

# The Ghanaian election of 2017 and the Waning Power of Incumbency in Africa

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# THE GHANAIAN ELECTION OF 2016 AND THE WANING POWER OF INCUMBENCY IN AFRICA

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On 7 December 2016, Ghanaians went to the polls in a high stakes election that tested the country's democratic credentials. A new Chair of the Electoral Commission (EC) faced a baptism of fire, accused of favouring the ruling party but presiding over an election that many observers predicted could deliver an opposition victory.<sup>1</sup> Despite two peaceful transfers of power in 2000 and 2008, mounting political tensions and concern that the outcome of the election would be disputed led a majority of citizens to fear that the polls would be accompanied by violence.<sup>2</sup>

Just two days later, public apprehension turned to pride as all parties accepted the results. This was despite the fact that the ruling party suffered defeat in both the presidential and legislative polls. In the former, Nana Akufo Addo of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) defeated the incumbent, President John Mahama of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), winning an absolute majority (54%) in the first round. Significantly, this represented the first time a sitting Ghanaian president had been defeated at the ballot box, since all previous opposition victories came in contests in which the ruling party was forced to run a first time candidate after the incumbent had exhausted constitutional term limits and stood down.<sup>3</sup>

This transfer of power delighted NPP supporters and disappointed their NDC counterparts in equal measure, but there appears to have been a broad consensus that the process was fair and represented the will of the people.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the elections confirmed both the willingness of the electorate to vote out poorly performing governments, and the commitment of political elites to play by the rules of the game, culminating in another step forwards in what Gyimah-Boadi has called Ghana's fragile process of democratic consolidation.<sup>5</sup>

Drawing on fieldwork before, during and after the elections,<sup>6</sup> we argue that the polls also have much to tell us about the state of democracy elsewhere in Africa. To date, the advantages of incumbency and the "menu of manipulation" have tended to dominate analyses of African elections.<sup>7</sup> Far less attention has been devoted to the conditions under which opposition parties win power. There are good reasons for this. Writing in this *Journal* in 2010, Cheeseman found that the electoral playing field was so unbalanced that incumbents won 88% of the elections that they contested - with transfers of power much more likely to occur in "open seat" polls in which sitting presidents are forced to give way to new candidates as a result of presidential term-limits.<sup>8</sup>

While this general pattern persists, Mahama's loss in Ghana – and the previous defeat of sitting presidents in Nigeria and, for a week at least, Gambia – suggests that it is also becoming increasingly difficult for incumbents to retain power. Although Ghana is in some ways an outlier in Africa in terms of the number of changes of government that it has experienced,<sup>9</sup> the institutional and societal factors that undermined the NDC's authority provide important insights into the challenges that many African presidents face. In particular, we argue that recent transfers of power have been driven by a combination of deteriorating economic conditions, opposition

learning, increasingly robust electoral processes, and – magnifying the impact of these three – increasingly assertive voters.

Taken together, these developments make for much more competitive elections but the outcome of this process is uncertain because it depends on the willingness of leaders to continue to play by democratic rules. When they do, as in Ghana and Nigeria's most recent elections, the defeat of incumbents is likely to ensue. When they do not, as in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, and Zimbabwe, the result is not democratic reform but greater repression, as presidents seek to insulate themselves against the rising risk of defeat. In this way, the factors that account for recent opposition victories also help to explain the recent decline in the quality of civil liberties across much of the continent.<sup>10</sup>

### **Economic Difficulties and Assertive Voters**

In the months preceding the 2016 elections, hand painted signs reading “no lights no votes” started to appear in parts of rural Ghana.<sup>11</sup> Their emergence illustrates a key feature of the campaign: the way in which economic difficulties and increasingly assertive voters combined to undermine the ruling party's grip on power. Ghana's economy has grown fairly steadily over the last two decades, and GDP growth is projected to rise from 4.1% in 2015 to 5.4% in 2016. These trends fuelled popular expectations that the Mahama government found itself unable to meet after production problems in the oil sector, combined with low oil prices, resulted in lower government revenue than projected.<sup>12</sup> Along with a series of power shortages, which highlighted the country's infrastructural shortcomings and hampered economic activity, these developments undermined the capacity of the NDC government to generate jobs.

