

Full Length Research Paper

The most difficult decision yet: Ghana's 2008 presidential elections

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Ghana's presidential election was held from 7 December 2008 through to 2 January 2009. The paper highlights the difficulty of choice between two good candidates which polarised the nation into two nearly equal halves. This paper also discusses the significance of the election to Africa and the rest of the international community. The article makes the point that the incumbent NPP administration would have won the presidency if their supporters had made sure to vote sufficiently enough in the first round. The article adds that the mixed quality of opinion polls had an influence on the electoral process. The article further emphasizes the utter independence and efficiency of the Electoral Commission. The impossible challenge for the new administration to live up to real and imagined expectations also has potential to cost them the next election. The article finally sets the scene for the next presidential election in 2012, and concludes with a note on the role of the international community, particularly the African Union, in future democratic governance in Africa.

Key words: Ghana, elections, opinion polls, African union, international observers, electoral commission, democratic governance.

INTRODUCTION

This paper results from an observation of the electoral process in the period leading to Ghana's 2008 presidential election as well as the election itself, supported by a background of previous analyses on the two preceding Ghanaian presidential elections of 2000 and 2004 (Amoah, 2003; Amoah, 2007a). The methodology is therefore a combination of a review of the directly related literature, an observation of the electoral process including the various players and media reporting, and an examination of the statistics made available by the Ghanaian Electoral Commission (EC).

It has been previously debated as to why residents of the Accra-Tema metropolitan area in Ghana had a very difficult choice to make between Professor John Evans Atta Mills and President John Agyekum Kufuor during the 2004 presidential election (Amoah, 2007a). That scenario pales in significance to the extremely difficult choice that faced the nation prior to the 2008 presidential election between the same Mills and Nana Addo Danquah Akufo Addo. President Kufuor had now completed his two terms of office, and handed over the candidacy of the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) to Akufo Addo. Being the incumbent, the NPP administration were keen to retain

themselves in government, to continue to enjoy their successes of political stability, significant and regular growth in Gross Domestic Product, and increased foreign investment, particularly as oil prospecting was in earnest and the country would be drilling in commercial quantities from 2010.

For Mills, this was his third time running on the ticket of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) which had been in opposition since they lost to the NPP in 2000, after being the elected government from 1992 to 2000 under Jerry Rawlings. The stakes were that high for both sides, and surely the loser would have to be very upset. On the sidelines, what mattered most was the existence of two marginal parties in the fray which were so called Nkrumah factions: the Convention People's Party (CPP)-Kwame Nkrumah's old party - whose candidate was Dr Paa Kwesi Nduom; and the People's National Convention (PNC) whose candidate was Dr Edward Mahama. However, as these two minor parties did not matter much in the grand scheme of the politics, the election was essentially a two-horse race.

The electorate also had their own set of issues about the difficult choice presented by the above context, and

even though change was a popular theme on the campaign trail, the intensity of the difficult choice between two exceptionally good candidates from the major and opposite parties effectively polarised the country into two nearly equal halves along the lines of the two dominant parties in the fray, as was also reflected in the electoral results. In 2004, the incumbent was given a further mandate to grant additional time to prove themselves, but that excuse had now expired in 2008.

To be fair to the NPP administration, no government since the era of Nkrumah had brought so much hope and development to Ghana. The NPP administration had ticked all the right boxes and had gained a shining international image, yet these remarkable achievements appeared not to have sufficiently translated into better living standards at the street level for ordinary people in Ghana, most of whom were constantly out of pocket, with no sign of abating for their situation.

International significance of the election

On the African continent itself, the elections held in Kenya and Zimbabwe during 2008 had gone terribly wrong, culminating in frail or unworkable power sharing agreements respectively. Furthermore, there were at least eight countries - Cameroon, Gabon, Algeria, Guinea, Chad, Burkina Faso, Tunisia and Uganda (The World Today 2009) where the ruling governments had done away with the constitutional limits to the presidential terms of office. Indeed the situation in Guinea erupted into a military coup d'etat on 23 December 2008, a few hours after the president-for-life Lansana Conte had died and in between the first and second round of the Ghanaian elections.

