



Situation Report

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Ghana's 2008 election: towards a consolidated democracy?

Abstract

Ghana's 2008 general elections ushered in the country's second peaceful change of government since its return to multi-partyism in 1992. This happened against a background of generalised anxiety and distrust about electoral processes in Africa, where elections have often been depicted as sources of tension and threats to national stability. In Ghana's case, instead of providing evidence for further pessimism about democratisation, the country's electoral monitoring bodies and political actors delivered a widely accepted and credible electoral process that helps Ghana to strengthen its progress towards democratic consolidation and socio-economic development. The defeat of the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the peaceful transfer of power to the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the erstwhile leader of the opposition offer a number of lessons for countries struggling to hold transparent and violence-free elections in Africa, or leaders locked into elitist power-sharing arrangements. There remain numerous challenges requiring the new leadership's continuous attention, and certain flaws observed during the elections require effective corrective measures. Notwithstanding the challenges the country faces, however, peaceful power alternation in Ghana may be explained by three principal factors: President John Kufuor's decision to uphold the constitutional terms limit; the respect shown by social and political actors to the democratic consensus; and, above all, an efficient national electoral machinery.

Introduction

The peaceful transfer of power in Ghana stands in sharp contrast to the frequent setbacks to the democratisation process elsewhere in West Africa. In Mauritania, the political transition process has been halted abruptly by a military coup; in Guinea Bissau, the emergence from domestic political conflict has been interrupted by the assassination of the president and army chief.

These dramatic cases are merely suggestive of some of the more extreme problems facing the establishment of multiparty democratic systems in Africa. There often seems to be a wide gap between political elite behaviour and their citizens' demands for a coherent political system based on good governance and accountability. In Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire and Togo, elected governments remain mired in corruption, incompetence and instability. In Senegal, there are concerns over the contradictions emerging under President Wade's leadership, and President Mamadou Tandja's recent decision to tamper with the constitution has triggered fresh political tensions in Niger.

It is in this environment that Ghana's elections took place in December 2008. Ghana, the first sub-Saharan African country to obtain its independence in 1957, held its fifth

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legislative and presidential elections since the return of multi-partyism in 1992. Some 12.5 million Ghanaians went to the polls to elect a president and 230 parliamentarians in what was seen as a fierce contest between the four most prominent political parties – the New Patriotic Party (NPP), National Democratic Congress (NDC), People’s National Convention (PNC) and Convention People’s Party (CPP). In the volatile sub-region of West Africa, there was a considerable amount of interest in the Ghanaian electoral process. There was also a great deal of concern, since Africa had already witnessed two protracted outbreaks of electoral violence earlier in the year: in Kenya and Zimbabwe. The mere fact that Ghana has so far succeeded in managing its electoral process without major violence may help consolidate African people’s adherence to the democratisation process and the promotion of political stability.

How has Ghana got it right? This paper argues that Ghana’s own political history and the electoral machinery continue to play a role in the steps taken towards effective political system based on democratic principles. Regarded by both local and external observers as one of the most stable countries in Africa, with bright prospects for socio-economic improvement, Ghana’s is now seen as one of the most promising democratic experiments in Africa. Yet, although these elections provided the opportunity for the country’s citizens to express or reconfirm their adherence to the democratic process, many challenges lie ahead, including the consolidation of economic development, a continued fight against corruption, the equitable distribution of resources and, above all, maintaining the confidence of the people in the institutions of government and in the legitimate political leadership.

According to World Bank projections,¹ by 2020, Ghana’s economy is likely to see major improvements that could raise it to the ranks of the middle-income countries. Whether this becomes reality will depend substantially on how well the political process is managed and how swiftly the new leadership incorporates the needs of citizens into its socio-economic agenda. This paper looks at the electoral monitoring process, and highlights its significance for the future of democracy in Ghana. It begins with a short overview of the political transition in Ghana, highlighting some of the major achievements and challenges. The paper also considers the relevance of these elections for political stability in Ghana and Africa at large and suggests a number of lessons for countries still experiencing difficulties in their electoral processes, principally in West Africa.

Ghana’s political life has been marked by a series of alternations between authoritarianism and attempts to democratise the political system. There were three periods of elected government and three of military rule between 1957 and 1992. In contrast to the First Republic under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah, the interludes of civilian government under the Second (1969–72) and Third Republics (1979–81) were short-lived, unable to endure for longer than 30 months.² Thus, until 1992, Ghana’s multiparty experience was interrupted repeatedly by the drift towards dictatorship. The perceived failures of the governments of the day and their mistaken policy options led to repeated military interventions in 1966, 1972, 1978, 1979 and 1981.

Major Events in Ghana’s Political Trajectory: 1957–2008

1957–1958	Attempts at political pluralism
1958–1964	Elected Civilian Regime
1964–1966	One-Party System (CPP)
1966–1969	Military Regime
1969–1972	Elected Civilian Regime
1972–1979	Military Regime
1979–1981	Elected Civilian Regime
1981–1992	Military Regime
1992–1996	Political Transition
1996– 2008	Emerging democracy

Source: Compiled by author with special reference to Gocking (2005)

Undeniably, two major political figures have dominated the recent political history of Ghana. Although Kwame Nkrumah's leadership still constitutes a historical reference point in Ghana's politics and for African liberation movements, the emergence of Flight-Lieutenant John Jerry Rawlings as a populist leader in 1981 dramatically transformed the country's political landscape. Despite Nkrumah's early promise of democratic rule he left office with a mixed reputation, Rawlings seized power as a military autocrat and left office converted to democratic rule. Rawlings's main concern was presumably to transform the lives of citizens and return Ghana to the path of sustainable development. But the repression that accompanied his regime's political and economic actions has clouded the legacy of one of the most charismatic figures in Ghana's political history.

