

REPORT ON GHANA 2004 ELECTIONS

INTRODUCTION

On December 7th 2004, Ghana went to polls and re-elect President John Agyekum Kufuor and 217 parliamentarians for a second four year term of office, having completed the first term from 2000 to 2004. In all, four political parties contested the elections but the major battle was between the New Patriotic Party (NPP) led by President John Agyekum Kufuor and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) formed by former head of state Jerry John Rawlings and led by John Atta Mills.

The other political parties that contested the presidential slot were the Peoples National Convention (PNC) led by Dr. Edward Mahama and the Convention People's Party (CPP) led by George Aggudey. The PNC came into an electoral alliance with two other parties – the Democratic People's Party (DPP) and the Every Ghanaian Living Everywhere (EGLE). The Reform Party (RP) which is a splinter party from the NDC, did not present any candidate for the presidential slot but contested for one parliamentary seat in the Western Region. Among these parties, the NPP claims to belong to the center-right tradition, while the rest may be loosely classified as belonging to the center-left tradition.

RESULTS OF THE 2004 ELECTIONS

1. Presidential

Political Party	Presidential Candidate	Percentage Votes
New Patriotic Party	John Agyekum Kufuor	52.6
National Democratic Congress	John Atta Mills	44.4
Peoples National Convention	Edward Mahama	1.93
Convention People's Party	George Aggudey	1.0

2. Parliamentary

Political Party	Number of seats won	Percentage
New Patriotic Party	128	55.65
National Democratic Congress	91	39.5
Peoples National Congress	4	1.73
Convention People's Party	3	1.30
Independent	1	0.43
Undeclared seats	3	1.30
Totals	230	100

CONDUCT OF THE ELECTIONS

In general, the 2004 Presidential and Parliamentary elections have been declared free and fair by Ghanaians as well as the international community. The Head of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Election Monitoring Team that monitored the elections had this to say about the December 7th elections: “the elections were peaceful, well organized and the electorate as well as the officials conducted themselves in such a manner that is commendable. The people of Ghana and the electoral commission are to be congratulated on an outstanding performance. What we saw warrants emulation.”

The Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODOE) made similar observations. The coalition, which is made up of religious bodies and NGOs and chaired by the renowned Professor Miranda Greenstreet, reported at a press conference “the entire voting process is a major achievement of which Ghanaians should be proud. The peaceful conduct of the elections once again demonstrate the ability of our established institutions to function properly in a democracy”.

There was an extraordinarily high turn out of voters who conducted themselves in an orderly and civil manner during the voting process. This is not to say that there were no cases of violence. Isolated cases of violence were reported particular in northern Ghana where two people lost their lives through gunshots and there were reported threats to electoral officials. But these were isolated cases that were dealt with effectively by the security agents.

In fact, Ghana has received worldwide acclamation for an exemplary presidential and parliamentary election. The Presidents of the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, South Africa and many others have congratulated President Kufuor and Ghanaians for the successful elections.

An electoral flaw that has to be acknowledged is the fact that the elections recorded an acceptably high rejected votes as result of low knowledge on the casting of votes. As per the results declared by the Electoral Commission, rejected votes alone accounted for 2.14 percent of the total vote cast which exceeds the votes obtained by Dr. Edward Mahama of PNC (1.93 %) and George Aggudey of CPP (1%). This is an indication that in spite of the good work done by the Electoral Commission (EC) and the National Commission on Civic Education (NCCE), there is still more to do to prevent a repeat of this flaw.

THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

1. Preparations for the elections

The year 2004 witnessed vigorous political activities in preparations for the elections. The Electoral Commission carried out a registration of voters to ensure that everybody was eligible for voting. Although there was a serious debate about participation of Ghanaians residing outside Ghana in the elections, the idea could not be carried through because of logistical difficulties. Another debate was the need for public funding of political parties for the campaign towards the elections. The rationale for the argument was to create a level playing field for all eligible political parties to be able to participate in the elections. Although research indicated that Ghanaians generally supported the idea, a conclusion could not be reached on how this could be done. The Government however provided vehicles to all the presidential candidates to support their campaign. 2004 also saw a vigorous educational campaign by the National Commission for Civic Education as well as the Electoral Commission on the ground rules for the elections. The success of the elections has been generally attributed to the good job done by these two institutions before and during the elections.

