The Third Peaceful Transfer of Power and Democratic Consolidation in Ghana

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Abstract

This paper examines Ghana's drive towards democratic consolidation and maturity after a third peaceful transfer of political power. It argues that even though some successes have been made, any attempt at describing Ghana's democracy as consolidated, would mean condoning mediocrity and lowering the bar of democratic consolidation. From the minimalists' view of democratic consolidation, the paper concedes the successes made after three turnover and peaceful transfer of power.

However, this paper takes the view that Ghana's electoral processes continue to be saddled with monumental flaws that undermine the integrity of elections and poses a threat of democratic relapse. From the maximalists view, the study points to some successes in terms of the existence of a multi-party system, the implementation of some electoral reforms, the existence of vibrant civil society and media as well as the acceptance of democratic norms behaviourally, attitudinally and constitutionally by the ordinary Ghanaian citizenry and political elites. These achievements notwithstanding, the study identifies several deficits of democratic consolidation including excessive powers of the executive president, ethnic or tribal politics, post-election violence, limited policy influence of civil society, as well as the deliberate effort at tagging civil society with a view to gagging them.

Keywords: Ghana, Third, Peaceful, Turnover, Transfer of Power, Elections, Democratic Consolidation.

Introduction

Ghana is seen as a model of democracy in Africa (Ayee, 1997; Gyimah-Boadi, 2001; Daddieh, 2009; Abdulai & Crawford, 2010; Gyimah-Boadi & Prempeh, 2012; Gyimah-Boadi, 2015). In this regard, many democracy watchers across the globe were not surprised when the 2016 General Elections ended peacefully. The incumbent government that lost the elections[2] handed over power peacefully to the leader of the main opposition party. This marked the third smooth transfer of power from a ruling party to the opposition in a manner that demonstrates some determination on the part of Ghanaians to climb higher the ladder of democratic progression.[3]

Earlier works on elections, democracy and democratic consolidation in Ghana like that of Gyimah-Boadi (1991) discussed Ghana's transition to constitutional rule. Other scholars such as Ayee, (1997); Ayee, (2002); Smith, 2002b; Daddieh, 2009; Gyimah-Boadi, 2001, 2009; Alidu, 2014) have also examined the 1996, 2000, 2008 and 2012 presidential and parliamentary elections respectively. Some other works have also highlighted the role of the Ghanaian media, civil society and state institutions in Ghana's drive towards democratic consolidation (Whitfield, 2003; Arthur, 2010; Gyampo & Asare, 2015). A few others have also focused on the role of third parties and their abysmal electoral performance in Ghana since 1992 and its implication for multiparty democracy in Ghana (Yobo & Gyampo, 2015). More so, some other scholarly works have looked at ethnicity and electoral politics in Ghana and highlighted its positives and dangers to Ghana' fledgling democracy (Frempong 2001, 2004, 2006; Arthur, 2009).

Clearly, Ghana's thriving democracy has received considerable scholarly attention (Abdulai & Crawford, 2010; Agyeman-Duah, 2005; Arthur, 2010; Ayee, 2011; Ayee, 1997, 1998, 2002; Boafo-Arthur, 2006; Bob-Milliar, 2012a; Brierley & Ofosu, 2014; Daddieh, 2009; Debrah, 2016; Gyampo & Asare, 2015; Gyimah-Boadi, 2009; Oquaye, 1995; Smith, 2002; Yobo & Gyampo, 2015). However, not much has been discussed on its recent third turnover of political power which occurred on 7 January 2017. This is a significant and topical phenomenon which deserves scholarly attention. This paper therefore contributes to the body of knowledge by examining the extent to which Ghana's democracy has been consolidated after a third peaceful transfer of political power. It does so within the framework of the minimalist and the maximalist conceptualization of democratic consolidation (Linz 1990; Huntington, 1991a, Huntington, 1991b; Beetham 1994; Diamond 1997). In terms of structure, the paper theorizes democratic consolidation; examines the practical extent of democratic consolidation in Ghana since the inception of the Fourth Republic in 1992; and draws some useful conclusions.

Theorizing Democratic Consolidation

There emerged a strong authoritarian tendency, a decade after the 1960s when many countries in Africa obtained independence from colonial rule. The nationalist movements that led many African states to independence quickly moved to undermine or abolish opposition parties. These ruling groups had the resources to co-opt opponents to extend and consolidate their support base (Sandbrook, 2000, p. 16). As a result, democracy was in short supply in Africa, especially sub-Saharan Africa where out of forty-seven countries only three – Mauritius, Botswana and Gambia – retained multiparty democracy for twenty years or more. Nonetheless, circumstances changed globally in the 1980s, with many economic hardships in these countries, which discredited authoritarian regimes. This gave birth to the democratic wave in the 1990s forcing the authoritarian regimes to embrace democracy. This is what Huntington, (1991b, 1991a) referred to as the "third wave of democratisation."

The concepts of democracy, democratisation and democratic consolidation defy a universally accepted definition. A democracy is seen as a compound of institutions of modern state and institutions of mass participation and representation with guaranteed freedoms (Rose & Shin, 2001, p. 333). To Huntington, (1991a, 1991b) democracy is a political system where virtually all adult population of sound mind are enfranchised to select their leaders through fair, honest and periodic elections (Huntington, 1991b, pp. 8–9).