On the other hand, governance in Ghana had metamorphosed from the military leadership of Jerry John Rawlings during the 1980s into an elected democracy where Rawlings became president in 1992 and handed over in 2000 after completing the maximum two four-year terms of office. From 2000 to 2008, Kufuor had also completed his maximum terms and was ready to hand over. In this regard, Ghana's record was commendable and the African continent was anxious that this was maintained. Against the backdrop of the trauma of the Kenyan and Zimbabwean elections, there was widespread anxiety that these should not to be repeated (Tayo 2008).

The rest of the international community strongly shared these anxieties, and it is significant that this concern translated into a record number of international observers who undertook to monitor Ghana's elections, some of whom had been stationed in the country long before the elections were due. The African Union Electoral Observer Mission had an unspecified number of observers on the ground, the Commonwealth Observer Mission had deployed seven people; the Pan African Parliament sent 21, the Carter Centre had a 58-member team, the European Union's mission team were eventually up to 70 people

people, and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) sent in 200 observers; the world had its eyes on Ghana. Locally, the non-partisan Coalition of Domestic Observers (CODEO) had a 4,000 strong observer team. Against the above national and international contexts, this election scheduled for 7 December 2008 commanded extremely high stakes both home and abroad.

Why the incumbency lost the presidency

A wide variety of sophisticated arguments and analyses would be debated around the world as to why the incumbent NPP administration lost the election, some of which would include extraneous economic and political factors. I have opted to stick to those factors that relate directly to the elections and the campaigns. An important point to make in this article, is that the NPP's own supporters failed to vote on election day 7 December 2008. Further calculations from Tables 1a, 1b and 1c below which are published results of the ballot held on this day show that the incumbent Nana Akufo-Addo was short of the 50% target by just 0.87%, and that all he needed to win the presidency outright was 73,478 extra votes; this figure has been calculated from working out 50% of the valid votes cast on 7 December 2008 and subtracting what Akufo-Addo actually got on this day.

However, up to 640,401 registered voters in the Ashanti Region failed to vote on the day, and up to 446,274 registered voters in Eastern Region also failed to vote on this day; these figures have been calculated from the number of registered voters in the two regions of Ashanti and Eastern, and the total valid votes cast in these two regions on 7 December 2008. Ashanti and Eastern regions are the NPP strongholds, therefore if such large numbers failed to vote, it is easy to see why the 73,478 shortage cost the NPP the presidency on 7 December 2008. One practical lesson from the Barack Obama campaign in the United States is that they marshalled their supporters to vote whether before or on election day itself, even though they knew Obama was well ahead in the polls; they took nothing for granted. Obviously, it is not expected for the voter turn out in the Ashanti and Eastern regions (or any other region) to be one hundred percent; the total national turn out for the first round was 69.52%; and 2.4% of total votes were rejected across the country. Furthermore, the vote's ratio of Akufo Addo to Mills was 73.5: 26.5 in the Ashanti Region, and 58: 42 in the Eastern Region. Applying the ratios to the numbers who failed to vote in Ashanti and Eastern during the first round does yield 470,695 and 258,839 respectively; applying the national rate of voter turn out to the subsequent figures does yield 327,227 and 150,127 respectively; and applying the national rate of rejected votes to the subsequent figures does yield 319,374 and 146,524 respectively.

Therefore taking all the above relevant factors into

Table 1a. First Round Presidential Ballot based on 229 constituencies

Regions	Akufo-Addo	Mahama	Atta-Mills	Antwi	Ward Brew	Nduom	Adjei	Amofa-Yeboah
Western	376,270	3,206	372,400	2,958	1,041	33,251	845	1,297
Central	313,665	2,693	345,126	2,677	954	15,449	473	1,334
Greater Accra	768,465	6,262	870,011	2,600	683	20,697	239	561
Volta	99,584	3,271	551,046	3,399	687	4,817	331	1,753
Eastern	491,520	2,948	353,522	1,739	660	8,101	364	1,274
Ashanti	1,214,350	5,464	438,234	3,191	744	11,937	848	2,517
Brong Ahafo	392,588	4,038	370,404	2,435	918	3,988	403	1,696
Northern	303,406	16,638	450,564	4,589	1,536	10,844	2,029	3,136
Upper east	118,454	20,349	188,405	2,100	744	2,800	650	2,558
Upper west	81,137	8,625	116,922	2,201	686	1,610	707	3,216
TOTAL	4,159,439	73,494	4,056,634	27,889	8,653	113,494	6,889	19,342

