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Sweet Electoral Victory and Painful Defeat: Analysis of The Victory and Defeat of The National Democratic Congress and John Dramani Mahama in the 2012, 2016 and 2020 Presidential Elections in Ghana

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Abstract

This paper interrogates the fortunes of National Democratic Congress (NDC), and its Presidential Candidate in the 2012, 2016, and 2020 presidential elections in Ghana. The analysis is situated within the context of structural and political-economic framework of analysis. The paper employed an explanatory sequential mixed methods design. The information leading to the achievement of the study objectives was gathered through data collection methods such as secondary data sources, interview guided questionnaire and key informant interviews. Drawing on multiple strands of data, multiple regression and interpretive techniques of analysis, the results show that several factors undergirded NDC's "sweet victory and painful defeat." Whereas ethnicity was largely responsible for NDC's victory in 2012, a multiplicity of factors accounted for its defeat in 2016. This paper argues that beyond the above factors, the "politics of the COVID-19" played a critical role in the defeat of the NDC in the 2020 presidential elections in Ghana.

Keywords

Democracy, election, candidate, defeat, party, presidential, parliamentary, victory

Introduction

Since independence from British imperial power in 1957, Ghana has gone through different democratic and military dispensations. The political history of the country is replete with successful coup d'états that ousted democratic regimes. With the toppling of democratic regimes a prevalent political phenomenon in Ghana since independence, political stability could not be guaranteed until the promulgation of the Fourth Republic in 1992. In that year, a new constitution (the 1992 Constitution) was promulgated that introduced democratic elections after over one decade of military rule (1981-1992). The first presidential and parliamentary elections under the Fourth Republican Constitution were held on 3 November and 28 December 1992, respectively (Bukari, 2017; Anaman & Bukari, 2019a; Alidu & Bukari, 2020; Anaman & Bukari, 2021, Dodsworth et al., 2022).

Since the 1992 presidential and parliamentary elections, the Ghanaian polity went through seven successive democratic exercises of choosing an Executive President and Parliamentarians in 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2016 and 2020 (Bukari, 2017; Anaman & Bukari, 2019a; Alidu & Bukari, 2020; Anaman & Bukari, 2021; Dodsworth et al., 2022; Bukari, 2022). However, the democratic political system of the country's Fourth Republic since 1992 comprises a mixture of both presidential and parliamentary positions (also called hybrid system). Whereas the president is elected by direct popular votes for a four-year term, members of the unicameral parliament with 275 seats are also elected by single-member constituencies, using the first-past-the-post system, who serve a four-year term. The successful conduct of these democratic elections has marked an important milestone in Ghana's democratic transition, and its drive towards democratic consolidation. In particular, the 2000, 2008 and 2016 general elections led to an unprecedented change of governments, as the ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP) were respectively voted out, resulting in a smooth change of governments (Bukari, 2017; Anaman & Bukari, 2019a; Alidu & Bukari, 2020; Anaman & Bukari, 2021, Dodsworth et al., 2022; Bukari, 2022).

Arguably, a peaceful and stable democracy has returned to Ghana, and as a multiparty democracy, political power has been changing hands between two main parties, NDC and the NPP, making the multiparty system of the Fourth Republic of Ghana a 'duopoly' party system. Since the country's political independence, the "multiparty trait is purely de jure because it has always been, politically and electorally, a duopolistic state since the passage of the Avoidance of Discrimination Act in 1957" (Alidu & Bukari, 2020, p. 147).

The 'duopoly' of the Fourth Republic of Ghana generally reflects a deeper underlying problem dealing with parity between the two main political parties whose vote-wielding power is largely based on the mobilisation of people on ethnic and regional differences during national presidential elections (Annan, 2013). For instance, Anaman (2013) established that members of the two biggest social/ethnic groups in Ghana, the Asante and the Ewe, who make up about 30 percent of the

citizen population, vote largely (86% to 97%) on ethnic lines for the NPP and NDC, respectively. The rigid ethnic factor does not determine the voting pattern of the remaining 70 percent of the voting population. Instead, 40 percent of the population vote along moderate ethnicity influences, while the remaining 30 percent (swing voters) vote based on insignificant tendencies, mainly based on economically rational voting tendencies (Anaman, 2016; Bukari, 2017; Anaman & Bukari, 2019b; Anaman & Bukari, 2021).

In the case of the various minor left-wing parties, including the Convention Peoples' Party (CPP) and independent candidates, the electoral outcomes over the years show that they have performed abysmally, largely due to the entrenched duopoly politics in Ghana. Altogether, these political parties hardly obtained 4 percent of the total valid votes cast and ten seats in the presidential election and parliamentary elections in the general elections conducted since 1992, respectively. Table 1 provides the electoral outcomes of the various political parties in the presidential and parliamentary elections held in Ghana since 1992.

