

Debates / Débats

A Response to Lloyd G. Adu Amoah's 'Ghana's Democracy and the 2020 General Election: Signs of a Fading Promise?'

Introduction

A moah's pessimistic assessment of Ghana's democracy published in *CODESRIA Bulletin*, No. 7, dated March 2021, focused on the uniqueness of its 2020 general elections outcome by using the 2016 elections as a proximate benchmark. While reflecting on the post-2016 alternation of power between the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC), the country's main political parties, he noted that even though 'no cudgels, loss of life, or loss of property' had attended power transfers, any euphoria expressed over the health of Ghana's democracy may be premature. Further, under the rubric of 'the policy pathology: democracy without development', he buttressed his assertions with evidence that, within the context, comes across as hard historical fact. He noted that Ghana's post-1966 'political and economic turmoil' gives the 1992 Constitution 'an unmistakably material rationale' and that the state's 'stability and consolidation', judged over two decades relative to the pace of material progress of the Asian Tiger economies, is mixed. The author also suggested that while corruption and 'the lack of prosperity' decided the outcome of the 2016 elections, 'the 2020 election results

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vividly showed the waning patience of Ghanaian voters towards the dominant parties. The author also blames the lack of material prosperity on the 'the pervasive party system' working in tandem with a culture of 'winner-takes-all' 'that has come to control every facet of Ghanaian life'.

The author's use of the outcome of the 2016 elections to pessimistically assess the 2020 elections necessitates a review of his piece. At the risk of failing a causality litmus test, one may argue (as in the subsequent sections) that the post-2016 NPP government, unlike the electorate, waived in its commitment to nourish the Republican spirit. Given this, the relative reduction in the votes garnered by the president plus the NPP's loss of parliamentary seats, as noted by the author, counts as a positive course correction effected by the electorate to vigilantly defend the sanctity of the democratic social contract as enshrined in the 1992 Constitution. Thus, rather than the 2020 election results 'vividly' showing 'the waning patience of Ghanaian vot-

ers' towards political parties, as the author suggests, it is rather the case that the electorate demonstrated a maturity beyond the political party manipulation of power and projected an independent capacity to correct deviations from its democratic path of development.

A sample of the NPP's post-2016 democratic deviations

To begin with, the author's suggestion that 'no cudgels, loss of life, or loss of property' attended the transfer of power is at variance with the effects of the extremist tendencies that characterised the NPP's tenure after the 2016 elections. For example, in 2017 members of a militant group associated with the party, known as the Delta Force, stormed a court session, vandalised property and freed thirteen of their members on trial for assaulting a Regional Security Coordinator (Modern Ghana 2017; Ghana Web 2017). Also, during a 2019 by-election in the Ayawaso West Wuogon (AWW) constituency, an NPP stronghold, violence perpetrated by masked national security operatives, who were later identified as associates of the NPP, led to eighteen people sustaining gunshot wounds as well as an NDC Member of Parliament being assaulted (GhanaWeb 2019). In the same year, an investigative journalist un-

covered the use of an annex in the seat of government to recruit and train NPP militia. In what amounted to the use of state power to illegally seize private property in 2020, about 500 excavators confiscated by a government task force set up to curb illegal small-scale mining (*galamsey*) went missing (African Eye Report 2020). Lastly, at least five people lost their lives and others were maimed in the heat of the 2020 elections (Al Jazeera 2020). These illustrations of deviation from the normative expectations of democracy served as the backdrop to the 2020 elections, during which the electorate voted to demonstrate that its commitment to guarantee the democratic ethos, unlike the NPP government, was beyond doubt.

Republican fidelity and democratic development

The author asserted that the lack of material prosperity in Ghana implies that its democracy is developmentally deficient. Stretched to its logical conclusion, this observation implies a loss of faith in the current democratic dispensation. Nevertheless, an Afrobarometer study reported that a supermajority of Ghanaians (79 per cent) (Fig. 1) are willing to honour their tax obligations to the state even though 61 per cent do not know what the revenue raised is used for.

This finding suggests that in as much as unmet material needs may be a source of frustration to the electorate, there is politically significant fiduciary trust by the Ghanaian electorate towards the incumbent parties in government. This observation raises questions about the author's take that the 2020 elections signify the waning patience of Ghanaian voters towards political parties.