It has been argued that Ghana has made giant strides towards democratic consolidation after successfully holding seven General Elections since 1992 and undergoing political transfer of power for three consecutive times. But, what is democratic consolidation? Does the Ghanaian situation necessarily epitomize democratic consolidation? The literature on democratic consolidation is mainly between two schools of thought. They are the minimalists and the maximalists' perspectives. Minimalists such as Linz (1990) argue that democracy is consolidated when there is the 'two-elections' test or the 'transfer of power' test.[4] This occurs when a government that was elected in free and fair elections, contests and is defeated at subsequent elections and accepts the results. In this view, it is not about winning office but losing it and accepting the verdict. This demonstrates that influential players and their social backers are ready and have respect for the rules of the game over the continuation of their power (ibid). This, according to Beetham (1994) is problematic since it is possible to have an electoral system that meets certain minimum democratic standards, but where such a transfer of power may simply not take place, because the electorate may keep voting for the same party as occurred in Botswana since independence, Japan and Italy for over fifty years (Beetham, 1994, p. 130). In this regard, some have argued that a democracy could be described as consolidated when there is simply longevity or generation test of twenty years of regular competitive elections. But, this position is also challenged on grounds that it could also lead to a long term serving party, with no change in government, and no experience in power transfer (ibid).

Another minimalist, Huntington, (1991b, 1991a) argues further that democracy is consolidated after 'two-turnover test.' To him, it is not just two elections but two-turn overs. Democracy, according to him is consolidated when a party that wins an election, loses and transfer power to another party that also loses an election and hand over power peacefully after an election. However, the minimalist scholars such as Dahl (1971), Schumpeter, (1976), Linz (1990), Huntington (1991b, 1991a) have been criticized by maximalists for committing the fallacy of electoralism (Karl, 2000), by "privileging elections over all other dimensions of democracy" (cited in Rose & Shin, 2001, p. 334). Maximalists like Beetham (1994) and Diamond (1997, 1999) suggests that for a democracy to be consolidated there must be certain features or conditions in place beyond elections and turnover of power. Diamond (1997, 1999) for instance, suggests that democratic consolidation encompasses the respect and protection of individuals and group liberties with an autonomous vibrant civil society. In his view, free and fair elections are needed but require certain political right of expression, organisations, and opposition, which are not in isolation. Consolidating democracy also requires the availability of mechanisms for the expression of dissent, articulation of interests, influencing of public policy and checking the exercise of power in the inter-election period. (Diamond, 1999).

Though the maximalists perspective have also been critiqued for extending the definition of democratic consolidation to encompass all the features needed to improve the overall quality of democracy (Linz & Stepan, 1996), it is from Diamond's (1997, 1999) conceptualization of democratic consolidation that this paper seeks to assess the progress and challenges to democratic consolidation in Ghana after a peaceful third turnover and peaceful transfer of political power in January 2017.

In Africa, Gyimah-Boadi (2015, p. 101) has observed that whereas some countries have in recent times incorporated democratic features such as the conduct of elections; the acceptance of constitutional norms; the emergence of free media; and an active civil society democracy continues to wane in some part of the continent. According to him, in some instances, African democratic growth has been slow, some have stalled in progress, and others have been backsliding (ibid).

Remarkably, Ghana appears to be doing well than many African countries after having exercise democracy for over twenty-four years. In this regard, can it be said that Ghana's democracy has been consolidated after three turnovers and peaceful transfer of power from the minimalists' and maximalists' perspective? The following section answers these questions.

Democratic Consolidation in Ghana's Fourth Republic

Minimalists' Perspective

Undisputedly, Ghana passed Samuel Huntington's two turnover test to democratic consolidation when political power alternated between the NDC and the NPP in 2001, 2009 and 2017 (Diamond, 1999; Huntington, 1991b, 1991a). The first peaceful transfer of power was in January 2001 after the 2000 General Election. In the 2000 election, incumbent Jerry John Rawlings, under the auspices of the NDC, had served his mandated two terms and was not eligible to seek re-election according to the constitutional provision. Consequently, a former vice president, J.E.A. Mills who became the NDC presidential nominee for the December 2000 polls lost to John Kufuor of the opposition NPP after a runoff presidential election on 28 December 2000. This occurred when no candidate secured the constitutionally 50 percent plus one vote in the 7 December 2000 polls (Yobo & Gyampo, 2015).

Subsequently, the John Kufuor –led government of the NPP, just like Rawlings' NDC, served two terms having won the next presidential election of 2004 with 52.5 percent against J. E. A. Mills who secured 44.9 percent of total votes. Just like John Rawlings in 2000, John Kufuor could not contest the 2008 polls. The 2008 polls, with the similitude of the 2000 polls, was won after a runoff election by NDC's J. E. A. Mills who polled 50.2 percent as against Nana Akufo-Addo of the NPP who secured 49.8 percent. Consequently, there was a peaceful transition from the NPP to the NDC on 7 January 2009. This transition marked the second turnover of political power in Ghana since the inception of the Fourth Republic (Yobo & Gyampo, 2015). The third alternation of power occurred on 7 January 2017 after the 7 December 2016 polls, which were won by Nana Akufo-Addo of the NPP who defeated incumbent President John Mahama in a keenly contested presidential race.

