

# Chapter 1

## Political Background

The 1996 Presidential and Parliamentary elections were the second since the restoration of multi-party politics in 1992 and, in the case of the parliamentary elections, the first to be contested by all the major political parties since 1979. This was also the first time in Ghana's history that multi-party elections were being held for a second time in succession. They were therefore of considerable significance for the people of Ghana and the Commonwealth, which Ghana joined at independence in 1957.

### Recent Political History

Since independence Ghana has had a succession of civilian and military governments. The first post-independence government, led by Dr Kwame Nkrumah, was removed by means of a military coup in February 1966. After three years under a military council a new Constitution was promulgated and at the general election of August 1969 the Progress Party won a majority of seats in the new National Assembly and its leader, Dr Kofi Busia, became Prime Minister. Three years later his government was overthrown by a second coup, the Constitution was suspended, the National Assembly dissolved and political parties abolished. In 1978 General Ignatius Kutu Acheampong, the leader of the then ruling body (the Supreme Military Council), was replaced by Lt-General Frederick Akuffo, political activity was permitted once again and elections were scheduled for June 1979.

A third coup took place on 4 June 1979, followed by the establishment of an Armed Forces Revolutionary Council led by Flt-Lt Jerry John Rawlings. However, the elections went ahead on 18 June, when the People's National Party won a majority of parliamentary seats and Dr Hilla Limann was elected President. Dr Limann's government had a short life: on 31 December 1981 Flt-Lt Rawlings seized power for a second time and assumed the leadership of a Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC). The Constitution was suspended and political parties banned.

### 1992 Elections

Although a National Commission for Democracy was established in 1982 to register voters, conduct elections and delineate constituency boundaries, and a nationwide voter registration took place in 1987/88, it was only from 1991 and the establishment of the Interim National Electoral Commission that Ghana's return to multi-party democracy gathered pace. In April 1992 a new Constitution was approved by referendum and in May 1992 the PNDC lifted the ban on political activity and restored the freedom of the Press. The presidential election of November 1992 was contested by five candidates: Flt-Lt Jerry Rawlings, by then retired from the air force, won with 58.3 per cent of the vote on a 48 per cent turnout.

In parliamentary elections the following month Flt-Lt Rawlings's National Democratic Congress (NDC) secured 189 of the 200 seats, this time on a turnout of 29 per cent. However, these elections were boycotted by the four major opposition parties, which claimed that the outcome of the presidential election had been rigged by the Government. The elections to the legislature were therefore eventually contested by only three parties – the NDC and its two allies in the presidential election, the Every Ghanaian Living Everywhere (EGLE) party and the National Convention Party (NCP) – and independent candidates. The NCP won eight seats, independents two and EGLE one.

The 1992 presidential election was observed by a Commonwealth Observer Group, whose Interim Statement said that 'the conduct of the election has been free and fair'. The Group's full Report, issued some weeks later, concluded that the Group was satisfied that 'although there were aspects relating to the "playing field" that were unsatisfactory, these were not such as to provide an impediment to the point where it challenged the process as a whole.' The Carter

Center also sent observers and concluded that 'despite the occurrence of serious irregularities in the election process, what we have observed does not lead us to question the validity of the results.' There were also observers from the Organisation of African Unity and the European Union, but their missions did not issue reports.

The 1992 Commonwealth Observer Group's Interim Statement and Report were heavily criticised by the opposition parties, which also believed that the Interim Statement had been issued before the polls had closed. In fact, the Interim Statement was issued on the morning of 4 November 1992, the day after the election. This was in line with the practice that it should be published after the closure of the polls but before the announcement of the result.

We were to find that the events of 1992 and perceptions of the Commonwealth Observers' role then were still very much live issues for the opposition parties in the run-up to the 1996 elections and were deeply conscious that the activities of our own Observer Group would come under close scrutiny.

### **The Legacy of 1992**

There were numerous specific complaints in 1992, many of which were collected together in a report produced in 1993 by the opposition New Patriotic Party entitled *The Stolen Verdict*. In particular, the opposition parties believed that the voters' register, heavily criticised by the Commonwealth and other observers, was fundamentally flawed.

Underlying the particular complaints, however, was a more fundamental issue: a deep-seated lack of trust on the part of the opposition parties in the impartiality of those responsible for managing the electoral process and profound suspicion that those in power would not hesitate to use whatever means were required to stay in power.

This lack of trust continued after 1992, although not at a sufficient level to prevent the parties from deciding to participate in the 1996 elections. It was reflected, for instance, in complaints voiced by the opposition parties well before the arrival of the Observer Group. These focused in particular on the advantages of the incumbent President and party in terms of resources and media domination which they thought meant there would not be a level playing field in either the presidential or parliamentary elections.

