

## PARTIES IN A PLURALITY SYSTEM: *Candidate Nomination in Ghana's Minor Parties*

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### ABSTRACT

*In theory, plurality electoral systems do not favour the development of minor parties. Scholarly analysis of minor political parties has focused on their electoral performance in national elections, and very little is known about their candidate nomination behaviour at grassroots level. Why minor parties should compete in national elections within a plurality system is a puzzle explained in this paper by an examination of candidate nomination by minor parties in Ghana's plurality system. Ghana's minor parties compete in constituencies they know they cannot win. Drawing on poll data, the paper argues that these minor parties use the candidate nomination process not to win parliamentary seats but as a strategy to make their party platforms visible in the political landscape. It reaches three conclusions on candidate nomination: that it is used by minor parties to make their presence felt in the country; that it allows the parties to give the appearance of being strong; and that it is a strategy to boost the campaign of presidential candidates.*

**Keywords:** Ghana; minor parties; plurality system; candidate nomination; two-party system

### INTRODUCTION

Following the re-introduction of competitive politics in Africa in the early 1990s, different electoral systems have been adopted and different party systems have evolved (Bogaards 2004, 2007; Doorenspleet & Nijzink 2014; Hartmann

2007). Whereas some countries adopted majoritarian systems, others embraced proportional representation. Cote d'Ivoire, Kenya, Malawi and Uganda are among those that adopted single member plurality systems while Burkina Faso, Benin, Sierra Leone and Senegal opted for proportional representation systems (Hartmann 2007). These different electoral systems have different consequences and are known to have an impact on the development of political parties (Cox 1997; Farrell 1997; Norris 1997; Taagepera, 2007). Proportional systems encourage the development of minor parties (Norris 1997) whereas studies have shown that majoritarian systems adversely affect the performance of minor parties (Borisjuk et al. 2007; Gerring 2005). The majoritarian system operates in many recently democratised African countries, and consequently Kadima (2006, p. 8) argues that most electoral systems in Africa 'call for pre-election alliances in order to avoid wasting votes'. In some countries with a plurality system, a pre-election alliance is prevalent (Kadima 2014), though it has also been observed that there is a low level of inter-party coordination in other African countries with a plurality system (Ishiyama 2009).

Ghana's party system is anchored in a plurality electoral system which has favoured the development of major parties only (Daddieh & Bob-Milliar 2014). As a result, a de facto two-party system is being consolidated in the country (Daddieh & Bob-Milliar 2014; Morrison & Hong 2006; Whitfield 2009). The duopoly of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP) has seen them maintain a strong presence across the country and between them these two parties have captured at least 95% of parliamentary seats since 1996 (Daddieh & Bob-Milliar 2014). Minor parties and independent candidates have managed to capture barely 5% of parliamentary seats (Daddieh & Bob-Milliar 2016). These minor parties, including the Convention People's Party (CPP) and the People's National Convention (PNC), have been visible in very few constituencies during parliamentary elections, an absence that has been attributed to financial constraints and organisational weakness (Aidoo & Chamberlain, 2014; Ninsin 2006). This reflects Stroh's observation (2010, p. 7) that a lack of human and financial resources renders 'secondary parties' incapable of engaging in 'territory-wide competition'.

Financial constraints and the electoral system have made it difficult for minor parties to make incursions into Ghana's political system. Following existing theories on party behaviour, these obstacles should result in strategies to put smaller parties in a better position to win seats in parliamentary elections. Such strategies could consist of coalition and strategic nomination choices, where parties with 'similar policy interests' enter pre-election alliances so as to avoid splitting votes (Herron 2002, p. 723). As Ishiyama (2009, pp. 320–21) succinctly notes, minor parties lack 'the organizational wherewithal to blanket the country

with candidates.' As a result, 'where to nominate candidates must be based on careful choices as to where the party's chances of winning are the greatest' (ibid.).

This paper contributes to our knowledge about the behaviour of African political parties by examining the electoral behaviour of minor parties in Ghana. It does so by exploring the extent of collaboration between the 'Nkrumahist' minor parties (Bob-Milliar forthcoming), and the degree to which these parties behave strategically with respect to coalition and strategic nomination theories. Given the contextual effects of majoritarian systems, how do minor parties in Ghana behave in parliamentary elections? Despite the majoritarian bias of Ghana's plurality system, electoral data reveals that these minor parties nominate candidates even in constituencies where they have no chance of winning, behaviour that defies the strategic nomination thesis. The paper thus argues that the behaviour of minor parties in Ghana's plurality system goes against the grain of existing theoretical perspectives. This is because minor parties use candidate nomination not only as a mechanism for winning parliamentary seats but also as a campaign strategy to make their parties visible in the political landscape. The paper thus demonstrates inconsistencies between the existing theoretical propositions and the pattern of candidate nomination in a democratising state like Ghana.