Ordinary Ghanaians have keenly felt the impact of economic difficulties. High inflation has led to increases in the price of key goods by 16 to 18% in each of the last three years, eroding the real value of wages, while youth unemployment is currently estimated at 48%. Consequently, many young people have been unable to pursue their personal ambitions, and have been forced to stay living with their parents well into their adult years.

Popular frustrations with economic hardship would not have altered the course of the election if Ghanaian voters conformed to an “ethnic census” model and simply turned out en masse for their ethnic representative/party.<sup>13</sup> Ashanti voters would have supported the NPP, which has historically represented their interests, while Ewe voters would have remained loyal to their leaders within the NDC, and the election would have been decided by ethnic arithmetic rather than the campaign. However, much like their counterparts in other African states, Ghanaian voters are more sophisticated than this. The “no lights no votes” signs that were carefully placed along roads so that they could be seen by travelling politicians were erected not in opposition areas, but in the Volta region – an NDC heartland. In this context, they were not so much a declaration of voting intentions as a demand for more responsive government from ruling party's core social base.

The message to ruling party leaders at both the constituency and national level was clear: votes cannot be taken for granted. Such public expression of discontent reflects three interrelated trends. First, successive transfers of power have inculcated the belief that poorly performing governments can be replaced. More specifically, the willingness of political elites to respect key democratic rules has helped to reduce the stakes of electoral contests, because losing parties believe that they will have an

opportunity to win power again in the future. At the same time, the fact that political candidates are typically careful to eschew explicitly ethnic appeals, and couch their campaigns in terms of national level policy goals such as industrialization and jobs, has stymied the evolution of the kind of divisive winner-takes-all politics witnessed elsewhere on the continent.<sup>14</sup> In turn, this has given Ghanaian voters of all stripes the space to be more critical of their own leaders.

Second, voter expectations are changing. Indeed, in the context of a cumulative experience of competitive elections and relatively educated citizenry (with a literacy rate above 75%),<sup>15</sup> some studies have argued that a significant number of Ghanaians have abandoned clientelism in favour of an 'evaluative' approach to politics in which club goods such as health clinics are more important than private goods such as cash handouts.<sup>16</sup> In contrast, others insist that clientelist politics remain dominant.<sup>17</sup> Our research offers a revision to these positions: the lesson of the recent elections is not that evaluative behaviour has displaced clientelism, but that voters are increasingly inclined to an evaluative clientelism, which is shaped by rising expectations and enabled by a relatively robust electoral system.<sup>18</sup>

As the authors found in a nationally representative survey of 2,700 Ghanaians conducted in December 2015, public attitudes towards vote-buying are highly permissive.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, during the campaign a range of items were distributed by candidates and their support teams, including money, t-shirts, rubber boots, cutlasses, second-hand clothes and pre-paid electricity meters. However, while many Ghanaian voters demand small gifts as a basic requirement of entering into a conversation about supporting a given party, this is only the first part of a more complex negotiation and does not guarantee their support with gifts often considered as inadequate or belated. As a result, while the NDC gave out more money and gifts than the NPP, they still struggled to mobilise the support they had enjoyed in previous polls both within and beyond their strongholds.

Third, an increasingly open and tolerant political atmosphere has made it easier for political parties and leaders to campaign in the heartlands of their rivals. Thus, seasoned political activists in Ho Central constituency recalled how opposition activists were forced to campaign "underground" or not at all during the campaign for the country's "founding" multi-party election in 1992. By contrast, in 2016, NDC and NPP flags hung side-by-side throughout the town centre, while opposition activists openly campaigned for political change. This is not to overlook a number of violent incidents between rival supporters that speak to the ongoing tension between the two parties, but it is important to note that these episodes were typically brief and localised.

Taken together, these developments have weakened the capacity of whichever party is in power to fully control the vote in its heartlands, generating an increasingly competitive political landscape that has rendered presidents more vulnerable to popular discontent. Although few countries have developed a political landscape that is as tolerant as Ghana's, or have experienced as many transfers of power, similar trends have weakened the position of incumbent presidents in a number of other cases. In Nigeria for example, a deteriorating economic environment, the waning credibility of President Goodluck Jonathan, and the presence of a number of respected reformers in the opposition All Progressives Congress (APC) helped to facilitate a transfer of power in 2015. In like manner, a period of economic decline in Gambia as a result of a drop in tourism and nearby Ebola outbreak, combined with the emergence of a credible opposition candidate in the form of businessman Adama Barrow, contributed to the defeat of President Yahya Jammeh – although he has yet to accept it.

