



MONITORING OF THE 2023 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS IN SELECTED ELECTORAL AREAS IN GHANA

Monitoring Report

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Acronyms

BVDs	Biometric Verification Devices
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
DLE	District Assembly elections
EC	Electoral Commission
GGA-WARO	Good Governance Africa – West Africa Regional Office
LGE	Local Government Elections
MMDAs	Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies
NDC	National Democratic Congress
NPP	New Patriotic Party
PO	Presiding Officer
PWDs	Person with disabilities
VO	Verification Officer




Executive Summary

The 2023 Local Government Election in Ghana, conducted by the Electoral Commission (EC), aimed to renew the mandate of local assembly members or elect new representatives across various Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies (MMDAs). Despite constitutional mandates and efforts to encourage citizen participation, local-level elections have often faced challenges such as apathy and disinterest, with fluctuating turnout figures.

The monitoring exercise conducted by Good Governance Africa – West Africa Region (GGA-WA) and the Bureau for 360 Research and Innovation Ltd (BRI 360) focused on assessing the efficiency, transparency, inclusiveness, and adherence to democratic principles in the voting and counting processes. Observations covered aspects such as voter turnout, participation of political parties, efficiency of EC personnel, transparency, and identified challenges.

Key Findings:

- 1. Increased Voter Turnout:**
 - The 2023 Local Government Election recorded a slight national increase in voter turnout, reaching 35% from 33.6% in 2019.
 - Selected districts displayed an average turnout of approximately 43%, indicating a positive trend in civic participation.
- 2. Regional Variation in Participation:**
 - Peri-urban regions exhibited robust turnout rates exceeding 50%, demonstrating active civic engagement.
 - Variations between urban and peri-urban regions emphasized the importance of understanding local dynamics for effective voter mobilization.
- 3. Positive District Turnout:**
 - Ada West District showcased a commendable 50.02% turnout in selected polling stations, indicating a moderate to high level of civic participation.
 - While the Suhum Municipality faced challenges with a 19.1% overall turnout, targeted strategies can address specific community dynamics.
- 4. Progress in Gender Representation:**
 - Women's participation in elected positions showed a gradual increase, reaching 4.1% in 2023.
 - Acknowledging gender differences in success rates highlights the need for continued efforts to promote inclusivity in local governance.
- 5. Efficient EC System/Personnel:**
 - The Electoral Commission (EC) personnel demonstrated professionalism and competence, efficiently managing election materials and addressing challenges.
 - Incidents of malfunctioning Biometric Verification Devices (BVDs) were minimal, contributing to a smoother election process.
- 6. Transparent Voting and Counting:**
 - Voting and counting processes were transparent, with strategic polling station setups, open ballot box displays, and clear validation procedures.
 - Public unsealing of EC and candidate seals added to the transparency, fostering trust in the electoral process.
- 7. Adherence to Democratic Processes:**

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- Adherence to democratic principles, including the one-person-one-vote principle, promoted transparency and citizen participation.
 - Commitment to democratic values was evident, contributing to a system that upholds the rights of citizens to participate in free, fair, and transparent elections.

8. Identified Challenges for Improvement:

- Challenges, including the absence of tactile jackets for visually impaired voters and difficulty in locating polling stations, provide opportunities for targeted improvements.
- Addressing challenges such as limited understanding among some candidate agents and voter dissatisfaction with the non-use of indelible ink can enhance the overall democratic experience.

The 2023 Local Government Election in Ghana showcased both positive aspects, such as improved turnout in some regions and transparent processes, and challenges that require attention, particularly in voter education and inclusivity efforts. Addressing these challenges can contribute to enhancing the overall democratic experience at the local level.

1.1 Introduction

The Electoral Commission (EC) of Ghana is constitutionally mandated to conduct Local Government Elections every four (4) years for the renewal of the mandate of local assembly members or election of new ones across the various Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs). Ghana's District Assembly Elections Act of 1994, stipulates that "District Assembly elections (DLE) are held every four years and shall be held at least six months apart from parliamentary elections." District assembly elections in Ghana, have been held in 1988/89, 1994, 2002, 2006, 2010, 2015 and 2019; obviously showing a certain pattern by Ghana's Electoral Commission to hold the elections averagely the year preceding the general presidential and parliamentary elections. While local-level elections present the most practicable opportunity for citizens to participate actively in selecting their local representatives to the various metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies and contribute to local government decision-making, it has rather gained ill repute for apathy and disinterest. Consistently, the turnout figures have been fluctuating, most of the time producing less than half of the turnout in presidential and parliamentary elections.

The 2023 Local Government Election was conducted on Tuesday, the 19th of December, 2023 across all 6,272 electoral areas, with the exception of Nkoranza North and Nzoranka South in the Bono East Region. The Electoral Commission of Ghana, however, on the day of voting postponed the elections in selected Electoral Areas in the Ashanti and Eastern Regions as a result of technical challenges – these areas subsequently had the elections conducted. Good Governance Africa – West Africa Region (GGA-WA), with its mandate of coordinating good governance research, and advocacy in English-speaking West African nations (*Ghana, Sierra Leone, and The Gambia*) in collaboration with the Bureau for 360 Research and Innovation Ltd (BRI 360) as part of its ongoing work in the governance space monitored the voting exercise in selected voting centres across the country. The key focus of the exercise was to assess the entire voting/election process with keen interest in the efficiency of the process, voter turn-out, transparency and inclusiveness of the process. In all, ten (10) observers were deployed on election-day across selected polling stations in six selected districts (Table 1) to observe the election-day voting processes and proceedings, from the opening to the close of polls, counting and declaration of results.

Table 1: Regions, districts and towns/locations

S/N	Study regions	Study districts	Location
1.	Greater Accra	Ada West	Sege
2.		Ayawaso Central	Kanda, Accra
3.		Ablekuma Central	Latebiokorshie, Accra
4.		Ablekuma North	Odorkor, Accra
5.	Eastern	Suhum Municipal	Suhum
6.	Central	Agona West Municipal	Agona Swedru

This report provides a synthesis of all the information and evidences gathered from the monitoring exercise.

