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PARLIAMENTARY PRIMARIES AFTER DEMOCRATIC TRANSITIONS: EXPLAINING REFORMS TO CANDIDATE SELECTION IN GHANA

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ABSTRACT

Candidate selection procedures play a crucial role in shaping parliaments and influencing the quality of democracy. Yet, our understanding of what motivates parties to reform candidate selection mechanisms at specific points in time is limited. To address this gap, we examine the experience of Ghana's National Democratic Congress (NDC), which reformed its selection procedures in 2015 allowing all party members to vote in primary elections for parliamentary candidates. We ask what triggered these reforms and identify four motivations—the confluence of which explains why the reforms were adopted in 2015. These motivations were: making the party more democratic by expanding participation, reducing the cost of the primary process, building the party's organizational capacity, and keeping up with the party's main competitor. Together, these led NDC leaders to believe that reforms would benefit the party. However, a divergence between actual and intended effects meant some of these benefits were not realized, so the NDC reversed its reforms. This case suggests that the current shift towards more inclusive candidate selection mechanisms across parts of Africa will not be linear: party leaders will adopt such reforms when they believe it is in their party's interest.

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IN MANY AFRICAN COUNTRIES SOUTH OF THE SAHARA, THE SELECTION OF PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATES by political parties is where the real electoral competition takes place. The reason for this varies between countries. It may be because a ruling party is dominant—as in Tanzania, because voting is heavily influenced by ethnicity—as in Kenya, or because parties have clear regional strongholds that render certain seats safe—as in Ghana. In such countries, political parties become the gatekeepers to the political world since voters can only select from the menu of candidates they offer up.[1] Parties' candidate selection procedures influence who has access to political power and what they do with it; they shape the composition of legislatures and the nature of political debates. This has particular significance in African countries south of the Sahara, where the ideological divides that characterize inter-party competition elsewhere are often weak or absent. Candidate selection procedures can also create barriers to the participation of women in politics[2] or allow parties to favour wealthy candidates over those who are better qualified but have fewer financial resources.[3] Both effects can have a corrosive impact on the quality of democracy.

There is significant diversity across the region[4] in terms of how political parties select parliamentary candidates. Examining 64 parties from 25 countries in the region, Merete Seeberg and her colleagues found that—as of fall 2016—roughly half of these parties (55 per cent) involved party delegates in the selection of parliamentary candidates.[5] In contrast, 29 per cent of the parties employed more exclusive approaches (party leaders only), while just 16 per cent took the most inclusive approach, allowing ordinary party members or all voters to be involved in the choice of candidates. In other words: inclusive candidate selection mechanisms have tended to be the exception, not the rule. Yet, south of the Sahara, Africa's political parties are increasingly making use of more inclusive candidate selection

1. Gideon Rahat, 'Candidate selection: The choice before the choice', *Journal of Democracy* 18, 1 (2007), pp. 157–70.
2. Vibeke Wang and Ragnhild Louise Muriaas, 'Candidate selection and informal soft quotas for women: Gender imbalance in political recruitment in Zambia', *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 7, 2 (2019), pp. 401–411; Gretchen Bauer, 'Ghana: Stalled patterns of women's political representation', in Susan Franceschet, Mona Lena Krook, and Netina Tan (eds), *The Palgrave handbook of women's political rights* (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2019), pp. 607–625; Gretchen Bauer and Akosua K. Darkwah, "'Some money has to be going." Discounted filing fees to bring more women into parliament in Ghana,' in Ragnhild L. Muriaas, Vibeke Wang, and Rainbow Murray (eds), *Gendered electoral financing: Money, power and representation in comparative perspective* (Routledge, New York, NY, 2019), pp. 133–154.
3. Dominika Koter, 'Costly electoral campaigns and the changing composition and quality of parliament: Evidence from Benin,' *African Affairs* 116, 465 (2017), pp. 573–596.
4. In this article, we use 'the region' to refer to African countries south of the Sahara.
5. Merete Bech Seeberg, Michael Wahman, and Svend-Erik Skaaning, 'Candidate nomination, intra-party democracy, and election violence in Africa,' *Democratization* 25, 6 (2018), pp. 959–977.

mechanisms, either by allowing delegates—rather than just party elites—to choose parliamentary candidates or, in rarer cases, allowing all party members to vote in primary elections. In 2001, for example, the ruling Botswana Democratic Party allowed all registered members to participate in the selection of its parliamentary candidates in a reform that became known as '*bulela ditswe*' (open to all).[6] In Nigeria, parties have been legally required to hold primaries since 2011,[7] although party elites have typically retained a substantial degree of influence over candidate selection. In most cases, Nigeria's primaries remain indirect in the sense that the selectorate is constituted by delegates (rather than all members). However, in the lead-up to the 2019 election, the All Progressives Congress, one of Nigeria's two major parties, piloted direct primaries (in which all registered members were able to vote) in 16 states.[8] In 2020, it also used a direct primary to select its candidate for the Edo state gubernatorial election. As those cases illustrate, the trend towards more inclusive candidate selection mechanisms is most pronounced in the region's more democratic regimes. Perhaps, as a result, much of the research conducted to date has analysed this trend in terms of its implications for intra-party democracy.[9]

In this article, we focus on the question of *timing*, asking: what triggers a political party to adopt more inclusive candidate selection mechanisms at a specific point in time? This is an area where current theories remain underdeveloped due to two things. First, an overemphasis on the structural determinants of candidate selections mechanisms. Second, a tendency to deduce the motivations of party leaders from the impact that a particular candidate selection mechanism has in practice, despite ample evidence that candidate selection mechanisms can have unintended effects. While these factors—which we discuss in more detail below—do shape the candidate selection mechanisms chosen by parties, they provide limited insight into the precise timing of reforms.

To develop a better theory about what triggers a party to adopt more inclusive candidate selection mechanisms, we present a case study of

6. Zein Kebonang and Wankie Rodrick Wankie, 'Enhancing intra-party democracy: The case of the Botswana Democratic Party', *Journal of African Elections* 5, 2 (2006), pp. 141–150.
7. Section 87 of the *Electoral Act 2011* stipulated that 'a political party seeking to nominate candidate for elections under this Act shall hold primaries for aspirants to all elective positions'.
8. International Republican Institute and National Democratic Institute, 'IRI/NDI Nigeria international election observation mission final report' (IRI and NDI, Washington DC, 2019).
9. Mpho Mlomo, 'The roles and responsibilities of members of parliament in facilitating good governance and democracy', in W. A. Edge and M. H. Lekorwe (eds), *Botswana, politics and society* (J. L. van Schaik, Pretoria, 1998), pp. 199–212; A. O. Omobowale, 'Flawed political party primaries in Nigeria's fourth republic: The case of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP)', *African Journal for the Psychological Study of Social Issues* 11, 1 (2008), pp. 282–291; Marietu Tenuche, 'The albatross called primary elections and political succession in Nigeria', *Canadian Social Science* 7, 4 (2011), pp. 121–130.