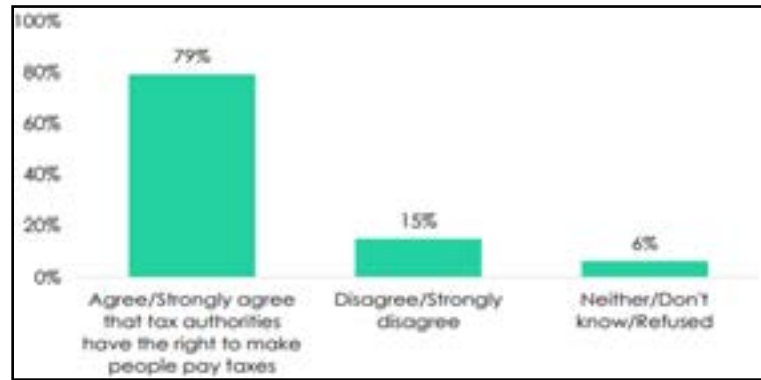


Fig.1: Views of Ghanaians on tax legitimacy, 2019

Source: (Bortey 2021: 3)

The author also noted that 'Ghana's democratic promise is failing to materialise' due to the unmet material needs of the citizenry, which can be blamed on a 'pervasive party system' thriving on an 'electoral system of winner-takes-all'. Again, this assertion does not stand the test of the bare facts of Ghana's political experience. Indeed, the country's democratic promise has been gradually materialising on a path of consistent consolidation since the 1966 crisis cited by the author. Although the evolutionary progress has been crude and deficient in human development, the polity has attained the necessary and sufficient conditions for the pursuit of other dividends, including material security: it evolved from political stability between 1981 and 1992 and transformed from an anocracy (1992–2000) into an inter- and intra-party power alternating democracy from 2000 to the present. Another indicator of consolidation is the sprouting of countervailing centres of power and agency beyond political parties. A few classic examples include the following. First, the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO), an independent and non-partisan network of civil society groups, faith-based organisations and professional bodies, has been vigilantly observing Ghanaian elections since 2000 (CODEO Ghana, n.d.).

Second, the National House Chiefs (NHC) in 2018 led successful agitation against an attempt by the NPP government to railroad the election of metropolitan, municipal and district chief executives (MMD-CEs) on the ticket of political parties (Gyimah-Boadi; GhanaWeb 2019). Third, in 2020 there was effective resistance by a broad coalition of civil society actors to an NPP government attempt to pass a Public Universities Bill (PUB), which was deemed as inimical to academic freedom (CDD-Ghana 2020). Fourth the Coalition of Car and Spare Parts Dealers stopped an NPP government attempt to pass the 2020 Customs Amendment Act to ban the importation of salvaged vehicles (Bediako 2020). Against this background, the outcome of the 2020 elections, which technically curtailed the reach of the president's power by splitting parliamentary seats evenly between the two parties, rather than being indicative of 'waning patience' was a sign of a mature and confident electorate capable of keeping political parties on a short accountable leash in defence of the Republic.

The author also singles out the tendency of a 'pervasive party system' that thrives on a culture of 'winner-takes-all' as the main drawback of Ghana's democratic development. There are two problems with this

assertion. First, it fails to recognise that the current dominant-party system has exorcised destabilising ethno-partisanship from Ghana's body politic, the core reason why the previous Republics failed (Chazan 1982; Boahen 1996). Even though the country is not yet out of the woods (Throup 2011), its parties have been compelled by the 1992 Constitution to internally even out ethnic group imbalances and project a national character. If Ghana's post-independence experience is anything to go by, the alternative to the current 'pervasive party system' will surely be the persistence of the 'pervasive ethnic-party system' of the past with all the turbulence it entailed (Moroff and Basedau 2013). Also, the suggestion of a culture of 'winner-takes-all' working in tandem with the dominant-party system smacks of exceptionalism and the non-assessment of a political dynamic on its merit. Ghana's political parties, just as any other in the world and history, are constituted and elected (during primaries and national elections) based on exclusive ideological/transactional affinity. Given this, it is not to be expected that the principle of inclusion, the alternative to 'winner-takes-all', will be a default option. Be that as it may, unlike the author suggests, a 'winner-patron-of-all' culture is a more apt attribute of Ghana's democracy: the state funds discretionary political expenditures of Members of Parliament (MPs) whether or not sitting MPs and the president belong to the same party (Citi Newsroom 2020). Given the foregoing, Ghana's democracy is developing with an internal logic of its own. It may not be in the same economic league as the Asian Tigers, but there are credible indicators to suggest that Ghana's democratic self-correcting capacity is steadily taking shape.

