

# Democratic Recession, Autocratic Resurgence and The Future of Governance in Africa

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First published 2026

ISBN: 978-1-032-90776-5 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-032-90777-2 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-55976-4 (ebk)

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DOI: 10.4324/9781003559764-12

Open Access funding was provided by Tampere University Library.



**Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group  
LONDON AND NEW YORK

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### Introduction

The West African sub-region ‘manifests a mix of political instabilities, misrule, civil wars, communal violence, and general insecurity’ (Kynsilehto et al., 2023, p. 13), creating a context in which democracy and the rule of law, where they exist, remain exceedingly fragile. The twenty-first century has witnessed a complex interplay of democratic advancements and setbacks across West Africa. While some nations have made significant strides towards democratic consolidation, others have experienced setbacks, revealing the political volatility that characterises the region. Despite these challenges, Ghana emerged as a noteworthy example of democratic resilience. Ghana has managed to establish a relatively stable democratic system, making it a significant model for democratic practices in West Africa (Biney, 2019).

In the post-Cold War era, West Africa experienced a wave of democratisation as many countries transitioned from authoritarian regimes to multiparty democracies (Gyimah-Boadi, 2020). However, this democratisation process has been uneven, with some nations grappling with military coups, electoral manipulation, and weak institutional structures, all of which contribute to the fragility of democracy in the region (Klingemann & Fuchs, 2020). Despite these difficulties, Ghana stands out as a success in terms of democratic stability. While the region is often referred to as the ‘coup belt’ due to its history of political instability (Agyemang, 2022), Ghana has maintained relatively peaceful democratic transitions (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2020). Ghana’s democratic journey is widely regarded as one of the most successful in Africa. Since its transition to multiparty democracy in 1992, the country has conducted regular, peaceful elections and experienced smooth transfers of power, which have cemented its reputation as a beacon of democracy in Africa (Ayee, 2019). Ghana’s political stability is attributed to its robust electoral system, active civil society, and institutional resilience in the face of political challenges (Kjaer, 2020).

A number of studies have focused on the democratic milestone of Ghana as an enduring democracy in West Africa (Ayee, 2019; Gyimah-Boadi, 2020; Asante, 2021). In advancing this discourse, this chapter examines the dynamics of Ghana’s democratisation process within the West African context, where authoritarianism

is a persistent phenomenon. To this end, it assesses the extent of democratic consolidation in Ghana in the twenty-first century, referencing the evolution of political institutions, electoral processes, governance structures, the rule of law, and the involvement of international actors.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

Democracy is always said to lead to development and invariably peace. Nations where democracy and its associated elements of good governance prevail tend to have better living conditions and human rights compared to nations where authoritarianism prevails. At the turn of the twentieth century, Ake (1996: 1) noted that 'political condition in Africa, are the greatest impediment to development'. In Africa, democratic development and political stability are products of the dynamics of formal and informal institutions over time (Cheeseman, 2019). Despite political transitions from dictatorship to civil rule at the close of the twentieth century, many regimes on the continent retain authoritarian traits through repression of opposition groups, election manipulation, and lack of public goods. This phenomenon undermines accountability and democratic development, creating a groundswell for autocratic development (Van de Walle, 2001; Brun & Diamond, 2014). Where citizens' basic needs are unsatisfied, the conditions for strife and conflict occur as people compete for scarce resources (Olaniyan et al., 2021). A cursory overview of the terrain in Africa shows that countries in conflict and war are enmeshed in these situations as a consequence of bad governance and a lack of democratic values.

The discourse on the democracy-development nexus has led to the valorisation of Western countries as legitimate harbingers of democratic and developmental cultures in global history. In this context, the theory of democratic diffusion explains how democratic norms, institutions, and practices spread across countries through various channels (Huntington, 1991). It examines how successful transitions influence neighbouring states with shared cultures or histories. The idea of democratic diffusion evolved from wave-based models to more complex frameworks acknowledging regime diversity and differing responses to external forces (Goldring & Greitens, 2020). With the observation that political systems react differently to outside forces, current research now focuses on the various successes of democratisation across regimes (Elkink, 2011; Goldring & Greitens, 2020). This differs from previous uniform models in that it points out the interaction between domestic political dynamics and global diffusion factors (Levitsky & Way, 2010). Key diffusion channels include geographic proximity, cultural similarity, and transnational networks, with transitions driven by both direct diplomatic pressure and indirect learning effects. While contagion-based models emphasise short-term influence from neighbouring democracies, developmental models focus on structural domestic factors like socioeconomic conditions. In this light, democratisation results from a dynamic interplay between domestic structures and international diffusion rather than any single factor.

