

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	1
CONCEPTUALISATION OF DEMOCRACY AND ITS APPLICATION IN GHANA	1
POLARISATION OF GHANA’S POLITICAL SPACE AND GRADUAL DETACHMENT FROM VALUE-DRIVEN DEMOCRATIC PRACTICE	3
HOW TO REPRIORITISE CIVIC EDUCATION AND INCULCATION OF DEMOCRATIC VALUES IN THE GHANAIAN SOCIETY	5
CONCLUSION.....	7
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	7

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper was reviewed by Mr Kwesi Jonah, Senior Research Fellow, Naa Ansah-Koi, Senior Research Officer and Mr Enoch Randy Aikins, Research and Programmes Officer, IDEG.

INTRODUCTION

When a West African country that embodies democracy is mentioned anywhere, it is often Ghana that comes to mind. Since the advent of the Fourth Republic in 1992, Ghana has gradually solidified its status as a beacon of democratic principles and its application to national development and politics. Indeed, the nation has made a lot of progress, given the absence of military interventions, respect for human rights, holding free and fair elections and ensuring smooth transition of power primarily between the two dominant parties, New Patriotic Party (NPP) and National Democratic Congress (NDC). This signifies a gradual consolidation of the nation's democratic dispensation and the people's willingness to adhere to democratic principles that eschew all forms of destructive behaviour or processes.

However, given the duopolistic¹ character of Ghana's politics, the nation has found itself riddled with undemocratic behaviour from both politicians and supporters alike. In other words, the respective political party candidates or representatives and their supporters have resorted to "othering"² each other, regarding themselves as opponents and polar opposites. Over time, this attitude is eroding Ghanaians' sense of self i.e. as one nation with a national identity. It is becoming difficult for people to see each other beyond or without partisan lenses, especially where interests and views do not converge about national development, electoral processes and other aspects of Ghana's democracy.

Accordingly, this paper interrogates how political positions associated with the duopolies became entrenched, how the citizens, particularly the electorate, who are simultaneously party supporters are undermining democratic values by virtue of their actions and behaviours and the cost of this behaviour to our democracy. It further gives recommendations on how Ghanaians could recalibrate their attitudes and retrace their steps to respecting the values and principles that a democratic country should adhere to and uphold. A normative attitudinal change or self-discovery would ensure that democratic processes and politics transcend partisan lines.

CONCEPTUALISATION OF DEMOCRACY AND ITS APPLICATION IN GHANA

Democracy, in simple terms, is a government by the people derived from the Greek word "dēmokratīā"³ which literally means rule by the people.⁴ Democracy rests upon the principles of majority rule and individual rights.⁵ The Cambridge Dictionary defines it as the "belief in freedom and equality between people, or a system of government based on this belief, in which power is either held by elected representatives or directly by the people themselves".⁶ This is a suitable definition with respect to this paper as it mentions two key principles of democracy namely "freedom and equality".

¹ A situation in which two political parties are dominating politics. In Ghana, this refers to the existence of the two dominant parties namely the NPP and the NDC and power alternation between the two parties.

² Viewing or treating another person as different from one's self (Oxford Languages). Although it is often linked with intrinsic qualities like race, ethnicity, religion or gender in ontological identity politics, it is operationalised here as a means of regarding anyone who does not share your political ideology or beliefs as different or an opponent.

³ dēmos ("people") and kratos ("rule").

⁴ Dahl, "Democracy".

⁵ US Embassy in the Republic of Korea, "Democracy in brief".

⁶ See Cambridge Dictionary.

Other equally important values are mutual respect, tolerance and fair play, diversity, common good, truth, patriotism, popular sovereignty, cooperation, and compromise, justice and equal opportunities. These values are the foundation on which democratic processes and governments revolve and as such, any deviation from respecting and upholding them demonstrates that a nation is going astray, might be practicing a pseudo-democracy or an entirely different type of government. Complementing these democratic values are the features of a fair and just judiciary, honest elections, freedom of the press, freedom of religion, free speech and civilian control of the military.

