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## Transcript

# Ghana: Post-Elections

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## Introduction

This document is a transcript of an event held at Chatham House on 19 December 2012. The topic of the meeting was the recent Ghanaian presidential election, and the post election environment.

Having experienced two peaceful transfers of power, Ghana is often lauded for its democratic credentials and steady political progress. The ordered succession following President Mills' passing was also an affirmation of the strength of democracy and the rule of law in Ghana. However the 2012 elections are expected to pose a strong test of its democratic credentials.

The event included a twenty minute presentation by Professor Paul Nugent, who was in Ghana for the elections. He reflected on the implications of the 2012 election results and the challenges facing the winning party in meeting the expectations of its citizens. This was followed by a general discussion.

The presentation was on the record, however the subsequent discussion was under the Chatham House Rule and the views expressed are those of the participants. The following transcript is intended to serve as an *aide-mémoire* for those who took part and to provide a general summary of discussions for those who did not.

## The Chatham House Rule

'When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed

## Professor Paul Nugent

The elections that were held on 7 December are the sixth since the return to electoral democracy in 1992. On this occasion, they did not culminate in a change of government, but they were still pretty close. There is an assumption on the part of many Ghanaians that a changeover ought to take place after two terms of four years, but whether the pattern will be repeated in 2016, it is clearly too soon to say. What we can do is to draw some conclusions about whether these elections have led to a consolidation of the democratic process. Despite the fact that the NPP [New Patriotic Party] is crying foul, and apparently preparing to go to court, my own assessment is that 2012 was an advance on 2008.

My preliminary comments will address three specific issues (i) the robustness of the electoral process itself (ii) what the patterns of voting tell us about the balance of political forces in Ghana (iii) and some of the challenges facing the Mahama regime in the coming years.

(i) Amongst most commentators, inside Ghana and outside alike, the expectation was that the Electoral Commission (EC) would be able to place its authoritative stamp on the election, and by and large this proved to be correct. In advance of the polls, there had been genuine concerns about whether the introduction of biometric verification would create a hostage to fortune. While the absence of international observers beyond Africa was justified in terms of the faith placed in Ghana's capacity to manage the election, one suspects that the failure to put in an appearance came down more to a lack of money than to a genuine belief that these elections would be problem-free. Hence, it was left to the domestic observers, especially those under the CODEO [Coalition of Domestic Election Observers] umbrella, to monitor the process. If there is anyone who deserves credit for seeing things through to a successful conclusion, it is certainly CODEO.

If we compare the 2012 polls with those of 2008, we could conclude that there were more 'technical' problems, but almost certainly less manipulation of the figures. The technical hitches included the late opening of polling stations, especially in Accra, and the malfunctioning of the verification machines. Many machines malfunctioned from the start, while others worked fine until the batteries were changed. The failure to conduct a proper dry run in advance of the polls was always likely to lead to problems. That said, the decision to create an extra day of polling on 8 December was done in a timely manner and the exercise was concluded in an effective fashion. When it comes to manipulation: I believe there were serious anomalies in 2008 - to some extent

in the Volta region, but especially in Ashanti. In the second round of 2008, there were 6 large constituencies in Ashanti that produced turnouts of more than 91 per cent- in Nhyiaeso turnout increased by 26 per cent in the second round to hit 98.3 per cent. This was made possible by creating a climate of intimidation which led to NDC [National Democratic Congress] agents deserting their polling stations. No audit was conducted after the event, probably because it would have been too sensitive to do so. The positive consequence of biometric verification in 2012 is that it effectively eliminated multiple voting, with the consequence that the inflation of the Ashanti results disappeared. Turnout was higher than average in Ashanti, but we did not see the same figures in the mid-90s. Moreover, while CODEO incidents reports suggested that there was more intimidation in Ashanti than elsewhere; overall this was a much more peaceful election. A lot of credit should be given to the police in making it possible for people to cast their votes in an atmosphere mostly devoid of intimidation. In a nutshell, while the EC [Electoral Commission] has been made aware of some of the problems of biometric verification, most of these can be solved with better training and logistics and, on the whole, the 'experiment' could be counted a success.

