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Ghana's 2012 Elections

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GHANA DEFIES THE ODDS YET AGAIN
The December 2012 Elections in Perspective

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On 7 December 2012 Ghanaians came out en masse to elect a new president and
members of Parliament, representing the country's 275 electoral constituencies.
Of the 23 registered political parties only seven fielded presidential candidates.
The candidates were Nana Dankwa Akufo-Addo, of the main opposition party,
the New Patriotic Party (NPP); John Dramani Mahama of the National Democratic
Congress (NDC); Michael Abu Sakara Foster of the Convention People's Party
(CPP); Hassan Azariga of the People's National Convention (PNC); Papa Kwesi
Nduom of the Progressive People's Party (PPP); Akwasi Addai Odike of the United
Front Party (UFP) and Henry Herbert Lartey of the Great Consolidated Popular
Party (GCPP). Jacob Osei Yeboah ran as an independent candidate, making a total
of eight presidential candidates.

Mahama, the incumbent, was declared the winner, with 5 574 761 (50.7%)
against Akufo-Addo's 5 248 898 (47.74%).

Although the elections generally went well and peacefully, as attested by
reports of domestic and international election monitoring groups (Commonwealth
Observer Group 2013; Coalition of Domestic Election Observers – CODEO 2012a,
2012b), they were not without some monumental challenges, most notably the
malfunctioning of electronic voting machines on polling day. In some other
climes, particularly in many African countries, such a technical problem could
have scuttled the electoral process and rendered the entire exercise a charade.

Another fundamental challenge relates to the fact that the elections were the first to be conducted under the new political economy of oil in Ghana. The discovery of oil has elicited both positive and negative responses, drawing on comparative experiences of what has come to be known as the 'resource curse' (Obeng-Odoom 2012; Gary 2011). The presence of oil automatically raised the electoral stakes, becoming the central theme of the campaigns of the two leading parties, the NDC and NPP, validating the question of whether oil will build or break the back of Ghana's democracy (Harvey 2010). The centrality of oil in the electoral contests only underscores the submission that

> [n]ow that oil has come to the forefront of the political economy, it remains to be seen how the struggle for oil revenue among competing groups/party traditions will begin to shape and reshape the democratisation process in Ghana. If not well managed, the discovery of oil may alter the equilibrium and stability of democratisation in Ghana.
>
> Omotola 2012, p 163

Serious disagreements over the boundary delimitation process, during which the Electoral Commission of Ghana (ECG) created 45 new constituencies, bringing the total number of members of Parliament to 275, also contributed to the heightening of pre-election tensions. These and related issues had caused some concern about the prospects of the ECG maintaining its impressive record. The odds were grossly stacked against the 2012 elections, threatening to end Ghana's reputation as a maturing and consolidating democracy.

But, in a sudden twist of events, the electoral process became another important milestone, betraying all prophets of doom who had anticipated that the elections would end in fiasco. The peaceful conduct of the 2012 elections will better be appreciated against the background of the foregoing crucial factors that shaped the elections in no small measure.

Ghana defied the odds again! The elections generally went well, in an atmosphere of peace and tranquillity.

Despite controversies over the outcome of the elections, including litigation over the result of the presidential election, the main political actors, particularly the ruling party and the leading opposition party, pursued their cases within legally permissible limits, without undue recourse to violence. The outcome of the litigation, which many had anticipated might generate violence, irrespective of who emerged the winner, also passed without much ado. The opposition, which lost its application, accepted the verdict in good spirit and urged its supporters to eschew violence.

Notable landmarks of the election process included the ability of the ECG to forge a consensus among all the players through the Inter-Party Advisory Committee (IPAC). This was particularly the case at the crucial moment of heightened tensions over the technical problems relating to the electronic voting machine. The resultant collective decision to extend the voting period in affected areas to ensure that eligible voters were not disenfranchised was the magic wand that helped mitigate a possible legitimacy crisis.

The speed with which the ECG processed and released the election results was also commendable. Anything short of that might have been catastrophic, serving as an open invitation to mutual suspicion and chaos, including the questioning of the validity of the results and the overall integrity of the elections.

The ability of the incumbent president, John Dramani Mahama, to put up an impressive showing in a hugely competitive and largely legitimate election, without recourse to the use of violence, stands out and may not be unconnected with the gains of electoral and party institutionalisation. Mahama had been in office for barely five months, having been sworn in on 24 July 2012 after the sudden death of then President John Atta-Mills.

These feats may not entirely surprise keen observers of the Ghanaian democratisation process during the Fourth Republic, during which the quality of electoral administration in the country has become a regional model and the cynosure of the international democracy aid industry. The height of this noble attainment would appear to be the peaceful alternation of power between the NDC and the NPP, as seen in 2000 and 2008 (Omotola 2010a, 2012; Whitfield 2009).

What is it about the electoral process in Ghana that makes it the bedrock of the democratisation process? In particular, what factors and issues underlay the relatively effective administration and democratic quality of the 2012 elections? What does the successful conduct of these elections mean to Ghana, Africa and the world at large? Are there lessons for troubled African democracies with respect to effective electoral governance?

These are the questions the articles in this special issue of the *Journal of African Elections* seek to examine critically, with a view to providing some refreshing insights. The primary objective is to illustrate how this remarkable electoral feat was accomplished, underscoring the high and low points of the process. The issue also seeks to tease out possible lessons for other emerging and consolidating democracies in Africa and beyond.

Despite the advances there is still room for improvement. The leading opposition party seriously challenged the validity of the results and instituted litigation in the Supreme Court. Whereas this development could be seen as a sad reminder of the popular view that African power seekers hardly ever accept or concede defeat, the recourse to court action and not to violence is commendable.

Despite palpable tensions over the likely outcome and the violence-generating tendencies among Ghanaians, associated with the legal tussle, the eventual outcome, with the court upholding the victory of Mahama's NDC, coupled with the peaceful manner in which both the NDC and NPP accepted and reacted to the outcome, helped release the tensions.

The civil society forum also contributed to the peaceful outcome of the litigation by working assiduously, championing the cause of a non-violent response to the outcome of the election petition, irrespective of where the judicial pendulum might swing. To complement the sensitisation and mobilisation of civil society the two parties also socialised and mobilised their supporters about the need to eschew violence and accept the judgement.

Moving forward, it is important for all political actors to join hands to ensure that Ghana's democratisation process does not go the Nigerian way, particularly now that oil has become a major feature of the political economy. This is achievable provided oil proceeds are used judiciously to improve the standard of living and general wellbeing of the average Ghanaian.

For other African democracies the overall lesson is that there is nothing that intrinsically prohibits effective electoral governance and the deepening of democracy in Africa. All that is needed is appropriate institutional design, effective leadership and a democratic attitude and behaviour among all the players. A totally independent election management body that is not subject to 'the control or direction of any other authority' and a functional mechanism for inter-party relations, such as Ghana's IPAC, are a good starting point. These and related issues engage the scholarly attention of contributors to this special edition.

OVERVIEW OF THE ARTICLES

In addressing these crucial concerns this issue starts with an insightfully masterful piece written by by E Remi Aiyede, Idris Erameh and Tosin Orimolade, which engages critically the institutional premise of the elections, including both the constitutional and non-constitutional rules about electoral governance. The article focuses specifically on such issues as electoral management, delimitation of constituencies and assembly size, the electoral system, voting procedure and ballot structure and the party system.

Noting the apparently weak start to the democratisation process in 1992, given that the transition process was not only guided by the military regime of Jerry Rawlings but also witnessed the transformation of Rawlings from military dictator to civilian ruler, the article also stresses how the parliamentary election of 1992 was largely boycotted by opposition parties, resulting in a low voter turnout of 26%.

However, no sooner had the process started than it began to transform positively. The elections of 1996, 2000, 2004 and 2008 were not only peaceful, they were largely competitive, participatory and legitimate, with the results broadly accepted by both the ruling and opposition parties. Ghana enjoyed relative political stability, with alternations of parties in government, as a result of which it has been touted as an emerging political success story and an example for other African countries. The democratic success of Ghana has been attributed to the character of its democratic institutions, especially its electoral commission and party system (Omotola 2012).

Aiyede, Erameh & Orimolode note with concern, however, the contestation of the 2012 election results by the NPP. Although the Supreme Court upheld the ECG's decision, the judges observed that revelations during the hearing of the petition raised some disquiet about the abilities of the ECG and the integrity of Ghana's electoral institutions. It is against this background that they undertake a critical intellectual engagement with the institutional foundations of the 2012 elections.

This is important because, as they claim, 'several institutional changes occurred in the Ghanaian system in the build-up to the election. There were also changes in the general political economy of the country that has rendered access to public office particularly attractive.'

Overall, the authors demonstrate how these electoral institutions were implicated in the challenges of Ghana's electoral process during the 2012 elections, providing insights into how to overcome them.

Despite these challenges they submit, quite persuasively, that the 2012 elections constituted an important step in democratic consolidation in Ghana and not only because of their peaceful nature. More importantly, they argue that the resort to due process and the patent transparency with which the petition brought to the Supreme Court by the NPP was prosecuted demonstrated the gradual entrenchment of democratic values in Ghana.

Better still, the controversial nature of the elections, they contend, 'provides Ghana with an opportunity to assess the strength of its institutions and to confirm that the country is gradually developing a culture of routine political transition'.

The institutional analysis of the elections continues in J Shola Omotola's interrogation of the role of the Electoral Commission of Ghana in the administration of the 2012 elections. He argues that the administrative and financial autonomy of the ECG, assured not only by statutory provisions but also by years of continuity and stability, good leadership and experience, is central to the enhancement of the professional competence and overall ability of the ECG to promote democratisation by election. As he puts it, Ghana's 'electoral and democratic success stories have been largely associated with the autonomy-

enhancing institutional design and leadership of the ECG, which were engendered by some degree of public confidence and trust in the institution'.

Drawing on the quality of the 2012 elections, measured by the level of participation, competitiveness and legitimacy, as well as by the actions and inactions of the ECG at critical stages in the electoral cycle, Omotola posits that the elections reflected an ominous twist in the hitherto sacrosanct nature of democratic legitimacy in Ghana. While the ECG could be judged to have done well, especially on the first two indicators, given the high level of voter turnout (80.15%) and the closeness of the total votes and seats won by the ruling NDC and main opposition, the NPP, the legitimacy of the election was fiercely challenged with the opposition's rejection of the results and attendant litigation. Although the court upheld the result, two of the nine members of the bench saw enough problems to dissent.

The legitimacy problem, according to Omotola, may have been accentuated by a number of factors. These include the new political economy of oil and the strong desire of leading parties to access and control the oil windfall, the messy application of the biometric voter verification system as a result of the malfunctioning of the equipment and the controversy generated by the delimitation of 45 new constituencies in a manner interpreted by opposition parties as gerrymandering.

Omotola concludes that 'it seems these are not heady days for Ghana's democracy. Rising levels of adversarial elite behaviour not only pose serious democratic threats, they raise questions about the depth of the much touted institutional foundations of Ghana's democracy.' With the impending retirement of the chairman of the ECG, who has largely been credited with the success of the organisation, Omotola believes only time will tell how the new leadership (and the discovery of oil) will shape the future of the politics of Ghana.

Whereas the first two papers focus on the formal institutions of democracy by election, Richard Asante's useful contribution emphasises the importance of informal institutions in explaining variations in electoral outcomes. In so doing Asante focuses on IPAC, which was formed primarily to serve as a channel of information to enable the commission, the parties and donors to discuss all aspects of the programme and activities of the commission; ensure that parties and donors contribute to the management of the electoral process and at the same time discuss their concerns and facilitate regional, district and constituency-level IPAC meetings.

The central argument of the article is that quasi-public entities or informal institutions play critical countervailing roles in the making of peaceful and credible elections, particularly in a competitive multiparty democratic system characterised by strong ethnic and regional mobilisation for votes and where the

stakes are extremely high and the agency responsible for conducting elections is generally perceived as partisan.

In such political systems, Asante argues, the presence of functional and effective informal institutions can help mitigate the potential for excessive partisanship, ethnic and political polarisation and conflicts and ultimately avoid democratic breakdown and national disintegration.

Whereas successful and pragmatic interventions in the 1996, 2000, 2004 and 2008 elections earned IPAC recognition and acceptance both domestically and internationally as a major instrument for inter-party dialogue, confidence-building, moderating political behaviour, actions and activities and promoting political stability, the committee was unable to perform a similar role in the 2012 elections.

This failure, according to Asante, was due to the shocking decision of the ECG to sideline IPAC in decisions about major electoral reforms. The implication of the neglect, as Asante points out, was that inter-party disagreements and other electoral matters that would have been addressed and resolved harmoniously in IPAC were allowed to play out in the media and the courts. Asante, therefore, advocates electoral reforms that will strengthen IPAC to enable it to perform its democratic and election-related functions.

It is often said that one of the fundamental problems of African democracies, or, rather, of political parties, is their weak, if not absent, ideological foundations (Omotola 2009; 2010c), yet little or no attention has been paid to the ideological premises of democratisation in many African countries. It is this gap that Franklin Obeng-Odoom attempts to fill in his important contribution.

Drawing insights from Giovanni Arrighi's theory of ideology, as spelt out in *The Long Twentieth Century*, Obeng-Odoom explores ideological orientations in the 2012 elections, illustrating them with examples from the speeches, manifestos and press releases of the main political parties. On the basis of empirical evidence Obeng-Odoom argues that 'in the 2012 elections, Ghanaian political parties espoused three archetypical ideologies, namely, social democracy, property-owning democracy and socialism of the Nkrumahist type; and political campaigns were largely organised around these belief systems'.

However, as the article further contends, 'beyond asserting difference, the substantive position of the dominant parties is one of common economic liberalism rather than multiple ideologies. So, while rhetorically and superficially the parties asserted their differences, substantially and substantively it was aspirations rather than ascription that were the common unifying logic of the two major political parties in the country.'

For Obeng-Odoom this finding has both positive and disturbing implications. On the positive side, since most political actors subscribe substantively to the

same ideology, political inclusiveness is more feasible. But, on the other hand, this assessment shows a further shift to the right in Ghana's political economy, with implications for continuing, if not intensified, social differentiation. The reason is that

> as an ideology that prioritises profits over human needs, neoliberalism in Ghana is locking the vast majority of the poor into a whirling vicious cycle. There is likely to be more prosperity, but this will typically be in the air and be grasped only by economic giants. For economic dwarfs, it is tough, if not impossible, to capture the fruits of prosperity. So, the 2012 elections and the neoliberal ideology it entrenches make it tough to attain inclusive prosperity, in spite of the numerous claims that this form of progress can be attain.

Although Obeng-Odoom identifies an alternative to economic liberalism among the smaller parties, he argues that 'continuing internal discord, rancour, and acrimony, together with external forces, eclipse the possibility that they will capture power any time soon'.

This conclusion is instructive, given the long-standing belief that Ghanaian politics has always been structured along two-party lines, namely, 'the socialist Nkrumahism and the more liberal market-based Danquah-Busiaism' (Ohman 2002, p 7; Omotola 2012, p 137). Although, some have questioned the contemporary relevance of this political distinction, one indisputable point is the fact that the NPP is a clear descendant of the Danquah-Busiaist tradition, while the ideology of the NDC has been seen as an admixture of Nkrumahist socialism, a relatively newfound belief in market solutions and the populism of Jerry Rawlings (Ohman 2002, p 7). By reducing political competition to two distinctly defined options, what Amponsah (2005, p 288) has called the 'incipient two-party tradition in Ghana', these political traditions tend to simplify the crucial issue of party affiliation and electoral choices.

In their important contribution focusing on the youth and party manifestos Ransford Gyampo and Emmanuel Debrah use party manifestos to explore the determinants of the voting behaviour of Ghana's youth in the 2012 elections. The focus on the youth is as important as that on the manifestos because, as they demonstrate, Ghana's youth not only constitute a sizeable proportion of the population, they also form a significant percentage of the voting population under the Fourth Republic.

Also important is the fact that 'whereas studies on explanations of electoral outcomes in Ghana abound, there is little on the contributions of party manifestos in shaping the youth's voting behaviour'. Manifestos have, therefore, been a

missing link in attempts to explain the political behaviour of young people, especially from an empirical perspective.

The study draws on primary data collected from 15 December 2012 to 21 January 2013 through face-to-face interviews conducted with 200 respondents, 80 of whom were women. The interviewees were drawn from the youth and officials of the NDC and NPP, non-partisan civil society groups in charge of youth advocacy and development and academics chosen from Accra and Tamale to satisfy geopolitical complexion and reflect the spread of the youth across the two-party divide. The conclusions were that, contrary to established wisdom, which tends to qualify African voters as clientelist/ethnic, particularly in Ghana (Lindberg & Morrison 2009), the youth were actually influenced by rational choice and especially by party manifestos.

This finding is particularly instructive, given the fact that both the NDC and the NPP received the bulk of their votes from their traditional strongholds. This development, according to Gyampo & Debrah, was attributable to the jettisoning of what they called 'gutter politics', defined as 'a kind of politicking that focuses on mudslinging, vituperation, personal attacks and character assassination', and its replacement with issue-based politics. The transition from gutter politics to issue-based politics was not unconnected with the intervention of civil society organisations such as the Institute of Economic Affairs.

In their contribution, Charles Nyuykonge and Keitumetse Letsoalo examine the role of the new political economy of oil in the presidential election. This is an important issue when viewed against the background of the experiences of other African countries which have fallen victim to the 'resource curse'. If oil revenues are to bring about economic transformation and benefits for the citizens of Ghana, the resources, and the proceeds from them, must be managed prudently. If this is not the case, the oil boom, Nyuykonge & Letsoalo argue, may prove to be a challenge rather than a boon to Ghana's democratic development.

The preliminary signs, they argue, are not very promising. The Jubilee Field, as the oil field is called, raised the stakes in the 2012 presidential election to such an extent that the manifestos and election campaigns of both the NDC and the NPP were largely built on what to do and/or not to do with oil revenues. It is against this backdrop that Nyuykonge and Letsoalo posit that the possibility of Ghana suffering from the 'resource curse' cannot easily be dismissed. The authors, therefore, warn that unless 'visible and apolitical accountable structures are institutionalised to manage the oil and its revenues, multinational lobbyists could fuel post-election political tensions in subsequent elections by funding different parties' pursuit of power, thus accelerating an end to Ghana's long-celebrated democratic stability'.

In the final article Festus Aubyn and Mustapha Abdallah examine the role of the National Election Security Task Force (NESTF) in the 2012 elections. They

begin by tracing the history of electoral politics in Ghana's Fourth Republic since 1992, emphasising significant developments and security challenges. The article also discusses the structure, composition, powers and the functions of the NESTF before delving into a critical evaluation of its performance in all three phases of the electoral cycle. In doing so, the authors not only highlight the responses of the NESTF to security challenges and threats in the electoral cycle, but also identify emerging security issues that require urgent policy reforms.

Drawing on survey data derived from face-to-face interviews and participant observations, the article notes that all three phases of the elections were marked by extreme violence. This was due, in part, to the challenges posed by the novelty of the biometric voter registration and verification system. However, the positive intervention of the NESTF helped moderate and avert possible conflict after the declaration of results. The authors believe that in subsequent elections the security forces should be seen to be neutral and government should also ensure adequate provision of logistics, transport and communications devices to ensure free, fair and violence-free elections.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

The articles in this special issue raise a number of fundamental issues that transcend the immediate concerns and challenges of the 2012 elections to include the future of democratisation by election in Ghana. This is important because, as the extant body of knowledge has demonstrated, the beauty and success story of Ghana's democratisation has most often been predicated not only upon its institutional design but also on the workability of the institutions, as well as the congruent political behaviour of key political actors, including the formal and informal, the high and the low.

But, as these articles show, the validity of some of the claims about the institutionalisation of elections and election-related institutions were heavily challenged in a number of ways. First, there were tensions associated with the pre-election phase, most notably controversy over the delimitation of new constituencies and the new voter register; second were the challenges confronted on election day, particularly technical hitches in the application of the biometric voting system, which necessitated the addition of a second day of voting, and third were the challenges posed by the rejection of the results of the presidential election and subsequent litigation by the NPP, questioning the legitimacy and integrity of the whole electoral process. There were also the issues of the centrality of the role of oil to the election campaigns of both the NDC and the NPP, as well as some security concerns.

As influential as these issues could be, especially in interpreting the quality

of the electoral process and outcomes, one inevitable conclusion drawn from the articles is that the problems were not serious enough to compromise the integrity of the whole process. Rather, they should be seen as a crucial test of the institutional strength of Ghana's democracy. The resort to litigation instead of violence and the acceptance by the NPP of the Supreme Court judgement are positive signs that, contrary to expectations, Ghana's democratic institutions may have emerged strengthened from the judicial process. There is, however, a need for the civil society forum to intensify its socialisation programmes about the need to eschew violence.

The main lesson of the 2012 elections, therefore, is the opportunity they offer Ghanaians to re-examine critically the institutional foundations of the country's democracy. Sustainable reform measures that address such institutions in an apolitical manner are desirable.

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THE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK OF THE 2012 ELECTIONS IN GHANA
Consolidating or Reversing Democratic Achievement?

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ABSTRACT

The 2012 elections were peaceful, but the results were contested by the New Patriotic Party in a petition brought to the Supreme Court challenging the National Democratic Congress and the Electoral Commission of Ghana. Revelations during the hearing of the petition raised some disquiet about the abilities of the ECG and the integrity of Ghana's electoral institutions. The fallout from the 2012 elections demands a critical intellectual engagement with the institutional foundation of the elections. There were several institutional changes in the Ghanaian system in the build-up to the elections as well as changes in the general political economy of the country that have made access to public office particularly attractive. This article reviews the institutional context of the elections and examines the constitutional and non-constitutional rules relating to electoral governance, focusing on such issues as electoral management, delimitation of constituencies and assembly size, electoral formula, voting procedure and ballot structure and the party system. It demonstrates how these institutions were implicated in the challenges relating to the electoral process during the 2012 elections, providing insights into how to overcome them.

INTRODUCTION

Ghana's transition to democratic rule in 1992 held little promise because the transition process, which was guided by the military regime of Jerry Rawlings, saw the transformation of Rawlings from military dictator to civilian ruler. He not only appointed the members of the Interim National Electoral Commission (INEC) that administered the elections but also supervised the writing of the Constitution that was to govern the Fourth Republic. Furthermore, the parliamentary election of 1992 was largely boycotted by opposition parties and the voter turnout was 26%.

However, contrary to expectations, the elections of 1996, 2000, 2004 and 2008 were not only peaceful, the results were broadly accepted by both ruling and opposition parties. Ghana, which has, since the restoration of multiparty democracy in 1992, enjoyed relative political stability, with alternations of parties in government, has not only been touted as an emerging political success for other African countries, the success has been attributed to the character of its democratic institutions, especially its electoral commission and party system (Omotola 2012).

The December 2012 elections, the sixth since the restoration of multiparty democracy, constituted a major step in the march towards the consolidation of democracy in the country. They took place within the context of increasing popular demands for better living standards, especially with the enhanced government revenue derived from the discovery of oil, and intensifying competition between the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP), Ghana's two major parties.

The 2008 elections were decided in a run-off, which the late John Atta Mills won by a narrow margin of 0.46%. They also took place in a changing institutional context. A major review of the 1992 Constitution had reached an advanced stage, although the process had not been concluded before the election. Indeed, certain consensus over the electoral process inspired some of the decisions and regulations that guided the 2012 elections.

In addition, the Electoral Commission of Ghana (ECG), which had been central to the country's democratic stability since 1992, introduced several innovations into the electoral process. An important aspect of these innovations was the introduction of a biometric voter registration and verification method. Thus Ghana went into the 2012 elections with a new voters' roll and the turnout was a remarkable 79.43%. Important, too, is the creation of 45 new constituencies 90 days before the elections, increasing the number of parliamentary seats from 230 to 275.

The elections, which were declared free and fair by both local and international observers, were conducted without any major outbreak of violence. However,

despite the accolades enjoyed by the country over the 'credibility' of the polls, the NPP raised doubts about the integrity of the elections, alleging irregularities, malpractice and collusion between the incumbent government and the ECG.

In a petition filed on 28 December 2012 before the Supreme Court of Ghana, Nana Dankwa Akufo-Addo, presidential candidate; Mahamudu Bawumia, his running mate and Jake Obetsebi-Lamptey, chairman of the NPP, asked the court to declare that John Dramani Mahama was not validly elected president. They claimed that in 11 916 (nearly 46%) of the 26 002 polling stations the elections were marred by gross and widespread irregularities, infractions and violations of electoral rules, which fundamentally undermined the integrity of the elections.

In a judgement handed down on 29 August 2013 the Supreme Court upheld the results.

This legal challenge was the first of its kind in the electoral history of Ghana. It is also noteworthy that this was the first time since the 1992 elections that a majority of the political parties (five of seven) that participated in the elections publicly rejected the outcome on the basis of widespread irregularities and malpractices.

This turn of events may be ascribed to several factors, including the usual claim by the losers of elections in Africa that the elections were rigged. Given the recent electoral history of Ghana and the fact that the NPP candidate did not contest the result of the 2008 election, which he lost to John Atta Mills, factors such as changes in social structure, population movement, urbanisation, economic conditions and labour markets, legal framework, electoral institutions and party competition need to be explored (Alvarez, Hall & Hyde 2008).

This article reviews the institutional context of the 2012 Ghanaian elections as a response to the compelling need to examine critically their fundamental challenges. Importantly, it seeks to provide insights into the relationships among the specific innovations in the electoral institutions, the changing political economy and the character of the elections.

The article proceeds from a theoretical exploration of the relationship between electoral institutions and democratic development. It then examines the institutional context of the 2012 elections and identifies and discusses central issues relating to election management, assembly size and constituency delimitation, voting procedure, electoral formula, the party system and election disputes.

THEORISING ELECTORAL INSTITUTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT

The worldwide spread of democracy in the 1990s has attracted scholarly attention to the central role of elections in democratic transition and democratic development. In the measurement of democracy elections must meet various

standards to ensure democratic legitimacy. More importantly, changes in electoral rules about voting thresholds, electoral formulas, assembly size and party systems have been viewed as key to managing tensions in plural societies (see Aiyede 2012).

A growing number of studies have investigated the various electoral systems and their implications for democratic stability. Some of these efforts have classified formal rules, their consequences, and how voters respond to the electoral choices before them. Indeed, since the work of Duverger (1954) and Rae (1967), it is believed that altering the formal rules has implications for the behaviour of political actors and citizens. A variety of institutionalist theories have emerged to explain the role played by formal rules and electoral institutions in the behaviour of actors and the trajectory of electoral development.

Norris (2004), for example, identifies three patterns in research in this regard. The first seeks to understand how social norms, political attitudes, cognitive opinions and cultural values shape the choices of voters and their support for a particular party by comparing electoral behaviour. The second investigates the impact of a variety of electoral rules and systems on cleavage politics, partisan identification, issue-voting or leadership popularity over time and across countries. The third uses case studies to analyse changes over time, especially 'before' and 'after' major electoral reforms are implemented.

Recently a growing interest has developed in cases of electoral fraud, especially their character, occurrence and how they can be detected, deterred and prevented. This has also spurred efforts to focus on institutional factors, especially the electoral system in use, economic interests, partisanship and incumbency and urbanisation (Alvarez, Hall & Hyde 2008).

What links these efforts is not merely the desire to improve our understanding of the electoral process but also the need to improve the conduct of elections. More importantly, they are driven by the need to build public confidence in elections and strengthen the democratic legitimacy and stability of states by ensuring that voters' intensions are successfully transmitted through the electoral process.

This article contributes to these efforts by examining the 2012 presidential elections in Ghana, focusing on constitutional and non-constitutional rules of electoral governance in relation to emerging issues of electoral management, delimitation of constituencies and assembly size, electoral formula, voting procedure, the party system and electoral disputes.

THE INSTITUTIONAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK OF ELECTIONS IN GHANA

The constitutional and legal framework of elections in Ghana is contained primarily in the Constitution of Ghana (1992) and relevant statutory frameworks,

among them the Elections Act, Electoral Commissions Act, the Presidential and Parliamentary Elections laws and the Political Parties Act and attendant regulations (Debrah 2004). The Constitution is the most important law governing the elections and its supremacy vis-à-vis other laws is anchored in Article 22. As the basis for citizen participation in the political and electoral process, the Constitution makes detailed provision and creates safeguards for fundamental human rights and freedoms and the protection of such rights by the courts. It encapsulates representation of the people and affirms the right to vote as a fundamental right.

The Constitution also establishes the elective offices and provides the eligibility criteria for contesting office, both for the presidency and for Parliament. Key institutions that play a critical role in the electoral process, such as the ECG and the political parties, also have their foundation in the Constitution (Article 22).

The 2012 election was expected to have been conducted within the legal frame of the 1992 Constitution, which came into effect on 7 January 1993, and the electoral rules formulated by the ECG. The Constitution was the outcome of a constitution-making process that began in 1991 with the establishment by the Consultative Assembly Law of 1991 of a Consultative Assembly. After a draft constitution was submitted to the Provisional National Defence Council on 31 January 1992 a national referendum was organised through which Ghanaians approved the draft constitution.

Since the Constitution came into effect it has been subjected to only one review process – in 1996. Indeed, even though a constitution review process is ongoing it is a testament to the quality of the 1992 Constitution that the chairman of the Constitution Review Commission, Professor Albert Kodzo Fiadjoe, has stated that 'the current constitution is good and care must be taken not to engage it in an unwarranted amendment' (Fiadjoe 2011). The Constitution was undergoing a review process when the 2012 elections were conducted.

In addition to the Constitution, which provides the legal foundation for the electoral system, the conduct of elections is guided by rules and regulations provided by the ECG and by the Public Elections Regulation Law (2012), which replaced the Public Elections Law of 1992) and the Public Elections (Registration of Voters) Regulation 2012 (C1.72), which validated the biometric registration system and verification of registered voters and any matters connected to any public election process in Ghana. The Electoral Commission Act (1993), which provides for the establishment of the electoral commission, its functions, qualifications and appointment, was amended in 2003.

The detailed procedure for elections in Ghana is contained in the Elections Act and the relevant statutory instruments. Specifically, the instruments deal with the salient aspects of elections, including voter registration, delimitation of constituencies and procedures for election to the office of the president and to

Parliament. Incidental matters such as qualification of voters, definition of polling stations and voting procedures are also laid down in the Elections Act and other statutory instruments. The Representation of the People Act 1992, a major part of the institutional framework of elections in Ghana, specifies how constituencies are to be delimitated and includes the review of constituencies and the division of polling units among other issues. It has been subjected to three amendments – in 1992, 1993 and 2006.

The Electoral Commission

During the transition to democratic rule an interim commission, then known as the Interim National Electoral Commission (INEC), was established to organise the 1992 general elections. The less than formalised or institutionalised nature of the commission at the time was purported to have been responsible for compromising the 1992 election results, with allegations of unprofessional conduct, among other issues, levelled against the chairman, hence Gyimah-Boadi (1994) emphasised the flawed nature of the process, describing it as 'transition without change'.

The institutionalisation of the electoral process has since taken on a life of its own with the passage into law of an Act, known as the Electoral Commission of Ghana Establishment Act (ECG) of 1993 (amended in 2003). Article 43 of the Constitution provides for an electoral commission which consists of a chairman, two deputies and four members. Article 44 states the criteria for qualification to serve on the commission as well as the conditions of service. Article 45 spells out the functions of the commission to include:

- compiling the register of voters and revising it at such periods as may be determined by law;
- demarcating the electoral boundaries for both national and local government elections;
- conducting and supervising all public elections and referenda;
- educating the people on the electoral process and its purpose;
- undertaking programmes for the expansion of the registration of voters; and
- performing such other functions as may be prescribed by law

Constitution of the Republic of Ghana 1992

Apart from these constitutional provisions, the Electoral Commission Act provides for two additional functions – the creation of identity cards and the proper storage of election materials. Both the Constitution (article 46) and the Electoral Commission Act (article 4) guarantee the independence of the ECG and these

clauses have played a major role in the institutional evolution of the electoral process. To ensure the financial independence of the ECG, its 'administrative expenses, including salaries, allowances and persons payable to, or in respect of person serving with the commission' are be charged to the Consolidated Fund (article 11 Electoral Commission Act 1993). Articles 4 and 5 reaffirm the basis for qualification to serve on the commission as well as the conditions of service of the chairman (Electoral Commission Act 1993).

Since it is the responsibility of the commission to administer the electoral process it has, in line with the constitutional provision, formulated certain legal instruments to enhance its capacity to do so. This is in line with article 12 of the Electoral Commission Act and article 51 of the Constitution, which empower the commission to make regulations for the effective execution of its functions (Constitution 1992). These regulations include the Public Election Regulation of 1996 and the Public Elections (Registration of Voters) Regulations of 2012. Both of these were replaced in 2012 by the publication of Elections Regulation 2012. It is generally believed that the ECG has been relatively independent of the government and has received credit for the successful alternation of government between the NDC and NPP.

Assembly size and constituency delimitation

Article 47 of the Constitution contains the rules governing the delimitation of constituencies. The Constitution empowers the electoral commission to delimit constituencies for the purpose of the election of members of Parliament and states that each constituency should be represented by one member (article 7(1)). Constituencies are also expected to fall with one region (article 7(2)); the boundaries are to be delimited in such a way that the number of inhabitants in the constituency is, as far as possible, equal to the population quota (article 47(3)). The population quota is derived by dividing the number of inhabitants of Ghana by the number of existing constituencies.

Clause 4 clarifies article 3 by stipulating that while the number of inhabitants should be more or less equal to the population quota it is important that constituencies be delimited in such a way that means of communication, geographical features, density of population and area and boundaries of the regions and other administrative or traditional areas are taken into account.

Constituencies must be reviewed at an interval of not less than seven years or within 12 months of the publication of enumeration figures after the holding of a census. Where such reviews are undertaken and the boundaries of constituencies are altered the alteration shall come into effect upon the next dissolution of Parliament (Article 47(6)).

Article 48 empowers an aggrieved person to contest a decision of the electoral commission in respect of the demarcation of a boundary by appealing to a tribunal consisting of three persons appointed by the chief justice. The decision of the tribunal shall be effected by the electoral commission (clause 1). A person aggrieved by a decision of the tribunal may file an appeal with the Court of Appeal, whose decision on the matter shall be final (clause 2).

The Representation of the People Act of 1992 is another source of rules guiding the delimitation of constituencies. Essentially it confirms the provisions contained in Articles 47 and 48 of the Constitution. But beyond that it provides for the division of constituencies into polling divisions and the division of polling divisions into polling units (s 42). Section 5 empowers the commission to appoint an election committee for every constituency which shall be a committee of the commission. Members are to be chosen from registered voters in each constituency. Section 6 empowers the commission to appoint a presiding officer for each polling division and as many deputies and assistants as it may consider necessary.