1.2 Objectives of the monitoring exercise

The general objective of the monitoring exercise was to observe the entire voting/election process with keen interest in the efficiency of the process, voter turn-out, transparency, inclusiveness and integrity of the process and adherence to democratic principles. Specifically, the exercise set-out to achieve the following:

1. Assess the overall voter turn-out (*gather evidence on the registered voters against those who actually vote*).
2. Measure the efficiency of the Electoral Commission’s system and the effectiveness of its personnel.
3. Observe the possible level of participation of political parties.
4. Measure the level of transparency of the voting and counting process.
5. Assess the security situation in the selected voting centres.
6. Assess the level of general adherence to democratic processes and principles.
7. Identify possible challenges in the voting, counting and declaration process.

1.3 Methodology

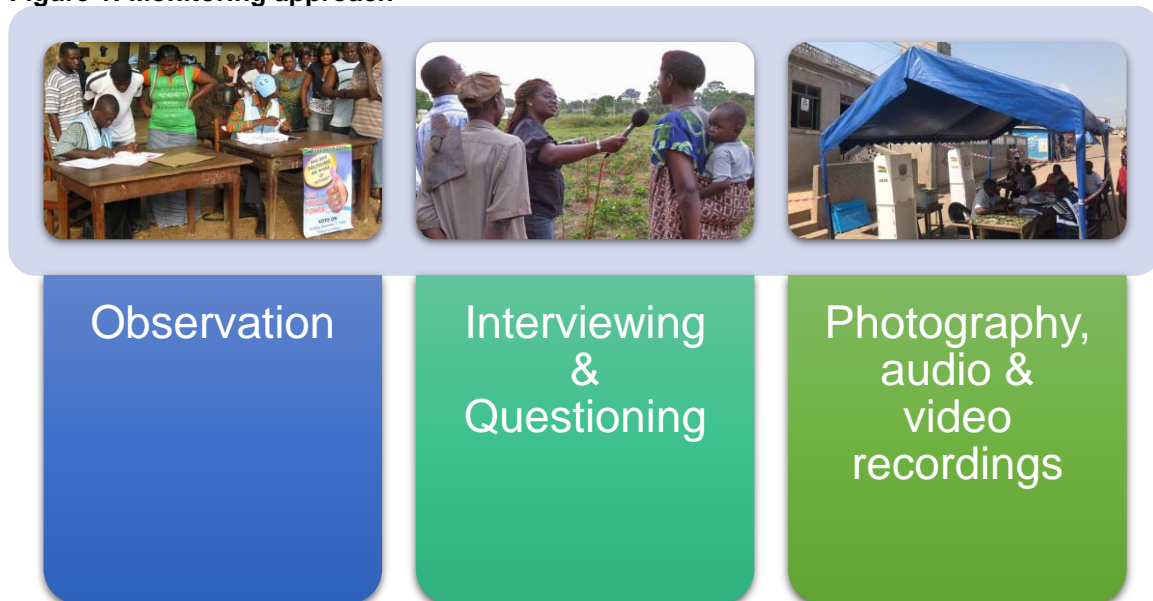
A systematic approach was adopted in observing, documenting and assessing various aspects of the local government election process. The following processes were followed:

Preparatory activities – the initial processes prior to the actual monitoring involved clearly defining the objectives of the exercise – to include assessing the efficiency and effectiveness of the entire process, identifying irregularities, observing the turn-out rate etc. This process also included understanding the legal framework governing the local government elections to identify key rules, regulations, and procedures that needed to be monitored. The process further included the development of a detailed checklist to guide monitors in collecting relevant data –including the voter turn-out, gender dynamics, availability of voting materials etc.

Recruitment of monitors – in all, ten (10) monitors were recruited for the monitoring assignment. These included individuals with knowledge of local governance, election laws, and relevant language skills. These monitors were trained on election laws, observation techniques, and reporting procedures. The monitors were deployed strategically across various polling stations, counting centers, and key locations to ensure some level of comprehensiveness in coverage.

The actual election day monitoring was done using 3 key approaches: Observation, questioning, and interview techniques. Photographs, audio and video records were also gathered to validate and strengthen the evidences (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Monitoring approach



1.3.1 Limitations of the monitoring exercise

The key limitation had to do with the limited number of observers deployed and the number of electoral areas covered. As a result of financial constraints, only ten monitors could be deployed to cover six selected municipalities/districts. Monitoring only six out of 216 metropolitan, municipal, and district assemblies in a local government election could present several limitations that may have affected the overall assessment of the electoral process. Some of the specific issues comprise the following:

1. *Limited representativeness* - the electoral process can differ significantly across regions, therefore, monitoring only six municipalities/districts may not have captured the diverse characteristics, and challenges present in other districts.
2. *Inability to identify all systemic issues* - observing a small sample may have limited the team's ability to identify systemic issues that may be widespread but not apparent in the monitored areas. Patterns of irregularities or challenges may have gone unnoticed.
3. *Missed localised issues* - each district has its unique socio-political and cultural context. Focusing on limited districts may have resulted in missing localised issues that are critical to understanding the overall transparency/fairness of the election process.
4. *Reliability of data* - the findings from a limited sample may lack statistical significance. It is therefore challenging to generalise observations or draw conclusive statements about the overall integrity of this particular electoral process.
5. *Difficulty in drawing comprehensive conclusions* - drawing comprehensive conclusions about the overall conduct of the election may be challenging with the limited data that was collected - potentially leading to incomplete or biased conclusions.

Despite these challenges, the team worked hard and in some instances, had all the data for the entire district. The evidence from the field was also complemented with information from media reportage (mainstream and social media) and press releases from the Electoral Commission. This helped to address some of the highlighted limitations.

2.0 Findings from the monitoring exercise

The evidence from the monitoring exercise is synthesised by objective and subsequently by municipality/district. Where data at the national level was accessible, it was utilised as the foundation for the evidence at the local level.

