

THE PRIMARY CONTENDERS (THE CANDIDATES, THE ISSUES, WHERE THEY STAND AND HOW THEY CAN WIN) BY ETSE SIKANKU. ACCRA: COLOURZONE, 2018. PP. 74.

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In Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince*, the 16th century political theorist offered unsolicited advice to existing royalty on how to operate and control their own kingdom. In absolute terms, Machiavelli's short treatise offered small nuggets of wisdom aimed at educating monarchs. While the document was published just under 500 years ago, its premise is evidently not trite, neither is Dr. Etse Sikanku's *The Primary Contenders* which offers political explanations and recommendations to the National Democratic Congress (NDC) [party] in light of the presidential primary elections, and indeed, academics whose research interest this is as well as pollsters who keep a clean tap on elections in Ghana.

Presented from the political, sociological and communicative tripod of Sikanku, this book is a worthwhile contribution to the political communication literature in Ghana. Specifically, in Ghana, where the literature on political communication may be grey and dearth, a monograph of this kind may well be welcome news to political sociologists and political communication experts and students in these fields. Himself a political sociologist, communicator and journalist, Sikanku offers this as a timely agency to the NDC primaries. Admittedly, and outside the remit of the NDC, it may

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well serve as an instructional manual for parties in abeyance, especially so immediately after losing political power. This short, glossy book is a quick read, with only six chapters and seventy-four pages, and can be read in a fairly short time.

Unlike the systematic chapter-by-chapter or section-after-section format of reviewing a book, the authors have decided to synthesise the issues raised in the book in order to harmonise the work for the reader, and to sustain interest.

The book offers introductions, profiles and analyses of candidates, thereby giving each potential delegate a closer perspective as to who to choose at the primaries. Again, at national elections in Ghana, once a candidate is selected, it offers the electorate a better view of who to vote or [to] not vote for. In other words, the choice of a flagbearer and their running mate for contending parties in the respective parties marks the end of contestations at the party level and the beginning of full electioneering. Again, the book caters for readership within the disciplines of political communication, political sociology and political science. This diversity of readership makes it a ready resource coupled with its compact volume. For the not-too-avid reader, this is a good discovery for knowledge. It initially comes across as a guide for voters, as it provides details on candidates' CVs and reasons as to why each would or would not serve well as Ghana's next President if they win the national elections against other party flagbearers. For the scholar, this presents further ideation for research and for the literature to proliferate. For instance, scholars could carry out a comparative study on ideological lines, or on gender and how that affects the narrative on contenders in a primary. Digested further, we surmise, the intended audience are the campaign teams, strategists, the contenders and party apparatchik. And, with a flurry of newspapers, panoply of radio stations and hordes of online news portals and a plethora of advertising avenues to contend with in a culturally-diverse country as Ghana, scanning *The Primary Contenders* for a political decision or counsel may be a good bargain after all. Arguably, a first of its kind in Ghana, "The Primary Contenders" reads as a first volume to an engaging, informative explanatory document on modern Ghanaian politics and its dynamic.

For further clarity, the author provides major factors, likely to shape the NDC's presidential primaries as commitment to grassroots, popularity, message experience and electability, ideology, and what he coins as 'uniter' and 'casha.' These variables, according to the author, would go a long way to influence the confluence of ideas in selecting a flagbearer as a veritable force to deliver the expected victory to the party. Of all these factors what stands out to us is ideology. Here, the author paints a convincing picture of the party's leftist 'social democracy' philosophy which Andrews Krow explains as the "implementation of economic policies which will ensure equal distribution of wealth" as opposed to the NPP's rightist laissez faire capitalist system which it calls 'property-owning democracy' (pp. 1-2). In the view of the author, "as a socialist party, the NDC aligns towards equality, collectiveness, camaraderie and a communal governance," thus making it "the party of egalitarianism and a party that is all too ready to shun the sometimes lofty and elitist sentiments associated with their political opponents" (p. 57). Standing on this argument as a plateau, "candidates should outline policies and programs that decidedly align with" this key ideology (p. 57), in order to equip voters to cast a smart ballot.

However, for a non-Ghanaian reader, this could be hard to appreciate as one flips through the pages in anticipation. Even more difficult is to review a book about Ghanaian politics that is specifically not written for a non-native target. However, to anyone who is an eager supporter of democracy everywhere, especially outside of Ghana, "The Primary Contenders" could make a fascinating look into another nation's political process in order to broach ideas.

A second dimension to this dilemma is how the author selected the six out of a race of thirteen contenders, for profiling. Methodologically, scholars are not likely to understand how the author selected and arrived at the sample size, out of the target population of thirteen. Be that as it may, this is only a prognosis into the chances or otherwise of the candidates, based on their pedigree on the political barometer.

Again, for a readership of voters, *The Primary Contenders* could have been a lot more detailed to help voters have a better appreciation of the contenders and their campaign trail. Although each candidate's accomplishments and

past jobs are listed and explained, their visions for Ghana are not. What will they do for Ghana's citizens? How can they serve a diverse country and still cater to each group's needs? With questions like these floating after the book's close, voters will need to turn to other resources to be fully equipped with the knowledge needed to make a sound electoral decision in a spirited campaign. It is also unclear what the response, reaction or patronage of the NDC as a political party may be to a book that appears fundamentally to serve its interests or other parties'.

Although all contenders are male, the idea of a woman as a balancing act in terms of gender parity could have been made for reflection in future primaries.

When it comes to readership of political candidates, it may feel odd to think a seasoned politician might turn to a novel about themselves for advice. Yet, in their desperate move to securing the ticket to the front row of their political party, every avenue, including this novel, may serve as a coo-ee, regardless of their political career and first-hand experience with Ghana's political system. After all, 'many hands make light work.' But the flaws that gnaw at the book in terms of spelling particularly cannot be ignored entirely. Instead, they can be appreciated, given that it was launched as a precursor only a few months to the presidential primaries of the NDC. With cleaner editing, formatting and proofreading, the issue may have been handled, though.

All said and done, Sikanku's second collection to the political communication literature provides an opportunity to political sociologists and political communication experts in particular, and students in the field of communication, political reporters and the general reader scraps of knowledge they can glean from the field.

WORK CITED

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