The defeats for Mahama, Jonathan, and Jammeh suggest that a significant proportion of the electorate decide how to vote on the basis of their perceptions of the economic performance and competence of the party in power. As Bratton et al have argued, based on Afrobarometer survey data from 18 countries, “would-be voters in Africa consider policy performance, especially the government’s perceived handling of unemployment, inflation, and income distribution”.<sup>20</sup> Further survey research has found that the kind of voters most likely to vote on the basis of performance and the public good are those who live in urban areas,<sup>21</sup> are more educated,<sup>22</sup> and come from families that have experienced inter-ethnic marriage.<sup>23</sup> If this is correct, the proportion of the electorate voting on the basis of the government’s record will grow in the future as levels of urbanization and education on the continent increase.

However, it is important to recognize that this is unlikely to mean that voters will swap parties regularly with no consideration to partisan or ethnic ties. The Ghanaian experience suggests that individual’s overall perception of competence is itself shaped by their sense of a politician’s willingness to respond to their particular needs. Indeed, even in countries where ethnic identities are highly salient – such as Kenya – voting patterns stem from a politics of persuasion whereby citizens are encouraged to view their interests – and the country’s – as best served by co-ethnics.<sup>24</sup> As a result, the politics of ethnicity and the politics of performance often bleed into one another, such that voters who are highly critical of the ruling party are not always prepared to vote for the alternative. Thus, leaders who take their supporters for granted are likely to suffer at the polls not because their supporters will necessarily switch to a rival, but because they may just stay home if their expectations are disappointed.

### **Opposition Learning and Innovation**

President Mahama’s defeat did not only reflect economic difficulties. The NPP also ran a more effective campaign than in the past. Having lost two elections in a row, it was widely rumoured that Akufo Addo would face a leadership challenge should he fail again.<sup>25</sup> Taken together with the NPP’s limited confidence in the EC, and recognition that defeating an incumbent president would be particularly problematic, Akufo Addo’s allies pursued a process of party strengthening. Consequently, although the NPP was hampered by a lack of funds, having spent eight long years in opposition, it appears to have targeted its resources more effectively.

This process took two forms: first, a more nuanced party message; second, new strategies of political mobilization and demobilisation. At the national level, the opposition made a number of grand promises, including a commitment to build one factory per district or constituency in order to industrialise the country, and the creation of an annual development fund of \$1 million per district to meet local needs. These pledges, which committed the NPP to a level of expenditure that may prove impossible to deliver, were carefully targeted to compete with President Mahama’s claims to have completed “the most massive infrastructural development in the history of this country”. Thus, although the NDC was able to point to Ghc 3 billion worth of expenditure on major projects, including the completion of a number of regional and district hospitals, it was the NPP that made the most expansive promises about what it would do in power.

Significantly, these pledges went hand-in-hand with a negative campaign that sought to emphasise the ruling party’s responsibility for the country’s economic malaise. In

making this case, the NPP – which recruits many of its leaders from legal and economic elites – depicted NDC leaders as lacking the skills necessary to effect development, and argued that it was best placed to support the business sector. These claims were strengthened by a series of corruption scandals, some of which implicated the president and his closest allies.<sup>26</sup> By consistently reinforcing the link between corruption, government waste, and the absence of funds to deal with key challenges such as poor roads and electricity shortages, the NPP was able to paint the government as the main cause of Ghana's economic difficulties. In doing so, the opposition began to undermine public confidence in the ruling party: in our December 2015 survey, just 44% of respondents reported trusting the president.<sup>27</sup>

These national campaigns were supported by a ground campaign that emphasised different messages in different parts of the country. Having learnt the difficulty of converting committed NDC supporters in previous elections, the opposition carefully targeted its efforts. In NPP strongholds, such as Kumasi, the main challenge for the party was not to win over government supporters so much as to foster internal unity and boost turnout among an electorate whose partisan allegiance is clear but which does not always head to the polls.<sup>28</sup> To this end, party leaders emphasised how much allied communities stood to gain from a transfer of power, pledging a wide range of benefits from small gifts to club goods such as health clinics.