Table 1: Presidential and Parliamentary Election Results from 1992 to 2020

Year	Presidential				Parliament		
	NDC (%)	NPP (%)	Difference (%)	Other Parties	NDC	NPP	Other Parties/Independent candidates
1992	58.4	30.29	28.11	11.31	189	-	11
1996	57.4	39.6	17.8	3.0	133	60	7
2000	44.5(1st) 43.1(ro)	48.4(1st) 56.9(ro)	13,8	0.0	92	100	8
2004	44.6	52.45	7.8	2.95	94	128	8
2008	47.9(1st) 50.23(ro)	49.1(1st) 49.77(ro)	0.46	0.0	115	108	7
2012	50.7	47.74	2.96	1.56	148	123	4
2016	44.53	53.72	9.19	1.75	106	169	0
2020	47.4	51.3	3.9	1.3	137	137	1

Source: (cf: Bukari, 2017 p70) and Electoral Commission of Ghana data, 2022.

Notes: NDC- National Democratic Congress, NPP-New Patriotic Party, ro (round-off).

As indicated in the table above, the percentage margins of victory between the presidential candidates of the NDC and NPP in the 2008 and 2012 elections were about 40,000 and 325,863 votes, representing 0.46 percent and 2.96 percent of the total valid votes cast of 7 million and 11.2 million, respectively (Bukari, 2017 p 69; Electoral Commission of Ghana, 2022). In the 2016 elections, the margin of victory between the NPP and NDC was 984,570 votes, representing 9.19 percent. The

margin of victory between NPP and NDC in the 2020 presidential elections was 3.9%. These results show a near-parity in base voter-wielding power of roughly 35 percent of voters for each of the NDC and NPP in the more recent presidential elections in Ghana. However, in the 2016 presidential election, many swing voters and supporters of NDC stayed home and chose not to vote as reflected in the sharp decline in voter turnout rate from 79.2 percent in 2012 election to 68.6 percent in the 2016 election (Bukari, 2017; Anaman & Bukari, 2021; Bukari, 2022). The NDC presidential candidate won the 2012 presidential election, but lost the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections as the first incumbent President in the political history of Ghana. This conundrum presents an intriguing question that requires both theoretical and empirical explanation and answers. Therefore, the empirical question the paper interrogates is: *What accounts for the sweet victory of NDC in the 2012 election, and painfully lost the 2016 election as an incumbent president, and the 2020 presidential election in opposition?* The rest of the paper is structured as follows: theoretical explanation, methodology, factors responsible for NDC's victory in the 2012 election, factors responsible for defeat of the NDC in the 2016 election, and factors responsible for the defeat of the NDC in the 2020 presidential election.

Theoretical Explanation

In this paper, victory and defeat in the electoral contest are discussed within the framework of political economy of elections. It is contextualized within the structuralism political economy theory. The theory suggests that dominant social/ethnic groups in society largely shape or determine economic and political outcomes in a nation-state (Sackrey *et al.*, 2016; Alshareef *et al.*, 2021). By extension, the participation of major social/ethnic groups can be increased by the mobilisation of the resources available to the political class elites of these groups.

In the Ghanaian context, as indicated by Bukari (2017) and Anaman and Bukari (2021), the two biggest social/ethnic groups, the Asante and Ewe, vote largely for the political parties that their political class elites dominate. While the Asante are pro-NPP, the Ewe are pro-NDC. These ethnic groups respectively constituted about 16 percent and 13.9 percent of citizens of Ghana based on the 2010 census (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013; Alsoud *et al.*, 2021). In terms of voter participation, as illustrated by turnout figures, Bukari (2017, p. 201) and Anaman and Bukari (2021) established that voter participation in the 2012 presidential election in Ghana increased significantly in districts with increasing proportion of the voters of Asante ethnic background, and decreased significantly in districts with increasing proportions of the Ewe. This provides evidence to support the structuralism political economy theory at work in Ghana.

Conversely, in the case of how regularities in voting behaviour influence policy making, redistribution and specific policy making (i.e., policy action) in Ghana, the paper is "largely built upon the Sweezy kinked-demand model of duopoly" (refer to McConnell & Brue, 2002, pp. 497-499). The kinked demand curve assumes that the rival in a two-party competition will follow an action of a price

decrease initiated by a first party, but not necessarily for a price increase. In the case of the current Ghanaian political situation, the duopoly is represented by the NDC and NPP, which are the two main players in the political parties' market in Ghana shown in (Figure 1) below. The kinked demand curve used here assumes that the rival political party will try to reduce the impact that the initiator policy party gets in terms of expected votes in a national presidential election. However, an opposition party is largely limited in its actions given that it is not in power and can only promise to take actions when elected. The ruling party, however, can maximise its chances in retaining power by the careful use of policies that can attract votes in swing electoral area. In (Figure 1) below, the ruling party can gain additional votes (referred to here as output) of the size q_1 - q_3 if the opposition party cannot "kink" or reduce the impact of the price reduction (here referring to a new favourable government policy for voters in electoral swing areas). If the opposition can reduce the impact, then the size of the impact of the new policy is reduced from q_1 - q_3 to q_1 - q_2 .

