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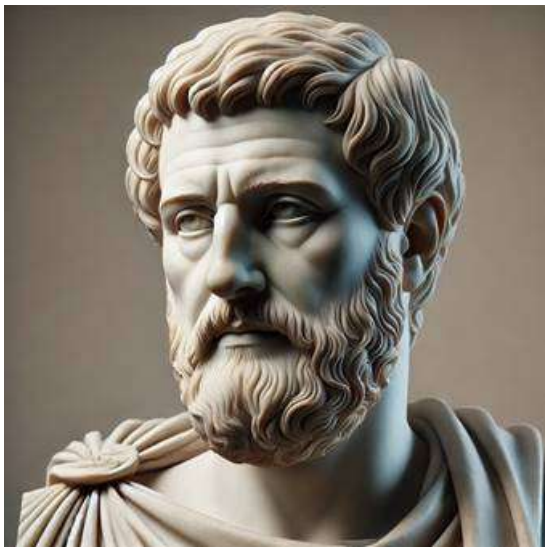

Thucydides' contributions to politics and international affairs are significant. He may be considered the father of political realism in international relations. His work has inspired and influenced many political and international affairs scholars.

June 2026

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GREGORY T. PAPANIKOS
Voter Turnout and Support for Greece's Leading Parties: PASOK and New Democracy

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Gregory T. Papanikos
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Making Democracy more Representative of the People

By Andrew Gitlin[*] & Kwame Acheampong[*]

This paper examines the evolving representativeness of democracy through a descriptive analysis of the United States and Ghana, two countries shaped by distinct historical trajectories yet similar democratic tensions between the period 1990 - 2025. In this context, we conceptualize democracy as constituted through the interaction of cultural practices and economic structures. Hence, we move beyond procedural accounts to interrogate how power, wealth, media, and institutional design condition meaningful participation. The U.S. case traces a pattern of democratic expansion followed by a seeming decline and the growing influence of social media and artificial intelligence on political polarization and participation. The Ghanaian case examines democratic consolidation following decades of political instability, highlighting electoral reforms, media liberalization, poverty reduction, and expanded civic engagement, while also identifying enduring challenges. Overall, we demonstrate how cultural arrangements, economic hierarchies, and media ecosystems interact to either enable or constrain democratic representation. Findings from our descriptive case studies suggest that democratic erosion and exclusion are not exceptional failures but predictable outcomes when structural inequalities remain embedded within democratic institution. We conclude by advancing a praxis-oriented approach to democratic renewal that integrates institutional reform, economic redistribution, labor protections, media accountability, and ethical governance of artificial intelligence.

Keywords: *democratic representation, comparative democracy, political economy, wealth and inequality, social media and artificial intelligence, United States, Ghana*

Introduction

Even where democracy is well established for centuries, in a nation state, its continued existence cannot be guaranteed. This fragility suggests democracy must constantly be critically considered if it is to enable all groups within society have a say in their government. No nation should assume its democratic nature will continue for future generations just because the democratic history has been long. Instead, the question of what can be done to strengthen the democracy needs to be part of a constant societal discourse (EIU, 2024). This essay shines a light on democracy by comparing two case studies: one in Ghana and the other in the United States focusing on the period between 1990-2025. The 1990's was chosen because this is the time when Ghana was making strong moves *to become a democracy* (Consultative Assembly, 1992) while in the US during the 1990's democracy hit a stasis fueled by several legislative moves that weakened this system of representation (Diamond, 2022).

These cases consider how direct cultural influences (e.g., legislative voting acts), and the cultural and economic conditions upon which democracy lies (e.g., the

[*]Professor, University of Georgia, USA.
[*]Graduate Assistant w/PhD, University of Georgia, USA.

relation between race and wealth inequality) influence the representativeness of a democracy. More specifically, these cases consider what groups get access to resources (and those that do not) thereby influencing future opportunities, their knowledge of civics and their ability to think critically about the political information coming from government representatives. Moving further, these cases also inquire into how social media and artificial intelligence (AI) either reinforce or broaden users preconceived biases. With these cultural factors in mind, the cases also focus on the economic sphere beginning with a consideration of the voice of workers (or lack of voice) to shape work conditions and compensation, as well as wealth inequalities that leave the poor in a survival mode thereby depending on politicians to understand and meet their needs. The rich, on the other hand, consistently influence the processes of voting such as who gets to vote as well as getting politicians elected by financing their campaigns.

Methodology

This case study design, however, is not determined idiosyncratically but rather guided by a conceptual frame that views democracy as more than cultural practices such as voting rights, but also economic factors, such as wealth inequality that set the conditions upon which democratic processes sit. Furthermore, it is assumed that the cultural and economic are woven together such that understanding democracy requires seeing the oneness of culture and the economy (Gitlin, 2023) and this oneness directs and is directed by a set of activist democratic practices. The purpose of these case studies is, in part, to see how context and history influence the type of representative democracy currently found in the US and Ghana. By making this comparison, possibilities and limits in the current construction of democracy can be illuminated. Once these case studies are compared, they are used to inform a discussion on the meaning of democracy, - following which the discussion moves to what can be done to strengthen representative democracies in particular contexts or even globally. Put simply, the essay moves from understanding democracy to thinking about types of activism that can strengthen democracies in these two contexts and beyond.

This activism is not separated from the understanding developed but rather becomes part of a unified whole that is a form of praxis (Korsch, 1970). In this view of praxis, not only is theory (or understanding) needed to direct activism, but activism consistently pushes the boundaries of our understanding or theory. From that purview, the discussion seeks to address two central questions namely:

- What does the comparison of the case studies say about the meaning or boundaries of democracy?
- What does the comparison of the case studies suggest is needed to make society more representative of the people?

The case studies begin by looking at the cultural factors that influence the representativeness of a democracy. These cultural factors are divided into direct factors such as voting rights and the cultural conditions that influence democracy

such as the intersections between race, class and schooling. Once these cultural factors are articulated, the case study moves to the economic conditions that work with or against democratic ambitions such as wealth inequality and unionization. While these factors are separated in this descriptive case study sections, when the paper moves to the discussion the cultural and the economic are woven together to get a holistic view of understanding and strengthening democracy.

U.S. Case Study
Cultural Factors

Direct Influences

Voting Rights legislation: While our emphasis is on the period between 1990's and 2025 it is essential to note that democracy, in terms of its representativeness, has always been a contested terrain in the United States. Economically powerful groups have long tried to keep the vote out of the hands of the less powerful. For example, in the 1700's many Southern states limited voting to white male landowners (Engerman & Sokoloft, 2005), women did not get the right to vote until the 1920's and even in the mid 60's blacks still had to deal with literacy tests and poll taxes (Keyssar, 2009) until President Johnson passed the Voting Rights Act in the spring of 1965.

In 1990 congress passed the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA is a comprehensive civil rights law with significant updates in 2008, that prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in various areas of public life, including employment, state and local government services, and public accommodations. The law defines a disability broadly and requires employers and public entities to provide reasonable accommodations, such as accessible features or adjusted work processes, to ensure equal opportunity (Burgdorf, 1991). ADA prohibits discrimination by state and local governments and applies to all aspects of voting, from registration to casting a ballot including making polling places accessible. The ADA also requires that all polling places be physically accessible to individuals with disabilities. This has led to the use of temporary fixes, like portable ramps and cones, or the relocation of sites to ensure voters with mobility impairments can enter, navigate, and exit polling locations.

Following closely afterward, the National Voter Registration Act (VRA) was passed in 1993 (James, 2023) in congress. This act allows citizens to register to vote once they are issued with a drivers' licenses. The law also offers mail-in voting as an alternative although states can approve or reject this approach to voting. Again, these acts tried to increase voting ease and thereby encourage larger numbers of people to vote. The Help America Vote Act (HAVA) of 2002 continued this trend and set federal standards for voting equipment and election administration. The aim was to modernize voting systems and improve the consistency and security of elections across states.

After a ten-year lull in passed legislation that lasted until 2012 and expanded the representativeness of US democracy, voting rights legislation took a dramatic turn to working against the Voting Rights Act (VRA) established in 1965. In Shelby County v. Holder (2013) the supreme court gutted a key provision of the VRA removing federal oversight of election changes in jurisdictions with a history of voter

suppression (Persily & Mann, 2013) This decision enabled states to pass new restrictive voting laws which has a disproportionate effect on minority [Black] voters.

Shortly before this decision in 2010 the supreme court also acted to make an economic ruling in term of contributions to campaigns—Citizens United (Epstein, 2011). They ruled that corporations and unions have the same first amendment rights as individuals and struck down restrictions on independent political spending. The ruling paved the way for super political action committees (PACS) and a surge in dark money political financing, - raising concerns about the concentration of political power among wealthy donors and special interest groups.

Building on Shelby County, Brnovich v. Democratic National Committee in 2021 the Supreme Court weakened Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, making it more difficult for plaintiffs to sue over discriminatory voting practices. Although two other bills were proposed Freedom to Vote Act (proposed, 2021–2024**)** and the John Lewis Voting Rights Act never passed the congress and therefore had no effect on increasing representative democracy.

Nevertheless, the supreme court made one ruling that greatly expanded the authority of the president and therefore directly limited voting rights. In 2024, the Supreme Court ruled on whether a former president could be prosecuted for official actions taken while in office. In Trump v. US, the Court ruled that a former president has "presumptive immunity" from criminal prosecution for official acts. This immunity is considered absolute for actions that fall under the president's "conclusive and preclusive constitutional authority" (McConnell, 2020)

In sum, while the first twenty years of the established time period the congress acted to expand voting rights, however from 2010 -2025 congress and the supreme court dramatically reversed course to limit representative democracy in the U.S.

Underlying Cultural/Economic Conditions

Social Media/AI: In all contexts democracy requires communication between those in power (representatives) and the people in the country. There is also a need for communication between groups so a common ground of some sort can be established. Discussing social media and AI are both important factors in understanding communication between the people and their representatives as well as between various groups within the society.

In the 1990's USA, the internet existed in a rudimentary force and was not a significant force in American political life. For example, only three million people world-wide had internet access. However, in the 2000's social media gained some traction with platforms like Six Degrees (1997) Friendster (2002) and My Space (2003), although these did not focus on political communication. It was Barack Obama's 2008 grass roots campaign that leaned on social media to get his message out in an efficient way that reached many homes, establishing social media as a platform for political activism.

