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# The End of an Era: The Ghanaian Elections of December 2000

*Klaas van Walraven*

The end of an era. That is the way in which many people, Ghanaians and non-Ghanaians alike, described the outcome of the presidential and legislative elections held in Ghana in December 2000. In two rounds (December 7 and 28) the ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC) was routed. It lost roughly half the total number of seats in parliament, plus its majority, and, in the second round, the presidency itself. In the first round of presidential polls the NDC candidate, John Atta Mills, got only 44 per cent of the votes against 48 per cent for the main opposition candidate, John Agyekum Kufuor (popularly known as Jak), the leader of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) ([www.ec.gov.gh](http://www.ec.gov.gh)).<sup>1</sup> After the first round, the NDC was visibly shaken. On Ghana television, the Minister of Education humbly admitted that the NDC would have to change its message. Unfortunately for the NDC, it was too late for this. The second round of presidential polls culminated in a resounding NPP victory, with Kufuor gaining nearly 57 per cent of the votes and Mills trailing with 43 per cent (see **Table 1**).<sup>2</sup> The NDC, which had been in power for eight years,<sup>3</sup> had been decisively beaten.

This article seeks to explain what caused this remarkable event. Firstly, it will present and analyse the main trends in the results of the parliamentary and presidential polls. Then it discusses some of the principal features of the electoral process itself. Thirdly, the article analyses the causes of the NDC's defeat. It is argued that its demise was triggered by a combination of factors, among which the poor state of the economy and the departure, formally at least, of Jerry Rawlings as government leader, assume considerable importance. Other factors were the high-handedness with which the party nominated its presidential candidate and those running for parliament; the glaring corruption that increasingly tainted the NDC's record and became a source of considerable resentment; and, more generally, fatigue over the same ruling class that had continued to dominate Ghana's political scene for nearly a decade and grown increasingly arrogant and complacent. Against this, the opposition NPP waged a very effective and formidable campaign. Finally, the article discusses the significance of the NDC's defeat in the context of the long-term development of multiparty politics in Ghana and African democratisation generally.<sup>4</sup>

## The Results

Ghana's electoral system provides for various ways in which the country's parliament and president are elected. The Ghanaian parliament is made up of 200 members elected by simple majority or plurality vote in single member constituencies for four-year terms (the so-called 'first-past-the-post' system). The president is elected by universal adult suffrage for a four-year term. The candidate who gains a simple majority stands elected. In case no candidate receives more than 50 per cent of the valid votes cast, a second round, or run-off, must take place between the two candidates who scored the highest number of votes in the first round. Presidential tenure of office is limited to a maximum of two four-year terms.

In the parliamentary polls on December 7, the NPP proved for the first time that it could cut deeply into territory that throughout the 1990s had been part of the NDC's fief. In particular, many constituencies in Brong-Ahafo, Western Region and the Greater Accra Region, formerly NDC strongholds, fell to the opposition. All in all, the NPP won in five of the 10 regions and half the total seats in parliament (100 to the NDC 92). In Central Region, Atta Mills' home province, the NDC just barely beat the NPP (nine to eight seats). Only the four poorest ones — Upper East, Upper West, Northern Region and Volta — voted overwhelmingly for the NDC ([www.ghanaelections.com](http://www.ghanaelections.com)). Moreover, during the first round the turn-out in Volta — President Rawlings' home base — was very low, with only half a million voters, out of an estimated electorate of 980 000, bothering to show up at the polling booth: a turn-out of some 58 per cent (*The Ghanaian Times*, December 12, 2000), much lower than in 1996 when it was 81 per cent. In the past Ghanaians jokingly referred to Volta as the NDC's 'World Bank'. The overall turn-out rate in the first round was 61 per cent (*Daily Graphic* [Accra], December 12, 2000). Quite apart from the turn-out in Volta, this generally low score was probably in part linked to flaws in the voters' register, which the Electoral Commission admitted to be inflated, possibly amounting to some 1.5 million uneligible or non-existing people.<sup>5</sup>

Not only did dozens of NDC parliamentarians lose their seat, but several among them were also ministers who were defeated at the hands of NPP or independent rivals. In this way, for example, the Minister of the Interior, Nii Okaija Adamafo, and the one for Food and Agriculture, Joseph Henry Owusu Acheampong, lost their parliamentary seat (*The Evening News* [Accra], December 8, 2000; *Daily Graphic*, December 9, 2000).<sup>6</sup> Generally during past elections, NDC members of parliament had never been challenged in their districts as they were now, and they showed themselves to be incoherent in their defence.<sup>7</sup> The two rounds of polls transformed the NPP, superficially at least, into a truly national party, although in terms of the regions it now controlled the NPP was only slightly more dominant than the NDC. Rawlings' party was still the leading force in four out of 10 regions in the country: the three northern regions and Volta.