Voter registration

The ECG is charged with registering voters and maintaining the voters' register. Article 42 of the Constitution explicitly provides for the right to vote and the right to be registered as a voter. Registration is therefore a constitutional right. The Constitution also deals with issues of citizenship, which is a major requirement for voter registration in Ghana. The detailed procedure for registration of voters is further contained in the Registration of Voters Regulations of 1995 which detail the eligibility criteria for voters, registration centres, registration officials, complaints, claims and objections, and offences related to the registration exercise.

Voting procedures

Both the Constitution and the Representation of the People Act 1992 set out voting procedures and ballot structure during elections. Article 49(1) of the Constitution specifies that voting shall be done by secret ballot. Clause 2 of the same article mandates the presiding officer, in the presence of the candidates or their representatives and their polling agents, to count the ballots in that polling station and record the votes cast in favour of each candidate after voting had been concluded.

Thereafter the presiding officer, the candidate or representative and their polling agents shall sign the pink paper on which the number of votes cast in favour of each candidate is recorded. The presiding officer shall there and then announce

the result of the voting at the polling station before communicating the result to the returning officer. The provisions contained in section 13 under the heading 'Voting at Public Elections' merely repeat the provisions contained in Article 49.

Party system

The Constitution does not specify a party system for the Republic of Ghana, instead it empowers citizens to form political parties and, indeed, guarantees that right (Article 55(1)). Hence it implicitly makes Ghana a multiparty state. The Constitution empowers citizens of voting age to be members of political parties and affirms the rights of political parties to participate in the political process whether in the form of political education or by shaping the political will of the people.

Article 55(3) of the Constitution also empowers them to participate in specific social and economic programmes. Clauses 4 and 5 specify the characteristics that are key to the democratic functioning of parties. These include the requirement that political parties be internally democratic and have a national character. Clause 6 states that parties must be duly recognised by law. Clause 7 stipulates the conditions for registration. These include the submission of the names and addresses of a party's national officers. Other conditions include the following:

- There is ordinarily resident, or registered as a voter in each district of Ghana, at least one founding member of the party;
- The party has branches in all the regions of Ghana and is, in addition, organised in not less than two-thirds of the districts of each region; and
- The party's name, emblem, colour, motto or any other symbol has no ethnic, regional, religious or other sectional connotations or gives the appearance that it activities are confined only to a part of Ghana.

Clause 11 clearly spells out the disposition of the state towards political parties, allowing them equal access to state-owned media. Clause 12 allows all presidential candidates an equal amount of time on state-owned media and clause 13 allows every candidate to conduct his or her campaign freely.

Interestingly, while the Constitution does not stipulate a party system for Ghana it is very clear in its rejection of any attempt to impose a one-party system or a unified programme, whether religious or political. This is clearly spelt out in Article 56, which states that: 'Parliament shall have no power to enact a law to establish or authorise the establishment of a body or movement with the right or power to impose on the people of Ghana a common programme or a set of objectives of a religious or political [nature].'

Electoral formula

The President of Ghana is elected for a four-year term and can serve a maximum of two terms in office. The president is elected in a single national constituency on the basis of a majority system. In order to be elected in the first round a candidate must secure at least 50%-plus-1 of the valid votes cast. If no candidate secures such a majority the two leading candidates contest a run-off election. In the run-off, whichever candidate secures the most votes is the winner. The Parliament of Ghana now consists of 275 members who are elected for a four-year term from single-member constituencies on the basis of the first-past-the-post system.

Electoral disputes

Dispute resolution mechanisms are an institutionalised aspect of the electoral process. Pre- and post-election complaints are dealt with within the framework of the electoral laws. While some disputes over voter registration are resolved through the ECG's internal structures, disputes over results are handled by the courts. The Supreme Court has exclusive jurisdiction over petitions related to presidential elections.

AN EMPIRICAL REVIEW OF INSTITUTIONAL PERFORMANCE AND CHALLENGES[1]

President Atta Mills catalysed and prosecuted an elaborate Constitution review process prior to the 2012 election. In January 2010 the Constitution Review Commission of Inquiry Instrument 2010 (CI64) appointed the Constitution Review Commission (CRC), chaired by Prof Albert K Fiadjoe, to facilitate the process of amending the 1992 Constitution for the first time. The Constitution review made remarkable recommendations for the reform of the electoral process.

The 'Report of the Constitution Review Commission', submitted to President Mills on 20 December 2011, contained several recommendations that relate directly to the electoral system. It recommended that parliamentary elections be held together with presidential elections within 60 days of the inauguration of a new government, to make the transfer of power from one administration to another smoother. It also recommended that the Rules of Court be amended to limit interlocutory applications, adjournments and delays in electoral disputes to ensure the disposal of such cases within a period of six months and that the

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1   This section draws copiously on the reports of the various election observation teams listed in the references.

ECG be allowed to study the system of proportional representation for possible application in Ghana, strengthen the Inter-Party Advisory Committee (IPAC) for improved self-regulation of political parties and submit annual reports to Parliament.

In July 2012 the government responded with a 'White paper on the Report of the Constitutional Review Commission', which accepted most of the main recommendations, although it sometimes differed with the CRC on methods of achieving the goals. The government differed on how the manner in which districts and constituencies are created could be better regulated and accepted that parliamentary elections be held together with presidential elections and that the transfer of power from one administration to the other be made smoother.

It accepted the amendment of the Rules of Court to limit delays in electoral disputes, but felt that the six-month period for the disposal of cases was too short, preferring 12 months. It also accepted that the Inter-Party Advisory Committee should be strengthened to enable improved self-regulation of political parties and that the Electoral Commission should be required to submit annual reports to Parliament. Government's recommendation that it should be 'mandatory for a Presidential candidate to win at least 4 regions before he or she can be elected to serve as President of the Republic of Ghana' sparked national debate (*Statesman* 2011).

Although the issues were not finalised before the December 2012 elections, some of the CRC's recommendations were put into practice, including holding the presidential and parliamentary elections simultaneously.

Challenges for the ECG

Ghana's Electoral Commission evolved as part of the institutional transfer of the superstructure of British colonial rule (Jinadu 1995). Post-World War Two political developments triggered constitutional reforms leading to multiparty politics in the Gold Coast (Austin 1964; Apter 1972). Since elections lie at the heart of multiparty politics, the search for an efficient system of election management became a priority. Initially, the machinery for administering elections was located within the colonial government – a department under the Ministry of Local Government (Ayee 1998, p 54). The overthrow of the one-party regime of Dr Kwame Nkrumah on 24 February 1966 opened up a long search for the most viable way of achieving a credible election authority.

This led to the establishment of an independent sole electoral commissioner, with legal autonomy to manage the electoral process. INEC was set up in 1991 to conduct the 1992 elections. Its job was later taken over by the ECG, which has proved to be different from its predecessor. Studies have shown that before the

2012 elections it had started to enjoy the trust and confidence of Ghanaians (Ayee 2001, Agyeman-Duah 2005, Armah-Attoh 2006, Berger 2009, Omotola 2012).

The chairman of the ECG, Dr Kwadwo Afari-Gyan, who has been in office since 1993, has become a celebrity of sorts in election management in Africa. He has worked hard with his team to improve the electoral process in Ghana by asserting the authority and independence of the ECG. The ECG has also introduced a biometric registration system to improve the security of the voter registration process and enhance the integrity of elections.

However, the 2012 election will go down as among the most trying for Afari-Gyan. Shortly before the announcement of the results, on 9 December, the NPP and its presidential candidate requested a 24-hour delay to enable it to investigate and report instances of voting malpractice and irregularities but the ECG went ahead and announced the results, declaring John Dramani Mahama of the NDC the winner.

On the basis of tallied results from 275 constituencies Mahama won 5 574 761 votes (50.70%). He was followed by the NPP presidential candidate, Nana Dankwa Akufo-Addo, who won 5 248 898 (47.74%) of the total votes cast. The other candidates garnered less than 2% of the total votes cast. The NDC also won the majority of seats in Parliament, closely followed by the NPP. The NPP petitioned the Supreme Court to annul 4 381 votes from 11 138 polling stations, arguing that those stations were bedevilled by constitutional and statutory violations, malpractice and irregularities, involving the collusion of ECG officials.

Issues associated with Assembly size and constituency delimitation

Article 47 of the Constitution empowers the ECG to determine the number of single-member constituencies and demarcate their boundaries. However, in performing this task the ECG is expected to consult with traditional authorities, opinion leaders, political parties, district assemblies, members of Parliament and other stakeholders (ECG 2012). Article 47(5) of the Constitution states:

> The Electoral Commission shall review the division of Ghana into constituencies at intervals of not less than seven years, or within twelve months after the publication of the enumeration figures after the holding of a census of the population of Ghana, whichever is earlier, and may, as a result, alter the constituencies.

As far as the delimitation process is concerned, Article 47 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana prescribes that no constituency may straddle administrative districts and the population of a single constituency should be as equal as possible to the population quota, taking into account the means of communication, geographical

features, density of population and boundaries of administrative or traditional areas.

In September 2012 the ECG announced that it would create 45 new constituencies, thereby increasing the total number from 230 to 275. The decision was taken in response to two key developments. Firstly, population data from the 2010 census was only made available in early 2012 and, secondly, government decided relatively late to create 21 new districts (African Union Commission 2012). The constituencies were created less than 90 days before the election, which caused some concern among opposition parties (Coffie 2012).

The ECG's decision to create the constituencies was challenged unsuccessfully in the Supreme Court. Despite the requirement that constituencies be as equal in size as possible, there are, in fact, quite wide variations. Based on figures released for the 2012 elections, while the average number of registered voters per constituency across the country is about 50 000, the smallest constituency has just 12 082, while the largest has 126 659. Equal suffrage is therefore not adequately provided for.

Further, the number of constituencies has increased quite substantially in the past decade. The Constitution states that the minimum size of Parliament should be 160 members and it currently has 275. The last time the ECG re-delimitated constituencies was in 2003, when it added 30 to the original 200 (Asare 2012). The responsibility for creating and reviewing administrative districts is vested in the minister for local government, who is an appointee of the president. When new districts are created the Electoral Commission must review the constituency boundaries to conform to the new district. It is not sustainable for Ghana to continue to create more and more districts, thus increasing even further the size of Parliament. In the interests of good governance and financial sustainability there needs to be a more rational process, or a ceiling.

Problems and challenges of voter registration

The ECG produced a new voters' roll for the 2012 elections using the biometric voter registration (BVR) system. This system is believed to have greatly improved the security of the registration exercise by means of multiple and complementary identification using photo identification, fingerprints and secure barcodes and serial numbers. The advantage of the biometric system over manual registration is that it reduces the incidence of double registration.

The process of procuring the BVR machine was initiated early and conducted in a manner that conformed to the procurement rules, which require a bidding process in which different companies submit proposals to procure the BRV machines. Companies were scored on the basis of their performance in various

examinable areas. As a further demonstration of transparency and accountability, the results were submitted to the Procurement Board, which affirmed the ECG's decision.

Political parties not only participated in testing the various samples provided by the suppliers but also monitored the registration exercise. Other stakeholders, particularly civil society organisations, were also involved in the various phases of voter registration. At the start of the process the ECG ensured that its personnel were trained and conversant with the functioning of the BVR machines.

The exercise was carried out from 24 March to 5 May 2012. The conclusion of the registration exercise was followed by a 10-day period, from 1 to 10 September, during which the voters' roll could be inspected and claims and objections lodged. The provisional register review processes were compressed into a very short period, with little advance notice given. This is largely because the novelty of the equipment and the lack of ample testing and training time resulted in hitches. The Consolidated Voters' Register was consequently published only two weeks before the election. Challenges faced before and during the registration exercise included the constant breakdown of kits and printers, which affected the efficiency of the registration officers. At the conclusion of the exercise slightly more than 14-million voters were registered to participate in the 2012 elections

Challenges relating to voting logistics

The 2012 presidential and parliamentary elections took place on Friday 7 December. Special voting for registered members of the security services and electoral officials had taken place on 4 December. Those votes were held by the returning officer, to be added to and tabulated with the main vote aggregation at the tabulation stage.

On 7 December polling was scheduled to take place from 07:00 to 17:00 in 26 002 polling stations, most of which were placed outdoors, with tape used to create a designated polling area. Campaigning was prohibited on the day before the election and on election day itself. In addition, a 500m exclusion zone was in effect around each polling station, within which it was prohibited to try to influence voters, for instance, by the placing of campaign posters (Hinshaw 2012).

According to the observer reports voting was generally orderly and voters understood the process. Voters who were uncertain of the process were assisted by polling staff. In most of the polling stations priority was given to the aged, to pregnant women, to voters with infants and to physically challenged persons. In accordance with election regulations voters who required assistance were also allowed to be helped by a person of their choice.

Each polling station was managed by a presiding officer supported by four

polling assistants (a names reference list officer, biometric verification officer/inker, presidential ballot issuer and parliamentary ballot issuer). Each polling station had two ballot boxes, one for the presidential election and one for the parliamentary election. There were also two cardboard voting booths in each station and security was provided.

Accredited party agents and observers, as well as media, were allowed to be present. The counting process was transparent and open and complied with electoral procedures and regulations. Results from polling stations and constituencies were broadcast on TV, radio and online, enabling people to follow as the final results were calculated.

Following the vote count at polling station level and the tabulation of results at the collation centre, the results were transmitted manually to the national office of the ECG from 7 to 9 December. The results were broadcast on national television as they were transmitted to the ECG office in Accra. However, the tallying process was conducted within the context of mounting political tensions and protests by NPP supporters as allegations of fraud and manipulation of results were directed at the ECG.

The ECG had procured more than 40 000 biometric verification devices in order to ensure that a machine was available for each of the 26 002 polling stations and that there were sufficient spares in cases of breakdown. Biometric verification, using photographic images and fingerprints, provided absolute certainty that the person who appeared at the polling station to vote was the same person who had applied for registration as a voter.

In several polling stations voting did not commence on time because of the late arrival of materials. The voter verification process was slow and cumbersome in some stations because the BVR data and verification machines could not read the fingerprints of some voters. There were also cases of incompatibility between the BVR data and the data contained in the verification machine. Because of this some voters' names appeared in the BVR but were missing from the verification machine. In some polling stations machines malfunctioned, resulting in the closure of the polling station and the extension of voting to the next day.

It was reported that, judging from photographs, a number of people who appeared on the list seemed to be children, leading to suspicions that some ECG registration staff had not exercised their clear authority to challenge the registration of these persons during the initial registration process.

Some ECG personnel did not follow instructions about the handling of the machines, which caused undue delays. On 8 December voting continued in polling stations in regions that had been affected by the breakdown of the verification machines, the fingerprint system and the backlog of the voting process. The transmission of the results was done manually and was thus slow.

The roles of political parties and politicians

Since the first multiparty election, in 1992, Ghana has evolved into a two-party dominant state. The past two decades have seen an alternation of power between the NPP and the NDC. The 2012 presidential election was, however, contested by candidates from seven parties and one independent candidate. The Inter-party Advisory Committee, which was formed in 1994, has provided a forum for building consensus among the political parties on electoral issues (Ayee 1998, Omotola 2012). The parties developed a Code of Conduct, which the majority have signed. The Political Parties Code of Conduct is not a legal document but is intended to invoke best practice and behaviour within political parties. The Code of Conduct for the 2012 elections set out clearly the roles and conduct of candidates and parties in order to achieve free, fair and peaceful elections. For instance, it provided that political parties and candidates must publicly and without reservation condemn all forms of intimidation and political violence, irrespective of the perpetrators.

Challenges relating to the electoral formula

There is no doubt the winner-takes-all nature of the first-past-the-post formula used in elections in Ghana partly accounts for the keen contest of elections. It is generally believed that this formula punishes minor parties in terms of the ratio of the number of seats to the percentage of the total votes won (Norris 1997, Carey 1997, Taagepera & Shugart 1989). In the future, with the discovery of oil and the increase in natural resource revenue, the contest will become increasingly keen. The government's recommendation that candidates fulfil additional requirements should be carefully considered in this regard. Perhaps Ghana should experiment with a proportional representation formula in parliamentary elections.

Challenges arising from the adjudication of electoral disputes

The handling of the petition by the NPP candidates was quite transparent. Chief Justice Georgina Woods allowed live telecasts of the hearings. The petitioners had access to electoral materials and were able to gather more than 24 000 of the 26 002 pink sheets, which helped them to present their case based purely on documentary evidence, unlike the situation in several African countries where presidential election petitions have failed because of lack of access to such sensitive electoral materials (Ofori-Atta 2013, p 2). It is hoped that the parties will accept the verdict of the court in good faith.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the gravity of the petition brought against the conduct of the 2012 elections, they constituted an important step in democratic consolidation in Ghana. Although the stakes were considerably higher in light of growing popular demands for better living standards, the creation of national mechanisms for fair distribution of oil revenues and the stiff competition between the NDC and NPP, the elections were carried out without any major incidents of violence.

In addition, the resort to due process and the transparency with which the petition brought to the Supreme Court by the NPP was prosecuted demonstrate the gradual entrenchment of democratic values in Ghana. Indeed, the controversial character of the elections provides Ghanaians with an opportunity to assess the strength of the country's institutions and to confirm that it is gradually developing a culture of routine political transition.

The constitutional review process that began with the government of Atta Mills stands to benefit from the fallout from the 2012 elections. This is particularly the case in the area of constituency delimitation, the creation of new local areas and the size of the Assembly, which have remained controversial. The power of the ministry of local government to create local districts automatically constrains the power of the ECG in constituency delimitation. There is a need to place a ceiling on the number of constituencies the country can accommodate so that the increase in population size does not necessarily imply an increase in the number of parliamentary seats.

There is a need for the ECG to review its use of the biometric system, drawing on the lessons learnt during the 2012 elections. It is expected that these will include the provision in each region of facilities for the rapid repair of equipment to address the problems of machine breakdowns as well as proper care of election materials.

In view of the high voter turnout there is a need for further public education geared towards enhancing the quality of participation in the electoral process. The ECG must guard its independence and improve its capabilities, especially in relation to the production and handling of election materials. There is a sense in which the logistic demands of holding both presidential and parliamentary elections simultaneously stretched it beyond its capacity, accounting for some of the lapses observed in the elections.

Ghana might also consider adopting elements of proportional representation for parliamentary elections to mediate the winner-takes-all system currently in place for both parliamentary and presidential elections.

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THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION OF GHANA AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE 2012 ELECTIONS

J Shola Omotola

ABSTRACT

Ghana's Fourth Republic has a reputation for having a reasonably high degree of institutionalisation in election administration. Its electoral and democratic success stories have largely been associated with the autonomy-enhancing institutional design and leadership of the Electoral Commission of Ghana (ECG), which engender a degree of public confidence and trust. The 2012 elections, however, produced an ominous twist in the hitherto sacrosanct nature of democratic legitimacy in Ghana. This article assesses the role of the ECG, drawing on the quality of the elections, measured by the level of participation, competitiveness and legitimacy, as well as the actions and inactions of the ECG at critical stages in the electoral cycle. Overall, the ECG could be adjudged to have done well, especially on the first two indicators, given the high level of voter turnout (80.15%) and the closeness of the total votes and seats won by the ruling National Democratic Congress and the main opposition, the New Patriotic Party. However, the legitimacy of the election was fiercely challenged with the opposition's rejection of the results and attendant litigation in the Supreme Court. The problem may have been accentuated by the new political economy of oil and the strong desire to access and control oil windfall, the messy application of biometric voter verification as a result of the malfunctioning of the equipment and the controversy over the delimitation of 45 new constituencies in a manner interpreted by opposition parties as gerrymandering. It seems these are not heady days for Ghana's democracy. Rising levels of adversarial elite behaviour not only pose serious democratic threats they raise questions about the depth of the much touted institutional foundations of the country's democracy.

INTRODUCTION

Since the inception of the Fourth Republic in 1992 Ghana has developed a reputation for a reasonably high degree of institutionalisation in the administration of its elections. This is partly the result of the degree of public confidence and trust

in the independence, professionalism and political impartiality of the Electoral Commission of Ghana (ECG), which tends to make all political actors accept the results of elections. For example, while the opposition parties bitterly contested the results of the 1992 presidential election, the losing parties accepted the outcomes of the elections of 1996, 2000, 2004 and 2008 (Omotola 2012, 2010a; Gyimah-Boadi 2009). This is important because the losers' acceptance of election results is an important component of democratic legitimacy. It presupposes that both voters and candidates believe that election administrators have complied substantially with the electoral rules (Lindberg 2004; Rakner & Svasand 2003).

Though not totally flawless, especially given the protracted controversy that surrounded the 1992 founding elections (Gyimah-Boadi 1994; Oquaye 1995, 2000), there is now a broad consensus domestically and internationally that the electoral process in Ghana 'functions pretty well' (Nugent 2005, p 2). Elsewhere, Nugent (2001, p 405) posits that Ghanaian politics, particularly the 2000 elections, ushered in 'an impressive measure of political pluralism' because it 'presented the first test of the workability of the constitutional limits on presidential tenure, as well as the first real opportunity to achieve a peaceful change of power through the ballot box' (also quoted in Gyimah-Boadi 2001, p 103 and Smith 2002, p 622). Walraven (2002, pp 186-187) also notes that 'there was great satisfaction among Ghanaians about the conduct of the polls'. Although there were various irregularities, 'none … appeared very significant or structural' or raised questions about the legitimacy of the process (see also Gadzekpo 2000).

In a comparative exploration by the Michigan State University-based AfroBarometer, devoted to the quantitative study of elections in Africa, Ghanaians expressed strong 'faith in elections as a means to represent the true voice of the people in government'. They also expressed the greatest confidence in the effectiveness of their votes (AfroBarometer 2006, p 2). Local and international observers and commentators also hailed the 2008 elections as highly successful (Omotola 2010a; Gyimah-Boadi 2009). Gyimah-Boadi & Brobbey (2012,p 2) attribute the effectiveness of election administration in Ghana to 'the success of transparency- and fairness-enhancing reforms to the electoral process in the mid-1990s', which 'proved resilient enough to survive the intense competition of the 2000 and 2008 polls … and produce two electoral turnovers, making Ghana unique among African democracies'.

Ghana's electoral and, by logical extension, democratic, success story has largely been associated with the autonomy-enhancing institutional design and leadership of the ECG, which has been acclaimed both locally and internationally for its credible electoral management over the years. In a more recent comprehensive evaluation of the ECG a consistent student of the Ghanaian democratisation process noted:

> Against the backdrop of failed electoral process in most African
> countries, the ECG has organized four successful general elections
> *with marginal errors*. The most distinguishing factor for the ECG's
> success were largely, but not exclusively, *the making of the electoral
> process transparent, fostering agreement on the rules of the game and
> asserting its autonomy in relation to the performance of its mandates.*
>
> <div align="right">Debrah 2011, p 25 (Author's emphasis)</div>

The 2012 election, however, reflected an ominous twist in the hitherto sacrosanct nature of electoral/democratic legitimacy in Ghana. Alleging various forms of irregularities, including 'the failure to comply with regulations requiring mandatory biometric verification, failure by Presiding Officers at some polling stations to sign the official results sheet, "over-voting" at a number of polling stations, and discrepancies in the size of the voters register', the New Patriotic Party (NPP) challenged the outcome not only of the presidential election but of more than 10% of the parliamentary results (Gyimah-Boadi 2013, p 5).

The Supreme Court handed down its judgement on 29 August 2013, upholding the results declared by the ECG. However, the fact that the NPP was moved to petition the court to declare the election invalid, along with the two dissenting voices on the nine-man bench, suggest that all did not go well, even if the irregularities were insufficient to warrant total cancellation and/or a rerun.

What factors account for the changes in the democratic quality of the 2012 elections, resulting in the opposition's rejection of results and the attendant litigation? In what ways and to what extent can the reversal of gains be linked to the actions and/or inaction of the ECG? What can be done to restore public confidence in the ECG's credibility and professionalism? These are the main questions this article seeks to explore, with the aim of providing a critical appraisal of the ECG's administration of the elections.

Until now the ECG has been regarded as one of the most vibrant institutional foundations of Ghana's successful democracy and it is crucial that efforts be made to ensure that its reputation, based on factors such as its administrative and financial autonomy, political neutrality and impartiality, capacity and professionalism, as well as public confidence and trust, real or imagined, is restored and sustained.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE ECG

From 1950 to 1968 and from 1974 to 1977 (Ayee 1998, p 54) the ECG was a department of the Ministry of Local Government. Between those periods, and ever since, attempts have been made to institute an independent electoral body:

either individual commissioners, as was the case in 1968, 1969-74, 1977, 1978, 1978-82, or a collective body, as in 1982-1992, 1992, 1993 (Ayee 1998, p 54) and to date.

The ECG's responsibilities, as set out in Article 45 of the 1992 Constitution, include compiling and revising the electoral register, demarcating and revising electoral boundaries, the conduct and supervision of public elections and referenda, education of citizens on the electoral process and other such functions that may be prescribed by law.

The commission also has wider responsibilities – it may assist in resolving conflicts between and within political parties. In this way, 'the ECG helps to establish and strengthen internal democratic procedures within the parties by supervising their primaries and certifying the outcomes of internal electoral processes' (Zounmenou 2009, pp 5-6). The ECG is thus the principal organ for the administration of elections in the country.

The ECG currently consists of seven members – a chairman, two deputies (one in charge of operations, the other in charge of finance and administration) and four other members. These seven members are appointed by the president in consultation with the Council of State, a body of eminent citizens partly elected and partly appointed, to advise the president and other state institutions on the discharge of their functions.

The current independent model has statutorily guaranteed mechanisms to ensure and protect the administrative and institutional autonomy of the electoral commission, without which it might easily be manipulated by the executive. Specifically, the 1992 Ghanaian Constitution and the 1993 Electoral Commission Act (known as Act 451) ensure the autonomy of the ECG in three ways. One, the ECG is not placed directly under the control of any person or authority. Specifically, Article 46 of the Constitution provides that 'except as provided in this constitution or in any other law not inconsistent with this constitution, in the performance of its functions the ECG shall not be subject to the direction or control of any person or authority (Constitution 1992, 39; also quoted in Debrah 2011, p 31).

Two, members of the ECG enjoy the same conditions of service as the justices of the superior court, meaning that they occupy office until they attain the mandatory retirement age of 70. Thus they have security of tenure, which guarantees that once appointed they cannot be removed except for reasons of infirmity or insanity, which must be confirmed by an independent medical board: 'members of the ECG cannot be dismissed by anybody except on grounds of incapacitation arising from ill-health' (Constitution 1992, p 27). The commission is funded directly by the Consolidated Account, meaning that the executive cannot cut off funds to the commission.

It is vital that the ECG, in discharging its duties, lives up to popular expectations and is sufficiently protected by the statutory provisions regarding

its autonomy. The next section offers some insights into these concerns as a background to the evaluation of its performance in the 2012 elections.

THE ECG AND ELECTION ADMINISTRATION UNDER THE FOURTH REPUBLIC

Despite the fact that the ECG is presidentially constituted the commission has always strived to demonstrate a reasonable measure of independence, competence and legitimacy in the discharge of its responsibilities. In part, this has to do with the deep institutionalisation of the commission and the institutional-political frameworks that surround it, particularly the political parties, the Inter-Party Advisory Committee (IPAC) – which was established in March 1994 and is funded largely by the donor community, civil society, mass media and the political leadership.

It is important to recall that Ghana's Fourth Republic was effectively launched by the 1992 founding presidential election, which was administered by the Independent National Electoral Commission of Ghana (INEC), constituted under President Jerry Rawlings's Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC). As it turned out, the elections were discredited both locally and internationally. The objections were so serious that opposition parties boycotted the parliamentary elections. Some of the shortcomings identified included the lack of independence of the INEC and attendant electoral irregularities and corruption (Gyimah-Boadi 1994; Oquaye 1995). However, by 1996 several of the major controversial issues had been resolved through IPAC. The reason for the establishment of IPAC, according to Debrah (2011, p 37) was two-pronged: 'first to diffuse opposition-government conflict and tension, and second, get the political parties to establish compromises on the rules of electoral competition'.

The positive impact of IPAC on the electoral process, according to Frempong (2008, p 191), showed in the 1996 elections and has continued. This is evident from the impressive level of voter turnout in 1996, which was established at 73.5%. More importantly, 'the general mood following the election confirmed the fact that the contending political leaders had agreed upon the basic rules of electoral politics' (Ninsin 1998, p 194, cited in Frempong 2008, p 191). Again, unlike in 1992, the defeated presidential candidates readily conceded defeat and congratulated the winner, who, in turn, congratulated the losers on their competitive spirit. Ever since then, the IPAC, an institutional mechanism for consensus building, has been sustained and replicated at regional and district levels. This has continued to aid the ECG in simplifying its electoral tasks.

Other areas of election administration in which the ECG has performed creditably, according to Freempong (2008, pp 191-192), include:

- It has asserted its independence in many respects over the years. In March 2004, for example, when the NPP government announced the establishment of a national procurement committee to undertake purchases for Election 2004, the ECG contended that such an action would undermine its independence, and had the plan shelved. Similarly, the ECG resisted all attempts by opposition parties to prevent the inclusion of 30 newly-created constituencies in the conduct of Election 2004. The commission, conscious of the fact that it had operated within its mandate in creating the new constituencies, maintained its stand until it was confirmed by a Supreme Court decision (Boafo-Arthur 2006, p 43).
- The ECG has taken even small controversies seriously and has taken innovative steps to deal with them. Before the 2000 elections, candidates' names on the ballot paper appeared in the order in which they filed their nominations. In 1996 this led to a mad rush to secure the top spot on the ballot paper. In 2000 the ECG resolved the matter by introducing balloting for positions on the ballot paper after parties have filed their nominations. It is significant to note that since then this method has been replicated for intra-party elections.
- The ECG, playing its neutral role, was also mindful of the religious dimension. On 24 November 2000 it organised a prayer and fasting session at its conference hall (Agyeman-Duah 2005 p 115).
- The manner in which the ECG has collaborated with donor agencies, political parties, think tanks, civil society groups and the media has been most impressive. One such collaboration, between the ECG, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), the Ghana Association of the Blind (GAB) and Action on Disability and Development Ghana (ADD) in 2002 led to the pilot test of the tactile ballot paper … Similarly, since 1996, it has accredited domestic poll watchers and ensured their unhindered access to important sites, which has boosted public confidence in the voting and its outcome.

<div align="right">Frempong 2008, pp 191-192</div>

The ECG is generally regarded as having contributed to the high level of internal democracy that has become a feature of civil society organisations in Ghana, where 'the ECG is increasingly called upon to organize, supervise and validate the election of their directing organs' (Lemarchand 1998, p 6). For this reason, 'the ECG

helps institutionalize democratic procedures and contributes to the legitimacy and validity of a significant segment of Ghanaian civil society' (Lemarchand 1998, p 6).

Beyond these accomplishments, during the 2008 elections, which threatened to end Ghana's reputation as a maturing and consolidating democracy, due largely to heightened tensions in the closing stages of election campaigns and the inter-elections period, leading to widespread fear of a probable outbreak of violence during and after the elections, the ECG brought its professionalism and competence to bear upon the electoral process. Ghana defied the odds (Omotola 2010a). Overall, the 2008 elections were seen, despite occasional hiccups, to have been well administered and a further step towards democratic consolidation (Gyimah-Boadi 2009; Whitfield 2009).

A number of factors help explain the credible performance of the ECG and its rising profile at home and abroad in successive elections before 2012. Firstly, it has been noted that the commission has always demonstrated a 'willingness to engage actively in confidence-building, the development of a transparent management style, where party grievances were addressed before they became serious allegations against the ECG' (Elklit & Reynolds 2002, p 103). Secondly, the commission has also been said to have taken the opposition's complaints about the 1992 elections into consideration in subsequent elections. Moreover, the ECG also has a relatively independent source of funding because it prepares its own budget, which is subject only to the approval of Parliament.

More importantly, the relative independence of the ECG, which has aided its professional performance, relates to the fact that the chairman and two deputies have the same terms and conditions of service as justices of the Court of Appeal, which means they cannot be removed arbitrarily (Agyeman-Duah 2005 p 3). The job security conferred by this provision means the senior members of the ECG have a stake in the success of the electoral process because if they fail they may lose their 'secured' positions.[1] Describing the virtues of the Ghana ECG René Lemarchand (1998, p 2) notes that:

> Over and above its mandates, the ECG has been remarkably innovative in expanding its jurisdiction to new areas in response to changing circumstances … Although the current ECG's commissioners and the chair are presidentially-appointed, their reputation for impartiality and competence is well-established.

Another perceptive commentator sums up the credibility of the ECG thus:

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1   I gained this insight from personal communication two days after the elections, on 9 December 2008, with Dr Nicholas Amponsah, who teaches political science at the University of Ghana, Legon.

> [T]he electoral commission has come to symbolize fair play, transparency, accountability, honesty, justice, independence, integrity, selflessness, openness, objectivity and strong leadership and is idolized by many institutions in Ghana and in Africa.
>
> Adusei 2009, quoted in Zounmenou 2009, p 6

For these and related reasons Ghana's ECG has enjoyed the support of other institutional actors in the democratisation process, simplifying and aiding its work. For instance, political parties, despite all odds, have endeavoured to be democratic in their internal dealings, especially in party primaries and candidate selection (Ohman 2002). The IPAC has been particularly outstanding, providing a forum for 'building consensus on electoral issues' (Ayee 1998).

The IPAC operates at national, regional and district levels as a 'forum where representatives from all parties can articulate their grievances and disagreements openly, where they can interact with each other informally, and develop a better understanding of their respective positions' (Lemarchand 1998, p 6).

This is possibly largely because of the organisational structure of the IPAC, whose activities and processes are owned and controlled by the political parties. Although IPAC meetings are held at the premises of the ECG, the ECG only serves as a neutral coordinator of the body, providing legal guidance on the appropriateness or otherwise of the decisions of the parties. Because of this the IPAC has been able to mediate inter-party conflicts and serve as a kind of advisory body to the ECG on party matters.[2]

In light of its impressive performance over the years, Lemarchand (1998, p 6) concludes that: 'Today the IPAC constitutes a critically important arena for resolving differences among parties, clarifying the meaning of statutory rules, and regulations concerning their activities and raising a broad range of issues related to the electoral process.' In the thick of heightened political tensions during the period between the first round of elections in 2008 and the run-off, which was won by the NDC, the IPAC was instrumental in the signing of peace agreements between the NPP and the NDC.

