WHITE PAPER

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Neither the NPP nor the NDC has a permanent electoral advantage in Ghana, analysis of 1996-2016 election data shows.

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Outlook and implications

- None of the two main parties has a dominant edge; the geographical distribution indicates NPP safe constituencies are predominantly located in the Ashanti (36 constituencies) and Eastern Regions (12 constituencies).
- The NDC safe constituencies, on the other hand, are more regionally spread out despite the greater majority being in the Volta Region (18 constituencies).
- Ghana has become relatively more NPP over the course of the past three elections, measured by the change in votes between 2008-2016.
- No party can do without winning the coastal regions (Greater Accra, Central and Western Region) in any election.

Ghana heads to the polls on 7 December to elect a president and 275 parliamentarians who will govern the country for the next four years (2021-2024) under the Fourth Republic. The poll will, however, be taking place with the spectre of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic still looming and its potential economic fallout yet to be fully understood. This is particularly important, given that Ghana's two main political parties, namely the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP) have recently announced their manifestos as their "social contract" with citizens amidst what is expected to be a keen electoral contest. It is often inferred or suggested that some 'swing' regions such as Greater Accra, Central and Western hold the key in determining which party wins elections in Ghana. However, to what extent is this 'swing region theory' true, and how do we statistically break these down?

iRIS Research has developed a framework for grading and rating a constituency, based on historical voting patterns and vote margins between the two main political parties – NPP and NDC. We use constituency presidential voting data from 1996 to 2016. Based on parameters from the data, we have developed the following rating and grading scale (which is subject to change based on new poll data):
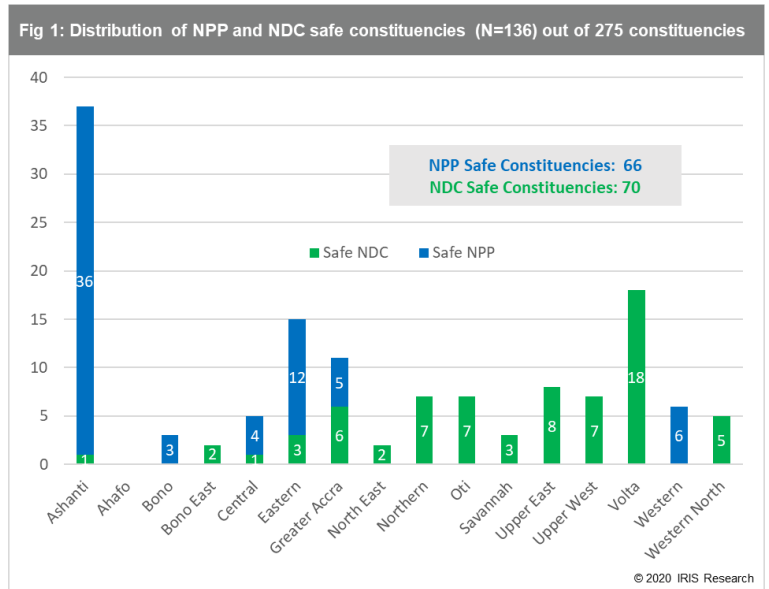
Safe/Solid	A constituency is not competitive, and one party has a clear and significant advantage: The average winning margin is greater or equal to 28 percentage points.
Likely	One party has an advantage in the constituency, but an upset is possible: The average winning margin is greater than 12 percentage points but less or equal to 27 percentage points.
Lean	The constituency is competitive, but one party has a slight edge: The average winning margin is greater than 4 percentage points but less or equal to 12 percentage points.
Toss-up	These are the most competitive constituencies in which any of the two dominant parties have an equal chance of winning: The average winning margin is less or equal to 4 percentage points. This is within the standard error of the data.

