020). These elections have resulted in three peaceful power transfers between two major political parties, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC). Central to alternation of political power is when defeated candidates in the electoral contest officially accept the outcome of the election, thereby conceding electoral defeat. To this point, in a democratic society, after the official election declaration, all defeated candidates are expected to congratulate the victor.

In contrast, the winner is responsible for accepting the congratulatory message from the Electoral Commissioner and contestants. In Ghana, statutory frameworks govern candidates' reactions in elections. For instance, presidential candidates sign the Presidential Election Peace Pact (PEPP) before every election.

Spectacularly, presidential candidates' reactions (accepting or rejecting) to election results contribute to democratic consolidation or otherwise. This argument aligns with the minimalist perspective, where democracy is consolidated when two government turnovers have occurred, especially when an opposition party has defeated the incumbent. In the subsequent election, the incumbent defeats the opposition party (Huntington, 1991). Consequently, election results prompt a twofold test of democratic consolidation whereby the actions or inactions of electoral losers concerning how they understand the defeat and their post-election reactions on the one hand, and winners' attitudes before and after the declaration of election results on the other hand, epitomises political stability and legitimacy of government (Frempong, 2012). The subsequent argument explicates a logical inference on the essence of exploring how the actions or inactions of political parties headed by their presidential candidates impact democratic consolidation in Ghana.

The extant literature on elections and democratic consolidation in Ghana, including the works of (Graham et al. 2017; Idowu & Mimiko, 2020a; Idowu & Mimiko, 2020b), focused on factors that enable peaceful political power alternation and the impact of alternation of power on democratic consolidation in Ghana. Taylor (2019) and Gyampo et al. (2017) researched the determinants of incumbent defeat in Ghana's presidential elections of 2016, while Kumah–Abiwu and Darkwa (2020) studied Ghana's efforts to advance democratic consolidation. However, the refusal of presidential candidates to concede defeat and its impact on democratic

consolidation in Ghana has attracted less scholarly writing. Consequently, this article throws a searchlight into the gap in the literature. It specifically provides a comprehensive report on the actions and inactions of defeated political parties and their losing presidential candidates, as well as the impact of their reactions on democratic consolidation in Ghana. The paper answers the question: to what extent do political parties' responses to election results impact Ghana's democratic consolidation? This paper extends the intellectual argument on elections and democratic consolidation. It stimulates the consciousness of political parties, presidential aspirants and citizens alike about the necessity of conceding to electoral defeat to enhance democratic consolidation in Ghana.

Empirical Literature Review

Democratisation is divided into three major processes: liberalisation, transition and consolidation (Rakner & Svasand, 2013). Accordingly, the liberalisation phase is when the previous authoritarian regime opens up or crumbles (Rakner & Svasand, 2013). The transition phase, the term used to denote 'political change or regime' (Diamond, 2015), occurs when the first competitive elections are held (Rakner & Svasand, 2013). Ghana passed this stage with her 1992 founding elections. The consolidation phase is entrenched when democratic practices, rules, and institutions have been established and entrenched (Linz & Stepan, 1996). Scholars see this as the final phase of establishing durable political regimes and stabilising democracy from reversal (Rakner & Svasand, 2013). The literature on democratic consolidation is divided into two schools of thought: the minimalists' and the maximalists' perspectives.

Minimalists such as Linz (1990) argued that democracy is consolidated when there is the 'two-elections' test or the 'transfer of power' test. This occurs when a government is elected in free and fair elections contests, defeated at subsequent elections, and accepts the results. In this view, it is not about winning office but losing it and accepting the electoral outcomes. This demonstrates that leaders of political parties and their over-zealous supporters are ready and respect the game's rules over the continuation of their power (Linz, 1990). Further, Huntington (1991) argued that democracy is consolidated after the 'two-turnover test.' To him, it is not just two elections but two-turn overs. Democracy is consolidated when a party that wins an election loses and transfers power to another party that also loses an election and then peacefully hands over power after an election. However, minimalist scholars such as Dahl (1971), Linz (1990), and Huntington (1991) have been criticised by maximalists for committing what Terry Karl referred to as "the fallacy of electoralism," privileging elections and neglecting all other tenets of democracy (cited in Rose & Shin,

2001, p. 334).

