

## Civil Society Organisations and Democratic Consolidation in Ghana's Fourth Republic

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### Abstract

This paper focuses on the activities of civil society organisations and their influence in ensuring democratic consolidation in Ghana. This includes the proliferation of CSOs and the constitutional provision in the 1992 Ghanaian constitution that promotes their formation and activities in Ghana's Fourth Republic. The paper utilised secondary data and analysed the data descriptively. The CSOs engaged the government on electoral matters, including presidential debates and citizens' sensitisations on issue-based campaigns. The CSOs, apart from sensitisation and voter education, employed their staff to monitor polls in various constituencies to ensure credible voting and results. The paper recommended, among others, that CSO members should avoid engaging in politics to ensure their neutrality and remain free from political involvement that could jeopardise their transparency role.

**Keywords:** *CSOs, Democratic, Consolidation, Fourth Republic*

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### **Background to the Study**

Civil society has been defined as “a sphere of social interaction between the household and the state which is manifest in norms of community cooperation, structures of voluntary association, and networks of public communication” (Bratton, 1994, p.1). The idea of civil society has been traced to both the liberal and Marxist traditions of European political thought as embodied in de Tocqueville's stress on the importance of voluntary associations in promoting democratic citizenship as well as in Gramsci's emphasis on the role of social institutions in either buttressing or challenging state power.

Bratton (1994) observed that the revival of the idea of civil society in contemporary times gained a lot of impetus from the emergence of a democratic opposition to authoritarian socialist party-states in Central and Eastern Europe in the twilight of the Cold War. From there, it spread to transition regimes in Southern Europe and Latin America and further gained traction through the activities of analysts critical of declining civic values in the advanced capitalist countries. It was subsequently adopted by social movements and political activists in post-communist Russia, China and more generally by opponents of military authoritarianism in Africa (Bratton, 1994). Bratton further explained that “the common thread in civil society discourse is a critique of state domination of public life, a preference for reform over revolution, and a strategy for political change based upon negotiations and elections” (p.1).

On the distinctiveness of civil society in Africa, Bratton explained that at first glance, it would appear that African societies possess few intermediary organisations that occupy the political space between the household and the state. But in fact, there exist “many cultural and religious institutions that express collective identities such as clan, age-set, and brotherhood, to which rural folk continue to grant allegiance”. Beyond these more traditional institutions, “Africans constructed fresh forms of voluntary association in response to the disruptive effects of urbanisation and the market economy during the colonial period”. Sometimes, these associations were modernised “expressions of long-standing informal solidarities (like ethnic welfare associations, prophetic movements, and agricultural work parties); in other cases, they gave expression to new occupational and class identities (peasant movements, labour unions, teachers' associations)” (Bratton, 1994, p.5). Within the milieu of colonialism, these associations assumed explicit political forms and became the vehicle for protesting the indignities of colonial rule. Later on, they transformed into the building blocks for the formation of nationalist political parties.

Bratton explained that after independence, African ruling elites gave top priority to state sovereignty and national security and so sought to whittle down the powers and influence of such associations and stop them from taking root in civil society. Such attempts succeeded in some countries through the process of co-optation of the associations into the fold of the ruling parties, while in others, they were clamped down successfully. In many others, though, such voluntary associations proved too resilient to be subordinated and so “survived as an alternative institutional framework to officialdom” (Bratton, 1994, p.5). In these instances, associational life took different forms in different countries during the colonial and immediate

post-independence period. In Kenya and Burundi, for instance, Christian churches were dominant, in Senegal and Sudan, the Islamic brotherhoods held sway, in Zimbabwe and Kenya, farmer organisations were most prominent, in Zambia and South Africa, it was the mineworkers' unions, while in Ghana and Nigeria, the lawyers' and journalists' associations led the way (Bratton, 1994). Bearing in mind the foregoing, this paper considers the role of CSOs in democratic consolidation in Ghana's fourth republic. The paper employed a secondary method of data collection and analysed the data contextually. The paper adopted the public sphere theory by Jürgen Habermas. This theory emphasises how citizens come together to discuss and deliberate on public issues of interest to take a stand on how to hold the leaders accountable.

### **History of Civil Societies in Africa and Ghana**

The fact that African citizens autonomously undertook a wide gamut of organised economic activity had profound political implications. As trade shifted to illegal or informal networks, taxes became difficult to collect and public revenues diminished, especially in valuable foreign exchange, thereby exacerbating the fiscal crisis of the state. Financially deprived governments had little option but to loosen restrictions on autonomous networks and organisations by permitting them to perform some of the functions previously monopolised by government. By the end of the 1980s, independent associations and alternative economic networks together provided a recruiting ground for a popular upsurge against post-colonial autocracy (Bayart, 1986).