By 2012 both major parties in the US tried to expand their bases by using social media. Studies showed that social media's effect on voter beliefs in falsehoods was small except with those already in one camp or the other. In 2016, the influence of

social media in politics gained tremendous currency, creating echo chambers by exposing users to content that reinforces their held beliefs thereby deepening ideological divides (Angelova, 2025; Garrett, 2019).

From 2017-2024 algorithms on social media favored inflammatory and divisive language that deepened already existing divides. Since then, AI has increased disinformation campaigns contributing to a decline in public trust. The year 2025 continued the partisan conflict as social media sites took on and endorsed political positions. In sum, social media made it difficult to differentiate misinformation from honest attempts to describe a political position and furthered the divides between groups of partisan political groups. In this way, social media to this point works against representative democracy (Carpenter, 2025).

Political News Stations: While social media and AI reinforced biases already present in individual perspectives, cable news stations such as CNN, Fox and MS Now, played a role in furthering divides between ideological groups. They did so by narrowcasting or tailoring content to specific ideological silos. For example, as of May 2025 trust in CNN was 80 percentage points higher among Democrats than Republicans while Fox news was 76 percentage points higher among Republicans. Clearly, these divides work against common ground so necessary for a democracy that depends on the "losers" of the election accept the decision of a majority of voters.

However, it is important to note that Fox commanded 64% of the total cable news audience while CNN and MS Now only commanded between 14-18% of that audience. The Republican silo is bigger than the Democratic silo in terms of the effect of cable news.

Finally, there is also the question of how honest the reporting is on cable news. For example, Fox News is accused of knowingly broadcasting false conspiracy theories about voting machines to retain viewers who were defecting to more conservative outlets. Fox News paid $787.5 million to settle a defamation suit after evidence emerged that hosts and executives privately ridiculed election fraud claims as "crazy" and "absurd" while continuing to air them. Furthermore, former employees have accused the network of operating as a "propaganda machine" for the Trump administration. Documents from 2017 and 2025 suggest instances where the network altered headlines or coverage at the direct request of administration officials. The other two cable networks have had no public accusations of this kind but the main point is that truthful independent reporting is gradually becoming a scarcity (Pew Research Center, 2025; Nielsen Media Research Database, 2025).

Economic Conditions that Influence Democracy

Wealth Inequality

Although the emphasis of this section is on wealth inequality between racial groups, it is important to go back to the founding of the U.S. The founding fathers (they were all men), were wealthy landholders, merchants or lawyers with significant financial interests, many holding public securities that would benefit from a stable national government. Put, directly they founded the U.S. primarily to benefit

themselves. The most direct way to see this self-interest is that the only people allowed to vote were white land holders. While the vote has expanded dramatically since that time wealth inequality continues to work against the representativeness of our democracy (Keyssar, 2000).

Wealth inequality in the US has significantly increased across various racial groups from 1990 to 2025 with wealth becoming concentrated among the top earners, older generation, and white households, while the bottom half and minority group have seen little improvement (Saez & Zucman, 2016). For the top 1%, their share of total U.S. wealth grew substantially from about 17-23% in 1990 to approximately 26-30.8% by 2022-2024. The share held by the top 10% increased from 56% in 1989 to 60% in 2022.Conversely, the bottom 50% of the population has remained low and even declined slightly in relative terms. It was about 3.5% in 1990 and hit a low of .4% in 2011 and stood at about 2.4-2.5% in 2024. In addition, following the passage of the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act" (OBBBA) in July 2025, tax legislation from 2024–2025 has cemented and is projected to increase U.S. wealth inequality. The law permanently extends key provisions from the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) that favor high-income earners and adds new tax breaks, while making cuts to social spending (Jones & Rycroft, 2023).

In summary, the period from 1990 to 2025 has been marked by a significant and persistent increase in wealth inequality driven by rapid asset growth for the wealthiest. This has crated systematic barriers for low-income younger and minority groups and tax breaks for the rich.

Unionization & Wage Inequality

From 1990-2025, union participation in the US has been declining steadily, directly impacting working conditions and contributing to slower wage growth and increased inequality for the typical worker (Macpherson & Hirsch, 2021; Mishel et al., 2012; Kim, 2025). Union membership has consistently decreased from 1990 to 2025 reaching a historic low of 9.9% in the US workforce in 2024, down from approximately 15.5% in 1990. The data shows that public-sector workers have consistently higher union membership rates than private-sector workers. In 2024 for instance, union membership among public-sector-workers were 32.2% compared to the private sector rate of 5%. The decline in union membership has impacted both union and non-union members as unions traditionally set wages. For example, during this time median weekly wages (adjusted for inflation) were approximately 19% higher in Q1 2025 than in Q1 1985**.** While this includes the latter half of the 1980s, it indicates a multi-decade trend of positive, but slow growth. However, when compared to middle management and executive salaries during this same period, the gap is dramatic with CEO compensation for the 350 largest US firms increasing by hundreds of percentage points in inflation-adjusted terms. One study using the "realized compensation" measure (actual take-home pay from stock sales) notes an increase of over 1,094% since 1978, with a significant portion of that growth occurring in the 1990-2025 period (Lawrence, 2021).

Ghanaian Case Study
Cultural and Economic Factors

Ghana is one of few African countries that has gained global acclaim for its stable democracy and commitment to the rule of law over the last 35 years. Like many African countries however, the country was once noted for political instability between the period 1966 – 1981 when military governments were a thing. In this essay, we take a look at some factors that have led to Ghana's democratic renaissance and related issues. Key among these being electoral reforms, voting rights, wealth distribution and liberalization of the media landscape. Following which we discuss some challenges for democratic representation in the country. First, we present a brief overview of Ghana's political terrain before 1990.

The Period before 1990: Political Instability, and a Deteriorating Economy

As the first Sub-Sahara African country to gain independence from colonial rule, Ghana quickly established itself as a beacon of hope for Africa's independence movement (French, 2025; Onyeneho, 2023). Barely a decade after proclaiming the country's independence, Kwame Nkrumah, the country's first native president was overthrown in a military coup d'état (Asante, 2020; Gutteridge, 2023). It was the first of five intermittent coup d'états between the period 1966 and 1981. Two of these (1979 and 1981) had been led by Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings[1]. Shortly after his second coup d'état, declining economic fortunes forced Rawlings and his Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC[2]) to seek support from Bretton Woods[3] (Harnack et al., 2000). However, such support will only be available on certain conditionalities. Key among these including reforms across Ghana's public institutions and a return to multi-party democracy (Leite et al., 2000).

To make this possible, the country needed a new constitution and to also lift the ban on political activism. The national committee for democracy (NCD) was formed in 1991 (Awal, 2012; Harnack et al., 2000), and was tasked with consolidating upon the positive achievements made in the country's participatory democracy (Gyimah-Boadi, 1991). The processes towards a new constitution were to reflect the values and beliefs of all Ghanaians. Specifically, the "proposals were to be placed before a 260-member Consultative Assembly (CA) made up of 117 representatives from the District and Metropolitan Assemblies, 121 representatives of various 'recognized' public organizations and associations and 22 government appointees" (Gyimah Boadi, 1991).

[1]Military officer from the Ghana Air Forces who ruled the country in 1979 and from 1981 to 2000. For details, see Haynes, J. (2022). *Revolution and Democracy in Ghana: The Politics of Jerry John Rawlings*. Routledge.
[2]Interim government formed by Jerry Rawlings after the 1981 coup d'état.
[3]Referring to the IMF, the World Bank, and other international finance corporations based in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, USA.

Criminal Libel Law, State Control and a Rigid Media Landscape

Back then, the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) remained solely in charge of radio and tv broadcast (Akrofi-Quarcoo & Gadzekpo, 2020; Osei-Appiah, 2019). Through a collaboration with the National Commission on Civic Education (NCCE), GBC provided daily adult education programmes in the respective local languages. Notwithstanding, these were generally perceived as pseudo propaganda programmes for the regime (Akrofi-Quarcoo & Gadzekpo, 2020; Nyarko, 2020). The situation was no different in the print media, most of which had been suppressed by the criminal libel law[4]. These circumstances largely inured to the benefit of the Rawlings regime who easily secured another mandate at the 1992 polls.

Electoral Reforms and the Democratic Experiment

Following the 1992 elections, the opposition NPP wrote the '*stolen verdict*[5]*';* a report which chronicles their misgivings about the 1992 presidential elections (Asante & Asare, 2017; Botchway, 2018). For most analysts, this action was the beginning of electoral reforms in Ghana's fourth republic, - largely due to allegations of vote rigging and other electoral malpractices. The corresponding electoral reforms occurred through the enactment of the Public Elections Regulation Act of (1996, CI.15) and several others thereafter (Afari-Gyan, 1996; Debrah, 2015; Van Gyampo, 2017c). Among these reforms were the replacement of the 1992 electoral register and opaque ballot boxes with transparent ones. The reforms also necessitated the involvement of the political parties throughout the electoral processes (Annor, 2011). It also made room for the electoral commission (EC) to provide assistance and logistical support to political parties. Most importantly, it mandated for presidential and parliamentary elections to be held simultaneously on the same day, following which counting of ballots were to begin immediately (Kumah-Abiwu & Darkwa, 2020; Van Gyampo, 2017c). These were the first in a series of intermittent reforms[6] aimed towards ensuring broader representation in Ghana's electoral processes. However, some of these electoral reforms have been contested over its true purpose and intent.

Voting rights: For example, article 45(a) of Ghana's constitution mandates the EC to compile and revise the electoral register whenever necessary. Over the last three decades, exercising this constitutional mandate have often been met with fierce resistance from opposition parties. This is largely due to suspicions of the EC conniving with government to infiltrate the electoral roll with unqualified persons or even disenfranchise qualified persons. It is basically an issue about trust and distrust over the neutrality of the EC that goes back to the 1990s. Back then, the allegation was that, the newly formed NDC government would coerce the EC to do its bidding

[4]With respect to Criminal and Offences Act 1960 (Acts 19 and Act 775). For details see https:// www.commonlii.org/gh/legis/num_act/cc196029115.pdf

[5]For details, see "The stolen verdict : Ghana, November 1992 presidential election : report of the New Patriotic Party. (1993). In. Accra, Ghana :: New Partiotic Party.