These remarkable events, in the view of Gyimah-Boadi (2009), Alidu (2014), Yobo and Gyampo (2015), confirm Ghana's place as a beacon of hope for democracy in Africa. Indeed, after over twenty-four years of democratisation, Ghana appears to be doing better after every election. From the minimalists' point of view therefore, it appears Ghana's democracy is consolidating because Ghana has gone through three peaceful turnovers of power in 2001, 2009 and 2017.

But were the elections devoid of challenges? Elections in Ghana have been fraught with several challenges that continue to threaten the relapse of Ghana's democratic gains. For instance the 1992 elections saw many allegation of electoral fraud, which marred the 1992 polls, and Jerry John Rawlings of the NDC was declared the winner with 58.3 percent of total votes (Jeffries & Thomas, 1993, p. 331; Arthur, 2010, p. 207). All the seven elections held since 1992 have been plagued with monumental flaws and accusations of electoral malpractices and disputes which have sometimes resulted in protracted court litigations. For instance, the 2012 General Elections were disputed at the nation's apex court. Indeed, the election petition and Supreme Court ruling exposed some monumental flaws of Ghana's electoral processes that cannot be glossed over in the quest for free and fair elections. In his ruling, Justice William Atuguba noted that:

"This petition however has exposed the need for certain electoral reforms. I mention same of them. The Voters register must be compiled and made available to the parties as early as possible; a supplementary register may cater for late exigencies; the calibre of presiding officers must be greatly raised up; the pink sheet is too elaborate, a much simpler one to meet the pressures of the public, weariness and lateness of the day at the close of a poll etc; the carbon copying system has to be improved upon; the Biometric Device System must be streamlined to avoid breakdowns and the stress on the electorate involved in an adjournment of the poll; and invalidating wholesale votes for insignificant excess numbers is not the best application of the administrative principle of the proportionality test".

Following this, the Electoral Commission invited proposals for electoral reform from thirty-eight key stakeholders including political parties, faith-based organizations, professional bodies and Civil Society Organizations. [5] The IEA under the aegis of the Ghana Political Parties Programme (GPPP) for instance, held series of workshops to review the electoral processes. This culminated in the submission of over twenty-five proposals for electoral reform to the Electoral Commission on 20th November 2013.[6]

Subsequently, the Electoral Commission in January 2015 inaugurated a ten-member Electoral Reforms Committee to examine the proposals for electoral reform and advise the Commission on the implementation of the proposals. The Committee, comprising of representatives of political parties, the Electoral Commission and Civil Society Organizations submitted its report encapsulating forty-one proposals for electoral reform to the Commission in April 2015.[7] Close to 99 percent of the proposals were generally accepted by the Electoral Commission albeit some with some few modifications while others were slated for further discussion with political parties before implementation.[8] The Commission argued that some of the proposals were not directly within its jurisdiction to decide on and therefore categorized the recommendations as follows:

1. Those that fall outside the ambit of the Commission
2. Those that have been wholly accepted with some modifications by the Commission
3. Those that have been accepted in principle but require further discussion with political parties
4. Those that were rejected.

Proposals Outside the Ambit of the Commission

Eight proposals fell outside the ambit of the Commission. The Commission therefore forwarded same to the appropriate institutions including parliament, Judicial Service, the Attorney-General's Department, etc for their necessary attention. These proposals bothered on the term of the office of the chairperson and members of the Commission; appointment of Commission members following broad consultations and with prior approval of parliament; financial estimates of the Commission to be sent directly to parliament; removal of Attorney-General's consent before prosecuting electoral offences; empowering the Commission to prosecute election offences; establishment of Election Tribunals to determine electoral cases and petitions; spelling out grounds for invalidating the election of a President; and the need to reduce the period of determination of a Presidential Election Petition.

Proposals Accepted with Modifications

A total of 17 proposals were accepted by the Commission with some modifications. These are:

- The need for well-trained election officials to man the polls
- Continuous voter registration exercise
- Setting up a National Collation Centre to replace the Strong-Room
- Institutionalizing the Inter-Party Advisory Committee meetings
- Using the Biometric Verification Devices for voter registration and exhibition exercises
- Raising the minimum educational qualification requirements for various levels of Election Officials
- Defining the term "ordinarily resident" in CI 72 and "hails from" to the qualifications to be registered as a voter in an electoral area.
- Taking of oath by election officials before a judicial officer
- Holding elections in November instead of December and
- Deferring the adoption of electronic voting
- The EC to take steps to reduce rejected ballots
- Sanctioning Election Officials who breach electoral laws

- Numbering serially all the Statement of Poll and the Declaration of Result Sheets
- Making clear provisions regarding processes and procedures to be followed upon an adjournment of the Poll.
- Improving compensation package for Election Officials
- Giving vulnerable persons priority at all polling stations
- Improving upon the training of Election Officials and Staff of the Commission

Proposals Accepted in Principle but requiring further Discussions at IPAC

The above proposals were fifteen in number. They were:

- No creation of additional constituencies in election year
- Extending the period of notice for Voter Registration Exercise from 14 to 21 days
- Giving mandate to the Commission to go to Court to seek authority to delete names of unqualified persons from Provision Voters' Register
- The Commission must be required by law to give a copy of the final Certified Register to parties 21 day before elections
- Civil Society Organizations must be full members of IPAC
- Reducing number of voters per polling station
- Publishing an annual calendar of activities of the Commission at the beginning of an Election year
- Publishing in the Gazette all Polling stations with their codes and locations not later than 42 days before elections
- Returning Officer should give copies of Proxy, Special and Absent voters' lists to candidates or their agents
- Expanding the list of accredited special voters to include accredited media personnel and election observers
- Redesigning and simplifying the Statement of Poll and Declaration of Results Form
- Where there is over-voting, the results of the Polling Station should be annulled
- Returning Officers must issue copies of collation sheets to agents
- Publish the Presidential Election Results on a Polling station by Polling station basis

Rejected Proposal

The only proposal that was rejected by the electoral Commission was *the No Verification, No Vote principles.* In the wisdom of the Electoral Commission, it would be unfair to machines to determine who is eligible to vote. The Commission indeed recognized that the right of a citizen to vote is fundamental and guaranteed by the 1992 Constitution. In the view of the Commission, it has an inherent mandate to ensure that every eligible voter gets the opportunity to vote. The Commission argued that in the absence or malfunctioning of the Biometric Verification Device, there should be other physical or manual means of verifying voters in order not to disenfranchise Ghanaians.[9]

It is imperative to point out that the EC was able to implement a few of these prior to the 2016 General Elections hence. It set up a National Collation Centre to replace the strong room; published some time lines for its election activities; and put in place an arrangement to commence continuous voter registration. The rest of the proposals were not implemented. Therefore, the 2016 elections could only be described as "miraculously successful" as no concrete and detailed proposals for electoral reform were implemented. So, even though Ghana's 2016 General Elections were seen as free, fair, transparent and credible, the electoral processes were virtually on "auto-piloting." More must be done to fine-tune Ghana's electoral processes in the nation's quest to consolidate her democratic gains, at least from the minimalists' point of view.

Maximalists' Perspective

As pointed out, democracy according to the maximalists, is consolidated when there are certain conditions in place beyond elections and turnover of power (Beetham, 1994; Diamond, 1997, 1999). These features include rule of law, vibrant civil society, respect and protection of individuals and group liberties in addition to free and fair elections are needed but require certain political right of expression, organisations, and opposition, which are not in isolation. Judging from the maximalist's view, it can also be said that Ghana has inched only closer to democratic consolidation.

To begin with, a prime achievement of Ghana's democratic consolidation process is the continuous practice of multiparty system for over two decades. This has permitted the formation of political parties to compete in elections since 1992. For Morrison (2004), political parties have become interest aggregators and reflectors of reasonable democratic practices and consolidation. For instance, political parties in Ghana had moved from the era when they served as personalised tools for authoritarian leaders to more institutionalised democratic assets (Bratton & Van de Walle, 1994).

Therefore, in the new wave of democratisation in Ghana, parties seem critical in organising public preferences and this drive the maturity level of democracy to another level. These parties abide by the electoral rules and seek to capture political office through elections. By so doing, electorate's choices are widened, and they are not restricted to one or two parties as in a closed system of democracy. Ghana has over 25 registered political parties and even though two parties appear dominant since 1992, the smaller parties have also been a force to reckon with. Indeed, the significance of the other smaller parties cannot be ignored since they have on two occasions (2000 and 2008) pushed the elections into a run-off. The competitive multiparty system in Ghana, since 1992, has been a key to the sustenance and consolidation of the current dispensation. Even though competition and political mobilisation were initially done along ethnic, religious and regional lines, the Ghanaian electorate has successful become sophisticated and discerning and are progressively making electoral decisions based on policies and programs in parties' manifestoes. Hence, parties' take it upon themselves to contributes to political socialisation by providing information that helps citizens to form opinions and make a choice during elections (Crotty, 1971).

It must at this juncture be pointed out that the mere existence of over 25 registered political parties does not necessarily guarantee a multiparty democracy. Since 1992, only two parties in Ghana have shown the wherewithal and seriousness to elections. It is true that in 2000 and 2008, the smaller parties were able to push the elections into run-offs. It is equally worth-nothing that in the 2012 and 2016 elections their role and contribution to the electoral processes were negligible as they had practically no impact on the outcome of the elections.

Secondly, Ghana's third democratic turnover has ensued partly as a result of the many progressive electoral reforms that have been executed since 1992; when the electoral outcome of the founding election of the fourth republic was highly perceived as fraudulent (Boahen, 1995; Jeffries & Thomas, 1993; Oquaye, 1995). Since then, Ghana's Electoral Commission, together with stakeholders, have progressively reformed the electoral process; and of great significance is the introduction of the Inter-party Advisory Committee (IPAC) which brings together political parties and civil society to build electoral consensus; and, the deployment of the biometric machines to register and authenticate voters (Ayee, 1997; Boafo-Arthur, 2008; Frempong, 2008, 2012). It is also important to stress that Ghanaian political parties recognise the practical value of inter-party alliances as a building block towards democratic consolidation (Abdulai & Crawford, 2010). These electoral reforms are backed by legal frameworks such as the Public Elections Regulations Law (2012) and the Public Elections (Registration of Voters) Regulation 2012 (C.I 72) as well as statutory instruments (C.I 73) and (C.I 75) which regulates the biometric register and voting system and addressed any challenge that may forestall fruitful and credible elections (EC-Ghana, 2016b).