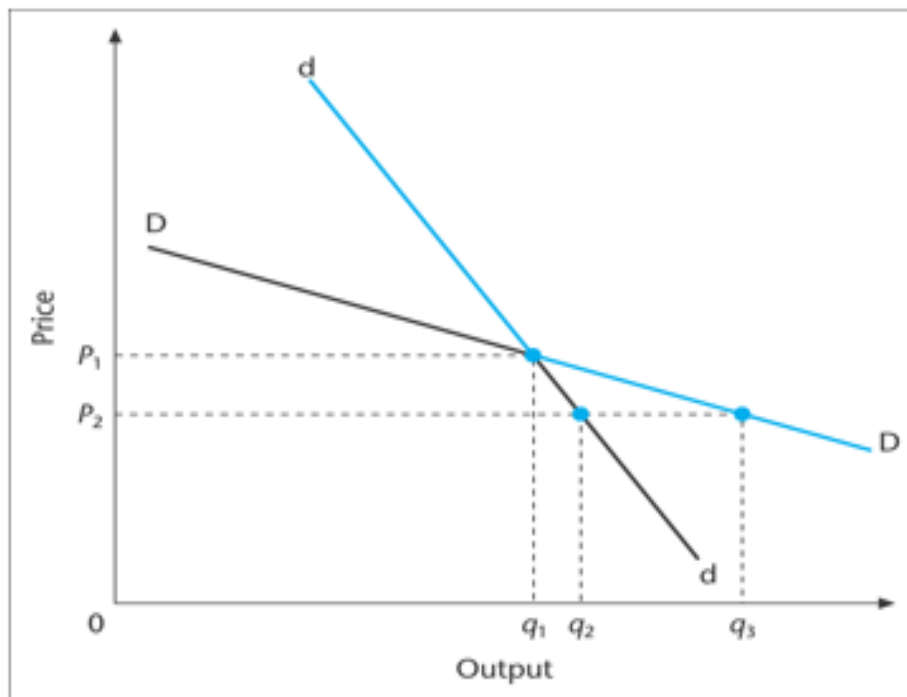


Figure 1: Diagrammatic representation of the influence of government policy in reducing the price of sustainable living on the number of voters garnered in a national presidential election.

Source: Sweezy model adapted from (refer to McConnell and Brue, 2002, pp. 497-499). **Notes:** Price is equivalent to new policy action directed at increasing votes in electoral swing areas. Output is the number of new voters expected to be won in an election.

Design, Methods and Data Sources

The paper employed a macro-micro approach to establish the factors accounting for the "sweet victory" of NDC in the 2012 elections, and the "painful defeat" in the 2016 and 2020 elections.

First, accounting for the “sweet victory” of NDC in the 2012 elections, a political economy simulation model was developed, comprising all the 275 constituencies which are re-classified into the existing 216 politically-administrative districts. To account for the factors contributing to the “sweet victory” margin of NDC in the 2012 election, the data was extracted from the 2010 population census and 2012 presidential election results. This means that aggregate district-level data available from national censuses conducted in 2000 and 2010 were linked to the 2012 presidential election data from Ghana Electoral Commission (see Bukari, 2017). The data for each of the 216 districts was directly sourced from census information produced by the Ghana Statistical Service, and merged with 2012 electoral results produced by the Electoral Commission of Ghana. The reclassification used in this paper implies that, for 33 districts, the election results data from their separate constituencies have been combined together for the purpose of district-level analysis. Altogether, 183 districts have one constituency each (Anaman, 2016; Bukari, 2017, Anaman & Bukari, 2021; Arici Özcan & Vural, 2020). The model has a number of socio-economic variables together with the electoral results for each district (combined from the constituency totals). The multiple regression model of the victory margin between the NDC presidential candidate and the NPP presidential candidate in the 2012 presidential election, using district-level data, is described in the equation below.

$$\text{NDCVICTORYMARGIN}_i = B_0 + B_1 \text{CHRISTIAN}_i + B_2 \text{MUSLIM}_i + B_3 \text{TURNOUT}_i + B_4 \text{SPOILEDBALLOTINDEX}_i + B_5 \text{RURALPROP}_i + B_6 \text{ILLITERACY}_i + B_7 \text{ASHANTI} + B_8 \text{VOLTA}_i + B_9 \text{NEWDISTRICT}_i + B_{10} \text{SMALLAKANCW}_i + U_i$$

where $\text{NDCVICTORYMARGIN}_i$ was the number of valid votes gained by the NDC presidential candidate less the number of valid votes gained by the NPP presidential candidate, as a proportion of the total valid votes cast in the constituencies of the district i ;

CHRISTIAN_i is a continuous variable measuring the proportion of the population who describe themselves as Christians for district i based on the 2010 National Population Census officially released in mid-2011;

MUSLIM_i is a continuous variable measuring the proportion of the population who describe themselves as Muslims for district i based on the 2010 National Population Census officially released in mid-2011;

TURNOUT_i is a continuous variable measuring the proportion of the registered voters who actually participated in the election by voting using the data compiled by the Electoral Commission of Ghana for the constituencies for district i ;

