

## BOOK REVIEW

Joseph R.A. Ayee; Lloyd G.A. Amoah & Seidu M. Alidu, *Political Institutions, Party Politics and Communication in Ghana: Three Decades of the Fourth Republic*. Palgrave Macmillan, Switzerland, 2024. 307 pages, ISBN 978-3-031-54743-0

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Ghana, a former British colony that became the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to achieve self-autonomy on March 6, 1957, holds a particularly special place in the world's and Africa's practice of democracy and good governance. Evidently, Ghana has had a turbulent but admirably tried and tested historical trajectory, having transitioned from colonial rule through military dictatorship to a constitutional democracy, which was solidified with the adoption of the 1992 Constitution. With evidence of 9 successful elections and 5 presidents elected in 33 years, it is unsurprising that Ghana has earned enviable credentials from governance rating agencies like Transparency International and the Ibrahim Index of African Governance. Despite the glowing tributes and monumental gains in governance, its democratic experimentation has not been seamless. In recent years, it has erupted practical challenges which have worsened, particularly under the fourth republic, necessitating the need to interrogate the situation and, in Arkorful's (2023a) words, identify the "torn ligaments and sinews" for "stitching".

In a manner almost reminiscent of the New Public Management advocates' (Arkorful 2023b) scramble for sustainable remedies to these practical teething governance challenges and complexities occasioned by democracy, Ayee, J. R., Amoah, L. G., and Alidu, S. M., in the book: *Political Institutions, Party Politics, and Communication in Ghana. Three Decades of the Fourth Republic*, uniquely provide a three-sixty assessment of Ghana under various policies and regimes, emphasizing in clear terms the strengths and traps that have marked its tumultuous transitions. In light of the numerous governance issues, the diversity of topics discussed in the book's fourteen [14] chapters by distinguished academics, comes across as subjects of enduring interest to scholars and development advocates, offering a rare opportunity for their reflection and discussion. This is where the current book addresses the gap in the larger body of governance literature.

Across divides, including but not limited to political communication, governance, and development in general, the book renders a somewhat comprehensive account of Ghana, and in its diagnosis of its many problems. While providing remediation measures to them, it blames the Constitution and leadership, as well as the established institutions, and thus far, recommends their review as the only guaranteed pathway to escape the "trappings". Anchored on the structure and agency theory, and further relying on empirical data, Alidu, S. M. sets the tone of the book in its proper context in Chapter 1, historicizing the continent-wide support for

democracy, as well as dislike for dictatorship in Africa, especially Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Guinea, and Mali. In light of the opportunities, deficits and gains chalked as a governance model in Africa, the authors re-echo the book's salience and its preoccupation with the painstaking transition of Ghana's fourth republic—throughout the entire book.

Following the framework established in the section prior, Meanteaw and Pimpong use a hybrid legal and institutional approach, hinged on a case study in Chapter 2, to discuss the intrinsic values of the chieftaincy institution—one of Ghana's resilient institutions—to environmental governance, despite being construed to be outdated, and frequently predicted to have outlived its significance. The development potential of this institution is undeniable; yet, its contributions are oftentimes oversimplified. In enlightening their practical transitional realities from the colonial to the modern democratic era, the authors pivot the institution's viability to environmental governance—at a time when Ghana is suffering mining-related pollution, on capacity building and forging institutional synergy while clarifying their management roles.

Through a historical tracing spanning various dispensations, i.e., 1957 and 1960, through 1969 and 1979, and finally, 1992, Quashigah K., in Chapter 3, delves into the subject of Ghana's constitution to determine whether or not it is fit for purpose in meeting the exigencies of the fourth republic. Drawing on lessons from Indian and American jurisprudence, among others, the author provides a basis for addressing the Ghanaian constitutional review process and cautions against the chaotic method in which the review matters are handled. Rather than a wholesale review, which the author acknowledges is necessary, he argues that it should not only allow for periodic modifications, as done in California and Illinois, but also be exercised in a way that averts constitutional crises. The chapter, in my opinion, could have benefited from a discussion on the withering implications of winner-take-all (see Arkorful and Lugu 2023), a sub-political culture that tends to sideline people outside the ruling party and, in its wake, deprives Ghana of expert opinions. As a remedial measure to this constitutional defect, the author recommends a review of the executive's unbridled powers to grant meaning to Montesquieu's Separation of Powers.

In a similar, yet diametrically complete vein, Bauer G. and Foli S. continue to discuss constitutional issues, however, with emphasis on women's political representation—a subject that has dominated policy for more than 20 years. In Chapter 4, they apply the feminist institutionalist perspective to examine the implications of institutions, both formal and informal, for behavior, norms, and values. In its persuasive account of an appreciation in female representation in Senegal, Ethiopia, Tunisia, Mozambique, South Africa, and Rwanda, they however observe malnourished returns in Ghana—despite the constitution's emphasis on women's integration—and following that, account for the underlying factors from the military era in the 1980s to the democratic period in 1992. As valid as the authors' diagnosis of a dearth of gender quotas and political commitment, vis-a-vis high cost of political campaigns and the politics of animosity as precipitating factors appears, a focus on how the medley of social, cultural, and religious stereotypical attributes define gender discourses in Ghana could have given the chapter a more nuanced perspective beyond the emphasis on history and legalities.

