

CONTOURS OF AFRICAN DEMOCRACY: A NARRATIVE OF TAILORING GOVERNANCE TO LOCAL REALITIES– A GHANAIAN ODYSSEY*

AFRİKA DEMOKRASİSİNİN HATLARI: YÖNETİMİ YER-EL GERÇEKLERE UYARLAMA ANLATISI - GANA'DA BİR SERÜVEN

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Abstract: Democracy, as a system of government where the people have a say in the running of the affairs of the state, has been advocated largely by Western intellectuals and policymakers alike. Having taken root and bearing roots in Europe and beyond, it seems democracy offers some sort of hope and opportunity. However, for the African continent, this hope and opportunity continue to elude the people. This paper argues as its central point that for democracy to work effectively, it needs to take into consideration the cultural and traditional landscape of the region, state, or area where it is being implemented. The paper mentions the subjective nature of democracy and where its features or characteristics intersect. Africa as a continent must see and view democracy as such and go on to feature their traditions in their respective states. The paper mentions the efforts Ghana made (although with little democratic dividends) towards this argument and what happened to it.

Keywords; Democracy, Africa, Ghana, Government

Öz: Demokrasi, halkın devlet işlerinin yürütülmesinde söz sahibi olduğu bir yönetim sistemi olarak, büyük ölçüde Batılı entelektüeller ve politika yapan kişiler tarafından savunulmuştur. Avrupa'da ve ötesinde kök salmış olan demokrasi, görünürde bir tür umut ve fırsat sunmaktadır. Ancak, bu umut ve fırsat halen Afrika kıtası insanların uzağında kalmaya devam etmektedir. Bu çalışma, demokrasinin etkili bir şekilde işleyebilmesi için uygulandığı bölgenin, devletin ya da alanın kültürel ve geleneksel yapısını dikkate alması gerektiğini savunmaktadır. Çalışma, demokrasinin özne doğasından ve özelliklerinin ya da karakteristiklerinin nerede kesiştiğinden bahsetmektedir. Afrika bir kıta olarak demokrasiye bu gözle bakmalı ve ülkelerinde kendi geleneklerini ön plana çıkarmaya devam etmelidir. Çalışma, Gana'nın bu argüman doğrultusunda gösterdiği çabalardan (demokratik kazanımları az olsa da) ve bu çabaların sonucunda olanlardan bahsetmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler; Demokrasi, Afrika, Gana, Hükümet

* Geliş Tarihi: 16.10.2023. Kabul Tarihi: 12.12.2023. DOI: 10.54132/akaf.1376487.

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1. Introduction

In the intricate tapestry of global governance, the discourse surrounding democracy has often been dominated by Western ideologies and experiences. As we scrutinize the evolving landscape of political systems, it becomes imperative to unravel the complexities embedded in the implementation of democratic structures within distinct cultural contexts. This academic exploration embarks on a nuanced journey into the heart of Africa, specifically focusing on Ghana, to illuminate the imperative of tailoring democratic frameworks to the indigenous cultural and traditional realities of the region.

As we delve into the discourse, it becomes evident that the conventional narratives surrounding democracy have predominantly emanated from Western intellectual and political spheres. However, this study contends that for democracy to transcend beyond a mere transplant, it must be intricately tailored to reflect the rich cultural tapestry of the societies in which it is implemented. The examination centers on the African continent, positing that a comprehensive grasp of democracy necessitates an earnest consideration of cultural, traditional, and historical contexts.

In the wake of Africa's post-colonial era, the adoption of democratic governance emerged as a beacon of hope for socio-economic development and political stability. However, the stark divergence between Western conceptualizations of democracy and the lived experiences of African nations poses a compelling dilemma. Rooted in the profound conviction that democracy is not a one-size-fits-all model, this study contends that the success of democratic systems in Africa is contingent upon a meticulous integration of indigenous cultural values, traditions, and socio-political landscapes.

The examination commences by juxtaposing the Western notion of democracy with its application in African nations, with a particular focus on Ghana. The premise is anchored in the argument that democracy, as a system of governance, must be inherently shaped by the unique cultural and historical tapestry of the societies it governs. Through an exploration of Ghana's endeavors to weave traditional values into its democratic fabric, we delve into the nuanced intricacies of fostering a governance model that resonates with the collective consciousness of its people. As we navigate this academic inquiry, the study will traverse the philosophical underpinnings of democracy, the historical evolution of state theory in Europe, and the dialectical engagements that shaped the democratic ideals in the African context. Drawing parallels between the theories of renowned political thinkers and the pragmatic realities faced by African nations, the research seeks to unravel the multifaceted nature of democracy and its subjective adaptations.

In light of the dynamic political landscape, this research critically assesses the choices made by African nations, exemplified by Ghana, in adopting democratic

governance. By dissecting the various types of democracies implemented, the study aims to discern patterns that shed light on the intricate relationship between governance structures and cultural heritage. Ultimately, this academic exploration endeavors to contribute a comprehensive understanding of the symbiotic relationship between democracy and cultural context, offering insights that resonate beyond the immediate confines of Ghana to inform a broader discourse on the democratization of diverse societies.

Finally, this study employs a qualitative methodology to investigate the correlation between the experiences of individuals governed within a democratic framework and the integration of cultural traditions into successful democratic systems. The research relies on data generated by Afrobarometer to elucidate the perspectives of ordinary Africans regarding choices about living in a democratic society or otherwise. The investigation encompasses a comparative analysis between Western democracies (Europe and the US), emphasizing their achievements in democratic implementation, and the challenges encountered by the African continent in striving for a sustainable democratic governance model. Historical evidence is examined to comprehend the variations observed in Western democracies, with a particular focus on how these thriving democracies incorporate cultural traditions and their distinct realities and experiences are quite different from that of Africa. The paper delves into the democratic struggles faced by Ghana in its pursuit of enhancing the representativeness of its political system within the context of traditional values.