Ghana's National Democratic Congress (NDC). We examine the changes that the NDC made to its parliamentary primary process in 2015 and 2019, prior to the 2016 and 2020 elections respectively. In 2015, NDC leaders dramatically expanded the selectorate by allowing all party members to vote in the parliamentary primaries. In 2019, this change was undone, with the NDC reverting to a more exclusive process, under which a small number of delegates and party officials (rather than all party members) were entitled to vote in primary elections. We investigate what motivated the party's decisions to embrace a more inclusive approach in 2015 and then to abandon it prior to the next election.

We find that the NDC's adoption of inclusive reforms in 2015 was triggered by the confluence of four factors, which led senior NDC figures to believe that the reforms would benefit the party. First, there was a desire within the NDC to democratize the party's primaries by expanding member participation. While this was often talked about by those we interviewed, it was more a convenient means of justifying the reforms to the public than an immediate cause of change. More important was a second factor: NDC leaders saw the reforms as a means of reducing the overall cost of the primary process, the increasing expense of which they regarded as unsustainable and a threat to the integrity of the party's candidate selection process. The third factor that played a role was the desire of senior NDC figures to build the organizational capacity of the party—specifically, its ability to identify, mobilize, and raise revenue from its members. Senior NDC leaders were also motivated by a fourth factor: a desire to keep up with—and preferably outpace—their main competitors, the New Patriotic Party (NPP). However, this was a longer-term driver of change rather than a proximate trigger for the reforms adopted in 2015. Ultimately, it was the combination of all four of these motivations rather than any single factor—that prompted the NDC to adopt more inclusive candidate selection mechanism in 2015.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, we find that the NDC's decision to abandon the reforms in 2019 was due to the failure of those reforms to deliver the benefits that leaders expected. While the reforms did succeed in democratizing the party primaries in a numerical sense—the number of people who voted in the NDC's primaries increased substantially—they largely failed to reduce the overall cost of the primary process or to build the organizational capacity of the party. Failure on both these fronts was significant for the sustainability of the reforms since these latter two goals played a more fundamental role in driving the reforms. Finally, the reforms became something of a scapegoat for the NDC's electoral defeat in 2016, although, as we detail later, the reforms appear to have made a relatively small contribution to that outcome.

From a theoretical point of view, our case study provides insight into when political parties are likely to adopt—and maintain—more inclusive candidate selection mechanisms. It shows that party leaders promote more inclusive selection mechanisms when they believe that such mechanisms will benefit the party. On the face of it, this might seem obvious. Yet, there are different ways in which inclusive reforms might benefit a party, and it is not clear which of these will be valued or prioritized by party leaders. Although our research does not reveal a precise 'recipe' of factors that are guaranteed to prompt reform, it does suggest that the trend towards a more inclusive candidate selection mechanism across the region's more democratic regimes is unlikely to be linear. Party leaders will continue to adopt such reforms when they believe that it is in the interests of their parties to do so, but some may misjudge the benefits that those reforms deliver, leading to their reversal.

We present our research design and case study below but, first, explain in more detail why existing research leaves us poorly placed to understand what triggers reforms to candidate selection.

Theorizing the timing of reforms

Candidate selection mechanisms, including primary elections, vary in many ways. They can differ with regard to candidate eligibility, the inclusivity or exclusivity of the selectorate that choses candidates, the degree of geographic centralization, the nature of selection method, and the extent to which it follows formal and clearly specific rules.[10] Prior research—much of it conducted in established Western democracies—identifies a wide range of factors that shape a party's choice of candidate selection mechanism.[11] These factors include variables internal to parties, such as their ideology and degree of organization, as well as external ones, such as anticipated electoral benefits, the degree of party competition, state or national laws, and contagion at both the domestic and international levels.[12] Some warn that the determinants of candidate selection mechanisms may differ in African countries south of the Sahara because there is relatively little ideological variation among political parties—a fact that drives party leaders to prioritize the attraction and retention of wealthy candidates, as well as

10. Seeberg, Wahman, and Skaaning, 'Candidate nomination, intra-party democracy, and election violence in Africa'.
11. For reviews see: Gideon Rahat and William P. Cross, 'Political parties and candidate selection', in William R. Thompson (ed), *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2018), <https://oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-625>; Bonnie N. Field and Peter M. Siavelis, 'Candidate selection procedures in transitional polities: A research note', *Party Politics* 14, 5 (2008), pp. 620–639.
12. Field and Siavelis, 'Candidate selection procedures in transitional polities'.

the mobilization of grassroots activists.[13] Others, such as Bonnie Field and Peter Siavelis, argue that choices about candidate selection mechanisms are likely to be different in new or transitional democracies.[14] In such contexts, they suggest, political uncertainty, weak party organizations, strategic complexity generated by fragmented party systems, and pressure to maintain elite alliances push parties to adopt exclusive rather than inclusive candidate selection mechanisms.

Despite this research, our understanding of *when* changes to candidate selection mechanisms come about remains surprisingly poor. One reason for this is that much prior research on the determinants of candidate selection mechanisms emphasizes the role of structural factors: things like party ideology, the electoral system, the territorial and constitutional structure of the state, the degree of political competition, and mass political culture.[15] These structural factors are undeniably important and offer some insight into changes that occur at moments of transition or political rupture; for example, when a new constitution is adopted or a new party emerges as a serious political contender. However, they have less utility in explaining when change occurs in more normal, stable periods—which is exactly where many of Africa's younger democracies now find themselves. In this context, we need to understand the more proximate causes or 'triggers' of reform that explain why a party adopted a change at a specific moment in time.

The second reason that our understanding of the timing of reforms remains limited is that existing work tends to deduce the intentions of party leaders from political outcomes and vice versa. If, for example, a candidate selection mechanism appears to increase party cohesion, then party leaders are implicitly assumed to have chosen that mechanism in pursuit of this outcome.[16] Rarely have researchers actually asked party insiders what motivated their decisions, and only fairly recently has research explicitly questioned whether the results that party leaders expect candidate selection mechanisms to achieve are realized in practice. Examining how the candidate selection mechanisms employed by both of Ghana's major parties in one such recent study, Nahomi Ichino and Noah Nathan observe that party leaders' often 'adjusted the rules to address one set of problems only to inadvertently complicate another, creating a need to further adjust

13. Nahomi Ichino and Noah L. Nathan, 'Primary elections in new democracies: The evolution of candidate selection methods in Ghana', in Robert G. Boatright (ed.) *Routledge handbook of primary elections* (Routledge, New York, NY, 2018), pp. 369–383.
14. Field and Siavelis, 'Candidate selection procedures in transitional polities'.
15. See Table 1 in Field and Siavelis.
16. Shane Mac Giollabhuí, 'How things fall apart: Candidate selection and the cohesion of dominant parties in South Africa and Namibia', *Party Politics* 19, 4 (2013), pp. 577–600.

nomination procedures in the future'.[17] Their finding indicates that a divergence between expected and actual outcomes may be far more common than prior work admits. As such, the immediate impact of reforms may not accurately reflect why a party opted to introduce them at a particular point in time.

