

GHANA'S 2016 ELECTIONS

An Overview of Selected Relevant Background Themes

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ABSTRACT

Seven successive elections have been held in Ghana since 1992, most recently in 2016 when the country made a fourth attempt to embrace constitutional rule. A burgeoning literature provides explanations for the outcome of the 2016 election, which saw the defeat of the erstwhile incumbent National Democratic Congress and a landslide victory for the New Patriotic Party. Yet, little attention has been given to the various undercurrents, events, and significant background dynamics prior to the elections on 7 December. This research therefore provides a partially analytical but largely descriptive presentation of selected relevant issues that contributed to the build-up to the 2016 elections. The study situates the discourse within the broader context of Ghana's democratisation, revealing how underlying phenomena possibly pose a threat to, and challenge the prospects of democratic consolidation. However, the conclusion indicates that the outcome of elections, which were deemed free and fair, should not be the only area of interest as the processes that lead to the elections are of great concern for a democracy. The work identifies several areas of concern, in particular Ghana's electoral management, intra-party conflicts, unconventional aggression, vituperative outbursts and personal attacks, internal party elections, campaigns, how some chiefs violated a constitutional provision and outwardly portrayed partisanship, and brief issues concerning vote buying.

Keywords: Ghana, New Patriotic Party, National Democratic Congress, elections, democratic consolidation, electoral politics

INTRODUCTION

Ghana's 2016 election was an empirical testing of the twenty-seven reforms implemented by the committee established by the Electoral Commission (EC)

in terms of a Supreme Court ruling. Parliament rejected the Constitutional Amendment Bill which sought to amend article 112(4) of the 1992 Constitution and thus alter the date for the elections (*Graphic Online* 2014). A new executive EC chairperson, Mrs. Charlotte Kesson-Smith Osei, was appointed in accordance with Article 70(2) of the 1992 Constitution to replace Dr. Kwadwo Afari Gyan. According to Ayee (2017, p. 4):

the preparedness of the EC to organize and manage the 2016 elections was initially doubted on largely operational and legal grounds and also a perception of inexperience and manipulation from the minority political parties, particularly the New Patriotic Party (NPP), as they called her resignation ahead of the polls when her performance was benchmarked against that of her predecessor, Kwadwo Afari-Gyan, who had successfully overseen five elections since 1996.

Domestic and international observers were present on election day (EUEOM 2016, pp. 20–21). On December 1, the EC opened its designated polling stations to over 127 394 special voters across the country, comprising security personnel, electoral commission officials, and the media, to vote for their preferred parliamentary and presidential candidates. Though there were some setbacks¹ in the conduct of the elections, the turnout of about 72.62% was satisfactory.

On Wednesday 7 December, about 15 million Ghanaians went to the polls to cast their ballot for 275 lawmakers and to elect a new president or renew the incumbent president's mandate. Across the country, the electorates responded enthusiastically and queued from early to vote.² The 2016 election was unprecedented as its outcome deviated from the normal pattern of elections that have resulted in power turnovers (Gyampo, Graham & Yobo 2017). Existing literature has provided an explanation for the outcome of such a historic election, which saw the defeat of the erstwhile incumbent National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the National Patriotic Party (NPP) winning in a landslide victory (Bob-Milliar & Paller 2018; Ayee 2017; Gyampo et al. 2017; Cheeseman, Lynch & Willis 2017). Yet little attention has been given to the various undercurrents, events and background dynamics behind the build-up to the elections on 7 December.

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- 1 The institutions involved – the EC and security agencies – failed to clearly communicate to special voters that they have to vote in their home constituencies and not in the places where they are currently deployed. Also, the extremely late finalisation of the polling station special voter registers may have contributed to the problem. In an attempt to address the problems, the EC agreed with political parties to continue with special voting on 4 December. However, the problems persisted and, according to the EC, only 6.6% of special voters used this extra opportunity to vote (EUEOM 2016).
 - 2 On election day as part of the fieldwork for my 2016 election project, I was in the Atwima Nwabiagya South constituency in the Ashanti region to observe the polls where I visited several electoral areas and witnessed a massive turnout.

This research therefore provides a partially analytic but largely empirical presentation of some relevant issues which preceded the 2016 elections. It places the discourse within the broader context of Ghana's democracy, revealing how underlying phenomena may constitute both a threat and challenge to the prospects of Ghana's democratic consolidation. However, the purpose is to indicate that the outcome of free and fair elections should not be the only area of interest as the processes that lead to elections are of equal concern for a democracy. Of the many different aspects, this work considers Ghana's electoral management, intra-party conflicts (including unusual aggression and vituperative outbursts), internal party elections, campaigns, how chiefs violated a constitutional provision and outwardly portrayed partisanship, and some brief issues with vote buying. This work relies on both secondary sources (reviews of press reports and literature) as well as primary sources in the form of interviews for an ongoing research project.

'THE TROUBLED REFEREE': GHANA'S ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Elections are inextricably interwoven into the process of democratisation in Africa. Elections give meaning to the concept of political representation and the protection of the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Constitution of Ghana (IEA 2012). In his book *Democracy and Elections in Africa*, Lindberg refutes a number of hypotheses and thus finds no general negative trend in either the frequency or quality of African elections. Rather, he argues that since the inception of multiparty elections there has been a liberalisation, and repeated elections have created incentives for political actors, which has helped to foster the expansion and deepening of democratic values (Lindberg 2006). Although Karl (1995, 2000) argues otherwise in his theory of the 'fallacy of electoralism', elections remain the core institution of representative democracy, and the only means to decide who holds legislative or executive power (Lindberg 2006). Throughout elections in Africa during the third wave of democratisation (Huntington 1993; Bratton & Van de Walle 1997), both domestic and international electoral observers have pronounced African elections to be free and fair. This indicates that there is nothing wrong with the electoral system and that election outcomes are devoid of irregularities. However, a study of conflict in African states reveals two main causative factors, ethnicity and elections. Elections have plagued many African countries such as Cote d'Ivoire, Togo, Benin, Kenya, and Zimbabwe (IEA 2012).

