

Politics of Issues or Of Sides: A Treatise on What Caused the Eventual Outcome of the 2012 Presidential Elections in Ghana

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Abstract

This article is a preliminary study which analyses the outcomes of the 2012 presidential election in Ghana, which saw the National Democratic Congress retain power. The paper argues that even though issues are supposed to guide voters in making their choices in elections, the outcome of the 2012 election was influenced by other factors also. Key issues that have been studied include respondents' responses on education (free Senior High School and Quality Senior High School); National Health Insurance (NHIS) have been studied. The others include party affiliation, personality of the voters, ethnic orientation and incumbency among others. The Data for this paper was gathered in Adum-Kumasi, a strong business area that has several people from various parts of the country come to do business. The other areas include Kejetia an entrepot and KNUST and Edwase which is a University community. Responses from the thousand (1000) respondents to questionnaires represent the position of Ghanaians from all walks of life. Responses from respondents have been thematically pieced together to form the discussions. The study points us to the future, the need to focus on **issues** during elections. It proposes that knowledge of the issues affecting the people and succinct appreciation of what parties propose in their manifestos as well as their past and present achievements in the governance of the nation among other significant issues should inform electorates in their choice of a president during presidential elections. It also points out that when the people are able to reach this height of choosing presidents base strongly on issues, we can assume or conclude that multi-party elections in Ghana and the democratization process which took off from 1992 after a long period of military rule, would have been deeply consolidated.

Keywords: issues, sides, new patriotic party (npp), national democratic congress (ndc), democracy, elections

INTRODUCTION

After the 1966 coup, Ghana had intermittent constitutional periods from October 1969 to January 1972 and September 1979 to December 1981. From 1981, the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) held on to power till 1992 when Ghana returned to constitutional Democracy. The military dictatorship periods included: National Liberation Council in February 1966-October 1969, the National Redemption Council (NRC)/ Supreme Military Council (SMC) from January 1972 to June 1979, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) in June 1979 to September 1979 and the provincial National Defense Council, December 1981 to January 1993.

In November 1992, Ghana held multiparty elections to return the country to constitutional Rule. It was won by the National Democratic Congress (NDC). Also on 7th Defense 1996 another election was won by the NDC (the incumbent party). However, the earlier election in 1992 was not fully accepted by four political parties, namely, the New Patriotic Party (NPP), the Peoples National Convention (PNC), the National Independence Party (NIP) and Peoples Heritage Party (PHP). They argued it was not transparent enough. The NPP for example referred to

it as the stolen verdict. However in 1996, the results of the elections were accepted by the opposition parties. On December 7, 2000, Ghanaians went to the polls again this time it was won by the NPP and J.A Kuffour was sworn in on January 7, 2001.

Several factors have been attributed to the loosing or winning of elections by political parties. A noticeable one has been socio-economic. For instance, unlike the 1992 and 1996 elections, the 2000 elections were held at a time of widespread disenchantment with the ruling government, (NDC), particularly in the urban areas where problems such as increasing unemployment, inflations and depreciating currency had become conspicuously burdensome. (Aryee, 2010). These real problems were exacerbated by reports in the media of corruption among the government functionaries (Aryee, 2010).

Again, unlike the elections held in 1992 and 1996, the 2000 elections was contested by seven presidential candidates whose views on issues confronting the country, such as agriculture, education, health, housing, media, corruption and empowerment of vulnerable groups (Aryee, 2010). This further suggests that the elections of Ghana have been won based on issues. However the issues based

elections have featured prominently in urban and peri-urban areas where both the electronic and print media is very vociferous.

The above notwithstanding, it is pertinent to do a posthumous analyses of the previous elections in Ghana especially from 1992 onwards to ascertain from the facts whether indeed elections in Ghana have been won based on issues or there are other existing variables affecting or are likely to affect the determination of a victory for a party or a candidate in an election in Ghana. For example, James Anderson (1975) argued that the effect of policy makers is worth thinking about in the light of the consideration that some elections are critical. Critical elections are those which produce major realignments in voter coalitions and shifts in public policy, elections in which citizens, through the electoral process, help to produce fundamental changes in public policy.

