Challenges to Party Development and Democratic Consolidation: Perspectives on Reforming Ghana's Institutional Framework

Nick Fobih

Myongji University, South Korea

Abstract

The second half of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of the party system and democracy in African countries, for example Ghana, in the period preceding the postcolonial era. This article looks at some of the challenges facing Ghana's democratic consolidation and party development, and some of the institutional benchmarks required to help to promote effectively an accountable, participatory and democratic party system in the country in order to consolidate further its democracy. The study concludes with the view that regardless of their apparent weaknesses, political parties in Ghana are generally important institutions that grease the wheels of the country's democratic governance in the post-transition era.

Introduction

The idea of the system of democracy under either a parliamentary or presidential system of government is associated with political parties, because parties and elections are indispensable mechanisms in promoting democratic governance in contemporary democracies. In their discussion of the importance of party development in democracies, Dalton and Wattenburg (2000: 1–27) noted that, 'parties are some of the inevitable aspects of democracy so democracy is unthinkable without parties'. Political parties play a dominant role in democratic development and consolidation in both advanced and emerging democracies across the world and constitute an integral part of contemporary democratic practice. Some of the central objectives of party activities include serving as the rallying point for members to compete for votes and power, and controlling policy-making in

Corresponding author:

Nick Fobih, Department of Public Administration, Myongji University, 50–53 Namgajwadong, Seodaemungu, Seoul, 120–728, South Korea.
Email: nfobih@gmail.com

the state as well as aggregating societal interests. This helps parties to contribute effectively towards shaping public policy by generating reliable information for the public, raising the electorates' political awareness and promoting government accountability. Political parties also serve as a means by which members are offered opportunities for upward mobility in the political system and key government institutions such as the executive and legislative bodies. Thus, membership in a political party offers certain opportunities at the national and local levels that would not be readily available to those who are not party members.

Most party systems and democracies in developing countries were inspired by Eastern and particularly Western political ideologies, with the rise of the party system and democracy, which emerged from the development of nationalism and the struggle to end colonialism. This first happened in Ghana with the establishment of the Aboriginal Rights Protection Society (ARPS) in 1898, and later through the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) in 1946 and the Convention Peoples Party (CPP) in 1948, in an attempt to oppose colonial rule during the country's struggle for independence in the 1940s and 1950s. This led to the institutionalization of the party system and democracy in Africa in the pre-independence and postcolonial eras, respectively. As with many countries in Africa and the developing world in general, the interchange of democratic and authoritarian regimes in Ghana in the postcolonial era due to constant regime changes and tenacious military intervention in politics delayed the development of the country's democratic and party systems. For example, from the 1960s to the late 1980s, Ghana's democracy underwent various transformation processes. However, the shift in the 1990s in the development paradigm and policies of the donor countries and organizations such as the United States and the World Bank changed the political dynamic in many countries in the developing world – such as Ghana – from the dominance of authoritarianism to the reintroduction of fledgling multiparty democracies.[1] Despite the uneven trends in the development of the party system and democracy, many third-wave democracies in Africa are gradually developing their party systems in order to sustain and consolidate their democracies.[2] For example, since Ghana's democratic transition under the Fourth Republic in 1992, the country has steadily developed and strengthened its party system and can currently boast about 11 parties, some that are represented in parliament and some that are unrepresented in parliament.[3] South Africa has 13 parties that are represented in parliament and 45 others that are unrepresented in parliament, and Kenya has 13 major and 2 minor parties. Nigeria, which, like Ghana, experienced major political instability for decades since its independence, can now boast 22 parties under the Fourth Republic, and Senegal has 20 major and minor parties, some that are represented in parliament and some that are not.[4]

The new sociopolitical matrix being promoted in some countries in Africa, which were previously dominated by authoritarian regimes, has led to the emergence or strengthening of opposition parties in order to challenge incumbent governments. Hence the drive towards strengthening political parties is a significant step in the direction of promoting democratic governance in many African countries. This article argues that while Ghana has made significant progress in consolidating its democracy and developing its party system since the 1992 democratic transition and the 2000 changes in power, some major democratic deficits still remain in the institutionalization of democracy and the party system. These constitute the crux of the country's democratic consolidation, yet have not been addressed adequately in a holistic approach by the government and leaders of the respective political parties. The article is divided into four sections. Following the introduction, it focuses on contemporary initiatives towards developing the party system in Ghana under the Fourth Republic, with regard to the reemergence of political parties after the ban on political parties was lifted. The work then turns its attention to some of the issues that continue to pose major challenges to party development and democratic consolidation in Ghana, and suggested

institutional frameworks for addressing these challenges effectively. A conclusion then follows with a summary of the analysis.

Party Development in Ghana within the Context of the Fourth Republic

The reintroduction of the party system and democracy in Ghana under the Fourth Republic began as a struggle for hegemony and power between pro-democracy civil society organizations such as the Movement for Freedom and Justice (MFJ) and some former supporters of the banned political parties against the dominance of the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) regime. Despite the ban on political parties under PNDC rule, many members maintained their networks and allegiance to their respective political party traditions and formed pro-democracy organizations such as the MFJ to oppose the PNDC's authoritarian rule. Some leading members of the defunct parties and the pro-democracy groups were also very instrumental in resisting authoritarian rule and in advocating a return to a democratic system of government in Ghana. For example, the renowned historian Albert Adu-Boahen's memorable speech at the Danquah Memorial Lectures in 1988 broke the PNDC regime's 'culture of silence' imposed on the Ghanaian polity. It is worth noting that the effort of the civic organizations to resist authoritarianism complemented the pressure by the international donor agencies and countries as well as other external and internal human rights and democracy-oriented civic organizations on the PNDC to lift the ban on political parties and reintroduce democracy into the country's political system.