Nonetheless, there is no doubt that Rawlings's leadership played a crucial role in laying the foundations for Ghana's economic performance and democratic achievements, although this was not without pain. When Rawlings assumed power, Ghana faced an overwhelming economic crisis. Ghanaians were desperately seeking a political redeemer, a role that seemed to suit Rawlings because he was considered to be a man of the people.³ In the same vein, it is important to note that Rawlings's strength of character and unwavering determination helped Ghana implement the economic recovery programmes of the 1980s relatively successfully. Surprisingly, and contrary to the Provisional National Defence Council's (PNDC) original leftist and populist orientation, Ghana's economic performance under the Rawlings regime was based upon the strict implementation of the capitalised-inspired Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) dictated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. For, this programme entailed, among other things, the privatisation of state-owned businesses, fiscal discipline, a systematic fight against corruption, and the promotion of foreign businesses. According to Adedeji,

The emphasis of the ERP by the Rawlings regime was predicated on increased production in agriculture and industry, combined with reducing the budget deficit by cutting government subsidies and establishing a more efficient revenue mobilization and collection. Rawlings, in his dealings with Ghanaians, exhibited the virtues of effective leadership by espousing the notion that sound economic planning would be the only guarantee of improving the well-being of the people after years of decline. Furthermore, since the launching of the 31 December, 1981 coup, his concern has consistently been focused on the poor and the exploited and his declarations of "power to the people," is reminiscent of a leader providing what is "missing" in the body politic in Ghana, a phenomenon much sought after in many neighboring West African regimes.⁴

Though the IMF and the World Bank hailed Ghana as a relative success story in terms of the positive impact of the SAPs on the economy, as in many African countries there were instances when citizens experienced negative and mixed effects despite economic growth. For example, and as Adedeji pointed out, some Ghanaians saw structural adjustment as causing hardship, especially in urban areas. "The new macro-economic policies in Ghana led to retrenchment in the mainly urban and public sectors but at the same time, it did shift resources and productivity toward the rural areas. For instance, many urban groups bore much of the cost of the reform program while internal trade terms between rural and urban now favored rural producers."⁵

The negative socio-economic impact of SAPs felt principally by urban groups undermined the PNDC's political and economic triumph and helped accelerate the country's political liberalisation process after the Cold War. Resentment born of economic hardship and a rising wave of political populism spread through various social and political groups and contributed to the weakening of Rawlings's military regime as it negotiated the transition to political pluralism in the 1990s.

The democratic wave that swept across the African continent in the 1990s presented dissidents within the PNDC regime with the opportunity to press for political liberalisation. Despite initial resistance, the party succumbed to democratic demands, though it managed to stay in control following elections in 1992 and 1996. The 1992 Constitution provided for a wide range of rights and institutions previously banned, including freedoms of association and of speech,

the separation of powers, and the creation of an electoral management body. Of critical importance was the creation of the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), which combined with other agencies to reinforce the rule of law and strengthen horizontal accountability.

The first elections held in 1992 under the new constitution heralded a new political era in Ghana. While the reconverted President JJ Rawlings's National Democratic Congress (NDC) victories in the 1992 and 1996 presidential elections were seen as the re-birth of a political pluralism in Ghana, it was the peaceful transfer of power to the opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP)'s candidate John Kufuor following the 2000 elections that was seen as a landmark achievement in Ghana's democratisation experiment. But democratisation itself is a process with possibility of reversals and stagnations. The question could be asked as to whether Ghana has yet reached a stage that might be described as one of consolidated democracy?

Though the country has made great strides in its political process and institution building, there is need for further improvement. One of the critical areas that still remains contentious in Ghana's democratisation efforts is what Gyimah-Boadi calls flaws in the constitutional design and practice that leave decisive power in the hands of the President. He warns that the vast appointment powers concentrated in the presidency could result in excessive patronage and control. In essence, an imperial presidency could undermine the systems of checks and balances and foster the excessive dominance of the executive.⁶ An imperial presidency might also promote electoral violence by raising the stakes and fuelling political antagonism.

Democratic consolidation is a loaded concept and a long-term exercise rather than a description of an end state. The term may be used simply to denote the stability of newly established democracies. A more useful definition is when democratic consolidation is seen as the process by which a newly established democratic regime becomes sufficiently durable that a return to nondemocratic rule is unlikely.⁷ On this view, democratic consolidation requires more than regular elections. Certainly, with five sets of presidential and parliamentary elections held subsequently (1992, 1996, 2000, 2004 and 2008), two turnovers of the governing party, and with perceived advances (review of electoral laws and practices, civic education, reinforced capacity of key electoral monitoring bodies including the judiciary) each time in the quality of the electoral process, Ghana appears to be one of the leading democratising countries in Africa. Nevertheless, though Ghana's democratic process enjoys consistent popular support, and the political leadership seems committed to the respect of the fundamental human rights and the prevalence of the rule of law, serious challenges remain.