The central question this article seeks to address is to ascertain the factors that determined the outcome of the December 7th and 8th 2012 elections in Ghana. Thus this article focuses on whether **Issues** (social (free SHS, Quality SHS, housing, roads, transportation) and economic (employment versus unemployment ratios, Inflation etc) was a dominant variable in determining the winning of the elections by the NDC or there were other variables such as the extent of the impact of party affiliation, the impact of floating voters, ethnicity, alliances of parties, or the strength or abuse of incumbency.

Approach

This research focuses on the use of qualitative and quantitative techniques. Both documentary and non-documentary sources have been used as sources of data for the research. The non-documentary sources have been sourced through responses to the questionnaires that were administered to respondents. The questions were varied and were an admixture of open ended and close ended to make room to test all the essential variables that were likely to have played to determine the voting pattern and the general outcome of the election.

A population of thousand was purposively selected from the campus of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Edwase, Adum and Kejetia. Adum and Kejetia are entrepots of trade and ideas and responses from persons from all walks of life within the Ghanaian society could be retrieved from there and therefore these two areas served a useful purpose. KNUST houses professors, doctors/philosophers, administrators, students, cleaners and labourers. It was therefore a useful place to get varied responses from different ethnicity, party affiliation and specific concerns to specific issues that might have informed their choice of candidate during

the election. It is important to also stress that Edwase is also a University Community that also holds on to its traditional population who are generally traders. Responses from persons in these key areas of the population in Kumasi and Ashanti Region for that matter have informed the outcome of this paper.

We have further used qualitative and quantitative techniques to analyze the data gathered. Ethnographic technique has been used to thematically piece the narratives as well as tables, pie charts and pictograms to explain the quantitative. The use of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) has proved an invaluable resource in this regard. The above notwithstanding written sources ranging from articles in journals, news papers, books among others have also been used.

Definitional Issues

The concept of issue voting embodies multitude concepts which need explication before a thorough investigation of the concept. In order to come to terms with what issue voting is, it is logically prudent to mark the conceptual contours of 'issues'. In other words, we have to understand or define what an issue is before we can consider the definition of issue voting.

Issues, as far as elections are concerned, comprise any matter relative to public policy that previously have been or presently are a source of contention/disputation between political parties. (Denver and Hands, 1990) Examples of issues are abortion, affirmative action, the economy, the budget, gun control, and global warming. Issue voting thus refers to the situation where voters in an election cast their votes on the basis of political issues. (Ibid) It is "the idea that voters' decisions are largely determined by the issue at stake in the elections." (Oxford Dictionary of Politics). Often contrasted with party voting, issue voting has been categorized into easy and hard issues (Carmines and Stimson, 1980). When voters are capable of making their voting decisions devoid of reliance on information, then issue voting is described as easy. Hard issues, on the other hand, are those that demand, on the part of the voter, 'knowledge and understanding' in order to cast their vote and are complex or complicated. (Ibid) Carmines and Stimson advance three necessary conditions that make an issue easy: "the issue will be symbolic rather than technical, it will be more likely to deal with policy ends than means, and it would be an issue long on the political agenda." Voters, as Jackson emphasizes, can either base their votes on what in their candid estimation it is possible for a candidate to attain in the future or on their(candidate) past record of achievement. These two bases of voting on issues, Jackson reminds us are known as retrospective issue voting and prospective issue voting respectively. Meanwhile, there are a number of

factors that can make issue voting more complex. Among these factors is the fact that issues are not always dichotomous. More often than not, a voter can take many positions on an issue.

This paper however, defines issue voting as developmental or economic and social challenges that electorates expect candidates or governments to resolve when they come to power. They do not regard whether they are hard or soft issues. However, it can sometimes be determined by the candidates past records and achievements and the confidence of the electorates in such candidate or the particular political party which has formed government before or is still in government. In the case of Ghana, the issues are mainly employment/unemployment, provision of social services like housing, health, water, electricity etc. It might also include food security and increasing purchasing power of the electorates based on good remuneration. This notwithstanding, the study is skewed to include the state of the economy at the time of election, Education, National Health Insurance (NHIS) and Employment issues.

