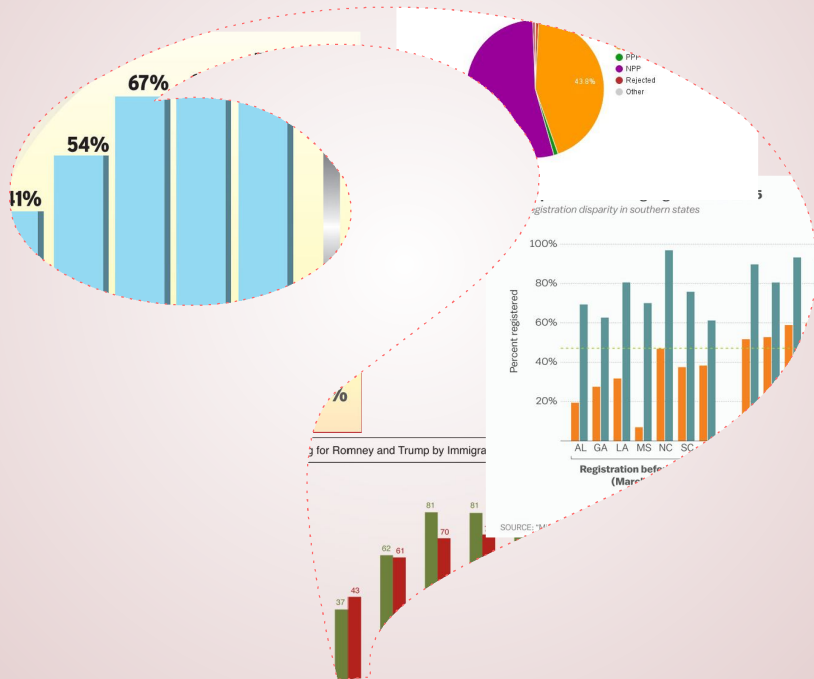


EXPLORING THE MAHAMA-NDC'S DEFEAT IN THE 2016
ELECTION:
INSIGHTS FROM PRE-ELECTION SURVEYS



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Survey Report

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INTRODUCTION

Ghana's 2016 presidential elections was closely contested between Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo (candidate for the opposition New Patriotic Party) and the incumbent President John Dramani Mahama (presidential candidate for the National Democratic Congress). Akufo-Addo emerged as the winner of the election with 5,755,758 votes while his main competitor, Mahama, received 4,771,188 votes, translating into almost a million (984,570) vote difference. Similarly, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) won a decisive majority of the parliamentary seats (169 out of the 275). The National Democratic Congress (NDC's) 106 seats represented a loss of 42 parliamentary seats it previously held. None of the minor political parties secured a parliamentary seat in the elections.

The NDC's electoral defeat surprised many party members and observers. Among other things, it marked the first time in the Fourth Republic that an incumbent government had lost the elections in the first round, and with such a huge margin. The incumbent president was rendered incapable of taking advantage of the constitutionally sanctioned opportunity to serve two terms. Moreover, the party had mounted a powerful election campaign with the advantage of incumbency which saw a lot of commissioning of projects close to the election period. At the same time, the opposition NPP had been struggling to maintain a united front, which was only resolved by changes to two key leadership positions but with worries of its electoral consequences. This is the backdrop against which an influential member of the NDC described the outcome of the elections as "very difficult and mysterious to understand."¹ The electoral defeat provoked an acrimonious debate within the party over what and who to blame for this inauspicious development.

Often, electoral defeat of incumbent regimes results in intra-party bickering, followed by the setting up of committees of enquiry. The defeat of the NPP in the 2008 general elections led to the setting up of the Dr. Heyman Committee which was tasked to investigate the party's defeat. Similarly, the NDC, after their defeat in the 2016 general elections, established a high-powered committee (Dr. Kwesi

¹ Rashid Pelpo, Member of Parliament for Wa Central and Minister for Private Public Partnership under NDC regime, in commenting about the defeat of the NDC: <http://citifmonline.com/2017/05/06/2016-election-results-mysterious-rashid-pelpuo/>

Botchway Committee), to investigate the causes of the party's defeat and recommend reforms to strengthen the party for better performance in future polls.

While intra-party investigations may offer valuable feedback to defeated political parties, they may fail to provide an accurate picture of an electoral defeat given that the investigations end with consultations with core party supporters, thereby, disregarding the views of a large majority of Ghanaians. Again, findings of committees set up to investigate electoral defeat of the various political parties, since the Fourth Republic, have never been made public or subjected to public scrutiny.