2. Democracy and Its Subjective Nature

Contemporarily, one of the most contested words in politics is the term democracy. The term democracy originates from the word *demokratia*, in Greek broken into two parts, '*demos*' meaning people and '*Kratos*' meaning rule, it conveys succinctly the 'rulership' of the people. It has attained several meanings, some of them are, according to Andrew Heywood (2003: 330), "rule by the people; democracy implies both popular participation and government in the public interest and can take a wide variety of forms". According to John Hirst (2004: 10) democracy means "a society in which the citizens are sovereign and control the government". According to Joseph Schumpeter (1942: 250), "the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide using a competitive struggle for the people's vote" he further adds "the purpose of the democratic method [is] not to select representatives who carry out the will of the people, but to choose individuals who [will] govern on their behalf". These definitions suggest firstly that the rule should be in the interest of the people and secondly, one that the people approve of. It follows therefore that democratic means or forms of government have in them similar characteristics, the essential features of democracy (the paper will call it). Although not exhaustive, some significant features of government or governance that make them democratic are rooted in the democratic

governing processes visible in the earliest and contemporary democratic states. First, the three ideals central to democracy as mentioned by Thomas Marshall (1950), the civil rights—the principal rights and the cornerstone for individual freedom; the political rights—the rights that enable citizens to participate in governing the state and finally, the social rights—the primary rights to welfare and security in the state. More so, human rights and secularism to some extent are significant features of democratic governments. Another important feature is voter enfranchisement and political participation. These two ensure that citizens or people, (as in the literal wording of the term democracy), actively contribute to the governing of the state. Most other features of democracy go into categorizing the kind of democratic governance a country has chosen, like say a social democracy that prioritizes welfare or the equality of citizens. Aside from that, a democratic state must certainly have the features mentioned above (or aim at the ideals).

There are different types of democracies, being that it is the people who are governing, different people will have different priorities. It is also important to note that democracy here refers strictly to the governing of the state, considering that democracy can exist in different places like markets and workplaces. First, the social democracy, where the state is concerned greatly with the welfare or equality within the state. It developed over time after World War II when most European countries had their governments as Social Democratic parties like Sweden, and Western Germany, etc. (its evolution goes beyond the scope of this paper).¹ Second, Liberal democracy, a form of democracy that shares an affinity with the philosophy of liberalism. In other words, liberal democracy focuses more on individual freedom and limiting state interference. Third, direct democracy, is the hardest and most complex among the types of democracy so far. Direct democracy is where all citizens within the approved age of political participation engage actively in governing the state. It is opposed to indirect or representative democracy (a contradiction of terms as mentioned by Jean Jacque Rousseau, 1762), where officials are elected to represent the people. Here, citizens are called upon to partake in policy discussions and their adaptation. This kind of democracy was practised in Ancient Greek city-states, under Cleisthenes the Athenian lawgiver, Athens is said to have become democratic in 508 BC thereby naming Cleisthenes, the “father of Athenian democracy” by historians.² Fourth, the representative kind of democracy where officials are elected on behalf of the people to the legislature. And finally, constitutional democracy, where the state is governed strictly by clear-cut specifications from the constitution— outlining the rights, freedoms, responsibilities and duties of the people and political leaders alike.³

¹See Ben Jackson, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*

²See Ancient Greek Democracy. <https://www.history.com/topics/ancient-greece/ancient-greece-democracy>

³ See Foldvary, F.E. (2011). *Democracy, Constitutional*. In: Chatterjee, D.K. (eds) *Encyclopedia of Global Justice*. Springer,

2.1. The Subjective & Variations in Democratic Governance

Democracy having different kinds implies that different states differ in terms of their democratic processes but essentially have the features or characteristics aforementioned playing out in their political dispensation. It could also be understood that the kind of democratic processes that take place within the state should not be divorced from the country's cultural, sociological, or historical aspects or dimensions. An intriguing example of the difference between States with differences in democratic processes or means that is tailored to their historic or cultural heritage is the difference in the term *secularism* and *Laicite*. The state does not take the form of any religion, mostly when it citizens practice diverse religions is known as secularism and the French version is *Laicite*. However, to assume that *Laicite* is the same as secularism is false, consequently, secularism in the United States of America is far different from that of the French Republic. France bans any conspicuous show of religious symbols like the Muslim headscarf (hijab), Christian crosses, the Jewish kippa and the Sikh turbans in public (Vaisse, 2004). It states in the first article of the 1905 Law in the Separation of the Churches and State, "the republic ensures freedom of conscience" second article, "the republic does not recognize, compensate or subsidize any religion" (France24, 2016). Henceforth, the state and consequently public places should not wear or have religious symbols, or persons should not appear with religious symbols. Simply put, the citizens are all seen as French and not as Christian or Muslim French. Unlike the United States where religion is conspicuous in the state like the national motto "In God we Trust", or the cliché ending the speeches of their political leaders, "God Bless America" and the prayers held in Congress, Christian prayers, and sometimes Muslim prayers (Crain, 2019). This distinction highlights the cultural divide between the two states: in France, where there has long been conflict between the state and the Church, they believe this type of secularism (*Laicite*) to be the best; in contrast, secularism is not understood in this strict sense in the US and many other democratically run countries across the world.

Another example is the Lebanon type of democracy which also takes into consideration the Lebanese cultural, historical, and sociological heritage. Lebanon has diverse religions or sects— there are the Maronite Christians, Greek Orthodox, Protestants, the Sunni Muslims, the Shiite Muslims, Jews, Baha'is, Buddhists, Hindus, etc.⁴ Lebanon's democracy is the kind of democracy where political offices are filled through ethnic, tribal, religious etc. lines. This kind of democracy is called Consociationalism. When political offices are filled strictly on religious lines then it is called Confessionalism.⁵ Therefore, in Lebanon, the President of the state is from the

⁴See the US, Report on International Religious Freedom: Lebanon, 2019. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/lebanon/>

⁵ See the entry by the United States Institute of Peace on "Lebanon's Confessionalism: Problems and Prospects". <https://www.usip.org/publications/2006/03/lebanons-confessionalism-problems-and-prospects>

Maronite Christians, the Prime Minister is from the Sunni Muslims and the Speaker of Parliament is from the Shia Muslims. This explicitly shows how democratic processes consider the realities of the people in terms of sociology, cultural or historical heritage.