However, the NPP adopted a very different strategy in NDC strongholds where it relied on the development of a stronger party infrastructure. As Morrison has argued,<sup>29</sup> one of most distinctive features of Ghanaian politics is the strong political traditions that the two main parties identify with, and the capacity of these parties to dominate the political landscape. In 2016, the NPP put its political networks in government heartlands to particularly good use, classifying and targeting voters so as to avoid wasting funds. First, in higher density areas in which many voters can be quickly contacted, an “advanced party” conducted door-to-door canvassing and localised meetings to determine the sentiments of households and communities. Those who were identified as committed NDC supporters were subsequently left alone, while those who appeared to be sympathetic to the NPP received follow-up meetings in which they were given small gifts such as party t-shirts in an effort to firm up their support. Faced with voters who fell somewhere in between these two poles, such as disgruntled NDC supporters, the NPP adopted a third approach, which emphasised a third choice: not to vote at all. Aware that former NDC supporters were unlikely to switch sides, opposition activists ran a negative campaign that emphasised the ruling party's failings and encouraged its supporters to stay at home.

Finally, in the country's four “swing areas” in which there is strong support for both parties – Brong Ahafo, Central, Greater Accra and Western – the NPP pursued a combination of these two approaches, to the extent that it was possible to target voters in diverse locales. This trio of strategies appears to have been effective. While the NPP performed better in the NDC's strongholds than it did in 2012, the most important development in these areas was that turnout fell dramatically, resulting in a drop in the number of votes for Mahama. For example, in Volta the number of votes secured by the NPP increased by 22,000 to 133,000, while support for the NDC fell by 121,000 to 613,205 – despite the expansion of the electoral register. Along with the NPP's stronger performance in its own heartlands,<sup>30</sup> and the fact that the opposition overturned NDC majorities in all four swing states,<sup>31</sup> this condemned Mahama to the worst electoral performance of any sitting president since the reintroduction of multiparty politics.

The kind of opposition political learning and innovation that contributed to the ruling party's defeat in Ghana has also underpinned transfers of power in a number of other

countries. This is an important point, because the fragmentation of the opposition has been one of the factors that has hitherto enabled incumbents to maintain political hegemony. As Nicolas van de Walle and Kimberley Butler argued in 1999, the most common party system on the continent features a dominant ruling party and fragmented opposition.<sup>32</sup> In the case of Ghana, the persistence of a two-party system has limited the extent of political fragmentation and so the main challenge for the NPP was to shore up internal party unity and find new ways to campaign outside of its home areas. But elsewhere on the continent, the task facing opposition parties has often been more taxing, and has involved complex processes of alliance formation.

Although the construction of stable political coalitions has often failed as a result of a lack of trust between leaders, the absence of common ground, and weak party structures,<sup>33</sup> there is evidence that successive defeats have encouraged opposition parties to take such processes more seriously. In Nigeria, for example, the creation of a relatively inclusive alliance of northern and southern leaders within the APC, and the ability of the new coalition to limit defections ahead of polling day, laid the foundations for Muhammadu Buhari's presidential victory. Similarly, in the Gambia, it was the decision of a number of different factions to bury their differences and invest in the formation of a united front that undermined Jammeh's grip on power. Given this, it may be time to reevaluate our understanding of the capacity of opposition parties to adapt and organize – even in contexts where supportive institutions such as trade unions are absent.<sup>34</sup> Political parties may still represent the “weakest link” in the chain of democratization,<sup>35</sup> but they are not static and need not repeat their mistakes.

### **Electoral Commission Institutionalization and New Technology**

The Ghanaian Electoral Commission has also undergone a process of institutional innovation and strengthening over the past twenty years. Following the controversy of the 1992 elections, when the NPP boycotted legislative polls in protest at the alleged rigging of the presidential vote, a process of steady reform has built opposition confidence in the electoral process. The EC's credibility has had two main sources. First, the personal authority and calming influence of its long-standing (1993-2015) Chairman, Kwadwo Afari-Gyan, who announced the first defeat of a ruling party in 2000. Second, the creation of the Inter-Party Advisory Committee (IPAC) – an arena within which all of the main political parties are represented and can discuss their electoral concerns – which has enabled the EC to build consensus around a series of reforms such as the introduction of transparent ballot boxes and election technology. Taken together, these processes have not eliminated malpractice, but they have given rise to one of the most respected commissions on the continent.<sup>36</sup>

