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# The 2020 General Elections in Ghana: An Analysis of the Issues, Voting Pattern and Impact

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**Abstract:** Ghanaians went to the polls on 7 December 2020, for the 8<sup>th</sup> successive time since the return to constitutional rule in 1993, to elect a President and 275 Members of Parliament. The incumbent President Nana Akufo-Addo defeated former President John Mahama and the National Democratic Congress, to secure a second term mandate, on the ticket of the New Patriotic Party. In the Parliamentary race, both parties secured 137 seats each with one independent seat. The outcome of the elections, therefore, did not follow the same trend as those held in Ghana in 1992/93, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012 and 2016 in which a victorious party won the presidential and secured majority of the seats in parliament. The outcome of the polls also saw a change in the country's governance system where for the first time, the Speaker of Parliament came from the opposition party. Also, National Democratic Congress, for the first time, officially rejected the outcome of the polls and mounted a challenge in the country's apex court. The author relied on the qualitative method to examine the process of the conduct of the 2020 general elections, the issues, outcome and analysis of the voting pattern and its implications for electoral politics in Ghana. The paper revealed that the Ghanaian electorate are rational actors who reward hard work and punish mediocracy and not based on destructive ethnic voting. Also, it reiterates the need for vigilance at both the polling stations and collation centres to ensure undisputed elections and to consolidate the gains in Ghana's electoral politics.

**Keywords:** Election, Electoral Reforms, New Patriotic Party, National Democratic Congress, Akufo-Addo, Mahama

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## 1. Introduction

Ghanaians went to the polls on 7 December 2020, to elect 275 Members of Parliament (MPs) and a President. That was the 8<sup>th</sup> successive Presidential and Parliamentary Elections in the Fourth Republic which was inaugurated on 7 January 1993 [1]. In the presidential election, Nana Akufo-Addo of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) won with 6,730,413 votes, representing 51.59% while the presidential candidate of the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC), John Dramani Mahama obtained 6,214,889 votes which represented 47.36% of the total votes cast. All other parties had a cumulative tally of about 1.3%. The results were declared within 48 hours after the close of polls, on 9 December 2020.

The presidential election results were declared without the Techiman South constituency which had a registered voter population of 128,018. The chairperson of the EC who is the Returning Officer for the presidential election in Ghana, Mrs.

Jean Adukwei Mensa, stated that "Indeed if we were to add the entire results, or collate all the results of the Techiman South constituency and add that to the percentage and votes of the second candidate, Mr. John Dramani Mahama, he will obtain 47.873 percent of the total votes cast and Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo will obtain 50.8 percent of the total votes cast" [2]. This was disputed by the opposition NDC, although that dispute did not prevent the EC from gazetting its figures. In the parliamentary election, the NDC had 137 seats and the NPP also had 137. A sitting NPP MP who went independent, because he was dissatisfied with his party's internal primaries, also won. Per the constitution of Ghana, the independent candidate loses his seat in parliament if he chooses to join either party in parliament, although he can choose to sit with either side in parliament [3].

The outcome of the 7 December 2020 polls did not follow the same trend since 1992 in which every political party that had won elections had secured an absolute majority of the seats in Parliament. Also, for the first in Ghana, the position

of Speaker of Parliament, the third most powerful person, went to the opposition party. Also, Parliament which has since 1993 had a majority and minority leaders, with the majority leader designated as the official leader of the House, do not have such now. There is now what is known as the majority group (because the independent MP sits with that group) and minority group, with their respective leaders. The outcome of the presidential polls, however, followed a similar trend since 1992, in which every political party that won a 4-year mandate, also a second-term victory. In other words, every political party has ruled for 8 years. By this outcome, the NDC has been in office for 16 years (1993-2000 and 2001 to 2016) while the NPP has secured the mandate of the electorate for 16 years too; 2001 - 2008 and 2017- 2024.

The 2020 general elections were keenly contested and the turn-out was impressive (79 percent). It was described by both domestic and international Election Observer Missions as free, fair, credible and transparent. The election was unique for a number of reasons including: first, it was the first time in the fourth Republic that the two leading candidates contesting the presidency had both occupied the seat at the presidency for 4 years. John Mahama was elected President in 2012 and lost re-election in 2016 while Nana Akufo-Addo was the sitting President from 2017 and was seeking re-election in 2020. Second, it was the first time that elections were conducted following the removal from office of the Electoral Commission Chairperson, Mrs. Charlotte Osei, on grounds of incompetence and procurement breaches, and replaced by Mrs. Jean Adukwai Mensa, who had since 2000 been accused by the NDC as being pro-NPP while the head, of the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), one of the leading CSOs in Ghana. As such, the opposition openly stated that the contest was between the NDC on one hand and the EC chairperson and the NPP on other hand. Third, the stakes were, arguably, much higher than previous elections, perhaps, because both leading candidates had empirical records to show in terms of their stewardship. Fourth, former President Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings, who was the founder of the NDC and chairman of the party's council of elders, died weeks to the polls. His death was unique to the contest because he appeared to love and spoke well of the NPP's presidential candidates, Nana Akufo-Addo while bitterly complained about his party's (NDC) inability to hold on to the principles of probity and accountability. Besides, his wife had broken camps with the NDC and formed the National Democratic Party (NDP) and was actually a presidential candidate in the race. However, Mr. Rawlings' first daughter was seeking re-election as a parliamentarian in the Klottey Korley constituency on the ticket of the NDC. It was therefore unclear, the direction that Flight Lieutenant Rawlings numerous followers will vote. Fifth, it was the first time that 12 people were contesting the presidency; the highest number since the return to constitutional rule in 1993. Sixth, it was the first time that three women were contesting as presidential candidates. Besides, the biggest opposition had a woman as running mate which was also the first time

that a major political party had selected a woman for the top job.

The outcome of the 7 December 2020 elections further solidified Ghana's enviable record as one of the beacons of democracy in Africa [4-6]. Further, it added legitimacy to the "principal-agent problems (i.e., the voters as principals holding their representatives as agents in check" [1]. Besides, it demonstrated that Ghanaians have accepted fierce and sometimes very acrimonious electoral contests and post-electoral cooperation as part of the democratic norms. This has so far been demonstrated by the cordial working relations between both sides in Parliament, which in the past had virtually worked in a way that can best be described as the minority having its say and the majority having its way.