In Ghana's Fourth Republic, elections have attracted discrepancies due to irregularities and other fraudulent occurrences. The electoral system has been unstable as there have been widespread challenges within the electoral

management body, and most importantly the organisation of elections which has for several years put the country's democracy on a knife's edge. The 2012 election petition and other electoral issues were the point of departure prior to the 2016 elections, but retrospective manifestations of unstable electoral processes and their outward appearance in Ghanaian politics are relevant to the study. In 1992, the credibility of the elections was marred by several serious incidents (NNP 1993):

- Ballot boxes, property of INEC, were found in the homes of unauthorised persons;
- These ballot boxes were pre-stuffed with thumb-printed ballot papers, showing a clear NDC preference;
- Several ballot boxes were used even though they were not opened for public view;
- Ballot papers counted in several places were found to be more than the number of those who actually voted, according to the tallies;
- Ballot boxes were conveyed by unapproved vehicles under the guard of commandos and without an opposition representative.

Prior to the 1992 elections, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) queried the electoral register, and recommended a complete re-registration of all eligible voters as a matter of urgency in order to provide a consistent and comprehensive register of the elections (Oquaye 1995, p. 268). Ghana was on the brink of conflict in December 2008, as the NDC complained that they had unveiled a conspiracy between the NPP and the EC to rig the elections. An electoral supervisor in the Ashanti region commented that:

The NPP could have won the 2008 elections. Our director was not smart, because he delayed in submitting the edited figures that were needed to increase the votes of the NPP from the Nhyiaeso constituency. He had collected [a] huge sum of money that he even didn't give us some. If he had sent the votes not even the Tain elections could not have determined the elections. (Anonymous, 2017, Personal communication)

Eight petitions were filed by aggrieved parliamentary candidates at the High Court by the end of January 2009. Those that were most pressing involved the Asutifi South and Akwatia constituencies, where no winner was immediately declared due to serious disagreements over the result. Boakye Agyarko, research fellow at the Danquah Institute, has detailed the troubled nature of the Electoral Commission. According to Dr Afari Gyan in an interview with privately-owned radio station Joy FM in 2008 (Myjoyonline, 2014):

If our population is indeed 22 million, then perhaps 13 million people on our register would be statistically unacceptable by world standards. If that is the case, then it may mean that there is something wrong with our register.

On 7 December 2012, Ghanaians went to the polls to elect both lawmakers and the president of the land. Despite the conclusion of most observer groups that the elections and their outcome were free and fair, they were contested in court by the opposition NPP who alleged that there were many anomalies. Though the chairman of the EC declared John Mahama the winner of the 2012 elections, the country was not entirely convinced. The entire country was in an expectant mood waiting for the court to either confirm or reject the declaration made by the chairman of the EC concerning the outcome of the elections (Asante & Asare 2016, p.3).

During and after the court proceedings on the election petitions, Ghanaians were informed that the electoral system was problematic and that election outcomes were questionable, even though they had been touted as free and fair by both domestic and international observers. The petitioners stated that diverse and flagrant violations of the statutory provisions and regulations governing the conduct of the December 2012 presidential election substantially and materially affected the results of the elections. In addition, they claimed that the election was also marred by gross and widespread irregularities and malpractices which fundamentally impugned the validity of the results in 4 709 polling stations, as declared by the EC. The petitioners continued that these statutory violations and irregularities were apparent on the Declaration Forms (pink sheets) and directly introduced 1 342 845 irregular votes into the aggregate of valid votes recorded in the polling stations across the country, which had a material and substantial effect on the outcome of the election. There were instances where there were no signatures by the presiding officers or their assistants on the declarations forms as required under Regulation 36(2) of CI 75. And yet the results on these forms were used in arriving at the presidential results declared on 9 December 2012 by the chairman of the EC, thereby rendering invalid the results so declared. In addition, there were instances of over-voting, voting without biometric verification, duplicate serial numbers (occurrence of the same serial number on pink sheets for two different polling stations), and duplicate polling station codes (occurrence of different results/pink sheets for polling stations with the same polling station codes) (Asante & Asare 2016, p. 5).

Several controversies surrounded the voters' register for the 2016 elections and undermined the integrity of the EC. Political parties in Ghana including the

NPP, then in power, and other political parties such as the Convention People's Party (CPP) and the Progressive People's Party (PPP); religious groups, the media and civil society groups such as the 'Let My Vote Count Alliance', revealed several lapses in the voters' register. The NPP, the erstwhile opposition, had claimed there were around four million illegal voters including some 760 000 foreigners in the old register that contained 14 535 987 names. With respect to the statistical acceptability of the voters' register, prior to the 2016 elections Boakye Agyarko explained that Nigeria, which has a population of 162 470 737 has a voter population of 67 764 327, representing 41.7%. Kenya, with a population of 41 609 728 has a voter population of 14 362 189 representing 34.50%. Tanzania, with 42.50% and Senegal with 41.50% of registered voters in their total populations are all significantly lower than Ghana's. Drawing inferences from these comparative cross-country statistics, a 56.20% voter population in 2012 was statistically improbable (*Graphic Online* 29 May 2014).

Within the country there were several counter claims, especially from the pro-NDC faction, on the allegations made by the NPP and other political parties, that they wanted to frustrate the EC and that the voter register was thus devoid of any irregularity. The Supreme Court's rulings on the voters' roll cleanup, including the deletion of 56 000 NHIS card registrants the EC claimed to have identified, upset the ruling NDC and its supporters. This was evident in the threat by panelists on the pro-NDC radio station Montie FM of physical harm to the Chief Justice and other Supreme Court judges (CDD 2016). In October 2015 the chairperson of the EC responded by constituting a panel of five prominent Ghanaians and electoral experts to hear proposals from various stakeholders and report to the Commission outlining their recommendations (*Ghanaweb* 11 March 2016). Surprisingly, and thus re-echoing the problematic nature of the electoral system, the panel presented a 77-page report on 21 December 2015 which concluded that the voters' register was dangerously bloated and therefore could not be used in the 2016 elections until widespread irregularities were addressed.