We contribute by theorizing that parties adopt more inclusive candidate selection procedures when party leaders believe that it is in the interest of the party to do so and that their beliefs will typically be the product of several factors. This theory is not quite as obvious as it might seem, given that reforms to candidate selection mechanisms so often have unintended consequences. As our case study demonstrates, the unintended consequences of reforms mean that untangling the reasons why party leaders come to believe that such reforms will be beneficial at a particular point in time is far from straightforward.

Research design

Ghana is one of Africa's most stable emerging democracies. Since the re-introduction of multi-party democracy in 1992, there have been three alternations in power between a governing party and the opposition party. These alternations have been both peaceful and regular, with power changing hands every 8 years. Thus, while Ghana's democracy is by no means perfect, it can no longer be labelled 'transitional'. As such, the case of Ghana, or more precisely the NDC, can shed light on what triggers reforms to candidate selection procedures in a more stable political context. The NDC's candidate selection mechanisms also have significance beyond Ghana's borders since political parties across Africa often view Ghana's parties as a model. In 2017, for example, Kenya's opposition, the National Super Alliance, planned to replicate the NPP's method of compiling a parallel vote tally, a tactic they saw as having played a crucial role in preventing electoral manipulation in Ghana's 2016 election.[18]

A qualitative case study is well suited to addressing our central research question. Although relying on a single case limits our ability to generalize, it offers advantages in terms of theory development and allows us to untangle complex causal relationships that play out over time.[19] Here, we confront not only the very high likelihood that multiple factors contributed to the outcomes of interest but also the complexity in terms of timing: we need to examine both underlying long-term causes and more temporally proximate

17. Ichino and Nathan, 'Primary elections in new democracies'.
18. Nic Cheeseman, Gabrielle Lynch, and Justin Willis, 'Digital dilemmas: The unintended consequences of election technology', *Democratization* 25, 8 (2018), pp. 1397–1418.
19. Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case studies and theory development in the social sciences* (MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass, 2005).

ones. As with many complex social processes, the connection between triggers and long-term causes is such that 'seemingly rival explanations may often be complementary'.[20] Thus, our analysis is not so much an attempt to rule out alternative explanations but to untangle the ways in which different causes interact to produce change at a particular point in time. In other words, we have reached our conclusions inductively, building up from a detailed analysis of the case rather than starting our analysis with a list of competing explanations to hand and evaluating which fits the facts of the case most convincingly. This approach is useful for theory development but means that care must be taken in making generalizations.

We draw on a wide range of empirical evidence. We use Ghanaian (and to a lesser extent, international) media reports to document both the publicly stated reasons for the NDC's adoption of reforms in 2015—and their abandonment in 2019—and the party's public assessment of the impact of those reforms. We identified relevant media reports using searches in the Nexis database,[21] which includes full-text articles from a number of Ghanaian media outlets, including government-owned sources (e.g. Ghana News Agency and the *Ghanaian Times*) and privately owned publications (e.g. *Daily Guide, The Herald* and the *Ghanaian Chronicle*). Our searches in the Nexis database covered the period from January 2015 to September 2019.[22] Relevant articles were analysed manually to identify patterns in how NDC officials and MPs justified the reforms and the extent to which they linked those reforms to party's performance in the 2016 election. With respect to the latter, we paid particular attention to reports of disputes over primaries in electorates that the NDC appeared to lose, or come close to losing, due to 'skirt-and-blouse voting'.[23] We recorded whether such disputes were linked to the reforms, including the new party register, or were linked to other issues such as the eligibility of aspirants and the vetting process.

To probe whether these public accounts align with narratives from within the party, we draw on 28 semi-structured interviews with key informants. The majority of these interviews were conducted in Ghana during the last four months of 2019 with different authors responsible for interviewing

20. Paul Pierson, *Politics in time* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2004), p. 102.
21. The keywords used in these searches were Ghana, NDC and primary/primaries.
22. We identified a small number of additional media reports using Google.
23. In Ghana, and in some other parts of Africa, the term 'skirt and blouse voting' refers to the practice of voting for a presidential candidate from one party and a member of parliament from another. See Nic Cheeseman, Eloïse Bertrand, and Sa'eed Husaini, 'Skirt and Blouse Voting' in *A Dictionary of African Politics* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2019) <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780191828836.001.0001/acref-9780191828836-e-307>.

different categories of respondents.[24] We selected interviewees in a purposive and targeted manner, recruiting respondents who—by virtue of their senior position within the NDC or NPP, personal experience as a parliamentary aspirant, candidate, or MP, or expertise as a political analyst or scholar—were able to provide insight into the NDC's decision to adopt the reforms and their impact. Respondents included: three current or former senior NDC officials who were closely involved in the decision to adopt the reform; three constituency-level party officials with experience in implementing the reforms; five NDC MPs elected in 2016; 10 individuals with direct experience of the 2015 primaries as an aspirant, candidate, or party organizer; five leading political experts within Ghana; and two members of the NPP, one a senior MP and the other an unsuccessful parliamentary candidate. We also rely on some descriptive analysis of the constituency-level election results from 2016 to test the plausibility of the effects attributed to the reforms by those within the NDC.

