

## Democratisation and Economic Development: Progress, Challenges and Future Prospects

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**Abstract:** The relationship between democracy and economic development has been a central focus of scholarly inquiry for several decades. This paper contributes to this unending debate by critically examining the relationship between democratisation and economic development in Ghana. Despite notable advances in democratic consolidation since the early 1990s, Ghana's economic transformation remains sluggish, with persistent structural challenges and limited improvements in socio-economic welfare. Drawing on a desktop review of scholarly literature, and policy reports, the study explores how democratic institutions-namely the legislature, executive, judiciary, civil society and the media- have contributed to sustainable economic development and poverty reduction. The findings reveal a complex paradox: while democratic processes have deepened, economic development has been characterized by stagnation and structural decays, notably in industrial capacity and value addition. Furthermore, political contestation, institutional weaknesses and resource mismanagement have constrained the translation of democratic gains into inclusive growth. The paper recommends the strengthening of institutional frameworks to foster policy continuity in order to pursue strategic economic reforms to harness development potential of democratization.

**Keywords:** *Democracy, Democratisation, Economic Development, Ghana.*

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### Introduction

Democracy is currently facing a significant crisis (Mounk, 2018; Diamond & Platter, 2015; Dasandi, 2018; Grayling, 2017; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). This crisis has been described using various terms, including 'democratic recession' (Diamond, 2015), 'democratic backsliding', 'authoritarian resurgence' and 'democratic deconsolidation' (Foa & Mounk, 2017). Some analysts have even argued that democracy is faltering or in decline (Waldner & Lust, 2018; Lührmann et al., 2018). Amidst this discourse, there are defenders of democracy who dismiss the idea of a global democratic recession, claiming the negativities attributed to democracy is a myth (Levitsky & Way, 2015). However, the evidence indicating democratic decline appears quite compelling. For example, Mechkova et al. (2018, p. 162) quizzed that:

Is there evidence of a global democratic recession? The answer, unfortunately, is yes. The average level of democracy in the world has slipped back to where it was before the year 2000. The decline has been moderate, however, and most changes have occurred within regime categories-with democracies becoming less liberal and autocracies less competitive and more repressive. So far, at least, the data show

relatively few countries backsliding from democracy all the way to full-blown autocracy.

Lührmann et al. (2018) in their comprehensive analysis of global democratic trends utilizing the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) dataset, observed a persistent decline in democratic governance across several regions, including Western Europe, North America, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Eastern Europe. Conversely, the African continent, particularly Sub-Sahara Africa (SSA), which historically exhibited sluggish progress towards democratic consolidation, has demonstrated a discernible trend toward democratisation and a decline in autocratization relative to other regions. In the African context, democratisation- an ongoing process- was formally initiated approximately three decades ago. This momentum was notably influenced by the World Bank's (WB) seminal 1989 report, which diagnosed the continent's developmental stagnation as rooted in a 'crisis of governance' and emphasized the imperative of addressing this challenge as a prerequisite for sustainable development (poverty reduction). The WB's conclusion followed years of efforts to assist African nations through market-oriented reforms aimed at 'getting the price right' strategies that ultimately failed to produce the anticipated growth. Consequently, the focus shifted towards strengthening institutional frameworks, laying the groundwork for governance reforms. Despite these efforts, the anticipated surge toward prosperity

remains elusive, and the overarching goals of economic growth and poverty alleviation have to be fully realized. Although some African nations have experienced notable economic growth in recent times, most continue to underperform across key development indicators. In contrast, some Asian nations have made significant and decisive strides toward economic prosperity and poverty reduction (World Bank, 2018).

Nevertheless, analysts have acknowledged considerable progress in Africa over recent years. Several SSA countries, including Ghana, are now perceived to have established more robust democratic foundations (Zindela & Ogunnubi, 2017). Ghana's democratic trajectory is often heralded as a 'success story' and a potential model for other African nations (Gyimah-Boadi, 2015). This progress largely commenced after Ghana's return to multiparty constitutional governance in the early 1990s, following earlier phases of democratic experimentation that faltered (Nisin, 2017). Notably, the current democratisation process appears markedly different from earlier efforts, as it is driven not solely by political elites but also involves active participation and support from ordinary citizens. This inclusive engagement reflects a broader appreciation among the populace of democratic governance as the optimal framework for national development and stability.

Significantly, the overwhelming support for democratic governance stems from the popular belief that democratisation leads to better development-improvement in living standards (economically, politically and socially) for all citizens (Doorenspleet, 2018; Halperin, Siegle & Micheal, 2004). Particularly in Ghana, horrendous persecutions, crass human rights abuses and degeneration of welfare and living standards, and the throes of military and authoritarian regimes in past decades have informed denizens' decision to embrace democratic political systems. Ghana's current democratic dispensation, with the institutions built thus far has been lauded by political scholars (Zindela & Ogunnubi, 2017; Arthur, 2010) who have proclaimed Ghana a consolidated democratic nation. However, analysts such as Abdulai & Crawford (2010) have cautioned that it might be premature to label Ghana a consolidated democracy, even though they acknowledged that progress in democratisation is far-reaching.

