

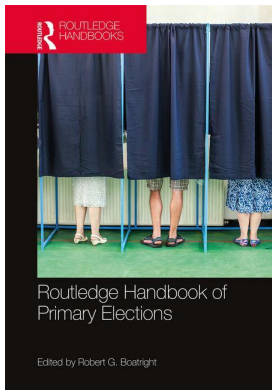
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Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



Routledge Handbook of Primary Elections

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Primary Elections in New Democracies

Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315544182-28>

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Published online on: 26 Feb 2018

How to cite :- Nahomi Ichino, Noah L. Nathan. 26 Feb 2018, *Primary Elections in New Democracies* from: Routledge Handbook of Primary Elections Routledge

Accessed on: 23 Sep 2023

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315544182-28>

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PRIMARY ELECTIONS IN
NEW DEMOCRACIESThe Evolution of Candidate Selection
Methods in Ghana*Nahomi Ichino and Noah L. Nathan*¹

Primary elections are increasingly used to select legislative candidates in new democracies around the world (Field and Siavelis 2008; Öhman 2004). This includes sub-Saharan Africa, where at least one major party in each of the 15 countries listed in Table 22.1 now holds legislative primary elections.² These primaries have mainly been adopted as party rules, not legislation, and the rules vary widely across countries and over time.³ Many involve small groups of local party supporters convening to choose nominees in each district. Other primaries, such as those in Uganda, Botswana, and, recently, in one of Ghana's main parties, are large-scale elections of all rank-and-file party members, similar to primaries in much of the United States. Primaries in Africa have received only very limited attention,⁴ however, reflecting the general neglect of primaries outside of advanced industrial democracies in the existing literature.⁵ What explains the adoption of democratic candidate selection mechanisms in new democracies? And how do party leaders in these countries decide what rules to use in primary elections?

Most theories of primary elections are based on the experiences of parties in advanced industrial democracies and provide only limited guidance for understanding the adoption of primaries in new democracies. They often begin with the premise that electoral competition takes place in a one-dimensional issue space, usually interpreted as ideology along a left-right dimension (e.g., Gerber and Morton 1998; Jackson et al. 2007), and party leaders are usually assumed to be policy-seeking. From the perspective of the party leader, candidate selection mechanisms differ in their potential trade-offs between the expected performance of a would-be nominee in the general election and the distance between the nominee's and the party leader's policy preferences. A primary election could improve the party's performance by selecting for a nominee with higher valence (Carey and Polga-Hecimovich 2006; Adams and Merrill 2008; Serra 2011). An intra-party competition between potential nominees might also signal to voters that the quality of the nominee will be high, improving electability by enhancing the image of the party in the electorate (Caillaud and Tirole 2002; Crutzen, Castanheira and Sahuguet 2010). In this framework, party leaders balance these potential gains against the potential increase in the distance between the nominee's and party leader's policy preferences in their choice of candidate selection mechanism.

In new democracies in Africa and elsewhere in the developing world, however, elections are less frequently organized around ideological divides (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007; Stokes

Table 22.1 Legislative Primaries in African Democracies and Hybrid Regimes

Country	Year	Legislative Body	Political Party with Primaries
Benin	2015	National Assembly	Cowry Forces for an Emerging Benin (FCBE)
Botswana	2014	National Assembly	Botswana Democratic Party (BDP)
Djibouti	2017	National Assembly	Union for a Presidential Majority (UMP) Union for National Salvation (USN)
Ghana	2016	Parliament	National Democratic Congress (NDC) New Patriotic Party (NPP)
Kenya	2013	National Assembly	National Alliance (NA) Orange Democracy Movement (ODM)
Lesotho	2015	National Assembly	Democratic Congress Party (DCP) All Basotho Convention (ABC)
Liberia	2014	Senate/House of Rep.	Unity Party (UP) Congress for Democratic Change (CDC)
Malawi	2014	National Assembly	Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Malawi Congress Party (MCP)
Namibia	2014	National Assembly	South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO)
Nigeria	2015	Senate/House of Rep.	All Progressives Congress (APC) People's Democratic Party (PCP)
Sierra Leone	2012	Parliament	All People's Congress (APC) Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP)
Tanzania	2015	National Assembly	Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) Party for Democracy and Progress (CHADEMA)
Uganda	2016	National Assembly	National Resistance Movement (NRM) Forum for Democratic Change (FDC)
Zambia	2016	National Assembly	Patriotic Party (PF) United Party for National Development (UPND)
Zimbabwe	2013	Senate/Natl. Assembly	Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU-PF) Movement for Democratic Change (MDC)

Note: We record all known cases of legislative primaries in the two strongest political parties in the most recent legislative election in any sub-Saharan African country that had a Polity score of 0 or greater or a Freedom House score of “Party Free” or “Free” at any point between 2010 and 2015.

et al. 2013; Riedl 2014). In the African countries in Table 22.1, in stark contrast to advanced industrial democracies, no major parties make a serious effort to distinguish themselves from their competitors along ideological lines.⁶ Moreover, most politicians and party activists are not policy-seekers, but instead office- and rent-seekers, which makes party activists vulnerable to vote buying in primaries. The lack of ideological distinction between the parties also means that parties are much more vulnerable to elite defections, as dissociating from a party would not deny a politician the benefit of being affiliated with the party label that best reflects the politician’s policy positions.