As to whether the emergence of opposition to authoritarian rule in African countries signified the presence of strong civil societies, Bratton explained:

*Certainly, civic actors in Africa derived newfound energy from the climate of political liberalisation in the 1990s. In response to popular protest and donor pressure, African political leaders created political openings -- for example, by releasing political prisoners and abandoning one-party constitutions -- that improved the legal environment for free expression and association. There is considerable evidence that previously closed political space was occupied by genuine manifestations of civil society, namely by structures of associations, networks of communication, and norms of civic engagement (Bratton, 1994, p.6).*

On the role of civil society in democratic consolidation in Africa, Osaghae (1997) stated that:

*It has varied from transition to transition depending on the mode of transition, the scope of popular participation by various constituents and their ability to reconcile their differences and form stable coalitions, and the extent of political and economic liberalisation (or openness of the system), all of which had implications for the outcome of transition in the short run, and democratic consolidation in the long run (Osaghae, 1997, p.20).*

Osaghae explained that it is the class dynamics of transitions that set the overall parameters for civil society's involvement in democratisation, and that in almost all cases, democratisation

was prefaced by prolonged civil strife and political turmoil – demonstrations, strikes, riots, and so on. Osaghae went on to explain that:

*These mass protests, which were primarily aimed at exacting improved economic and social conditions for workers, students and other groups, provided, as it were, the enabling environment for specifically political demands to emerge for the ousting of incumbent authoritarian leaders and regimes (Osaghae, 1997, p.20).*

Citing Marx and Engels (1995), Osaghae further stated that “the transition-inducing struggles involved mainly the subordinate classes and groups which have been the most forceful promoter, defender and supporter of democracy simply because they have consistently been excluded from political participation” (Osaghae, 1997, p.20). The problem, according to him, was that these mass-based organisations and movements tended to be sidelined from the actual processes and arrangements of transition, which were taken over by members of the “predatory” classes, typically public and private sector elites forced by economic reforms to seek new forms of control and accumulation, and the middle-sector classes and groups comprising the intelligentsia, professionals, labour, exile opposition groups and displaced elites from the predator class. And in most cases:

*These latter groups literally hijacked the democratisation process, subordinated popular demands to their narrow class interests, and foreclosed the chances of fundamental reforms of the state and its relations with society, which were central to the demands of the lower classes. It was the dominance of these groups which coalesced into opposition coalitions that led to the quest for, and in some cases, actual takeover of state power by civil society constituents (Osaghae, 1997, 20).*

The prospect for successful transition and eventual consolidation was brighter where the scope of participation was wide enough to allow all the contesting interests to be articulated and addressed by civil society constituents: this increased the chances of legitimacy of the ensuing democracy, which is a prerequisite for consolidation.

The history and development of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in Ghana is closely associated and shaped by the political dynamics of the country (Alidu & Gyekye-Jandoh, 2016). Its evolution has been traced to as far back as 1781 when local people in the then Gold Coast formed Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) to protect and promote their rights (Darkwah et al, 2006). The Fante Confederacy and the Aborigines Rights Protection Society (ARPS) are notable historical CBOs that fought against the possible encroachment of the rights of indigenes by British colonial authorities (Gyimah-Boadi et al., 2000). According to them, increased local grievances witnessed a corresponding proliferation and vibrancy of CBOs in Ghana to such an extent that activities of CBOs expanded to embrace economic interests and attempts to influence pricing policies in the country (Alidu & Gyekye-Jandoh, 2016).

Such advancement allowed local cocoa producers to strongly object to the total control of the local market by the expatriate-controlled Association of West African Merchants (AWAM) in 1938. Partly influenced by the desire for economic and political liberation, these historical struggles nonetheless feed into the Ghanaian cultural essence of self-help. Undeniably, the concept of civil society or the idea behind it is not new in Ghana. Ghanaian cultural and social norms profess the concept of communalism as a way of learning and burden sharing. Therefore, the explosion of CSOs as well as their increased activities in Ghana could also be assumed from this perspective. Indeed, the concept of civil society is often discussed in contrast to the state and the market (Diamond1999). It is argued that civil society organisations exist to make up for the failures of both the market and state, and therefore demonstrate the desire of ordinary citizens to provide for themselves in times of need.

Alidu & Gyekye-Jandoh (2016), however, explained that culture alone is not a sufficient explanation for the proliferation of CSOs and their activities in Ghana. This is because, “without an enabling political environment, it would be very difficult to celebrate this unique culture. In many countries, political support for CSOs is either limited or subjected to arbitrary regulations” (CIVICUS, 1997, cited in Alidu & Gyekye-Jandoh, 2016, p.4). Linz and Stepan (1996) explained that until perhaps the 1970s, CSOs in the country operated under a difficult political climate, suggesting that the type of government in a country invariably affects civil society operations. Similarly, Collier (2010) noted that the formation and growth of CSOs are greatly undermined by totalitarian rule since such regimes “atomise” individual citizens and create mistrust among them (p.53). Mistrust among citizens suggests that they cannot work together effectively.

Therefore, the promulgation of a liberal constitution in 1992 and the subsequent return to democratic rule in 1993 created an enabling political environment for civil society groups to freely operate in Ghana. The 1963 Companies Code (Act 179), the 1962/1993 Trustees (Incorporation) (Amendment) Law, the 1992 Constitution and Cabinet Directives define the institutional and legal framework for government-CSO engagement in Ghana. Though Article 21(1) of the 1992 Constitution provides considerable space for the growth of participatory civil society and associational life, it is rather Article 37(2) that gives enormous powers for the formation and participation of civil society in the process of development. It calls on the Ghanaian state to:

*Enact appropriate laws that assure the enjoyment of rights of effective participation in development processes, including the right of people to form their own associations free of state interference, and use them to promote and protect their interests in relation to development processes.*

It further conferred on CSOs the “... freedom to form organisations to engage in self-help and income-generating projects; and ... to raise funds to support these actions.”