**Table 1: Presidential Elections 1996-2000: Results by Region****1996**

Region	Rawlings		Kufuor	
	Votes	%	Votes	%
Ashanti	412,475	32,8	827,821	65,8
Brong-Ahafo	395,382	61,7	230,457	36,0
Central	313,386	55,7	241,542	42,9
Eastern	459,090	53,8	384,597	45,0
Greater Accra	658,626	54,0	528,484	43,3
Northern	370,330	62,1	190,621	32,0
Upper East	230,791	69,0	54,041	17,4
Upper West	145,812	74,6	21,871	11,2
Volta	690,421	94,5	34,538	4,7
Western	405,992	57,3	289,730	40,9
TOTAL	4,099,760	57,4	2,803,702	39,6

Source Electoral Commission, Accra

**2000 (Run-off)**

Region	Mills		Kufuor	
	Votes	%	Votes	%
Ashanti	258,623	20,11	1,027,132	79,89
Brong-Ahafo	245,300	41,70	342,961	58,30
Central	199,006	39,69	302,414	60,31
Eastern	269,270	37,59	447,154	62,41
Greater Accra	421,954	40,05	631,506	59,95
Northern	277,038	51,10	265,076	48,90
Upper East	154,703	57,17	115,880	42,83
Upper West	104,533	61,97	64,163	38,03
Volta	589,719	88,47	76,839	11,53
Western	299,978	39,10	358,138	60,90
TOTAL	2,750,124	43,10	3,631,263	56,90

Source [www.ghanaelections.com](http://www.ghanaelections.com)

Moreover, one should distinguish between the parliamentary and presidential elections and the popular attitudes that determined their outcome. For example, the reasons that people had for voting for a parliamentary candidate may have been affected by specifically local considerations that differed from what determined their presidential vote. The second round in the presidential contest may

also have been influenced by the so-called 'bandwagon' effect, that is, people becoming increasingly inclined to vote for the most likely winner in order not to be marginalised afterwards for having betted on the wrong horse.<sup>8</sup> The NPP's candidate benefited in this round from support by the smaller parties, which decided to rally behind Kufuor and advised their voters to give him their support. Yet this bandwagon effect should not be overestimated, as the popular vote for Mills held up rather well in the second round. The NDC candidate still gained a majority in the three northern regions and Volta and, with the exception of Ashanti, nowhere fell below a third of the vote.

Nevertheless, in the second round, Kufuor not only consolidated his wins in Brong-Ahafo, Western Region and Greater Accra, but also won Central Region outright (**Table 1**). Here he had already come out on top in 11 out of 17 constituencies in the first round and now took 60 per cent against Atta Mills 39 per cent (or 16 out of 17 constituencies) ([www.ghanaelections.com](http://www.ghanaelections.com)). This graphically underlines the extent of Mills' humiliation. Moreover, while in the second round the north again showed to be solid NDC territory, even here some constituencies went to Kufuor. Sissala in Upper West, Navrongo Central and Bolgatanga in Upper East, and Yendi, Gukpegu/Sabongida and Choggo/Tishigu in Northern Region returned Kufuor with more than 60 per cent of the votes. Some of these constituencies had voted for Edward Mahama's small People's National Convention in the first round but others, including Choggo/Tishigu,<sup>9</sup> had first shown a (marginal) preference for Atta Mills and now opted clearly for Kufuor. In total, Kufuor took 48 per cent of the votes in Northern Region, 42 per cent in Upper East, and 38 per cent in Upper West. He even managed to get one-fifth of the votes in some individual Volta constituencies, although in the region as a whole Kufuor trailed with an overall 11 per cent.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Electoral Process**

On the whole, there was great satisfaction among Ghanaians about the conduct of the polls. One observer argued them to have been the "fairest we ever had".<sup>11</sup> Personal impressions of the first round yielded a picture of a very relaxed and peaceful atmosphere, punctuated by meticulous and careful handling of registration procedure and electoral ritual. Observers of the various parties were present at the polls, besides representatives of non-governmental groups mandated to observe the elections. Results came in relatively quickly, or more quickly than before, in part because of improved communications.<sup>12</sup> According to political observers and judging from newspaper articles, the Electoral Commission really asserted its constitutional independence vis-à-vis the government, which could not, or dared not, engage in massive acts of fraud, the more as the NPP this time around kept a close watch on each and every detail of the electoral process.

In general, Ghana benefited from what might be termed the 'Côte d'Ivoire factor' — and perhaps even from something that might be called the 'Florida

factor'. The government had already aired ugly pictures on television from violent events in other West African countries such as neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire. Many people, of various persuasions argued that, whatever the electoral outcome, Ghanaians did not want civil war. Peace groups and traditional leaders had issued declarations appealing for calm. Negotiations also took place beforehand about the way in which the media should conduct themselves, centring on the need to make clear whether results announced had been certified by the Electoral Commission or not.<sup>13</sup> This should prevent a repetition of hasty and unwarranted claims to victory as had marred past Ghanaian elections or the US presidential contest in Florida, the fall-out of which was still reverberating across the globe.<sup>14</sup>