This distrust also accounted for an initial reluctance on the part of some opposition parties to accept that the new Electoral Commission, introduced after 1992, would manage the electoral process with impartiality. For instance, some of the parties were at first deeply suspicious of registration arrangements, the Commission's plans to use computerised scanners to process voters' details and their intention to introduce identity cards. This reflected their belief that the Electoral Commission's predecessor, the Interim National Electoral Commission (which had been responsible for managing the 1992 elections), had been biased in favour of the governing party and that the new Commission would prove equally untrustworthy. The suspicion diminished over time, and the parties later accepted the new technology and the arrangements for registration and voter identity cards, although a number of other issues were to provoke complaints from opposition parties from time to time.

On the part of the governing NDC there was concern over the allegations made by the opposition and their tone, which the NDC regarded as wholly without foundation, and at the opposition's continued questioning of the legitimacy of the Government elected in 1992.

### **The Political Parties**

The opposition parties' boycott of the 1992 parliamentary elections meant that they were not represented in the parliament which sat until 1996. However, they continued in existence and some new parties were formed as the 1996 elections approached. At the close of nominations in September 1996 the Electoral Commission (see Chapter 2) had accepted nominations for the parliamentary elections from eight political parties. In alphabetical order these were:

- Democratic People's Party (DPP)
- Every Ghanaian Living Everywhere (EGLE)
- Great Consolidated Popular Party (GCPP)

- National Convention Party (NCP)
- National Democratic Congress (NDC)
- New Patriotic Party (NPP)
- People's Convention Party (PCP)
- People's National Convention (PNC)

Five of these parties formed electoral alliances prior to the elections, with the intention that each alliance should be represented by a single candidate in each of the 200 parliamentary constituencies and should support a common presidential candidate. The alliances were:

- The **Progressive Alliance**: The governing NDC and the much smaller EGLE and DPP parties came together in the 'Progressive Alliance'.
- The **Great Alliance**: After prolonged negotiations, the NPP and PCP united in a 'Great Alliance' with the aim of agreeing on a common list of parliamentary candidates.

This left three parties outside the two major alliances: the PNC, the NCP and the GCPP.

From the start it was clear that the Progressive Alliance would fight on its record in government. The message would be that Flt-Lt Rawlings and his party had put Ghana back on its feet and that they were developing the country effectively. To elect the opposition would be to undo all their good work; to return Flt-Lt Rawlings and the NDC for a further term would enable them to continue to make progress for the country.

For its part, the Great Alliance would stress the need for change, highlight what they regarded as the negative aspects of the performance of Flt-Lt Rawlings and his NDC Government and argue that they would be able to do better. The future of the country required the rejection of President Rawlings and the NDC and the installation of a Great Alliance government which would be able to manage government effectively and honestly. Inevitably, this implied sharp focus on the personalities involved. As the Great Alliance leader John Kufuor said of his NPP-PCP alliance, "we are not presenting a united ideology...we came together to fight the incumbency" (*New African*, November 1996).

### Parliamentary Candidates

The selection of parliamentary candidates was not without difficulty for the two major alliances.

For the Progressive Alliance the main problem was that a number of NDC figures who had been passed over during their party's selection of parliamentary candidates in June decided to stand as independents (i.e., against their former party). This was one factor in the increase in the number of independent parliamentary candidates, from five in 1992 to 57 in 1996. Some political commentators believed that some of these independents had considerable local support and that this might be sufficient to weaken the NDC's prospects in a number of seats.

A more serious difficulty faced the opposition Great Alliance in that final agreement on common alliance candidates was not reached until November, well after nominations had closed. In a number of constituencies, therefore, there were two Great Alliance candidates – one for the NPP and one for the PCP – one of whom had to be persuaded to stand down in favour of the other. Often this did not occur: as deposits were paid by candidates it was legally the candidate's decision to withdraw or not, not her/his party's. Even when such agreement was forthcoming it was sometimes too late to ensure that the withdrawn candidate's name did not appear on the ballot paper since they had already been printed for that part of the country. This raised the prospect of confusion on the part of at least some voters and the possibility of wasted votes for the Great Alliance.

### Presidential Candidates

There were to be three candidates in the presidential election, each supported by a vice-presidential 'running-mate': Flt-Lt Jerry John Rawlings for the Progressive Alliance (vice-presidential candidate Professor John Evans Atta Mills), Mr John Agyekum Kufuor for the Great Alliance (vice-presidential candidate Mr Kow Nkensen Arkaah) and Dr Edward Nasigrie

Mahama (vice-presidential candidate Ms Adeline Dedo-Mate) for the People's National Convention. The Great Alliance choice of Mr Arkaah as Mr Kufuor's running-mate was of particular interest since he had been Vice-President in President Rawlings's outgoing government.

### **Observers**

As the elections approached it emerged that a number of organisations proposed to send observers. In addition to the members of the Commonwealth Observer Group, the United Nations, the Organisation of African Unity, the European Union, the National Democratic Institute (a non-governmental organisation based in the US) and several diplomatic missions accredited to Ghana intended to have a presence.

Domestic observers were provided by Ghana Alert and, on a bigger scale, by NEDEO (the Network of Domestic Election Observers), bringing together some 25 organisations, including the Ghana TUC and a number of individual trade unions, the National Union of Ghana Students, the Ghana Union of Traders and the main Christian and Muslim organisations.