The case of the NDC in Ghana

In the decade that followed Ghana's return to multi-party democracy in 1992, a stable two-party system emerged, one that is now quite well institutionalized compared to other countries in the region. Both the NDC and the NPP established a nationwide presence—something mandated by Ghanaian party laws—and although they eschewed appeals to an ethnic base, both built clear regional strongholds.[25] While the NPP draws most of its support from the Ashanti and Eastern Regions, the NDC typically wins the bulk of the vote in the Volta region and the northern parts of the country. As political power has regularly changed hands through elections held in 2000, 2008, and 2016, an expectation that it will continue to do so emerged among Ghana's voters and political elites. After 2008, when political power changed hands for the second time via an election, both the NDC and NPP have operated in a context in which democracy, although not fully consolidated,[26] is increasingly accepted as 'the only game in town'. This was perhaps best illustrated in the wake of 2012's contentious election, when rather than take to the streets, the NPP took its complaints about the conduct of the poll to the Supreme Court. Ghanaian scholars later

24. A small number of interviews, conducted by Gretchen Bauer between May 2016 and June 2018 and part of a different project, provide supplementary evidence.
25. Anja Osei, 'Political Parties in Ghana: Agents of Democracy?,' *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 31, 4 (2013), pp. 543–63.
26. Abdul-Gafaru Abdulai and Gordon Crawford, 'Consolidating democracy in Ghana: Progress and prospects?' *Democratization* 17, 1 (2010), pp. 26–67.

hailed this move as 'a giant leap in Ghana's journey towards democratic consolidation'.[27]

Immediately after Ghana's transition to democracy, both the NDC and its rival, the NPP, employed relatively exclusive procedures to select parliamentary candidates. Since the early 1990s, the NDC has slowly increased the inclusiveness of its candidate selection mechanisms, often lagging slightly behind the NPP on this front. As Cyril Daddieh and George Bob-Milliar document, the NDC initially used an informal system, nominating candidates who received 'overwhelming support' from the political elite within their constituency.[28] After their electoral loss in 2000, the NDC shifted to a more formalized system, in which candidates were selected through primaries in which a limited number of delegates could vote.

By 2015, the NDC and the NPP had very similar mechanisms in place, in each constituency, electoral colleges of around 500 delegates selected the parliamentary candidates for the relevant party. Each electoral college was comprised of four- or five-party executives from each polling station in the constituency,[29] plus around 15 additional delegates.[30] At this point, the NDC's candidate selection procedures for parliamentary elections reflected the median, or most-common, approach adopted by political parties in the region.[31]

For the 2015 primaries, the NDC opted to expand its primary selectorate significantly, opening up primary voting to all party members: thousands, rather than hundreds, of people were now able to participate in each constituency. These changes made the NDC one of the most inclusive parties in Africa as far as parliamentary primaries were concerned. Consequently, the changes announced by the NDC generated very positive media coverage for the NDC, with one reporter stating that the reforms were 'a democratic first and a marked improvement in the system employed by its rival the New Patriotic Party'.[32] Although the decision to adopt the reforms appears to have taken place in a fairly top-down manner, rather than in response to widespread demand from members, it nevertheless enjoyed

27. William Asante and Bossman E. Asare, 'Ghana's 2012 election petition and its outcome: A giant leap towards democratic consolidation', in Bossman E. Asare and Alex Kaakyire Duku Frempong (eds), *Selected issues in Ghana's democracy* (Digibooks, Tema, Ghana, 2017), p. 109.
28. Cyril K. Daddieh and George M Bob-Milliar, 'In search of "honorable" membership: Parliamentary primaries and candidate selection in Ghana', *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 47, 2 (2012), pp. 204–220, 211.
29. A typical constituency would have about 90 polling stations.
30. Bauer and Darkwah, 'Some money has to be going'; Ichino and Nathan, 'Primary elections in new democracies'.
31. Seeberg, Wahman, and Skaaning, 'Candidate nomination, intra-party democracy, and election violence in Africa'.
32. *GhanaWeb*, 'NDC presidential, parliamentary primaries slated for Nov. 7, 14 August 2015, <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/NDC-presidential-parliamentary-primaries-slated-for-Nov-7-375040> (17 September 2019).

significant support at the grassroots level when it was first announced. This point is notable, as it helps to rule out one alternative explanation for the subsequent failure of the reforms: a lack of demand for them at the grassroots level.

The NDC's decision to expand the selectorate became very closely tied to the introduction of a new biometric party register. Plans for this were first mooted in the wake of the 2012 election, and in 2013 the NDC solicited bids for the construction of the new register and production of biometric membership cards for members. Balking at the cost of this—the bids received came in at more than 7 million euros—the NDC attempted to roll out a home-grown solution. Relying on data included in the national voter register, in 2014, the NDC began to issue party members with new membership cards featuring a photo, but it did not itself collect biometric data, nor use biometric data beyond photographs to verify the identity of those included in the new register or check for multiple registrations. The two initiatives—the construction of a new party register and the expansion of the selectorate—became almost inseparable both in practice and in terms of how the reforms were discussed by NDC insiders. In media reports and in our interviews, party leaders, MPs, and aspirants rarely talked about one without immediately mentioning the other, frequently presenting the two initiatives as part of a single package of reform. As they put it, the decision to allow all party members to vote in the 2015 primary elections was premised on the idea that members would be identified by the new register, while the expense of the register was partly justified on the basis that it would facilitate the expansion of the selectorate. As we discuss later, this conflation of the two initiatives had important ramifications for how the NDC evaluated the reforms after the 2016 election.

Motivations for the NDC reforms in 2015

Our interviews with NDC party leaders, aspirants, candidates, and sitting MPs, together with an analysis of media reports documenting public statements made by those actors, reveal four reasons that combined to trigger the opening up of the NDC primaries in 2015. Different types of actors within the party typically emphasized different reasons for the reforms, while certain reasons were accorded greater prominence in public narratives about the reforms and less in more private discussions. The reason that was typically first cited by those within the NDC—both in media reports and interviews—was a desire to democratize the candidate selection process in the sense of bringing more party members into the process as primary voters, bolstering grassroots participation in this crucial party activity. Yet, a second reason tended to follow this and was typically given much greater emphasis by those we interviewed, especially aspirants and MPs.

They stressed a desire to reduce the role of money in the primary elections, expanding the selectorate so as to render vote-buying either impossible or ineffective.

A third reason, building the party's organizational capacity—its ability to identify, mobilize, and generate revenue from members—via the new party register was cited much less frequently in interviews. However, this factor was particularly important to senior leaders in the party who argued that the new register both necessitated, and justified, by the expansion of the selectorate. As these actors drove the reforms forward, their comments provide evidence that this reason played a central role. Finally, a fourth reason, cited only occasionally and almost exclusively by senior party leaders, was a concern that the NDC needed to keep up with and preferably outpace reforms adopted by the rival NPP. Overall, our evidence suggests that the second and third factors, reducing the role of money and building the capacity of the party, were the primary triggers for the adoption of the reforms in 2015, with the other reasons playing a more supplementary role.