2.1 Overall number of contestants

Table 2 presents a snapshot of candidates that filed to contest the 2023 Local Government Elections in Ghana. Almost a third (28.3%) of the candidates contested for Assembly member positions and 71.7% aspired to be Unit Committee representatives. Having one in every three of the contestants standing for the Assembly member positions highlights the perceived importance of these positions. Meanwhile, the substantial numbers who competed for Unit Committee roles underscores a grassroots focus. The total candidate pool of 66,257 also signifies a robust and diverse participation in the election, portraying a collective eagerness to contribute to leadership roles at various levels of local governance.

Table 2: Number of candidates who contested the LGEs

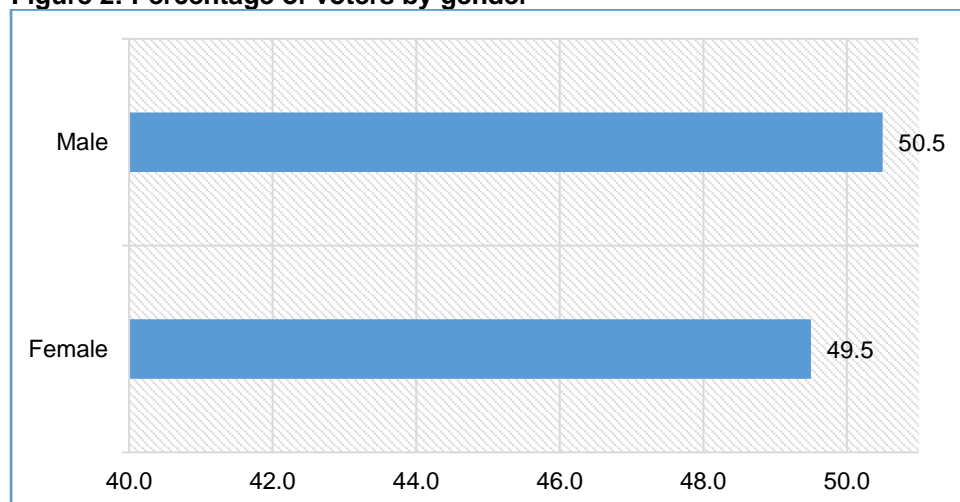
Position	Freq.	%
Assembly members	18,755	28.3
Unit Committee	47,502	71.7
Total candidates	66,257	100.0

Source: Electoral Commission of Ghana, October, 2024

2.2 Overall voter population

Figure 2 presents a breakdown of voters by gender. Of the total 6,200,000 voters, males accounted for 3,131,000, representing 50.5% of the electorate. In parallel, females constituted 3,069,000 voters, making up 49.5% of the total. This gender distribution underscores a relatively balanced representation in the voting population, with a marginal difference in favour of male voters. The equal participation of both genders is pivotal in ensuring a democratic process that reflects diverse perspectives and interests. These figures provide valuable insights for policymakers, political campaigns, and electoral organisations to tailor outreach efforts and policies that resonate with the diverse electorate and address potential gender-specific concerns.

Figure 2: Percentage of voters by gender



Source: Electoral Commission of Ghana, October, 2024

2.3 Gender distribution - Elected Females in DLEs in Ghana (1994 – 2023)

Women form 50.7% of Ghana's population (2021 Population and Housing Census), however, less than six percent of them on average, get elected in District-level elections. Table 3 presents a longitudinal overview of the proportion of women elected in district-level elections in Ghana spanning from 1994 to 2023. The data indicates a seemingly insignificant shift in the representation of women over the years, revealing a gradual increase in their participation. In 1994, only 2.9% of the total elected candidates were female, but this proportion has shown a consistent upward trend, albeit very slow. By 2023, the percentage of women elected has risen to 4.1%. Despite this positive trajectory, the figures underscore a significant gender disparity in elected positions, with men consistently dominating the electoral landscape. The highest proportion of women elected was observed in 2006, constituting 10.1% of the total elected representatives. While minimal progress has been made, the data signals the ongoing need for concerted efforts to enhance gender inclusivity in district-level elections in Ghana, emphasising the importance of initiatives aimed at promoting women's participation in political leadership roles.

Table 3: Elected Females in District elections in Ghana (1994 – 2023)

Year	Female	%	Male	%	Total elected
1994	122	2.9	4082	97.1	4,204
1998	196	4.1	4624	95.9	4,820
2002	341	7.4	4241	92.6	4,582
2006	478	10.1	4254	89.9	4,732
2010	412	6.8	5681	93.2	6,093
2015	276	4.7	5654	95.3	5,930
2019	234	3.8	5,924	96.2	6,158
2023	259	4.1	5,987	95.9	6,243

Source: Electoral Commission of Ghana

2.3.1 Gender distribution by election type and by PWDs

Table 4 offers insights into the dynamics of gender representation in both Assembly Member and Unit Committee elections, focusing on the number of candidates who contested and the proportion of male and female candidates who emerged victorious. In Assembly Member elections, a total of 16,925 male candidates contested, with 5,984 successfully winning their positions, constituting 35.4% of the total. Female candidates, numbering 1,049, secured 259 seats, representing a slightly lower success rate at 25%. In the Unit Committee elections, a larger pool of male candidates, 42,094, participated, with 22,646 winning positions, translating to a success rate of 54%. In contrast, female candidates, numbering 5,666, achieved a higher success rate of 59%, with 3,335 securing Unit Committee positions. These figures indicate variations in the success rates between male and female candidates in both types of elections, emphasising the need for continued efforts to promote gender equity and inclusivity in local governance through targeted initiatives and awareness campaigns.

Secondly, the data also indicated that 73 individuals with disabilities (PWDs), consisting of 55 males and 18 females, were elected as Assembly Members. Relatedly, a total of 67 PWDs, consisting of 38 males and 29 females, were also successfully elected as Unit Committee members (Table 4).