[6]Other significant electoral reforms occurred in 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012. For more see, Botchway, T. P., & Kwarteng, A. H. (2018). Electoral reforms and democratic consolidation in Ghana: An analysis of the role of the electoral commission in the fourth republic (1992-2016). *Asian Research Journal of Arts & Social Sciences*, *5*(3), 1-12.

to ensure a continued stay in power. More specifically by overlooking electoral infractions such as the registration of underage voters and non-Ghanaians in government stronghold areas. Similar arguments have also made been made by the NDC whenever the NPP came to power. The recent of these counter-accusations occurring through the Let My Vote Count Alliance (LMVCA) in 2012, the petition for the removal of the Electoral Commissioner and her deputies in 2018, petition against the use of Ghana card and passport as the only means of citizenship verification in 2020 and petition for a forensic audit of the voter register in 2024. Among these, the ruling by the Supreme Court to uphold the Ghana card and passport as the sole means of citizenship verification automatically disqualified Ghanaians who did not have any of these documents from exercising their franchise.

Liberalization/decolonization of the Media Landscape

Besides electoral reforms, Ghana's decision to liberalize its media landscape is another factor that have helped strengthen democratic participation in the country (Osei-Owusu, 2015; Tettey, 2017; Williams & Kwofie, 2022). As a result, Ghana now boasts of a robust media landscape which has since shifted from the colonial model of radio to a decolonized model of radio (Akrofi-Quarcoo & Gadzekpo, 2020; Mohammed, 2025). These coupled with the repeal of the criminal libel law in 2001 (Act 602) has empowered Ghanaians to participate freely in the civic discourse without fear of being reprimanded. Both sides of the country's political divide have been quick to leverage these in support of their ideologies.

Political News Stations: Subsequently, wealthy businessmen affiliated with either side as well as well-known politicians have made significant investments in both radio and television services across the country. For instance, stations like Oman FM and NET2 TV, Wontumi Radio and TV are known pro-NPP platforms whereas stations such as Radio Gold, Radio XYZ, TV XYZ, Power FM are known pro-NDC platforms. Other stations have also alternated between both sides of the divide and have allegedly used their platform as a bargaining chip for negotiating their business interests. Except for the state-owned media and a few others, Ghana's media landscape has reached the extent where it is almost impossible to discern credible news from propaganda.

Wealth (re)distribution

Ghana significantly reduced poverty levels over an estimated 50% since the return to democratic governance (Gradín & Schotte, 2020; Osei-Assibey, 2014). These were made possible through the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) and other policy interventions, as well as the discovery of crude oil in commercial quantities. This created jobs and spurred growth in the country's services sector, culminating in the attainment of a lower middle-income by 2010. Available data from Worldscorecard (2025) shows that Ghana's GDP per capita increased from a paltry US$1,738 in 1992 to US$8,037 in 2024. In particular, policies such as the free compulsory universal basic education (FCUBE[7]), the single

[7]Policy that provided free basic education for all children of school going age. See Amedahe, F. K., & Chandramohan, B. (2009). Ghana–Towards FCUBE (Free and Compulsory Universal Basic Education).

spine salary structure, the free maternal healthcare, national health insurance act, free senior high school (FSHS) and others have been instrumental (Chandramohan & Amedahe, 2009; Darkwa & Acquah, 2022).

Unionization: Workers right and welfare are widely respected and upheld in Ghanaian organizations. Mostly, there is the freedom to join any organized labour platform of choice; most of which have umbrella bodies superintending over their nationwide activities. Nonetheless, most if not all of these unionized workers fall under the auspices of the Ghana Trades Union Congress (GTUC) which negotiates annual minimum wage and salary increments on behalf of organized labor. Coupled with a disjointed labor front and allegations of corruption amongst union leaders, these negotiations typically result in no more than 10 - 20% increments, a trend that mostly favors those in the middle to upper income bracket. As at today, minimum wage in Ghana still remains under $2, a little below the global poverty line.

Challenges for Democracy and Political Representation in Ghana

Systemic Inequality

Certainly, prevailing trends in Ghana have not bridged the gap between the rich and poor as had been envisaged. The situation is attributed to the underlying systemic and structural issues that keep frustrating pro-poor growth and social protection initiatives (Dim & Asomah, 2025; Osei-Assibey, 2014). Most of these issues have long existed before the promulgation of the 1992 Republican constitution. For instance, the country's natural resources and economic opportunities are traditionally concentrated in the south, largely due to a favorable rainfall pattern, mineral rich forests and arable lands as compared to the North. These were instrumental in the colonial regime's decision to move Northerners to farm on cocoa plantations in the south (Kuusaana, 2022; Sutton, 1989). This trend still persists today in the form of seasonal migration, the benefits of which accrues mostly to Southern farmer owners. Naturally, this also created a contemptuous ethno-tribal relationship between the farm owners and labourers. Such complex interactions also manifest through voting patterns and ideological preferences within these areas (Adams & Agomor, 2015).

Winner takes all System

Like many contemporary democracies, Ghana runs an executive presidential system which grants enormous powers to the president and the ruling party. In Ghana's case, the situation has led to a scenario where the country's democratic institutions have been 'rhetorically decentralised' but 'practically recentralised' (Anaafo, 2018). More to do with how the consolidation of power in the Executive branch enables them to control the respective local governance structures through political appointments. Thus far, this has inured to the benefits of Ghana's elites due to instances of clientelism, neopatrimonialism and political patronage (Dim and Asomah, 2025). In particular, the "alternations of power between the two major

political parties [i.e., NPP and NDC] have been historically accompanied by shifts in access to public resources" (Dim and Asomah, 2025, p.6).

Political Party Financing

Besides the winner takes all system, the associated high costs of running for electoral office have inadvertently made it a preserve of the rich and affluent in the country, - a trend now commonly referred to as 'money-cracy' [8]. According to the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD, 2021), it costs approximately USD $100 million and USD $700,000 to run an effective presidential and parliamentary campaign respectively as at the 2020 electoral cycle. The insights further show that a large chunk of this money is spent on incentivizing voters to vote in a particular manner (Asante & Oduro, 2016; Asekere et al., 2025). This huge financial requirement inhibits less resourced candidates from going through the preliminary rounds even though they may have the best ideas. Thus, further entrenching the gap between the rich and the poor.

Free Speech, social media and Algorithms

In Ghana's case, the liberal media landscape provided a fertile ground for the internet boom and proliferation of social media that occurred from 2010 onwards. Since then, these social media platforms have offered the means for Ghanaians to hold governments accountable without having to go through *'traditional gatekeepers[9]'*. That coupled with Ghana's youthful population have made social media the new '*norm*' for political and civic engagement in the country (Dzisah, 2018; Van Gyampo, 2017a). Nevertheless, with such tools also came new challenges that threaten the foundations of Ghana's democracy. These challenges emanating from the underlying mechanisms and excessive freedoms that social media platforms grant its users (Dzisah, 2018; Van Gyampo, 2017b). More specifically, the algorithms that powers these platforms tend to aggregate information into trends without necessarily checking for accuracy. Hence, there is the tendency for an issue to trend although it may not be true. Furthermore, the incentives given to creatives to generate content on these platforms not only projects dominant narratives but could also incite ethno-tribal[10] and political conflicts[11] as has been witnessed in Ghana recently.

Representation of Ghanaians in the Diaspora

Besides, representation of Ghanaians in the diaspora also remains an outstanding issue that is yet to be resolved. This category of Ghanaians serves as a major

[8]With reference to the use of money and other financial incentives to influence electoral outcomes.
[9]Used with reference to editors and editorial processes required on mainstream media platforms.
[10]Referring to social media tensions between supporters of the Asantehene and Dormaahene respectively. See https://www.myjoyonline.com/urgently-help-resolve-the-asantehene-dormaahene-feud-chieftaincy-minister -to-national-house-of-chiefs/
[11]With reference to political tensions between supporters of the NPP and the NDC. For more, see https://citinewsroom.com/2024/08/asesewa-npp-ndc-supporters-clash-over-branding-of-drip-equipment-several-in jured/

economic backbone for the country through their remittances back home which now exceed foreign direct investments (FDI) in the country. Yet, they are unable to participate in national elections from their respective jurisdictions abroad. To this end, an amendment was made in 2006 through the representation of people abroad law (ROPAL). A law which sought to allow such persons to vote in successive national elections. However, due to the lack of clear-cut procedures, funding and logistical challenges, the bill is yet to see implementation. Thus, begging the question about whether voting rights in Ghana is truly representative of all Ghanaians or just those domiciled in the country.

Implications of the Case Studies

Having laid out the state of democracy in the United States and Ghana, this section compares the two case studies to see new possibilities for change that makes democracy more representative of the people. By doing so, we also hope to see democracy through a wider lens and not just in procedural terms. We begin with what can be done.

Democracy, the Constitution and Wealth Inequality

Because the Ghanaian constitution is much more recent as compared to the US constitution this discussion begins with the years both constitutions were written and the key changes that occurred in the years to follow.

The US constitution was written and approved in 1787 whiles the Ghanaian constitution was approved through referendum in 1993. One notable difference between both is that the Ghanaian constitution builds upon three other versions (1957/1960, 1969, 1979) that were abrogated after the intermittent military takeovers. However, just like the US constitution, the Ghanaian constitution does not explicitly mention the clause that "*all men (sic) are created equal*". The absence of such a clause is significant, in that, the constitution is the supreme law of the land, out of which other legal/regulatory frameworks emerge (Wood, 2021). Though the above-mentioned statement is enshrined in the Declaration of Independence document in the US, the document could not be built upon as is true of amendments to the constitution.

In the US case, there were four amendments that spoke to all men are created equal: The 14th in 1868 focuses on equal protection under the law, while the 15th in 1870 liberalized voting rights for all racial categories. Similarly, the 19th in 1920 emphasized that voting rights could not be based on gender categories while the 26th in 1971 set the legal voting age to 18 years old (Vile, 2021). Though these amendments embodied the notion that all men are created equal, in practice the interpretation of what constitutes *equal* was left to the supreme court. For the first 200 years of the US constitution, the supreme court supported legislation that moved toward an inclusive notion of equality, and yet this same supreme court was reluctant to say so explicitly.