Civil society, too, including local and international election observers, has played a positive role in strengthening electoral politics in Ghana over the years (Ninsin 2006). In 2008 its roles included civic education and election monitoring, thereby contributing to the overall quality of the electoral process. It should be

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2   For this insight, I thank participants in a focus group discussion session held at my instance at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, on 9 December 2008, where I discussed my preliminary findings as an independent research observer of the 2008 elections. I am particularly indebted to my friend Samuel Ntewusu, of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, also at the time a PhD candidate at the African Studies Centre, Leiden, the Netherlands, for facilitating the forum/presentation at short notice.

noted, however, that civil society was able to do these things because of its vastly improving democratic credentials. Internal democracy has become a referent feature of civil society organisations in Ghana, where 'the ECG is increasingly called upon to organize, supervise and validate the election of their directing organs' (Lemarchand 1998, p 6).

For this reason, 'the ECG helps institutionalize democratic procedures and contributes to the legitimacy and validity of a significant segment of Ghanaian civil society' (Lemarchand 1998, p 6). Together, these institutions have played an important role in political education and mobilisation, including the promotion of peace rallies across the country at which the message of peace and the negative implications of violence take centre stage.

From a governance perspective, Debrah (2011, p 25) attributes the success of the ECG in institutionalising good governance in the management of the electoral process and the consolidation of democracy in Ghana to three important factors:

> The most distinguishing factor for the ECG's success was largely, but not exclusively, *the making of the electoral process transparent, fostering agreement on the rules of the game and asserting its autonomy in relation to the performance of its mandates*
>
> Author's emphasis

Overall, there is considerable public confidence in the autonomy of the ECG, as most Ghanaians perceive it to be completely independent and not susceptible to political manipulation and interference. This is significant, given the glaring lack of trust in election management bodies (EMBs) in several other African democracies, leading to mutual suspicion among political actors/parties and in the extreme post-election violence witnessed in Nigeria, Kenya and Zimbabwe in recent times (Omotola 2010b, 2011).

Among the reasons for the trust in the ECG's autonomy are:

- It is guaranteed by law. Sufficient safeguards exist in the law to secure the operational, financial and institutional autonomy of the ECG.
- It is insulated from executive or governmental controls. Checks and balances are worked into the process of appointing its members to ensure that they are completely nonpartisan. Members of the ECG enjoy security of tenure and have the same conditions of service as justices of the superior courts.
- The ECG is in firm control of recruitment of both the permanent and temporary election staff. It controls the drafting of important legislative instruments that regulate the conduct of elections. Its budget is funded by the country's consolidated fund.

- It has exercised its authority over setting election dates and has determined the methods of declaring election results.
- It has a relatively developed infrastructure, including, among other things, vehicles, office accommodation and communications devices that facilitate its election operations.

THE ECG AND THE 2012 ELECTIONS

This section attempts an appraisal of the performance of the ECG in the administration of the 2012 elections. In doing so it underscores three crucial aspects, namely, pre-election issues, particularly the delimitation of constituencies; the conduct of registration for the new voter register; the regulation of party finance and interparty relations and voter education; the conduct of the elections, including the deployment of election personnel and materials and security of ballots and voting as well as the collation and announcement of results and management of post-election issues, particularly the opposition's rejection of the results.

Pre-election issues

At this stage, certain issues were critical to the evaluation of the performance of the ECG in the 2012 elections. The first, and arguably one of the most vexatious, relates to the delimitation of 45 new constituencies to increase the total number of parliamentary seats to 275. The creation of these constituencies, according to the ECG Chairman, Dr Kwadwo Afari-Gyan, became inevitable following the creation of new districts by the Ministry of Local Government.

Whereas the creation of local districts was presented merely as an extension of government's decentralisation policy, emerging studies have emphasised the political economy of district creation, stressing contested interests, benefits and tensions associated with the exercise (Ayee 2012; Nyendu 2012).

In order to cater for the electoral interests of those in the new districts the ECG considered it expedient to create new constituencies in the affected areas. Thus, with the official release of the 2010 census figures, the ECG created an additional 45 electoral constituencies in October 2012 (Papran 2012).

The delimitation exercise created considerable controversy. The opposition parties, particularly the NPP, saw the move as not only politically motivated, with the active connivance of the ruling NDC, but ill-timed, coming into operation barely three months before the elections (Commonwealth Observer Group 2013). The ECG, however, regarded the creation of new electoral districts as nothing more than the fulfilment of its constitutional mandate. Article 47(1-7) of the 1992

Constitution specifies the conditions for the establishment of new constituencies, vesting the power to do so in the ECG. Specifically, Article 47 (5) provides that:

> The Electoral Commission shall review the division of Ghana into constituencies at intervals of not less than seven years, or within twelve months after the publication of the enumeration figures after the holding of a census of the population of Ghana, whichever is earlier, and may, as a result, alter the constituencies.

For many others, including the ruling party, the criticisms were baseless. Firstly, the ECG was legally competent to create the new constituencies and secondly the enabling law did not specify a specific time for the exercise of such powers, making it a discretionary power of the chairman of the ECG. In addition, the NPP had done the same in 2000 when the ECG had created an additional 30 constituencies to bring the total to 230 in defiance of the opposition's objections (Hiadzie 2012; Darko 2012).

The matter was put to rest by a Supreme Court judgement in October 2012 upholding the ECG's decision. Though legally correct and binding, the decision constituted one of the bases of mutual suspicion, especially between the two leading parties, the NDC and the NPP, that fuelled adversarial behaviour during and after the elections. One may be tempted to argue that, while legally valid, it was not particularly politically expedient at the time, given that the results of the 2008 presidential election were so close that a run-off election was necessary.

The ECG's insistence on creating the new constituencies could be seen as an error of judgement. If it had waited until after the election it might have averted the legitimacy crisis relating to the electoral outcome.

Voter registration is another important indicator of the level of preparedness for an election. If well handled and credible it helps promote popular trust in the electoral process and outcome. The creation of a new voter register was necessary, given widespread suspicion that the previous register was bloated. At the onset of the 2008 exercise it was expected that between 600 000 and 800 000 new voters would be registered. In fact, the figure was 1 835 417, giving rise to suspicions that there had been foul play and calling into question the competence of the ECG (Commonwealth Observer Group 2013, p 6).

In order to salvage its reputation the ECG introduced a biometric system of registration, a move aimed at preventing double registration, thereby eliminating ghost names from the register. It also prescribed various penalties for violations. For instance, double registration warrants a jail term and, if it involves an electoral officer, such an officer will not only be dismissed, he or she will be prosecuted. While the exercise reportedly went well despite allegations of the registration

of underage persons, the technical challenges it generated during the elections were its undoing.

Table 1
Number of registered voters, constituencies and polling stations by region 2012

Region	Registered voters	Constituencies	Polling stations
Greater Accra	2 792 576	34	4 114
Ashanti	2 557 122	47	4 628
Eastern	1 429 682	33	2 961
Western	1 425 158	26	2 618
Northern	1 263 462	31	2 386
Brong-Ahafo	1 245 954	29	2 740
Central	1 231 513	23	2 192
Volta	1 156 740	26	2 283
Upper East	565 097	15	1 136
Upper West	364 489	11	944
Total	14 031 793	275	26 002

Sources: EC2012a; EISA 2012

As Table 1 shows, at the end of the exercise a total of 14 031793 eligible voters were registered across the 275 constituencies and 26 002 polling stations. Despite all claims to the contrary, the validity of these figures can be challenged. The difference between the 2008 and 2012 figures is too exponential and questionable. One cannot totally rule out double or even, in extreme cases, multiple registrations. The ECG chairman allegedly admitted, when confronted with evidence in the course of cross examination in the Supreme Court in the suit challenging the presidential election results, to several cases of double registration in the 2012 register (*Graphic* 2013).

The question of voter education is also very important. If well handled it can help to galvanise the level of political participation in terms of both quantity and quality. Over the years the ECG has paid attention to voter education. However, there are indications that it has been inadequate or ineffective, as evidenced by the large percentage of rejected/spoilt ballots.

A situation in which spoilt ballots come third in a presidential election contested by seven parties and an independent candidate is an indication of a fundamental flaw in the voter education process. To illustrate, in the first round

of the 2008 presidential election Nana Akufo-Addo of the NPP won 4 159 439 (49.13%) of the vote and John Atta Mills of the NDC 4 056 634 (47.92%). They were followed by Papa Kwesi Nduom of the CPP, with 111 494 (1.34%) of the valid votes cast, far below the number of rejected ballots, which was 205 438 (2.4%) (Omotola 2010).

Table 2
Rejected/Spoilt Ballots as a Percentage of Total Votes Cast
1992-2012

Year	Number				Percentage	
	Registered	Votes cast	Valid votes	Invalid votes	Turnout	Invalid
2012	14 158 890	11 246 982	10 995 262	251 720	79.43	2.24
2008	12 532 758	8 897 937	8 691 941	205 996	71.00	2.32
2004	10 354 970	8 813 908	8 625 785	188 123	85.12	2.13
2000	10 698 652	6 605 084	6 500 870	104 214	61.74	1.58
1996	9 279 605	7 256 872	7 145 764	111 108	78.20	1.53
1992	7 401 370	2 126 918	2 062 564	64 354	28.74	3.03

Sources: ECG 2012b; EISA 2013

As can be seen from Table 2 there has been a high level of spoilt/rejected ballots in Ghanaian elections since 1992, oscillating between 1.5% and 3.03% and standing at 2.24% (251 720 ballot papers) in the 2012 elections. There is a need for enhanced political education, especially with regard to the handling of ballot papers.

Finally, the oil question (see Van Gyampo 2012 and Nyuykonge & Letsoalo on page 115 of this issue). also played a significant role, especially during the party campaigns. Oil automatically raised the electoral stakes, becoming the central theme of the campaigns of the two leading parties. The emphasis of both parties was on what should be done and not done with oil receipts.

Conduct of the elections

As usual, the ECG made an effort to ensure the smooth conduct of the elections. The stage was set with the early deployment of election officials and materials. According to the reports of election observation groups, both domestic and international, the elections generally went well, with substantial compliance with the electoral rules.

The Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO), which conducted parallel vote tabulation (PVT) as part of its overall effort to observe the 2012 elections, returned a positive verdict (CODEO 2012a). The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) group, led by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, Nigeria's former president, declared the election well administered. The Commonwealth Observer Group (COG 2013) reported that in most places voting was well administered and voters were free to exercise their rights.

It attributes this success in part to the presence of party agents 'in virtually all stations, providing for transparency and accountability'. The process of vote counting, tabulation and the announcement of results was also said to be transparent and credible.

> The vote count at the polling stations was transparent, with party agents able to follow the process closely. This was also the case during the tabulation process. At the polling station level party agents were able to get a copy of the results and could therefore check and verify the results later tabulated and announced at the constituency and national levels. Results from polling stations and constituencies were also broadcast extensively on TV, radio and online, enabling people to follow on an on-going basis as the final results of the 2012 election were calculated
>
> Commonwealth Observer Group 2013, p 52

This view was corroborated by CODEO (2012a, p 2), whose report 'confidently confirms that the results of its PVT are consistent with the official presidential results announced by the Electoral Commission', thereby boosting its 'confidence that the results of the 2012 presidential polls declared by the Electoral Commission are generally an accurate reflection of how Ghanaians voted in the December 7 polls'.

However, there was another side to the administration of the elections on the election days and it was this that led to the rejection of the result of the presidential election by the NPP (*Daily Guide*, 12 December 2012; BBC Africa News, 9 December 2012). The official results indicate that the incumbent, President John Mahama of the NDC, won 5 574 761 (50.70%) of the total vote against 5 248 898 (47.74%) for Nana Akufo Ado. The NDC also won 145 of the 275 parliamentary seats, while the NPP won 123 (Gyimah-Baodi 2013, p 5), leaving only 15 for other parties and independent candidates.

The NPP rejected the results and went to court to challenge the outcome of the presidential election and more than 10% of the parliamentary election results. The rejection was predicated upon what the party called monumental irregularities and the ECG's failure to comply with important aspects of the electoral regulations.

Table 3
Ghana Election 2012: Presidential Results

Candidate	Votes obtained	Percent votes	Rank
John Dramani Mahama (NDC)	5 574761	50.70	1
Nana Akufo Addo (NPP)	5 248898	47.74	2
Papa Kwesi Nduom (PPP)	64362	0.59	3
Dr. Henry Herbert Lartey (GCPP)	38223	0.35	4
Hassan Ayariga (PNC)	24617	0.22	5
Michael Abu Sakara Foster (CPP)	20323	0.18	6
Jacob Osei Yeboah (Independent)	15201	0.14	7
Akwasi Addai Odike (UFP)	8877	0.08	8

Sources: ECG 2012a; African Elections Project 2012

The first and most basic of the NPP's bases of rejection related to the technical hitches encountered in the application of the biometric voter equipment. On page 20 of its manual for candidates and their agents the ECG states:

> On Election Day, all voters will be verified/identified by their biometric details in the Voters' Register. Voters' fingerprints will be scanned on a voter verification machine and compared with their details in the Voters' Register. The verification of voters is to ensure that only persons on the voters' roll in each polling station are allowed to cast their ballots on Election Day.
>
> Quoted in Damptey 2013, p 3

At a press conference on Wednesday 5 December 2012 to reassure Ghanaians that the ECG was prepared to conduct free, fair and credible elections, the ECG chairman reiterated that all prospective voters should make themselves available for verification, without which they would not be allowed to vote. As he put it, 'among the decisions we have taken with the political parties is "NVNV-No Verification, No Voting", and by verification we mean that everybody would have to be verified biometrically' (quoted in African Elections Project 2012, p 1).

The achievement of this goal depends entirely on the effectiveness of the biometric voting equipment. Unfortunately, the equipment, according to CODEO (2012b, cited in Gyimah-Boadi 2013, p 5), 'malfunctioned in almost a fifth of the polling stations in the country and in about a third of the polling stations in Greater Accra'.

The implications of this development were generally negative. Firstly, it meant that for the first time since 1992 the voting period had to be extended beyond the traditional one day and voting took place over two days. While the extension may be seen as a way of accommodating as many eligible voters as possible, it must also have come at a cost. For instance, were polling officers in affected areas originally recruited to work for two days? How many eligible voters had the patience to wait for two days in order to exercise their right to vote?

Secondly, there were allegations that double standards were applied, with some allegedly allowed to vote without biometric voter verification, while others were not. Worse still, this discriminatory practice was said to have favoured the ruling party to the disadvantage of the opposition.

Other notable sources of dissatisfaction with the conduct of the elections included the failure of presiding officers at some polling stations to sign the official results sheet, over-voting at a number of polling stations and discrepancies in the size of the voters' register. The Supreme Court judgement, which upheld the victory of Mahama's NDC, would appear to have finally put to rest the controversies that surrounded the results, particularly since all the political actors, particularly the main opposition NPP, graciously accepted the verdict in good faith. Contrary to pre-judgement tensions, the judicial outcome did not generate post-judicial violence in the country.

These shortcomings notwithstanding, the ECG was generally considered to have administered the elections well, as attested to by the reports of local and international election observer groups.

POST-ELECTION CHALLENGES

The pronouncement of election results does not signify the end of an election. The responses to the outcome by critical stakeholders, including the candidates and their parties, the electorate, civil society and election observers, are also important. These actors confer the seal of legitimacy on the electoral process by expressing satisfaction with the process and its outcome. The danger is that negative verdicts are treated as sacrosanct and tend generally to discredit the election.

Often the opposition may raise a false alarm to generate public sympathy both locally and internationally. Staffan Lindberg (2004, p 64) underscores this possibility when he notes that the opposition's rejection of results may be a strategy to undermine the political rule of its rivals. He therefore warns that 'challenge to the official results cannot be taken at face value as substantiating allegations of irregularities'.

One viable way to establish the veracity or otherwise of such claims is through legally sanctioned institutional frameworks, particularly the courts. The legitimacy

of the litigation process also requires the full cooperation of the ECG, especially in making necessary electoral materials available to the litigant (in the most recent case, the NPP) so that it can argue its case. In doing so the ECG demonstrates its political neutrality and impartiality and can contend that if anything went wrong it was a genuine mistake.

The ECG appears in the recent case, despite allegations and counter allegations (see Appiah 2013), to have done its best to assist the court process. Its lawyers and its chairman appeared before the court and complied substantially with court directives.

It is important that Ghanaians, irrespective of party affiliation, continue to trust the Supreme Court to mete out justice without fear or favour. As it has turned out, both parties have responded well to the court's decision to uphold the victory of Mahama's NDC.

The ECG, however, needs to do more in terms of post-election peacebuilding through a sustainable process of social mobilisation and voter education on the need to eschew violence. In this regard, civil society has taken the lead through peace advocacy. Efforts must be intensified to sustain the peace process.

CONCLUSION

The primary objective of this article was to assess critically the role of the ECG in the administration of the 2012 elections. This could be done in a number of ways. On the one hand, the overall quality of the elections, measured by the level of participation, competitiveness and legitimacy, sheds some light on the performance of the ECG. The reports of domestic and international observers groups, media reportage and specific features of the election results can be useful in this regard.

Assessed this way, the ECG may be judged to have done very well, especially on the first two indicators, given the high level of voter turnout as an important indicator of participation and the closeness of the total number of votes and seats won by the ruling NDC and its main opposition, the NPP. However, the legitimacy of the election was fiercely challenged by the opposition's rejection of the results and the attendant litigation.

On the other, the performance of the ECG could be assessed by examining its action and inaction at critical stages of the electoral cycle – before, during and after the elections, underscoring how this enabled or disabled the electoral process. The ECG may also be assessed through public perception and trust in its electoral activities during the period under review. This will require an extensive survey among various stakeholders using a variety of data-collection methods, including questionnaires, focus group discussions and interviews. It is also possible to combine two or all of these approaches in measuring the performance of the ECG.

In this article a combination of the first two approaches has been adopted. The overall quality of the elections, as shown above, portrays the ECG in a relatively positive light. However, the rejection of the result by the NPP constituted an affront to the institutional integrity, competence, professionalism and political impartiality that needs to be proved beyond any reasonable doubt.

As the analysis reveals, a number of factors, some of which can be directly linked to the ECG, could have aided the disposition of NPP to the election results. Firstly, the official commencement of oil exploitation in 2010 meant access to huge oil revenues. Since access to political power amounts to access to these oil revenues, it was only natural that the oil question would play a significant role in the election process.

Gyimah-Boadi (2012, p 104) reinforces this position when he asserts that 'early indications suggest that oil will exacerbate the unhealthy partisanship and "competitive clientelism" that plague Ghanaian politics'. And so it happened, because 'partisan politics has been woven into Ghana's oil story from the moment the Jubilee discovery was announced'. In short, the tensions associated with the 2012 election were, in large part, a signifier of the desire by both parties to control oil windfall/revenues.

Secondly, while the ECG cannot be directly linked to the oil question, some of its actions had an impact on the overall quality of the election. Two of these are critical. One is the BVR and the subsequent NVNV requirement for voting that became deeply messy as a result of the malfunctioning of the biometric voter equipment on election day. While technical problems are inevitable with machines, the handling of such challenges in a way that promotes fairness and equity is important. Unfortunately, this would appear not to have been the case.

The development was allegedly exploited by electoral officials to promote double standards, allowing some to vote without verification and denying others the opportunity. The second action, the delimitation of 45 new constituencies, while it is within the statutory powers of the ECG, would appear to have been ill timed. It came barely three months before the election, leaving room for suspicion among opposition parties that it was nothing more than gerrymandering.

The inability to address these pre-election issues effectively and to disperse the associated tensions contributed to a resort to adversarial behaviour by key political actors across party divides. This accentuated distrust among competing political parties and actors, manifested in the resort to vulgar political language and inciting statements.

For example, while the NPP presidential candidate, Nana Akufo-Addo, 'urged his party's supporters not to be intimidated by the NDC's muscular tactics, but to be prepared to fight to the death if need be', the ruling NDC would appear to have taken the use of vulgar language to the extreme by announcing

'the creation of a "Heroes Fund" for party supporters (or their families) who are injured or die "in the service of the party"' (quoted in Gyimah-Boadi 2012, p 106). Such a decision could be taken as a form of insurance to embolden people in their resolve to resort to violence at the slightest provocation.

On the whole, it seems these are not heady days for Ghana's democracy. While it has been touted in recent times as a regional African model, developments surrounding the 2012 election give cause for concern and raise questions, if not doubts, about the institutional abilities and professionalism of the ECG.

Since the chairman of the ECG is widely considered to be a person of high integrity and competence, critical eyebrows can be raised about the quality of his supporting and ad hoc staff, especially those deployed during the 2012 elections. With the impending retirement of the chairman only time will tell how the new leadership (and the discovery of oil) will shape the future of the politics of Ghana. These are crucial issues that must not be trivialised.

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MAKING DEMOCRACY WORK?
Quasi-Public Entities and the Drama of Elections in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

*Since Ghana made the transition to multiparty democracy in the early
1990s there has been a progressive improvement in electoral management
and the acceptance by the political players of election results. Six successive
elections have been held so far, with two crucial power alternations between
two hostile political parties in 2001 and 2009. The 2012 elections presented
an opportunity for the country to continue along the path of democratic
consolidation. However, the outcome of the elections was vigorously disputed
and contested in court by the main opposition party, nearly bringing the
country to the brink of violence. This article makes a contribution to ongoing
debates about why some elections pass peacefully and results are accepted,
while others do not. Various studies have focused on the role of formal
institutions in ensuring credible and fair elections. This article, however,
emphasises the importance of informal institutions in explaining variations
in electoral outcomes and legitimacy in Ghana.*

INTRODUCTION

Since the restoration of multiparty democracy in the early 1990s the electoral
path has emerged as the only means of choosing political leaders and disposing
government in Ghana's political system. The extent to which Ghanaians have
embraced the electoral system as a means of delivering national goals and political
stability is reflected in high voter turnouts, sometimes reaching 80%.

After 1992 Ghana turned its back on the constitutional instability that had
characterised the country's political history, particularly from 1966 to 1991, when,
political power oscillated between civilian and military regimes.

With an enviable record of six successive presidential and parliamentary
elections (1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008 and 2012) and two crucial alternations of
power, in January 2001 and January 2009, between two hostile political parties,

the country has won praise from the international community as a beacon of hope and democracy and a model for the whole of Africa (Gyimah-Boadi 2009, Gyimah-Boadi & Prempeh 2012).

However, unlike the 1996, 2000, 2004, and 2008 elections, which passed peacefully, with losers conceding defeat and congratulating the winner, the results of the 2012 elections, like those in 1992, were contested. In 1992 the credibility of the Electoral Commission of Ghana (ECG) was questioned and it was accused of colluding with the incumbent president. In 2012 the New Patriotic Party (NPP) accused the government of colluding with electoral officers to fraudulently manipulate electoral figures, taking the matter to the Supreme Court, which, in a judgement handed down on 29 August 2013, decided against the NPP's petition, with only two of the nine judges dissenting.

The dispute brought the country to the brink of violence.

Why are the outcomes of some elections broadly accepted by political players while others are strongly disputed? How do we explain variations in electoral outcomes in Ghana? How do we juxtapose Ghana's image as a political success story with strong formal institutions, particularly its Constitution and electoral laws, power alternation and democratic consolidation, with the resurgence of ethnic and regional conflicts and political polarisation, particularly after the 2012 elections? What roles do quasi-public entities or informal institutions play in enabling peaceful and credible elections? Are such roles able to bridge the gaps of ethnic, regional and political polarisation or do they feed into the political divide? These are the central issues this article interrogates.

Various studies have paid a great deal of attention to the importance of credible and peaceful elections, but the spotlight has largely fallen on the role of formal institutions. There is no doubt that formal institutions such as the Constitution, electoral laws, judiciary, political parties, electoral commissions and the security agencies, among others, play critical roles in the creation of peaceful and credible elections, however, the role of informal institutions or quasi-public entities deserves close attention too.

Drawing on Ghana's Inter-Party Advisory Committee (IPAC), a quasi-public entity (or informal framework for inter-party dialogue), this article argues that such entities play critical countervailing roles in the making of peaceful and credible elections. This is particularly so in a competitive multiparty democratic system where the stakes are extremely high and the agency responsible for conducting elections is generally perceived as partisan (see APRM 2005, para 34) and as characterised by strong ethnic and regional mobilisation for votes. The presence of informal institutions can mitigate the potential for excessive partisanship, ethnic and political polarisation and conflicts and can ultimately help avoid democratic breakdown and national disintegration.

By contrast, the absence of such institutions may inflate these negative tendencies, increase the potential for ethnic and political violence and undermine social cohesion (see Gyimah-Boadi & Asante 2006). Ghana's experience with informal institutions, particularly IPAC, enhances our understanding of variations in electoral outcomes in fragile democracies, especially in Africa.

In advancing this argument, the article is structured as follows: This introduction is followed by the theoretical foundations of the study and alternative explanations. The next section examines some of the key institutions adopted by Ghana to manage elections and diversity. The subsequent section looks at IPAC, emphasising its origins, functions and activities. It also provides a critical analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of IPAC, as well as its effectiveness as a framework for managing peaceful and credible elections in Ghana.

THEORETICAL DEBATES AND EXPECTATIONS

There has been a long-standing debate in political science about the viability of democracy in multi-ethnic and multicultural societies and some post-colonial and nationalist leaders in Africa, such as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Ahmed Sékou Touré of Guinea, Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and, in the 1990s, Paul Biya of Cameroon, Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, and Jerry Rawlings of Ghana, claimed that ethnic diversity made democracy a bad fit for their countries.

Broadly, the debate may be classified into two main schools of thought: democracy-ethnic diversity pessimists and democracy-ethnic diversity optimists.

Democracy-ethnic diversity pessimists

Democracy-ethnic diversity pessimists argue that ethnic diversity or multi-ethnicity is detrimental to the maintenance of democracy. Adrian Karatnycky (2002, p 107) reinvigorated the debate when he concluded that 'democracy has been significantly more successful in mono-ethnic societies than in ethnically divided and multi-ethnic societies'.

Advocates of this view generally contend that ethnic differences polarise society and make compromise and consensus building difficult and, as a result, institutions cannot help with ethnic heterogeneity. Ancient Greek political philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle argued that pervasive inequalities and subcultures and cleavages (heterogeneity) are detrimental to the demos and a good political order (Merkela & Weiffen 2012). John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) popularised this idea when he argued in the 16th chapter of his *Considerations on Representative Government* that:

> Free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of
> different nationalities. Among a people without fellow-feeling,
> especially if they read and speak different languages, the united
> public opinion, necessary to the working of representative
> government cannot exist.
>
> <div align="right">Mill 1861, p 289</div>

According to Ernest Barker '… in a multinational State the government either pits each nation against the rest to secure its own absolutism, or allows itself to become the organ of one of the nations for the suppression or oppression of others' (quoted by Connor 1967, p 33). As Robert Dahl (1989, p 207) succinctly puts it: 'The criteria of the democratic process presuppose the rightfulness of the unit itself.' Dahl (1971, p 108) also notes that:

> Presumably because an ethnic or religious identity is incorporated so
> early and so deeply into one's personality, conflicts among ethnic or
> religious subcultures are especially fraught with danger, particularly
> if they are also tied to region … That subcultural pluralism often
> places a dangerous strain on the tolerance and mutual security
> required for a system of public contestation seems hardly open to
> doubt. Polyarchy in particular is more frequently found in relatively
> homogeneous countries than in countries with a great amount of
> subcultural pluralism.

Donald Horowitz (1993, p 19) states that

> [d]emocracy has progressed furthest in those East European countries
> that have the fewest serious ethnic cleavages (Hungary, the Czech
> Republic, and Poland) and progressed more slowly or not at all in
> those that are deeply divided (Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, and of
> course the former Yugoslavia).

In Asia it has been asserted that democracy is more robust in South Korea, which is more homogeneous than Indonesia. In Latin America it is also believed that democracy has flourished in Chile and Costa Rica, which are relatively homogeneous compared to Peru and Guatemala (Fish & Brooks 2004, p 155).

Democracy-ethnic diversity optimists

Contrary to the opinion of democracy-ethnic diversity pessimists that ethnic diversity and democracy are incompatible and, as a result, institutions cannot

help, various studies in recent times show that it is possible for democracy to be
stabilised and even flourish in multiethnic societies (Fish & Brooks 2004; Fearon
and Laitin 2003; Young 1976, 2002). Democracy-ethnic diversity optimists believe
that the issue of ethnicisation of politics is a political problem that requires a
political solution within an institutional context. Institutions are thus held as the
solution to the problems of multi-ethnicity in a democratising state. It is in this
context that the idea that institutions matter has become a central pillar in the
management of ethnic diversity, particularly in fragile democracies.

However, proponents of this view tend to emphasise strong formal
institutions. For example, Donald Horowitz (1985, p 601) notes that formal
institutions matter because they 'structure incentives for political behaviour'.
Brendan O'Leary (2001) also stresses an institutionalist approach that focuses on
constitutional and institutional design (see also O'Leary & McGarry 1993). Paul
Collier (1998) and William Easterly (2000) have also noted the importance of
institutions in managing ethnic diversity and conflicts. For example, Easterly (2000,
p ii) states that 'high quality institutions – reflected in such factors, such as rule of
law, bureaucratic quality, freedom from government expropriation, and freedom
from government repudiation of contracts – mitigate the adverse economic effects
of ethnic fractionalization'. Others cite federalism and institutionalised political
parties as key mechanisms for managing the ethnic factor in politics (Lijphart
1977; Bloomfield, Ghai & Reilly 1998).

Still other scholars have noted the role played by presidential and
parliamentary systems and other forms of constitutional engineering in
moderating political attitudes and actions in ethnically divided society (Linz
1990a, 1990b, 1994; Horowitz, 1990). For example, Linz (1990a, 1990b, 1994) holds
that parliamentarism is more flexible and creates a more conducive environment
for a politically stable democratic transition than presidentialism, which is
deemed to be too rigid and associated with various 'perils' such as polarising
society, authoritarianism, personalisation of power and so on. Horowitz (1990),
however, disagrees with this assertion, citing the case of Nigeria to show that
presidentialism fosters a more effective institutional environment for promoting
inter-ethnic harmony and peace than the Westminister model or parliamentarism.

In short, while the pessimists contend that institutions cannot help to stabilise
democracy in multi-ethnic societies, the optimists believe that institutions are
key to stabilising democracy in such societies. I advance the perspective of the
optimists, arguing that institutions could have a stabilising effect, but, unlike
the optimists, I emphasise informal institutions or socially shared rules created,
communicated and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels (Helmke
& Levitsky 2004). The reason for this is that since 1992 Ghana has put in place
several important formal institutions and a legal framework for elections.

The Constitution is the most important law governing elections in Ghana, but others include the election laws and statutory instruments pertaining to voter registration and presidential/parliamentary election; and constituency demarcation instruments, the Political Parties Act of 2000, the Local Government Act, the Electoral Commissions Act and relevant regulations developed by the ECG.

The Constitution provides for fundamental rights and freedoms and affirms the right to vote as one of those fundamental rights. It also establishes the elective offices and sets out the eligibility criteria for standing for president and for Parliament.

The ECG, an autonomous body comprising seven members, was established in 1993 by a statute in accordance with the provisions of the 1992 Constitution and has played a key role in managing elections in Ghana. However, the power of the president to appoint members of the commission has been a source of controversy among the parties.

When two members of the Interim National Electoral Commission were appointed after the controversial 1992 elections the then opposition NPP opposed the president's sole right of appointment and proposed political party representation on the commission. In 2004 the National Democratic Congress (NDC) challenged the intentions of the incumbent NPP president in appointing particular persons to vacant positions on the ECG in an election year even though the appointments conformed with the constitutional provisions.

Importantly, the Constitution contains elaborate provisions concerning the management of ethnic diversity. For example, the Directive Principles of State Policies frown on discrimination and the ethnicisation of politics and promote equality/equity in public sector governance (Republic of Ghana 1992). In addition, various laws in the Constitution and the Political Parties Act (2000) governing the activities of political parties also frown on ethnic mobilisation and bar ethnic-based parties. In addition, the judiciary plays an important role in settling electoral disputes.

I argue that the various formal institutions for managing elections in Ghana, most of which have been in existence since 1992, are important but not sufficient to guarantee credible and peaceful elections and the efficient resolution of electoral disputes, both in the pre- and post-election phase and, as such, should be complemented by informal institutions.

The missing link in the disputed elections of 1992 and 2012 was largely the result of the absence of a strong IPAC to deal with grievances and to promote confidence-building measures while moderating political tensions and excessive partisanship and ensuring a conducive political environment. The absence or weak presence of IPAC meant that political grievances with which it had previously dealt

effectively played out in the courts and the media, generating further tensions and anxiety and poisoning the political environment.

For example, in July 2012, the four main political parties, the ruling NDC, the opposition NPP, the People's National Convention (PNC) and the Conventions People's Party (CPP) jointly sued the ECG over its insistence on proceeding with the by-elections in the Kwabre East and Wulensi constituencies using the old voters' register. The court ruled in favour of the parties, noting that the use of the old register for the by-elections could trigger electoral disputes (Myjoyonline. com 2012).

The strength (or lack of strength) of informal institutions such as IPAC is important in explaining the disputes and contestations that characterised the 1992 and 2012 elections despite the fact that the formal institutions were in place.

I set out three main theoretical expectations. Firstly, that the absence of quasi-public entities will lead to flawed elections and a surge in ethnic, regional and political conflict and will ultimately undermine social cohesion. Secondly, that the presence of strong quasi-public entities will enhance the quality and credibility of elections and reduce ethnic and regional tensions while strengthening social cohesion. Thirdly, the presence of weak quasi-public entities may lead to contested elections and a surge in ethnic regional conflicts and will ultimately undermine social cohesion.

Thus, the strong presence of IPAC in 1996, 2000, 2004 and 2008 contributed significantly to the successful elections despite the deep suspicion, new reforms and competitive nature of these elections, while its absence in 1992 and weakness in 2012 resulted in the flaws and disputes that characterised those elections.

THE INTER-PARTY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

In the late 1980s and early 1990s the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC), led by Jerry Rawlings, which took power through a military coup d'état on 31 December 1981, came under both internal and external pressure to return Ghana to constitutional rule. Despite his initial reluctance Rawlings succumbed to the pressure, but the regime guided the transition process closely, excluding opposition parties from participating fully in the Constitution-drafting process and hand-picking members of the Committee of Experts set up to draft the Constitution. The PNDC also manipulated the composition of the Consultative Assembly that discussed the draft, in order to exclude independent voices, while refusing to allow a fully elected constituent assembly to undertake this task.

In the 1992 founding elections the opposition parties disputed the presidential election results and subsequently boycotted the parliamentary elections, which were held separately (Frempong 2012; Agyeman-Duah 2008; Boafo-Arthur 2007).