Since the re-democratisation of Africa in the 1990s, elections have become a common fixture in African political systems. Periodic elections have been welcomed by the populace as a vital means to express themselves and to have a say in governance. Despite occasional recessions, the democratisation of Africa has enlivened political participation and Ghana in particular has established itself as a beacon of hope for democracy on the continent. One of the underlying factors for this is 'the institutionalization of political parties' which is spearheaded by the two major parties (Whitfield 2009). Despite its 'democratic success' (which is largely electoral), the political system is bedevilled by episodes of political violence, the limited capacity of civil society organisations, and excessive presidentialism (Abdulai & Crawford 2010). Generally, the literature on party politics in Ghana has concentrated on the political behaviour and activities of the major parties (Ayee 2011; Bob-Milliar 2012; Daddieh & Bob-Milliar 2016; Ninsin, 2016), voter behaviour (Arthur 2009; Fridy 2007; Gyimah-Boadi 2007; Lindberg 2003; Lindberg & Morrison 2005; Nugent 1999, 2001, 2007), and party systems (Daddieh & Bob-Milliar 2014; Morrison & Hong 2006; Osei 2012; Whitfield 2009). Recently there have been some preliminary works that put minor parties in the spotlight and assess their staying power, performance and the normative role they play in Ghana's political system (Aidoo & Chamberlain 2014; Bob-Milliar forthcoming; Yobo & Gyampo 2015). Yet an interesting puzzle that has not been given significant attention in the literature is the political choices or electoral behaviour of the minor parties. Stroh (2010, p. 7) observed that 'due to the apparent and sometimes obvious weakness [of African

parties], a systematic analysis of their strategic behaviour has not been seen as relevant'. Nevertheless, Ishiyama (2009) asserts that the electoral behaviour of minor parties is an important element of African democratisation.

This paper thus attempts to interrogate the electoral behaviour of the minor parties in Ghana. Electoral behaviour is a broad concept; however, for the purpose of this paper, the focus is on the candidate nomination behaviour of the parties. With insights from Ishiyama (2009, p. 321), candidate nomination behaviour is defined as 'candidates nominated by the minor opposition parties in the publicly announced lists of candidates for the single member district elections'.

## METHOD AND DATA

The paper is based on a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods. In essence, the quantitative approach was used to depict the electoral behaviour of the parties while the qualitative approach enabled us to unravel the reasons behind their nomination behaviour. Helland and Saglie (2003, p. 600) indicate that 'electoral statistics provide a rich data source for the study of electoral behaviour'. Thus poll data forms the primary unit of analysis. Poll data is underutilised in the study of minor parties in Ghana. All the studies that have given exclusive attention to minor parties in Ghana used aggregate results from elections. In studying the electoral behaviour of African voters, Wahman (2014, p. 206) concludes by suggesting that there is 'a need for more systematic research on sub-national electoral behaviour' for a better understanding of political behaviour in Africa. Therefore, to study the nomination behaviour of a party, it is important to disaggregate poll data and make use of regional and constituency results in general elections, as is done in this paper. The data was collected from five parliamentary elections and analysed descriptively, and is based on the performance of the two minor parties at the regional and constituency level. Broadly, we observed the nomination pattern of the parties where particular attention was given to the spatial distribution of nominations, and also the extent to which their nominations are coordinated. For the purpose of comparison, we presented the electoral results and performance of the parties in the same tables and graph, and then highlighted the key issues in the discussion section. In some cases the performance of all political parties in the country (including the major parties) was highlighted for a better understanding of the strength of the minor parties. In addition, elite interviews were conducted with the leadership of the two minor parties which provided a deeper understanding of the political choices of the parties.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: an overview of the theoretical debates on electoral systems and party behaviour is followed by a discussion

of the electoral system and party politics in Ghana. The paper then analyses the nomination of the parties under consideration, focusing on the spatial distribution of their nominations in five election cycles. Finally, we explain the reasons underlying the nomination behaviour of the minor parties and draw some conclusions.

### THEORETICAL EXPLANATIONS FOR ELECTORAL SYSTEMS AND PARTY BEHAVIOUR

The way an electoral system is designed has a bearing on a political system and can also determine party systems (Farrell 1997; Taagepera 2007). An electoral system broadly includes 'different components such as the regulation of candidacies, the facilities for registration and voting, and the funding of party campaigns' (Norris 1997, p. 299). However, Norris (*ibid.*) further contends that the heart of electoral systems is the process of translating votes into seats. This facilitates the determination of 'victors and losers' in an election (Farrell 1997). To a large extent, this process gives rise to different systems. Generally, the literature on electoral systems provides three broad types – majoritarian, proportional and mixed/combined systems (Norris 1997). In majoritarian systems, parties often win a proportion of seats more or less than the proportion of votes they amass in elections, whereas proportional systems ensure that parties get seats commensurate with the votes they obtain in elections (*ibid.*). These two electoral systems affect parties in diverse ways. Proportional representation ensures equitable representation of all parties, including smaller ones. On the other hand, the utility of majoritarian systems lies in the effectiveness, accountability and stability they ensure in governance (Norris 1997).

Notwithstanding the utility of plurality systems, the negative consequences it has on the performance of minor parties cannot be overlooked. The anomalies in a plurality system tend to favour the big-tent parties. In this context, Bogaards (2007, p. 171) contends that 'the choice of electoral system follows from the choice of party system function'. This implies that electoral systems are meant to produce particular party systems in line with the needs and aspirations of a country. Thus, Norris (1997, p. 300-301) argues that:

The aim of plurality systems is to create a "manufactured majority", that is, to exaggerate the share of seats for the leading party in order to produce an effective working parliamentary majority for the government, while simultaneously penalizing minor parties, especially those whose support is spatially dispersed.