Although democratic governance has steadily deepened in Ghana over recent decades, economic development and structural transformation remain largely stagnant. Despite commendable economic growth rates, other key economic indicators continue to underperform. Ghana's economy faces persistent challenges, including high levels of unemployment, a rigid economic structure incapable of generating sufficient domestic revenue for sustainable socio-economic development, and continued reliance on external financial support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB). Furthermore, the country's dependence on aid and donor funding remains significant, while poverty continues to be pervasive and widespread (Graham, 2016). Ayelazuno (2014, p. 81) underscores the harsh realities of this economic stagnation, asserting that the lived experiences of the majority of Ghanaians mirror Paul Collier's notion of the 'bottom billion'—populations trapped in 'grinding poverty and deprivation', lacking access to fundamental necessities such as employment, food, potable water, healthcare, decent housing, and sanitation. This context reflects a broader phenomenon often referred to as the "paradox of growth without development" (Ayelazuno, 2014, p. 82), wherein

remarkable economic growth fails to translate into meaningful socio-economic advancement.

A key concern arising from this paradox is the apparent disconnect between Ghana's political progress and its economic development trajectory. Despite notable strides in institutional reform and democratic consolidation, the anticipated improvements in economic welfare and poverty alleviation have not materialized (Ewoh, 2019; Ayelazuno, 2013). This paper is premised on the recognition that the relationship between democracy and developmental performance—both of markets and state institutions—remains one of the most contentious debates in contemporary economics, political science, and development studies (Khan, 2005, p. 704). Moreover, recent global trends, including democratic backsliding and the resurgence of authoritarianism in various regions, driven in part by popular disillusionment with democratic governance, pose a significant challenge to fledgling democracies (Luhmann & Lindberg, 2019; Brunkert, Kruse & Welzel, 2018; Diamond, Plattner & Walker, 2016). For a country like Ghana, which continues to invest in democratic consolidation with the hope of realizing improved living standards for its citizens (Constitution of Ghana, 1992), such trends underscore the need for vigilance and critical reflection on the sustainability of democratic gains.

Against this backdrop, this article examines the interrelationship between democratisation and economic development in Ghana. It seeks to assess whether the dual processes of democratic deepening and economic transformation hold the potential to significantly enhance the country's welfare outcomes and standard of living in the near future. The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. The next section reviews the literature on the nexus between democracy and economic development. Sections three and four analyse the trajectories of democratisation and economic development in Ghana, respectively. The final section concludes the paper with key findings and implications.

## Literature Review

### Democracy and Economic Development: A Contested Nexus

The relationship between democracy and economic growth and development has been a focal point of scholarly inquiry for several decades, and it continues to generate considerable academic interest. This sustained attention has produced a vast body of literature with diverse and often contradictory conclusions (Ewoh, 2019; Carbone, Memoli, & Quartapelle, 2016; Lipset, 1959; Arat, 1988; Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub, & Limongi, 2000; Foweraker & Landman, 2004; Khan, 2005).

One school of thought posits a positive and direct relationship between democracy and economic development. Proponents of this view argue that democracy, frequently lauded as the most effective political system for poverty eradication, inherently fosters economic development (Diamond, 2004; Sen, 1999; Roll & Talbott, 2003). This perspective draws on modernization theory, which suggests that as countries attain higher levels of economic development, democratic governance is likely to emerge and become consolidated. In contrast, a second strand of scholarship disputes the existence of a direct relationship and instead highlights an inverse correlation between democracy and economic and economic development (Huntington, 1968; Moore, 1991). O'Donnell (1973) in his study of Latin America, observed that economic progress in the region during the 1970s

and 1980s coincided with the rise of authoritarian regimes. He argued that these economic gains contributed to the erosion of democratic institutions, ultimately resulting in deteriorating welfare conditions and persistence of poverty.

A third perspective contends that there is no systematic or causal relationship between democracy and economic development. Scholars in this cohort argue that both processes are distinct and autonomous phenomena, each driven by separate dynamics (Inkeles & Sirowy, 1991; Daron, Simon, James & Pierre, 2008). According to this view, democratisation and economic development can occur independently of each other, and neither necessarily determines the success of the other. Despite these divergent perspectives, democratic governance is often normatively associated with higher levels of economic development and reduced poverty. A cursory examination of advanced economies reveals that most of the developed nations are characterized by stable democratic institutions and high standards of living. This empirical observation has led some to infer a causal relationship between democracy and economic prosperity. However, such generalizations may be misleading. As Przeworski (2004) cautions, the assumption that all democracies yield broad-based economic benefits risks oversimplifying a complex and context-dependent relationship.