As a result, post-election commentaries and analyses on electoral defeat, more often, appear to be subjective, self-serving and sometimes contradictory. There were a few comments by leading party members and groups within the NDC in the media that have sought to explain the defeat of the party. Benjamin Kunbour², a former Attorney General, Minister for Defence and Majority leader under the Mahama administration made this observation when asked about his party's defeat:

“...wherever you went this stigma that was thrown at the government in terms of perceived corruption was very high and it permeated the entire system. And ...everybody was asking this question about how we came to inherit this whole notion of being the most corrupt government since Ghana's independence started.”

Others, such as Mark Owen Woyongo³ and Baba Jamal⁴, cited economic hardships, high standard of living, unemployment, and implementation of IMF austerity measures and its attendant effects (cancellation of teacher and nursing trainee allowances) as causes of the party's defeat. However, some praised the performance of the Mahama administration and ascribed their defeat to the mere expression of governance fatigue or the desire of Ghanaians to change government in every eight years, irrespective of the government's performance. As expressed by Alhaji Mohammed Minuru-Limuna⁵:

² Dr Benjamin Kunbour speaking on GH One TV's current affairs show 'State of Affairs' to share his opinions on the NDC's defeat in the 2016 elections. <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/We-had-several-arguments-on-corruption-while-in-government-Kunbuor-526152>

³ Mark Wongo, a former NDC Member of Parliament for Navrongo Central Constituency and Minister for Interior under the Mahama administration attributed the party's defeat in the 2016 general elections to economic hardship. See <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Economic-hardship-caused-my-defeat-Mark-Woyongo-494206>

⁴ Baba Jamal is a former Member of Parliament for Akwatia constituency and Deputy Information Minister under the Mahama led-administration.

⁵ Alhaji Mohammed Minuru-Limuna, a former Minister for Food and Agriculture, Northern Regional Minister and the regional campaign coordinator for the NDC attributed the party's defeat to Ghanaians failure to appreciate the massive infrastructure development by the Mahama government and governance fatigue expressed by citizens. See <https://mynewsgh.com/its-either-john-mahama-for-2020-or-no-one-else-former-minister/>

“It has now been put in the minds of Ghanaians that every government has maximum of eight years not because of what the government of the day can do for the people. All the good things and the struggling we did, they were not moved. All they wanted was change....”

President Mahama attributed the defeat of his administration to an act of God. He explained that:

“We set our hearts on something but God will not give it to you; but whatever God does is good because it was God who made us lose the election⁶.”

In a sharp rebuttal, Ekow Spio Garbrah rejected the attribution of the defeat of the Mahama led-administration to an act of God, saying:

“God speaks to people in different ways; even prophets of God see different things but God has not told me he caused our defeat....⁷”

On the other hand, several individuals and groups in the NDC ascribed the party’s defeat to reasons such as ineffectiveness of the party’s campaign message, breakdown of internal party structures, irresponsible behaviours of some government appointees and party leadership, theft of campaign funds and inefficient deployment of campaign resources for grassroots mobilization, lack of coordination of campaign activities as well as the failure of the party to stop District Chief Executives and Presidential staffers from contesting sitting MPs. While the attributions provide some insights, they leave out a lot of lessons and critical socio-economic and political factors that provide deep insight into the defeat of the NDC.

This paper attempts to offer further insights into the defeat of the Mahama led-administration based on empirical information from the two pre-election surveys conducted in July and October 2016 by the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana). We argue that the findings from the CDD-Ghana’s pre-election surveys provide compelling evidence to support the assertion that Ghanaian voters rejected the Mahama-led NDC based on the poor economic record, the lack of public confidence in the party’s campaign policies, the high perception of corruption, and the inward-looking nature of the administration. We hope our study offers new insights into the expectations of Ghanaian voters, and provide useful lessons to guide the policy decisions, actions and choices by political parties, in general, and leaders in government, specifically.

⁶ See <https://citinewsroom.com/2018/09/28/god-hasnt-told-me-he-caused-ndcs-defeat-spio-garbrah/>

⁷ See <https://www.myjoyonline.com/politics/2018/September-28th/dont-bring-god-into-your-defeat-you-caused-it-spio-garbrah-to-mahama.php>

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This study combined quantitative data from two pre-election surveys carried out by CDD-Ghana during the 2016 election year, and qualitative data from media and newspaper content analysis of key campaign issues and discussions by the NDC and the NPP in the run up to the election.

