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The ruling New Patriotic Party holds its last legislative primaries on 2 December setting the party up to prepare for the 7 December 2024 general election. The NPP needs party unity as the party and its presidential candidate, vice president Mahamudu Bawumia, are trailing in the latest polls conducted by Accra-based Global Info Analytics. Finance minister Ken Ofori-Atta gives his budget address on 15 November and tries to portray a positive tone. However, Ghana continues to face economic headwinds and has had to implement significant expenditure cuts. Intercommunal violence continues to increase in Bawku (Upper East Region), with an attack on 7 December leaving three people dead.

Ruling party concludes legislative primaries amid intraparty tensions

The ruling **New Patriotic Party (NPP)** concluded its legislative primary elections on 2 December when it selected the last of its constituency candidates for the upcoming December 2024 general election, with the NPP now having a complete electoral slate of candidates for the election.¹ The NPP faces a difficult challenge in its campaign to retain control of the country's legislature in the upcoming general election. The NPP and the opposition **National Democratic Congress (NDC)** each hold 137 seats in the legislature, but the NPP holds the parliamentary majority purely because the lone independent candidate elects to caucus with it. As such, the NPP cannot afford to lose a single seat in the 2024 general election if it hopes to retain control of the legislature.

This challenge has been exacerbated by the ongoing internal tensions within the party. Such tensions are typical following primary elections as losing candidates are often resentful of their losses and can blame supposed party insiders for their defeats. However, the current efforts to unify the party have been complicated by the fact that former trade minister and NPP senior leader **Alan Kyerematen** resigned from the NPP on 25 September and declared that he would contest the December 2024 presidential election as an independent.² Kyerematen's independent candidacy has aggravated internal ruptures within the NPP as evidenced by the party's decision on 20 November to expel four members who were accused of supporting the former trade minister.³

Former NPP general-secretary **Nana Ohene Ntow**, former inner-city development minister **Boniface Abubakar Saddique**, former **Adentan** member of parliament (MP) **Yaw Buaben Asamoah**, and unsuccessful parliamentary candidate **Hopeson Adorje** were accused of actively campaigning for Kyerematen. If true, this would be a direct violation of the NPP's constitution and would qualify them for expulsion. However, the speed at which they were ejected from the party may further aggravate tensions as it will lend itself towards the allegations that the party has become intolerant of internal dissent. These expulsions will likely fuel uncertainty and fear within the party and make the NPP presidential candidate, vice president **Mahamudu Bawumia**'s task of unifying the party that much more difficult. Bawumia needs the NPP united behind him if he is to have any hope of winning the presidential election given the widespread negative view of the current administration.

New survey finds popular negative sentiment

Accra-based research firm **Global Info Analytics** released the results of its latest **National Opinion Poll Governance and Elections** on 17 November which found that the majority of voters

¹ GhanaWeb, 2 Dec 2023

² Modern Ghana, 25 Sep 2023

³ Peace FM, 20 Nov 2023

believe Ghana is headed in the wrong direction.⁴ This poll was conducted in October and surveyed a representative sample of 6,423 likely voters.⁵ The survey shows that 70% of voters believe Ghana is heading in the wrong direction and a further 47% believe that their standard of living has worsened in the past year while only 18% believe life has improved.

In a finding that will concern Bawumia, only 28% of respondents stated that they intend to vote for Bawumia while 48.3% back NDC candidate former president **John Mahama** (2012-2017). Kyerematen, meanwhile is polling with 11.3% of support nearly all of which appears to have been pulled from the NPP and Bawumia. This was confirmed by Global Info Analytics' own analysis which found that one million voters who backed President **Nana Akufo-Addo** (2017-present) in the 2020 election are intending to support Kyerematen in 2024.

Arguably the most worrying result of the survey was the fact that only 49% of voters have confidence in the **Electoral Commission** while 41% do not just the organisation to hold an effective election. This indicates a growing disillusionment in Ghana's democratic institutions that could suppress voter turnout in December next year.