Alidu & Gyekye-Jandoh (2016) recalled that “the essence of 'civil society' appeared in the writings of early philosophers such as Rousseau, Ferguson, Tocqueville and Gramsci, though the use and current multidimensional understanding of the term became prominent later after

these writings” (p.5). They noted that though civil society has been variously defined, “the meaning, applicability and categorisation of civil society are embedded in the highly contextualised ideological debates of Tocqueville's liberal democracy and the Gramscian post Marxist school of thought” (p.5). Alidu & Gyekye-Jandoh added that:

*Whilst liberals see civil society as characterised by high social capital, trust and cooperation necessary for the development of political and economic democracy, and also for protecting the individual from the state's overwhelming power, the Gramscian conception assumes a more direct political position and considers civil society as an instrument of resistance and activism that seeks to promote the creation and sustenance of social movements to negotiate or challenge political, social or economic hegemony (Alidu & Gyekye-Jandoh, 2016 p.5).*

Alidu & Gyekye-Jandoh further explained that the use of the term civil society among Ghanaian scholars has tended to align more to Tocqueville's neo-liberal perspective than the Gramscian post-Marxist thought. As such, it is defined more in relation to the pursuit of the political end of promoting democracy and checking the despotic tendency of the state. They, however, cautioned that since the role of civil society is applauded in this regard, great caution needs to be exercised in universalising all civic organisations in Ghana as pro-democratic entities.

### **Literature Review**

Meanwhile, scholars have thrown light on the existence of different dimensions of civil society. Whilst Hegel and Marx, and Engels, emphasise the material nature of civil society, Ferguson and de Tocqueville (1899/1956) highlight the organisational dimension of the concept. Yet, Gramsci and Havel focus on the ideological. According to Bratton (1994), these three dimensions constitute the observable dimensions of the theoretical concept of civil society. For example, de Tocqueville argued in his Democracy in America (1899/1956) that the state should be checked and supervised by the “independent eye of society,” consisting of “a plurality of interacting, self-organised and constantly vigilant civil associations” which had the functions of nurturing basic rights, advocating popular claims, and educating citizens in the democratic culture of tolerance and accommodation (cf. Bratton 1994, p.54).

Overall, there has been in recent times a common concern among political thinkers with restoring civil society, and its significance for state legitimacy, to the centre of political research. Though variously manifested, the meaning, applicability and categorisation of civil society are embedded in a highly contextualised ideological debate of Tocqueville's liberal democracy and Gramsci's post-Marxist school of thought (UNECA, 2011, p.4). The liberal democratic ideology defines civil society as the intermediary body between the state and the individual or family (UNECA, 2011a). Conceived from the liberal point of view, civil society is characterised by high social capital, trust and cooperation to develop political and economic democracy and also protect the individual from the state's overwhelming power. However, the Gramscian interpretation assumes a more direct political position and considers civil society as an instrument of resistance and activism that seeks to promote the creation and sustenance

of social movements to negotiate or challenge political, social or economic hegemony (UNECA, 2011). Though there seems to be a gradual shift towards the Gramscian-based conception of civil society during the last decade (UNECA, 2011a), the neo-liberal ideology has been dominant since the end of the Cold War in 1989.

The use of civil society in Ghana embraces more of Tocqueville's neo-liberal perspective than the Gramscian post-Marxist thought. For example, Linz and Siepan (1996) see civil society in Ghana as a variety of voluntary organisations that work to consolidate democracy and democratic tenets by checking the despotic tendency of the state. Specifically, Linz (1986) sees a surge in the activities of civic groups as being vital to the process of democratic governance in Africa. He notes that civil society organisations such as trade unions, professional associations and religious groups contributed to the disbandment of authoritarianism in the early 1990s, and a surge in this same role will enhance democracy in Ghana. The role of civic organisations in democratic governance is manifest in different activities and processes. The first is their responsibilities during elections and transitional processes.

According to Bofo-Arthur & Plantter (1999), civil society organisations have played a tremendous role in advancing democratic governance during elections and also in transitional periods in most African countries. Even in countries where these processes were relatively advanced, civic groups focused purely on consolidating the relative democratic successes achieved by acting as watchdogs for citizens' rights. However, there are great challenges arising from these responsibilities, specifically, the difficulty in fighting an ever-powerful oppressive state. To overcome this obstacle, civil society organisations formed networks to protect both their interests and those of other citizens. Networks have assumed many labels in the field of international development, including coalitions, alliances, partnerships and consortia (Diamond, 1999). They have been variously defined in the literature according to their purpose, level of collaboration, type of activities they engage in, and the structure of the partnership (Carothers, 2007). CSOs are networks and platforms where members contribute resources and participation for their own benefit. White (2004) sees networks as the “formal and informal structures that link actors (individuals or organisations) who share a common interest on a specific issue or a general set of values” (p.2). Networked civic groups also embellished the strategies that they used to engage the government. They have become more sophisticated, less confrontational and encourage more thoughtful policy debates.