There were, nevertheless, various irregularities, none of which appeared very significant or structural. Firstly, there was a controversy over registration of voters. The NPP had argued that people carrying ID cards without a photograph should not be allowed to vote. A few days before the first round, however, the NDC won a case before the Supreme Court, which vindicated its argument that voters with so-called thumbprint IDs should also be allowed to vote — ostensibly because otherwise poor voters would be disenfranchised. Many of these, including in the urban areas, were without photo ID. The NPP feared, however, that this would open the gate to fraud, through which the NDC might be tempted to inflate its share of the vote (*Daily Graphic*, December 1, 5, 2000; *The Evening News*, December 4, 2000; *The Chronicle*, December 3-14, 2000; *The Ghanaian Times*, December 5, 2000 [all Accra]). It was supported in this by Western donor countries, some of which had funded the production of photo IDs and became subsequently embroiled in a row with the Rawlings government over alleged interference in Ghana's internal affairs (*Africa Confidential*, November 24, 2000; also editorial, *Daily Graphic*, December 1, 2000). In retrospect, this issue seems to have evaporated and may only have helped to reinforce popularly held perceptions about the lack of neutrality and independence of the courts.<sup>15</sup> Other incidents involved, among others, Kufuor's rather hasty claim to victory upon completion of the first round, a claim that many NDC people argued was a violation of Ghana's constitution (*Daily Graphic*, December 11, 2000; *Ghana Palaver*, December 11-12, 2000; *The Ghanaian Times*, December 11, 2000). There were also individual cases reported of potential voters turned away from polling stations because of an irregularity in their ID or because their ID did not tally with the voters' register. At some polling stations, voting material arrived late. Otherwise, these events seemed as incidental as some of the reports on vote buying and pressure before the elections appeared anecdotal. Clearly, the Electoral Commission kept its head cool — even in the face of protests by urban, middle-class women in Accra, who were told that they would have to remove false finger nails in order to have their finger marked after the act of voting (news broadcast Ghana Television, December 3, 2000).

Despite the composure that marked most Ghanaians on and before polling day, it was ironically President Rawlings himself who, in characteristic fashion, made

some inflammatory remarks. Some of these may have been misquoted by certain of the less impartial newspaper publications, but they appeared to be more typical of Rawlings' own flamboyant personality than of Ghanaian political culture. For example, at a rally in Kumasi he was quoted to have said that the NPP would not be allowed to succeed the NDC before the second coming of Christ. He was also quoted, perhaps more accurately, to have misgivings about the very principle of multiparty democracy. Yet Rawlings' address to the nation on the eve of polling day was considered to be composed, sober and responsible (*The Independent*, December 5, 2000; *The Guide*, December 7-13, 2000; *Free Press*, December 8-14, 2000 [all Accra]).<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, during and after polling tempers sometimes ran high, as shown in some violent incidents.<sup>17</sup> In Accra, for example, NDC militants beat up a couple of journalists after the first round, an incident for which Atta Mills later offered his apologies. The most serious incident took place on December 7 itself, in Bawku Central constituency in Upper East Region. This incident was atypical, however, for it was closely bound up with the peculiar political problems that have held this district in its grips for some time, involving a long-standing politicised feud between the Mamprusi and Kusasi ethnic groups, with each lining up behind rival political parties. Delays in the declaration of results and some sloppy handling of electoral procedure led to an outburst of anxiety, and security personnel firing shots. The incident and subsequent rioting left several people dead.<sup>18</sup> Some calm was restored in the days following the incident and the vice-president visited the area in order to help in this effort. Bawku Central witnessed the most serious violence during the entire election, something that was not replicated in other constituencies.

### **The Reasons for Defeat**

By the time of the elections, the economy was in deep crisis. Unemployment had risen sharply, while cocoa and gold prices — the country's main sources of income — had plummeted at a time that oil prices went through the roof. This induced a free fall of the country's currency, the Cedi. Prices of certain food staples such as rice had doubled within a year and rising inflation had generally begun to bite into salaries. A one-billion-dollar trade deficit was forecast and while inflation stood at roughly 25 per cent, public foreign debt had risen to seven billion dollars (*Africa Confidential*, November 24, 2000). Despite years of structural adjustment, private foreign investment had, on the whole, been disappointing and largely limited to the sell-off of Ghanaian companies to Asian entrepreneurs. The so-called 'cash-and carry' system introduced to make people contribute towards the costs of Ghana's health care services was also very unpopular.

Consequently, by 2000 the politics of gratitude that benefited the NDC during the 1996, and especially the 1992, elections had finally run its course. The provision

of roads, electricity and potable water that, according to some observers, had carried away many Ghanaians in the past,<sup>19</sup> was no longer a relevant factor, with some of the thinly populated northern areas as a possible exception. Moreover, the government did not dare to go on a spending spree, at least not to the extent that it had in 1992, for fear of antagonising foreign donors.<sup>20</sup> Most Ghanaians were by now made to feel the pinch. Opinion polls conducted in 1999, showed that Ghanaians were very dissatisfied with the state of the economy and blamed the government for this (CDD 1999). By election time, the political atmosphere in Accra was marked by outright hostility towards the NDC.

While economic prospects in 1996 had also been bleak (Jeffries 1998:194) and one could therefore argue that the current economic crisis, in itself, could possibly not have sealed the NDC's fate, by 2000 key economic indicators had deteriorated substantially — also as compared to 1996. Cocoa prices had dropped by nearly half in the preceding two years, while oil had more than doubled. By the time of the elections, the Cedi had depreciated from 1,600 to 1,800 for one US dollar in 1996 to 7.000 at regular foreign exchange offices (*Africa Research Bulletin*, 2000:14325; *Africa South of the Sahara*, 1998:504). The decision to keep on subsidising domestic petrol prices also cut severely into the government's revenue base, thus eroding its incumbency advantage to channel state resources so as to influence the electorate. In the midst of this financial squeeze many development projects that the government had promised had failed to materialise (Nugent 2001:413).