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Key Finding 1: None of the two main parties has a dominant edge; geographical distribution indicates NPP safe constituencies located in the Ashanti (36) and Eastern Regions (12) while NDC safe constituencies are more regionally spread out despite the greater majority being in the Volta Region (18).
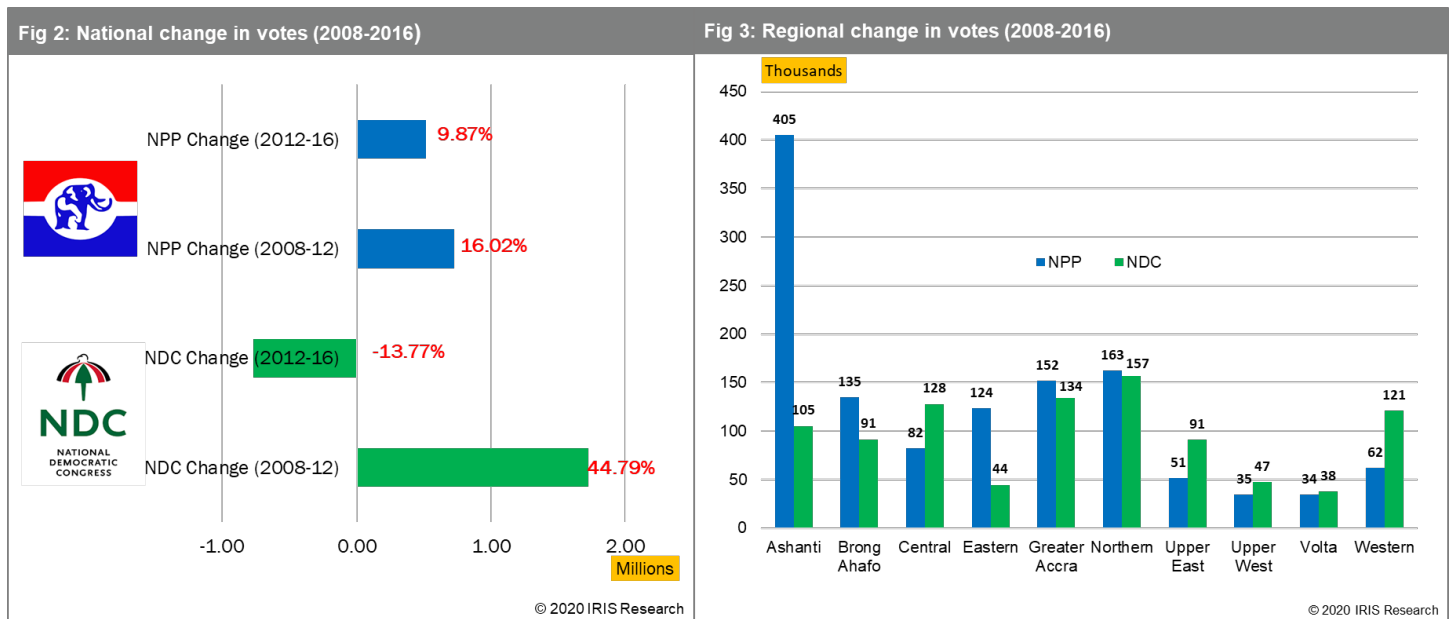
Our model shows that the NDC has 70 constituencies that are deemed 'solid/safe' while the NPP has 66 in the same category. Further disaggregation of the data shows that NPP's 'solid/safe' constituencies are located in six (6) regions with the Ashanti region alone, accounting for 51% of the total.

The NDC, on the other hand, has its 'solid/safe' constituencies spread out in 13 regions. The Volta Region, the party's stronghold, accounts for 27% of the total. These estimates suggest that the NDC's core support base is more geographically distributed across the country while the majority of the NPP's base support is concentrated in the Ashanti Region.

Fig 1: Distribution of NPP and NDC safe constituencies (N=136) out of 275 constituencies

NPP Safe Constituencies: 66
NDC Safe Constituencies: 70

Safe NDC ■ Safe NPP

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Key Finding 2: Ghana has become relatively more NPP over the course of the past three elections, measured by the change in votes between 2008-2016.

NPP has been gaining more votes than the NDC with every election cycle going back to 2008; our estimate shows an average gain of 27.5% for the NPP and 24.9% for the NDC, a net of 2.6% (Figures 2 and 3). This represents a net gain in votes of 956,861 for the NDC and 1,243,000 for the NPP. However, confirming the observations under **Key Finding 1**, the NPP's vote gain is more concentrated in the Ashanti and Eastern Regions followed by Brong Ahafo, Greater Accra and Northern Regions. The NDC's vote gain, on the other hand, has been in the Central, Upper East, Upper West and Western Regions (Figures 2 and 3). This trend in the shift of the electorate toward the NPP accelerated, even though it has since slowed down, after the end of Rawlings' second term. Indeed, in the 2000 presidential elections, 17 constituencies that had voted for the NDC in the last two presidential elections 'permanently' switched to the NPP.

