

The NDC-NPP Duopoly In Ghana’s Multiparty Democracy

The Speaker of Parliament, Rt. Hon. Alban Kingsford Sumana Bagbin launched a year-long celebration of thirty years of parliamentary democracy in Ghana under the Fourth Republic on February 22, 2023. Among the many things he said, this caught my attention – *“To the fact that Ghana has had eight successful elections, and four government changeovers between two major political parties. We say multi-party democracy. We don’t say a duopoly. And so, we have to look at how come we have gone down from a multiparty to a duopoly. We have to look at it.”*

He echoed a sentiment expressed several times by some using phrases such as *“we are stuck with NDC and NPP”*, *“we need a third force”*, and *“NDC and “NPP are the same”* etc.

We Are Stuck With The Duopoly

Yes, eight elections and thirty years later, it is easy to conclude that we are *“stuck”* with our two main political parties, the NDC and the NPP. They have each won four of the eight presidential elections held. The NDC won 1992, 1996, 2008, and 2016 while the NPP won 2000, 2004, 2016, and 2020. The story of parliamentary elections, as shown in the table below, also lends support to the *“we are stuck with the NDC-NPP”* narrative.

Table 1: Composition of Ghana’s Parliament by Political Party|1992-2022|

	No. of Seats Held by Party			
	NDC	NPP	Other Party	% of seats held by NDC-NPP
1st Parliament (1993 to 1997)	189	0	11	94.5%
2nd Parliament (1997 to 2001)	133	61	6	97.0%
3rd Parliament (2001 to 2005)	92	100	8	96.0%
4th Parliament (2005 to 2009)	94	128	8	96.5%
5th Parliament (2009 to 2013)	116	107	7	97.0%
6th Parliament (2013 to 2017)	148	123	4	98.5%
7th Parliament (2017 to 2021)	169	106	0	100.0%
8th Parliament (2021 to present)	137	137	1	99.6%

The results of our elections – both presidential and parliamentary, reflects sentiments Ghanaians have expressed about political party preference and voting intentions in the Afrobarometer survey. When asked *“which particular political party do you feel close to?”*, an overwhelming majority (over 90%) of those who indicate a preference consistently choose the NDC and the NPP. The survey also asks, *“If presidential elections were held tomorrow, which party’s candidate would you vote for?”*. Again, as shown in table two, a strong majority (80% or more) have consistently said they intend to vote for the duopoly. Even with a noticeable gap where preference for the duopoly is higher than the intention to vote for it, our election results have demonstrated a strong

vote for the duopoly – 1992 (89%); 2000 round one (93%); 1996, 2004, 2008 round one (97%); 2012, 2016, 2020 (98%).

Table 2: Political Party Preference|1992-2022|

Survey Year	% of Ghanaians who feel close to the duopoly (NDC+NPP)	% of Ghanaians who intend to vote for the duopoly (NDC+NPP)
1999	95%	-
2002	94%	-
2005	96%	95%
2008	95%	83%
2012	95%	85%
2014	94%	80%
2017	98%	86%
2019	96%	80%
2022	98%	87%

We Need A Third Force

I made this point weeks ago based on data from the Afrobarometer survey. The years between 2002 and 2012 witnessed a period of strong demand for more political parties, growing by as much as 24 percentage points. Although the demand still remains high, it decreased by nine percentage points between 2012 and 2022. With the NDC-NPP hold on the political system very strong, I wonder if the demand for more political parties will materialize to the point where a third force can emerge as a strong viable alternative to the duopoly. I remain doubtful.

Table 3 – Demand For Political Parties|Ghana|2002-2022

Survey Year	Percentage of Ghanaians who say more political parties are needed
2002	57%
2005	69%
2008	71%
2012	81%
2014	70%
2017	70%
2019	71%
2022	72%

The Future Of The Duopoly

The two main parties are not exactly the same. I can point to a number of differences between them—political history, ideology, Ghanaian experiences under their governments over the course of the fourth republic, etc. In fact, during Round Six (2014) when Afrobarometer asked what the main difference between the ruling party is (NDC was in power then) and opposition political

parties, about 25 percent said their economic and development policies. I must note that a close 22 percent said there was no difference.

We are by constitutional design a multiparty democracy because we allow for the existence of many political parties. We however require, by the same constitutional design, that our political parties have a national character. It takes a lot to organize, form, grow, and sustain a political party. The duopoly (NDC and NPP) has figured out how to do that extremely well.

Can the duopoly be broken?



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