Ghana in 2004

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The year was thoroughly dominated by the run-up to the presidential and parliamentary elections that were held on 7 December. Apart from the preparatory work carried out by the National Electoral Commission (NEC), most aspects of everyday policy and governance, including the budget, were interpreted in the light of the forthcoming polls. The proceedings of the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) and the continuing fall-out from the murder of the Ya Na (king of Dagomba) and up to 40 of his retainers in 2002, were similarly highly charged. Even President Kufuor’s attempts to mediate in the Ivorian crisis served as a heated debating point between the government and the National Democratic Congress (NDC). The electoral contest itself, which brought victory for the incumbent New Patriotic Party (NPP), was far more evenly matched than most observers expected, and confirmed the entrenchment of a two-party system.

Domestic Politics

At the start of 2004, the efforts on the part of NEC to resolve a number of looming problems in the election process proved contentious. One problem, which had become apparent during the 2000 polls, was that there was a large disparity in the size of constituencies. Moreover, the uneven rate of population increase threatened to create further distortions. The chairman of NEC, Dr. Kwadwo Afari-Djan, justified the creation of 30 new constituencies on the basis that they were the most appropriate way of resolving
the anomalies. Although the opposition parties were suspicious – especially when NPP General Secretary Dan Botwe tactlessly stated that NPP should by rights win all the new constituencies that it had helped to create – the process did eventually win broad acceptance. In fact, far greater disagreement was caused by the creation of 28 new districts (whose boundaries cannot cross-cut constituencies) by virtue of the competition over the choice of new district capitals. In some cases, such as Adaklu-Anyigbe district (Volta region), this had a dramatic effect on the parliamentary campaign when what should have been an extremely safe NDC seat almost fell to an independent candidate. Another bone of contention was the electoral register, which most people agreed was grossly inflated in 2000. The NEC presided over the compilation of a new register and the issuing of photographic identification cards. The latter proved logistically difficult and many concerns were expressed about the likely disenfranchisement of large numbers of voters. However, the NEC, which remained in close contact with all the political parties, was able to resolve the problems to the satisfaction of most.

Kufuor and the NPP campaigned for re-election on the basis that the government had managed the economy successfully and had demonstrated its sincere commitment to ‘zero tolerance’ on corruption. On 8 September, Kufuor launched the NPP manifesto with a pledge to create an office of accountability within the presidency, if he was re-elected. The NPP also reminded Ghanaians of the poor standards of public accountability that had prevailed under the last NDC regime, as a result of which a number of ministers were incarcerated. The NPP also claimed that John Atta-Mills of NDC would not be his own man, but would be beholden to former President Flight-Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings, who played the key role in securing his renomination ahead of Dr. Kwesi Botchway (a respected former finance minister from the 1980s). The fact that Rawlings was so prominent on the campaign