### **Democracy as a Catalyst for Economic Development and Poverty Reduction**

Amartya Sen's *Development as Freedom theory* underscores the pivotal role of democracy in fostering economic development and reducing poverty. According to Sen (1999), democracy—characterized by individual freedom, political participation, and institutional accountability—creates a conducive environment for human development. He argues that the absence of democratic governance often enables conditions under which mass poverty, famine, and starvation occur. Drawing on empirical evidence, Sen observed that major famine, such as those in Ukraine in the 1930s, Sudan and Ethiopia, predominantly occurred under authoritarian regimes. These outcomes, he espouses, stem from the fact that autocratic governments frequently lack incentives to respond promptly to crises. In contrast, democratic governments, which must contend with elections, public scrutiny and civic accountability, are more likely to undertake timely and preventive actions. As Sen (1999, p.5) notes:

authoritarian rulers tend to lack the incentive to take timely measures. Democracy governments, in contrast, have to win elections and face public criticisms and have strong incentives to undertake measures to avert famines and other such catastrophes [including poverty]

The broader promise of democracy for economic development lies in its facilitation of peace, security and the protection of civil liberties—conditions essential for entrepreneurship, investment, wealth creation and sustained economic interactions (Khan, 2005). Additional empirical studies reinforce this theoretical linkage. For instance, Roll and Talbott (2003) conducted a cross-country analysis which found that differences in per capita income were significantly influenced by political variables such as political rights, civil liberties, property rights, and regime types. Their findings indicated that countries with democratic institutions consistently reported higher per capita incomes compared to their undemocratic counterparts.

Consequently, they concluded that democracy has a positive correlation with economic development.

Conversely, poor governance—often associated with authoritarian or unaccountable regimes—has been identified as a key driver of underdevelopment. Bad governance is typically characterized by systemic corruption, rent-seeking behavior, unproductive investments, and inadequate provision of essential public goods and services such as education and healthcare (Diamond, 2004). This was particularly evident in many African countries in recent decades, where authoritarian rule contributed to widespread poverty and institutional decay. In such contexts, undemocratic institutions tend to cultivate values of distrust, disorder, and exclusionary exploitation. These traits not only hinder social and economic productivity but also deepen poverty and stagnate development.

### **Revisiting the Democracy-Development Nexus: Lessons from the Asian Tigers and Beyond**

Despite the normative discourse that positions democracy as the most conducive system for economic development and poverty reduction, this assertion has come under increasing scrutiny. A significant challenge to this perspective stems from the remarkable achievements of the so-called “Asian Tigers”—South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong—who have managed to achieve rapid industrialization, sustained economic growth, and significant poverty reduction within relatively short periods. Notably, these successes were largely realized under regimes that did not adhere strictly to liberal democratic principles, often described as *pseudo-democratic* or illiberal political systems. Beyond the Asian Tigers, countries such as Malaysia, Taiwan, and particularly China have demonstrated impressive developmental outcomes despite operating within constrained democratic environments. A prominent case is the comparison between India and China. While India is often celebrated as a robust democracy, it has consistently underperformed relative to China in terms of economic growth and poverty reduction. Indeed, the United Nations (2015) reported that China's substantial strides in lifting millions out of poverty have resulted in India overtaking it as the global epicenter of poverty. A key factor commonly attributed to the success of the Asian Tigers and China is the presence of strong, centralized leadership, which played a critical role in directing national development strategies.

Empirical evidence from the African context also paints a complex picture. A study conducted by Afrobarometer—a pan-African research network—on democratisation and poverty reduction in sub-Saharan Africa revealed mixed results. The study indicated that in a few countries, such as Ghana, Zambia, Lesotho, and South Africa, political freedoms were associated with a decline in lived poverty. However, in other cases, such as Mali and Tanzania, there was no significant change, while countries like Botswana, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe experienced increases in poverty levels (Roberts & Bratton, 2009). These findings suggest that the relationship between democratic governance and poverty reduction is neither uniform nor automatic.

Nonetheless, the belief in a “democratic advantage” remains widespread among international stakeholders who continue to promote democratic governance as a pathway to sustainable development. While the developmental trajectories of many democratizing nations have yet to match the rapid economic transformation of the Asian Tigers, their outcomes are also not as dire as those seen under authoritarian regimes. As Varshney (2002,

p. 2) aptly puts it, the economic performance of recent democratizing countries tends to “fall exclusively in the unspectacular but un-disastrous middle.” The critical challenge, therefore, lies in how emerging democracies such as Ghana can move beyond this middling position to achieve transformative development and effective poverty eradication. This question is particularly salient given Ghana’s adoption of democratic governance with the hopeful conviction, enshrined in the 1992 Constitution, that democracy would lead to improved living standards and economic prosperity for all citizens.

