

Political Party Mobilization Strategies in Ghana: A Comparative Analysis of Three Constituencies

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Abstract : Elections are core democratic institutions. Consequently, voter participation during elections is paramount to democratic governance as it serves as a medium to legitimize authority and make the privileges of electoral democracy meaningful to citizens. To this effect, the topic of voter mobilization and subsequent turnout level have been largely studied in advanced democracies. In young and consolidating democracies, the debate has, however, revolves around the huge reliance on ethnic and regional appeals. According to the Author's knowledge, studies on electoral mobilization especially within the African context have argued the use of ethnic linkages by political parties to mobilize voters during elections. Literature has however not differentiated between the level of democratic dispensation among African countries and the use of ethnic linkages. The question, however, is whether the state of the country's democracy determines the strategies employed by political parties to induce voter participation. In other words, do parties simply play ethno-regional cards as strongly suggested by literature or will consider an arrayed of strategies to mobilize voters? Additionally, studies have not differentiated the impact of mobilization strategy within a country, i.e. between high to low turnout areas. They have also not distinguished between strategies employed by an incumbent or an opposition party. This paper, therefore, is a comparative analysis of voter mobilization in Ghana. It uses original survey and interview data from three constituencies in Ghana: Nanton, Assin North, and Ellembele, which are typical cases of high, average and low turnout areas, respectively. The data were concurrently collected during fieldworks conducted in November 2016 to February 2017, and again from July to August 2017. The study found that political parties within a consolidating democracy employ a blend of strategies to ensure turnout by both parties' faithful and swing voters. The dominant strategies used depends on whether the party is an incumbent or in opposition. While an incumbent may depend more on personalistic and clientelistic strategies, parties in opposition will largely use programmatic strategies, which entails making many campaign promises. Additionally, opposition parties do use clientelistic tactics, but not on the same level as the incumbent. Similarly, within the context of this study, the use of ethnic linkage by political parties to mobilize voters has not been found to be as strong as suggested in the literature. Further, location was key in determining the strategy to use. In all, the consolidation process of a democratic country like Ghana means the change of mobilization strategies used by political parties, which entail a gradual shift from ethnic linkages to programmatic and other forms of non-programmatic strategies.

Keywords : comparative analysis, elections, mobilization strategies, voter turnout

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