The lifting of the ban on political parties and the reintroduction of multiparty democracy in May 1992 saw new developments in Ghana's party system under the Fourth Republic. In this way, what used to be the dominant party traditions of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) (which represents the Danquah/Busia United Party tradition[5] and the parties that emerged from the Nkrumah's tradition (namely the Convention People' Party (CPP), the Peoples' National Convention (PNC), the Great Consolidated Peoples' Party (GCPP) and the Every Ghanaian Living Everywhere party (EGLE)) resurfaced to compete with the newly formed Rawlings' National Democratic Congress (NDC) party in the 1992 elections. Since the democratic transition, political parties have been the rallying point of the electorate in Ghana's democracy and elections, which is evident in the limited number of independent candidates whom are elected as Members of Parliament (MPs) to Ghana's parliament and the fact that no independent presidential candidate has ever been elected President in the country. Parties constitute the main agents of mobilizing people for participation in a democratic system. As Smith (1996) noted, political parties are the most important institutions of political mobilization in the context of mass politics. To buttress this view, Cross (2004) argued that political parties are responsible for aggregating citizen interests and articulating them in the political sphere.

The 1992 Constitution of Ghana and the Political Parties Act 2000, Act 574, recognizes the fact that political parties have formal and informal membership. Apart from members who join parties on their own, political parties in Ghana use common strategies such as organizing rallies and community outreach programmes to recruit members. They also attend formal and informal gatherings to promote their party's ideology and development policies and to solicit support. Each of the parties combines card-bearing and fee-paying membership with informal or floating membership. This strategy of gaining formal and informal membership in political parties is consistent with the Ghanaian political tradition since the inception of party politics in the 1950s. As with many developing countries, in contemporary times, rapid changes in the international political economy from the 1980s and 1990s onward have affected the political parties of Ghana's ideological orientation

and policies, which have changed over time to keep pace with the changing global environment. Unlike under the First, Second and Third Republics, under Ghana's Fourth Republic, regardless of the differences in the three political traditions' ideological orientation, there are significant similarities in the platforms of the different parties. All the parties have adopted centrist policies, which emphasize economic growth with redistribution.[6]

Fundamental Challenges Facing the Development of the Party System and Democracy in Ghana

While the parties and ruling governments under the Fourth Republic have taken some important steps toward promoting democracy and made significant inroads in sustaining the country's democracy, as well as developing its party system in the post-transition era, it continues to face a number of institutional challenges. The findings in the study highlight some of the fundamental challenges facing the development of the party system and the consolidation of democracy in Ghana, which require the effort of government officials and institutions as well as members and leaders of the respective parties to find ideal solutions to these problems. To begin with, one of the central issues that hinders party development in Ghana is a lack of democratic procedures at the level of party organization. The importance of internal party democracy is based on the premise that if a party is not internally democratic, it cannot promote democratic principles in terms of encouraging participation in decision-making, respecting the rule of law and civil liberties and in promoting checks and balances in government when it assumes power. Hence Nwabueze (1993) highlighted the need to promote democratic procedures and rules and principles such as freedom, justice, equality, accountability and transparency in order to create the enabling environment for party development. Internal party democracy has a major impact on a party's unity and support base, yet has not received widespread attention from Ghana's political parties. Regardless of the challenges facing party development and democratic consolidation in Ghana and other 'third wave' countries in Africa, many theorists on democracy in Africa have often overlooked the significant impact that party organization has on democratic development in terms of how political parties are organized, the level of grassroots members' participation and representation and the extent of corruption in the parties as well as how election procedures and practices are followed by parties and ruling governments.

Ghana's political parties, for example, have structural and organizational problems such as a lack of internal party democracy and problems in the process of selecting candidates. In his discussion of the importance of democracy and participation, Aryee (2002) noted that the concentration of the power of policy-making in the hands of party members might prevent the abuse of power by over-zealous party officials who might overstretch their power advantages in the party to the detriment of the grassroots members' interests. To buttress this view, the NPP Eastern Regional Chairman (2005) noted that the importance of internal democracy in promoting party development and democracy is underlined by the need for people freely to join or leave political parties and to participate in decision-making or present their views on issues within the parties and in national affairs. In this regard, Shell (1962) argued that the behaviour of a party can influence its development in terms of how it functions and its organizational strategies. As the Assin South Constituency Chairman of the Democratic Freedom Party (2008) noted, the lack of internal democracy was one of the main factors that led to the party's secession from the NDC. While Dahl (1991) and Huntington (1991) were silent on the issue of internal party democracy, others such as Ohman (2002) give credence in their writings to its role in the promotion of democracy.[7]

Another vital issue in party development that is interwoven with internal party democracy is candidate selection. While the selection methods of political parties candidates are generally

supposed to be based on democratic principles, various strategies adopted by some of the parties in Ghana call into question the issue of fairness. Problems associated with candidate selection are not unique to any single party, although the extent of the problem differs significantly from one party to another.