## Methodology

This study employed a desktop review to explore and synthesize existing knowledge, policy documents, empirical research and other relevant literature on the subject under study. This was deemed appropriate due to the need for a comprehensive understanding of existing perspectives, historical trends and institutional frameworks relevant to the subject. Specifically, the data sources reviewed included; peer-reviewed journals articles, academic books and chapters, Government reports and policy documents economic growth, international organizations’ publications (such as World Bank) on Ghana economy and governance and conference papers and working papers. Academic databases including Google Scholar, JSTOR, Scopus, EBSCOhost and ScienceDirect were used to retrieve scholarly materials. In addition, official websites of relevant institutions, including the Ministry of Finance were consulted.

## Results: The Democratisation Process in Ghana: Institutional Contributions and Challenges

This section examines the contribution of key political institutions to the democratisation process in Ghana. Democratisation is expected to engender the evolution of strong, functional institutions as opposed to the dominance of power individuals, in which is typical in authoritarian regimes. These institutions are intended to serve as the bedrock of governance and drivers of socio-economic development. Central to this analysis are the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. Additionally, the roles of the media and civil society are considered, given their position as critical ‘gatekeepers’ in the democratic process.

### The Legislature and its Role in Promoting Citizens’ Welfare

Since the inauguration of the first Parliament of the Fourth Republic in 1993, Ghana’s legislature has functioned uninterrupted, marking a significant milestone in the country’s democratic consolidation. The legislature, as a representative body, is constitutionally mandated to reflect the will of the people. Its core functions include representation, law-making and oversight of the executive.

Members of Parliament are elected to convey the views and concerns of their constituents within national policy-making processes. However, the practical execution of this function has been inconsistent. MPs are often overwhelmed by constituents’ personal demands during visits to their electoral areas, stemming from the popular perception that MPs possess financial resources to address private needs. This perception has led to limited engagement between MPs and constituents, with some parliamentarians avoiding their constituencies to escape such pressures.

Although the oversight function of Parliament is vital for ensuring accountable governance, particularly in curbing executive excesses and enhancing citizens’ welfare, the legislature has underperformed in this regard. Despite improvements in parliamentary debates quality, effective oversight remains limited (Kumah-Abiwu & Darkwa, 2020). While the 1992 Constitution guarantees legislative independence, the effectiveness of oversight has been undermined by article 78(1), which stipulates that the President must appoint the majority of ministers from Parliament. This provision creates a conflict of interest, as MPs often refrain from critiquing the executive in the hope of securing ministerial appointments. Furthermore, partisan loyalty frequently supersedes national interest, with MPs supporting their party’s positions even when such positions do not align with the broader national good (Ninsin, 2017).

### The Executive and its Role in Ghana’s Democratic and Development Trajectory

The executive represents one of the central institutions in Ghana’s democratisation process, serving as the primary driver of national development. In the democratic context, executive authority is conferred through electoral legitimacy-secured via the ballot box- as opposed to authoritarian regimes where power is often acquired through coercion or force. According to the 1992 Constitution of Ghana, the President embodies the executive authority and is mandated to lead the country in both governance and socio-economic development. The constitutional responsibilities of the executive include safeguarding the constitution, representing the state in international affairs, ensuring national peace and security, and most importantly, formulating and implementing economic policies that promote public welfare, employment creation and economic freedom. Since 1992, Ghana has had five democratically elected presidents, all of whom have adhered to constitutional norms and maintained social cohesion. These leaders have generally upheld democratic principles, facilitated peaceful coexistence among diverse ethnic groups, and fostered political stability. Notably, citizens have been able to exercise cultural rights with discrimination. Politically, while intense partisanship has sometimes challenged democratic practice, successive governments have contributed to maintaining national unity and security. Economically, although each administration has introduced policy interventions aimed at improving living standards, the tangible outcomes of these efforts have been limited, with progress in poverty reduction and structural transformation remaining modest.

