



GHANAIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS 2024

BACKGROUND

The coastal West African state of Ghana is approaching its presidential elections on **December 7**. These elections are unique, as the political landscape is shaped by dynamics that extend beyond the historical rivalry between the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP), which have alternated in power since 1992. The presidential candidates, John Mahama of the NDC and Mahamudu Bawumia of the NPP, have campaigned fiercely in a high stakes battle throughout their presidential campaigns.

The potential for political violence is being closely monitored by both domestic and international observers. The elections are taking place under conditions of escalating mistrust in state institutions, a narrative both candidates have sought to capitalize on, each accusing the other of contributing to the endemic corruption that has plagued Ghanaian politics. This dynamic is exacerbated by mutual allegations between the NDC and NPP of undermining electoral integrity, which deepens fears of instability. Accusations of bias directed at key state institutions, including the Electoral Commission (EC), the judiciary, and law enforcement agencies, have further fueled concerns about the transparency of the electoral process. Political violence, such as vigilantism, remains a persistent issue, worsened by growing public mistrust of the police.

Ghana represents an oasis of relative stability in a volatile region, as military juntas have recently overthrown governments in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. However, Ghana's domestic vulnerabilities mean that a disputed result could lead to conflict, weakening its role as a regional bulwark and Western ally in the fight against jihadist expansion in the Sahel outwards toward the Lake Chad Basin. The election outcome will determine if Ghana is able to maintain its position as a reliable security partner to the West and African states.

KEY INDIVIDUALS

Mahamudu Bawumia (NPP): Serving as vice president for eight years, the Oxford-educated economist could become Ghana's first Muslim president. A former deputy governor of the central bank, he faces criticism over the country's economic crisis during his tenure.

John Mahama (NDC): A veteran politician, he previously served as president from 2012 to 2016. Previously facing corruption accusations in 2016, he now targets the NPP by highlighting scandals and claims of 'state capture' and nepotism.

Independent candidates, though not likely to win, could fragment voting blocs, potentially forcing a runoff:

Alan Kyerematen (Independent): The former minister known as "Alan Cash," who left the NPP last year after claiming bias in the presidential primaries. He could siphon votes from the NCC's stronghold in the southern Ashanti region.

Nana Kwame Bediako (Independent): A businessman known as "Cheddar," he is a political newcomer who has drawn a young support base via social media.

WHY YOU SHOULD CARE

Ethnic Conflict & Electoral Strategies: Ghana's persistent ethnic and communal conflicts are largely concentrated in the north, driven partially by the unique levels of ethnic pluralism. The ongoing Mamprusi-Gonja conflict in the Northern Savannah Region is especially concerning, as it is tied to the ethnic affiliations of the NPP and NDC candidates. Both Bawumia and Mahama have used inflammatory language in their campaigns, with Bawumia notably describing the upcoming elections as a "do-or-die" affair earlier this year, which was widely interpreted as a call to violence. Each candidate has made clientelist appeals – promising goods and services along ethnic lines – to consolidate their respective ethnic vote banks. This strategy is especially divisive in a region considered to be the most impoverished in the country. The use of local conflicts for electoral gain increases the likelihood of post-election violence, deepening ethnic divisions.

Fulani Expulsion & Terrorist Expansion: Ghana is vulnerable to jihadist threats, with several active jihadist groups moving toward the already volatile

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

September 2017: Creation of Accra Initiative, a security mechanism to address expanding security threats in the Sahel.

December 2020: Ballots were rejected by the NDC, fueling mistrust in state institutions and heightening tensions in the 2024 presidential race.

August 2021: Ghana's #FixTheCountry protesters took to the streets of Accra, showing popular discontent with governance.

November 2022: Lake Chad Basin countries of Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger,



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northern border. The ongoing violence in neighboring Burkina Faso has led to at least 3,000 Fulani refugees entering northern Ghana. In mid-2023, the Ghanaian government made the decision to forcibly expel Fulani asylum-seekers back to Burkina Faso, which was then exploited by extremist groups to fuel resentment and facilitate recruitment. Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) recently called for violence against the Ghanaian government, citing its mistreatment of the Fulani people. Ghana has not experienced high-profile terror attacks by insurgents to date. However, reports suggest that these groups are operating in its northern regions, using the country as a logistical base for regrouping and restocking supplies. If insurgents shift strategies and engage in direct attacks in northern Ghana, the country could face significant destabilization. Ghana's militarized counterterrorism including its role in 2017 Accra Initiative – overlooks the socioeconomic factors driving recruitment, as such, Ghana's current counterterrorism approaches are ill-equipped to handle a direct insurgent attack.

Economic Downturn: Economic issues dominate Ghana's election buildup, with rising living costs and 2022 inflation peaking at 54 percent. Though inflation has eased, prices remain high, pushing 850,000 more Ghanaians into poverty. Debt restructuring efforts and better-than-expected growth may give the next government fiscal flexibility, but tensions with Western donors over a proposed anti-LGBTQ+ bill could reduce foreign aid, which could undermine Ghana's role as a financial donor to ECOWAS. Meanwhile, public frustrations are mounting over new measures like the Electronic Levy (E-Levy) and a betting tax. Ghana seeks stronger security ties with the U.S. to boost regional stability, yet domestic challenges persist. The "galamsey" crisis over illegal mining devastates bodies of water and agricultural livelihoods, underscoring governance concerns as leaders are accused of prioritizing short-term gains over environmental and economic sustainability.

Benin, and Chad introduced the Multinational Joint Task Force comprising of 10,000 soldiers to counter jihadists, with its headquarters in Tamale, a city in northern Ghana.

May 2023: The IMF approved a \$360 million bailout for Ghana to help manage its debt burden and large fiscal deficit.

May 2024: Alleged theft of Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) kits from the EC has fueled concerns about electoral integrity.

July 2023: Ghanaian security forces forcibly repatriated at least 250 Burkinabe-Fulani asylum-seekers who had fled to Ghana.

July 2024: The Ghanaian Supreme Court upholds an anti-LGBTQ+ bill. The U.S. has strongly opposed the bill, warning it could harm U.S.-Ghana relations, and lead the World Bank, IMF, and European Union countries to reconsider its aid.

December 2024: The U.S. State Department announced a "visa restriction policy," aimed at individuals complicit in undermining democracy.

KEY POSSIBLE OUTCOMES

Uncontested NDC Victory: If Mahama wins decisively, Ghana would maintain its reputation as a democratic leader in West Africa. The NDC could focus on economic recovery, tackling inflation and debt restructuring, which may boost investor confidence. Diplomatic ties, particularly within ECOWAS and the African Union, would remain. The risk of unrest would be low, with only minor protests expected if the election is perceived as free and fair.

Contested NPP Retention or Runoff Dispute: If Bawumia retains power amid allegations of electoral malpractice or a disputed runoff, Ghana's democratic image could suffer. Prolonged political unrest could delay economic recovery and deter investment. Accusations of bias against institutions like the EC may erode public trust. Protests, particularly in urban centers and opposition strongholds, could escalate into violent clashes. Moreover, political instability could spill over into border areas, complicating efforts to counter regional jihadist threats.

RECENT POLLS

National Opinion Polls: 2024 General Elections, 1st October 2024 (%)

- John Dramani Mahama: 51.1%
- Dr Mahamudu Bawumia: 37.3%
- Alan Kyeremanten: 4.1%
- Nana Kwame Bediako: 6.2%

Source: GlobalInfoAnalytics

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