Fig 2: National change in votes (2008-2016)

- NPP Change (2012-16): 9.87%
- NPP Change (2008-12): 16.02%
- NDC Change (2012-16): -13.77%
- NDC Change (2008-12): 44.79%

-1.00   0.00   1.00   2.00
Millions

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Fig 3: Regional change in votes (2008-2016)

Thousands

■ NPP ■ NDC

Region	NPP	NDC
Ashanti	405	105
Brong Ahafo	135	91
Central	82	128
Eastern	124	44
Greater Accra	152	134
Northern	163	157
Upper East	51	91
Upper West	35	47
Volta	34	38
Western	62	121

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Key Finding 3: No party can do without winning the coastal regions (Greater Accra, Central and Western Region) in any election.

Every presidential candidate who has won Greater Accra, Central and Western regions under this Fourth Republic has also gone on to win the general elections. These three regions remain the only regions that have consistently voted for every winner of the presidential election since 1992. The key reason underlying the oversize role they play in determining the winner of the presidential elections is their combined relative share of the number of registered voters. Estimates from the just ended voter registration exercise indicate that these three regions account for 54% of all registered voters on the voters' register. Therefore, one can conclude that their 'swingness' and combined relative share of likely voters make them a must-win for any candidate who wants to win the presidency.

Our analysis of all the constituencies in these swing regions indicates that combined, they account for 45% of all 'lean' and 'toss-up' constituencies (33 out of 73) or 9 out of 14 'toss-up' constituencies in the country (see Table below). From the Table, we also observe that even if you were to allocate to the NPP or NDC all constituencies that we rate as 'likely' or 'lean' in addition to the 'solid' constituencies, they would only have 130 and 131 constituencies, respectively (total: 261 constituencies). Given that a party needs to win a minimum of 137 constituencies to gain a simple majority in parliament, the winning party will have to pick up at least seven (7) constituencies from the 'toss-up' column. Moreover, with 9 (nine) out of the 14 of these constituencies located in the three swing regions, winning the regions becomes crucial.

Region	Safe NDC	Safe NPP	Likely NDC	Likely NPP	Lean NDC	Lean NPP	Toss-up	Total	∑ (Lean + Toss up)	% Regional Total (Lean + Toss up)
Ashanti	1	36	1	5	2	2	0	47	4	9%
Ahafo	0	0	0	3	1	2	0	6	3	50%
Bono	0	3	1	3	1	2	2	12	5	42%
Bono East	2	0	5	0	1	2	1	11	4	36%
Central	1	4	2	3	2	6	5	23	13	57%
Eastern	3	12	2	10	2	4	0	33	6	18%
Greater Accra	6	5	4	8	6	2	3	34	11	32%
North East	2	0	2	0	1	1	0	6	2	33%
Northern	7	0	2	1	3	3	2	18	8	44%
Oti	7	0	1	0	0	0	0	8	0	0%
Savannah	3	0	3	0	1	0	0	7	1	14%
Upper East	8	0	4	0	3	0	0	15	3	20%
Upper West	7	0	1	0	1	2	0	11	3	27%
Volta	18	0	0	0	0	0	0	18	0	0%
Western	0	6	1	1	5	3	1	17	9	53%
Western North	5	0	3	0	0	1	0	9	1	11%
Total	**70**	**66**	**32**	**34**	**29**	**30**	**14**	**275**	**73**	**27%**

Outlook and Implications

Overall, we find that for constituencies that have ever voted for the two parties before, the average vote margins in the last election before they voted for the party in the next election ranges from 0.06 to 27 percentage points. This finding indicates there is wide variability in the likelihood that a constituency votes for a different political party given that they have voted for more than one party in past elections.

Also, adding to the compelling evidence that the road to Jubilee House goes through Central, Western and Greater Accra regions, we find that only nine (9) constituencies have voted for every winner of the presidential election; three (3) in Greater Accra, 4 in Central Region and 2 in Western Region.

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Work in progress

iRIS Research Consortium is conducting two pre-election opinion polls on Ghana's upcoming December elections.

(1) A nationally representative and statistically weighted 2,500 face-to-face respondent survey based on 36 identified swing constituencies (14 toss-ups, 11 lean NDC and 11 lean NPP constituencies).

(2) An 8,550-respondent constituency-level telephone survey based on 18 identified constituencies (14 toss-ups, two lean NPP and two lean NDC constituencies).

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