It is against this backdrop that this article examined the 7 December 2020 general elections in Ghana. Specifically, the paper examines the factors that accounted for the outcome of the polls which further puts Ghana ahead of many countries in Africa in terms of democratic elections.

## 2. Methods and Materials

The study first sought to explore and analyze the issues that informed the voting pattern in the 7 December 2020 general elections in Ghana. The second task was to examine the extent to which the outcome of the elections conformed or differed from previous elections held since the return to constitutional rule in 1993.

To address these issues, the study used the qualitative methods. This method was chosen because it enabled the researcher to gather, integrate, and present data from a variety of sources. Further, the method allowed for a review of both published and unpublished secondary data relating to electoral politics in Ghana. The published sources included books, book chapters and peer-reviewed journals. The author used these secondary data sources for a critical review of related literature and the formation of a theoretical framework to strengthen the discussions and arguments.

The other source of data for the study came from official statements and other documents from political parties in Ghana, the Electoral Commission, the 2020 manifestos of the NDC and NPP, Election Observer Missions' Reports, the statements from stakeholders such as the Catholic Bishops Conference, the National Peace Council, Civil Society Organizations and the National House of Chiefs. Further information was gleaned from credible media publications. Specifically, the paper relied on the state-owned Daily Graphic which is Ghana's authoritative Newspaper since 1957 and two leading private media outlets, Joy FM/joynews/joyonline.com and Citi FM/citinewsroomonline.com. These media outlets have over the years won the trust of the public as authoritative sources of credible information. They have adhered to the principle of rejoinders and have not hesitated to retract and apologize whenever they go wrong.

The data was analyzed using a qualitative method of data analysis where themes were formed in a sub-heading for

discussions. This was done by first accessing the relevance of both the published and unpublished data from credible sources (open access) in proving substantive evidence to the central issues examined in this study.

### 3. The State of Electoral Politics in Ghana

Ghana became the first country in Africa, sub of the Sahara, to gain independence from Britain in 1957 [7-8]. The country has had four Republics due to military interventions. The first Republic was from 1960 to 1966, the second was from 1969-1972, the third was from 1979 to 1981 and the fourth and longest been in place since 1993 [9-11]. Ghana is today regarded by many around the world as “one of the most successful democracies in Africa and as one of the

continent's fastest-growing economies, which is supported by the discovery of oil in commercial quantities” [12].

The military intervention was first from 1966 to 1972 under the National Liberation Council (NLC). The second was under the National Redemption Council/Supreme Military Council (NRC/SMC) between 1972 and 1979 while the third was under the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) from June 1979 to September 1979 [13]. The fourth military regime was the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) from December 1981-January 1993. It is instructive to note that both the AFRC and PNDC were executed by the same individual, Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings. The fourth Republic has since 1992 experienced 8 general elections without the chaos associated with elections in most countries in Africa.

*Table 1. Number of National and Local Elections and Referenda in Ghana, 1951-2020.*

PERIOD	NATIONAL ELECTIONS	REFERENDA/PLEBISCITES
Pre-independence	3 (1951, 1954 and 1956)	1 (1956)- Trust Territory of Trans – Volta Togoland (for union or separation)
Post-independence	11 (1965, 1969, 1979 and run-off, 1992, 1996, 2000 and run-off, 2004, 2008 and run-off, 2012, 2016, 2020)	5 (1960 – electorate voted twice within 3 days; one for or against the draft constitutional proposals and again for Nkrumah or Danquah; 1964 – 2 amendments to the 1960 constitution; 1978, 1992, 2018)
Total	14 and 3 run-offs	6

Source: [12, P. 89] and updated by the author to cover the period 2013-2020.

Scholarship on Ghanaian politics abounds. They include various aspects of democracy such as elections, manifestos, party funding, patron-client relations, internal democracy, gender and leadership and political party vigilante groups [14-19].

In *Chasing the Elephant into the Bush*, Kennedy (2009) gave an insider's account of how the New Patriotic Party (NPP) lost the 2008 elections. He blamed the defeat on a multiplicity of factors including internal acrimony within the party resulting in lack of coordination, the composition of campaign team outside internal party principles and the inability of elected officers to manage campaign funds. Others have explored the internal democracy of political parties and its effect on elections in Ghana [20, 21, 4]. For instance, Debrah [4] opined that lack of internal democracy contributed to the defeat of the NDC in 2000. Also, Akuamoah and Asekere agreed that internal democracy is a major factor that determines electoral outcome in Ghana. This assertion was manifested when an independent candidate (sitting NPP MP for the Fomena constituency in the Ashanti region; the NPPs electoral stronghold) who lost in the NPP primaries, blamed his defeat on internal machination by the party's regional and national hierarchy to get him out of parliament. Accordingly, the President, Vice President, regional and constituency campaign teams of the ruling party (NPP) went to the Fomena constituency to campaign against the independent candidate. This, notwithstanding, the independent candidate won the seat. This affected the performance of the ruling NPP in that constituency. According to Ichino and Nathan [22], the effect of internal democratic deficit affects the performance of the

ruling party more than it does to the opposition party “because lower investment by primary aspirants generates less internal party conflict and exit options are less attractive for losing aspirants”, a situation they termed “bonus” for the opposition party [22]. Others have looked that the impact of ethnicity on elections in Ghana [23-25]. While Alabi and Alabi found that ethnicity plays a central role in Ghanaian elections, Ayee downplayed the influence of ethnicity on Ghanaian elections [4]. Debrah [26] has argued that elections in Ghana have since 1992 been influenced by the Ashanti and Ewe ethnic groups. For him, while the quest to maintain the Ashanti hegemony is behind the success of the NPP, the anti-Ashanti hegemony group has rallied behind the Ewes, on the ticket of the NDC, in all elections.

Another area of concern to scholars recently is the influence of political party vigilante groups on elections in Ghana. Scholars who have written about this subject concord that vigilantism poses a threat to Ghana's electoral politics [27, 15, 28]. Others have extensively explored the winner-takes-all politics and how that led to the acrimonious atmosphere during Ghanaian elections [29-30]. In the view of Ichino and Nathan and Alidu and Aggrey-Darkoh, rationality on the part of the Ghanaian voter is a major predictor of electoral outcomes in Ghana [31-32].

Studies on women in politics in Ghana abound. Some of such scholars have decried the yawning gap between men and women in politics and explored the reasons for the inability of more women to get into elective positions in Ghana [21, 33-35]. Allah-Mensah [35] explored the gender dimension of the 1996 elections in Ghana. According to her, even though the political equation of who controls political

power changed with independence, the change has not been reflected in the numerical strength of women. Ayea [10] notes that the low numbers of women in Ghana's Parliament require that specific reforms targeting women are undertaken.