Despite functioning within constitutional boundaries, the executive has encountered several challenges. One critical concern is the concentration of extensive powers in the presidency (Ninsin, 2017). Analysts argue that such concentrated power requires constitutional reforms to enhance institutional checks and balances. Another persistent issue is economic mismanagement and the prevalence of corruption (Damoah, Akwei, Amoako & Botchie, 2018), often unaddressed effectively despite public commitments transparency and accountability. For instance, President John Agyekum Kufuor’s administration, which declared a ‘zero tolerance for corruption’, failed to transparently investigate allegations of corruption against senior government officials. His response that ‘corruption started from Adam’ signalled an unwillingness to confront systemic corruption. His successor- Evan Atta Mills-tenure was similarly marred by financial scandals, most notably the ‘Woyome Gate’ which involved the fraudulent payment of

substantial public funds to a private business man (called Alfred Woyome). Moreover, the executive has largely failed to structurally transform the Ghanaian economy. The colonial economic structure (based on the export of primary commodities including cocoa, gold, timber etc. and the import of manufactured goods) remains largely intact. None of presidents in the Fourth Republic has deliberately designed a robust agenda for inclusive growth or initiated comprehensive reforms aimed at economic diversification and structural transformation.

Given the extensive powers granted to the executive under Ghana's democratic framework, its role in shaping developmental outcomes is critical. Unlike authoritarian regimes, where development agendas can be enforced top-down, at the behest of the leadership, democratic governments must navigate complex negotiations and consensus building processes, often hindered by political rivalry and contestation. The democratic space permits opposition actors and vested interest to challenge or obstruct policy initiatives- sometimes not for developmental grounds but for political gains. As Whitfield (2011) notes, political settlements in Ghana are often characterized by 'competitive clientelism', where the primary focus of political actors is winning elections rather than delivering long-term development outcomes. This orientation undermines policy coherence and discourages ruling elites from investing in transformative strategies with long gestation periods. The tendency to prioritise electoral success over sustainable development has therefore impeded progress in sectors requiring long-term investment and reforms. This challenge is further reflected in the executive's approach to public sector reform. While government routinely express commitment to reforming the civil service and building institutional capacity, implementation often remains superficial. When reform initiatives are externally driven (typical by international financial institutions or donor partners) they are met with tepid government support due to the potential political costs involved (Killick, 2010). Internal reforms efforts, in contrast, frequently are lackadaisically implemented or remain unimplemented.

A key responsibility of the executive is to strike an appropriate balance between the public and the private sectors to fosters development and reduce poverty. Yet, successive administrations have struggled to achieve this balance. While the first post-independence government under Kwame Nkrumah had a clear vision for modernization and industrialization, subsequent governments have lacked consistent developmental visions. For example, although former president Jerry John Rawlings initially espoused a socialist and state-driven economic approach, his government ultimately implemented market-oriented policies under external pressure. Similarly, president kufuor's administration promoted private-sector-led growth, which yielded some early success, but ultimately expanded the public sector instead. Again, the administrations of President Mills and John Mahama continued this trend, with a largely dominant public sector overshadowing private sector.

As a result, the public sector remains the largest employer in Ghana, contributing to a bloated wage bill that consumes over 60% of public revenue (Ministry of Finance, Budget Statement, 2019). Although governments have rhetorically embraced the private sector as the engine of growth, practical implementation has often been inconsistent or contradictory. As Killick (2010) observes, successive governments have exhibited ambiguity in balancing public and private sector roles-frequently espousing one development path but ultimately pursuing another.

### **The Judiciary and the Rule of Law in Ghana's Democratic Dispensation**

A key hallmark of democratic governance is the entrenchment of the rule of law, which is primarily operationalized through an independent and institutionalized judiciary. In Ghana, the 1992 Constitution makes explicit provision for the establishment and operation of the judiciary. According to Chapter 6 of the Constitution, judicial authority is vested in the judiciary and derives its mandate directly from the Constitution. Article 125(1) establishes the judiciary as an autonomous institution, independent and subject only to the Constitution of Ghana.

The independence of the judiciary is further guaranteed under Article 127(1) and (2), which insulate the judiciary from the control or direction of any external authority, including the executive and legislature. These provisions reinforce the separation of powers doctrine, a fundamental principle underpinning democratic governance. To safeguard this autonomy, all financial matters related to the judiciary—including administrative expenses, salaries of judges, and judicial service staff—are charged directly to the Consolidated Fund, thereby limiting the potential for financial manipulation or interference from other arms of government.

The judiciary's primary mandate is to uphold and enforce the Constitution, which is regarded as the supreme law of the land. In addition to this fundamental responsibility, the judiciary is also entrusted with the protection and enforcement of human rights, including civil, political, economic, and property rights. Notably, the Supreme Court is vested with original jurisdiction to interpret constitutional provisions, a role that positions it as a critical arbiter in national constitutional development and the deepening of democratic norms.