Apart from making gains in elections, an effective system of candidate selection strengthens the democratic base of a party, promotes popular participation and helps the party to grow in membership, in addition to strengthening its policy-making capabilities (Maor, 1997). As the NDC General Secretary noted, a fair candidate selection process helps to promote thriving parties and democracy (2005). Since a party's cohesion is based on its internal democratic culture, candidate selection methods used by some political parties may lead to internal divisions among members, the emergence of independent candidates and even secession by disgruntled groups. According to Essuman-Johnson (1993), one of the yardsticks for measuring a party's internal democratic structure is how party leaders are chosen to contest national office and run the party's affairs. For example, the National Reform Party seceded from the NDC due to problems of candidate selection and internal power struggles among some of the party's key leaders. Some of the accusations about candidate selection processes made by various contestants against their opponents that have consistently affected the fairness of the 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004 and 2008 primaries of the major parties in Ghana were: vote buying and improper inducements by candidates to influence some party membersin order to win their votes; interference from the constituency, regional and national party executives; and bribery and other electoral malpractices. In some cases, these allegations led to intra-party confrontations and the emergence of independent candidates after the parties' primaries. As the Deputy Chairman of the Electoral Commission (2005) noted, since there is no legal framework empowering the EC to monitor the party's democracy, so far what happens within the parties is considered their internal affair, and the party leaders are expected to resolve internal issues through their own strategies and efforts. Consequently, a closer look is needed at the internal organizational calls by Ghana's political parties to improve the level of tolerance and cooperation within the parties.

Whereas internal party democracy and candidate selection are vital and necessary for promoting civil and political rights, promoting participation and effective representation helps establish sustainable parties and encourage participatory practices in democratic systems. Chandler and Siaroff (1991) underscored the importance of parties fulfilling their representational roles to the members and society in general, and Epstein (1980) also highlighted the linkage role that parties must play between the state and society. For example, whereas party members interviewed in the study see themselves mainly as the grassroots organizers of the parties and of the local level, most interviewees (including grassroots party members, constituency and unit/branch leaders), admitted that the major actors in the policy-making process within the parties and at the local level are the national and regional party leaders, Members of Parliament, and the district/municipal chief executives. These people are also mainly responsible for coordinating the planning and implementation of all policies.

Since Ghana's democratic transition in 1992, two kinds of concerns have emerged over the organization and structure of the various political parties and their institutional frameworks. The first set of concerns deals with the internal organization of political parties; and the second emerges from a lack of intervention from the grassroots members to seek reforms in the institutional frameworks of the parties, especially at the local level. Mehra (2003) generally attributes this trend to the apparently large gap between the organizational incentives of the party leaders and the grassroots supporters. It became apparent from my observation of government operations during this work that other concerns such as unfulfilled promises, representatives' lack of

involvement in community activities and a lack of dynamic and competent leaders who are accountable to the electorate are some of the major problems facing the party system. Additionally, while observing party activities in Ghana, it became obvious that party leaders integrate the urban and mostly rural-based grassroots supporters in a subordinate way to make them play minor roles in the parties. This restricts the level of participation of grassroots members in the parties to playing insignificant roles, such as attending political rallies, canvassing for votes for the parties and voting in elections.

In terms of representation, although the NPP and NDC parties have taken some important steps to make a visible mark on gender equity by integrating some women in high-level positions within the parties and governmental appointments, there is still a degree of disproportionate distribution of power in all the parties in Ghana. The concept of membership participation and the manner in which participatory mechanisms are implemented in political parties in Ghana are very different and complex. In most cases, the question of who gets the opportunity to participate in party decisions, in addition to the depth at which they are allowed to participate, appears inconsistent with democratic principles. Many party leaders and government officials often exclude or minimize public consultation and participation in planning efforts for party activities and public policy, claiming that popular participation is too expensive and time consuming. As the Assin South District Chief Executive (2008) noted, at the constituency and unit levels of the parties, women are disadvantaged when it comes to contesting for key positions.[8]

The study contends that in spite of the minor progress in women's political participation and empowerment over the years, their representation in the party system and their role in politics remain generally weak. Thus, the level of unbalanced gender representation in Ghana's political landscape shows that Ghana has a long way to go before achieving gender equality in its public and political life. The lack of female participation in politics has prompted some local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) like Community Action and the Centre for Sustainable Development to encourage more women to participate in district assembly elections and run as parliamentary candidates. Incorporating the grassroots members, minority groups and rural-based supporters into the lower strata of the party structures without allowing them to occupy important positions reduces their influence in decision-making. The lack of popular participation and the weaknesses in representation in Ghana's party system are indications of the fact that the majority of Ghanaians lack an in-depth knowledge about politics, which highlights the deficit in civic and political education by the parties, the National Commission on Civic Education (NCCE) and civil society groups.

Patronage and patron–client relations in party membership drives and elections constitute some of the central issues in Ghana's party development. The electoral campaign platforms of political parties and community and individual voter electoral decisions are guided by patronage. Parties in Ghana solicit support and membership by offering promises of development programmes to communities. As the Western Regional Secretary of the NDC (2005) noted, donations made to communities come along with the party's message and are indirectly intended to offer the party leadership the opportunity to promote their party's interests at such community gatherings. This inducement may influence would-be members or guide voters in their decision to support one party over another. As Ninsin (1993) noted, through this kind of relationship, voters create opportunities for their communities' improvement both by soliciting development programmes and simultaneously trying to achieve the maximum material gains to improve their living conditions. Meeting a community's socioeconomic needs boosts the community's confidence in that party to meet its collective interest. It is also a way of forging a new social contract with an elected government, which means benefiting from the distribution of development projects and patronage to groups and individuals. As a deputy minister in the erstwhile People's National Party (PNP) government

(2009) noted, due to patronage in Ghana's party system, voters' choice of candidates or parties is very often guided by the view that the candidates or parties should serve as a link between them and the state in the distribution or allocation of financial and material resources. In this regard, there is a linkage between one's willingness to support a party and its candidates, and the expectation of reward in the form of development projects and other resources for the community, after winning the election.