The need for electoral reforms to deepen Ghana's electoral politics has received scholarly attention [36, 1, 6]. Agyeman-Duah [9] attributes the electoral success in Ghana to the desire of Ghanaians for multi-party governance and the willingness to accept change through electoral reforms. Bofo-Arthur [16] shares a similar view, although, he insists challenges such as the enforcement of electoral laws has not been the best.

Ayea [12] has detailed the impact of manifestos on the electoral fortunes of Ghana's dominant political parties. For him, manifestos of political parties can "make and unmake their political fortunes" [12]. Also, Debrah and Gyampo [37] have underscored the importance of manifesto contents in shaping voting behaviour in Ghana describing same as "crucial in promoting issue-based voting" in Ghana [37].

Bofo-Arthur [38], Essuman-Johnson [39] and others have explored the effectiveness of Ghana's parliament. They made a case for the election of competent people to improve parliamentary practice in the country [40, 18, 39]. It has been argued that a strengthened parliament will enhance "accountability, transparency and democratic consolidation" in Ghana [16]. Gyampo has also looked at parliamentary representation in Ghana and argued that the "quality of representation in Ghana is weak as majority of the MPs are unable to interact regularly with their constituents" [41].

This paper adds to the burgeoning literature on Ghana's electoral politics by examining the 2020 elections. Specifically, the paper focuses on how the reforms, the election management body, the candidates and campaigns accounted for the outcome of the 7 December 2020 elections and lessons learnt.

#### 4. Theoretical Framework

The advent of the democratic renaissance in Africa in the early 1990s brought with it, largely, sustainable multi-party competitive elections in many countries on the continent. Scholarship has since focused on various aspects of elections including the reasons for voter choices. Theories or models such as the Consumption Benefits of Voting Democracy, the Psychological, Sociological and Rational Choice, have been discussed in relation to voter choices in Ghana [3, 42, 18, 26].

Basically, the Consumption Benefits of Voting Democracy links voter choices to moral obligation. In other words, people vote because they feel they should vote since others do. This means people regard voting as a civic responsibility. According to some of the proponents, the electorate cast their votes simply because they want to cheer or boo their favoured or unflavored candidates. This voting behavior, which is expressive, is in marked contrast to the instrumental voting behavior in which "people vote because they perceive voting as a means of achieving a particular election

outcome" [43]. The revealed empirical findings on such voter behaviour in data from 1988 in American National Election Study which showed that the "cheering" and "booing" effects are statistically significant and that they exert substantial influence on both turnout and voter choice [43]. This theory appears not to prioritize critical issues of development by voters since campaign messages are subordinated to moral or civic responsibility. Critics have argued that voters consider the interest of others. In fact, voter choices are linked to the unselfish interest of others hence voters consider issues that improve the welfare of other people in society before making a choice [44]. Situated within the Ghanaian context, it is possible for voters to consider the interest of others before casting their ballots. This makes sense because in Ghana every middle or upper-class person has so many dependents due to the extended family system which makes the needs of family members, the collective responsibility of all. A Ghanaian worker who takes care of two or more people in the second cycle school may want to vote for a candidate who promises to make schooling free at that level. This, however, cannot be universally applied in explaining voter turnout especially in strongholds of political parties.

The assumptions in the Sociological and Psychological Models, appear to overlap with rational choice' especially when examined from the angle of voter choices. For instance, the Sociological Model which was championed by scholars from the School of Columbia, in their work 'The People's Choice' emphasizes the impact of social factors in determining voter choices [45]. Similarly, the Psychosocial Model, which is credited to the School of Michigan emphasized party identification based on psychological factors in determining voter choices [45]. According to Debrah [26], the assumption in the Psychological Model that voters "have the ability to learn good strategies from observing" past events such as performance in previous elections" make the model useful in the Ghanaian context.

Scholars in Ghana have often used the Rational Choice Theory to explain voter choice in elections. For instance, Ayea [46] has argued that electorate in the advanced democracies make choices based on anticipated benefits which is not entirely different from voter behaviour in Ghana. Rational Choice Theory basically assumes that "voters and political parties act directly according to their own interests" hence they resort to strategies that are tailored towards their desired ends [47]. Downs noted that rational politicians "formulate policies in order to win elections rather than win elections in order to formulate policies" [47]. Rationally, in the view of Downs implies that when a voter is faced with several choices, he or she will rank all the available options and weigh same in an ordered preference after which the choice will be based on the one that "ranks highest in his preference ordering" [47]. In effect, voters make choices because of what they want or get from politicians. The politicians, also, formulate policies because they want votes. The theory is criticized for not adequately explaining the concept of public goods which is characterized "impossibility of exclusion" [48], which is

relevant in the Ghanaian context because the NDC and NPP used social intervention programmes as a major campaign tool in the 2020 elections. This, notwithstanding, the theory is important for this paper because it encapsulates the ‘egotropic’ and ‘sociotropic’ rationality of Ghanaian voters and politicians [3-48]. The ‘egotropic’ rationality refers to the anticipated personal benefits of both politicians and voters while the ‘sociotropic’ refers to benefits that politicians and voters anticipate for others, such as their communities, supporters, family members, or even country. Rationality is, therefore, relevant in explaining the motives of politicians and voters in Ghana’s 2020 elections. The critical question to answer in this paper is what explains the outcome of the 2020 elections in Ghana.

## 5. Election Management Body

The Fourth Republican constitution of Ghana guarantees the right of every Ghanaian who is 18 years and of sound mind, the right to register and vote in public elections. In line with the laws of Ghana, the Electoral Commission undertook a lot of measures before the 2020 elections. Topical among the measures was the decision by the EC to replace the existing voters' register which was said to be a "bloated and contentious one" [1], with a new register. This was done amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and accusations of deploying the military to intimidate registrants in the opposition stronghold, especially in the Volta region. This, the government discounted and explained that soldiers were deployed to the region, like any other border region, because of the COVID-19 pandemic which had led to the closure of Ghana’s land and sea borders at the time. Despite the lack of consensus on the compilation of the new register, the 38-day biometric voter registration exercise was carried out in June 2020. The final register, was certified by the EC on 6 November 2020 and copies made available to all the political parties, 21 clear days before election day, as per the laws of Ghana. Also, the EC published the voters’ register online for the general public. The new register captured 17,027,641 eligible Ghanaians. In the words of the Chairperson of the EC “citizens have access to information on the number of registrants on the Voter’s roll, the number of registered male and female voters, the number of youth and first-time voters as well as the number of voters who are persons with disabilities” [2].