According to American political scientist Larry Diamond,⁷ democracy consists of four key elements: a political system for choosing and replacing the government through free and fair elections; the active participation of the people, as citizens, in politics and civic life; the protection of the human rights of all citizens; a rule of law, in which the laws and procedures apply equally to all citizens. According to Diamond, a democracy must be accountable, transparent, genuinely competitive, respectful of individual rights, inclusive of diverse forms and sources of participation, and responsive to the needs and aspirations of ordinary citizens.⁸

Ghana has enjoyed a stable multiparty democracy in the Fourth Republic (1992 - present). The features of the nation's multiparty and representative democracy have been enshrined in the 1992 Constitution to ensure its practice. The Directive Principles of State Policy⁹ clarifies into detail the application of democracy and its principles to political and social life in Ghana. It specifically states that "Ghana shall be a democratic state dedicated to the realization of freedom and justice; and accordingly, sovereignty resides in the people of Ghana from whom Government derives all its powers and authority through this Constitution".¹⁰ Therefore, Ghana is a democratic nation that subscribes to democratic norms and values. Ghana's democracy subjects its government to the rule of law¹¹ and that all persons are equal under the law. As such, Ghanaians have rights and responsibilities. This is because the citizens do not only have rights to elect representatives and speak freely but the responsibility to participate in the political system.¹² They must also respect the values of tolerance, cooperation, and compromise.¹³

Ghanaians are therefore enjoined to coexist irrespective of religious, ethnic or political beliefs to foster national unity and cohesion as needed in a democracy. However, although the country practices a multiparty system, two political parties – NPP and NDC – have emerged as the dominant ones in the Fourth Republic. With both parties amassing widespread support from the electorate, Ghanaians who are fanatics of either are found to, sometimes, have an antagonistic outlook on each other. This antagonism has translated, particularly during election years, into a culture of violence and vigilantism, insults, propaganda, misinformation and impunity. There is disregard for all that democracy preaches, particularly the values of tolerance, compromise, mutual respect and cooperation.

⁷ Diamond, "What is Democracy"

⁸ Diamond, "In Search of Democracy".

⁹ 1992 Constitution, Chapter 6

¹⁰ 1992 Constitution, Chapter 6, Article 35(1)

¹¹ Everyone is equal before the law and no one is above the law.

¹² Principles of Democracy, "Overview: What is Democracy"

¹³ Principles of Democracy, "Overview: What is Democracy"

POLARISATION OF GHANA'S POLITICAL SPACE AND GRADUAL DETACHMENT FROM VALUE-DRIVEN DEMOCRATIC PRACTICE

The Fourth Republic has seen its share of partisan politics; with all that comes along with it permeating even the public institutions that are constitutionally banned from overtly demonstrating political affiliation.¹⁴ Partisan politics has presented an opportunity, where people representing different political ideologies and practices are able to coexist in Ghana's liberal democracy. However, there has been a price to pay; the challenge has been that almost everything or every deed that is done is seen as representative of the political party to which they belong.

Over time, partisan politics has led to an environment of polarisation, with Ghanaians seeming to find themselves stuck in a conundrum where their own identities and self-worth are found with their political parties. A Ghanaian's party affiliation has therefore become a tag of identity. Sadly, partisanship associated with the multiparty system does not transcend the two dominant parties to include the minority parties. This is because Ghana's polarisation is sustained by the duopoly that has emerged from the alternation of power between the NPP and the NDC. It has also been alleged that minority parties have also been bought over or influenced by the two larger parties.¹⁵

To understand the democratic degradation that is brought about by polarisation, it is important to conceptualise this phenomenon. Polarisation highlights the existence of opposing or conflicting values, viewpoints, positions or tendencies.¹⁶ It can simply be understood as being divided along political lines. In Ghana, citizens are divided along two political lines, further entrenching the duopolistic nature of its politics. This has become even more dangerous since this partisan politics influences the way the electorate cast their vote, their preferred policies as well as their values.