There were a few pockets of violence around the country. In the interests of peace and stability the Commonwealth Observer Group recommended dialogue, even if it was informal (Frempong 2012), but the initial NDC-NPP dialogue failed because of deep mistrust between the two parties and suspicions about the electoral process (Frempong 2012, pp 62-63; Frempong 2007, 2008; Ayee 1997; Boafo-Arthur 2006). In March 1994 the ECG created IPAC, an informal and non-statutory body comprising representatives of political parties and of the ECG.[1]

The main functions of IPAC are: to serve as a channel of information for the commission and the parties and to enable them to discuss all aspects of the programme and activities of the commission with parties and donors; to ensure that parties and donors make an input into the management of the electoral process and, at the same time, bring out their concerns for general discussion; to facilitate regional, district and constituency level IPAC meetings (Open Society Initiative for West Africa – OSIWA – and the Institute for Democratic Governance – IDEG 2007 Ayee 1997a, 1997b; Frempong 2012).

Although IPAC's decisions are not binding on the ECG it has served as a forum for generating proposals for electoral reform and has succeeded in building trust in the electoral process, especially among political parties (Frempong 2012, pp 62-63; Frempong 2007; Ayee 1997). In response, the ECG, with donor support, embarked on a comprehensive programme of reforming the electoral process and enhancing its credibility.

Most starkly, through IPAC forums political parties participated in key electoral processes such as voter registration, development of the election Code of Conduct and the procurement of electoral materials. This resulted in the ECG largely succeeding in building confidence and achieving credible improvements in electoral management, leading to the conduct of four successful general elections with few complaints from the participants.

IPAC interventions in elections

Elections in Ghana are generally competitive and the political environment is often characterised by deep suspicions and anxieties among the political players and their supporters. This was the case in both 1992 and 1996. However, under the auspices of IPAC the main political stakeholders agreed on major electoral reforms prior to the 1996 elections: a single day for both parliamentary and presidential elections, photo-ID cards, voter photos on the electoral register and

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1   It should be noted that the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) /Ghana Political Parties Programme (GPPP), formed in 2002, also brings together political parties with representation in Parliament and civil society organisations (CSOs) to discuss critical national issues. However, the GPPP is the subject of another article.

transparent ballot boxes and the active involvement of party agents as observers of the registration exercise.

The reforms agreed to within IPAC were not binding on the ECG, nevertheless, it gave serious attention to suggestions and proposals that were practical, legal and cost effective (Frempong 2012). Since then, IPAC has become a framework for building trust and confidence within the political class on the conduct of elections and has also provided a platform for deepening trust in the ECG. By and large, IPAC succeeded in building confidence and has moderated excessive partisanship, political behaviour and actions of the key actors that have led to successful elections and less ethnic and political tension and have enhanced social cohesion.

Although the 2000 elections, too, were characterised by deep mistrust among the parties, IPAC continued with its confidence-building measures and moderation of political activities and behaviour and this resulted in another successful election and the alternation of power, with John Evan Atta Mills, the ruling NDC's presidential candidate, conceding defeat to the NPP candidate, John Kuffuor. The post-election environment was peaceful and the losing candidates conceded defeat, congratulated the victor and subsequently participated in the inauguration of the president, minimising ethnic and political tensions and fostering national unity (Gyimah-Boadi 2001).

Mistrust was evident in 2004 too, despite major electoral reforms announced by the ECG. One source of controversy was the creation of 30 additional constituencies for the election, increasing the number of seats in Parliament from 200 to 230. Once more IPAC succeeded in building confidence and consensus and the election was successful.

By 2008 IPAC had gained widespread recognition among the political actors, the public, donors and election observers, with both European Union and African Union observers suggesting it should be institutionalised. Once more power changed hands without conflict when Atta Mills defeated Nana Akuffo-Addo of the NPP by less than 0.5% in a run-off after Akuffo-Addo had won the first round by about 2%, falling short of the 50%-plus-one threshold.

Ghana's democratic credentials and ethnic harmony and social cohesion remained intact, winning praise for the country from the international community as a political success story and a model of electoral democracy for the whole of Africa.

Constant discussions among the ECG, political parties and the donor community and advice to the ECG yielded new ideas, resulting in progressive improvements in the electoral process. For example, in the 2000 and 2004 elections parties were represented at the various printing houses where ballot papers were printed. The ECG, through IPAC, discussed not only the electoral roadmap but also new reforms and changes prior to their implementation.

For instance, in October 2003 the ECG informed IPAC of the 30 additional constituencies (Ghanaweb 2003). It also announced to IPAC that a voter registration exercise would take place in January 2004 and that, in conformity with Article 451 of the Constitution, it had set up a procurement committee with representatives from the donor community and the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, which had completed the evaluation of bids for the procurement of electoral materials for the voter registration exercise and the 2004 elections (Ghanaweb 2003).

The ECG also proposed to set up a six-member committee comprising two representatives each from the ECG and the political parties (one from the governing party and one from an opposition party), a representative each from the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning and the donor community, which would serve as an expert or consultant on the procurement of electoral materials. However, the parties declined to serve on the committee, stating that 'there had not been any indication of malfeasance on the part of the ECG to suggest that the commission was incompetent and inefficient in handling the procurement of electoral materials and that the commission should be allowed to take responsibility for its actions' (Ghanaweb 2003).

On that basis the parties 'agreed at the meeting that once the IPAC is informed of the process of procurement and items of deliveries the fears of political parties would be allayed and their interest secured'. In this regard, '[t]he parties again suggested that instead of their participating in a procurement committee the commission should put in place a five-member committee made up of three ECG representatives and two others from the donor community' (Ghanaweb 2003). Clearly, the involvement of the political parties in all aspects of the electoral process gave them the feeling that they had a stake in the process and that it was therefore binding on them. Consequently, they played an active role in ensuring the success of all electoral activities.

IPAC's interventions in the 2008 elections were equally crucial in assuaging the anxieties and tensions that emerged following concerns raised by the opposition NDC that the voters' register in the Ashanti Region, the stronghold of the NPP, was bloated and the call for an IPAC meeting to look into the issue. The NDC threatened to contest the outcome of the elections if its concerns were not addressed by IPAC and the ECG.

The NDC also vehemently opposed the Representation of the People Amendment Bill, which the NPP had tabled in 2004. In terms of the Bill the Representation of the Peoples Law of 1992 (PNDC Law 284) would be amended to enable Ghanaians residing abroad to register and vote in elections. Again, the NDC threatened to contest the election results if the Bill was passed (OSIWA and IDEG 2007). Through the efforts of IPAC and other CSOs the issues raised by the

NDC were discussed with the ECG and resolved, calming tensions around the organisation of the December 2008 elections.

The head of the European Union Election Observer Mission (EU-EOM), Nickolay Mladenov, stated in the final report on election 2008 that 'the IPAC meeting should be developed as a more regular platform of dialogue between the Electoral Commission and the political parties' (Hayford nd). Similar recommendations were made by the election observer missions of the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States, with some suggesting once more that IPAC should be institutionalised.

Indeed, delegations from other African countries such as Nigeria (UNDP 2012) and Uganda (Ghana News Agency 2013) have visited Ghana to learn more about IPAC and inter-party dialogue. Political parties in Ghana have also suggested that IPAC should be guaranteed by law in the same way as the Council of State that advises the president on important national issues (Ghana News Agency 2011).

IPAC and elections 2012

Successful and pragmatic interventions in the 1996, 2000, 2004 and 2008 elections earned IPAC recognition and acceptance both domestically and internationally as a major innovation and instrument for inter-party dialogue, building confidence, moderating political behaviour, actions and activities and promoting political stability. Against the background of its growing popularity many Ghanaians were optimistic that IPAC would continue to play an influential role in promoting credible and peaceful elections in 2012. Shockingly, the ECG sidelined IPAC when it made major electoral reforms and decisions about the 2012 elections.

Instead of convening regular IPAC meetings to deliberate on electoral reforms and a new roadmap, the ECG issued declarations and directives through the media and press conferences, to the disappointment of the political parties. For example, in March 2011 a workshop on how to strengthen inter-party dialogue in Ghana organised by International IDEA, in collaboration with the ECG, and attended by representatives of all political parties, provided a platform for political parties to reflect on the challenges facing IPAC and to make recommendations to improve its effectiveness (IDEA 2011).

During the workshop the parties expressed concerns about the infrequency of IPAC meetings, which, they felt, deprived them of the opportunity to understand the ECG's ongoing programme (IDEA 2011). The parties said they were 'keen to be kept informed about plans for biometric registration. The parties also thought they could be consulted on matters relating to district-level elections' (IDEA 2011), indicated that the ECG was sometimes heavy handed and intolerant in

its chairing of IPAC meetings and called for the leaders of the ECG to respect the decisions of IPAC, especially in cases where parties generally agreed about a particular issue (IDEA 2011).

By sidelining IPAC and resorting to unilateral decisions, often supported by the ruling NDC, the ECG was locked into a long-drawn-out debate with the opposition parties, particularly the NPP, as well as several non-governmental organisations, over some of the new reforms, particularly the introduction of the biometric electoral register and verification system.

The creation of 45 new constituencies just weeks before the elections drew strong criticism from the clergy, student groups and the opposition parties, especially the NPP, who described the move as gerrymandering. The political environment was further poisoned by the consistent support the ECG received from the ruling NDC with regard to many of the controversial issues. As a result, changes announced by the ECG were interpreted as laying the groundwork for election rigging.

Ghana has a constituency-based first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system and the ECG has jurisdiction over the review of the constituency boundaries and creation of new constituencies. Shortly before the elections the commission embarked on a delimitation exercise through which it increased the number of constituencies from 230 to 275.[2] In a similar exercise in 2004 the ECG announced the changes during an IPAC meeting. In 2012 the ECG made the announcement at the Ghana International Press Centre in Accra (*Daily Guide* 2012), astonishing political parties and civil society groups.

The news drew swift criticism from the opposition parties, who argued that they had not been consulted and the matter had not been discussed at IPAC, but it was welcomed by the NDC. The opposition parties cautioned the ECG about its sidelining of IPAC, stating that if it acted unilaterally this could lead to the electoral process being discredited. An attempt by a group of citizens to get a court ruling to prevent the ECG from creating the new constituencies failed.

At a press conference the NPP stated that the 'minority and the NPP are not against the creation of new constituencies per se, [but that] the process and timing is reprehensible' (RadioXYZonline 2012). The NPP demanded, unsuccessfully, that a meeting of IPAC be held immediately 'to resolve thorny issues bedevilling the biometric registration in the country' (RadioXYZonline 2012). The minority leader, Osei Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu, lamented that the process of creating constituencies had been fraught with so many problems that it was unreasonable to continue with it.

Earlier in August the majority in Parliament had been forced to spike the

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2   The roles of the Local Government Ministry, which creates administrative districts and the Electoral Commission, which creates constituencies, overlap.

document, known as CI 73, which contained the regulations for the creation of the new constituencies, when the subcommittee responsible for looking into its contents complained that it was riddled with inaccuracies. The original document was withdrawn and a new one, CI 77, was tabled, only to be withdrawn and replaced with a third document. The minority leader described the way in which the ECG and the majority party tried to force CI 73 through as 'a complete illegality [which] clearly portrays the ECG as being in bed with the NDC government' (RadioXYZonline 2012).

He noted further that, '[t]he Electoral Commission knows that as we speak today there are no new constituencies in place, yet the ECG went ahead and supervised the conduct of the primaries by the ruling government party in these non-existent constituencies' (RadioXYZonline 2012). Such actions, he said, might make people suggest that the ECG and the government had malicious intentions. The minority said CI 73 had been put together in haste and it was time civil society groups intervened and demanded that the 'powers that be' change their position on the matter (RadioXYZonline 2012).

The minority leader urged the ECG to focus instead on CI 75, which regulated the biometric register and voting system, in order to forestall problems related to the ongoing display of the voters' register. In order to ensure credible and fair elections, the minority leader suggested, 'this is not a time for ordinary prayers' but one for all to discuss this 'vain experimentation' in order to curb any potential problems (RadioXYZonline 2012).

Biometric voter registration (BVR) was a major reform announced by the ECG for the purposes of the 2012 elections. The commission argued that the BVR and biometric voter verification (BVV) would speed up the electoral process and reduce queuing time, while also ensuring total accuracy by providing useful election-day statistics and further enhancing confidence in the elections. The voter registration exercise was carried out from 24 March to 5 May 2012, during which period about 14.3-million voters were registered.

However, like the creation of the new constituencies, the introduction of the BVR was not adequately discussed by IPAC. Much of the information about the process was disseminated through the media, resulting in mounting criticism of the ECG. The parties expressed concern about the commission's delay in convening an IPAC meeting to deliberate on the methods and procedures for the implementation of the biometric exercise and related processes.

In a letter to the ECG the NPP stated: 'We wish to convey our deep sense of apprehension that the manner in which you are conducting affairs towards the 2012 elections, secretly, stealthily and silently is a recipe for disaster' (*The Chronicle* nd). It stated further: 'We realize that your institution has no experience in the field of electoral biometrics and you have not requested credible experts to help

you in undertaking this exercise' (*The Chronicle* nd). Failure to do so could lead to a flawed outcome, wrote the NPP.

In order to avoid this, it posited, 'There is an urgent need to convene IPAC immediately so that together we can help restore credibility … We refer you to our previous correspondence on the need to get IPAC convened and deliberating on matters regarding the forthcoming Biometric Voter Registration exercise and other issues pertaining to the 2012 general elections' (*The Chronicle* nd). The opposition noted that its call for specific information and material to enable it to convince itself that the 'tender process' leading to the procurement of equipment and materials was credible had fallen on deaf ears.

The debate was, however, eventually resolved with the introduction of the principle of no verification, no vote (NVNV).

Despite the benefits of the biometric system there were major setbacks during the registration period.

Partly due to misinformation and poor publicity on the part of the ECG there were tensions in some centres as a result of people moving from areas where the exercise was yet to be conducted. There were reports of malfunctioning printers and laptops and thumbprint machines. These technical problems, in addition to the late arrival of officers, delayed registration in some areas.

Ineffective communication of the schedules for the registration exercise added to the frustration of some applicants, who visited registration centres which were not included in the first phase of the exercise, scheduled for 24 March to 2 April.

There were clashes among party members and agents over irregularities relating to the poor understanding and application of eligibility criteria for registration, particularly with regard to place of residence, age, identification and procedures for guarantors. In the Odododiodio constituency in Accra the process became chaotic when NDC agents turned away people they claimed did not live in the constituency. The NPP's parliamentary candidate for Ablekuma South, Ursula Owusu, and the spokesperson for Nana-Akufo Addo, Samuel Abu Jinapor, were allegedly attacked by the same agents. There were also clashes in the constituency between supporters of the NDC and the NPP.

Discussions in the media about this incident became ethnicised because it was alleged that those who were turned away had particular names or were perceived to come from particular ethnic groups.

These unfortunate developments, coupled with the failure of the police to act swiftly, further heightened ethnic tensions and severely poisoned the pre-election political environment, especially when a leading member of the NPP called on supporters of the party in some regions to attack NDC supporters.

In response to these tensions and challenges IPAC, civil society and the

political parties called on the ECG to address all the problems before the elections, but, despite assurances from the ECG that this would be done, election day produced further problems, which are detailed in other articles in this issue of the journal.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined why some elections in Ghana went smoothly, with the results broadly accepted by key political players, while others did not. It shows that since the re-introduction of multiparty politics in 1992 Ghana has put in place various formal institutions for managing elections and has held six successive elections, the results of four of which were broadly accepted by the main political players. Those in 1992 and 2012, however, were disputed, despite the fact that the formal institutions have remained largely the same throughout all the elections.

The Inter-Party Advisory Committee was established to ensure that the technical, operational and logistical challenges encountered in the 1992 elections were tackled. I have shown that the absence of IPAC in 1992 led to the flawed election and the contestations and ethnic and political tensions that followed that election.

In contrast, IPAC's presence in 1996 significantly enhanced the quality and credibility of the elections, reducing ethnic and political tensions and strengthening social cohesion. Finally, the sidelining of IPAC largely explains the disputes and the resultant surge in ethnic and political conflict that brought the country to the brink of violence after the 2012 elections.

Clearly IPAC is a forum that promotes transparency in the electoral process and a place where political players can share ideas and advise the ECG on electoral issues. Importantly, IPAC has collaborated with other civil society groups, such as churches, the media and the National Peace Council, to set in motion incremental changes and improved mechanisms to ensure peaceful, fair and credible elections. This has enabled Ghana to achieve a progressive improvement in electoral management and the increasing acceptance of election results by key political actors and observers alike.

As noted, through IPAC forums political parties participated in key electoral processes such as voter registration, the development of the electoral Code of Conduct, procurement of election materials, printing of ballot papers, development of the Political Parties Code of Conduct and negotiated a framework for peace known as the Kumasi Accord (signed on 27 November 2012) that commits election stakeholders to peaceful elections.

IPAC's activities also engendered confidence in and goodwill towards the electoral commission. However, unlike in the four previous elections, in 2012

IPAC was sidelined by the ECG and thus failed to promote the kind of confidence-building measures expected of it.

It also failed to deal with all the grievances and anxieties that emerged prior to the elections and heightened tensions, especially in the implementation of the biometric voting system and constituency delimitations, leading to disputed elections and increased ethnic and political tensions.

The intransigence of the ECG meant that previous grievances and issues that were resolved peacefully through IPAC were allowed to play out in the media and the courts. In light of the ongoing disputes and the challenges that bedevilled the 2012 elections Ghana needs to embark on major electoral reforms. This would require careful consideration of strengthening the role of IPAC, which is currently weak, poorly structured and has no funding for its activities.

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THE NATURE OF IDEOLOGY IN GHANA'S 2012 ELECTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The nature of ideology in Ghana's 2012 elections has not been studied, but to do so is key to understanding social, economic and political developments in the country. This article tries to fill the gap. Theoretical guidance is taken from Giovanni Arrighi's The Long Twentieth Century *(1994). While the analysis is cast in the longue durée, the empirical evidence is mostly extracted from the 2012 elections. Contrary to earlier findings that ideology plays no part in Ghanaian politics, it is argued that it was central, to the campaign at least, but that the position is one of common economic liberalism rather than multiple ideologies. So, while rhetorically the parties asserted their differences, substantially and substantively, aspiration rather than ascription was the common unifying logic of the two major political parties. This assessment has some positive but mostly very disturbing implications for the distribution of wealth.*

INTRODUCTION

Now that the Supreme Court has brought finality to the 2012 elections and President John Mahama has been affirmed as winner, it is important to turn attention to the political and economic aspects of the elections. The issue of ideology is central to the economic direction of the country and, hence, to the material conditions of the people, so it requires careful reflection.

On the basis of the nature of previous elections and political programmes the literature coheres around the view that it is pragmatism rather than any ideology that drives party programmes in Ghana and that while the parties profess differences in political traditions, in practice their actions are not anchored in any real ideology (see, eg, Rathbone 1973; Ninsin 2006; Fridy 2007; Ayee 2011).

This state of knowledge has recently been advanced by Bob-Milliar (2012, pp 678-79) and Gyampo (2012). The former argues that the dominant and common view of non-ideology-based-politics should be qualified because party support and membership can be categorised and it is those on the lowest rungs, often the least educated, who are sometimes described as 'foot soldiers', who follow parties without considering their ideologies. The more informed members, Bob-Milliar argues, are drawn to their parties on the basis of distinct political ideologies.

However, these findings are contradicted by survey results presented by Gyampo. According to him, most party supporters who have a tertiary education are either ignorant of their party's ideology or, despite knowing the ideology, are not draw to the party for that reason. So, the jury is still out about the nature of ideology and party politics in Ghana. It should be noted, however, that most of these studies examine the demand side of politics – perceptions, beliefs and attitudes of supporters and voters, not the supply side – the behaviour of the parties themselves. Yet both perspectives are necessary for a better appreciation of the role of ideology in Ghanaian politics.

This chapter tries to further the debate by examining the supply side, while weaving insights from the demand side into the story. Guidance is taken from Giovanni Arrighi's theory of ideology as spelt out in *The Long Twentieth Century* (Arrighi 1994). The article is cast in the *longue durée* historical research tradition, but the empirical evidence (among other evidence gleaned from speeches, manifestos and press releases) is drawn mostly from the 2012 elections.

It is argued that in 2012 Ghana's political parties espoused three archetypical ideologies, namely, social democracy, property-owning democracy and socialism of the Nkrumahist type and that political campaigns were largely based on these belief systems. However, beyond asserting difference, the substantive position of the dominant parties is one of common economic liberalism rather than multiple ideologies. So, while rhetorically and superficially the parties asserted difference, substantially and substantively, aspiration rather than ascription was the common logic of the two major parties.

This view leads to both positive and disturbing conclusions. On the positive side, since most political actors subscribe, substantively, to the same ideology, political inclusiveness is more feasible. On the other hand, this assessment shows a further rightward shift in Ghana's political economy, with implications for continuing, if not intensified, social differentiation. An alternative to economic

liberalism exists in the smaller parties, but continuing internal discord, rancour, and acrimony, together with external forces, make it unlikely that they will capture power any time soon.

The rest of the article is divided into four sections. Section one presents the ideologies of the two leading parties to pave the way for more substantive analysis in section two, where the various approaches to the management of Ghana's economy are compared and contrasted along ideological lines. Section three analyses the tendency of the key ideas, indices, and approaches to the management of the country's economy to converge around a central neoliberal ideology and the implications of this tendency for society and economy. Section four examines an alternative political ideology and ponders the possibility of it becoming the common and dominant belief system.

IDEOLOGY AND POLITICAL PARTIES IN GHANA

Ghana's political parties lay claim to traditions, core beliefs, 'creeds' or philosophies. I will call these belief systems ideology. The parties that went into the 2012 elections advanced three ideologies: social democracy (National Democratic Congress, NDC), property-owning democracy (New Patriotic Party, NPP) and socialism/scientific socialism/Nkrumahism (Convention People's Party, CPP). The rest (eg, the People's National Convention – PNC and the Progressive People's Party – PPP) advocate versions of these key belief systems.

The official ideology of the NDC has evolved over time. The party started out, in 1981, as the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC), a military group justified by its architects on the grounds of opposition to corruption, moral decadence, obscene concentration of wealth and lack of accountability on the part of the government. It was widely believed that the PNDC would turn out to be socialist in ideology – as John Haynes (1992) noted in his contribution to the *Journal of Communist Studies*.

However, the choice of economic policies (as in the acceptance and implementation of the Economic Recovery Programme, Ghana's version of Structural Adjustment Programmes), and an alliance with Washington, created doubts about whether the PNDC was ideologically socialist or simply a populist regime seeking global legitimacy and economic survival. Its leader, Jerry Rawlings, was later to make it clear that he did not believe in party politics at all and, while his promotion of the ideas of decentralisation might be lauded as progressive, the decentred governance programme was mainly a scheme to perpetuate his rulership (Crook 1999).

All that changed, however, when he called for multiparty democratic elections in 1992 in response to overt and covert international pressure (Oquaye

1995). Since that time, but especially since 2002, the NDC has been a proponent of social democracy (Bob-Milliar, 2012). In the 2012 elections the party stated that:

> As a social democratic party the NDC is duty-bound to focus its economic development priorities on improving the lives of Ghanaians through investment and development policies that maximise inclusive growth and supports a responsive relationship between state and private sector in a manner that creates wealth without undermining the interests of ordinary Ghanaians and a sustainable environment. Arising out of these we aspire to achieve the following targets during our next term:
>
> • Maintain single digit rate of inflation;
> • Ensure exchange rate stability;
> • Reduce deficits significantly;
> • Maintain an average annual growth rate of at least 8%.
>
> NDC 2012, p 31

Article 5 of the NDC's constitution states that 'The Party is a Social Democratic Party that believes in the equality and the egalitarian treatment of all persons irrespective of their social, cultural, educational, political, religious and economic relations in a multi-party environment' (NDC 1992).

Within these sentiments are echoes of a type of democracy that cherishes collective progress, social justice and broad human development. According to Daddieh & Bob-Milliar (2012, p 8) the party has a 'revolutionary ideology'.

The NPP, on the other hand, has always espoused an ideology of 'property-owning democracy'. Although, the party was formed in 1992 it has consistently held onto this ideology since the days of the United Gold Coast Convention and later the National Liberation Movement and the United Party, and has followed the articulation of that ideology, especially by J B Danquah and K A Busia (see Ayee 2009 for a more detailed account of the formation of the NPP). According to Mike Oquaye (1995, p 270), '[w]ith the motto "development in freedom", NPP, inter alia, stood for human rights, anti-Marxism, anti-authoritarianism, liberal economy and rural development'. In the 2012 elections the NPP quoted a statement from Danquah in its manifesto, presumably as an embodiment of its ideology.

According to the NPP (2012, p 14), '[the party's] policy is to liberate the energies of the people for the growth of a property-owning democracy in this land, with right to life, freedom and justice, … .' Various subsections of Article 2 of the party's constitution (NPP 2009) contain references to the idea of a property-

owning democracy, but a fuller version of this ideology is stated on the party's official website (NPP 2013). Under the caption, 'our creed', it states that:

> *We believe* … in 'Property-owning democracy'… We believe in Freedom of the Individual, of Choice, of Speech and of Enterprise. *We believe* that national development starts with the individual, who has the right to choose, fully grow and exploit his or her God-given talents. *We believe* that government has a duty: To provide access to relevant education and training that will empower the individual's development. To make available affordable, quality healthcare to every citizen. To create and sustain an environment that offers opportunity to all. To guarantee that rule of law and protection of rights that enables the individual to flourish … We believe that we are responsible for ourselves, but that in our development, we must raise our families, improve our community and contribute to the creation of a wealthy country. Finally, we believe that the people of Ghana, the government and each and every one of us, must accept that there will always be those who are unable to provide for themselves, and for them we must provide a level of support, a safety net.
>
> <div align="right">NPP 2013, emphasis in original</div>

Here we see the centrality of individual responsibility, with collectivity almost unremarked. So, of the two ideologies, it is the NPP version that is clearly individualistic and mostly based on aspiration – although, in practice, the NPP has important interventionist policies such as its free senior high school ('free SHS') proposal. Cast in the language of the world ideologies, the NDC is social democratic and the NPP holds a neoliberal ideology and tries to create a neoliberal state.

According to eminent political economist David Harvey (2006, p 25):

> The fundamental mission of the neo-liberal state is to create a 'good business climate' and therefore to optimize conditions for capital accumulation no matter what the consequences for employment or social well-being. This contrasts with the social democratic state that is committed to full employment and the optimization of the well-being of all of its citizens subject to the condition of maintaining adequate and stable rates of capital accumulation … The neo-liberal state is particularly assiduous in seeking the privatization of assets as a means to open up fresh fields for capital accumulation.

The parties contesting the 2012 elections in Ghana asserted these differences. Their campaigns were mostly party manifesto based, issue based, substance based and programmatic, retrospectively and prospectively. There were political debates, lectures, and other issue-based events that gave the key political actors the opportunity to set out their programmes and ideologies. So, the 2012 elections would seem to contradict – at least in terms of the conduct of the elections as distinct from voting patterns – the claims by Cornell University don Nicolas van de Walle of the centrality of valence, ethnicity and clientelism to elections in sub-Saharan Africa (see, eg, Van de Walle 2003, 2012). They would also contradict the situation in the 1950s in Ghana where the key difference between the competing parties was the speed with which self-government would be achieved (Rathbone 1973). In short, the campaigns were based on expressed ideologies.

In what follows I shall argue that, contrary to the claims of difference, both political parties seek to extend *capitalist* market forces, reduce the role of the state in economic management, financialise society and promote aspiration, not ascription. In short, both parties have a neoliberal ideology and strive to create a neoliberal state. The version of these ideologies advocated by the parties in Ghana is consistent with the theoretical position of the NPP, not that of the NDC. So, of the two parties it is the NPP whose policies are congruent with its ideology.

Yet, suggestions that some of its proposals, such as the famous 'free SHS', are 'socialist' because they call for social interventions, amount to a misapprehension of the concept of property-owning democracy, as recently discussed by Richard Dagger (2012) in *The Good Society*. A highly educated workforce is consistent with the NPP's ideology of ensuring individualism, free enterprise and general extension of free markets. Ultimately, however, it is in the management of the economy that we see the similarities between these two parties.

MANAGING THE ECONOMY

The NDC and the NPP advanced different programmes and policies in their manifestos. In the case of education, for instance, both had programmes geared towards improving the quality, but they approached the subject differently. In the case of the NPP, education would be free, at least at the senior high school level. The NDC was critical of this viewpoint, claiming that it was not attainable, that education should not be regarded as a promise but a right, that it is basic not secondary education that should be free, that other aspects of education were more important, that the costing of the programme was wrong and that the country was not ready for the programme as the existing infrastructure was incapable of supporting 'free SHS'. It then offered a gradualist alternative.

So, on the surface, there seem to have been important differences between the two parties. However, in terms of the overall philosophy about the transformation of the economy, both placed total confidence in economic growth and both played up their achievements in terms of mainstream indices of economic management such as inflation, while downplaying the efforts of the other along the same orthodox indices.

Even more telling is the fixation of the two parties on private-sector-led growth. In the NPP's manifesto the private sector is regarded as the 'driving force of the economy' (NPP 2012, p 45) and the 'bedrock of the economy' (p 45) and, for those reasons, an NPP government 'will put its weight behind our private sector' (p 46).

The NPP's aim is to divide wealth evenly among the masses. To achieve that it promised to review taxes and to create a vibrant private sector by offering free education, establishing 'economic growth poles' (p 39) and formalising, creating and extending land ownership (p 39). In short, the NPP believes 'in the efficiency of a market economy' (p 45) and, in saying that it envisages a Ghana in which 'everyone wants to do business' (p 47), it aims to create what Karl Polanyi ([1954] 2001) calls a 'market society'.

The NDC, which is supposedly social democratic, called the private sector the 'key' to transformation – a surprising position, though not new, since it was the NDC, or its predecessor, the PNDC, that ushered in the pro-market Economic Recovery Programme in 1983. The founder of the party himself, who once claimed to be a socialist, was later hailed as a pragmatic neoliberal and a great political acrobat because he shifted his ideology to the right (Haynes 1992). The reduction of state involvement in economic management was accelerated and state powers were used to clear the way for private capital accumulation. While the NPP definitely continued the process of marketisation when it governed the country (2001-2009), this was in keeping with the party's ideology of a property-owning democracy.

From this basis both parties claim that, through the private sector, they can create jobs for all. It can be argued that it is pragmatism that is shaping this ideological choice or that it is the failings of the state-led model of economic development or that this approach is the only way – what Margaret Thatcher termed 'TINA – there is no alternative'. Yet, the so-called failings of the state can be found in private-sector-led development programmes too. The National Youth Employment Programme is a case in point. A private-sector-led programme set up in 2006 and renamed the Ghana Youth Employment and Entrepreneurial Development Agency in 2012, its scope was the empowerment of the youth through activities such as employment. Yet the draft report of the Ministerial Impact Assessment and Review Committee (2013) contains allegations of

corruption attendant on this model, so something other than pragmatism must be driving the wheels of private-sector growth. Ideology is one possibility.

Ghana's economy is largely based on natural resources, so it is important to see how the two parties intend to manage these resources. In its manifesto the NPP (2012) promised to industrialise what it called a Guggisberg or raw-materials-based economy. It planned to use the oil resources for social services and promised transparency in oil management. More importantly, it would process and add value to the raw materials produced in Ghana.

As part of that vision it would modernise agriculture but it emphasised that it would 'diversify into higher value production' (NPP 2012, p 39). It considers small-scale farming a problem and blames the problem of food security on small-scale farmers who use outmoded techniques and inefficient agricultural methods. It would give support to the small-scale farming sector if it was prepared to serve corporate food chains or out-grower schemes.

Its preference is to stimulate the growth of commercial agriculture on a large scale (NPP 2012, pp 69-71), disregarding the objections to and rejections of these models, which have recently been styled in the literature of political economy as 'land grabbing' (Yaro & Tsikata 2013). That said, the NPP had a comprehensive programme on agriculture, spanning five pages of ideas of how to transform the sector (NPP 2012, pp 68-77) and even the most uncharitable critic of the party is likely to be impressed, if not by the ideas, at least by the commitment and seriousness it attached to the sector.

In terms of depth of analysis the NDC manifesto did not measure up to that of the NPP but, in essence, focused on similar policies. For instance, the NDC (2012, p 32) promised to provide 'further tax incentives for investments in strategic businesses' and, like the NPP, it promised to modernise agriculture, to capitalise, mechanise and marketise the sector and to encourage the production of 'high value crops' (p 33). Farmer-based organisations and farming co-operatives were mentioned as achievements, but their radical effect was quickly countered by another self-styled achievement of creating rural industrialisation (p 33), with the likely effect of creating a large pool of wage labour and turning land usufructs into opportunities for tenants and farm workers. As in the NPP's manifesto there was praise for out-grower schemes and self-congratulatory remarks about the creation of contract farming (p 33). Food security is important to the party, but, like the NPP, the NDC emphasise food sufficiency not autonomy; matters of distribution were muted and quantity highlighted.

Although it is a social democratic party, what the NDC regards as 'achieve-ments' are, by definition, what neoliberals should celebrate. The true colours of the NDC become clearer upon reading the party's position on the private sector and capitalist markets. In short, the NDC believes 'the private sector is key',

priding itself on creating the necessary environment for ease of doing business in Ghana (NDC 2012, p 38). Indeed, there is an elaborate programme, *Private Sector Development Strategy II*, aimed at ensuring that the private sector thrives under a 'social democratic' party. The NDC also has a 'Brand Ghana' programme, analogous to the NPP's former Golden Age of Business programme. Like the NPP, the NDC promotes the building of industrial estates and, also like the NPP, it promises to use oil resources responsibly.

The common denominator in the oil programmes of both parties is not only that they focus on similar topics, but rather that the underlying logic of both is more privatisation of natural resources and the creation of property in land. Both put their trust in private use of nature's resources, both talk of the privatisation of resources and both talk about the use of natural resources to promote economic growth.

Substance aside, the form of the manifestos reveals dramatic similarities in terms of references to 'social justice' – a key ideal for social democrats. Interestingly, there is only one reference in each to 'social justice' (on p 11 for the NDC and p 82 for the NPP), although there is a reference to 'social and economic justice' in the NDC manifesto (p 83). So, overall, it would be extremely challenging, if not impossible, for readers who are not informed about the professed ideologies of the two parties to identify which of the two manifestos is social democratic in character, but it is easy to classify both as neoliberal in form, essence and substance.

