



**DEMONETIZING ELECTORAL POLITICS,  
STRENGTHENING ACCOUNTABLE GOVERNANCE:  
WHICH WAY FORWARD FOR GHANA?**

**DP-E-001-20  
SEPTEMBER 2020**

## 1. Introduction

Ghana's democracy is touted as a leading example in Africa. Since the inception of the Fourth Republic, the country has successfully organized seven presidential and parliamentary elections and alternated power between the two major political parties without any major hiccups. However, this democratic gain has not translated into the expected democratic values and development dividends. The emergence of the growth of use of money to negatively influence the nation's electoral politics and governance is undermining multiparty representative democracy in the country. Since the 2004 presidential and parliamentary elections, the country has witnessed a significant rise in this negative trend and its derailing impact on the integrity of elections. Moreover, it threatens the credibility of election outcomes as the true reflection of the will of the people as well as the stability and sustainability of Ghana's democracy.

In a 2017 survey of Parliamentarians in Ghana, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) found that it costs approximately \$87,000 (U.S) or about GHC 500,000 to get elected to Parliament (Asante and Kunnath, 2018). This is equivalent to about two years' salary of a sitting Member of Parliament (MP). Today, many aspirants would put the figure at not less than GHC 1 million or \$200,000, with only a small fraction of this cost counting as legitimate campaign expenditure. In the August 2019 NDC parliamentary primary election, one candidate in the Madina constituency in Accra confessed that his victory cost him GHS 300,000.00. At the just ended NPP primaries in July 2020, there was evidence of vote buying, with some candidates alleged to have paid as much as GHC 3,000 per delegate as well as other gift items (Corruption Watch, 2020).

## 2. Problem: Monetization of Electoral Politics

In economic theory, monetization refers to the process of liquidating an asset into legal tender. Similarly, monetization in politics occurs when money becomes the legal tender for attaining political office. This refers to the excessive increase in the cost of contesting for political office in a multiparty democracy such that votes are not mobilised by superior proposals of transformation but rather by a candidate's financial strength. It usually occurs when money and other material incentives are donated to parties, election candidates and voters in exchange for political influence and votes i.e. bribery and treating, a phenomenon popularly known in Ghana as vote buying.

In developed democracies, financing political parties and election candidates for power and influence is a more pronounced form of monetization. However, in emerging democracies like Ghana, financing for power and influence and vote buying are practiced side by side in equal measure. Monetization occurs at two main levels; the intra-party level during party primaries and inter-party level during general elections. Although, monetization of electoral politics and governance is a global phenomenon (Onah & Nwali, 2018), it has had far reaching ramifications on African politics than any other continent (Bryan and Baer, 2005).

Political parties are usually burdened with numerous competing expenditures such as the cost of rallies, congresses, transportation, training, salaries and allowances, rent, utilities and other operational expenses (International IDEA, 2006; IDEG, 2018). In order to raise sufficient resources and meet these expenditures, election candidates and political parties often resort to unconventional

persons or entities to mobilize financial support (Strauss, 1994). This is attributed to the fact that most party members do not pay dues (Bagbin and Ahenkan, 2017; Bedi, 2017), and fundraising activities have also proven to be either inadequate or dangerous (International IDEA, 2006; Bagbin and Ahenkan, 2017).

These reasons coupled with lack of public funding for political parties make election candidates and party leadership susceptible to the influence and control of party financiers who become “King Makers” in the party (Bedi, 2017). These financiers, usually with questionable source of wealth, finance campaigns for their parochial interest (Ohman, 2013). As at now, there are concerns about the infiltration of illicit and criminal money into Ghana’s elections (Star-Ghana, 2020). Indeed, the country faces the threat of a possible blacklist by the EU over money laundering charges. Candidates who are not able to secure funds from financiers resort to loans whilst others squander all their personal savings (Casal Bertoa, and Sanches, 2019).