The CDD-Ghana pre-election surveys were carried out in July and October 2016 respectively, and drew from a nationally representative sample of adult citizens. Respondents were randomly selected, giving every adult citizen of age 18 and above an equal chance of being selected. Each of the surveys had sample size of 2,680 with a margin of error of $\pm 2\%$ at a 95% confidence level. The sample was stratified across regions and urban-rural areas in proportion to their share in the adult national population. Face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondents' choice were used.

Media evidence was gathered over the period of eight months (March - October) to the 2016 general elections. Dataset on key campaign messages by the presidential candidates, vice presidential candidates and leading party members of both the NDC and the NPP was collected through the daily monitoring of radio discussions, electronic, print and digital media platforms with political content. In this paper, we employed basic descriptive statistics to analyse the results of the two pre-election surveys. The results of the analysis are reported using percentages in tables and graphs. For the data gathered through media content analysis, the findings are reported by highlighting key themes.

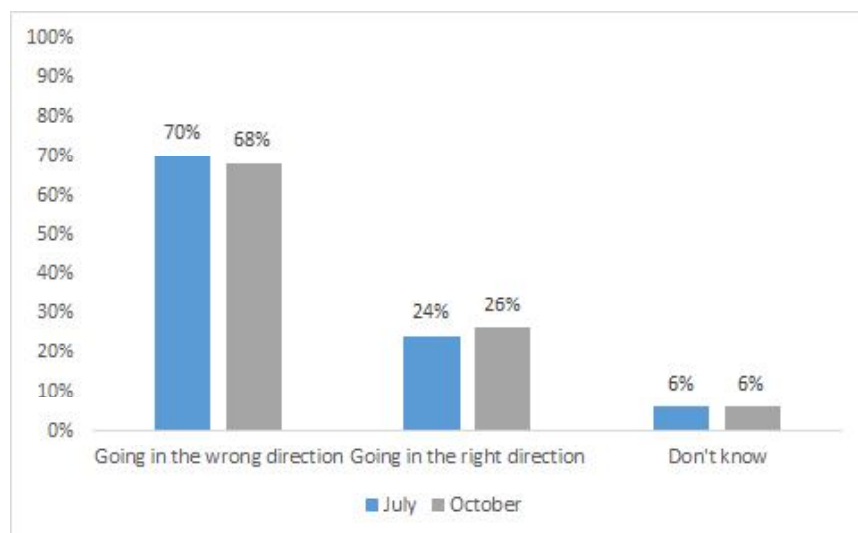
3.0 FINDINGS

This section discusses voter perception of the Mahama-led NDC and how a retrospective look at those perceptions can help explain why the NDC lost the 2016 election. We argue that the negative ratings of the NDC on key issues such as economic management, perception of corruption, policy credibility and ethnocentric governance underscored the defeat of the party in the 2016 elections.

