

# Are Electoral Outcomes Influenced by Rejected Ballots? The Case of Ghana's Elections Under the Fourth Republic

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## Abstract

Elections have become the prerequisite of democratic governance in most countries. In pursuit of this democratic imperative, Ghana has conducted eight (8) successive elections since the inception of the Fourth Republic. In the quest to seek continuous improvement, the Election Management Body of Ghana has over the years implemented various policies to give citizens the right to vote to choose leaders. However, notwithstanding the relentless effort to improve the electoral process, the incidence of rejected ballots poses risk to the democratic value of elections. The quantum of rejected ballots sometimes is enough to push the elections into a runoff. Apart from the financial and economic costs to the nation, runoff elections birthed by rejected ballots creates tensions and anxiety with the tendency to threaten the peace and security of countries. The study adopted a descriptive exploratory research design to find out the effect of rejected ballots on electoral outcomes and the factors that account for the incidence of rejected ballots in Ghana's elections. The study revealed that factors such as protest voting, ignorance of the voting system, the structure and design of ballot papers, illiteracy of voters, and political biases of electoral officers as responsible for the causes of rejected ballots. The study further revealed a strong correlation between rejected ballots and electoral democracy. The study also recommends measures that must be implemented by stakeholders to curb the incidence of rejected ballots to safeguard the efficacy of democratic elections.

**Keywords:** elections; democracy; spoilt ballot; rejected ballots.

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## 1. Introduction

Elections have contributed to the emergence of democratic governments in several countries including Ghana. Since 1992, elections have become an important democratic imperative in Ghana and now constitute a mandatory tool for obtaining political power. So far, eight successive general elections have been conducted by the Electoral Commission under the Fourth Republic, where Ghanaians have demonstrated an unflinching appetite to choose their leaders through the ballot box. Although the outcome of some of these elections has been disputed, they have generally been described by local and international observers as free, fair, transparent, and credible. In the quest to seek continuous improvement in the conduct of these elections, Ghana's Election Management Body (EMB) has over the years implemented operational and administrative policies aimed at giving oxygen to the constitutional right to vote by allowing voters to express their will to choose leaders through the ballot box in a manner that give value to Ghana's democracy. Among measures put in place by the EMB include voter education, compilation of Biometric Voters Register, interparty dialogue, and strict adherence to voting processes to ensure the "one man one vote" policy.

Standards of democracy require active citizens' participation and representation in the affairs of the state. This forms the basis for countries to organize acceptable elections as a means of adopting democratic systems. However, notwithstanding the relentless effort to improve the electoral process, the incidence of rejected ballots has become prevalent and poses risk to the democratic value of Ghana's elections. Gyimah-Boadi (2008) avers that elections in Africa are somehow superficial. He postulates that factors such as poverty, illiteracy, oppression, and disempowerment of the people combine to reduce the political efficacy of elections in Africa.

Globally, elections undoubtedly remain one of the most efficient tools for assessing the value of any democracy. However, various factors affect how citizens exercise their choice in democratic regimes. Studies show that among the factors that influence the choice of voters include the candidate's personal characteristics, the area the candidate comes from, the candidate's political party, and the policies of the candidate (Moser and Scheiner, 2005; Raunio, 2004). These voter preferences must reflect the will of the people at the end of the poll. As such, duty is imposed on Election Management Bodies (EMB) to ensure that voters cast their vote with strict compliance with the legal, operational, and administrative frameworks governing the elections. Embedded in the duties of the EMB is to also educate the voting public on how to thump print ballot papers when casting their votes.

The electoral system of Ghana is a single-member model with the First Past the Post (FPTP) system. Under this electoral system, the weight attached to the value of every single vote is of material importance in

determining the winner in competitive elections. Given this, although elections in Ghana have been relatively peaceful, the major setback has been the high incidence of rejected ballots and their impact on the outcome of the elections. Since the inception of the Fourth Republican Constitution in 1992, various elections in Ghana have witnessed an exponential rate of increase in rejected ballots. Asante (2009) for example, opined that the high rate of rejected ballot papers in the 2008 elections could be attributed to lack of effective voter education. Acheampong (2006) concluded that the prevalence rate of ballot rejection in Ghana is due to lack of proper planning and effective public education. According to Brown (2008), this high rate of rejected ballots technically means disenfranchisement of eligible voters, and efforts need to be made to deal with the phenomenon.

Although elections offer an opportunity for citizens to participate in the affairs of governance, the extent to which the choice of voters advances democratic efficacy remains questionable given the high incidence of rejected ballots which sometimes becomes the determining factor of who ought to have been elected during general elections. This makes it extremely difficult to ascertain the true intentions and choices of some voters as well as the value of their choices to democratic consolidation in Ghana. This is because, in some instances, the quantum of rejected ballots constitutes a third force behind the two dominant political parties, namely, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and New Patriotic Party (NPP) thereby outstripping the electoral contributions of other political parties. Again, in some circumstances, the rate of rejected ballots is so huge that if added to the valid vote cast can change the outcome of the elections by either pushing the elections to run-off or making the second-placed political parties become the eventual winner.

However, till now, the risk and danger posed by rejected ballots to the democratic value of elections have not manifested greatly in the literature and policy programmes of stakeholders. Consequently, the main causes and effects of rejected ballots on the democratic value of elections have eluded the voting public. The objective of this study is to evince the possible cause of rejected ballots and to narrow the knowledge gap of its impact on Ghana's democracy by adopting descriptive analysis to assess the democratic peril of the high incidence of rejected ballots in Ghana's elections. To achieve the objective of this study, the study would use the election results recorded by the Electoral Commission of Ghana since the inception of the Fourth Republic (1992-2020) to determine the rate of rejected ballots in Ghana. This aims to establish whether electoral outcomes in Ghana are to some extent influenced by rejected ballots.

## 2. Research Problem

There is an abundance of literature on election administration in both developed and developing economies around the globe. However, most of these studies have focused on other electoral and political variables to the exclusion of demographics of the voting group contributing to the incidence of rejected ballot papers. Even though the global democracy index and credentials of Ghana remain unquestionable, the high incidence of rejected ballots raises questions about the democratic value of Ghana's elections. This is because in some cases, the voters' preferences and choices are unclear and undeterminable after the close of the polls. The pattern of rejected ballot papers in Ghana's elections has been remarkable. Multiparty elections in Ghana under the Fourth Republic began in 1992. In 1992, the elections recorded 64,354(3.6%) rejected ballot papers while in 1996, a total of 111,108 (1.53%) ballot papers were rejected at the end of the election. Rejected ballot papers accounted for 104,214 (1.58%) and 188,123 (2.13%) during the 2000 and 2004 presidential general elections respectively. The percentage of rejected ballot papers further increased to 205,483 (2.37%) and 251,720 (2.24%) in the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections respectively. In the 2016 elections, the percentage of rejected ballots dropped to 167,349 (1.54%) but subsequently increased to 313,397 (2.33%) in the 2020 general elections. Since the Fourth Republic, eight successive general elections have been conducted. So far, the highest percentage of rejected ballots witnessed in Ghana's elections under the Fourth Republic was 3.6% registered in 1992. Understandably, this could be justified since the country was transitioning from an autocratic regime to a democratic rule. Although the incidence of rejected ballots continued to rise since 1992, a more troubling occurrence of the menace was registered during the first run of the 2008 general elections where the rate of rejected ballots increased to 2.37%. The danger was that the number of rejected ballots was far more than the difference in votes between the two leading political parties. This meant that had the number of rejected ballots been added to the votes of either the NPP or NDC, it could have produced an outright winner during the first run without going into a run-off.