Monetization has disastrous impact on representative democracies and accountability systems. In a representative democracy, there should be an opportunity for honest competition based on ideas and policies to enable voters make informed choices among candidates. Diamond (2004) posited that a key feature in democracy is a transparent system for choosing and replacing government through free and fair elections. However, monetization undermines the sovereign will of the voter and tilts the electoral process in that it gives unfair advantage to well-resourced candidates (NIF, 2001).

Monetization has a two-way impact on governance, first it allows incompetent people with fat wallets to be voted into power whilst flushing out existing competent people in power who do not have the financial muscle to compete. This depletes and denies state institutions of the needed competence and experience required to function effectively. Consequently, there is lackluster performance of parliament in terms of fulfilling its legislative functions and holding the government accountable to enhance development dividends. It been estimated that only about 5% of the MPs in the current Ghana parliament performs real parliamentary duties<sup>1</sup>. It has also created a situation of consistent absenteeism in parliament by members. For instance, the average MP in the Ghanaian Parliament misses 1 out of every 4 sitting with some missing as high as 3 out of every 4 sitting (Odekro, 2015).

Second, monetization undermines democracy by promoting corruption and reducing the role of honesty and integrity in politics. Politicians who buy votes invariably recoup the amount invested in vote buying (Ojo, 2008) and save enough for the next vote buying at subsequent primaries. Candidates that are sponsored by financiers do the bidding of their paymasters as these financiers use their influence to lobby for positions and contracts for themselves and their cronies (Bedi, 2017). As a result, they compromise their integrity and accountability to the benefit of financiers (Bryan & Baer, 2005). As posited by NIF (2001), monetization corrupts the democratic principle of “one person, one vote” into “one donor, much influence”. On the other hand, those that are self-financed may prioritize their

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<sup>1</sup> This was reported by the majority leader of the current parliament, Hon. Osei Kyei Mensah-Bonsu retrieved from: <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Only-13-out-of-275-MPs-perform-real-parliamentary-duties-Majority-Leader-1054132>

individual parochial gains over national interest in order to either pay back their loans or recoup their lost savings.

Thirdly, it further raises the cost of political campaigns to the point of excluding prospective political leaders who only have modest financial resources. It suppresses minority parties and candidates and hinders women and other marginalized groups who do not have the financial strength to compete in monetized elections (Ballington, 2003; Best, 2008). As a result, Ghana's politics is saddled with the representational problem where women in particular are side-lined from effectively contributing to political and public processes. Overall, it erodes citizens' values about governance and turns political leadership into a commercial product that is up for auction to the highest bidder.

Furthermore, political vigilantism and electoral violence are consequences of monetization as financiers who have invested heavily in elections may use every possible means to win (Adetula, 2015). Thus, the overriding impact of monetization on governance is the persistent rise in violence, high levels of unemployment, poverty and income inequality, poor public service delivery and less accountable governments. In fact, *“money politics makes it impossible for electoral outcomes to reflect the popular will and therefore cannot guarantee democracy, accountability and good governance* (Egwu, 2009, p. 41; International IDEA, 2001).

### **3. Drivers of Monetization in Ghana**

Several factors have been identified as key drivers of monetization in Ghana. First, the delegate system for presidential and parliamentary primaries where only few selected party members are given the right to vote contribute to monetization. This serves as an incentive for bribery as candidates raise huge sums of monies to buy votes from the few delegates that decide on them. The main mode of competition for these party primaries are through distribution of monies and gifts. (Ichino and Nathan, 2012). It has therefore become common practice for candidates to bribe and treat delegates in a bid to secure seats in parliament.

Second, the election overload faced by political parties drives monetization in Ghana. Within the 4-year government mandate period, political parties are preoccupied with campaigning and contesting numerous elections such as those to elect branch constituency, regional and national executives as well as parliamentary and presidential primaries scheduled at different times. Consequently, the parties have become election machines rather than development agents and are burdened with raising money to finance the rising cost of conducting these elections (Fogg, 2003).