Table 1b. Percentage voters for candidate

Candidate	Votes	Percentage
Akuffo Addo	4,159,439	49.13
Mahama	73,494	0.87
Atta-Mills	4,056,634	47.92
Antwi	27,889	0.33
Ward Brew	8,653	0.1
Nduom	113,494	1.34
Adjei	6,889	0.08
Yeboah	19,342	0.23
Total votes cast	8,671,272	100
Total votes rejected	205,438	2.40

Table 1c. Total vote population

Nationwide voter population	12,472,758	100%
National voter turn out	8,671,272	69.52%

Source: Electoral Commission of Ghana; <http://www.ec.gov.gh/>

account, it remains abundantly clear in all probability, that some 319,374 from Ashanti and 146,524 from Eastern failed to vote for unexplained reasons outside of the factors already discussed above, and sheds light that just a little more effort from the NPP side could have fetched them the 73,478 needed to win in the first round.

A variety of reasons can be invoked to explain the above. My suggestion is that there were those among the NPP support base who preferred John Alan Kyerematen to have been the candidate, and could not bring themselves to vote

even though they were staunch NPP supporters. It will be recalled that Kyerematen was the anointed choice of President Kufuor, but failed to win the nomination at the December 2007 party congress where Akufo Addo got 47.9% of the vote, and Kyerematen 32.5%. Kyerematen would soon be drafted into Akufo Addo's team and begin the campaign stumps together, but the rift never healed between the two men and their respective camps within the party, as was manifested several months down the line when Kyerematen resigned from the party in April 2008, and rejoined just as dramatically within the same month, after heavy arm twisting by Kufuor on the basis that Kyerematen's concerns could not be addressed outside of party membership. A patching up was attempted and negotiated to some degree, but this meant that the party proceeded into the election with a nemesis within its own ranks.

Another issue that dogged the incumbent NPP was the late timing of their nominee for the Vice Presidential ticket. While the clock ticked and the NPP's Kyerematen went backwards and forwards in April 2008 about the commitment to his party's campaign, the Opposition NDC went ahead to nominate their Vice Presidential candidate within the same month that Kyerematen was indecisive, and consequently gathered a momentum which the NPP could never claw back. John Mahama was a very deft choice made by the NDC which made it even more difficult and time consuming for the incumbency to match. When the NPP managed to finally choose their running mate to the presidency a good four months later, not even the power of incumbency could generate the much needed boost. The choosing of Bawumia yielded some votes in Northern Ghana, but did not generate the lift and momentum which

Table 2a. Results of the Presidential Run-off based on all 230 constituencies.

Region	Akufo-Addo	Mills	Valid	Rejects	Total cast	Reg. voters	Turnout %	Reject %
Western	384,028	414,144	798,172	9,038	807,210	1,214,128	66.48	1.12
Central	325,454	378,975	704,429	10,359	714,788	1,020,761	70.03	1.45
Greater Accra	798,556	953,086	1,751,642	9,166	1,760,808	2,514,739	70.02	0.52
Volta	102,173	630,899	733,072	6,924	739,996	1,012,122	73.11	0.94
Eastern	536,366	396,277	932,643	10,380	943,023	1,306,852	72.16	1.10
Ashanti	1,438,820	479,749	1,918,569	12,259	1,930,828	2,317,686	83.31	0.63
Brong Ahafo	384,237	408,029	792,266	9,047	801,313	1,164,155	68.83	1.13
Northern	311,774	500,953	812,727	14,161	826,888	1,097,597	75.34	1.71
Upper east	117,477	223,994	341,471	6,915	348,386	495,884	70.26	1.98
Upper west	81,561	134,926	216,487	4,637	221,124	328,834	67.24	2.10
TOTAL	4,480,446	4,521,032	9,001,478	92,886	9,094,364	12,472,758	72.9	1.0

Table 2b. Final Presidential Result

Candidate	Votes obtained	Percentage
Nana A. D. Akufo Addo	4,480,446	49.77
Prof John E. Atta-Mills	4,521,032	50.23

the incumbency had bargained for nationally.