In a similar vein, Heywood (2007, p. 260) asserts that 'two-party systems and single party government are manufactured by the majoritarian bias of the [plurality] electoral system and do not reflect the distribution of popular preferences'. These claims suggest that majoritarian systems are used as 'gatekeeping mechanisms' to keep smaller parties at bay for the sake of stability and efficiency in the political system. In effect, plurality rules tend to favour larger parties. Of importance for this paper is the penalising effect of plurality systems on minor parties in terms of their performance and the seats they win. If plurality systems penalise minor parties, such parties could minimise this punishment by stretching the boundaries of the electoral system through a call for reforms. However, Taagepera (2007, p. 9) notes that 'fundamental changes in electoral laws are infrequent'. For electoral system reforms to be successful, they would require the support of representatives (especially in the main parties) who happen to be the major beneficiaries of majoritarian systems. In the absence of reforms, minor parties can stay relevant in the political system only by adopting strategies that can put them in a better position to win seats in parliamentary elections. The nature of an electoral system thus structures electoral competition (Sartori [1976] 2005).

According to Helland and Saglie (2003, p. 581), 'majority-plurality systems invite strategic behaviour' especially from parties that are adversely affected. With respect to strategic behaviour, Norris (1997) suggests that small parties can do well in plurality systems if their support is spatially concentrated. On this note, she observes that smaller parties with 'a strong concentration of votes in key regions' perform better than those 'that spread their nominations across a wide range of constituencies' (Norris 1997, p. 301). Similarly, Ishiyama (2009, p. 320-321) posits that since 'minor parties do not have the organizational wherewithal to blanket the whole country with candidates', 'where to nominate candidates must be based on careful choices as to where the party's chances of winning are the greatest.' Furthermore, Stroh (2010) contends that since 'secondary parties' are hampered by inadequate human and financial resources, they need to focus on constituencies where they are likely to perform well. Hence, the idea of 'spatial concentration of nominations' is a crucial strategy for minor parties in plurality systems.

Also, parties can engage in electoral alliances to optimise the chances of winning elections (Bob-Milliar, forthcoming). The National Democratic Institution (2015, p. 14) notes that 'the main purpose of an electoral alliance is to combine the resources of two or more parties to improve electoral outcomes for the members of the alliance'. Often 'parties in plurality-majority systems may agree not to compete against each other in particular electoral districts' (ibid.). Helland and Saglie (2003, p. 600) assert that 'in [a plurality system], a pair of parties may negotiate electoral alliances centrally, securing representation for both parties'. In this context, Herron (2002) suggests that in single-member district elections, like-minded parties may

decide to coordinate their nominations in order to avoid nominating candidates in the same districts so as to optimise their chances of winning. This shows that parties with similar ideologies in a plurality system may choose to enter electoral alliances to coordinate their nominations in parliamentary elections.

To sum up this section, we can tease out the main ingredients as follows: first, the explanations of electoral systems and party behaviour suggest that minor parties can minimise the penalising effects of majoritarian systems by concentrating their nominations in key constituencies or selected regions. Second, like-minded parties in plurality systems may choose to coordinate their nomination choices in parliamentary elections, which has been the norm in some advanced democracies. Nevertheless, in a democratising state like Ghana with a competitive party system, the candidate nomination behaviour of the minor parties challenges these dominant theoretical perspectives. Notwithstanding the financial and organisational challenges facing these minor parties in Ghana's plurality system, they compete in constituencies where they are unlikely to win parliamentary seats, as is evident in their nomination patterns. The goals of Ghana's minor parties, as well as the impression they wish to create, explain why their behaviour deviates from the norm. What follows is an explanation of the nature of party politics in Ghana.

#### THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM AND PARTY POLITICS IN GHANA

Competitive politics in Ghana is regulated by a number of variables including (but not limited to) the Constitution, the electoral system and several Acts of Parliament. First, the 1992 Constitution, which legalises multiparty competition, defines the boundaries within which the political parties operate. Even though the Constitution guarantees the 'right to form political parties', certain provisions tend to restrict how these political parties operate. Among these, the Constitution stipulates that 'every political party shall have a national character and membership shall not be based on ethnic, religious, regional or other sectional divisions' (Republic of Ghana 1992, p. 48). It also enjoins all parties to have 'branches in all the regions of Ghana' and in at least 'two-thirds of the districts of each region' (*ibid.*). These constitutional requirements have a profound impact on political parties, especially the smaller ones. Crafted as they are on the history of competitive politics in Ghana, these provisions do not favour the development of smaller parties. As Ishiyama (2009) has correctly observed, many smaller parties in Ghana do not have the 'organizational wherewithal' to cover the whole country.