In order to protect the integrity of the voters' register and ensure that it was a fair representation of the Ghanaian electorate in the country, the Supreme Court took a 5-2 decision ordering the EC to delete names of minors, foreigners, dead persons and persons who had registered and voted in the 2012 polls with national health insurance cards. These had been banned as a means of identification in voter registration (Laary 2016). Since elections are indispensable for the execution of democracy, the fact that these electoral issues had been addressed prior to the 2016 elections significantly elevated Ghana's democracy. Yet, they also threatened its consolidation, as should these issues arise in subsequent elections Ghana's democracy would be on a knife edge.

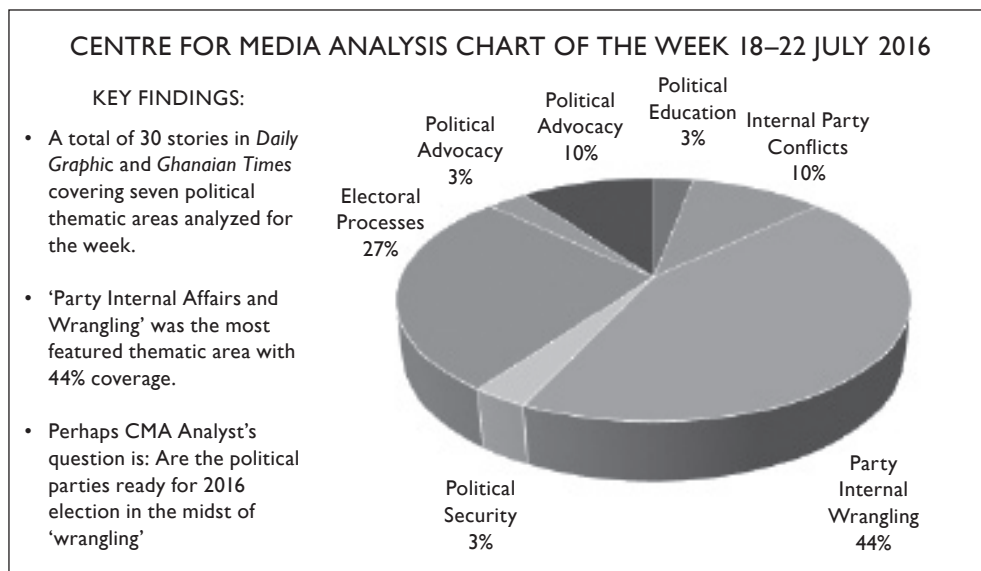
INTRA-PARTY WRANGLING, VITUPERATIVE OUTBURSTS AND UNCONVENTIONAL AGGRESSION

A recurring feature in all Ghana's presidential and parliamentary elections since the adoption of its 1992 Fourth Republic's Constitution, was the wrangling within political parties and the low-intensity but violent clashes and vituperative outbursts (Bob-Milliar 2014). In the buildup to the 2016 elections political discourse became increasingly marked by verbal abuse and unguarded political rhetoric. Ninsin (2006) adds that political parties in Ghana adopted a comprehensive range of strategies to marshal votes in order to capture political power. The strategies include the use of prevailing economic conditions; appeals to political traditions, ethnic identity, and religion; the use of money and other material incentives; and in recent years, an increasing use of insults and derogatory language against opponents (*ibid.*). Even though political parties are one of the core institutions of democracies, unless care was taken doom was predicted by the IEA for Ghana as evident in other African countries (IEA 2012) – Côte d'Ivoire (2000, 2010), Nigeria (2003, 2007, 2011), Zimbabwe (2008) and Kenya (2007). Intra-party political dynamics in Ghana in the Fourth Republic (Daddieh & Bob-Milliar 2102) have attracted conflict. Conflict and opposition exist inside political organisations, though members are bound by the same ideology (Bob-Milliar 2012). Ayee (2008) contends that, within the two major parties, the NPP and the NDC, sources of tension relate to the elitist preference for a dominant role in both parties for party financiers who, together with the political godfathers, control party structures at every level. This means that both the NDC and the NPP have common structural problems that manifest themselves differently. Since there is a competitive struggle for political power, political parties look for setbacks and other shortcomings in opposing parties, and then capitalise on these to set the propaganda agenda and attack each other's party (*ibid.*).

Generally, the root cause of conflict stems from the primaries, especially in the selection of candidates (Daddieh & Bob-Milliar 2012). In 2007, opposition in the NPP between the different factions of Nana Akuffo Addo and Alan Kyeremanteng was characterised by conflict which nearly split the party. The contest effectively alienated the party's support base and killed their interest, as it unnecessarily exposed the party to the NDC's propaganda machinery and incessant criticisms. The NDC ironically benefited by winning the general elections by a narrow margin as the NPP suffered from apathy. Bob-Milliar (2012) throws more light on the internal convulsions that divided the NDC into two factions, FONKAR and GAME.³ Research conducted by the Centre for Media Analysis (CMA), a media

³ The two factional groups within the NDC are FONKAR (Friends of Nana Konadu Agyemang Rawlings) and GAME (Get Atta Mills Elected).

monitoring and strategic communication agency based in Accra, revealed that 'party internal wrangling' was the most featured thematic area in the political news sections of two Ghanaian newspapers monitored between 18 and 22 July 2016.