Networks such as the Northern Ghana Network for Development (NGND), the Northern Network for Education and Development (NNED), the West African Network for Peace building (WANEP) and the Network for Women's Rights (NETRIGHT) have all rolled out programmes that have created huge impacts in the policy arena. Jones and Villar (2008) identify five key dimensions of possible policy impact initiated by CSOs. The most important of these dimensions, for our purposes, are attitudinal change (whereby CSOs try to influence policy by “framing debates”, drawing attention to new issues, affecting awareness and changing the attitude and perceptions of policy stakeholders); discursive commitments (CSOs influence government and policy actors to change the language and rhetoric concerning a specific policy); and procedural change (whereby CSOs can open new space for policy

dialogue and debate). Similarly, Diamond (1999) identifies a series of activities that could help impact the outcome of a policy. Among them are CSOs' ability to carry out ground-breaking research which defines a problem and clarifies an appropriate course of action to resolve it (p.31), and sharing lessons learnt from practical policy experiences.

Meanwhile, the constitutional rule in Ghana led to a proliferated civil society (Boafo-Arthur & Plantter, 1999), which has focused on improving the quality of analysis and deliberation in the National Assembly through memoranda and expert testimony (Linz & Stepan, 1996). An epitome of thoughtful policy debates through the platform of civil society in Ghana is the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) Presidential debate series. The IEA Presidential debates have been ongoing over the years, and arguably, they have created the opportunity for voters' assessment of the policies of political parties; allowed for a peer review of the capabilities of their fellow aspirants, and have significantly shifted campaign messages from personal attacks and vilification to issue-based ones. The IEA has also expanded this accountability process to embrace debates among vice-presidential candidates who are just a heartbeat away from the presidency.

Furthermore, the Ghana Centre for Democratic Development (CDD) embellished this process by subjecting parliamentary aspirants of some selected constituencies across the country to this accountability process, where their constituent members had the opportunity to interrogate them on salient issues. Unlike the CDD parliamentary debates, the criterion for participating in the IEA's Presidential debate is to have representation in the Ghanaian parliament. This means that Ghanaians have not had the opportunity of subjecting all Presidential aspirants seeking to govern the country to the same level of scrutiny. The Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) in 2012 took upon itself the responsibility of organising a separate debate for the other Presidential candidates without parliamentary representation. As novel as this has been, it lacked the publicity and vigour associated with the IEA's presidential debates. In the 2012 election debate, both the sitting President and his Vice-President participated for the first time in the history of the IEA debate series. According to Diamon, Linz and Lipset (2014), this accountability procedure initiated by the IEA, a civil society organisation, promoted democratic governance in Ghana.

But even beyond the IEA Presidential debate series, civil society organisations embark on democracy-enhancing activities such as domestic election monitoring to ensure peaceful, free and fair elections, rather than focusing on pressuring the government based on their own individual narrow interests. This goes to buttress the agency arguments, by Linz and Stepan (1978; 1996) and Diamond, Linz, and Lipset (1995), about the important role of political elites (and civil society) and their adherence to democratic rules in institutionalising democracy. The Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) in Ghana has made this responsibility more forthcoming. CODEO has deployed election observers in the past, and in the 2012 election, it deployed 4,000 election observers across the country. Besides deploying observers, it has, in an election year, issued monthly pre-election observer reports, with the November 2012 report being the sixth and the last that sought to analyse the general pre-election environment ahead of the 2012 general election. CODEO also deployed the Parallel Vote

Tabulation (PVT) system in 2012 election, which helped more than 4,000 independent observers to collate and analyse their reports at the various polling centres across the country.

Liberals posit that the contribution of CSOs to development might be important for political rather than economic reasons, because these organisations are significant bolsterers of civil society by virtue of their participatory and democratic approach. They have grappled with such issues as CSOs' efficiency, impact and scale, which have gained prominence in the literature on NGOs since the early 1990s. Taken together, these represent a concern with the proliferation of political activities of the CSOs (White, 2004). There is a growing agreement, however, that civil society, civic culture, and social capital are all important for strengthening democracy and enabling conflict resolution. The early academic discussions of civil society did not see it as self-initiating, self-regulating and advocating a common cause, or expressing a common passion (Diamond, 1999). Liberals see civil society as the setting for the associational life of individuals who carry their rights within them and are governed by the rule of law. Where civil society is considered to be weak, there will be underdevelopment, corruption, lack of 'democratic culture', and democratic consolidation will be threatened (Burnell, 2008, p.7). Based on the above submissions, it has been surmised that Ghana's democratic development and the gradual growth of a robust economy are largely associated with the expanding policy space provided to civic groups in the country (Fadakinte, 2015).