While some patronage practices, such as meeting community development needs, may be acceptable in political competition and even occur in the advanced democracies, other practices used by parties in Ghana to court prospective members and win votes during elections are unacceptable and give rise to clientelism. Personalities and clientelist networks predominate in Ghana's party system, since some politicians and public officials regard politics and public office as a means to personal enrichment at the expense of public interests, and use state power and resources to cultivate political loyalties largely on the basis of ethnic and regional solidarity. Some party leaders at the constituency level claim that the party leaders at the national and regional levels control power and resources, and distribute patronage to the members at the grassroots, constituency and unit levels. For example, at the constituency and unit levels, there is a strong presence of patron–client relationships between the party leaders and the grassroots members. Whereas parties and their candidates 'grease the electorates' palm' to gain their support and votes, the majority of the electorate in Ghana also believe that 'pulling the right strings and knocking on the right doors' by supporting a winning party could offer them benefits in the form of jobs, material gains and other favours for themselves and their communities, which they believe serve as a trade-off for their votes. It is therefore common knowledge in Ghanaian politics that some candidates and parties offer financial and material incentives in the form of bribes to potential individual voters and supporters, ranging from money, clothes and sewing machines, to other material goods.

Due to the patron–client relationship between the party elites and the grassroots members, membership in Ghana's political parties is categorized into two main classes, namely the 'Big Men and Small Boys' (Nugent, 1996). The so-called 'Big Men' who constitute the leadership and wealthy members of the party enter politics to acquire wealth and/or increase their wealth in order to enable them to play key roles within the party. This is what Bayart (1993) termed 'politics of the belly'. As Clapham (1985) also noted in his discussion of African politics, the patron–client relationship is fundamentally a one of exchange in which a superior (patron) provides financial and material support to the inferior (the client), and the client, in turn, provides support for the patron. The base of this is an unequal relationship between patrons and clients, and the benefits accruing to each of them from the exchange may be uneven. The 'Big Men' distribute part of their financial and material acquisitions in the form of patronage to the lower classes, who have been termed 'Small Boys' and who are uneducated, poor grassroots supporters, mostly in rural, but also in urban areas. In this way, power is concentrated in the hands of the 'Big Men' and the members in the lower ranks of the party not only serve the interest of the leaders, but also have a limited chance of upward mobility in the parties' leadership. As Fox (1994) rightly noted, clientelism is a form of social and political control. Hence political parties and some voters see patron–client relations as an exchange of favours between the parties and the electorate, as some people are co-opted by the parties through various forms of patronage. The National Vice Chairman of the NPP (2006) noted that during the Rawlings' NDC era, contracts were awarded to individuals 'not for reason of professional competence, but political partisanship', and contractors perceived to be members of the opposition parties were victimized. While bribery in elections is a crime and is seriously monitored in many advanced democracies, in Ghana this practice has so permeated the party system that the party leaders and supporters do not see anything wrong with patron–client relations.

Party financing also remains a major bottleneck in developing the party system and promoting democracy in Ghana. One main observation on Ghanaian politics relating to party financing is the excessive influence of money in contemporary elections. It is worth noting that the establishment and operation of a political party is a very expensive undertaking and is increasingly becoming more and more expensive in all democracies. The desire of parties to generate more funds is evidently driven by the increasingly high costs of organizing electoral campaigns. Party primaries and elections have become very competitive over the years, in terms of the number of aspiring candidates that compete for positions on party tickets and the passion with which people participate in national and local elections. Nonetheless, the costs of election campaigns and standing for public office at both the local and national level have also skyrocketed to extreme levels and the demands of the electorate on candidates and public officials have sharply increased. In this case, a good and credible candidate who does not have sufficient access to funding to advertise his/her policies through the radio, newspaper and television, to buy campaign vehicles and pay people to work on his/her campaign, and to bribe the electorate can only dream of getting elected into public office. The absence of state funding and the parties' reliance on the benevolence of a few wealthy people can threaten internal party democracy, since those who contribute heavily to a party's support unfairly influence party decisions by ensuring that they or their nominees occupy key party positions, often expecting to receive rewards in the form of contracts, jobs and other favours, whether or not they are qualified (Fobih, 2008, 2010). In view of the fact that the effectiveness of a party depends on its ability to communicate its ideas to the voters through election campaigns, newspaper, radio and television advertisement, party administration and practicing democracy are very expensive endeavours.