The manifestos aside, a scrutiny of how the two parties intend to produce economic transformation reveals an obsession with attaining narrow macroeconomic health as against broader human development outcomes. The limitations of such indices have recently been discussed in a paper published in the *African Review of Economics and Finance* (Obeng-Odoom 2013a) so they are not repeated here except to stress that aspiring to attain such ends is the stock-in-trade of the liberal economic ideology. It is best achieved when orthodox economists are put in direct charge of managing the economy (see, eg, Pusey 1991).

This is not too surprising given that there is proof that a training in neo-classical economics typically makes people selfish or that selfish people are attracted to the study of economics (Stilwell 2011). The culture of sharing often ruffles the feathers of the *homo economicus* spirit, hence those who have studied economics usually feel that Christian attitudes of love are sharply contrasted with the promotion of individualism in economic science (Chalupníček 2011). So economists in charge of managing the economy, especially if they are of the orthodox breed and have had no experience with radical trade unionism or labour issues, tend to manage the economy along neoliberal lines.

That was what the two parties promised to do in the 2012 elections. In the lead-up to the elections, both the NPP and the NDC fielded professional

economists as vice-presidential candidates. Both Mahamudu Bawumia, the NPP candidate, and Paa Kwesi Amissah-Arthur, the NDC candidate and current vice-president of the country, are central bankers with impressive technocratic skills.

In a debate in the lead-up to the elections both showed great knowledge of economic management. So it might be said that the growing participation of professional economists in Ghanaian politics has important positive implications for delivering on promises and improving the social and material conditions of the citizenry. This view may, however, be too optimistic. There is international evidence that the greater use of economists, for whom the 'economy' is the market, people are 'rational' and 'profit maximising' and the market tends towards equilibrium (see, eg, Pusey 1991, 2003) leads to less accountability and little or no use of 'people power' in managing the economy.

Therein lies the conundrum of trying to depoliticise and technicalise issues relating to the people's material conditions as a way of co-option. As the vice-president's portfolio in Ghana is typically to head the country's economic management committee, the presence of an economist in this position in the light of the international evidence, is disturbing.

In a statement issued on 4 August 2012 in support of the selection of Amissah-Arthur as the NDC's vice-presidential candidate, Tsatsu-Tsikata, a highly respected member of the party and hence a social democrat, at least in theory, wrote:

> Paa Kwesi Amissah-Arthur played an important role in the develop-
> ment of Ghana's Economic Recovery Programme in 1982. He was one
> of the young economists who were actively involved in undertaking
> the economic analyses that culminated in the formulation of the
> Economic Recovery Programme and its implementation.
>
> Tsikata 2012, p 1

To be sure, the Economic Recovery Programme was Ghana's formal initiation into neoliberalism as a capitalist ideology (Aryeetey, Harigan & Nissanke 2000; Yeboah 2000; Hutchful 2002). So, for a 'social democrat' to be so instrumental in its formulation and for such a person to be praised by another 'social democrat' – and, for that matter, the lead legal counsel for the NDC in the 2012 election petition, only serves to confirm, if anecdotally, that the NDC's ideology is substantively neoliberal.

The ideological suasion of the NPP's vice-presidential candidate is equally obvious. As a conventionally trained economist and central banker – formerly Deputy Governor of the Bank of Ghana and head of the Monetary Policy Committee, a unit whose duty it is to ensure macroeconomic health through economic growth, Bawumia is a highly praised economist of the neoliberal order.

According to his official profile, published on the NPP website, he has played a key role in ensuring the growth of the banking sector, the growth of credit, electronic money (e-zwich) and the general financialisation of the economy. The fact that the NPP has appointed such an economist is, of course, in keeping with its ideology of a property-owning democracy, and he is well placed to steer the desired neoliberal changes.

IDEOLOGY IN WORD, IDEOLOGY IN DEED

So much for empirical analysis. Conceptual considerations are also important to an understanding of ideology and how it was represented in the 2012 elections. In principle, property-owning democracy and social democracy are different, but can also be conceptualised as similar ideologies.

Claiming that the two ideologies are similar is counter intuitive, especially since property-owning democracy is generally regarded as conservative. However, as we see in the collection of articles that appeared in *The Good Society*, it can be considered a feasible alternative to the stresses of the neoliberal, capitalist ideology.

That view emerges from a Rawlsian analysis of property and inequality. From this angle, property-owning democracy is the broad distribution of the means of production, wealth, and opportunity among the masses (Williamson 2012). This reading of the ideology does not support capitalism classically defined as monopoly capitalism (Baran & Sweezy 1966), as neoliberalism does. Neither is it socialism. Perhaps it is best regarded as a progressive system pitched at the cleavage of the extreme left and the extreme right.

The idea of property distribution makes property-owning democracy radical as it tries to avoid the concentration of capital, and hence, power, in the hands of a minority who will, in turn, control the polity (Williamson 2012). Indeed, James Meade, the British economist, whose ideas influenced Rawls in his *A Theory of Justice*, developed the idea of property-owning democracy as another approach to the search for egalitarianism. While Rawls purged the idea of state welfarism, the key notion of egalitarianism remained a central tenet of property-owning democracy (Thomas 2012).

Social democracy shares some of these features. Much like property-owning democracy, the social democratic ideology does not try to curtail markets or private property, although equality is a key aspiration, which is not the case with neoliberals. Social democracy also places enormous trust in politics, regarding it as an effective and practical medium through which change can be sought. Thus, while it does not systemically try to change the way the means of production is held, it strives to make equality a central ambition.

Social democracy tends to be confused with technocracy and centralism, but these ought not to be a *sine qua non* for social democracy. Indeed, such features can be replaced by bottom-up, people (including minorities)-based politics (Block 2010). Social democracy, then, is 'the belief that the key to radical social change is to use democratic politics and the power of the state to challenge and reduce the inequalities of income wealth and power that result from the unequal ownership of property' (Block 2010, p 6).

If the construction of property-owning democracy as a radical ideology is possible it should not be regarded as 'property-grabbing democracy', as some critics of the NPP argue (see, eg, Dadzie 2011). Indeed, the radical meaning of the concept is *property sharing.* Nevertheless, the version of the ideology advocated by the NPP is neoliberalism, so the argument is different in that sense.

Similar comments apply to the NDC's claim of holding onto a social democratic ideology. Contrary to common belief, the difference between social democracy and neoliberalism is not just the size of the state. Rather, it is the role the state plays in the process of economic development. Big states that clear the way for capital accumulation are obviously more neoliberal than small states that support the position of labour and the environment. 'Actually existing neoliberalism', as it is normally called (Cahill 2010), sees the state intervening to help the private sector develop. That is evidently the case for both the NPP and the NDC, as can be seen, for example, in their eviction of poor people who work in the informal sector of the urban economy (see Obeng-Odoom 2011).

The question, then, is why two parties rhetorically professing distinct ideologies end up with one ideology – economic rationalism or, simply, neoliberalism? Giovanni Arrighi's (1994) theory of ideology, how it spreads and is established, can help to unravel this puzzle. Arrighi, an Italian political economist, argues that ideology spreads and is adapted because of its credibility and force of persuasion but also because of force of coercion or incentivisation.

He believes that capitalism, or its economic ideology, economic liberalism, was well crafted and presented and effectively advertised as a force for the good of all, but that was not the only reason for its success, another was the way its advocates in the imperial North forced it down the throats of countries on the periphery of the world system through a combination of powerful exposition of the credibility of the ideology and the use of force to ensure its acceptance.

Arrighi's theory of ideology not only explains how and why ideas become important and how they drive action, it also shows that ideology has no autonomous identity outside of material forces. In turn, to understand ideology, it is important to consider both political and economic factors and how they have influenced particular views over time (Major 2012).

Arrighi's framework is a more effective way to view the 2012 elections as it is part of a long march towards democracy in a process that has been highly

influenced by the world system and its key political economic actors. The process of evening out or eroding all alternative ideologies cannot be said to have commenced with the 2012 elections. It goes way back into the global ascent of neoliberalism and its local manifestations in the 1983 era of economic reform. There must have been compliant officers to make the acceptance of the economic rationalist policies gain roots. But such people alone could not have made the programme successful.

External pressure, the claim that the state was a problem and was solely responsible for the economic stresses of the time, coupled with the global wave of neoliberalism, made this ideology unstoppable in Ghana (see Hutchful 2002). In turn, even a party like the NDC, which talks tough and radical, behaves conservative or, as South African political economist Patrick Bond aptly puts it, 'talk[s] left [but] walk[s] right' (Bond 2006).

IMPLICATIONS

So, if both parties walk right, what are the implications for Ghana's politics and elections, economy, society and environment? In the lead-up to the judgement in the Supreme Court case to determine who won the 2012 elections, several calls were made for an all-inclusive, biparty or even multiparty government. Indeed, Ernest Abotsi of the School of Law of the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration, made a passionate plea for such a system in a lecture at the Institute of Economic Affairs, Accra (Bokpe 2013).

Critics claimed that the ideologies of the two leading parties were so fundamentally different that any such inclusiveness was bound to fail. However, the evidence set out in this article casts doubts on the so-called ideological schism between the two parties. If, in essence, they are similarly orientated, political inclusiveness ought not to be such a major problem. Rather, it could provide a basis for harmonising and utilising the diversity of skills available for running the country along shared ideological lines.

However, from the perspective of the voters the matter is more complex. In a controversial paper recently published by Staffan I Lindberg in *Party Politics* (2012), the argument advanced is that voting in Ghana is mainly done on programmatic lines. Ghanaians vote on the basis of promises made to them or on the basis of how well the national economy does, Lindberg argues. If this view were accepted, the question would be how voters perceive the alleged differences in programmes when, in substance, there are no major differences? Further, it raises questions for Bob-Milliar's stimulating analysis that suggests that more informed people join parties because of their ideologies (Bob-Milliar 2012). If we accept that there are no substantial differences in the ideological positions of the NPP and the NDC what ideological features inform the informed people's choices?

This conundrum provides a strong basis for the argument that other factors, or what Bob-Milliar (2011) regards as non-material drivers, or, to quote Gyampo (2012, p 160), 'personal interest' or 'what [people] can gain from the parties and the political process' (Gyampo 2012, p 161) continue to play a major role in elections in Ghana, even if segments of the population are more reflective about their choices. For Ghanaian voters, material 'achievements' or 'failures' seem to lie in the eye of the beholder (Kelly & Bening 2013, p 478).

This pattern should not, however, be regarded as 'irrational', as Lindberg's work suggests. Rather, being potentially a function of poverty and other social problems (Gyampo 2012), both diachronically and synchronically, this feature of politics, which is not only a 'Ghanaian thing', as it exists even in advanced capitalist countries (see the analysis by Ayelazuno 2011, pp 31-32 of the Alvin Green case in the US), is rational (under the circumstances).

Besides, in the broader scheme of things, the art or act of voting serves not only as a decision-making tool but also as a moral right of citizens, namely to be part of a legitimising group which establishes that the rulers or the law makers have the legitimate mandate of the people. Otherwise, the right to vote would have to be restricted to some group of people purported to be more 'rational' or 'enlightened' than the rest of the population – a point poignantly made by the Australian-based philosopher, John Armstrong (2013), in another context.

More importantly, the most popular choices available to voters are different sides of the same coin – neoliberal ideology disguised as 'social democracy' on the one hand and neoliberal ideology described as 'property-owning democracy' on the other.

More fundamentally, the country is now, more than ever before, knee deep in the neoliberal ditch. There can be progress, but this is likely to be concentrated rather than spread, or will co-exist with inequality, as recent empirical analysis demonstrates (Obeng-Odoom 2013b). The result is that the youth – that large stratum of Ghanaian society – are now transforming from viewing the society as one of ascription to a position of aspiration where they have to blame themselves for being unemployed and, in some cases, unemployable.

Neoliberalism as ideology is unsympathetic to the poor and unemployed. It is an ideology that looks favourably on the patrician and scornfully on the destitute, as the latter, in this ideology, are the cause of their own poverty and want. In turn, the political class and economic technocrats pontificate in newspapers and policy documents that the unemployed ought to start their own businesses, be creative, create property in the commons and find ways of staking out a share in the common wealth.

Both the NPP and the NDC have presented reactionary programmes for the youth and unemployed, often with short-term perceived benefits that turn out, in the long term, to have disastrous consequences. While design defects are often

blamed for such results (Ministerial Impact Assessment and Review Committee 2013), historical research (Gyampo & Obeng-Odoom 2013) points to more systemic reasons linked to neoliberalism as a capitalist ideology. Fundamental change is badly needed.

SCIENTIFIC SOCIALISM AND NKRUMAHISIM AS AN ALTERNATIVE

There is an alternative to the NDC-NPP substantively uniform neoliberal ideology. The Convention People's Party advocates a different philosophy and while, in the past, some of its policies have intersected strongly with those of other political traditions (Obeng-Odoom 2009), it clearly holds and espouses a substantively and substantially different ideology – Nkrumahism, which Kwame Nkrumah said was 'scientific socialism' and the only effective socialism in Africa (Mohan 1966, p 220). According to the CPP (2013, np), the party Nkrumah founded, this philosophy connotes three principles:

> *Self-determination:* We must abandon our colonial mentality and inferiority complex and re-assert control over our natural resources and national interests for the sustainable and equitable development of our country;
> *Social Justice:* The State has a moral and constitutional duty to promote equal opportunity and equitable rewards for all Ghanaians, irrespective of age, gender, ethnic, religious, political or other backgrounds; and
> *Pan-Africanism:* We must work with Africans at home and abroad to find common solutions to our common problems of racism, poverty, exploitation and under-development.

While the CPP does not promise to abolish wage labour it explicitly advocates greater state ownership of the means of production. That is, it does not advocate the use of the private sector to *lead* development. Indeed, during the second 2012 Presidential Debate, Abu Sakara Foster, the CPP's presidential candidate, called that approach an 'illusion'. Private ownership will not be abolished under a CPP regime and there will be markets, but they will not be capitalist. Strictly speaking then, there will be market socialism, but the presence of markets is not inconsistent with the tenets of socialism (Schweickart 1992). Polish political economist Karl Polanyi ([1954]2001, p 242) famously noted that

> [s]ocialism is, essentially, the tendency inherent in an industrial civilization to transcend the self-regulating market by consciously

> subordinating it to a democratic society. It is the solution natural to industrial workers who see no reason why production should not be regulated directly and why markets should be more than a useful but subordinate trait in a free society.

It follows that the significance of market presence is not one of quantity but of proportion. That is, the markets under socialism ought not to rule society but must be subordinated to political economic institutions such as the state. The CPP declares in its manifesto (CPP 2012) that:

> We, the CPP, are determined to re-activate our sense of self-determination, self-reliance, and self-mobilization. In doing this, we shall be guided by the three main objectives of: Social Transformation, Sustainable Economy, and Social Justice. These objectives will shape all our policies and programmes.

Consistent with this 'S Cubed' philosophy of socialism, as the party calls it, the CPP advocates, for example, that most of the goods and services needed in the country be produced locally. The party's definition of democracy is both economic and political and when it talks about political democracy it seeks to find congruence between what the people want and what politicians offer. Freedom is expressed in terms of escaping want, poverty, and fear.

The CPP prioritises social indices over economic ones and hints at indigenisation, as against the other parties' obsession with modernity. 'Social justice' as an ideal is more frequently mentioned in its manifesto than in any other manifesto considered in this article. The main role of the (Central) Bank of Ghana under a CPP government will be to help the state create jobs rather than play its current role of being predominantly interested in monetary policy. The party advocates greater state involvement in the oil industry, again, as opposed to the other two parties, which are fixated only on the idea of managing oil rents as transparently as possible, important as that focus is. Small-scale farmers will be given state support through farmer-based organisations and social security protection will be extended to fishers and farmers (CPP 2012).

The CPP's position on the environment is reformist and is likely to be criticised by ecological and Marxist political economists such as James O'Connor (see, O'Connor 1991). The party adopts uncritically the neoliberal definition of sustainable development, as postulated by the Brundtland Committee (CPP 2012, s 2.5). Indeed, it talks about recycling, but fails to discuss the role of corporate capital in generating waste.

Presumably the state would be the biggest polluter under a CPP government, since it will control the commanding heights of the economy, but even if that is

the case, restraints on overproduction could have been covered much better in the manifesto. Be that as it may, overall, looking at the programmes on agriculture and environment in their entirety and the way these are linked with Afrocentric ideas to challenge the world system, the CPP presents not just an alternative but a just alternative.

Yet, the 2012 elections saw a staggering and stuttering CPP, a party with deep wrinkles and one embroiled in rancorous in-fighting, leading to the breakaway of Paa Kwesi Nduom, arguably the party's most visible, most popular, and most creative leader. Not surprisingly, the party he founded, the Progressive People's Party (PPP), performed substantially better in the presidential elections than the CPP, coming third after the two biggest parties, while the CPP candidate came sixth of eight competitors (see Kelly & Bening 2013 for a breakdown of both the presidential and parliamentary election results).

The plight of the CPP should be put in historical context. The 2012 conflict only compounded long-lasting conflicts which have afflicted the party since it was last in power, in the 1960s. Its poor showing in elections is not only due to the internal conflicts in which it is entangled but also to poaching by other parties, with which some notable CPP members recurrently associate themselves.

By portraying itself as social democratic, the NDC has successfully annexed a large number of CPP followers. It is telling that the only CPP member of Parliament, who won a by-election when the sitting NDC MP passed away, votes with the NDC in Parliament.

Of course, the NDC is not the only beneficiary of the CPP's losses. In the 2001-2008 NPP government, leading CPP members, for example, Paa Kwesi Nduom and Agyemang-Badu Akorsah were given top government and civil service positions. Yet the official position of the CPP is that the NDC has benefited more than any other party. According to the CPP Political Committee (2013, np), 'it was the NDC that dismembered the CPP in the run up to the elections of 1992 by financing the formation of many parties in the Nkrumaist [sic] tradition'. However viewed, unless the current situation of the CPP both internally and externally improves substantially, the alternative to NDC-NPP neoliberal ideology will, unfortunately, be long delayed.

CONCLUSION

Party politicking for Ghana's 2012 elections was conducted along ideological lines – contrary to earlier findings presented in the political science literature that assert that politics in the country are not ideology based. The expressed ideologies range from property-owning democracy and social democracy to socialist-Nkrumahism, but the spectrum is narrower in practice, often spanning neoliberal capitalism and socialist-Nkrumahism.

Even narrower were the 'choices' between winnable ideologies presented to voters in 2012 – neoliberalism portrayed as property-owning democracy and neoliberalism disguised as social democracy, effectively blurring any real distinctions.

While it might be argued that there is a natural tendency for political ideologies to coalesce, Arrighi's theory and the evidence show that this dynamic is imposed. There are important implications arising from these conclusions. On the one hand, the uniformity of ideology can be leveraged in the pursuit of political inclusiveness. On the other, as an ideology that prioritises profits over human needs, neoliberalism in Ghana should be expected to lock the vast majority of the poor into a vicious cycle.

There is likely to be more prosperity, but this will typically be up for grabs only by economic giants. For economic dwarfs it is tough, if not impossible, to capture the fruits of prosperity. So, the 2012 elections and the neoliberal ideology they entrenched make it challenging to attain inclusive prosperity in spite of the numerous claims that it is attainable.

Indeed, the distribution of wealth, and hence the material conditions of the broad mass of the people, are likely to deteriorate.

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THE YOUTH AND PARTY MANIFESTOS IN GHANAIAN POLITICS
The Case of the 2012 General Elections

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ABSTRACT

*In the run-up to Ghana's 2012 general elections 'gutter politics', the kind
of politicking that focuses on mudslinging, vituperation, personal attacks
and character assassination, which usually characterises the nation's
election campaigns, gave way to issue-based politics. The contents of the
manifestos of the two main political parties, the National Democratic
Congress and the New Patriotic Party, were brought into sharp focus. Indeed,
through the activities of civil society organisations such as the Institute of
Economic Affairs and state bodies like the National Commission for Civic
Education, politicians campaigned vigorously by articulating the key policy
prescriptions encapsulated in their manifestos. The contents of the manifestos
of the two main political parties were virtually the same apart from their
policies on senior high school education. Given that the youth constitute
the majority of the nation's voting population they were the main target of
the various campaign messages, particularly those concerning education,
with a view to capturing their support. Through interviews with some 200
respondents aged between 18 and 35 and drawn from a cross section of young
people, this study investigates the relevance of party manifesto contents in
shaping the voter behaviour of young Ghanaians.*

INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

There is no ambiguity about the role manifestos play in the campaigns of modern political parties. They not only promote issue-based politicking during the electioneering period but lie at the heart of peaceful campaigns. Given that manifestos tend to encapsulate the key issues or problems that confront a nation and demonstrate the pathways to tackling them, they have become the principal instrument for mobilising groups' support for political parties and their candidates during election contests.

Most scholars agree that a party that campaigns on a manifesto is able to secure wider support among segments of the voting population (Wayo-Seini 2006; Konteh 2007; Gyampo 2012). Ayee (2011, p 368) notes that 'as a key political product, manifestos create the platform on which political parties and politicians who are looking for electoral mandates, particularly in poor democracies such as Ghana, set out their proposed responses to social needs and demands from the electorate'. Even in many developed democracies political office-seekers spend resources and time on their manifestos because they are used to promote issue-based campaigns and therefore represent an important factor in determining candidates' electoral fortunes (Zukin, Andolina, Jenkins & Carpini 2006).

Whereas manifestos have been a salient feature of Ghana's electoral politics they have rarely been the reference point of the parties' engagements with the voters. Indeed, most scholars who have explained the voting behaviour of Ghanaians have noted the absence of issue-based campaigns largely because of the neglect of the use of manifestos as a means of canvassing for votes.

Anebo (2006) observes that non-rational rather than 'bread and butter issues' that directly affect the livelihoods of the voters shaped the 1992 election campaign and the voters' choices. The campaigns were dominated by non-issues such as insults, extreme propaganda, mudslinging and personal attacks. As a result, many political pundits who have contributed to the election campaign discourse have admonished the parties to resort to the use of manifestos because of their attractiveness to modern voters, particularly, the youth.

The claim is that the youth in Africa, and in Ghana in particular, who are seeking solutions to the socio-economic problems confronting them, tend to support parties that campaign on manifestos because of the belief that the document can be used to rectify their social ills (Chazan 1983; Aalto 1975; Diouf 2003; Gavin 2007). Consequently, prior to the 2012 elections some donor and civil society organisations initiated several programmes aimed at persuading the parties to draw the youth into the electoral orbit. For instance, the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA-Ghana) provided funding to support the drafting of the manifestos and influenced their contents to reflect the youth's perspectives. In a

radical departure from previous elections the donors insisted that party leaders and presidential candidates should educate the youth on the contents of their manifestos.

The requirement to make the messages of the manifestos relevant to the needs of the youth was premised on the fact that the youth constitute a majority of Ghana's population. Indeed, Ghana has always had a youthful population (Austin 1970; Lentz 1995; Ahwoi 2006; Gavin 2007, p 69). According to Ghana's 1960 Population and Housing Census, persons aged between 15 and 35 constituted 40.71% of a total population of 6 726 815. In 1970 they made up 38.18% of 8 559 313, in 2000, 60% of 18 912 079 and in 2010, 58.7% of a population of 24 223 431.

According to the 2012 Report of the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER) of the University of Ghana, the youth constitute about 70% of Ghana's labour force and a majority of the voting population. Records of Ghana's Electoral Commission show that of the 10 586 377 people who registered for the 2000 elections 76.19% were between 18 (the earliest age at which one can vote) and 35, with only 23.72% aged 40 years and older.

In the 2004 elections the youth constituted more than 68% of the voting population, while those aged 40 and above made up the rest. The percentage of voters in the 18-35 category rose to 78.7% and 79. 2% in the 2008 and 2012 elections respectively. It is not surprising, therefore, that some political analysts have noted that the youth are the age cohort that has the highest rate of voter turnout in Ghana (Chazan 1983; Ahwoi 2006; Awoonor 1990; Gyampo 2012). Ghana, in common with the rest of Africa, is currently in the midst of what demographers call a youth bulge. According to Ebata, Izzi, Lendon, Ngjela, Sampson & Loweicki-Zucca (2005), 85% of the global youth population is from the developing world, and forms a majority of the labour force.

Whereas studies of electoral outcomes in Ghana abound, little has been written about the contributions of party manifestos to shaping the behaviour of the youth. The dominant explanations for the determinants of electoral outcomes in Ghana, and in Africa as a whole, are age cohorts and tribal or ethnic affiliations (Bates 1974; Young 2002; Posner 2005; Lonsdale 1994; Horowitz 1985; Gyampo & Obeng-Odoom 2009; Anebo 2006; Frempong 2006; Boafo-Arthur 2006).

Debrah (2009) draws attention to economic variables as the issue that has shaped voters' decisions in Ghana's elections. Downplaying the effects of party manifestos on voter behaviour, Chazan (1983, p 35) notes that 'once issues were set, politicization during elections tends to occur around social groups, local interest, and personalities and not around contents'. Like Chazan (1983), Dunn (1975) refers to primordial factors as significantly shaping voters' choices in Ghanaian elections.

Only Ayee (2011) has pointed to the contribution of party manifestos as a factor that has influenced the electoral fortunes of political parties in Ghana.

While these studies are pertinent because they allude to important dynamics of electoral choices, they hardly establish the interface between the youth and party manifestos. Although Ayee (2011) drew attention to manifestos his analysis was anecdotal rather than empirical and it lacked input from the youth themselves.

More than any of the election campaigns since 1992, the 2012 campaign was dominated by socioeconomic issues that have plagued the country; issues that were most important to the youth. As a result, the youth rallied around the parties, particularly, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and New Patriotic Party (NPP) because, according to 184 of the interviewees, 'the political parties possess the capabilities to address the topical issues'. The questions this article investigates are:

- What were the essential election issues in the parties' manifestos?
- How did these influence the vote of the youth, the majority of whom (particularly those aged between 18 and 35) were the expected beneficiaries of the parties' proposed policies?

Analysing responses from 200 interviewees this article contributes to the debate about the factors that shape voters' choices in Ghana. Specifically, it examines how party manifestos influenced the youth's voting decision in the 2012 election.

THEORETICAL EXPLANATIONS OF VOTING

Theories that explain voting behaviour abound in the literature on elections and democracy. For instance, the classical analysis by Down (1957) is cited frequently. However, in this particular study Heywood's (2002) typology is adopted because it is suitable for Ghanaian election issues and particularly in relation to conclusions about the voting behaviour of Ghanaian voters. For this reason, the taxonomy of voting behaviour identified by Heywood is examined in detail

Party identification model

In this model attitudes to policies and leaders, as well as perceptions about group and personal interests tend to develop on the basis of party identification. Events are thus interpreted to fit pre-existing loyalties and attachments. In simpler terms, the model places much emphasis on strong attachment to the party. This partisan alignment creates stability and continuity, especially in terms of habitual patterns of voting behaviour, often sustained over a long time. One weakness of the model is the growing evidence of partisan dealignment. In other words, people no longer merely vote for the party, they look at the quality of the candidates.

In Ghana this has led to a phenomenon popularly referred to as 'skirt and blouse voting' – voters vote for their party's presidential candidate and for a parliamentary candidate from another political party if they believe that their party's parliamentary candidate cannot serve their interests. This indicates a drop in party identification and a decline in habitual voting patterns. As our earlier findings indicate, some respondents failed to align or associate themselves with political parties although some were known to be active supporters of a particular party.

Sociological model

The sociological model links voting to group membership, suggesting that voters tend to adopt a voting pattern that reflects the economic and social position of the group to which they belong. Rather than developing a psychological attachment to a party on the basis of family influence, this model highlights the importance of social alignment, reflecting the various divisions and tensions within society, the most significant of which are class, gender, ethnicity, religion and region.

Simply put, the model states that people may vote for a candidate if he belongs to their class, comes from their ethnic group, shares the same religious beliefs, and so on. This model allows for rationality insofar as group interests may help to shape party allegiances. The model has, however, been attacked on the grounds that there is growing empirical evidence that the link between sociological factors and party support has weakened in modern societies. In particular, attention has been paid to the phenomenon of class dealignment and the need for people to vote on issues and not on class, religious or ethnic grounds.

Rational choice model

In this model voting is seen as a rational act in the sense that voters are believed to decide their party preference on the basis of personal interest. Rather than being habitual, a manifestation of broader attachments and allegiances, voting is seen as essentially instrumental: that is, as a means to an end.

The model stresses the importance of 'issue-based voting' and suggests that parties can influence their electoral performance significantly by reshaping the policies encapsulated in their manifestos. It is generally accepted that one of the consequences of partisan and class dealignment has been the proliferation of issue-based voting.

The weakness of the theory is that it abstracts the individual voter from his or her social and cultural context. However, in developing countries that are trying hard to extricate themselves from the quagmire of poverty and under-

development, issue-based voting and the contents of manifestos present a rational opportunity for voters to shape political destinies and development prospects.

Dominant ideology model

This model stresses the importance of political ideology in influencing the behaviour of voters. The model simply states that the dominant ideology influences voters. Consequently, if voters' attitudes conform to the tenets of a dominant ideology, parties develop their policies in line with the tenets of that ideology in order to get the support of voters. The weakness of this model is that it takes individual calculation and personal autonomy out of the picture altogether.

Under this model individuals may not be willing to weigh the merits and demerits of policy options being presented and how such policies advance the interests of the ordinary people. Once a candidate or a policy conforms to their ideological persuasion they support it. However, Max Weber has argued that it is irrational and a self-consciously contradictory posture to vote in an election without thinking about the protection of one's own interests.

A BRIEF NOTE ON METHODOLOGY

To investigate the role of party manifestos in shaping the outcome of Ghana's 2012 elections face-to-face interviews were conducted from 15 December 2012 to 21 January 2013 with the youth and officials of the NDC and NPP, nonpartisan civil society groups in charge of youth advocacy and development and academics. The NDC and NPP have alternated political power since Ghana returned to constitutional rule in 1992 and, based on their manifestos, have interesting youth polices. They have well-established youth wings that are active in canvassing for their parties and therefore command a large youth following.

Given the complex nature of the respondents we used mixed-method sampling techniques. First, the two parties were chosen specifically because of their significance in Ghana's electoral politics since 1992. Given the saliency of the issue to be investigated, and in order to accommodate the diverse elements involved in the sample population, a sample size of 200 respondents was considered most appropriate for the study. In particular, it ensured a gender-balanced ratio in the choice and distribution of the unstructured questions for the respondents.

The respondents were chosen from the Accra and Tamale metropolises, Accra representing the southern sector of the country and Tamale the northern sector. This was not only done to satisfy geopolitical needs but also to reflect the youth spread in the two parties. The two metropolises also serve as political microcosms

of the voting population. Apart from possessing an ethnic and socioeconomic mix and being electorally balanced between the two parties, the regions have animated active party youth electoral campaign activities. Significantly, most of the vociferous youth leaders of the two parties live in the two regions.

Of the 200 interviewees 80 were female and 120 male. The reason for the imbalance is that in northern Ghana, where Tamale is situated and where there is a predominantly Muslim community, a married woman requires her husband's permission to speak to a foreigner. As Gavin (2007) rightly observes, although young women outnumber men in many African countries, youth activities before, during and after elections are largely dominated by young men. Similarly, Allah-Mensah (2005), Tsikata (2009) and Manuh (2011) have shown that about 80% of those in Ghana who do not want to vote and prefer to stay away from active partisan politics are women. Furthermore, research experience has highlighted the difficulty of sampling and interviewing young women on matters of politics, and elections in particular.

One hundred respondents from each region, randomly selected, were interviewed. In each of the metropolises three electoral areas were randomly selected from the Electoral Commission's list of demarcated electoral con-stituencies. But the distribution of questions to the respondents in these areas was based on the total number of voters, and particularly youths, on the roll. Using the random method the Kinka, Kolewoko and Ngleshie electoral areas were selected in the Accra metropolis and Sabongida, Kakpagyili and Choggu in Tamale. The areas selected were fairly homogenous in terms of population size, gender and youth complexions.

Academic and nongovernmental or civil society groups are also active in these areas. Accra and Tamale are home to two state universities and recently many private universities have mushroomed in the areas. Above all, the areas are home to unemployed youth, including school dropouts as well as relatively skilled youngsters. We interviewed 30 respondents in each electoral area of the two regions, which added up to 180 interviewees with partisan youths, party executives/officials and other registered voters. The remaining 20 interviews were carried out with civil society groups and academics in the regions who had shown a knowledge of and interest in the youth and in Ghana's election discourse.

Of the 200 respondents, 125 had had a formal education: 54 had basic education, 40 secondary education and 31 tertiary education. Only 75 of the respondents had no formal education and, shockingly, 126 of the 200 were unemployed.

The 2012 manifestos of the two main political parties were analysed as case studies, given that the focus of this study is on the way manifestos influenced the youth's voting decisions.

The following questions were asked:

- Do you belong to any political party?
- Did you vote in the 2012 general elections?
- What is your age?
- Did a party's manifesto influence your voting decision?
- If not, what influenced your decision?
- If yes, mention one key element of the party's manifesto.
- Which of the important issues in the party's manifesto shaped your voting choice?

To provide a context for explaining these pertinent issues and answering the central question underpinning the study we examined some of the theoretical foundations of voting behaviour.

THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT OF PARTY MANIFESTOS IN GHANA

Ghana's 1992 Constitution provides the legal and institutional framework for the functioning of political parties. Article 55(3) empowers parties to participate in shaping the political will of the people and in educating their followers about national socioeconomic and political issues. Chapter six sets out the Directive Principles of State Policy, which provide strategic policy direction to all political leaders and citizens for the establishment of a just and free society as well as the promotion of the socioeconomic and political well-being of all citizens (Republic of Ghana 1992).

Given the importance of these directives, the president is required to report to Parliament at least once a year on the 'steps taken to ensure the realization of basic human rights, a healthy economy, the right to work, the right to good health care and the right to education' (Republic of Ghana 1992, p 31). To achieve these political, economic, social, educational and cultural objectives citizens are expected to render important duties and obligations to the state. Thus, the Directive Principles of State Policy have become a social contract between government and governed (Ayee 2011). In the words of the Committee of Experts that drafted the 1992 Constitution:

> The Directive Principles are not only the core principles around which national, political, social and economic life revolve, but also a set of fundamental objectives which people expect all bodies and persons

that make or execute public policy to strive to achieve as well as a
sort of barometer by which the polity could measure the performance
of their government. In effect, they provide goals for legislative
programmes and a guide for judicial interpretation.