The politics of opinion polls

Having dealt with the above points, it is necessary to analyse a few other factors which took their toll on the electoral process. One significant factor was to what extent the opinion polls circulating could be attributed as credible. There were all sorts of polling figures being bandied about by the media circus, some of which were downright hoaxes, to the extent that these polls played their own politics on the minds of the electorate. Each sychophant source sang to the tune of their favourite candidate. For example, in August 2008, the Danquah Institute, a think tank partisan to the incumbent, circulated in the media that the incumbent Akufo-Addo polled 52% while Mills had only 25%, in a poll that excluded the three northern regions. A subsequent poll by the same organisation circulated in November 2008 put Akufo-Addo ahead as 56% nationally, and 33% for Mills, however this same exercise circulated a 57% win for Akufo-Addo during a second round scenario without a predicted percentage for Mills. Subsequently, a series of polling statistics began circulating which put Mills ahead by various proportions, in what came to be seen as sources partisan to the

Opposition camp but whose addresses or real existence could not be traced. Among the credible polls however, the National Commission on Civic Education (NCCE) announced a close call (44.6% for the Opposition NDC and 44.3% for the incumbent NPP) in August 2008. This was followed by a poll from Research International in November 2008 that Akufo-Addo would win 48%, Mills 38%, Nkrumahist Nduom 8% and Nkrumahist Mahama 2%. Subsequently the Editor of the Daily Despatch, Ben Ephson, predicted that non of the competing parties would win the 50% required to avoid a second round. In sum, a close call heading for a second round became the realistic analysis of the electoral season. CODEO claim that they conducted a poll just before the second round on 28 December 2008, but would not make public which candidate won the tight race, perhaps judging from the utmost sensitivity of that moment.

The politics of border closures

Next was the mysterious decision taken by the incumbent government to close Ghana's eastern international border with the Republic of Togo from midnight Friday 5 December 2008. This decision, without sufficient notice of intention, potentially affected the movements of masses of Ghanaian citizens who could easily make the short journey from Togo to cast their votes in the neighbouring Volta Region of Ghana, a region also known as the Opposition NDC's stronghold. Many Ghanaians were left stranded at the border on Saturday morning 6 December 2008 when they came to realise that the border was closed. Excuses for the closure ranged from relieving border personnel to help out with electoral duties elsewhere on 7 December 2008, to security concerns at the border itself. The excus-

es which did not add up, attracted a lot of cynicism, and unleashed a series of actions with political implications which eventually backfired against the ruling government: the Volta Regional House of Chiefs made two appeals to the President; and the Catholic Bishop of Ho (the Volta Region's capital) complained that border closure against Ewes weakened national unity, thereby suggesting that if borders should be closed, then all of Ghana's borders should be closed. Subsequently, the government had no further excuse but to adopt the knee jerk resolution to close all of Ghana's borders: in the east with Togo; in the west with La Cote d'Ivoire; and in the north with Burkina Faso, to the utter disgust of the ECOWAS Secretariat which lodged an official complaint that Ghana's decision was against ECOWAS protocols that allowed for free movement of goods and people.

The Government of Ghana replied that this protocol did not allow ECOWAS nationals to vote in Ghana as was Ghana's main concern, to which ECOWAS responded that the border closure nevertheless generated unnecessary tensions for an election. Once more a local matter had generated some international significance. All of this background became an unwanted distraction to the ruling NPP's electoral campaign at this crucial moment when the incumbency preferred to have some space in order to oversee and concentrate on a serious election. The furor generated from the politics of border closures include abuses and assaults against NPP polling agents and functionaries, the most notable being the kerfuffle which resulted in the severe beating of Sammy Ohene (brother of Elizabeth Ohene - a prominent NPP functionary) at a Dededo polling station in the Ho West Constituency during 28 December's second round voting.