Maximalists like Beetham (1994) and Diamond (1999) suggest that for a democracy to be consolidated, certain features or conditions must be in place beyond elections and turnover of power. Diamond (1999), for instance, suggests that democratic consolidation encompasses the respect and protection of individuals and group liberties with an autonomous vibrant civil society. Extending this argument from the maximalist school of thought, Beetham (1994) argued that winning political power is not the yardstick to democratic consolidation. Instead, losing elections and accepting defeats, since the ruling elites and their supporters must prepare to uphold and respect the game's rules against power continuation. The author succinctly summed up that democracy is consolidated when a government elected in a free, fair, multiparty election is defeated at a subsequent election and accepts the result (Beetham, 1994).

Similarly, Anderson and Mendes (2005) concurred that what makes democracy work and sustained cannot necessarily be linked so much to the success of winners. The test case, however, is for losing parties to accept seemingly distasteful results and the processes and procedures that produced the outcomes. Furthermore, according to Linz and Stepan (1996), a country's democracy is consolidated when it becomes behaviourally, attitudinally, and constitutionally rooted. Thus, when the tendencies of 'national, social, economic, political or institutional actors' to create a non-democratic regime are very minimal or insignificant when the majority of citizens believe that any further political change must emerge from within the parameters of democratic formulas, and when all political actors in the state are subjected to laws, procedures, and institutions sanctioned by the new democratic order (Linz & Stefan, 1996, pp. 5-6).

Generally, the maximalists' perspective conceives democratic consolidation to encompass electoral uncertainties, accountability and party institutionalisation in conjunction with human rights protection, enfranchisement, universal adult suffrage, and associational freedoms. However, the maximalists' perspective has been critiqued for over-extending the meaning of democratic consolidation to encompass all the features needed to improve the overall quality of democracy. Hence this paper draws on the minimalists' conceptualisation of democratic consolidation to check how parties' reactions (acceptance and rejection) to election results affect Ghana's democratic consolidation and good governance.

In their study, Braimah and Bawah (2019) reported that political parties' claims and counterclaims of victory before the official declaration of Ghana's 2016 elections led to election violence. As a result, this paper adds to the works of Braimah and Bawah (2019) by exposing how politicians' reactions to election

results, defined by the nature of the electoral processes, affect democratisation. A related study by Idowu and Mimiko (2020a) on the enabling factors for the peaceful alternation of power in Ghana and Nigeria reported that a transparent election management system and rooted democratic culture are responsible for Ghana's peaceful alternation. In contrast, the electorates' perception, stakeholders' pressures, improved electoral management body, and candidates' personalities explain Nigeria's alternation of power. Comparatively, Idowu and Mimiko's report imply that institutional and cultural variables shape the alternation of power in Africa.

In another study, Cho and Logan (2014) investigated whether democracy can be consolidated without power alternation. In their view, the lack of peaceful alternation among power holders demeans popular confidence in democratic fortitude. Similarly, Idowu and Mimiko (2020b) studied the role of election management in the alternation of power and reported that credible election management in Ghana influenced incumbents' willingness to accept defeat. However, this paper expands this line of argument by showing how presidential candidates react to irregular elections and their impact on democratic consolidation. Asante and Asare (2016) interrogate why the 2012 election challenge could be a leap toward Ghana's march to democratisation and argue that the courts are essential elements of Ghana's democratic progress. Bob-Milliar and Paller's (2018) findings supported this argument, postulating that the NPP's petition of Ghana's 2012 presidential election results was a 'democratic rupture' in the country's electoral politics that facilitated the party's victory in 2016. The authors found that the petition of the 2012 presidential election results contributed to Ghana's democratic development by revealing flaws in the electoral system and increasing voters' knowledge of the electoral processes. Thus, the 2012 election petition provided important lessons for electoral reforms in subsequent elections in Ghana.

Contrary to this position, Aggrey-Darkoh and Asah-Asante (2017) reported that the Supreme Court's verdict on the 2012 election petition can deepen the country's nascent democracy and can also be a recipe for chaos which may consequently undermine the democratic gains the government has made. Interestingly, Bentil (2017) found that Ghana's EC has attained an enviable- feet of supervising the peaceful conduct of elections, leading to successful alternation of power. However, the study reveals that bloated voters register and inadequate voter education continues to elude the EC's work. This assertion supports our argument that parties' mistrust of the EC contributes to their rejection of election results. Nwokeke (2019) added the dimension of political elites, revealing that political elites play significant roles in democratic consolidation in Africa. In

their opinion, the differing attitude among political elites accounts for democratic outcomes. This revelation is critical to understanding how the actions and inactions of political leaders toward election results shape democratic consolidation in Ghana.