Since the inception of multiparty contest in Ghana in the early 1950s, electoral competition has always been mediated by the plurality electoral system. As explained earlier, to be elected as a member of parliament in this system, the

candidate needs only to win a plurality of the votes in parliamentary elections. This reflects the 'British type single-member district plurality system' (Morrison & Hong 2006, p. 624). Ninsin (2006, p. 7) notes that 'this electoral system does not reward a political party whose candidate may have won a number of votes beyond an established threshold'. The system tends to over-reward major parties and penalise other parties. Based on Ghana's 2000 parliamentary elections, Adjei (2013, p. 17) shows that smaller parties would be 'better off under the proportional representation system'. He reached this conclusion by running the votes gained by all parties in a proportional representation formula which saw the seats of the major parties decrease while the seats of the minor parties increased (ibid.). Clearly, this brings to light the majoritarian bias of the plurality system which has worked against the development of the minor parties in the country. To a large extent, the 'majoritarian bias' ingrained in this system has helped in 'nurturing Ghana's two-party system' (Daddieh & Bob-Milliar 2014).

The filing of nominations for the presidential and parliamentary elections is regulated by the Electoral Commission (EC), and also affects minority parties as it comes at much cost. Candidates are required to make a (refundable) deposit before picking up a nomination form. Between 1992 and 2004, the deposit was pegged at 5m old Ghana cedis (\$114.29) and 200,000 old Ghana cedis (US\$ 4.57) for presidential and parliamentary nominations respectively. In 2008, the Electoral Commission increased the nomination deposit to GH¢ 5,000 (US\$ 1,142.86) for presidential nomination and GH¢ 500 (US\$ 114.29) for the parliamentary nomination. New filing fees announced for the 2012 elections were fixed at GH¢ 10,000 (US\$ 2,285.72) and GH¢ 1,000 (US\$ 228.57) for presidential and parliamentary nominations respectively. In the recently concluded election, the EC increased the fee to GH¢ 10,000 (US\$ 2,285.72) for the parliamentary election and GH¢ 50,000 (US\$ 11,428.59) for the presidential election. The minor parties protested against this increase, and the Progressive People's Party (PPP) sued the EC at an Accra High Court after it refused to consider a reduction of the fees. Nonetheless, the challenge was unsuccessful. Legally, parliamentary candidates are entitled to a refund if they are able to obtain at least 12.5% of the votes in the parliamentary election. For the major parties, this has not been a problem since they easily pass the 12.5% threshold. But the minor parties with limited resources have been hardest hit since their performance in most constituencies has not reached 12.5% (see Tables 2 and 3). In effect, the institutional design of Ghanaian politics has been benevolent to the two major parties while having a punishing effect on the minor parties.

Despite the majoritarian bias of the electoral system and the cost of nomination fees, a number of minor parties have contested elections in the Fourth Republic. Since 1992, more than 20 political parties have been registered

and certified by the Electoral Commission to compete in national elections. Yet the number of parties contesting elections has not reached half the number of registered political parties in an election year. Between 1996 and 2016, the number of parties competing in parliamentary elections, including the major parties, fluctuated between seven and eight. Throughout these elections, the major parties have competed in virtually all the constituencies. In the recent elections, the major parties competed in all 275 constituencies in the country. On the other hand, due to financial constraints and weak organisation, most of the minor parties were unable to file candidates in most constituencies. And even where they competed, as Nugent (2001, p. 423) notes, they were 'little more than spectators in a two-way fight'. Consequently, for a keen observer like Nugent, the smaller parties were also-rans. The People's National Convention (PNC) and Convention People's Party (CPP) have nominated more constituency candidates for parliamentary elections than the other minor parties, and they are the only existing minor parties to have gained representation in the National Assembly (see Table 1). The next section focuses on their ideologies, nomination behaviour and electoral performance in Ghana's Fourth Republic.

**Table 1**  
**Results of parliamentary elections, 1992-2016**

1992						
Party	NDC	NPP	PNC	NIP	PHP	NCP
Seats Won	189					8
1996						
Party	NDC	NPP	PNC	PCP	NCP	GCPP
Seats Won	133	61	1	5	0	0
2000						
Party	NDC	NPP	PNC	CPP	GCPP	
Seats Won	89	100	3	1	0	
2004						
Party	NDC	NPP	PNC	CPP	DPP	
Seats Won	91	129	4	3	0	
2008						
Party	NDC	NPP	PNC	CPP	DPP	
Seats Won	113	108	2	1	0	
2012						
Party	NDC	NPP	PNC	CPP	PPP	GCPP

Seats Won	147	123	1	1 <sup>a</sup>	0	0
<b>2016</b>						
Party	NDC	NPP	PNC	CPP	PPP	GCPP
Seats Won	106	169	0	0	0	0

<sup>a</sup> This seat was won in a bye-election in 2013.

### *The CPP and PNC in electoral politics*

By most definitions in the empirical and theoretical literature, the CPP and PNC are minor parties (e.g. Bob-Milliar, forthcoming; Gerring 2005). These parties have gained fewer seats in parliamentary elections since the inception of electoral politics in 1992. According to the EC records, some twenty-two parties have registered. However, for the purposes of this paper, the focus is on two minor parties of historical and parliamentary relevance. Historically, both parties have their roots in the vanguard party founded by Kwame Nkrumah in the late 1940s and are consequently linked to the ideas of the founding president of Ghana. Even though some of the other minor parties subscribe to the ideals of Nkrumahism, the CPP and the PNC have been more proactive with this ideology.