Third, the emergence of the two unregulated duopolistic parties under the Fourth Republic has become the breeding ground for large scale vote buying and selling and extravagant election expenditure. Currently, these two parties control all the seats in parliament and 98.5% of all presidential ballot cast in the past three general elections. Due to this, the presidential and parliamentary tickets of the two parties are more attractive to politicians and therefore are willing to spend any amount to contest on the ticket of these duopolies. Also, there are reports that these duopolies infiltrate the primaries of the smaller parties with money to influence its outcome.

The persistence of “moneycracy” in electoral politics is exacerbated by the weakness of political party finance regulations in the country. The legal framework for the regulation of political parties is

stipulated in Article 55 of the 1992 Constitution, the Political Party Act 574 (2000) and a party's own constitution. However, in practice, the parties do not comply with these regulations (Bryan and Baer, 2005; International IDEA, 2006) neither does the Electoral Commission (EC) enforce them (Ohman, 2016). There is generally lack of transparency, accountability together with insufficient means to oversee political party funds management. For instance, most parties default in their reporting obligations (Ohman, 2016) and when they submit, it does not reflect the full expenditure (Bryan and Baer, 2005). Aside the lack of enforcement, there are loopholes in the current regulatory framework that facilitate non-compliance by the parties. For instance, although the parties are required to disclose and account for campaign funds, this law does not apply to candidates or their campaign teams (Star-Ghana, 2020).

Other scholars have attributed monetization to high levels of poverty. Politicians usually target delegates who are poor for vote buying as they are more susceptible to monetary influence (Kramon, 2009). This statement corroborates the findings that vote buying and selling is prevalent in rural areas of Ghana (Asante and Kunnath, 2018). Aside these, political and constitutional factors have combined to produce a pattern of monetization which is more pronounced in the ruling party than opposition parties. For example, Article 78 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana requires majority of Ministers to be Members of Parliament (MPs). Therefore, parliamentary aspirants often view parliamentary positions as transit points to ministerial positions and resort to greasing the palms of constituents to win parliamentary seats. Other causes of monetization include social and political status of the contestant and the parties' relationship to power.

#### **4. Demonetization: Key Proposals**

Demonetization occurs when a currency is striped off its legal tender. Likewise, demonetizing electoral politics and governance means stripping the excessive usage of money which negatively influences electoral politics and governance of its legal tender. It is an undeniable fact that money is a necessity in politics, it is "*the mother's milk of politics*" (Stanbury 1986: 795) and the *fuel for engine of party politics* (Haughton, 2012). Therefore, it is important to control its negative influences whilst fostering its positive impact (Ohman, 2013). Accordingly, there is the need for an appropriate framework so money can play a constructive role in electoral politics and governance. In an attempt to demonetize Ghana's politics, several stakeholders have put across proposals that are intended to curb this harmful practice:

##### **4.1. Democratizing Party Ownership**

As noted earlier, the lack of public funding for political parties coupled with inadequate dues payment by members has left the parties with no choice but to resort to private funding that are highly opaque. To countervail the power and influence of these private financiers, there is the need for the payment of party dues and subscription through vibrant party membership to finance the political parties. For instance, both the NDC and NPP pride themselves with having at least 4 million registered members, if each of these members is to contribute an average of GHC 10 per month, this will yield GHC 40 million monthly and GHC 480 million yearly. This will help reduce the influence of the private financiers and energize the base of the party which has become "subservient to power brokers" (IDEG, 2018;

Myjoyonline.com, 31 December 2018). Additionally, it will not only help party members claim ownership of the party but also enable them to dictate the usage of party funds and demand accountability from party leaders.

#### **4.2. Public Funding for Political Parties**

There are proposals for direct public funding of political parties to complement party subscription and membership dues to resource the parties as done in other democracies. For instance, countries like Kenya, Uganda, Morocco, South Africa, Zambia, Angola, Malawi and Botswana all have direct public funding for political parties (Casal Bertoa, and Sanches, 2019). This public funding should be channeled into supporting the developmental needs of the political parties such as the preparation of party manifestoes, policy programs, public education, research and annual conferences among others (IDEG, 2015). The distribution of state funding should be based on the proportion of funds that the parties are able to raise themselves. In addition, parties with transparent and accountable financial systems as well as high women representation should be allocated more public funding. This will not only encourage parties to comply with existing laws, but will also solve the underrepresentation problem within the parties.