In the Ghanaian case, whereas the 1992 Republican constitution does not explicitly mention the equality of men, it hints towards this in articles 1(1), 12(2), 55(2) and (10) respectively. For instance, in article 1(1), the constitution assigns sovereignty to "the people of Ghana in whose name and for whose welfare the powers of government are to be exercised". However, a closer hint towards the idea of equality is enshrined in article 12(2) which states "[e]very person in Ghana, whatever his race, place of origin, political opinion, colour, religion, creed or gender shall be entitled to the fundamental human rights and freedoms of the individual contained in this Chapter but subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others and for the public interest". This is followed by article 55 (2) and (10) which grants universal adult suffrage and the right to political activism for all Ghanaians. These clauses are not only an amendment of the original constitution promulgated in 1960 but also borrows ideas from those promulgated in the 1969 and 1979 constitutions (Mensah, 2022). For instance, the 1960 constitution did not have any such "clear provisions for fundamental human rights" except for those espoused under "the solemn declaration by the president before the people" (Mensah, 2022, p. 259). On the contrary, the 1969 (article 12) and 1979 (article 19) constitutions of Ghana had similar provisions just as those espoused in article 12 (2) of the current constitution. Thus, unlike the US, it took Ghana less than a decade to amend its original constitution and collectively 30 years after independence to move towards correcting representational injustices in its constitution albeit a lot of grey areas still remain.

With respect to electoral democracy, on that first day of the approved constitution all Ghanaians could vote whereas in the US it took close to 200 years and still voting for everyone was not guaranteed. This conflict about equality and democracy showed up clearly in the dismantling of the John Lewis Voting rights act by the Supreme court and in Trump vs US where the notion that no one is above the law was rebuked by the Supreme court thereby giving a president immunity from almost all prosecution related to their job as president (Delahunty & Yoo, 2024). Unlike the US, the right of all Ghanaians to vote is not a contested issue in Ghana. However, the real issue is about who qualifies as a Ghanaian as well as whether all Ghanaians are equal before the law. The former emerging from the creation of Ghana as a nation state by the colonial regime.

Long before such a creation, families, communities and tribes were living together along the points where modern Ghana, Togo, Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast coalesce. Though the creation of the modern state created artificial boundaries, many of such communities continue to live together through intermarriages, trade, religion and other communal activities. As such, they have legitimate ties to Ghana, some of which qualifies them to Ghanaian citizenship by heritage or residence. In other words, it is possible to be living on the fringes of Togo, Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast and still be entitled to Ghanaian citizenship on legal grounds. The same scenario applies to Ghanaians born in the diaspora. Yet, these have been the subject of intense political argumentation and judicial interpretation over the years particularly during electioneering season.

Nonetheless, the major bone of contention is now about the equality of all Ghanaians before the law. For instance, in the recent case of the Republic v. Kwame Baffoe (2025), the judge ruled that "all men are equal, but some are more equal

before the law". By inference, the judge was suggesting that the president and other high-ranking officials deserves preferential treatment before the law. Thus, confirming a widely held perception among Ghanaians that elitist groups always have their way with the law (Osae-Kwapong, 2025). Akin to the US scenario, such instances suggest that, the notion of equality of all men as enshrined in the Ghanaian constitution is just a matter of interpretation, in which the judiciary are the supreme arbiters.

Rationale for the status quo

Why have both countries been so reluctant to make an unequivocal statement, a legal statement that all men are created equal? In the US for instance, the situation is partly attributed to the "monied class" that owned the land and eventually the capitalist class that accumulated gaudy sums of money. These people essentially wanted to implement laws that would maintain their privilege and wealth. For example, out of the 55 delegates at the Constitutional Convention, 12 including George Washington, owned and managed large slave-operated plantations, while 6 of them were major land speculators. Another 35 were lawyers who earned money often through dealing with debts and property rights on the frontier which allowed them to accumulate significant wealth. Due to these privileges, they also had access to intimate details about the economic system built on private property right which compensated them both financially and socially. The delegates were interested, at least partially, in maintaining their wealth and social position above others and therefore had questions of where the democracy would lead them.

In the Ghanaian context, the British had administered the then colonial territory through locally trained bureaucrats and other loyalists who later became elites in Ghanaian society. Among these locally trained bureaucrats were children of prominent chiefs, businessmen, cocoa farmers and traders who aligned with the colonial regime to protect their own interests (Bannerman-Wood, 1984; Berman, 1998; Gocking, 2014). This alliance also created a system of political patronage which exists till today and may have manifested in the processes leading to the promulgation of the 1992 Republican constitution. For instance, Gyimah Boadi (1991) mentions that whereas the committee of experts that drafted the 1992 Republican constitution had some political credibility, same cannot be said for members of the NCD and CA. According to him, the latter two had been filled with appendages of the PNDC regime, who for one reason or the other were looking to protect their own interests. This was also a deliberate strategy to safeguard the regime from some sort of national trial as had happened elsewhere (Gyimah-Boadi, 1991). Thus, except for a few differences, the Ghanaian scenario portrays a very similar scenario to the American scenario where patronage and classism may have superseded the broader national interest.

Going back to the US case, the delegates wealth at the 1787 constitutional convention also fundamentally shaped their skepticism toward "pure" democracy. It led them to build a system of checks and balances designed to protect property and prevent "mob rule" (Beard, 1913). Democracy was viewed by these delegates, in part, as an approach to governance that could lead to mob rule. "Mob rule," in turn,

could undermine the privileged status of the wealthy delegates because in their thinking, the uneducated masses and the poor might vote to redistribute wealth. As a result, the founders preferred a republic over a democracy. James Madison argued that a republic would dilute the power of the poor and protect the nations "true" interests (Madison, 1787). To insulate the government from popular fluctuations the delegates also built-in filters into the Constitution (e.g., the Senate was initially chosen by State Legislator's, and the electoral system limited the democratic influence of the popular vote). One limitation of this historical view is that it could be claimed that we are imposing presentist values and conditions to a historical situation that is no longer the case. It appears however, that not much has changed with respect to the importance of wealthy political leaders in the US seeking to protect their wealth and privilege.

In Ghana's instance, wealth may not have directly influenced the drafting of the constitution. However, the need to maintain political power, status and privilege may have played a part in the constitutional development processes. As Gyimah-Boadi (1991) observes, newly emerged elitist groups including some members of the NCD and CA who held lucrative job positions were in favor of a pro-government stance. This stance included a desire for "the PNDC [to] continue in office" as well as denouncing "the evils of multi-party politics" (Gyimah-Boadi, 1991). These privileged few were not only seeking to centralize power in the regime but were also looking to extend the tenure of the regime. Such that it would allow them an opportunity to hold on to their positions and invariably influence the sharing of the national cake. It appears then, that the consultative processes beneath the drafting of the 1992 constitution was just a matter of formality over functionality, one that did not necessarily see all Ghanaians to be of equal stature before the law. In that vein, we may deem Ghana's transition back into democratic governance as a grant by the military regime and not a negotiated outcome by the people (Gyimah-Boadi, 1991). Whichever way it was, Ghanaians were eager to embrace it due to the excesses of a military regime that consistently infringed upon their fundamental human rights.

Current Influences on Democratic Governance

How have these dynamics shaped democratic governance in both the US and Ghana? Of the 50 Senators in the US senate today, many would be considered in the top 10% of the US population in terms of wealth. In fact, several senators average US$ 3.2 million in wealth which is well above the top 10%. Nearly half of the senators are confirmed millionaires compared to 7-8% of the general population.

Senators also include the ultra-wealthy with net worth exceeding US$ 50 million. It is generally difficult to determine the wealth of congress members because they only report between 1 million and 5 million dollars of wealth. Further, as was true of the founders who had insider knowledge of land on the frontier open for purchase current politicians often have insider knowledge on the equity markets. This became such a concern, for which the Stop Treading on Congressional Knowledge Act (STOCK) was recently enacted. While this may have been well intentioned when you go to the details, the penalty for using insider knowledge to make equity trades is just 200 US dollars. This bill is unlikely to hold anyone

accountable and will not serve as a deterrent (U.S. Constitutional Convention, 1787) to using insider knowledge to enhance politician's wealth. Furthermore, with the decline of collective bargaining through the seeming demise of unionization in the US have further heightened the wealth inequality gap between politicians' and those who work blue collar jobs.

Comparing to the US, there is little data to describe the exact wealth being held by Ghana's political class. However, Ghana's political landscape reveals a very interesting pattern about how the democratic process further widens the gap between the rich and poor. Starting from the colonial regime, those who entered the country's bureaucracy later joined the country's political class (Bannerman-Wood, 1984). They became the pioneers of contemporary Ghanaian politics who in turn sought to nurture the next crop of politicians (protégés). With such nurturing came a form of patronage, in which the understudy politicians commonly upheld these pioneers as 'godfathers' (Ameh et al., 2025; Bello et al, 2025). Having a 'political godfather' meant access to a support network and financial resources, both of which are key to electoral outcomes in Ghana. In return, political protégés are required to offer their loyalty and service to these 'godfathers' by protecting their [godfathers] interests wherever possible. Similar to the US, these interests often include the need to gain insidious knowledge about government contracts and key aspects of the economy. In Ghana's case, there are little to no legal clauses that prevent politicians from using such knowledge to enrichen themselves. As such, it is common place for politicians to buy state property or be awarded juicy government contracts. Often, these are the hidden incentives behind the quest to enter parliament or political office in Ghana.

To some extent, these negotiated dynamics may have become necessary due to the huge responsibilities associated with occupying political office in Ghana. In particular, there is a perception amongst the populace that the political class is better off than the ordinary Ghanaian. With such perception comes high expectations, often to foot all manner of bills for constituents even though these may not be constitutionally mandated.

What do these trends mean for democracy? Wealth and status often influence one's views on democracy. However, the fact that politicians from the signing of the constitution to today are far wealthier than most Americans means the US democratic system does not elect politicians in large numbers from the poorer classes. Similar patterns are also observed in Ghana where access to resources and relevant connections are a determining factor in who gets elected and who does not. In Ghana's case, this has partly led to some sort of class struggle between the bourgeois and proletariats as were witnessed during the period of military takeovers. There are signs of such a trend continuing under the fourth Republican dispensation. For instance, from 1992 onwards, political power has alternated only between two political parties (i.e., NPP and NDC). In turn, a few people have dominated these political parties respectively, creating some sort of cabal that determines who gets elected and who does not. Mostly, these dynamics have inured to the benefit of the bourgeois class as compared to the proletariats. Thus, the insights from both the US and Ghanaian scenarios suggests that politicians have divided interests between the notion that all men are created equal, the bedrock of democracy, and the need to make laws that protect their privilege, status and wealth.

