



## The Challenges to Ghana's Peace with Democracy

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In April 2023, my book, "*5 Presidents, 8 Elections, 30 Years Later*" was successfully launched. The book drew on nine rounds of the Afrobarometer survey administered at period intervals (1999, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2019, and 2022). In the book, I captured in fifty-one observations how Ghanaians have come to feel about their democracy on matters such as support for democracy, trust in institutions, perceptions of corruption, and state legitimacy, among many others.

In several conversations, I have asserted emphatically that Ghanaians have made peace with democracy as evidenced by their strong support for democracy and positive attitudes towards democratic norms as measured in the Afrobarometer surveys.

However, a close examination of the data reveals that our peace with democracy is confronted with some challenges. In the book, I addressed six of those challenges. In this piece, I highlight two of them.

**Challenge 1 – The re-emerging democracy deficit.** The preferred state of democracy is one of equilibrium where the level of support is equivalent to satisfaction levels or surplus (where satisfaction is higher than support). However, a deficit emerges when the percentage of citizens who say they support democracy is greater than those who say they are satisfied with the way democracy is working. In 1999, Ghana's democracy experienced a large deficit where support (77%) for democracy was twenty-three percentage points higher than satisfaction (54%). However, starting in 2002 the deficit greatly improved and eventually culminated in a small surplus (support at 78%, satisfaction at 80%) in 2008. The democracy deficits re-emerged in 2012 and grew further in 2014 with support greater than satisfaction by a total of twenty percentage points.

The trajectory enjoyed temporary improvement in 2017 where support (81%) was only greater than satisfaction (78%) by three percentage points. The smallest democracy deficit in the history of Afrobarometer.

However, the democracy deficit grew in 2019 with support at seventy-six percent (76%) and satisfaction at sixty-six percent (66%). This further grew to a historic level in 2022, with support at seventy-seven percent (77%) and satisfaction at fifty-one percent (51%). This put the democracy deficit at twenty-six percentage points, three times higher than where it stood in 1999.

I have regularly said I am looking forward to the next thirty years of constitutional democracy in Ghana. But as we march towards the next thirty, it is incumbent upon all stakeholders to work towards reducing and, if possible, eliminating the democracy deficit. Citizens must get to a point where they feel they are getting the democracy they



want (satisfaction) in exchange for the strong support they continue to express for democracy.

**Challenge 2 – A growing sense that the law treats officials differently than it treats ordinary citizens.** Democracies often tout the rule of law as one of their major strengths. The long-held cherished principle is that, in democracies, the law treats every citizen equally without fear or favor. When the question was first asked in 2008 about how often ordinary people, as opposed to officials, get away with committing a crime, citizens felt that officials often or always go unpunished one and a half times more than ordinary citizens. The gap grew to the point where in 2014, citizens felt that officials often or always go unpunished three and a half times more than ordinary citizens. There was a slight improvement in 2017, only for the gap to grow wider again in 2019 and 2022. In both years, citizens felt officials often or always went unpunished three times more than ordinary citizens.

**Table 1: Equality Before the Law | Ghana | 2008-2022 |**

	<b>% who say officials who commit crimes often/always go unpunished</b>	<b>% who say ordinary people who commit crimes often/always go unpunished</b>
<b>2008</b>	44%	28%
<b>2012</b>	53%	24%
<b>2014</b>	67%	18%
<b>2017</b>	55%	24%
<b>2019</b>	60%	20%
<b>2022</b>	77%	25%

Such perceptions of inequality are not healthy as they undermine trust and confidence in law enforcement institutions in particular and other public institutions in general. Additionally, a feeling of the lack of rule of law may have the unfortunate consequence of citizens seeking alternative measures as opposed to entrusting the institutions charged with ensuring that all citizens obey the law.

These are but two of the six challenges I point to. The remaining four are

- a) growing perception of corruption in institutions
- b) growing mistrust in institutions
- c) growing perceptions that elected leaders do not listen; and
- d) our lack of optimism that our democracy will greatly improve in the next five years



## Blog post

Despite these challenges, I still maintain my position that we have made peace with democracy. What we are yet to make our peace with is how we want it to work. We want it to work so that democracy can deliver its promises. That is our task now.

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