Source: Centre for Media Analysis, 2016

Figure 1: Party Internal Wrangling tops Political News in 2016

Prior to the 2016 elections, one of the major conflicts was within the NPP. The conflict had its roots in the inability of Chairman Afoko and General Secretary Agyepong to run the party effectively. This resulted in a compromise due to the unending bickering which resulted in a vote of no confidence by a significant number of regional executives, external branches, the parliamentary caucus and other key stakeholders of the party. One of the root causes was the conditions that led to the gruesome murder of the Upper East NPP regional chairman, Adams Mahama, on the night of 20 May 2015. For this and because of the alleged leaking of vital information during NEC meetings by these two executives to the opposition NDC (Personal communication with Haruna Alhassan 2018), there was a significant degree of mistrust within the regional and national leadership centred on these two officers, which required a full, competent and unbiased investigation by an appropriate party committee. As a result, the national chairman of the NPP was suspended indefinitely. The decision was taken at an emergency national committee meeting (NEC) at the party headquarters, which suspended Mr. Afoko (Myjoyonline 23 October 2015). One of the main issues was that Afoko

had been accused of working against the flag-bearer's chances of winning the elections (Owusu Nyantakyi 2018, personal communication). Following the issue of suspension, violent clashes were recorded at the NPP headquarters both before and after the meeting. The clashes were suspected of being between the party's private security guards and vigilante groups purportedly from Kasoa supporting the party's beleaguered chairman. The Bolgatanga Bulldogs, another vigilante group supporting Mr. Afoko, also threatened to cause mayhem at the party's headquarters (Myjoyonline 23 October 2015).

Within the NDC, the Ningo-Prampram constituency primary election was fiercely contested and became an arena of conflict between two members of the party. The two candidates, Samuel Tetteh Nartey George and Enoch Teye Mensah, engaged in a war of words in the media and finally resorted to physical violence when George was allegedly punched in the face during a disagreement about the voters' register. Before the primary elections, George had been a protégé of Mensah who, as then incumbent Member of Parliament for the constituency, had complained that the voters' register would undermine the elections. Mensah, who had earned the nick name '*Prampram Mugabe*' for his longevity in the legislature, was fully convinced that he would retain his bid to lead the party in the 2016 elections. The elections began on Saturday 21 November 2015, but due to confusion were postponed to the following day, Sunday 22 November. The certified results declared by the EC from 22 polling stations gave Samuel Tetteh Nartey George 4 910 votes, representing 53.4% of the total votes, with Enoch Teye Mensah polling 2 831, or 38.5% (*Citifmonline* 22 November 2015).

During the Fourth Republic, Ghana's political discourse has become increasingly marked by verbal abuse and unguarded statements, mainly by political actors, particularly during election season. Such intemperate language in political discourse often triggers a range of controversies, (mis)interpretations and disputes that consequently pose a potential threat to the peaceful conduct of elections and to national security (Danso & Adu-Afful 2012, p. 97). Unconventional aggressive participation has also featured in Ghana's electoral politics (Bob-Milliar 2012); prior to the 2016 election, there were several instances of these undemocratic acts. Political activist Owusu Aduonu justified the abusive language used in politics by explaining that invective is part of democracy and referred to the interactive insults in the debates between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. He further opined that:

Ghana is a developing democracy which is also learning from the developed countries like the USA. Even these democracies are okay with insults how much more we the developing ones. So, I think insults are normal thing in Africa, in our politics.

(Personal communication 2017)

Sometimes this unguarded and intemperate language is provocative, demeaning and ethnocentric. These insults reached their lowest ebb when two former presidents openly engaged in verbal insults in the media. Agyekum Kufour described Jerry Rawlings as *sasabonsam, the devil*. Jerry John Rawlings responded by comparing Kufour to a notorious armed robber, one Atta Ayi, serving a life sentence for his criminal activities. Analysts have used various measurements to ascertain the level of abusive languages in our politics. In an interview, one ‘macho’ activist who belongs to a dominant political party, opined:

In the 2008 elections we were giving guns like AK 47, to go to our opponent’s stronghold to cause commotion just in case there was any alleged rigging. And to our surprise our opponents’ macho men were much bigger and taller than ourselves, so we couldn’t even actually deliver, but we chop money in that election.

(Anonymous 2016, Personal communication)

Aggressive physical clashes were particularly evident between two political parties, the NPP and the NDC, prior to the 2016 elections. In October, the inspector general of police (IGP), John Kudalor, ordered the deployment of more officers to Ajumako Besease in Central Region due to violent political clashes between members of the NDC and the NPP. Injuries were sustained, and an NDC supporter was allegedly stabbed in the right eye (Myjoyonline 4 October 2016). Violent clashes erupted in Zabzugu in the Northern Region among the supporters of the NDC, NPP and an independent candidate, James Cecil Yawunbe, in the Tatale Sanguli constituency. The timely intervention of the police ahead of the elections prevented a bloodbath between the supporters of the NPP and the NDC at some registration centres in Nkoranzbig wiga in the Brong Ahafo region, during the limited voters’ registration exercise in May. Supporters of the two parties attacked each other with cutlasses and other sharp instruments over challenges of some new registrants by polling agents of both parties (*Pulse News* 2016).

Table 1. Selected incidents of aggression and invectives in 2016

| Aggression/invectives | Source of information | Date (2016) |
|--|-----------------------|-------------|
| Mahama and Akuffo Addo bodyguards fight at funeral | <i>Xbitgh.com</i> | 11 March |
| Atebubu-Amanteng district NDC youth activists burn down constituency office of the party | <i>myjoyonline</i> | 30 March |