Theoretical Review

The literature on what explains politicians' attitudes in electoral contests is waxed. However, this paper contextualised this phenomenon in the theoretical roots of relative deprivation, instrumental institutionalism, historical-cultural institutionalism, and resource mobilisation theories. The theory of relative deprivation, introduced by the work of Stouffer in 1949, has been used to predict and explain the results of various variables, including people's willingness to participate in protest-driven activities and intergroup activities, among others (Smith et al., 2015). The theory propounds the comparative analysis of individual standards, embodied by anger and resentment that make people worse off, lingering their possibility to join the protest. To this point, it is clear that the theory of relative deprivation provides a subjective evaluation of the social behaviour of politicians amidst elections. It strongly links variations in protest activities to the changing perceptions and assessment of people's economic situations (Ekiert & Kubik, 1998). In affirmative to the tenets of the relative deprivation theory, this paper finds that overzealous and anguished supporters of presidential aspirants contribute to demonstrations to showcase their dissatisfaction with election results. However, this and other related activities in this paper make the road to Ghana's democratic consolidation turbulent.

This theory provides a yardstick to underscore why comparative analysis of parties' provisional results and EC's final results have been critical determinants of parties' actions and inactions in Ghana's electoral contest. This argument is more exquisite as this paper finds that perceived rigging in elections makes parties feel anger and resentment, increasing their possibility to protest against the results. Starting from the founding election of 1992, which was declared a 'stolen verdict', most electoral outcomes have been challenged and sometimes reluctantly accepted by defeated candidates due to perceived fraud (Frempong, 2012). For instance, the 2012 and 2020 election results were challenged by defeated candidates due to perceived rigging. As postulated by the relative deprivation theory, this subjective sentiment drives parties' actions and inactions. The approach emphasises the economic situation as key to parties' reactions to election results. This implies that the winner-takes-all politics, which renders opposition parties go home with nothing, strongly defines how they respond to election results. This study revealed that financial losses incurred by political

parties were a key determinant of politicians' reactions toward election results, while such responses are often violence related.

The theory of instrumental institutionalism, however, argues that structural mechanisms, in the form of the country's electoral institutions, are critical variables in explaining the incidence and magnitude of collective protest by political parties (Kriesi, 1995). The theory of instrumental institutionalism postulates that transitory democracies with an influx of key electoral institutions remain an arena of constant struggle by political parties amidst electoral contests. The theory expounds why the results of most first elections that mark a regime change, such as Ghana's 1992 elections, have been contentious by contending parties due to institutional structures. This school of thought concurs with Gyampo et al.'s (2017) assertion that the opposition parties in the 1992 elections could not trust the NDC's overzealous supporters who constituted the Interim National Electoral Commission (INEC), which lingered and manifested in their rejection of the results. Occasionally, Ghana's electoral institution has been perceived by opposition parties as an appendage of incumbent parties, which determines how they respond to election results. As noted by Abdulai and Sackeyfio (2021), the NDC's mistrust of the EC in acting as a fair referee in the 2020 elections hinted at the party's rejection of the result. A critical revelation by this paper is that Ghana's EC has been the bone of contention and the primary source of opposition parties' reluctance to concede defeat which revives tension in the political atmosphere (during and after voting) wax and wane.

The historical-cultural institutionalism theory, on the other hand, argues that interactions between institutionalisation and cultural learning shape parties' reactions to the results of subsequent elections (Smith et al., 2015). The theory reiterates that historically driven "traditions" of contentious action inspire and predict future actions to election results. The theory this way argues that historical actions and inactions of parties towards election results explain their reactions in subsequent elections. This study finds a strong correlation between political parties' actions and reactions (such as organising press conferences to declare their presidential candidates' winners, petitioning and protesting of election results) towards election results as typical replicas of the past, but such actions have diversely inverted democratisation. According to Smith et al. (2015), strong evidence emphasised traditions and previous experiences of protest as primary indicators of future protest actions by parties. Thus, the theory of historical-cultural institutionalism postulates that parties' reactions to election results are predicated on learning experience and the party's realisation of relevant benefits accumulated by itself or other parties from their previous struggles or protest (Kriesi, 1995). In relation to Ghana, we argue that the high magnitude of

protested election results can be closely associated with the tradition of protest politics that characterised previous elections in Ghana. This paper argues that the NDC's Supreme Court Petition against the 2020 presidential election results was largely a political strategy for the upcoming 2024 elections, based on the perceived benefits of the NPP's Petition on the 2012 presidential election.