3. The Evolution of State Theory and Democracy in Europe

The Philosophical & Dialectical Engagements

In the fifteenth century, Europe was fraught with empires and not states as it has come to be known currently in the political parlance, the Great Britain Empire, the Ottoman Empire, and the Russian Empire among others. As it was mentioned earlier, a significant role played by the Reformation and Enlightenment period of the continent was its ability to question the accepted standard or norms of society thus it set in motion what has now become the democratic state. Painstakingly assessing John Locke's Two Treatises of Government (aside from Locke there have been numerous thinkers who have provided a thesis for the conceptualization of the state) provides a clear picture of what the environment was in the seventeenth century. The Two Treatises Of Government authored by Locke provides in its first part an answer or challenges Sir Robert Filmer's *Patriarcha* which is a book that argued the divine rights of kings as monarchs, and the second part of the treatises provides the basis of the formation of government and here '*State of Nature*' is mentioned.⁶ This is a hypothetical state in political theory that posits that man before the creation of the state had full control over all that he/she could do, and it was because to secure him/herself from harm or injury to property that everyone corporated to form a state. This is also an understanding shared by Jean Jacques Rousseau, an Italian philosopher, and Thomas Hobbes an English philosopher among others.⁷

It is important to note that most of these writings or dialectical exercises considered the question of governance with Europe as their point of reference and point of departure, in other words, the European environment was the basis on which these suppositions were made. That is, the European cultural heritage provided the backbone or was a synthesis for the creation of the current state which happens to thrive under democracy. In saying this, it does not mean the creation of the state and democracy is exclusive to the advantage or workable only under the European environment but that, it is grounded in the very meaning and understanding of what these enlightenment thinkers imposed. In other words, the meanings of terms take the form of what these enlightenment thinkers have imposed on them or spring from a Eurocentric perspective. An example of these terms that could easily take the meaning or form of a Eurocentric perspective is civilization, modern, religion, beauty, rich, and

⁶ Before Locke's text, the Two Treatises of government, Robert Filmer's text which was primarily supporting divine rights of monarchs had a lot of favour among the intelligentsia. However, after the strong argument put forward by Locke in his text, Robert Filmer's argument continued to lose credibility.

⁷ See Rousseau's Social Contract as well as Hobbes Leviathan texts

certainly, democracy (which is part of the aims of this paper to argue that democracy should be understood from the African reality and not as a wholly imported commodity to the African continent).

It is part of this significant difference in the meaning of terms or connotations (here being civilization) that perhaps awarded the rights of Western states to intrude the continent of Africa, although other motives are behind this intrusion. This is depicted in the copious writings of Westerners, a popular notion is that it is the responsibility or burden of the white man to civilize the African continent, the '*White Man's Burden*' succinctly called (this is depicted in the poem of Rudyard Kipling titled *The White Man's Burden*).⁸

3.1. The Evolution of the Nation-State

In political science, the now nation-state is said to have been accepted as an international actor in international politics after the end of the religious wars that led to the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 (Farr, 2005). This war lasted for thirty years and caused a lot of damage throughout Europe, there were finally peace treaties signed in the cities of Osnabruck and Munster collectively known as the Peace of Westphalia. However, these states did not look like how states are now; it was the beginning of what will be known today as sovereign States. Sovereignty was the significant achievement of Westphalia, it ensured that States were not intruded by external forces and if there happened to be an aggressor amongst states collective security was to be activated i.e., states come together to fight the aggressor. Democracy was not specifically an attribute of these states however, freedom of movement and religion quite existed. Democracy took some time to have its seeds planted. This is seen in the Glorious Revolution of England in 1688 where the Catholic Monarch King James II was overthrown and replaced by his daughter Mary and William of Orange, her Dutch husband. The motives behind the actions of the parliament include political as well as religious reasons, however, this was what set in motion the political democracy of Great Britain.⁹ Worthy of mentioning, before this event was the infighting between the barons and the crown, and later between the parliament and the crown that forced the monarch to sign the *Magna Carta* and later the Bill of Rights respectively– both signify the evolution of what is now known as the democratic state. The trailblazing state in terms of democracy was the newly established United States of America when it finally broke the shackles of colonialism under Great Britain in 1776. The US democratic trail was the hallmark for states to replicate. However, the question arises, how come women and blacks were not allowed voting rights in such a trailblazing democratic state? (Women began voting after the 19th Amendment of 1920, and

⁸ See the full poem of Kipling portraying the white as the saviors of the universe, thus brining civilization to other parts of the world especially Africa

⁹ See the entry on the Glorious Revolution. <https://www.history.com/topics/european-history/glorious-revolution>

1965 for Black women). The answers to this question will be found in examining the evolution of States and most significantly in the Western or European cultural or sociological construct or understanding.

What was happening to the African continent during these periods of change? While the continent had structural leadership based on ethnic or tribal affiliations, such as chiefs, and some areas were flourishing, it also experienced enslavement and later colonization. Unlike Europe, Africa did not have the opportunity to explore diverse governing mechanisms, which has resulted in a difference in the nature of statehood. And this has led to what is found in the difference of the nature of statehood in both continents, in Europe, most of the states are termed Nation-States whilst in Africa, the states are termed State Nations. A nation is primarily psycho-cultural (i.e., language, culture, religion, history etc.) while a state is primarily a political-legal concept. Nationalism is thereby the sense of loyalty towards a nation. In this, Raji & Encloe distinguishes between nationalist ideology which is the “self-conscious attitudes and feelings towards nation and nationalist movement, social and political processes that seek to fulfil these attitudes and feelings” (Raji - Encloe, 1969: 142). They further mentioned the difference in the sphere of nationalism, the first, ‘formative nationalism’—the process of nation-building thus involves the effort to throw off foreign rule and establish a new nation, the second, ‘expansive nationalism’—annexation of territories or contest of lands, the third, ‘the prestige nationalism’—the process of nation-aggrandizing. Contemporary France is a form of prestige nationalism, Nazi Germany an expansive nationalism and the bulk of African states formative nationalism. This spells out why most European countries are easily known as nation-states since there was the psychological condition where one’s loyalty was to the nation and the African countries as State-nation, being that it was later after the European settlers demarcated borders which represented statehood that the sentiment of nationalism was kindled in the people and the African leaders alike.