The concept of 'democratic development' refers to the gradual process through which democratic institutions, norms, and values are established and consolidated.

These include fundamental elements such as civil liberties, inclusive governance, the rule of law, electoral competitiveness, and the separation of powers (Diamond, 1999; Gyimah-Boadi, 2009). In the context of West Africa, democratic development also involves confronting the enduring legacies of authoritarian rule, colonial fragmentation, and weak state institutions. Unlike the notion of ‘good governance’, which often privileges technocratic concerns such as efficiency, transparency, and accountability, democratic governance focuses on the relationship between the state and its citizens, emphasising political participation, equity, and the human-centred dimensions of governance (Mafeje, 2002). This perspective critiques the depoliticisation inherent in technocratic approaches, which may achieve procedural benchmarks without meaningfully engaging the populace. Mafeje (2002) thus argues that democratic governance entails sustained interaction between the state and civil society, as well as the unfettered participation of citizens through institutional and grassroots mechanisms—an emphasis that places popular engagement at the core of governance, beyond mere administrative competence (Mafeje, 2002). Consequently, any analysis of democratic governance must consider the quality and capacity of institutions that enable citizen participation. In their absence, public trust in the democratic process can erode, potentially leading to instability, insecurity, and democratic regression.

The stages of democratic development are captured by the concept of ‘Democratic Consolidation’. Democratic consolidation refers to the process by which a democracy matures, becoming more stable and institutionalised, such that it becomes the only legitimate form of government within a given society. It involves the deepening of democratic practices and values, where the political system is widely accepted by the population, and where democratic norms are integrated into the functioning of political institutions (Linz & Stepan, 1996). According to Huntington (1991), democratic consolidation occurs when a democratic regime achieves a level of legitimacy and stability, making a return to authoritarianism highly unlikely. This view emphasises that consolidation goes beyond the mere establishment of democratic procedures, focusing on the embedding of democratic values in society and the capacity of democratic institutions to manage societal conflicts.

Central to the concept of democratic consolidation is the idea of institutionalisation, which refers to the extent to which democratic institutions are able to perform their functions effectively, impartially, and in a way that is accepted by the public (Schmitter & Karl, 1991). This includes the rule of law, the protection of civil rights, the holding of free and fair elections, and the existence of a vibrant civil society. For instance, the presence of a strong and independent judiciary, a free press, and a political system that allows for alternation in power are key indicators of a consolidated democracy (Diamond, 1999). Beyond democratic transitions, which emphasise the initial removal of authoritarian governance, consolidation entails the enhancement of democratic principles, the fortification of institutions, and the cultivation of a political culture where all significant players recognise democratic norms as legitimate. In this vein, Abdulai and Crawford (2010) noted that the progression of democracy in Ghana should be viewed as

a process of 'consolidating democracy', which includes not only the creation of electoral structures but also improving democratic institutions, promoting horizontal accountability, and improving mechanisms for the rule of law. In the same light, Oquaye (2000) describes Ghana's democratic development as 'the process of democratization', indicating the gradual establishment of competitive politics, constitutional governance, and the peaceful settlement of political disputes through recognised democratic processes. Elsewhere in West Africa, Guinea serves as a stark reminder of the vulnerability of electoral democracy to authoritarian manipulation. In Guinea, President Alpha Condé was able to run for a third term in 2020 despite the country's long-standing term-limit laws, thanks to a controversial constitutional referendum. In September 2021, a military coup resulted from this decision (Cassani, 2020; Amoah, 2023; Matthews & Sá, 2024). This incident, in which the ruling class subverts constitutional laws, often undermines democratic values and the legitimacy of institutions in West Africa.