In its 2005 report on Ghana, the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) praised the achievements of Ghana's political leadership and citizens in terms of their efforts to strengthen the democratic environment and the rule of law. However, the report highlighted a number of issues that needed action in order to consolidate democracy and promote good governance. These included concerns about the poor resourcing of the Electoral Commission and other key institutions, notably in human, financial and logistic capacity. The APRM also raised concerns about the sustainability of the Commission's budget, which is donor dependent, and highlighted the lack of internal democracy within political parties. The report warned that the potential long-term effect of these shortcomings might weaken the democratisation process in the country. The underrepresentation of women and what this portends for participation and representation in politics, and the ethnic voting patterns that seem to be emerging in national elections were also seen as sources of concern for the consolidation of democracy.⁸

Although some of these criticisms received prompt responses from political actors including those in government, others have yet to be addressed. The Electoral Commission improved the management of the electoral process, and political parties progressively have established internal democratic mechanisms to elect their leaders, which reinforce the democratic culture in the country.

The under-representation of women remains an important matter of concern. In 1998, the government issued a White Paper on Affirmative Action in which the goal was stated of ensuring that women occupied at least 40 per cent of the representative positions in decision-making structures. This never became official policy, however, so government and political parties have not been held to account on this quota. It is not surprising, therefore, that while gender parity is better in Ghana than in much of Africa, the number of women in decision-making positions in Ghana still remains low. For example, 45 per cent of women are illiterate, compared to 28 per cent of men.⁹ Of the 230 members of the post-2008 parliament, only 20 are women, a reduction from the 25 in the previous legislature. Of the 38 ministers appointed by President Mills, only eight are female. Another preoccupying fact is that gross primary school enrolment is at 78 per cent for girls, compared 85 per cent for boys.

But it is to basic social services delivery that citizens in Ghana expect the political leadership to show coherent and sustainable commitment. Ghana has recorded noticeable economic improvement over the past eight years. According to IMF estimates, real GDP grew by 5.4% in 2006 and 6.3% in 2007, the highest growth rates achieved in 20 years. Improvements not only in agriculture but also in industrial and services sectors stand out as the major drivers of the growth, in addition to the macroeconomic reforms initiated in the early 1990s and consolidated by the Kufuor administration.¹⁰ Notwithstanding the economic progress realised by the country, a third of the population remains in acute poverty. According to the 2007 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Ghana ranks 135 out of 177 in the Human Development Index (HDI). More than four million of Ghana's estimated 22 million population are extremely poor, struggling to access basic social services in terms of health, water and education. The slow pace of poverty reduction will remain a constant threat that could undermine efforts to consolidate democratic gains in the country.

Though in the long term, the 2008 elections were vital to the survival of Ghana's democratisation process, more immediately they were a public assessment of Kufuor's administration's performance and legacy and whether the citizenry would renew its confidence in the New Patriotic Party (NPP). The discovery of oil and the prospects of its exploitation by 2012 added an extra element to the contention.

The Electoral Commission of Ghana and the 2008 elections

Having held four general elections without major difficulties, it could be said that Ghana has developed political institutions capable of responding effectively to electoral challenges.¹¹ Nevertheless, political institutions alone, regardless of their strength, cannot explain why the prospects for democratic consolidation are brighter in Ghana than in many other African states. There is also a shared commitment between the state or the political elite, the civil society and citizenry to make democracy work effectively. Without that consensus and commitment, political institutions remain hollow and may undermine the democratisation process.¹² In addition, whether specific institutions (judiciary, electoral commission, human rights organisations) can help consolidate democracy depends as much on their capacity to adapt, and the resources made available, as on the skills and commitment of political actors.

Ghana's 1992 Constitution and the 1993 Electoral Commission Act (known as Act 451) made provision for the creation of an independent electoral commission, the Electoral Commission of Ghana (ECG), responsible for conducting, managing and supervising all national, regional and local elections. The ECG was established to replace a largely inefficient and widely discredited Interim National Electoral Commission (INEC) put in place by President Rawlings's Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC). Its mandate extends far beyond the ballot box. The Commission is responsible not only for voter registration, the demarcation of electoral constituencies, and voter education, but may also assist in resolving conflicts between and within political parties. Thus, 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.

Though the President appoints the seven members of the Commission, the ECG has, over the years, positioned itself as an independent and credible institution whose role has contributed significantly to the democratic process in Ghana. While the leadership¹³ of the electoral commissioner, Kwadwo Afari Gyan, goes some way to explaining this, it is the professionalisation of the electoral machinery in Ghana that ensures the fairness and the transparency of the voting process. In addition to the high court judges' status conferred to the commissioners, the Electoral Commission works with key permanent staff admonished to resist pressure from political actors and to fulfil their task independently. In the words of Adusei, "the electoral commission has come to symbolise fair play, transparency, accountability, honesty, justice, independence, integrity, selflessness, openness, objectivity and strong leadership and is idolised by many institutions in Ghana and in Africa."¹⁴ The Electoral Commission has developed an effective communication strategy that has brought it close to the public, and the institutionalisation of the Inter Party Advisory Committee (IPAC) has continued to provide a framework for the generation of ideas on how to improve the performance of the ECG.¹⁵

The hurried voter registration process prior to the 2008 elections severely tested the credibility of the ECG, however. Political parties, principally NDC and NPP, accused the ECG of partiality. Their frustrations stemmed from a perceived absence of safeguards during the registration process that led to inflated figures being presented by the ECG. Though the Electoral Commission acknowledged flaws in the process, time constraints prevented it from correcting all this before the elections. Nonetheless, none of the complainants has come up with evidence of a deliberate attempt on the part of the Commission to favour a particular political party. Nor has this issue affected the credibility of the results, none of which were challenged significantly after the first round of voting.