The comparison of the 2008 elections in Ghana to the 2010 general elections in the United Kingdom presents a gloomy picture of the alarming rate of rejected ballots in Ghana. A total of 45.6 million voters were registered in the 2010 elections in UK. Nearly 29.7million valid votes were cast, representing a turnout of 65.1%. The proportion of ballots that were rejected at the official count was 0.28% (EC-UK, 2010). This percentage compared to Ghana's 2.37% raises major concern for stakeholders on how to curb the menace in Ghana. However, the lack of scientific reasons accounting for the high rate of rejected ballots in Ghana's elections has called into question the electoral cost the country incurs from the confusion and the indecisiveness of the voter at the polls. Although some studies have attributed lack of education on the part of the Electoral Commission as a

contributing factor to the high incidence of rejected ballots (Gyampo, 2009; Yankah, 2009), others like Smith (2009) believe that educating the electorates was not the issue but rather the ballot system of voting had outlived its purpose.

Interestingly, various studies conducted on Ghana's election have not placed premium on finding the possible causes of rejected ballots and their impact on the electoral outcome. While some scholars opine that electoral outcome in Ghana is political parties and personality inclined (Jonah, 2005; Ayee, 2001; Oquaye, 2003), others also postulate that factors like the degree of professional performance of the election management bodies in the conduct of the election, voter education and the overt and covert use of incumbency impacts on the electoral outcome (Asante, 2009; Jeffries, 1998). But no matter which political party gains electoral dividends or losses from elections; the outcome of general elections must seek to advance the course of democracy. Standards of democracy require active citizens' participation and representation in the affairs of the state. This forms the basis for countries to organize acceptable elections as a means of adopting democratic systems. But the extent to which the choice of the voter advances democratic efficacy remains questionable given the high incidence of rejected ballots recorded in elections. However, till now, the risk and danger that rejected ballots pose to the democratic value of elections have not manifested greatly in literature and policy programmes of stakeholders. As a result, the main causes, solutions, and the democratic perils of rejected ballots have received very little attention in the democratic discourse in Ghana.

The aim of this study is to narrow the literature gap on the issue of rejected ballots and to escalate academic and policy discussion on the incidence of rejected ballots by providing an impact analysis on the rate of rejected ballots pertaining to all general elections conducted in Ghana under the fourth republic. The study would again provoke discussion on some of the causes of rejected ballots and attempt to offer some prescriptions on how to reduce the menace to realise the full democratic value of the expression of voter choices and preferences during general elections. The study also sought to ascertain the views of respondents on the effects of rejected ballots on electoral outcomes. To achieve the objective of the paper, the study would use both qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis. The study adopted exploratory and descriptive methods of analysis. This stems from the fact that qualitative design is suitable for descriptive and explanatory studies (Babbie, 2004). The study obtained secondary data from the Electoral Commission of Ghana. The data collected were analyzed to determine the trajectory of the incidence of rejected ballots and the causes of rejected ballots since the inception of multi-party elections in Ghana. The descriptive nature of the study involves the systematic collection and presentation of data on the various views accounting for the high incidence of rejected ballots. The twin approaches of the study's methodology ensures that the process of obtaining data in a non-numerical and numerical form is content-rich and provides an in-depth insight into the research questions.

### 3. Significance of the Study

The misleading but high tendency to equate elections to democratic consolidation of a country underscores the main essence of this study. Ghana is the first country in Sub-Sahara Africa to gain independence in 1957. Since the inception of the Fourth Republican Constitution in 1992, Ghana has conducted eight successive general elections which have resulted in power alternation among the two dominant political parties (National Democratic Congress, NDC, and New Patriotic Party, NPP). The conduct of democratic elections has become a global imperative for countries such that various international treaties, conventions, and protocols as well as national constitutions and domestic legislations have made provisions for the right of citizens to vote as a fundamental human right. Article 42 of the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana provides that every citizen of Ghana who is eighteen (18) years of age and above and of sound mind has the right to vote and is entitled to be registered as a voter for the purposes of public elections and referenda. However, the democratic value of this right to vote remains questionable due to the high incidence of rejected ballots which dilutes voters' preferences and choices as to who should be elected as leaders during general elections. In a single-member constituency model under the First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system, every single vote is significant in determining the outcome of an election. In pursuit of this electoral system, a vote would be disallowed if it is cast in favour of more than one person on the ballot. Such a ballot would be declared rejected. The decision to undertake this study in Ghana is therefore expedient. Ghana's current population stands at 30.8 million (GSS Report, 2021) with a voter population of 17.02 million (EC, 2020). The study is therefore significant for investigating the causes of the high incidence of rejected ballots that have become endemic in the electoral process of Ghana. This study would provide insights into the possible causal factors of rejected ballots and their impact on the value of elections in the process of democratic consolidation. However, the limitation is that although data obtained from the study provides a phenomenal basis for the conclusion of this study, it might however not form conclusive evidence about the prescription of the study since the study fell short of identifying and interviewing the very voters whose ballot papers were rejected. This is because, under the legal requirement of secrecy of the ballot and the anonymity that comes with voting, it becomes extremely difficult if not impossible to identify such voters. However, notwithstanding these limitations, the data sources give sufficient

information and framework to make an informed conclusion on the study.

#### 4.0 Theoretical Orientation for the study

##### 4.1 Rejected Ballot and Spoilt Ballot Distinguished

Although the term rejected ballot and spoilt ballot are sometimes used interchangeably by the media and even some election observers, the two terms are fundamentally different in terms of their definition and categorization within the framework of election administration. However, while in some jurisdictions like Scotland, the terms “rejected ballot papers” and “spoilt ballot paper” is statutorily defined by relevant electoral law, the exact definition of these terminologies is elusive in the legal framework of elections in Ghana. For example, Regulation 58 of the Scotland Election Rules, Order 2007, paragraphs (3)(4) and (5) defines rejected ballot papers as those ballot papers which are void and not counted for reasons that:

- a) they do not bear the official mark and the unique identifying mark,
- b) in the case of a constituency ballot paper, on which votes are given for more than one candidate; and in the case of a regional ballot paper,
- c) on which votes are given to more than one registered party or individual candidate,
- d) on which anything is written or marked by which the voter can be identified except the printed number and other unique identifying marks on the back; or
- e) which is unmarked or void for uncertainty.

However, although the term rejected ballot has been defined by various scholars, in Ghana, what constitutes rejected ballot is not statutorily defined nor has it been classically defined administratively by the Electoral Commission of Ghana. Again, there has not been a generally accepted common definition of rejected ballot adopted by the Interparty Advisory Committee (IPAC) of the Electoral Commission. As such, what constitutes rejected ballot paper at the end of the poll is discretionally left to the discernment and determination of the presiding officer on the occurrence of certain factors. This sometimes brings confusion and misunderstanding between political party agents. According to Herbert and Edwards (2007), a ballot paper can be described as a rejected ballot when the said ballot paper cannot be counted for one reason or a combination of the following reasons:

- a) situations where the voter cast his or her vote for more than one candidate in a first past the post (FPTP) electoral system,
- b) where the ballot paper bears no official mark,
- c) where the voter has made writings or marks which could reveal his or her identity,
- d) where the voter drops a blank ballot paper into the ballot box or
- e) has marked or thumb-printed the ballot in a manner that the intention of the voter as to who he or she voted for is not clear.

A study conducted by Odoom et. al (2015) revealed that while about 63% of the voters believed that rejected ballots affect the outcome of general elections, about 6% of the study population believed that rejected ballots do not affect the election results. It must be noted, however, that, although rejected ballots do not form part of the total valid votes cast, they form part of the total vote cast and the percentage turnout which is the measure of electoral participation. The coterminous nature of the statutory definition by the Scotland Election Rules and the academic proposition by Herbert and Edwards (2007) has become the standard benchmark upon which the Electoral Commission of Ghana applies in the determination of whether or not a ballot paper should be rejected. One of the difficulties in election administration is the rules of interpretation on rejected ballots on the account of their subjectivity. This deals with the subjective decision-making duties of the electoral officer in determining whether a ballot paper must be declared valid or rejected amidst agreement and contestation by political party agents. This means that to eliminate the possibility of objection to the validity of a ballot by a polling agent, the electoral officers should be provided with clear rules of interpretation of what constitutes an acceptable and unacceptable basis or rationale for rejecting a ballot paper. Narrowing this interpretative function of the electoral officer by providing clear rules of what constitute rejected ballot makes it easier for the electoral officer to take the necessary decisions that have the tendency to minimize disputes over the validity of ballots. As such, for purposes of this study, the concept of rejected ballots would be contextualized in tandem with the definition given by Herbert and Edwards in line with the statutory provision under the Scottish electoral law.