Despite these constitutional safeguards, the judiciary in Ghana faces several enduring challenges that threaten its effectiveness and public legitimacy. While the judiciary has demonstrated commitment to its mandate, allegations of corruption have significantly tarnished its image. There exists a growing public perception that justice can be commodified, thereby undermining confidence in the judicial process. This erosion of trust has had serious implications for the rule of law, including the rise of vigilante justice, where citizens resort to extrajudicial measures—such as lynching suspected offenders—due to delays or perceived unfairness in the judicial system. These perceptions are rooted in several systemic challenges, including inadequate remuneration and poor working conditions for judicial officers and support staff. Furthermore, infrastructural deficits across many judicial districts impede the timely and efficient delivery of justice. Such constraints compromise the judiciary's capacity to effectively discharge its constitutional responsibilities and meet public expectations.

Nevertheless, the judiciary has made commendable contributions to Ghana's democratic consolidation, particularly in politically sensitive and high-profile cases. A notable example is the Supreme Court's adjudication of the case involving businessman Alfred Woyome, in which the Court ruled that he had fraudulently received substantial judgement debt payments from the state and ordered the restitution of the funds. Similarly, the judiciary has been instrumental in safeguarding the public purse through its intervention in various economic and financial disputes involving both individuals and state institutions. Additionally, the judiciary has played a pivotal role in maintaining political stability



and national unity. This was particularly evident during the resolution of a historic presidential election petition, where the Supreme Court's impartial and transparent handling of the case contributed to peace, democratic maturity, and the credibility of Ghana's electoral processes.

### **Civil Society and the Media in Ghana's Democratic Governance**

Civil society (CS) broadly refers to a collection of individuals and organisations that are non-governmental and non-profit in nature but exist to promote, protect, or advance shared interests, values, or goals. These goals often span a wide array of sectors including economic, political, cultural, and civic development (Daniel & Neubert, 2019). While civil society is not a novel phenomenon in Ghana, its role has gained renewed significance within the context of the Fourth Republic. Under previous authoritarian regimes, civil society organisations (CSOs) were often suppressed and denied operational space. In contrast, contemporary Ghanaian democratic governance recognises civil society as a vital partner in development and governance (Gyimah-Boadi, 2004).

Ghana's civil society comprises a diverse range of actors working across sectors. Prominent and influential CSOs include the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), Integrated Social Development Centre (ISODEC), IMANI Africa, the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), and chapters of global bodies like Transparency International. In addition, professional associations such as the Ghana Bar Association and the Association of Ghana Industries have played notable roles in promoting democratic values and institutional accountability.

The contributions of civil society to Ghana's democratic process are multifaceted. They include policy advocacy, public education, monitoring of governance practices, and the promotion of inclusivity and accountability in public service delivery. For example, the IEA pioneered initiatives such as the Inter-Party Advisory Committee (IPAC) and presidential debates, which have become key features of Ghana's electoral process. Similarly, ISODEC and allied organisations exerted pressure on the government to withdraw from an unpopular water privatisation deal with Aqua Vitens Rand Limited. Furthermore, organisations like the CDD and the Institute for Democratic Governance (IDEG) played central roles in advocating for constitutional amendments during the administrations of Presidents Mills and Mahama.

The media is closely linked with civil society in terms of function and impact and, for this reason, is examined alongside it in this analysis. Although much of the media operates as for-profit entities, they share the civil society's mission of informing, educating, and empowering the public on democratic values such as transparency, accountability, and human rights. Often referred to as the "Fourth Estate" or the "Fourth Power" of the realm, the media acts as a watchdog over state institutions and serves as a platform for public engagement and opinion. Since the advent of the Fourth Republic in 1992, the Ghanaian media landscape has expanded significantly. The proliferation of radio and television stations, along with a vibrant print and increasingly digital press, has enriched public discourse and facilitated citizen participation in national governance (Arthur, 2010). Daily talk shows and discussion programmes on national and local stations provide forums for analysis and debate on issues of public concern, thereby reinforcing democratic participation.

Despite their contributions, both civil society and the media face notable challenges. For civil society organisations, financial sustainability remains a major constraint. While internationally connected CSOs often secure external funding, local organisations frequently struggle with resource mobilisation, which affects their operational effectiveness. In some cases, the pursuit of funding can lead to the compromise of core values or advocacy positions. For instance, CSOs that receive direct government support may become less critical of government failures, particularly in service delivery to marginalised communities. The politicisation of CS engagement is also a concern. Governments may view critical CSOs with suspicion, while opposition parties tend to form alliances with CSOs only when out of power, demonstrating inconsistent political support. Nonetheless, governments in recent years have increasingly recognised the importance of civil society in the governance process. Unlike in previous eras, when civil society actors could be harassed or excluded from national discourse, today they are often seen as legitimate and essential stakeholders in national development.