<div align="right">Republic of Ghana 1991, p 49</div>

Since 1992, when democratic governance was restored to Ghana, the parties
that have contested the elections have endeavoured to design their manifestos
to capture the tenets of the Directive Principles of State Policy. For instance,
they have followed the directive that requires governments to continue with the
policies initiated by their predecessors. From 2001 to 2008 the NPP completed
the development programmes and projects that had been started under the NDC
government. Similarly, the NDC showed commitment to the continuity principle
by completing some of the projects initiated by the NPP before it lost the 2008
elections.

   A review of the manifestos of the NDC and NPP shows that they capture
the political, economic, social and cultural objectives of the Directive Principles
of State Policy. What appears to be a disturbing development, however, is that
the parties have not campaigned on those issues that are encapsulated in the
Directive Principles. The fear that the parties may not campaign on these core
developmental issues generated public anxiety as the 2012 election campaign
unfolded. For this reason, the media gave prominence to the need for the parties
to develop their manifestos and use them for their campaigns.

   Whereas the NPP and NDC manifestos did not directly refer to the Directive
Principles, the issues embedded in them did not differ from what the Constitution
demands of parties. As 148 as against 52 interviewees rightly noted, 'the contents
of the NDC and NPP manifestos brought out the critical socioeconomic needs
of the people'.

   In highlighting the issue of education, which was the overriding concern of
the youth, the 2012 election campaign departed from the status quo. Thus, the
thrust of this study is that while in previous elections party manifestos were not
a key campaign issue and the parties ignored them in their mobilisation of voters,
the 2012 election was unique in the sense that the contents of manifestos were the
principal instruments used for canvassing the support of the youth.

   The question now is, 'to what extent does the evidence corroborate this
assertion'? Was the 'victory' of the NDC shaped by its ability to influence the
youth with a manifesto that encapsulated the overwhelming developmental
issues to which they youth sought solutions? The next section attempts to address
these issues.

COMPARING THE MANIFESTOS OF THE NDC AND NPP

In developed democracies parties use manifestos and ideologies in their engagement with voters (Wayo-Seini 2006). They are a form of political product in a highly competitive political market. As Ayee (2011, p 372) rightly notes, 'to operate in the political market, one needs to present political products which include personalities, manifestos, ideology, past performance, and evidences of dependability and reliability'. Even though party manifestos include short-, medium- and long-term plans they may also largely be seen as promises and slogans rather than as specific strategic policy initiatives to be implemented within a four-year term (Ayee 2011, p 374). All 200 interviewees confirmed that the parties depended on their written manifestos to compete with and upstage each other in their bid to win.

The 2012 manifestos of the NDC and NPP differ in name rather than substance. While the NDC manifesto was titled 'Advancing the Better Ghana Agenda', that of the NPP was called 'Transforming Lives, Transforming Ghana'. A close examination of the contents of the manifestos reveals that they pledged to achieve the following:

- Education as a right, water, sanitation, efficient transportation;
- Robust macro-economic fundamentals and private-sector-led growth;
- Industrialisation, adding value to raw materials and modernisation of agriculture;
- Quality health for all;
- Job creation and youth empowerment;
- Poverty reduction;
- Good governance;
- Gender equity, empowerment of women, and so on.

Of all these issues education was pivotal to the campaign messages of both parties, though they differed marginally over how to fund senior high school (SHS) education. While the NPP promised to make it free in order to lighten the burden on parents the NDC promised to address the problem by offering opportunities for access to SHS through the provision of more school infrastructure to help parents to send their children to school. The NPP manifesto unambiguously articulated the problematic areas in SHS education and prescribed a single pathway to overcoming the challenges, which have been a problem for many years.

By free SHS we mean free tuition, admission, textbook, library, science centre, computer, examination, utilities, boarding and meals.

> Although the cost of free secondary school education will be high at an additional 1 percent of Ghana's total income, the alternative of a largely uneducated and unskilled workforce is a situation Ghana cannot afford. So NPP will prioritize and fund this expenditure using budgetary resources (including resources from oil exports) in the interest of the long-term growth of Ghana's economy.
>
> NPP Manifesto, 2012, p 23

More than two-thirds of the interviewees (167) indicated that the NPP manifesto raised the education issue that was most important to the ordinary Ghanaian. They noted that the cost component of education was the most salient problem the NPP brought into the public domain for discussion. Indeed, 152 interviewees said the NPP's message about cost touched their hearts and they lauded the initiative. Of these 152, 41admitted that they followed the NPP because 'it presented the campaign issue that touched on the problem they look for a solution'. When asked whether they thought the NPP's promise was achievable, 30 responded in the affirmative while 11 thought it was merely grandiose rhetoric. Those who regarded the campaign on education as important believed the promise of free SHS was a pro-poor initiative that might increase mass education in the country.

They explained that it has the potential to encourage mass enrolment in primary schools because 'the pupils would be assured of a continuous post-basic education'. Even those who did not think the NPP's message was serious had no doubt about its psychological impact on basic school education. Three representatives of civil society organisations interviewed observed that 'apart from boosting school enrolment, it could create a general feeling that the Millennium Development Goal on education would be achieved'.

The NDC's major policy thrust regarding SHS education was the attainment of universal access to secondary education by 2016. In pursuit of this goal its manifesto pledged to increase infrastructural facilities at the SHS level as follows:

- Construct 200 new community day senior high schools across the country, with an emphasis on districts where there are no such schools;
- Provide a capitation grant to all students in the new community day senior high schools to be built by government;
- Increase the subsidies currently paid to existing secondary schools with a view to reducing the burden on parents;
- Aggressively expand infrastructure, including classrooms, dormitories, laboratories and teachers' accommodation in existing secondary schools to enable them absorb the increasing numbers of qualified candidates;

- Continue the rehabilitation of science resource centres;
- Strengthen the computer school selection and placement system (CSSPS) to place all junior high school graduates into second-cycle institutions and other skills development programmes, including apprenticeship programmes.

<div align="right">NDC Manifesto 2012, p 17</div>

Interestingly, 177 of the respondents indicated that the NDC manifesto raised salient education concerns. They argued that access to SHS education was crucial and that 'free education would be meaningless without a corresponding increase in access to education'. One hundred and sixty respondents said the NDC's message about access was crucial and, perhaps, more pertinent and fundamental. A total of 163 of the respondents indicated that they followed the NDC because of its expressed intention to extend access to SHS education. When asked whether they thought the NDC plan was achievable 134 responded in the affirmative while 29 thought it was merely a political gimmick. Those who thought the party's message on education was pertinent believed that 'the problem of access to SHS education must be tackled first before making it free'.

This divergence in the policy positions of the two parties dominated the campaign to such an extent that many Ghanaians wondered whether SHS education was the only issue confronting the nation in the run-up to the elections. Was the emphasis on SHS education as encapsulated in the manifestos of the two parties intended to capture the attention of the youth? If so, to what extent did these issues influence the voting behaviour of the youth, who constitute close to 80% of Ghana's voting population? This question is addressed in the next section.

ANALYSING VOTER BEHAVIOUR IN THE 2012 ELECTIONS

The discussions above give credence to the use of manifestos as a means of voter mobilisation in the 2012 general elections. In a sharp departure from previous elections, the two parties constituted their manifesto committees a year before the start of the election campaign. Indeed, by the end of 2011 deteriorating economic conditions and general hardships, including lack of access to quality healthcare and education as well as unemployment, had become topical national issues that had received considerable media attention. Therefore, the signs were clear that the voters, particularly, the youth, were interested in issues that affected their livelihoods. As one of the interviewees, Rhoda Mahama, observed, 'given the growing youth and public sentiments about the issues of unemployment, lack of access to health, and particularly education, the parties felt compelled to respond to these critical issues by consulting their manifestos'.

The fact that the parties were curious about the contents of each other's manifesto highlights their centrality to the parties' campaigns. While the media publicity hyped the manifestos, neither the NDC nor the NPP wanted to be the first to launch its manifesto because of the fear that its contents would be 'stolen' by its competitor. It therefore came as no surprise that the two parties scheduled the same day, 25 August, to launch their manifestos and campaigns.

On the appointed day only the opposition NPP launched its manifesto, saying it had adopted the slogan, 'People Matter, You Matter'. The NDC, which failed to launch its manifesto on that day accused its opponent of having plagiarised the slogan. This led to accusations and counter-accusations which attracted widespread condemnation from social commentators, political analysts and civil society organisations, which accused the parties of failing to respect their own code of conduct relating to plagiarism.

When campaigning began in June 2012 it was clear that it would be the contents of the parties' manifestos, which encapsulated the overwhelming developmental issues, that would dominate the debates.

The question is, did the youth vote decide the outcome of the 2012 elections and if so, was it the contents of the manifestos that influenced their choice?

Austin (1970) has shown that the youth in Ghana are politically active. In the struggles to attain independence from British colonial rule, the nascent political parties' mobilisation and campaigns were anchored in the youth. Our study backs up these claims. Of the 200 interviewees, 112 were youth activists registered with either the NDC or the NPP. These party activists have followed and voted for their parties in general elections and were instrumental in the parties' campaign planning, organisation and education of voters during the 2012 campaign.

All the respondents acknowledged the importance of party manifestos to the political campaigns, indicated that young people were influenced by the fact that the parties appeared to have the answers to their socioeconomic difficulties and voted for the party they hoped would be able to deliver. This confirms the general opinion that the youth in Ghana under the Fourth Republic are politically active and that their support for a party is based on the party's policy rather than on factors such as ethnicity, personality, region and religious attachments.

Five interviewees, of whom three are academics and two civil society activists, said that 'since independence the Ghanaian youth has been the support-base of the political parties, and no political leader has ascended to political power without the youth's backing'.

However, when the respondents were asked whether they knew the full contents of the manifestos of their respective political parties their response was surprising. Only 73 answered in the affirmative, meaning that 123 were unaware of what their party stood for.

One respondent, Michael Abbey of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, one of the nonpartisan civil society groups that undertake youth leadership programmes in Ghana, confirmed the fact that, 'even though the parties have manifestos, most of their core supporters who are the youth are ignorant about the full contents of the manifestos'.

Abdulai Mohammed, a respondent from the Choggu electoral area in the Tamale metropolis, said, 'I know my party has a manifesto, but honestly, I don't know the full details of the document.' Similarly, Leticia Quansah, a respondent from the Kinka electoral area in Accra, said, '[t]here is a huge difference between preparing a manifesto and creating awareness about its content.' She continued: 'Yes, my party has the best of manifestos but I can tell you for a fact that not all of us who support and vote for the party are fully aware of the contents of the manifesto.'

In trying to explain the cause of this anomaly it is tempting to adopt a simplistic approach and blame it on illiteracy. However, only 75 of the respondents had no formal education and of the 125 interviewees who had received some education only 79 claimed to know the contents of their party's manifesto. The remaining 46, of whom eight were university graduates, 21 had SHS education and 17 had received basic education, did not. So it seems that the lack of familiarity with the contents of the manifestos is caused by weak party political education and voter awareness creation.

The parties did not do much to inform their young supporters of the contents of their manifestos. Dennis Ofosu-Appiah, President of the Federation of Youth Associations in Ghana, agrees with the claim that 'the youth's ignorance of their parties' manifestos may be attributed to the lack of political education rather than illiteracy'. What has compounded the problem is the parties' failure to ensure that the manifestos are made available and accessible to the youth. Indeed, nine political party officials admitted that 'the parties could not print many copies for distribution to their supporters and members because of the lack of financial resources'. Only a few copies were printed and were sold at exorbitant prices to rich party financiers as a means of raising money for the parties' programmes. Parties did not target the youth and young people did not have the money to buy the manifestos. As Emmanuel Attafuah, the National Youth Organiser of the NPP, observed, 'even though the parties produced copies of their manifestos, it was for the purposes of raising funds rather than reaching out to their youth support'.

Despite their failure to bring the contents of the manifestos to the youth, the parties adopted a strategy involving selecting a few populist areas in their manifestos in their efforts to mobilise voters. For instance, of the numerous policy prescriptions in the NPP manifesto it was only the free SHS issue that was highlighted, as though it was the only problem.

Recognising that the promise of free SHS resonated well with the youth's demands, the NDC also framed its campaign around the issue. Thus, it abandoned all the points in its manifesto and responded only to the issue of free SHS propagated by the NPP. However, it insisted that increasing access to SHS was the priority rather than 'free SHS'. To this end, it promised to build 200 more schools first.

Emmanuel Bombande, who heads the West African Network for Peace Building, and Jean Mensa, Executive Director of the Institute of Economic Affairs, both expressed grave concerns about the reductionist approach of the parties in highlighting only their position on education and neglecting other important issues.

This contributed largely to the fact that young people did not know the full contents of the manifestos of the parties they subscribed to. Their response to the question that follows attests to this. The respondents were asked to mention one key provision in the manifesto of their party. In response, all 200 identified SHS education. The response of Edmund Akpor Adjei, a respondent from Kolewoko in the Accra metropolis who is an active supporter of the NPP, is interesting. He chanted: 'my party's manifesto is free education, no free education, no vote!!!' Similarly, Fuseina Ali from Sabongida in the Tamale metropolis, who supports the NDC, indicated that her party's manifesto is all about 'quality and not free and cheap SHS education'. She said: 'free things are cheap, vote for quality SHS education; that is all the NDC manifesto says!'

The youth had full knowledge and a good command of their party's positions on SHS education and that was all. Ludwig Hlordze, National Youth Organiser of the NDC, admitted that 'the supporters of the various political parties contesting the 2012 General Elections, and in particular, my own party people and that of the NPP know almost nothing in our manifestos beyond what we have said about education at the SHS level'.

The campaign debates focusing on SHS decided the outcome of the elections: 190 of the 200 interviewees indicated that they voted on the provision of SHS education that defined the foundation of their party's manifestos, suggesting that they made rational voting decisions, as defined by Heywood (2002).

Only 10 respondents – six from the NDC and four from the NPP – voted for their party on the basis of support and allegiance and strong attachments developed over the years. This means that they did not consider the issues espoused by the two parties when they went to the polls. Michael Adjetey Sowah, a respondent from the Ngleshie electoral area in the Accra metropolis, for example, said '…I will always vote for my party because my parents and grandparents have always voted for the party…'

The voting behaviour exhibited by these 10 interviewees is in line with the party identification model, which downplays the importance of 'bread and butter issues'. While strong party affinity explains the survival of some of the smaller parties despite their poor performance at the polls, it could be one of the justifications for the prevalence of the ethnic and regional voting patterns that were observed in the 2008 elections. In those elections the NDC won in eight of the ten regions, and a majority of Ewes rooted for the NDC candidate, while, in traditional Akan, particularly, Akim and Ashanti dominated areas, the NPP won overwhelmingly because the presidential candidate was an Akim. While the voter-party bond is not anti-democratic in outlook, in nascent democracies such as that in Ghana if the trend persists it could erode the quest for national unity and promote ethnic conflict.

The youth's voting decisions reflect the view that rather than being habitual (a manifestation of broader attachments and allegiances), voting by the youth was instrumental, that is, it was a means to an end. By making rational voting decisions (issue voting) the youth helped to promote credible elections free from the politics of personality, insult and vilification. The need for issue-based voting was the subject of media discussions and was advocated by a number of non-state organisations during the 2012 election campaign.

Past campaigns in the run-up to elections were overshadowed by violence, insults and personality attacks that pitted political entrepreneurs against each other in a hostile atmosphere.

The fear that the 2012 election campaigns could degenerate into acrimony and violence encouraged state institutions such as the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) to undertake important outreach programmes and appeal to the candidates to highlight issues rather than to insult opponents.

The IEA-Ghana organised four 'Evening Encounters' with four presidential candidates to educate their supporters about the fundamental issues that underpinned their campaigns. The majority of those who attended were young people.

The IEA-Ghana also organised two presidential debates and one vice-presidential debate to drum home the message of issue-based campaigns and promote political tolerance and accountability and the exercise of freedom of choice, and the issue that dominated the candidates' encounters with their supporters was SHS education.

CONCLUSION AND THE WAY FORWARD

This article has revealed that manifestos are crucial in promoting issue-based voting and reducing the tendency of voters to make irrational choices. The party

campaigns focused on the issue of SHS education and this caught the interest of the youth. Therefore, in drafting such manifestos care should be taken that they reflect the wishes and aspirations of the youth, who are the actual 'voting machines' in Ghana.

Party manifestos should be simplified, abridged and translated, if possible, into the major local languages. The issue of public funding of political parties must be revisited to ensure that they are able to print and distribute more manifestos to their young supporters. Moreover, while electioneering, political leaders must endeavour to stay focused on all the core issues encapsulated in their manifestos, not merely one of them, in order to sensitise and popularise those issues.

It is parochial and myopic to pretend that the only challenge facing Ghana is education at SHS level. There are other monumental challenges with regard to lack of infrastructure, youth unemployment, health issues and food security that affect all Ghanaians, especially the youth, who constitute a majority of Ghana's national and voting population.

The parties have not been able to educate and sensitise their supporters effectively about the solutions to these problems.

This deficiency resulted in the singling out and hyping of one catchy provision in their manifestos which they knew affected the youth and their parents.

If issue-based voting is to be promoted among the youth, parties must deepen the awareness of their supporters of all the core issues in their manifestos. This, coupled with other intervention programmes from civil society organisations and state bodies, could check ethnic voting and voting purely on partisan lines, which do not benefit a nation struggling to free itself from the shackles of polarisation, poverty and under-development. In the process, young people must be encouraged to read and educate themselves about their party manifestos.

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OIL AND GHANA'S 2012 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS
Reinvigorating the 'Resource Curse'?

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ABSTRACT

The threat posed to burgeoning democratic dispensations by natural resources could not be more glaring than it is in Ghana following the discovery of large quantities of oil in what has been named the Jubilee Field. While it is evident that oil revenues could bring about economic transformation and benefits for the citizens of Ghana, prudent economic management of the resources is required. At the same time, the oil boom may prove to be a challenge to Ghana's democratic development if it brings, as it has elsewhere in Africa, an increase in corruption, authoritarianism and conflict. The Jubilee Field raised the stakes in the 2012 presidential election. In their manifestos the National Democratic Congress and the New Patriotic Party, the two leading political parties in Ghana, each made a different proposal about what should be done with the oil revenue. Against this backdrop we posit that the relevance of the 'resource curse' dictum cannot be dismissed. For political parties the stakes remain high. The heightened attention paid to oil adds currency to the conception that resources have a long-standing destabilising effect on African democracies. This article argues that unless visible and apolitical accountable structures are created to manage the oil, multinational lobbyists could fuel post-election political tensions in subsequent elections by funding the pursuit of power of the parties, thus accelerating an end to Ghana's long-celebrated democratic stability.

INTRODUCTION

Resources have been well documented as a source of dispute in some of Africa's intractable conflicts, such as that in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Darfur and Somalia and their discovery in any country should be carefully celebrated. This caution is particularly appropriate in the Ghanaian context, where the recent discovery of oil has elicited high hopes and expectations for socioeconomic renewal and political development.

Since the inauguration of the Fourth Republic, in 1992, Ghana's politics has been dominated by two main political parties, namely, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP) (Throup 2011, p 4), each of which has enjoyed almost equal levels of support among voters, exemplified by frequent alternation of power between the two parties, as well as acceptance of electoral outcomes without undue recourse to violence.

In the December 2008 election, for example, the failure of the NPP's candidate Nana Akufo-Addo to secure the statutory 50%+1 of the total vote cast in the presidential elections in the first ballot caused the NPP barons to decry the outcome. However, then President John Kufuor convinced his supporters to accept a second round. When the NDC candidate, John Atta-Mills, won the run-off election by 0.46% President Kufuor called for the result to be accepted, making it clear that Ghanaians accepted constitutional democracy as expressed through the ballot box. It also seems that President Kufuor's statesmanship was critical in holding the NPP and Ghana's despondent population together.

However, following the 2012 elections, the lack of a leader of the likes of Kufuor, an infrastructure that fails to meet the country's needs and, more crucially, the discovery of oil, heightened the stakes and triggered an immediate objection, by the NPP and a dispute that challenged Ghana's reputation as a politically mature state (Maplecroft 2012, p 1).

Beyond these election battles Ghana's fast track resolution mechanism for dealing with election related disputes has been saluted by both national and international observers as being free and fair (Commonwealth Observer Group 2012, p 14). The decision of the Electoral Commission of Ghana (ECG), an independent body consisting of seven members, can be challenged through the Supreme Court within 21 days of the declaration of the results.

The NPP's decision to challenge the election result – something that had not been done in several previous elections – hints at the party's strong desire to control Ghana's newly discovered oil wealth. Given the fact that there were residual tensions from the 2008 elections (Omotola 2012) and the fact that the winner of the 2012 elections would manage the oil revenue, the objection raised fears that violence could ensue from the heightened stakes introduced by the discovery of oil.

This article investigates the effects Ghana's oil could have on future elections. It posits that drawing on the lessons of the 2012 elections, especially the premium placed on oil revenues by both the NDC and NPP in their election campaigns, adequate steps must be taken to avoid falling into the pitfalls of the 'resource curse', which can engender underdevelopment and conflict. The 2012 election should be seen as a warning to Ghana's leaders to ensure that oil management does not become a political football.

Although Ghana does not have the significant amount of oil reserves of its neighbour, Nigeria, whose Niger Delta region has been the focal point of intractable instability (LaMonica & Omotola 2013), the production of oil does present various opportunities: if it is well managed, the revenue accrued from oil production could help the country become a middle-income state. It could also provide employment opportunities and foster local participation and development (Throup 2011, p 9). The Jubilee Oil Field has reserves of approximately two billion barrels of oil and 5 000-billion cubic feet of gas. It is believed that production will continue until 2030 (Prempeh & Kroon 2012, p 3) and will account for $1-billion and $1.5-billion annually, which will amount to six to nine percent of Ghana's gross domestic product (Prempeh & Kroon 2012, p 3).

If care is not taken the potential role of multinational corporations in supporting dissenting political factions as a lobbying strategy to control oil markets could run Ghana aground, as has competition over resources in the DRC and Sudan. This could weaken government institutions and reduce Ghana's economic performance (Kapela 2009, p 11). Thus, rather than the discovery of oil contributing to the growth of Ghana's GDP as projected, it might have repercussions that would lend credibility to the 'paradox of plenty', also known as the resource curse – the thesis that suggests that states with resource wealth tend to perform more poorly economically than those without.

This article also argues that it is time to reconsider the 'winner-takes-all' nature of Ghana's electoral system (Prempeh & Kroon 2012, p 3), which is a political culture built on a cabalistic system of government where the party that wins control of Parliament or the presidency manages political and material resources, often in favour of influential interest groups and public investments that have short-term pay-offs. The need, therefore, for a political reconfiguration in which visibly apolitical and accountable structures are created to manage Ghana's resources could not be more pressing. Failure to do this could have dire consequences for Ghana's nascent democracy.

The paper has four thematic sections. The first provides some theoretical information about the relationship between oil and democracy. The cases of Nigeria and Sudan portray oil as a trigger of both intra- and interstate conflict, with dire humanitarian consequences for civilians.

The second section reflects on how Ghana's discovery of oil has steadily changed (and will continue to influence) the contours of democratisation. This section describes briefly how oil discovery energised the political elite while weakening the democratisation process before the 2012 election.

This section is followed by a reflection on the role of oil in the 2012 presidential election. The article argues that oil became a major issue in the election campaigns and divergent party proposals on how oil should or would be managed during each party's tenure became one of the most crucial factors in the voters' choice of candidate.

In the concluding section the paper recommends strategies for avoiding the resource curse. Among these are: strengthening transparency and accountability and reinvesting oil revenues in productive ventures such as job creation, infrastructural development, poverty eradication and research grants for academically deserving and financially needy Ghanaians.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OIL AND DEMOCRATISATION

Policy research into oil and democracy has reached a fairly universally accepted conclusion that oil discovery in Africa has, more often than not, given birth to crises. According to Luke Patey (2007, p 5), '[t]he tragedy of civil war, corruption, and poverty of many African oil producers represents one of the most baffling paradoxes on the continent.' Although states such as Ghana possess a potential basis for rapid development pursuant to the discovery of oil, a great deal depends on 'getting the politics right' (Obi 2007, p 9). For this reason successful oil administration can strengthen the democratisation and governance process. Cyril Obi, a renowned expert in oil and environmental politics, laments, however, that '[c]onflict [ensuing from oil] occurs only as a result of the politicization of the oil factor, in ways that make the exclusive control of oil and its distribution, the [affair of a few]' (Obi 2007, p 5).

Leading studies in the field (Cook 1970; Beblawi 1987; Beblawi & Luciani 1987; Chaudhry 1997; Yates 1996; Karl 1997; Rose 1999, 2001) have established what may generally be regarded as the conventional wisdom about the relationship between oil and democracy, showing how oil, unconditionally, hinders democracy or promotes authoritarianism.

The argument goes that oil rents breed rentier states, that is, states that depend largely on external rents/revenue, where the rent accrues directly to the government and only a few are engaged in the acquisition of the rent (wealth). As the argument goes, the majority does not get involved in the sharing of the wealth (Rose 2001, p 329). These tendencies not only promote corruption and violence, they also undermine development. It has also been argued that such

crude democracies are easily susceptible to oil shocks resulting from disruption in production or a general fall in the price of oil, with a telling impact on the level of political freedom and democracy (Ramsay 2007). Others have argued that the volume of oil plays a prominent role in determining its effects on democracy, positing that the more oil, the less democracy (Tsui 2005).

All these studies, though conducted using different methods and models, point in one direction – the resource curse, which describes a situation where abundant mineral resources and increasing resource revenues undermine democracy and development.

From the studies the sins of oil, like those of most mineral resources, have been identified as the rentier effect, the repression effect and the modernisation effect (Rose 2001). While the rentier effect posits that resource-rich governments use low tax rates and patronage to relieve pressures for greater accountability, the repression effect argues that resource wealth retards democratisation by enabling governments to boost their funding for internal security. The modernisation effect holds that growth based on the export of oil minerals fails to bring about the social and cultural changes that tend to produce democratic government (Rose 2001; Dunning 2008).

In Nigeria and Sudan there is a close connection between oil, the state and democratic processes. Oil, for instance, contributes about 40% of Nigeria's GDP, 70% of federal government revenue and 92% of its foreign exchange earnings (Obi 2007). Similarly, about 70% of Sudan's total export revenue comes from oil exports. Whereas in 2006 and 2007 increases in oil production, high oil prices, and large inflows of foreign direct investment amplified Sudan's economy and steadied its GDP growth to over 10%, the country plunged into civil war barely a year later. The war was triggered by disputes over the way the oil should be managed and who or which regions should be its beneficiaries.

Although the civil war was disguised as a religious conflict between the Muslim North and a largely Christian South, analysts believe this dynamic was peripheral and that the real reason was the control of Sudan's rich oil reserves and the wealth they bring. The conflict became extremely brutal, with untold loss of life, large numbers of internally displaced persons and refugees, many undocumented cases of rape and the wanton destruction of state and private property.

Empirical researchers, for example, Ross (2001), have found clear links between poor governance, poverty and the exploitation of oil, gas and minerals. To Ross oil dependence is a recipe for high rates of child malnutrition, low healthcare spending, low school enrolment rates and poor adult literacy – all of which are governance matters.

According to Ross there are two schools of thoughts about the relationship between oil and governance, one suggesting that oil enhances governance and

supports the attainment of economic growth and stability, the other arguing that some states were better off without oil. Rose, however, subscribes to the first school of thought but believes that '[many countries – like Angola, Nigeria and Sudan] would clearly be better off if they had had no oil in the first place' (Rose 2001).

Ghana is likely to learn a lesson or two from two of African leading oil giants. It is also noteworthy that, apart from having good diplomatic relations, Nigeria and Ghana share some striking similarities. These include their multi-ethnic composition, the challenge of regional cleavages connected to the legacy of colonial administrative policies, prolonged periods of military rule and elite-dominated politics.

Historically, Nigeria began exporting oil in 1958 and Sudan in 1999. Nigeria also went through a gruelling three-year civil war, from June 1967 to January 1970, while the Sudan was embroiled in an intractable conflict from 2008. In both cases oil played a critical role in disrupting governance.

In post-war Nigeria the 1970s oil boom substantially expanded the state's economy, as was the case in Sudan between 2006 and 2007. Oil management became the focal point of governance and, by the 1980s, the discourse had shifted to 'control, mismanagement, and ownership of oil by the national [elite] versus accountable leadership', with a view to guaranteeing the long-term interests of citizens. This discourse has dominated public opinion and the instability of the Niger Delta has been largely attributed to under-development of the region (LaMonica & Omotola 2013). In light of this, its discovery in Ghana foreshadows some potential instability among communities living around the Jubilee Oil Field, with broader ramifications for the state and the country's governance.

THE DISCOVERY OF OIL AND THE CHANGING CONTOURS OF DEMOCRATISATION

Now that oil has come to the forefront of the political economy, it remains to be seen how the struggle for oil revenue among competing groups/party traditions will begin to shape and reshape the democratization process in Ghana. If not well managed, the discovery of oil may alter the equilibrium and stability of democratization in Ghana.

Omotola 2012, p 163

The chances of this prediction coming true appear increasingly feasible given the realities of the 2012 elections. As the presidential election revealed, both the NDC and the NPP aspire to attain resource-led growth. During the elections petroleum

politics became a recurrent salient issue of contention between the two parties, each accusing the other of corrupt dealings associated with oil.

Kosmos Energy's stake in the Jubilee Oil Field became an issue of contention after the NDC government, which took office in 2009, alleged that perhaps President Kufuor and his associates had profited from oil production contracts with the company.

Collier & Venables (2009, p 2) have warned about governments that appear to be concerned with the short term. Any tendencies whereby governments make decisions that are likely to lead to excessive spending or opportunistic behaviour with regard to resource companies will not have a positive impact in the long run.

When it came to power in 2009 the NDC inquired about the contract negotiations between the previous government and Kosmos Energy and, when Kosmos tried to sell its stake in the Jubilee field to Exxon Mobile, the issue generated considerable publicity, which led to Exxon Mobile relinquishing its attempt to purchase (Throup 2011, p 9).

The promise of oil revenue distribution is likely to be a significant factor in voting patterns within Ghana for many years to come. Prempeh & Kroon (2012, p 5) have noted that there are visible shortcomings in public financial management. There have been discrepancies between the budget and actual spending. Thus fiscal discipline and macroeconomic management suffered during the elections as political parties spent heavily on campaigning. Another issue that has emerged is that Ghana lacks a long-term national development plan as every new party administration has followed its own short- to medium-term national development plan and expenditure priorities based upon its own manifestos (Prempeh & Kroon 2012).

The promise of oil revenue has raised the expectations of many Ghanaians, including political parties. In the lead-up to the 2012 elections both parties expressed their intention to use oil revenue to deal with Ghana's development needs. Many had speculated that the 2012 elections would result in partisan conflict, as the winner would preside over oil revenues accrued from the Jubilee field and the winning party would be able to secure its place in office for several terms (Prempeh & Kroon 2012, p 21) *if corrupted by the oil wealth*. Wantchekon (2000, p 836) has also stated that governments with abundant mineral resources have more discretion about spending the proceeds and also have an informational advantage over the opposition as to the amounts involved.

Wantchekon (2000, p 819) asserts that in states where high levels of income from resources are available politics is dominated not by ideology but by issues associated with resource rents and voters will select political parties on the basis of credible promises to deliver resource rents. Wantchekon (2009, p 821) also argues that when the capacity of the state is weak and the state cannot enforce laws,

incumbent political parties have a large amount of discretion about how resource rents are distributed. Therefore, if the opposition cannot break the advantage of the incumbent government it means resource rents will translate into one-party dominance, as has been the case in Botswana (Wantchekon 2000, p 821).

In such cases some opposition parties may resort to unconstitutional means of challenging the incumbent's advantage, which may lead to instability. Incumbent politicians may ban the opposition party, co-opt it into the ruling party or use the resource rents to buy off the opposition (Wantchekon 2009, p 821). Thus Wantchekon (2000, p 822) cautions that even within democratic systems where there is political competition dependency on resources may translate into authoritarian government and this, in turn, may make it difficult to consolidate democracy.

 Throup (2011, p 8) alludes to the fact that the combination of Ghana's patronage politics and its weak institutions may exacerbate corruption. The zero-sum game increases the risk of violence surrounding elections and also raises the possibility that the losing party may not accept the results. Cabrales & Hauk (2009, p 22), on the other hand, argue that in states with strong institutions it is less likely that natural resources will allow the incumbent government to remain in office.

Collier & Venables (2009, p 8) have alluded to the notion that if voters have inaccurate or limited information politicians may be able to embezzle with few consequences. Wantchekon (2000, p 7) also states that when the incumbent has discretionary power over policies of redistribution the government may engage in what is known as a consumption binge, a situation in which taxes are reduced and government spending is geared towards projects that guarantee high immediate visibility.

Wantchekon also shows that the discretion of the incumbent government over how and when to spend revenues enables the incumbent to undermine the credibility of the opposition through a process of upfront payments: the incumbent can spend the money on maintaining and upgrading facilities, promise the voters more and capitalise on its successes. Thus it is possible that the NDC will be entrenched in power for many more years to come.

While oil revenue may provide an incentive to build the capacity of Ghana, to develop infrastructure for economic development and to educate the population, the NDC will have to be cautious. In some cases resource mismanagement can create problems. Incentives to gain access to resource rents may actually weaken a government and make it vulnerable to being overthrown (Collier & Venables 2009, p 4).

Authors like Kapela (2009, p 12) have warned that when resources are discovered and there are no transparent policies in place to regulate their extraction, corruption permeates throughout government, as a few officials in

control of the resource rents may be encouraged to consolidate their power by repressing civil society and exercising authoritarianism.

OIL AND THE 2012 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION: POLITICAL PARTIES, MANIFESTOS AND ELECTION CAMPAIGNS

The 2012 elections were significant for both parties: the NPP sought to regain power after its defeat in the 2008 run-off election and the NDC had the task of convincing voters that it deserved to continue in office. Political analysts believe the tension that existed during the 2008 elections could be attributed to the high expectations of both parties of the oil revenue from Jubilee. This situation was no different in the 2012 elections and political leaders made promises based on what they could achieve by using oil revenues.

Prior to the 2012 elections the NDC's candidate, John Dramani Mahama, released a manifesto entitled 'Better Ghana', which was interpreted as a continuation or perpetuation of the policies propagated by the late President John Atta Mills (Jahateh 2012, p 1). Mills's death was expected to have a significant impact on the elections: people would vote for Mahama as they believed that the progress made under Mills during his three-year term would continue under Mahama.

Jahateh (2012) writes that Mahama's prospects of victory would be in-fluenced by Ghanaians who would express their condolences and sympathy to the NDC by voting for the party's candidate. It must be noted that Mills lacked the support of the party's founder, Jerry Rawlings, whose influence on the party's grassroots supporters was considerable (Jahateh 2012, p 8). Prior to Mills's death Rawlings had stated that the ruling party would not win another term in power with Mills as leader (Jahateh 2012, p 8).