In short, there was unanimity that despite the challenges it was facing, the ECG delivered a credible electoral process that reinforced its authority and confirmed it as a key player in the national political debate. Several factors¹⁶ accounted for this success, including effective electoral management by the ECG and other related constitutional bodies, consensus building among political actors, the crucial roles played by civil society organisations and the media, and mass participation in the electoral process. The presence of party agents alongside civil society representatives at various voting stations and the fair distribution of the polling stations also contributed significantly to the reduction of controversy about the results. Local and foreign observation teams' reports¹⁷ unanimously suggested that the 2008 presidential elections were conducted largely in accordance with the electoral laws of Ghana and identified relatively few problems and lapses in the setting up and opening of the polls. This helped dissipate concerns about electoral violence, and guaranteed the credibility of the results released by the ECG, which was particularly significant given the narrow margin that separated the two main candidates, both of whom complied with the appeal of the outgoing president John Kufuor and accepted the results.

Managing electoral violence

Ghana's electoral process was impressive not only because it was violence-free, but also for the way in which various incidents of violence were managed, reinforcing a successful and credible process. During the 2008 campaign, the opposition had vowed to call for street protests if the electoral process failed to deliver a credible outcome. This indicated that there were potential triggers for election related violence in Ghana. The political landscape was polarised by ethno-regional animosities between the incumbent NPP and the opposition NDC. Violent incidents occurred in the northern regions of Tamale and in parts of Accra, including the killing of supporters of the two major political parties, NDC and NPP, the use of inflammatory language and the emergence of vigilante groups. Only a few weeks

before the first round, violence erupted in the Volta Regional capital, Ho. This was blamed on the alleged defacing of NPP posters by supporters of the NDC. In Accra, the national capital, mutual accusations were rife and tension was building up as leaders of the two parties blamed their opponents for orchestrating the violence that accompanied their campaign tours through some parts of Accra.¹⁸

Violent confrontations began during the registration process: the vandalism of certain registration centres in Tamale and protests that the ECG was registering underage and foreign voters. Vigilante groups were formed to defend the “territories” of their respective political parties, fuelling citizens’ fears. These alarms seemed well founded, especially when former President JJ Rawlings began criticising the credibility of state institutions, including the security agencies, questioning their ability to ensure free and fair electoral process.

It is important to emphasise the role of key actors and institutions in providing leadership in managing the incidents and preserving the credibility of the elections by spreading a message of tolerance and peace. Ghana has witnessed the emergence of vibrant and competent civil society organisations, whose members took the lead in civic and political education and remained vocal about the responsibility of political actors and their followers to respect state institutions and the electoral code of conduct. The Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO), a group of civil society organisations, deployed more than 5,000 observers across the country. They also invested a great deal of effort and resources in civic and voter education across the country, and participated in the counting and the tabulation of the election results. The state-funded National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) took an active role in reinforcing the voter education campaign. Local NGOs’ public appeals for a peaceful election proved effective in curbing the possible escalation of violence, which could have undermined the electoral process and Ghana’s democratic gains. The role of local NGOs was complemented by that played by external partners. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) deployed 200 observers, the AU sent 25 observers from its member countries to all ten of Ghana’s regions, and the EU deployed 70 observers from 24 EU member states and Norway.

The strong partnership between civil society organisations, media and the electoral monitoring bodies helped to raise awareness about the necessity of transparent elections. This was crucial in forestalling any elite manipulation of the citizenry for electoral purposes. The judiciary was also efficient, dealing promptly with petitions related to the elections. Finally, the presidential debates held by the Institute for Economic Affairs (IEA) helped shift the focus of the campaigning away from personal rivalry between the leaders to issues of interest to the citizens. It should be remembered, however, that institution building and the maintenance of an effective electoral mechanism are continuing processes requiring resources, trust in political actors and the support of citizens.

The behaviour of political parties during the 2008 elections, though it occasionally caused alarm, constituted an important pillar in the successful electoral process. Though there was some violence, use of inflammatory language and even hate speech in the run-up to the elections and in their aftermath, the attitudes of Ghana’s political parties were managed through a combination of initiatives and pressures, including the leaders’ personal commitment and civil society organisations’ active and positive campaigning.

For decades, Ghana’s political parties have asserted different identities and professed different ideologies in their quest to secure state power.¹⁹ The military regime’s suppression of political parties during the 1980s failed either to silence or isolate them from the national political debate. Many political parties insisted on, and fought for, the return to a national democratic polity. Taking advantage of the democratic wave of the early 1990s, and with the adoption of a new constitution in 1992, political parties’ activities gained momentum in Ghana. But though the political landscape has seen the emergence of about a dozen political parties, only a few have been able to really influence the political debate in recent years.

In the December 2008 elections, four principal political parties stood out as major players. These were:

- The National Democratic Congress (NDC) founded by the former President John Jerry Rawlings and currently led by John Atta Mills,
- The New Patriotic Party (NPP) of John Kufuor, currently led by Nana Addo Danquah Akufo,
- The Convention People's Party (CPP) that traces its origin to Kwame Nkrumah's CPP and is now led by Paa Kwesi Nduom; and finally,
- The People's National Convention (PNC) under the leadership of Edward Mahama.

