

## Third-party presidential and parliamentary candidates have higher prospects of winning votes in Northern Ghana; however, they need a minimum combined vote share of more than 3% to have a chance at influencing presidential elections in Ghana

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### Outlook and implications

- The performance of third-party presidential candidates has been on the decline over the past six electoral cycles: trendline analysis indicates third parties have been dropping an average of 31,000 votes per election from a base of about 365,000 votes since 1996.
- Third parties need to gain a minimum combined vote share of more than 3% to have a chance at influencing presidential elections, sending it into a second round.
- The likelihood of a presidential election going into a run-off or an incumbent losing depends on the combined impact of whether the incumbent or challenger is a new candidate; the incumbent or challenger is popular or charismatic; and if there is a popular third-party candidate.
- Both third-party presidential and parliamentary candidates are more likely to perform better in the three Northern Regions than other parts of the country.
- The number of candidates contesting as independent MPs as a proportion of the total parliamentary candidates has reduced since 2004. Likewise, their success rate has also significantly dropped. Also, there is no successful independent parliamentary candidate who is not connected to any of the two main parties (NPP and NDC).

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 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 keenly contested election. In our first [Research Brief](#), publicly released on 2 November, we examined patterns in regional voting preferences in Ghana and concluded that neither the NPP nor the NDC has a 'permanent' electoral advantage. This second research brief complements the first.

More specifically, we examine the performance of independent parliamentary candidates and third-party presidential aspirants in Ghana using historical elections data from 1996 to 2016. This research brief is focused on exploring four (4) broad questions: (1) the overall performance of third-party presidential parties and the extent to which they serve as 'kingmakers'; (2) which regions they are likely to perform better; (3) their success rate, which is measured as seats won per total candidates contesting; and (4) the impact of affiliation to the NPP or NDC on the likelihood of success.

Finally, we finish off our analysis by proposing three (3) fundamental qualitative factors that, combined, are predictive of a presidential run-off or a defeat for an incumbent party - these variables we call the 'iRIS Keys'.

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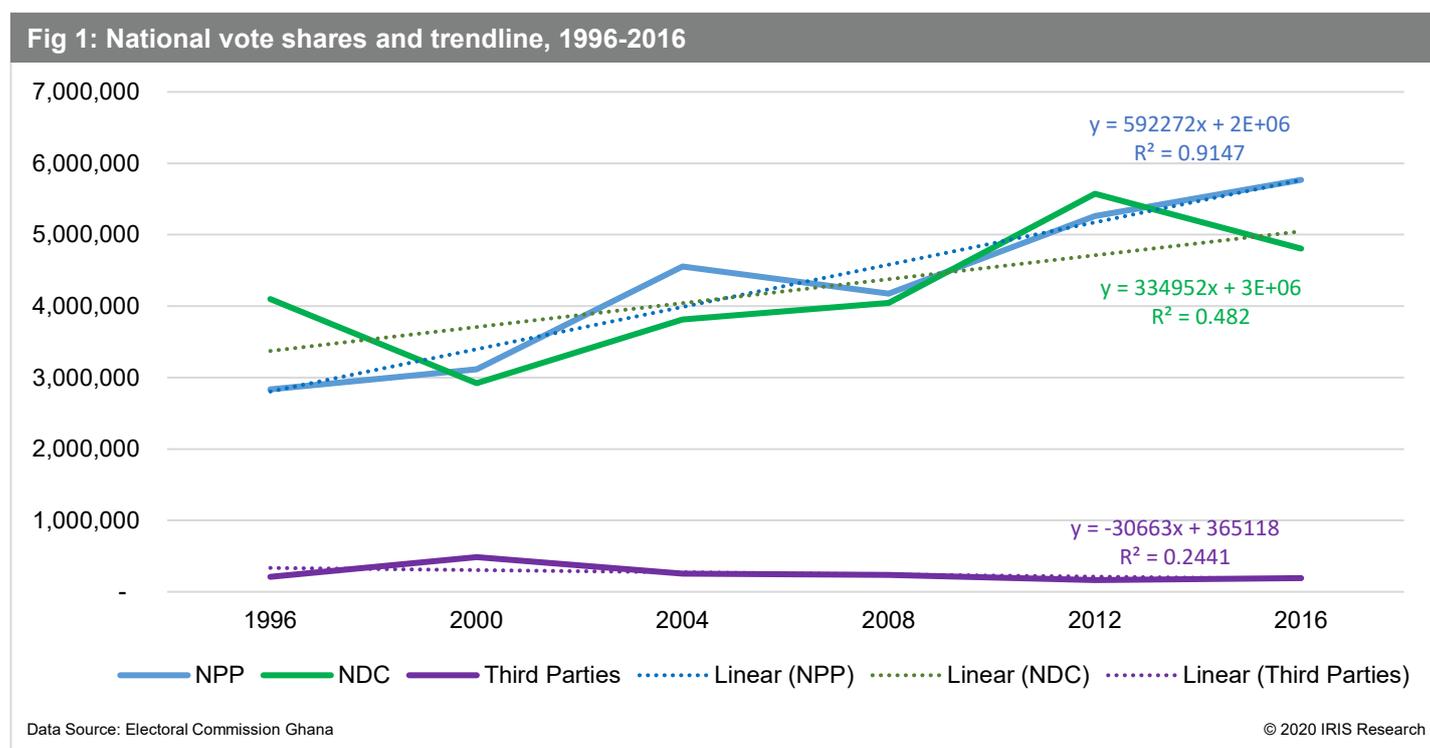
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**Key Finding 1: The performance of third-party presidential candidates has been on the decline over the past six electoral cycles; trendline analysis indicates third parties have been dropping an average of 31,000 votes per election since 1996 from an average of about 365,000 votes between 1996 and 2016.**