Leaders of political parties in these new democracies focus on two imperatives other than the location of nominees in an ideological issue space when deciding whether to hold primaries. First, similar to party leaders in all democracies, they need a means to screen for the most electable candidates while avoiding costly intra-party disputes and defections from politicians who do not receive nominations. Second, they must ensure that local party activists are motivated to work on behalf of their party’s nominees in the general election – a crucial consideration where parties do not use mass media to communicate ideologically distinct platforms but

depend heavily on grassroots campaigning. This alternative approach to primary elections shares a central concern with theories of candidate selection mechanisms that emphasize how primaries address intra-party conflicts among elites (Kemahlioglu et al. 2009) or between leaders and activists (Katz and Mair 1995; Katz 2001).

We examine candidate selection mechanisms in new democracies using the case of Ghana, an emerging democracy in West Africa where the main parties first introduced parliamentary primaries in the mid-1990s. Ghana's extended experience with primaries through multiple elections is instructive in highlighting factors that affect the choice of candidate selection mechanisms in other new democracies, including those where parties are considering primaries for the first time.

It has not been easy for party leaders in Ghana to find candidate selection rules that balance the oft-competing goals of selecting for strong candidates, avoiding elite defections, and motivating grassroots members. Nomination procedures changed several times in each party through trial and error. Party leaders were often unable to predict the consequences of using different nomination procedures and only gradually identified the relative importance of each of these goals to their party's electoral success after facing unanticipated electoral costs created by particular candidate selection rules. Party leaders changed candidate selection mechanisms mainly with the goal of winning the general election, either in response to surprising electoral defeats or in anticipation that defeat loomed if the current system continued. But in so doing, they adjusted the rules to address one set of problems only to inadvertently complicate another, creating a need to further adjust nomination procedures in the future. In particular, steps taken to prevent elite defections have often invited damaging backlash from grassroots members and *vice versa*. One major party – the National Democratic Congress (NDC) – gradually found primary rules that appear to address each of the main imperatives; the other – the New Patriotic Party (NPP) – still has not.

Our exploration of the evolution of candidate selection mechanisms in Ghana deepens understanding of political party development in new democracies in two ways. First, we bring attention to two problems – elite defections and motivating grassroots activists – that are much more serious for leaders of parties in new democracies that lack ideological competition than for party leaders in advanced democracies. These two problems drive the institutional development of parties in new democracies.

Second, we highlight how candidate selection mechanisms are a key tool for party institutionalization, which in turn affects electoral accountability and democratic consolidation. Party institutionalization is the process by which parties develop durable organizations and connections to both voters and elites that persist across elections and are separable from the interests of specific party leaders (Mainwaring and Scully 1995; Riedl 2014). Parties in new democracies compete in what often begins as an unconsolidated political space, in which elites and ordinary voters may choose to forgo parties and pursue their political goals through other, potentially non-democratic, means. In order to become institutionalized, parties must align the incentives of elites and ordinary supporters towards committing to the party in the long-run, crowding out other forms of political mobilization and preventing defections (Hale 2008). The Ghanaian case illustrates how primary elections are a central tool that parties in new democracies can use to align these incentives.

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, we present a theory that explains the likely dynamics of three common types of nomination procedures in new democracies where ideology is not a central feature of elections. We then introduce the Ghanaian case before documenting and analyzing the evolution of candidate selection since democratization in 1992. These sections synthesize material from three empirical papers on primary elections in Ghana (Ichino and

Nathan 2012, 2013b, 2017). The final section concludes, discussing broader implications of primary elections for party institutionalization in new democracies.

Candidate Selection without Spatial Competition

Where ideology is not the main axis of competition between political parties, parties do not invest in building “ideational capital” to attract and motivate members (Hale 2008; Keefer and Vlaicu 2008). Instead, they frequently offer similar platforms as their competitors centered on development issues such as economic growth or fighting corruption, alongside targeted promises to deliver private and local public goods such as jobs and infrastructure (van de Walle 2007; Bleck and van de Walle 2013). Legislative election outcomes are determined not by the candidates’ policy positions, which are often very similar, but by a combination of the candidates’ financial capacities, their reputations for constituency service, and, in countries with political competition along ethnic lines, their ethnicities. A key element of campaigning in non-programmatic political systems is the pre-election distribution of personal benefits to voters (Stokes et al. 2013; Kramon 2016), and candidates with financial resources will be more competitive. A positive reputation for constituency service, a valence characteristic, improves voters’ evaluations of a candidate, and voters also generally prefer co-ethnic representatives.