Nevertheless, there was one other crucial negative factor influencing the NDC's chances at the polls — the absence of Rawlings as a contender, at least in a formal sense. Rawlings was constitutionally barred from standing for a third term. This meant not only that the NDC lost the man that had provided firm leadership to the party and its predecessor — the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) — for two decades, but also that the only politician in Ghana enjoying real charisma was leaving the arena. In the two preceding elections, Rawlings had shown his ability to persuade a majority of the electorate that he was the only worthy candidate to lead the country (see also Verlet 1997; Assimeng 1979). In the 2000 vote, the two main presidential contenders were a modest law professor and a practising lawyer, who both had to do without comparable magnetism. What was worse for Atta Mills was that Rawlings actively campaigned on his behalf, making the elections at times look like a contest between Rawlings and Kufuor rather than between Kufuor and Mills. Many observers thought that this did not do Mills any good.<sup>21</sup>

Compared to the 1996 presidential vote,<sup>22</sup> the NDC's share in the 2000 run-off dropped significantly across the board. In all regions, with the exception of Volta and Upper East, the NDC's share in the run-off was 10 percent down on its 1996 vote, or more. Its losses were highest in Brong-Ahafo (20 per cent); followed by Eastern Region (16 per cent); Central Region (15 per cent); Greater Accra and Western Region (14 per cent); and Upper West (13 per cent). Its share of the vote



in the Northern Region went down from 62 to 51 per cent and in Upper East from 69 to 57 per cent. Even in Volta — the region that provided Rawlings with the highest percentage in 1996, Mills had to concede 6 per cent. However, it is not easy to interpret these figures. Firstly, the NDC's figures in the 2000 run-off may have been depressed by a bandwagon effect that worked to the advantage of Kufuor. Secondly, some of the party's northern losses may have been tied to the way in which the government had handled some of the ethnic conflicts in these regions.<sup>23</sup>

**Table 2: Partition of Parliamentary Seats in 2000: Results by Region**

Region	NDC	NPP	Other
Ashanti	2	31	
Brong-Ahafo	7	14	
Central	9	8	
Eastern	8	18	
Greater Accra	6	16	
Northern	18	3	2
Upper East	8	2	2
Upper West	7	-	1
Volta	17	-	2
Western	10	8	1
TOTAL	92	100	8

Source: [www.ghanaelections.com](http://www.ghanaelections.com)

Perhaps the best way to distinguish between Rawlings' departure and other factors — such as the state of the economy — as reasons for Mills' defeat, is to compare the results of the 2000 presidential run-off with those of the parliamentary elections that year (**Table 2**). The three regions where the parliamentary results and those of the presidential run-off did not tally — and which could, hence, potentially provide an indication of the significance of Rawlings' departure — are Northern, Western and Central Region. In the Northern Region, Mills just narrowly defeated Kufuor in the run-off (51 to 48 per cent), whereas the NDC won a substantial majority of seats in the parliamentary polls (18 to the NPP 3 and others 2). Conversely, whereas Mills was roundly beaten in the Western Region's run-off (60 to 39 per cent), his party won slightly more than half its parliamentary seats (10 to the NPP 8 and the Convention People's Party, CPP, 1). In Central Region the NDC took more seats than any other party, although Mills himself was decisively beaten by Kufuor in the presidential run-off (39 to 60 per cent). That this happened in Mills' own home ground provides, perhaps, the best indication of the NDC's dependence on the personal popularity of the departing president. However, its significance should maybe not be overestimated,<sup>24</sup> as in seven of the

10 regions the figures for the parliamentary results and the presidential run-off followed each other more or less closely, with the parties winning the majority of constituencies where their presidential contender won as well. One may therefore conclude that, overall, the Rawlings factor may have compounded the fall-out of the economic crisis.

Another factor in the NDC's defeat was a serious controversy over the NDC's lack of internal democracy that occurred well before the elections. This was an issue grossly mishandled by the party executive, as it refused to hold primaries for the parliamentary and presidential elections — in the process confirming or imposing unpopular candidates in the constituencies and producing Atta Mills as the presidential contender. Thus, before the elections it was rumoured that the NDC might lose as many as 22 formerly safe seats over the parliamentary candidates issue alone (*Africa Confidential*, November 24, 2000). There is a parallel here with the situation in 1996, when numerous sitting MPs were deselected to make way for wealthy members of the NDC (Nugent 1999:304). In addition to this, however, the NDC had to come up with a successor to Rawlings, a process that degenerated into an undignified row. When Rawlings openly backed Mills, the NDC splintered, with some of its more intellectual forces leaving the party. Many of these had provided the links between the rural areas and the centre in the past and had argued for a restructuring of the party, but were systematically obstructed in their effort. Consequently, well before the elections, many NDC people had resigned or been expelled and joined the new National Reform Party, which was predicted to do well in the impending contest.<sup>25</sup>

Rampant corruption was another important issue. For years, the NDC had been collecting dues from people and companies that were awarded government contracts.<sup>26</sup> This form of corruption engendered deep hostility among Ghanaians, or more accurately, among those who did not benefit. For well over a decade, Ghanaians could see how “nobodies turned into somebodies”<sup>27</sup> and how NDC stalwarts developed ostentatious lifestyles that were well out of reach for most ordinary people. The Serious Fraud Office investigated several, well-publicised cases and found various forms of irregularities, but neither the president's office nor the NDC-dominated parliament took any action.<sup>28</sup> While regulations on party funding require the submission of audited accounts to the Electoral Commission, these accounts have usually been very vague. The NDC, in particular, failed to follow certain legal provisions, arguing them to be unworkable, despite the fact that it had voted them into law itself.<sup>29</sup> The fact that, in the 2000 contest, the NDC no longer offered a charismatic contender may have made voters — especially in the more wealthy central regions — less forgiving of the party's vices.