However, despite its record of success, the EC went into the 2016 elections facing serious questions over its credibility. In 2012, the NPP filed a petition with the Supreme Court, challenging the election results and alleging multiple voting, the existence of “ghost” polling stations not on the official list and – crucially – the absence of relevant signatures on some forms. Even after the Supreme Court confirmed Mahama's victory, the opposition continued to protest that the election had been fraudulent and that the 2016 polls would be rigged. Their fears were intensified when Afari-Gyan stood down in 2015 and was replaced by the former chairperson of the National Commission for Civic Education, Charlotte Osei, who was alleged to be a government ally. The combination of the controversy of the 2012 polls and Osei's appointment weakened public confidence in the EC, to the extent that in December

2015 only 24% of Ghanaians said that they trusted the body “a lot”, while 25% reported that they did not trust it “at all”.<sup>37</sup>

The EC responded to these challenges as it had to similar criticisms in the past: by enacting reforms to counteract identified problems and using IPAC to build agreement between the rival parties. In total, the EC agreed to make 27 out of 29 changes proposed by a Special Reform Committee set up to review the 2012 controversy.<sup>38</sup> As in that election, biometric registration and verification technology was used to try and improve the quality of the voters register and to reduce multiple voting. At the same time, there was a new requirement that physical copies of signed polling station and constituency level results be supplied to party agents. Perhaps most significantly, the EC continued to build up its cadre of regional and district election officers who see themselves as professionals and regard their work as a career. While the nuts and bolts of the process were handled by temporary staff, the managerial and supervisory presence of these bureaucrats encouraged confidence in the process at the constituency level. Despite NPP concerns about the alleged appointment of NDC supporters as returning officers, the combination of these measures resulted in a high quality election, which suggests that the EC has developed an institutional strength that is just as important as the personal authority of the Chairperson.<sup>39</sup>

The NPP also changed the way in which it monitored the polls. Building on a strong network of activists in all parts of the country, the opposition developed an app that party agents at the polling station level could download onto their mobile phones and use to record and transmit both the result and a photograph of the signed verification form. As a result, the opposition was able to construct a parallel set of results that meant that party leaders were confident that they had won the presidency well before the Electoral Commission began releasing the official figures. Along with similar efforts by some media houses, this ensured that the NPP’s gains were widely publicised early on, which in turn increased the pressure on the Commission to declare the result, and on Mahama to stand down.

Similar processes of electoral reform have also played an important role in enabling opposition victories in other countries. For example, in Nigeria the widely praised election that brought Buhari to power came just eight years after elections in 2007 that were widely condemned as some of the worst ever seen on the continent. In-between these two polls, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) strengthened both its independence and capacity – including the use of biometric registration and verification – under its well-respected Chairman, Attahiru Jega.

However, it is important not to exaggerate the extent to which incumbents are vulnerable to these trends, or the efficacy of election technology. The weak legal standing of most electoral commissioners in Africa, who tend to be appointed by and to serve at the pleasure of the president, means that it is often relatively straightforward for the ruling party to sustain a pliant electoral management body. Moreover, election technology has a mixed track record, and has typically only worked when there has been the necessary political will to put in place the infrastructure required to sustain it. Most notably, during the controversial Kenyan election of 2013, a new system for transmitting results via mobile phones failed completely, while in Nigeria many biometric verification machines could not be used on polling day, forcing polling officials to fall back on manual processes. Given this, it is important to keep in mind that neither electoral commission reform nor new technology represents a silver bullet for free and fair elections.



## Should I stay or should I go

Taken together, economic downturn, assertive voters, stronger electoral commissions and opposition innovation has increased the pressure on incumbent presidents in many parts of the continent. However, these developments will not necessarily translate into more competitive elections and transfers of power. As Robert Dahl famously noted,<sup>40</sup> presidents have two choices when faced with mounting opposition: they may accede to pressure for reform, or they may decide to repress their rivals. When incumbents agree to reform, transfers of power become far more likely, as in Ghana and Nigeria. But where presidents respond through coercion, as in Burundi and Chad, hope of democratic consolidation is typically undermined by a period of autocratization. This point is important, because over the past decade African leaders faced with the prospect of imminent defeat have tended to choose repression over reform, leading to a decline in the quality of civil liberties and political rights on the continent.<sup>41</sup>