4. The Traditional Landscape of Africa and the West

Africa, the second-largest continent, encompasses approximately 20% of the global land area and boasts over 50 countries, making it the most country and ethnicity-rich continent. This diversity is reflected in a population of 1.34 billion as of 2020, positioning Africa as the second most populous continent, with projections exceeding 2.5 billion by 2050. The continent is geographically segmented into West, East, South, North, and Central regions, each characterized by unique countries and ethnicities. Despite a plethora of languages, historical influences from Europe and Arabic-speaking empires have led many African nations to adopt English, French, Portuguese, or Arabic as their official languages.

The African continent is rich and diverse, although it has had a significant intrusion on its culture and society during the colonial period or even prior (i.e., the slavery period) it still retains its cultural heritage, and this is what forms the African society.

Africa continues to preserve its rich heritage, while European culture, influenced by the ideas of thinkers emerging from the Reformation period led by Martin Luther in the sixteenth century, has undergone significant transformations. The Reformation period of Europe undoubtedly has had significant consequences on the overall culture of the continent especially because it was followed by the Enlightenment period. The Enlightenment being a period of reasoning, skepticisms and as its famous motto relays “*Sapere Aude*” translated as “*dare to know*”, transformed the cultural heritage of the European continent i.e., standard cultural norms began changing, what was considered evil or immoral were through dialectical means proven to be otherwise, among others. Unlike the African continent where cultures of old age still flourish. The Himba tribe of Namibia is a place quite famous because of the number of people who have visited them and shared on social media (BBC, 2017). The continent of Africa is replete with such tribes that still preserve their cultural heritage, and although the urban areas have slight changes in their *modus vivendi*, they still retain within themselves their sense of tribal affiliation in terms of leadership etc.

Because of these differences in the preservation of culture between these two continents, there has recently been the issue of why African states are not accepting persons of LGBTQ+, there is, passing laws to safeguard people who identify with that community. Most often the argument put forth by the African states is that, these practices are against their culture. This is even echoed recently by the Ghanaian parliament which is trying to outlaw LGBTQ+ practices or ways of life¹⁰. The fundamental point that seems to be overlooked is that African cultural heritage has shown remarkable resilience in the face of colonialism, while European cultural heritage has been profoundly influenced by the Enlightenment period. The core culture of Africa, if they will significantly change, may take many more generations to change, as certain actions that would be frowned upon and met with consequences in a town like Agona Swedru in Ghana could be viewed as a symbol of liberalism and trailblazing in a town like Ilmenau in Germany. Some perhaps worth noting difference is the notion of happiness, maturity, love, God etc. which happens to play out and have significantly different meanings between the two continents. For instance, it has become a custom for Mauritanian women to celebrate when they successfully go through divorcing their spouse (TRT, 2020). This informs somewhat the notion of what is meant by happiness by these women, which is different from the conventional understanding of what happiness is.

4.1. Colonial Woes on the African Continent

The destruction of colonialism is such that peoples within the African continent were displaced on a large scale which in this day and age would have been considered

10 See the entry, The Washington Post (2021). Lawmakers in Ghana seek to outlaw advocacy for gay rights. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/07/28/ghana-lgbtq-bill/>

a serious humanitarian crisis. Because of the forced borders springing from the Berlin Conference of the latter part of the 19th century, ethnicities found themselves living within two countries, that is, one ethnic or tribe could be found in one country and right across the border (sometimes far from the border) the remaining part of the ethnic members are found living there. For instance, between Ghana and Togo, there are shared ethnicities such as Ewe, Konkomba, and Akposso. In addition, Ghana and Burkina Faso share ethnicities such as Mossi, Sissala, and Dangara Kusasi. Within central Africa the Tshokwe found themselves living in Zambia, Angola, and Congo among other countries (Asiwaju, 1984). This is a significant cause of conflicts like what ensued in the Nigerian Civil War in 1967¹¹. The situation has also further caused the fragmentation of the African continent, from when the greater proportion of African states regained independence till now more than 10 countries have been subdivided into states like the division between Rwanda and Burundi, Sudan, and South Sudan, and still an ongoing divide over self-determination in African countries like Somalia and Somaliland, Morocco and Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic.

The destruction of colonialism is such that different persons and multiplicity of languages and tribes are situated within a single territory known as a country, causing a plethora of minority-related issues. This issue was conveniently dealt with by using the languages of the colonial powers as an official language. The problem of having diverse languages or persons living within a state is something even countries with strong democratic institutions struggle with. It took the European Commission to create a charter such as the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML) in its efforts to preserve languages and grant freedom of the usage of languages. The EU also has the High Commissioner on National Minorities. However, within the African continent, due to colonialism, there has been a multiplicity of minority groups, although the African Union has taken some steps to deal with issues of the minority. (The African Union has made significant progress in addressing the issue of minority groups in Africa by adopting the African Charter on Human and People's Rights in 1981. The establishment of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights has played a crucial role in monitoring and reporting on human rights violations, while also engaging with member states to promote awareness and implementation of the Charter's provisions.)