There were only marginal ideological differences between the two official presidential candidates. The NPP man laid more emphasis on human rights and the rule of law — a veiled reference to the human rights' violations that have tainted the record of the (P)NDC. But as in 1996, economic differences were quite small: both candidates professed a willingness to continue structural adjustment, al-

though the NPP preferred to slow down implementation of certain aspects of it.<sup>30</sup> The NDC's election slogan was more explicitly economic than that of the NPP: "always for people, always for development", with billboards showing Atta Mills against a surrealist background of large, modern motorways and high-rise buildings but ironically without any people. Contrary to the situation in 1992 and even 1996, the government could not back up its boasts with an abundance of impressive development projects, or seduce the electorate with the charisma of its departing leader. Hence, in the end it seems that the reasons for the NDC's demise were made painfully clear in the simplicity of the NPP's slogan, "positive change". People were tired of the same old party stalwarts, the same patronage networks, and the same old solutions offered to Ghana's economic and social predicaments, the more so as the government that had implemented them did not prevent the economy's catastrophic plunge. Some of this fatigue was especially generational, as younger people had never known any alternative to (P)NDC rule. Some of its representatives made themselves unpopular through unfortunate remarks and most ministers appeared to have run out of fresh ideas. What made matters worse was what many saw as government arrogance, complacency and outright vindictiveness towards those Ghanaians who never supported the NDC and became the victim of its politics of exclusion.<sup>31</sup>

In addition, the NPP was much better organised than in 1996 or 1992. It commenced mobilising and canvassing very early. Kufuor was chosen as presidential candidate in October 1998 (*Africa Research Bulletin*, 1998:13323) and went on the campaign trail almost immediately. As the results of the elections point out, the NPP proved able to cut into territory where it did not have much support in the past, at least not during the two preceding elections. The significance of some of these gains should, however, be qualified, as in some cases, such as Brong-Ahafo, the party essentially recaptured territory which in the 1969 and 1979 elections had been among the core areas of the Progress Party (PP) and Popular Front Party (PFP) respectively — that is, the parties of the old Danquah-Busia tradition preceding the NPP (Nugent 1999:312).

Nevertheless, in the 2000 vote the NPP also gained support, at least to a limited extent, from sections of the population other than those represented by the Danquah-Busia tradition. Thus it widened its support base from its original Ashanti and urban middle class bias by mobilising interests from other regions and social strata. The young were especially targeted. Kufuor took a northerner as running mate and the party also focused more on the north during the campaign. Significantly, the NPP was also able to penetrate deeper into the rural areas. The fact that the NPP commanded fewer billboards and flags and other election paraphernalia, as some observers pointed out, did not say everything. What seems important was NPP willingness to go to those people who never formed its natural electorate. Its gains stand out as the more remarkable as, contrary to 1996 (Jeffries 1998:191-192), the party did not form a pre-electoral pact with fellow opposition parties such as some of the Nkrumahist splinter groups.

In the 2000 campaign, the government also did not get in the way, at least not openly or to any great extent. The playing field was therefore more even, especially as compared to the traumatic election of 1992. Although the NDC had by far the most resources, indigenous businesses, notably from Ashanti, contributed to NPP coffers.<sup>32</sup> The NPP also benefited from the numerous FM radio stations ready to spread the party's message. Its electoral achievement stands out in even sharper relief when set against the logistical superiority of the NDC. The ruling party commanded far more means of transport, not only cars, buses and four-wheel drive vehicles, but even bicycles with which it could visit just about every single Ghanaian hamlet. Against this, the NPP responded with an intimidating travelling schedule, taking on non-Akan people in the party leadership in order to distance itself from widespread perceptions that it was fundamentally an Akan party.<sup>33</sup> Whether this really worked cannot be deduced simply from the electoral outcome. It is, in any case, noteworthy that the stiff middle-class Kufuor did his best to appeal to ordinary Ghanaians, including the rural folk. On several occasions he spoke in the vernacular or mixed his English with Twi, while steering clear of sweating in three-piece woollen suits at 30 degrees centigrade in favour of more traditional African couture. In contrast, four years before, the NPP's style had still exhibited a certain stuffiness (Nugent 1999:297).

In the end this may have affected voters' choice only marginally. One significant aspect about the 2000 elections is the inability of parties other than the NPP and NDC to make much headway. While this bipolarity is in line with the general picture of Ghanaian politics since independence, the Nkrumahist parties have been divided ever since Rawlings managed to co-opt their political tradition into the (P)NDC fold. In the run-up to the second round, the NPP managed to get the Nkrumahist parties to rally behind Kufuor, although in view of the NDC's past and social background, Atta Mills could have laid a better claim to their support. Nevertheless, the CPP — Nkrumah's vehicle to power in the 1950s — managed to gain re-entry into parliament, albeit by only one seat representing the Ellem-belle constituency in Western Region.<sup>34</sup>

The National Reform Party mentioned earlier clearly disappointed everyone. It failed to win a single seat even though it had been tipped as a contender with a promising political future. It had been argued that it enjoyed some roots in the electorate and also had a presence in the rural areas, as opposed to the other small parties. Many thought that its ideas on local-level decision-making and individual economic empowerment made it an interesting political alternative.<sup>35</sup> It may be that its poor showing was the result of insufficient time to organise itself and that it might yet gain greater political relevance in the future. However, while it had been expected to cut especially into NDC territory, the fact that it sprang from the ruling party may have made people sceptical.<sup>36</sup>