The *local elites* who form the pool of potential aspirants for legislative office are office-seekers rather than policy-seekers. If they expend personal resources in pursuit of office, they do so in order to obtain ego rents and pecuniary benefits of office. Others involved in politics at the local level also do so to seek personal benefits. Grassroots activists can engage in face-to-face campaigning and mobilize their personal networks of friends and family on behalf of the party. These grassroots activists include *branch-level party leaders* who run local party organizations, as well as *rank-and-file ordinary party members*, who are connected to branch-level leaders by social networks and clientelistic relationships and expect to share in the benefits passed down through the party branch.

Winning elections in new democracies requires *national-level party leaders* to address two related tasks. First, as in established democracies, national party leaders must recruit and put forward the strongest possible candidates. But national party leaders lack good information on which local elites have the financial means and local reputations for constituency service necessary to be competitive in the general election. Moreover, as Caillaud and Tirole (2002) note, party leaders must set up a candidate selection method in which weaker aspirants who are not selected will defer to the nominee and are incentivized to remain committed to the party. This is complicated because local elites are office-seeking and the party’s nomination for a particular office is a single, indivisible good.

Second, national party leaders must get branch-level leaders and ordinary members to work on behalf of the party’s nominee in the general election. Where parties compete with promises of personal benefits to individual voters and local communities rather than with distinct policy platforms, the mass media cannot substitute for the labor-intensive retail campaigning of grassroots activists to effectively convey the nominee’s promises of targeted benefits to voters. Personal interactions and the gifts distributed by these activists are essential components of a viable campaign. Each party’s branch-level leaders and ordinary members are thus actors “who hold, or have access to, critical resources that office-seekers need to realize their ambitions” (Aldrich 1995, 20). But because they are active in politics in order to gain personal benefits and not motivated by policy goals, these grassroots agents must be remunerated in some way to encourage them to expend effort on behalf of the party in the campaign.

National party leaders must consider both of these tasks in their choice of candidate selection methods. Different candidate selection methods have advantages and disadvantages with respect

to each task, but party leaders often choose among selection methods without being able to fully anticipate many of their implications. Because local elites and grassroots members adjust their own behavior in response to party rules, new nomination procedures can have unintended effects on the party's relationship with local elites and grassroots members, which party leaders may then have to address through further changes to candidate selection rules. Party leaders gradually learn the full implications of different candidate selection mechanisms through trial and error.

We focus on the likely costs and benefits of three candidate selection methods that have been commonly used to choose legislative nominees in the African countries in Table 22.1. The first method is undemocratic – national party leaders select the nominee directly. The downsides of this selection method for each task are clear. Given party leaders' uncertainty about aspirants' attributes, nothing assures that the nominee selected by national party leaders will be a strong candidate or the strongest among the available pool of aspirants. The nominee could be a distinguished and popular politician with significant experience, but could also be someone whose only qualification is that he has close personal connections to the national party leadership. Local elites with the financial means and good reputation for constituency service but who lack ties to party leaders may decline to put themselves forward, resulting in a weaker and smaller overall pool of potential nominees. Moreover, the direct selection of nominees also provides no obvious mechanism to remunerate local party members. This method has some benefits for party leaders, however. It ensures that the nominee will be the person they most prefer by whatever criteria they select, and that the nomination is available to be dispensed as patronage.

The second selection method is a primary election with a small electorate composed of branch-level leaders of the party. Where primary electorates are small, individual primary voters have significant leverage to extract rents from the competing aspirants in return for support. The primary election becomes a vote buying contest. It becomes an indirect mechanism for remunerating branch-level leaders for their participation in the party without party leaders having to do so themselves; vote buying in primaries forces local elites who seek valuable nominations to compensate the party's branch-level leaders from their own funds. In turn, branch-level leaders can share some of these benefits with the ordinary members in their local organization. Primaries with vote buying effectively select for, and attract, aspirants with the necessary financial resources to win the general election. But they will not select for nominees with the best reputations for constituency service nor necessarily the best match between candidate ethnicity and the demographics of a constituency.

Vote buying also raises the prospect of intra-elite disputes after the primary. Local elites who expended considerable resources towards winning a nomination but were outbid may see the process as unfair, feel aggrieved, and leave the party, damaging the party's prospects in the general election. National party leaders have few good options for addressing this disaffection of losing aspirants. They may be able to minimize this prospect by selectively tampering with primaries to ensure that the aspirants who they fear are most capable of damaging the party are indeed nominated, but this is likely to only further aggrieve the other aspirants. Placating losing primary aspirants with alternative appointments to other offices that offer similar pecuniary benefits as a legislative seat is very costly, and not possible at all for the opposition party. Moreover, selectively cancelling primaries after announcing them risks aggrieving the branch-level leaders who expected to be compensated by aspirants during the primary election. These branch-level leaders can punish party leaders by withholding their own effort in the general election campaign and discouraging the effort of the ordinary members who are tied to them.