SPOILEDBALLOTINDEX_i is a continuous variable measuring the proportion of the total votes cast that was deemed to be spoilt or invalid based on the data compiled by the Electoral Commission of Ghana for the constituencies for district i ;

RURALPROP_i is a continuous variable measuring the proportion of the population who reside in rural areas (as defined by the Ghana Statistical Service as those towns and settlements with population less than 5,000) for district i ;

ILLITERACY_i is a continuous variable measuring the proportion of the

population who do not have any formal educational qualifications for district i ;

ASHANTI _{i} is a dummy variable for district i which is located in the Ashanti Region taking a value of 1 and zero if the district i is not located in the Ashanti Region;

VOLTA _{i} is a dummy variable for district i which is located in the Volta Region taking a value of 1 and zero if the district i is not located in the Volta Region;

NEWDISTRICT _{i} is a dummy variable for district i taking value of 1 if the district was created in 2012 and zero if the district was not created in 2012;

INDIGENECWREGION _{i} is a dummy variable for the district i taking a value of 1 if the district is in the Central and Western Regions and is not in the principal urban towns of Sekondi, Takoradi, Tarkwa and Kasoa, and zero for all other districts in Ghana plus Sekondi, Takoradi, Tarkwa and Kasoa. This variable indicates districts which are predominantly of Akan indigene origin;

U _{i} is the equation error term initially assumed to be normally distributed with zero mean and constant variance.

Explaining NDC's loss in the 2016 and 2020 elections, data gathered was sourced from both primary and secondary sources. For primary data, key informants were purposively selected and interviewed. The primary data was complemented by a review of academic journal papers, published books, policy reports, and other relevant documents explaining causes of electoral defeat in liberal democracies. The aim of the review was to identify factors that could possibly account for NDC's defeat in Ghanaian elections. Thus, the information gathered from the interviews and earlier works and other relevant documents was used to establish the factors that contributed to the defeat of John Dramani Mahama and NDC in the 2016 and 2020 elections in Ghana. Thus, for the explanation of NDC's defeat in the 2016 and 2020 presidential election, a micro-level analysis is employed, drawing on a wide range of empirical evidence from documents and key informant interviews.

Explaining the Sweet Victory of NDC in the 2012 Election

The 2012 Ghanaian national election, like the previous elections of the Fourth Republic of Ghana beginning in 1992, was a unique election. Two reasons accounted for the uniqueness of the 2012 national elections in the history of Ghana's electoral politics. First, the biometric system of voters' registration was introduced by the Electoral Commission of Ghana. For the first time in the history of Ghana's electoral politics and voters' registration exercise, the bio-data of individual eligible Ghanaian citizens (or voters) of 18 years and above, were captured. The uniqueness of the biometric voters' registration system introduced in 2012 is that it helped avoid or reduce the incidence of double registration that characterised the previous voters' registration exercises. It also helped to prevent voting more than once, thereby making the voters' register credible.

Second, the NDC's presidential candidate in 2012 (John Dramani Mahama) was the Vice President to the late President of the Republic of Ghana (Prof. John Evans Atta Mills), who died on 24 July 2012, whereupon the Vice President (Mr.

John Dramani Mahama) took over office as the President the same date. Officially nominated as the presidential candidate of the NDC in a special delegates' conference held in Kumasi on 29 August, 2012, President John Dramani Mahama contested the 2012 elections on the ticket of the NDC against the NPP's presidential candidate, Nana Akuffo Addo of the NPP, who had contested the previous presidential elections held in 2008 and 2012. In Ghana's electoral politics, incumbency advantages are clear in all elections and referenda, and under the Fourth Republic of Ghana. *So, what really accounted for the sweet victory of the NDC and its Candidate in the 2012 presidential election?*

A multiple regression equation was estimated using SPSS software to determine the factors explaining NDC's victory in the 2012 election. A key problem in statistical estimation using cross-sectional data is heteroscedasticity when the error term is related to independent variables in the model. This problem was corrected in the estimation by the transformation of the dependent and independent variables to ensure that the error-term was both normally distributed and had no problem of heteroscedasticity. The equation was also tested for correct model specification using the Ramsey Reset Test (Gujarati, 2009).

The results of analysis provide the answers to the above question, as reported in the (Tables 2 and 3) below. The power of the estimated model was very strong based on the strong R^2 and adjusted R^2 especially given the cross-sectional nature of the data. Furthermore, the estimated models were adequately and correctly specified based on the Ramsey Reset Test for correct model specification (refer to Gujarati, 2009). The variance inflation factor, a measure of multicollinearity (refer to Gujarati, 2009), was largely absent in the second more accurate model with VIF values mostly less than the minimum threshold value of 10.0 (refer to Table 2). However, it was moderately present in two variables, CHRISTIAN and TURNOUT, but did not affect the statistical significance of their parameters (See Table 3), generally suggesting that multicollinearity was not a problem.