As Daddieh and Bob-Milliar have observed, the NDC's 'revolutionary ideology and populist rhetoric predisposed it to a preference for bottom–up processes and for consensus building in its operations'.[33] This preference appears to have played a role in the decision to expand the primary selectorate in 2015. Almost all of those we interviewed about the 2015 reforms referred to a desire to democratize the candidate selection process, and, for many, this was the first reason they identified. While our respondents only rarely described the reforms explicitly as an attempt to strengthen internal democracy, most implied as much, frequently referencing a desire to increase the participation of party members in decision-making. For example, one relatively senior MP, first elected in 2012, stated that the primary motivation for the reforms was a desire 'to get everybody involved in the decision',[34] while another explained that 'it just made sense that they wanted more people involved'.[35] In 2015, party leaders had made similar statements to the media, sometimes linking this desire to increase participation to a need to select candidates who had genuine grassroots support. In 2015, the NDC's Deputy General Secretary, Koku Anyidoho, explained that delegates sometimes selected candidates who did not resonate with voters, driving down the NDC's vote in parliamentary races compared to the presidential poll.[36] Other party leaders repeated these sentiments in interviews, with some explaining that broadening participation and making the primaries more inclusive would force candidates to become more

33. Daddieh and Bob-Milliar, 'In search of "honorable" membership', p. 211.
34. Interview, NDC MP, Accra, 12 November 2019.
35. Interview, NDC MP, Accra, 14 November 2019.
36. *GhanaWeb*, 'NDC presidential, parliamentary primaries slated for Nov. 7'.

familiar with the needs of their constituents. This would, in their view, not only empower the grassroots members of the party but ensure the NDC selected candidates who were better positioned to win elections.

While a desire to strengthen democracy by expanding participation was often the first response to questions about what drove the NDC to reform its primary process in 2015, it was typically not what respondents emphasized most strongly. This suggests some degree of social desirability bias: respondents may have explained the reforms by reference to democracy and participation due to a perception that this was the correct response. In interviews and contemporaneous media reports, a different motivation tended to be given greater emphasis, although it was one that also had serious implications for the quality of democracy: vote-buying. Specifically, a desire to eliminate the 'cocoa season' described by Staffan Lindberg,[37] the costs of which many felt had escalated to a point that was unacceptable and unsustainable. In media interviews at the time the reforms were announced, party leaders asserted that by increasing the number of people who voted in the primary elections, the new system would make vote-buying impossible unless one had—in the words of the NDC's Deputy General Secretary—'all the money in the Bank of Ghana'.[38]

All of the senior NDC party leaders we interviewed indicated that reducing the role of money in the primaries, as well as their overall cost, was one of the main reasons for the 2015 reforms. Party leaders typically explained that the practice of vote-buying had made the primary elections excessively expensive and led to corruption and dishonesty. As a very senior NDC party official put it, the reforms were 'the most radical way' to 'eliminate corruption in the [primary] elections'.[39] Thus, from the perspective of NDC officials, reforms that reduced the cost of the primary process would offer several benefits, addressing complaints from candidates and aspirants that the process had become too expensive while also increasing the integrity of the process itself.

Although we found no evidence to suggest that aspirants, candidates, or MPs had actively lobbied senior NDC officials to introduce the reforms, it is clear that they generally supported the introduction of the reforms due to a belief that this would help constrain the role of money and reduce the cost of the selection process. In interviews, aspirants stressed the need to move away from a primary system in which they were expected to provide envelopes of money and material goods to delegates. One sitting MP first elected in 2012 and again in 2016 stated, 'the system of delegates, getting

37. Staffan I. Lindberg, "'It's our time to 'chop"': Do elections in Africa feed neo-patrimonialism rather than counter-act it?', *Democratization* 10, 2 (2003), pp. 121–140.
38. *GhanaWeb*, 'NDC Presidential, Parliamentary Primaries Slated for Nov. 7'.
39. Interview, Accra, 2 October 2019.

delegates is prone to – how do you call it – the monetization of the process. The highest bidder wins'.[40] Aspirants explained the logic behind the reforms: with the new procedures expanding the selectorate, candidates could not possibly pay all voters in the way delegates had been paid in the past. One aspirant who unsuccessfully challenged an incumbent MP in the Upper West region said that in the past one could 'buy' all of the delegates for GH₵ 500 each but that would not be possible when the voter register was expanded 10-fold. Many others made similar statements about the anticipated impossibility of buying victory when all party members were able to vote.

Senior NDC party leaders also spoke frequently of the third motivation, namely building the party's organizational capacity—something not raised by those who had actually competed in the primaries. According to senior NDC party officials, the reforms to the 2015 party primaries were also intended to build the infrastructure of the party, creating an accurate and reliable database of party members while raising revenue as members would need to pay their membership dues to obtain their new party card. While these kinds of motivations received less prominence in media coverage, they were emphasized by party leaders interviewed by the press. For example, as early as 2013, the NDC's General Secretary called on party members to support the new party register and planned reforms to the primary process because they would help transform the party, ensuring it was active on a continuous basis—not only during elections.[41] Later, in August 2015, he explained how the new party register made the impending expansion of the selectorate possible and would help to reduce disputes relating to candidate selection[42] since so many conflicts 'hover around who a real member is'.[43] He went on to highlight the importance of the new party register—which he presented as almost inseparable from the expansion of the selectorate—in terms of organizational capacity:

> You cannot run an organization without knowing the number of members you have in that organization, so it is a basic requirement of any management situation that, if you are in charge of any organization, you have to know how big or how small the organization is to be able to monitor the growth or decline in membership of that organization.[44]

40. Interview, NDC MP, Accra, 3 October 2019.
41. Jasmine Arku, 'NDC reforms distinct from NPP — Asiedu Nketia', *Graphic Online*, 9 October 2013, <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/politics/ndc-reforms-distinct-from-npp-asiedu-nketia.html> (29 September 2019).
42. Under the delegate-based system, disputes often arose at the vetting stage, as formal rules state that aspirants are only eligible to contest if they have been a party member for a certain length of time.
43. Quoted in Gifty Arthur, 'NDC holds presidential & parliamentary primaries on November 7', *The Herald*, 14 August 2015, accessed via Nexis archive (17 September 2019).
44. *Ibid.*

According to senior party leaders, the twin reforms, that is, an expanded selectorate and a new party register would allow the party to make more accurate predictions about election outcomes. Their logic was that changes in party membership would signal increases or decreases in support, identify where the party should invest campaign resources, and increase its ability to generate revenue by motivating members to pay their membership dues. Since these benefits of the reform would flow primarily to the party as an institution, it is perhaps unsurprising that this motivation for reform was stressed by senior party officials far more than aspirants, candidates, or MPs.