A case has been made in the United States where partisan influence on policy preferences and moral judgements is a cause for both hope and concern.¹⁷ However in Ghana's case, polarisation is more of a growing cause of concern than that of hope. This is because politics is primarily centred around the NPP or the NDC who dominate Ghana's political space. These two parties also propagate divergent views about rendering development and consolidating democracy in Ghana which should enhance competitive politics if not done to incite hate or disorder. Unfortunately, this has not been the case since the nation has witnessed a disheartening trend where there is a gradual detachment from value-driven or normative democratic practice. This gradual detachment can be attributed to the "duopolisation" of politics which consequently makes citizens to view each other and their viewpoints primarily with partisan lenses.

As a liberal democracy, democratic values should be part and parcel of the nation and the citizens thereof. However, rather than a respect and adherence to such values, people are becoming less tolerant and accommodating. Through their words and deeds, the country has seen a rise in misconduct and moral decay particularly associated with electoral politics. Evidently, there have been increasing incidents of political violence as witnessed in Ayawaso West Wuogon by-elections in 2019¹⁸ and the Jamestown peace walk clash in 2020,¹⁹ hate speech and propaganda,

¹⁴ Ghana Web, "Extreme political party polarisation"

¹⁵ Peace FM, "PNC Executive Declares Support" and Modern Ghana, "Northern Region PNC"

¹⁶ De-Wit et al, "What Are the Solutions to Political Polarization?"

¹⁷ De-Wit et al, "What Are the Solutions to Political Polarization?"

¹⁸ Modern Ghana, "Dossier: Ayawaso"

¹⁹ Ghana Web, "Chaos erupts in Jamestown"

misinformation particularly during election years. Abusive language has become rampant on radio and television with Bernard Antwi Boasiako aka Chairman Wontumi and Kennedy Agyapong of the NPP as well as Kelvin Taylor and Mugabe Maase of the NDC making the language monitoring list.²⁰

Polarisation has also become a means for mobilising popular support; an opposing party or candidate juxtaposes its policies or promises to the other by hammering on the differences and painting a precarious picture of what the nation could become if such a policy is favoured. Indeed, this political characteristic may not be peculiar to Ghana alone, however, in Ghana's case, such polarisation has incited violent reactions from vigilante groups and party fanatics. In light of this, it appears that Ghana's democracy is being consolidated at a price of disharmony and division. Consequently, hate speech and libel contrasts tolerance and freedom of expression, violence contradicts the spirit of non-violence, and politics is now seen as a zero sum game.²¹ Instead of encouraging harmonious living and competitive politics for national development, all contrary political views and actions are seen as those of an opponent who must be decimated.

Ghana's polarisation, especially during election years, has ultimately led to a culture of violence, impunity and injustice. This is because elections are "winner takes all"²² where the emerging president who represents a political party has the right to appoint ministers, district chief executives, award contracts²³ among others. The executive therefore has a lot of power vested in it. This exacerbates the desperation and the tactics which are employed by candidates, parties and their supporters alike to ensure that they come out victorious at the polls. This structural cause of polarisation of politics in Ghana persists with division about the requisite constitutional and institutional reforms needed to address it. Misinformation, propaganda and the growth of disruptive electoral forces associated with the duopoly have characterised recent elections. During the 2012 and 2016 elections, electoral violence and political vigilantism intensified as a result of polarisation. There were incidents of vigilante violence in a number of by-elections: Chereponi in 2009, Akwatia in 2009, Atiwa in 2010, Talensi and Amenfi in 2015, and other constituencies.²⁴

Ghana will hold its seventh presidential and parliamentary elections under the Fourth Republic on 7th December, 2020. Ahead of these elections, popular political figures who either belong to the NPP or the NDC are perpetrators of hate speech and misinformation. Their speeches, although they are yet to be proven to incite violent actions, demonstrate Ghana's gradual detachment from democratic values of tolerance and compromise to that of intolerance and disdain.²⁵ Vigilante violence has also characterised electoral processes such as the mass voter registration exercise carried out between late June to early August 2020.²⁶ All these are signs of the gradual disregard for democratic values that is threatening Ghana's democratic gains in the Fourth Republic. What should be done to re-inculcate democratic principles into our politics? How does Ghana find its way back to respect for the rule of law and peaceful coexistence in the face of increasing competitiveness?