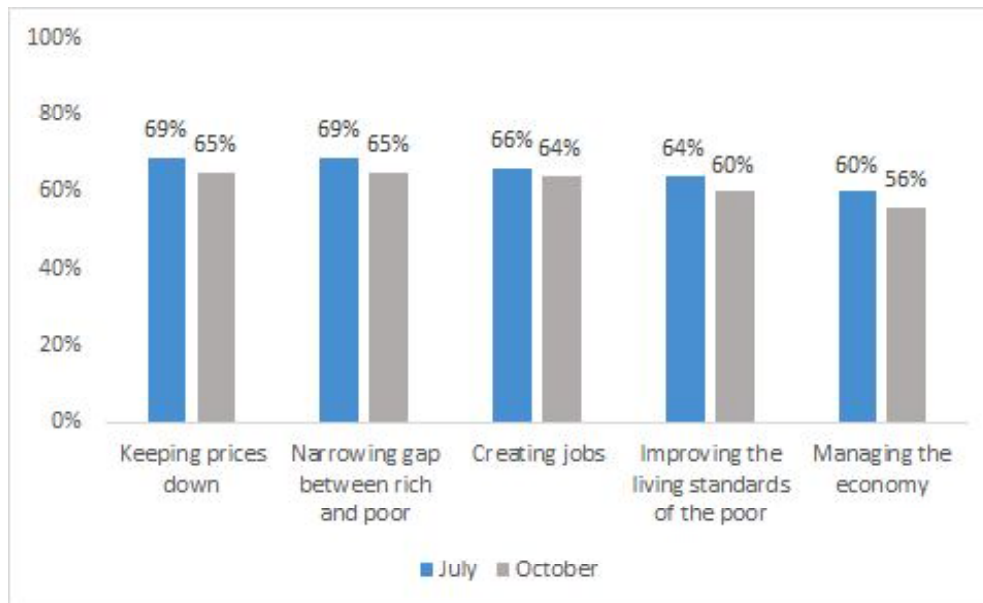
3.1 Management of the Economy

The Mahama-NDC administration received high negative ratings for the management of the economy going into the 2016 general elections. Seven out of 10 Ghanaians (70% for the July survey and 68% for the October survey) rated the country as heading in the wrong direction (Figure 1). Similarly, as represented in Figure 2, 60% to 69% of Ghanaians held the view that the government had performed *fairly badly* or *very badly* with regard to controlling inflation, creating jobs, reducing social inequality and improving the living standards of the poor.

Figure 1: Assessment of the direction of the economy | 2016



Pre-election survey asked: Some people might think the country is going in the wrong direction. Others may feel it is going in the right direction. So let me ask you about the overall direction of the country: Would you say that the country is going in the wrong direction or going in the right direction?

Figure 2: Assessment of government performance in economic management | 2016

Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say?

It is obvious that a majority of Ghanaians were not satisfied with the economic conditions in the country. However, the government appeared complacent and unresponsive to the complaints of hardship as government officials and party functionaries took interest in citing positive economic ratings from Moody and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in defence of the party's development record⁸. The failure of the NDC to distinguish between positive macro-economic indicators, the general standard of living and the wilful neglect of popular sentiments about economic hardships cost the party at the polls.

3.2 Policy Priority and Credibility

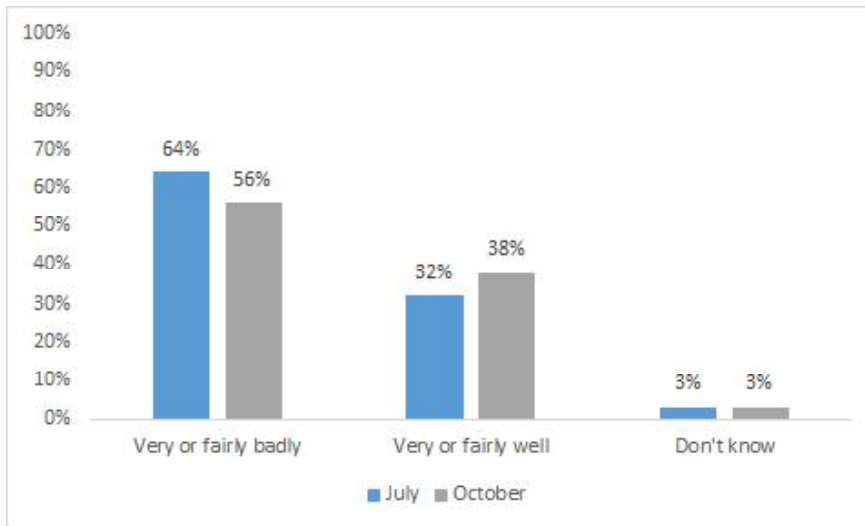
The CDD-Ghana pre-election survey asked respondents to indicate key policies they expected political parties to focus on in their campaigns to address their problems. Among the top policy priorities of Ghanaians were unemployment and education (especially in October survey). A quarter of Ghanaians (27%) cited unemployment as their first policy priority, while 16% cited it as their second. One in 10 (12%) cited education as their third policy priority. Additionally, three in 10 Ghanaians considered the

⁸ The then Finance Minister, Seth Terpkper observed this as a sign of good economic management. See <http://citifmonline.com/2016/09/27/moodys-positive-rating-of-ghana-a-reflection-of-economy-terkper/>. Technical Advisor to the Ministry of Finance, Dr Sam Mensah told the Daily Graphic in an interview that "the revision of the outlook at this time is a testimony to the prudent policies adopted by the government since 2014 via the home-grown program and consolidated in the IMF program. See <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/moody-s-upgrades-ghana-s-economy-it-s-now-b3.html>

economic and development policies each political party wanted to implement as the most important difference between the ruling and opposition parties – an indication that voters were keen on policy matters in the 2016 electoral campaign.