Moreover, **democratic resilience** is an important element of consolidation, highlighting a democracy's ability to withstand crises and external shocks. According to Mounk (2018), resilience is demonstrated when democratic institutions are able to endure challenges such as economic crises, political turmoil, and external pressures while maintaining democratic norms and processes. In this sense, the robustness of democratic institutions, including the ability of political parties to peacefully transfer power and ensure public accountability, is a critical component of consolidation. While democratic consolidation suggests a shift from transitional democracy to a stable and functioning democratic system, it is important to acknowledge that this process is often non-linear and can be influenced by both domestic and international factors (Przeworski et al., 2000). Factors such as socio-economic development, the strength of political culture, the role of external actors, and the presence of political elites committed to democratic norms play a significant role in determining the success or failure of democratic consolidation (Diamond, 1999).

Furthermore, West African politics' winner-take-all mentality frequently encourages zero-sum rivalry, widens regional and ethnic divides, and discourages sharing of power and reaching consensus. Election cycles turn into tense times, and in order to stop violence, domestic and foreign parties frequently need to mediate. Modern African societies are marked by complex pluralism, encompassing diverse religious, ethnic, and political identities. In such heterogeneous settings, building consensus is not only conducive to peaceful coexistence but also essential for deepening democratic governance. In contrast with majoritarian models, a central feature of consensus-based democratic systems is proportional representation, which allows for more equitable inclusion of minority groups and fosters a more pluralistic political environment, including broad coalitions, thereby legitimising democratic institutions (Lijphart, 1989; Croissant, 2002, 2004; Croissant & Lott, 2024). Using Ghana's democratic evolution since 1992 as a case study, the subsequent section illuminates these conceptual frames through the lenses of institutional reforms, electoral processes, governance structures, civil society engagement, and the rule of law, with reflections on the challenges and prospects of democratisation in West Africa.

## **Democratic Development in Ghana: Lessons for Democratic Consolidation in West Africa**

The historical development of democracy in Ghana reflects the broader political trajectories of West Africa, where colonial legacies and post-independence struggles shaped their political landscapes. The road to democratic governance has been marked by significant challenges, including military coups, authoritarian regimes, and periods of political instability. However, Ghana stands out in the region for its relatively stable democratic transitions within the third wave of democratisation in Africa, and West Africa to be specific. Ghana's democratic journey began with its independence in 1957, making it the first sub-Saharan African country to break free from colonial rule. Kwame Nkrumah, the country's first president, initially fostered a vision of Pan-Africanism and development, but his authoritarian rule soon led to political repression. In 1966, Nkrumah was overthrown in a military coup, and Ghana entered a period of political instability marked by successive military governments and short-lived civilian administrations (Aye, 2019). It was not until 1992, with the return to multiparty democracy under the leadership of Jerry John Rawlings, that Ghana began its modern democratic experiment. Rawlings, who had initially come to power through a military coup in 1981, transitioned to a civilian government after the 1992 constitution was adopted, establishing Ghana as a multiparty democracy. Since then, Ghana has held regular elections, and power has peacefully alternated between political parties, earning the country a reputation as one of Africa's most successful democracies (Gyimah-Boadi, 2020).

Ghana's path to democracy was shaped by a long period of military rule and political upheaval. However, the transition to democracy involved the establishment of electoral systems, the strengthening of civil society, and the gradual maturation of political institutions. The evolution of these democratic processes underscores the significant role that leadership, political culture, and institutional frameworks play in shaping the political landscapes of post-colonial African states (Abdulai, 2021). Ghana's relatively successful democratic transition has served as a model for other countries in the region, particularly in terms of peaceful elections and political transitions.