²⁰ MFWA, "Abusive Language on Radio"

²¹ Merriam Webster defines it as a situation in which one person or group can win something only by causing another person or group to lose it

²² Ziekye, "Political Polarisation in Ghana"

²³ Mills, "Politics, policy, and implementation"

²⁴ Dumenu et al, "Electoral Violence"

²⁵ Myjoyonline, "MFWA cites Ken Agyapong..."

²⁶ Lancaster, "Ghana Faces Growing Vigilantism"

HOW TO REPRIORITISE CIVIC EDUCATION AND INCULCATION OF DEMOCRATIC VALUES IN THE GHANAIAN SOCIETY

With Ghana still a growing democracy and an example to other African nations, it is important to ensure that these challenges to the nation's democratic practice do not remain unresolved. It is imperative that the nation reprioritises civic education and the re-inculcation of democratic values. It must be acknowledged that education is a principal means through which democracy can be consolidated within a nation. Although Ghana seems to have gone astray in practicing democracy to its fullest, a reprioritisation of civic education is key to returning the nation to the right path. Notably, all societies transmit their norms, culture, values, and habits from one generation to another²⁷ through socialisation or education. In turn, people living in a democratic society become informed and more conscious about where their rights and responsibilities begin, end and overlap with other citizens. They therefore become well equipped to actively participate and enhance democratic dividends.

The existence of a direct and vital correlation between education and democratic values emphasises the need for educational content and practice to affirm the attitudes of democratic rule.²⁸ The 1992 Constitution stipulates that the State shall actively promote the integration of the peoples of Ghana and prohibit discrimination and prejudice on the grounds of place of origin, circumstances of birth, ethnic origin, gender or religion, creed or other beliefs.²⁹ It further enjoins the State to promote a culture of political tolerance among citizens.³⁰ Hence, it is the State's responsibility to conduct civic education through the independent governance institution named the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE).

It is the primary non-partisan public institution in charge of educating and creating awareness among citizens on rights and responsibilities, democratic norms, acceptable political and electoral behaviour. The NCCE was set up in 1993 to strengthen and promote Ghana's democracy, as well as educate citizens about their rights and obligations.³¹ However, it has over the years bemoaned inadequate resources and manpower to perform its duty.³² The NCCE is so financially and logistically under-resourced that it does not have vehicles to conduct public education, a fact exposed by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.³³ As such, it can be inferred that it is lagging in fulfilling its duties which could indirectly be a reason why Ghanaian civic culture is on the decline.

Unfortunately, other entities such as the media and political parties have filled the vacuum created by the NCCE's inability to effectively exercise its mandate which is proving dangerous. The media is one of them although they serve as watchdogs in a democracy. Given that the media has become one of the main means of stoking political tensions as some media houses are either politically affiliated³⁴ or give the platform to some infamous members of political parties who spew partisan discourse.³⁵ Such provocative or hateful speech can polarize, heighten tension, and ultimately

²⁷ Principles of Democracy, "Education"

²⁸ Principles of Democracy, "Education"

²⁹ 1992 Constitution, Chapter 6, Article 35(5)

³⁰ 1992 Constitution, Chapter 6, Article 35 (9)

³¹ ARAP, "The NCCE"

³² News Ghana, "NCCE Under Resourced"

³³ Ghana Web, "Ghana's democracy is growing but not maturing"

³⁴ Reporters without Borders, "Who owns the Media in Ghana?"

³⁵ Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), "Abusive Language on Radio"

result in violence, especially when elections are to happen.³⁶ Media partisanship poses a threat to Ghana's democracy and remains one of the tools to spur violence.³⁷ Clearly, civic education and promotion of normative behaviour has been left in the hands of individuals, political parties or politically-affiliated media stations that have contributed to the progressive erosion of civic behaviour.

Despite this, there is still time for the NCCE to fully assume its duties on civic education if more support is received from the government. In the meantime, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) that have also assumed the role of providing public services and sensitising Ghanaians should continue to complement the efforts of the NCCE. Civic virtues should remain anchored in the Ghanaian basic to tertiary school curricula to ensure that the upcoming generation is socialised to become upright and mindful citizens. According to Mr Manasseh Azure, "integration of civic education into the curricula of our educational system would have been the surest way of inculcating democratic values in the citizenry right from their childhood".³⁸ Additionally, socialisation at home remains very crucial to transmitting civic values and should not be left solely in the hands of the NCCE.