(II) Voting patterns: Assuming that the EC results do reflect how Ghanaians actually voted - and here it should be noted these are born out by CODEO's independent projections - then it is worth considering what these tell us about patterns of political allegiance. The first point to note is that the smaller parties were squeezed very tightly (1.66 per cent split between six candidates), with the result that all the optimistic predictions of PPP [Progressive People's Party], CPP [Convention People's Party] and PNC [Peoples National Convention] proved to be predictably wide of the mark. Where there is no third party, of course, the likelihood of a first round winner is that much greater, and so it proved to be. The second point is that, in the context of historic patterns of voting, the NPP failed to reverse the trend in the 2008 election when it was pegged back to Eastern Region and Ashanti. This was not for want of effort because Nana Akuffo-Addo fought the more astute and better-financed campaign. But the NPP could not have won these elections without having recovered some lost ground in Brong-Ahafo, Western, Central and Greater Accra Regions. In fact, the NPP actually lost further ground. In the presidential election, the NDC won in 16 Western Region constituencies whereas NPP only won in 10, In Brong-Ahafo the score was 18 to 11. In Greater Accra, the tally was NDC 21 to 13 for the NPP. In the parliamentary elections, voters often preferred Mahama, but shopped elsewhere for their parliamentary candidate. Be that as it may, the general picture is that while

the NPP failed to make significant inroads, the NDC actually won support and picked up seats in key regions.

In a nutshell, while the NPP has struggled to project itself on the national stage, the NDC has shown that it is capable of winning votes across the country. What the NDC has successfully managed to do is to project the party as the champion of the margins. The NPP has a problem on its hands in that it is widely seen as being the preserve of competing power blocs in the Ashanti and Eastern Region, in which the rest of the countries are essentially spectators. One merely has to pose the question to see the nature of the problem: could the NPP ever be expected to field a candidate from the Northern Region?

(III) The Mahama Agenda: Finally, what can we expect of the Mahama administration? Are we likely to see a repetition of the lethargy of the Mills years or are we likely to see greater proactivity? I think that Mahama finds himself in a strong bargaining position, which should make a difference to how he performs. He has a healthy majority in Parliament and he managed to get elected without depending on the support of the Rawlings' - of course, Mrs Rawlings effectively supported Nana Akuffo-Addo, while Jerry made quite a late endorsement and did not appear on the Mahama platform. Mahama would be best advised to coax Rawlings into accepting the role of an elder statesman. There will be elements in the NDC who will expect to be rewarded in the division of the portfolios (e.g. the Fanti Confederation), and it will be interesting to see whether Mahama decides to be bold and to appoint his own preferred people.

A four-year election cycle is very short, and it won't take too long before people will be thinking ahead to the 2016 elections when Mahama will be eligible to stand again. The NDC knows full-well that they have a chance to entrench themselves in power, but that there is every chance the pendulum will swing the other way again. Some of the key issues, the Mahama administration has to handle are:

(a) Managing the revenues from the oil sector in a transparent and effective manner. The temptation is to spend lavishly, not least because Ghanaians expect better amenities, and a lot will depend on how the checks and balances operate. But the NDC will have to be astute in managing expectations — especially in the Western Region where one can already anticipate some complaints over the distribution of the revenues.

(b) Keeping corruption under control. This is something which had already become an issue under the Mills administration and it is one that the government needs to be alert to.

(c) Dealing with the problems of urban governance. Voters in the urban constituencies are very acutely aware of the power of their vote. They shifted support away from NPP in 2008 and 2012, but things could always go the other way. The importance of sorting out electricity supply, water and sanitation cannot be underestimated.

(d) More generally, the NDC government has to be able to show a record of promoting accelerated economic development. The tricky thing is to do so in a manner which creates jobs and does not exacerbate regional inequalities.

The NPP is likely to undergo a difficult internal struggle for power once the defeat of 2012 sinks in. This may provide the Mahama administration with further breathing space. But Ghanaians are impatient, and well-aware of the power of the vote, which means that the NDC also needs to be thinking several steps ahead. We don't as yet know whether Mahama will appoint the kind of people who create the kind of momentum that would lead to a further consolidation of their position.

## SUMMARY OF Q&A

### *Legal Issues Surrounding the Election and Government Formation*

There was some concern over timing in post election Ghana, and how the next few months would play out. One particular concern was the potential legal proceedings against the electoral commission and how this would impact on the new government.

It was expected that the court case would not be a lengthy process. The government will want the issue put to rest as quickly as possible.

It was also expected that the formation of the new cabinet would happen quickly.

A comparison was drawn between the recent elections in Sierra Leone and the Ghanaian election. One of the similarities between the two is that there is growing dominance of a small number of political parties. It was argued that if this trend continues then there could be the crowding out of small parties.