The electoral processes, governance structures, and rule of law in Ghana are fundamental components of its democratic development. The country has established electoral systems that ensure political participation and peaceful transitions of power, which are essential for the deepening of its democracy. These processes, along with the strength of its governance frameworks and adherence to the rule of law, have significantly contributed to democratic development. In Ghana, the electoral process is characterised by regular, competitive elections that are generally regarded as free and fair by both domestic and international observers. Since the return to democracy in 1992, Ghana has held six successful presidential elections, and the country has become known for its peaceful transitions of power. The country's electoral system is based on a two-round presidential election, which is held every four years. A candidate must secure at least 50% of the vote in the first round, or a second round is held to determine the winner. Parliamentary elections are also

Table 12.1 Ghana's rating on democratic freedom: 2020–2023

Country	2020 Rating	2021 Rating	2022 Rating	2023 rating
Ghana	Free	Free	Free	Free

Source: Freedom House (2024)

held every four years using a first-past-the-post system. The Electoral Commission of Ghana plays a crucial role in overseeing elections, ensuring transparency and fairness in the voting process (Gyimah-Boadi, 2020). Despite challenges such as voter registration issues and political party manipulation, the country's electoral system is widely seen as a model in Africa due to its inclusivity and integrity (Asante, 2021). Similarly, the West African country of Senegal is also known for its high voter turnout and the peaceful nature of its elections, which have been praised by both local and international observers (Lund, 2015). Elsewhere in West Africa, in Nigeria and Niger, the electoral system is considered not transparent and unaccountable to the voters (Madueke & Enyiazu, 2025; Korotayev et al., 2024).

Electoral commissions continue to face logistical difficulties, charges of bias, and influence from the executive branch in several West African nations. Consider Nigeria, where the Independent National Electoral Commission has implemented electronic voter accreditation (BVAS) and permitted real-time result transmission, among other noteworthy advancements. However, following the 2023 elections, which were tainted by allegations of result tampering and a lack of transparency, which caused a great deal of public outrage, its reputation suffered (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023). Beyond merely having elections, maintaining their integrity is essential to bolstering democracy. Elections that disregard electoral fairness, institutional independence, transparency, and civil rights run the risk of producing 'illiberal democracies' (Zakaria, 1997), where the outward signs of democracy are there but the fundamental democratic values are not.

Ghana has also fared well in the liberal idea of 'Freedom'. At a time when several countries in the global south are classified as 'partly free' and 'not free' by the global non-profit organisation Freedom House, Ghana has consistently been rated as a 'free' state (see Table 12.1). This is a testament to the unwavering desire of people and institutions to pursue the virtues of democracy and try to steer the nation on the path of good governance.

Ghana's rating on democratic freedom illustrates the country's road to democratic consolidation as influenced by strong democratic institutions, political leadership, and a commitment to democratic norms.

The governance structure in Ghana is based on a multi-party system, with strong executive, legislative, and judicial branches that function to check and balance each other. In Ghana, the executive branch is headed by the president, who is both the head of state and the head of government. The president is elected by popular vote and serves a four-year term with a maximum of two terms. The parliament of Ghana is unicameral, with members elected through a first-past-the-post system to represent constituencies. The judiciary in Ghana is independent, and the country

has an active civil society that holds the government accountable through advocacy and oversight (Ayee, 2019). Ghana's decentralised system of governance also allows for local administration and ensures that citizens have access to government services at the regional and district levels. These governance structures support democratic principles by ensuring that power is not concentrated in one branch of government and by providing mechanisms for citizens to participate in political decision-making.

The rule of law is a cornerstone of Ghana's democratic consolidation. In Ghana, the rule of law is enshrined in the 1992 Constitution, which provides for fundamental human rights, the separation of powers, and the independence of the judiciary. Ghana's judiciary is empowered to review laws and actions of the government to ensure compliance with the constitution, and it has acted as a safeguard against authoritarianism (Ayee, 2019). The independence of the judiciary has been tested in several high-profile cases, such as the 2012 election petition, where the Supreme Court upheld the legitimacy of the electoral results despite challenges from opposition parties. This commitment to the rule of law has reinforced public confidence in Ghana's democratic institutions. In Ghana, the electoral processes, governance structures, and adherence to the rule of law have been essential in ensuring democratic consolidation. These elements have fostered political stability, inclusive participation, and respect for human rights, which are necessary for the continued growth of democracy in the country. However, challenges such as political polarisation, corruption, and the need for deeper reforms remain, suggesting that while progress has been made, further efforts are required to fully consolidate democracy in the country.

