

Ghana’s Democracy – Worrying Signals from the 2023 Democracy Index

By John Osae-Kwapong

The Economic Intelligence Unit’s 2023 Democracy Index has been released. Every country a) receives an overall score; b) a score in five categories: *electoral process and pluralism, functioning of government, political participation, political culture, and civil liberties* and c) a classification into one of four regime types – *full democracy, flawed democracy, hybrid regime, or authoritarian regime*.

Here is a summary of the global and regional picture.

Table 1: Democracy Index 2023, by regime type

| | Full Democracy | Flawed Democracy | Hybrid Regime | Authoritarian Regime | Total |
|-------------------|----------------|------------------|---------------|----------------------|-------|
| Global | 24 | 50 | 34 | 59 | 167 |
| Sub-Sahara Africa | 1 | 6 | 15 | 22 | 44 |
| West-Africa | 0 | 3 | 7 | 5 | 15 |

Globally, the world is dominated by authoritarian and hybrid regimes. In the report, a) fifty-three percent (53%) of the world’s population live under these regimes; b) eight percent (7.8%) live in a full democracy and c) and thirty percent (29.9%) live in flawed democracies.

The regional (Sub-Sahara Africa) and sub-regional (West-Africa) picture mirrors the global picture.

How did Ghana perform on the 2023 index? Overall, Ghana a) scored six out of ten (6.3) points; b) ranked sixty-fifth globally; c) ranked fourth in Sub-Sahara Africa and third in West-Africa; and d) is classified as a flawed democracy.

However, a broader look at Ghana’s performance over time points to democratic retrogression and an urgent need to pay attention to the challenges ahead for democratic consolidation.

Key Points to Note

Drop in global ranking and scores. In the first two rounds (2006 & 2008) Ghana was classified as a **hybrid regime**. Since 2010, the country has consistently been classified as a **flawed democracy**.

Over the period though, it improved its global ranking from seventy-eight (78) in 2011 to fifty-six (56) in 2021. In the last two years however, its global ranking has dropped to sixty-five (65).

The country's scores have also dropped. In 2006, the country scored five out of ten (5.4) points. By 2016, scores had improved to seven out of ten (6.7) points. Since 2016, the country's score has been on a slow decline to six out of ten (6.3) points.

There are two possible signals from this observation – a) efforts at deepening democracy have stalled and b) other countries are making strides in their efforts thus outranking Ghana.

Drop in scores across categories. On **functioning of government**, scores have been on the decline since 2020, after growing steadily (4.7 to 5.7) over a twelve-year period. Currently the country's score stands at five out of ten (5.0) points.

On **political culture**, scores declined in 2023, after growing steadily (4.4 to 6.3) over an eight-year period and maintaining that score for another seven years. Currently, the country's score stands at six out of ten (5.6) points.

On **civil liberties**, scores improved between 2006 and 2016 (5.9 to 7.4). Since then, scores have declined to the current score (5.8). This was the country's score in 2006 when it was classified as a hybrid regime.

There are some bright spots though. On **political participation**, scores have improved by a full point (1.1) over the sixteen-year period of the index, remaining at seven out of ten (6.7) points since 2017.

On **electoral process and pluralism**, Ghana scored seven out of ten (7.4) points in 2006, improved to eight out of ten (8.3) points in 2010 and has maintained the score since.

The Way Forward

A full examination of the index with particular attention to the questions used in constructing the overall score as well as the individual categories, demonstrates clearly that Ghana has been able to address the electoral part of democracy – regular elections, presence of political parties, a constitutionally guaranteed right to vote among others.

The real challenge is how to deepen the substance of democracy - political culture, civil liberties, and functioning of government. They are the areas that give character and meaning to democracy (political culture and civil liberties) while also ensuring that democracy is not simply an end, but also a means to an end (functioning of government).

This is an election year. Our two main political parties are prioritizing economic issues as they campaign. On matters of good governance and democracy *corruption, the number of ministers, and constitutional reforms* have been raised.

But the best economic ideas and programs will struggle to produce optimal results in an environment of major governance challenges.

This is my worry. The campaigns so far are not addressing democratic regression in Ghana. I expect the campaigns to address this and offer real substantive ideas about how to stop this trend and place the country on a solid path toward democratic consolidation.

As I often say, our support for democracy and positive dispositions towards democratic norms as per results from the Afrobarometer survey, gives us a good foundation to work to address democratic retrogression.



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