Silah and Suifon argue that the 2008 elections in Ghana brought to the fore the three most influential political traditions in the country's history: those identified with Nkrumah (CPP), with Danquah and Busia (NPP) and with Rawlings (NDC).²⁰ A closer look, however, suggests that Ghana's political landscape is dominated currently by the last two of these traditions, symbolised by the NPP and the NDC. In essence, the New Patriotic Party (NPP), and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) bear the mark of two contrasting contemporary political personalities: John Kufuor, a veteran politician, praised for Ghana's recent political and economic achievements, and John Jerry Rawlings, whose controversial political and economic legacy also contributed to Ghana's economic and political progress over the past decade. Both parties have positioned themselves as dominant actors in the national political debate, and the 2008 elections clearly showed that the electorate was split almost equally between the two parties not only in terms of political stance but in terms of ethnic and regional affiliation. The resulting antagonism between the two parties during the campaign was sometimes identified as a destabilising factor for Ghana's democracy, particularly when it tended to take the form of ethnic manipulation and mutual hatred.

Over the past decade, Ghana's electoral contests have been marked by a number of fluctuations. From 1992 until 2000, Rawlings's NDC clearly was the most influential political force in Ghana. It was argued that Rawlings's popularity was key to the NDC's electoral performance, though the opposition contended that the NDC maintained power by manipulating the electoral processes. According to Lyons, however, if the 1992 elections were flawed by allegations of fraud and the opposition boycotting the 200-seat, unicameral National Assembly, by 1996 important reforms in the electoral system and a spirited campaign by an opposition coalition gave Ghanaians a meaningful choice on election day.²¹ The opposition won a third of the seats in the Assembly, and could use this base both to scrutinise the Rawlings government and to build more effective political parties for subsequent elections.²² Since 2000, the NPP has gained in prominence, benefiting mostly from the "need for change" after two decades of Rawlings's administration. But eight years in power and 16 years into the democratisation process have not gone beyond the established regional voting patterns.

In the 2008 elections, one could not deny that the NPP stronghold is in the South (Southern Akans), and that the NDC is popular among the Ewes and the Northerners. Studies on voter loyalties in Ghana disagree about the significance of the ethnic factor in elections. A study published in 2003 by Lindberg and Morrison was based on 700 interviews conducted in six out of the 200 constituencies and in four regions, attributed little relevance to ethnicity in the voting patterns in Ghana. They found that "clientelistic and ethnic predisposed voting are minor features of the Ghanaian electorate".²³ In a similar study two years later, however, with 600 interviews in three of 230 constituencies in three of the ten regions, Fridy came to a very different conclusion: "ethnicity is an extremely significant although not deciding factor in Ghanaian elections".²⁴

In explaining the impact of ethnicity, Yalae argues that "in the 2008 Elections, Fante-Akans abandoned NPP for NDC thus enabling NDC to overcome the strength of the coalition of Ashanti-Akan and Akyem-Akan, the two socio-political groups believed to be firmly in control of NPP."²⁵ This political shift was a reaction to the adverse effect of majoritarian democracy experienced by some ethnic groups. It

was also a reaction against ethnic hegemony in Ghana, as perceived during the NPP administration between 2000 and 2008. The perpetuation of political dominance through the winner-takes-all system under an Ashanti-Akan and Akyem-Akan dominated NPP persuaded the politically neutral Fante-Akans (Atta Mills) to vote for the NDC in 2008. During Kufuor's two-term administration, the majority of his appointees came from two socio-political groups —Ashanti and Akyem. Public resentment of this domination is not in dispute. Majoritarian democracy virtually excluded other socio-political groups from the NPP administration, thereby inciting ethnic animosities and political tensions as the election approached.²⁶

But what is clear is that, in recent years, both the NPP and the NDC have consolidated their regional and ethnic bases even as they made efforts to improve their national representation. Each of them has maintained its regional stronghold since 2004, including during the 2008 election (see table below). Perhaps due to the fact that both parties' presidential candidates were of Akan background (John Atta Mills is of Fante-Akan origin, his opponent Nana Addo-Akufo has strong links with Akyem-Akan), the NDC flag bearer consistently complained about the fact that people from 'one region', Ashanti, dominated government positions. Campaigning for the opposition, former president Rawlings called upon the Northern population to consider December elections as an opportunity to end their relegation to the status of third or fourth-class citizens. By the same token, traditional leaders and the NPP campaign directorate in the Ashanti region had called upon the population to vote for the NPP to enable the government to continue its good work. There was a widespread assumption that the Eastern Region would vote massively for the NPP to make a local figure president. On the other hand, it was suggested that the Central region which voted against the NDC candidate in the previous two elections (in 2000 and 2004) was going to wake up to the ethno-regional nature of Ghanaian politics and vote for their own man this time.

Table 1: Ghana's two major political parties performance in the 10 electoral regions in Ghana: 1996–2008²⁷

YEARS	1996	2000	2004	2008
REGIONS				
Ashanti Region	<i>NPP</i>	<i>NPP</i>	<i>NPP</i>	<i>NPP</i>
Brong Ahafo	NDC	<i>NPP</i>	<i>NPP</i>	<i>NPP</i>
Central Region	NDC	<i>NPP</i>	<i>NPP</i>	NDC
Eastern Region	NDC	<i>NPP</i>	<i>NPP</i>	<i>NPP</i>
Greater Accra	NDC	<i>NPP</i>	<i>NPP</i>	NDC
Northern Region	NDC	NDC	NDC	NDC
Upper East	NDC	NDC	NDC	NDC
Upper West	NDC	NDC	NDC	NDC
Volta Region	NDC	NDC	NDC	NDC
Western Region	NDC	<i>NPP</i>	<i>NPP</i>	NDC

It is interesting to realise that after four elections, there seems to be an almost equal balance of forces between the two main parties, the NDC and the NPP. The 2008 parliamentary results released by the Electoral Commission of Ghana indicated that, apart from the two leading parties, which kept their regional bases, the remaining six candidates shared only 3% of the popular vote, virtually turning Ghana into a two-party state.