The democratic development of Ghana has faced significant challenges in terms of political unrest, economic crises, and regional instability, but its institutional responses have played a critical role in mitigating these issues and reinforcing democratic consolidation. The strength and resilience of its political institutions have allowed the country to navigate these crises more effectively than many of its regional counterparts, highlighting the importance of stable governance structures and the rule of law in promoting national stability. In Ghana, political unrest has occasionally threatened the country's democratic stability, particularly during periods of intense electoral competition. One of the most notable instances was the 2000 presidential election, where the opposition party, the New Patriotic Party (NPP), challenged the results, leading to significant public protests and political tension. However, the Electoral Commission, along with the judiciary, played a crucial role in managing the crisis. The Supreme Court of Ghana upheld the election results after a legal challenge, ensuring that democratic processes were respected and reinforcing public trust in electoral integrity (Ayee, 2019). The peaceful resolution of this political unrest demonstrated the strength of Ghana's democratic institutions, particularly its judiciary and electoral bodies, in handling political disputes. Ghana's democratic development reveals a complexity of African political architecture transcending simple political science notions of democratisation and authoritarianism. For instance, Ghana's political leadership, under President Jerry John Rawlings (a former military leader), made strategic efforts

to strengthen democratic processes, such as the introduction of political reforms and the development of civil society organisations, which provided platforms for dialogue and conflict resolution (Gyimah-Boadi, 2020).

In the path to democratic resilience, economic crises have posed significant challenges for Ghana. One of the most severe economic crises occurred in the early 1980s, when Ghana was facing hyperinflation, a collapsed currency, and widespread poverty. The government's response, led by the National Democratic Congress (NDC), included implementing market-oriented reforms under the guidance of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. These reforms, which included privatisation and the removal of subsidies, were met with both public resistance and political instability, but they ultimately led to economic stabilisation in the long run (Osei, 2018). The institutional response to these crises demonstrated the importance of policy flexibility and the role of international financial institutions in Ghana's economic recovery. Over time, Ghana's economic management improved, and the country became one of the fastest-growing economies in Africa in the twenty-first century, largely due to sound fiscal policies and institutional reforms (Gyimah-Boadi, 2020). In this vein, West African countries like Nigeria, embattled with economic difficulties that undermine public goods, could learn from the Ghanaians' path of democratic development.

Ghana has demonstrated the resilience of its political institutions in the face of political unrest, economic crises, and regional instability (Ayee, 2019). The effectiveness of Ghana's political institutions in managing crises has been key to its continued journey to democratic consolidation and stability in West Africa. The establishment of strong democratic structures post-1992, following a history of military rule, has been vital in this regard. The constitution, which includes provisions for regular elections, freedom of expression, and the protection of human rights, has provided a firm foundation for democratic practices (Ayee, 2000). In this direction, the fostering of democratisation through local institutions such as the independent legislature and the judiciary cannot be overemphasised. However, political party competition and partisan divisions have sometimes led to polarisation, undermining the unity necessary for strengthening democracy. The intense rivalry between the NPP and the NDC has occasionally resulted in heightened tensions, although the peaceful nature of elections since the 1990s has prevented violent conflict (Gyimah-Boadi, 2009). These internal political struggles hinder efforts at building trust and long-term stability in the democratic process. Despite these challenges, political party financing in Ghana follows a more democratic nature in comparison to other West African states. For instance, a comparison of Ghanaian and Nigerian political party financing would reveal that the former enjoys a more favourable review than the latter. Ghana has demonstrated highly constitutionalised rules about party financing compared to Nigeria's rating of merely fairly constitutionalised. Whereas in Ghana, state subsidy is fairly provided to political parties, the situation in Nigeria is classified as poor. Moreover, the financing of political parties in Ghana is considered highly transparent and accountable in comparison with Nigeria's unaccountability in this regard (Nam-Katoti et al, 2011; Nwokeke, 2018).