2. The Election Campaign

The campaign was based on rather ambitious economic programmes set out by all the political parties in their manifestos. While the NPP campaign was hinged on promises to continue the rigorous fiscal/monetary policies that it initiated in its first term, the NDC campaign was based on promises that “a new NDC government will move the economy from dependency on foreign donor charity to self-help, domestic initiative and indigenous entrepreneurship”. But far from these lofty political ideologies, the real campaigns were unfortunately not based on an assessment of the potential of the parties to achieve these objectives. The campaigns in many cases were characterized by conscious efforts to lure the electorates through monies, roofing sheets, bicycles, and the likes. This was particularly visible in the rural areas where poverty and illiteracy is most prevalent. In fact the integrity of many parliamentary contestants came into question as they adopted dubious tactics like trading insults against opponents. However, by and large, the Ghanaian electorate, even those in the rural areas demonstrated political maturity by voting according to their conscience. The vote in the northern sector in particular attests to this where it is believed the NPP candidates spent a lot of money to influence the electorate perceived to be pro- NDC but still lost in most areas.

3. Role of Civil Society

It is generally acknowledged that the success of the 2004 elections may be attributed to the professional manner in which the Electoral Commission carried out its duties before, during and after the elections. However, the role of other institutions cannot be ignored. The Kufuor administration, it must be admitted, did much more to ensure freedom of speech during its first four years in office. This was manifested during the election period when the press played a critical role of keeping contesting candidates on their toes in terms of their conduct during the campaign process. A survey just before the elections showed that all the political parties were given a fair coverage. A case to worry about was

the manner in which some press houses and FM stations conducted themselves. It is believed by many observers that a greater proportion of the stories published or presented in some FM stations were either outright lies or politically biased propaganda. The National Media Commission had cause to rebuke some press houses for unsubstantiated reportage against some politicians. This notwithstanding, the bulk of the media did a good job.

Civil society organizations in general organized itself to monitor the elections. NGOs, and religious bodies came together to form the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODOEO) that sent observers to all the constituencies to monitor the elections. The participation of this coalition together with many other individual NGO initiatives greatly supplemented the work of the observers sent out by the Electoral Commission and political parties themselves.

4. Emerging Post Election Issues

The results of the elections give Ghanaians a cause to be proud of. Ghana is generally recognized as leading the crusade for democracy in Africa. On the other hand, the results also give cause for worry. The results of election 2004, just like in previous elections, have shown that, politically, Ghana is gradually dividing along ethnic lines. The NPP, which is perceived to be a party for the Akans, gave credence to this by the massive votes they got from the akan speaking areas. The NDC on the other hand has been noted as the party for Ewes and it came that it got the bulk of its votes form the Volta region. The PNC, an off-shoot of the CPP is emerging as the northern peoples party and thus got the bulk of its support from the north. This trend if not stopped will do serious damage to the unity of Ghanaians as one people with serious repercussions on justice, peace and development. This calls for serious public education and political engineering. The role of the national Commission on Civic Education and civil society organizations in this endeavor cannot be overemphasized.

The second issue is the emerging trend in the further development of political parties in Ghana. The results show the NPP and the NDC emerging as the main parties in Ghana with little possibility for the emergence of a third party. The results show a strong indication that Ghana has a natural two party system – NPP-NDC. This is because apart from these two parties, all the rest did not win up to 5% of the electorate in both the 2000 and 2004 elections. In political business, it will be politically strategic for these smaller parties to align themselves with the two main parties in order to improve their chances of securing seats in parliament. Pronouncements by the PNC and CPP after the elections give indications of a possible alliance of the so called Nkrumaist parties before the 2008 elections.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE WORK OF KAF IN GHANA

The results of the elections show that the elections were highly competitive with the result that the ruling NPP has a good working majority but with a substantial presence of the minority NDC in parliament which will not allow the ruling party to have a field day

in the running of the affairs of the country. This is the best news out of the elections. However, for the deepening and institutionalization of democracy in Ghana, there is need for an alert and pro-active civil society that will keep power bearers in check. There is also need for support to government to give meaning to democracy by ensuring that all citizens, irrespective of their political leanings, are fairly treated and to effectively deal with the issues of poverty.

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