At the level of representation, both parties have won seats and have entered Parliament at different times. Despite the fact that the PNC and the CPP have outperformed other minor parties in parliamentary elections, these two parties have faced similar challenges to those of other parties in the political system. They also lack the organisational wherewithal and the financial capacity to compete with the mainstream parties in the country. Most importantly, these parties share similar ideologies: on that score, they can be branded as like-minded parties. The next section depicts candidate nomination behaviour of these two parties by analysing electoral data in parliamentary elections, focusing on the nomination pattern and their electoral performance.

**Table 2**  
**Frequency distribution of electoral performance for the CPP and PNC**  
**in the 2012 parliamentary election**

Percentage Vote (%)	Ashanti Region		Volta Region		Greater Accra	
	CPP	PNC	CPP	PNC	CPP	PNC
(0.00 – 0.99)	22	22	11	3	17	17
(1.00 – 1.99)	1	-	6	1	7	-
(2.00 – 2.99)	-	-	-	-	-	-

(3.00 – 3.99)	-	-	1	1	2	-
(4.00 – 4.99)	1	-	2	-	-	-
(5.00 – 10.00)	-	-	1	-	-	-

Source: 2017 Electoral Commission poll data

### *The Convention People's Party*

The CPP is the reincarnation of the vanguard party that won political independence from the British in 1957. After the overthrow of the Nkrumah regime in February 1966, the CPP lost prominence and has since been fragmented. Like the PNC, the CPP also subscribes to Nkrumahism as its central tenet. The CPP competed in 188 out of 200 constituencies in the 2000 elections, winning only one seat (see Table 4). With 230 constituencies available for capture in the 2004 elections, the CPP filed candidates in 172 constituencies and won three seats (see Table 5). In the 2008 elections, the party won only one of the 205 seats it contested (see Table 6). In the 2012 election, the party again performed poorly by failing to win a single seat in the 159 constituencies it contested (see Table 7). The CPP, however, managed to win the bye-election held in the Kumbungu constituency (in the Northern Region) in April 2013. This bye-election victory by the CPP is attributed to the support from the two major parties and in particular the NPP. In 2016, the party competed in 220 constituencies and again failed to win a seat (see Table 8). Like the PNC, the CPP also lost seats to the NDC. The CPP has won a total of seven seats in parliamentary elections since 2000 which were, with the exception of the Kumbungu seat, all in the Central and Western regions. The favourite son thesis best explains the CPP's ability to win because the founding father of the party, Kwame Nkrumah, hailed from this region. Gyimah-Boadi and Debrah (2008, p. 149) observe that 'the relative support base of the CPP is rooted among the Nzema whose affinity to Nkrumah appears to be unshakable'. It is thus not surprising that when Kwame Nkrumah's daughter Samia appeared on the political scene in 2008, she was able to unseat the incumbent in that year's election. While other factors might be responsible for this feat, the fond memories of her father cannot be underestimated.

### *The People's National Convention*

The PNC was formed in July 1992, emerging from the 1979 Imoru Egala-Limann tradition of the People's National Party (PNP). Dr. Hilla Limann, President of the short-lived Third Republic, founded the PNC after several attempts to present a single Nkrumahist platform had failed (Nugent 1996). As an appendage of

Nkrumahism, the PNC subscribes to Kwame Nkrumah's brand of socialism and Pan-Africanism (scientific socialism). Since its formation in 1992, the party has contested in every election in the Fourth Republic with the exception of the 1992 parliamentary elections. The party has competed in all national elections and has won a total of 11 seats in parliamentary elections (see Table 1). In the 2000 elections, the party nominated 155 candidates across the country and won three seats (see Table 4). In the 2004 elections, the PNC presented 124 candidates and won four seats (see Table 5). In the 2008 elections, the number of nominations increased to 127 but the number of seats won decreased to two (see Table 6). However, in the 2012 parliamentary elections, the party managed to file candidates in 100 out of 275 constituencies, winning only one seat (see Table 7). In the 2016 elections, the PNC filed fewer than 100 candidates for the parliamentary election (see Table 8). It is worth noting that the party has won parliamentary seats in only the three northern regions in the country (Northern, Upper East and Upper West regions). As such, it is said that the PNC is a 'Northern-based party' (Gyimah-Boadi & Debrah 2008, p. 149). Furthermore, all party leaders have hailed from one of the three northern regions; for example, former president Dr. Hilla Limann is a son of Gwolu, the capital of the Sissala West District in the Upper West Region. Between 2000 and 2008 the PNC were able to win at least one of the parliamentary seats in the two Sissala constituencies, which are among the strongholds of the party. However, the party lost its parliamentary seat to the NDC in the 2016 elections.