One significant observation is the strategic redefinition of campaign trend with the increased growth of technology. Political parties have reformed their campaign platforms to include social media, especially in the 2012 and 2016 elections unlike the elections before (Penplusbytes, 2016; TheBFTonline, 2016). Also, campaign in Ghana's elections hitherto was mainly tribalistic and ethnical along clientelistic and neo-patrimonial lines instead of issues and policy-centred (Lindberg & Morrison, 2008; Lonsdale, 2014). During the recent 2016 electioneering campaign, for instance, both the incumbent and the opposition parties deployed issue-based campaigns to woo the electorate. This propelled many competitive campaign pledges including expanding access to healthcare and education, job creation and industrialisation, among others.

Even though these reforms have contributed to strengthening the electoral process, the Supreme Court election petition in Ghana following the 2012 elections exposed huge challenges of the electoral processes that require reform. Even though the Electoral Reform Commission put in place by the Electoral Commission submitted over forty proposals for electoral reform, less than five percent of the proposals were implemented in 2016.[10] Impliedly, Ghana's electoral processes still require monumental and radical reforms to ensure that they deliver credible and acceptable results.

Thirdly, there has been an increased contribution of civil society and media to the development of Ghana's democratic political culture. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) were nascent in the initial stages of the democratic dispensation, but a well-defined civil society emerged to facilitate the 1996 and the subsequent elections (Frempong, 2012). Typical among them is the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO), and the Network of Domestic Election Observers (NEDEO). The vibrancy and interest of CSOs increased over the years as well as their mounting pressure on government and reflected in the electoral reforms and democratic institutionalisation. Owing to this, Gyimah-Boadi (2009) posits that Ghana's civil society—including religious, secular, and professional organisations, as well as think tanks and civic-advocacy bodies—acting individually and in groups, was vigorous and savvy enough to monitor the entire electoral process from beginning to end, thereby enhancing its transparency. Civil society's interventions, along with media vigilance, helped to keep campaigns issue-based and peaceful. This signified a renewed political alertness and expanded the democratic space. The impact of Ghanaian CSOs on public policy-making remains a driving force for the democratic consolidation process. For example, in 2012 the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) held live televised presidential and vice-presidential debates; the Association of Ghanaian Industries hosted meetings with all the presidential candidates to discuss economic and business policies; and the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO), in collaboration with the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), since 2000 provide forums for parliamentary candidates to interact with their constituents.

The increasing alertness and watchdog role of CSOs has concurrently increased Civic participation in policy-making. It must be noted that in spite of their contributions, CSOs continue to suffer from lack of funding that douses their independence and sometimes makes them pliable tools in the hands of their foreign funding partners. Again, the conspicuous absence of *Freedom to Information Law* still limits the availability of relevant information to CSOs as well as the over-dependence of CSOs on donor funding leading to their co-option by external actors (Abdulai & Crawford, 2010; Crawford, 2006). Although a number of structures have emerged independently from CSOs through which citizens can influence public policy, these according to Abdulai and Crawford (2009) are generally top-down 'invited spaces' where selected organizations are 'invited to participate in a policy consultation hosted and controlled by government officials. Furthermore, CSOs in Ghana continue to suffer the disingenuous practice of being deliberately tagged by political parties to be in bed with other parties in an attempt to discredit them. For instance, the 2016 IEA's Presidential Debate was boycotted by the ruling party among others, on grounds of that the institution according to the ruling NDC, is in bed with the opposition NPP. IMANI Ghana suffered the same tag when it issued its verdict on the various promises made by the political elites. There is, therefore, a certain deliberate effort to silence the voice of reason particularly by the ruling party in a manner that douses the role of civil society and other independent arbiters in Ghana's electoral politics.

Using Linz and Stepan's definition of a consolidated democracy, we examine further, the extent to which Ghana's democracy has been consolidated. On the behavioural dimension, Linz and Stepan (1996, 2011) argue that no significant political groups seriously attempt to overthrow the democratic regime or secede from the state. Succession and political power transition have not been an issue in Ghana under the current dispensation, and this can be attributed to behavioural change due to the roles play by various institutions to instil the principles and basic tenets of democracy on the minds of ordinary Ghanaians. Apparently, democracy is becoming a culture that the ordinary Ghanaian lives with and cannot afford to destroy it. The political elites and leaders have continuously made an unconditional commitment to preserving the country's democratic regime. As a result, Ghana has witnessed three peaceful transfer of political power from to and from opposition parties. These smooth transitions are indicative of mature democratic behaviour. Ghanaian political class now recognise democracy as the 'only game in town' (Abdulai & Crawford, 2010, p. 30).

It must however be mentioned that there have been some attempts at secession. In February 2017, some minority group christened the Homeland Study Group Foundation, based in Ho, the Volta Regional capital of Ghana threatened and initiated demonstrations to break away from Ghana to constitute an independent state to be called the Western Togoland State.

The group claimed that residents of the Western Togoland voted to become a Union with the Gold Coast through the 1956 plebiscite (now Ghana) but the Union has not been established.[11] This move does not only run contrary to prevailing international order of globalization which rather facilitates the integration of states and nations into political and economic blocks. It also treasonable and undermines the nation's record and attempt at consolidating the democratic gains made from the behavioural perspective.

