



For Immediate Release

**IRI/NDI Report:
Efforts Needed to Ensure Confidence and Inclusion
on Ghana's Road to Peaceful and Credible Polls**

November 2, 2020

Washington D.C. – On December 7, 2020, Ghana will hold presidential and parliamentary elections. While Ghana has demonstrated its ability to conduct credible polls, persistent issues continue to hamper full confidence and participation in the electoral process according to a report released by the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI).

“Ghana’s strong institutions, free and open political space, and commitment to democracy lay the foundation for inclusive, transparent, and accountable elections,” said Constance Newman IRI board member and former assistant secretary of state for African affairs. “Throughout our virtual assessment, Ghanaians expressed a fervent desire for these polls to meet the high expectations that they have come to hold for their elections.”

The analysis of the pre-election environment released today is based on in-depth interviews conducted virtually from October 20 to October 29, 2020 by a joint IRI and NDI team that included Newman, NDI Vice President Shari Bryan; IRI Resident Program Director and Senior Technical Specialist for East and Southern Africa Jessica Keegan; and NDI Senior Advisor for Elections Richard L. Klein.

IRI and NDI’s analysis was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and in light of constraints imposed by the global COVID-19 pandemic, which precluded deployment of an international delegation to Ghana. IRI and NDI therefore adapted their methodology to accommodate intensive remote engagement.

Over the past seven election cycles, Ghana has demonstrated its ability to deliver well-administered elections. The 2020 polls are expected to be competitive. Political campaigns are increasingly focused on issues that matter to Ghanaians rather than on the personalities of the candidates. A vibrant civil society and a segment of increasingly professional media are contributing to a more informed, discerning, and engaged citizenry.

Yet full public confidence will require measures to address persistent challenges in Ghana’s electoral process. Key among these challenges are the need for increased transparency around important steps in the electoral cycle, the presence of vigilante groups, and the pervasiveness of disinformation, hate speech, and inflammatory language. In addition, electoral actors could do more to make elections more inclusive. In particular, the consistently low number of women candidates fails to meet global democratic standards.

“In the remaining weeks ahead of the December 7 polls there is still sufficient time for electoral actors to take steps to instill more confidence in the electoral process, mitigate the risks of electoral violence, encourage the full participation of all voters, and deliver on Ghanaians’ high expectations for their democracy,” NDI Vice-President Shari Bryan said.

The report makes 21 recommendations to improve Ghana’s electoral process, including the following:

- The National Peace Council (NPC) and other traditional and religious leaders should prioritize facilitating the signature of national and regional peace pledges. Political parties should adhere to these commitments, including publicly calling upon their supporters – especially youth – to refrain from violence.
- To further enhance transparency and build confidence in the voter register, the Electoral Commission (EC) should make the full final voter register available to political parties, as well as citizen and international observers, in an electronic and analyzable format to enable better analysis, in line with election data standards (www.openelectiondata.net).
- Political parties, civil society, and the media should engage the EC when they have concerns and work in good faith to build consensus on solutions. For its part, the EC should pro-actively seek such engagements and be open to constructive suggestions that could improve the electoral process.
- To provide increased confidence to the public and election stakeholders, members of the National Election Security Task Force (NESTF) should prioritize publicizing outcomes of its meetings and the measures taken to ensure election security.
- Political parties should make efforts to provide financial and other support to women candidates to support campaigns and to offset the structural challenges they face standing for office.
- To help create a space for women candidates, all parties should agree to a national ban on violence against women in elections, including a ban on hate speech and cyberbullying often used to target women. Political parties should publicly condemn any incidents of violence against women by their supporters.
- Media, working in collaboration with civil society, should amplify efforts to create platforms for candidate and inter-party debates and discussions of issues of national interest. Political parties and candidates should take advantage of opportunities to participate in moderated public debates, town halls, or other events to engage directly with voters.

IRI and NDI will continue to monitor the overall election process through its conclusion.

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IRI and NDI wish to express their appreciation to the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) which has supported this analysis.

IRI and NDI are nonprofit, nonpartisan organizations that support and strengthen democratic institutions and advance freedom in the world. IRI and NDI have collectively organized more than 400 international observation missions or assessments to more than 65 countries.