**Table 3**  
**Frequency distribution of electoral performance of the CPP and PNC**  
**in the 2016 parliamentary election**

Percentage Vote (%)	Ashanti Region		Volta Region		Greater Accra	
	CPP	PNC	CPP	PNC	CPP	PNC
(0.00 – 0.99)	33	20	16	1	28	6
(1.00 – 1.99)	2	1	3	-	2	-
(2.00 – 2.99)	-	-	-	-	-	-
(3.00 – 3.99)	-	-	-	-	-	-
(4.00 – 4.99)	-	-	-	-	-	-
(5.00 – 10.00)	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: 2017 Electoral Commission poll data

### *Interparty coordination*

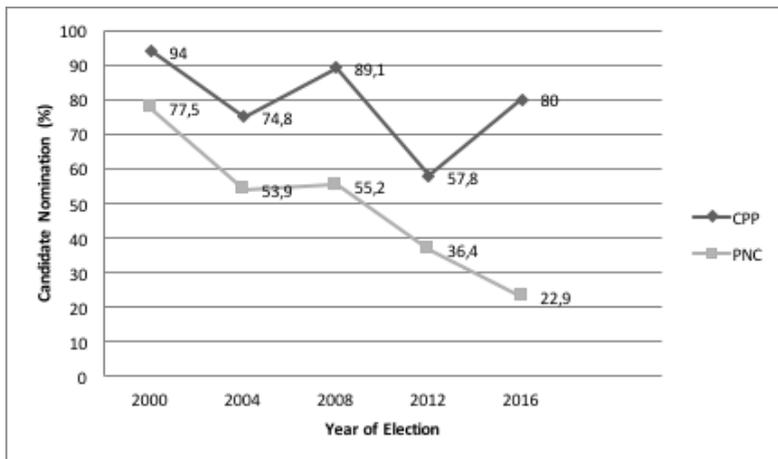
The major parties aided the CPP and PNC to win seats in some regions by withdrawing their candidates from the 2004 parliamentary contest. Based on an earlier agreement with the CPP and PNC, the NPP in particular did not file candidates in four constituencies during the 2004 parliamentary elections (Bob-Milliar, forthcoming). In three constituencies in the Central and Western regions, the CPP candidates were unopposed by the NPP (Bob-Milliar, forthcoming). Similarly, the PNC candidate in the Sissala East constituency of the Upper West region ran unopposed (Bob-Milliar, forthcoming). In all four constituencies, the Nkrumahist minor parties won the parliamentary seats. Bob-Milliar explains the nature of these alliances in the context of party patronage. Despite sharing a common ideology, there is no formal agreement between the CPP and PNC in parliamentary elections.<sup>1</sup> In contrast to the theory of interparty coordination, the two parties coordinate their nominations sparingly. Inter-party coordination in Ghana is mediated primarily by party patronage rather than ideologies, and that has proven to be quite viable for the Nkrumahist minor parties. Nevertheless, the major parties have been the major beneficiaries of these ‘unholy alliances’ (Bob-Milliar, forthcoming).

### *The nomination pattern of the CPP and PNC*

Ghana’s ten regions are further partitioned into single-member constituencies. The number of constituencies has varied over time, having increased from 200 in 1992 to 275 in 2016. As a result of these variations, it will not be helpful to use the number of nominations in its raw form to make an assessment. Thus the number of nominations for each party has been converted into a percentage to allow for uniformity even though this conceals some variations (see Figure 1).

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1 There is no evidence confirming that the parties coordinate their nominations in general elections. However, the two parties have supported each other in some bye-elections where one party refrained from contesting and threw its weight behind the other.



**Figure 1**

**Nomination pattern of the CPP and PNC between 2000 and 2016**

*The spatial distribution of national nominations*

Overall nominations for these two parties have been decreasing; the nomination pattern for the PNC has witnessed a steep decline from 77.5% in 2000 to 22.9% in 2016. On the other hand, the nomination pattern for the CPP has been up and down; in the transition elections in 2000, 2008 and 2016, the party competed in more than 77% of the constituencies. The drastic decline of nominations for the CPP in 2012 can be attributed to the sudden breakaway in 2011 of Dr. Nduom (the party's flag bearer in 2008) and the emergence of the Progressive People's Party (PPP). The nomination pattern for the two parties is illustrated in Figure 1. Even though the graph conceals the regional distribution of the nominations, it gives a fair idea of the extent of nomination dispersion by the parties. The percentage of candidate nomination for the PNC in the various elections suggests that their candidate nomination is fairly dispersed. With the exception of the 2012 and 2016 elections, the PNC competed in more than 50% of the constituencies in the country, varying between 53% and 77%. The CPP percentage reveals that their candidate nomination is widely dispersed across the country. Aside from the 2012 election, the percentage nomination of the CPP has fluctuated between 77% and 94%. Overall, the findings reveal that the two parties spread their candidates across the country, and that contrasts with the theoretical proposition of a spatial concentration of nominations. However, despite the fact that the CPP spread its candidates across the country more widely than the PNC, the PNC won more parliamentary seats than the CPP (see Table 1).