In the case of the US, this internal conflict started with the oversights in the constitution and became more pronounced with Citizens United that flooded politics with dirty money of billionaires. This way, from the constitution onward, US law protected capitalism and property rights to ensure that the wealthy 1% remain in a dominant position in the political process (Overtz, 2022). In Ghana's case, whereas article 55 (5) of the 1992 constitution directs for "the internal organisation of political parties to conform with democratic principles", a lot of grey areas remain about how best to approach or enforce this clause. As a result of this vacuum, there is an influx of money and display of wealth to among other things induce electorates. Unlike the US however, it cannot necessarily be claimed that Ghana's constitution is skewed towards protecting capitalism and property rights. Afterall, it was a pro-socialist regime that led processes for the 1992 Republican constitution. However, if we think in terms of how the regime infiltrated the process with their affiliates, we can make a claim that the constitution was largely drafted to protect the interests of the regime and its cohorts who occupied the upper echelons of Ghanaian society at the time. Like the US, such a hierarchy in Ghana may have compromised the representative nature of democracy itself and has rarely been challenged because it is hidden in a democratic narrative that focused primarily on voting rights.

We now turn attention to social media and artificial intelligence (AI), both of which have shaped political outcomes in recent times and will undoubtedly play a key role in the future of democracy.

Democracy, Social Media and AI

In both Ghana and the US, social media is gradually undermining the representativeness of democracy through the use of algorithms that creates echo chambers. This not only creates wide divides that are difficult to bridge but diminishes the common ground which is the foundation for a highly functioning democracy. AI, primarily thrives on data, for which reason it prioritizes the past and the "is" over the ought, and what ought to be. The truth, therefore, is in an instrumental form that focuses on the means separated from the ends that direct users to think about what should be (Bucher, 2018). Let's dig a bit deeper into social media and AI with a focus on how social media and AI influence democracy but more importantly what can be done to modify this negative effect on democracy.

Why do the social media companies use algorithms to determine your priorities and then send messages to your profile or places on the site you visit that reinforce your perspectives? The answer is simple. Social media platforms are interested in making profits and doing so means they need to encourage engagement—meaning an increase in the time you scroll through content on your preferred site. The longer you stay active on a site, in turn, the easier it is to match ads to your likes and priorities. While algorithms do personalize your experience on the site, they also produce an echo chamber that is the key for the huge profits these companies—corporations produce (Angelova, 2025). Meta, for example, had a market capitalization on US$1.8 trillion and a profit of US$ 60 billion in 2025. Tik Tok also reached a US$ 33 billion valuations in ad revenue. Clearly, these two companies have extreme

amounts of power, and they use it to shape laws and politics which serve their interests. (Sims, 2026; Schultz, 2025).

Meta, for example, has one lobbyist for every six members of congress. Advocacy groups such as Amnesty International argue that social media giants like Tik Tok and Meta manipulate opinions at scale and suppress competition. The latter occurs through lobbying politicians to pass laws in their favor, a situation that threaten human rights and democratic values. Reports from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence in the US also suggest that these social media sites threaten free expression in democratic societies. Social media is frequently criticized for fostering division and extremism through echo chambers (Angelova, 2025). Yet, far less attention is paid to how social media corporations leverage their vast economic power to shape legislation, - weakening data privacy protections, minimizing their tax burdens and safeguarding their own privileges. Thus, economic hierarchies fueled by the reluctance to say anything negative about capitalism allow these companies to work openly against democratic priorities (Magalhães, 2025).

Like many American companies, these social media platforms now have a global reach that allows them to influence decision-making and electoral outcomes in other countries. As evidenced from the Cambridge Analytica incidence (2016), such global reach makes it easy to harvest big data on user behavior and value preferences in these countries. This data is used for training the algorithms and inferring user behavior because AI works through pattern recognition and not understanding. In that vein, AI may be better conceived as a statistical mirror that analyzes what humans have done and replicates those patterns to achieve a goal. It is instructive to note that, AI has no inherent sense of what should be done, neither can it determine if an outcome is good or bad on its own. Any "ought" to be is manually programmed by human engineers using Reinforcement Learning from human Feedback (Google, AI, 2026). This is an avenue that allows for encoding and reinforcing popular beliefs and values into the algorithms. Although, AI may be well suited for efficiently finding answers to technical "how to" questions, its value for democracy is limited because it separates the moral ends from the how to means.

Habermas (1984) refers to this separation as instrumental rationality, a form of technical knowledge that is used to manipulate the environment or other people that are seen as objects to be managed. In contrast, he suggests we engage in communicative rationality that requires humans to debate and agree on norms and values through open uncoerced conversation which links the ought and the how to. According to Habermas, instrumental rationality has colonized the "lifeworld" and therefore stands in the way of a strong democracy that tries to do more than pick a leader and instead is the social practice of communicative rationality. Communicative rationality is how a society thinks out loud to solve its problems fairly. An example might clarify these points. Say, a notable leader stated he wanted to increase the price of homes as opposed to making homes more affordable for first time buyers because this would be a great result for the economy. The means are clear: increase the price of a home. But the ends are not clarified and hide within the term good for the economy without saying who would benefit. However, if one debated the term good for the economy one could consider if it was more important for those who owned a home to make a greater profit or for those who couldn't afford a home to start to build wealth by

owning this sort of abode. The leader assumed a good economy should focus on the current homeowners who are rich enough to own a home while ignoring if the non-homeowners need to be supported to have a good economy. If both groups had a say in a future law, guided by this sort of conversation, a debate could occur on who should benefit from the so-called good economy. Through the use of social media and other platforms to influence public opinion, US society has largely lost the will to talk across differences and argue about values and norms. As a result, instrumental rationality has in fact taken over the lifeworld and therefore threatens democracy.

Compared to the US, Ghana may not have necessarily lost its will to talk across differences or argue about values and norms. For the most part, communicative rationality is present in the country's media. Yet, the rise of social media and AI platforms is gradually shifting this towards those paraded on these platforms. Given Ghana's youthful population, a quarter of whom are active social media users, it is common place for mutual learning to occur between these users and the AI algorithms beneath social media platforms. However, due to the allure of capitalism and a desire for profit, insights from such mutual learning constitutes a rich source of data for the tech companies behind social media. For these companies, data is the new oil because of the enormous power and profits it grants them. This power emerging from the near 'superhuman' ability to know what everybody else is thinking whiles the profit emerges from the financial rewards earned from selling such data. Ghanaian politicians have been quick to discern and leverage these trends strategically. Either through paid or organic self-promotion to gain gravitas or gauge public sentiments on policy. The threat herein is that there is now a section of voters whose thoughts about a particular candidate, policy or the democratic process are easily influenced by the content that they engage with on these platforms. In that sense, these persons may lose the ability to properly evaluate candidates and policies in a manner required for a communicative rationality.

Social media, AI and Wealth (re)distribution

How do these algorithms affect wealth distribution in democratic societies? The main strength of AI is the ability to analyze big data in real-time. Seeing this potential, governments and organizations are fast leveraging the technology for analytical workflows. Say a government wants to determine the effects of a policy on various categories of people, it can use AI to run a simulation model to predict the corresponding outcomes. In the housing example for instance, AI can easily predict the effects of rising cost of housing on various groups of people and the broader US or Ghanaian economy in general. However, a major challenge emerges when banks and financial institutions leverage AI in determining who gets access to mortgage facilities or a home ownership loan. Unlike a human analyst, AI does not does not consider the individual circumstances of an applicant. Rather, it recognizes and replicates patterns in its training data. This is problematic because the training datasets frequently contain biases and discriminatory practices. Moreover, over 2.2 billion people worldwide lack access to digital connectivity, and are not represented on social media platforms (Signé, 2023). This means that, their voices, perspectives and aspirations are invisible to these models by default. In the context of the housing

for instance, these realities may determine which category of people are selected or not selected by the AI system for a mortgage in the US or a home ownership loan in Ghana. Thus, Whichever way that is, using AI for decision-making could further entrench housing disparities and wealth inequality in democratic society(ies). Then again, what happens to global inequality when governments and international organizations leverage AI for analytics or policy work? We can keep asking these questions on and on.

However, that is not the point of this paper. The point of this paper was to show the state of democracy in two contextually different countries, i.e., the US and Ghana. Insights from both case studies suggest that democracy in its current form maybe limited to some extent; especially in terms of wealth (re)distribution and creating equal opportunities for various categories of people. These occur through cultural and value preferences embedded in institutional mechanisms such as the Constitution, corresponding laws, policies and etc., that determine the pace of democratic societies. However, it appears from both case studies that, these institutional mechanisms are mostly skewed towards preserving elitist interests than the broader national interest. When such a disequilibrium occurs in democratic society(ies), it leads to a growing frustration with the system. As such, there is the tendency to downplay the basic privileges (if any) that comes with democratic societies.

Do these suggest that we give up on democracy and its values? Certainly not. Inspite of its flaws, democracy remains the best option (at least in our opinion) for contemporary societies until otherwise proven. This is due to the fundamental freedoms that it provides for people and businesses to thrive devoid of intimidation. However, it appears that democracy is at a critical juncture due to contemporary challenges such as the AI conundrum that many democratic societies are grappling with. What then maybe the way forward for preserving the dignity of democratic societies?

First, there is the urgent need to rethink the distributive aspects of democracy especially in capitalist societies such as the US, such that the ripple effects of wealth creation may not only accrue to the top 10%. Inter alia, such a rethinking must occur through the institutional mechanisms such as the constitution, corresponding laws and policies that determine the rules of the game. In that regard, countries such as the US may have to learn lessons from Ghana who have recently moved towards reviewing its constitution to reflect changing societal needs. Likewise, nascent democracies like Ghana and others may also learn lessons from the US scenario where a disequilibrium in the country's institutional mechanisms have led to the concentration of wealth among 1% of American citizens. More specifically, by focusing on where and how the US got it wrong in terms of wealth (re)distribution and creating equal opportunities for all. To reduce wealth disparities and systemic inequalities, there is an urgent need for democratic societies such as the US and Ghana to invest in affordable and equitable healthcare services, paying living wages instead of minimum wages as well as other robust social protection mechanisms to provide a better safety net for citizens. For that reason, both the US and Ghana may need to look towards the Nordic democracies such as Denmark, Sweden, Norway and others who have made significant advancements in that regard.

Second, current scenarios across the US and Ghanaian media landscape require an urgent need to (re)think what constitutes free speech and a free press. This is

because of how political propaganda have overshadowed substantive content within both countries. As the fourth estate in democratic societies, the role of the media is essentially to keep citizens informed about happenings within society, such that citizens can exercise communicative rationality and contribute to the national discourse. The role of the media therefore is to act as an honest broker of news and other informative content, not about spewing falsehoods and half-truths in the name of political propaganda. Addressing these fundamental concerns have become even more critical due to the growing lack of censorship and the disruptive potential posed by social media, AI and the underlying algorithms. From all indications, the AI era is upon us now and will be with us until we achieve the singularity where everything will be interconnected. This means that democratic societies such as the US and Ghana must put in the necessary guardrails to protect their citizens from becoming puppets in a global marionette show. These guardrails may include very strict privacy and data protection mechanisms such as promoting digital avenues where there is no monetization of content, data belongs to users, and most importantly the users are creators that create spaces of difference that bring differences between users and helps them discuss ends and its relation to means.