For purposes of transparency and verifiability of the election results, spoilt ballots, unused ballots, and used ballots must be reconciled and counted to create an audit trail to guarantee the integrity of the ballot accounting process. However, the term rejected ballot must be distinguished from the concept of spoilt ballot. Spoilt ballots and rejected ballots are never the same and mean different things altogether. As a result, assigning the same meaning to the two concepts could create problems in accessing their impact on the electoral outcome. A spoilt ballot is a ballot paper that gets damaged, soiled, or torn before or during the process of voting by the voter. Again, a ballot not properly printed with an identifiable mark could constitute a spoilt ballot. A classical distinction between a spoilt ballot and a rejected ballot is that spoilt ballots do not find their way into the ballot

box in a properly organized election. Again, a spoilt ballot has no impact on the collated results and the declared result thereby not forming part of the total vote cast. They are only used for ballot accounting and reconciliation purposes. A ballot paper can get spoilt at the point of issuance or at the point of vote casting. As such, a voter is entitled to be re-issued a fresh ballot paper when the earlier one issued to the voter is spoilt. On the other hand, rejected ballots find their way into the ballot box and form part of the votes cast. It is identified at the close of polls during vote sorting and vote counting.

#### 4.2 Elections and Democratic Value

Active citizens' participation and representation in the political affairs of a state form an integral part of measuring democratic efficacy. As such, elections have become a global imperative making it an indispensable component in democratic consolidation. However, the concept of democracy continues to remain paradoxical despite efforts made by academics and policymakers to find a common ground. This is because different definitions and theories emphasise different dimensions of democracy. While various studies have shown a strong nexus between elections and democracy, others also dispute the election-democracy relationship. For example, Lindberg (2006) recognizes that there is no necessary link between the term democracy and the conceptual construct to which it refers. In disputing the election-democracy theory, some scholars argue that although democratic processes could be reduced to the holding of internationally observed multi-party elections, there still remains no agreement on the definition and principles of democracy (Ake 1996; Colomer, 2000 et al.). While these studies view democracy as bigger than elections, others restrict the definition of democracy to elections.

Bratton and van de Walle (1998) for example, opine that while there can be elections without democracy, democracy cannot exist without elections. Some scholars have, in the Schumpeterian way confined the concept of democracy to elections (Dahl, 1989; Huntington, 1991; Alvarez et al., 2000). According to these scholars, democracy is best defined in terms of competitive electoral politics and the institutional structures that come with it. They believe that real competitive electoral process is pivotal in almost all definitions of democracy (Schumpeter, 1942; Dahl, 1989; Alvarez et al., 2000). In support of the cardinal role of elections in democratic governance, Lewis (2007) posits that elections underscore the essence of democratic rights, political inclusion, and transparent governance. According to Jinadu (1997), election is an inclusive and participatory tool for citizens' integration into the democratic affairs of a state. However, while elections do not, all by themselves, constitute an all-round democracy, Bratton (1998) avers that they, nonetheless, remain essential for rule by a majority system and a fundamental imperative, for more extensive democratic consolidation. This means that elections have become an indispensable and unavoidable requirement and necessity of democracy.

Competitive elections play a central role in democracy (Dahl 1998; Karl 1990; Alvarez et al., 1996). Cohen (1983) argues that the fundamental value of elections is to educate and give the citizens a feeling of participation in the affairs of governance. Van Ham (2009) defines citizens' influence on government policies to mean how government becomes responsive to the policy preferences of voters. The product of these propositions is that elections allow people to participate in choosing representatives to form governments in a competitive manner. Competitive elections have also been described as a prerequisite for economic development. Feng (1997) argues that political competition enhances democratic governance thereby promoting economic growth. To show the relationship between elections and development, Kambudzi (2008) avers that properly conducted elections by countries in Africa would be an admission of commitment to Africa's social and material development. According to Kambudzi, elections enhance the lives of citizens by offering them perspectives and alternatives by political contestants on fundamental issues of national life to make an informed voters' choice.

Various studies have employed different evaluation criteria and datasets to assess the quality of democratic elections (Pastor, 1999; Van de Walle, 2003; Elklit and Reynolds, 2005a; Lindberg, 2006; Birch, 2008; Hartlyn et al., 2008). However, investigation of the role of elections in democratic governance goes beyond academia since the international community views investment in democratic governance in developing countries as a crucial factor for global peace. For example, in 2009, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) dedicated about 35% of its annual budget to democratic governance. A substantial part of this budget allocation representing about USD1.4 billion was dedicated to electoral assistance. However, studies have expressed contrary views about election quality either positively, by outlining the presence of criteria that render elections democratic, or negatively, by identifying the principal violations that cause elections to be undemocratic. The positive inclination uses conceptual framework ranging from free and fair elections, clean elections, and democratic elections (Elklit and Svensson, 1997; Lindberg 2006; Munck 2009; O'Donnell, 2001) while negative definitions, on the other hand, refer to electoral malpractice, flawed elections, electoral manipulation, electoral fraud, and election rigging (Pastor 1999; Birch, 2008; Schedler 2002a). Elklit and Reynolds (2005a) for example, identify the following 11 sequential steps in the electoral process to define election quality. These include the legal framework of the elections, electoral management, constituency and polling demarcation, voter education, voter registration, access to and design of ballot paper, party and candidate nomination and registration,

campaign regulation, polling, counting, and tabulating the vote, resolving election-related complaints, and post-election procedures.

In view of the above democratic propositions, it can be asserted that the dividend of democracy is the value attached to the choices and preferences of the voter at the poll. But the extent to which the electoral value of the voter advances democratic efficacy in Ghana since the inception of the multiparty election remains uncertain given the high incidence of rejected ballots which sometimes becomes the determining factor of who ought to have been elected during general elections. However, till now, the risk and danger that rejected ballots pose to the democratic value of elections have not manifested greatly in literature and policy programmes of stakeholders. As a result, the main cause, solution, and the democratic peril of rejected ballots have received very little attention in the democratic discourse in Ghana. This is because the quantum of rejected ballots registered in every electoral cycle represents the percentage of electorates whose votes are declared invalid. The aim of this study is to narrow the literature gap on the issue of rejected ballots and to escalate academic and policy discussion on the incidence of rejected ballots by providing an impact analysis on the rate of rejected ballots pertaining to all general elections conducted in Ghana under the Fourth Republic. This imposes a duty on election administrators and critical stakeholders to identify the causes of rejected ballots and attempt to offer some recommendations on how to reduce this electoral menace to realise the full democratic value of the expression of voter choices and preferences during general elections.

### **5.0 Research Methodology**

The design for this study was both qualitative and quantitative. The study adopted exploratory and descriptive methods of analysis. This stems from the fact that qualitative design is suitable for descriptive and explanatory studies (Babbie, 2004). Again, according to Sarantakos (2005), an exploratory descriptive research design provides an opportunity to examine the various dimensional challenges confronting the study. The descriptive nature of the study involves the systematic collection and presentation of data on the various views accounting for the high incidence of rejected ballots. The twin approaches of the study ensure that the process of obtaining data in a non-numerical and numerical form is content-rich and provides an in-depth insight into the research questions. The study uses both primary and secondary sources of information. The study obtained secondary data from the Electoral Commission of Ghana. The data collected were analyzed to determine the trajectory of the incidence of rejected ballots and the causes of rejected ballots since the inception of multi-party elections in Ghana. In other to get firsthand information, the researchers conducted formal face-to-face interviews with some stakeholders in Ghanaian politics. The study population comprised persons who meet the criteria of personal, academic, and policy involvement in the conduct of elections (Burns and Grove, 2003). These included staff of the Electoral Commission, Returning Officers, Presiding Officers, Civil Societies, and political parties. Observing critically the high incidence of rejected ballots in Ghana's election, the target population was carefully selected through a purposive sampling strategy to draw respondents for the study as postulated by Leedy and Ormrod (2005).