But Ninsin (1998), while writing about the democratic reforms that led to the Ghanaian transition in the 1990s, distinguished between two categories of civil society. He notes that the struggle for democratic reforms was a contest between “pro-democracy civil society” and an “alternative civil society.” He defines “pro-democracy civil society” as the genuine civic groups that aim to promote democracy in Ghana, and “alternative civil society” as comprising mainly loosely formed civic associations with close ties to the government of the day, and which were being used by the latter to further its political agenda. In his subsequent writings, Draah (2003) reiterates Ninsin's classification of Ghanaian civic organisations into two broader categories: the “corporatist” and the “voluntary-pluralist.” The “corporatist” civil society “comprises intermediary groupings which are sponsored and often sustained by, and hence subservient to, the state” (p.25), whereas the “voluntarist-pluralist” civil society denotes the presence of an “array of strictly non-governmental civil associations voluntarily and interdependently established to pursue their own interests without necessarily ignoring those of society as a whole” (p.25).

Alidu & Gyekye-Jandoh (2016), however, countered that Ninsin's categorisation, though quite influential, did not provide much detail to enable a specific demarcation of the features of CSOs deemed “alternative” to the liberal norm. Other writers also support the position that “alternative” civil society organisations rely on favours from the state or the institutions in whose interest they work, thus undermining their autonomy (Kambale, 2016). This arrangement interferes not only with their capacity to hold their paymasters to account but also, they steadily lose the confidence of the population whose interest they were supposed to serve in the first place. The consequence is the routine alignment of alternative civic bodies with state policy institutions on whom their survival is based, rather than against them. and

strategy with which civil society groups deal with the authority (that is, the state, government or donors) regarding an issue; and consistency regarding the frequency with which they speak to similar occurrences in different regimes or governments.

Indeed, in Ghana, there has been a proliferation of numerous civic organisations that can be easily passed as “alternative” in terms of the political orientation of their leaders and the source of their allegiance. For example, the Association for Accountable Governance (AFAG) and the Danquah Institute (DI) are known to have close political affinity to the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and have publicly acted in ways that were inured to the benefit of the party. Some of the executive members of the Danquah Institute (DI) are also known NPP executives and party functionaries, including the founding CEO (Gabby Otchere Darko) and the current CEO (Mustapha Hamid). The same can be said about the Research and Advocacy Platform (RAP) convened by Felix Ofori Kwakye, an outspoken National Democratic Congress (NDC) supporter (and one time a deputy minister for Communications) as well as the Committee for Joint Action (CJA) which has suddenly relegated its watchdog role under the immediate past government since majority of its leaders were ministers and key functionaries of the party in power. The relationship that exists between these individual members of these bodies may not be enough evidence to assume such bodies as “alternative” civic groups unless there is established evidence that links them to financial and other support from these parties.

Despite the pioneering role assumed by civic groups in democratic governance in Ghana, they have continued to face huge obstacles, including a sustained campaign of official intimidation, severe material and organisational deficiencies and inadequate funds to sustain their programmes. Emanating from these challenges, a sizeable segment of the Ghanaian citizenry has expressed doubts about the democratic role that these institutions play in the country. For example, in a 2014 survey conducted by Alidu & Gyekye-Jandoh (2016), 72.2% of the sample selected held the view that CSOs did not contribute to political participation in the country, while only 37.6% felt otherwise. Even though there has been enough policy space granted by the 1992 Constitution for CSOs to enhance political participation, there is still a weak political will to commit to these constitutional provisions.

Also, citizens' perception of the role of CSOs in enhancing transparency in the country was not different from their response on political participation. The response showed that 47.6% of respondents believed CSOs were not doing enough to enhance transparency in Ghana. This finding was supported by subsequent public opinion surveys conducted by Transparency International (in collaboration with Ghana Integrity Initiative, its local chapter in Ghana), the Centre for Democratic Governance Afrobarometer Survey Round 8 and the Institute for Economic Affairs' public opinion survey (2014), all of which affirmed citizens' perception of a high incidence of corruption in the country.

From the foregoing, it does appear that the bulk of the literature reviewed tends to suggest that civil society organisations played a significant role in not only democratic governance but also towards its consolidation in Ghana. The overall impression is that the formation of civil society networks has actually enhanced the capacity of CSOs to perform their watchdog role

in the country. These networks have been able to aggregate the respective interests of their members into a collective one and have fended off governments' desire to be overbearing. Emboldened by constitutionalism, which provides an enabling political environment, civic associations have fostered democratic governance by speaking against the dictatorial tendencies and actions of the government, educating the citizenry on their rights and responsibilities, and providing evidence for policy alternatives when confronting the government. The IEA has gone a step further by using its flagship presidential debate programme to drum home the need for an issue-based campaign. The idea is that by focusing on issues and not on personalities, the process of accountability is being deepened (Gyimah-Boadi 2009, Young, 2012).

