

Election 2024 – Are Ghanaians In A Dilemma?

By John Osae-Kwapong

When the political party primaries for the upcoming 2024 elections got underway, my reading of the political environment led me to two initial conclusions. First, John Mahama and Dr. Bawumia were going to emerge as the flagbearers of their respective parties. Second, given the turnover every eight years so far in the 4th Republic plus the economic and governance challenges under this administration the political winds were blowing favorably in the direction of the NDC.

Professor Smart Sarpong, (Associate Professor of Statistics; Research Design & Data Management Consultant; and Director of Research and Innovation, Kumasi Technical University, Ghana) has just released his pre-election report for the upcoming 2024 elections. Prof.'s work in previous elections is one I greatly respect. I have therefore been looking forward to this year's.

Before I delve into the key signals from the report let me point out its methodological rigor by highlighting the following – a) sample size; b) geographic spread of the sample (all 275 constituencies); and c) the use of proportionality in drawing from the sub-samples.

Key Signals

First, is the size of the undecided voters – a total of twenty-three percent (23%). I have regularly argued that given the economic challenges faced under this administration and other governance issues, the political winds are blowing favorably in the direction of the National Democratic Congress (NDC). While there is still validity to this assertion, the report is signaling that the election is not won yet. This finding suggests that there is still a sizable number of voters up for grabs in the upcoming election.

Second, is the answer to the question of voting intentions. The NDC edges out its main political rivals the NPP by a 38.8% to 34.5% margin if the voting intention question is framed as “which party gets your support.” The NPP edges out its main political rival the NDC by a margin of 38.9% to 36.1% margin if the voting intention question is framed as “which candidate gets your support.” Under both scenarios, the undecided population is at least twenty percent (20%). The

party preference margin for the NDC (+4.3) is slightly bigger than the candidate preference margin for the NPP (+2.8). What does all this mean for both parties? For the NDC, it appears the party is a stronger selling point than its candidate. For the NPP, its candidate is a stronger selling than the party.

Third, is what voters feel are the most important challenges facing the country today which the next president must address. The issue of unemployment emerges as the number one most important challenge. This reinforces what the Global Info Analytics poll (April 2024) found in its study which also showed jobs as the top issue for voters. There is a curious case of corruption though. In this baseline study, it ranks 10th out of 12 issues. It may well be because of the issues presented (inflation, economic slowdown, poor roads, water crisis, power crisis, illegal mining, debt crises, LGBTQ rights, sanitation and climate crisis, forest loss/deforestation). However, while voters regularly express concerns about corruption every election year, it continues to be outranked by other issues such as jobs and the economy in importance. The Global Info Analytics poll (April 2024) for example found corruption to be ranked 6th out of 15 issues. Is it because voters are yet to fully appreciate how corruption undermines how effectively a government can address its most important priorities like jobs and the economy?

Fourth, is the voting intentions in the central region, a region from which the NDC presidential candidate has picked his running mate. In this report, Bawumia edges John Mahama by a margin of 43% to 38%. A total of fifteen percent (15%) of voters in the region are undecided. In terms of party support, the NDC edges the NPP by a 42% to 40% margin in the region. The Global Info Analytics poll (April 2024) showed that in January 2024, John Mahama held a 52%-28% edge over Bawumia only for the gap to narrow to 51% - 45% in April 2024. There are multiple reasons for the choice of Prof. Naana Jane Opoku Agyeman as the NDC's VP candidate but if political dividends (votes) is one of them then that it is not showing yet.

Voting Intentions of Likely Voters

I revisit voting intentions expressed so far by Ghanaians using data from three sources – a) Afrobarometer Round 9, 2022; b) Global Info Analytics (average of 9 polls between April 2022 and April 2024); and c) Prof. Smart Sarpong's baseline report (April 2024).

Since the Global Info Analytics poll uses a "likely voter's model" which means those who say "won't vote or undecided" are excluded from their analysis, I do the same for the two other sources to appropriately compare voting intentions across all three sources.

Which presidential candidate do likely voters intend to vote for this election year? Between Afrobarometer Round 9 in 2022, the various polls conducted by Global Info Analytics, and the most recent election year baseline study by Prof. Sarpong, here are the intentions of likely voters.

Table 1. Voting Intentions of Likely Voters

Source	John Mahama	Dr. Bawumia	Other
Afrobarometer Round 9, 2022	54%	41%	5%
Global Info Analytics (2022-2024 avg. of 9 polls)	57%	35%	8%
Global Info Analytics (April 2024)	57%	34%	9%
Prof. Smart Sarpong baseline study (2024)	46%	50%	4%

All three sources use very sound methodological approaches in their work. For the Afrobarometer survey, it is not designed as an election survey although it does ask questions about voting intentions. Also, two years have passed since the voting intention question was asked. As a result, intentions could have changed over time hence the difference in the results when compared to the two other sources.

For the Global Info Analytics poll (April 2024) and Prof. Sarpong’s baseline study (April 2024), two key things account for the different results in my estimation– a) the sample sizes; and b) the geographic coverage.

If the voting intentions model is expanded to include undecided voters, then as of Afrobarometer Round 9, 2022, John Mahama enjoyed a 50% - 37% advantage over Dr. Bawumia. And as per Prof. Sarpong’s baseline report Dr. Bawumia enjoys a 39% - 36% advantage over John Mahama.

Are Ghanaian Voters In A Dilemma?

I conclude with this polemic - Are voters generally not happy with the choices before them come this December? Are voters struggling to choose between a) a candidate whose party’s performance has left them with economic scars and b) a party whose candidate reminds them of some of the challenges experienced in the past even if they pale in comparison to current ones?

My questions are driven primarily by two observations – a) the size of the undecided vote (23%) in Prof.’s baseline report and b) the insignificant margins (.14) between John Mahama and Dr. Bawumia on the issue of trust and competence as per the Global Info Analytics poll (April 2024).

In addition, I previously pointed out the warning signals for the NPP as per the findings from the Global Info Analytics poll. Prof. Sarpong’s baseline report has warning signs for the NDC – a)

victory may not necessarily be assured yet; and b) Dr. Bawumia appears stronger in a political terrain where all the signs suggest he should not be.

At the same time, the report also suggests that if likely voters (undecided voters removed from the analysis) were casting their vote primarily based on which political party is preferred, the NDC edges out the NPP by a 50%-45% margin.

If we look at the two most recent polls/surveys from April 2024, using the likely voter model, the story of the probable outcome of election 2024 is unclear. At best we have a convoluted answer. That to me says a lot about the peculiar nature of this election year and the reason why I have been asking myself since yesterday whether Ghanaians are struggling to make a choice. And if they are struggling what will be the deal breaker between now and December?

A few more pre-election surveys and polls will help provide more insights. As the campaigns progress, it will be very important to see whether voter sentiments are changing and in which direction. Also, how many voters continue to remain “undecided” and for how long.

Voters are unpredictable though. In addition, the election is still six months away. In politics, that is a very long time.



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