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DEEPENING DEMOCRACY IN THE FACE OF WINNER TAKE ALL POLITICS IN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Winner-take-all politics, characterized by political systems where the winning party or candidate assumes total control, significantly influences African governance dynamics. The study, therefore seeks to explore Winner takes all implications within the African governance. The study employed a qualitative research method drawing from scholarly articles, books, and historical accounts. The literature Review found that political structure can foster decisive governance. This also poses challenges related to ethnic tensions, inclusivity, and long-term stability. The article also offers suggestions for fostering deeper democracy in Africa, emphasizing the importance of inclusive political frameworks, electoral reforms, and civil society engagement. African nations should strive for sustainable democratic practices, understanding and addressing the ramifications of this political framework will be crucial for fostering peace, security and development.

KEYWORDS: *Winner Take All, Politics, Governance. Deepening Democracy*

INTRODUCTION

Democracy in Africa has evolved from one-party rule to multiparty democratic systems since the early 1990s. Winner-takes-all (WTA) politics, which involve a party or candidate winning the majority of votes, can lead to inequality, tension, and conflict. WTA politics has been studied extensively in various political systems, particularly in the African context where diverse ethnic compositions and historical colonial legacies can exacerbate tensions and limit political representation. Understanding WTA dynamics is crucial for fostering more inclusive governance structures Gyampo (2016). In this system, the political party or candidate with the majority of votes gains complete control over political offices and resources, leaving the opposition with little or no representation.

The Winner Takes All (WTA) concept, popularized in the United States during President Andrew Jackson's time, involved political parties giving government civil service jobs to supporters and friends after winning elections. This practice created inequality and affected government policies. WTA politics gained popularity in Africa in the 1990s with multiparty democratic elections, leading to tension and conflict. Civil society and academics have been working on preventing conflict in 21st-century Africa. The need for a rethinking of the WTA concept is crucial due to its negative impact on development and potential for conflict and insecurity. African States, Regional Economic Communities, and the African Union must address the causes, effects, and measures to address WTA challenges in elections (Anthony, Marko, Tobechukwu, 2024).

Winner-take-all politics in African countries often leads to authoritarian rule and undermines democratic institutions. Post-colonial African states adopt this system to unify fragmented societies, often using majoritarian electoral systems that marginalize minority voices. Countries like Tchombé, Bokassa, Houphouët-Boigny, Ghana, and Kanye demonstrate how leaders implement this governance, justifying it with promises of national stability and development. This can lead to social fragmentation, violence, and the erosion of institutions. For example, case studies from Kenya, South Africa and Ghana provide further insights.

Kenya

The country's experiences during the 2007-2008 post-election violence highlight the perils of winner-take-all governance. The work of authors like Mwagiru (2014) in "Conflict Resolution in Africa: Lessons from Kenya's Ethnic Conflicts" illustrates how electoral outcomes can lead to societal unrest when sections of the populace feel disenfranchised.

South Africa

The African National Congress's (ANC) dominance following Nelson Mandela's presidency serves as a case of both the benefits and drawbacks of winner-take-all politics. In "The ANC's Politics of Power" by Daniel (2016), the complexities of maintaining a unified national vision while addressing diverse citizen concerns are discussed, revealing the strain on democratic governance.

Ghana

The winner-take-all political system in Ghana's Fourth Republic backed by the 1992 Constitution has led to questions in representation in governance. Reforms promoting inclusivity, tolerance, and accountability are crucial for enhancing democratic practices and fostering a more equitable society (Gyampo, 2016). Addressing this legacy is essential for Ghana's democratic journey.

The winner-take-all approach in African governance can lead to social cohesion and national unity, but it can also exacerbate ethnic tensions and promote a zero-sum view of power. This can result in political violence and instability, as seen in the Rwandan Genocide and civil strife in Ivory Coast. The cycle of exclusion can undermine the legitimacy of ruling authorities and the political system. This paper examines deepening democracy in the face of the WTA concept in African. Focusing on its background, causes, effects, potential measures to address the WTA challenges and the path to deepening democracy in Africa.