Of course, the deployment of repression, which often takes the form of arresting rival leaders, clamping down on freedom of speech, refusing to permit opposition rallies, and the intimidation of civil society groups, is not always effective. In Burkina Faso, public hostility towards President Blaise Compaoré was so entrenched that when he attempted to change the constitution in 2014 to extend his 27 years in power, opposition leaders were able to mount an uprising that removed him from power. But Compaoré's example is rare. More often than not, coercion has proved highly effective. Partly as a result, a majority of sub-Saharan African countries have never experienced a transfer of power via elections. Of course, there are a number of examples of countries with open political systems in which the ruling party continues to win because it is genuinely popular, such as Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa. However, in more authoritarian contexts such as Ethiopia, Uganda, and Zimbabwe, the opposition would likely have made a major breakthrough in the absence of repression and electoral manipulation.<sup>42</sup>

**Table 1 - Presidential Transfers of Power Through The Ballot Box in Africa Since 1989<sup>43</sup>**

	Number (%)	Cases
<b>No transfer of power via elections</b>	28 (61%) <sup>44</sup>	Angola, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo Brazzaville, Djibouti, DRC, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Gabon, Gambia, Guinea-Conakry, Liberia, Mozambique, Mauritania, Namibia, Rwanda, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, South Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zimbabwe.
<b>Transfer of power via elections</b>	18 (39%)	Benin, Cape Verde, Comoros, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Nigeria, Niger, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Zambia.

This raises an important question: under what conditions do leaders agree to step down? In previous research, Cheeseman has argued that presidents are most likely to pursue reform rather than repression when they lack secure access to economic resources, face a united opposition, enjoy limited international backing, and have no

reason to fear that they or their allies will suffer a high economic or physical cost if they stand down.<sup>45</sup> The evidence of recent elections highlights the particular significance of the last of these factors. In Ghana, President Mahama's defeat has resulted in a blow to his pride, but is unlikely to lead to him being prosecuted or persecuted by the new government. Instead, Ghanaian politicians have come to a consensus on an extremely generous "golden handshake" that protects the economic interests of losing candidates at the presidential and parliamentary level. Mahama therefore had little to fear from leaving office.<sup>46</sup>

This stands in stark contrast with events in Gambia, where President Jammeh initially accepted defeat only to change his mind eight days later. Publicly, Jammeh has said that the reason for this u-turn was his growing belief that the election had been rigged. However, no evidence of electoral manipulation emerged during this period. What did change between Jammeh's two assertions was a statement by Adama Barrow that he would prosecute the outgoing president for a range of crimes committed during his time in office within a year of taking power.<sup>47</sup> Other softer options, such as allowing the president to go into exile, were explicitly rejected. Most notably, just two days before Jammeh's u-turn, Fatoumata Jallow-Tambajang, one of the main architects of the opposition alliance, stated that "He can't leave ... Any day he tells us he wants to go abroad, then we say no."<sup>48</sup> Seen in this light, Jammeh's about-face was driven not by a love of power for power's sake, but by an instinct for self-preservation.

The tumultuous events in the Gambia are instructive, because they demonstrate both the waning power of incumbency and the capacity of even defeated presidents to frustrate processes of political change when their personal safety is at stake. Along with victories for incumbent leaders in poor quality elections in Uganda and Zambia in 2016, Jammeh's intransigence serves as an important reminder that, while the challenges facing presidents are growing in many countries, the power of incumbency remains formidable.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> CDD-Ghana. "Ghana's 2016 Elections: Prospects for Credibility and Peacefulness", 16 November 2016, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0ByAq4dHfpyAtRIV0aFJJR2ZFcFk/view>.

<sup>2</sup> CDD-Ghana. "Ghana's 2016 Elections".

<sup>3</sup> In 2000, when the Jerry John Rawlings stood down at the end of a second term in 2000, his successor, John Atta Mills, was beaten by John Kufour and the NPP. Two elections later, power passed back to the NDC after Kufour's successor, Nana Akufo-Addo, lost to Mills in 2008.

<sup>4</sup> None of the authors heard any accusations that the result of the presidential election was rigged, and online commentary has been largely positive with regards to the process.

<sup>5</sup> Emmanuel Gyimah-Boadi. "Another Step Forward for Ghana". *Journal of Democracy* 20 (April 2009): 138-152.

<sup>6</sup> In total, the three authors spent 5 months on the ground in three locations: Asante Akim in the Ashanti region, an NPP stronghold, Ho in the Volta region, an NDC stronghold, and Cape Coast, a "swing" constituency. These areas were selected to offer variation on levels of political competition and the political affiliation of voters.