The results of the first round showed that the ruling NPP had lost its majority in parliament to the NDC, though no presidential candidate had secured enough votes for an outright victory.

Initially, the ruling NPP had the advantage of incumbency and sufficient resources to campaign throughout the country. Moreover, eight years in power had helped the party consolidate its structures and presence countrywide. Many polls

conducted in Ghana in the last few days before the elections also predicted the NPP would win in the first round, a conclusion that seemed justified by the capable leadership and legacy of President Kufuor. But the results turned out to be different. Two issues might help explain why the pollsters got it wrong.

First, though the NPP enjoyed a degree of popularity, the party had a new candidate, Nana Akufo-Addo. Son of a former president and a well-known human rights activist, Nana Akufo-Addo never had been tested in a major national presidential election before, unlike his opponent, John Atta Mills, who was runner-up in 2000 and 2004. The NDC had also performed well in parliamentary elections in those years, securing 92 out of 200 contested seats in 2000 and 94 of the 230 seats in 2004. In addition, though Nana Akufo-Addo was a veteran politician, he was not the candidate favoured by the outgoing president, and managed to win only 47.90 per cent of the votes during the NPP's primaries. In contrast, Atta Mills secured more than 80 per cent of his party's votes during the primaries and the NDC appeared unified in the run-up to the 2008 elections. A partial explanation of this unity might be found in the fact that the NDC had held its primary as early as 2006, almost two years before the poll. A close race therefore began with the opposition candidate enjoying a more consolidated support base within his own party.

The second issue related to the government's soft attitude on corruption, notwithstanding the successful economic reforms it had carried out. The NPP's selective approach to corruption in Ghana made some voters' reluctant to embrace the ruling party for another four years. A few days before the elections, the opposition used controversies around the unveiling of a new presidential palace, "The Golden Jubilee House" to undermine the government's reputation. President John Kufuor and his NPP candidate were criticised during the campaign for choosing to build and hurriedly move into a new presidential complex that cost approximately at least US\$50 million. These resources came from development grants made available by the Indian government to assist Ghana in its efforts at economic recovery. The opposition argued that the government could have invested these resources in meaningful development projects with a direct impact on living conditions. This argument may have cost the ruling party the votes it needed for victory.

The current economic situation and allegations about the budgetary laxity of the outgoing government also raises concerns about transparency under John Kufuor's administration, despite a public commitment to transparency and good governance. Okwuosah argues that the current economic position in Ghana conjures up memories of the situation that greeted NPP's Kufuor administration when it took over from the NDC in 2000.

Kufuor inherited such a huge and somewhat clueless debt (198.3 percent of national income) that it was also compelled to go the HIPC option. Today, the same scenario is being played out again, revealing a running thread of some vicious cycle of governance irresponsibility, where a departing government seemingly strives to ensure that the in-coming one comes in to meet an economy that is bereft of all financial gains that may have been achieved in order to make governance difficult for the new government. This is why, now, President Atta Mills is being compelled to, once more, look in the direction of the IMF for a way out, in spite of his party's criticism of relationships with the Bretton Woods.²⁸

Finally, The NPP, which had ruled the country for the past eight years, failed to clinch the promise "one-touch victory" because there was general voter apathy in some of the regions where the party thought it was well entrenched. For example, in the Ashanti Region, the NPP's traditional bastion, voter turnout was 62% as against 88.7% in 2004, and compared with a national average in 2008 of 70%. In contrast, the NDC appears to have enjoyed a massive turnout in its support bases in the Volta Region for example.

Many opinion polls did not see the opposition NDC winning, at least in the presidential election. The controversial Rawlings legacy was still seen as a major impediment to electoral success, and his continued prominence in party affairs continued to cast a shadow over the ability of John Atta Mills to operate independently and effectively, though the latter had distanced himself from Rawlings's flamboyant political style and emphasised his determination to assert his independence as a leader.

Many expected John Atta Mills to benefit from the support of undecided voters who wanted to see another democratic change of government in Ghana, to prevent the NPP from becoming a hegemonic party, complacent and therefore running the risk of undermining the vibrancy of Ghana's democracy. In spite of the tensions of the second round of presidential elections, both parties respected the decision of ECG. In the event, the presidential outcome was decided by the little district of Tain and 23,000 votes.

A number of useful lessons stand out from Ghana's elections of 2008. First, democracy is a long process rather than an end state, requiring constant work to address the many challenges it faces. Although regular and well-planned elections are key to the democratic process, peaceful power alternations can be seen as a major ingredient in consolidation. It is important to stress that President John Kufuor did not contemplate the possibility of amending the constitution to stand for a third term. This not only reflected the maturity of Ghana's democratic experiment, but also demonstrated the fallacy of the arguments that a capable leader ought to be given a "third chance" or that Africa should be left to chart its own course towards democracy. A number of African countries have seen their constitutions amended to remove presidential term limits in order to perpetuate de facto one-party rule. In the long run this might lead to political decay, and possibly to violence.