DISCUSSIONS

The central theme for this discussion is to ascertain based on the feedback of our respondents whether the 2012 elections of Ghana was based on issues or on sides. With respect to **issues** we have looked at the following variables: employment issues (jobs), National Health Insurance Scheme, Education (Free Senior High School, SHS or Quality and affordable SHS), job creation and economy. The variables for

sides ranged from the following: candidate orientation, personal characteristics of the candidate, party affiliation, ethnic considerations, incumbency advantage and floating voters.

The discussions focus on the responses from our respondents. Out of a sample of thousand persons from the age of eighteen (18) upwards, who were found within Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Edwase, a village near KNUST as well as Adum and Kejetia important trading centres in Kumasi where various persons from within and without the Ashanti Region come to trade. It is important to stress that KNUST also represent such homogeneity and Edwase being a University community would not be totally dissimilar. Both males (590) and females (410) formed part of the respondents. Religious affiliation of respondents was Christians in the majority followed by Muslims. Atheist, Traditionalist and others were not part of our respondents. It is important to state that the youth, ranging from the age of 18 to 35 formed a majority of the respondents. This is amply shown in table one (biodata). Significantly, majority of the respondents were not married (730) followed by those who are married (220). Again respondents included those who have had little or no formal education to those who have less or much education even to the post-graduate school. This is also an attestation to the fact that responses did not come from only one section of society but from varied groups as much as possible.

Table One. Biodata

Gender		Age		Marital Status		Religious Affiliation		Formal Education	
Male	590	18-25	480	Married	220	Muslim	130	None	50
Female	410	26-35	310	Widowed	10	Christian	870	Primary	20
		36-45	80	Divorced	20			Secondary	300
		46-55	100	Separated	20			Post-secondary	80
		56-65	0	Single	730			University	500
		66+	30					Post-graduate	40
								Other	10

Table Two. Employment

Occupation		Income		Ethnic Group	
Unemployed	210	200	150	Akan	670
Self Employed	280	201-300	120	Mole Dagbani	170
Artisan	10	301-400	70	Ewe	50
Teacher	80	401-500	20	Guan	40
Manual Worker	20	501-600	50	Ga-Adangbe	60
Professional	120	601-700	10		
Business Man/Woman	80	701-800	20		
Sec. Personnel	10	801-900	20		
Other	180	901-1000	10		
Unanswered	20	1001-1100	0		
		1100+	0		
		Other	460		
		Unanswered	70		

Sides

This section of the discussion pays attention to the politics of sides. SIDES have been used in this study

to refer to all other variables that determined the outcome of the 2012 General elections in Ghana except ISSUES. For us to be able to test whether the

results or outcome of the 2012 election was based on issues or sides there was the need to firstly pay attention to the orientation of the electorates so far as their knowledge of the respective candidates was concerned. It was noticed from table three below that respondents knew the respective candidates who were the flag bearers of the various political parties who contested in the 7th December 2012 presidential elections. Table three also confirms that the

respondents generally knew the candidates they voted for. This notwithstanding (50) people which is 5% of the respondents could not really tell who were the candidates for the respective political parties that contested for the 2012 presidential elections in Ghana. The following have been identified to be very important variables which informed the outcome of the 2012 presidential election.

Table Three. Candidate Orientation

Which candidates took part in the 2012 general elections?		Did you vote in the general election?		If Yes, which candidate did you vote for?	
Nana Akuffo Addo	270	Yes	920	Nana Akuffo Addo	720
John Dramani Mahama	250	No	60	John Dramani	160
Others	390	Unanswered	20	Others	60
Don't Know	50			Unanswered	60
Unanswered	40				

(a) Personal Characteristics of the candidate

This variable pays attention to the personalities of the candidates. The study shows that **220** people, which forms 22% of the sampled population voted for respective candidates based on their personalities or physical outlook (physical appearance, handsomeness, beauty or stature). Although **740**

respondents accounting for **74%** of the total sample, as shown in table four, do not subscribe to voting based on a candidate's physical appearance, it has confirmed that a significant number of Ghanaian vote based on the appearance or physical stature of a candidate.

