IEA Ghana
Making political transitions smoother

With wide-ranging consultation, capacity building and advocacy, the Institute of Economic Affairs Ghana (IEA) turned political polarization into unanimous support for its Presidential Transition Bill.

SETTING THE SCENE —Since Ghana returned to multiparty democracy in 1993, the country has held successive free and fair elections and is viewed as one of Africa’s most successful democracies. However, post-election periods have been ridden with tension and uncertainty, resulting from polarization among Ghana’s political parties. The chaotic transfer of political power in 2001 following historic presidential elections, for example, resulted in a highly polarized and acrimonious political climate that threatened to undermine the nation’s democratic and economic achievements.

WHAT IEA DID —In this unsettled political context, the Governance Centre of the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) – Ghana’s premier think tank – initiated research to examine the polarization of politics. It discovered that one of the main contributing factors was the lack of an established protocol for government transition. To help fill this gap, IEA employed a multipronged strategy to develop a set of guidelines that would govern future transitions of political power.

IEA orchestrated a consultative process that involved a wide range of actors – commencing a study, reviewing findings, making recommendations, participating in discussions and drafting, validating and re-drafting the guidelines. Through workshops and ongoing dialogue with the leaders of political parties, civil society organizations, the media, and other key stakeholders, IEA then worked to turn these recommendations into concrete legislation.

Based on this wide consultation, IEA developed a multi-partisan set of legally binding guidelines designed to govern future political transitions. The draft bill mandated the formation of a transition team, including members from both outgoing and incoming administrations, within 24 hours after election results were certified. It established the new office of an independent Administrator General to oversee a timely, transparent, and accountable transition. Importantly, the draft bill
THE OUTCOME — The resulting Presidential (Transition) Act, 2012 (Act 845) was passed unanimously by Ghana’s Parliament in March 2012 – no small feat considering the political tension out of which it was born. Key aspects of the law remain to be tested and some of these will only come into force when a transfer of power from one elected president to another occurs. All the same, the law already seems to be having a positive effect on the political climate. In fact, Ghana’s orderly 2013 transition could be attributed to the framework provided by Act 845.

The law is widely recognized as fundamentally an IEA initiative and IEA’s leadership in this policy process is only one of its many efforts to enhance democracy in Ghana. IEA also hosts presidential debates and works to expand women’s participation in the political process.

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