The purposive sampling technique was adopted to enable the study to select individuals who could purposefully inform an understanding of what participants perceive to be the causes of the high incidence of rejected ballots in Ghana's elections (Creswell, 2007). Babbie (2004) posits that purposive sampling techniques allow the researcher to select the sample on the basis of his own judgments about which population would be the most representative. The rationale for adopting this survey method is the ability to assemble information from a substantial specimen of the populace as asserted by Leedy & Ormrod (2005). Although the study could not source data directly from voters whose votes might have been rejected about the possible causes of rejected ballots, analysis of the data gathered, however, provided a useful basis for inferences about the influence of rejected ballots on electoral outcomes. The main instrument used for data collection was the administration of structured questionnaires to respondents. The instruments sought to gather relevant data on factors responsible for rejected ballots, and the effects of rejected ballots on election outcomes. A central web-based domain was created. The e-mails sent to invite responses included a link, and 'double clicking' this link would take the respondent directly to the web-based survey. A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed. A response rate of less than ten percent was expected. However, due to interest in the study, a total of 285 questionnaires were received with a response rate of 95% achieved. Although according to Dillman (1998), it is not necessary to begin a question with demography as it puts respondents off in answering the questions before them, the administered questionnaires contained demographic items placed at the end of the questionnaire. The data collected was organized for purposes of quantitative analysis. The quantitative analysis took the form of descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages with the aid of the Statistical Product and Service Solution (SPSS). This enabled the researcher to make deductions, draw inferences, and relevant conclusions.

### **5.1 Pattern of Rejected Ballots in Ghana's Elections under the Fourth Republic**

This segment of the study focuses on the pattern of the incidence of rejected ballot papers in Ghana's general

elections since the inception of the fourth republican constitution in 1992. The study through secondary data obtained from the Electoral Commission of Ghana demonstrates the pattern of incidence of rejected ballots recorded in Ghana's general elections in the following tabular format:

**Table 1: 1992 Election Results for 5 of the Contestants**

Registered Voters	Total Votes Cast	Valid Votes Cast	Rejected Ballots	NDC Votes	NPP Votes	PNC Votes	NIP Votes	PHP Votes
7,401,370	4,127,888	3,978,070	149,813 (3.6%)	2,323,193 (58.40%)	1,308,785 (30.29%)	266,531 (6.70%)	113,773 (2.86%)	70,014 1.76%

**Table 2: 1996 Election Results for 3 of the Contestants**

Registered Voters	Total Votes Cast	Valid Votes Cast	Rejected Ballots	NDC Votes	NPP Votes	PNC Votes
9,279,605	7,256,868	7,145,760	111,108 (1.53%)	4,099,758 (57.37%)	2,834,878 (39.67%)	211,136 (2.95%)

**Table 3: 2000 Election Results for 4 Contestants**

Registered Voters	Total Votes Cast	Valid Votes cast	Rejected Ballots	NPP Votes	NDC Votes	PNC Votes	CPP Votes
10,698,652	6,605,084	6,500,870	104,214 (1.58%)	3,131,739 (48.17%)	2,895,575 (44.54%)	189,659 (2.92%)	115,641 (1.78%)

**Table 4: 2000 Elections (Run-Off)**

Registered Voters	Total Votes Cast	Valid Votes Cast	Rejected Ballots	NPP Votes	NDC Votes
10,698,652	6,459,003	6,381,387	77,616 (1.20%)	3,631,263 (56.90%)	2,750,124 (43.19%)

**Table 5: 2004 Election Results for 4 of the Contestants**

Registered voters	Total Votes Cast	Valid Votes	Rejected Ballots	NPP Votes	NDC Votes	PNC Votes	CPP Votes
10,354,970	9,002,031	8,813,908	188,123 (2.13%)	4,524,074 (52.44%)	3,850,368 (44.63%)	165,375 (1.91%)	85,968 (0.99%)

**Table 6: 2008 Election (First Run) Results for 4 of the contestants**

Registered voters	Total Votes Cast	Valid Votes	Rejected Ballots	NPP Votes	NDC Votes	CPP Votes	PNC Votes
12,472,758	8,671,272	8,465,834	205,438 (2.37%)	4,159,439 (49.13%)	4,056,634 (47.92%)	113,494 (1.34%)	73,494 (0.87%)

**Table 7: 2008 Elections (Run-Off)**

Registered Voters	Total Votes Cast	Valid Votes	Rejected Ballots	NDC Votes	NPP Votes
12,472,758	9,094,364	9,001,478	192,886 (1.02%)	4,521,032 (50.23%)	4,480,446 (49.77%)

**Table 8: 2012 Election Results for 4 of the contestants**

Registered Voters	Total Votes Cast	Valid Votes	Rejected Ballots	NDC Votes	NPP Votes	PPP Votes	GCPP Votes
14,158,890	11,246,982	10,995,262	251,720 (2.24%)	5,574,761 (50.70%)	5,248,898 (47.74%)	64,362 (0.59%)	38,223 (0.35%)

**Table 9: 2016 Election Results for 4 of the contestants**

Registered Voters	Total Votes Cast	Valid Votes	Rejected Ballots	NPP Votes	NDC Votes	PPP Votes	CPP Votes
15,712,499	10,881,083	10,713,734	167,349 (1.54%)	5,755,758 (53.72%)	4,771,188 (44.53%)	106,092 (0.99%)	25,552 (0.24%)

**Table 10: 2020 Election Results for 4 of the contestants**

Registered Voters	Total Votes Cast	Valid Votes	Rejected Ballots	NPP Votes	NDC Votes	GUM Votes	CPP Votes
17,027,941	13,432,857	13,119,460	313,397 (2.33%)	6,730,587 (51.3%)	6,213,182 (47.36%)	105,548 (0.80%)	12,200 (0.09%)

**Table 11: Summary of Rejected Ballots since 1992**

Election Year	Rejected Ballots (%)
1992	3.60%
1996	1.53%
2000 (First Round)	1.58%
2000 (Run-off)	1.20%
2004	2.13%
2008 (First Round)	2.37%
2008 (Runoff)	1.02%
2012	2.24%
2016	1.54%
2020	2.33%

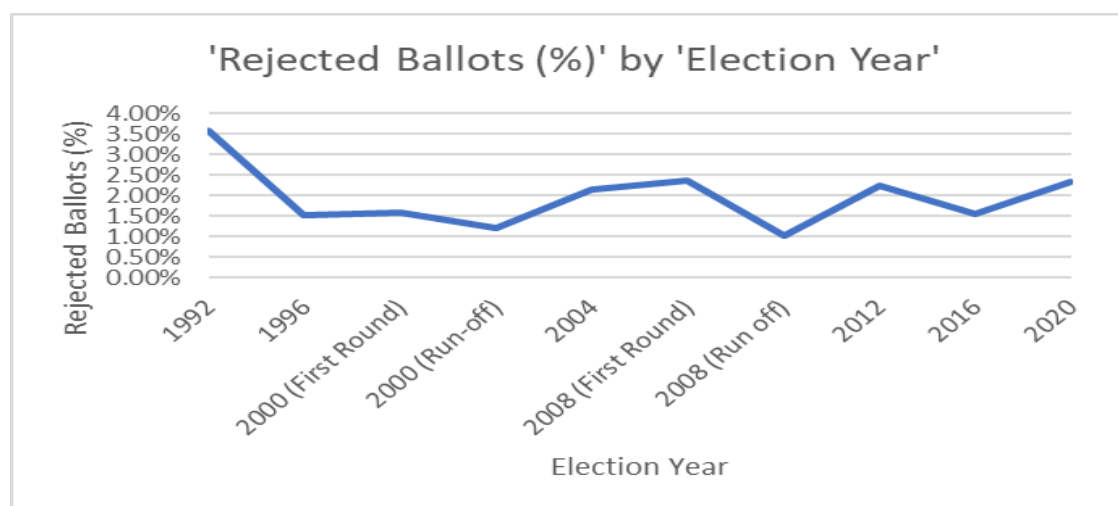


Figure 1: Pattern of Rejected Ballots in Ghana's Elections since 1992

## 6.0 Analysis and Discussion of the trajectory of Rejected Ballots in Ghana's Elections under the Fourth Republic

This section of the study discusses the historical analysis of the pattern of the incidence of rejected ballot papers in Ghana's general elections since the return to multiparty democracy in 1992. Based on table 1 to table 11 and figure 1, the incidence of rejected ballots permeating the electoral cycles of Ghana was discussed and analysed as follows:

### Elections 1992

The Fourth Republican Constitution of Ghana was promulgated in 1992. Article 43 of the 1992 Constitution created the Electoral Commission of Ghana as an independent election management body. Per Article 45, the constitutional mandate of the Commission is to among other things conduct and supervise all public elections and referenda. Following the return to multiparty democracy under the fourth republic, the first constitutional election conducted by the Commission was the 1992 general elections. Table 1 shows that 4,127,888 voters out of 7,401,370 total registered voters voted in the 1992 general elections representing 56% turnout. Of the 4,127,888 total votes cast, 3,978,070 of the votes were valid representing 96.37% of the valid votes cast. Of the five contestants, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) won the elections with 58.40% of the valid votes cast. The New Patriotic Party (NPP) placed second with 30.29% of the valid votes cast. The People's National Convention (PNC) obtained 6.70% of the valid votes with the National Independence Party (NIP) and People's Heritage Party (PHP) obtaining 2.86% and 1.76% of the valid votes cast respectively. Out of the 4,127,888 total votes cast, the election recorded 149,813 votes as invalid representing 3.6% of rejected ballots. This rate of



rejected ballots described as the “Rejected Ballot Party” was high enough to outperform the National Independence Party (NIP) and People’s Heritage Party (PHP) to place in the fourth position. However, although the rate of rejected ballots recorded was high, the margin between the winner (NDC) and the second-placed party (NPP) was statistically wide and the impact of the rejected ballot was not significant to affect the outcome between the two main political parties. Hypothetically, the reason for the high incidence of rejected ballots recorded in the 1992 elections may have resulted from lack of familiarity with the voting process voters due to political migration from authoritarianism to democratization.

### **Elections 1996**

The 1996 general election was the second election conducted by the Electoral Commission of Ghana after the restoration of multiparty democracy in Ghana. Table 2 shows that the total number of registered voters was 9,279,605. Out of this, 7,256,868 of the electorates voted in the elections representing 78.20% turnout. The total valid votes out of the turnout were 7,145,760 constituting 98.47% of the valid votes cast. The National Democratic Congress (NDC) won the elections with 57.37% of the valid votes cast. The New Patriotic Party (NPP) placed second with 39.67% of the valid votes cast, and the third-placed party, the People’s National Convention (PNC) obtained 2.95% of the valid votes. It could be observed that while the relative performance of NDC from 1992 to 1996 worsened to -1.03%, that of NPP increased to a positive 9.38%. However, 111,108 votes out of the total votes cast of 7,256,868 representing 1.53% were declared invalid as rejected ballots. Here, again, the wide gap between the winning party and the second-placed party was so colossal that the impact of rejected ballots could not influence the outcome of the elections.

### **Elections 2000 (First Round)**

For the first time since the return to multiparty democracy under the fourth republic, the 2000 general elections in Ghana went to a second round. This is because the outcome of the elections could not produce a clear winner since none of the contesting parties obtained the constitutional threshold of 50%+1 votes to be declared a winner. Article 63(3) of the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana states that “a person shall not be elected as President of Ghana unless at the presidential election the number of votes cast in his favour is more than fifty percent of the total number of valid votes cast at the elections”. The total number of registered voters in the 2000 elections was 10,698,652. Out of the registered voters, a total of 6,605,084 votes were cast representing 61.74% turnout. A total of 6,500,870 out of the 6,605,084 votes cast were valid constituting 98.42% of the valid votes cast. Of the vote cast, a total of 104,214 votes were declared invalid representing 1.58% of rejected ballots. Out of the valid votes cast, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) obtained 3,131,739 votes representing 48.17% of the valid votes cast while the second-placed party, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) got 2,895,575 representing 44.54% of the votes. The third-placed party, People’s National Convention (PNC) also bagged 189,659 of the votes constituting 2.92% of the valid votes cast while the Convention People’s Party (CPP) got 115,641 representing 1.78% of the votes. The National Reform Party (NRP) got 78,629 of the votes accounting for 1.21% of the valid votes cast while the next placed party, the Great Consolidated Popular Party (GCPP) obtained 67,504 representing 1.04% of the valid votes cast. The last-placed political party, the United Ghana Movement (UGM) garnered 22,123 votes constituting 0.34% of the valid votes cast. Compared to the 1996 general elections, the number of rejected ballots in the first round of the 2000 election increased by a margin of 0.05%. However, compared to the 1992 elections, it can be observed that even though the number of rejected ballots improved significantly during the first round of the 2000 elections, the rate of increase was still substantial enough to outperform the National Reform Party (NRP), the Great Consolidated Popular Party (GCPP), and the United Ghana Movement (UGM) which obtained 1.21%, 1.04% and 0.34% of the valid votes cast respectively. This shows that rejected ballots placed the 5<sup>th</sup> position on the hierarchy of percentages.

### **Election 2000 (Run-off)**

Following the inability of any of the presidential candidates to obtain the constitutionally required number of votes to be elected as president during the first round of the 2000 general elections election, it became legally imperative to conduct a run-off election for the first two contestants. Article 63(4) of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana provides that at a presidential election where there are more than two candidates, and no candidate obtains the number or percentage of votes a second election shall be held within twenty-one days after the previous election. As a result, the runoff election was between the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Party (NDC). At the close of the poll, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) won the election by 3,631,263 votes representing 56.90% of the valid votes cast while the National Democratic Congress (NDC) lost the elections with 2,750,124 votes, representing 43.10% of the valid votes cast. Generally, run-off elections do not require new registration of voters given the short constitutional time frame within which to conduct such elections. As such, the total number of registered voters of 10,698,652 used in the first round of the 2000 elections remained unchanged. Out of the registered voters, a total of 6,459,003 votes were cast during the runoff

representing 60.37% turnout. Compared to the first-round election, the run-off witnessed a depressed turnout of 1.37%. This could be attributed to lack of interest of voters in the runoff or loss of interest of the supporters of the minority parties to vote. Of the 6,459,003 votes cast in the run-off, 6,381,387 of the votes were valid representing 98.79% of the valid votes cast while 77,616 of the votes representing 1.20% constituted rejected ballots. Comparatively, it could be observed from the data that although the turnout was lower than in the first round, the rate of valid votes cast in the run-off was 0.37% better than in the first round. Again, compared to the first-round election, the higher performance of the valid votes cast in the run-off also manifested in the reduction in the rate of rejected ballots by 0.38%. However, although the number of rejected ballots was not significant enough to change the election results between the NPP and NDC if they were added to the votes of the NDC, the rate of rejected ballots was nonetheless higher than the votes obtained by the National Reform Party (NRP) and the United Ghana Movement (UGM) during the first-round election.