Finally, senior party leaders sometimes mentioned a fourth motivation for the 2015 reforms: keeping up with—and preferably overtaking—the NPP. While the NPP continues to use a delegate-based system for its parliamentary primaries, it had expanded the selectorate for the selection of its presidential candidate prior to the 2012 election. In interviews, one expert informant, as well as several party leaders, explained that this made the NDC look as if it was lagging behind the NPP in terms of democracy. In media reports, senior party figures admitted that the NDC was emulating the NPP, with one Ghanaian newspaper describing the reforms in its headline as an order from former President Jerry John Rawlings 'to copy NPP'.[45] In an interview, one very senior NDC figure noted how the NDC's origins—created out of Rawlings' Provisional National Defence Council—made the NDC appear less democratic than the NPP—and this was something the party had long sought to change:

> When we got to 2002, NPP had emerged strongly and people were comparing how they were doing their things versus how we were doing ours… So, people began increasingly looking at our party as less democratic than NPP that had also begun selecting their candidates through open elections and so on. So, you cannot isolate yourself from an environment like this.[46]

Such statements suggest that both competition and a degree of contagion were underlying drivers of the reform but had a less immediate effect on the NDC's decision in 2015.

The impact of the 2015 reforms and their reversal

The reforms introduced by the NDC in 2015 had a variety of effects. Some of these aligned with the party's intentions. Most notably, expanding the selectorate to include all party members did increase participation

45. Daniel Nonor, 'JJ orders NDC to copy NPP', *The Chronicle*, 7 October 2013, <https://allafrica.com/stories/201310072122.html> (30 September 2019).
46. Interview, Accra, 2 October 2019.

in the candidate selection process. Whereas in the past, candidates had been selected by several hundred people, in 2015, the NDC's candidates were selected by thousands:[47] according to Ghana's Electoral Commission, more than 1.2 million people voted in the NDC's primary elections.[48] This roughly 10-fold expansion of participation represented a significant achievement and suggests that most NDC members were enthusiastic about the prospect of participating in the selection of parliamentary candidates.

There is more disagreement about whether the reforms achieved the goal of reducing the monetization of the primary process. In interviews, a number of aspirants and candidates in the primaries, as well as some sitting MPs, asserted that the reform had increased rather than decreased the cost of the primaries, something that they attributed directly to the expansion of participation. They complained that they had been expected to compensate not just a group of delegates but all voters—up to 10,000 in a single constituency. A common refrain was that it was as if candidates were financing a general election two times over. One incumbent NDC MP lamented:

> You now [in 2015] have to bribe the 50,000. It's very expensive and time consuming. Now the entire community was involved. In fact, you spend so much money, and then your energy. It was so difficult.[49]

Yet, there were also some aspirants who suggested that vote-buying did become more difficult. They acknowledged that the overall cost of running a primary campaign was increased by the need to engage with a larger number of people, pushing up costs for things like transportation and refreshments. However, they felt that direct vote-buying, in the form of monetary payments explicitly being made in exchange for votes, was harder. One unsuccessful aspirant who contested in the Volta region explained:

> Whereas [with] 9 branch members you can always bribe them easily – it happened in 2012 where the night before our primaries people were distributing 500 Ghana cedis when some of us had only 50 Ghana cedis to give. So, in 2015 the good thing about it is that you couldn't bribe people on election day or a day before the election day, it was difficult.[50]

47. In a small number of constituencies, parliamentary candidates were unopposed in the primary election.
48. Ebenezer Afanyi Dadzie, '95% of NDC members affirm Mahama's candidature for 2016 polls', *CitiFM Online*, 22 November 2015, <http://citifmonline.com/2015/11/95-of-ndc-members-affirm-mahamas-candidature-for-2016-polls/> (19 September 2019).
49. Interview, Accra, 3 October 2019.
50. Interview, an NDC parliamentary aspirant, Accra, 8 October 2019.

There were also some candidates who stated that the goal of reducing the monetization of the process was accomplished for certain people: the candidates who had good track records in their communities and genuine grassroots support, among which they typically identified themselves. Such candidates could—according to these respondents—count on the votes of ordinary party members and so were liberated from the financial expectations of delegates.[51]

While our evidence suggests that the more inclusive primary process employed in 2015 did not necessarily reduce the cost of primary elections overall, there are signs that it did sometimes render voter-buying less effective in some circumstances because it allowed aspirants—particularly female aspirants—with good track records in their communities to make greater use of this non-financial political capital. This finding is broadly consistent with previous research conducted by Ichino and Nathan, who found that the more inclusive approach employed by the NDC in 2015 allowed a more diverse group of aspirants, including women, to win primaries.[52] This, they suggested, was partly due to the expanded selectorate, which rendered vote-buying a less effective means of securing nomination because it increased the logistical and financial burden of distributing private goods. This implies that even candidates who could afford to engage in vote-buying would choose not to, reducing the prevalence of vote-buying. Yet, our interviews make it clear that many aspirants did attempt to buy votes regardless of the changed circumstances—perhaps because they had not fully recognized that the expansion of the selectorate eroded the efficacy of that strategy. Thus, Ichino and Nathan are right that under a more inclusive system, candidates who rely on vote-buying, rather than promises to deliver local public goods, become less competitive[53] but perhaps not quite for the reasons that they propose.

The most serious unintended consequences to flow from the reformed primary process in 2015 related to the new party register, with which the expansion of the selectorate had become so closely tied. Senior NDC figures identified 'the development of the database' as 'the biggest source of challenges'.[54] The construction of the new party register would have constituted a logistical challenge under any circumstances. For the NDC, this was exacerbated, in some constituencies, by a misalignment between

51. There may be a degree of social desirability at play in some responses, although we found that aspirants and MPs were typically quite open about the fact that they spent a lot of money on their campaigns. The role of money in Ghana's primary elections is very widely acknowledged and well documented: see Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 'Cost of politics in Ghana' (Westminster Foundation for Democracy, London 2017).
52. Nahomi Ichino and Noah L. Nathan, 'Democratizing the party: The effects of primary election reforms in Ghana', *British Journal of Political Science*, pp. 1–18.
53. *Ibid.*
54. Interview, senior NDC party official, Accra, 2 October 2019.

the interests of national executives and local officials. Local party officials, whose influence would be diluted by the more inclusive process, and consequently tended to oppose the expansion of the selectorate, were—somewhat perversely—responsible for building the new party register. This threat to their influence, together with the fact that the new register would determine who could—and could not—vote in the primary elections, meant that local officials had a clear incentive to manipulate it.