Table 4: Gender distribution by election type and by PWDs

Gender	No. who contested	No. who won	% of those who won	PWDs
Assembly Member elections				
Male	16,925	5,984	35.4%	55
Female	1,049	259	25%	18
Unit Committee elections				
Male	42,094	22,646	54%	38
Female	5,666	3,335	59%	29

Source: Electoral Commission of Ghana, October, 2024

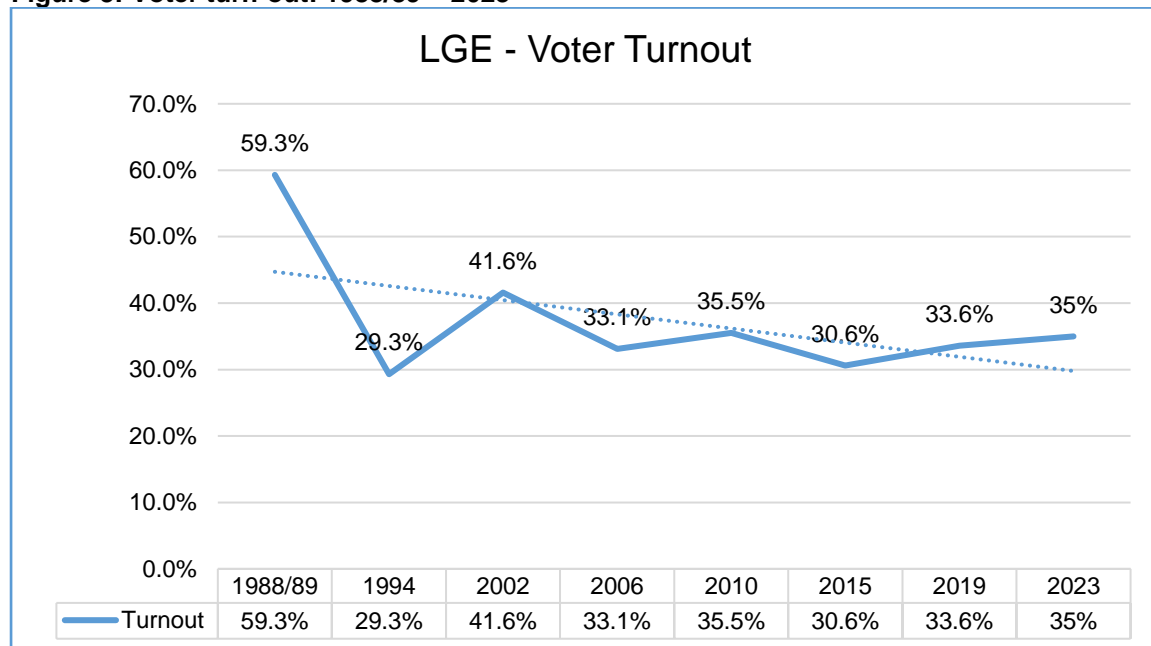
2.4 Voter Turn-out and overall participation

Voter turn-out over the years has been significantly reducing. Ghana's Local Government Elections are characterised by high levels of apathy. The records show that, participation in the local government elections that followed the 1989 elections has declined so much to the worry of many local governance experts. Only the 1988/89 elections is on record to have registered the highest voter turnout till date. Since inception of the local government elections, average voter turnout has hovered around 38% with probably the lowest being the 29.3% recorded in the 1994 elections (Figure 3). The December 2019 elections was not so different

in terms of voter turnout – with about three percentage point increase over the preceding election (33.6%).

The 2023 data suggests that the District Level Elections experienced a slight increase in voter turnout compared to the elections in 2019. Specifically, the turnout increased from 33.6% in 2019 to 35% in 2023, representing an increase of about two percentage points (Figure 3). However, the data from the monitoring exercise in selected districts showed average turn-out of about 43% (Table 6).

Figure 3: Voter turn-out: 1988/89 – 2023



Source: Compiled from online sources and the EC, 2023

2.4.1 Voter turn-out by region

The regional level voter turn-out figures show an interesting trend, where a significant number of peri-urban regions had voter turnout rates exceeding 50 percent, whilst urban regions had low levels of voter participation. Overall, thirteen out of the sixteen regions recorded turn-out rates higher than the national average. Notably, the North East region recorded the highest voter turnout at 55.2%, followed closely by the Northern region at 52.1% and Oti and Upper East regions both at 51.1%. Conversely, the Greater Accra region exhibited the lowest voter turnout at 18.0%, with Ashanti region closely following at 33.4%. The regional disparities in voter turnout highlight variations in civic participation, potentially influenced by factors such as local issues, mobilisation efforts, and socio-political contexts. The data provides valuable insights for policymakers, and advocacy groups, emphasising the need for targeted strategies to enhance voter engagement in regions with lower turnouts and maintaining effective practices in regions demonstrating higher civic participation. Understanding these regional dynamics is essential for fostering a more inclusive and representative democratic process.

Table 5: Voter turn-out by region

No.	Region	Voter Turn-out (%)
1	North east	55.2
2	Northern	52.1
3	Oti	51.1
4	Upper East	51.1
5	Upper West	50.8
6	Savannah	48.2
7	Ahafo	45.0
8	Western North	44.6
9	Bono	40.1
10	Eastern	38.6
11	Volta	37.2
12	Central	36.7
13	Bono	36.1
14	Western	33.7
15	Greater Accra	18.0
16	Ashanti	33.4

Source: Electoral Commission of Ghana, 2023

2.4.2 Voter turn-out in selected polling stations in the Ada West District

Table 6 summarises the voter turnout in selected polling stations within the Ada West District. The total number of registered voters across the seven selected polling stations was 3,159, with 1,550 valid votes cast and 30 rejected ballots. The overall voter turnout was 50.02% which is higher than the national average of 35%. This reflects a moderate to high level of civic participation in the electoral process and further indicates a significant portion of registered voters exercised their democratic right. Though the data suggests a generally positive engagement of the electorate in these specific polling stations, with a notable majority turning out to cast their votes, the turn-out is still relatively low. The low number of rejected ballots (30) contributes to the overall efficiency of the voting process, implying a relatively smooth and well-administered election in the sampled polling stations.