The third candidate selection method is a primary election in which the electorate comprises both ordinary members and branch-level leaders. Vote buying is a much less effective strategy

with a large electorate, so the importance of aspirants' financial resources in the selection process is reduced as compared with the small electorate. The primary can attract aspirants who may be disadvantaged financially but have a strong reputation for constituency service and are a good ethnic match to their constituencies.

Moreover, candidate selection with the larger electorate is less prone to post-primary disputes. Without widespread vote buying, losing aspirants are more likely to see the primary as a fair process. In addition, with a larger primary electorate that more closely mirrors the general election electorate, an aspirant who does not win the nomination will be less likely to conclude that he could defeat the nominee in the general election, weakening the incentives for losing aspirants to defect from the party (Kemahlioglu et al. 2009).

Large-electorate primaries bypass branch-level leaders to directly remunerate ordinary members by including them in the selection process. In doing so, large-electorate primaries reduce the relative power of branch-level leaders by weakening their ability to hold back ordinary members' effort. Whether the personal benefits now directed to ordinary party members in primaries will be sufficient to compensate them for their campaign work, however, depends on the resources of the local elites who seek the nomination and the number of primary voters over which those resources are divided.

The Ghanaian Context

Several features of Ghanaian elections and parties are important for understanding how national party leaders have adapted candidate selection mechanisms for parliament. First, as in many African countries, Ghana's president is by far the most powerful actor in the political system (van de Walle 2003; Barkan 2008). The legislature is weak, exercising little oversight over the executive or influence on policy-making (Lindberg and Zhou 2009; Lindberg 2010). Nevertheless, individual members of parliament (MPs) control constituency development funds from which they can disburse benefits at their own discretion, with little to no oversight on how the money is spent. MPs who are appointed as cabinet ministers also have access to additional resources and opportunities for rent seeking. The returns for being an MP can be large in terms of reputation and prestige, as well as improved business contacts and networks for post-parliamentary careers. Concurrent elections are held every four years for president and the unicameral parliament. MPs are elected from single-member constituencies by plurality rule.

Second, left-right programmatic differences do not distinguish Ghana's two main parties – the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP) (Riedl 2014). Competition between the NDC and NPP in the 1990s fell mostly along a pro- vs. anti-regime cleavage, and the two parties have since converged on highly similar platforms emphasizing development issues. The parties are now differentiated instead mostly by their ethnic bases. Patronage-based appeals are widespread in election campaigns (Nathan, forthcoming), which feature a mix of ethnic and performance voting (Lindberg 2010; Ichino and Nathan 2013a; Weghorst and Lindberg 2013; Harding 2015).

Third, in the 1990s, both parties built dense, nationwide, grassroots organizations, and today the parties have nearly identical organizational structures, with elected branch-level leadership committees at almost every polling station, as well as higher-level committees of party leaders at the parliamentary constituency, administrative region, and national levels. Election campaigns are labor-intensive, and candidates for president and parliament rely on grassroots members who are key intermediaries in the patronage networks that connect parties to voters between campaigns. The parties provide little financial support for their parliamentary candidates, who must largely finance their own election campaigns (Lindberg 2003).

The Evolution of Candidate Selection Mechanisms in Ghana

Multi-party elections returned to Ghana in 1992 after two decades of nearly uninterrupted authoritarian rule. The Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) government refashioned itself as the NDC around the candidacy of incumbent ruler Jerry Rawlings. The NPP emerged as the main opposition party. Because the ban on political parties was lifted only a short time before the transition elections of 1992, national leaders of the NDC and NPP selected their respective candidates for parliament (Öhman 2004).

Since that transition election, parliamentary candidate selection methods in Ghana's two main parties have changed several times. Table 22.2 outlines the candidate selection methods used by the two parties in the Fourth Republic (1992–). National leaders of each party wrestled at first with the decision over whether to keep directly selecting nominees or to adopt some kind of limited primary election. By the early 2000s, both parties had decided that the benefits to holding primaries, especially in terms of motivating the grassroots, outweighed the risks of selecting candidates directly. Nevertheless, party leaders continued to struggle with the defection of disgruntled losing aspirants and selection of weak general election candidates. This sparked a new wave of changes to candidate selection methods after the 2008 elections in which national party leaders sought to reduce problems with disgruntled local elites without further sparking a backlash from grassroots activists.

The 1996 Elections

Both parties moved towards a system of delegate-based primaries with small electorates ahead of the 1996 elections. Under the new rules, parliamentary nominees were to be selected at a constituency congress by delegates representing each polling station-level party branch in the constituency.⁷ In the NPP, the nominee was to be selected by approximately 100 primary voters, comprising the chairman of each branch, the party's constituency-level executives, and several other local dignitaries. The NDC's constituency congresses were of similar size and composition.