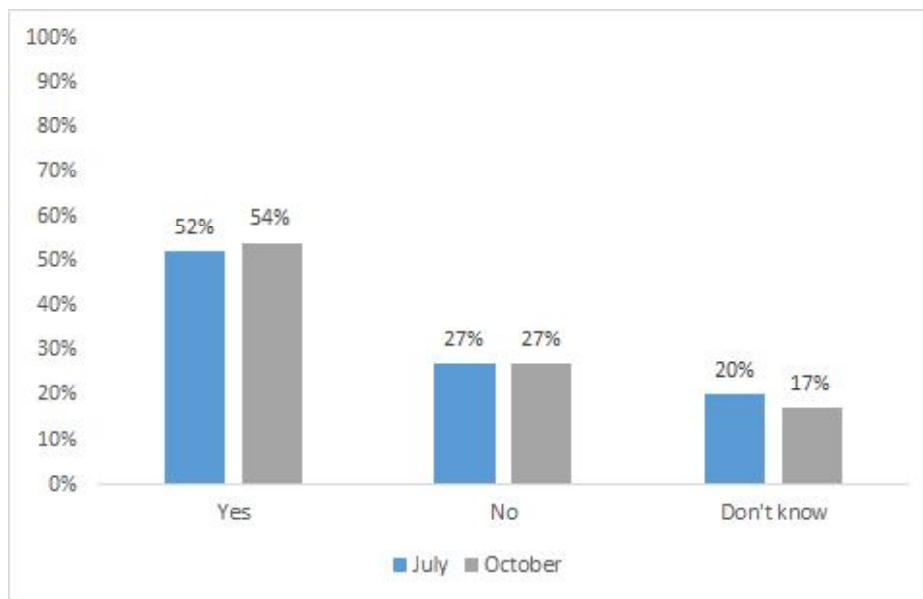
As the election drew closer, confidence in the government’s ability to tackle unemployment declined. When the CDD-Ghana pre-election survey asked Ghanaians how well or badly the NDC government was handling unemployment in the country, six in 10 Ghanaians (56% in July and 64% in October) negatively assessed the incumbent NDC government’s performance in addressing unemployment (Figure 3). This represents an eight-percentage-point decrease in negative ratings (between July and October) of the government’s ability to manage unemployment. However, more than half of Ghanaians (52% in July and 54% in October) also believed that another political party could do a better job of addressing unemployment (Figure 4) and about a third of respondents (35% in July and 37% in October) cited the NPP as the party that could better address the unemployment in the country.

Figure 3: Opinion on how government was handling the top policy priority of respondents | 2016



Respondents were asked: Thinking of the problem you mentioned first, how well or badly would you say the current government is handling this problem?

Figure 4: Views on whether another party could do a better job of addressing the top policy priority | 2016



Respondents were asked: In your opinion, is there any other political party that could do a better job in solving this problem?

The decline in public confidence in the Mahama government's ability to tackle the unemployment problem was not only due to the administration's obsession with defending its job creation records⁹, but also, the failure to espouse their unemployment strategies as clearly laid out under the theme, '*Strong Economy for Jobs and Transformation*' of the 2016 manifesto of the NDC¹⁰. Though it is understandable why the NDC (the then sitting government) had to comparatively devote more time to defending its record in office, their failure to aptly respond and exact public confidence in their employment campaign policies also presented a great challenge. It is important to note, however, that a government's ability to command public confidence in its campaign policies depends on how credible the public views its existing policies.

In comparison, Akufo-Addo and his running mate, Bawumia, proposed clear campaign policies meant to address the high rate of unemployment in the country, notably among which were initiatives such

⁹ See <http://citifmonline.com/2016/04/25/weve-created-about-600000-jobs-govt/> in the first half of 2016, Dr. Omane Boamah, the Minister for Communications under the Mahama administration, released a statement indicating that the NDC government had created over 600,000 jobs in a span of three years

¹⁰ See NDC (2016). Changing Lives Transforming Ghana, 2016 Manifesto, p.30-50.

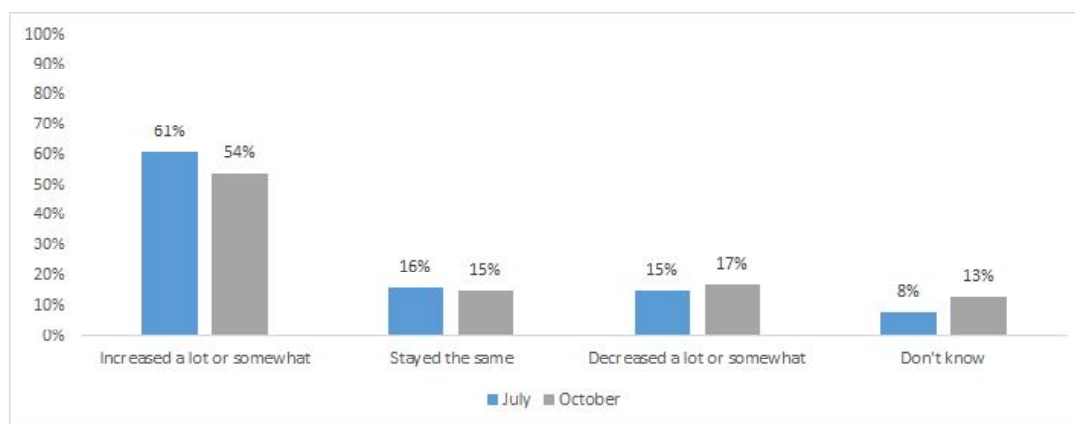
as the “one district-one factory” and “one village, one dam” programs, the reduction in taxes and incentives to the private sector. Moreover, the NPP leveraged on the successes of the Kufour administration in the implementation of ‘social-welfare’ programs such as the National Health Insurance Scheme, the School Feeding Program and the National Youth Employment Program to promote their campaign policies.