As Figure 1 and Table 1 below indicates, third-party presidential candidates have been performing abysmally in the presidential elections since 2000. The trendline indicates that third-parties have been losing on average about 31,000 votes between successive elections from an average of about 365,000 votes between 1996 and 2016. This indicates that Ghana’s third-parties now count only about 179,000 voters among their sympathizers, translating to only a potential vote share of 1.06% assuming all currently registered voters cast a ballot in the upcoming election. After increasing their share of the valid vote cast by 130% from 211,136 (3.0% of total valid votes cast) in 1996 to 485,441 (7.4% of total valid votes cast), third-parties have shed significant votes in the subsequent elections. Indeed, compared to 1996, their total vote gained was down on average by 47% between 2000-2004, 7% between 2004-2008 and 31% between 2008-2012. They, however, saw an average increase in votes by 18% between 2012-2016.

On the other hand, both the NDC and NPP have grown their support base as the voter population has grown. For example, between 1996 and 2016 the NPP has been gaining an average of 592,000 votes between successive elections. The NDC, likewise, has also been gaining an average of 335,000 votes within the same period.



**Table 1: NDC and NPP, and third parties share of the votes, 1996-2016**

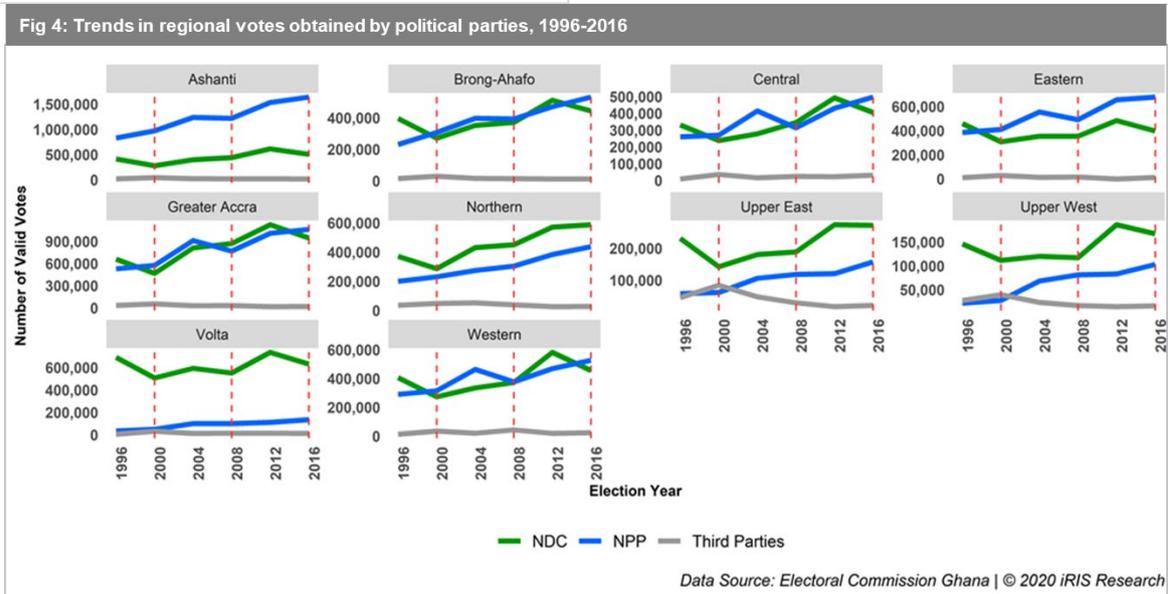
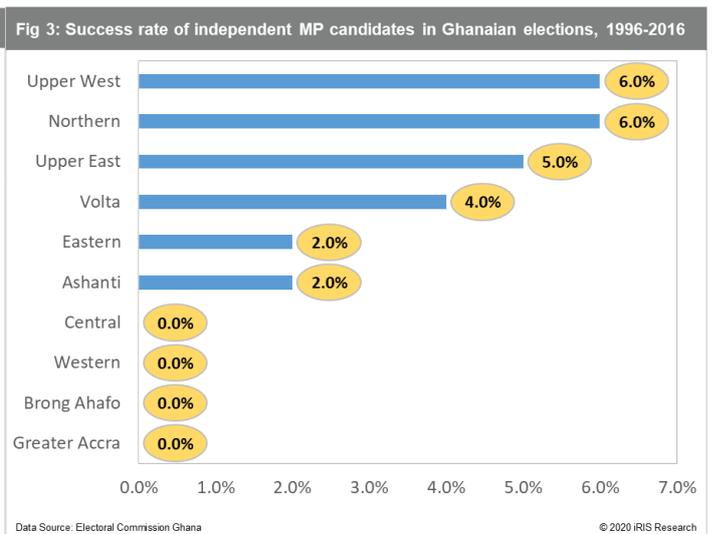
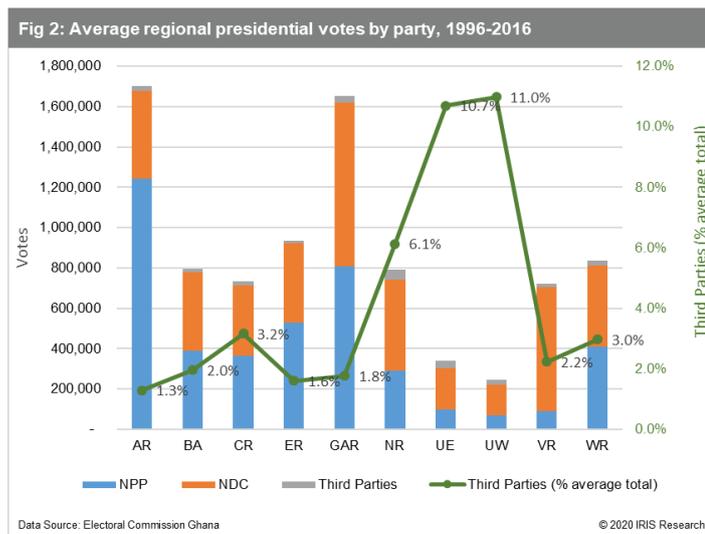
Year	NDC and NPP share of the votes	Third parties share of the votes	Total valid votes cast
1996	97.0%	3.0%	7,034,666
2000	92.6%	7.4%	6,500,870
2004	97.0%	3.0%	8,625,785
2008	97.1%	2.8%	8,465,834
2012	98.4%	1.5%	10,995,262
2016	98.3%	1.8%	10,713,734
<b>Average (1996-2016)</b>	<b>96.7%</b>	<b>3.2%</b>	