| | | |
|---|---|--------------|
| Macho men attack NPP youth activist at fox fm. | <i>Pulse news</i> | 26 April |
| NPP used more abusive languages than the NDC | <i>Media foundation for west Africa</i> | 16 May |
| Angry NDC youth in the Western Region constituency in the Upper West Region set the party's office ablaze | <i>Daily Guide</i> | 27 June |
| Siasala west district DCE – Moses Lari attacked and beaten by NDC youth activists | <i>Daily Statesman</i> | 26 August |
| We will insult Mahama back if he doesn't stop attacking Nana Addo | <i>Rainbow radio online</i> | 24 August |
| We will insult the NPP twice if they insult the NDC once | <i>Ghanacebroity.com</i> | 26 August |
| We are ready for battle of insults, the NDC vice presidential candidates tell the NPP | <i>The lead.com</i> | 29 August |
| Violent clashes between aggressive supporters of NPP and NDC over vote transfer | <i>citifmonline</i> | 19 September |
| Kennedy Agyapong threatens to slap Ayariga | <i>Pulse news</i> | 28 September |
| Angry NDC youth destroy property of daily guide in Tamale office | <i>Ghana live</i> | 3 October |
| NDC and NPP violent clashes in Damango over vote transfer | <i>Ghana pulse</i> | 6 October |
| Dormaa-East DCEs bodyguard assaults NPP communicator | <i>Watch Ghana</i> | 17 October |
| Ayariga angrily insults EC boss | <i>Graphic online</i> | 10 October |
| District Assembly representative beaten for campaigning for Mahama | <i>Adom online</i> | 31 October |
| NDC thugs beat up 52-year-old man for NPP gestures | <i>YEN news</i> | 6 November |
| Mahama guards molest mourners | <i>Xlive Africa</i> | 8 November |
| 7 injured in NPP, NDC clashes in Wulensi | <i>Ghana web</i> | 17 November |
| 5 injured in NPP, NDC clash at Aso-kore | <i>Myjoyonline</i> | 20 November |

Ghana's democracy has been hailed by domestic and international observers as a model for sub-Saharan Africa, due to the peaceful power alternations with no record of high-intensity violence. Besides these undemocratic acts, the low-intensity violence (Bob-Milliar 2014) and abusive language in Ghanaian politics may escalate to mass disturbance if measures are not introduced to halt them.

'WARMING UP BEFORE THE MAIN EVENT': POLITICAL PARTIES, INTRA-PARTY POLITICS AND CAMPAIGNS

One noticeable feature of Ghanaian politics in the Fourth Republic has been the intra-party democratic pragmatism – issues concerned with decision-making, proper organisation, hierarchical political structure, the operationalisation of binding measures (constitutionalism) and other inherent principles that are not simply theory but are inherently pragmatic. Political parties are classically and theoretically conceived as *organisations*; in the ideal, or rational model, there is a collective orientation towards the attainment of a specific purpose; its ends are given or knowable and thus its central internal processes involve decision-making and its success or failure is judged by standards of effectiveness and efficiency. Its ideal form is conceived as an enterprise seeking to maximise profits or achieve a target rate of return on invested capital (Wilson 1995, p.10). Unlike pressure or interest groups, political parties seek to gain political power to steer the affairs of a country; thus, there should be effective presentation of candidates who would further the office-seeking agenda. Even though there are potential implications, the gate-keeping role of political parties in nominating candidates for political office remains one of the crucial and key functions of political parties (Daddieh & Bob-Milliar 2012).

Candidate selection methods throughout the Fourth Republic have altered several times. Ahead of the 1996 elections, both parties, the NPP and NDC, initiated a system of delegate-based primaries with small electorates. Parliamentary nominees were selected at a constituency congress by delegates representing each polling station-level party branch in various constituencies. In the NPP, the nominee was selected by approximately 100 primary voters, comprising the chairman of each branch, the party's constituency level executives and several other local dignitaries (Ichino & Nathan 2016). But when the NPP lost the 2008 elections, they drafted two reform proposals; the first saw an increase from 1 to 5, that is the number of branch-level leaders who would serve as delegates from each polling station. The second option also increased the size of the electorates by opening primaries to all rank and file party members (*ibid.*). There was a much larger electorate expansion in 2016 on the part of the NDC which greatly altered the dynamics of the party's primaries. A greater number of local elites sought

nominations, including more women and aspirants from outside the NDC core ethnic coalition, which increased the diversity of the party's eventual nominees. With this approach by the NDC, the NPP misjudged how large an electorate expansion was necessary to bring the electorates past the point where vote buying would be very difficult for wealthy aspirants (*ibid.*). Primary elections prior to the 2016 elections were scheduled in 2015, except for the NPP's presidential primary election which was held in 2014.

The NDC opened its nominations for parliamentary primaries between 10 August and 10 September 2015 for the elections at the end the year, on 7 November. The NPP however, had their intra-party elections earlier, on 13 June 2015. Prior to this, nominations were opened between 30 March and 10 April. One remarkable feature common to the primary elections of all the political parties was the reincorporation of an affirmative action policy, providing electoral contestation advantages to minority groups seen to have been discriminated against in the past and given less representation, with the aim of creating a more egalitarian platform. Both the NDC and the NPP made measures to implement this policy, as women, members with a disability and young aspirants (only in the NPP) had a rebate of 50% of the filing fee of 10 000 Ghana cedis (\$1 790). The NPP further championed affirmative action by reaching a consensus that the parliamentary positions held by 16 female MPs were to be contested by female candidates only. Even though this approach could have increased the number of women represented in decision-making, this parity and egalitarian restoration received opposition from the male counterparts. The Member of Parliament for Abirem constituency, Esther Obeng Dapaah,⁴ explained that most of the women who had lost in the primary elections were victims of the party's earlier pronouncements on an affirmative action policy. She further asserted that the female MPs lost their bid to contest for the 2016 parliamentary elections on the NPP ticket because their political opponents used their stance on the policy to campaign against them. She provided a concrete instance to reinforce her complaint, asserting that:

What caused us dearly was the affirmative action policy that became controversial. In my case for instance, my opponent told the delegates that I was the originator of the affirmative action policy and also the one who signed it because I am the NPP women caucus leader... when the law is made to stand, the 'Abirem' seat will be no-go area for any man. Most of the delegates are men and such pronouncements scared them. So, that is one of the major reasons why I lost my primaries.

