

**ISSUE PAPER**  
IP-E-002-20



## **POLITICAL PARTIES AND MANIFESTO PREPARATION FOR ELECTION 2020: STATE OF READINESS**

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**AUGUST, 2020**

## **INTRODUCTION: THE FUNCTION OF MANIFESTOES**

There are 24 political parties registered on the books of the Electoral Commission (EC). Only six consistently contest Presidential Elections-New Patriotic Party (NPP), National Democratic Congress (NDC), Convention People Party (CPP), People National Convention (PNC), Progressive People’s Party and the National Democratic Party (NDP). The two major parties, NPP and NDC repeatedly gather 98.5 percent of the total votes cast in the presidential elections and field candidates for parliamentary elections in all the 275 constituencies. The rest put up candidates in anything from ten (10) constituencies to a little over hundred (100).

The 2020 elections promises to be interesting in the number of independent candidates interested in the presidency. If intentions are carried out into action, not less than four independents will join the presidential race.<sup>1</sup> The election of December, 2020 will otherwise show the same level and pattern of participation as in three previous ones – same parties and more or less same number of parliamentary candidates.

The principal instrument with which elections are contested in Ghana is the party manifesto. Party manifestos in Ghana serve two key functions; the manifesto is a major vote mobilizing instrument and the foundation for the winning party’s four-year program until the next elections. In this regard, the electorate, independent observers and political parties measure governmental achievement almost entirely by the extent of delivery on the ruling party’s manifesto promises. The dual dimension of the manifesto as a vote catching tool and program of development gives the document itself a highly elevated importance.

Indeed, parties have now come to believe that catchy phrases both popular and easy to remember are great for capturing the popular vote. The alluring charm of “Free SHS”, “one district one factory”, “one village one dam” and “one constituency one million dollars” etc. in pulling the votes for the NPP in the 2016 election will not be very easily forgotten by politicians and voters alike.

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<sup>1</sup> Ghana Web. (2020). [Election 2020: It's time for change now!](#)

## STATE OF PREPAREDNESS

With a few months to go before we go to the polls in December 2020, what is the state of preparedness of the political parties to issue their manifestos? The NDC was the first party to name a 25-member Manifesto Working Committee just before the end of 2019 and has since declared that their manifesto will be launched in August 2020. The committee under the chairmanship of Professor Danso Boafo has engaged different segments of Ghanaian society and has now finalized and presented the document dubbed the “People’s Manifesto” to the flagbearer, Former President John Dramani Mahama.<sup>2</sup>

The NPP followed up in February 2020 by naming a 10-member manifesto committee under the chairmanship of vice president Alhaji Dr. Mahumadu Bawumia. It is clear from the paucity of members and sector ministers involved that the manifesto is intended to have a strong socio-economic focus. The chairman of the committee is a prominent economist and banker. The inclusion of the minister of Finance, Trade and Industry, Agriculture, Education and Local Government is clearly indicative of strong emphasis on socio economic development in the manifesto.

The ministerial composition also seems to suggest that the committee will only serve as a coordinating body. The actual work of producing the manifesto has mostly been the responsibility of technocrats associated with the ministers. The NPP General Secretary, Mr John Boadu has stated that the committee will finalize the manifesto on August 11, 2020 and will be launched on 22 August, 2020.<sup>3</sup>

The PPP has the smallest manifesto committee chaired by Mr. William Dowokpor, first vice chairman of the party and Parliamentary Candidate for Ayawaso West Wuogon in the 2016 election. The committee has only 3 members with power to co-opt any other persons to support their work. The PPP is well-known for producing the smallest manifesto<sup>4</sup> and therefore the 3-member committee would be more than enough to accomplish the job at hand.

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<sup>2</sup> Ghana Web. (2020). [John Mahama receives copy of NDC’s 2020 manifesto](#)

<sup>3</sup> Dzivenu, E. (2020). [NPP outdoors 2020 manifesto on August 22. My Joy Online.](#)

<sup>4</sup> Progressive People’s Party (PPP). (2016). [2016 Elections Manifesto.](#)

Two other parties have set the time for naming their manifesto committees and commencing work on their manifestos. According to the PNC, the committee comprises almost exactly the same members who served in 2016 with a few changes to replace those no longer available. The party's manifesto committee is working to complete the manifesto as soon as possible. However, in the meantime it is faced with the challenge of the absence of a flagbearer who will make an input into the manifesto.

The CPP faced a peculiar challenge; the original intention of the party was to name its manifesto committee soon after its National Delegates Congress to elect the national executives in April. The congress which was delayed by a court injunction seeking to restrain the interim officers from calling this congress has now been scheduled for August 15, 2020.<sup>5</sup>

### **CONTINUITY IN CHANGE**

An essential characteristic of party manifestos is continuity in change. New policy proposals may be incorporated in party manifestos every election; however, manifestos remain essentially unchanged overtime. The logical consideration underpinning manifesto continuity is that the development problems of the nation do not change every four years but persist over time. Therefore, proposals for solution embodied in manifesto cannot change from election to election.

It is moreover very important for the electorate to associate parties with a certain core set of policies. A party whose policy proposals change from election to election risks confusing voters. The NPP's flagship Free SHS policy remained on its manifesto for 3 elections before the party eventually got elected and got the opportunity to implement it. Manifesto promises require a certain constancy before they can cut ice with voters. Therefore, while the public wait with bated breath for party manifestos to be released, it is reasonable to expect that there will be very little that will be completely new in them.

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<sup>5</sup> Graphic Online. (2020). [CPP August 15 congress: 19 File to contest flagbearer, national positions.](#)

## **DO MANIFESTOS MATTER TO VOTERS?**

One of the most persistent myths in Ghanaian politics from early pre-independence elections is that manifestos do not matter in Ghanaian politics since voters have a high propensity to follow their ethno-regional preferences in elections. The party popular with a major ethnic group or region regularly tends to capture the majority of their votes. Therefore, manifestos do not matter.

It is even sometimes believed that some leading members of political parties and majority of voters care very little about the content of party manifestos. However, the fact that major parties invest a lot of time, effort and energy into their manifestos strongly suggest that the manifestos should have some meaning for voters. And indeed if manifestos did not matter, it would be extremely difficult to explain the alternation of power between the two major parties and the substantial effort they put into setting up manifesto committees of experts and knowledgeable persons with experience.

It is generally true that the vast majority of voters hardly spend time reading and analyzing the manifestos of parties in election years. It is true, nonetheless, that voters have a good sense of party manifesto promises since the party manifesto is the basic source of all the election promises that party leaders, election candidates and party communicators use during rallies, radio and TV discussions and even door-to door campaigns.

## **CONCLUSION**

We conclude therefore that manifestos have assumed increasing importance in Ghana's multiparty democracy. They serve not only as vote mobilizing instruments but also the basis for party's medium-term developmental agenda once in power. Very careful thinking and effort should go into manifesto preparation if the document itself is to meet the aspirations of the people and to align with national, continental and global development plans.