Moreover, the resource mobilisation theory postulates that the number, size, and duration of parties' protests toward election results hinge on the availability of their resources (Kriesi, 1995). This theoretical argument applies in the Ghanaian context in relation to the cost incurred due to a party's protest of election results, especially at the Supreme Court. Substantiating this theoretical premise, we find that political parties prefer street protests and demonstrations to court petitions because of the cost involved in the latter and the seemingly lengthy procedures coupled with perceived vitiated verdicts. Corollary, we find evidence about opposition parties' less confidence in Ghana's judicial system.

Historical Antecedence of Parties' Reactions to Election Results in Ghana's Fourth Republic

Table 1: Reactions to Presidential Election Results in Ghana's Fourth Republic

Election Year	Defeated Candidate	Defeated Party	Reaction to Result
1992	Albert Adu Boahen	New Patriotic Party (NPP)	Rejected and protested
1996	John A. Kufuor	New Patriotic Party (NPP)	Accepted
2000	John Evans A. Mills	National Democratic Congress (NDC)	Accepted
2004	John Evans A. Mills	National Democratic Congress (NDC)	Accepted
2008	Nana A. D. Akufo-Addo	New Patriotic Party (NPP)	Accepted
2012	Nana A. D. Akufo-Addo	New Patriotic Party (NPP)	Rejected and petitioned
2016	John D. Mahama	National Democratic Congress (NDC)	Accepted
2020	John D. Mahama	National Democratic Congress (NDC)	Rejected and petitioned

Source: Authors' construct developed from the literature

NB: Only the NPP and NDC defeated candidates are included since they are the parties to have won elections and have experienced electoral defeat in Ghana's Fourth Republic.

The table above depicts presidential aspirants' reactions to election results since 1992. It shows that the results of three out of the eight successive presidential elections (i.e., 1992, 2012, and 2020) have been rejected by various defeated candidates' while two have been challenged at the Supreme Court of Ghana as certified by Article 64 (1) of the 1992 Constitution. It suffices to reveal that the results of the 2000 and 2008 presidential elections were accepted, but the concession of defeats by defeated candidates was seemingly reluctant.

Research Methodology

The study employed a purely qualitative approach and collected data from two main sources (i.e., primary and secondary). Preliminary data was retrieved qualitatively using interviews. Semi-structured interview guides were used as an instrument for data collection. The researchers conducted expert interviews, spanning about twenty-five (25) minutes via in-person mode and telephone calls where necessary. The expert interviews aimed to gather an in-depth opinion and view of three electoral experts on the issue of presidential candidates' reactions to election results and their ramifications on democratic consolidation in Ghana's Fourth Republic. Other semi-structured interviews were conducted with four party officials of the NPP and NDC and three policymakers.

Informants (experts) were purposively selected based on their area of specialisation (i.e., in politics in Ghana, elections, and democratic governance). Political party officials were also purposively selected based on their expertise in the party's election activities. Policymakers were selected based on their experience in Ghana's electoral politics. The study strictly observed ethical guidelines such as respondents' privacy rights and informed consent. Before the interviews, experts were pre-informed about the purpose of the research and sought the informed consent of participants. In addition, respect for divergent views and participants' convenience during interviews were strictly observed.

Moreover, confidentiality and anonymity of information provided by participants were adhered to throughout the study, as experts were not required to disclose their personal information, such as positions, names, or contact details to the researchers. Secondary data sources were gleaned from journal articles, book chapters, newspaper reports, seminars, or working papers on electoral politics in Ghana's Fourth Republic and democratisation. Analysis of primary data ensued the latent thematic analysis procedure, where recorded data were analysed and discussed qualitatively after the researchers had carefully segmented the findings into meaningful analytical strands.

Findings and Analysis

This paper revealed some significant and novel findings as presented and discussed subsequently. The study showed that defeated candidates are likely to concede defeat when the mechanisms and electoral processes that produced the results are transparent, fair, reliable, trustworthy, and promising to ensure their victory in subsequent elections. Corollary to the above, the NPP candidate, John A. Kufour, declared that there was nothing like a 'stolen verdict' in the 1996 presidential elections as in the case of 1992. It conceded electoral defeat, admitting that Rawlings and the NDC at the time were virtually a potent third force in electoral politics in Ghana (Frempong, 2012). More promising for democratic consolidation is that all the defeated presidential aspirants, including their party executives, were present at the inaugural ceremony in January 1997, legitimising the acceptance of the elected government (Frempong, 2007). Corroborating this line of argument, Idowu and Mimiko (2020) reported a strong and interweaving relationship between confidence in electoral processes and the transition of power in a political system. This finding implies that seemingly incredible elections extenuate electoral petitions and protested outcomes by parties. In contrast, the methods used in opposing electoral outcomes are highly detrimental to democratic consolidation.