Second, the results of the 2008 elections revealed some of the challenges to democratic consolidation. The number of elections held does not necessarily guarantee the stability of institutions and the consolidation of the democratisation process. On the one hand, the claim that elections facilitate conflict management or resolution and the consolidation of democracy in multi-cultural and multi-ethnic settings seems to be validated by the Ghanaian 2008 electoral process.²⁹ It is clear that the process was contentious and its outcome unpredictable. A power contest in a tense political environment without adequate mechanisms to handle it is likely to lead into violence and instability. In such circumstance, power-sharing deals hardly succeed in restoring the credibility of the institutions.

On the other hand, it is important to stress that multi-party politics and elections, if poorly managed or subverted, may deepen existing ethno-regional and other socio-economic cleavages in specific socio-cultural and political economic contexts. The 2008 elections, therefore, called into question the much-acclaimed steps towards the consolidation of democracy in Ghana.³⁰

Ghana's experience could serve to underline the importance of the machinery of election organisation, which, though expensive and challenging, is not intellectually problematic.³¹ "It just requires adequate and competent preparation, a high degree of transparency, a responsible government, which respects its own citizens and an alert citizenry ready to protect their vote".³² If well managed and accepted by all, elections even serve as peaceful means of conflict resolution. People have the power to sanction a poorly performing government as well as the ability to renew their confidence in a particular government that delivers on its promises. Peaceful and transparent elections are always a sign of maturity and a step further toward the consolidation of state institutions.

It is also useful to note that a series of political reforms have created an enabling environment for political succession to take place without resort to violence. For Tessa Bakary, political succession or power alternation is not only a national matter for the changing of the guard, but may also be an important regional issue

because it could influence the political bargaining within a democratic framework in general.³³ One could assert that a system that depends on an individual to survive is prone to violent conflict and will ultimately collapse. In successfully passing the test of peaceful political succession, Ghana stands as a challenge to longstanding leaders who weaken the institutions of their countries to strengthen their personal networks of political survival. Above all, elections may settle political rivalry without compromising the democratic consensus or leading to so-called power-sharing arrangements that thwart the will of the people and promote elite control of state's resources and power privileges.

President John Atta Mills has completed his first six months as Ghana's head of state following the closest presidential race since the democratisation process began in the country in the early 1990s. Though it is too soon to pass judgment on his government's performance, there are indications of what the leadership stands for and where the country is heading. The exploitation of oil resources continues to raise concern in light of the poor resource management in neighbouring countries. The risk of oil wealth perverting the political system cannot be ignored. Though this is not the first natural resource discovered in Ghana, it is understandable that local and international media and civil society organisations are aware of the potential risks Ghana faces as it seeks to exploit its new oil wealth. The precipitate fall in the global oil price notwithstanding, the proceeds from the exploitation of the Ghana's oil and hydrocarbons could easily tempt the ruling elite to use it as a tool for self-enrichment and political manipulation, as has happened elsewhere in West Africa.

Political succession remains contentious and highly challenging in many African countries. The privileges associated with power and the fear of being prosecuted by their successors causes some leaders to maintain control of the political process even through electoral manipulation and violence. For some years, the design of electoral systems to encourage cooperation, bargaining and interdependence between rival political leaders and the groups they represent has become increasingly crucial for the promotion of democracy in poor and divided societies. This seems to have made it increasingly difficult to hold elections without violence or protest in such settings. As political elites see elections a means to capture the state apparatus and the resources it commands, electoral processes have come under severe threat.

There has been a considerable amount of interest in Ghana's 2008 elections. Although there is agreement that fraudulent elections undermine the legitimacy of the leadership and plant the seeds for protracted political crises, African countries still have to confront numerous challenges when conducting elections: the cost of the elections themselves, poverty that make citizens vulnerable to leaders' manipulations, illiteracy and other social ills that still pose formidable challenge to sustainable political stability. A new political era certainly is germinating in Ghana. This coincides with the discovery of oil. How President John Atta Mills handles the flow of the resources in the interest of the socio-economic development of his country will largely determine whether Ghana maintains this political momentum without compromising the fundamentals that give substance to the vibrancy of its achievements.

The enthusiasm with which the NDC took power is now moderated by Ghana's domestic economic climate and the global economic and financial meltdown, which forced the new government to redefine its priorities, and the 2009 budget anticipates a funding deficit of more than 11 per cent. But as noted above, within the next two years Ghana will join the ranks of the oil producing states. The question in some minds is whether Ghana's government will manage an oil boom any better than the other resources it already possesses. The current political context and achievements in the establishment of an effective system of governance may allow for cautious optimism.