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**Key Finding 2: Third-party presidential and parliamentary candidates are more likely to perform relatively better in the three northern regions**

Despite the low overall performance of third-party candidates, our analysis shows a much more nuanced picture at the regional level. Our analysis shows that they are more likely to perform better in the three northern regions (Upper West, Upper East and the Northern Regions) as shown in Figures 2, 3 and 4. The data indicates that third parties have been polling an average of 11% of the valid votes cast in the Upper West and Upper East regions, and 6% in the Northern Region between 1996-2016. This compares with an average of 2.1% in the remaining eight (8) regions. We note that measuring performance by averaging the data from 1996 to 2016 may not be reflective of recent trends. Hence, the next set of analyses seeks to isolate recent performance by focusing on the 2016 elections data. This data shows that third parties won 4.8%, 5.8% and 2.6% of the total valid votes in Upper West, Upper East and the Northern Regions respectively, representing an average of 4.4% of the combined regional votes.

In contrast, they averaged 1.6% of the combined regional votes in the remaining seven (7) regions. The trend is similar when one disaggregates the votes further to incorporate the six (6) newly created regions. Likewise, when it comes to independent parliamentary candidates, we find that they have a better chance of success in these northern regions. For example, a total of 17 independent parliamentary candidates contested for seats in the Upper West Region from 1996-2016 out of which 6% were successful – measured as the number of independents who won as a percentage of total independent candidates. In the Northern and Upper East regions, the success rates were 6% (67 total independent MPs contesting) and 5% (17 total independent MPs contesting) respectively.



Note: Vertical dotted lines represent years where there were changes in government

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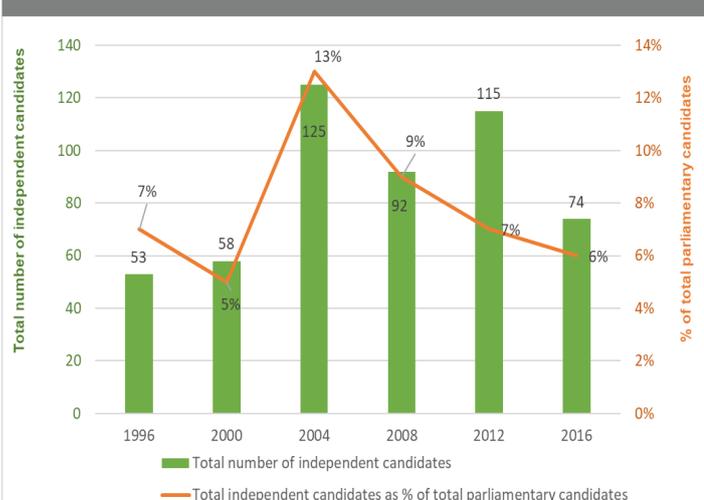
**Key Finding 3: The number of independent parliamentary candidates, as a share of total parliamentary candidates, contesting has reduced from a high of 13% in 2004 to about 6% in 2016. Likewise, the success rate, which is the measure of the number of independents who won as a percentage of total independent candidates, has also dropped.**