#### **Election 2004**

The total number of registered voters in the 2004 general elections was 10,354,970. Out of this number, a total of 9,002,031 voted representing a turnout of 86.93%. Of the total votes cast, 8,813,908 of the votes were valid constituting 97.91% of the total valid votes cast. The New Patriotic Party (NPP) won the elections by obtaining 4,524,074 of the valid votes representing 52.44% while the second-placed party, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) garnered 3,850,368 of the valid votes cast representing 44.63%. The third-placed party, the People's National Convention (PNC) got 165,375 of the votes accounting for 1.91% of the valid votes cast while the fourth-placed party, the Convention People's Party obtained 85,968 of the votes constituting 0.99% of the valid votes cast. The election, however, recorded a high number of rejected ballots. The total number of rejected ballots recorded in the 2004 election was 188,123 representing 2.13% of the total votes cast. Compared to both the first and second rounds of the 2000 elections, the rate of rejected ballots in the 2004 elections increased by 0.55% and 0.93% respectively. The rate of increase in the incidence of rejected ballots was so alarming that it outperformed the votes bagged by the People's National Convention (PNC) and the Convention People's Party (CPP). The scary impact of rejected ballots in the 2004 elections was clear. This is because although the number of rejected ballots if added to the votes of the National Democratic Congress could still not have overturned the outcome of the elections, it could have produced anxiety for the winning party and pushed the election results to "too close to call" which could have escalated a full-blown election petition or suspicion of stolen verdict.

#### **Elections 2008 (First Round)**

For the second time in Ghana's electoral history since the inception of the fourth republic, the 2008 general elections could not produce a winner. It again became constitutionally imperative to conduct second-round elections between the first two winners. At the end of the first round, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) led the polls by obtaining 4,159,439 votes representing 49.13% of the valid votes cast while the National Democratic Congress placed second by obtaining 4,056,634 of the votes constituting 47.92% of the valid votes cast. Although the NDC was placed second, it won majority of the parliamentary seats. The Conventions People's Party (CPP) bagged 113,494 of the votes representing 1.34% of the valid votes cast while the fourth-placed party, the People's National Convention (PNC) managed to pull 73,494 of the votes constituting 0.87% of the valid votes cast. The total number of registered voters in the 2008 elections was 12,472,758. Out of the registered voters, a total of 8,671,272 votes were cast representing 69.52% turnout. The total valid votes were 8,465,834 votes representing 97.63% of the valid votes cast. A total of 205,438 votes were declared invalid constituting 2.37% of rejected ballots. Compared to the previous elections, in election 2004, the rate of rejected ballots during the first round of the 2008 elections increased by a margin of 0.24%. It could therefore be asserted that the incidence of rejected ballots was gradually becoming a peril to Ghana's electoral system. The difference in votes at the first round between the NPP and the NDC was 102,805 votes. The danger was that the number of rejected ballots was far more than the difference in votes between the two leading political parties. Again, apart from NPP and NDC, rejected ballots were in excess of the votes obtained by the other political parties. This underscored the decisive effect of rejected ballots in democratic elections. This is because had the number of rejected ballots been added to the votes of either the NPP or NDC, it could have produced an outright winner thereby saving cost, the threat of peace, anxiety, and the tension that occasioned the 2008 second round elections.

#### **Elections 2008 (Run-off)**

Article 63(4) of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana was again invoked following the inability of any of the presidential candidates to obtain the threshold of votes required to be elected as president during the first round of the 2008 general elections. The runoff election was between the then-ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the largest opposition party, the National Democratic Party (NDC). The standard electoral practice in Ghana requires that no voters registration exercise is conducted during run-off elections. This is because the Constitution mandates the Electoral Commission to organize the second election within twenty-one days after

the previous election. As such, the total number of registered voters of 12,472,758 used in the first round of the 2008 elections remained unchanged. However, out of the registered voters, the total votes cast was 9,094,364 representing 72.91% turnout. Compared to the first-round election, the runoff witnessed an increased turnout of 3.39%. This could be attributed to high political advertisement and communication by the two contesting parties due to the narrow gap between them. Again, out of this vote cast, 9,001,478 of the votes were valid representing 98.97% of the valid votes cast while 92,886 of the votes were invalid representing 1.02% rejected ballots. Out of the total valid votes cast, the NDC won the elections with 4,521,032 votes (50.23%). The NPP narrowly lost with 4,480,446 votes (49.77%). Compared to other previous runoffs, it can be observed from the 2008 runoff election results that the margin of win between the NDC and NPP was 0.46% lower than the rate of rejected votes of 1.02%. The decisive nature of the incidence of rejected ballots in the 2008 runoff necessitated national discourse among civil society organizations, political parties, and the media on the role of rejected ballots in democratic elections. This is because, even if 50% of the rejected votes were added to the votes of NPP, the election results could have been different.

### **Election 2012**

The total number of registered voters in the 2012 general elections was 14,158,890. Out of this number, a total of 11,246,982 voted representing 79.43% turnout. Of the total votes cast, 10,995,262 of the votes were valid constituting 97.76% of the total valid votes cast. The National Democratic Congress (NDC) won the elections by obtaining 5,574,761 of the valid votes representing 50.70% while the second-placed party, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) obtained 5,248,898 of the valid votes cast representing 47.74%. The third-placed party, the Progressive People's Party (PPP) got 64,362 of the votes accounting for 0.59% of the valid votes cast while the fourth-placed party, the Great Consolidated Popular Party (GCPP) garnered 38,223 of the votes representing 0.35% of the valid votes cast. The national discourse on the impact of rejected ballots following the 2008 election runoff could not foil the subsequent occurrence of the menace. This is because the 2012 election recorded a high incidence of rejected ballots. The total number of rejected ballots recorded in the 2012 election was 251,720 representing 2.24% of the total votes cast. Compared to the 2008 runoff, the rate of rejected ballots in the 2012 elections increased by 1.22%, an increase of 120%. This could be attributed to lack of pragmatic steps on the part of critical stakeholders to take measures to avert the rate of rejected ballots in Ghana's election. The rate of increase in the incidence of rejected ballots was so high that, apart from the NDC and NPP, it outperformed the total valid votes obtained by all the other six political parties that contested the elections. The scary impact of rejected ballots in the 2012 elections was clear. This is because although the number of rejected ballots if added to the votes of the New Patriotic Party could still not have overturned the outcome of the elections, it, however, produced anxiety for the winning party and pushed the election results to "too close to call" which could have escalated a full-blown election petition. For the first time since the inception of multi-party democracy under the Fourth Republic, Ghana's 2012 Presidential Elections witnessed a full-blown election petition at the Supreme Court. Article 64(1) of the 1992 Constitution provides that the validity of the election of the president may be challenged only by a citizen of Ghana who may present a petition to the Supreme Court within twenty-one days after the declaration of the result of the election in respect of which the petition is presented. Pursuant to this constitutional provision, the presidential candidate of the main opposition party (the NPP) in the 2012 election, Nana Akufo-Addo, petitioned the Supreme Court praying the court to declare the elections invalid on allegations of various infractions and malpractices in the elections. Although the court by majority decision rejected the petitioner's reliefs, the court made various proposals for electoral reforms to guide the conduct of the Electoral Commission in subsequent elections. The motivation for the petition, however, might have been occasioned by the closeness of the 2012 election results.

### **Election 2016**

The 2016 general election was the third election under the Fourth Republic that led to a change in political regime. The National Democratic Congress, led by John Dramani Mahama lost to the main opposition party, New Patriotic Party, candidate Nana Akufo Addo. The total number of registered voters in the 2016 general elections was 15,712,499. Out of this number, a total of 10,881,083 voted representing 69.25% turnout. Of the total votes cast, 10,713,734 of the votes were valid constituting 98.46 % of the total valid votes cast. The New Patriotic Party (NPP) won the elections by obtaining 5,755,758 of the valid votes representing 53.72% while the second-placed party, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) obtained 4,771,188 of the valid votes cast representing 44.53%. The third-placed party, the Progressive People's Party (PPP) got 106,092 of the votes accounting for 0.99% of the valid votes cast while the fourth-placed party, the Conventions People's Party (CPP) garnered 25,552 votes representing 0.24% of the valid votes cast. In the 2016 elections, 167,349 votes out of the total votes cast representing 1.54% were declared invalid or rejected ballot. Here, the wide gap between the winning party and the second-placed party was colossal that the impact of rejected ballots could not influence the outcome of the elections. However, the rate of rejected ballots was enough to outstrip the votes obtained by the

other political parties apart from the NPP and NDC. Compared to the 2012 elections, the rate of rejected ballots in the 2016 elections decreased by 0.7%. This could be attributed to the extensive measures taken by the Electoral Commission of Ghana supported by the National Commission on Civic Education (NCCE) and other critical stakeholders to reduce the incidence of rejected ballots. Among these measures included widespread public education and the decision to increase the size of the black border lines separating the pictures and details of the contestants and the thumbprint areas on the ballot paper.