Institutional Benchmarks for Improving Democracy and the Party System

While Ghana has made significant progress in developing its party system since the 1992 transition, a lack of democratic procedures in internal party organization and other related issues continue to hinder the effective organization of the political parties. It is thus important to note that the issues outlined above need to be addressed effectively in order to strengthen Ghana's party system. To achieve this, this article outlines a number of institutional benchmarks to help reform Ghana's party system. It is apparent from the challenges discussed above that one of the main obstacles to party development in Ghana is an institutionally weak party system. Numerous theoretical studies on party development contend that party institutionalization is a major necessity for democratic consolidation, which forms an important feature in the design of democratic institutions, especially in terms of representativeness and inclusiveness. Huntington (1965, 1991) defines institutionalization as 'the process by which organizations and procedures in parties and state institutions acquire value and stability'. With cases of undemocratic practices in the conduct of some past and recent party primaries in Ghana's party system, it is important to revise the parties' internal structure and organizational strategies. In their discussion of party development, Randall and Theobald (1998) also argued that the structure and organization of parties constitute important aspects of institutionalization in party development. To buttress this view, Hofferbert (1998) also noted that the structure, organization and performance of political parties are some of the most vital aspects of the road to democratic consolidation.

Institutionalization of the political system is crucial for the development of party structures and the strengthening of the formal representative structures of democracy, because it helps political institutions to be more accountable and thus more responsive to the people's needs. As Panebiaco (1988)

noted, political parties can primarily be distinguished based on the degree of institutionalization that they attain. Thus the premise for measuring a party's level of institutionalization is the level of inter-dependence and participation among its internal actors as well as its representativeness and intra-party coherence. Where parties lack clear programmes, autonomous organization, strong linkages to society and social groups and are unable to build strong networks and support bases, it becomes difficult to develop a healthy party system. According to Aryee (2002), building internal democracy within the parties and restraining the power of leaders who may use their power to control grassroots members requires institutionalizing the political parties. This view is buttressed by Boafo-Arthur (2003), who said that institutionalizing political parties involves the direct participation of the grass-roots members of the party in its decision-making, organization and leadership selection processes. One issue of great importance in the context of institutionalizing political structures are the internal democratic practices of the parties. Low levels of institutionalization of the parties could result in a lack of competitiveness and reduced civic engagement in the parties. For example, part of the reason for the lack of competitiveness and weak organizational and membership drives in the CPP and PNC is the weak institutionalization of the parties. Plasser et al. (1998) highlighted the centrality of institutionalization to the entire process of party development and democratic consolidation, which involves how parties are organized and the relationship of the party leaders with the grassroots members in terms of decision-making processes.

To promote internal democracy and enhance the procedures for electing parliamentary candidates, the parties' primaries must be reformed. It is recommended that the parties review their procedures for primaries in order to promote democratic practices, because the parties' laws and procedures must conform to the needs and interests of the majority of the party members. It is also necessary that all party members, regardless of their position in the party, adhere to the party's 'code of ethics' to guide the conduct of primaries and promote internal democracy within the parties. To achieve this, independent bodies such as the Inter-Party Advisory Committee and the Electoral Commission could be empowered to measure the political parties' performance based on some standardized benchmarks. The parties should promote democratic and civic virtues such as tolerance, the accommodation of intra-party and inter-party opposition and cooperation between party leaders and grassroots members. Additionally, the practice whereby a few constituency and polling-station chairpersons vote to elect parliamentary candidates limits the participation of party members and makes it easy for some party leaders to manipulate the candidate selection process. The scope of participants in candidate selection during party primaries should be broadened to encompass more party members at the national, regional, constituency and unit levels or where possible, and be open to all party members who are cardholders and in good standing. While some critics may argue that the process will be too expensive, the rationale is to encourage mass participation in all aspects of the party system, and that is what democracy is about. For example, the recent nationwide vote by members of the NPP in the party's presidential primaries is a step in the right direction, which the other parties should find worthy to emulate. Using democratic methods in the parties' organization and selection of candidates would help make national politics more democratic because aspiring candidates learn the virtues of democracy and tolerance through their participation in party activities.

This study further contends that there is a need for political engagement through consultation and empowerment of grassroots members of the respective political parties. This can be achieved through social and political reforms in the political parties to promote effective representation and participation. As long as the parties remain elite-based, there will be continued discontent at the grassroots. An increasing disillusionment of party members with the party leadership could result in internal revolt within the political parties – as happened on two separate occasions in

the NDC party – and a sagging support for democracy. The ability of the leaders to move the parties' organization from their elitist focus to a grassroots- and societal-based focus would help to dispel the negative public perception of parties and politicians in Ghanaian society. There is a need to increase the role of the grassroots party members, because limiting the majority of the urban lower classes and rural-based supporters to the lower strata of the party structures restricts their influence in decision-making and in their level of participation merely to attending rallies and voting in elections.

Political parties and democratic institutions should embrace such broadly shared norms as political trust, tolerance, willingness to compromise and belief in democratic principles. Since democracy develops from the national and regional levels of the parties to the grassroots and constituency levels, when power is more evenly distributed within the various party levels, it is more likely to promote trust and produce leaders who are accountable to the electorate and who willingly promote checks and balances in the institutions of government. Increasing dialogue and trust relations are indispensable prerequisites for strengthening the party system, because they contribute to making the parties more representative. In *Making Democracy Work* and *Bowling Alone*, Putnam (1993, 2000) highlights the need for trust, cooperation, social capital and social relations in party development. This point reiterates Plasser et al.'s (1998) view that trust has an integrated effect on democratic consolidation because it widens the scope of action and serves as an incentive for political parties to cooperate. It is imperative that the party leaders, the NCCE, the Electoral Commission and the pro-democracy civic groups embark on a non-partisan civic education focused on the need for citizen involvement in the process of developing Ghana's party system and democracy. Almond and Verba (1963) and Diamond (1993) emphasized the importance of developing a rich civic culture and of changing the political culture of the people to conform to democratic principles in order to promote party development and democracy in general. Effectively enhancing the participation of the people in party decisions will make the parties more transparent, strengthen the legitimacy of elected officials, and make government and public officials more responsive to the needs of the people. State funding of political parties is also a necessity to help emerging parties to compete effectively against the major parties in elections, but to implement such a policy, there should be a condition or threshold to monitor the parties from abusing the system.