5. Africa and Democracy

Before the now strong favour for democracy, democracy was seen as an alien concept, and it was claimed that its introduction would "violate the integrity of African culture". This misconception according to Ake stems from the fact that there is confusion between the institutional manifestations of democracy and the principles

¹¹ The Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), also known as the Biafra War, was a conflict that occurred in Nigeria. It was primarily fought between the secessionist state of Biafra, located in the southeastern region of Nigeria, and the Nigerian government. The war was triggered by political, economic, and ethnic tensions, with the secessionist movement seeking to establish an independent state for the predominantly Igbo ethnic group. The war resulted in a significant loss of life and had a lasting impact on the political and social landscape of Nigeria.

of democracy (Ake, 1991). African societies were to some extent infused with democratic principles. These principles could include the accountability of leaders. “Chiefs were answerable not only for their deeds but for natural catastrophes like famine, epidemics, floods and drought” (Ake, 1991: 34). Chiefs were required to go into exile or asked to die as a consequence of their misdemeanours. There was a high level of participation in the activities of societies by the governed or ruled and in some instances or periods, with consent of the governed. Why then was Africa not fully and easily democratized when it finally ended the shackles of colonialism? According to Ake, the democratization of Africa was substituted with the so-called development of Africa. Most African leaders opted for a one-party system, *inter alia*, with claims that the newly founded states needed drastic developmental projects and redistribution of power; political pluralism would hamper such efforts. Several African states opted for a one-party state system during different periods in their history. For example, Tanzania established the Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) as the sole legal political party in 1965, which remained in power until multiparty democracy was reintroduced in 1992. Kenya operated as a de facto one-party state under the Kenya African National Union (KANU) from 1969 to 1991. Zambia established a one-party state under the United National Independence Party (UNIP) in 1972, which lasted until multiparty democracy was reintroduced in 1991. Similarly, Malawi was under the rule of President Hastings Banda and his Malawi Congress Party (MCP) from 1964 to 1994, when multiparty democracy was reinstated. Ghana also experienced a period of one-party rule. After gaining independence in 1957, Ghana was under the leadership of President Kwame Nkrumah and his Convention People’s Party (CPP). During these periods, opposition parties were banned, dissent was suppressed, and political pluralism was discouraged.

In the 1960s, (the Year of Africa) being the period seventeen states regained independence aside from a handful of states like Ghana and Guinea that regained independence in the late 1950s, saw the post-colonial African continent fraught with states with some semblance of democracy more or less imposed upon them by the erstwhile colonial powers.¹² Ghana, for example, had to make it a point in its Constitution that the Ashanti Kingdom was excluded from the other regions that were to be under the political control of the new state. Aside from this, other concessions such as providing for land reforms, minority rights, federalism etc. had to be made before the African states could gain full control over the political affairs of the state.

These new states had to be governed anyway, considering the absence of administrators, minimal political institutions etc. Kwame Nkrumah mentions that when the British left the country, they collected everything and ransacked the buildings where they used to govern the Gold Coast until nothing was left behind (Nkrumah,

¹² See the entry on “The Year of Africa” authored by Katherine Everett, Emily Hardick, Damarius Johnson. https://origins.osu.edu/article/year-of-africa-1960-rumba-pan-africanism-Kariba?language_content_entity=en

1963). The new African leaders were to find ways to develop or build the nation. 'Democracy' was the system of government with inspiration from pan-africanism coupled with Marxism, Socialism, and Lenin-Marxism amongst others. These African states resorted to these socio-economic ideas to build the newly formed states (or not). Democracy was also chosen because the new states had diverse ethnicities or tribes living within them, some had no clear majority of tribes in them while some had, consequently, to reach a consensus between these tribes the notion of nation-building was supported through democratic means thus voting. "Democracy in Africa is an experimental process in a new generation of countries", a reference to 21st-century Africa, what about 20th-century African states? (Sklar, 1983: 12). The grappling of Africa with the democratic system of government has led to many variations outlined by Richard Sklar in four. First, the liberal democracy, where the constitution limits the powers of government and "citizens enjoy the freedom of association to compete for office in free elections at regular intervals", he mentions Nigeria, Gambia, and Mauritius to have had some lingering semblance of such democracy. The second is guided democracy, where there is a one-party state, the government of Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya. Third, social democracy, was largely the theory of Nyerere of Tanzania seen through the Arusha Declaration of 1967 aimed at minimizing social inequality. The fourth is the participatory democracy, which was seen in Zambia, during President Kenneth Kaunda where there was the encouragement of all and sundry so that "no single individual or group of individuals shall have a monopoly of political, economic, social or military power" (Kaunda, 1971: 37). This led to Zambia's constitutional declaration of a "One Party Participatory Democracy" in 1973.

It shows how these African states have struggled to implement the democratic system of government for various reasons. When other forms of government are mentioned for example authoritarianism, it harks back to the political and economic traumatic moments experienced in the continent by some leaders like Mobutu Sese Seko and so, it perhaps scares the African to imagine his or her state under such rule. Given the number of military coup d'états that took place between 1950 and 2023, precisely two hundred and twenty two (220), including both failed and successful coups, Africans are aware of what it is like to be ruled by the military. Below in fig.1, the successful and failed coups in Africa spanning from 1950 to 2023 are outlined.

Decade	Total coup attempts	Successful	Success rate
1950-1959	6	3	50%
1960-1969	41	25	61%
1970-1979	42	18	42.9%
1980-1989	39	22	56.4%
1990-1999	39	16	41%
2000-2009	22	8	36.4%
2010-2019	17	8	47.1%
2020-2023	14	9	64.3%

Fig. 1 (Megan Duzor & Brian Williamson, 2023)

The choice of democracy is seen in the survey of the Afrobarometer Survey presented in the ‘Democracy in Africa: Demand, supply and the ‘dissatisfied democrat’ policy paper. The following are some of the results of the survey carried out in more than 30 African countries.

“Respondents were asked:

Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion?

Statement 1: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.

Statement 2: In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable.

Statement 3: For someone like me, it doesn’t matter what kind of government we have. (% who say democracy is preferable)

There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives?

A. Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office.