Causes of Winner Takes All in Africa Elections

The causes of WTA in African politics are numerous. However, the paper will look at the issue from the perspective of the Constitution, electoral formula, electoral law, and must win attitude.

The Constitution. The constitution in African countries is a key factor in WTA politics, as it guides the executive, legislature, and judiciary in governing the country. The constitution grants the president executive powers, which can lead to party favouritism and a lack of technical skills. The legislature and judiciary are expected to oversee these powers, but these checks are often ineffective due to the majority of the legislature being in power (Obour, 2013). A constitutional review could reduce executive powers and create a national skill database for all citizens, regardless of political affiliation, to ensure fair and effectiveness.

Electoral Formula. The Plurality Voting System (FPTP), a single-winner voting system, is a major factor in winner-takes-all elections in Africa. This system, often used for electing executive officers or legislative assembly members, is suitable for developing countries with low literacy rates. However, recent changes in the FPTP have led to tension, rejection of results, and conflict in many African countries (Gyampo, 2013). To address this issue, a referendum could be held to allow opposition parties to have an opportunity in governance, potentially allowing them to participate in the elections.

Electoral Law. Electoral law promotes political inclusiveness and democracy, but it currently allows election winners to choose and form their government. Some African countries have constitutions giving executive powers to design agendas and assemble teams, potentially leading to the removal of previous officials without considering their experiences and competencies. This calls for rectification of electoral laws to consider a team with more experience and competency.

Must Win Attitude. Must win attitude is another challenge which is associated with the winner takes all politics in Africa. In Africa losing elections means losing everything including money invested in the elections, entitlement, job, and termination of appointments. The situation where political parties would want to win to keep their positions and redeemed money invested in election creates a must win attitude leading to electoral tension and conflict. As a way of solving this challenge the government must consider funding the activities of political parties leading to elections.

Effects of Winner Takes All Concept in African Elections

The effect of WTA concepts in Africa elections are numerous. Nevertheless, this paper will discuss increase in political party costs, security challenges, abuse of executive powers and policy discontinuity.

Increase in Political Party Cost. WTA elections increase political party costs, potentially leading to electoral violence. Incentives often use state resources, while opposition parties invest heavily in campaigns. These entrenching tendencies can motivate losers to reject results, leading to violence in countries like Kenya, Togo, and Zimbabwe (Atta-Asamoah, 2010). Unchecked politics could derail democratic gains, development, and peace in Africa. African states must fund electoral campaigns to reduce election costs on political parties (Arku, 2013).

Security Challenges. The WTA concept in Africa presents security challenges as political parties often rely on ethnic affiliations and colours, leading to violence and inter-ethnic conflict (Obour,2013). This system breeds apathy, divisiveness, and ill feelings, resulting in thousands of deaths, displacement, and property destruction. To reduce insecurity, political parties should stop campaigning on ethnic, religion, and cultural lines.

Abuse of Powers. The executive, legislature, and judiciary often abuse their powers by appointing unqualified individuals to key governance positions, particularly when opposition parties struggle to reject government agendas due to small numbers (Abotsi, 2013). To prevent such abuses, it is crucial to reduce executive powers and ensure proper deliberation in parliament.

Policy Discontinuity. Policy discontinuity in Africa is hindered by successive governments not considering the costs of policy retardation, as policies are not binding on successive governments according to the constitution. Opposition parties are sometimes excluded from policy formulation, leading to abandoned vision strategies and affecting the economy. This undermines national progress and requires policy continuity (Gyampo, 2013). African countries must develop concrete policies for political parties to adhere to during elections and after winning power.

Impedes Development. In most African countries, the winner-takes-all system hinders development due to successive governments suspending previous projects without respecting the money invested. This has led to various challenges in Africa. Political parties often fulfil campaign promises to abandon previous projects, as allowed by the constitution. For example, the 1992 Constitution of Ghana allows for new projects within two years of assuming office. African countries must establish a blueprint for political parties to continue with successive government development projects.