Externally, the influence of international organisations and donor countries has been crucial in shaping democratic consolidation in Ghana. The country has benefited from significant foreign aid aimed at supporting democratic governance, human rights, and civil society initiatives. These external interventions have helped to strengthen Ghana's democratic institutions and civil society organisations, which in turn have fostered political accountability (World Bank, 2008). Indeed, external donors have played a pivotal role in Ghana's democratisation process, providing substantial financial and technical assistance to strengthen democratic institutions, promote good governance, and support civil society initiatives. This support has been instrumental in consolidating Ghana's position as a beacon of democracy in Africa through the Constitutional Reform Act of 1992 (Government of Ghana, 1992). The United States, through agencies like USAID, has been a significant contributor to Ghana's democratic development. In 2023, USAID committed US\$127 million to support various sectors, including governance, health, and education, bringing its total contribution to Ghana's development to US\$656.5 million (USAID, 2023). The United Kingdom, through its Department for International Development (DFID), has also been a key partner in Ghana's democratic journey. Over the past two decades, the United Kingdom has invested over £2 billion in aid to Ghana, focusing on areas like governance, education, and health (Independent Commission for Aid Impact, 2019). In 2022, the UK government provided additional resources of £1 billion to £1.5 billion to support Ghana's development efforts (UK Government, 2023). The European Union has been actively involved in supporting Ghana's democratic processes. In 2016, the EU disbursed €11.9 million to support decentralisation reforms, aiming to improve service delivery at the district level (European Union, 2016). These external contributions have been instrumental in strengthening Ghana's democratic institutions, enhancing governance structures, and promoting civic engagement. The support from these donor countries and organisations underscores the international community's commitment to fostering democracy and good governance in Ghana. However, external influences have not always been entirely positive. The dependency on foreign aid has sometimes led to criticisms of neocolonialism, where democratic processes are influenced by the priorities of donor countries, which may not always align with local needs and conditions (Gyimah-Boadi, 2009). However, the existence of strong local institutions in Ghana has helped safeguard its path to democratisation without compromising the country's sovereignty in the face of international politics.

Furthermore, Ghana's governance structures support its democratic development. Ghana's decentralised reform allows for political participation at local levels, ensuring that governance is not overly centralised. Established by the 1992 Constitution, decentralisation in Ghana aims to transfer administrative, political, and fiscal powers from the central government to local authorities, thereby fostering a more inclusive and responsive governance system (Constitution of Ghana, 1992). This provision underscores the commitment to making democracy a reality by affording all possible opportunities for citizens to participate in decision-making at every level of national life (Constitution of Ghana, 1992). At the heart of this decentralised system are the Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies

(MMDAs), which serve as the highest political authorities in their respective districts. These assemblies are responsible for formulating and executing plans, programs, and strategies for the effective mobilisation of resources necessary for the overall development of their districts. The assemblies are composed of elected members, including the District Chief Executive, who is appointed by the president, and other members appointed in consultation with traditional authorities and other interest groups (Kumah-Abiwu, 2025; Adusei-Asante, 2012). Ghana's decentralisation also emphasises fiscal autonomy, allowing local governments to raise and manage their own revenues. The creation of the District Development Fund in 2006 enabled the central government and donors to channel funds directly to the districts, enhancing transparency and accountability in the utilisation of resources. This financial empowerment has led to improved service delivery in sectors such as education, health, and infrastructure. Furthermore, the decentralisation process has been instrumental in promoting democratic participation. Additionally, the decentralisation framework has encouraged the involvement of non-state actors, including non-governmental organisations and traditional authorities, in local governance, thereby broadening the base of democratic participation (Ackah, 2024; Osei-Kufuor & Bukari, 2022). Despite these advancements, challenges persist in the decentralisation process. Issues such as inadequate funding, capacity constraints at the local level, and the need for constitutional amendments to enhance the democratic environment of politics in Ghana have been identified.

In essence, democratic development in Ghana reveals several lessons for other West African countries striving for democratic consolidation. Firstly, the importance of leadership cannot be overstated. Ghana has benefited from leaders who have successfully navigated transitions from authoritarianism to democracy. Secondly, strong electoral systems and governance structures are essential for ensuring political stability and fostering public trust in democratic institutions. The smooth transition of power in Ghana demonstrates that electoral integrity and peaceful competition are crucial for the survival of democracy. Moreover, the role of civil society in the country has been indispensable. A vibrant civil society, including independent media and active political participation, has helped to hold the government accountable and promote democratic values. The external support provided by international organisations and donor countries has played a crucial role in strengthening democratic institutions, but it is vital that this support respects the sovereignty of the country and aligns with their specific needs and contexts. Ghana's decentralisation reform is a cornerstone of its democratic development, facilitating citizen participation, enhancing local governance, and promoting equitable development. Ghana's decentralisation structure plays a pivotal role in supporting its democratic development by decentralising administrative and financial powers, promoting citizen participation, and enhancing local governance. The ongoing efforts to strengthen decentralisation reflect a commitment to building a more inclusive and democratic society.

