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Notes on recent elections

The presidential and parliamentary elections in Ghana, December 2012

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1. Introduction

On the 7th December 2012 Ghana held its sixth presidential and parliamentary elections under the Fourth Republic. The incumbent presidential candidate, John Dramani Mahama, won, narrowly beating his major opponent, Nana Akufo-Addo. The president's party – the National Democratic Congress (NDC) – also retained a majority in the unicameral parliament. Following the declaration of the results, the main opposition party – the New Patriotic Party (NPP) – filed a petition to the Supreme Court arguing that the election was marred by widespread electoral malpractices and fraud. Over the next eight months Ghanaians were fixated on the court proceedings which were broadcast live on television and radio. In August 2013, President Mahama was eventually declared to have been 'validly elected' by the Supreme Court. Ghana's 2012 elections show the role of the judiciary in promoting electoral integrity and securing political stability. The elections also saw an increase in issue-based campaigning.

2. Electoral system

Ghana's president is elected via a majority-runoff system. The top two candidates go through to a second round if no candidate gets a majority in the first. Votes for

presidential candidates are aggregated across a single nationwide district. This electoral system incentivizes presidential candidates to mobilize support from across the country, a practice that is also supported by the constitutional requirement that all registered political parties must have branches in each of the country's ten regions and be organized in two-thirds of all districts in each of these regions (Article 55(7) of the Constitution of Ghana). Ghana's presidential elections have become highly competitive since the return to democracy in 1992. In 2008, the president was elected with a majority of just over 40,000 votes, out of 14 million registered voters. Ghana has twice held a second round election for the president (in 2000 and 2008). Both of these elections led to an alternation in executive office.

There are currently 275 Members of Parliament (MPs) elected by plurality rule in single-member constituencies, an increase in 45 seats from the previous election.¹ Despite the institutional possibility of divided government, in each election the party that has won the presidency has also won a parliamentary majority. The NPP and NDC dominate politics, and have done since the return to democracy; together they have captured over 90 percent of the presidential vote since 1996, and 95 percent of the parliamentary seats.

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¹ Prior to Ghana's 2012 elections, the Electoral Commission by a Constitutional Instrument (CI 78) created 45 new constituencies in addition to the 230 constituencies used in the country's 2004 and 2008 presidential elections. See <http://politics.myjoyonline.com/pages/news/201209/94714.php>.

3. Presidential and parliamentary candidates

Both the NDC's Mahama and the NPP's Akufo-Addo are political veterans, having both been MPs and ministers of state. Mahama was Vice-President under the administration of his predecessor (from 2008 to 2012), and became President of Ghana a few months before the election when the incumbent, John Evans Atta-Mills, died in office on the 23rd July 2012 (as provided by Article 60(6) of the Constitution of Ghana). Mahama was subsequently endorsed as flagbearer for the NDC in a party congress held in Kumasi on 30th August 2012. No candidates stood against him.

Akufo-Addo was elected as presidential candidate for the NPP through competitive party primaries which were held on 7th August 2010. Over 100,000 registered party supporters voted in these elections. Akufo-Addo gained roughly 79 percent of the votes cast. Other candidates in the 2012 presidential race included prominent businessmen, the most influential of whom was millionaire hotel-owner Papa Kwesi Nduom. Nduom ran on the ticket of a new party he formed for the election, the Progressive People's Party (PPP).

Parliamentary candidates in Ghana are elected by party delegates in constituency-level primaries. These primaries are competitive, especially in constituencies where one of the two parties is politically dominant. In these constituencies winners are almost guaranteed of victory should they win the primary, which incentivizes many candidates to run (Ichino and Nathan, 2012). Both of the major parties held their primaries over a year before the election, the NPP on the 30th April 2011 and the NDC on 26th November 2011, to give candidates time to fundraise for their campaigns.

4. Campaign

Before the election, popular polls showed an extremely tight race for president. It was also unclear which party, if any, would secure a majority in the parliament. In response, presidential campaigns vigorously across the country, while parliamentary candidates also engaged in costly campaigns within their respective constituencies.

Following the death of Atta-Mills, the NDC had the challenge of publicizing their new presidential candidate. Campaign materials – posters, t-shirts, and other party paraphernalia – had to be re-printed, emblazoned with Mahama's face. Mahama was a relatively easy candidate to sell to voters. To his advantage, if elected, he would be the first president under the Fourth Republic to hail from the Northern part of the country.² He was also seen as dynamic and relatively young—nearly fifteen years younger than Akufo-Addo. The economy also supported the re-election of the incumbent. Economic growth rates the year before the election were among the highest in the world (around 12%), and as the election drew closer the government was able to stabilize the devaluing Ghana cedi by limiting access to foreign currencies.

In Ghana, political tours, which include visiting voters in towns and cities, and holding mass rallies, are necessary

² The North of Ghana is represented by three regions – the Northern, Upper East and Upper West regions.