**Table 4**  
**Candidate nomination for CPP and PNC in 2000**

Region	No. Constituencies	Nominations		Average %		No. Seats	
		CPP	PNC	CPP	PNC	CPP	PNC
Ashanti	33	33	28	100	84.8	0	0
Brong-Ahafo	21	21	12	100	57.1	0	0
Central	17	16	10	94.1	58.8	0	0
Eastern	26	23	24	88.5	92.3	0	0
Greater Accra	22	22	19	100	86.4	0	0
Northern	23	23	22	100	95.7	0	1
Upper East	12	11	12	91.7	100	0	1
Upper West	8	2	7	25.0	87.5	0	1
Volta	19	18	10	94.7	52.6	0	0
Western	19	19	11	100	57.9	1	0
Total	200	188	155	94.0	77.5	1	3

**Table 5**  
**Candidate nomination for CPP and PNC in 2004**

Region	No. Constituencies	Nominations		Nominations %		No. Seats	
		CPP	PNC	CPP	PNC	CPP	PNC
Ashanti	39	33	19	84.6	48.7	0	0
Brong-Ahafo	24	16	6	66.7	25.0	0	0
Central	19	15	8	78.9	42.1	1	0
Eastern	28	21	13	75.0	46.4	0	0
Greater Accra	27	25	14	95.6	51.9	0	0
Northern	26	17	19	65.4	73.1	0	0
Upper East	13	12	11	92.3	84.6	0	2
Upper West	10	5	10	50.0	100	0	2
Volta	22	12	13	54.5	59.1	0	0
Western	22	15	11	68.2	50.0	2	0
Total	230	172	124	74.8	53.9	3	4

*Regional distribution of nominations*

The regional distribution of candidate nomination for the two parties further demonstrates the inconsistencies between the strategic nomination thesis espoused by Ishiyama (2009) and the behaviour of the minor parties in Ghana. Minor parties were expected to make strategic choices by nominating more candidates in their strongholds and fewer candidates outside their strongholds. However, in Ghana there is little empirical support for this assertion. The data shows that both parties nominate fewer candidates in their strongholds while competing in more constituencies outside their strongholds (see Tables 4–8). In the 2012 and 2016 elections, the PNC competed in fewer than 50% of the constituencies in the Northern Region. The CPP also competed in fewer than 50% of the constituencies in the Western and Central Regions in 2012 (see Tables 7 and 8). Most importantly, these parties competed in more constituencies, even in regions such as Ashanti and Volta considered to be strongholds of the major parties. In particular, the CPP competed in all the constituencies in the Ashanti Region (the stronghold of the NPP) in the 2000 parliamentary election but did not win any seat.

**Table 6**  
**Candidate nomination for CPP and PNC in 2008**

Region	No. Constituencies	Nominations		Nominations %		No. Seats	
		CPP	PNC	CPP	PNC	CPP	PNC
Ashanti	39	34	22	87.2	56.4	0	0
Brong-Ahafo	24	20	12	83.3	50.0	0	0
Central	19	18	2	94.7	10.5	0	0
Eastern	28	25	18	89.3	64.3	0	0
Greater Accra	27	26	13	96.3	48.1	0	0
Northern	26	22	21	84.6	80.8	0	0
Upper East	13	12	12	92.3	92.3	0	1
Upper West	10	9	10	90.0	100	0	1
Volta	22	18	9	81.8	40.9	0	0
Western	22	21	8	95.5	36.4	1	0
Total	230	205	127	89.1	55.2	1	2

**Table 7**  
**Candidate nomination for CPP and PNC in 2012**

Region	No. Constituencies	Nominations		Nominations %		No. Seats	
		CPP	PNC	CPP	PNC	CPP	PNC
Ashanti	47	25	22	53.2	46.8	0	0
Brong Ahafo	29	11	5	37.9	17.2	0	0
Central	23	10	5	43.5	21.7	0	0
Eastern	33	14	10	42.4	30.3	0	0
Greater Accra	34	26	17	76.5	50.0	0	0
Northern	31	16	10	51.6	32.3	0	0
Upper East	15	7	11	46.7	73.3	0	1
Upper West	11	4	8	36.4	72.7	0	0
Volta	26	21	5	80.8	19.2	0	0
Western	26	12	8	46.2	30.8	0	0
Total	275	159	100	57.8	36.4	0	1

**Table 8**  
**Candidate nomination for CPP and PNC in 2016**

Region	No. Constituencies	Nominations		Nominations %		No. Seats	
		CPP	PNC	CPP	PNC	CPP	PNC
Ashanti	47	35	21	74.5	44.7	0	0
Brong Ahafo	29	25	10	86.2	34.5	0	0
Central	23	21	3	91.3	13.0	0	0
Eastern	33	24	1	72.7	3.0	0	0
Greater Accra	34	30	6	88.2	17.6	0	0
Northern	31	27	10	87.1	32.3	0	0
Upper East	15	10	5	66.7	33.3	0	0
Upper West	11	8	4	72.7	36.4	0	0
Volta	26	19	1	73.1	3.9	0	0
Western	26	21	2	80.8	7.7	0	0
Total	275	220	63	80.0	22.9	0	0

## WHY THE CPP AND PNC NOMINATE CANDIDATES FOR PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

Notwithstanding the number of constituencies the CPP and PNC contested in parliamentary elections, they lacked traction. The question that needs to be addressed is why these parties nominated candidates even in constituencies they knew they could not win. According to Daddieh & Bob-Milliar (2016), 'the office of the Member of Parliament is a coveted trophy in Ghana' so it is not uncommon to see more candidates (from both major and minor parties) on the ballot paper vying for parliamentary seats during general elections.