(Pulse News 2015)

4 She was the chairperson of the minority women caucus in Parliament for the NPP when in opposition.

The primary elections saw incumbent casualties, where a number of senior representatives, the 'big men', in both the NDC and the NPP, were ousted by new aspirants. Within the NPP, 25 sitting MPs, six women and nineteen men lost their bids to stand for the 2016 elections. Notable among them were Dr. Richard Anane (Nhyiaeso), Francis Addai Nimo (Mampong), Isaac Osei (Subin), Elizabeth Agyemang (Oforikrom), Edward Enin (Obuasi East), Henry Kwabena Kokofu (Bantama) and Esther Obeng Dapaah (Abierm). The NDC also recorded 20 sitting MPs who lost their seats. These included E.T. Mensah (Ningo–Prampram), Joe Gidisu (Central Tongu), Alfred Agbeshie (Ashaiman) and Nii Amarmah Ashitey (Korle Klottey). This surprising feature triggered speculation that the 'fall of the mighties' would aggravate an already weakened legislature.⁵ On the other hand, these assertions of parliament's efficacy without these 'experienced legislators' were queried.⁶ The National Executive Council (NEC) of the NPP met on Wednesday 16 July 2014, and decided to hold its presidential primary elections on 18 October 2014. Seven NPP candidates filed nominations to contest the presidential elections. However, since article 12(5) of the NPP constitution stipulates that 'where there are more than five contestants for nominations as the party's presidential candidate, a special electoral college shall cast their votes by secret ballot for the first five contestants to be shortlisted', there was a need for a prior shortlist election ahead of the main event. Mr. Akuffo Addo, a 72-year-old lawyer and twice leader of the NPP, was opposed by his old political foe Alan Kwadwo Kyeremanten as well as Francis Addai Nimo, Dr. Kofi Konadu Apraku, Osei Ameyaw, Joe Ghartey and Stephen Asamoah Boateng. On 31 August 2014, the special delegate elections pruned down the number of flag bearer aspirants to five. While Mr. Stephen Asamoah, former information minister and Dr. Kofi Konadu Apraku, former trade minister dropped out of the race with 1.76% and 1.35% respectively, Mr. Akuffo Addo polled 589 votes out of 740 ballots (80.78%) of the five shortlisted aspirants (Myjoyonline 31 August 2014). Delegates in all 275 constituencies simultaneously cast their ballot on 18 October to elect one candidate from the shortlist to lead the party for the 2016 elections. Predictably, Mr. Akuffo Addo emerged victorious for the third time as he secured 117 413 votes, representing 94.3%. The percentage margin reinforced the fact that Mr. Akuffo Addo was by far the favourite candidate in the election results from the various constituencies. On 23 November 2015, erstwhile President John

5 Dr. Rasheed Dramani, executive director of the African Centre for Parliamentary Affairs, commented that the situation would affect the efficacy of parliament as more experienced legislators had lost their seats.

6 Dr. Amoako Baah, former head of the Department of History and Political Studies, KNUST, expressed the view that the exit of the 'big men' would have little or no effect on legislative development. He added that institutional memory could not be lost and that the advancement of such argument as premium would value experience over democracy.

Mahama was unchallenged in the NDC presidential primaries, but had to be endorsed according to the party's constitution. The results showed that 61 836 (4.9%) delegates voted against the retention of President Mahama as the party's candidate in the 2016 elections. On the other hand, 95% of the total vote endorsed John Mahama to lead the National Democratic Congress (NDC) (*Citifnonline* 23 November 2015). Comparative analysis of the primary elections revealed several dissenting views on the legitimacy of John Mahama's candidature and thus his bid to win the 2016 elections. This was due to the fact that, unlike Akuffo Addo who had contenders but managed to obtain 94.3%, John Mahama was unopposed with a similar percentage to Akuffo Addo. Some political watchers opined that with this percentage of rejection, the general elections in December would be a difficult task for the NDC. However, other experts asserted that the rejecting votes were negligible and thus had no bearing on the outcome of the 2016 elections.

Other political parties with presidential primaries and elected candidates for the 2016 elections include Ivor Kobina Green Street for the Convention People's Party (CPP), Nana Konadu Agyeman-Rawlings for the National Democratic Party (NDP), and Papa Kwesi Nduom for the Progressive People's Party.

CAMPAIGNING

The right to stand as a candidate is provided for and candidate qualification criteria for presidential and parliamentary elections are reasonable, with the notable exception of the nomination fees. On 8 September the EC announced a significant increase in the candidate deposit, with presidential candidates having to pay 50 000 GHC (\$8 969) and parliamentary candidates 10 000 GHC (\$1 793). This represented a fivefold and tenfold increase for presidential and parliamentary candidates respectively. Furthermore, for the vast majority of candidates it was practically non-refundable as the deposit was refunded only to those candidates who obtained at least 25% of the votes in the presidential and 12.5% in the parliamentary elections. Except for NDC, almost all political parties condemned the EC for setting such high nomination fees, although the NPP was cautious in its criticism (EUEOM 2016, p.16).

Since the 1992 Constitution advocates for a system of political plurality, several political parties provided the intent to file their nomination and contest in the 2016 presidential elections. Yet, the presidential ambitions of about 13 candidates were dashed as the EC rejected their nominations. The reasons for these disqualifications were summed up in an 18-page statement given by the Electoral Commission. Initially, only four presidential candidates successfully passed the Commission's vigorous checks, but later three more were added after an appeal to seek redress for their disqualifications. Finally, seven presidential

candidates as they appeared on the ballot sheet (see Figure 2) – Ivor Kobina Green Street (CPP), Nana Konadu Agyeman-Rawlings (NDP), John Mahama (NDC), Papa Kwesi Nduom (PPP), Nana Akuffo Addo (NPP), Edward Mahama (PNC) and Jacob Osei Yeboah, independent candidate, were accepted as qualified to contest the 2016 elections. The effect and relevance of position on the ballot sheet on voter's choice and decision have been argued elsewhere in the literature (Bagley 1965). In Ghana, the framing position of the ballot sheet is of great concern to candidates and political parties.⁷ The erstwhile governing NDC picked the coveted third position while the NPP also picked the fifth position just as it did on the parliamentary ballot paper for the December polls. Interestingly, an Islamic numerologist and philosopher commented on the NPP candidate's position on the ballot paper and its significance towards the December polls (*Ghanaweb* 18 November 2016).