Attitudinally, Linz and Stefan (1996; 2011) argue that democracy is consolidated on when "the overwhelming majority of the people believe that any further political change must emerge from within the parameters of democratic formulas," even in the presence of severe economic crises and general hardship (Linz & Stepan, 1996b, p. 5). In Ghana, results of the Afrobarometer surveys, conducted in 1999, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2014 and 2015 suggest overwhelming support for democracy among Ghanaians (CDD, 2012; Afrobarometer, 2017). Ghanaians firmly rejected non-democratic regimes, with an overwhelming majority of respondents in the Round 4 survey disapproving of presidential dictatorship (84%); single party rule (81%); and military rule (79%).[12] There is conspicuous evidence that suggests significant progress regarding the positive attitude towards democracy exhibited by most Ghanaians, with an overwhelming majority endorsing democracy as their preferred form of governance, even in the context of high-levels of economic dissatisfaction (Afrobarometer, 2017). This indicates the significant extent to which a democratic political culture has become embedded in Ghanaian society. Similarly, Boafo-Arthur (2008) notes that 'Ghanaians are incurably political and they cherish going to the polls to pick those to rule them. Exercising their franchise has become part of their political existence' (Boafo-Arthur, 2008, p. 40).

Finally, from the constitutional standpoint, Linz and Stefan (1996) argue that democracy is consolidated when all political actors in the state, governmental and non-governmental alike, 'become subjected to, and habituated to, the resolution of conflict within the specific laws, procedures and institutions sanctioned by the new democratic process' (Linz & Stepan, 1996b, p. 6). Here, two aspects of conflict and its resolution are examined – electoral disputes and chieftaincy disputes – with different conclusions regarding democratic consolidation (Abdulai & Crawford, 2010, p. 35). Ghana has enjoyed nearly two decades of peaceful multiparty democracy, because Ghanaian political actors have continually used the appropriate democratic institutions in addressing their grievances, leading to the resolution of several potentially destabilising electoral disputes. Boafo-Arthur (2008) gives well-elaborated discussions on how potentially destabilising election-related disputes had been resolved using the courts since the 1992 elections. Also, main Ghanaian political actors have accepted the rule of law as the best option in settling the electoral dispute through appropriate procedures and institutions, and there have also been an increased trust in the capacity of the legal institutions to that effect (Abdulai & Crawford, 2010). This is clearly evident in 2012 elections petition as discussed next.

Ghana's 2012 presidential election ended up at the Supreme Court. The Electoral Commission (EC) at the end of polls declared the National Democratic Congress nominee, John Dramani Mahama, winner of the election. Following the declaration of the results, the New Patriotic Party (NPP), which lost the presidential election, filed a petition at the Supreme Court on 28 December 2008 challenging the EC's declaration on the grounds of electoral irregularities. Although this created tension and anxiety in the country, the court process ended up enhancing the democratic credentials of the country through the testing and trial of institutions such as the Electoral Commission and the judiciary (Kwarteng, 2014; Alidu 2014). Throughout the proceedings, Ghanaians, irrespective of party affiliation, continued to trust the Supreme Court to resolve the puzzle by meting out justice without fear or favour. Certainly, the turnout was well received by both parties as they responded well to the court's decision to uphold the electoral victory of NDC's John Dramani Mahama (Omotola, 2013). Significant of the election petition is the evidence that Ghana can resolve election crisis in its political development. For Kwarteng (2014, p. 93), 'post-election tranquillity would be Ghana's export to the political market of democracy and governance in Africa and the Commonwealth. The petition demonstrated a sense of national pride to showcase Ghana's democratic credentials'.

Other Issues on Ghana's Drive Towards Democratic Consolidation

Despite the above discussion, there are other serious deficits in terms of democratic consolidation that cannot be glossed over. First of all, a major limitation to democratic consolidation in Ghana is a complex and cumbersome state bureaucracy and excessive executive powers. It is well documented on how bureaucracy in Ghana suffers from problems of corruption and ineffectiveness (Abdulai & Crawford, 2010; Gyimah-Boadi, 2009; Prempeh, 2008). For instance, Prempeh (2008) argues that excessive executive power has placed in the hands of the president the ability unilaterally to create and to restructure ministries, departments, and agencies which successive governments have arbitrary utilised in their own discretion breeding corruption, nepotism and mediocrity. The Constitution of the Republic has placed too much power on the president to the point that he/she cannot be checked by other institutions. As has been argued by Gyampo and Graham (2014), Ghana's hybrid constitution gives extensive executive powers to the president in a way that makes the presidential office very powerful. For instance, Articles 107 and 108 of the 1992 Constitution give the president the power to pass any law and as such submit bills to Parliament (Government of Ghana, 1992). Such bills must be introduced by, or on behalf of the president hence, no private-member bill has been introduced in Parliament since the inception of the current dispensation (Gyampo & Graham, 2014; Gyimah-Boadi, 2009).