3.3 Corruption

The NDC administration was perceived to be corrupt. Majority of Ghanaians (61% in the July survey and 54% in the October survey) held the view that corruption had increased ‘a lot’ or ‘somewhat’ over the past year (under NDC) (Figure 5).

In addition, six in 10 Ghanaians (62% in July and 57% in October) poorly rated government’s performance in fighting against corruption. Even though there had been a reduction in the negative ratings of government between the July and October surveys, majority of Ghanaians rated the government as both corrupt and not committed to fighting corruption. Thus it is not enough for a government to be seen as incorruptible; their ability to arrest and prosecute corrupt officials also matters to its electoral fortunes.

Figure 5: Perception of levels of corruption over the past year | 2016



Respondents were asked: In your opinion, over the past year, has the level of corruption increased, decreased or stayed the same?

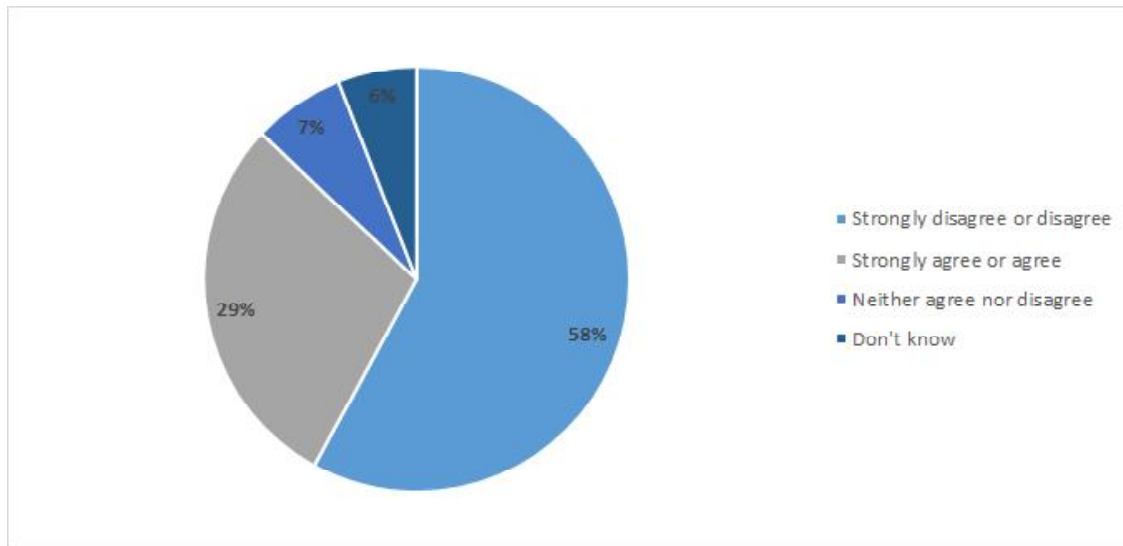
When respondents were asked about the likely factors that were going to influence their choice of party or candidates in the elections, perceived government corruption was rated second to bad roads (among other factors) by three-fourths of Ghanaians (75%) in the July survey and first by two-thirds (69%) in the October survey (see Table 1). Almost six in 10 (58%) respondents “strongly disagreed” or “disagreed” with the statement: “I will vote for a party or candidate that can deliver development, even if that party or candidate is perceived to be corrupt” (Figure 6). This is an indication that Ghanaians would prioritize the fight against corruption over development.