Table 1

Presidential election results 2012.

Party	Presidential candidate	Presidential vote share (%)
NDC	John Dramani Mahama	50.72
NPP	Nana Akufo-Addo	47.79
PPP	Papa Kwesi Nduom	0.66
CPP	Michael Abu Sakara Foster	0.18
GCPP	Henry Herbert Lartey	0.35
UFP	Akwasi Addai Odiako	0.08
PNC	Ayariga Hassan	0.22
Independent	Jacob Osei Yeboah	0.14
Rejected ballots		2.23
Turnout		79.43

Notes: Presidential vote share is calculated as the share of valid votes cast. Rejected ballots is the percentage of votes rejected out of the total votes cast. Turnout is calculated using total votes cast and the number of registered voters.

Source: Electoral Commission of Ghana.

mobilization tools. Following Atta-Mills' funeral, Mahama quickly embarked on a 'Thank-you' tour across the nation. The tour allowed the incumbent to display reverence to Atta-Mills, and also familiarize himself to voters. Akufo-Addo (popularly known by his first name, Nana) also led a 'Listening tour' across the country. During this tour Akufo-Addo met with ordinary voters to discuss their concerns and issues. Important for the NPP, the Listening tour was a strategy to show that Nana, who was often portrayed as aristocratic and out of touch with the needs of ordinary Ghanaians, could empathize with the masses. In addition to nationwide tours, both candidates, as well as other presidential hopefuls, participated in a series of presidential debates. The live debates, which were broadcast in English but translated into local languages by regional radio stations, focused the election on policy issues, beyond the personalities of the candidates.³

Parliamentary contestants are expected to campaign for themselves, but also drum up support for their party's presidential candidate, for whom every vote counts equally. When parliamentary candidates are successful in garnering high turnout and high presidential vote shares within their (respective) constituencies they are sometimes rewarded with ministerial positions.⁴ Within constituencies, candidates worked with the local party executives to co-ordinate house-to-house canvassing and local events such as football matches and town and village beautification exercises. The parliamentary campaigns were relatively free of violence, although skirmishes were reported between party activists and MPs in a few constituencies.⁵

³ These debates are organized by the Institute for Economic Affairs a think-tank based in Accra. The country's first debates were held for the 2000 election. For the 2012 election there were two debates for the presidential candidates and the introduction of a vice-presidential debate.

⁴ Clause 78 of the Constitution of Ghana ensures that a majority of ministers must be appointed from among MPs.

⁵ Zabzugu in the Northern region and Ododiodoo in Greater Accra were two such exceptions. See <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/artikel.php?ID=204084> and <http://politics.myjoyonline.com/pages/news/201204/84766.php>.

Table 2
Political parties represented in Parliament.

Party	First parliament (1993)	Second parliament (1997)	Third parliament (2001)	Fourth parliament (2005)	Fifth parliament (2009)	Sixth parliament (2013)
NDC	189 (94.5)	132 (66.0)	92 (46.0)	94 (40.9)	115 (50.0)	148 (53.8)
NPP	–	62 (31.0)	100 (50.0)	128 (55.7)	108 (47.0)	122 (44.4)
NCP	8 (4.0)	–	–	–	–	–
PNC	–	1 (0.5)	3 (1.5)	4 (1.74)	2 (0.87)	1 (0.36)
CPP	–	–	1 (0.5)	3 (1.30)	1 (0.43)	–
EGLE	1 (0.5)	–	–	–	–	–
PCP	–	5 (2.5)	–	–	–	–
Independent	2 (1.0)	–	4 (2.0)	1 (1.74)	4 (1.74)	4 (1.45)
Total	200	200	200	230	230	275

Notes: Percentages in parentheses.

Source: Boafu-Arthur (2005), African Elections Database and Electoral Commission of Ghana.

5. Issues

Two major topics dominated the election campaign – corruption, and access to secondary education. The implication of the NDC government in corruption resulted from a scandal that broke out towards the end of 2011, known locally as *Woyome-gate*. The *Woyome* saga involved a businessman and bankroller of the governing NDC party – Alfred Agbesi Woyome – who claimed a ‘judgment debt’ on the government for the illegal cancellation of contracts to build three football stadiums. Woyome’s claim was in the region of 51 million Ghana cedis (\$30 million, US dollars).⁶ The government’s action was controversial because the state did not put up a defense against the claim, and instead released the funds. The NPP reveled in the opportunity to defame the government, aided by a popular music track that sung of the ‘gargantuan’ corruption inside the government and politicians desire to ‘share and eat [enjoy]’ the money with Woyome. The Afrobarometer survey conducted in Ghana at the start of 2012 showed that 29% of citizens believed that Atta-Mills and officials in his office were corrupt, an increase of 12% from the previous round.