The media, on its part, has also made considerable strides, particularly with the repeal of the criminal libel law, which previously exposed journalists to arrest and imprisonment for defamation of public officials. However, key legislative reforms such as the operationalisation of the Right to Information Act—though passed—remain incomplete. The effective implementation of this law would enhance transparency and enable journalists and citizens alike to access critical information for informed civic engagement. Other challenges facing the media include the commercialization of news content and a preference for sensational reporting over development-focused journalism. These tendencies can result in the underreporting of critical social and economic issues such as poverty and healthcare. Furthermore, some media houses soften criticism of the government in exchange for material benefits such as advertising contracts or tax exemptions. Such practices undermine the independence of the media and weaken its role in promoting accountability.

Despite these obstacles, both civil society and the media continue to play significant roles in Ghana's democratisation process. Their capacity to engage the public, hold power to account, and shape policy discourse is a direct outcome of the rights and freedoms enshrined in the 1992 Constitution. Specifically, Article 21(1) guarantees fundamental freedoms including freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of association, and freedom of movement—liberties that underpin the active participation of CSOs and the media in democratic governance.

### **State of Economic Development in Ghana: How Far?**

There is no denying that Ghana has experienced notable economic progress since its return to constitutional and democratic governance. Following a period of severe economic decline in the 1970s through to the early 1980s—often referred to as the 'black years' in Ghana's economic history—the country began a path of recovery. By the early 2000s, Ghana's economy was recording an average annual growth rate of 4–5%, despite the absence of oil production during this period (Ghana Statistical Service, 2019). The discovery of oil in commercial quantities in 2008 significantly enhanced the country's economic prospects. Subsequently, Ghana's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth surged to 9.1% in 2008 and reached a historic peak of 14% by 2011. Although economic growth declined again from 2014, the economy rebounded to

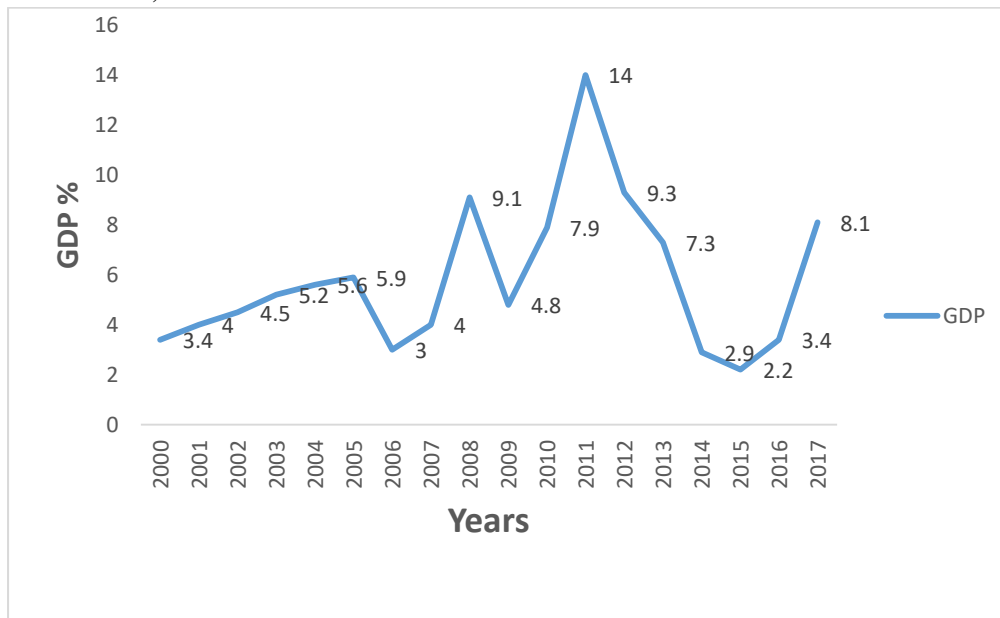
above 5% from 2017 onwards. This growth trajectory enabled Ghana to attain the status of a Lower-Middle-Income Country in 2010[20] (Ayelazuno, 2014). The occurrence of Corona Virus Pandemic saw the plummet of the Ghanaian economic once again. However, it has started rebounding in recent times.

Despite these macroeconomic gains, critical structural challenges persist. Ghana's economy remains largely unchanged in its foundational structure, continuing to rely heavily on the export of primary commodities. More than six decades after independence, the economic model established during colonial rule—based on the extraction and export of raw materials such as gold, cocoa, timber, and more recently, crude oil—remains fundamentally intact. While the country has diversified its export base somewhat with non-traditional exports including fish, fruits, and vegetables, these commodities generate relatively low foreign exchange earnings when compared to the country's high import bill for essential goods and services. As a result, Ghana frequently records a trade deficit [49] (Young, 2016). A core issue with Ghana's export economy is the absence of value addition. Most exports are shipped in raw form, thereby attracting minimal revenue and denying the economy the benefits of industrial processing. Although the advantages of adding value to primary commodities—such as increased revenue, employment generation, and economic diversification—are well-documented, meaningful steps toward industrialisation and local processing have yet to be taken. Compounding this challenge are international trading regimes, particularly commodity pricing mechanisms, which are externally determined and beyond Ghana's control. These arrangements leave the economy vulnerable to external shocks and global price fluctuations.