The EC put in place new measures to reduce the long queues usually associated with voting. This was done by organizing the polls in all the 38,622 polling stations but voting took place in 38,622 voting stations across the country and in 275 constituencies. The expanded polling stations ensured that no voting station had more than 750 voters. In fact, 70% of the polling stations had less than 500 voters. This meant that voters were not to spend too much time queuing in the scorching sun to cast their ballots. Also, the EC introduced another layer in the results declaration process. It is instructive to note that only the Chairperson of Ghana's EC is the Returning Officer for the presidential election. This means only the chairperson can declare presidential results. Over the

years, results from the ten regions were faxed to the ‘strong room’ in Accra, for verification/certification in the presence of all political party representatives, before the declaration. This, in the view of the EC chairperson, delayed the process. To reduce this, the EC decided that all 16 regional directors should collate the final results and forward the regional summary sheets via fax and email to the ‘stronghold’.

Further, the EC successfully reformed the country’s entire Biometric Voter Management System. It, for instance, procured and deployed robust equipment and devices including the Biometric Verification Devices, the biometric registration kits, user-friendly software to govern the entire Biometric voter registration and verification system, and a brand-new data center. In the words of the Chairperson of the EC, “we can all be proud of a brand-new Biometric Voter Register that reflects unique individuals who are eligible to vote. With determination and focus, we were able to prepare a Register that recorded seventeen million and twenty-seven thousand, six hundred and forty-one (17,027,641), eligible voters, in just 38 days in the rainy season of Ghana” [2].

There was a marked increase in the frequency of communication with political parties through the Inter-Party Advisory Committee (IPAC) especially in the last two months to the election. Even though the opposition parties criticized a lack of consultation during earlier IPAC meetings, the last two meetings observed just before the elections, were conducted in a consultative manner [49].

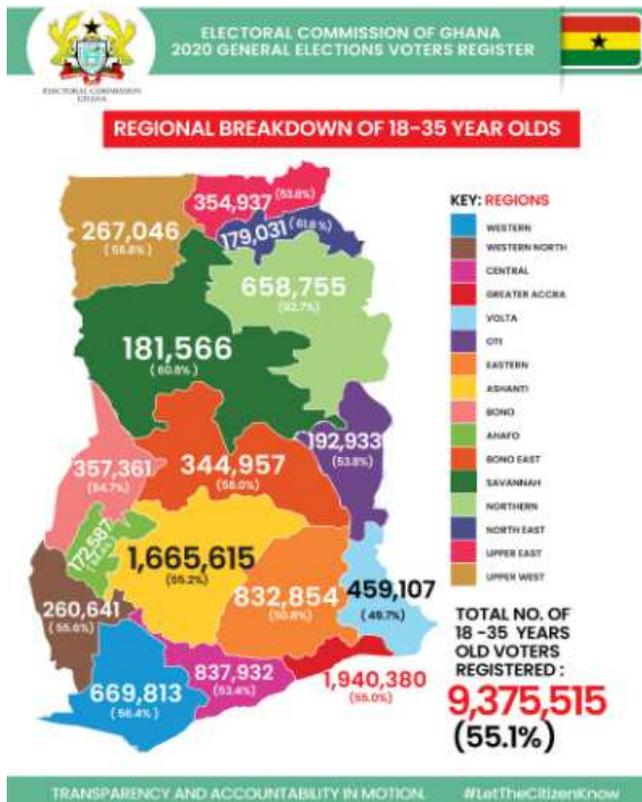
The EC put in place robust transparency measures at the polling stations and collation centres for counting of votes and collation of results. According to the EC, the NDC and NPP had party agents that monitored the election process from the printing of ballot papers, transportation, voting, counting, collation and final declaration. This claim was disputed by the NDC which cited the Techiman South Constituency where the declaration was done amidst heavily armed soldiers, captured on a viral videotape, without the presence of the NDC agents and candidate.

### 5.1. The Dynamics of The 2020 Voters Register

The total number of first-time voters was within the 18-21-year-old bracket and they were 2,635,050 constituting 15.5%. Over, the total number of young people defined as people aged between 18-35 was 9,375,515. This figure represents 55.1% of the registered voters. The national capital recorded the highest number of young voters with 1,940,380 followed by the Ashanti region with 1,665,615. This was relevant to the polls because the governing NPP had implemented a Free Senior High School Policy, which the party believed young voters would buy into it and vote accordingly. The others are: 36-45 years 3,314,935 (19.5%); the 45-55-year bracket was 2,078,550 representing 12.2%; the 55-65-year bracket was 1,289,491 (7.6%). The least number was people aged 75 and above. The group recorded only 341,051 representing only 2%.

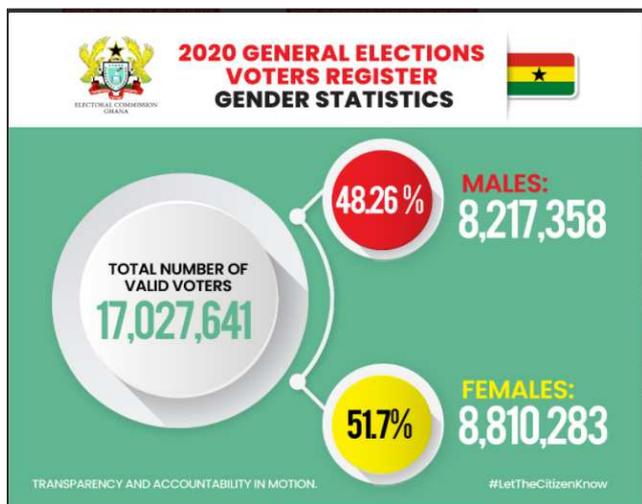
The voters register recorded more women than men. Figure 2 showed that women constituted 51.7% of registered voters while men were 48.26%. The NDC chose a woman as its running mate and argued that she would appeal to the

numerous female voters.



Source: Electoral Commission of Ghana, [40]

Figure 1. Breakdown of 18-35-year-old registered voters based on Ghana's 2020 register.



Source: Electoral Commission of Ghana, [40].