Measures to Address Winner Takes All Challenges

Stedman (2002) in "Negotiating Democracy: Politics in Post-Conflict Africa" suggests power-sharing arrangements that move beyond winner-take-all frameworks, focusing on coalition politics for broader representation and stability. However, the WTA concept has persisted in Africa over the years, eroded significant gains. To address these challenges, constitutional amendment, proportional representation, funding for political activities, and adherence to national development policy could be adopted, ensuring Africa's future stability.

Constitutional Amendment. The proposed constitutional amendment aims to encourage winner-takes-all government by reducing executive powers through referendums. This would allow for the firing of previous officials and hiring new ones. The amendment also considers an equal representation system, promoting inclusive government based on experience and competencies. This would create opportunities for qualified citizens without party colours to support the government and eliminate the WTA concept.

Adoption of Proportional Representation System. Africa could tackle the challenges WTA elections by adopting the proportional representation (PR) formula for selecting leaders in parliament. This formula, used in over 70 countries, ensures a close match between candidate votes and legislative seats. A successful candidate must achieve a quota, promoting political inclusiveness and reducing electoral conflict (Reynold, 2009). Although it may encourage party proliferation, it is associated with democratic stability. Modifying the PR formula in Africa could help address WTA elections challenges.

Funding of Political Activities. The government could address the challenges of WTA by funding political parties' activities. Political parties often spend large sums of money on election-related activities, anticipating winning power and redeeming their investments (Sakyi, 2015). To ensure equal platform for all parties, a national framework should guide their activities. This would allow all parties to assess support in logistics and government funds to alleviate campaign costs, thereby reversing the WTA and reclaiming election investments.

Adherence to National Development Policy. The National Development Policy should guide all political parties in their campaign promises, ensuring they follow the same agenda as their predecessors. This policy should be based on national development, not the party manifesto, to prevent the WTA attitude from affecting future governments.

Pathways to Deepening Democracy in Africa

To address the challenges posed by WTA politics, several strategies can be implemented:

Promoting Inclusive Political Frameworks: Establishing power-sharing agreements and coalition governments can foster greater political inclusivity. Institutional reforms that encourage multiparty systems can help ensure that diverse voices are represented in the decision-making process.

Electoral Reforms: Implementing reforms to electoral processes, such as proportional representation, can help mitigate the winner-take-all mentality. Transparent, fair, and competitive elections are critical for building trust in the electoral system.

Strengthening Civil Society: Empowering civil society organizations is essential for enhancing democratic governance. Civil society can serve as a watchdog, holding governments accountable while encouraging active citizen participation.

Judicial Independence: Strengthening the rule of law through independent judicial systems can provide a check on executive power, ensuring that all political actors are held accountable to the law.

International Support and Cooperation: The international community can play a pivotal role in supporting democratic governance in Africa. By promoting dialogue, offering technical assistance, and applying pressure on undemocratic regimes, external actors can help to create an environment conducive to democracy.

CONCLUSION

Winner-take-all politics presents both opportunities and challenges within African governance. While it can lead to decisive leadership in the short term, long-term implications include the risk of ethnic strife, weakened institutions, and alienation of minority groups. To enhance democracy in Africa, exploring alternative governance models that encourage inclusivity and representativeness is imperative.

However, by embracing inclusive political frameworks, implementing electoral reforms, empowering civil society, ensuring judicial independence, and engaging with the international community, African nations can work toward deepening democratic practices and enhancing political stability. Moving beyond winner-take-all politics is essential for fostering a more participatory and equitable political environment that respects the voices of all citizens.

Addressing the complexities of winner-take-all politics in Africa requires a multifaceted approach, involving scholarly dialogue, pragmatic reforms, constitutional review and active participation from civil society. African nations should strive for sustainable democratic practices, understanding and addressing the ramifications of this political framework will be crucial for fostering peace, security and development.

Africa's government should create a national skill database for all citizens, regardless of political affiliation, and champion constitutional amendments through referendums to check executive powers and adopt a proportional representation system. Funding political activities should be redirected to reduce a need for a must-win attitude, and a national development policy should be established for sustainable development in Africa.

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