The results shown in (Table 2) dealt with the use of the turnout figures reported by the Electoral Commission of Ghana (MODEL 1). Given that the turnout figures were based on the number of registered voters which are known to be bloated, a new turnout variable was also computed which was based on the number of votes cast divided by the number of people in the district aged 15 and over as reported by the Ghana Statistical Service for the 2010 National Population Census finalized in June 2011 (MODEL 2) as presented in (Table 3) below. The results in the (Tables 2 and 3) present the variables that significantly influenced the variation in the victory margin of the NDC, and these were VOLTA, ASHANTI, NEWDISTRICT and INDIGENECREGION.

The positive and negative impacts of national presidential electoral victory in 2012, exhibited by the Volta and Ashanti regions, respectively, were expected and need no further discussion, given the well-known nature of the strongholds of NDC in Volta Region and NPP for the Ashanti Region (Bukari, 2017; Alidu & Bukari, 2020, Anaman & Bukari, 2021). The creation of new districts (NEWDISTRICT) was

a major significant factor influencing the election of the NDC presidential candidate.

Using the accurate Table 2, as measured by the standardised parameter estimate absolute value, the study ranked the influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable (NDCVICTORYMARGIN). The creation of new districts was the second most important variable influencing the election of the NDC’s presidential candidate, and was even more important than the Ashanti Regional dummy factor (0.292 versus 0.288). Furthermore, INDIGENEWCREGION, which measured the unique set of circumstances and conditions in the indigenous areas of Central and Western Regions, was the fourth most important factor influencing the NDC’s electoral victory in the 2012 presidential election.

Table 2: Results of Regression Analysis of Factors explaining the Degree of influence of Victory Margin between the NDC and the NPP in the 2012 Election (Model 1)

Explanatory Variable	Parameter Estimate	Standardised Parameter Estimate	Student T Value	Probability Level of Significance	Variance Inflation Factor
Constant	0.000	0.000	-1.779	0.077	0.000
Christian	0.004	0.678	2.679	0.008*	60.608
Muslim	0.005	0.213	3.638	0.000*	3.246
Turnout	-0.007	-0.980	-3.586	0.000*	70.774
Spoiled ballot Index	0.045	0.086	2.041	0.043*	1.700
Ruralprop	0.001	-0.034	-0.787	0.432	1.735
Illiteracy	0.007	0.162	3.153	0.002*	2.504
Ashanti	-0.352	-0.257	-6.752	0.000*	1.372
Volta	0.798	0.737	19.239	0.000*	1.391
New district	0.171	0.326	5.884	0.000*	2.896
Indigenecwregion	0.000	0.080	2.222	0.027*	1.224

Notes:

The dependent variable is NDCVICTORYMARGIN

The sample size used analysis was 216 (216 districts) with degrees of freedom of 206.

R² was 0.793 and adjusted R² was 0.782 and was statistically significant at the 0.000 level.

** denotes that the parameter was statistically significant at the 5% confidence level used for the study. The model was correctly specified based on the Ramsey Reset test with a p value for rejection of the null hypothesis that the model is correctly specified being 0.144.*

The model had no significant problem of heteroscedasticity with a p value for rejection of the null hypothesis that the model is free from heteroscedasticity is 0.256.

Table 3: Results of Regression Analysis Explaining the Factors that have influenced the Degree of Victory Margin of NDC in the 2012 Election (Model 2)

Explanatory Variable	Parameter Estimate	Standardised Parameter Estimate	Student T Value	Probability Level of Significance	Variance Inflation Factor
Constant	-0.001	0.000	-1.343	0.181	0.000
Christian	-0.001	-0.163	-1.552	0.122	9.288
Muslim	-0.002	0.091	1.731	0.085	2.312
Turnout	0.000	-0.023	-0.190	0.849	11.992
Spoiled ballot Index	0.049	0.094	2.108	0.036*	1.679
Ruralprop	0.001	-0.041	-0.927	0.355	1.656
Illiteracy	0.002	0.056	1.217	0.225	1.760
Ashanti	-0.383	-0.288	-7.176	0.000*	1.361
Volta	0.782	0.724	17.783	0.000*	1.398
New district	0.171	0.292	5.407	0.000*	2.461
Indigenecwregion	0.001	0.105	2.800	0.006*	1.194

Notes:

The dependent variable is Ndcvictorymargin

The sample size used analysis was 216 (216 districts) with degrees of freedom of 206.

R² was 0.768 and adjusted R² was 0.756 and was statistically significant at the 0.000 level.

** denotes that the parameter was statistically significant at the 5% confidence level used for the study.*

The model was correctly specified based on the Ramsey Reset test with a p value for rejection of the null hypothesis that the model is correctly specified being 0.157.

The model had no significant problem of heteroscedasticity with a p value for rejection of the null hypothesis that the model is free from heteroscedasticity is 0.998.