Table 1. Opinion on issues likely to influence electorates’ choices at 2016 election | 2016

	July	October
Bad roads	76%	69%
Perceived government corruption	75%	69%

Respondents were asked: Let’s talk about your vote in the 2016 elections. Please tell me whether as a voter, your choice of party and/or candidate will/will not be influenced by (the factors listed under Table 1).

Figure 6: Opinion on whether respondents would vote for a party or candidate that can deliver development even if that party or candidate is corrupt | 2016



Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: I will vote for a party or candidate that can deliver development even if that party or candidate is perceived to be corrupt.

The high negative ratings of corruption in the Mahama administration may not have come as a surprise, considering the several cases and allegations of corruption brought against the government's appointees, the President and his cronies. For instance, Martin Amidu had revived the corruption charge against Alfred Abgesi Woyome, a known financier of the NDC, after the Attorney-General had shown no interest in continuing with the case at the Supreme court¹¹. This issue had attracted much interest in the media with equally greater public discussions. Again, high-level government officials were implicated in several corruption charges in the National Service Secretariat (NSS)¹², Savannah Accelerated Development Authority (SADA), the Ghana Youth Employment and Development Agency¹³ and the Transport Ministry via the GHc 3.6 million Smarttys Bus Branding saga¹⁴, among others. Much worse, President Mahama had been implicated in allegations of Ford Expedition vehicle bribery from a Burkinabe contractor but cleared by the Commission of Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ)¹⁵.

The NPP's key anti-corruption campaign message was predicated on the highly perceived corruption in the Mahama administration. Again, taking advantage of the general mistrust in the ability of President Mahama to fight corruption, Akufo-Addo proposed a difficult but more credible alternative to arresting political corruption through the establishment of the office of the special prosecutor¹⁶.

¹¹See <http://dailyguideafrica.com/amidu-chases-woyome-supreme-court/>

¹²The Mahama administration was criticised for corruption that had bedevilled the government initiative meant to reduce poverty among the people occupying the Savannah zones <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/SADA-rot-traceable-to-Mahama-Martin-Amidu-492367>

³ GYEEDA became topical in the media following the release of 2014 Auditor General's report in the election year. See <https://www.myjoyonline.com/news/2016/March-10th/qyeeda-features-again-in-stinking-auditor-generals-report-2014.php>

¹⁴ Revelations on the controversial bus branding saga involving the Minister for Transport under the Mahama administration began to gain prominence in the media after government was compelled by a high court ruling to hand over documents on the contractual arrangement to Occupy Ghana, a pressure group. See <https://www.myjoyonline.com/news/2016/May-9th/smarttys-saga-a-g-handpicked-bus-branding-documents-to-occupyghana.php>

¹⁵ See <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/how-chraj-dismissed-bribery-allegations-against-prez-mahama.html> CHRAJ exonerated President Mahama from allegations of conflict of interest and receipt of bribes but ruled that the President breached the gift policy. Following, the findings of CHRAJ were criticised by the NPP and some influential individual including a former CHRAJ Boss, Justice Emile Short.

¹⁶ Akufo-Addo promised to establish the office of the special prosecutor six months into his administration when voted into power. See <http://kasapafmonline.com/2016/08/22/akufo-addo-promises-establish-office-special-prosecutor-prosecute-corrupt-officials/>

3.4 Sectarian Interests versus Interest of All: NDC & NPP

In the CDD-Ghana pre-election survey, Ghanaians were asked whether they “think the NPP or the NDC looks after the interest of all the people of Ghana or after the interest of just one region or one group”. Although a considerable percentage of Ghanaians perceived both the NPP and NDC as inward-looking, the NDC, more than the NPP, was largely perceived to be sectarian in its governance approach.

More than half (55%) of Ghanaians stated that the NDC looks after the interests of all citizens, while a quarter (27%) said they look after sectarian interests. With regard to the NPP, 70% of Ghanaians stated that the NPP looks after the interest of all citizens. Only a tenth (11%) said the NPP looks more after sectarian interests (i.e., that of only one group or region).