Table 6: Voter turn-out in selected polling stations in Ada West District

Name of Polling Station	Total No. of Registered Voters	Total No. Valid Votes Cast	No. of Rejected Ballots	Total Votes Cast	Voter turn-out
RC Primary Koluedor 1	646	Only total given	Only total given	Only total given	50.02%
RC Primary Koluedor 2	605	-Do-	-Do-	-Do-	
JHS Koluedor 1	390	-Do-	-Do-	-Do-	
JHS Koluedor 2	347	-Do-	-Do-	-Do-	
DC Primary Madavunu	394	-Do-	-Do-	-Do-	
Tehey Makpehe	204	-Do-	-Do-	-Do-	
Presby Church Koluedor	573	-Do-	-Do-	-Do-	
TOTAL	3,159	1,550	30	1,580	

Source: Field monitoring exercise, December, 2023

2.4.3 Voter turn-out in the entire Ada West District (Greater Accra Region)

Table 7 presents the evidence on the voter turnout across all the electoral areas in the Ada West District. The overall voter turnout for the local government elections in the district is 43.1% - which is also higher than the national average of 35%. Notably, Nakomkope electoral area recorded the highest turnout at 66.4%, reflecting strong community participation. Badzohe-Luta (56.6%) and Matsekope (59.2%) also demonstrate significant voter engagement. However, Akplabanya (32.5%) and Wokumagbe (42.0%) recorded lower turnouts, indicating potential challenges in mobilising voters in these areas. The diverse range of turnout percentages underscores the importance of understanding local dynamics and tailoring outreach strategies to enhance participation across all electoral areas in the Ada West District. Overall, the analysis provides valuable insights into the district's electoral landscape, facilitating targeted efforts to improve civic participation in future elections.

Table 7: Voter turn-out across Electoral Areas in the Ada West District

SN	Electoral Areas	Reg. Voters	Total Valid Votes	Rejected Ballots	Total Votes	% Turnout
1	Sege Koni	7,738	1,781	18	1,799	23.3
2	Badzohe -Luta	1,304	727	11	738	56.6
3	Nakomkope	1,353	884	15	899	66.4
4	Bornikope	3,000	1,495	35	1,530	51.0
5	Toflokpo	2,772	1,346	32	1,378	49.7
6	Matsekope	1,807	1,054	16	1,070	59.2
7	Koluedor	3,159	1,550	30	1,580	50.0
8	Hwakpo Addokope	2,921	1,316	23	1,339	45.8
9	Afiadenyigba	1,743	901	4	905	51.9
10	Caesarkope	1,489	810	22	832	55.9
11	Wokumagbe	1,669	695	6	701	42.0
12	Akplabanya	4,186	1,324	37	1,361	32.5
13	Anyamam	4,162	1,984	64	2,048	49.2
14	Goi	4,223	1,776	41	1,817	43.0
15	Lolonya	3,263	1,279	33	1,312	40.2
Total		44,789	18,922	387	19,309	43.1

Source: Field monitoring exercise, December, 2023

2.4.4 Voter turn-out in selected Polling Stations in the Suhum Municipality (Eastern Region)

Table 8 presents voter turnout data for selected polling stations in the Suhum Municipality in the December, 2023 district level elections. Notably, there was generally very low turn-out across all the polling stations that were monitored. The overall voter turnout for the Suhum Municipality stands at 19.1% - which is far lower than the national average. Specifically, Post Office Suhum 2 recorded the highest voter turnout at 25.3%, followed closely by Suhum Police Station with a turnout of 22.4%. Other polling stations, including Post Office Suhum 1B (21.4%), Presby Prim. Sch. Suhum 1B (8.3%), Mile 44 Highways Camp (17.4%), Presby Prim Sch. Suhum 2 (20.3%), and Presby Prim. Sch. 1A (18.1%), also recorded relatively lower turnout rates. This data provides crucial insights into the local dynamics of civic participation, offering a nuanced understanding of how different polling stations contribute to the overall electoral landscape. These variations are expected to inform targeted efforts to increase voter

awareness, address potential barriers to participation, and tailor civic engagement initiatives to specific communities within the Suhum Municipality.

Table 8: Voter turn-out in selected polling stations in the Suhum Municipality

Polling station	No. of registered voters	No. of votes cast by close of polls	Voter turn-out
Post Office Suhum 1B	397	85	21.4
Presby Prim. Sch. Suhum 1B	517	43	8.3
Post Office Suhum 2	522	132	25.3
Mile 44 Highways Camp	774	135	17.4
Presby Prim Sch. Suhum 2	636	129	20.3
Presby Prim. Sch. 1A	518	94	18.1
Suhum Police Station	700	157	22.4
Total	4064	775	19.1

Source: Field monitoring exercise, December, 2023

2.4.5 Voter turn-out in selected Polling Stations in the Otaten Electoral Area

Table 9 presents voter turnout percentages for specific polling stations in the Otaten Electoral Area, Greater Accra Region. Turnout varied, with some stations achieving higher percentages (e.g., South Odorkor 4&5 Sch (1) - 16.1%), while others had lower participation (e.g., South Odorkor 4&5 Sch (4) - 6.3%). The cumulative turnout for the Otaten Electoral Area was 11.3% - which is far lower than the national average of 35%. The data highlights the need for localized strategies, investigation into factors influencing lower turnouts, collaboration with community leaders, and continuous monitoring for future electoral improvements.

Table 9: Voter turn-out in selected polling stations in the Otaten electoral area - Greater Accra


Name of Polling Station	Total No. of Registered Voters	Total No. Valid Votes Cast	% Turnout
South Odorkor 4&5 Sch	409	66	16.1%
South Odorkor 4&5 Sch	407	58	14.4%
South Odorkor 4&5 Sch (2)	32	2	6.3%
South Odorkor 4&5 Sch (3)	50	5	10.0%
Odorkor McLean JHS	547	53	9.7%
Total	1445	184	11.3%

Source: Field monitoring exercise, December, 2023

2.5 Participation of political parties

Article 248 (1&2) - POLITICAL PARTIES AND CANDIDATES FOR ELECTION TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS' – states that:

- (1) A candidate seeking election to a District Assembly, or any lower local government unit shall present himself to the electorate as an individual, and shall not use any symbol associated with any political party.
- (2) A political party shall not endorse, sponsor, offer a platform to or in anyway campaign for or against a candidate seeking election to a District Assembly or any lower local government unit.