One of the reasons for the dominance of the large parties, it was argued, is that Ghanaian voters know the value of their vote and they do not want to waste it. At the presidential level there was intense competition between the NDC and the NPP. However, both of these parties obtained fewer votes in the parliamentary elections, with more votes going to smaller parties.

A point was raised as to whether the NDC victory was simply down to people wanting a continuation of the same government, and not in fact down to party preference.

On a number of issues the parties held similar views although there were some differences on education and health. One of the main differences between the parties is the perception of the NPP as the party of economic liberalism.

It was argued that the NPP has represented itself as the party of economic liberalism and will therefore be less likely to engage in redistributive programmes. This may become more accentuated with the expected increase in oil revenue.

While the difference between the parties is arguably marginal now, it is expected to increase rather than decrease in the future.

### *Ghana and the Region*

In terms of Ghana's international and regional engagement it was stated that former President Attah Mills had a strong connection to Laurent Gbagbo. Given this, there was some debate over what Ghana's engagement would be like with its neighbours, with links to the issues in Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, and Mali.

One of the critical issues involved in engagement with Côte d'Ivoire is the debate over ownership of oil on the border between the two countries. This was a problem in the past that seemed to go away. It is now re-emerging as a potential issue.

On engagement with Mali it was pointed out that Mali is now a *de facto* split state. However the African Union does not recognise the Tuareg controlled north as a separate state, and therefore neither will Ghana. On this issue it was expected that Ghana, and the President, will support the AU.

South Sudan has created an important precedent on this issue of secession. There are a number of secession movements across the continent, and many of these are in communication with each other. Considering the secession of South Sudan it was agreed that these movements will continue to be a concern.

### *Corruption and Government Finance*

At the domestic level it was questioned whether Mahama has either the will or the ability to tackle corruption. Ghana had a good record on corruption; however there has been an increase in perceived corruption since 2006. This was said to be a result of the weakening of the institutional framework which, it was stated, is a constitutional issue. It was expected that this weakening of institutions could lead to increased corruption in the future.

As well as corruption, there was concern for the wider issue of tax broadening. The government has been successful in increasing revenue through the broadening of the tax base. However it was argued that there would be resistance to any further broadening from the local population. As a result the most effective way for the government to increase revenue is through the continued interest in oil revenue. It has been successful in generating revenue through taxes on the oil industry in the past, and is expected to continue. Having said that, the government realises that the projections for potential oil revenue are exaggerated, and they cannot rely on



it alone. They need to spread their revenue reliance to other sectors such as minerals (gold).

It was stated that Ghana is currently running a budget deficit of 6 per cent, and the current account deficit is 14 per cent. On top of this it has been re-classed as a middle income country which means it receives less aid. This led to the question of what the new president would do to address these issues.

It was pointed out that the budget deficit always increases the year before an election. This is a cyclical pattern and is usually followed by a decrease in the deficit after the election. With four year election cycles the deficit normally increases from the mid-term onwards, and then is re-balanced in the following term.

Expectations of revenue from the oil sector have led the government to develop an attitude whereby they base pre election spending on anticipated post election revenue.

A comparison was drawn to Nigeria on this issue. It was agreed that this is not a good attitude for the government to take.

#### *Local and International Media Coverage*

In the international media, Ghana is always portrayed as a good news story. This has two important implications. Firstly, it puts unnecessary pressure on the government. Systems of governance on the continent cannot be split simply into those that are good and those that have failed. It is a spectrum. Unnecessary pressure is put on the government by increasing expectations beyond a feasibly deliverable level. The second problem is that it overlooks many of the underlying issues. By only reporting the good news, underlying problems are not reported.

The British press is guilty of splitting Africa into strong success stories, and massive failures.

On the other hand, it was pointed out that the Ghanaian media did a good job in covering the election, including the debates and the pre-election political dialogue.

#### *Presidential Debates and Mills' Death*

It was argued that before Mills died the NDC were in trouble, and they would have struggled to win an election. The subsequent win can therefore be seen to be partly due to a 'sympathy' vote. They did not run a very good campaign, and there were few fresh ideas.

The NPP campaign on the other hand was very good. It was argued that they became victims of their own propaganda machine. They were so convinced that they would win, that even after their defeat they could not accept that they had not won. This was cited as one reason for the subsequent legal case against the Electoral Commission.

It was argued that the debates were great theatre, but not a great predictor of election. With debates going on for 3-5 hours, they have very limited impact on people's voting behaviour. They are merely symbolic.