Table 22.2 Main Candidate Selection Mechanisms by Election for the Two Major Parties in Ghana

Year	National Democratic Congress (NDC)	New Patriotic Party (NPP)
1992	Direct selection by national party leaders <i>NDC wins</i>	Direct selection by national party leaders
1996	Small-electorate primaries of branch leaders <i>NDC wins</i>	Small-electorate primaries of branch leaders
2000	Direct selection by national party leaders	Small-electorate primaries of branch leaders <i>NPP wins</i>
2004	Small-electorate primaries of branch leaders	Small-electorate primaries of branch leaders <i>NPP wins</i>
2008	Small-electorate primaries of branch leaders <i>NDC wins</i>	Small-electorate primaries of branch leaders
2012	Small-electorate primaries of branch leaders <i>NDC wins</i>	Small-electorate primaries of branch leaders
2016	Closed primaries of all ordinary members	Small-electorate primaries of branch leaders <i>NPP wins</i>

Note: In 2012 and 2016, the NPP held small-electorate primaries but allowed significantly more branch-level leaders to vote per polling station than before.

These small-electorate primaries were unexpectedly characterized by vote buying (Öhman 2004), which had the unanticipated benefit to parties of being a means to compensate branch-level leaders and to motivate their effort without party leaders having to pay them directly. Vote buying turned the primaries into a “cocoa season” for the delegates – an opportunity for branch-level leaders to enjoy a windfall from holding local party positions for which they otherwise were rarely directly compensated.

At the same time, however, important party figures, including some with close ties to President Rawlings, were not re-nominated amid reports that rival aspirants had been able to buy support at the constituency congresses. Some of these aggrieved elites left the party and ran for parliament as independents, siphoning off votes from the NDC.⁸ Although the NDC won the 1996 elections, party leaders were concerned that further elite defections would pull the party apart (Öhman 2004; Daddieh and Bob-Milliar 2016).⁹

The 2000 Elections

NDC leaders responded by re-centralizing control over nominations for the 2000 elections, making the party’s National Executive Committee the final arbiter for candidate selection. Although direct selection could risk complaints about an unfair process from aspirants who were not selected, NDC leaders believed that they would be better able to placate key party elites and produce intra-elite consensus than would primary voters. NDC leaders claimed they would consult with the grassroots in each constituency before making nominations, but they appear to have largely ignored the preferences of branch-level leaders and ordinary members when selecting nominees before the 2000 elections (Öhman 2004).

The NPP won the 2000 presidential election and gained a majority in parliament for the first time, ending two decades of (P)NDC rule. Shocked by their defeat, NDC leaders attributed their poor performance in part to their centralized control over nominations (Öhman 2004).¹⁰ NDC leaders came to believe that discontent at the grassroots level had reduced local campaign effort and hurt the party’s general election performance. Once branch-level leaders learned that they could extract significant personal benefits from aspirants if a competitive primary were to be held, direct selection meant denying branch-level leaders a valuable opportunity to be compensated for their work for the party. Branch-level leaders in many constituencies had responded by protesting against the imposition of parliamentary nominees whom they did not support and threatening to encourage the ordinary members in the local party organization to vote “skirt and blouse” – a Ghanaian expression for split-ticket voting – to block the party’s parliamentary nominees. After experimenting with the direct selection of nominees, NDC leaders had realized that direct selection carried significant downsides for their relationship with the grassroots. Consequently, the NDC decided to return to its previous delegate-based primary system for the 2004 elections and kept those rules for 2008.

For the 2000 elections, the opposition NPP kept its small-electorate primary system. At the same time, in selected constituencies, NPP leaders ensured the nomination of their favored local elites by pressuring delegates to pick particular aspirants or manipulating administrative processes to disqualify challengers (Ichino and Nathan 2012).

The 2004 and 2008 Elections

Both the NDC and NPP used small-electorate primaries for the next two elections. Much like the NDC primaries ahead of the 1996 elections, these contests were dominated by vote buying (Ichino and Nathan 2012, 2013b). In a widely repeated characterization, one MP described the

primaries as creating a “moneyocracy,” instead of a meritocracy, in which financial resources were the main criterion deciding who received nominations.¹¹ In interviews, primary aspirants described paying tens of thousands of dollars on their primary campaigns – a significant sum in Ghana – with much of the funds directed towards gifts to individual delegates, such as televisions, motorbikes, cash, school scholarships, and other valuable benefits.