There is a need to shift from the confrontational atmosphere that exists within and among some of the parties towards a politics of reconciliation, bargaining, cooperation and consensus. In order to achieve this, it is also necessary to promote tolerance and compromise to accommodate the views of opposing party members and opposition parties. While it is apparent that competition for political power everywhere often evokes passions, tensions and extreme partisanship, political parties in Ghana should learn to accommodate one another, especially after general elections. For example, in response to solidarity messages from the NDC, the CPP and the PNC at the NPP's National Delegates Congress at the University of Ghana, Legon, in 2005, President John Agyekum Kufuor called on Ghana's parties to learn to develop and nurture a relationship of constructive engagement notwithstanding their inherent adversarial nature. He noted that 'as and when necessary, they should even adopt a bi-partisan stance in discussing critical issues of national interest' (Ghana Web News, 2005). The leaders of the respective parties should also create a more conducive atmosphere for political tolerance for intra- and inter-party competition, for example in candidate selection and election processes. It is also the responsibility of all party members to demand that the parties are organized along democratic principles (CDD/CODEO, 2005). The call for Ghana's parties to engage constructivly with one another has been on the agenda of some party leaders and international organizations such as the United States Agency for International

Development (USAID) and the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy that have a stake in the success of Ghana's democracy.

Since leadership and candidate selection is a central feature of political parties, parties in Ghana must formulate common candidate selection processes that encourage grassroots participation and offer the opportunity for collective deliberation in decision-making at the unit, constituency, regional and national levels. This study contends that popular participation at the local level within both the party system and government institutions has positive effects on the quality of democracy. Members and citizens' participation in decision-making is an essential institutional benchmark of the party system and of the democratic process generally. It is important that party grassroots members and citizens at the local level have equal or fair access to the decision-making structures of the parties and government, and have an equal opportunity to participate in party decisions and public policy-making. Government officials and party leaders must take into consideration the effect of policy implications on the development of political parties and members' participation in decision-making at the national and local levels. To deepen and further consolidate Ghana's democracy, tangible benefits can be derived from an effective membership involvement in party organization and public policy-making, such as strengthening the parties' internal democratic values and the national democratic principles, which far outweigh the cost and time spent in encouraging members' consultation and participation. Citizen participation and involvement in parties and government decision-making processes are important components of the democratic decision-making process, which provides members with an opportunity to influence public policy. Participatory policy-making in the parties also facilitates the inclusion of members through consultative or participative means in the design of policies, and helps to achieve accountability, transparency and democratic values. This study further argues that the process of achieving participatory and consultative approaches should be based on processes that are both top-down (where party leaders, government officials and institutions initiate participatory approaches to policy-making or donors by influencing members to do so) and bottom-up (where party members and other stakeholder groups such as NGOs advocate a participatory approach to influencing party and government policies).

Based on the research findings, this study further recommends that for real and meaningful participatory policy-making to be realized in the respective political parties and government institutions in order to improve state–society relations to facilitate Ghana's democratic consolidation, and to enhance the level of engagement of party leaders and state officials with party members and citizens, it is vital to achieve the following institutional benchmarks:

- **Legitimacy of elected officials and electoral outcomes:** Party primaries and national elections should be organized freely, fairly, peacefully, legitimately and in an orderly way so as to make losing parties and candidates accept the electoral outcomes and give winning parties and candidates legitimacy. To accelerate Ghana's democratic consolidation process, it is important that key government officials in the executive and legislative bodies have legitimacy and public support.
- **Accountable and responsible leadership:** The scope of a society's ability to exert pressure on political institutions and leaders in decision-making processes contributes significantly toward democratic consolidation. This includes demanding accountability and institutional reforms from political leaders and public officials, and compelling them to take responsibility for their actions. To sustain a hegemonic democratic culture in Ghana, it is imperative that party leaders and government officials be accountable to the public by promoting human rights and a drastic reduction in clientelism and corruption within the parties and government institutions.

