

Ghana Continues to be a Beacon for Democracy in Africa

Joseph Atsu Ayee provides a comprehensive overview of the 2016 elections in Ghana.

This article is part of our **African Elections** series.

Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, the 72-year-old flagbearer of the opposition party, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) was declared the winner of Ghana's 2016 presidential elections by the Electoral Commission (EC) more than 48 hours after the elections took place. He defeated the incumbent, John Dramani Mahama of the National Democratic Party (NDC) by taking 53.85 per cent of the vote while Mahama had a 44.40 per cent share of the valid votes. These figures exclude the results of four constituencies, Afram Plains North, Upper West Akyem, Tuna-Sawla-Kalba and Tamale Central, which were still being collated. The results of these four constituencies, totaling about 120,000 votes were considered insignificant in changing the overall outcome of the elections. The total turnout was 68.62 per cent even though the EC expected 80 per cent. The total number of rejected ballots was 1.4 per cent, which while lower than the 2.23 per cent recorded in 2012, is still of concern and emphasises the point of deepening voter education.



It's three times successful for Nana Akufo Addo as he is elected President of Ghana
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In addition to winning the presidential elections, the NPP also won almost two-thirds of the 275 seats in parliament in six of the ten regions of Ghana, namely, the Ashanti and Eastern regions (strongholds of the party) and the four swing regions of Brong Ahafo, Central, Greater Accra and Western. Mahama, however, won in the Volta (considered the “World Bank” of the NDC), Northern, Upper East and Upper West regions with reduced votes while the votes for the NPP increased compared to the results in the 2012 elections which were won by Mahama. By this defeat, Mahama becomes the first sitting president to lose an election in the Fourth Republic which began in 1993 and, at the same time, the first to have served for only one term in office. It also confirms the two-term regime cycle of change since 1993.

It is worth noting that the smaller parties, namely, the Progressive People's Party (PPP), People's National Convention (PNC), National Democratic Party (NDP) and Convention People's Party (CPP) and the independent candidate only took a paltry 1.75 per cent of the votes and failed to win a single seat in parliament. Ghana has clearly become a political duopoly, that is, a two-party state as seen in countries like the United States and, possibly, the United Kingdom.

The elections themselves were peaceful and orderly and considered free and fair by the international observers and civil society organisations. The EC was commended for organising credible and successful elections **in spite of the initial hiccups in the special voting exercise** which was conducted for the security agencies and the media for two days prior to election day and the **breakdown of the electronic transmission system** for election results. There were some sporadic incidents at a number of polling stations across the country and in the **case of Jaman North constituency** in the Brong Ahafo region; the elections were postponed to the following day because of some disagreements by the political parties over the voter register for the constituency. In addition, some of the credit should go to the Ghanaian electorate for exhibiting maturity, composure and sincerity for setting the relatively high standards for which the 2016 elections will ultimately be judged.

Before the official results were released, both the NDC and NPP had claimed victory by holding press conferences while supporters stormed the houses of their presidential candidates to declare their continuing support. However, by the evening of Friday 9 December, Mr Mahama called Mr Akufo-Addo to concede defeat before the official declaration of results by the EC even though most of the media, which had done very well in terms of voter education and empirical compilation of results, had earlier called the elections for Akufo-Addo. In his **concession speech**, Mahama said that he respected the will of the people of Ghana and promised to cooperate with the President-elect to ensure a smooth transition. He also stated that the results were not what the party expected and that even though he accepted the results of the elections there were some irregularities, which he did not mention. However, one of such irregularity which the EC itself pointed out is over-voting in some of the constituencies. On the other hand, in his **victory speech**, Akufo-Addo promised to be the president of all Ghanaians without discrimination, malice or ill-will to any ethnic group or political or religious affiliation.

A plethora of factors account for the defeat of Mahama and the NDC. First, the campaign message of the NDC did not resonate well with the majority of electorate. Mahama campaigned on “continuity”, “unprecedented infrastructure achievements” and “changing lives and transforming Ghana”. Akufo-Addo campaigned on “change, job creation hinged on the industrialisation of the economy and the modernization of agriculture” and the “incompetence of Mahama”. The Ghanaian electorate adopts an instrumentalist approach to politics and therefore the NPP’s message of job creation, industrialisation, and modernisation of agriculture was more appealing than that of the NDC. Even the slogan of the NDC, that is, “Forward ever, backwards never” was not as appealing as the NPP’s “Ghana must work again” and “Arise for Change”.

Secondly, the economy is still not strong as one would have expected in spite of some progress being made in both the macro and micro economic indicators. Even though urban poverty has decreased, rural poverty has increased while the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals is mixed. Third, there is still a high incidence and perception of corruption, which the NDC has struggled to deal with without success despite launching the National Anti-Corruption Action Plan (2015-2024).

Fourth, the NDC was seen as more opulent than the other political parties through the abuse of incumbency such as the mounting of expensive advertisements in the media, erection of huge billboards and **vote-buying**. Fifth, there is evidence and a perception of arrogance, rudeness and disrespect on the part of some ministers and officials of the NDC. This naturally led to over-confidence and the creation of an aura of impunity, invincibility and complacency, which made the party disregard pre-election predictions of a loss by some reputable institutions such as the Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU).

Sixth, the NDC did not package itself well in terms of communicating its message and ideas. Rather than concentrating on the issues, the NDC spent a significant part of its time assassinating the character of Akufo-Addo without any evidence leading to a perception of massive propaganda and deception. On the other hand, the NPP communicated well with their crisp messages and slogans such as “one district one factory” and “one village one dam”. Finally, the NDC shot itself in the foot by taking some unpopular decisions. They include **the August 2016 presidential pardon**

granted to three people (popularly known as the Montie Three) – a radio host and two panelists of an Accra FM station who were jailed for four months by the Supreme Court for criminal contempt (scandalising the Supreme Court) and released barely a month after being jailed.

The President-elect will be sworn in on January 7, 2017. It is anticipated that the inter-party transition process will be smooth because of the Presidential Transition Act, Act 845 of 2012, which was amended in November 2016. This will be in contrast to the transitions of 2001 and 2009 which were acrimonious and contentious because there was no legal and institutional framework.

Going forward, the President-elect has a huge task of fulfilling his electoral promises, achieving some of the objectives of the directive principles of state policy enshrined in the 1992 Constitution and holding the country together. In addition, the EC will require support to implement its strategic plan of organising “world class” elections which will thereby build and enhance the needed trust among the key political players. For now, the 2016 elections have yet again proved that Ghana is the bastion of democracy in Africa.

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