In a seemingly audacious study under Chapter 5, Amoah G. A. L., beginning with the million dollar question: "things change, things remain the same?", comprehensively overviews political parties, election campaigns and governance in Ghana through Dennis Austin's scholarly output: *Politics in Ghana from 1946-1960*. Amoah examines, through an intriguing historical lens, "as factually as possible", and in a "very fine textured detail," the intellectual development of a scholarly milieu, its impact on governance, and ultimately the devolution of extensive executive powers along with the emergence of a murky political campaign funding,

vigilantism, and a neo-patrimonial political subculture—all of which are characteristics of the fourth republic. The author affirms that as things change, they become the same and even more uncertain—through their institutionalization by the political parties and duty bearers, just as was the case in Austin's time.

Similarly, Frempong and Amankwah dissect Ghana's political duopoly, explaining its emergence and implications, benefits in stabilizing the political space as well as drawbacks in triggering power misuse—in Chapter 6. While the authors claim that the duopoly has been sustained by ideological, electoral systems and ethnic factors in particular—as confirmed by Domfe *et al.*, comparative study of voter behavior/turnout in border [low] and non-border [high] towns under Chapter 8, they suggest that breaking it is dependent on how smaller political parties form strategic alliances to augment their resource pooling and support while maximizing electoral capital. Its examination of the ramifications of the winner-take-all politics compensates for Chapter Three's shortcomings. As though Frempong and Amankwah's concerns with the fourth republic's politics are not enough, Owusu-Mensah and Ateku's Chapter 7 segues into the same, however with a focus on smaller political parties, their relevance to democracy's consolidation and electoral performances. Notwithstanding, these parties remain financially constrained. The authors, following Frempong and Amankwah, propose a review of the Parties Act 2000, to support state sponsorship of smaller parties, and encourage them to form strong alliances.

Given the relevance of equality, as evidenced by SDGs 4 and 5, Zaato and Foli's study on domestic violence in Chapter 9 is timely. In spite of acknowledging the Advocacy Coalition Framework's inherent shortcomings, alongside its unique replication in Ghana's domestic violence Act context, the authors could have clarified the nuances of the coalition building processes and challenges, politics, and most importantly, the successes and pitfalls thereof, by engaging mainstream policy paradigms like the Multiple Streams (Kingdon, 1984) and McConnel model (McConnel 2010). In a chapter distinct from the mainstream political arena, yet within the fourth republic's sphere, Aday and Hinson investigate corporate managerial governance and Chief Executive Officers' usefulness to national development. They foreground communal and wellbeing attributes like Caritas, Ubuntu and Africapitalism as the underlying philosophical incentives driving executive officers' resolve to leverage economic power for development.

Reifying Shulman and Sweitzer (2018), and focusing more on the implications of communication on ideological, political, and social attributes, Dzisah and Herzuah's Chapter 11 illuminates the inaugural lecture cases of Ghana's five post-military era leaders to deconstruct their framing effects on policy, leaders and audiences. The discussion on the effects of language on mobilization of citizens' support could have used a military-era scenario to provide a comparative perspective. Alidu's presidential election study in Ghana, using the 2016/2020 election data, emphasizes the effect of the interplay of faith and non-faith-based institutions on polls and election outcomes. Per the research, despite the minimal salience of polls on voting, the contagious "*bandwagon effects*" especially for a winning party or candidate are proven under Chapter 12.

Preceding Amoah's conclusion, Tettey and Anoff-Ntow observe the transition in Ghana's media landscape, the mushrooming of regulatory bodies, as well as their impacts on good governance and the excesses engendered. To sanitize the mediascape and avert a possible backslide and capture by the political class, they recommend entrenching media ethos to forge trust and confidence. Amoah recenters the book's theme in the final part, and maps out pathways targeted at unleashing Ghana's Fourth Republic from the dilemma saddling its over 30 years of democratic governance practice. The countervailing mechanism to the

challenges thus far is anchored in reviewing the constitution to forge development, ethics and checks and balances.

Without doubt, this *magna opus* will stimulate interest and proffer antidotes to Ghana's governance challenges—especially at a time when the quest to explore mechanisms for the constitutional lapses never envisaged during the 1992 Constitution's promulgation is high. While the book pushes back against the utopian assumption laid to consolidate democracy, it forefronts legitimate concerns about democratic backsliding and how to avoid the practical uncertainties arising from its practice. In a nutshell, the book not only furnishes governance pointers to experts and entities such as Ghana's Constitutional Review Committee, but also delineates context for understanding the underpinnings of the interplay of issues, further availing a lens for conceptualizing and overviewing present and future research and policy. Altogether, the contributions by the diverse ensemble of distinguished scholars testify to the editors' outstanding work.

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