Besides the regression results, the NDC won the 2012 election because the party had just won the 2008 general elections, and was just 4 years in political power. In the elections, the majority of Ghanaians voted for a continuation and rejected the idea of change. The outcome of the 2012 election, like the previous 1996 and 2004 elections, the NDC enjoyed the 'goodwill' of the two-term political power alternation under the Fourth Republic of Ghana. Thus, in the elections, Ghanaians voted for a continuation and for the *de facto* eight years (of a four-year term) political power cycle under the Fourth Republic of Ghana. Another factor contributing to the "sweet victory" of NDC and its presidential candidate in the 2012 election was the fact that President John Dramani Mahama had just taken over power from his predecessor. The untimely death of President John Dramani Mahama's predecessor naturally swirled up sympathy votes for the NDC. In

addition, the incumbency factor cannot be rule out in any explanation of the variables that accounted for the victory of the NDC in the 2012 presidential elections in Ghana.

Explaining the 'Painful Loss' of NDC in the 2016 Election

The 2016 Ghanaian national election, unlike the previous elections in 1996 and 2004, was the first time an incumbent president seeking his second term lost to the opposition in Ghana's political history, and the first time under the Fourth Republic of Ghana. *What accounted for this 'painful defeat'?*

The analysis of 2016 Ghanaian national presidential election shows that several factors contributed to the defeat of the NDC and its presidential candidate. First, poor economic conditions affected the choice of voters due to direct impacts on their living conditions by close of December in 2016. For instance, Anaman (2016a) and Bukari (2017) have indicated that the period from 2013 to 2015 in Ghana, though not a period of economic recession, could be best described as a period of economic turbulence, with the country hit by about six simultaneous exogenous and endogenous economic shocks. These included the persistent power cuts (referred to as "dumso" in the local parlance), the big El-Nino weather phenomenon experienced in much of the world over the period, lower commodity prices of major export commodities, the drastic reduction of the levels of government budget support and grants by Western donors, the relatively fast depreciation of the local currency, the cedi, and attempts of the government to rein its huge budget deficits (Anaman, 2006a; Anaman, 2006b; Anaman & Bukari, 2019a). Unlike the earlier years when the economy experienced mostly negative real economic growth rates, there had been positive real economic growth rates each year over the 2013 to 2015 period, recording 7.3 percent in 2013, 4.0 percent in 2014 and 3.9 percent in 2015 (Anaman, 2006a; Anaman, 2006b). The economic shocks of the 2013 to 2015 period resulted in hardships across the general population and prospective voters in the country prior to the elections on 7 December 2016 (Bukari, 17). The section of the Ghanaian population hardest hit by this economic phenomenon was the low-income earners, whose real incomes deteriorated as a result of frequent fuel price hikes, which resulted in increases in transport fares and prices of many commodities. Also, the Government of Ghana's expenditures were more tightly controlled from 2013 to 2016 in order to rein in its very high deficits. For this reason, the growth of wages of government sector workers from 2013 to 2016 was also considerably less than the inflation rate, thus, reducing real incomes of government workers. The economic imbalances during the last two or three months before the election therefore had an effect on the choice of presidential candidate (Van Gyampo *et al.*, 2017; Bob-Milliar & Jeffrey, 2018). Given these economic hardships, many swing voters began to firm up their choices of candidates two months to the elections, a situation which severely affected the fortunes of the NDC in the presidential election (Bukari, 2017).

Second, NDC's loss in the 2016 election was due to the organisation of the party's internal presidential and parliamentary primary elections. A single most important factor that affected NDC's fortunes in the 2016 elections was its nationwide primary election held on Saturday 21 November, 2015, to select the party's parliamentary and presidential candidates. In the presidential primary election, John Dramani Mahama (then incumbent President) was the sole candidate, and was therefore elected by a margin of 95.4 percent of the total valid votes cast. The NDC's primaries was the first ever primary elections in Ghana that allowed the party to get a fuller appreciation of its strengths and support base throughout the country (Dodsworth et al., 2021; Dodsworth et al., 2022). This primary election was supposed to be the turning point for NDC and its incumbent presidential candidate to retain political power in the 2016 presidential election. The opposition NPP also held its primary election to choose their flagbearer at the end of October, 2014, but the NPP's primary election, unlike the NDC's nationwide primary involving all card-bearing members of the party (1.3 million), was limited to about 100,000 local party leaders. Whereas the NDC's primary elections were greeted with contentions, that of the NPP was generally consensual. It was this dichotomous atmosphere that engulfed the NDC and the NPP after the primary elections that played a critical role in the defeat of the former in the 2016 presidential elections (Dodsworth et al., 2021; Dodsworth et al., 2022). Many of the contentious issues that engulfed the NDC after the primary election emanated from the process of creating the register of party members to vote in the primaries. According to the NDC Director of Research:

"There was no proper safeguarding or monitoring of the register and the resulting flawed and inaccurate register engendered further acrimony and division, and that "greedy party members abused the management of the reform process and this was made worse by the lack of an adequate dispute resolution mechanism, and (this resulted disputed outcome in the parliamentary primary election in many constituencies)."¹

The overall effect of the NDC's nationwide primary elections (or reforms) in 2015 was that the process generated considerable suspicion and disunity within the party, a situation the party could not overcome before the general national presidential election in 2016. It was this reason that was primarily responsible for the defeat of the NDC in the 2016 presidential elections.