It should be noted that the survey represents a snapshot in time and should be viewed as predicative of the 2024 election. In particular, the survey was conducted prior to the conclusion of the NPP's primaries and the selection of Bawumia as the party's presidential candidate on 4 November.⁶ However, the survey is a good measure of the current sentiment among Ghana's electorate and reflective of the scale of Bawumia's challenge in reversing this negative outlook and convincing voters to support him. His success or failure in this endeavour will likely be determined by the government's ability to improve Ghana's current economic situation to a point whereby election day 7 December 2024 the majority of Ghanaians feel that the country is heading in the right direction and that their standard of living is improving.

Finance minister presents budget to parliament

Finance minister **Ken Ofori-Atta** presented the 2024 **Budget Statement and Economic Policy** to parliament on 15 November, framing the 2024 budget in a positive light despite the country's entrenched challenges. During his presentation, Ofori-Atta stressed the theme that Ghana's economy had "*turned the corner*", a sentiment likely driven by the focus on the upcoming election.⁷ The finance minister particularly highlighted the decline in inflation over the past year and the fact that Ghana managed to secure a \$3 billion **Extended Credit Facility (ECF)** with the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)**. Ofori-Atta also stated that he believes that Ghana will secure the second ECF tranche payment by the end of the year bolstering the government's finances by \$600m.⁸ However, this payment is likely dependent on Ghana's ability to secure a comprehensive restructuring agreement with its external creditors; something which the government has been struggling to achieve. The finance minister sought to alleviate these concerns by saying that his department believes that such an agreement will be secured by the end of 2023.⁹

Although Ofori-Atta sought to portray the government's new budget as a growth-centred optimistic policy document, the fact is that Ghana's current economic challenges have forced the finance minister to implement significant expenditure cuts. The 2024 Budget Statement and Economic Policy cites that the state will reduce expenditure by around 6.1% of GDP primarily through fiscal consolidation measures.¹⁰ However, even with these substantial cuts, Ghana is expected to continue to operate with a significant budget deficit. The 2024 budget has forecast expenditure of around GHS 226.7 billion (\$18.87 billion) against revenue of GHS 176.4 billion (\$14.69 billion), equating to a

⁴ Modern Ghana, 17 Nov 2023

⁵ Global Info Analytics, 17 Nov 2023

⁶ News Ghana, 5 Nov 2023

⁷ Modern Ghana, 15 Nov 2023

⁸ Bloomberg, 15 Nov 2023

⁹ Reuters, 15 Nov 2023

¹⁰ The Herald Ghana, 15 Nov 2023

budget deficit of at least GHS 50.3 billion (\$4.19 billion). Ghana currently has limited debt-raising capacity given the fact that the country has defaulted on several external debt repayments over the past two years, excluding it from most capital markets. Furthermore, under its arrangement with the IMF, Ghana is under pressure to not exacerbate its debt burden and, as such, is unlikely to easily borrow funds from domestic or international sources, especially given the rates they will charge due to the country's low credit rating. Accordingly, the country will be dependent on other sources of external budgetary support including budgetary aid from bilateral partners, and support from international financial institutions such as the IMF, the **World Bank**, and the **African Development Bank (AfDB)**. Illustrative of this, the AfDB confirmed on 9 November that it had approved a \$102.6m budget support programme for Ghana to help fund fiscal consolidation and economic recovery.