Figure 2. Gender statistics of Ghana's 2020 voters register.

### 5.2. Electoral Reforms

The EC went into the 2020 elections with a number of reforms. Most of these reforms were largely the outcome of the 2012 election petition at the Supreme Court. Some of the recommendations from the apex court formed the basis for the reforms.

#### 5.2.1. Recommendations Adopted by the Electoral Commission and Implemented

The reforms that were accepted and implemented by the EC are: 1. institutionalization of Inter-Party Advisory Committee (IPAC), 2. definition of the term “ordinary resident”, 3. extension of the period of notice for the voter registration exercise from 14 to 21 days, 4. use of BVD for the exhibition of the provisional register, 5. implementation of continuous voter registration, 6. election officials and party agent should be made to take an oath before a Magistrate instead of an officer of the Electoral Commission, 7. Reduction of the number of voters per polling station to a maximum of 750 voters, 8. raise the minimum education qualification required for recruitment as an election officer, 9. improve compensation package for election officials, 10. improve upon the training of election officials and an expansion of the list of special voters to include accredited media personnel and election observers, 11. Returning officers should give copies of proxy and special and absent voters lists to candidates, 12. EC should give copies of the final voters register to the political parties 21 days before elections, 13. priority should be given to vulnerable persons at the polling stations, 14. EC should take steps to reduce rejected ballots, 15. redesign and simplify the statement of poll and declaration of results forms, 16. serially number all statement of poll and declaration of results forms, 17. clear provision should be followed on the adjournment of the poll, 18. appoint collation officers for each constituency and set up National Collation Centre to replace the Strong Room [40].

#### 5.2.2. Reforms Partially Implemented

Reforms that were partially implemented had to do with the continuous voter registration based on Regulation 9 (1&2) of Constitutional Instrument, CI, 91 and the expansion of the list of Special Voters to include Media Personnel and Election Observers [40].

By partial, the author meant that there was some amount of continuous voter registration, but this was done before the compilation of a new voters’ register, which made that exercise a nullity. Also, some accredited journalists and election observers were included in the special voting list.

#### 5.2.3. Reforms Yet to Be Implemented

The reforms that are yet to be implemented are that presidential and parliamentary elections should be held on 7th November. The Electoral Commission should publish in the gazette all polling stations with their Codes and locations not later than 42 days before an election. Others are that the EC should publish the Presidential Election Results on a polling station by polling station basis and the Electoral Commission should be given the mandate to apply to Court to delete names of unqualified persons from the Provisional Voters Register [40].

#### 5.2.4. Reform Recommendations Outside the Ambit of the Electoral Commission

There are other reforms that are not within the ambit of the EC. These are 1. the period for the determination of a

presidential election petition should be shortened in view of the fact that the 2012 petition took 8 months in court. It must be noted that the Supreme Court has decided that future election adjudication will take 42 days but that is yet to be seen. In fact, in a public comment on the issue, renowned lawyer, Tsatsu Tsikata, disagreed and argued that justice cannot and must not be sacrificed on the altar of expedition, 2. the grounds for invalidating the election of a president should be clearly spelt out, 3. election tribunals to hear and determine electoral cases and petitions should be established, 4. the EC should be empowered to prosecute election offenses, 5. the requirement for the consent of the Attorney-General before prosecution of election offenses should be removed, 6. the financial estimates of the electoral commission should be sent directly to parliament without being subjected to the control of the executive, 7. appointments of members of the EC should be with the prior approval of parliament, 8. the term of office of the chairperson and members of the Electoral Commission should be limited to two five-year periods [40].

## 6. The Candidates and Campaign

The 2020 elections recorded the highest number of presidential candidates on the ballot paper. For the first time in the electoral history of the fourth Republic, 12 individuals comprising one male independent candidate, three women and 8 other male contenders, were on the presidential ballot paper. Overall, the contest was not gender-favourable. For instance, the ruling NPP fielded only 24 female candidates (8.7 percent) while the NDC filed just 22 (8 percent) for the parliamentary elections in 275 constituencies. The only seemingly good thing was the nomination of a woman for the vice-presidential slot by the opposition NDC and perhaps the three women who contested on the tickets of smaller parties, although, none of them made 0.5% of popular votes.

The nomination fee for presidential candidates was doubled to 100,000 GHS (14,160 EUR) in 2020. The fee for parliamentary candidates was 10,000 GHS (1,416 EUR) for the 2020 elections. Given Ghana's GDP per capita of 11,541 GHS (1,634 EUR) in 2019, the nomination fees for parliamentary candidates appeared unreasonably high (EU EOM, 2020). It must be noted that per the electoral laws of Ghana, the amount paid is refunded to any candidate who gets 25% of the votes in the case of presidential and 12.5% in the case of parliamentary candidates.

This notwithstanding, only five out of 17 presidential candidates were disqualified by the EC based on allegations of forged signatures, although, some were not given a hearing. This led to applications for judicial review by three disqualified candidates but their cases were dismissed by 30 November 2020 by the law courts. 12 presidential candidates, therefore, sought the votes of the Ghanaian electorate to govern. However, the main contest was between the ruling NPP and the opposition NDC candidates whose campaign, according to the UE observer mission, was sometimes acrimonious. The two who have all occupied the seat at the

presidency before were at each other on the basis of track record and other trivialities including the use of abusive words like 'incompetent' used by Akufo-Addo on his opponent and 'Sakawa' used by Mahama against Akufo-Addo. They were also low points perpetuated by their supporters such as an audio with slay queens allegedly fighting over an unnamed man but the ruling party attributed the unnamed man to the main opposition candidate Mr. Mahama. On the other hand, a video whose content did not indicate the time it was recorded with Mr. Akufo-Addo receiving cash from someone and T-shirts was used against the NPP candidate, president Akufo-Addo. The NDC alleged that it was a bribe offered to the president.

The NPP described the NDC's campaign message as '*ato nsuom*' literally meaning it has fallen in water while the NDC simply described the NPP's campaign message as empty. The NPP mainly focused on continuity while the NDC focused on change. Also, Mr. Akufo-Addo accused Mr. Mahama of reversing the economic gains of the country during his period of stewardship and so should not be given another mandate. On the contrary, Mr. Mahama accused Mr. Akufo-Addo of borrowing more than all governments since independents just within his first 4 years in office and with nothing to show, as well as practicing nepotism and family and friends government.