Table Four Candidate Characteristics

Vote based on candidate's personal characteristic rather than other?		Do you think others vote based on candidate orientation than others?	
Yes	210	Yes	510
No	740	No	440
Unanswered	50	Unanswered	50

(b) Party Affiliation

730 (73%) respondents noted that Ghanaians voted based on party affiliation. This stresses the argument that a significant portion of the population do not vote based on pressing economic issues, that is labour or unemployment issues etc. Voters will generally vote for parties they have family ties with. Especially where young voters find their fathers, grandparents

and elder siblings belonging to a particular political party the find it necessary to have a certain sense of belonging and would vote for such parties. This position does not necessarily change based on level of education, the personality of the candidate to be voted for or the kind of campaign message he/she presents during the campaigning period.

Table Five Party Identification/Affiliation

Are you a member of a Pol. party?		If yes, did you vote for the party in the 2012 general elections?		If No, Do you admire or identify with any of the parties?		If yes, did you vote for that party in the 2012 elections?		Do you think people voted based on party affiliation than other?	
Yes	470	Yes	430	Yes	440	Yes	430	Yes	730
No	530	No	50	No	170	No	30	No	230
								Unanswered	40

(c) Ethnic Considerations

The study confirmed ethnic considerations influenced the outcome of the 2012 presidential election. 680 (68%) of the respondents voted based on ethnic considerations. The nature of such consideration was strongly based on party strongholds. For instance the New Patriotic Party (NPP) is generally voted for by those in Akan speaking areas or Akans whilst the National Democratic Congress (NDC) is generally voted for by those in Non-Akan speaking areas or

Non Akans. The trend has been same since 1992 elections which the NPP described as the stolen verdict. Although, the defeat of the NDC in 2000 elections was based on poor national economic performance in conjunction with other factors (Boafo-Athur; Ayee 2001), the 2012 election did not show that. Indeed the 2012 economy was described as experiencing jobless growth (Ghana Economic Review and Outlook 2012) yet it did not tilt the election in favour of the NPP.

Table Six Ethnicity

What Is The Ethnic Background Of The NPP Candidate		What Is The Ethnic Background Of The NDC Candidate		Did The Ethnic Back. Of The Candidate Influence Your Vote?		Do You Think People Voted Based On Ethnic Consideration?	
Akan	930	Akan	0	Yes	230	Yes	680
Mole-dagbani	10	Mole-dagbani	680	No	750	No	280
Ewe	0	Ewe	80	Unanswered	20	Unanswered	40
Guan	0	Guan	50				
Ga-Adangbe	0	Ga-Adangbe	30				
Gonja	0	Do not know	140				
Do not know	60	Unanswered	20				

(d) Incumbency

610 (61%) of the respondents confirmed that incumbency advantage led to the victory of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) in the 2012 presidential election. It is important to draw our attention to the facts. Since 1992 to 2012 incumbent governments with candidates who have served their first terms were voted for to serve their second term, except Prof. Evans Atta Mills who died before the 2012 election and was replaced by his running mate John Dramani Mahama. It is significant to investigate whether voters become apathetic and stay away from voting because they perceive that the incumbent government will win or the other contesting parties will lose.

Table Seven. Incumbency

Do You Believe/Think Incumbency Advantage Led To The Victory Of The NDC In The 2012 General Elections?	
Yes	610
No	330
Unanswered	60

(e) Floating Voters

440 (44%) of the respondents agreed that floating voters influenced the outcome of the 2012 presidential election. Floating voters refer to those voters who do not stick to one political party. They are the group that do not stick to party affiliation, incumbency or ethnicity etc, but are rather generally influenced by the pressing issues affecting the nation. In most instances where campaign issues of opposing majority parties are fierce and close in terms of quality, floating voters are most likely compelled to look at other indices before they cast their ballot. This study has confirmed that floating voters played a significant role in determining the outcome of the 2012 General elections.

Table Eight. Floating Voters

Floating Voters Contributed Largely To The Victory Of The NDC In The 2012 General Elections.	
Strongly agree	240
Disagree	220
Neutral	240
Agree	200
Strongly disagree	70
Unanswered	30

Issues

The following variables have been used in discussing the issues which determined the outcome of the 2012 presidential election in Ghana. The focuses of the analyses are based on the outcomes from the administered questionnaires. These are amply represented in table's nine (9) to eleven (11).