Vote buying became the grounds used by several losing aspirants to challenge the outcome of the primary elections. Primaries in the ruling NPP were particularly expensive and problematic, and even winning aspirants in the NPP complained that bidding wars for delegates’ votes had spiraled out of control. Some were left scrambling for new campaign funding after the primary to cover general election campaign expenses, having spent their budgets to secure the nomination.¹²

In addition, leaders of both parties continued to intervene selectively to impose favored nominees ahead of the 2004 and 2008 elections, resulting in protests by members and lawsuits by aspirants who had been pushed aside. But they did so in a pattern that demonstrated that party leaders in each party had learned to be sensitive to the risk of backlash from the grassroots. Selective interference in primary elections was less likely in constituencies where it would cause the denial of a large “harvest” for the delegates and was likely to generate greater protests by branch leaders (Ichino and Nathan 2012).

After the 2008 Elections

The main issue confronting leaders of each party after the 2008 election was no longer whether to hold primaries at all. Both parties now considered further democratizing the nomination process by expanding the primary electorate to offset the problems that they had not anticipated when they first introduced primaries: extensive vote buying in primaries that selected for aspirants with financial resources over other merits, and post-primary challenges by losing aspirants upset about vote buying.

With small primary electorates, as a senior NDC leader argued, “You [had] a situation where somebody who has not taken part in party activities for a long time, with moneybag, comes, [and] hijacks the system.”¹³ Wealthy aspirants who had not worked publicly on behalf of their party in the past and had no reputation for constituency service – and in some cases did not even live in their constituency – could leverage personal wealth to buy their way ahead of local elites who had been working for the party for years. Moreover, some of the aspirants who lost primaries to wealthy outsiders had spent years working on behalf of their party, building up strong reputations for constituency service that made them formidable independent candidates in the general election. Allowing wealthy outsiders to “cut in line” in front of aspirants with more experience risked discouraging local elites from committing to work for a party. The NPP and NDC attempted different solutions to reduce the influence of vote buying. The NPP moved first and failed, while the NDC moved second and appears to have been more successful. We consider these in turn.

After losing the 2008 election, the NPP debated two reform proposals, having attributed the party’s loss in part to its candidate selection methods. The first option was to increase from 1 to 5 the number of branch-level leaders who would serve as delegates from each polling station branch. The second option was to dramatically increase the size of the electorate by opening primaries to all rank-and-file party members. With more primary voters, NPP leaders expected that primary aspirants would find it more difficult to buy the delegates’ support, forcing primary voters to evaluate aspirants by other criteria such as their reputations for constituency service. Internal talking points circulated among senior NPP leaders advocating for an electorate expansion emphasized

that doing so would “lead to election of people who actually . . . work for the party,” would “ensure that the selected . . . candidates . . . represent the popular will . . . [and] serve the interests of the party people as a whole,” and “reduce expenditure on internal party elections.”¹⁴

The logic behind these proposals is clear. The effectiveness of vote buying depends on the ability to identify, monitor, and enforce exchanges with individual voters (e.g., Stokes et al. 2013). This is possible when the primary electorate is composed of a hundred or so easily identifiable branch-level leaders with whom aspirants can build personal relationships, buy off, and monitor on an individual basis. Enforcement of exchanges with these small sets of voters could be as rigorous as aspirants camping them in hotels before the primary, where they could be kept from soliciting further vote-buying offers from the other aspirants. As the number of voters that need to be bought increases, however, these types of strategies become more difficult. It is impossible for an individual aspirant to monitor and personally interact with thousands of primary voters.¹⁵ Moreover, with a larger electorate, aspirants would have to spread finite budgets over larger numbers of voters, reducing the transfers they can provide to each individual voter.

The NPP adopted the first plan for its primaries ahead of the 2012 elections for several reasons. Some NPP leaders were concerned that organizing primaries among all party members would be too expensive and logistically difficult.¹⁶ In addition, supporters of one of the NPP’s main contestants for the 2012 presidential nomination were concerned that he would not be competitive among an electorate of all party members and sought to block the larger reform.¹⁷ Moreover, by keeping branch-level leaders at the heart of the candidate selection process, the smaller expansion plan was unlikely to invite a major backlash from branch-level leaders, even if the expansion led each branch-level leader to receive less from the aspirants.

This reform failed to reduce vote buying in NPP primaries, however. Aspirants reported that there were now simply five times as many branch-level leaders demanding payment for their votes. In a survey of 125 aspirants in the NPP’s 2016 primaries, which were held under the same rules as in 2012, the most common complaint about the primary process by far was the pressures created by vote buying (Ichino and Nathan 2017). As one aspirant noted, “We tend to fool ourselves that the larger the electoral college, the less we spend . . . In reality, it is the opposite . . . nobody will come and vote for you if you don’t induce him financially.”¹⁸

Although it had won the 2012 elections, NDC leaders were also concerned that contentious primaries had hurt their performance. Aggrieved aspirants and other challenges that the then-incumbent NPP had faced in 2008 had emerged in the now-ruling NDC in 2012. The party’s General Secretary identified 15 parliamentary constituencies in which the NDC had won the presidential election but lost the parliamentary seat because of split-ticket voting that could be attributed to a disputed primary or an independent candidacy by a disgruntled primary aspirant.¹⁹