In November 2020, a month before the elections, former president Rawlings died. The last month to the elections saw the campaign dominated by the death and legacy of Mr. Rawlings. Another major topical issue within the period was the resignation of the Special Prosecutor on the basis of official interference, especially in relation to his assessment of the Agyapa deal involving Ghana's sale of rights to future gold royalties. The NPP and NDC candidates were the only ones who toured the country on several occasions. Their vice-presidential candidates conducted separate campaigns and also toured the entire country. According to the EU EOM observers (2020), the misuse of state resources and the practice of turning official state events into campaign rallies were prevalent, resulting in an unlevelled playing field for the candidates. For example, the inaugurations of development projects by the incumbent President, Vice-President and aspiring candidates, with the overt involvement of metropolitan, municipal and district chief executives, made the campaign appear like a state event, with all the credit going to the incumbent governing party.

### 6.1. The Manifestos

Among the multiplicity of factors that determine electoral outcome, manifestos stand tall. To win elections in Ghana, the political parties prepare their manifestos and espouse ideologies to the masses [37]. While "manifestos are documents outlining in more or less detail policies or programmes a party proposes to pursue if elected to power", the "ideologies are more or less coherent sets of ideas that provide the basis for some kind of organized political action" [12, P. 84].

All the political parties launched their manifestos less than 4 months to election day which was 7 December. The ruling

NPP was the first to launch its 216-page manifesto on 22 August 2020 in Cape Coast. President Akufo-Addo officially out-doored Vice-President Dr. Alhaji Mahamadu Bawumia, as his running mate. He also out-doored all 275 parliamentary candidates of the NPP as well as the campaign team. Titled, *Leadership of service: Protecting Our Progress, Transforming Ghana for All*”, the NPP manifesto contained arguments based on their quest for re-election. It focused on the NPP’s desire to consolidate the significant successes achieved in office and to set the stage for the next level of the country’s development. It particularly highlighted social intervention programmes such as Free Senior High School Education and a ‘now working’ National Health Insurance Scheme. In the words of the president “all our flagship programmes, be it Free SHS, “One District, One Factory”, “One Village, One Dam,” the Programme for Planting for Food and Jobs and many others, have been rooted in the effort to liberate the energies of the people to grow an economy of which all the people can be part” [51, P.vii]. He summed up by urging the electorate to vote “four more years for Nana and the NPP to do more for you” [51, p. ix].

The opposition NDC followed suit and launched its manifesto on 7 September, 2020 in Accra. It was titled: People’s Manifesto: Jobs, Prosperity and More’. The 143-page document cataloged failed promises by the NPP, corruption and over-borrowing among other challenges facing the country. The manifesto focused on good governance, anti-corruption and accountability, creating sustainable and decent jobs, providing infrastructure for accelerated growth, reducing borrowing and fixing the economy. The presidential candidate, John Mahama, officially introduced his running mate, Prof. Jane Naana Opoku Agyemang, to the crowd. He argued that Ghana cannot afford to do things in the same old way. In his assertion, survival and success for present and future generations require a much more urgent and, in some cases, painful change of prevailing economic and social relations. He argued that Ghana needs a “new era of Social Justice: “it is time for renewal and gathering, it is time for greater self-reliance, it is time to close the wealth gap that divides our society, it is time to finally end intolerance and social discrimination against ethnic groups, religious groups, gender and age groups, it is time to end the repression of the media, and it is time to unite and create opportunities for all - not just a few” [52, p. 4].

The content of both manifestos showed that the parties recognized the immediate problems facing Ghanaian and so they made direct promises. This set the tone for an issue-based campaign. An analysis of the two manifestos; the NDC and NPP showed that in principle both parties were desirous of addressing some economic, educational, health, economic, environmental, social and cultural objectives. However, there was no direct link between the *Directive Principles of state policy* contained in chapter six of the 1992 Constitution which actually set the tone for the social contract between the government and the governed. The net effect of this is that “when a political party is in government there is little or no

reference to the *Directive Principles* while the manifesto is expected to define public policy” [12, p. 93].

Another worrying issue was the timing for the release of the manifestos. It simply made it difficult for the electorate, the majority of whom are illiterate to understand the documents. As such, the candidates made promises which were not contained in their manifesto documents. Besides, the candidates/parties failed to translate the message into local languages for the masses to comprehend. A careful observation of political party communicators on radio and television as well as on social media showed that most of the torch bearers at the constituency levels had a poor understanding of their own campaign messages. This applied to both parties.

## 6.2. Presidential Debates

Social forces engaged in Ghana’s electoral politics showed interest in the campaigns of the political parties. For instance, IMANI-Africa, a Civil Society Organization in partnership with the Multi-Media Group created a platform for presidential candidates to reach out to the voters. This took the form of presidential debates. The content of the debates covered areas such as law and order, job creation, economic recovery, corruption, mining, natural resource management, ease of doing business digital inclusion, mining, housing, agriculture and inclusive governance. Unlike previous elections, the 2020 presidential debates were not well structured and inclusive. For instance, both the presidential candidates of the ruling NPP and opposition NDC boycotted the debate and focused on directly campaigning in the various constituencies. The opposition leader also made use of social media handles to reach out to the electorate. The two leading candidates ignored COVID-19 restrictions and organized mass rallies with huge numbers.

The 2020 presidential debates were, therefore, not exciting due to the absence of the leading presidential candidates. This notwithstanding, the platform provided an opportunity for minor parties to showcase their political, social and economic ideas as part of deepening multi-party democracy in Ghana.

## 7. The Rejection, Protests and Legal Challenge

The opposition NDC rejected the declaration of incumbent president Akufo-Addo as the winner of the 7 December 2020 presidential election. Opposition leader former President Mahama held a news conference and stated that: “I stand before you tonight unwilling to accept the fictionalized results of a flawed election,” and added that “we will take all legitimate steps to reverse this tragedy of justice”. He alleged that numerous steps were “taken to manipulate the results of the election in favour of the incumbent.” Mr. Mahama noted that “armed forces featured heavily as an intimidating measure to reverse election results,” and called on the international community to remain engaged in “what is

happening in Ghana and to take careful note of the current threat that is being waged to our democracy.”