The politics of alliances

It is generally the case in Ghanaian politics, that if an election proceeded to a second round, the incumbent suffers because the Opposition ganged up against it. For example, in 2000, Mills lost the second round of the presidential election because the opposition parties collaborated against the NDC which was the incumbent at the time, and placed their support firmly behind the NPP, thereby handing the victory to Kufuor (Amoah, 2003).

The effects of this syndrome increased the NPP's psychological battle at this stage. As Akufo-Addo won 49.13% and Mills won 47.92, only 2.5% of votes remained outside their grip. But for an election this close, and with only 1.2% of votes between the two, every endorsement for the second round, however sinister, mattered psychologically, and every drop of vote contributed to the ocean of eventual ballots. The variety of mini political and pressure groups chose sides as they wished. The incumbent NPP however would neither rely on, nor be deceived, by any support or the lack of it from any of the minor opposition groups, because the NPP knows about the syndrome from which they benefited in 2000. Rather, it is

the insidious nature of some of the alliances which obfuscated the scenario. Whereas both Nduom and Mahama declared their neutrality, their supporters were left to their own devices. Indeed three key PNC functionaries and Members of Parliament who openly declared their support for the NPP during the run-off on 28 December 2008, have since January 2009 made a u-turn to join the new NDC government.

The integrity of the electoral commission

In all of this, it is the utmost independence and integrity of the Electoral Commission (EC) that saved the day, and particularly the boldness of the EC's Chair Dr Kwadwo Afari-Gyan to announce an election result of which an incumbent government was short of target by just 0.87%. Judging from the experiences in Nigeria, Kenya and Zimbabwe, the EC might have just pushed the government through with a clever fiddling of figures, but this was not to be in Ghana. Indeed the EC was buoyed by the austere nature of their own procedures at all levels from the polling station right up to the strong room at the headquarters in Accra where the grand total of votes is collated.

The procedures were such that no figures would pass from one stage to the other without agreement and authorisation from all party agents and EC personnel. Hence the EC was absolutely sure that statistics reaching him were *kosher*, and his chain of command was not open to government intervention. It became a matter of course for the Electoral Commissioner to announce what the due process had collated. Once this bridge had been crossed, and results of the indecisive first round had been announced, the invincibility of the EC as an institution became obvious, and also became a major confidence boost for the Opposition camp and the observer teams. Such was the confidence held in the EC that at crucial moments during the collation of the second round ballot held on 28 December 2008, all stakeholders reverted to the mantra that the EC's decisions should be respected. Hence the EC as an institution became a significant anchor point for the integrity of the Ghanaian democratic process.

Furthermore, although it is not in the legal statutes, or the constitution, for the EC to announce results within 72 h, this became a self-imposed good practice guide. A final election was organised on 2 January 2009 for Tain constituency where the EC's local offices had suffered an arson attack after the first round ballot, and where the second round ballot scheduled for 28 December 2008 also failed to take place because of the late arrival of election materials. As the saying goes 'Tain will tell', but the writing was already on the wall that the NPP was out of government. The final result has it that Mills polled 50.23% nationally, and Akufo-Addo 49.77%. The chorus from all the international observer teams and CODEO is that the Ghanaian elections were free and fair. It is

worthy of note that Dr Afari-Gyan has been Electoral Commissioner since the multi-party elections from the 1990s, and there is no obvious reason why he should quit the job at which he has excelled over the years. However, if Ghana wishes to effect a change, it is advisable for this to occur sooner rather than later, in order to afford a reasonably long period for Afari-Gyan's replacement to have sufficient time to prepare well in advance of the 2012 elections. At the same time it would make sense for any potential changes in the EC's top leadership to occur after the outstanding electoral allegations from the two main political parties have been fully resolved in court. This suggests that it is in the nation's interest for resolution to be reached as quickly as possible, to contrast with disputes over the 2004 elections which were finally resolved by the Supreme Court as late as July 2008. The 2012 elections could be more keener contested, and the last thing the country needs is an ill-prepared EC.