Ghana's decentralisation programme is a reflection of the fact that African societies are made up of people and groups from different religious, political, and ethnic backgrounds. Building consensus is therefore very important for peaceful coexistence

and democratic development in such a society. In the political arena, the quality of political decisions is measured in terms of the acceptance by those who are bound by those decisions (Doherty, 2015; Issacharoff, 2008). Therefore, seeking consensus is axiomatic in every human society. The most focal point of consensus-based democracy is often built around the idea of representation. Proportional representation in consensus democracies gives individuals and groups, especially minority groups, a better representation (see Lijphart, 1999). Thus, Consensus Democracy is a democratic model where governments are supported by a wider range of diverse social and political groups (Croissant, 2002). Decisions under consensus-based democracies are taken based on consensus by relevant groups across different divides of society, but not just by the majority group as it is done in a majoritarian system (Hendriks, 2010). As noted by Graeber (2004), African societies such as the Talensi in Northern Ghana, the Logoli of Western Kenya, and the Nuer (of Southern Sudan), where decisions are taken based on consensus, functioned in a peaceful and orderly manner without any form of centralised government or administration.

Ghana has made strides to improve its democratic credentials since 1992. However, the country still records violence during elections and allegations of corruption by government officials. Resource mismanagement by public office holders undermines public goods, as indicated by the growing youth unemployment in the country (Kendie et al., 2021). The youth movement is a growing, formidable force holding the government to accountability and supporting Ghana's path to democratic consolidation. This is illustrated by the activities of the #FixTheCountry campaign. While challenges such as political polarisation, corruption, and economic crises persist, Ghana has demonstrated that sustained democratic development is achievable in West Africa with the right mix of leadership, institutional strength, and external support. Its experience provides valuable insights for other countries in the region, particularly those grappling with political instability or authoritarianism, highlighting the importance of inclusive electoral processes, strong governance structures, and the protection of democratic rights.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter shows that despite its unique challenges, Ghana has demonstrated significant strides towards strengthening democratic governance in West Africa. It reveals that the success of democratic development in the country is heavily influenced by the strength of its political institutions and leadership. Ghana, emerging from a turbulent history of military coups, has built a stable democracy characterised by regular elections, peaceful transitions of power, and a robust civil society. However, it faces challenges such as political polarisation, corruption, and the need for further institutional reforms to consolidate democracy fully. The role of external actors, particularly international organisations and donor countries, has also been pivotal. Support from these external actors has strengthened Ghana's democratic institutions, although it has raised concerns about neocolonialism. Despite this, governance reforms such as the decentralisation framework allow strategic spending of donors' endowment in promoting democratic governance.

Moreover, the imperative of consensus building in Ghana unveils the benefits of decentralisation for inclusive governance and the importance of nurturing institutional and civil society frameworks that constrain executive overreach. Ghana's path to decentralisation and devolution of power emphasises a suitable political structure where decisions are taken in consultation with all stakeholders, including minority groups, thereby strengthening the democratic value of pluralism. The Ghanaian example emphasises the critical place of electoral integrity, the rule of law, and strong political institutions to foster democratic resilience. As Ghana continues to refine its democratic systems, it provides a promising template for other West African countries aspiring to strengthen democratic institutions and governance in the twenty-first century. In sum, Ghana's democratic development underscores the nuanced and non-linear nature of democratic consolidation in post-authoritarian societies. It exemplifies how democracy can take root and flourish—even in the face of historical legacies of instability—when supported by institutional resilience, civic engagement, and both regional and global solidarity. As such, Ghana serves not only as a beacon of hope but also as a strategic blueprint for democratic renewal across West Africa.

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