B. The army comes in to govern the country.

C. Elections and Parliament are abolished so that the president can decide everything. (% who “disagree” or “strongly disagree”)

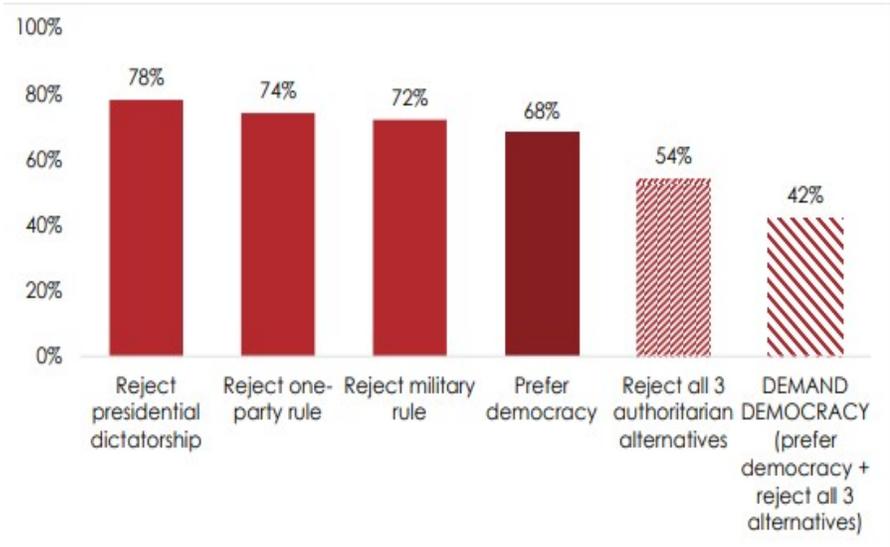


Fig.2 (Afrobarometer, 2019) Shows the results of Africans rejecting authoritarian rule in favour of democratic governance.

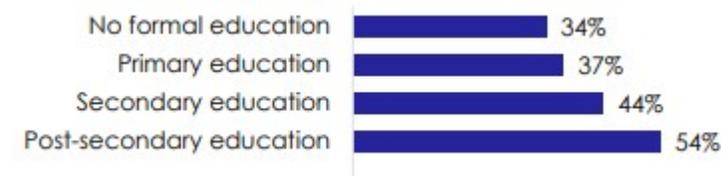


Fig.3. (Afrobarometer, 2019) Shows the level of education and how citizens in African states demand democracy.

Demand for democracy was also the highest in those with post-secondary education although those without formal education also had an appreciable per cent of demand for democracy.

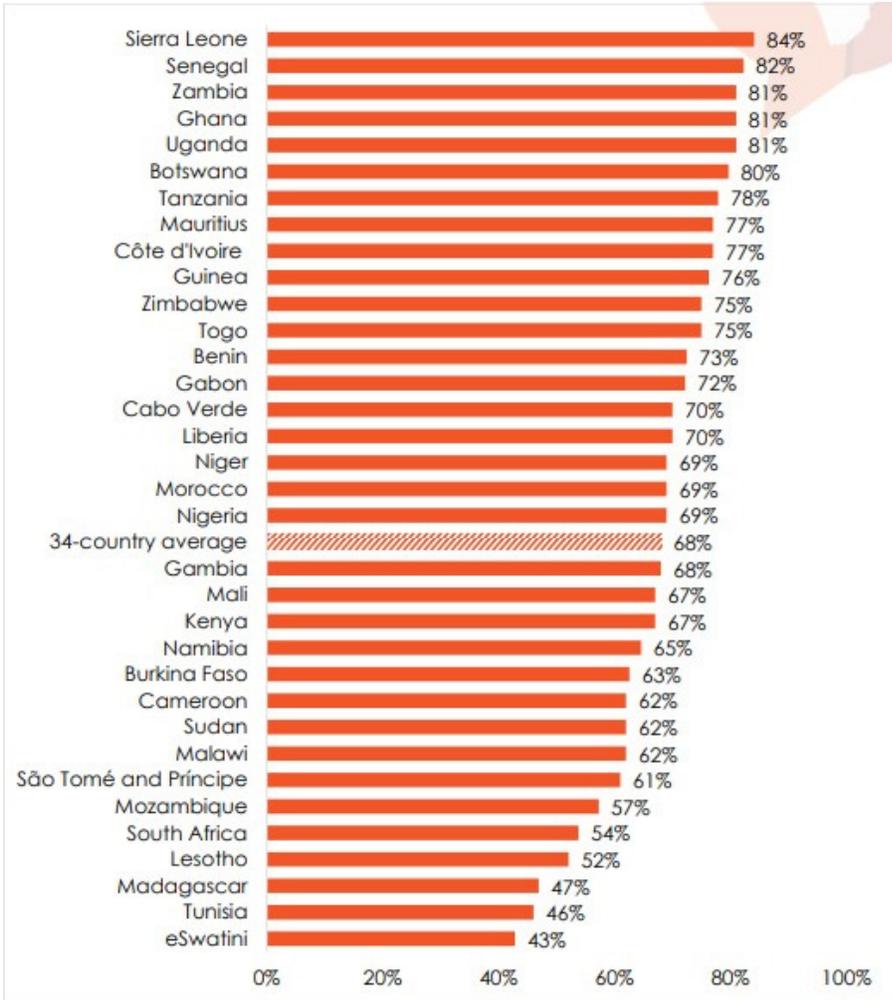


Fig.4. (Afrobarometer, 2019) Shows the demand for democracy in the respective African states.

Africans continue to yearn for and choose democracy, despite the negative outcomes experienced in states that claimed to be democratic. This can be attributed to several factors.

The presence of multiple tribes or ethnicities within a single territory, such as the more than 240 tribes in Cameroon, over 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria, and over 100 ethnic groups in Ghana. In order to promote equality and development and allow everyone to have a say in the governance of the country, democracy is seen as the

preferred system of government (PRC, American Historical Association (AHA), - Lamar Soutter Library).

Another reason Africans choose democracy is due to the horrors of authoritarian rule, whether by the majority tribe or even the intellectual minority. The Rwandan Genocide serves as a stark reminder of the consequences that can arise when such misdeeds are allowed to persist. By embracing diversity and fostering a sense of community, peace and harmony can be established as a defense against tribal conflicts and extreme poverty. In other words, a society that values freedom and allows individuals, regardless of their tribal affiliations, to express their opinions through voting can contribute to the economic development of the country.

Another reason for Africans to choose democracy is the success rate of other democratic states, which provides a blueprint for potential success. It is not coincidental that the Industrial Revolution in 18th century Europe took place after the Enlightenment and Reformation periods. There has been a clear correlation between societal development and the presence of freedom, where individuals can freely express their ideas and opinions. A free society encourages innovative thinking and allows intellectual growth to flourish, as there are fewer restrictions or authoritarian barriers hindering progress.