Despite knowing their strength vis-a-vis the major parties, the minor parties nominated candidates in parliamentary elections not only to win the parliamentary seats; other factors also inspired them to campaign nationally. First, the parties competed in parliamentary elections as a way of making their presence felt. One respondent explained: 'when you have a candidate in a constituency, he will run a day-to-day campaign which will make the people know that the party exists' (Abdul Sallam, 2016, personal communication). Another respondent notes: 'if there is no candidate, the party will not be active'; but 'having a candidate in a constituency spices up party activism' (Suleman Seidu, 2016, personal communication).

Furthermore, nominating a candidate is meant to create the impression that the party has strong grassroots support. The CPP secretary for Ashanti Region notes that 'if a party is not able to file more candidates in an election, it means the party is weak.' Thus the CPP nominated as many candidates as possible. As can be seen in Figure 1 and Tables 5–8, they have always nominated more candidates than the PNC in all five of the elections they contested.

Finally, the parties used candidate nomination as a strategy to boost the campaign of their presidential candidate. Given that the presidential candidates are often distant from their constituencies, it becomes expedient for them to count on the popularity of the 'home boys' who are in touch with the grassroots for success in the presidential elections. Since the 1992 Constitution requires parliamentary aspirants to be residents of their constituencies, political parties normally nominate persons who hail from constituencies to contest the parliamentary elections. And given that parliamentary and presidential elections take place simultaneously in Ghana, it is expected that the joint-ticket philosophy would apply in the grassroots campaigns. Thus, the parties expect that as they nominate more candidates in parliamentary elections, their parties will become popular at local level which will eventually benefit them with more votes in presidential elections. Electoral results show that this strategy has not been effective for the presidential candidates of the CPP and PNC. For instance, the

Great Consolidated Popular Party (GCPP), one of the minor parties, nominated fewer than ten parliamentary candidates in the 2012 parliamentary election. Yet, in comparison, the presidential candidate of the GCPP outperformed the CPP and PNC which had each nominated more than 100 candidates. Even though the CPP nominated more candidates than the PPP in the 2016 elections, the PPP outperformed the CPP in the presidential election. Nevertheless, the parties achieved their aim of being visible to the Ghanaian electorate and as a result both the CPP and PNC are considered to be among the leading parties in Ghana.

### CONCLUSION

Several studies have established that minor parties generally perform poorly in a majoritarian system such as Ghana's two-party plurality system. Best and Lem (2010) note that the participation of minor parties in America's two-party plurality system is puzzling due to their slim chances of winning elections. Theoretically, the decision by minor parties to compete in Ghana's national elections is problematic, and it is even more surprising that they compete in constituencies where they know they cannot win. Despite professing a similar ideology, there is little cooperation between Ghana's minor parties and their behaviour is inconsistent with existing theories on strategic nomination and interparty coordination.

This accords with Kadima's (2014) observation that party alliance in African countries is rarely based on ideological considerations. Like minor parties in other African countries, inter-party coordination is used sparingly by the CPP and PNC; however, they both collaborate with major parties that have different ideologies, and minor parties have successfully won seats in the few instances where they have cooperated with the larger parties.

Since 2000 the CPP has nominated more candidates than the PNC in parliamentary elections; nonetheless, overall nominations for these parties have declined. Contrary to Ishiyama's expectation, in all five elections both parties nominated more candidates outside their strongholds where they stood little chance of winning. The nomination investment made by these parties has not yielded significant results as far as winning parliamentary seats is concerned. Broadly speaking, neither the CPP nor the PNC was able to win more than four seats out of the several nominations they made in each election.

The candidate nomination behaviour of the minor parties can be understood both within the context of Ghanaian politics and in terms of the aspirations of these parties. To this end, the paper has argued that the electoral behaviour of the minor parties in Ghana deviates from the norm because the political parties use candidate nomination not only as a means of winning parliamentary seats,

but also as a campaign strategy to make their parties visible in the political landscape. Three reasons underlie this strategy; first, by nominating a candidate in a constituency, the minor parties intend to make their presence felt. Second, minor parties use candidate nomination to create the impression that they are strong on the ground. Finally, candidate nomination is used to boost the popularity of their presidential candidates. However, candidate nomination has not been a productive strategy for the CPP and PNC as their performance in the last presidential elections was no better than those parties that nominated fewer parliamentary candidates. Nevertheless, it bears repeating that the parties under consideration nominate candidates not only to win but also to popularise their parties. Overall, this has profound implications for the concept and practice of candidate nomination.

Existing theories conceive of candidate nomination only as a means of winning parliamentary seats, and while this might be so in many political systems, the Ghanaian case suggests that this is not always the case. The inapplicability of the theories is rooted in a narrow conception of candidate nomination. This paper takes a broader view and contends that candidate nomination should be viewed not only as a mechanism for winning parliamentary seats, but also as a means for achieving other socio-cultural and political goals deemed relevant to a political party. The present study thus provides a basis and context for political scientists to conceptualise candidate nomination and electoral strategies. Empirical analyses of party behaviour in plurality systems in both advanced and new democracies will deepen our understanding in this area.

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