### **Civil society and democratic Consolidation in Ghana**

Alidu & Gyekye-Jandoh (2016) observed that networked civic groups in Ghana have embellished the strategies that they used to engage the government, and so have become more sophisticated, less confrontational, thereby encouraging more thoughtful policy debates. They noted that networks such as the Northern Ghana Network for Development (NGND), the Northern Network for Education and Development (NNED), the West African Network for Peace building (WANEP) and the Network for Women's Rights (NETRIGHT) have all rolled out programmes that have created huge impacts in the policy arena. Following Jones and Villar's (2008) identification of five key dimensions of possible policy impact initiated by CSOs, Alidu & Gyekye-Jandoh noted that the most important of these dimensions, as it relates to the Ghanaian experience, is attitudinal change by which:

*CSOs try to influence policy by “framing debates”, drawing attention to new issues, affecting awareness and changing the attitude and perceptions of policy stakeholders); discursive commitments (CSOs influence government and policy actors to change the language and rhetoric concerning a specific policy); and procedural change (whereby CSOs are able to open new space for policy dialogue and debate) (Alidu & Gyekye-Jandoh, 2016, p. 12).*

Sutton (1999) also identified series of activities that could help impact the outcome of a policy. Among them are CSOs' ability to carry out ground-breaking research which defines a problem and clarifies an appropriate course of action to resolve it (p.31), and sharing lessons learnt from practical policy experiences. Table 1. below summarises the activities of the networks selected for this study under each stage of the policy process in Ghana.

**Table 1: CSO Networks and the Policy Process in Ghana**

	Agenda Setting	Policy Formulation	Policy Imp'tation	Policy Evaluation
WANEP	Through quality research & policies such as National Security Brief which highlights security issues.	Through early warning Programs such as the Ghana Alert Project, Ghana Peace Watch and bi-annual publications.	Built capacities of personnel in government and private sectors to implement security policies.	Security policies in Ghana especially in Bawku and Yendi, where security problems persist.
NETRIGT	Establishment of MOWAC, agenda on establishment of Commission on Gender and Equality.	Gender-based analysis of the GPRSP; women's land rights; Aid Effectiveness and Financing for Development; Women's Manifesto; Beijing +5 & +10 reviews.	Built capacities of government agencies and NGOs to implement government policies; organized seminars and workshops.	Evaluated policies related to women's rights; land reform policies; etc.
NGND	Research on the deduction of the DACF; press releases.	Mole meetings, SADA and policies on Northern Development.	Capacity building workshops; seminars and trainings.	Implementation of SADA and other development projects in Northern Ghana
NNED	Set several policy agenda through quality research on absenteeism, conditions of service in educational sector, etc.	ESAR Platform, Monthly Development Participation Meetings, Education Sector Thematic Advisory Committee, etc	Oversees the implementation of Capitation Grant, School Feeding Programme etc.	Budgetary allocation to Capitation Grant, the School Feeding Programme

**Source:** Alidu & Gyekye-Jandoh (2016, p.13)

Gyimah-Boadi (1997) observed that constitutional rule in Ghana has thrown up an array of civil society that focuses on improving the quality of analysis and deliberation in the National Assembly through memoranda and expert testimony. Perhaps the most notable of these thoughtful policy debates through the civil society platform in Ghana is the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) Presidential debate series. The IEA Presidential debates have been ongoing over the years and arguably, they have created the opportunity for voters' assessment of the policies of political parties; allowed for a peer review of the capabilities of their fellow aspirants, and have significantly shifted campaign messages from personal attacks and vilification to issue-based ones. The IEA has also expanded this accountability process to embrace debates among vice-presidential candidates who are just a heartbeat away from the presidency (Alidu & Gyekye-Jandoh, 2016).

Later, the Ghana Centre for Democratic Development (CDD) embellished this process by subjecting parliamentary aspirants of some selected constituencies across the country to this accountability process, where their constituent members had the opportunity to interrogate them on salient issues. Unlike the CDD parliamentary debates, the criterion for participating in the IEA's Presidential debate is to have representation in the Ghanaian parliament. This means that Ghanaians have not had the opportunity of subjecting all Presidential aspirants seeking to govern the country to the same level of scrutiny. The Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) in 2012 took upon itself the responsibility of organising a separate debate for the other Presidential candidates without parliamentary representation. Alidu & Gyekye-Jandoh (2016), however, noted that even as novel as this has been, it lacked the publicity and vigour associated with the IEA's presidential debates.

In the 2012 election debate, both the sitting President and his Vice-President participated for the first time in the history of the IEA debate series. This accountability procedure, initiated by the IEA, a civil society organisation, promoted democratic governance in Ghana. Beyond the IEA Presidential debate series, civil society organisations embark on democracy-enhancing activities such as domestic election monitoring to ensure peaceful, free and fair elections, rather than focusing on pressuring the government based on their own individual narrow interests. This goes to buttress the agency arguments, by Linz and Stepan (1978; 1996) and Diamond, Linz, and Lipset (1995), about the important role of political elites (and civil society) and their adherence to democratic rules in institutionalising democracy. The Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) in Ghana has made this responsibility more forthcoming. CODEO has deployed election observers in the past, and in the 2012 election, it deployed 4,000 election observers across the country. Besides deploying observers, it has in an election year issued monthly pre-election observer reports, with the November 2012 report being the sixth and the last that sought to analyse the general pre-election environment ahead of the 2012 general election. CODEO also deployed the Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT) system in the 2012 election, which helped more than 4,000 independent observers to collate and analyse their reports at the various polling centres across the country.