Therefore, hegemonic presidency presents dangers, which tend to encourage reliance on political patronage and corruption. The president and the ruling party can abuse incumbency for personal as well as partisan electoral gain (Ayee, 2008; Bob-Milliar, 2012; Debrah, 2004; Frempong, 2008; Gyimah-Boadi, 2009; Jeffries, 1998). This explains the lack of transparency in the management of public assets and state enterprises, as well as the official tolerance of nonperforming boards of state and parastatal organisations. For Gyimah-Boadi (2009), executive dominance has made it possible for successive administrations to resist the introduction of transparency-promoting instruments such as access to information about legislation and public office holder asset-disclosure laws (Abdulai and Crawford, 2010; Gyimah-Boadi, 2009). The direct negative consequences for Ghanaian democracy include the extravagant campaign spending and an active rumour mill that keeps alive unsubstantiated scandals involving political figures (Gyimah-Boadi, 2009). The 2016 General Elections witnessed abuse of incumbency by the President John Mahama-led NDC. The NDC used affluent advertisements in the media, mounting of huge billboards and several cases of vote-buying (Gadugah, 2016). Furthermore, there were numerous instances where President Mahama resorted to the helicopter to get to his destination to campaign in the Northern Region and Western Regions while the opposition NPP's Nana Akufo Addo and his team were stacked on the road as a result of poor road accessibility to these communities (Daily Guide, 2016; Obempong, 2016).

Second, even though gradually Ghanaians have become discerning, ethnic or tribal politics remain somewhat instrumental for soliciting votes in Ghana. This has reflected in all seven presidential and parliamentary elections held Ghana since 1992. Ethnic polarisation has aligned very well with the Ghanaian politics to the extent that most people who belong to some particular ethnic groups become members of a particular political organisation or party (Mahama, 2013). There have been cases where some political parties have been referred to as the political organisations of particular ethnic groups just because those parties wield the majority of support from specific ethnic groups or their founders are members of the respective ethnic groups. For example, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) are often referred to as the Akan and Ewe-Northerners parties just because the majority of these ethnic groups support them, or their founders are Akans and Ewes respectively (Adjei, 2013; Bossuroy, 2009; Frempong, 2012). Though regionalism and ethnicity may be dying down, they remain potential source of chaos particularly during election seasons (Mahama, 2013). For instance, during the 2016 General Elections campaign President Mahama passed some ethnocentric comments to sway voters to vote for him. He said in Lawra at the Upper West Region during his campaign that 'I feel sorry for Northerners who are calling for change'. He purportedly approached Northerners not to vote in favour of Nana Akufo-Addo and the NPP, because they abhor individuals from the north, including the unfortunate statement 'they will utilise you and dump you'.

These remarks did not run down well with many individuals who called on opinion leaders to call the president to order. Also, ex-president John A. Kufuor at a crusade visit in the Eastern region encouraged voters to vote hugely for Nana Akufo-Addo in light of the fact that he was their 'child'. Indeed both NDC and NPP have been culpable with tribalism and ethnocentrism with regards to getting votes from the Ghanaian electorate (Africanelections, 2016).Similarly, in 2012 General Elections campaign the NPP flagbearer for the 2012 general elections, Nana Akufo-Addo, speaking to his party supporters in Koforidua in the Eastern Region of Ghana, made reference to the Atiwa by-election in 2010, which was bedevilled with violence saying:

> 'The Atiwa bye-election showed just a little of what we are capable of doing.... They say we Akans are feeble or afraid and that once violence breaks up, we run away but I want to disabuse the minds of such people that we are brave and courageous people just like our forebearers who founded our political tradition. You must understand that courageous people formed this party. Our leaders who formed this party that has now become the biggest political movement in Ghana were not cowards. So, in 2012, we need to be courageous because all die be die' (Daily Graphic, February 10, 2011, quoted in Mahama, 2013).

In response to this unfortunate statement from a presidential candidate, the secretary general of the NDC, Johnson Asiedu Nketiah described Nana Akufo-Addo as 'bellicose and belligerent' deducing that one could draw from the statement that Nana Akufo-Addo 'sees the NPP as identical to the Akan ethnic group and even in opposition he sees himself as the leader of this Akan group which he must galvanize into war against all other ethnic groups in Ghana with the sole objective of capturing political power come 2012' (ibid). Unfortunately, akin statements are made daily in various political communicative encounters. It must be noted that ethnic sentiments can be latent waiting to explode at the slightest chance; hence ethnic-politics needs to be lessened if not eliminated in order not reverse the successes chalked in the democratic institutionalisation. Ethnic-politics creates unwanted tension. Gyimah-Boadi (2009) argues that such tensions underscored gaps in Ghana's efforts to build a democratic culture in the Fourth Republic, as reflected in persistent polarisation and the mutual loathing of the two main parties.

Third, over the years there have been several cases of post-elections violence and takeover or seizure of public property by winning party supporters. All elections in Ghana that led to the defeat of the incumbent including that of 2016 have witnessed these unfortunate events.

For instance, there were a couple of cases of some supporters of the NPP attacking some supporters the NDC after the declaration of the 2016 presidential election results by the Electoral Commission in some parts of the Western and Central Regions of Ghana. (GhanaWeb, 2016).

Also, on 2 January 2017, five days to the swearing-in of the new President, there was a clash between NDC supporters and NPP at Suhum in the Eastern Region (GhanaWeb, 2017a). In Ejura, a town in the Ashanti Region, four were shot due to clashes between members of the NPP and the opposition NDC over who must run the school feeding program after the elections (GhanaWeb, 2017b). Unfortunately, a change of government is sometimes interpreted as an overthrow of government where acts of violence, clashes and humiliations are perpetrated against supporters of parties that lose an election. All these anti-democratic tendencies constitute severe affront to the nation's drive towards democratic maturity and consolidation.