<sup>7</sup> Andreas Schedler. "The Menu of Manipulation." *Journal of Democracy* 13 (April 2002): 36-50.

<sup>8</sup> Nic Cheeseman. "African Elections as Vehicles for Change." *Journal of Democracy* 21 (October 2010): 139-153. Cheeseman suggests three reasons for this. First, ruling parties tend to split when they have to appoint a presidential successor. Second, new leaders tend to lack the patronage resources of their predecessors. Third, outgoing presidents tend to allow for freer and fairer elections.

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<sup>9</sup> Only Benin and Mauritius have experienced the kind of consistent transfers of power that have so far characterised Ghanaian politics under multi-partyism.

<sup>10</sup> Larry Diamond, "Facing up to the Democratic Recession". *Journal of Democracy*, 26, 1 (January 2015): 141-155.

<sup>11</sup> This observation was made by Dominika Koter during fieldwork in the Volta region and shared with Cheeseman via email on 26 December 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Maggie Flick, "Power Shortages Cut Growth Prospects in Ghana", *Financial Times*, 8 July 2015, <https://www.ft.com/content/fa56bb02-2481-11e5-bd83-71cb60e8f08c>.

<sup>13</sup> Horowitz, Donald L. *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (California: University of California Press, 1985).

<sup>14</sup> Susanne D Mueller. "The Political Economy of Kenya's Crisis." *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 2 (May 2008): 185-210.

<sup>15</sup> UNESCO, "Ghana", no date (2016), <http://en.unesco.org/countries/ghana>.

<sup>16</sup> Keith R. Weghorst, and Staffan I. Lindberg. "Effective Opposition Strategies: Collective Goods or Clientelism?". *Democratization* 18 (September 2011): 1193-1214; Robin Harding. "Attribution and Accountability: Voting for Roads in Ghana". *World Politics* 67, 4 (August 2015), 656-89.

<sup>17</sup> For the continued importance of patronage politics, see Emmanuel Gyimah Boadi and H. Kwasi Prempeh. "Oil, Politics and Ghana's Democracy". *Journal of Democracy* 23, 3 (July 2012), 94-108; Nahomi Ichino and Noah L Nathan. "Do Primaries Improve Electoral Performance? Clientelism and Intra-party Conflict in Ghana". *American Journal of Political Science*, 57, 2 (April 2013), 428-41.

<sup>18</sup> See also Ryan Briggs. "Electrifying the Base? Aid and Incumbent Advantage in Ghana". *Journal of Modern African Studies* 50, 4 (November 2012), 603-24.

<sup>19</sup> Nic Cheeseman, Gabrielle Lynch and Justin Willis. "Ghana Shows A Troubling Willingness to Accept Political Corruption". *Washington Post*, 21 December 2016, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/12/21/yes-ghana-had-a-peaceful-transfer-of-power-but-its-citizens-accept-some-troubling-practices-as-part-of-democracy/?utm\\_term=.f5045a2bae57](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/12/21/yes-ghana-had-a-peaceful-transfer-of-power-but-its-citizens-accept-some-troubling-practices-as-part-of-democracy/?utm_term=.f5045a2bae57).

<sup>20</sup> Michael Bratton, Ravi Bhavnani, and Tse-Hsin Chen. "Voting Intentions in Africa: Ethnic, Economic or Partisan?". *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 50 (February 2012): 27-52, 1.

<sup>21</sup> Danielle Resnick. "Opposition Parties and the Urban Poor in African democracies." *Comparative Political Studies* 45 (July 2012): 1351-1378.

<sup>22</sup> Nic Cheeseman. "'No Bourgeoisie, No Democracy'? The Political Attitudes of the Kenyan Middle Class." *Journal of International Development* 27 (July 2015): 647-664.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Bratton and Mwangi S. Kimenyi. "Voting in Kenya: Putting ethnicity in perspective." *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 2 (May 2008): 272-289.

<sup>24</sup> For example Gabrielle Lynch. "Electing the 'Alliance of the Accused': The success of the Jubilee Alliance in Kenya's Rift Valley Province." *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 8 (March 2014): 93-114

<sup>25</sup> Kobby Asmah, 'Clamour For NPP Flagbearer Slot', *Daily Graphic*, 24 March 2016, <http://www.graphic.com.gh/news/politics/clamour-for-npp-flag-bearer-slot-who-comes-up-against-akufo-addo.html>.