Internal divisions were not unique to the NDC. Both parties were plagued by internal discord over their candidates. The NDC struggled to distance itself from the influence and legacy of its founder and former president, Jerry Rawlings, (Lowther 2013, p 1) and Nana Akufo Addo of the NPP worked to rebrand his party, which was seen as elitist and pro-upper class.

In the lead-up to the elections the NDC characterised itself as a social democratic party that was in favour of equality for all (Jahateh 2012, p 8). It focused primarily on infrastructural development, a principle contained in the executive summary of the 2012 manifesto, which stated, 'Our infrastructure development will be intensified to accelerate the transformation of Ghana into a middle-income status' (Nonor 2012, p 1).

Thus, in order to attain its goal, in the lead-up to the elections the NDC made various promises pertaining to the use of oil revenues. It stated that it aimed to

use oil and gas development as a catalyst to diversify its economy and said that if it was re-elected it would strengthen the agencies that controlled the regulation of all segments of the petroleum industry (Top Africa 2012). In its manifesto the NDC also promised to promote local involvement in the exploration, development and production of both oil and gas and provide funding for training and scientific research for the development of the oil and gas sector.

The NDC was able to highlight its achievements within these sectors during Mills's term. It had established the Ghana National Gas Company as a means of guaranteeing the sustainable development of the infrastructure and industry. The debt that had been accrued by the Tema Oil Refinery had been substantially paid off and the refinery was managed sustainably, the manifesto claimed. Thus the NDC was able to use its success and projections for the future to garner support (Top Africa 2012).

The NPP, which was regarded as conservative, in contrast to the NDC, which was seen as socially progressive, promised to 'promote a vibrant free economy'. Both parties promised an equal distribution of oil revenue, the modernisation of agriculture and better education (Lowther 2013). These issues were deemed crucial in the contested race.

The main issues that concerned voters were job creation, corruption and free secondary education (Melimopoulos & Vetch 2012).

The parties diverged on the issue of free senior high school (SHS) education, which, in the run-up to the elections, was a major issue. While some parties had promised to make basic education compulsory and free, others promised free SHS education. As Nana Akufo-Addo of the NPP put it:

> Clearly the most equitable manner in which our nation and our people would benefit from the oil revenue is to ensure that they are used on the two most critical aspects of our national life – our education and our healthcare.
>
> <div align="right">Nonor 2012</div>

While the provision of free secondary education would be costly, it has been acknowledged that Ghana cannot have an uneducated and unskilled workforce. The NPP's manifesto promised free SHS education, which included technical and vocational education. To make this aspiration a reality would require the use of budgetary resources, including those from oil exports.

The NDC countered with the argument that such a promise was neither viable nor sustainable (Nonor 2012, p 1; Commonwealth Observer Group 2012, p 8). Some analysts also argued that Ghana's economy was too small to implement free SHS and the government could not meet such a huge promise while infrastructure

was inadequate (Kwode 2012). Consequently, the NDC proposed the phasing in of free SHS education over a period of 20 years (Kwode 2012), arguing that building the necessary infrastructure was a prerequisite for attaining such a goal.

Whatever their differences, both parties intended to use wealth accrued from oil and other minerals to prompt industrial growth, improve health services and education and create jobs (Kwode 2012). During a debate organised by the Institute of Economic Affairs Akufo-Addo listed the revenue accrued from oil as a significant source of funding for his free SHS policy. The NPP believed that this would secure him votes among young, urbanised voters (Lowther 2013). The NPP also had the support of the former president, John Agyekum Kufuor. For Afuko-Addo, investing in oil revenue to build Ghana's human resources through education was the answer to developing the state (Nonor 2012).

While the NDC placed more emphasis on infrastructural development, it, like the NPP, believed that it was important to use oil revenues for this purpose.

However, Throup (2011, 5) points out that little attention has been paid to the potential impact of mismanagement of resource revenue. Many analysts have argued that Ghana is an 'exceptional state' in Africa and may therefore be able to avoid the resource curse. However, some issues have come under scrutiny.

THE IMPERATIVE TO AVOID THE RESOURCE CURSE

Transparency and oil resources

The resource curse within West Africa could provide a cautionary tale for Ghana. Collier & Venables (2009, p 9) state that without adequate infrastructure and political systems developing states cannot use oil resources successfully because of the greed of political elites and multinational corporations, who may exacerbate unequal distribution of resources. Kapela (2009, p 3) notes that Ghana has problems that have the potential to undermine any positive impact of oil and gas development.

Kapela believes the process of oil development is moving too fast because proper institutions have not been put in place to regulate the petroleum industry. Kapela also believes civil society is being marginalised and when it comes to deals between oil companies and regulatory bodies there is a reluctance to be transparent. In order for Ghana to avoid the resource curse, it is argued, there is a need for improved transparency in resource management and monetary and fiscal policies; there have also been proposals to improve government transparency and encourage civil society engagement (Kapela 2009, p 17). It has also been suggested that oil revenues should be used to promote economic diversity and the establishment of an oil fund.

The Ghanaian government has already passed the Petroleum Commission Act, giving the Ministry of Energy powers to regulate and manage the petroleum sector and issue licences, formerly the responsibility of the Ghana National Petroleum Cooperation (GNPC) (Prempeh & Kroon 2012, p 10).

The activities of the GNPC had been considered to be opaque and it was believed that it offered employment opportunities to influential NDC representatives, thus its powers have been reduced by the passage of the Petroleum Commission Act. However, the regulatory capacity of the Petroleum Commission are weak and the GNPC poses a problem because its leadership consists of influential members of the NDC and it is considered to be heavily politicised (Throup 2011, p 11).

Kapela (2009, p 20) recommends the creation of a new oil authority which is independent of the GNPC. Prempeh & Kroon (2012, p 11) argue that transparency in the petroleum sector within Ghana is weak and that although the Petroleum Revenue Management Act (2011) requires the publication of information about petroleum revenue, when it comes to contracts and contracting and licence procedures there is little transparency and budgeting and spending decisions are not explained. For example, the projected budget for 2013 failed to state how much revenue from oil would be allocated to particular sectors or projects (Prempeh & Kroon 2012).

It is significant that initiatives to establish transparency such as the Petroleum Revenue Management Act and petroleum contracts came from donors and the private sector, not from government (Prempeh & Kroon 2012, p 11). The Act allows the government to use 70% of its oil revenues as collateral for loans and to support the budget. The opposition deemed this provision controversial because it believes that if the government is permitted to use oil revenues to raise loans it will give the governing party the opportunity to misuse the revenue (Gary 2012). It may also increase the risk of debt (Throup 2011, p 17). While the Petroleum Act may provide for auditing and transparency what remains to be seen is whether Ghana has the technical capacity to enforce the requirements.

Kapela (2009, p 20) states that many countries do not have the 'autonomous technocracy' necessary to implement unpopular policies pertaining to budgetary spending practices that offset the 'Dutch Disease'.[1] Botswana is one of the few states to have stipulated that all spending must be approved by Parliament, which ensures that all activities of the executive are checked.

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1   'The theory states that windfall profits from commodity exports (eg, natural gas, oil, gold and/or diamonds) will appreciate the exporting nation's exchange rate, making all other export sectors of the economy suffer from less competitive trade terms (ie, non-mineral exports like agriculture and manufacturing become more expensive in international trade)' (Kapela 2009). Also see *The Economist*, 'The Dutch Disease', 26 November 1977, pp 82-83.

Contrary to expectations and practice, the control of Ghana's petroleum management and revenue spending lies with an executive agency which is responsible to the president and not to Parliament. All transactions between foreign oil companies and government have been shrouded in secrecy, with information and data classified beyond the reach of civil society. Thus, it is crucial that oil management is overseen by an independent and apolitical institution answerable directly to Parliament (Prempeh & Kroon 2012, p 27).

Ghana also has low levels of the checks and balances necessary to guarantee executive accountability to other equally important state organs like the judiciary, the legislature and the media (Dessus, Medvedev, Land, Bain, Kwawukume, Andrade, Calvacanti, Stevens, Foster, Vagliasindi, Costain, Jackson & Byerlee 2009, p 5). Ensuring that oil management is declassified and managed without fear or favour or doom from the executive is critical to avoid the curse embedded in oil discovery. Alternatively, President Mahama's government should, perhaps, look for a means of minimising the risks of creating grievances springing from oil (mis)management. There is a need for consensus among all stakeholders about the management of oil revenues.

Ghana, a major exporter of gold and cocoa, needs to continue to diversify its economy. Hayes has argued that expected oil returns will account for only 6% of the economy, unlike the situation in Nigeria, where they account for about 92% (Mitchell 2012). Thus it is in a better position to manage oil resources because it is not entirely dependent on them.

Political grievances can escalate violence in the following way: those who live closest to natural resources may feel they have a greater right to the wealth created by these resources than the rest of the population because they are affected by their extraction (Humphreys 2005, p 31). Thus, distribution of mineral resource wealth should be just and equal, as the NDC believes.

In order to avoid future conflict and tensions among political parties the incumbent party must ensure that the revenues accrued from oil rents benefit all the people of Ghana and that the government does not engage in rent-seeking behaviour. The governing party must seek ways of managing wealth transparently and equitably, as a lack of transparency and accountability may increase political and social tensions in subsequent elections.

CONCLUSION

Much of the literature on the political economy of oil dwells on the oil-conflict nexus, particularly as it pertains to some of Africa's intractable conflicts such as Sudan and Cold War-era proxy battles like those in Angola. For this reason oil discovery and (mis)management has been construed as a tragedy of sorts. The

role played by oil in Ghana's 2012 presidential election scarily gave credence to the belief that oil discovery in Africa inevitably leads to an elitist political system which deprives the populace of the improved living standards that should be the result of oil discovery.

This article was premised on the urgency for Ghana to build an apolitical, transparent and accountable institution to manage its oil and report to the people's parliamentary representatives while exerting checks and balances.

The article has attempted to provoke some reflection on the part of the Ghanaian government about engaging in constructive thinking about its oil management policy. Leaving it to the dictates of political parties is a recipe for disaster. The 2012 elections only showed one side of this potential sledgehammer that may disrupt the image of Ghana's political system as a democratic beacon for West Africa and Africa at large.

At this point the extent to which foreign oil companies are involved in the scramble for oil exportation or drilling licences is unclear – but extrapolating from how such foreign interests have sponsored political dissent and proxy wars in the past, it is reasonable to suggest that Ghana's political elite must be watchful about the harm competition among Western, Chinese and other Asian oil companies over its oil could cause to the nation as a whole in years to come.

At best, short term licences should be issued, with an insistence on the employment of Ghanaians, support of indigenous projects as part of corporate social responsibility, public-private partnership with Ghanaians holding top management positions and an emphasis on skills transfer. Such a scheme, which would benefit Ghanaians, will diminish the chances of popular uprisings ensuing from unemployment and will enable Ghana to grow more successfully than Nigeria, Sudan or Angola, which leveraged their oil extraction control to foreign competing forces in the absence of effective government policies and strong institutions.

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SUSTAINING PEACE AND STABILITY IN GHANA

Appraising the Role of the National Election Security Task Force in the 2012 Elections

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the role of the National Election Security Task Force (NESTF) in the 2012 elections in Ghana. It traces the history of electoral politics in Ghana's Fourth Republic, highlighting significant developments and security challenges from 1992, with a particular focus on the 2012 elections. The structure, composition and powers as well as the functions of the NESTF are discussed. The article further examines the performance of the NESTF during all three phases of the elections relative to security challenges, responses and emerging issues that require urgent policy reforms. Based on face-to-face interviews and participant observations, the article concludes that the 2012 elections were not only keenly contested but all three phases were marred by extreme violence, particularly because of the novelty of the biometric voter registration and verification system. While commending various election stakeholders such as the Electoral Commission of Ghana, we argue that although the election results were contested in court, the NESTF, in particular, played an exemplary role in averting possible conflict after the declaration of the results. We recommend, however, that in subsequent elections the security forces should be seen to be neutral and government should also ensure adequate provision of logistics, transport and communication devices to ensure free, fair and violence-free elections.

INTRODUCTION

None of the elections during Ghana's Fourth Republic has witnessed more campaigns for peace than those held on 7 December 2012. The reason for this is that although Ghana has an enviable record of conducting credible and peaceful elections the 2012 elections presented a major challenge in respect of whether the country would maintain this tradition and hold another peaceful and transparent election, whose outcome would be acceptable by all, particularly the two main political parties, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP). The reason for this concern was several security threats that characterised the political landscape in the country prior to the 2012 poll.

The 2012 poll marked the introduction by the Electoral Commission of Ghana (ECG) of the biometric voter register (BVR) and verification system (VS) (CODEO 2012) and the tensions and election-related violence that characterised the BVR exercise raised fears about its successful implementation.

Another potential threat was the alleged 'secret tapes', which appeared to reveal plans by people high up in the NPP and NDC to destabilise the electoral process (Zamana 2012; African Elections 2012). This issue became a serious security concern and the subject of intense public debate. A third problem was the acrimonious debates over the creation by the ECG of 45 additional constituencies a few months before the date of the election (Coffie 2012; CDD 2012).

The blatant use of aggressive, intimidating and violent language in public political discourse in the media and on political platforms as well as the increasing level of media polarisation and biased political reportage was a fourth major concern. Other major problems were the use of youth vigilante groups and private security guards known as 'Macho men' to harass and intimidate political opponents (Alhassan 2012; KAIPTC 2012) and the high level of mistrust among political parties of state institutions such as the ECG, the judiciary and the security agencies suspected to lack objectivity and be political biased.

Lastly, the issue of the availability and proliferation of small arms and light weapons, increasing tension between farmers and pastoralists, growing dissatisfaction among the coastal communities over Ghana's oil find and pressure in some mining communities over the issue of 'Galamsey' (illegal mining), chieftaincy related tensions and communal violence all posed a critical threat to the successful outcome of the 2012 poll (WANEP 2012).

In addition to these internal security challenges were external threats that also sought to undermine the hard-won democratic gains of the country ahead of the election. Notable among these was the influx of Ivorian ex-combatants, mercenaries and rebels into the country and its tendency to increase the availability of arms in the hands of non-state actors (WANEP 2012). All these issues added up to the highly competitive nature of the electoral process.

Against the backdrop of these worrying trends and security threats, ensuring that the election was peaceful remained a veritable challenge. Though the ECG is constitutionally mandated to conduct and supervise all national-level elections, the success and credibility of the process is the shared responsibility of all the stakeholders – political parties, security agencies, government, citizens, election observers, civil society groups and media. But of all these stakeholders it was the maintenance by the security agencies of public law and order as well as the safety of persons and properties that was critical to the peaceful outcome of the election.

For this reason, and drawing on the experience of previous elections, the Ghana Police Service (GPS), together with the other allied security agencies, formed the *ad hoc* National Elections Security Task Force (NESTF) a few months before the 2012 elections, to ensure that peace prevailed before, during and after the elections. The NESTF comprised all the security agencies and existed at national level with divisions at regional, divisional and district levels. Using information gleaned from face-to-face interviews and participant observation we seek in this article to assess critically the NESTF and the way it performed its role in ensuring security.[1]

The article has six parts. In the first we examine Ghana's politics under the Fourth Republic, highlighting the major features, security challenges and transformations from 1992 to 2008. The second section looks at the 2012 elections in perspective, identifying all the critical issues that posed a threat to the peaceful outcome of the elections. The third section discusses the structure and composition of the NESTF, while the powers and mandate of the taskforce are discussed in the fourth section. The fifth examines the preparation of the NESTF for the elections and assesses its performance with respect to its mandate as well as some of the challenges it encountered. Some emerging issues that require urgent reform are also discussed. Lastly, we offer some practical recommendations on how to improve the task force for future elections.

AN OVERVIEW OF ELECTORAL POLITICS IN GHANA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC

Electoral politics in Ghana's Fourth Republic began with the promulgation and adoption of the 1992 Constitution, which reinstated multiparty democracy under the leadership of Jerry John Rawlings.

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1   The interviews were conducted with individuals in the security forces and experts/participants in the Colloquium on Ensuring Peaceful Elections in Ghana, 'Preserving National Security in Elections 2012 and Beyond', organised by the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre, Accra, Ghana, October, 2012.

Having twice seized power in military coups Rawlings accepted the shift towards multiparty democracy as a result of both domestic and international pressure.

On the domestic front there was a relentless and growing demand from various pressure groups and civil society organisations that the 'culture of silence' be broken and reforms be introduced in governance and political processes (Frempong 2007, p 134). Indeed, in the latter part of the 1980s and early 1990s a significant number of Ghanaians had become conscious of their rights and were no longer prepared to accept suppression and dictatorship as a form of leadership and governance, believing that dictatorship should give way to democracy, where citizens can choose their leaders or representatives through a majority votes.

Concurrently with the increasing pro-democratic culture after the Cold War, which had a contagious effect across Africa, the PNDC government succumbed to pressure and a new Constitution was drafted and approved by means of a referendum in 1992, ushering in the Fourth Republic.

One important feature of the Fourth Republic has been the change of governments through competitive elections under the supervision of the Interim National Electoral Commission (INEC) in 1992 and, subsequently, the Electoral Commission of Ghana. The INEC and the ECG, both described as credible democratic institutions, have organised and supervised six successful presidential and parliamentary elections (1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008 and 2012). Unlike the situation in the previous republics, where regimes were changed through the barrel of the gun, the use of elections and the 'power of the thumb' has remained an important characteristic of Ghana's Fourth Republic.

Apart from this overarching feature electoral politics in the Fourth Republic has also been characterised by the fact that two dominant political parties have alternated power, with each of them serving two terms and simultaneously dominating parliamentary seats. All elections apart from that in 1992 have been presided over by the same electoral commissioner, Kojo Afari Djan. Moreover, the media, civil society organisations, constitutionally mandated institutions such as the National Media Commission (NMC) and Commissioner for Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) and domestic as well as international observers have played an increasingly important role. In particular, the issue of election observation in the 1992 transitional and subsequent elections became important, largely due to external and domestic concern for multiparty democracy and for ensuring free and fair elections (Gyimah-Boadi 1999; Jeffries & Thomas 1993).

In spite of this transformation, however, there has been a host of irregularities (Gyima-Boadi 2003, pp 131-2; Ayee 1998, p 35) and election-related violence, which, in one way or another, have threatened to undermine the internal peace and stability of the country (Aubyn 2012, p 240). These have arisen from multiple

factors such as the lack of transparency of the electoral system and processes, perceived and real rigging by party officials, the exploitation of incumbency and the bloating of the electoral register (Ayee 1998). The associated tensions and violence in all three phases of elections remained issues of concern from 1992 to 2008 (Gyimah-Boadi 2003, pp 131-2; Ayee 1998, p 85; Frempong 2012; Boafo-Arthur 2008, p 38).

In 2008, for the first time, fear and tension gripped the entire nation prior to the declaration of the results, after a third round of voting. Indeed, the future of the nation rested on a knife edge (Frempong 2012, p 136) as the election cycle was highly competitive, without an incumbent and clear frontrunner. Against this background, slogans such as 'mother of all elections', 'win or die', 'there can be no loser', 'we will win at all cost' (Aning & Lartey 2009), 'Ghana will be like Kenya', began to emerge on the political landscape. These utterances challenged the security forces to be extra alert about possible security infractions by supporters of the two leading parties.

As expected, violence characterised all three phases of the elections. As Danso & Lartey (2012) note, a registration exercise that should normally be conducted peacefully was characterised by acts of vandalism and attacks on journalists and party agents as well as on civilians, particularly in the Volta, Ashanti and Northern regions.

In the post-election period the security forces struggled to maintain law and order as supporters of the NDC, incited by pro-NDC radio station, besieged the offices of the electoral commission in anticipation of the final results. Similarly, NPP supporters inundated a local radio station to protest against its line of re-porting, allegedly slanted towards the NDC (Frempong 2012).

These isolated incidents created an atmosphere of panic and tension and there was a growing fear that the situation could degenerate into conflict. However, the threats of the outbreak of conflict, particularly during the 2008 elections, were averted by the efficient and collaborative role of the security forces, which, unlike during the military era, have become somewhat 'sanitised', operating more as enforcers of the law than as perpetrators of human rights abuses.

THE 2012 ELECTIONS IN PERSPECTIVE

Like the 2008 elections the 2012 elections were crucial, with the NDC keen to maintain the power it had won in 2008 and the NPP anxious to defeat it. The NDC had won the 1992 and 1996 elections, while the NPP had won those in 2000 and 2004 and the power had shifted back to the NDC in 2008. In essence, only the NDC and NPP have alternated power since the Fourth Republican Constitution in 1992 and Ghana can be described as a two-party state.

An NDC victory in the 2012 elections would affirm what Huntington terms the mechanistic two-turnover test of democratic consolidation (Frempong 2012, p 143) and, more importantly, the NDC would have the opportunity to benefit from the country's newly-discovered oil resources. On other hand, a loss by the opposition NPP would mean that Nana Akufo-Addo, having twice stood as the party's presidential candidate (2008 and 2012) would become unpopular, which would put paid to his vaulting ambition to become president of Ghana and this, arguably, might affect the fortunes of the party in subsequent elections.

The quest by the NDC to maintain power and by the NPP to win it became a matter of concern among the rank and file of the two parties. The frustrations of the NPP in particular were reflected in NPP presidential candidate Akufo-Addo's catch phrase, 'all-die-be-die',[2] a phrase that was heavily criticised and subjected to varied interpretations by the political class, the religious fraternity and the broad mass of party followers (Danso & Adu-Afful 2012). The danger of the statement is the inherent ethnic undertones that sought to instigate and encourage the use of violence in the elections. The flag bearer arguably encouraged his followers, who are predominantly from the Akan ethnic group, to muster courage and fight the ruling NDC if its members engaged in any acts of violence or exploited the electoral process to their advantage. Although Akufo-Addo later defended the phrase as harmless, the statement had already gained currency among the youth and consequently raised the political temperature and security concerns in the country.

As the political temperature rose, the incumbent president, John Atta Mills died – an unprecedented occurrence in the political history of Ghana. The death gave a new twist to the political campaign – the NDC now had to 'sell' a new candidate to the electorate. While some NDC followers felt the death of President Mills was a blessing in disguise because he was increasingly losing appeal due to his ill health, others believed the new leader, John Dramani Mahama, faced a daunting task in competing with Akufo-Addo, a well-known lawyer and former minister of foreign affairs.

As a result, the election campaign became more competitive, and also more tense, with the revelations of 'alleged secret tapes' by the two main political parties to derail the electoral process (Zamana 2012). On the one hand, the NDC alleged that NPP National Youth Organiser Anthony Karbo was planning to disrupt the December 2012 polls by engaging the services of mercenaries, described as 'bad

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2   The interpretation of 'all-die-be-die' is that party followers should demonstrate commitment even if it means dying for the NPP in the face of provocation. Party followers should not allow themselves to be cowed into submission nor be intimidated by the ruling NDC, at whose hands the NPP suffered attacks in previous elections. Another interpretation is that Akufo-Addo was inciting the predominantly Akan ethnic group in the NPP to resort to violence against minority tribes that dominate the ruling NDC.

boys', from Togo, Liberia, Nigeria and Libya (Ghanaweb 2012). On the other, the NPP released a secret tape in which it alleged that the NDC had hatched a plan to recruit a special force whose members would be given national security identification cards to enable them move freely as security operatives and cause trouble in some parts of the country during the elections (Peace FM Online 2012).

But what evoked enormous controversy and generated heated debate among the two main political parties, the religious fraternity and the broad mass of civil society organisations was a secret tape believed to have been released by the NDC and linked to a series of sermons delivered by Pastor Mensah Otabil, General Overseer of the International Central Gospel Church (ICGC), who is widely believed to be a member of the NPP and who has a significant following in the country.

The so-called secret tape contained statements that suggested that Otabil sought to undermine the party's main campaign message – the provision of free senior high school education, a message that differed from that of the NDC, which focused on improving the quality of education. While the NPP's policy on free education gained increasing traction among the broad masses of the youth, the NDC allegedly and logically pieced together different sermons delivered by the pastor suggesting that free education was impossible in the circumstances prevailing in the country at the time.

The repeated playing of the message on the airwaves went down well with the majority of Ghanaians and was intended to create disaffection between the renowned pastor as an individual and the NPP on the one hand and the wider Christian community on the other. We argue that although the secret tape created tensions it could also be described as a dirty but politically grand scheme by the NDC to recapture the attention of the youth and persuade them to buy into the party's policy of providing quality rather than free education.

Another critical concern was the introduction of the biometric voter register and verification system (CODEO 2012). The concern stemmed from the fact that during the registration phase security forces had faced the daunting task of maintaining peace and security at various polling centres when the machines broke down, raising fears that similar difficulties might be encountered on election day. For this reason and in consonance with the avowed commitment of the government and the ECG to ensure free, fair, transparent and credible elections, the NESTF was established.

THE NATIONAL ELECTIONS SECURITY TASK FORCE: STRUCTURE AND COMPOSITION

The NESTF, the election security framework for elections in Ghana, is an *ad hoc* security arrangement which is usually inaugurated by the inspector-general of

police (IGP) a few months prior to national and district-level elections. It consists of all the state security agencies including the Ghana Police Service (GPS), Ghana Armed Forces (GAF), Fire Service, Immigration Service, Customs, Excise and Preventive Service (CEPS), Prison Service, Bureau of National Investigations (BNI) and the External Intelligence Service (GPS, 2008; Aubyn & Lartey 2012). Other co-opted members include the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE), the Ghana Information Services, the National Ambulance Service and the National Disaster Management Organisation (NADMO).

The co-opted members are specifically responsible for public education as well as any possible casualties incurred during the elections. The GPS is the lead security agency of the NESTF primarily because it is the only state agency constitutionally mandated to maintain internal security, law and public order (GPS 1970; Constitution of Ghana 1992). All the other allied security agencies are included in the taskforce to support the NESTF due to the human resources constraints of the GPS. The NESTF exists or is decentralised at national, regional, zonal (police divisions) and district level.

At the national level it is called the National Taskforce (NTF) and represents the highest decision-making body of the NESTF. All regional, zonal and district task forces report or are responsible to the NTF. It is headed by the inspector-general of police, who is also the national chairman, with the deputy IGP as the national vice-chairman. Members include selected representatives from the headquarters of all the security agencies, the ECG and the Ministry of Local Government (GPS 2008).

The Joint Regional Security Task Force (JRTF), as it is called at the regional level, is chaired by the regional police commander and co-chaired by his/her deputy (GPS 2008). The JRTF is responsible for the work of the NESTF at the regional level and reports to the national chairman of the NTF. The members are the regional commanders and communication officers of all the security agencies, the regional electoral officers and regional co-ordinating directors.

The Zonal Joint Security Services Task Force at the divisional level, on the other hand, is headed by the divisional police commander and includes the divisional or sector commanders of all the security agencies together with municipal co-ordinating directors and municipal electoral commission officers and is answerable to the JRTF. Lastly, at the district level, there is the Joint District Security Task Force (JDSTF), which is also headed by the district police commander, with its members synonymous with those of the Zonal Joint Security Services Task Force at the divisional level.

In order to facilitate the work of the task force, sub-committees were established at each level (see Table 1) to do the operational work of the NESTF. Membership of the various sub-committees was determined by a person's

expertise and knowledge in the area. In other words, membership was dictated by 'best fit' to function (involving a division of labour among the security services).

Table 1
NESTF sub-committees and their functions

Sub-committees	Functions
The Planning, Implementation, Monitoring and Coordinating Sub-committee	The highest policy body of the NTF for policy formulation, planning, implementation, monitoring and coordinating all the activities of the various sub-committees
The Joint National Operations Room and Secretariat (located at the police information room in Accra)	As the national secretariat of the NESTF it receives and collates sitreps and other correspondence and disseminates them to the competent authorities approved by the IGP
Legal and Prosecution Sub-committee	The correct conduct of police investigations and prosecutions of all criminal and electoral offences before, during and after the elections
Election Liaison Officers Sub-committee	Liaises with the ECG and its officials, other security organisations that contribute personnel and material resources for the task force and the print and electronic media to ensure good communication and information flows
Ballot Boxes Security Sub-committee	Formulates policies or directives on security of ballot boxes, ballot papers, election officials, polling stations, election material or officials in transit and collation centre security
The Investigations Sub-committee	Informs the IGP of any involvement of a public officer in electoral offences or malpractices and nefarious activities and also investigates all cases related to elections

The Financial Sub-committee	Collates budget and logistics requirements of the task force and advises national chairman on the source of funding
Intelligence Sub-committee	Intelligence and information gathering, processing and dissemination for proactive and reactive operations
The Transport Sub-committee	Deliberates on the mobilisation and commandeering of vehicles from the other allied security agencies, electoral commission, Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, Metropolitan, Municipal and District assemblies, private transport union, intercity / STC and metro mass transit to convey personnel and transport electoral materials

Source: GPS 2008; Aubyn & Lartey 2012

Powers and functions of the NESTF

The NESTF was charged primarily with maintaining law and order, protecting life and property and dealing professionally and firmly with any breaches of the peace and the ECG Code of Conduct before, during and after the elections (GPS 2008; Government of Ghana 2012; GraphicOnline 2012).

The execution of this function was divided among three categories of the taskforce, namely, the static force, the mobile force and a standby or contingency force (Aubyn & Lartey 2012; fieldwork 2013). The work of the three forces was complementary and mutually reinforcing and covered all three phases of the elections. The static force was responsible for manning and protecting the polling stations, the country's borders, electoral offices, voters, ballot boxes, electoral officials, and collation centres (Aubyn & Lartey 2012; fieldwork 2013).

The force also provided heavy security protection during political party campaigns and meetings and the safe escort of all voting materials to and from polling stations, before, during and after the elections. The mobile force, on the other hand, undertook massive patrols in the electoral areas and, especially, conflict prone areas or flashpoints, to deal with any unforeseen events. Lastly, the standby or contingency force provided support to the other two forces in case of emergencies; thus, it only consisted of specialised police units like the Police

Rapid Deployment Force, the Armoured Car Squadron, the Mounted Squadron, the Striking Force and military contingents (Aubyn & Lartey 2012; fieldwork 2013; Myjoyonline 2012a). It reacted promptly to reinforce and contain any crisis situation.

PREPARATION FOR THE 7 DECEMBER ELECTIONS AND BEYOND

The prime objective of the security agencies from January 2012 to election day and its aftermath was to maintain peace and security. In addition, all of them, especially the police, were expected to continue with their traditional roles in maintaining peace and public order as well as fighting crime. Thus the police and the military continued with the operation dubbed Camp Drive, a police-military patrol that fought the menace of armed robbery day and night throughout the electoral period to prevent criminals from taking advantage of their preoccupation with election duties (KAIPTC 2012).

The most important aspect of the NESTF's preparation concerned the need to ensure the necessary logistics, equipment, personnel strength and training, funding, accommodation and personnel welfare and other pertinent issues (Government of Ghana 2012; Myjoyonline 2012a). Other elements of its work included a comprehensive plan to identify all flashpoints in the country where violence was likely to erupt during the elections, in order to double security patrols at such points.

Training programmes and orientation sessions were organised in all regions and districts in the country to build the capacity of all law enforcement agencies. This was done with the support of the United Kingdom government through UK Aid and the Department of International Development (DFID), the Hans Seidel Foundation and the Government of France (KAIPTC 2012; fieldwork 2013). One such training programme undertaken by the military was codenamed Exercise Bridget and involved drills and scenario-building exercises on how to respond to emergency situations (Mishio 2012; KAIPTC 2012). The police were also taken through some formal training sessions on their election duties by a company called Executive Diligence (Ghana News Agency 2012).

Security officers who were deployed for election duty were given printed notes or fliers detailing their prime duties, to guide them in taking decisions when confronted with tricky situations. However, most of the training programmes involved only senior and middle-level police officers and military personnel, to the disadvantage of the other security agencies. This created a situation where most of the security officers, especially from the fire service, immigration and CEPS, lacked essential knowledge about the electoral laws and a clear understanding of what their specific roles or duties were (fieldwork 2013). Perhaps a standardised

training programme should be developed for all members of the taskforce, to enable them to gain the necessary theoretical and practical knowledge to perform their electoral duties professionally and effectively.

Funding was yet another important component of the taskforce's preparatory processes. In order to execute their expected roles effectively they required vehicles to patrol and to transport officers to and from their areas of operations. They also required communication devices, shockers and batons to control crowds and rations to meet personnel subsistence needs while on election duty.

Although the government provided some financial assistance as part of the electoral budget to cover rations and other logistical needs it was insufficient. The taskforce still lacked much of the necessary equipment (fieldwork 2013). These constraints not only limited the effectiveness and efficiency of their operations, they also affected their timely response to crisis situations.

ASSESSING THE PERFORMANCE OF THE NESTF

The role of the NESTF covered all phases of the electoral process: pre-election, election day and the post-election period. As indicated above, the taskforce had specific tasks to perform in each phase of the process.

The pre-election period

During the pre-election period the taskforce ensured the safe escort of all voting materials to and from the 26 002 polling stations across the country. In addition, the taskforce, led by the police, provided security during the biometric voter registration exercise and political party campaigns and meetings.

While stringent security measures were put in place to ensure that party campaigning and meetings were peaceful, this was not the case with respect to the BVR exercise. Unlike on election day, when security official were deployed to the various polling stations, the security services were conspicuously absent from polling centres during the BVR exercise. It appeared that the police had no security plan to safeguard the process other than performing their routine duty of maintaining public law and order.

Given the intense debates that characterised the introduction of the BVR, which suggested the possibility of clashes between opposing political parties during the exercise, one would have thought that adequate security measures would have been put in place to prevent any violence, but this was not done. This created a security void which was filled by thugs, popularly known as 'Macho men', and by political party vigilante groups.

Taking advantage of the technical, operational and logistical difficulties that characterised the BVR process, these groups instituted various forms of violence, including assault, malicious destruction of property, theft of election equipment and attacks on individuals. A typical case was the alleged assault on the NPP parliamentary candidate for Ablekuma South, Ursula Owusu, and on Abu Jinapor, an aide to the NPP flag bearer. The two were attacked by thugs working for the NDC candidate for the Odododiodoo constituency in the Greater Accra region, Nii Lantey Vanderpuye, over a misunderstanding about the registration process (*Daily Guide* 2012; Ghana Web 2012).

In another instance the BVR exercise was brought to an abrupt end at the Ahenboborano polling centre in the Tafo Pankrono constituency in the Ashanti region when a group of men riding motorbikes belonging to the NDC thronged the polling centre and seized the equipment of the ECG officials (Citifmonline 2012; Mensah 2012). The confrontation that ensued between the NDC group and NPP youth present at the polling centre resulted in the exercise being halted for the whole day.