Another reason Africans choose democracy is the desire to be heard, listened to, and considered as part of society. Despite experiencing numerous democratic governments that have failed to deliver on their promises, this does not discourage the populace from demanding a more democratic system of governance (although there is some sense of apathy in the political participation of the masses). This is because humans, regardless of their background, crave inclusion and the opportunity to have their voices heard. Therefore, when given the chance to be heard, individuals tend to opt for that option rather than strictly following the orders of an authoritarian government.

Despite the aforementioned reasons, 2023 saw several coups in Africa. Surprisingly, the coup plotters were cheered on by the populace. This raises the question of why citizens would support coup plotters if they desire to live in a democratic country. It is evident that the leaders who were ousted from power had overstayed their welcome. Some of them were considered puppets of the Western apparatus, exploiting the resources of African countries. Niger serves as an example of such a country. These leaders were also authoritarian in their governance, which is why the populace was happy to see them ousted from power.

6. Ghana's Case and Pursuing a New Democratic System

Ghana's journey of state formation and democratic development is intricately woven through its colonial past, independence struggle, and subsequent political transformations.

Colonial Period (19th-20th Century): Ghana's modern history arguably began with British colonization in 1874, known as the Gold Coast during this era. The British introduced a system of indirect rule, centralizing governance and exploiting resources for economic gain. This colonial presence significantly impacted Ghanaian society, altering power dynamics and creating dependency on British authority.

Independence and Early Postcolonial Period (1957-1966): After years of resistance, Ghana gained independence in 1957, becoming the first African colony to do so (Arhin, 1993). Kwame Nkrumah, a key nationalist leader, played a pivotal role in this struggle, serving as Ghana's first Prime Minister and later its President (Arhin, 1993). Nkrumah's government aimed at economic development through nationalization and social welfare policies. However, concerns about authoritarianism and economic challenges led to his overthrow in a military coup in 1966 (Nugent, 1995).

Post-Nkrumah Era and Democratic Transition (1966-1992): Ghana faced a series of military coups and civilian rule in the post-Nkrumah era. After the 1966 coup, periods of military rule followed, marked by political instability and economic decline (Nugent, 1995). In fact, Ghana has experienced four periods of military rule, namely from 1966-1969, 1972-1979, 1979, and 1981-1993 (Haruna, 2023). Jerry Rawlings, who came to power through a coup in 1981, transitioned Ghana back to multi-party democracy in 1992 (Gyimah-Boadi, 2005). The Fourth Republic marked a turning point, introducing a multi-party system and witnessing peaceful transitions of power.

Current Democracy and Political Landscape (1993-present): Ghana's Fourth Republic, inaugurated in 1993, symbolized a period of political stability and economic growth. Despite critiques of corruption and accountability issues, Ghana has upheld its reputation as one of Africa's politically stable nations. Regular elections and alternation of power between political parties, such as the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP), have been key features of Ghana's contemporary political landscape.

As extensively argued in the paper, the form of democracy in each country is influenced by its traditions. In simpler terms, democracy is shaped by the specific realities and circumstances of the people and country it governs. This is summarized concisely and precisely by Jennings, which is quoted at length below (Jennings, 1963: 68-9).

“The essential problem of African democracy is... the essential problem of democracy everywhere - and it is wise to remember that only a few countries in the world have made a success of it. Democracy has succeeded in Northwestern Europe and a few countries outside Europe because it has become entwined in the traditions of the people...If there is a strong political organization with its roots in the villages,

and if the leadership is both efficient and honest, it may create opposition to itself equally efficient and honest and so accustom the people generally to democratic ways...the success of a constitution depends very largely on the strength of the support given to it by the people. In the African context, this means the urban and rural masses, whose primary identification and loyalty are to local communities and traditional areas, with indigenous political traditions based, in the main, on different concepts of behavior”.

In the desire to change the democratic system to suit the realities of the country, in Ghana, during the rule of Jerry John Rawlings in the 1990s, the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) government launched a plan designed “to create a new kind of democracy that will bring about greater efficiency and productivity in the state machinery through the involvement of the people at all levels” (Owusu, 1992: 385). This is an effort towards ending “a lasting solution to some of Africa’s endemic political and economic difficulties, liberating the enormous long-term development and the potential of the countryside” (Owusu, 1992: 388). It is the Districts and District Assemblies established by the Local Government Law, 1988 (P.N.D.C.L. 207), and the Local Government (Amendment No. 2) Law, 1990, to include extensively the far too long forsaken countryside of the state. It seeks to be

“Non-partisan, based strictly on meritocracy and held every three years.

The district shall be responsible, for (a) the overall development of the district and (b) formulate programs for the effective mobilization of utility of human, physical, financial and other resources in the District etc.

The District assembly may conduct its business in English or any other Ghanaian language among others.”

“The Assemblies have had the salutary effect of increasing local autonomy and raising political consciousness and participation, notably by producing both elected and appointed members who are more representative of, and responsive to, the local electorate” (Owusu, 1992: 390).

In the spirit of democracy, after the decentralized system instituted by the Ghanaian government which was to reflect the cultural landscape of the country, some official delegates fascinated by how it works visited Ghana, from Uganda, Tanzania, Sierra Leone etc. In March, as well, the International Union of Local Authorities held in Gaborone unanimously decided to ask Ghana to host the fourth regional conference in 1993 (Local Government Information: 1991). The obvious question that comes to mind after hearing the advances Ghana made to incorporate at large the active participation of the grassroots is— what happened next? Where is Ghana’s democracy now? In the pursuit of answering these important questions, the paper will mention one important problem that hindered the progress of the democratic processes of the country.

The crucial problem that is plaguing Ghana’s democracy and most African states is that their democracies are not developing or developmental, i.e. “developmental democracy”. This kind of democracy should not be mistaken with the other forms of developmental democracy. Such as the type of developmental democracy that emphasizes the integration of democratic governance and socio-economic development. It recognizes that democracy is not just about political freedoms and participation, but also about addressing the needs and aspirations of the people by promoting economic growth, social welfare, and reducing inequality. In a developmental democracy, the government plays an active role in fostering economic development, implementing policies to improve living standards, and ensuring equitable distribution of resources. The goal is to achieve both political and socio-economic progress, with democratic institutions and processes supporting sustainable development and the well-being of the population.