Despite the overall number of seats in parliament increasing from 200 in 1996 to 275 in 2016, there has been a relatively stable average of four (4) parliamentary candidates contesting every seat in each election cycle (see Table 2). The total parliamentary candidates contesting elections was 757 in 1996, 1,160 in 2000, 962 in 2004, 1,022 in 2008, 1,643 in 2012 and 1,233 in 2016 (Table 2). Of this number, the number of independent candidates was 53 in 1996, 58 in 2000, 125 in 2004, 92 in 2008, 115 in 2012 and 74 in 2016. However, the number of seats won by these candidates was relatively small – zero (0) in 1996 and 2016, four (4) in 2000 and 2008; one (1) in 2004 and three (3) in 2012. Table 2 also shows that the proportion of independent candidates, as a share of total parliamentary candidates, was 7% in 1996, 5% in 2000, 13% in 2004, 9% in 2008, 7% in 2012 and 6% in 2016 – representing an average of 8% from 1996-2016 (Figure 5). However, on the most important indicator – the success rate – the numbers have been disappointing. In 1996, none of the four (4) independent candidates who run was elected. Seven (7) per cent of candidates were successful in the 2000 election, and this success rate has since dropped to zero in the 2016 elections (Figure 6).

**Table 2: Trend in parliamentary seats, 1996-2016**

Year	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016
Total parliamentary seats	200	200	230	230	275	275
Total parliamentary candidates contesting	757	1,160	962	1,022	1,643	1,233
Total number of independent candidates	53	58	125	92	115	74
Actual seats won by independent candidates	0	4	1	4	3	0
Total parliamentary candidates per seat	4	6	4	4	6	4
Total independent candidates as % of total parliamentary candidates	7%	5%	13%	9%	7%	6%
Success rate (seats won/total independent candidates)	0%	7%	1%	4%	3%	0%

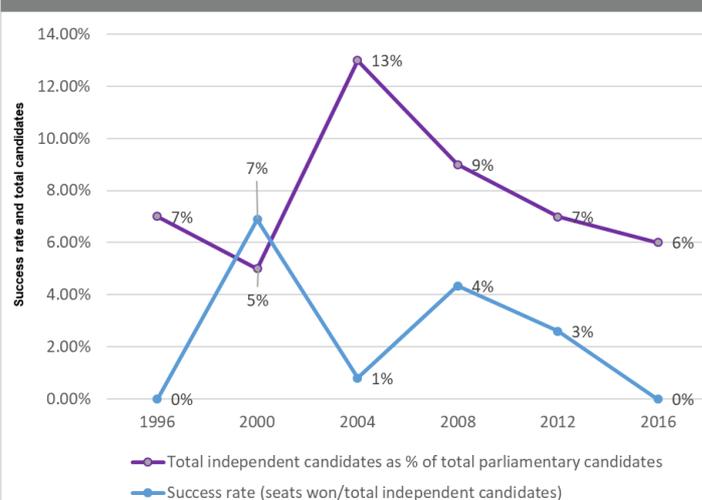
**Fig 5: Total independent candidates and as % of total parliamentary candidates, 1996-2016**



Data Source: Electoral Commission Ghana

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**Fig 6: Success rate, 1996-2016**



Data Source: Electoral Commission Ghana

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### Key Finding 4: A significant majority of successful independent parliamentary candidates are affiliated to one of the two main parties, namely the NPP and NDC.

Except for two (2) candidates whom we identified as having no political party affiliation, all the remaining ten (10) independent parliamentary candidates who have won their elections since 1996 are either affiliated to the NPP or the NDC. In essence, 83% or eight in ten successful parliamentary candidates are affiliated with one of two main parties. In other words, the likelihood of an independent candidate successfully winning a parliamentary seat is very small unless they are somewhat affiliated to either of the two parties. The connection of the largest share of independent candidates to the two main political parties suggests that the decision to run as an independent candidate may be triggered by internal party disagreements – most likely disagreements about who won at the primary contests. This ‘losing candidate’ problem as we call it, is however not confined to only party strongholds such as Ashanti, Eastern and Volta regions.