In the interest of preserving the sanctity of democratic societies, we have shared insights from two well-regarded democratic countries, (i.e., Ghana and the US, with similar challenges). We have as well shared some thoughts on what we consider as pathways towards making democratic societies more representative of the collective interest and not just a few. To do so, economic limitations (e.g., wealth inequalities and wage stagnation) as well as cultural limitations (e.g., media and AI and voting rights) need to be woven together, addressed and challenged if democracy is to move forward. We offer this as an open call for others to share lessons from elsewhere as well as offer their thoughts for strengthening democracy in the era of AI and polarization that is upon us.

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Structural Silence in Relation to Article 5 ECHR: A Comparative Analysis of Pretrial Detention Practices in Azerbaijan and Turkey

*By Vidadi Orujlu**

This paper examines the discrepancy between formal legal guarantees and their practical implementation under Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which protects the right to liberty and security. Although the Convention provides detailed safeguards against arbitrary detention, the existence of these safeguards does not necessarily ensure their effective application at the domestic level. Persistent shortcomings in pre-trial detention may therefore represent not only separate violations, but also deeper structural constraints affecting the practical enforcement of human rights standards. This paper employs the idea of "structural silence" to analyse why formally recognised rights may remain visible in judicial decisions while losing part of their protective effect in practice. The comparison is based on detailed examination of Farhad Aliyev v Azerbaijan, Mammadli v Azerbaijan, and Rasul Jafarov v Azerbaijan, as well as Şahin Alpay v Turkey and Selahattin Demirtaş v Turkey (No 2). It also considers the Venice Commission's findings concerning Turkey's criminal peace judgeships. The analysis demonstrates recurring patterns of generalised reasoning, limited engagement with defence arguments, continued detention without renewed factual justification, and review mechanisms that sometimes confirm rather than reassess detention. At the same time, the paper does not treat Azerbaijan and Turkey as identical systems. It argues that structural silence may emerge through different institutional paths, while producing a similar weakening of Article 5 protection.

Introduction

The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), while widely viewed as one of the most comprehensive regional frameworks for the protection of fundamental freedoms, has developed a sophisticated system for safeguarding individual liberty, particularly under Article 5.[1]

Despite the extensive body of law developed under the Convention, a considerable gap may exist between the formal recognition of rights and their real-world implementation. This gap is particularly visible in the context of pre-trial detention, where a person may be deprived of liberty through a formally valid judicial procedure, yet without the detailed and individualised reasoning required by the Convention. The authority of international law is therefore dependent not only on the existence of a rule, but also on the form in which national institutions receive and apply that rule.[2]

*LL.M. Candidate, Fulda University of Applied Sciences, Germany

[1]European Convention on Human Rights (opened for signature 4 November 1950, entered into force 3 September 1953) 213 UNTS 221, art 5.

[2]Başak Çalı, The Authority of International Law: Obedience, Respect, and Rebuttal (Oxford University Press 2015).

This paper posits that such shortcomings cannot always be attributed solely to isolated instances of non-compliance. In some situations, they reflect recurring characteristics of national legal and institutional practice that shape how individual liberty is realised. Accordingly, the concept of "structural silence" is proposed as an analytical tool for understanding cases in which the law continues to speak through formal procedures, while the facts and arguments necessary for meaningful protection receive insufficient attention.

"Structural silence" refers to situations in which rights formally exist within a legal system, yet progressively lose their functional effectiveness because of routinised decision-making, standardised reasoning, limited judicial engagement, or review mechanisms that reproduce the original decision. As Koskenniemi has emphasised, the existence of legally recognised norms does not automatically ensure their realisation in practice.[3] Similarly, Merry has shown that human rights norms undergo processes of translation when applied within local institutions, and that their meaning may be narrowed during that process.[4]

Through the analysis of pre-trial detention in Azerbaijan and Turkey, this paper asks how formal Article 5 procedures can fail to provide substantive protection and through which institutional mechanisms such failure becomes recurring. The argument is developed through close examination of the factual basis for detention, the reasons used by domestic courts, the arguments raised by the defence, the quality of subsequent review, and the response of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR).

The comparison does not claim that every detention decision in either country follows the same pattern. Nor does it attempt to rank the two legal systems. Rather, the selected cases are used to identify specific mechanisms through which judicial review may become formal rather than protective. The central argument is that the effectiveness of Article 5 depends not only on legal recognition, but also on institutions capable of connecting legal standards to the facts of the individual case.

Structural Silence as an Analytical Framework

The gap between law as formally recognised and its actual implementation has long been documented in legal and socio-legal scholarship. The familiar distinction between law in books and law in action is important because it demonstrates that a norm does not operate independently from the institutions applying it. Tamanaha similarly argues that the practical effect of law is determined by the broader social and institutional environment in which legal actors operate.[5]

The implementation-gap concept, however, generally focuses on whether a recognised legal rule is enforced. Structural silence places greater emphasis on the internal form of compliance. A court may cite the relevant legal provision, hold a

[3]Martti Koskenniemi, From Apology to Utopia: The Structure of International Legal Argument (Cambridge University Press 2005).

[4]Sally Engle Merry, Human Rights and Gender Violence: Translating International Law into Local Justice (University of Chicago Press 2006).

[5]Brian Z Tamanaha, Law as a Means to an End: Threat to the Rule of Law (Cambridge University Press 2006).

hearing, issue a written order, and refer to accepted categories such as flight risk or interference with evidence. Nevertheless, the procedure may fail to protect liberty if those categories are not connected to the particular conduct, history, or circumstances of the detainee. In that situation, the failure is not external to the legal process. It is produced through the ordinary form in which the process operates.

Structural silence must also be distinguished from a normative gap. A normative gap exists when the applicable law does not regulate an important question or remains unclear. The problems examined in this paper occur despite the existence of developed standards. Article 5 already requires a factual basis for reasonable suspicion, relevant and sufficient reasons for continued detention, and effective review capable of ordering release. The issue is therefore not that the law is silent, but that its practical content may be reduced during institutional application.

This concept does not convert every Article 5 violation into a structural problem. A single incorrect decision may be corrected on appeal and may not indicate any broader institutional pattern. Structural silence becomes more relevant when several indicators appear together: the same abstract grounds are repeated at different stages; defence arguments capable of affecting the result are not answered; a reviewing court reproduces the reasoning under challenge; the passage of time does not lead to a stronger justification; or the institutional design reduces the possibility of independent correction.

These indicators are analytical rather than independent legal tests. The finding of a Convention violation remains governed by the requirements of Article 5. Structural silence is used only to explain how the protective purpose of those requirements may be weakened. The concept therefore operates between doctrinal and institutional analysis: the ECtHR judgment identifies the legal defect, while the broader comparison examines how similar defects are produced and repeated.

This approach also avoids the assumption that the mere use of legal language proves compliance. Legal frameworks may maintain an appearance of neutrality even when institutional routines and relationships of power shape how legal concepts are applied.[6] Recent discussion within the Athens Journal of Politics & International Affairs has also emphasised that the practical protection of human rights is connected to the institutional conditions in which rights are claimed and enforced, rather than to abstract recognition alone.[7]

For the purposes of this paper, structural silence is therefore defined as the recurring institutional production of formally reasoned decisions that acknowledge a right, but fail to engage with the facts, changing circumstances, and defence arguments necessary for that right to influence the outcome. In the context of pre-trial detention, the analysis focuses on three questions: what material supported the initial suspicion; what specific reasons justified continued detention; and whether judicial review functioned as a genuine reassessment or merely as confirmation of the prosecutorial position.

[6]David Kennedy, A World of Struggle: How Power, Law and Expertise Shape Global Political Economy (Princeton University Press 2016).

[7]Gregory T Papanikos, "Are Human Rights a Luxury or a Normal Good?" (2025) 1(1) Athens Journal of Politics & International Affairs 9-38.

Methodology and Scope

This paper employs a qualitative comparative case-study method combined with doctrinal analysis. The primary materials are judgments of the ECtHR and official Council of Europe documents. The doctrinal part identifies the applicable standards under Article 5 §§ 1(c), 3, and 4, and, where relevant, Article 18 in conjunction with Article 5. The comparative part examines the facts described in the judgments, the grounds relied upon by domestic courts, the defence submissions, and the manner in which detention decisions were reviewed.

The cases were selected because they provide detailed information about different stages of detention. *Farhad Aliyev* concerns prolonged detention sustained by nearly identical grounds and proceedings that did not adequately address the applicant's submissions. *Mammadli* concerns the absence of a sufficiently concrete factual basis for suspicion and the automatic endorsement of detention requests. *Rasul Jafarov* is used as a corroborating case because it demonstrates that similar reasoning appeared in another prosecution connected with civil-society activity. *Şahin Alpay* illustrates a situation in which a final and binding Constitutional Court judgment did not immediately produce release. *Selahattin Demirtaş* concerns the use of political speech and parliamentary activity as the basis of terrorism-related suspicion, together with prolonged and formulaic detention review.

The analysis also relies on the Venice Commission's opinion on Turkey's criminal peace judgeships. This source is important because individual judgments alone cannot fully explain the institutional setting in which decisions are made. The opinion provides information concerning the judgeships' competence, workload, and the horizontal-appeal structure operating during the period examined. The later amendment to this appeal structure is addressed below.

The selected cases are not a statistically representative sample of all detention orders in Azerbaijan or Turkey. The paper therefore does not claim that every domestic court or judge applies Article 5 in the same manner. Its narrower claim is that the judgments reveal recurring mechanisms capable of transforming formal judicial control into weak protection. Where the paper uses the term "structural," it refers to documented recurrence across stages, cases, or institutional arrangements, rather than statistical universality.

The comparison further recognises that Azerbaijan and Turkey have different constitutional systems, political histories, procedural rules, and judicial structures. These differences are not treated as obstacles to comparison. They make it possible to examine how different institutional pathways can produce a comparable functional result: the continued existence of Article 5 procedures together with a reduction in their capacity to challenge detention.