The term “developmental democracy” in the paper refers to a type of democracy that acknowledges its shortcomings and continuously evolves to incorporate the changing realities of the governed people. This form of democracy strives for improvement, explores new ideas and methods to engage the masses, and aims to significantly increase political participation. It avoids stagnation in a state of unsatisfactory imperfection. In Ghana, after the 1992 constitution, there were questions as to why the Executive arm of government has so much power. Except for good faith, the executive arm of government is prone to function like a dictatorial arm within the state. After the 2020 elections, there were crucial discussions about the problematic nature of the appointments of public officials mandated by the constitution, given how the Chairperson of the Electoral Commission of Ghana was eluded with simple arithmetic. The Chairperson was appointed before the national elections on controversial grounds surrounding the dismissal of the former EC chairperson (Kaledzi, 2018). The aura around the political spectrum at that time was that the appointment was rather calculated to keep the government in power (Frimpong - Arku, 2018). Although the claims were speculations, after the 2020 elections, the EC chairperson granted critics enough to prove the point they made before the elections. There were unprecedented arithmetic errors, lengthy delays in the announcement of results (which was more than expected) etc. For the first time in Ghana’s history, five people were killed during elections, although there have been elections-related deaths in the past, however, the 2020 killings happened during and on the fields of polling stations, which was unprecedented (Aljazeera, 2020).

The Way Forward

The unfortunate incidents surrounding the 2020 elections in Ghana provide a lens through which one can evaluate the state of democracy in the country, particularly in the context of “developmental democracy”. It is essential to assess how the democratic system recognizes its flaws, adapts to changing circumstances, and ensures increased

political participation to avoid stagnation in imperfection.

I. Executive Power and Checks and Balances:

The concentration of power in the executive arm of government raises concerns about the effectiveness of checks and balances within the democratic system. A “developmental democracy” should evolve to address such imbalances and prevent the executive from potentially functioning in a dictatorial manner. Evaluating the distribution of powers and mechanisms for accountability is crucial to ensure a healthy democratic environment.

II. Appointment of Public Officials and Electoral Independence:

The controversies surrounding the appointment of the Chairperson of the Electoral Commission highlight issues related to the appointment process of key public officials. In a “developmental democracy”, there should be transparent and accountable procedures for such appointments, ensuring that individuals in key positions are competent, impartial, and free from political influence. The events leading up to the 2020 elections suggest a need for reforms in the appointment process to enhance the credibility and independence of electoral institutions.

III. Election Integrity and Transparency:

The reported arithmetic errors, delays in result announcements, and allegations of manipulation during the 2020 elections underscore challenges related to election integrity and transparency. A “developmental democracy” should continuously strive to improve its electoral processes, ensuring fairness, accuracy, and transparency. Addressing issues such as delays and errors is crucial to maintaining public trust and confidence in the democratic system.

IV. Political Violence and Electoral Security:

The unprecedented incidents of violence, particularly the killings during the elections, highlight a significant concern. In a “developmental democracy”, efforts should be made to enhance political stability and security during electoral processes. Investigating the root causes of violence, implementing measures to prevent recurrence, and promoting a culture of peaceful political participation are essential components of a robust democratic system.

V. Public Participation and Civic Engagement:

The incidents described may indicate a potential decline in public trust and participation in the democratic process. A “developmental democracy” should encourage and facilitate increased political engagement among citizens. This involves creating platforms for dialogue, addressing concerns, and actively involving the public in decision-making processes.

VI. Media Freedom and Information Accessibility:

The role of media in disseminating information and fostering public discourse is vital for a well-functioning democracy. Assessing the state of media freedom and accessibility of information is crucial. A “developmental democracy” should support a free and responsible media that provides accurate information, fosters informed public debate, and holds those in power accountable.

The incidents surrounding the 2020 elections in Ghana highlight areas where the democratic system can be further developed. A “developmental democracy” should continuously adapt to address its shortcomings, promote transparency, and enhance the political participation of citizens. The events described emphasize the importance of ongoing reforms to strengthen democratic institutions and ensure the resilience of the democratic process in the face of challenges.

7. Conclusion

In examining the dynamics of democracy in Africa, with a particular focus on Ghana, this discourse seeks to underscore the pivotal importance of aligning democratic systems with the sociocultural fabric of the governed. Drawing upon the historical evolution of states and democracies, we contend that the adoption of democratic structures in Africa, often inspired by Western models, necessitates a nuanced approach deeply rooted in indigenous traditions. As the case of Ghana exemplifies, the endeavor to integrate cultural landscapes into governance mechanisms initially displayed promise. The decentralization efforts, marked by the establishment of Districts and District Assemblies, reflected a genuine attempt to engage grassroots participation and build a democracy reflective of Ghana’s unique societal tapestry. However, this promising trajectory faced a formidable impediment — the lack of “developmental democracy”.

The concept of “developmental democracy”, as advocated here, transcends the static implementation of democratic structures. It involves a continual process of introspection, adaptation, and innovation within democratic frameworks. Ghana’s experience post-constitutional reforms raises pertinent questions about the concentration of power within the executive, the integrity of electoral processes, and the urgency for a democracy that evolves to address contemporary challenges. This analysis draws attention to the imperative for African states, including Ghana, to cultivate a “developmental democracy” that not only acknowledges its imperfections but actively engages in reforms and enhancements. The experiences recounted herein, coupled with insights from African nations, emphasize the need for democracies that are dynamic, responsive, and attuned to the evolving sociopolitical landscapes they govern.

In conclusion, for Africa to flourish democratically, it must break free from the shackles of imported models and forge a path uniquely suited to its historical, cultural,

and traditional contexts. Only through a commitment to “developmental democracy” can the continent surmount the challenges that have hindered the full realization of the democratic ideal, fostering a future where governance aligns harmoniously with the diverse voices and aspirations of its people.

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