The 2012 elections saw an increase in issue-based campaigning. The major policy debate was access to secondary education. Universal primary education had been established under an NPP government in 2005, and now out of office they campaigned to extend universal education to support children’s education up to the age of 16. The NPP argued that greater government investment in education was necessary to support the country’s future economic development. The NDC, on the other hand, campaigned against free senior high school (SHS). They claimed that the state could not afford it, and that the opposition was being unrealistic, or, more accusingly, lying to the public about their intentions and what they had the ability to achieve should they be elected. The NDC’s claim of the lack of realism attached to the free SHS policy seemed to gain sympathy with voters. Voters objected that despite policies of free primary education neither the NPP nor NDC had

successfully implemented this policy, with many parents still having to pay school fees. The election results suggest that the majority of voters were unconvinced that free SHS was a realistic goal.

6. Results

As predicted, the presidential race was extremely competitive. Mahama beat Akufo-Addo by about 300,000 votes of the approximately 11 million that were cast, and obtained a majority of 50.7 percent of votes (see Table 1). A disaggregation of the results across Ghana’s ten regions shows that the NDC captured majorities in eight of the country’s ten regions, with the NPP winning only in the Eastern and the populous Ashanti regions.

In the parliamentary race the NDC again outperformed the NPP to win a majority of the 275 available seats (Table 2). Both parties won a roughly equal number of seats in the 45 newly created constituencies, helping to dispel concerns that the incumbent had influenced the Electoral Commission to create new constituencies that would favor them; the NDC won 22 of the new seats and the NPP won 23. The NDC captured all of the seats available in two regions (Volta and Upper West), and also gained a seat in the Ashanti region, the traditional stronghold of the NPP, bringing their total seats in this region to four. Four seats were won by independents. As in previous years, these independents were candidates disqualified from parliamentary primaries for various, sometimes dubious, reasons, or candidates who had lost primaries but decided to run without party backing.⁷

7. Election day issues and the post-election court case

The 2012 general election was the sixth since the country’s return to democracy. Despite Ghana’s international reputation for organizing credible polls, the election was not without significant challenges. Many of these challenges resulted from the breakdown of biometric

⁶ The value of the national currency, the cedi, has decreased since 2011. This exchange rate is for December 2011.

⁷ Both Hon. Joseph Ofori and Hon. Paul Derigubaa lost their party primaries (both NDC). Hon. Dahamani Alhassen was disqualified from the NDC Tamale North primary.

verification machines at polling stations. The Electoral Commission (EC) had compiled a new voter register for the elections, requiring voters to provide a photograph and fingerprints to verify their identification. The EC adopted a policy that on election day only persons whose identities were verified by the biometric verification machine at the polling station would be permitted to exercise the franchise. Despite the intention that this would eliminate multiple voting and the voting of unregistered persons, the machines broke down at approximately 19 percent of polling stations.⁸ The NPP, who were eventually declared to have lost the presidential race, argued that electoral protocols had not been followed at over 11,000 polling stations (about one third of the total stations), affecting over 4.5 million votes.

Following the declaration of the results, the NPP challenged the results before the Supreme Court. The NPP alleged widespread electoral malpractices and fraud, and accused the Electoral Commission of conniving with the incumbent party to rig the polls.⁹ In addition to the allegation that election officials did not comply with regulations requiring mandatory biometric verification, they argued that presiding officers at some stations did not sign the official results form, and some stations saw more people vote than were legally registered at the station—an act referred to in Ghana as ‘overvoting’ (see [Asunka et al., 2014](#)).

Following eight months of court hearings that were broadcast live on television and radio, the Court declared that the NDC’s candidate, John Mahama had been ‘validly elected’. Akufo-Addo, a trained lawyer, publicly accepted the court’s judgment. He also urged party supporters to do the same. Fears that the judgment would bring social instability were not realized.

8. Implications

The 2012 general elections and the judicial aftermath took nearly one year. They ultimately showed the importance of the judiciary in playing the role of neutral arbiter, as an institution with the potential to be above partisan politics. The elections also saw the shortcomings associated with introducing technological equipment into the electoral process without significant testing. In the case of Ghana, it was clear that the EC did not have a back-up plan in case of the failure of the biometric verification equipment. By contrast, the nation wide discussion around the issue of secondary education and the live presidential debates constituted significant steps forward in terms of the campaign, offering a greater balance between issue-based and personality-based politicking. By the end of 2013, the general election in Ghana had at last been put to rest, and as one Accra resident notes ‘This period has tested our democracy...No matter your political affiliation, you should be able to say that the victory is for Ghana.’¹⁰

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⁸ This figure is calculated using data from 4000 Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) who were dispatched across the country on election day.

⁹ The party also challenged over 10 per cent of the parliamentary results.

¹⁰ Quoted from an Accra resident in the Voice of America: <http://www.voanews.com/content/ghana-supreme-courtupholds-presidents-poll-win/1739631.html>.