The balance of demand and supply

Arguably, it is not so much an incompetence of the NPP administration that cost it the 2008 election. Some policies initiated or implemented would take many months, if not years, to impact. More importantly, there is a phenomenon currently playing itself out in Ghana, which politicians have not fully grasped or woken up to, and even if they had, could not do much about, for some time to come. The phenomenon is itself a product of the success of the Ghanaian democracy so far, and a feature of what pertains when citizens experience peace, security and freedom of speech over a considerable period within a polity, and now have the luxury to crave for other things such as improved living standards and political accountability, the lack of which any administration would be punished to exit through the ballot box. The current Ghanaian electorate is extremely hungry for development in their lives, and this demand far outstrips the ability of any administration, including of course the existing institutions and the current state of harnessed resources, taxation and wealth distribution, to supply or deliver development to the doorstep of the ordinary citizen. Kufuor and his NPP administration received their wake-up call the hard way, at the final hour, after seeing the harsh reality of the electoral outcome. Kufuor's farewell speech on Monday 5 January 2009 to the Fourth Parliament of the Fourth Republic epitomised this reality when he stated: 'in the current information age, incumbency was proving to be extremely challenging in a vibrant democracy. it demands being on the alert 24 h a day, seven days a week. Every action of government is put under constant scrutiny for questioning while a spin is put on almost every policy decision. This attitude tends to ignore the need for gestation periods for programmes, and thereby promotes a negative culture of instant gratification and unrealistic expectations, which is often exploited for undue political gain'. Hence the potential exists, that the sheer satisfac-

tion of the masses, can cost another administration an election before they develop a grip on the phenomenon. Realistically, the relative gap between the demand and supply of development would only begin to minimise, from when another administration has assiduously increased system efficiencies, sufficiently decreased the misuse and abuse of resources, and achieved development planning to the minutest degree, plus when oil revenues begin to contribute tangibly to the Exchequer from around 2011, or a few months just before the 2012 electoral season. A realistic estimation of the Ghanaian economy in the context of the current global economic downturn, suggests therefore, that it would be improbable for the Mills administration that has just assumed power in 2009 to have balanced the equation of supply to demand, nearly enough by the time of the 2012 elections. This means that they could be voted out for the same reasons that the NPP has been voted out. The season of allowing administrations two full terms to prove themselves ceased at 2008, and in the current political milieu, there is no honeymoon period for any government. The Mills administration would be expected to perform and deliver from day one in office, and the clock already started ticking from the inauguration on 7 January 2009. Whereas it is relatively easy to get a grip on macro-economic policy and balance the budget, some micro-economic initiatives that should make for a comprehensive system of tax accountability among the electorate, and subsequently, thorough fiscal planning and economic forecasting, are harder to implement. A good proportion of Ghanaian citizens are only engaged in the informal sector of the economy which involves small businesses, some services, street vending and farm activity that are missed out of the tax system and key aspects of national planning, including accurate projections. Yet these ordinary Ghanaians struggling within the informal economy, and who contribute relatively less towards tax revenues, form the bulk of the electorate that would respond to the key question as to whether they have benefited from the overall Exchequer, or in ordinary language whether the Mills administration has brought tangible change to their lives, a scenario which President Mills the tax expert knows too well. As already hinted, this question would form a key battle ground at the 2012 election. Perhaps this is a fortuitous season to attempt a comprehensive reform of the tax system to include a strategic widening of the tax net and the national tax database. Even if the fledgling informal sectors might not be discouraged with a tax burden that would disincentivise entrepreneurship, the data accrued from this exercise would contribute to more accurate forecasting, policy planning and delivery; there is nothing to lose.