Supporters of the opposition NDC subsequently embarked on series of demonstrations across the country to register their displeasure over the election. Such protests led to deaths and injuries across the country. The Inspector-General of the Ghana Police Service, James Opong-Boanuh told the media in Accra that the police recorded over 60 incidents. "Twenty-one of the incidents are true cases of electoral violence, six of which involve gunshots resulting in the death of five". Attempts by opposition legislators to present a petition to the electoral commission, as part of their series of actions and unhappiness over election-related casualties, failed as armed policemen stopped the lawmakers from presenting the petition to the EC. Further, the police in the national capital had indicated their unwillingness to tolerate further protests by the NDC.

On 30 December 2020 former president Mahama caused his lawyers to file a petition in Ghana's apex court challenging the results of the 2020 Presidential Election declared by the Chairperson of the Electoral Commission of Ghana. He argued that based on the data contained in the declaration by Mrs. Jean Adukwei Mensa, chairperson of the EC, no candidate satisfied the requirements of Article 63 (3) of the 1992 Constitution to be declared President-elect. The 1992 Constitution stipulates that a person cannot be deemed to be elected as President of Ghana unless at the presidential election the number of votes cast in his or her favour is more than fifty percent of the total number of valid votes cast in the polls. Mr. Mahama, therefore, prayed the apex court to declare the results declared by the EC as "unconstitutional, null and void", because no candidate secured more than 50 percent of the total valid votes.

In an opposition to the petition, president Akufo-Addo noted that the petition was a face-saving attempt by former president Mahama and hence lacked substance. According to him, "the instant action is a ruse and face-saving gimmick by the petitioner after the petitioner and many senior members of the NDC party had prematurely claimed outright victory in the election, only to be badly exposed by results of the 1st respondent (EC), corroborated by all media houses of note in the country as well as many independent local and international observers”.

The EC acknowledged the possibility of errors but argued that the possible discrepancies did not have any significant effect on the final election results. Further, the EC noted that in announcing the results on 9 December 2020, it made an error and inadvertently "used 13,433,573 as the total valid votes cast. The total valid votes cast is 13,119,460". The true results, according to the EC, was that President Akufo-Addo garnered 6,730,587 representing 51.59 percent of the valid votes while former President Mahama got 6,213,182 representing 47.359 percent. The Techiman South Constituency has a total registered voter population of 128,018. As such the NDC held the view that if the figure is added to the total valid votes announced by the EC as cast (13,434,574), the resultant figure would now be 13,562,592.

Consequently, if all the votes of Techiman South Constituency were added to Petitioner's votes, President Akufo-Addo's votes would remain the same at 6,730,413, now yielding 49.625%, while the votes of former President Mahama would increase to 6,342,907, now yielding 46.768%. Therefore, the EC's claim in the declaration on 9th December 2020 that adding all the 128,018 votes in the Techiman South Constituency to the votes standing to the name of Petitioner would not change the results, was clearly wrong. Details of the petition are a subject of another study by this author.

## 8. Analysis of Ethnic and Regional Dynamics of the 2020 Elections

Ethnicity has played a central role in all elections in Ghana since independence [23, 22, 25]. The fourth Republic has witnessed the ethnic divide in the duopoly; the NDC and NPP. The ethnic card is mainly along the pro-Akans and anti-Akans with the Ewe ethnic group leading the anti-Akan hegemony crusade [26].

However, the outcome of the 2020 elections watered down the effect of ethnicity on Ghanaian politics. The presidential results saw the NPP's candidates (an Akan) making unprecedented gains in the Northern part of Ghana where the NDC's candidate hailed from. On the other hand, the NDC's candidate (a Guan from the North) made unprecedented inroads in some Akan dominated constituencies. The NPP won in the Ashanti region (72.75%), Eastern region (60.84%) Western region (50.92%) Central region (52.2%), North East region which is a non-Akan region (51.36%), the Ahafo region (55.04%) and the Bono region (58.22%). The NDC in addition to winning in the Northern dominated regions of Upper East (64.68%), Upper West (66.18%), Savanna (62.96%) Northern (53.26%) as well as the Oti (62.55%) and Volta regions (84.59%), also won in Akan dominated regions such as the Western North (50.92%), the Bono East (55.82%) and the Cosmopolitan national capital of Greater Accra region (51%). This is good for Ghana's democracy because ethnicity is inimical to a healthy growing democratic state.

The NDC and NPP took strategic decisions that resulted in the kind of results they got. The presidential candidate of the NPP was an Akan from the Eastern region. He selected a Mamprusi who was a Muslim from the North East region. This was strategically meant to target both Akan, Northern and Muslim voters across the country. The NDC presidential candidate was a Guan (Gonja) from the Savanna region in the Northern part of Ghana. He selected an Akan female from the Coastal region - Central. This was equally strategic to target both Akan and Northern votes as well the gender (women) voters, who were 51.7% on the electoral roll.

The presidential results declared by the EC were interesting and surprising to the parties based on the ethnic and gender calculations. The NPP won in the region where its running mate hailed from (North East) by 51.36% as against the NDC's 46.99%. The NDC lost in the Central

region where its running mate haled from by 45.81% as against the NPP's 52.2%. However, in the parliamentary race, the NDC won 13 as against the NPP's 10 in the Central region. This requires further studies to ascertain whether the good show in the parliamentary race had anything to do with the running mate who hailed from the region. The NPP won 4 out of the 6 seats in the North East Region.

The impact of the presidential candidates equally played a role in the victories they both chalked in their respective regions. The NPP won the Eastern region in both the presidential (60.84%) and parliamentary (25 out of 33 seats). Equally, the NDC won in the Savannah region by 62.96% in the presidential race and secured 4 out of the 7 seats. With the same presidential candidate in 2016, the NPP did better in the Eastern region by securing 62.37% of the presidential candidate as against the NDC's candidate who obtained 36.56%. Similarly, the NDC did better in the area now constituting the Savannah region in 2016 by winning all the 7 seats but lost 3 in 2020 and won 4. This means that both parties have successfully penetrated into the strongholds of the other. This could be explained by the issue-based campaign that took place in 2020 compared to previous elections which were largely dominated by identity politics and irrelevant things like insults.

## 9. The Media

The media environment in Ghana is largely conducive. In other words, Ghana has increasingly enjoyed a vibrant, diverse, pluralistic and relatively independent media. Unfortunately, the media is polarized along political party lines making it very difficult to rely on the media for unbiased opinion on political issues [53-54]. This is partly blamed on ownership. Politicians control the media environment in Ghana. Unfortunately, the state media has largely operated in favour of the ruling government [55-57].