- **Strengthening the legal and institutional frameworks:** While Ghana has made significant progress in its democratic development in the last two decades, many state institutions are still weak and plagued with corruption and the abuse of power and citizens' basic human rights. For example, whereas the police and judiciary services are supposed to be the backbone of the country's democracy, they are among some of the most corrupt state institutions, and the executive and legislative branches have failed to check the excesses of these key state institutions. In order to deepen Ghana's democracy, there is a need to strengthen the state's institutional capacity by implementing major policy reforms in the public sector.
- **Constitutional review:** To consolidate Ghana's democracy, there is a need for a genuine constitutional review to address some of the flaws in Ghana's 1992 Constitution. For example, Chapter 8, sections 78–79 of the Constitution empowers the President to appoint 50 per cent of the Ministers from Parliament. This makes it easier for a sitting president to co-opt parliamentarians to support unpopular bills. Also, MPs who aspire to become ministers or board members of state enterprises are often less critical of the executive for fear of offending the President and losing his favour. To facilitate 'good governance' and democratic consolidation in Ghana, it is necessary to remove the clauses that permit the appointment of MPs as ministers from the Constitution (as was the case in the 1979 Constitution) in order to promote the strict separation of powers and effective checks and balances between the executive and legislative bodies.
- **Respect for the rule of law and civil liberties:** It is imperative that public officials and party leaders strictly adhere to democratic principles such as respect for the rule of law, political rights and civil liberties, as well as to effective mechanisms that should be put in place to promote the separation of powers and checks and balances in key government institutions such as the executive and legislative bodies.
- **Citizen engagement, consultation and empowerment:** Transfer of control over decision-making and resources for party organization at the local level to members at the grassroots. Party members should be given the opportunity to interact with the national and regional leaders, be involved in party programme planning and decision-making, and be able to express freely their concerns and provide feedback to the leaders.
- **Communication, information sharing and decision-making:** Avenues for communication between party members and their leaders must be created and/or strengthened to ensure that party members are able to communicate their concerns to the party leaders and that appropriate action is taken to redress them effectively. Grassroots members of the respective political parties have an important role in party decisions and public policy design, implementation and evaluation. Party members must be knowledgeable of their roles, rights, responsibilities and options in voting in party primaries and national elections to help them make informed choices without any inducement or pressure.
- **Building trust relations:** Strengthening relations between government institutions, political leaders and society is vital for promoting trust relations. This would help build trust between party leaders and grassroots members as well as government officials and citizens.
- **Civic education:** It should be stressed that while governments and international donor organizations and countries have a greater role to play in opening political space, creating the right conditions and setting up the necessary structures and processes to enable participatory policy-making, local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the National Commission for Civic Education, the print and electronic media and the Electoral Commission also have important roles to play in raising awareness in communities of voting procedures, educating citizens and communities on the need to demand democratic

accountability as well as the need for civility towards opposing party members so as to reduce partisan conflict.

- **Cooperation, consensus building and partnership:** To promote harmony and unity within the parties, it necessary that party leaders and members cooperate on all issues. When there is disagreement between party leaders and grassroots supporters, especially in times of candidate selection, there should be accommodation and consensus to help determine common grounds and priorities. Party leaders, government officials and party members and citizens should work together as equals towards mutual goals of promoting democracy and meeting the socioeconomic and political needs of the people.

This article contends that by effectively implementing the participatory and democratic benchmarks discussed above could go a long way towards increasing the collaboration between party leaders and members, building trust between them, and helping rebuild the institutional capacity of the political parties. These can be accomplished by further decentralizing the parties' and state institutions' decision-making systems from the national level to the constituencies and District Assemblies.

Conclusion

Looking at the challenges associated with political parties in Ghana discussed in the work, it could be argued that while Ghana's democracy has made great strides in recent years, some major internal problems continue to plague the development of the party system. One major manifestation of the above-highlighted institutional benchmarks is the fact that many factors, such as party institutionalization and organization, democratization, socialization and trust relations as well as party behaviour, influence the party system and the process of consolidating democracy in diverse ways. The challenge is how to build sustainable democratic institutions and strengthen political parties in order to to achieve enhanced participation in decision-making and political accountability. Although not all-embracing, political parties contribute to the fundamental standards of promoting democracy and exercise a range of important mobilization and linkage formations in every society where they operate. Notwithstanding the fact that Ghana's party system has evolved over the years since independence, especially after the 1992 democratic transition and power alteration and has played significant roles in promoting and sustaining democracy, the issues discussed in this study show that the development of Ghana's party system continues to face a number of challenges. These require pragmatic reforms to meet the changing global trends in party development and democratic consolidation. This article argues that there is a need for internal and external frameworks for evaluating the basis of political participation, inclusiveness and responsiveness, especially in the process of candidate and leadership selection, electoral processes and leaders accountability.

For Ghana's democracy to be firmly consolidated, some of the weaknesses in party organization and governance need to be recognized and addressed appropriately. The key role of party members in the nurturing and consolidating democracy shows that public support for the development and consolidation of democracy is also vital and needs to be sustained over a long period of time. Finally, it is worth noting that building a strong party system and sustaining democracy requires that the national, regional and constituency executives promote democratic values, such as participation in decision-making, transparency and an effective system of checks and balances at all levels of party organization. With such an approach, grassroots members and supporters of political parties as well as citizens in general will feel more appreciated for their support and role in

moving the development of the party system and democratic process forward. Through these initiatives, the government and party leaders can resolve some of the critical problems that need serious attention and reforms, and by successfully dealing with these issues Ghana's democratic consolidation process can move forward to a whole new and unprecedented level.

Notes

1. After the Arusha Conference in 1990 in Tanzania on Popular Participation in order to promote democracy and development in Africa, there was a major shift in focus of the policy prescription of the World Bank and other international donors from adjustment and economic growth to the promotion of democracy and popular participation.
2. 'Third wave democracies' is a term coined by Samuel Huntington with reference to the emerging democratic countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe that experienced democratic reforms and changed from authoritarian rule to multiparty democracy during the 1980s and 1990s into the twenty-first century.
3. Ghana's Fourth Republic began in 1992 and continues to the present.
4. For a detailed discussion refer to Africa Online (2010).
5. The Danquah/Busia tradition is based on successive parties belonging to the United Party tradition that follows the line of the United Gold Coast Convention party led by one of the pioneers of Ghana's independence, JB Danquah and Ghana's Prime Minister in the Second Republic, KA Busia. These parties include the United Gold Coast Convention (1946), the Progress Party (1969), the Popular Front Party (1979) and the New Patriotic Party (1992).
6. Ghana's First Republic was from 1957 to 1966, after the National Liberation Council coup toppled the government of Kwame Nkrumah's Convention Peoples Party; the Second Republic was from 1969 to 1972, after the National Redemption Council's coup ousted the government of KA Busia's Progress Party; and the Third Republic was from 1979 to 1981, after the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council overthrew the government of Hilla Limman's Peoples National Party.
7. Robert Dahl and Samuel Huntington are among some of the contemporary theorists on democracy and political parties who have written extensively on these subjects.
8. A number of women Municipal Chief Executives (MCEs)/District Chief Executives (DCEs) and party activists interviewed during the study expressed concern about the dominance of men in Ghana's party system and key government positions, and suggested the implementation of major social reforms to address the inequitable system.

