

GHANA'S ELECTORAL LANDSCAPE

2020-2024



1.0 Introduction

The Ghanaian electoral environment between 2020 and 2024, reflected a growing democratic system characterised by increased civic engagement, the adoption of digital campaigns, and a proactive stance against misinformation. Since returning to democratic rule in 1992, Ghana has preserved its reputation for peaceful elections, which has earned the country a position as a model of political stability in West Africa (Gyimah-Boadi, 2019).

However, recent electoral cycles have exposed emerging challenges, notably the rise of misinformation, which has impacted public perceptions and electoral transparency (Adjei, 2022; Osei-Tutu, 2021). Various studies have highlighted that misinformation disseminated through social media and other digital platforms has had an influence on public opinion, usually swaying the electorate with its false narrative and contributing to a decline in trust in electoral institutions (Annan & Kpentey, 2023). In response, the Electoral Commission of Ghana, in addition to several civil society organizations, has embarked on key steps to mitigate these impacts by launching fact-checking initiatives and voter education activities that generally inculcate media literacy among citizens (Electoral Commission of Ghana, 2023; CDD-Ghana, 2022). Moreover, political parties' adoption of digital campaigns has reframed voter outreach, in which Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), and WhatsApp are now the main channels for dispensing campaign messages and mobilizing support (Amoah, 2023). The 2020 and 2024 election cycles then pose both opportunities and vulnerabilities of digital engagement in Ghana's electoral process, where the country balances its democratic aspirations against complications brought about by modern technologies.



2.0 Overview of Ghana's Electoral System

The electoral system of Ghana has become a widely followed issue over the last three decades, especially after the country transitioned to multiparty democracy in 1992. Following this, the country has held multiple general elections with the most recent being the 2020 General Election.

Ghana operates a multi-party democratic system anchored on universal adult suffrage, where citizens elect a President and Members of Parliament through direct voting. Since the return to democratic governance in 1992, the country has conducted several general elections, with the most recent held in 2020.

The electoral system of Ghana operates under a multi-party democracy, where every citizen is given the opportunity to participate using the universal adult suffrage system in electing a President and members of Parliament. This framework allows qualified voters to choose their leaders directly within the democratic dispensation and thus cements the two main tenets of accountability and representation (Debrah, 2015). Since independence, Ghana has experienced considerable political and electoral regime changes that have led to the entrenchment of a strong democratic process. As pointed out by Carey, (2005), in this presidential system of governance, the president doubles as both head of state and head of government, hence playing a very central role in national leadership and policy making. This dual-function structure serves to centralize executive power, where the president is placed at the top of both government and diplomacy.

The administration and regulation of Ghana's electoral framework are executed by the Electoral Commission (EC), a constitutionally independent body mandated with the responsibility of safeguarding the integrity, transparency, and equity of the electoral process (Omotola, 2013). The EC has been given the function of ensuring that electoral processes are conducted with integrity, transparency, and fairness. It controls major electoral activities such as the compilation of voters' register, candidate nomination, regulating the campaign activities, the casting of ballots, and the declaration of election results (Asante & Asare, 2016). This institution plays a critical role in ensuring that democratic principles are upheld by acting as a neutral referee within the electoral process. As established by the 1992 Constitution, the EC has supervised several electoral cycles and thus, through time, introduced a host of reforms to

enhance the credibility of elections, including biometric voter registration to help curb multiple voting and improve the accuracy of voter identification (Asante & Asare, 2016; Debrah, Asante & Gyimah-Boadi, 2010).

Focusing on the area of political parties, out of the numerous parties that are in the country, two dominant parties, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP), have dominated the political landscape of Ghana since the country's return to a multiparty democratic system in 1992 (Yobo, 2022). As described by Adadevoh (2014), these political parties embody different ideological positions and policy agendas, with the NDC often espousing social democratic principles and the NPP preferring liberal economic policies (Adadevoh, 2014; Daddieh & Bob-Milliar, 2014). The competitive dynamics inherent in the Ghanaian political environment have given birth to a relatively balanced two-party system where the NDC and the NPP take turns in governance following electoral wins (Yobo, 2022; Armah, 2019). This dynamic enhances political stability since constituents have clear and trusted political options (Daddieh & Bob-Milliar, 2014).

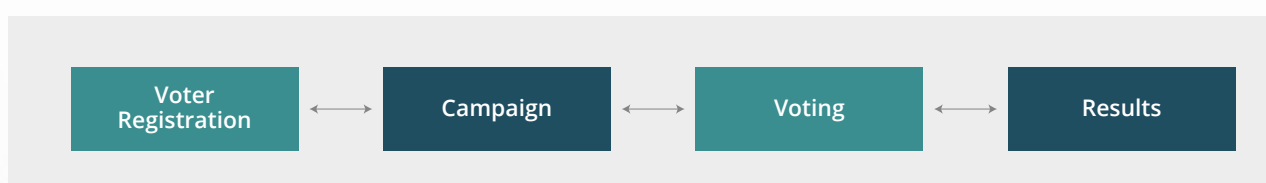
Moving on, Ghana has largely credible election processes, however, it has faced challenges such as voter intimidation and allegations of vote-buying (Appiah, 2023). To overcome these challenges, the EC has instituted some security and transparency election measures with the support of CSOs (Rahman, 2023). Furthermore, domestic and international election observers have supported democratic accountability with independent assessment through elections (van Aaken & Chambers, 2009). This is reflected in the strong adherence to democratic principles in Ghana as well as the country's largely peaceful transitions and a strong legal framework through which to



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redress electoral grievances (Rahman, 2023).