Essentially, this paper finds that presidential candidates are often reluctant and mostly refuse to accept the results of presidential elections due to unclear details of figures from various collation centres and the Electoral Commission's substantial room, mistrust in the Electoral Commission, perceived rigging of the outcomes, eagerness to win political power and the lack of transparency and fairness in the electoral process. This paper further revealed that parties' mistrust in Ghana's Electoral Commission is predicated on opposition parties' perceived corruption and electoral irregularities, such as wrong counting of ballot papers and tabulation of election figures on the part of the commission. The extensive literature, such as the work of (Abdulai & Sackeyfio, 2021; Alhassan, 2016; Ayee, 2017; Frempong, 2015), however, found mistrust in the electoral commission and the election procedures, along with perceived rigging to be critical factors that explain presidential candidates' reluctance to accept electoral outcomes in Ghana.

Spectacularly, we find that whereas petitioned election results (through legal means) may not necessarily denote de-democratisation, the actions and inactions of losers before the election petition remain bumpy and rough to democratisation. In the affirmative, this paper reveals that protest-driven mechanisms in the wake of political parties' expression of dissatisfaction before and mainly after the declaration of election results have marred Ghana's feat of

consolidating her democracy within the last two decades. Empirically, we found evidence that protests, such as demonstrations against election results, have often destroyed life and state property. Further, this paper shows that boycott of election results by defeated presidential candidates and their ardent supporters have contributed to the death and injuries of many, the violation of fundamental human rights, the destruction of state properties, and increased tension in the political atmosphere.

In addition, this paper concurs with the findings of Braimah and Bawah (2019) and Ayee (2017) that self-declaration of victory in press conferences and counter-press conferences before the official declaration by Ghana's Electoral Commission is potentially dangerous to democratic consolidation as it often prompts violence.

This paper further revealed that incumbent control of the independent election institution had been the backbone of opposition distrust and refusal to concede defeat in line with the outcome of election results. Indeed, studies conducted by Aggrey-Darkoh and Asah-Asante (2017) and Abdulai and Sackeyfio (2021) have reported similar revelations. This finding explains opposition parties' inability to obey electoral rules and peaceful pacts or frameworks.

Moreover, this paper finds that politicians' investment in huge sums of money during elections makes them reluctant to accept results that are not in their favour, given Ghana's rooted winner-takes-all politics. Collaborating this line of argument, Braimah and Bawah (2019) revealed from their study that presidential candidates' actions toward Ghana's 2016 election results were marred by the fear of wallowing in the cost of contesting an election. In another study, Ijon (2018) argues that oppositions and incumbents have been reluctant to concede electoral defeat due to the fear of losing their core means of survival, made possible by the winner-takes-all nature of Ghanaian politics. By extension, we argue that the menace of presidential candidates' reluctance to concede electoral defeat amidst the cost their political parties incurred in the electoral process results from the lack of a party financing Act in Ghana. Finally, the findings of this paper concur with Pate's (2020) assertion that the use of fake news on social media platforms about election results is closely linked to disputed election results on the part of defeated candidates, exacerbating their distrust, division, violence, and their unwillingness to concede defeat. Such desperate politicians are prone to craft malicious justifications for their displeasure with election results.

CONCLUSION

It can be inferred from the analysis and discussion that. In contrast, failure to concede defeat after the declaration of election results has adverse ramifications for democratic consolidation; political parties' actions and reactions toward election results have deflated Ghana's journey toward democratic consolidation. Consequently, the negative impact of rejecting election results outweighs the positive due to the violence-driven actions and reactions that often ensure the latter. The succeeding empirical analysis and discussions further explain that opposition parties are mostly unsatisfied and need more confidence in Ghana's electoral processes. This political misfortune model infixed in Ghana's presidential elections imply that candidates' and political parties' rejection of election results, and sometimes their subsequent disagreement with Supreme Court verdicts (as happened in the aftermath of the 2020 presidential election) on election petition are clear indications of opposition mistrust in state institutions, and failure to respect the electoral rules of Ghana. Drawing on this concise statement, we argue that the degree of democratisation in Ghana's presidential elections in the Fourth Republic has been minimal, subverting the country's democratic consolidation agenda.

We recommend that political parties and their presidential candidates employ only legal means (go to court) to showcase their discontent with election results after the official declaration. Further, political parties mistrust in Ghana's Electoral Commission could be reduced when the executive appointment authority, as outlined in Article 43(2) of the 1992 Constitution, follows the wheel of merit and holistically popular procedure capable of attracting public confidence and trust, while members should not be removed based on political ties.

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