The important thing about the above challenges for Ghana's democracy is that successive governments (from 2009) would feel tasked to concentrate on pursuing development from where the previous one left off, rather than waste time trying to instil their brand, of which the

electorate are not necessarily impressed. In addition to delivering development to the doorstep of ordinary Ghanaians - which became Mills' chief campaign mantra, the Mills administration of 2009-2012 has the exclusive task of sorting out Ghana's petroleum industry, negotiating and signing off contracts which would be in the national interest; planning and executing a development agenda which would lay the foundations for an industrial and manufacturing Ghana; and leading Ghana firmly into middle income status. The administration would also be expected to build and strengthen party, civic, and civil society institutions, and see to the development of a strong and inclusive national identity, as well as be seen to command a respectable lead on African foreign policy. Come the 2012 election, they would be judged by whether development has been delivered to the doorstep of ordinary people; whether the ordinary citizen sees a marked difference in their living standards since 2008; whether the electorate sees that the government have sufficiently negotiated the national interest in all oil contracts; whether there are signs of foundations laid for the future of an Industrial and manufacturing Ghana, and furthermore whether Ghana could surely be counted among countries marching into middle income status. In other words, this is not a period for messing around, as the Mills administration could be judged more harshly than the Kufuor administration. Ordinary Ghanaians now appear to have a heightened awareness of a potent weapon they possess - the power to vote, and are on the look out for the earliest opportunity to apply this tool. It is worth noting at this stage, that despite the enormous premium placed on the country's newly found oil reserves, and which raised the stakes for the 2008 elections (Tayo, 2008), it is now firmly established that oil will not perform the economic magic for Ghana, as reliable data (Gary 2009) shows that Ghana's estimated reserves are at best just 3.6% of Nigeria's; Ghana's reserves are currently estimated at 1,300,000,000 barrels, and Nigeria's at 36,220,000,000 barrels. This emphasizes the point about the exaggerated excitement over the prospects of oil versus the realistic potential. Hence, expectations have to be carefully managed.

Pointers for 2012

The most obvious about the next election is to expect voting patterns in the Ashanti and Volta regions to reinforce themselves - Ashanti for NPP and Volta for NDC. However, there are some interesting and tricky scenarios ahead to negotiate, not least aspects of age and gender. The current Ghanaian electorate appear to have a relatively less appetite for older people at the helm of politics, particularly if they have been in frontline politics for a considerable length of time. Among other reasons, some older statesmen have proved to have too many political scores to settle, and appeared to be too oriented towards certain identity groups; for example, part of the under-

current of criticism against Kufuor is that he existed for the benefit of the Ashanti throne. The electorate would therefore prefer new blood if possible. Kufuor was 70 years old when he completed his term in 2008, and had been the torchbearer of the NPP since April 1996. Both Mills and Akufo Addo are currently 65 years of age. But compared to Akufo Addo, Mills has been leader of his party over a much longer period, having served previously as Vice President from 1997 to 2001, and carried on as Opposition Leader from then until 2009. Unless the electorate would view Mills as a safe and capable pair of hands for any reason including if his administration has sufficiently delivered on the expectations outlined in the previous paragraphs, he would have to discern whether to stand for a second term, and that decision would have to be made, practically by 2011 or as soon as possible thereafter, as it has implications for whether and how the NDC grooms or scouts for their 2012 electoral nominee. Whoever the eventual nominee might be (for any party) the electorate would respond by weighing a careful balance between age and experience.

Should Mills step down, the race for the presidential nomination opens up for any pretender currently home or abroad, including the current Vice President John Mahama, and Dr Ekow Spio-Garbrah who in 2007 contested the nomination but lost to Mills; both are in their fifties. The issue would almost certainly flare up as to whether the Vice President should gain the NDC nomination. Mahama is a Northerner, but might not be a strong match for a potential Opposition candidate such as Akufo-Addo who is already a political heavyweight with significant frontline experience. The NDC would have to grapple with this issue, and careful handling will be necessary to maintain their support in the three northern regions as has been in previous elections.