<sup>26</sup> Samuel Obour, 'Eight Scandals That Have Rocked the Mahama Administration', *Yen News*, December 2016, <https://yen.com.gh/57962-scandals-that-have-rocked-mahama-administration.html>.

<sup>27</sup> The exact question was "How much do you trust the president?". This figure includes those who said that they trusted the president "a lot" or "somewhat" and excludes don't knows and refusals.

<sup>28</sup> Cheeseman, "African Elections".

<sup>29</sup> Minion K.C. Morrison. "Political Parties in Ghana Through Four Republics: A Path to Democratic Consolidation." *Comparative Politics* (July 2004): 421-442.

<sup>30</sup> In the Ashanti region the NPP increased its vote by 70,000 to 1,609,167.

<sup>31</sup> Brierley, Sarah and George Ofuso. 'What will Ghanaians Expect from Their New President?', *Washington Post*, 6 January 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/01/06/what-will-ghanaians-expect-from-their-new-president/?utm\\_term=.c48768c613b9](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/01/06/what-will-ghanaians-expect-from-their-new-president/?utm_term=.c48768c613b9).

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<sup>32</sup> Nicolas van de Walle and Kimberly Smiddy Butler. "Political Parties and Party Systems in Africa's Liberal Democracies." *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 13 (September 1999): 14-28.

<sup>33</sup> Paul Chaisty, Nic Cheeseman, and Timothy Power. "Rethinking the 'presidentialism debate': conceptualizing coalitional politics in cross-regional perspective." *Democratization* 21 (January 2014): 72-94.

<sup>34</sup> These are typically seen to be the building blocks of effective opposition parties in Africa; see Adrienne LeBas. *From Protest to Parties: Party-building and Democratization in Africa*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>35</sup> Thomas Carothers. *Confronting the Weakest Link: Aiding Political Parties in New Democracies*. (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006).

<sup>36</sup> A number of studies have indicated the persistence of local malpractice: see for example Nahomi Ichino and Matthias Schündeln, "Deterring or Displacing Electoral Irregularities? Spillover Effects of Observers in a Randomized Field Experiment in Ghana". *The Journal of Politics*, 74, 1 (2012), 292-307.

<sup>37</sup> The exact question was: "How much do you trust the Electoral Commission?"

<sup>38</sup> Electoral Commission of Ghana, 'EC Implements 27 Reforms for Better Elections', no date, <http://www.ec.gov.gh/medias/news/89-ec-implements-27-reforms-for-better-elections.html>.

<sup>39</sup> Lindsay Whitfield. "Change for a Better Ghana": Party Competition, Institutionalization and Alternation in Ghana's 2008 Elections". *African Affairs* 108, 433 (August 2009), 621-41.

<sup>40</sup> Robert Dahl. *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972): 15.

<sup>41</sup> Larry Diamond, "Facing up to the Democratic Recession".

<sup>42</sup> Marco Di Nunzio. "'Do Not Cross the Red Line': The 2010 General Elections, Dissent, and Political Mobilization in Urban Ethiopia." *African Affairs* 113 (July 2014): 409-430; Roger Tangri and Andrew M. Mwenda. "President Museveni and the Politics of Presidential Tenure in Uganda." *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 28 (February 2010): 31-49.

<sup>43</sup> Transfers of power are only included if the previous government stood and was defeated at the ballot box. The emergence of a new government following a coup or civil war does not qualify. In presidential regimes, this means that an opposition party or an independent wins control over the executive. In parliamentary systems, this means a change of the party of the prime minister.

<sup>44</sup> Even if we exclude the states that do not regularly hold elections (such as Eritrea), this figure only falls to 60%.

<sup>45</sup> Nic Cheeseman. *Democracy in Africa: Successes, Failures, and the Struggle for Political Reform*. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>46</sup> Mike Pflanz, 'Huge golden handshake for former Ghana president', *The Telegraph*, 21 January 2009, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/ghana/4307757/Huge-golden-handshake-for-former-Ghana-president.html>.

<sup>47</sup> Ruth Maclean, 'The Gambia's new rulers vow to prosecute outgoing president', *The Guardian*, 7 December 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/07/the-gambias-new-rulers-vow-to-prosecute-outgoing-president>.

<sup>48</sup> Ruth Maclean, 'The Gambia's new rulers'.