Legal Framework and Doctrinal Development under Article 5 ECHR

The doctrinal standards developed under Article 5 provide the benchmark against which the structural deficiencies identified in the case studies can be assessed. Article 5 guarantees the fundamental right to liberty and security while defining the limited

situations in which a person may lawfully be deprived of liberty. The purpose of the provision is to prevent arbitrary or unjustified detention.[8]

Reasonable Suspicion under Article 5 § 1(c)

Article 5 § 1(c) permits arrest or detention for the purpose of bringing a person before the competent legal authority on reasonable suspicion of having committed an offence. Reasonable suspicion requires facts or information capable of satisfying an objective observer that the person may have committed the alleged offence. The investigative stage does not require evidence sufficient for conviction, but a domestic criminal label or a general prosecutorial statement cannot replace the necessary factual connection.

The requirement must exist at the moment of detention and remain capable of justification while detention continues. The seriousness of the political or security context does not remove this condition. Even in terrorism-related investigations or during an emergency, the authorities must identify verifiable conduct connecting the individual to the alleged offence. Otherwise, the concept of suspicion risks being expanded to such an extent that it loses its protective function.

Relevant and Sufficient Reasons under Article 5 § 3

Reasonable suspicion may justify the initial deprivation of liberty, but it cannot by itself justify continued detention. In *Buzadji v the Republic of Moldova*, the Grand Chamber clarified that the authorities must provide additional relevant and sufficient reasons from the first judicial decision ordering detention, and that the burden of justification becomes increasingly demanding as time passes.[9]

The Court has accepted that risks such as absconding, interference with evidence, pressure on witnesses, reoffending, or disturbance of public order may justify detention. However, these risks must be supported by concrete and individual circumstances. In *Letellier v France*, the Court emphasised that the persistence of reasonable suspicion is not sufficient after a certain period and that the grounds relied upon must be linked to the particular case.[10] In *Idalov v Russia*, it criticised stereotyped reasoning capable of being applied to almost any accused person.[11]

Individualised reasoning also requires attention to change over time. A risk that may be credible at the beginning of an investigation may become weaker after documents have been seized, witnesses have been questioned, or the accused has demonstrated stable residence and cooperation. A court should therefore explain not only why detention was initially necessary, but also why the same reason remains sufficient at every later stage.

[8]European Court of Human Rights, Guide on Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights: Right to Liberty and Security (updated 28 February 2026).
[9]Buzadji v the Republic of Moldova [GC], App no 23755/07 (ECtHR, 5 July 2016) paras 87-102.
[10]Letellier v France, App no 12369/86 (ECtHR, 26 June 1991) paras 35-51.
[11]Idalov v Russia [GC], App no 5826/03 (ECtHR, 22 May 2012) paras 139-48.

Effective Judicial Review under Article 5 § 4

Article 5 § 4 requires a procedure through which the lawfulness of detention can be decided speedily by a court and release can be ordered where detention is unlawful. The existence of a hearing or written decision is not sufficient by itself. Depending on the circumstances, the procedure must be adversarial, respect equality of arms, and allow the court to examine the factual and legal conditions essential to detention.

The review court is not required to respond to every sentence in a detainee's submissions. It must, however, address arguments that are specific, relevant, and capable of affecting the lawfulness or necessity of detention. Where a court simply repeats the prosecutor's position or uses the same formula as the initial order, review risks becoming confirmatory rather than corrective. Timeliness is also an essential element of protection, as demonstrated by the Court's early case law in *Brogan and Others v the United Kingdom*.[12]

Article 18 in Conjunction with Article 5

Some of the selected cases also concern Article 18, which prohibits restrictions imposed for purposes other than those prescribed by the Convention. Article 18 does not mean that every weak prosecution or incorrect detention order is politically motivated. Its application requires the Court to examine the purpose actually pursued, taking account of the chronology, the quality of the evidence, the wider context, and the conduct of the authorities. The Grand Chamber clarified this approach in *Merabishvili v Georgia*.[13]

Article 18 is relevant to structural silence because ineffective review may allow detention to serve a purpose that is not visible in the formal language of the order. A court may refer to criminal investigation, seriousness of the offence, or public security while failing to examine whether the facts support those grounds. In such circumstances, formal legality may conceal a different institutional or political function.

Case Studies: Azerbaijan

The Azerbaijan case studies reveal related but distinct forms of weakened Article 5 protection. *Farhad Aliyev* demonstrates how detention may be sustained through repeated grounds without genuine temporal reassessment. *Mammadli* demonstrates a more fundamental problem: the facts relied upon did not provide a sufficient basis for reasonable suspicion, yet courts continued to authorise detention. *Rasul Jafarov* provides additional evidence that the latter pattern was not confined to one applicant.

[12]Brogan and Others v the United Kingdom, App nos 11209/84, 11234/84, 11266/84 and 11386/85 (ECtHR, 29 November 1988) paras 55-62.
[13]Merabishvili v Georgia [GC], App no 72508/13 (ECtHR, 28 November 2017) paras 287-317.

Farhad Aliyev v Azerbaijan: Repetition over Time

Farhad Aliyev was serving as Azerbaijan's Minister for Economic Development when he was taken from his office to the Ministry of National Security on 19 October 2005. He was suspected of participating with other senior officials in an alleged plan to overthrow the government. On 21 October 2005 he was charged with offences including large-scale embezzlement and attempting to usurp state power, and a judge ordered his detention. His detention was subsequently extended on several occasions until the criminal case was transferred for trial.[14]

The chronology contains two details that are sometimes overlooked when the case is discussed only as an example of prolonged detention. First, the ECtHR found that the applicant had remained in custody for a period beyond the forty-eight-hour limit permitted by domestic law before judicial authorisation was obtained. Secondly, from 19 April to 21 May 2007 he remained detained after the final investigation-stage order had expired and before the trial court provided a new legal basis. The existence of serious criminal allegations did not cure these gaps in lawful authorisation.[15]

The central Article 5 § 3 problem concerned the length and quality of the reasoning. The applicant's pre-trial detention lasted two years and six days. In the decisions extending detention, the domestic court repeatedly referred to the gravity of the charges and the risks that he might abscond or influence participants in the proceedings. The ECtHR observed that the reasoning in the extension decisions was the same as, or very similar to, the original wording. It did not identify facts showing that the applicant had prepared to leave the country, attempted to contact witnesses, or taken steps to interfere with evidence.[16]

The passage of time did not result in a more detailed analysis. The courts did not explain whether the risks had changed after evidence had been collected or after the investigation had advanced. Nor did they examine the applicant's individual circumstances in a manner capable of demonstrating why less restrictive measures would be insufficient. The reasoning therefore treated the initial decision as a continuing assumption instead of a conclusion requiring renewed justification.

The Article 5 § 4 findings show that the problem was not merely a matter of short drafting. Detention was extended on three occasions in the absence of the applicant and his lawyers. Although legal representatives were able to participate in some later proceedings, the courts did not adequately address the specific written arguments submitted in support of release. The proceedings formally existed, but they did not provide the level of adversarial and substantive control required by Article 5.[17]

This case illustrates structural silence in a direct form. Judicial orders, extension hearings, appeals, and recognised legal grounds were all present. Nevertheless, the facts necessary to connect the stated risks to the individual were missing, and the reasoning did not develop with time. The legal procedure continued to operate, but its capacity to protect liberty was progressively reduced through repetition.

[14]Farhad Aliyev v Azerbaijan, App no 37138/06 (ECtHR, 9 November 2010) paras 10-34.
[15]Farhad Aliyev v Azerbaijan (n 14) paras 154-69 and 172-79.
[16]Farhad Aliyev v Azerbaijan (n 14) paras 188-94.
[17]Farhad Aliyev v Azerbaijan (n 14) paras 199-213.

Mammadli v Azerbaijan: Suspicion without a Sufficient Criminal Basis

Anar Mammadli was a civil-society activist whose organisations specialised in election monitoring. Following the 2013 presidential election, the Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Centre published a critical assessment of the electoral process. In December 2013 Mammadli was arrested and charged with offences including illegal entrepreneurship, tax evasion, and abuse of power. The prosecution's theory was closely connected to grants received for the work of an unregistered organisation through another registered organisation.[18]

The factual basis of the suspicion requires careful attention. Domestic law did not prohibit a non-governmental organisation from operating merely because state registration had not been obtained. The authorities also failed to identify a provision clearly prohibiting the receipt of grants through a registered partner organisation. The purpose of the grants, which included election-monitoring activity, was not itself alleged to be unlawful. The donors did not claim that funds had been misused, and the prosecution did not initially identify conduct demonstrating that Mammadli had personally appropriated money or obtained unlawful profit.

The ECtHR also noted an important chronological point. Additional allegations of embezzlement and forgery were introduced only after the last order extending the applicant's pre-trial detention. Those later charges could not retrospectively provide reasonable suspicion for an earlier period of detention. This distinction is important because a court must examine the evidence existing at the time when liberty is restricted, rather than rely on material developed at a later stage.

On this basis, the Court held that the material relied upon by the authorities was insufficient to satisfy Article 5 § 1(c). The detention orders did not merely contain weak explanations for an otherwise supported suspicion. They accepted a prosecutorial characterisation without identifying conduct that was sufficiently connected to the constituent elements of a criminal offence. The formal existence of charges therefore concealed an evidentiary absence.[19]

The domestic review did not correct that weakness. Mammadli relied on factors favouring release, including his permanent residence, the absence of a previous criminal record, family circumstances, and the availability of bail or house arrest. The courts continued to rely on the seriousness of the accusations and a risk of reoffending, but did not explain why those personal circumstances and alternatives were insufficient. The ECtHR concluded that the domestic courts had limited their role to the automatic endorsement of the prosecution's applications rather than conducting genuine and independent review.

The Court further found a violation of Article 18 in conjunction with Article 5. That conclusion was based not on the applicant's status alone, but on the relationship between the weak evidentiary basis, the timing following the election-monitoring report, and the broader treatment of civil-society actors. The Court found that the actual purpose of detention had been to silence and punish Mammadli for his election-monitoring work.[20]

[18]Mammadli v Azerbaijan, App no 47145/14 (ECtHR, 19 April 2018) paras 7-32.
[19]Mammadli v Azerbaijan (n 18) paras 72-74 and 87-91.
[20]Mammadli v Azerbaijan (n 18) paras 99-105.

For the present argument, this finding demonstrates the consequences of structural silence. When courts do not test whether the alleged conduct is criminal, the legal form of detention may be used for a purpose beyond ordinary criminal procedure. The written order remains formally recognisable, but it no longer performs its central function of requiring the state to justify the deprivation of liberty.