More generally, the fact that Ghanaians outside Volta and the northern regions voted massively for Kufuor and the NPP may be interpreted as a clear sign of the desire for change. On a national level, only eight out of a total of 200 parliamentary

where the dearth of resources has constricted local empowerment and reinforced dependence on financial patronage by the central authorities (Nugent 2001).<sup>39</sup>

Nevertheless, Ghanaian politics still constitutes a system of political patronage only in part. Its electorate does not simply assume a passive role — far from it. There may indeed be an erosion process going on as far as authoritarian features are concerned. In the debacle over the imposition of NDC parliamentary candidates, the party leadership sometimes had to go on its knees to persuade local constituencies to accept central government favourites (*Africa Research Bulletin*, 2000:14213). Some Ghanaian politicians were seen crossing party lines. While such behaviour is typical of patrimonial politics, it also enhances the freedom of choice of local communities and, with rival politicians vying for the favour of the same electoral district, increases their potential influence. This is reinforced by the resurgence, after the reintroduction of multipartyism, of the middle-class-based liberal tradition in Ghanaian politics, with its emphasis on civil and political liberties (Konings undated). Ghana's liberal media climate is, indeed, remarkable for sub-Saharan Africa.

By and large, voting patterns in 2000 followed regional lines, although in a way different from 1996. In the previous elections, regional cleavages still materialised more or less along the lines of a centre-periphery divide, with the NPP winning mainly in the Ghanaian heartland of pre-colonial Asante, leaving outlying areas that had traditionally suffered from Ashanti domination to the NDC.<sup>40</sup> Now, however, the NPP also gained many of these peripheral regions, or at least some of their constituencies. In Brong-Ahafo, Kufuor won 15 of the 21 constituencies in the first round. This outcome could, however, be interpreted in different ways. Firstly one could argue that in the 2000 vote the old historical fault-line of greater Asante — which marked off Ashantis from other Akan and non-Akan people and divided its core from outlying areas — was to some extent overcome, with the NDC only really managing to hold on to the northern regions and Volta. However, an alternative interpretation would be that in the 2000 vote the NPP recaptured areas which had eluded it in the 1992 and 1996 elections but which in the 1960s and 1970s had been strongholds of its predecessor parties (PP and PFP). Brong-Ahafo and Eastern Region are clear examples. In that sense, the 2000 vote partially returned to the electoral patterns of the pre-Rawlings era. In any case, the NPP's successes were still mainly in Akan areas, which makes it questionable to what extent the party had now actually overcome the historic limitations of the Danquah-Busia tradition (Nugent 2001:423).

Notably in the Volta region, the poor home region of President Rawlings, ethnicity continued to play a distinct role in influencing the voters' line-up. Relations between Akan and non-Akan have traditionally been marked by distrust, more especially between Ashantis and Ewes. According to some observers, the NDC waged a very negative anti-Ashanti campaign. Some politicians tried to exploit distrust of Ashantis in the Volta Region, even going so far as to threaten that Ewes might be evicted from Ghana and sent to Togo if the NPP came to power.

Consequently, in Volta, people responded emotionally to any suggestion that they might vote for the NPP, arguing that they would sooner vote for a goat than an Ashanti.<sup>41</sup> In the parliamentary polls the NDC therefore managed to take 17 of the 19 Volta constituencies while the NPP gained none. Even if Mills had to concede 6 per cent of the votes in the presidential run-off compared to Rawlings' record in the 1996 elections, he still roundly defeated Kufuor (88 to 11 per cent) in Volta — the only region where the NDC candidate managed to do so. Rather than voting for the Ashanti Kufuor, the Volta electorate preferred the Fanti politician Atta Mills.

However, the turn-out in both presidential rounds was significantly down on the figures of 1996. In the previous presidential election Volta could justifiably lay claim to the epithet of Rawlings' 'World Bank', with 81 per cent of its eligible voters making their way to the polling booth. Now, the turn-out dropped to a low 58 per cent in the first round (3 per cent less than the national average). In the run-off it climbed back to 69 per cent — nine more than the national average ([www.ghanaelections.com](http://www.ghanaelections.com); [www.ifesorg.org](http://www.ifesorg.org)). Many Ghanaians explained this by pointing to allegations aired during the election campaign that the Volta region had never really benefited from having one of its sons, Rawlings, occupying Osu castle. Controversy erupted over the degree to which the Volta region had been left behind in infrastructural investment. It was said that Rawlings never wanted to give preferential treatment to the Ewes for fear of being accused of favouritism. Hence in a way the Ewe people had to pay a price for having their son at the helm of government. However, it should be pointed out that many Ewes have traditionally migrated elsewhere in search of jobs and been well represented in the country's civil service.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, if deprivation was such a dominant issue in Volta politics, one would have expected that Rawlings and his party would be repudiated at an earlier stage. By 2000, successful application of the 'big man-small boy' dynamic<sup>43</sup> was too late. Instead the NDC vote, and in the second round the vote for Mills, held up steady. A better explanation of the low turn-out in the first round would therefore be that the departure of Ghana's most charismatic leader discouraged voters from showing up at the polling station.