The electoral system of Ghana has shown a maturing democratic culture that, despite its challenges, continues to move forward with every election cycle. Reforms put in place by the EC, coupled with the lively engagements of civil society, have gone a long way to strengthen the integrity of Ghanaian elections. Despite the NDC and NPP dominating the political landscape, this multi-party system promotes diversity and competition, ensuring lively politics within the country. Scholars (Towah, 2019; Boafo-Arthur, 2008; Odukoya, 2007) have noted that the democratic governance approach in Ghana to a large extent, has become a role model for political stability in West Africa and a demonstration of resilience and adaptability by the country in consolidating democracy.



3.0 Key electoral events (2020-2024)

The period from 2020 to 2024 in Ghana has seen a number critical electoral events that have shaped the political environment of the country.

3.1 2020 General Elections

The 2020 general elections in Ghana took place on 7 December 2020 with the two major political parties, that is, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP), along with several others including the Convention People's Party (CPP), Progressive People's Party (PPP), and the People's National Convention (PNC) among others, contesting for the presidential and parliamentary seats respectively (Asekere, 2021). This saw the incumbent president, Nana Akufo-Addo of the NPP, re-elected with 51.3% of the vote against his main rival, the NDC's candidate, former president John Mahama, who polled 47.4% of the vote with the NPP taking majority in parliament with 137 seats out of 275 while the NDC took 137 seats (Electoral Commission of Ghana, 2020). The general view of international observers was that the election was free and fair, despite some isolated cases of violence and alleged voter intimidation, mainly in the Volta region of Ghana, which happens to be a stronghold for the NDC (Commonwealth Observer Group, 2020).

3.2 2023 District Assembly Elections

The District Assembly elections are held every four years and, by statute, are non-partisan (Framo, 2024; Adamtey, 2014). The prime focus of these elections is to ensure local governance through which the assembly members and unit committee members are elected to represent their respective electoral areas. The 2023 District Assembly Elections in Ghana were a landmark event in the country's democratic arrangement and a testimony to the unrelenting drive toward devolution of political and administrative authority to local levels of governance. Held on December 19, 2023, the elections were instrumental in selecting Assembly and Unit Committee Members, who shall be responsible for holistic development across the country's district levels (Framo, 2024).

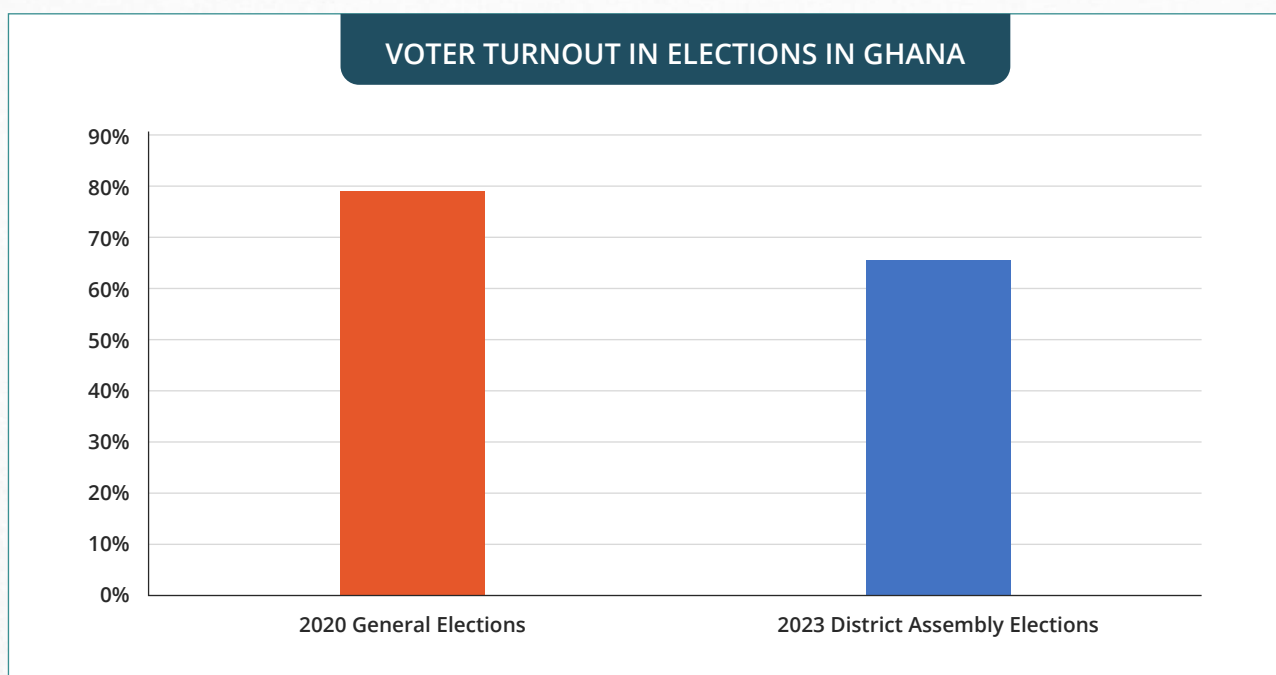
In the run-up to the 2023 District Assembly Elections, the Electoral Commission of Ghana and other civil society organizations actively engaged in efforts toward voter sensitization and mobilization. Despite these efforts, the elections faced major challenges. Although classified as non-partisan, some candidates received tacit support from political parties, a scenario that influenced electoral outcomes and jeopardized the independence of assembly members.