Judging from the record number of female Members of Parliament from 2009, plus the increased number of female Ministers in the 2009-2012 Mills administration, the political climate would be ripe for a potential female Vice President. In this regard, Betty Mould Iddrissu, the current Minister of Justice and Attorney-General, who in 2008 contested for the nomination and lost to the current Vice President, would be a front-runner. She is also likely to throw her hat in the ring for the presidential nomination, but would certainly encounter male chauvinism as the country does not seem ready for a female president, even if that move should gain her some more political capital which defaults her into a front-runner position for the vice presidential race. As a result of an innocuous campaign promise to allocate up to 40% of key appointments to women, the Mills administration is packed with other notable appointees including Elizabeth Mills-Robertson as Inspector-General of Police, Joyce Bamford-Addo as Speaker of Parliament, Zita Okai-Kwei as Minister for Information, Juliana Azumah-Mensah as Minister for Tourism, Sherry Ayithey as Minister for Environment, Science and Technology, Hajia Rafat Alhassan as Minister

at the Presidency, and Akua Dansua for the obvious gender portfolio of Minister for Women and Children's Affairs. Come 2012, one can expect any female to throw their hat into the Veep ring, and herald the beginnings of a tradition to allocate the Veep slot (hitherto reserved for Northerners) to females. Gender is generating political capital of its own, and President Mills is justifiably feeding the appetite for more female leadership by his endorsement of gender equality, and outright condemnation of all forms of gender discrimination.

In the NPP camp, Akufo-Addo has a more youthful demeanour even though he is of the same age as Mills. Also, he became the NPP front-runner from December 2007 when he won the presidential nomination for the 2008 election. If the party prefers to avoid the risk of experimenting with another new leader between now and 2011, then it is almost certain that he will win the NPP's nomination for 2012. Kyerematen is expected to contest the nomination again, plus other dark horses including Isaac Osei, the former High Commissioner to the United Kingdom and currently Member of Parliament for Subin Sub-Metro constituency in the Ashanti Region. It is however envisaged that there will be fewer than seventeen – the number of contestants who stood for election at the 2007 NPP congress.

The media, had played a significant supporting role, and generally refrained from announcing any result that did not originate from, or was not certified by the EC, apart from Joy FM which could not restrain their enthusiasm during the final stages and called the election before the EC's decisive announcement. The cyberspace media, particularly Ghanaweb and Myjoyonline consistently fed the public with certified data, and hosted a wide variety of freelance opinion on their websites. The local print media published comparatively less analysis for public consumption, even if, for their trade, they knew much more than was in the public domain. Some influential media houses openly supported the incumbency, and were therefore not minded to venture out any detailed analysis that could serve as ammunition for the Opposition. The poll circulated by the Daily Despatch was helpful, and it would be encouraging to see more media houses commission their own credible polls with which to feed the electorate, so that no political party can misinform the public. The 2012 elections will be highly sophisticated and issues would be top on the agenda, for which reason a lot more analysis from an impartial media will be much needed.

The international community and the future of democratic governance in Africa

Surely the African Union (AU) is very relieved that the Ghanaian elections concluded successfully. At the very least, this reduces the amount of bad press about the continent in relation to electoral conduct. In the thick of the Ghanaian electoral process, Guinea was suspended

from the AU, and the new military junta given six months to conduct multiparty elections and return to civilian rule. It is alright for the AU to be seen to being tough on undemocratic behaviour. But it has to be pointed out that the late former president of Guinea effectively got rid of the limits to his presidential term of office as far back as November 2001, and the AU failed to rectify the situation. There are many other live examples for the AU to prove that it really cares about ensuring democratic governance. However, the AU has so far been unable to ensure the restoration of the limits to presidential terms of office in the seven other countries already listed in this article. Undoubtedly, the AU will need to do more to address these issues if the organization aims to accumulate sufficient moral credibility to tackle military overtures. It is interesting to note that with the exception of Uganda which is a member of the Commonwealth of Nations, the others listed are of La Francophonie. Unlike the former that suspended Nigeria, Zimbabwe and Pakistan, La Francophonie has not demonstrated a tradition of disciplining its member states for significant deviations from democratic practice. So unless the African Union acts decisively, the continent's democratic deficit could deteriorate, and more coups could emerge in addition to Mauritania and Guinea. If the AU is unable to reign in the leadership of these countries when they are already signed up to the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), perhaps this is the sign that the road map towards the Union Government of Africa should be taken seriously, and be completed sooner rather than later, for a stronger political framework that binds member states to accountable democratic relationships.

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