The structural weaknesses of Ghana's economy also manifest in persistent macroeconomic instability, notably in the depreciation of the Ghanaian Cedi against major international currencies. This currency volatility is symptomatic of deeper systemic issues: the failure to transform the economy from a primary producer into an industrialised, value-added, and export-competitive one. The collapse of Ghana's manufacturing sector provides further evidence of the stagnation in economic transformation. The country has experienced a form of de-industrialisation, with the manufacturing sector's contribution to GDP steadily declining over the decades (see Figure 1). From 14.2% in 1975, manufacturing's share fell to 10.2% by 2006, and further deteriorated to a mere 3.5% by 2015[50] (Ghana Statistical Service, 2015). This decline has led to a surge in imports of finished goods, significantly weakening domestic industrial capacity and competitiveness.

Moreover, the few surviving manufacturing enterprises are largely uncompetitive on the global stage. They have not been able to penetrate international export markets in any significant way, thereby limiting their potential to generate foreign exchange or contribute meaningfully to GDP. Even more concerning is the apparent lack of coherent policy direction or investment to revitalise the sector. As Whitfield (2011) observes, there has been limited political will and strategic planning to promote productive sector investment and industrial transformation. As noted, poverty reduction is a production of broad-based economic development coupled with effective democratic governance anchored on entrenched political and economic institutions [51](Treisman, 2020).

**Figure 1: Selected GDP, Selected Years**



Source: Ghana Statistical Service, April 2019

## Conclusion

This paper has provided a broad analysis of democratisation and economic development in Ghana, revealing a complex and, at times, contradictory relationship between political and economic development. While Ghana's democratisation process has been steady and relatively stable since the inception of the Fourth Republic, the capacity of democratic institutions to foster inclusive development and social welfare remains limited.

The analysis suggest that democratic consolidation in Ghana has not been accompanied by a corresponding transformation in the structure of the economy or in the equitable distribution of national resources.

One of the critical observations is the absence of a cohesive national development agenda. Successive governments lack a consensual and strategic blueprint for long-term development, leading to policy discontinuities and fragmented implementation.

Political transitions often result in the abandonment of projects initiated by preceding administrations, largely due to the politicisation of development and the fear of ceding political capital to rival parties. The intense electoral competition between Ghana's dominant political parties has narrowed governance to short-term, populist programmes aimed at electoral gains rather than sustained socioeconomic transformation. This electoral calculus frequently supersedes genuine efforts to enhance the welfare of citizens.

The executive arm of government, led by the president, bears primary responsibility for steering both democratisation and economic development. While presidential leadership is central to driving economic transformation, evidence suggests that apart from the post-independence industrialisation drive under President Kwame Nkrumah, subsequent presidents have not demonstrated sufficient commitment to economic structural reform or industrial development. Despite relatively impressive GDP growth rates in recent decades, these have not translated into meaningful and sustained improvements in the quality of life for the majority of Ghanaians.

Similarly, the legislature-constitutionally mandated to represent citizens and provide checks on executive power-has struggled to assert its autonomy and effectiveness. Parliamentary oversight has often been weakened by partisanship, with Members of Parliament prioritising party loyalty over their representative and accountability functions. Consequently, the legislature has failed to provide the necessary scrutiny and policy direction to ensure inclusive development. The judiciary, though constitutionally independent, faces significant institutional and operational challenges. Delays in the judicial process, limited funding, and persistent perceptions of corruption have undermined public confidence in the justice system. These challenges weaken the judiciary's role in promoting rule of law and protecting citizens' rights. Civil society organisations and the media have played relatively more active roles in Ghana's democratic development. They have contributed to policy discourse, promoted transparency, and held public officials accountable. However, their effectiveness is constrained by financial insecurity and, in some cases, political intimidation.

The implications of the democratization processes experienced thus far demonstrate the masses have developed faith in the potential of democratic governance as the legitimate way of governance. However, as democratic awareness increases, so do citizens' expectations for improved livelihoods, equity, and good governance. Failure to meet these expectations risks generating political apathy, disillusionment, and potentially destabilising forms of civic dissent, as has been witnessed in some established democracies. In light of these findings, the study recommends that all democratic stakeholders—including political actors, civil society, the private sector, and international partners—must channel collective efforts and resources toward the development and strengthening of democratic institutions. A deliberate, inclusive, and sustained focus on institutional reform, economic transformation, and policy continuity is imperative if Ghana is to translate democratic gains into meaningful economic and human development outcomes.

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