The EU EOM observed that both the state-owned and private media in Ghana at national, regional and district levels made conscious efforts to provide media access to the smaller political parties. This was done through interviews of mostly the presidential candidates. Also, provisions were made for debates among the presidential candidates of the minor parties. The EU EOM (2020) report noted that the NPP and NDC mostly dominated the election-related information presented to voters through the media. Also, the state broadcaster - Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) - provided a fair opportunity to all political contestants through various programmes. However, EU EOM's media monitoring revealed the state-owned GTV, which is the TV section of GBC favoured the NPP by allocating 26.2 percent of airtime in its election-related news and programmes to the party. However, only 15.8 percent of airtime was allocated to the NDC in GTV's news and programmes. Additionally, the report noted that the ruling NPP and its presidential candidate benefited from extensive additional coverage on GTV (22.1 percent of airtime) through news and live broadcasts of inaugurations and projects launched by the President or

government representatives, often including campaign songs and messages. GBC Radio or Radio Ghana with its most powerful Greater Accra FM Uniiq FM was said to have provided equitable electoral coverage to all political parties; 34.2 and 28.6 percent of airtime allocated to NPP and NDC, respectively. According to EU EOM, the *Daily Graphic* (Ghana's oldest, most authoritative, widely read and most circulated newspaper) allocated 29.9 and 26.5 percent of space to the NPP and NDC, respectively.

Among the private media analyzed by the EU EOM, Adom FM and Joy FM (belonging to the Multi-Media Group) favoured the NDC in their election-related coverage, while UTV and peace FM (belonging to the Despite Media Group), as well as private newspapers. *The Chronicle* and *Daily Guide* showed biased coverage in favour of the NPP' (EU EOM, 2020). In addition, the EU EOM observer's report identified at least 33 NPP-affiliated, 28 NDC-affiliated and five PPP-affiliated radio stations currently on air in Ghana. The media has over the years tried to collate their own election results albeit was logistical constraints.

The author of this article who has worked with the state media for a decade and taken part in discussions in other media outlets as well as keenly monitored the media space and had discussions with some journalists and their producers during and after election 2020 notes as follows:

First, while Joy FM appeared to have favoured the NDC, it cannot be the case that Adom FM favoured the NDC. The explanation is that prior to the elections, the most authoritative programme on the Joy FM/TV platform (news file) was boycotted by the NPP on grounds of unfair paneling of discussants. While GTV argued that it invited both the NDC and NPP on its programmes, but the NDC openly accused GTV of not covering its activities for news. While the GTV had a self-inflicted unwritten 'policy' of not covering public lectures and religious activities, it did so when the President or his Vice, who were candidates in the elections, attended such programmes. The same could not be said of the opposition NDC. The president of Ghana has unimpeded access to the state broadcaster based on the 1992 Constitution, hence it makes sense for the ruling party to dominate GTV than the opposition and this has been the trend since 1992.

Second, some private stations were set up to champion the course of certain political parties, hence, it comes as no surprise that they were skewed in their reportage and election-related programming. For example, the *Daily Guide* which is the most powerful private newspaper in Ghana is owned by the national chairman of the NPP. *Ahoto FM* is owned by the national chairman of the NDC.

The Ghanaian media with this blend used interesting names to brand themselves in their preparedness to provide what they termed 'accurate and up-to-date reports' from voting to the declaration of results. Some of such included Multi-Media (Election Headquarters), Media General (Election Command Centre), EIB (Election Hub), CITITV and Radio (Election Bureau), etc. The reality, however, was that no media house had the staff strength to cover the over

38 thousand polling stations. As such, the media basically relied on the EC's results and sometimes, social media and tabulated same. There was, therefore, no independent collation of results by any media house in Ghana. Some of the Media Houses churned out wrong figures and had to correct them later. Media General and Despite Media Group were the worst offended; the former projected 149 seats for the NPP and the latter 139 for the NPP.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought to the light, the essence of social media. The EC did some of its communications on social media. Also, the political campaigning and discussions were present in closed chat groups on WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook Messenger and Twitter. In remote places, Information Centres were used. An Information Centre is just and a place for an announcement with mounted speakers capable of broadcasting to an entire community with about 50 houses.

## 10. Conclusion

The article examined the 7 December general elections in Ghana. It emerged that, despite some avoidable hiccups and isolated incidents of violence and deaths, the polls were generally free, fair and transparent. While this is commendable, the challenge at the supreme court highlights the need to re-examine issues such as vote collation and transmission, ballot snatching and the use of the armed forces in elections.

The unsatisfactory performance of the ruling NPP especially in the parliamentary race, where it lost its absolute majority, showed that the Ghanaian electorate are rational actors who punish mediocrity and reward hardwork. The message of the NPP parliamentary candidates, whom all relied on the provision of free Senior High School Education by central government, was not appealing to the voters. Equally, the electorate were not, too, enthused about the return of former president Mahama. As such, they voted for the incumbent president, Nana Akufo-Addo, and divided the parliamentary seats equally between the NDC and NPP, which has led to the opposition occupying the Speaker of Parliament position; the first time such has happened in Ghana.

The paper found that the issue of trust, especially, between the NDC and the EC, contributed to some of the challenges that were recorded. It further deepened the fact that the political parties in Ghana do not trust one another with the ruling party always in the good books of the EC and vice-versa. The EC needs to work hard to gain the trust of CSOs and opposition parties to lessen the suspicions and tensions associated with Ghanaian elections.

Also, it was found that the ethnic voting pattern has reduced with both parties making substantial gains among all ethnic groups. This has the capacity to contribute to the integration of Ghanaians as one people with a common destiny. This is in sharp contrast to the prevailing theoretical view that ethnicity is a deciding factor in Ghanaian elections and has the potential to polarize the country [23-25]. The paper agrees with Debrah (2016) that voting for co-ethnic is

not conditionally based on a good performance but sometimes it is an opportunity to receive portions of the authoritative allocation of the country's resources.

The paper concludes that the success of the 2020 general elections in Ghana was largely hinged on the continued electoral reforms, cooperation from competing political parties, vigilant civil society organization and media, issue-based campaign and the desire of the electorate to deepen multi-party democracy. Notwithstanding some challenges, the outcome of the elections has contributed to positioning Ghana as one of the beacons of hope in electoral politics in Africa. By examining the 2020 elections in Ghana, in this paper, the author has brought to the light important dynamics at all levels before, during and after elections and how they contribute to democratic deepening in Ghana.

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## Notes on Author

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