Also, the media has not been able to provide fair and equal access for all political parties and their candidates, particularly in the lead up to elections. This has created an uneven playing field for political parties (Frempong, 2008). The state broadcaster has often been accused of giving more prominence to the ruling party in terms of coverage and publicity than the other parties.[13] Again, the media appear to be polarized on partisan lines in spite of CSO efforts to train practitioners on the canons of objectivity, fair coverage and professionalism in the conduct of their activities (Agyeman-Duah, 2005, p. 20). Some media houses have over the years been professional and diligent in the discharge of their duties, before, during and after elections. Typical of such are JOY FM, Peace FM, Adom FM, Tv3 and Metro TV (Frempong, 2008). But there have been on the ascendency, some politico-media houses in the likes of Oman FM, Radio/TV Gold, Daily Guide, Statesmen, Daily Post, Montie FM and so on. These media houses do nothing apart from promoting the political agenda of the party they are loyal to. Sometimes, they use their platform to spew propaganda, issue threats and incite violence through the use of intemperate language. For instance, in the run-up to the 2016 general elections some three NDC supporters who were featured on a pro-NDC radio station, Montie FM threatened "to rape the Chief Justice Georgina Theodora Wood and kill other judges who sat on a case brought against the Electoral Commission" (Frimpong, 2016). They were trialled and jailed, this created some chaos and needless tension within the body politic, and in confirmation of the partisan role of the media practitioners and much to the disappointment of many Ghanaians, the President freed them from prison by granting the remission.

Conclusions and Way Forward

Though Ghana passed the turnover test for democratic consolidation, there are several democratic deficits that undermine the nation's efforts to climb higher the ladder of democratic progression and consolidation. As the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) report on the 2016 General Elections suggested, Ghana's 2016 elections were largely well administered and transparent. Indeed, the EU-EOM's Chief Observer, Tamás Meszerics noted that "in the evolution of its democracy since 1992, Ghana has passed the benchmark for credible, inclusive and transparent elections. From now it can focus on those areas which continue to give rise for concern"(EU EOM-Ghana, 2016).

The giant strides made towards democratic consolidation cannot be glossed over. However, the nation risks democratic relapse if practical measures are not put in place to strengthen her efforts at democratic consolidation both at the minimalist and maximalist levels. At the minimalist level, elections should not be placed on auto-piloting as occurred in 2016. All proposals for electoral reform must be implemented with immediate effect before the next election in order to fine-tune the electoral process to ensure that its results are acceptable. The fact that the 2016 elections were peaceful has more to do with a miracle and nothing to do with electoral reform. Until Ghana adopt and implement all proposals for electoral reform, the nation may be sitting on a time-bomb that may explode in the next election. From the maximalist view, measures must be put in place to strengthen civil society to play their role as independent arbiters, reduce the whipping up of ethnic sentiments and "playing on the emotional keyboards of voters in the lead up to elections" and curb post-electoral violence and vindictive politics that leads to seizure of public properties by party apparatchiks after elections. Measures should also be put in place to deal with the excessive powers of the executive president that undermines constitutionalism. A review of the 1992 constitution in a manner that strengthen other key institutions of state like the media, civil society, parliament etc to play the role of countervailing authority to the powers of the President may be in the right direction. The media must assert its role as the fourth estate of the realm by ensuring fairness, objectivity and equity in coverage. The proactive implementation of some of the above proposals may not prove to be the full panacea in addressing Ghana's democratic deficits. Nevertheless, they may aid a great deal in the nation's forward march towards the consolidation of her democratic gains.

Notes

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2. In the 2016 General Election, the opposition leader, Nana Akufo-Addo, won 53.85 percent of total valid votes while President John Dramani Mahama secured 44.40 percent of the total valid votes. Regarding the popular votes, Nana Akufo-Addo of the NPP obtained 5,716,026 votes, and NDC's John Dramani Mahama secured 4,713,277 votes. The remaining l.76 percent of the total votes went in favour of the other political parties and an independent candidate. Correspondingly, the NPP annexed 169 of the 275 parliamentary seats while the NDC garnered 106 seats.

3. The first and second turnovers occurred in 2001 and 2009 respectively. Indeed, in 2001, the incumbent President Jerry John Rawlings of NDC handed over power peacefully to John A. Kufuor of NPP who also handed over power to John E. A. Mills of NDC in 2009.

4. For other minimalist see Dahl, 1971; Schumpeter, 1976; Huntington, 1991b, 1991a

5. See more details at www.ec.gov.gh

6. One of the co-author is the Coordinator of the Ghana Political Parties Programme and led the Political Party Leaders to submit their proposals for electoral Reform

7. See report of the Electoral Reforms Committee submitted to the Electoral Commission in April 2015

8. One of the co-authors is a member of the Electoral Reform Committee

9. See Minutes of IPAC meeting on 20th July 2015

10. One of the co-authors is a member of the Electoral Reforms Committee.

11. See details at www.globalfmonline.com/calls-for-the-secession-pf-volta--region-from-ghana-treasonable-dr-letsa

12. See Bratton, et al., 1999, Gyimah-Boadi and Mensah (2003) for a summary of the survey results

13. See 2016 EU-Election Observation Mission's report at www.eueom.eu/ghana2016

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