## **Conclusions**

Does the relatively smooth handover of power to the NPP signify a gradual internalisation of the rules of the democratic game? Perhaps. If one looks at the history of democratisation elsewhere in the world, one is forced to realise that it involves a very long-term historical process with twists and turns and, especially, structural changes in economies and the patterns of social stratification. Ghana may now have enjoyed the longest period of formal democratic politics since independence, but any definitive conclusions about the chances of democratic consolidation depend on far more extensive temporal parameters. As mentioned above, political culture in Ghana is still marked by considerable intolerance. The economic downturn could aggravate tensions among members of the political

class and in social relations generally and hence put respect for the rules of the game in jeopardy. While people in Ghana may have begun to realise the significance of their voting power,<sup>44</sup> this cannot in the end compensate for a lack of significant socio-economic development that provides the only solid basis to genuine democratisation, that is, the growth in political equality between the social strata. While one should not argue that Africa has to follow the political trajectories pursued in other parts of the world, the history of democratisation shows that to a considerable extent the franchise follows, rather than substitutes for, an increase in social and political power. Nevertheless, the smooth relinquishment of power by the power clique that held Ghana in its grip for a decade shows that there is no reason to be dismissive about the relevance of multiparty politics.<sup>45</sup> In the medium term, the rules of the democratic game may at least help in shifting the balance of power between sections of the political class itself, if not between the social strata they purport to represent.

In the short term, it will be interesting to see whether the NPP will repeat the mistakes of its predecessor parties: can it fail to escape from the socio-cultural entrapment of the Danquah-Busia tradition by concentrating its energies on providing for the urban middle classes and the Ashanti, or Akan, sections of the electorate generally? Its promised anti-corruption drive should prove pertinent here, as one may reasonably expect that many Ghanaians who were excluded from the NDC's patronage might now be tempted to take their turn and try to cash in on the NPP's control of the state. Judging from Kufuor's cabinet appointments, which included some (former) representatives of rival parties and opposition regions (*Africa Confidential*, January 26, 2001), the president could be credited with a cautious beginning.

This need not come as much of a surprise, as the NPP's election campaign more or less followed the ideological eclecticism that formed the backbone of the NDC's hegemony in the past. By castigating the government's economic record and its involvement in corruption, the NPP rallied to the defence of Ghanaian commoners and the young — in a way copying NDC ideology. Yet it also paid lip-service to the basic neo-liberal parameters of the NDC's economic policies, something that came very naturally to the NPP with its urban middle-class origins and the benefits that had accrued to Ghana's middle-classes from the structural adjustment programmes implemented by the Rawlings administration. Only by discarding a more narrow, urban middle-class bias, in favour of a more encompassing political programme in ostensible defence of all Ghanaians — including especially the young, the poor and the rural folk — could the NPP defeat the incumbent government. Rawlings had already shown them the way by combining a neo-liberal economic agenda with a programme that catered especially for rural interest groups, thus breaking the dichotomy in Ghanaian politics between the liberalism of urban middle-class interests and the more populist policies pursued by the Nkrumahist tradition. With a correct interpretation of these historical changes wrought by the departing president, the NPP, rather than faced with a

shrinking of its political base as predicted by Nugent after the 1996 elections (1999:313), managed to broaden its electoral support.

By inducing the opposition to follow in his footsteps, Rawlings can be credited with having permanently transformed Ghana's political landscape. However, it remains to be seen whether the NPP will be able to break out of the old Danquah-Busia tradition or whether the outcome of the 2000 elections will appear to be as much of an aberration from electoral trends as the victory obtained by the NPP's predecessor, the Progressive Party, in 1969 (Nugent 1999:316). At present it would appear that parliamentary arithmetic forces Kufuor to adopt a constructive attitude towards other parties including the NDC, and the electoral strata they claim to represent. With 100 out of 200 seats the NPP did not gain a majority in the legislature, forcing it to co-operate with other political forces. With 92 parliamentary seats, the NDC is still the second dominant political force in the country, something the NPP must take into account when charting government policy. Assuming that the former ruling party can recover from its crushing defeat, both parties could develop into permanent political alternatives for the Ghanaian electorate. With the charismatic Rawlings as the NDC's chairman-for-life, the party may continue to exert considerable influence. Such a development could contribute to the consolidation of multiparty politics even though the ideological distinctions between the two parties seem at present relatively muted, in line with the prevailing international dominance of neo-liberal dogmas.

#### Notes

1. Results have been rounded to the percentage point. I would like to express my gratitude to Piet Konings, Roger Southall and two anonymous referees for their comments on an earlier draft of this article.
2. The results of the parliamentary and presidential elections have also been published in the *Ghana Gazette*.
3. If one included the years of the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) government preceding NDC rule, one could even argue that it had been in power for 20 years. However, the NDC's policies differed from that of the PNDC, while its administration included many new faces apart from old PNDC stalwarts (Nugent 1995:273).
4. Sources for this article are data from interviews with scholars, journalists and other observers of Ghanaian politics in December 2000 as well as various documentary material.
5. The register numbers 10,7 million (*The Ghanaian Times*, December 12, 2000). Some Ghanaians of the opposition even said it should in reality number no more than 7 million (*Africa Confidential*, November 24, 2000). In 1992, the register stood at 8,3 million and in 1996 at 9,27 million (Nugent 1999:305).
6. Foreign Minister Victor Gbeho won as an independent candidate. However, he did not leave the NDC.
7. Interview with Kwesi Aning and Leslie Boafo, Institute of Economic Affairs, Accra, December 4, 2000.
8. For a discussion of the bandwagon effect in African elections see Bratton and Van de Walle 1997:209 ff.
9. In 1996, Yendi and Gukpegu also voted for Kufuor, something that was related to violent conflicts with the Konkomba, which had fuelled hostility among Dagomba and Nanumba towards the Rawlings government (see Nugent 1999:308-9).