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African Humanities Association Projects

The African Academy of Sciences

Situation Analysis of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts
Research Leadership Capacity Development in Africa Project

WHO ARE WE? / From AHP to AHA

The African Humanities Program (AHP) was established in 2008 under the auspices of the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) and funded by the Carnegie Corporation with the principal objective of rejuvenating humanities research in five African countries, namely, Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda. The African Humanities Association (AHA) was formed by the adoption of its constitution at a Regional Assembly held in Abuja in February 2020. After twelve years of AHP activity the time had come for a new initiative, driven by the needs of African scholars and designed by us to extend the transformative impact of our work to the development of the continent.

WHAT'S THIS RESEARCH ABOUT?

The AHA has been commissioned by the African Academy of Sciences (AAS) to: Generate evidence to inform the trajectory of Social Science, Humanities and Arts Research Leadership Capacity Development (SSH&A RLCD) initiatives within the African Academy of Sciences and particularly the DELTAS Africa program.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Please fill in this questionnaire as it will have a direct impact on the kinds of programmes which the AAS designs for the Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts.

SOME IMPORTANT DETAILS

Please be aware that this survey is very long and detailed to ensure that we get the most accurate and useful information possible. Please set aside at least 30 minutes to work through the survey methodically without distractions. The survey is anonymous and no identifying information is gathered about you, the respondent. Please ensure that you only submit one response, do not submit multiple copies. **The survey is available in Arabic, English, French and Portuguese languages.** You can choose to respond in whichever of those languages you prefer, but **please submit only one response in only one of the languages.** Multiple responses from one responder will result in inaccurate results when the information is analysed.

Because we are trying to reach as many people as possible who might have important information that is relevant to this survey, we encourage you to share the survey with any colleagues who you feel should be responding. At the same time, this means that you may have received a link to the survey from multiple sources. We do apologise for that. As we stated above, **no matter how many times you receive a link from someone, please only fill in the survey once.**

Survey in English (<https://sites.google.com/a/rucis.co.za/aha/projects/surveys/english>)

Projet de l'Association Africaine des Sciences Humaines

QUI SOMMES NOUS

De AHP à AHA

Le Programme Africain en Sciences Humaines - African Humanities Program (AHP) a été établi en 2008 sous l'égide de l'American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) et financé par le Carnegie Corporation dans le but de redynamiser la recherche en sciences humaines dans cinq pays africains, à savoir le Ghana, le Nigéria, l'Afrique du Sud, la Tanzanie et l'Ouganda.

Le African Humanities Association (AHA) a été formé par l'adoption de sa constitution lors d'une Assemblée Régionale tenue à Abuja en février 2020. Après douze ans d'activité par AHP, il était temps de concevoir une nouvelle initiative, régie par les besoins des chercheurs africains et conçu pour élargir l'impact transformatif de notre travail au développement du continent :

A PROPOS DE LA RECHERCHE

L'Académie Africaine des Sciences (AAS) a commandé le AHA de fournir des preuves pour fournir des informations sur le trajectoire des initiatives sur la capacité de leadership de recherche en sciences humaines et sociales, en lettres et dans le domaine des arts (SSH&A RLCD) dans l'Académie Africaine des Sciences (AAS) et en particulier le programme DELTAS Africa.

POURQUOI CETTE RECHERCHE EST-ELLE IMPORTANTE?

Veillez remplir ce questionnaire puisque vos réponses auront un impact direct sur les types des programmes conçus par le AAS pour les Sciences Sociales, les Sciences Humaines et les Arts.

Ce questionnaire a pour but d'obtenir les réponses des chercheurs en sciences sociales et humaines et en arts dans le cadre d'une étude portant sur le statut des disciplines et leur capacité à diriger des recherches. Veuillez donner votre opinion et vos réponses en toute honnêteté.

Nous reconnaissons que votre participation est entièrement volontaire et nous vous assurons que vos réponses sont totalement confidentielles car elles ne sont pas conçues pour être liées aux répondants.

Enquête en français (<https://sites.google.com/a/rucis.co.za/aha/projects/surveys/french>)