As a result of the constitutional restriction of Article 248 (1&2) imposed on Political Parties and candidates not to meddle partisan politics in Local Government Elections, political parties could not openly display the usual partisan opulence during the conduct of the 2023 LGEs.

Despite the constitutional restrictions, the partisan nuances were quite palpable as known partisan politically exposed persons from both the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the main opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC) were seen bringing voters to verify their correct polling stations to vote. Also, before and after the declarations, political party colours were seen being displayed as a sign of victory. In some instances, the design and background colouring of posters of some candidates were proof of their partisan affiliations.

For instance, in certain polling sites inside the Suhum Municipality, political party representatives implemented a tactic of providing transportation to select members as an incentive to facilitate their participation in voting.

2.6 Efficiency of the EC system/personnel (challenges faced by officials)


In all, the EC personnel demonstrated professionalism and competence in handling the voting process, utilising adequate equipment and experienced staff.

The personnel of the Electoral Commission (EC) stationed at the polling centers consisted of a Presiding Officer (PO), Verification Officer (VO), and Ballot Issuer. The majority of POs and VOs had prior experience working with the EC, demonstrating a thorough understanding of the electoral processes. Election materials, including ballot boxes, voting booths, Biometric Verification Devices (BVDs), enumeration sheets, manual verification forms, writing implements, hygiene supplies, directional signage, posters, A4 sheets, reflector jackets, rulers, seals, validation stamps, thumbprint pads, demarcation tape, ballot papers, voters register, multiple registration list, exceptional list, name reference list, and relevant forms such as the statement of poll for Assembly Member and Unit Committee Member, as well as the Tally Form for Unit Committee Member, were efficiently distributed to polling centers. EC personnel exhibited competence in their duties, with POs promptly addressing any issues or challenges encountered during the polling process. Despite the common issue of BVD malfunctions observed in previous elections under high pressure, such incidents were notably minimal in most of the centers visited. Infrequent challenges arose when the BVDs could not verify the fingerprints of some voters, leading POs to resort to manual verification forms. This challenge was attributed to the excessive exposure of voters' fingers to heat, resulting in fingerprint erasure. In the Ada West district for example, only four manual verification cases were recorded out of 19,309 votes, highlighting the overall effectiveness of the election administration process.

2.7 Level of transparency in voting and counting processes

The transparency of the voting and counting processes was meticulously maintained during the district-level elections – especially in all the centers monitored by the BRI360 team. The Presiding Officers (POs) strategically set up polling stations in open areas with clear entry and exit points, and the polling centers were appropriately demarcated to facilitate the smooth flow of the electoral exercise. Voter screens (voting booths) were positioned to uphold the principle of a secret vote, and ballot boxes were displayed openly, ensuring proximity to the voting screens to receive ballots and prevent any unintended mixing of ballots, such as those meant for District Assembly Elections and Unit Committee Elections.

Each voter received one ballot for the election of an Assembly Member and another for the Unit Committee Member, except in rare cases of a spoilt ballot, which the Pos usually handled by placing it in a separate envelope, distinct from the official ballot box. The barcode verification by the Biometric Verification Device (BVD) was promptly destroyed by the Verification Officers (VO), mitigating the possibility of a second vote. Agents representing the



candidates were present at the polling stations, closely observing the process and documenting voter identification numbers.

Crucially, the POs conducted the unsealing of both the Electoral Commission's (EC) seals and candidate agents' seals after 5:00 pm, ensuring transparency with public visibility, including security personnel and candidate agents. The validation stamp, uniquely identifying each polling station, was verified after pouring the ballot papers on a table, and the empty ballot box was displayed to the public. The counting process involved meticulous sorting of votes for each candidate, with POs displaying and recording each ballot appropriately, followed by the public announcement of results at the polling station.

This transparent process extended to the Collation Centers (Twerebua Pentecost for Otaten EA in Ablekuma North and RC JHS for Koluedor EA in Ada West) and other centers across the districts of focus. While ballots were not recounted at these centers, the votes for each candidate were recorded based on endorsed statements of polls (pink sheets) submitted by POs from the polling stations. For example, candidate agents, present at the collation centers, actively observed the aggregation process for the Twenty-Two (22) polling stations at Otaten EA and the Seven (7) polling stations in Koluedor EA. The recorded results were then endorsed by candidate agents on a statement of poll (pink sheet) before the official declaration at the collation centers for both Assembly Members and the Five (5) Unit Committee Members who emerged victorious in the election.

2.7 Assessment of Security Situation


Security arrangements were effectively managed during the district-level elections. At the Otaten Electoral Area (EA) in Ablekuma North, where five polling stations were consolidated into one location, the security detail comprised one Police Officer and one Immigration Officer. Similarly, at Koluedor EA in the Ada West District, which housed five polling stations, security oversight was provided by five Police Officers and two officers from the Ghana National Fire Service.

The Collation Center for Otaten EA, situated at Twerebua Pentecost in Ablekuma North, was bolstered by the presence of twelve standby Immigration Officers, contributing to a comprehensive security setup. This allocation of security personnel aimed to ensure the safety and orderly conduct of the electoral process at both the polling stations and the collation center. The strategic deployment of officers reflects a proactive approach to addressing potential security concerns and upholding a secure environment for voters, election officials, and observers throughout the electoral proceedings.

On the contrary, the Latebiorkorshie area presented a concerning scenario as, upon observation prior to the commencement of the electoral exercise, it became apparent that there was a notable absence of any security personnel at the polling stations. This lapse in security measures raises significant concerns, and it is noteworthy that despite the lack of a visible security presence, the voting process progressed without incidents of violence or chaos, suggesting a degree of operational success. However, it is imperative to address this security gap to ensure the safety of voters and the integrity of the democratic process.

2.8 General Adherence to Democratic Processes

In the context of the 2023 Local Government Election, several actions exemplified a sense of commitment and strict adherence to democratic processes. The foundational principle of 'one man, one vote' was rigorously followed, ensuring that each eligible voter had an equal say in the election outcomes. In accordance with Article 242 (a) of the constitution, one person was elected from each Electoral Area (EA) for both districts, reflecting the commitment to universal adult suffrage.