Despite the NPP’s failure to reduce vote buying in 2012, the NDC used a similar logic to decide to eliminate the delegate system and expand its primary electorate. Unlike the NPP, however, the NDC chose to expand the primary to include all ordinary members. Expanding the electorate was intended to “cure moneyocracy in our system.”²⁰ NDC leaders also believed that expanding the electorate would help eliminate complaints from primary losers that they had been denied nominations based on an unfair process that advantaged only the wealthiest politicians. The NDC’s General Secretary argued, “the one who will emerge a winner will [now] have the confidence that he has the support of the members of the party at the constituency level and the losers will have a clear message that the whole constituency had decided that it is not their turn.”²¹ The NDC conducted a biometric registration campaign of all party members in 2015, producing a primary electorate of as many as 8,000 ordinary members per constituency, substantially greater than the several hundred delegates who had voted in each constituency in prior years and an order of magnitude larger than the NPP’s expanded primary electorate for 2012.

Unlike the NPP's more marginal reforms in 2012, the NDC's much larger electorate expansion in 2016 seems to have significantly altered the dynamics of the party's primaries. A greater number of local elites sought NDC nominations, including a greater number of women and aspirants from outside the NDC's core ethnic coalition, which increased the diversity of the party's eventual nominees.²² By contrast, aspirants who had no prior experience in party leadership or government positions but had private sector backgrounds, indicative of having significant financial resources for vote buying but no reputation for constituency service, became significantly less likely to win nominations. These changes are consistent with the reduced influence of vote buying on primary election outcomes (Ichino and Nathan 2017).

This suggests that party leaders in Ghana were correct that expanding the primary electorate had the potential to reduce the influence of vote buying. It is only that NPP leaders had misjudged how large of an electorate expansion was necessary to bring the electorate past the point where vote buying would be very difficult for wealthy aspirants. The expansion of the NDC primary electorate was more successful. With many thousands more primary voters for aspirants to win, vote buying likely became a much less efficient strategy in the NDC primaries, allowing the ethnicity and reputation of aspirants to become more important in deciding nominations (Ichino and Nathan 2017).

At the same time, the reforms raised the possibility that branch-level leaders would revolt at the reduction of vote buying and their lost opportunity for remuneration. But the NDC's 2016 primaries did not generate widespread protests by branch-level leaders, as had occurred in the past. NDC leaders may have averted these protests by including ordinary members in the primary electorate and effectively cutting out the intermediary role of branch-level leaders. Primary aspirants now interacted with ordinary members directly, instead of relying on indirect transfers from the branch-level leaders. Even if branch-level leaders were personally upset at lost rents, they now likely had less influence over ordinary members in their branches necessary to encourage them to join protests or sit out the general election campaign.

Conclusions

Primary elections in new democracies remain understudied, particularly in Africa. This is at least partly an outcome of the difficulty of data collection on internal political party processes in the developing world. For example, Ichino and Nathan (2012, 2013b, 2017) required reconstructing the record of primary elections in Ghana largely from scratch in the absence of reliable official data. But it is also the result of an absence of theoretical frameworks appropriate for candidate selection methods for elections without spatial competition.

Despite these constraints, studying primaries is important for understanding elections in new democracies for several reasons. First, candidate selection mechanisms are a central element of electoral accountability relationships between politicians and voters. Voters can only hold politicians accountable to the extent that they have real alternatives available on the ballot – an outcome determined by candidate selection rules. While a vast literature in the study of African politics investigates the extent to which voters are able to hold local politicians accountable, this research almost never addresses the process by which politicians appear in the voters' choice set. By breaking the direct link between voters and politicians, candidate selection mechanisms may distort politicians' incentives to serve voter interests by making politicians potentially more accountable to actors within parties than to their constituents. In the extreme, as under dominant party rule, candidate selection can be the only stage at which there is any opportunity for electoral accountability (Hyden and Leys 1972; Chazan 1979).

Second, candidate selection rules are a key element of party building. Developing well-institutionalized parties is often seen as an important step towards improving the quality of democratic governance by extending politicians' time horizons, reducing the personalization of politics around specific powerful elites, allowing voters to more easily attribute blame for poor performance, and providing voters with informational heuristics that allow them to select politicians better aligned with their preferences. As parties attempt to become more institutionalized, primaries are a possible tool for preventing intra-elite disputes and efficiently allocating scarce resources demanded by aspiring politicians. We show that primaries can also play an important role attracting grassroots activists into party organizations by creating a mechanism that forces office-seeking elites to compensate local-level agents. Aside from Riedl (2014), few recent studies on party development in the developing world closely examine how internal party institutions can shape the incentives of elites or grassroots activists to commit to pursuing their political goals within a party.