It is clear from the outcomes from the responses especially in table eight that on matters pertaining to issues based politics, respondents or voters were able to strongly identify that the New Patriotic Party (NPP) focused on Free Senior High School Education (SHS). 940 (94%) respondents knew that the NPP focused on Free Education and 12 () rather thought that the NPP focused on quality and affordable SHS. Only 10 (1%) had no idea of what the NPP central message in the 2012 election was. Again, 590 (59%) respondents knew that the NDC focused on quality and affordable SHS. 360 (36%) respondents did not

know. 10 (1%) rather thought the NDC focused on Free SHS. The nature of the responses for the central message of the NDC amply suggests partly why the NPP had an increase in the number of votes in the Ashanti region. This notwithstanding, other variables tested earlier could have determine why the NDC rather made a tremendous progress in terms of numbers and percentage in the 2012 presidential elections in Ashanti Region. It is important to also note that the Ashanti Region is pro-NPP and their likely bias will be on focusing on the message of the party they like. It should therefore not be surprising that (36%) did not know anything about the NDC's quality and affordable SHS.

Table Nine. Major Issues in 2012 Elections

What Major Issue Informed The NPP In The 2012 General Elec.		What Major Issue Informed The NDC In The 2012 General Elec.	
Free SHS	940	Free SHS	10
Quality and affordable SHS	40	Quality and Affordable SHS	590
Don't Know	10	Don't know	360
Unanswered	10	Unanswered	40

The responses on what issues were important to respondents (voters) in the 2012 presidential elections, placed education on top of the scale of preference followed by health, employment and matters relating to the economy. The responses further show that the campaign message of Free SHS and Quality and affordable SHS resonated. Yet the other variables were as much important. Significantly, it has been argued that floating voters for example mostly pay attention to economic issues,

especially the area of job creation. This notwithstanding it has also been argued that they are sometimes able to settle on a particular candidate based on how likable he is in the sight of the general populace. In several instances the economic arguments do not suffice in the case of the floating voters especially in instances where there is a tie or both candidates are equally raising or touching on key issues that are equally pertinent and would inure to the benefit of the nation.

Table Ten. Issues Candidates Preferred

What Issue(S) Were Important To You In The 2012 General Elections?		Did You Vote For A Party With Development Issues Similar To Yours?	
Employment	100	Yes	790
NHIS	170	No	130
Job Creation	40	Unanswered	80
Education	430		
Economy	30		

Table Eleven. Statements Agreeing With Voter Issues

Statement Agreed With		The 2012 General Elections Was Won Based Mainly On Issues	
I vote based on issues	710	Strongly agree	140
Based on party affiliations	130	Disagree	210
Based on candidate orientation	120	Neutral	210
Vote based on ethnic identity	0	Agree	170
Unanswered	40	Strongly disagree	250
		Unanswered	20

CONCLUSION

The study has confirmed among other things that voters will generally prefer to vote on issues, party affiliations, and candidate’s orientation but not on ethnic identity. This notwithstanding, 460 (46%) respondents disagreed with the argument that the 2012 presidential elections was won based on issues whereas 310 (3.1%) of the respondents agree that the 2012 General Elections was won based mainly on issues. In 2004, the expectation was that Ghana’s democratic experiment would be strengthened and voter preference at the polls would be influenced more by the issues at stake than personalities, traditional party alliances, ethnicity etc. (Kwame Boafo-Arthur, 2006). In 2008, Ghana’s democracy survived all odds against competitively fought multi-party elections in Africa (Lindsay, 2009). It is still envisaged that the 2016 elections would be focused on **Issues** than on **Sides**.

It is also envisaged that knowledge of the issues affecting the people and succinct appreciation of what parties propose in their manifestos as well as their past and present achievements in the governance

of the nation among other significant issues should inform electorates in their choice of a president during presidential elections. Again, when the people are able to reach this height of choosing presidents base strongly on issues, we can assume or conclude that multi-party elections and the democratization process which took off from 1992 would have been deeply consolidated.

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