Furthermore, the voting and counting processes underscored a commitment to transparency, a cornerstone of democratic governance. These processes were conducted openly, allowing for scrutiny and observation, and the adherence to the principle of secret voting ensured the confidentiality of individual choices. These actions collectively demonstrate a dedication to democratic values, fostering a system that upholds the rights of citizens to participate in free, fair, and transparent elections.

2.9 Identified challenges in the voting, counting and declaration processes

(i) At South Odorkor 4&5 School Polling Center 1A, a visually impaired man encountered a challenge as there was no tactile jacket provided by the Electoral Commission (EC), with the Presiding Officer lacking one. However, the Presiding Officer, along with the accompanying aid, assisted the visually impaired voter in the voting process, ensuring his participation.

(ii) In Otaten Electoral Area (EA), several voters faced difficulty locating their designated polling stations, potentially impacting the overall turnout. Instances arose where assistance was required to guide voters to their stations, highlighting challenges in clear signage or information dissemination. Personal efforts were made to assist voters in finding their respective polling centers, emphasizing the need for improved directional guidance.

(iii) Some candidate agents displayed a lack of understanding of the counting process, leading to disruptions and delays. Despite this, the Presiding Officers maintained professionalism and upheld the integrity of the counting process by standing firm in adherence to established procedures.

(iv) The Electoral Commission's failure to conduct voter education on the non-use of indelible ink resulted in dissatisfaction among some voters. Certain individuals insisted on its application by the Presiding Officers, who, unfortunately, did not possess the required ink. This highlights a need for enhanced voter education to mitigate misunderstandings and ensure a smoother electoral process.

3.0 Other key issues/areas observed

In most of the polling stations visited including Koluedor Electoral Area (EA) of the Ada West District, Kanda Estate and Swedru Municipality, voting commenced promptly between 7:00 and 8:00am, accommodating all voters, including those with physical challenges. Each station was staffed by three officials – a Presiding Officer (PO), Verification Officer (VO), and Ballot Issuer (BI). The electoral process unfolded seamlessly without any irregularities, ensuring accessibility and efficiency.

In contrast, the Five Polling Centers at Otaten EA in Ablekuma North experienced a delayed opening, commencing at 9:00 am due to the tardy arrival of election materials. Around 10:00 am, candidate Eric Nyarko raised concerns with the PO of South Odorkor 4&5 School Polling Center 1B, urging the display of the voting screen to make voters' choices visible to the public, preventing the introduction of unauthorised ballots into the box. The PO maintained the importance of the right to secret voting and opted to display the ballot box openly.

Compounded by the fact that most of the Polling Centers were situated within schools still in session, the presence of pupils running through the centers during the voting process added an additional layer of complexity. Despite these challenges, the electoral proceedings continued, navigating through the circumstances to ensure the exercise was conducted as smoothly as possible.



- **Voter turn-out**

With the advantage of hindsight gained through observations in both rural and urban districts, it becomes evident that the voter turnout in rural districts surpasses that in city districts, influenced by several key factors.

(i) Rural communities exhibited a significant level of respect for their Assembly Members and Unit Committee Members, viewing them as immediate leaders who are closely connected to their daily lives. In certain instances, these local leaders are integrated into the extended family systems within these communities, emphasising the pivotal role they play. The risk of introducing partisanship into Local Governance Elections is particularly perilous in these contexts, as it can lead to division even among community chiefs.

(ii) The absence of transportation costs for voters in rural areas contributes to enhanced participation. Unlike their urban counterparts, voters in rural districts do not bear the financial burden of transportation to polling centers. This factor, coupled with the flexibility to return to their work or daily activities after voting, facilitates a more favourable environment for voter engagement in the rural electoral process.

- **Obstacles to voter participation in urban districts**

(i) As highlighted, the registration of voters at locations distant from their regular stations could contribute to voter apathy in Local Governance Elections (LGE). This anticipation materialised during the election in the Otaten Electoral Area (EA) of Ablekuma North, where a number of voters arrived at the five designated centers, only to find that their Polling Station Codes did not align with these locations. Frustrated by the mismatch, some voters chose not to venture further in search of their correct polling stations. A poignant example involved a soya bean hawker whom, one of our monitors assisted in locating her polling station through EC officials. Despite the guidance, she refused to proceed, citing fatigue as the reason.

(ii) Another barrier to voter participation in the city district stems from individuals unwilling to sacrifice their work commitments for the Local Governance Elections (LGE). The reluctance to forgo employment hours contributed to reduced voter turnout, particularly among those with demanding work schedules.


(iii) Additionally, people who have relocated from their initial voting areas may be deterred by the cost of transportation to return and participate in the Local Governance Elections. This financial burden contributes to a reluctance among relocated individuals to engage in the electoral process, impacting the overall voter participation in the city district.

3.1 Interesting Trends and Observations

(i) The apparent infiltration of partisan political interests in the Local Governance Elections (LGE) generated disinterest among voters, as evidenced by several rejected ballots where voters refused to thumbprint upon receiving their ballot papers.

(ii) An unusual observation during this Local Governance Election was the absence of indelible ink application, a standard practice in all elections since the inception of democracy in the country. The non-application of indelible ink raised questions about the adequacy of voter identification measures during the electoral process.

(iii) Limited accessibility to information regarding polling stations became apparent, particularly for individuals who registered during the Limited Voter Registration conducted solely at the district offices of the Commission. This lack of awareness regarding the EC application to check polling stations contributed to some voters' challenges in locating their assigned voting centers.



(iv) The Electoral Commission's seemingly undervalued emphasis on the Local Government Elections was evident in various aspects, such as the number of ballots issued compared to the registered voter count, the limited preparation involving registration conducted only in District Offices, and scheduling election dates on working days.