Furthermore, a culture of impunity seems to prevail at the cost of upholding democratic values because of the failure to sanction libellous personalities, vigilante groups and wayward citizens. The application of the rule of law in Ghana has been compromised and this is evidenced by the acts of intolerance, violence, injustice and use of abusive language that fills the political space. Although the Constitution clearly requires that the State must protect a social order that is based on the ideals and principles of freedom, equality, justice, probity, accountability³⁹ and must apply the law fairly irrespective of social, economic, political, ethnic or religious beliefs or status, this has not always been the case. Vigilante groups run rampant, political representatives continue to wander between the thin line of freedom of expression and hate speech without facing dire consequences. Ideally, the Constitution gives the basis for reprioritising civic education and behaviour when applied judiciously.

It must also be noted that the violence and indecent behaviour can not only be addressed through socialisation and re-socialisation on democratic values but also by strengthening institutions like the NCCE and security agencies such as the Ghana Police Service. When the capacities of these bodies are enhanced and they are well-resourced, they can respectively perform civic education as well as law and order duties effectively and efficiently. Additionally, the "winner-takes-all" system which primarily sustains the polarisation of Ghana's politics must also be reformed. This will entail constitutional amendments to promote representation and participation at all levels of governance. For example, opening up local government through the election of local representatives who will contest elections on multiparty basis will give a chance to other political parties to positively influence governance. In the long run, the duopoly will be broken.

Moreover, Ghanaians cannot continue to feign ignorance and perpetrate acts that foster discord and disrespect among them. This is because every citizen's rights and responsibilities have been clearly outlined in the Constitution and are inseparable. Specifically, on promoting civic culture and national cohesion, Ghanaians are charged to foster national unity and live in harmony with others;

³⁶ Danso et al, "Fruitcake', 'Madmen', 'All-die-be-die'"

³⁷ Danso et al, "Fruitcake', 'Madmen', 'All-die-be-die'"

³⁸ Ghana Web, "Ghana's democracy is growing but not maturing"

³⁹ 1992 Constitution, Chapter 6, Article 37 (1)

to respect the rights, freedoms and legitimate interests of others, and generally to refrain from doing acts detrimental to the welfare of other persons; to contribute to the well-being of the community where that citizen lives; and to co-operate with lawful agencies in the maintenance of law and order.⁴⁰ It is therefore important that Ghanaians become accountable to themselves, their society and to the Constitution in order to promote adherence to democratic values.

CONCLUSION

Ghana is internationally recognised for its status as a liberal democratic country. However, it suffers from a growing culture of detachment from democratic values, norms and behaviours associated with the “duopolisation” of its politics. The country has witnessed several incidents of violence and use of intemperate language which has been normalised as part of its political landscape. Citizens’ interactions with each other and their ways of life are marred by political ideologies and actions. Admittedly, politics is a part of each person’s life, but to what extent does it dictate a person’s actions? This problem calls for a reprioritisation of civic education on the national agenda and a campaign to re-inculcate democratic values into the Ghanaian society; old or young, rich or poor, elite or masses. This will entail an allocation of greater resources from the State to support the NCCE’s work on civic education. Moreover, institutional reforms and constitutional amendments will complement strengthening the NCCE to deal with the structural cause polarisation.

In a developing country like Ghana, it would be nearly impossible to solely rely on the State to fulfil this duty. Therefore, CSOs, religious organisations, educational institutions, media and political parties themselves should undertake democracy education by emphasising the values of tolerance, mutual respect among others in political interaction and discourse. If this is done, in the long run Ghana’s democracy would be strengthened to become more deliberative and value-driven rather than elective and disruptive. Until this is taken seriously, the incapacity of the State and assigned institutions as well as political parties, particularly the NDC and NPP, will continue to be blamed for the ongoing decay of Ghana’s politics, values and morals as a result of political polarization.

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⁴⁰ 1992 Constitution, Chapter 6, Article 41

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