**Table 3: Successful independent parliamentary candidates**

Year	Region	Constituency	Winner	Previous party/leaning
2000	North	Salaga North	Boniface Abubakar	NPP
	Upper East	Garu	Joseph Kojo Akudibilah	No known political party affiliation
	Volta	Akan	Rashid Bawa	NPP
	Volta	Anlo	Victor Gbeho	NDC
2004	Northern	Bunkpurugu	Joseph Yaani Labik	No known political party affiliation
2008	Ashanti	Bekwai	Joseph Osei Wusu	NPP
	Ashanti	Bosome-Freho	Nana Yaw Ofori-Kuragu	NPP
	Eastern	Nkawkaw	Seth Adjei Baah	NPP
	Northern	Wulensi	Alhaji Saani Iddi	NPP
2012	Northern	Tamale North	Alhassan Dahamani	NDC
	Upper West	Jirapa	Paul Derigubah	NDC
	Volta Region	Akan	Joseph Kwadwo Ofori	NDC

### Key Finding 5: Third-party presidential candidates have served as the ‘kingmakers’ in two presidential elections since 1992 – the 2000 and 2008 presidential elections

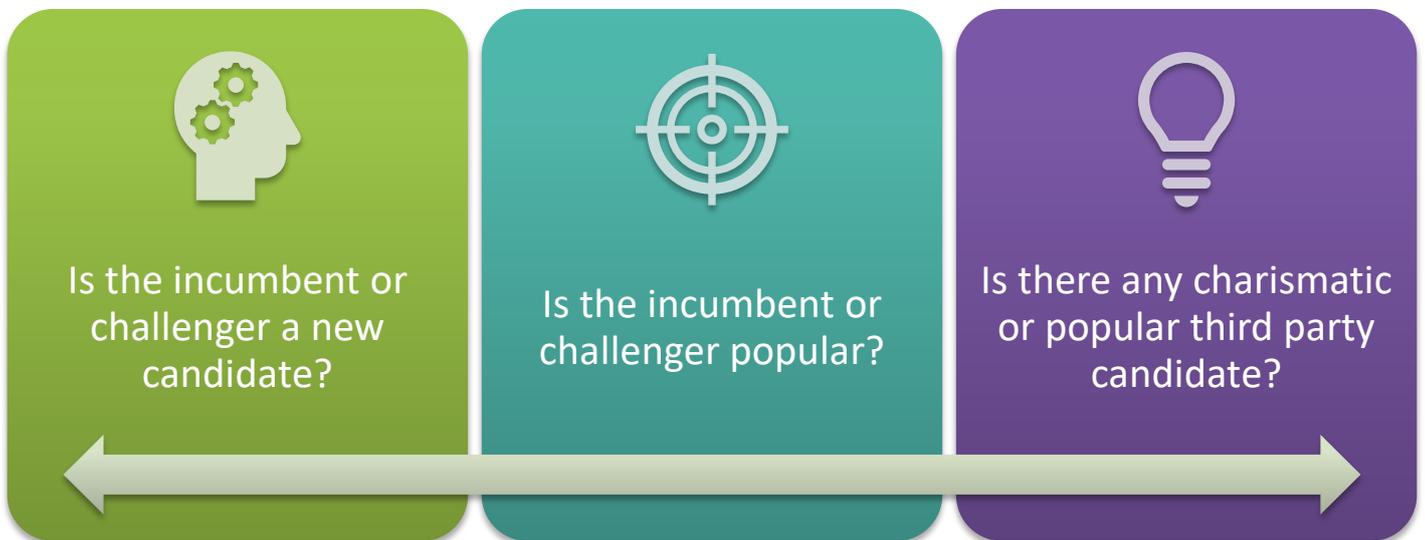
In the Fourth Republic, third parties and their presidential candidates have mainly influenced political outcomes by winning enough votes to push an election into a run-off, which historically has always resulted in a defeat for the incumbent. Our analysis of first-round presidential election results from 2000 to 2016 shows that the NDC has obtained 50% or more of the valid votes in only one (2012) out of the last five elections. In the four cases where they polled less than 50%, their vote shares have been between 44% and 48%. The NPP, on the other hand, obtained more than 50% of the valid votes in two elections (2004 and 2016) within the same period. Where they fell short of 50%, their vote share was between 47% and 49%. If this trend in the data were to hold, this would mean that, depending on which of the two main political parties is in power, third parties need to gain a minimum combined vote share of 3% to 7% to have a chance at influencing the election and defeating the incumbent. Indeed, this observation bears out in the data. Since 2000, third parties have obtained a combined ~3% or more of the vote share in three presidential elections (2000, 2004 and 2008). Two of them – 2000 and 2008 – resulted in a run-off and a defeat of the incumbent. In the 2000 election, it was the ‘over-performance’ of Edward Mahama, George Hagan, Goosie-Tanoh and Dan Lartey – who combined obtained more than 7% of the valid votes – that pushed the election into a run-off, which subsequently resulted in the defeat of the NDC. In a similar vein, Paa Kwesi Ndoum’s relative ‘over-performance’ in the 2008 elections raised the combined vote share of third parties to ~3%, forcing the hotly contested election into a run-off and a defeat of the incumbent NPP.