Thus, what was, on the face of it, an administrative challenge, was exacerbated by political factors—most notably the potential for the reforms to empower grassroots members at the expense of local party officials. According to one very senior NDC official, this resulted in 'many people finding ways of compromising the database', aided by the fact that the party 'did not have the capacity to introduce the necessary checks and security features'.[55] It is therefore unsurprising that problems with the register were cited by nearly all of our informants whether they were party leaders, aspirants, or candidates. Some stated that certain NDC members had been prevented from registering or had their names removed from the new register, causing them to be turned away on the day of the primaries. Others suggested that NPP members might have infiltrated the register in order to help elect weaker NDC candidates, benefiting the NPP in the national election. Media reports document similar allegations, most notably in the Atebubu-Amantin Constituency in the Brong-Ahafo Region, where NDC party members set fire to a copy of the new register in the wake of allegations that it had been manipulated by aspirants.[56]

The true extent of any manipulation of the new party register is difficult to verify and may well have been overstated. Nevertheless, from the vantage point of party leaders, the expanded register engendered significant acrimony and division within the NDC. While many ordinary party members were able to vote in the 2015 primaries, it is clear that a small minority were disenfranchised by the new register—their names were omitted either due to poor implementation or deliberate manipulation. As such, the administrative challenge of implementation was exacerbated by political factors: problems with the new register fuelled feelings of disenfranchisement among party members, eroding support for the reforms among the grassroots of the party. Thus, while a lack of demand among party members for the reforms does not explain their failure, members' discontent with the manner in which those reforms were implemented helps to explain why they were ultimately reversed.

55. Interview, Accra, 2 October 2019.
56. Daniel Yao Dayee, 'NDC burns bloated register at Atebubu', *Daily Guide Ghana*, 24 October 2015, <https://www.modernghana.com/news/651305/ndc-burns-bloated-register-at-atebubu.html> (18 September 2019).

In the wake of the NDC's election loss in 2016, the reformed primary process and new party register quickly became targets of blame. Senior NDC figures made allegations—both in media reports and in our interviews—that the reforms had caused disunity and disillusionment, suppressing turnout among the NDC's supporters, splitting its parliamentary vote in constituencies where dissatisfied aspirants had run as independents, and leading many NDC supporters to vote 'skirt and blouse'. These allegations were purportedly borne out by the findings of the Kwesi Botchwey Report, the 455-page document produced by a committee that the NDC had tasked with investigating the causes of its defeat in 2016.[57]

However, a close analysis of constituency-level election data strongly suggests that the negative impact of the reforms on the NDC's electoral fortunes has been overestimated by many within the NDC. Although gaps between the NDC's presidential and parliamentary votes show that a significant number of people did vote skirt and blouse in some constituencies, there are very few constituencies in which this ultimately led the NDC to lose the parliamentary seat and even fewer where this can plausibly be attributed to the expansion of the primary selectorate and new party register. Specifically, there were 17 constituencies where the gap between the NDC's presidential vote outstripped its parliamentary vote by a number exceeding the NPPs' (parliamentary) victory margin.[58] This number fell well short of the 67-seat parliamentary majority secured by the NPP. Moreover, in many of these 17 constituencies, there is little evidence of controversy relating to the primaries in contemporaneous media reports. In others, there are reports of disputes within the NDC triggered by the primary process—some of which led to court cases or failed aspirants standing as independents. However, many of these disputes centred on the vetting process rather than the new register, having been triggered by disagreements about the eligibility of aspirants to compete. In only four constituencies—Atebubu-Amatin, Dade Kotopon, Jomoro, and Lawra—do media reports provide fairly clear evidence of disputes centred on attempts to manipulate the new party register. Moreover, in one of these constituencies—Jomoro—the real drain on the NDC's parliamentary vote was Samia Yaaba Nkrumah, the candidate for the Convention People's Party, who had served as the MP for Jomoro from 2008 to 2012 and is the daughter of Ghana's first President, Kwame Nkrumah.

57. The committee was led by former Finance Minister Professor Kwesi Botchwey. The report has not been publicly released, although some media outlets claimed to have seen leaked versions of it.

58. Authors' calculations based on number of ballots cast in 2012 and 2016 using data from Election Passport. <http://www.electionpassport.com>. These constituencies were Atebubu-Amantin, Dormaa West, Tain, Ekumfi, Dade Kotopon, Bunkpurugu, Kpandai, Salaga South, Savelugu, Tempane, Zebilla, Lawra, Nandom, Sissala East, Krachi East, Jomoro, and Sefwi Akontombra.

Similarly, voter turnout was down by almost 10 per cent (compared to 2012) in the Volta Region[59]—the NDC's most important stronghold, where lower turnout clearly benefited the NPP in the presidential race. This drop in voter turnout had less impact on the parliamentary results. While it almost certainly contributed to the NDC's shock loss in Krachi East, where the NPP's candidate won with a margin of roughly 50 votes, the NDC won all the other parliamentary seats in the Volta region. Party leaders, aspirants, and MPs frequently attributed the drop in voter turnout to disillusionment and resentment generated by the manipulation of the party register during the primaries; but, at best, dissatisfaction with the changes made to the primary process in 2015 explains this only partially. The largest drops in turnout tended to coincide with disputes centred on the NDC's vetting process, as was the case in Ketu South. Moreover, the drop in turnout was not uniform: in the Brong-Ahafo Region, generally considered a swing region, there had been reports of NDC members being disenfranchized in the primaries, but voter turnout was essentially unchanged compared to 2012.

Previous research has also highlighted a variety of factors—quite independent of the primary reforms—that led to the NDC to lose the 2016 election. These include general disillusionment with 8 years of NDC rule, combined with the expectation—now quite firmly entrenched in the minds of many Ghanaian voters—that political power changes hands every 8 years.[60] Poor economic performance and a strong campaign by the NPP also cost the NDC.[61] In the eyes of many voters, the NDC's mismanagement of the country was amply demonstrated by frequent and increasingly long-lasting rolling blackouts in the period from 2012 to 2016. These blackouts became known as 'dumsor'[62] and cost Ghana's economy almost $1 billion in 2014 alone.[63] Together, these factors meant that the NDC faced an uphill battle in the 2016 election.

Although the negative electoral impacts of the 2015 reforms were overestimated by many within the NDC, it is clear that they did generate considerable suspicion and disunity within the party. This was not due

59. Authors' calculations using data from Election Passport <http://www.electionpassport.com> (23 and 24 September 2019).
60. Ransford Edward Van Gyampo, Emmanuel Graham, and Eric Yobo, 'Ghana's 2016 general election: Accounting of the monumental defeat of the National Democratic Congress (NDC)', *Journal of African Elections* 16, 1 (2017), pp. 24–45.
61. Joseph R. A. Ayee, 'Ghana's elections of 7 December 2016: A post-mortem', *South African Journal of International Affairs* 24, 3 (2017), pp. 311–330; Nic Cheeseman, Gabrielle Lynch, and Justin Willis, 'Ghana: The ebbing power of incumbency', *Journal of Democracy* 28, 2 (2017), pp. 92–104.
62. In Twi, it roughly translated as 'off and on'.
63. Charles Ackah, 'Electricity insecurity and its impact on micro and small businesses in Ghana' (ISSER Report, Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research, University of Ghana, 2015).