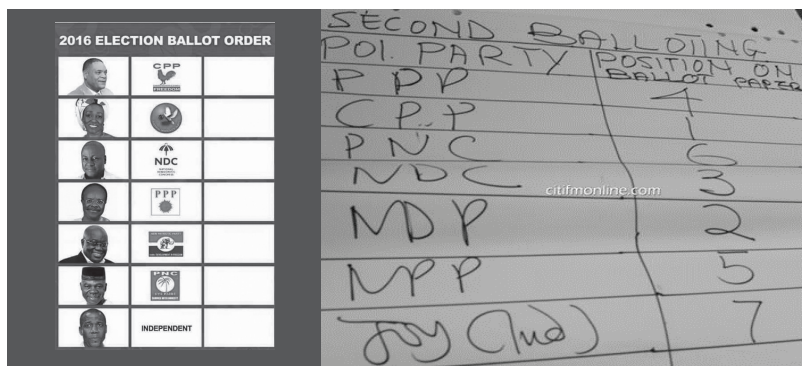


Figure 2: Candidates' positions on the ballot sheet

Since the campaign period in Ghana's electoral politics is not bound by a specific legal framework, election campaigns began even before the close of candidate nominations for the 2016 elections. The political stakes were high and thus throughout the country fear proliferated; there were low intensity clashes as discussed previously, but these did not escalate into large-scale violence. The campaign environment was lively and vigorous. Presidential candidates conducted multiple tours around the country during the lengthy campaign, with a high number of large rallies and town hall meetings. Parliamentary candidates conducted largely smaller-scale activities, including door-to-door campaigning and small neighbourhood meetings. Candidates used advertisements on radio, and posters, party flags and billboards (EUEOM 2016, p.18). Social media was

⁷ In the 2000 elections, JA Kufuor took the last position on the list, which was interpreted as *Ase3 h*, and thus informed voters to look for the last candidate on the ballot sheet.

another avenue used by presidential candidates to campaign and thus mobilise votes. The 2016 election appeared more issue-based than previous polls, though there were manifestations of clientelist appeals (vote buying), as will be shown.

In August and September 2016, the NDC launched its campaign consecutively in two of Ghana's electoral swing regions, Cape Coast in the Central Region and Sunyani in the Brong Ahafo Region respectively. The campaign launch aimed at appealing to Ghanaians and also served as an avenue to market the attributes of John Dramani Mahama's theme, 'Changing Lives and Transforming Ghana'. The 78-page manifesto highlighted the achievements of the NDC, which campaigned under the slogan 'Continuity in change and progressive change' (NDC 2016). This was because the campaign was to remind Ghanaians of the NDC's achievements, and thus urged Ghanaians to compare the record of the NDC in office vis-à-vis that of the other parties, especially the NPP. As a result, there was an appeal to renew the mandate under the NDC slogan 'JM Toaso', meaning the continuity and renewal of the erstwhile president JM, John Mahama.

The NPP on the other hand campaigned while the NDC governed – their campaign began right after the 2012 election petition and thus it had its full campaign machine assembled more than a year before the general elections (Bob-Milliar & Paller 2018). The NPP delayed launching its manifesto, primarily to avoid other political parties, in particular the NDC, from plagiarising its policies. The NPP campaigned under the theme: 'Change: creating prosperity & equal opportunity for all' (NPP 2016). It campaigned against the NDC which it accused of being a corrupt government with legacies of stalling the development of the economy through poor education, health and socio-economic policies, and the mismanagement of state funds. The preamble note of Nana Akuffo Addo in the NPP manifesto states that:

Our nation is in crisis: a crisis created and sustained by the mismanagement, incompetence and corruption of the Mahama-led National Democratic Congress (NDC) government. Economic conditions are worsening by the day and there is so much suffering in the land. But Ghana does not have to be like this. Ghana deserves the best! I have dedicated my life to public service to change Ghana for good. As President, with the help of the Almighty God, I will be committed to a different kind of government, one that governs in the national interest, not for private gain. (NPP 2016: V)

The manifesto proposed a radical transformation of the national economy, with job creation at the top of its agenda. Its flagship policy of 'one dam, one village' and 'one district, one factory' promised to improve agricultural production in

the northern savannah and to give jobs to unemployed youth (Bob-Milliar & Paller 2018, p. 20).

CHIEFS, PARTISANSHIP AND THE 2016 ELECTION

The 2016 election campaign also revealed the breach of a constitutional provision which specifically prohibits chiefs from engaging in partisan politics (1992 Constitution [article 276]). Some chiefs endorsed political parties, preferably presidential candidates. The 2016 election recorded possibly the highest number ever of endorsements from chiefs across the country. Over 50 chiefs in Atwima Kwanwoma (Ashanti Region) declared their support for New Patriotic Party (NPP) presidential candidate Nana Akufo Addo, ahead of the December polls. According to the chiefs, Nana Akufo Addo and the NPP remained the country's best option for good governance, hence their decision to endorse him. Speaking on behalf of the chiefs, Otumfuo 'Mpaboahene', Nana Yaw Owusu further indicated that Nana Addo would spearhead Ghana's development when voted into power. He said:

This is your family, we are always with you. In good times or in bad times, we support you. We always remember you in our prayers. When we pour libation, we remember you because you are one of us. Let us all here vote for him and the NPP because he will deliver on his promises. We know him, it is our own Nana. Like we do every four years, let's vote for him.