4.0 Challenges with the voting processes


Despite the successful conduct of the Local Government Elections, few challenges were identified across the entire process:

1. **Accessibility issues for Persons with Disabilities:** the absence of tactile jackets for visually impaired voters highlights a challenge in ensuring accessibility for persons with disabilities. The Electoral Commission should address this gap to promote inclusivity.
2. **Difficulty in locating Polling Stations:** instances where voters faced challenges in finding their designated polling stations indicate issues with clear signage and information dissemination. Improved directional guidance is essential to address this challenge.
3. **Lack of Voter Understanding on Indelible Ink Use:** The dissatisfaction among voters due to the Electoral Commission's failure to educate them on the non-use of indelible ink emphasizes the importance of comprehensive voter education to prevent misunderstandings.
4. **Partisan nuances despite constitutional restrictions:** despite constitutional restrictions on partisan activities, the observable partisan influence from known political figures and the display of party colours indicate challenges in fully maintaining a non-partisan environment during Local Government Elections.
5. **Limited gender representation:** the slow progress in increasing the representation of women in district-level elections, as evidenced by historical data, underscores the need for targeted initiatives to address gender disparities in local governance.
6. **Limited voter turnout:** despite a slight increase in overall voter turnout from the previous election, the average turnout remains relatively low. This challenges the goal of fostering active citizen participation in local governance.
7. **Challenges in voter verification:** occasional malfunctions of the Biometric Verification Devices (BVDs) leading to manual verifications highlight technical challenges that, while minimal, can impact the efficiency of the election process.

5.0 Conclusions

The 2023 Local Government Election in Ghana reflected a nuanced landscape, combining positive strides and challenges. While the national voter turnout saw a marginal increase, reaching 35%, specific districts like Ada West demonstrated commendable civic participation at 50.02%. Regional variations highlighted the importance of understanding local dynamics for effective voter mobilization.

Gender representation showed progress, with a gradual increase in women's participation, reaching 4.1%. The efficiency of the Electoral Commission's personnel and the transparency of voting and counting processes contributed to a trustworthy electoral system. Adherence to democratic principles, such as one-person-one-vote, fostered transparency and citizen participation. However, challenges, including the absence of tactile jackets for visually impaired voters and difficulty in locating polling stations, underscored areas for improvement. Addressing these challenges, along with enhancing voter education and mitigating misunderstandings, can contribute to a more inclusive and effective local governance process.



In essence, the 2023 Local Government Election showcased positive trends but calls for targeted interventions to address specific challenges, ensuring a democratic process that is transparent, inclusive, and responsive to the diverse needs of the electorate.

6.0 Lessons Learned


The evidence from the monitoring exercise brought to the fore a number of key lessons that could strengthen future DLE processes. These comprise the following:

- **Regional dynamics impact turnout:** understanding and addressing regional variations in civic participation are crucial. The notable difference in turnout between peri-urban and urban regions emphasises the need for tailored strategies to enhance engagement in areas with historically lower participation.
- **Gender inclusivity requires continuous efforts:** while some level of progress has been made in increasing women's participation, the slow pace suggests the need for sustained initiatives promoting gender inclusivity. Continuous efforts should focus on encouraging more women to participate in local governance.
- **Effective electoral management:** the efficient handling of election processes by Electoral Commission personnel, minimal equipment malfunctions, and transparent procedures underscore the importance of continuous training and equipping electoral staff.
- **Transparency is Key:** the meticulous transparency maintained in voting and counting processes enhances public trust. Emphasizing open procedures, from polling stations to collation centers, contributes to a credible electoral system.
- **Challenges require targeted solutions:** specific challenges, such as the absence of tactile jackets and difficulties in locating polling stations, highlight the need for targeted solutions. Implementing measures like improved accessibility and enhanced voter education can address these issues.
- **Inclusive Voter Education:** voter education should go beyond procedural information to cover critical aspects like the non-use of indelible ink. Ensuring voters are well-informed minimizes misunderstandings and contributes to smoother electoral processes.
- **Active citizenship:** encouraging citizens to actively participate in the democratic process is vital. Strengthening civic education initiatives can empower individuals to understand their roles and responsibilities in the electoral process.
- **Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities:** the experience of a visually impaired voter highlights the importance of ensuring accessibility for all citizens. Adequate provision of tactile jackets and other resources fosters an inclusive electoral environment.

7.0 Recommendations

Based on the evidence and the lessons learned from monitoring the District Level elections, a number of key recommendations are provided to guide the conduct of future exercises. Implementing these recommendations could significantly improve the efficiency, transparency, and inclusivity of future local government elections in Ghana.

1. **Enhanced voter education:** the Electoral Commission should prioritise comprehensive voter education programmes, covering not only procedural aspects but



also important details like the non-use of indelible ink. This will contribute to a better-informed electorate.

2. **Targeted gender inclusivity initiatives:** Continuous efforts should be made to increase the representation of women in local governance. Implementing targeted initiatives, mentorship programs, and awareness campaigns can encourage more women to participate as candidates and voters.
3. **Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities:** To ensure inclusivity, the Electoral Commission should guarantee the provision of tactile jackets and other necessary resources for persons with disabilities. This will create a more accessible and accommodating electoral environment.
4. **Continuous professional development for EC personnel:** While the Electoral Commission personnel demonstrated professionalism, continuous training programs can enhance their skills and readiness to handle potential challenges, ensuring smooth election processes.
5. **Regional engagement strategies:** recognising regional dynamics impacting turnout, political campaigns and advocacy groups should tailor their strategies to address specific issues and mobilize voters effectively, especially in regions with historically lower participation.
6. **Community-specific outreach:** implementing community-specific outreach strategies will enhance voter engagement. This includes understanding local dynamics and designing initiatives that resonate with the unique characteristics of each electoral area.
7. **Active citizenship promotion:** civic education initiatives should focus on fostering active citizenship. Encouraging citizens to understand their roles and responsibilities in the democratic process will contribute to increased participation.
8. **Adherence to constitutional restrictions:** Political parties and candidates should adhere strictly to constitutional restrictions on partisan activities during Local Government Elections. Efforts to maintain a non-partisan environment contribute to the integrity of the electoral process.

Annexes – Photo Galleries



Photo gallery_Suhm
Municipality_Eastern I



Photo gallery_Otaten
Electoral Area_Greater



Photo
gallery_Latebiorkorsh