The 2024 budget was not universally welcomed, and the opposition criticised the budget as being a product of the IMF and accused the government of sacrificing Ghana's sovereignty to secure the ECF arrangement.¹¹ This criticism is motivated by the NDC's need to critique the government's economic stewardship as the 2024 election is expected to centre on economic issues. Regardless, the budget was only passed by Parliament on 7 November and even then, the vote was decided along partisan lines with 138 votes supporting the bill and 136 opposing with one absent ballot.¹²

Recent incidents highlight the countrywide threat of intercommunal violence

Although much of the focus on Ghana remains centred on the country's economic difficulties, the country appears to be struggling with a growing issue of intercommunal violence. As usual, the worst incidents of intercommunal violence have continued to centre on the chieftaincy dispute in **Bawku (Upper East Region)**. On 7 December, at least three people were killed, and nine others injured when identified gunmen opened fire on a bus in the region's **Zuarungu** area.¹³ This follows a similar incident on 29 November when two people were killed in another attack on a bus in Bawku municipality.¹⁴ The conflict in Bawku stems from a prolonged dispute between the **Kusasi** and **Mamprusi** communities over the traditional chieftaincy in the area. This conflict has continued to fuel a deterioration of the security environment despite repeated efforts to broker peace between the two groups and heighten security in the city.

The entrenched security challenges resulting from the Bawku conflict serve as a warning for authorities about the dangers of allowing these intercommunal tensions to escalate. This is particularly relevant given that there are several such disputes developing across Ghana. Most notably, seven people were killed in clashes in **Wanchiki (North East Region)** over a similar dispute between the **Jaabu** and **Forboru** communities over control of the chieftaincy. Meanwhile, on the other side of the country, clashes broke out on 30 November after gunmen opened fire on the installation ceremony for the new chief in **Sampa (Bono Region)**.

Although intercommunal violence in Ghana can centre on a plethora of issues including land and water rights and cultural festivals, tensions over traditional leadership positions appear to be driving the worst of this violence. This is partly because Ghana's chieftaincy system invites such tensions as control of traditional chieftaincy grants the incumbent's community access to enhanced systems of patronage. This access to resources compounds deeper communal grievances over who has the legitimate claim to the land and leadership of a geographical area; grievances which have been aggravated ever since Ghana's colonial era. In the absence of any meaningful reform to this system, disputes over chieftaincies are expected to continue.

A look to 2024

Developments in Ghana are expected to be dominated by the country's 7 December presidential and legislative elections. The former of which will see Bawumia face off against Mahama. The elections

¹¹ 3 News, 14 Nov 2023

¹² GNA, 7 Dec 2023

¹³ Modern Ghana, 7 Dec 2023

¹⁴ Ghanaian Times, 29 Nov 2023

will likely be closely fought affairs and are expected to centre on economic issues. As such, Ghana's ongoing economic recovery and the government's ability to implement the IMF approved structural reform programme is an important development to watch in 2024. Central to the success of these economic reforms will be Ghana's ability to secure substantive debt restructuring agreements in the first half of the new year. Although 2024 is expected to be dominated by election and economic recovery developments, the ongoing deterioration of the security environment in Ghana's northern regions, especially near the border with **Burkina Faso** and Bawku, will remain a concern.

Planner

19 Dec 2023 **(Ghana)** District level elections;
 8–24 Mar 2024 **Accra (Ghana)** Africa Games;
 7 Dec 2024 **(Ghana)** General election

Chronology

7 Dec 2024 **Accra (Ghana)** *Modern Ghana*. Lands and natural resources minister **Samuel Abu Jinapor** defends the recently announced lithium agreement with **Australia's Atlantic Lithium** claiming the lithium royalties are the highest in the country's recent history;

7 Dec 2023 **Accra (Ghana)** *Ghanaian Times*. The police's **National Election Security Task Force (NESTF)** announces that it has established its own **Election Security Task Force** to bolster arrangement ahead of the 19 December District Level Elections;

7 Dec 2023 **Accra (Ghana)** *Ghana Business News*. The **Ghana Armed Forces (GAF)** conduct a series of field training exercises in **Northern, Upper East, Upper West, North-East** and the **Savannah** regions

6 Dec 2023 **Accra (Ghana)** *GNA*. The opposition **National Democratic Congress (NDC)** calls on the public to oppose the new regulations on imports and exports, including essential goods such as poultry, rice, sugar and diapers;