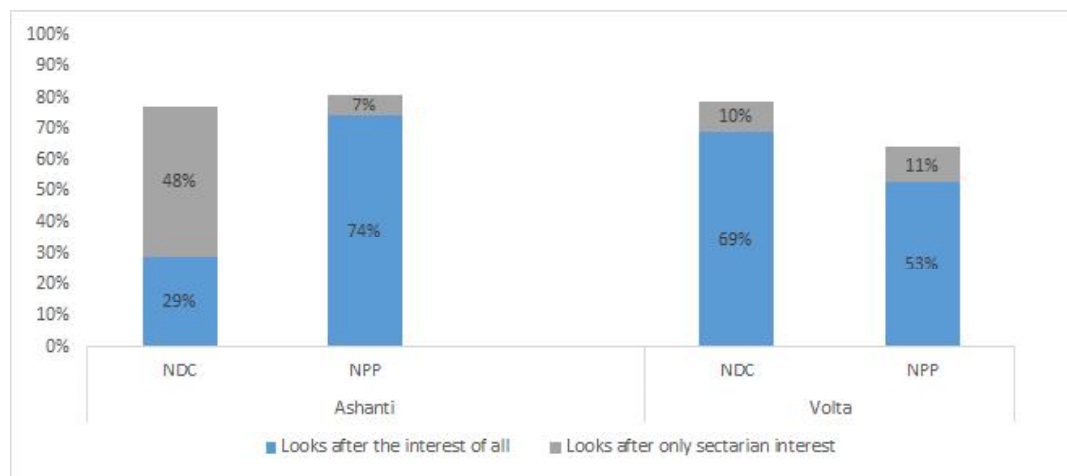
Table 2: Opinion on how NDC and NPP pursue the interest of all citizens versus interest of a section of the populace | 2016

	NDC (October)	NPP (October)
All	55%	70%
One region/one group	27%	11%
None	5%	4%
Don't know	11%	14%
Refused	2%	2%

Respondents were asked: (a) Do you think the National Democratic Congress (NDC) looks after the interests of all the people of Ghana or after the interests of just one region or one group? If you haven't heard enough about them, please say "don't know." (b) Do you think the New Patriotic Party (NPP) looks after the interests of all the people of Ghana or after the interests of just one region or one group?

The high perception of sectarianism about the NDC is likely to have negatively affected its public appeal among floating voters and, weakened its core support base. This suggests that the policies and programs of the party could not easily enjoy popular support by majority of Ghanaians who would not trust the party to represent the general interest. The NPP, on the other hand, enjoyed broader public appeal as representing the general interest of all citizens, an advantage to sell its campaign policies and programs to Ghanaians.

Figure 7: Looking after the interest of all Ghanaians: Comparative glance at two regional “strongholds” | by region (Volta and Ashanti) | 2016



Respondents were asked: Do you think the National Democratic Congress (NDC) looks after the interests of all the people of Ghana or after the interests of just one region or group?

A quick comparative glance at Ashanti (an NPP “stronghold”) and Volta (an NDC “stronghold”) regions confirms the low ratings of the NDC in promoting the interest of all Ghanaians. Three-fourths (74%) of respondents in Ashanti viewed the NPP as looking after the interests of all Ghanaians with just 29% of respondents stating that the NDC looked after all Ghanaians (Figure 7). Given the political victories of the NPP in Ashanti, it is tempting to dismiss the assessment as purely partisan. However, in Volta, two-thirds of respondents (69%) believed the NDC looks after the interests of all Ghanaians, but the difference as compared to the NPP in Volta is not as striking. More than half of respondents (53%) also believed that the NPP looks after the interests of all Ghanaians, which is noticeable given the fact that the Volta Region is considered an NDC “stronghold.” Again, only a tenth of respondents in the Volta Region rated the NDC (10%) and the NPP (11%) as sectarian.

CONCLUSION

The 2016 CDD-Ghana pre-election surveys established that Ghanaians were more focused on issue-based campaigns in the 2016 general elections. The tracking of key campaign issues and citizens' response therefore became an extremely important measure for ascertaining the success of contending political parties in the polls.

The findings indicate that the NDC had high levels of negative ratings from Ghanaians on the general economic and governance issues that had a strong bearing on the outcome of the 2016 general elections. Most Ghanaians indicated that the country was going in the wrong direction – which most of the respondents attributed to the performance of the government. The Mahama-led NDC administration was viewed as non-performing in the economic management of the country as regards; controlling inflation, creating jobs, reducing social inequality and improving the living standards of the poor. It was also perceived to be more corrupt than its competitors and less committed to fighting corruption. Our analyses also show that a majority of Ghanaians had lost confidence in the NDC's ability to address their most important problem (unemployment) and, rather, thought another political party could offer the most credible solution to these concerns. Apart from the policy credibility crisis of the NDC, it was also perceived as more inward-looking compared with the NPP.

This paper provides analytical filters and baseline indicators for measuring the electoral prospects of incumbent governments and the assessment of election loss by defeated political parties based on the new insights regarding the expectations of Ghanaian voters. Our analysis offers much lessons to the NDC as it prepares for the 2020 elections and for the NPP to consider as the ruling administration.