Third, the "sweet manifesto" promises of the main opposition party (the NPP) prior to the 2016 general elections contributed significantly to NDC's loss in that election. In the Ghanaian electoral context, development issues are politicised, and are instrumental in political and economic decisions among the various political parties in the context of scarce resources. The NPP went into the 2016 presidential and parliamentary elections with the 'BIG' pushed manifesto promises. The NPP led by its 2016 presidential candidate (Nana Akufo Addo) and his running mate (Dr Mahamud Bawumia) launched a 'manifesto that promised heaven on earth', which

¹An interview with NDC Director of Research, November 2019

ultimately dismantled the incumbency advantage of candidate John Dramani Mahama of the NDC. Explaining the catchy promises of the NPP, an informant said:

The NPP manifesto had, among other, promised to introduce FREE secondary school education, promised One District One Factory (1D1F), promised One Village One Dam (1V1D) to provide all season-round farming irrigation in all the villages in the then three northern regions. It also promised to provide one million dollars to each of the 275 constituencies for development projects every year (personal communication with a voter in the Central Region of Ghana).²

The party and its presidential candidate also promised to establish the Office of the Special Prosecutor to deal with all corrupt-related issues, ministers and other government appointees (who have been accused of corruption) in the John Dramani Mahama-led administration should the party win the 2016 election. All in all, the promises of the NPP attracted electorates, which scaled the elections in its favour. As Gyampo et al. (2017: 37) also noted:

The NPP's campaign message based on their 2016 manifesto was more appealing to many voters than the NDC's campaign message, and that Nana Akufo-Addo of the NPP campaigned on 'change, job creation linked to the industrialization of the economy and the modernization of agriculture' and the 'incompetence of the Mahama-administration.

Thus, the NPP's manifesto promises, and several corruption allegations against the administration of President John Dramani Mahama (who himself was accused of taking FORD MOTOR VEHICLE as bribe from a Burkinabe Contractor), were the key factors that swung votes in favour of the NPP (particularly, the SWING VOTER) in the presidential elections held in 2016.

Fourth, incumbency complacency and power arrogance also worked against the NDC and its presidential candidate in the 2016 elections (Gyampo et al., 2017; Bob-Milliar & Jeffrey, 2018). The party neglected its support base at all levels of governmental authority after winning the 2012 general elections. For instance, the political power arrogance and complacency was at work when President John Dramani Mahama was reported to have said that his administration would scrap the Teachers' and Nursing Trainees' allowances even if it would cause his defeat and that of his party (the NDC) in the next presidential elections (Citi news, 9 September, 2016; Gyampo et al., 2017). Perhaps, the NDC's perceived arrogance and complacency was caused by the 1.3 million members the party had registered in its 2015 nationwide membership mobilisation drive it had undertaken. Rather than be a catalyst for the victory of the NDC in the general elections in 2016, the 2015 nationwide membership mobilisation drive caused lots of dissatisfactions and the infiltration of non-party members from the opposition parties. It was these issues, which created the bottlenecks for the NDC, which ultimately led to its defeat in the 2016 presidential and parliamentary elections (Dodsworth et al., 2021; Dodsworth et al., 2022).

² See NPP 2016 Elections Party Manifesto

Finally, the two terms political power rotation (of 4 years each) also worked against President John Dramani Mahama in the 2016 election. The NDC had served in government for eight years – four years under the presidency of the late Prof. John Evans Atta Mills and another four years under the presidency of John Dramani Mahama. Though John Dramani Mahama contested the presidential elections seeking re-election to serve his second term in office, his political party, the NDC, had stayed in power for eight years. Hence, the electorates were unwilling to vote for a re-election of John Mahama (Gyampo *et al.*, 2017; Bob-Milliar & Jeffrey, 2018).

Explaining the ‘Painful and “Contentious” Loss’ of NDC in the 2020 Election

Like the previous elections, the 2020 election had its unique features. The 2020 election was one that can be described as ‘politically and electorally chaotic.’ The events before, during and after the election could be succinctly described as ‘politically-motivated agenda’ to get President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo re-elected as President to serve another four years of eight year constitutionally-mandated term.

First, as a rehearsal towards the 2020 presidential election, vigilante groups of the NPP were deployed to various polling centres in the Ayawaso West-Wuogon Constituency by-election in the Greater Accra Region held on 31 January, 2019. According to Ijon (2020: 38), “the violent conduct of the by-election in Ayawaso West-Wuogon in 2019 has increased the number of violent by-elections in Ghana.” This by-election recorded a violent confrontation between the purported ‘masked National Security Personnel and uniformed Police Personnel.’ This armed security personnel allegedly shot at the residence of the NDC parliamentary candidate, which was in close proximity to the voting centre. The NPP was alleged to have extended the use of party vigilante groups in elections to many constituencies in the national elections in 2020. The NDC, dwarfed by the NPP with its financial and political clout, was also alleged to have made use of party vigilante groups in an attempt to influence the 2020 general elections. In fact, the act of thuggery by the various political vigilante groups was intensified in the 2020 general elections. Each tried to play the game to win political power for their respective political parties, and this was much felt during the elections especially the voting day (personal communication with a political analyst in Accra, Ghana).