10. In five Volta constituencies Kufuor got 20 to 25 per cent of the votes: Buem, Biakoye, Akan, Krachi and Nkwanta. All figures from www.ghanaelections.com.
11. Interview with Edward Briku Boafu, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Accra, December 8, 2000.
12. Interview with Edward Ameyibor, Ghana News Agency, Accra, December 8, 2000 and *West Africa*, December 18, 2000 - January 14, 2001. This also played a role in the Senegalese elections earlier in the year.
13. Interview with Kwesi Aning and Leslie Bofo, Institute of Economic Affairs, Accra, December 4, 2000 and news broadcasts Ghana Television, December 3-4, 2000.
14. For Florida coverage, see *Daily Graphic*, December 1 and 5, 2000; *Public Agenda*, December 4-10, 2000; and *The Statesman*, December 5-10, 2000 (all from Accra).
15. Interview with Kwesi Anings and Leslie Bofo, Institute of Economic Affairs, Accra, December 4, 2000 and *The Guide* (Accra), December 6-12, 2000.
16. Interview with Edward Ameyibor, Ghana News Agency, Accra, December 8, 2000. Whether or not he was misquoted over some of these issues, in the past Rawlings has been cited as arguing that the NPP would die in opposition (*Africa Confidential*, November 24, 2000).
17. The most serious incident before the elections took place on November 12 in a suburb of Accra, where eight people were seriously wounded (*Africa Confidential*, November 24, 2000, *West Africa*, November 27 to December 3, 2000).
18. Figures varied: seven people, according to the *Africa Research Bulletin*, 2000:14212; and 10 according to the *Ghanaian Times* and *Daily Graphic* (Accra), both December 11, 2000.
19. Interview with Edward Briku Boafu, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Accra, December 8, 2000.
20. Interview with E. Gyimah-Boadi, Centre for Democracy and Development, Accra, December 4, 2000.
21. Mills was seen by many as a puppet of Rawlings. Interview with Edward Briku Boafu, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Accra, December 8, 2000 and with K. Kumado, Centre of International Affairs, University of Ghana, Legon, December 11, 2000.
22. Extensive analysis of the 1996 polls can be found in Aye 1998.
23. Moreover, regional figures themselves represent totals compiled from individual constituency results — which in turn may have been affected by very specific, such as local, factors.
24. Thus, the difference in Central Region's parliamentary seats between NDC and NPP was very small (nine to eight), which would indicate that the party did not depend wholly on the charisma of Rawlings and/or the relevance of other factors in determining the votes in the parliamentary elections.
25. Interview with Kwesi Aning and Leslie Bofo, Institute of Economic Affairs, Accra, December 4, 2000.
26. Generally on this issue in Africa, see Tangri 1999.
27. Interview with Stevens Ahiawordor, Political Science Department, University of Ghana, Legon, December 11, 2000.
28. Interview with Edward Briku Boafu, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Accra, December 8, 2000. Also *The Weekend Statesman* (Accra), December 8-14, 2000.
29. The Electoral Commission did not act on this. Interview with K. Kumado, Centre of International Affairs, University of Ghana, Legon, 11 December 2000. Also Kumado 1996b:8-23.
30. This was reiterated by Kufuor after his victory (*West Africa*, January 15-21, 2001).
31. Interviews held in Accra, December 2000.
32. Interview with K. Kumado, Centre of International Affairs, University of Ghana, Legon, December 11, 2000. Technically this is not allowed under Ghana law (see Kumado 1996b:15).
33. Interview with Kwesi Aning and Leslie Bofo, Institute of Economic Affairs, Accra, December 4, 2000.
34. The winning candidate was Freddie Blay (*The Evening News* (Accra), December 12, 2000).
35. Interview with Edward Ameyibor, Ghana News Agency, Accra, December 8, 2000.
36. Interview with Edward Briku Boafu, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Accra, December 8, 2000.
37. Interview with K. Kumado, Centre of International Affairs, University of Ghana, Legon, December 11, 2000. In the 1992 and 1996 elections chiefs in Northern, Upper West and Upper

- East regions gave voting instructions to their people, providing the NDC with overwhelming majorities (Aye 2000:155).
38. See Nugent 2001:407-10 for the spending of money in the hope of getting votes in the 2000 elections.
  39. There is a parallel here with the situation in other African countries, such as Senegal (see Van Walraven 2001).
  40. For a discussion of geographical voting patterns in 1996, see Nugent 1999:305-6; Constituency surveys in Aye 1998:part III.
  41. Interview with Kwasi Kpodo, Ghana News Agency, Accra, December 12, 2000. In northern Ghana, a goat's head symbolised poverty and was used in the 1950s to underline distrust of politicians in the southern, richer, parts of the country (see Lentz 1998:477).
  42. Interview with Stevens Ahiawordor, Political Science Department, University of Ghana, Legon, December 11, 2000 and *The Ghanaian Voice*, December 11-17, 2000.
  43. On this dynamic in Africa generally, see Le Vine 1980:662, and for its relevance for Ghana, Price 1974.
  44. Interview with K. Kumado, Centre of International Affairs, University of Ghana, Legon, December 11, 2000.
  45. The defeat, in February 2000, of the ruling Parti Socialiste in Senegal provides an interesting parallel.

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