With some of the most well-institutionalized parties in Africa, Ghana is often held up as an exemplary case of party development on the continent, and it is frequently compared with countries with far less stable parties such as Benin, Kenya, or Zambia. The early adoption of primary elections that helped regulate elite conflicts and attract local members is a key part of the explanation for why Ghana has had much greater success in building and sustaining durable party organizations. Some parties in countries where party systems have been far more inchoate, such as Kenya, are now beginning to experiment with primaries as well. The introduction of primaries in these settings should be viewed as a step on the path towards party institutionalization. This chapter proposes a theoretical framework that scholars examining the introduction of primaries in these other cases can use to think about the key trade-offs and imperatives that party leaders will likely confront as they design candidate selection institutions.

Notes

- 1 We thank Peter Carroll and Lalitha Ramaswamy for their research assistance for this chapter.
- 2 We searched for any discussion in media reports and secondary literature of legislative primaries held by the two highest-placing parties in the most recent legislative election. We restricted the search to sub-Saharan African countries that are either democracies or hybrid regimes with contested elections, defined as countries with Polity scores of 0 or greater or Freedom House scores of "partly free" or "free" at some point between 2010 and 2015. There are 32 countries that meet these criteria. It is possible that primaries about which no information was readily available are also held in the other 17 African countries. These 17 countries are Burkina Faso, Burundi, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Madagascar, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Senegal, Somalia, South Africa, and Togo.
- 3 Primaries are sometimes only selectively implemented in the cases in Table 22.1, with party leaders interfering in the nomination process to handpick some nominees in many parties even after the formal introduction of primary elections.
- 4 See Ichino and Nathan (2012, 2013b, 2017) on Ghana, however, as well as Izama and Raffler (n.d.) on Uganda, Warren (2016) on Botswana, and Choi (2017) on Kenya.
- 5 Significant exceptions are Langston (2001), de Luca et al. (2002), Field and Siavelis (2008), and Bruhn (2010). Carey and Polga-Hecimovich (2006) and Kemahlioglu et al. (2009) have also examined primaries for presidential candidates in new democracies in Latin America.
- 6 In other new democracies, there are sometimes both ideological and non-ideological parties. This includes Latin American countries such as Argentina (Calvo and Murillo 2004) and Mexico (Greene 2007), as well as new democracies in Southeast Asia, such as Indonesia (Slater 2016). In other cases, the same party, such as conservative parties in Chile and Uruguay or India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), simultaneously uses ideological appeals to mobilize voters in some districts and non-ideological appeal in others (Luna 2014; Thachil 2014).

- 7 In practice, however, party leaders intervened in some primaries, and not all constituencies held primaries (Öhman 2004; Daddieh and Bob-Milliar 2016).
- 8 Several barriers discourage party switching in Ghana, such that elite defections have taken the form of independent candidacies rather than defeated primary aspirants from one party becoming parliamentary candidates in another. Both major parties require in their party constitutions that a politician be a member of the party for two years before becoming eligible for a nomination. Ghana's constitution also specifies that a by-election be held if an MP leaves his party while in office, deterring party switching by sitting MPs.
- 9 Interview with former NDC General Secretary, Accra, May 6, 2010.
- 10 Interview with former NDC General Secretary, Accra, May 6, 2010.
- 11 Interview with NPP primary aspirant and incumbent MP, Brong Ahafo Region, November 10, 2015.
- 12 For example, interview with NPP primary aspirant and incumbent MP, Eastern Region, July 19, 2011.
- 13 "NDC's Expanded Electoral College Will Cure Vote-Buying – Ade Coker," *Citi FM Online*, August 17, 2015.
- 14 Document obtained from a NPP national executive committee member, August 2011.
- 15 Primary aspirants could employ clientelistic intermediaries instead, but relying on intermediaries introduces its own inefficiencies, including rent capture by the intermediaries themselves (e.g., Stokes et al. 2013).
- 16 Mahama Haruna, "Should all NPP Members Elect the Party's Presidential Candidate?," *Ghana Web*, March 28, 2009.
- 17 Any changes to the parliamentary primary electorate would also have resulted in changes to the presidential primary electorate. Interview with NPP primary aspirant and former MP, Central Region, August 5, 2011.
- 18 Interview with NPP aspirant and incumbent MP, Western Region, 10 November 2015
- 19 "NDC to scrap Electoral College: moves for universal membership suffrage," *Daily Graphic*, 10 September 2013.
- 20 "NDC's Expanded Electoral College Will Cure Vote-Buying – Ade Coker," *Citi FM Online*, August 17, 2015. Also discussed in interview with senior NDC national leader, Accra, October 26, 2015.
- 21 "NDC to scrap Electoral College: moves for universal membership suffrage," *Daily Graphic*, September 10, 2013.
- 22 Before the reforms, the woman's organizer, a leadership position set aside for a woman, was typically the only woman among the four delegates voting in NDC primaries from each branch. The gender balance in the primary electorate improved significantly with the reforms since the ordinary party membership has a greater proportion of women

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