Worryingly, the police failed to deal swiftly with most of these incidents and their inability to arrest and prosecute perpetrators of election-related violence made the service very unpopular. The unfortunate pronouncement of Kennedy Agyapong, NPP Member of Parliament (MP) for the Assin North Constituency was an example. The MP made a statement to the effect that he would organise NPP supporters to defend themselves because the police had failed in their duty to protect them. He was also reported to have declared 'war', vowed to lynch any 'fake' security operative and to have made ethnocentric comments about Asantes, Ewes, and Gas (*Ghanaian Times* 2012; Myjoyonline 2012b).

Although the MP's comments were regrettable and irresponsible and should have led to rapid prosecution, the way in which the police handled the case to some extent confirmed the public perception of political interference in their operations. The MP was charged with treason for declaring 'war' – a patently inappropriate charge which suggested to some critics that members of the incumbent government were using the police to frustrate the MP, who was a fierce critic of government.

Consequently, while some political parties accused the police of failing to control the violence associated with the BVR exercise others believed they had compromised their neutrality and professionalism. These claims were not surprising because for the political parties, especially the NPP and the NDC, it is only when the conduct of the police favours them that they praise the service for showing impartiality and a high sense of professionalism.

For example, while the Ashanti region wing of the NDC accused the Tafo-Pankrono District Police Commander, Superintendent Kwesi Ofori, of selective justice because he prevented NDC thugs from disrupting the BVR exercise at

the Ahenboborano polling centre, the NPP praised him for acting professionally (Citifmonline 2012; Mensah 2012). Although, most of the allegations levelled against the security services cannot be completely disregarded it is also true that they did everything within their power to keep the peace by effectively and efficiently discharging their duties as stipulated in the Constitution.

To be precise, despite the shortcomings, security was beefed up in various conflict hotspots or flashpoints, enabling the police-military patrol team to work day and night to deter potential troublemakers from fomenting any trouble. The police rapid deployment force was also put on standby to nip in the bud any disturbances by individuals or groups.

The end of the BVR exercise ushered in the campaign season, which was also characterised by intense political tension and pockets of violence and clashes across the country. Three categories of election-related violence identified by Omotola (2010), namely, psychological, structural and physical violence, confronted the police during this period. The psychological violence, which involved political intimidation, death threats, hate speech and defamation or insults and physical violence such as assault, disruption of campaign rallies, arbitrary detention, fighting, arson and defacement of political party posters, seemed to be pronounced at this stage.

Some violent acts were recorded in Kyebi in the Eastern Region, Manhyia in the Ashanti regional capital Kumasi and Agbogbloshie in the Greater Accra region. The police response time left much to be desired. They responded late and, in most cases, failed to arrest and prosecute perpetrators. The structural violence included abuse of incumbency and the politicisation of electoral officials and security personnel. The taskforce had a major challenge in dealing with the structural and psychological forms of violence, being constrained by issues such as lack of evidence, while abuse of incumbency fell within the constitutional mandates of certain state institutions.

One of the biggest challenges was dealing with the so-called 'secret tapes' produced by members of both the NDC and the NPP with the aim of disrupting the elections. Two of the tapes that attracted considerable public discussion were those purporting to be the voices of Yaw Boateng Gyan, national organiser of the NDC and Anthony Karbo, NPP national youth organiser. Gyan was alleged to have said that the NDC had planned to draft some of its members into a special force that would be issued with national security identification cards to enable them to move freely and cause trouble in some parts of the country during the elections. Karbo was accused of planning to disrupt the elections using mercenaries from neighbouring countries (Myjoyonline 2012c; Zamana 2012). A lack of evidence and of equipment that would have enabled the police to identify the voices made their task of investigating the veracity of the tapes extremely difficult.

Voting days, 7 and 8 December

For the first time since 1992 voting was held over two days to allow those who were unable to vote on the first day because of the breakdown of some of the BVR machines to exercise their right to vote the following day. Throughout the two days of the elections the task force had the responsibility of manning and protecting all polling stations, the country's borders, electoral offices, voters, ballot boxes, electoral officials and collation centres.

To this end, while the contingency force remained on standby, the mobile force undertook massive patrols in the electoral areas, especially the conflict-prone areas, to calm tensions and also to prevent the outbreak of any violence (fieldwork 2013). This helped deter potential troublemakers from fomenting trouble that might have marred the elections. However, the lack of adequate communication devices and means of transportation and the inaccessibility of polling stations due to bad roads sometimes hindered the timely response to emergencies (fieldwork 2013).

On the other hand, the static force, which was most active during the period, manned and protected polling stations and all ECG installations. In all, about 41 000 security personnel were deployed nationwide to police the 26 002 polling stations (Myjoyonline 2012a).

There was adequate security at polling stations to protect voters, electoral material and officers as well as the ballot boxes. Security officers also ensured that the queue of voters was orderly, stood at the end of queues at 5pm to ensure that no person joined them after the closing time and also carried out the lawful instructions of the presiding or returning officer of the Electoral Commission (fieldwork 2013). Two to three security officers were stationed at flashpoints to avert any unforeseen threat.

The absence of the police and military in some areas, however, actually created the impetus for some unscrupulous people to engage in violent acts. For example, in polling stations that were manned by the other security agencies such as immigration, fire service and prison service, their presence did not deter would-be perpetrators of violence because, according to some voters, unlike the police these agencies lack powers of arrest and are also not armed (fieldwork 2013). Some polling stations were not manned by any security officers at all (CODEO 2012). Furthermore, in some areas and in spite of the presence of security officers party thugs harassed and intimidated electoral officers for starting the voting process late.

The preliminary statement of the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO 2012) recorded 17 cases of harassment or intimidation across the country. The Ashanti region recorded the highest number – six incidents, followed by

Greater Accra, Central and Northern region, each recording two incidents. The rest of the regions recorded one incident each, except the Upper East region, in which there were no cases of harassment (CODEO 2012). In other polling stations the voting process was disrupted by fighting among voters in the queue according to the CODEO statement.

These incidents notwithstanding, the taskforce did a very good job of ensuring adequate security throughout the two days of the elections and should therefore be commended for their efforts. For instance, despite the insufficient logistical and monetary allowances, some officers who had no communication devices used their own mobile phones to make calls and report cases, without being reimbursed. Others had to travel for two to three days before and after the elections to and from very remote areas just to ensure that the process was carried out smoothly and peacefully.

Security officers also ensured the safe counting of results at the collation centres and, in situations where there was no light, the counting was done by torchlight. Others worked day and night throughout the period, sometimes going without food for the whole day, just to ensure that peace was preserved (fieldwork 2013).

Post-election period

In the post-election period, which usually lasts until the inauguration of the president, the mobile forces undertook massive patrols in the electoral areas. They monitored post-election activities, intensified patrols throughout the country, especially in potential trouble spots where violence was likely to erupt, and supplied heavy security protection for electoral offices, especially the Electoral Commission headquarters, before and after the declaration of results.

Some officers also maintained security at the borders and ensured the safety of lives and property. In an incident prior to the ECG 's declaration of the final results the police and military cordoned off a building in Dzorwulu in the Ayawaso-West Wuogon in Accra, which was besieged by hundreds of supporters of the NPP, who claimed the commission was able to 'doctor' election results. Journalists from various TV and radio stations were also reported to have been attacked by NPP supporters and thugs after the declaration of the results (*Daily Graphic* 2012). In this particular instance, the police and military reacted promptly, securing the area against any possible violence by the irate youth of the NPP.

Apart from this, the taskforce continued to protect and maintain the peace of the country throughout the early post-electoral period, especially during the victory rallies of the NDC and the subsequent rally of the NPP at the Kwame Nkrumah Circle's Obra Spot in Accra. Significantly, although the taskforce was

disbanded, the police and military provided heavy security at the Supreme Court during the adjudication of the NPP's election petition (Ghana News Agency 2013; GBC 2013).

EMERGING ISSUES REQUIRING URGENT POLICY REFORMS

One issue that became a source of intense public debate, especially between the ECG and the taskforce, in the build-up to the 7 December poll, was the question of who should lead the security of the elections: whether it should be the ECG or the taskforce? The thrust of the matter is that in accordance with section 5 of Ghana's 1996 Security and Intelligence Agencies Act (Act 526), regional security councils (REGSECs) and district security councils (DISECs) must be established in each of the ten administrative regions of the country.

These councils implement government security policies at regional and district levels and provide an early warning to the government of the existence or likelihood of any security threat to the region, to the country or to the government (Security and Intelligence Agencies Act 1996).

The councils are chaired by the regional ministers and the metropolitan, municipal and district chief executives of the respective regions, metropolitan assemblies, municipalities and districts in Ghana, who are all political appointees of the president (Constitution of Ghana 1992). They superintend security issues, meaning that all the state security agencies are under their authority, though they do not take direct instructions from them. However, since the 2000 elections most of the regional ministers and metropolitan, municipal and district chief executives, who sometimes also stand for election, have used their positions as heads of the security council in their respective jurisdictions to interfere in the operations or activities of the NESTF.

Some police officers interviewed, for example, noted that there were occasions when party thugs and electoral offenders who had been arrested were released for no apparent reason in response to directives from some of these government officials (fieldwork 2013). From time to time security officials have been threatened by politicians with transfers to remote areas or with being relieved of their positions.

A classic example during the 2012 elections was a case involving the Commander of the Motor Traffic and Transport Unit (MTTU), ACP Angwubutuge Awuni and the NDC MP for Osu Klottey and former Greater-Accra Regional Minister, Nii Armah Ashietey. Awuni was accused by the former minister of ordering policemen to assault him at a biometric registration centre and also of insulting him. Although the MTTU boss admitted using inappropriate language after he was provoked by threats of dismissal made by the former minister,

he insisted that the ex-minister had committed an offence by disrupting the registration process.

Subsequently, the Greater-Accra branch of the NDC called for the removal of the MTTU commander or his transfer for acting unprofessionally, but the inspector-general of police ignored the request. The case was later covertly settled by the police administration. But the fact is that the work of the police and other security services is constantly interfered with by politicians who think they are above the law, especially when their party is in power.

This situation has dented the image of the police over the years as they have been accused of unprofessional conduct and of allowing themselves to be used as 'puppets' by incumbent governments to pursue their 'evil' agendas, allegations the police administration has persistently denied. In effect, however, this has led to mistrust of the police and has resulted in politicians and voters resorting to illegal means to protect themselves and their votes, which, in many cases, has led to violent clashes.

For these reasons what the National Security Secretariat, which has oversight responsibility over the operations of the taskforce, sought unsuccessfully to do in the 2012 elections was to have the Electoral Commission provide strategic guidance for the operations of the taskforce, while the NESTF undertook the operational level tasks (Gbevlo-Lartey 2012). That is, instead of the arrangement whereby the IGP and the police commanders at both regional and district levels led the activities of the taskforce, what the National Security Secretariat proposed was that ECG officials take the lead at national and district levels.

In this way the taskforce would be chaired by the heads of the ECG at their respective levels and the heads of the security agencies would only be members of the taskforce. In essence, according to the National Security Coordinator, Lt Col (rtd) Larry Gbevlo-Lartey, 'it is the ECG who would decide the "What" – what exactly is the problem in the region or district? What do we need to do?' Once that was decided at that level the taskforce, which is an operational wing of the Electoral Commission, that is, it does not make decisions for the ECG, would implement what the ECG believed needede to be done to help it conduct a successful election.

Once that decision had been made the taskforce would lead the implementation process (Gbevlo-Lartey 2012). This process would ensure that heads of regional, metropolitan, municipal and district security councils, some of whom also stand for election, did not interfere with the operations of the taskforce. However, there appeared to be some kind of apprehension on the part of the ECG, particularly with regard to supervising the military and the police.

This is not a new issue, it was discussed before the 2004 elections, but no major headway was made in resolving the dilemma because it had legal implications.

Though the taskforce and the ECG failed to agree on the way forward, it is important for the purpose of subsequent elections that this issue is resolved. Finding an amicable solution will go a long way to making the taskforce more independent, boosting the confidence of the public in its operations and preventing political interference in its activities.

CONCLUSION

The 2012 elections were among the most keenly contested since the 1992 transitional elections. There was also a greater attempt than ever before to keep the elections peaceful. Despite this, all three phases were characterised by violence, posing a serious challenge to the security forces.

One of the largest of these security challenges during the voter registration phase was the introduction of the BVR, which was characterised by the malfunction of biometric machines, creating frustration, tension and violence in a number of constituencies in the country. With hindsight it seems that, while there were growing fears about its successful implementation on election day, the problems during the registration period should also have served as an opportunity for the ECG to marshall the necessary resources and back-up BVR machines.

The NESTF was aware that it would have to be extra alert to avert violent incidents and possible outbreaks of conflict and, in pursuance of this goal, NESTF personnel were deployed to the 26 002 constituencies, primarily to maintain law and order but also to ensure that votes were cast in a free, fair and transparent manner, devoid of intimidation. The fact that for the first time there were two days of voting challenged the NESTF beyond its limits, sometimes resulting in delays in its response to emergencies.

During the post-election period, which is usually critical for a country's stability, the mobile force undertook massive patrols in the electoral areas and intensified their patrols throughout the country, especially in potential trouble spots, and ensured heavy security protection of electoral offices, especially the Electoral Commission headquarters, before and after the declaration of results.

In spite of these efforts there was a host of alleged irregularities and election-related violence. However, potential outbreaks of conflict were averted by the efficient and collaborative role of the security forces.

Although there is still a perception that the security forces, mainly the police, are often tied to the government in power, we argue that the wider election security task force played a significant and collaborative role in ensuring peaceful and successful elections. But to reduce the burden on the NESTF in future elections and to prevent possible violence, it is necessary to recruit and train more security personnel.

More importantly, the supporting security services that form part of the NESTF, such as immigration and CEPS, need to be given essential knowledge of the electoral laws in order to have a clearer understanding of what their specific roles or duties are. The effective operation of the NESTF will also be dependent upon the acquisition of the necessary equipment, funding and accommodation. Above all, there is a need for the NESTF, and especially the police, to act professionally and without political interference. This is an essential element in inspiring trust and confidence in the public so as to embolden the security forces to work effectively and maintain peace and stability.

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REVIEW

WATCHING AN AFRICAN ELECTION

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On its release in 2011 Jareth Merz's documentary on the Ghanaian presidential elections of 2008 engendered a warm reception from critics. The *New York Times* praised its 'fleet footed, engagingly volatile' depiction of 'a political contest defined by higher hopes and even higher anxieties'.

Notwithstanding its 'colourful gallery of political insiders, including the candidates', the film's real triumph was in its capture of 'national mood', the *Times* correspondent noted (*New York Times*, 30 November 2011). 'Nimble and non-judgemental', according to the *Guardian*'s reviewer in London, the film was only ostensibly about 'the tussle' between two parties.

'The real battle, though, appears to be between the past and the future, as the nation toils to shake off the dark days of neo-colonialism and embrace free, open and fair elections' (*The Guardian*, 24 November 2011).

'Political drama at its most compelling', reported Toronto's *Now Magazine*.

For this writer, in its final sequences Merz's film became 'a breakneck political thriller' (29 December 2011). Garnering similar accolades on the festival circuit, *An African Election* won a prize last year for the best African documentary. Deservedly so, too, for, even in this lively setting, turning the routine of electoral competition into political theatre required artistic accomplishment as well as political insight.

As the critics make clear, the documentary's dramatic tension is as much the result of skilful editing and calculated camerawork as it is the reflection of the intrinsic narrative excitement of the real events as they unfolded on the ground. Even so, though Merz's creation is a work of interpretation; as much artifice as reportage, his film represents a key source for any serious effort by outsiders to understand modern Ghanaian politics.

Imagine an attentive audience with an interest in African elections but whose members know very little about the intricacies of Ghanaian political life. It's not such an unlikely proposition. Here, in Ireland, at the university in which I teach,

I am using the film as the basis for a class exercise in an introductory course on African politics. For this project the students will assume the role of election observers, completing the kind of checklist used by real missions working in the field. So, what do I hope they will learn from a careful viewing of the documentary?

The first feature of this battle for the Ghanaian presidency is that it was vigorously competitive, with the main protagonists affiliated to two groups, both evidently mobilising tumultuous armies of enthusiastic supporters. There's an abundance of evidence to indicate systematic organisation and plentiful resources on both sides.

The candidates travel at (reckless) speed along Ghana's dusty highways in convoys of expensive vehicles, decorated with party insignia. They are accompanied by T-shirted motor cycle outriders. They overtake specially hired buses of flag-waving supporters. They deliver their addresses from well-constructed podiums equipped with sophisticated sound systems. T-shirted marshals act as cheerleaders: at one rally these auxiliaries are even mounted on horses. At a night-time meeting spotlights pick out a dirigible floating above the assembly. Campaigning is quite evidently national: both parties hold exuberant meetings in the same vicinities, in big cities and in more remote villages, in the north and in the south.

As a BBC voiceover commentary attested, this was 'essentially a two-party contest' (1:26).[1] The British reporter could not discern 'a huge amount of difference between the two parties' and indeed they both appeared to be offering voters very comparable undertakings. Later in the film there's a deftly edited passage of cross-cutting excerpts from speeches by the two candidates at different rallies. His government would soon 'modernise agriculture', the National People's Party's (NPP) Nana Akufo Addo pledged. A renewed mandate for his party would 'bring science and technology here'. The National Democratic Congress (NDC) had the same plan, though, according to John Atta Mills: 'I'm telling you, *we* are going to modernise agriculture, we will give you the fertiliser, we will give you the seedlings, we will give you the input' (11:58).

Notwithstanding these similar enticements, in the film the two parties in fact projected rather distinct identities. Professor Atta Mills's NDC represented itself as the party of 'change' and as the vehicle for the aspirations of common people, 'the generality of the people working in poverty'. Its opponents, Mills, charged, stood for 'their own tradition, property owning democracy, they call themselves' (10.46). Such hostile characterisations might, of course, be unwarranted, but in fact the patrician-accented Akufo Addo did choose to project his group as the party of meritocracy: 'we are not going to put the destiny of our nation into the hands of

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1   Numbers in brackets refer to minutes into the film.

these incompetent, unproductive, inefficient persons' (58:07). It's a contrast that is echoed in the film's *vox populi* commentary.

In a blacksmith's shop an NDC supporter proposed that change is needed: 'because the youth are suffering: now you cannot go to school any more'. 'There's no food for a lazy man' (5:38) was the bantering response from the older NPP adherent. Atta Mills directed his appeals precisely at those people who felt they were 'suffering'.

The NDC would bring jobs for such people and it would invest in new infrastructure for neglected regions: 'Tamale airport: we'll turn it into an international airport. So when you are travelling to Mecca you don't need to go to Accra' (57:44). Akufo Addo's pledges tended on the whole to be more circumspect, for he was, after all, campaigning on behalf of the incumbent group: 'we won't promise you the moon' and, really, 'the best way forward is to have a stable government guided by the principles of good governance' (4:30).

As Sekou Nkrumah explained in an interview, 'If you want to be more progressive, more to the left, I think the NDC will do it.' The NPP was for people who were 'more conservative', he thought (8:48). Sekou Nkrumah isn't the only famous son to appear in the cast of characters who animate this documentary; indeed, both presidential contenders belong to political dynasties whose members can trace their genealogies to the politicians who helped Kwame Nkrumah construct Ghana's First Republic. And both parties are sharply conscious of their own and their opponents' historic lineages.

Akufo Addo projects the NPP as the bearer of a liberal tradition 'in the frontline in the struggle for democracy and a regime of human rights' (7:39). Meanwhile, NDC spokesmen claimed to embody '*Osagyefo*, Dr Nkrumah's vision for Ghana, a vision for black people' (12:02), 'a promised land' (19:11). In the film footage the most conspicuous campaigner is, in fact, neither of the two presidential candidates but rather the ebullient personality of Jerry Rawlings, first elected president of the Third Republic and before that a two-times military dictator.

In *An African Election*, Rawlings delivers the best lines. He appears in the third minute of the film, arms akimbo, his voice booming across an adoring multitude at an NDC rally: 'Presidents will come and go. Governments will come and go. But this time once again. When the people's power returns to your hands. Never let it out of your grip again. Don't ever make that mistake again' (3:58).

The mistake to which Rawlings is referring is not the complicity of Ghanaian citizens in military takeovers – Nkrumah's overthrow in 1966, for example, was greeted with public rejoicing and Rawlings's own coup in 1979 and the subsequent brutalities were widely acclaimed. His reference is, rather, to the 2004 election, an election the NDC lost, for the second time in succession, in a poll that he informs the visiting ECOWAS observer team, 'did not have the integrity it needed' (30:41).

They should not make the same mistakes of observers in that election who validated its outcome; even one little mistake, he insisted, 'could undermine the aspirations and hopes of a population of 20-million Ghanaians' (30:41).

If we are to believe the evidence in the film, Rawlings remains a charismatic figure in Ghanaian politics, talismanic both for his supporters and his opponents: alternately, 'the foundation on which the rest of us are today building' (27:00) or the preacher of 'the old revolutionary slogans … that will take us back to our dark days' (12:02). And as we shall see, Rawlings's role in the film is pivotal, for, in its dramatic construction, he is both actor and *auteur*.

If a basic requirement for a working democracy is to have at least two strong parties that offer voters clear choices there is plenty of testimony in Merz's documentary to demonstrate that in this respect Ghanaian democracy is flourishing. It's not just that each party appears organisationally robust, with its own separate brand or identity, it's also obvious that voters are offered real choices.

Though at a very localised level political affiliations appear be territorial, to judge by the flags of one party or another flying above shanty rooftops, the regional settings in which the parties bid for support are not politically monolithic. In the streets of the larger cities the T-shirted partisans of *both* groups exchange insults and derision and, at times, come to blows.

There's the odd evidence of regional or ethnic loyalties affecting political choices – for example, at one NPP rally there's a T-shirted cluster of 'Ashanti boys' – but such primordial identities do not appear to preoccupy the main protagonists, even in their denigration of each other's groups; not in front of the cameras, anyway. These *are* national parties, it would appear, with contrasting ideological appeal. But if elections do, indeed, offer real choices, how eager are the voters to choose between them? What does the film tell us about the quality of Ghanaian citizenship and the extent and depth of public political participation?

Here the evidence is much more mixed. Certainly, there are many indications of civic enthusiasm. On polling day voters started lining up hours before the stations opened. Even so, they were lucky if they obtained a head start over their neighbours, for, as one police officer observed, most of the people in his location 'were at the polling station around 3am' (30:58).

Many of them would wait all day: at Gbebu polling station there were long lines of voters still awaiting verification at the formal closing time, 5pm. The police had to summon the army so that their vehicles' powerful headlights could illuminate proceedings, for this station had no electricity: officials enjoined the soldiers: 'give them light' (37:59).

In Ghanaian elections counting takes place at every polling station the day after the ballot. It is a very public procedure, conducted in the open air on tables separated from onlookers by a plastic police strip. Small children stand at the

front of the crowd. As one of the witnesses explains: 'We want to see everything with our own eyes: we don't want anyone to steal' (39:20).

The cameras record the scene as it is witnessed by these spectators. The ballot papers are sorted by party choice, each one held aloft so that everyone can verify its assignment to the correct presidential contender. Then each pile is counted, aloud, with the crowd supplying a chorus as each ballot is enumerated. The results are declared and validated by party agents. A similar public reception greets the arrival of the ballot boxes and the results tabulations at the various collation centres: at the Jonestown centre the atmosphere is carnival-like and dancers entertain the awaiting multitude.

Visibly excited crowds assembled around counting stations might represent a healthy indication of a politically assertive citizenry but their presence may, alternatively, signal a contest in which public perceptions are of stakes at issue that represent vital interests, in which the electoral contest is, in effect, a zero-sum game. Indeed, the film's street-side commentaries suggest that many people believed or at least professed to believe that victorious candidates would reward their supporters: 'We know there are jobs but these are for your party people. It's not for any other person apart from your party people. They look at the party card. You have to hold a party card before you will be employed as a worker' (5:49). As one T-shirted supporter of the 'Kakpugu Fan Club' informed the cameraman: 'We are praying to see who can come out to get us some skills to do something' (15:30).

On a radio chat show a listener insisted that 'Professor Mills, he will take us to the promised land' (19:11), echoing one of the NDC's favourite catchphrases. Of course, it is possible that there may have been a substantial segment of the population who shared the predispositions of farmer Moses Imoro, who had not attended any rallies or meetings and did not intend to. All he wanted from politicians, Moses Imoro said, was that 'if only they stopped to tell lies' (20:42).

But such disengagement was exceptional among the testimonies brought together in the film, and the visual evidence depicts many settings in which political animation appeared to be universal. As noted above, the prevalence of party flags – uniformly of one party or the other – flying above shanty neighbourhoods – suggests this, though it also reflects the territorial dynamics of party patronage, of 'chop' politics, so to speak.

Zero-sum politics can be lethal. And indeed, at moments in the film, activists behave violently – or at least assume forceful postures. After the second run-off poll, at the end of a protracted collation of the national results, the final addition of long-awaited tabulations from the Volta region changes the overall outcome by a fraction, but sufficiently to put the NPP candidate, Akufo Addo, in front of his rival. The NDC officials are furious and are quick to accuse the Electoral Commission of foul play: 'We are not accepting the Volta results. Stop the process.

This is not Nigeria.' That night a large and hostile crowd appeared outside Akufo Addo's residence: 'Addo, Addo', its members chanted, 'do something before you die' (70:00).

In the campaigning for the run-off election, noticeably more ill-natured than the first contest, at an NDC rally, youngsters are lined up in T-shirts bearing the legend 'winning team'. They perform a military drill, deploying painted wooden guns. During the run-off, Jerry Rawlings is filmed on the campaign trail, warning that the NDC's opponents – 'a pack of thieves and liars' – were scheming 'to do everything possible to wanna steal your 2008 election *again*' (55.42). NDC activists should 'protect the ballot boxes the way you will protect and defend your mothers and your daughters' (54:24). An NDC television advertisement begins with a cobra opening its fangs. Then a voiceover message: 'If we give these people another chance they are going to be very dangerous' (52:45).

How widely such polarised perceptions are shared among ordinary Ghanaians is a question the film does not attempt to answer. Such perceptions are at odds with the calm insights on offer from commentaries in the film, though. As journalist Kwesi Praa notes, 'none of the parties are offering a paradigm shift; they are all planning to do the same thing'. According to 'expert' Baffour Agyemeh-Duah, 'the psychology of Ghanaians when it comes to politics is very much influenced by our political history': Ghanaians valued 'stability' above anything else, he thought (4:25). And the violent posturing of the activists might be just that, posturing – theatrical heroics.

Merz's cameras record a street skirmish – as one group of partisans attempts to demolish a barricade of burning rubbish erected by their rivals. In the stick fighting that ensues one man is struck down and falls to the ground. The other adversaries are then dispersed by police. But the cameras continue filming as the fallen man eventually gets to his feet, clutching a doubtless sore head, and stumbles off the scene. Perhaps such animosities are games, dangerous games to be sure, but games all the same, in which participants act out roles assumed only temporarily.

As one NDC party agent notes about his relationship with his opposite number in the NPP while they await the results tabulation at the Electoral Commission headquarters: 'Kwabena and I, we are friends. It is the politics that make it look as if we are at each other's throats, but hey, we are friends, we're buddies' (43:56).

Even in the troubled northern region, in which, during the 2008 campaign, both parties fielded virtual militias of youthful adherents, in the regional capital, Tamale, during the NDC's victory 'jubilations', reporters noted 'an atmosphere of peace and camaraderie' in which partisans of the two rival parties 'were seen teasing and hugging each other and dancing together to campaign songs of the two parties' (Nurudeen 2009).

The main drama of Merz's film is constituted by its second act, when accusations of ballot-box theft and false tabulations apparently bring the country to the brink of political breakdown. Merz's direction is generally careful not to endorse these accusations of electoral malpractice completely, but many viewers may well join certain film critics in sharing the NDC's view that this was an election which was nearly stolen by the incumbent party and its candidate.

This is the representation of the campaign favoured by Jerry Rawlings, who enjoys a privileged status amongst the political principals who appear in the film. He is the only one who is interviewed at length and is allowed to speak directly to the camera. Rawlings lays the groundwork for this narrative about a stolen election right at the film's opening, when he tells his supporters not to 'make this mistake again' of letting power slip out of their hands. He warns the visiting ECOWAS mission about his worries about repetition of the fraud that he suggested affected the outcome of the 2004 election.

Rawlings's professed anxieties appeared to be shared by senior NDC officials. In the national collation centre, the Strong Room, the film records NDC agents making the first complaints about 'attempts to manipulate results' (45:05). Encouraged by the lap-top-assisted projections of their likely support, premature celebrations begin at both party headquarters about their respective candidates' victories.

Once again, this time during the run-off campaign, Rawlings warned a visiting African delegation that his party's rivals were 'bent on taking [the election] by force and violence'. There was a real possibility of an 'explosion', he insisted (53:04). In the one editorial judgement in which Merz's direction seems to be supporting Rawlings's conspiratorial narrative, the sequence that depicts the events on the second polling day, the run-off ballot, is entitled 'Macho Men'. We are told about reports of 'macho men', or 'muscle men', who have been intimidating voters at certain polling stations. Then, at a station in Accra, NDC officials object to a body of NPP agents who have positioned themselves outside the station. 'They have stationed themselves here with their motor bikes and we know that when they are stealing ballot boxes they will use motor bikes' (60:21).

We then learn that in a whole constituency, in Tain, the voting had to be called off, after a search for supposedly stolen boxes produced no results. After the police's failure to disperse angry crowds, the Electoral Commission closed the local stations. Tain is, customarily, a NDC stronghold, an obvious target for any supposed conspiracy by the NPP. In the film Rawlings then appears on television: 'Freedom can come at a cost; justice can come at a cost; we have to be ready to defend freedom and justice, just as others did' (60:25).

In the disputes that accompany the subsequent collation of the run-off results as they arrive from the different constituencies NDC agents appeared to

be taking their cues from Rawlings. The Volta outcome was unacceptable, they said (for this was a region of historic strength for the NDC): 'You are doing what Robert Mugabe did.' But Ghana was not Nigeria and it was not Zimbabwe: if the outcome was unacceptable 'we'll meet you in streets', the NDC 'would organised the people in the streets', the NDC's officials promised (65:34).

In the end, the conflict is resolved, not in the streets but behind closed doors – away from the cameras – in the Electoral Commission's Strong Room. Dr Afari Akan, the electoral commissioner, was able to negotiate a compromise. The results of the second poll were too close to be decisive, though Mills was in the lead, having overtaken his rival, who enjoyed a plurality by a narrow margin after the first round. The margin between the two candidates was smaller than the number of votes that might have been cast in Tain constituency if polling had been held there. Hence, the Tain election would be re-run.

The film's closing episodes are anticlimactic: a tranquil – in fact uncontested – ballot in Tain and the inevitable NDC victory, followed by Professor Atta Mills's investiture.   Ghana obtained its second electoral turnover, a benchmark democratic achievement.

Who deserves the credit, though? Was this an election saved by a forceful opposition with supporters willing to defend democracy in the streets, as the NDC's spokesmen who appear in the film would have us believe? Or were the accusations and threats of the NDC's officials part of the normal bluster and bargaining that accompanies Ghanaian electioneering?   Was the atmosphere of 'a country balanced on the brink of chaos' a manufactured contrivance, in which Merz reinforces Rawlings's narrative about conspiring opponents with footage of tumultuous activism for dramatic effect? In other words, does Merz borrow unduly from Rawlings's interpretive frame to construct his 'political thriller'?

For a candidate who won the first round by a one per cent margin and then lost the second round, Akufo Addo's response was remarkably low key, phlegmatic even: 'I'm not downhearted, just disappointed. It didn't turn out my way' (79:01).

In the context, it's a graceful enough concession, even if it came 24 hours after the declaration (Gyimah-Boadi 2009, p 144). Its tone may have been prompted at least partly by Addo's awareness that the NPP lost despite its own vigorous efforts to subvert electoral procedure. NPP officials were not alone in making such attempts. Subsequent academic analysis does suggest that both parties were probably responsible for serious abuses (Jockers, Kohnert & Nugent 2010, pp 104-111). In core support regions of both parties: Ashanti, in the case of the NPP, and Volta, with respect to the NDC, there seems to have been considerable over-registration and then, in these constituencies with bloated registration figures, there were incredibly high turnouts, particularly in the second, run-off round. Both parties recognised turn-out as the decisive consideration.

In one conversation recorded in the film the NPP's director of operations warns his colleagues about the risks of promoting a too festive mood at his party's final rally: 'We have to be careful so people don't assume we are celebrating and therefore don't go out and vote. It should give a bit of good feeling but at the same time there should be a bit of anxiety' (23:21). The scenes filmed in the Electoral Commission's Strong Room include an episode in which NDC agents objected to tabulations arriving from the Volta constituencies, the party's regional stronghold. Here, in certain districts inhabited by ethnic minority groups, the NPP had succeeded in achieving unexpectedly high registration figures and subsequently implausibly high voter turnouts.

Which party was more guilty of such fraud is difficult to assess, particularly in the absence of the detailed computations of the local results: the Electoral Commission refrained from publishing these. In a poll in which the outcome was so finely poised it is possible that the extent of fraud committed by one side or the other might have been decisive.

Merz's film suggests that during the count it was the NDC that was most predisposed to complain. In fact, however, the NPP also objected to what it perceived to be irregularities in NDC-dominated districts in the Volta region and boycotted the final Tain poll as a consequence (Gyimah-Boadi 2009, p 144). It stood little chance of winning Tain anyway: this was a locality in which the NDC had an established strength. A key consideration in influencing Akufo Addo's decision to concede was the fact that most of his agents in most of the constituencies in the region had, in fact, signed off on the results.

The NPP had despatched the so-called 'macho men' from Accra in an attempt to substitute them for their own locally appointed agents in the Volta region – party officials hoped they would more predisposed to contest any irregularities. In most cases they were refused accreditation; hence their presence outside polling stations that the NDC perceived to be so threatening.

Democracy on a knife edge? Perhaps. Though, as noted, the NDC's threats to take its followers into the streets to contest the results had an element of theatricality. Its assertions about the risks of a stolen election were part of its campaigning from the beginning, helping to instil that 'bit of anxiety' so essential to promoting a high turnout among core supporters. For students of African politics the final lesson emerging from Merz's luminous film is that, despite Ghana's success in 2008 in meeting the challenge of the 'two times turnover test', institutional consolidation remains an untidy and messy process, and democracy is not quite the only game in town.

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