

# What Does It Mean to Hold a Free and Fair Election?

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My current research analyzes the election process in developing nations and how countries ensure the free and fair nature of their electoral procedures. Developing nations experience incentives to democratize from both domestic and international sources. The international community, however, has a history of placing great emphasis on whether democratizing nations hold elections that meet internationally-defined 'free and fair' standards, as compared to other democratic aspects of governance. As such, my research investigates the processes by which countries produce free and fair elections, and to what extent these standards are tailored to domestic and/or international audiences. I utilize a case-study methodology by investigating how these questions pertain to Ghana.

Ghana is a newly democratized state that has received much attention for its democratic progress. Having transitioned



to democracy in 1992, Ghana has since experienced five peaceful democratic elections at the national level, three of which have seen alternations of power. In the context of an election in December 2012, the focus of this on-going research endeavor is the analysis of the ways in which Ghana continuously guarantees that their elections are free and fair. Ghana's Electoral Commission has intro-



duced a number of measures to guarantee elections are free and fair, including certification of election observer groups, provisions that members of each party (Ghana largely operates as a two-party system at the national level) sign final tally sheets, and has secured mechanisms by which final tallies are communicated to the center of command in Accra. However, having previously experienced criticism for a severely bloated voter registration list, this year the Electoral Commission assumed the great undertaking of re-registering the entire population and generating new voter identification cards for every registrant. Additionally, the Commission has invested a great amount of time and money in the adoption of new election technologies which will be used in the upcoming election. Registered voters' fingerprints were collected by new biometric identification machines, and these fingerprints cross-referenced against the voter identification cards on election day.

During my summer research trip, I conducted interviews, and made numerous contacts at the Electoral Commission, the two major political party headquarters, and local NGO and think tank groups. I also analyzed newspapers and generally kept abreast of election-related developments. The purpose of this research trip was two-fold. First, I

want to analyze the political and logistical ramifications of strategies adopted by the Electoral Commission in the production of a free and fair election. I am especially interested in the new technologies adopted by the Commission as well as the general public's reaction to the overall election standards. As such, it was necessary for me to generate critical contacts at the national level of politics, and to gain top official's opinions about the election process. In addition to gaining access to official's thought processes as they made decisions about the upcoming election, I was also interested in developing specific areas of interest which would be targeted during future research trips. As a fourth-year political science PhD candidate, the results of this summer research endeavor are greatly helping in the planning and preparation of my overall dissertation research. I will be traveling to Ghana for the national elections in December, and I will also be back in the country as a Boren Fellow in 2013.

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