Ghana has done it again. When President-elect Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo accedes to office on 7 January following a decisive victory at last week’s polls, his win will mark the fourth peaceful transition of power since multi-party democracy was re-established in 1993 under the Fourth Republic, ushered in by former military strongman-turned civilian head of state Jerry John Rawlings.

Rawlings retains significant influence right across this oil-producing country but this time, rather than whip up bad blood and imply malfeasance, he embraced Akufo-Addo’s triumph and commitment to root out corruption — echoing the good wishes expressed from across Africa and the world.

“Through their peaceful conduct during the election, the people have written the next chapter in Ghana’s democracy. A democracy that continues to inspire across the region and the continent,” gushed UK Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson.

And he is right — it is all looking remarkably rosy — the World Bank this week proclaimed fiscal consolidation remains on track and that “technical problems” within the oil and gas sector should soon be resolved, freeing a resurgent civil society for maximum impact on the reform agenda currently pursued by all political parties.

With inflation now easing and GDP growth set to nudge 7.5% next year, Ghana represents something of an oasis of stability surrounded by fragile states.
Voter turnout was predicted to hit 80% of eligible voters but on the day only 62% made it to the polling booths, suggesting waning interest in the country’s binary politics.

There was also a welcome lack of polarisation over oil related issues — unlike in previous elections.

Since sweeping reforms in revenue management, clear indigenous participation rules and passage this summer of transparent licensing laws under the Petroleum E&P Act, there has been little to stir public opinion — except whether to plough money into health or infrastructure.

Oil output from the Tullow Oil-operated Jubilee field accounted for 10% of gross national product in 2014, but has since declined, and the Centre for Policy Analysis has said this figure will fall further with production actually stagnating in 2018.

Former parliamentary energy committee chairman Moses Asaga has anticipated that reserves may soon exceed 7 billion barrels of oil in place, alongside 6 trillion cubic feet of gas. However, activity has fallen amid uncertainty surrounding the maritime border dispute with neighbouring Ivory Coast — which may not see resolution until the end of 2019.

At stake is future output from Tullow’s $5 billion TEN field development, located entirely within the disputed zone, as it moves beyond production testing to pump a projected plateau of 80,000 barrels per day — and a swath of hydrocarbon potential in a chunk of deep-water acreage beyond the 3000 metre isobar.

Despite official confidence in Accra that Ghana’s case is watertight, expert opinion has warned that judges have yet to rule on the substantive arguments.

Extending the Ivorian boundary some 12 kilometres to the east into Ghana’s maritime waters remains a real possibility, says CMS Cameron McKenna’s head of investment arbitration task force Pieter Bekker, who is also a professor at Dundee University’s Centre for Energy, Petroleum & Mineral Law & Policy in the UK.

The jury is out on whether Ghana may reap incremental rewards from its Tano basin investment.

Ghana has made great strides in putting its upstream house in order before imminent licensing activity, building a nascent industry on the back of a pragmatic local content drive — it would be a real shame to see it lose a large chunk of national waters just before the cyclical upturn.