Liberals posit that the contribution of CSOs to development might be important for political rather than economic reasons, because these organisations are significant bolsterers of civil society by virtue of their participatory and democratic approach. They have grappled with such issues as CSOs' efficiency, impact and scale, which have gained prominence in the literature on NGOs since the early 1990s. Taken together, these represent a concern with the proliferation of political activities of the CSOs (Arthur, 2010; White, 2004). There is a growing agreement, however, that civil society, civic culture, and social capital are all important for strengthening democracy and enabling conflict resolution. The early academic discussions of civil society did not see it as self-initiating, self-regulating and advocating a common cause, or expressing a common passion (Asante, 1998). Liberals see civil society as the setting for the associational life of individuals who carry their rights within them and are governed by the rule of law. Where civil society is considered to be weak, there will be underdevelopment, corruption, lack of 'democratic culture', and democratic consolidation will be threatened (Teshome, 2008). Largely, Ghana's democratic development and the gradual growth of a

robust economy are associated with the increasing policy space provided to civic groups in the country (Alidu & Gyekye-Jandoh, 2016).

Despite the robustness of civil society activism in Ghana, some believe that there exists a shadowy civil society side by side with the authentic one. Ninsin (2006), for instance, distinguished between two categories of civil society that were in operation during Ghana's transition in the 1990s. He argued that in fact, 'the struggle for democratic reforms was a contest between "pro-democracy civil society" and an "alternative civil society."' (cited in Alidu & Gyekye-Jandoh, 2016, p. 16). Ninsin defined:

*"Pro-democracy civil society" as the genuine civic groups that aim to promote democracy in Ghana; and "alternative civil society" as comprising mainly loosely formed civic associations with close ties to the government of the day, and which were being used by the latter to further its political agenda (cited in Alidu & Gyekye-Jandoh, 2016, p. 16).*

Ayee (2003) corroborated Ninsin's classification of Ghanaian civic organisations into two broader categories: the "corporatist" and the "voluntary-pluralist." According to him:

*The "corporatist" civil society "comprises intermediary groupings which are sponsored and often sustained by, and hence subservient to, the state" (p.25), whereas the "voluntarist-pluralist" civil society denotes the presence of an "array of strictly non-governmental civil associations voluntarily and interdependently established to pursue their own interests without necessarily ignoring those of society as a whole" (Drah, 2003, p.25).*

Alidu & Gyekye-Jandoh (2016) however differed from Ninsin's categorisation because it "did not provide much detail to enable a specific demarcation of the features of CSOs deemed "alternative" to the liberal norm", and that "his argument and definition of an "alternative civil society" fail to provide the calibre, scope and the modus operandi of these bodies except the fact that they have close ties to the government of the day and work in ways to promote its interest" (p.16). Alidu & Gyekye-Jandoh (2016) similarly found issues with Drah's explanation of a "voluntarist-pluralist" civil society. They argued that though it is not the same as Ninsin's "pro-democracy" civil society, their definition of "corporatist" and "alternative" civic bodies overlaps. They admitted in Ghana that there has been a proliferation of numerous civic organisations that can be easily passed as "alternative" in terms of the political orientation of their leaders and the source of their allegiance. Such groups, according to them, include the Association for Accountable Governance (AFAG) and the Danquah Institute (DI), all of which are known to have close political affinity to the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and have publicly acted in ways that inured to the benefit of the party. They acknowledged that some of the executive members of the Danquah Institute (DI) are also known NPP executives and party functionaries, including the founding CEO (Gabby Otchere Darko) and the current CEO (Mustapha Hamid). The same can be said about the Research and Advocacy Platform (RAP) convened by Felix Ofofu Kwakye, an outspoken National Democratic Congress (NDC) supporter who went on to become a deputy minister for Communications, as well as the Committee for Joint Action (CJA) which at some point relegated its watchdog role under

the NPP government in which majority of its leaders were ministers and key functionaries of the party. Nonetheless, Alidu & Gyekye-Jandoh (2016, p. 18) insisted that:

*The relationship that existed between those individual members of these bodies may not be enough evidence to assume such bodies as “alternative” civic groups unless there was established evidence that linked them to financial and other support from the parties.*

Buttressing the role of what he termed “Ghana's rebellious civil society” in the democratisation gains being experienced in that country, Abdul (2022) recalled that as with most other African countries, “Ghana embarked on its own brand of political liberalisation and democratic transition under Western pressures combined with the impact of the rapid transformation of the world into a neoliberal political and economic order” (p.51). He, however contended that:

*The liberal political order adopted under the 1992 Fourth Republic constitution has been a fulfilment of ambition by the Ghanaian state and its people after three previous democratic dispensations have been thwarted by military adventurism in 1957-1966, 1969-1972 and 1979-1981 (Abdul, 2022, p.51).*

In other words, by Abdul's reckoning, Ghana's 1992 Constitution was an affirmation of the Ghanaian people's desire for a transition from authoritarian military rule to a liberal democratic state with the necessary guarantees for people's freedom. In his evaluative study, Abdul noted, following Nsiah (2021), that “after eight successive elections and four turnovers of power from one democratically elected government to another, democratic norms seem to have gained roots in the country” (Nsiah, 2021, cited in Abdu, 2022, p.51). Other scholars of Ghanaian politics, including Gyimah-Boadi (2001, 2009), also share the view that after three decades of the commencement of Ghana's political transition, Ghana's liberal political order is headed in the right direction towards consolidation. Such scholars argue that:

*The Fourth Republic, despite the numerous obstacles it encountered in the three decades of its existence, has survived, surpassing the longevity and record of the three earlier Republics since the attainment of independence from British colonial rule in 1957 (Abdul, 2020, p.51).*

After the 2024 general election, some observers raised concerns that Ghana's democracy remains “highly flawed”, and so were worried about the actual direction and the future of liberal democracy in the country. But despite such legitimate concerns, “different state, non-state and autonomous institutions and organisations have played different roles in getting Ghana to this stage of its democratic process” (Abdu, 2020, p.51). One of the most indispensable of such institutions, according to Abdul, is the civil society organisations. He observed that, unlike several other fledgling democracies, since the transition to democracy in 1992, the Ghanaian state has tolerated the autonomy of civil society and therefore, a countless number of them have proliferated in the three decades of the history of the Fourth Republic.

Arguing along this line, Jandoh-Gyekye (2015) had stated that though civil society under the authoritarian state of the 1980s through to the early days of the democratic transition faced various obstacles including co-optation by the government, “a decade after the adoption of the 1992 constitution and its accompanying raft of civil liberties, associational activities multiplied and civil society eventually regained its status as a partner in the democratic process” (cited in Abdul, 2022, p.51, Oduro, Franklin, Lisa-Marie & Kendra, 2022).

To empirically test this claim, Abdul (2022) explored the boundaries between associational life and the consolidation of democracy in Ghana's Fourth Republic with a focus on the activities of the #FixTheCountry movement. After a thematic analysis of data from Ghana Centre for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), Afrobarometer, #FixTheCountry, GhanaWeb, and 3News, Abdul found that there is a nexus between “the existence of vibrant democratic opposition and dissident movements and groups within the Ghanaian political system in the last three decades has boosted the efforts towards consolidating the democratic political system started in 1992” (Abdul, 2022, p.55). He found that the #FixTheCountry movement was the latest of the rebellious civil society groups that have been instrumental to the consolidation of democracy in Ghana under the Fourth Republic. He described the #FixTheCountry movement as a protest movement formed by various youth activists and political dissidents led mainly by a Ghanaian PhD student from Cambridge University, Mawuse Oliver Barker-Varmawor.

Since its inception in the middle of 2021, #FixTheCountry has sought to resist the Ghanaian state and the political class on several fronts, utilising the power and influence of the mass media, public opinion formation and mass protests. While all the past activist groups under this current democratic dispensation, such as the Committee for Joint Action (CJA), Let My Vote Count Alliance, and OccupyGhana have limited their advocacy and activism to the government's social and economic policies, #FixTheCountry has launched frontal attacks on the 1992 constitution, calling for its total abrogation. This is because the group believes that all of the country's socio-economic problems are a result of what they perceive as anachronistic and dysfunctional nature of the 1992 constitution (Abdul, 2022, p.56).

Abdul observed that whereas it may seem a radical proposition and perhaps farfetched, the clamor by the #FixTheCountry movement “for the complete abrogation of the national constitution has some resonance with the demands of Ghanaians for some form of constitutional amendments” (P.57). Abdul concluded that under the Fourth Republic democratic dispensation in Ghana, civil society organisations have actively aided the consolidation of democracy in the country through vigorous advocacy on government or state policies and applying means such as media engagement, public debate and articulation of alternative narratives on social and economic policies.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

In conclusion, it is thus evident that a multi-party system has the capacity to engender competitive party politics and thus enhance democratic participation. Indeed, a multi-party system provides the framework within which the interests and demands of the citizens are

aggregated and accomplished in a more transparent, participatory and credible manner. Therefore, political parties usually respond to the wishes and aspirations of the people by packaging them into party manifestos, as instruments of mobilisation during election campaigns and as policy guidelines if endorsed by citizens to govern. This shows that political parties possess the institutional capacity of persuading the masses, maximising factors that influence political participation. For example, parties have potential bargaining power in an active legislature to influence the formation of public policies. It is fundamental to state that the effectiveness of the multi-party system greatly lies in the parameter where people enjoy freedom to form, join and independently manage their political affairs. This helps to broaden the political space and widens the choice for democratic participation by individual citizens based on their ideological convictions. The activities of civil society organisations are key in this process because they are involved in sensitisation of the citizens, voter education, monitoring and observing the electoral process and election to ensure credibility, among others.

It is therefore pertinent that Ghana has shown steady progress in this aspect and ensured democratic consolidation, as the successful turnover of power has taken place since 1995. However, much still needs to be done. As a result, we recommend that:

1. All civil society organisations and their officials should endeavour to stay out of politics to avoid clear interfacing with the government on issues affecting the public in relation to politics'.
2. On the other hand, civil society organisations should do everything possible to be financially independent to avoid the temptation to fall back on the government for their funding, which will definitely lead them to a process of compromising their stands on national issues.

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