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**Key Finding 6: Whether an election will go into a run-off or an incumbent will lose, depends on three key qualitative variables: whether the incumbent or challenger is a new candidate; incumbent or challenger is popular or charismatic, and if there is a popular third-party candidate**

Based on our analysis of the underlying trends in the data, we propose three fundamental qualitative factors that are likely to indicate if there would be a presidential run-off or a defeat of the incumbent. These factors are outlined and discussed in the figure below. Whether the incumbent or challenger – between the two main parties – is a first-time candidate matter because history has shown that first-time candidates have a relatively lower chance of winning on the first run. This was the case for then candidates John Kufour (NPP), John Atta-Mills (NDC) and Nana Akufo-Addo (NPP). Also, the popularity of the main challenger or any third-party candidate matters. In 2000, we saw how the combined effect of Mills being new on the presidential ticket, the relative popularity of Kufour, and the combined strengths of Edward Mahama, George Hagan, Goosie-Tanoh and Dan Lartey cost NDC the election. We saw a similar dynamic in 2008: Nana Addo was new on the ticket and relatively unpopular compared to Mills. This, in addition to the popularity of Paa Kwesi Nduom's 'yere se sam' campaign, was enough to cause the defeat of the incumbent NPP.



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### Other iRIS Research Works

- (1) Ghana 2020 Pre-Election Survey:** iRIS Research Consortium just completed its Ghana pre-election opinion on the upcoming December elections. The emphasis of the poll was to gauge voting intents in the election. We also survey the favourability rating of the incumbent president Nana Akufo-Addo of the NPP and main opposition leader John Dramani Mahama of the NDC; the influence of the selection of the running mate and the performance rating of the government. The survey is a 2,640 respondent nationally representative and statistically weighted face-to-face survey from 36 (14 toss-ups, 12 lean NDC and ten lean NPP) identified swing constituencies/seats which are key to which party is likely to win the elections. The sample constituencies and sampling framework are based on a rigorous statistical framework that we have developed internally after several iterations. We have used this statistical framework to grade and rate every one of the 275 constituencies in Ghana, based on historical voting patterns and vote margins between the two main political parties – the NPP and NDC. This has been applied using constituency presidential voting data from 1996 to 2016 to statistically identify the **safe, likely, lean and toss-up** constituencies. We have identified 73 of such lean and toss-up constituencies, out of which we polled from 36 of them.
- (2) Ghana Development Indicators Tracker (G-DIT):** The Ghana Development Indicators Tracker (G-DIT) is a free online dashboard that shows Ghana's performance on various socioeconomic and governance indicators in the history of the Fourth Republic from 1993 to date. The dashboard has been developed from the perspective of an ordinary Ghanaian citizen who is confused on questions such as where we are, which political party has done what, and what impact have they created – for example, on the economy, education, health, infrastructure and energy, among others. Citizens can evaluate and see the relative performance of the political parties on over 100 indicators, clustered around three major themes. These are economy, finances and business environment; Public sector and governance and social sectors. Access the dashboard: [www.irisresearchgroup.com/ghana-data-dashboard](http://www.irisresearchgroup.com/ghana-data-dashboard)

*Credits: We appreciate the support of Alfred Appiah for creating some of the graphs and reviewing the document.*

**For enquiries on the Ghana 2020 Pre-Election Survey, contact:**

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