#### **4.3. Enforcement of Existing Laws**

Ghana is known for enacting laws but falling short in ensuring compliance to these laws. In this regard, there is also the idea that strict enforcement of existing legislation on general bribing and treating in elections and party financial regulation is the panacea to monetization. Specifically, section 33 and 34 of the Representation of the People Law, 1992, PNDC L284 together with the section 23 and 24 of the Political Party Act 574 (2000) should be rigorously enforced. The enforcement should be coupled with incentives for compliance and sanctions for non-compliance of the law.

#### **4.4. Creation of a Multiparty Democracy Commission**

Given the inability of the EC to regulate the parties and enforce existing laws, there is also a proposal for the establishment of independent constitutional body i.e. *Multiparty Democracy Commission* to regulate the activities of political parties (IDEG, 2019). Just as all critical sectors of the economy are regulated, the Commission should be mandated with registering and regulating the parties as well as administering political parties' funds. Furthermore, the Commission must be given the power to monitor and audit the accounts of the parties as well as convene dialogues and discuss broad national interest issues.

#### **4.5. Strengthening the Developmental Orientation of Parties**

There has been advocacy for constitutional amendments and consequential reforms aimed at strengthening the developmental orientation of the parties. In this regard, proposals include the amendment of Article 55(3) to enable political parties to participate in local government. With several political parties now in government at the local level, their developmental governance capacity will be strengthened to enable them to be effective in local development (IDEG, 2018). Also, in order not to saddle the parties with election overload, there are proposals for the merger of presidential,

parliamentary, district assembly elections, as well as the merger of all internal political party elections. The country should define an election year and a campaign period for party elections. This together with will shift the focus of the parties from elections to public service delivery. Moreover, manifestos must be mandatory and a requirement for party registration with a copy lodged with the regulatory authority. Aside these, there must be mandatory annual conference by the parties to discuss developmental ideas [IDEG, 2019].

#### **4.6. Internal Party Reforms**

Within the parties, there are proposals for political parties to amend their constitutions to allow for unconventional methods of choosing MPs (GNA, August 5, 2020). In such a case, the leadership of the party in parliament will assess the performance of MPs and report to the party leadership for a decision to be made to either allow the MP to go unopposed or be contested. However, this policy itself can create room for intense lobbying and bribery by MPs at the national level. It is also an affront to intra-party democracy since the bedrock of democracy is competition. Others have argued that political parties should simply expand their electoral college to allow all card bearing members of the party to vote (GNA, August 5, 2020). Extending the franchise to all paid-up party members in the constituency would go a long way to improve inclusiveness and minimize the extensive vote buying and selling (Ichino and Nathan, 2016).

#### **4.7. Strengthening the Regulatory Framework**

Given the weak regulatory framework that political parties operate within, there have been proposals to strengthen the financial and operational regulatory framework within which political parties operate [IDEG, 2019]. To this end, there are calls for legislation that ensure open, transparent and accountable campaign financing which places reasonable limits on campaign spending and contributions of parties and candidates. Also, others have argued for the need to ensure limited campaign season to limit the unending campaigns by the parties.

### **5. Conclusion**

With the eighth presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled to take place in December 2020, the use of money in electoral politics has become prevalent and poses a threat to multiparty politics in the country. Regrettably, despite many proposals from various stakeholders on demonetizing electoral politics, there has neither been a convergence on the appropriate solutions nor strong national consensus on the way forward in resolving this canker destroying our democracy.

#### **Acknowledgements**

*This paper was drafted by Mr. Enoch Randy Aikins, Research and Programmes Officer and reviewed by Dr Emmanuel O. Akwetey, Executive Director, Mr Kwesi Jonah, Senior Research Fellow and Ms Dorsina Dwamena-Aboagye, Research and Programmes Officer, IDEG.*

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