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- 1 International Monetary Fund and International Development Association, *Ghana: Joint IMF/World Bank debt sustainability analysis*, June 2008.
 - 2 David Crawford, Democratisation in Ghana: Assessing the impact of political aid, *Polis Working Paper*, 8, (February 2004), 11.
 - 3 Djibril Ibrahim, Democratic transition in anglophone countries, *CODESRIA Monograph*, 2003, 8–9.
 - 4 John Adedeji, The legacy of JJ Rawlings in Ghanaian politics, 1979–2000, *African Studies Quarterly*, 10 (2&3) (Fall 2008), 3
 - 5 Ibid.
 - 6 E Gyimah-Boadi, Another step forward for Ghana, *Journal of Democracy*, 20 (2) (April 2009).
 - 7 There are various contending views on democratic consolidation. Some scholars of democratisation explain consolidation (stability or low probability of reversal) by referring to two key determinants: values and attitudes or “software”. They see democracy as being consolidated only when it becomes legitimated or when an overwhelming majority see it as the only game in town. Others take a different view; from their perspective, “consolidated democracy” is a result of stable and successfully functioning democratic institutions. Here, political institutions are seen either as a set of rules or as the organisations that perform the work of the government, such as legislatures, executives, the judiciary and other security and welfare agencies.. A third approach to the debate on consolidated democracy suggests an integrated view. Michael Bratton and Gyimah-Boadi for example argue that “new democracies consolidate when a high proportion of citizens demand democracy and receive it from their political regimes. This approach uses public opinion to measure demand and supply (for example Afrobarometer surveys). For details see Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of democratic transition and consolidation: Southern Europe, South America and post Communist Europe*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996; Wonbin Cho and Michael Bratton, *Electoral institutions, partisan status, and political support: A natural experiment in Lesotho*, Afrobarometer Working Papers, 49, 2005; Larry Diamond, *Developing democracy*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.
 - 8 For further details on this, see the Ghana APRM Report, January 2005, 12–16.
 - 9 IRIN, Ghana: Women in power – Trickle down, 2008, <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=83148>
 - 10 Economic Intelligence Unit, *Ghana Country Report*, 2008.
 - 11 René Lemarchand, Ghana’s electoral commission provides regional model, *African Voices*, 7 (1), (Winter/Spring 1998).
 - 12 Ibid.
 - 13 According the Electoral Act, the chairman and the two deputy chairmen have permanent tenure of office and enjoy the same conditions of service as justices of the Supreme Court, they cannot be removed by the president.
 - 14 Lord Aikins Adusei, Electoral Commission and Dr. Afari Gyan deserve a Nobel Peace Prize, at <http://www.modernghana.com/news/220114/1/electoral-commission-and-dr-afari-gyan-deserve-nob.html>, 4 June 2009.
 - 15 The ECG has an updated webpage with recent initiatives to improve its performance. These include: development of a code of ethics for political parties that seeks to regulate inter-party relationships and the behaviour of the parties during political contests, the formation of a Media Watch Committee by the Electoral Commission to monitor the reporting of all issues that touch on elections and the Commission in the local media so as to ensure the accuracy of information on the electoral process being made available to the public by the media. The objective of this measure is to maintain the integrity of the Commission and to strengthen its relationships with its public Special Training for Media Practitioners. This is meant to update media practitioners on the details of the processes adopted by the Commission in its efforts to ensure that reports on them are accurate. There is a constant review of the training and remuneration of poll workers to enhance their competence and ensure their commitment to duty. (See <http://www.ec.gov.gh>)
 - 16 See *1992 Constitution of Ghana*, articles 21, 29 43, 55 and 70.
 - 17 See, for example, the EU Election Observation Mission, *Ghana Presidential and Parliamentary Elections 2008 Report*, February 2009 .
 - 18 Kwesi Yirekyi Boateng, Ghana: 2008 Election is not a do or die affair, *Public Agenda*, August 2008.
 - 19 Roger Gockings, *The history of Ghana*, Westport CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2005, 103
 - 20 Kalie Sillah and Takwa Z Suifon, December 2008 Elections in Ghana: Stakes, challenges and perspectives, *Wanep Policy Brief*, November 2008.
 - 21 Terrence Lyons, Ghana: A major step forward, *Journal of Democracy*, 8 (2) (April 1997) 65–77
 - 22 Terrence Lyons, Ghana: A major step forward, 67.
 - 23 See Staffen Lindberg, I Morrison and K C Minion, Are African voters really ethnic or clientelistic, *Political Science Quarterly*, 123 (Spring 2008), 95–122; Kevin S Fridy, The elephant, umbrella, and quarrelling cocks: Disaggregating partisanship in Ghana’s Fourth Republic, *African Affairs*, 106 (423), (April 2007), 281–306.
 - 24 Fridy, The elephant, umbrella, and quarrelling cocks, 302.
 - 25 According to media reports, many chiefs in the Akan areas worked actively to ensure that voters in the Zongos (Ashanti Region), perceived to be National Democratic Congress (NDC) strongholds, were prevented from casting their votes for the NDC. They openly threatened to evict Zongo residents from the areas where they lived, if they voted for the NDC. These manifestations of ethnicity in national politics were seen as dangerous for Ghana’s democratic future. The 2000 population census showed that the Akan constituted 69.1% of the population, the Mole-Dagbani, 16.5%, Ewe, 12.7% and Ga-Adangbe, 8.0%. If ethnicity is allowed to take hold of Ghanaian politics, large numbers of citizens will be excluded. See Mustapha Abdul Hamid, Ethnicity and religion in Ghana’s politics, *Modern Ghana News*, December 2007.

- 26 Ibid.
- 27 It is interesting to see a balance in term of political influence of the two major parties after four general elections. It is likely that the balance remains the same even if one of the parties wins the presidential vote.
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- 29 Jasper Ayelazuno, The 2008 Ghanaian Elections: The narrow escape, *Nordic Africa Institute Newsletter* 2009
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- 31 Kayode Fayemi, Ghana: Election commentary, *AfricaFocus Bulletin*, 2005, available at <http://www.africa.upenn.edu/afrfocus/afrfocus121904b.html>
- 32 Ibid
- 33 Tessy Bakary, Political polarization over governance in Côte d'Ivoire, in I William Zartman (ed) *Governance as conflict management: Politics and violence in West Africa*, Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1997; see also Jasper Ayelazuno, Democracy and conflict management in Africa: Is Ghana a model or a paradox? *African Journal of International Affairs*, 10 (1&2) (2007), 13–36.