(*Citifmonline* 20 October 2016)

From the Upper East Region, the Chief of Bawku, Naba Asigiri Azoka Abugrago II, told Nana Akufo-Addo when he visited as part of his campaign tour: 'This is the proper endorsement I want to make. God willing this year, you will get what you want and become the President of Ghana' (*Graphic online* 2016). The Paramount Chief of the Tumu Traditional Area, Kuoro Richard Babini Kanton VI, endorsed the 'One-District-one-Factory' and the 'One-Village-one-Dam' policies of the 2016 presidential candidate of the NPP, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo (*Citifmonline* 20 October 2016).

Chiefs in the Northern Region also endorsed President Mahama's bid for the 2016 election. Affirming their support, the President of the Northern Regional House of Chiefs, Nayire Naa Bohugu Mahami Abdulai, prayed for the president to retain the seat (*Citifmonline* 17 November 2015). 'We passionately pray that almighty God and our ancestral skins will support and back you to achieve your desired aim of continuing to be the president of the Republic of Ghana come 2016.' Some chiefs openly expressed their support and even promised the erstwhile president and the NDC 50 % votes in the eastern region and also 80% votes in the Brong

Ahafo. The paramount chief of Offinso in the Ashanti region, Nana Wiafe Akenten III, called on his fellow chiefs and subjects to support John Dramani Mahama in his bid to retain the presidential seat for a second term. He stated that:

For me, I know God who has kept you until now will be with you. All I am requesting from my brothers is that, by any means we can, we should support him [Mahama] to continue his good works. I am asking you to do this wholeheartedly to support him to finish the works God has tasked him to do.

(*Ghanaweb* 8 November 2016)

These positions present a worrying trend since they indicate a negative appearance for Ghana's constitutional democracy; however, there were several condemnations of these partisan views. Even though civil society organisations and the Otumfour Osei Tutu had previously cautioned chiefs to acknowledge the Constitution and thus abstain from political statements ahead of the 2016 elections, their appeal fell on deaf ears (*The New Crusading Guide* 2016).

Elements of election irregularities such as clientelist tendencies (vote buying, treating) were found by civil society organisations. A survey conducted by the CDD showed that 51% and 32% of Ghanaians believed that both the NDC and NPP were found guilty of such occurrences respectively (CDD, 2016). For example, in CODEO's pre-election environment observation statement, they found that both the NDC and NPP parliamentary candidates were seen giving money to people and some women's groups in communities in the Tolon Constituency of the Northern Region. On 14 October 2016, an aspiring MP in Sefwi Akontobra gave money to the parents of some senior high school (SHS) students and university students to settle their school fees (CODEO 2016, p.3). The NDC organised a political rally in Jirapa on 17 Sunday July 2016 for their parliamentary candidate, Francis Dakurah. He distributed ten new motor bikes to party officials, and was also captured on camera distributing two Ghana Cedi bills to the crowd (*GII Report* 2016, p. 4). On 16 August 2016, outboard motors and pans were distributed to fishermen in Sekondi by the NDC during their four-day campaign tour of the Western Region (*ibid.*, p. 6). Also, Rebecca Akuffo Addo, wife of Akuffo Addo, together with officials of the NPP, donated a number of items and an undisclosed amount of cash to the chief and people of Lantze Dzan at Ga Mashie in Accra ahead of the 7 December polls (*Graphic Online* 2016).

Both parties condemned the findings of civil society regarding vote buying, and stated that those acts were not intended to buy votes. However, within the literature it is the timing that makes such deeds an antithesis to democratic practice. That political parties wait days, weeks and months until elections before dispensing such material incentives to voters indicates a clientelist approach.

Ethnic appeals and politicisation were minimised as the civil debate of policy issues took precedence at the macro-level of politics in the 2016 election.

CONCLUSION

Ghana's elections during the Fourth Republic have been devoid of violent conflict, and this outcome and its aftermath have made the country a model worth emulating in Africa. Passing Huntington's two turnover tests (Huntington 1993, p. 267), and with the democratisation of elections (Lindberg 2006), Ghana's democracy has supposedly consolidated. In the 2016 elections Ghana increased its credentials as a beacon of democratic freedom and political excellence. Yet, there are some contending issues and undercurrents relevant to Ghana's electoral democracy. This study has identified some ineffectiveness and weakness in the functioning of the Electoral Commission in terms of election governance. There are issues with the voters' register which was deemed bloated as it contained names of deceased, minors and, surprisingly, non-Ghanaians. In addition, lack of trust in the EC stems from several factors, including the appointment of the EC chairperson and deputies by the president, which problematises the neutrality of the Commission. Many concerns have been raised over political affiliation, that is the EC being easily influenced by incumbent governments (political parties) to work towards the latter's victory in elections. Much as light has been thrown on this worrying trend in the main body of this paper, concerns with the EC and its internal workings remain critical, as they pose a threat to Ghana's democracy. More importantly for the future, the voters' register should be cleaned and if possible, a new one should be provided.

This work has also identified some internal party conflicts and unconventional aggression taking place before the 2016 election. Political party primary elections were peaceful, but there were conflicts within some parties. Though affirmative action was a step in the right direction, it had its own controversies and as a result could not be implemented as intended. With regard to the campaign, one laudable feature was the appeals made by political parties at the macro level. The campaign saw well-articulated issues that captured the main concerns of the ordinary Ghanaian, and provided many policy options for the electorate. However, other matters breached constitutional provisions and electoral regulations. Although chiefs have relevant roles to play in political development (Bob-Milliar 2009; Crook 2005; Knierzinger 2011), the external manifestation of their political affiliation has been restricted by the 1992 Constitution. The 2016 election saw chiefs endorse presidential candidates, particularly from the two main parties. This kind of development threatens the stability of Ghana's constitutional democracy, widens the social divisions already established by partisan politics, and has negative implications for national development.

Finally, although political parties condemned acts of indulgence in vote buying, civil society exposed such acts with substantial evidence. Going forward, such undercurrent developments should be given attention and thus dealt with to prevent them from accumulating and threatening Ghana's consolidated electoral democracy.

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