### Election 2020

For the second time, the 2020 General Election was taken to the Supreme Court by the presidential candidate of the largest opposition party, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) to challenge the validity of the declared results. The total number of registered voters in the 2020 general elections was 17,027,941. Out of this number, a total of 13,432,857 voted representing 78.89% turnout. Of the total votes cast, 13,119,460 of the votes were valid constituting 97.67% of the total valid votes cast. The election was won by the incumbent party, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) by obtaining 6,730,587 valid votes representing 51.3% while the second-placed party, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) obtained 6,213,182 of the valid votes cast representing 47.36%. The third-placed party, the Ghana Union Movement (GUM) garnered 105,548 of the votes accounting for 0.80% of the valid votes cast while the fourth-placed party, the Conventions People’s Party (CPP) got 12,200 of the votes representing 0.09% of the valid votes cast. The total number of rejected ballots recorded in the 2020 election was 313,397 representing 2.33% of the total votes cast. In spite of the widespread public education on how to cast ballots, rejected ballots almost doubled from 167,349 in the 2016 general election to 313,397 in the 2020 elections. This demonstrated the dominance of rejected ballots in the Ghanaian electoral system. This means that to date, both policy and practical framework put in place to deal with the high incidence of rejected ballots have not yielded results thereby making rejected ballots an integral part of the Ghanaian electoral system. This is evident from the fact that the 2.33% of the rejected ballots recorded in the elections far outperformed the combined votes obtained by all the other ten (10) contestants in the 2020 election apart from NPP and NDC.

### 7.1 Summary of analysis of the pattern of Rejected Ballots under the Fourth Republic

The incidence of rejected ballots in Ghana transcends all electoral cycles since the inception of multi-party democracy under the Fourth Republic. The analysis portrays a high rate of rejected ballots in Ghana’s elections with the proclivity to dilute the will of voters by robbing the country of the democratic value of elections. In 1992, rejected ballots accounted for 3.6% of the valid votes cast. The rate of rejected ballots, however, reduced to 1.53% in the 1996 elections but marginally increased to 1.58% during the first round of the 2000 elections. The run-off of the 2000 elections saw a marginal decline to 1.20%. The 2004 and the first-round of 2008 elections saw rejected ballots on ascendancy constituting 2.13% and 2.37% respectively. However, the 2008 run-off elections registered a significant drop in rejected ballots to 1.02%. The rate began to surge again in the 2012 elections which constituted 2.24% of the valid vote cast. In 2016 it saw a marginal decline and constituted 1.54% of the votes cast while in 2020 rejected ballots took a huge proportion of the votes accounting for 2.33% of the valid votes cast.

Election Year	Rejected Ballots (%)
1992	3.60%
1996	1.53%
2000 (First Round)	1.58%
2000 (Run-off)	1.20%
2004	2.13%
2008 (First Round)	2.37%
2008 (Runoff)	1.02%
2012	2.24%
2016	1.54%
2020	2.33%

### 8.0 Results and Discussion from primary data

The study ascertained the gender and educational background of the respondents in terms of sex, age, and educational qualification. These demographic traits were obtained for purposes of differentiating the views of respondents on rejected ballots. Out of the 285 respondents, 63.16% were males while 36.84% were females as shown in Table 1 below. This indicates that more males participated in the study than females.

**Table 12: Sex and Age Distribution of Respondents**

Sex/Age	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Male	180	63.16
Female	105	36.84
	<b>285</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<b>Age of Respondents</b>		
Less than 20 years	15	5.26
20-30 years	80	28.07
31-40 years	102	35.79
41-50 years	70	24.56
51-60 years	10	3.51
Above 60 years	8	2.81
<b>Total</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2022

On the relevance of gender in democracy, McDermott (1998) opines that electorates see gender and race of candidates as a cue to policy positions. According to McDermott, voters are sometimes influenced by the physical appearance of candidates in addition to their gender. In Ghana, gender distribution constitutes one of the vital statistics for population analysis. Ghana's current population is 30.8Million. Out of this, 15.7million are females representing 50.7% and the males are 15.2million representing 49.3% (GSS, 2020 Population and Housing Census). This shows that females outnumber males by 0.4Million. In terms of the voter population, the 2020 voter population indicates that 52.5% of registered voters are females compared to their male counterparts who make up 47.5% (EC, 2020). In terms of age, Article 42 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana pegs the voting age at eighteen (18) years. Table 12 shows that the majority of the respondent were between the ages of 20 and 40 representing 63.86% while 6.32% were 50 years. This implies that the majority of the respondents between the ages of 20 to 40 participated in the study. This clearly reflects the population structure of Ghana where 59.73% of the population constitutes the adult population of persons above 18 years.

**Table 13: Educational Qualification of respondents**

Educational Level	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Up to SHS	20	7.02
Diploma	75	26.32
First Degree	135	47.37
Postgraduate	55	19.30
<b>Total</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Field Study, 2022

Table 2 shows the educational qualification of the respondents. From Table 13, it can be demonstrated that the minority representing 7.02% of the respondents had a Secondary School educational background while a total of 73.69% had Diplomas and First Degrees with 19.3% of the respondents possessing Postgraduate Degrees. This is symptomatic of the fact that many of the causal workers employed by the Electoral Commission are mostly teachers who might have acquired Diplomas and First Degrees. Again, with the official of the Electoral Commission, it is a requirement that all Electoral Officers must have a minimum of a first-degree qualification, and to be promoted to a certain grade, a staff must acquire a post-graduate degree. Furthermore, persons interviewed from civil society organizations are experts who have high levels of qualifications in their field of study. Elections remain one of the key elements in measuring democracy and offer the voters accountability tools in measuring the performance of political authority. As such, there is a need for citizens to actively take part in it. Studies show that there is nexus between education and democratic consolidation. Safty (2004) postulates that an educated population is a cardinal requirement for building a democratic society. He further avers that the process of building democratic institutions stands to suffer when leaders fail to educate their citizens to embrace the process of democratic consolidation. In support of this proposition, Analoui (2007) posits that quality education is the bastion of human resources leading to the development and growth of nations. It can be gleaned from table 13 that this form of education required for democracy to thrive is reflected in the response rate of the respondent.

**Table14: Views of Respondents on causes of rejected ballots**

Factors	SA	A	U	D	SD
Protest voting	38.70	42.40	0.57	11.88	7.60
Ignorance of voting procedure	39.48	30.78	1.56	20.86	5.82
Ballot paper design	41.28	35.7	1.54	15.5	7.48
Illiteracy of voters	58.55	25.54	5.26	0.65	11.50
Political bias of Electoral Officers	43.50	29.30	2.95	23.45	2.30

Field Survey 2022

SA=Strongly Agree A=Agree U=Undecided D=Disagree SD=Strongly Disagree

On factors accounting for rejected ballots, from Table 14, it can be seen that 81.1 % of the respondents believed that protest voting accounts for some of the reasons for rejected ballots while 19.48% had an opposing view. This revelation is particularly important to guide political parties about the choice of candidates they nominate to contest elections. This is because voters may show disapproval of certain candidates by thump printing on their faces with multiple fingers thereby invalidating the vote cast. It could also happen where the voters dislike more than one candidate and thumbprint against their names or fails to thumbprint on the ballot paper at all. In such situations, the choice of the voter cannot be determined leading to the rejection of that ballot paper as invalid. A protest vote may demonstrate voters' disapproval of candidates, political regime, or the policies of a political party. The findings of the study support the assertions of earlier studies that one of the means by which voters express their dislike for candidates is to engage in protest vote on election day (Gyampo, 2009; Yankah, 2009).