Research shows that partisan dynamics in seemingly neutral elections often affect voter decisions, using patronage networks that potentially influence electoral outcomes and shape citizens' views of local governance (Acheampong, 2023). This engagement in politics is what makes proponents of decentralization apprehensive, as the move robs local governance of its authenticity and diverts attention from the priorities in the community (Hossain & Habib, 2021; Arends, 2018; Kombe & Namangaya, 2016). Also, there is always the unresolved issue of monetization in elections. Reports indicate that some candidates engage in vote buying, which offers an undue advantage to those with financial resources at the cost of people who genuinely want to serve the people (Appiah, 2023). Moreover, the studies also explain that vote-buying, besides partisan affiliations, runs against democratic ideals by prioritizing partisan gains over true, community-oriented governance (Driscoll, 2023).

4.0 Voter Statistics and Trends

Between 2020 and 2024, voter participation in Ghana displayed both challenges and growth opportunities in electoral engagement. Voter turnout in the 2020 general elections stood at 79%, reflecting a healthy civic interest in national governance despite reports of isolated incidents of voter intimidation and logistical constraints in certain regions. Demographic analysis showed a rising number of first-time voters, fueled by an increase in the youth population, while urban centers continued to dominate in voter registration compared to rural areas. However, there has been a marginal decline in turnout for district-level elections, such as the 2023 District Assembly elections, which saw a participation rate of approximately 65%. This trend underscores the need for enhanced voter education and engagement, especially at the grassroots level, where political apathy appears more pronounced.

Digital platforms also played a significant role in shaping voter trends, with social media increasingly influencing voter decisions. However, this came with challenges, such as the spread of misinformation, which at times distorted public perceptions of key electoral processes. The Electoral Commission of Ghana, alongside civil society organizations, has since intensified efforts to combat misinformation while promoting informed voter participation.



5.0 Notable Developments in Electoral Processes

The 2020–2024 period marked significant progress in Ghana's electoral landscape, particularly in technological adoption and transparency. The Electoral Commission (EC) introduced reforms such as biometric verification updates and piloted electronic transmission of results in some districts. These measures aimed to enhance the credibility of elections and reduce post-election disputes.

Additionally, there has been increased involvement of international and local observer missions, which have commended Ghana's commitment to democratic principles. However, challenges like vote-buying and the monetization of campaigns persist, undermining the essence of fair competition. In non-partisan elections like the 2023 District Assembly elections, political party influences and financial pressures highlighted areas for further policy reforms to ensure a level playing field.

6.0 Citizen Participation Analysis

Citizen participation during this period was characterized by a dual narrative of enthusiasm and underlying apathy. While the 2020 general elections saw high voter engagement, non-partisan local elections, such as the 2023 District Assembly elections, highlighted a gap in public interest. Factors contributing to low engagement included a lack of awareness about the significance of local governance and the perception that district-level elections hold limited influence on everyday lives.

Women and youth participation in electoral processes showed a gradual increase, driven by targeted advocacy and gender inclusion campaigns. However, representation gaps remain significant, particularly in rural areas, where traditional and socio-economic barriers limit participation. Furthermore, digital platforms emerged as a key tool for mobilization, but access disparities and online misinformation presented obstacles to equitable civic engagement.



7.0 Conclusion

Ghana's electoral landscape from 2020 to 2024 underscores a maturing democratic system facing modern challenges. While voter engagement remains commendable at the national level, local governance elections reveal the need for deeper civic education and reform. Technological advancements and increased transparency efforts by the EC are positive strides, but issues like misinformation, monetization of politics, and unequal participation persist.

As Ghana moves forward, addressing these challenges will be critical in consolidating democratic gains and promoting inclusive governance. The lessons learned during this period highlight the importance of sustained voter education, grassroots mobilization, and institutional reforms to strengthen public trust and participation in electoral processes.

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