6 Dec 2023 **Winneba (Ghana)** *GNA*. At least 10 people are arrested following protests opposing planned lithium mining in the **Yenku** forest in **Central Region**;

7 Dec 2023 **Accra (Ghana)** *Modern Ghana*. The ruling New National Party (NPP) denies that it is deliberately slowing the progress of the Promotion of Proper Human Rights and Family Values Bill which is also referred to as the anti-gay bill;

5-6 Dec 2023 **Accra (Ghana)** *DefenceWeb*. The **United Nations** peacekeeping ministerial meeting is held in Accra;

5 Dec 2023 **Accra (Ghana)** *My Joy Online*. The finance ministry intervenes to prevent independent power producer, **Sunon Asogli Power (Ghana) Limited** from suspending operations over unpaid fees by the **Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG)**;

5 Dec 2023 **Dubai (United Arab Emirates)** *Citi Newsroom*. Ghana signs an **Emission Reductions Payment Agreement (ERPA)** with the **Lowering Emissions by Accelerating Forest finance (LEAF) Coalition** on the sidelines of COP28;

5 Dec 2023 **Accra (Ghana)** *Graphic*. The **Ghana Union of Traders Association (GUTA)** and the **National Union of Ghana Students (NUGS)** voice support for **National Democratic Congress (NDC)** presidential candidate **John Mahama's** policy for a proposed "24-hour economy";

5 Dec 2023 **Accra (Ghana)** *GNA*. President **Nana Akufo-Addo** declines to sign the newly amended **Criminal Offences (Amendment) Bill, 2022**, the **Criminal Offences Amendment Number Two Bill, 2023**, and the **Armed Forces Amendment Bill** claiming that they have outstanding constitutional issues;

4 Dec 2023 **Accra (Ghana)** *GNA*. Convicted illegal mine operator **Aisha Huang** is sentenced to four years and six months in prison for operating a mine without a licence, entering Ghana illegally, and the illegal employment of foreign nationals;

4 Dec 2023 **Accra (Ghana)** *GhanaWeb*. Organisers of the **#FixTheCountry** movement file documents challenging the injunction preventing them from staging their planned December demonstrations in Accra;

29 Nov 2023 **Accra (Ghana)** *Ghanaian Times*. The **Dawhenya** irrigation dam overflows and floods an estimated 600 homes;

29 Nov 2023 **Accra (Ghana)** *Graphic*. The **Forestry Commission** arrests 10 suspected illegal miners in the **Anhwiaso East Forest Reserve** in the **Western North Region**;

27 Nov 2023 **Accra (Ghana)** *Modern Ghana*. The Accra high court upholds the GHS19m (\$1.5m) tax liability imposed by the **Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA)** on **MTN Ghana**;

27 Nov 2023 **Accra (Ghana)** *Reuters*. The **Bank of Ghana (BoG) Monetary Policy Committee (MPC)** elects to maintain the monetary policy rate at 30%.

27 Nov 2023 **Accra (Ghana)** *AP News*. The **Accra Reparation Conference** is held during which delegates agree to establish a **Global Reparation Fund** for the descendants of victims of the trans-Atlantic slave trade;

23 Nov 2023 **Accra (Ghana)** *AfricaNews*. The government announces a 46-day visa-on-arrival for the period between 1 December and 15 January;

14 Nov 2023 **Accra (Ghana)** *Reuters*. The **Ghana Statistical Services** reveal that inflation fell to 35.2% (year-on-year) in October from 38.1% in September;

14 Nov 2023 **Accra (Ghana)** *Reuters*. The government and public sector labour unions reach a new wage agreement for 2024 under which public sector wages will increase by 23% between January to June 2024 before increasing to 25% for July through December;

13 Nov 2023 **Accra (Ghana)** *Reuters*. **United Kingdom**-headquartered **Tullow Oil** signs a \$400m five-year debt deal with **Swiss**-headquartered commodities multinational, **Glencore**, under which the Swiss company will take over marketing of crude from Tullow's oil fields.

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