to the formal design of the reforms but rather the manner in which they were implemented. Regardless, the (mis)perception that the changes to the primary process had played a role in the NDC's defeat, together with the failure of the reforms to reduce the cost of primaries and backlash from party members dissatisfied with their implementation, ultimately led to a reversal of the reforms prior to the 2019 primaries. In 2017, the NDC's National Executive Council (NEC) voted unanimously to scrap the biometric party register because it lacked credibility and to manually construct another new party register.[64] Later, in 2019, the NEC announced that the NDC would put the selection of parliamentary candidates for the 2020 election back in the hands of delegates—albeit a slightly higher number of them than in the past: the electoral colleges for each constituency would comprise nine delegates from each polling station,[65] and the number of additional constituency-level delegates would increase. The party also introduced several new rules designed to avoid internal disputes relating to the primaries and minimize the impact of those that did occur. For example, aspirants in the 2019 primaries in the Volta region were required to sign declarations stating that they would respect the results, abstain from taking court action, and refrain from running as an independent candidate should their primary campaign be unsuccessful.[66]

All the NDC party leaders interviewed for our study expressed some regret at the reversion to the delegate system and indicated that the expanded selectorate is 'the future of the party'.[67] Indeed, in their views, the original reasons for seeking the reform still prevail. Moreover, they all seemed in agreement that the problems were not with the goals of the reform but with its implementation. At heart, they felt, the problem was that the party leadership had not fully appreciated the enormity of both the technical and political task that it was taking on. Several of the NDC MPs we interviewed expressed regret that the party had decided to return to the previous primary process, indicating a personal preference for the more inclusive process used in 2015. That more inclusive process was, they felt, safer and more reliable since the risk of being outbid for the votes of the delegates was eliminated—providing you had demonstrated your value to the community. Notably, while some women MPs indicated that the reversion to the delegate system had little impact on them personally, a small number felt it had made their campaigns for re-selection significantly harder

64. *GhanaWeb*, 'NDC biometric register not credible – Portuphy', 19 October 2017, <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/NDC-biometric-register-not-credible-Portuphy-592118> (18 September 2019).
65. Rather than four, as in 2012.
66. *Ghanaian Times,* 'Volta NDC to vet 63 aspirants for parliamentary primary …Rawlings aide joins race', 23 July 2019, <http://www.ghanaiantimes.com.gh/volta-ndc-to-vet-63-aspirants-for-parliamentary-primary-rawlings-aide-joins-race/> (23 September 2019).
67. Interview, senior NDC party official, Accra, 2 October 2019.

because it increased the risk that they would be outspent by rival candidates. Such statements, together with the fact that the number of female candidates selected by the NDC in 2019 dropped to 27, compared to 40 female candidates fielded in 2016, suggest that the reversion of the primary reforms may have had a gendered impact. This possibility is something that we have been unable to fully explore in this paper and which warrants further attention in the future.

Conclusion

Our research contributes to existing knowledge on candidate selections mechanisms by shedding light on what triggers a party to adopt more inclusive mechanisms at a specific point in time. We provide evidence that party leaders promote more inclusive selection mechanisms when they believe that such mechanisms will benefit the party. In the case of the NDC, a confluence of four motivations prompted the party to adopt a more inclusive process for selecting parliamentary candidates in 2015. NDC leaders believed that the reforms would benefit the party by making it more democratic, reducing the cost of the primary process, building the party's organizational capacity, and keeping up with the party's main competitor—the NPP. We also found a substantial divergence between what the NDC hoped to achieve through its reforms and the actual effects of those reforms. The party did succeed in expanding participation in the primary process. However, this did not deliver the electoral benefits that NDC leaders had anticipated, in part because the construction of the new party register—a necessary step in the implementation of the reforms—was poorly managed, triggering internal disputes and distrust. The reforms also had no immediate success in reducing the monetization of candidate selection. In fact, many aspirants found that the costs of contesting the primaries increased. Yet, in certain cases, the expansion of the selectorate did reduce the efficacy of vote-buying, allowing some aspirants to better leverage other sources of political capital. Had the reforms been retained, this might have shifted the behaviour of aspirants, reducing the role of money over the long term. The NDC was also unable to realize anticipated gains in terms of the party's infrastructure and organizational capacity: the new register constructed in 2015 was flawed and ultimately abandoned. Although our evidence suggests that the electoral cost of disputes related to the primary reforms has tended to be overstated by NDC insiders, the perception that the reforms contributed to the party's electoral defeat in 2016, together with the failure of the reforms to reduce the cost of the primary process and dissatisfaction among party members, ultimately led to the reversal of the reforms in 2017.

Some care must be taken in generalizing from our case, which comprises a single party in a single country. There are ways in which the NDC

differs from the average party in Africa and ways in which Ghana's political landscape sets it apart from other countries in the region. The NDC, for example, is more strongly institutionalized than many of its counterparts: it has weathered several changes in senior leadership, as well as periods in and out of power. Ghana is also more democratic than most other African nations. As a result of both these factors, the NDC was probably more likely to adopt inclusive reforms than other parties in the region. Yet, when it comes to the specific issue which is our focus, the *timing of reforms*, these differences pose fewer barriers to generalization. Our case study suggests that African parties adopt more inclusive candidate selection procedures when party leaders believe that it is in the interest of the party to do so. That finding is likely to hold true in a variety of contexts. What will, however, vary is the way in which party leaders understand and define 'the interest of the party'. As our case study shows, such beliefs will typically be the product of several factors. How and why party leaders believe that such reforms will be beneficial is not straightforward because reforms often have unintended consequences—as they did in the case of the NDC. Thus, party leaders' beliefs about the impact of reforms to candidate selection mechanisms—both in Ghana and in other African countries south of the Sahara—may often be wrong. They may be likely to overestimate the immediate benefits of reform and underestimate the difficulty of rolling out more inclusive candidate selection mechanisms.

Our research provides some insights about what to expect from African political parties in the future. It suggests that the trend towards inclusive candidate selection mechanisms that has been documented by other researchers is unlikely to be linear: parties in the region may adopt inclusive reforms only to reverse them when they fail to live up to the expectations of party leaders. A staggered pattern of reform and reversal is particularly likely to emerge in the region, where many parties lack the organizational capacity to roll out inclusive candidate selection mechanisms smoothly. Despite this, our research also suggests that the trend towards the adoption of more inclusive candidate selection mechanisms will probably continue. Despite the difficulties of reform, being more democratic has both normative and electoral appeal in Africa's more democratic regimes. We found some evidence of this in Ghana when we asked those within the NPP for their view on the NDC's reforms. In an interview, one senior NPP leader stated that giving all party members a vote is 'ultimately… where we may all have to go when we are having primaries'. This statement reveals that the negative experience of the NDC has not doomed the prospects for a more inclusive candidate selection process to one day be introduced by the NPP—and perhaps by other parties across Africa.