References

Africa Online (2010) *Political Parties in Africa*. Available at: http://www.africaonline.com (accessed 24 November 2010).

Almond GA and Verba S (1963) *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Aryee JRA (2002) *Political Parties and Internal Democracy: Problems and Prospects*. Paper presented at a public symposium organized by the Ethics Foundation, Teachers Hall Complex, Accra, 24 April.

Bayart J-F (1993) *The State in Africa: Politics of the Belly*. London: Longman.

Boafo-Arthur K (2003) Political parties and democratic sustainability in Ghana 1992–2000. In: Mohamed Salih MA (ed.) *African Political Parties: Evolution, Institutionalization and Governance*. London: Pluto Press, 207–238.

Center for Democratic Development (CDD) and Committee of Democratic Election Observers (CDEO) (2005) *Ghana's Election 2004*. Accra: Centre for Democratic Development–Ghana.

Chandler W and Siaroff A (1991) Parties and party government in advanced democracies. In: Bakvis H (ed.) *Canadian Political Parties: Leaders, Candidates and Organization*. Toronto: Dundurn Press, 129–177.

Clapham C (1985) *Third World Politics: An Introduction*. London: Croom Helm.

Cross W (2004) *Political Parties*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.

Dalton RJ and Wattenburg MP (2000) *Parties without Partisans: Political Change in Advanced Industrialized Democracies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dahl R (1971) *Polyarchy: Participation and opposition*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press.

Diamond L (1993) Political culture and democracy. Diamon L (ed.) *Political Culture and Democracy in Developing Countries*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, Introduction.

Epstein LD (1980) *Political Parties in Western Democracies*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.

Essuman-Johnson A (1993) The democratic ethos and internal party democracy: The case of parties in the Fourth Republic. In: Ninsin K and Drah FK (eds) *Political Parties and Democracy in Ghana's Fourth Republic*. Accra: Woeli Publishing Services.

Fobih N (2008) Political parties and democratic development in Ghana: From transition to consolidation and beyond. Unpublished PhD dissertation, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario.

Fobih N (2010) Dynamics of political parties administration in Ghana. *Africa Today* 57(1): 25–41.

Fox J (1994) The difficult transition from clientelism to citizenship. *World Politics* 46(2): 151–184.

Ghana Web News (2005) *Political Parties Must Nurture Relationship of Constructive Engagement*. Available at: http://www.ghanaweb.com (accessed 17 December 2005): 1–3.

Hofferbert RI (1998) Introduction: Party structure and performance in new and old democracies. In: Hofferbert RI (ed.) *Parties and Democracy*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 423–431.

Huntington S (1965) Political development and political decay. *World Politics* 17(3): 386–430.

Huntington S (1991) *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Maor M (1997) *Political Parties and Party Systems: Comparative Approaches and the British Experience*. London: Routledge.

Mehra AK (2003) Introduction. In: Mehra AK, Kharma DD and Kueck GW (eds) *Political Parties Party Systems*. New Delhi: SAGE Publications, Introduction.

Ninsin KA (1993) The electoral system, elections and democracy in Ghana. In: Ninsin K and Drah FK (eds) *Political Parties and Democracy in Ghana's Fourth Republic*. Accra: Woeli Publishing Services.

Nugent P (1996) *Big Men, Small Boys, and Politics in Ghana*. Accra: Asempa Publishers.

Nwabueze BO (1993) *Democratization*. Ibadan: Spectrum Law Publishing.

Ohman M (2002) *Determining the Contestants: Candidate Selection in Ghana's 2000 Elections*. Accra: Centre for Democratic Development–Ghana.

Panebiaco A (1988) *Political Parties: Organization and Power*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Plasser F, Ulram PA and Waldrauch H (1998) *Democratic Consolidation in East and Central Europe*. New York: St. Martin's Press Inc.

Putnam RD (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Putnam RD, Leonardi R and Nanetti RY (1993) *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Randall V and Theobald R (1998) *Political Change and Underdevelopment: A Critical Introduction to Third World Politics*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Shell KL (1962) *The Transformation of Austrian Socialism*. New York: State University of New York.

Smith BC (1996) *Understanding Third World Politics: Theories of Political Change and Development*. Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press.

Nick Fobih is Assistant Professor in Public Administration at Myongji University in Seoul, South Korea. He has previously worked as an Expert Trainer on human rights and journalism in Ghana for the Journalists for Human Rights in Toronto, Canada and as Policy Advisor in the Office of the President of Ghana. His research interests include democracy, governance and human rights, political parties, public policy management, the non-profit sector, organizational behaviour and human resource management.