Second, President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, after taking office on 7 January, 2017, dismissed the Electoral Commissioner, Madam Charlotte Osei and her two Deputy Commissioners, and appointed new Commissioners, a move the opposition parties, civil society organisations and some cross-section of Ghanaians described as ‘Nana Addo 2020 election ‘re-election agenda.’ Some Ghanaians believe that the appointment of the new commissioners of the Electoral Commission of Ghana was the ‘magic charm’ that manipulated the 2020 presidential election in favour of the incumbent president, President Nana Akufo-Addo.

Third, the introduction of a new voters' register for the 2020 presidential and parliamentary elections in Ghana also played a significant role in the victory of the NPP's presidential candidate. The NDC, brimming with fear that the new voters' register would be manipulated to favour the NPP, fruitlessly opposed its compilation. According to the NDC and the civil societies that opposed the compilation of a new voters' register, it did not make an economic sense to compile a new voters' register; that the old register could be 'purged' to make it more credible; and that the 'new normal' introduced by the COVID-19 made it medically insensitive to cause prospective voters to queue and expose them to the dangers of the pandemic to compile a new voters' register. On the other hand, the compilation of the new register received the total support of the NPP sympathizers and its party hierarchy and apparatchiks. Despite the divided reactions, the new voters' register was compiled, and its compilation arguably witnessed the use of state resources and party foot soldiers by the NPP to register its supporters and to prevent the supporters of the opposition from registering. The opposition NDC chastised the antidemocratic antics of the government and the NPP, describing them as 'state capture' of the electoral process aimed at disenfranchising NDC supporters. Whatever was the case, one cannot discount the role that the purported state capture of the electoral process by the Nana Addo-led government played a role in the victory of the NPP in the 2020 presidential election.

Fourth, the discourse on the victory of the NPP in the 2020 presidential election is incomplete without a discussion of the 'politics of the COVID-19.' Mention had already been made of the 'politics of the COVID-19' in the arguments against the compilation of the new voters' register. It should be emphasized that the 'politics' of the COVID-19 was not limited to the issues leading to the compilation of the new voters register; it was visible in the run up to the elections. Both political parties defied the COVID-19 protocols and held mammoth political rallies that exposed their supporters to the pandemic. Besides, in all the events leading to the election, the incumbent NPP government allegedly spent COVID-19 funds to buy goodies for prospective voters to attract their votes. Furthermore, the NPP government was alleged to have 'shared the COVID-19 funds' that the government received as loans and donations locally and internationally among its national and constituency executives as well as its parliamentary candidates. Furthermore, it is alleged that, under the guise of providing effective security in all the land borders of Ghana to prevent immigrants from 'exporting the COVID-19 virus to the country', the 'politics of the COVID-19' found its expression in the use of the military to intimidate voters in the strongholds of the opposition, the NDC. Military personnel were dispatched to the Volta Region, whose activities both at the borders and polling stations on the voting day were alleged to have stifled the progress of the NDC. The result was that the 'politics of managing the COVID-19 funds and containment of the virus' gave the NPP, its presidential candidate and its parliamentary candidates a huge financial clout and political leverage over their NDC counterparts.

Conclusion

The paper interrogated the fortunes of NDC in the 2012, 2016 and 2020 elections. The study found that several factors contributed to the victory of NDC and its presidential candidate in the 2012 election. A single most important factor was the ethnicity factor which expressed itself in the votes of the of the Asante and the Ewe in the Ashanti and Volta Regions for the NPP and the NDC, respectively. Other factors were the creation of new districts by the ruling NDC party in 2012, and the unique attraction of voters from the small Akan groups in the Central and Western Regions, especially in the non-Fante areas, towards the NDC. Besides, the NDC enjoyed the 'goodwill' of the two-term political power alternation under the Fourth Republic of Ghana.

The results of analysis also show that a combination of factors contributed to NDC's loss in the 2016 presidential election. First, poor economic conditions affected the choice of voters' due to direct impacts on their living conditions by the end of December in 2016. Another factor that contributed to NDC's defeat in the 2016 election was the disagreements arising from the organisation of the party's internal presidential and parliamentary primary elections in 2015. Furthermore, the paper established that the "sweet manifesto" promises of NPP prior to the 2016 was attractive, thus, swinging votes in favour of the NPP and its presidential candidate. In addition, the paper found that the incumbency complacency and power arrogance of the NDC also worked against the party and its presidential candidate in the 2016 elections. In the case of the 2020 presidential election, the study found that one most significant factor that led to the defeat of the NDC was the 'politics of the COVID-19', which the NPP government exploited to its advantage.

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