Regarding the issue of ignorance of voting procedures, from Table 14, majority of the respondents representing 70.26% indicated lack of knowledge about the voting procedure while 26.68% of the respondents indicated their appreciation of the voting procedures. This reveals that ignorance about voting procedures accounts for the high incidence of rejected ballots. Ignorance of the voting procedure may result in incorrect thumbprinting of the ballot paper thereby rendering the ballot paper invalid. This may be due to situations where the voting process may sound cumbersome, or some members of the voting public may not be conversant with the process of thumbprinting. In such situations, voters may decide to thumbprint for more than one candidate in a first-past-the-post electoral system. This makes it difficult for election officials to determine the choice of the voter. A ballot could also be rejected where voters reveal their identity on the ballot when casting their vote. This amounts to a clear violation of the principles of secrecy of ballot. This could be due to low voter education. A study by Odoom et.al (2015) indicates that low voter education constitutes one of the main causal factors of rejected ballots. Legally, the primary responsibility to educate the public on how and why to vote rests on the Electoral Commission and the National Commission on Civic Education. As such, minimizing the high incidence of rejected ballots on account of ignorance of the voting process requires the state to provide adequate resources to these institutions to make voter education and sensitization a continuous programme rather than making it a periodic and ad-hoc project.

On the design and structure of the ballot, 78.98% of respondents were of the view that the manner in which the ballot paper is designed contributes to the rejection rate of ballot papers while 22.98% of the respondents held a contrary opinion. The study reveals that the ability of voters to understand the choices of candidates to elect on the ballot paper depends on well and simpler the ballot paper is designed. In Ghana, candidates are arranged on the ballot paper vertically. Elements on the ballot paper include party symbols and names, candidate names, and photographs, as well as a square space for the voter to thumbprint. There are borderlines between one candidate and another protecting and safeguarding each candidate's vote to establish a clear manifestation of the voter's choice and preference. This means that poorly designed ballot papers, with, for example, small and closely aligned preference squares, can lead to voters' thumbprints overlapping more than one square, with the consequent dispute during vote counting over whether that vote is valid, and, if valid, which party or candidate the voter voted for. The objection to the validity of such votes cast by the political party agents at the polling station is a contributory factor accounting for the high incidence of rejected ballots.

On the issue of illiteracy contributing to the rate of rejected ballots, Table 14 shows that majority of the respondent representing 84.09% agreed that illiteracy remains one of the causal factors of rejected ballots while 12.15% strongly disagreed with 5.26% of the respondents remaining undecided. A report of the 2020 Population and Housing Census conducted by the Ghana Statistical Service suggest that about 30.2% of the adult population are illiterate. Out of this number, about 34.6% are females while males constitute 25.9%. The study finds support with these statistical data given the fact that, in Ghana, 52.5% of registered voters are females compared to their male counterparts who make up 47.5%. This reveals that the rate of illiteracy has a direct impact on the high incidence of rejected ballots. The outcome of the study found a positive correlation between illiteracy and the

incidence of rejected ballots. This finding from the study is supportive of earlier studies which suggested that illiteracy has a negative impact on how people vote and that the higher the rate of illiteracy rate, the greater the percentage of rejected ballots. (Gyampo, 2009; Yankah, 2009).

On the question of whether political bias on the part of electoral officers causes rejected ballots, findings from the study indicate that 72% of the respondents believe that rejected ballots are caused by political biases of electoral officers while 25.75% of them disagreed with 2.95% of respondents remaining undecided. This shows that one key factor that accounts for the high incidence of rejected ballots is the political bias of election staff. One of the cardinal requirements of democratic elections is that the election must be conducted and supervised by impartial election management bodies. However, in a competitive political environment, the core and temporary officers recruited to conduct the elections may be motivated by their political persuasions and preferences. These preferences may sometimes motivate these officers to reject ballots cast in favour of their political opponents. Again, in pursuit of political allurements and affiliation, election staff may during vote sorting and counting exercise capricious and disproportionate discretion to reject ballots even though the choice or preference of a voter may be clear. The study, therefore, reveals that electoral officers are sometimes influenced by their own biases and partisan inclinations to reject an otherwise valid ballot thereby denying the voter the right to have his or her counted.

**Table 15: Views of respondents on the likelihood of rejected ballots affecting election results**

Responses	Frequency	Percent(%) of response
Very likely	123	43.16
Likely	87	30.53
Neutral	15	5.26
Unlikely	35	12.28
Very Unlikely	25	8.77
<b>Total</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Filed Survey 2022

Regarding the issue of whether or not there exists a positive correlation between rejected ballots and electoral democracy, Table 15 demonstrates the views of respondents on whether or not the rate of rejected ballots has an impact on the outcome of democratic elections. Table 15 shows that majority of the respondents representing 73.69% were of the view that rejected ballots affect the outcome of elections while 21.05% of them held a contrary opinion with 5.26% of them remaining neutral. The findings from the study are in tandem with the proposition by Yankah (2009) that electoral outcomes in Ghana are influenced by rejected ballots. This particularly manifested itself during the first run of the 2008 general elections. The results from the first run of the 2008 elections indicate that the difference in votes between the NPP and the NDC was 102,805 votes. However, a total of 205,438 votes were declared invalid constituting 2.37% of rejected ballots. This figure was far more than the vote difference in votes between the two main political parties. This underscores the decisive effect of rejected ballots on electoral outcomes. This is because had the number of rejected ballots been added to the votes of either the NPP or NDC, it could have produced an outright winner thereby saving the nation an enormous outlay of expenditure to conduct the second-round elections. This means that the effect of rejected ballots does not only come with an electoral cost but also comes with economic, social, and political costs as well as presenting a threat to peace. In the view of Yankah (2009), low public education on elections is a contributory factor to the high rate of rejected ballots. This underscores the need for election administrators, policymakers, and critical stakeholders to adopt pragmatic measures to curb the occurrence of rejected ballots.

## 8.0 Conclusion

Even though competitive election does not necessarily translate into well-functioning democratic governance, elections, however, have become an important democratic imperative in most countries and now serve as a mandatory tool for accessing or retaining political power. This makes elections a fundamental precondition for democratic consolidation. Bratton and van de Walle (1997) posit that while elections can take place without democracy, democracy cannot take place without elections. Some scholars have, in the Schumpeterian way reduced democracy to elections (Dahl, 1998; Huntington, 1991; Schumpeter, 1942; Karl, 1990; Alvarez et al., 2000). According to these scholars, democracy is best defined in terms of competitive electoral politics and the institutional structures that come with it. Studies show that democratic consolidation requires periodic conduct of free and fair elections that afford citizens the right to choose political leaders of their preference (Adcock, 2005). However, the democratic value of election would be defeated on account of rejected ballots. Since the inception of multi-party democracy, elections in Ghana have witnessed high levels of rejected ballots. Rejected ballots could have enormous implications in terms of time and resources required for instance to conduct run-off

elections. The study identified several factors that contribute to the incidence of rejected ballots. From the study factors that contribute to the incidence of rejected ballots include protest voting, ignorance of the voting system, the structure and design of ballot papers, illiteracy of voters, and political biases of electoral officers. Apart from the financial and economic costs to the nation, the high incidence of rejected ballots has the tendency to threaten the peace and security of countries due to tensions and anxiety associated with run-off elections which are normally occasioned by rejected ballots. The threat posed by the incidence of rejected ballots has the proclivity to derail the democratic value of elections. The study, therefore, recommends that governments, election management bodies, and other critical stakeholders must adopt pragmatic education campaigns and election literacy programmes to curb the incidence of rejected ballots to advance the democratic of elections.

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