Rasul Jafarov as Corroborating Evidence

The case of *Rasul Jafarov v Azerbaijan* provides a further and less frequently examined point of comparison. Jafarov was a human-rights defender and the chair of the Human Rights Club, which had organised public campaigns including "Sing for Democracy" and "Art for Democracy." He was arrested in August 2014 and charged with offences connected to grants, registration, tax obligations, and alleged abuse of power. As in *Mammadli*, the authorities relied heavily on the legal status of an unregistered organisation and on the receipt of grant funding.[21]

The ECtHR found that the domestic courts did not verify the existence of reasonable suspicion despite repeated objections. The courts reproduced the prosecution's account and rejected the applicant's challenges through short and vague formulae. The Court stated that their role had been reduced to automatic endorsement of the prosecution's applications. It also found that the detention review did not meet the requirements of Article 5 § 4.[22]

The Court additionally found a violation of Article 18 in conjunction with Article 5, concluding that the restriction had pursued the purpose of silencing and punishing the applicant for his human-rights activities.[23] The significance of *Rasul Jafarov* is not that it proves that every prosecution of an NGO representative has the same purpose. Its significance is that a similar combination of weak criminalisation, automatic judicial endorsement, and an ulterior purpose appeared in another case involving different activities and a different applicant.

Later judgments have continued to refer to the abstract and formulaic use of detention grounds in Azerbaijan. In *Azizov and Novruzlu*, for example, the ECtHR again observed that domestic courts repeated grounds without explaining their relevance to the applicants or identifying case-specific facts.[24] This broader recurrence supports the conclusion that the deficiencies examined above cannot be treated only as drafting errors in two isolated decisions.

Turkey

The Turkish materials reveal comparable risks of formulaic reasoning, but they arise within a different institutional environment. The role of criminal peace judgeships is central during the investigation stage, while the selected ECtHR cases

[21]Rasul Jafarov v Azerbaijan, App no 69981/14 (ECtHR, 17 March 2016) paras 8-28 and 119-33.
[22]Rasul Jafarov v Azerbaijan (n 21) paras 140-55.
[23]Rasul Jafarov v Azerbaijan (n 21) paras 156-63.
[24]Azizov and Novruzlu v Azerbaijan, Apps nos 65583/13 and 70106/13 (ECtHR, 18 February 2021) paras 76-80.

developed in the exceptional context following the attempted coup of July 2016. The analysis therefore focuses on the structure of review, the treatment of expressive and political activity as criminal evidence, and the ability of higher-court findings to produce an effective result.

Criminal Peace Judgeships and Horizontal Review

Criminal peace judgeships were established in 2014 and were given authority over investigative-stage measures affecting personal liberty and privacy, including arrest, pre-trial detention, search, seizure, and interception. According to the Venice Commission, their official purpose included specialisation and improvement of the reasoning used for protective measures.[25]

At the time examined by the Venice Commission in 2017, the appeal structure was unusual. A decision of one peace judgeship was reviewed by another peace judgeship at the same level. The judgeships were numbered, and an objection normally passed to the next numbered judge; the objection against the highest-numbered judge returned to the first. The number of judgeships within a province was limited, producing a circular form of horizontal review rather than review by a superior court.

The institutional details are relevant. At the time of the Venice Commission's visit, Turkey had 719 peace judges. In Ankara, nine peace judges served a population of more than 3.6 million. The Commission was informed that the Ankara judges dealt with approximately 7,700 decisions annually, including around 700 detention matters, approximately 1,500 objections against decisions of other peace judges, and a large number of unrelated matters. Their offices were situated close to one another in the same courthouse.[26]

The Venice Commission did not conclude that every peace judge lacked independence or that every order was defective. It nevertheless considered the horizontal appeal system among a small number of judges problematic, described it as a closed system, and noted numerous decisions with insufficient reasoning. It recommended that objections be examined by a different or higher court and observed that the heavy workload left insufficient time for individualised reasoning, particularly in detention cases. This description concerns the system examined in 2017. Article 268 § 3(b) of the Code of Criminal Procedure was amended in 2021, and appeals concerning detention and judicial control were transferred to a judge of the criminal court of first instance within the judicial district. Where that judge handles the matters of the peace judgeship, the appeal belongs to the president of the assize court. The earlier horizontal structure is therefore used here to explain the institutional setting of the cases and period examined, rather than as a complete description of the present appeal model.[27]

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[25]European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), Opinion on the Duties, Competences and Functioning of the Criminal Peace Judgeships in Turkey, CDL-AD(2017)004, paras 16-26.
[26]Venice Commission (n 25) paras 22-24 and 104-05.
[27]Venice Commission (n 25) paras 72-76 and 101-06; European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), Amendments to the Turkish Code on Criminal Procedure Related to Criminal Judgeships of Peace, CDL-REF(2025)017 (31 March 2025), art 268 § 3(b), reproducing the amendment adopted on 8 July 2021.

These historical points do not by themselves prove a violation in any individual case. They identify institutional conditions that were capable of reducing corrective distance during the period examined. Where the reviewing judge worked within the same small circle, applied the same procedural routines, and handled a substantial workload, the review process could reproduce the assumptions of the original decision. The formal right to challenge detention remained, but the institutional possibility of correction could be weakened.

Şahin Alpay v Turkey: A Binding Judgment without Immediate Effect

Şahin Alpay was a journalist and columnist for the newspaper *Zaman*. He was taken into police custody on 27 July 2016 on suspicion of belonging to an armed terrorist organisation and was subsequently placed in pre-trial detention. The authorities relied largely on his journalistic work and his association with a newspaper considered to be linked to the Gülen movement. The case therefore raised not only the existence of judicial review, but also the question whether published political analysis could provide a sufficiently concrete link to the alleged criminal activity.[28]

The Turkish Constitutional Court examined the material and found that the articles relied upon did not demonstrate a strong indication that Alpay had acted in accordance with the aims of a terrorist organisation. It noted that the expressions used in his writings formed part of public and political debate and that at least one article had warned against a military intervention. The Constitutional Court concluded on 11 January 2018 that his detention had violated the constitutional right to liberty and security, as well as freedom of expression and of the press.

The rare and legally significant feature of the case arose after that judgment. The Istanbul 13th Assize Court refused to release Alpay and questioned whether the Constitutional Court had acted within its competence when assessing the evidence. An objection was also unsuccessful. No new factual material or newly identified detention risk replaced the basis rejected by the Constitutional Court. Alpay therefore remained detained despite a final and binding finding by the highest domestic court that the measure had violated his rights.[29]

The ECtHR held that continued detention following the Constitutional Court judgment could not be regarded as lawful and in accordance with a procedure prescribed by law. It emphasised that allowing another court to call into question the powers of a constitutional court to issue final and binding judgments would undermine legal certainty and the rule of law. Alpay was eventually released from pre-trial detention on 16 March 2018, shortly before the ECtHR delivered its judgment.[30]

This case adds a distinct dimension to structural silence. The domestic constitutional remedy did not fail at the stage of legal analysis: the Constitutional Court identified the violation and required its consequences to be removed. The failure appeared in the transmission of that judgment to the court controlling detention. The right was fully expressed at the constitutional level, but its practical effect was temporarily neutralised by institutional resistance below.

[28]Şahin Alpay v Turkey, App no 16538/17 (ECtHR, 20 March 2018) paras 7-58.
[29]Şahin Alpay v Turkey (n 28) paras 75-89 and 114-21.
[30]Şahin Alpay v Turkey (n 28) paras 127-39.

The legal limits of the case should also be stated. The ECtHR did not find a violation of Article 5 § 4 concerning the speed of the Constitutional Court proceedings in the exceptional circumstances, and it did not separately determine the Article 5 § 3 complaint after finding a violation of Article 5 § 1. The case should therefore not be presented as a finding that every stage of Turkish review was ineffective. Its narrower importance concerns the inability of a final and binding judgment to produce immediate protection.

Selahattin Demirtaş v Turkey (No 2): Political Activity as Suspicion

Selahattin Demirtaş was a co-chair of the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) and a member of the Turkish Grand National Assembly. In May 2016 a constitutional amendment lifted parliamentary immunity in respect of pending investigation files affecting a large group of members of parliament. Demirtaş was arrested on 4 November 2016 together with other HDP parliamentarians and was placed in pre-trial detention on terrorism-related accusations. The evidence relied upon included political speeches, participation in public meetings, and statements made in the course of his political activity.[31]

The Grand Chamber examined whether the domestic decisions identified facts capable of connecting those activities to the specific offences alleged. It accepted that states may investigate genuine terrorism-related conduct and that the relevant national context was serious. However, it found that none of the decisions on initial or continued detention had established a clear factual link between the applicant's speeches or participation in lawful political meetings and the criminal offences attributed to him.

A particularly important issue concerned parliamentary non-liability. The domestic courts did not adequately examine whether some of the statements relied upon were protected because they formed part of parliamentary political activity. The omission was not a minor procedural point. It affected whether the very conduct used as evidence could lawfully serve as the basis for suspicion. The Court concluded that no specific facts or information capable of establishing reasonable suspicion had been put forward for the relevant detention.[32]

The Article 5 § 3 analysis reached a related conclusion. Domestic courts repeatedly referred to the nature and seriousness of the alleged offences, the existence of strong suspicion, and statutory grounds for detention. The wording remained abstract and formulaic. It did not explain how the risks applied to Demirtaş personally or how they changed as proceedings continued. The Turkish Constitutional Court later found that the extension decisions had not contained relevant and sufficient reasons, but that later recognition did not undo the long period already spent in detention.[33]

The political timing formed part of the Article 18 assessment. Demirtaş remained detained during the 2017 constitutional referendum and the 2018 presidential election, in which he was a candidate. The Grand Chamber did not rely on timing alone. It considered the absence of reasonable suspicion, the sequence of political events,

[31]Selahattin Demirtaş v Turkey (No 2) [GC], App no 14305/17 (ECtHR, 22 December 2020) paras 10-70.
[32]Selahattin Demirtaş v Turkey (No 2) (n 31) paras 323-39.
[33]Selahattin Demirtaş v Turkey (No 2) (n 31) paras 350-60.

statements by senior political figures, the effect on parliamentary activity, and the broader interference with pluralism. It concluded that the predominant purpose of the detention had been to stifle pluralism and limit freedom of political debate.[34]

Under Article 46, the Court held that Turkey had to take all necessary measures to secure the applicant's immediate release.[35] This remedy demonstrates the seriousness of the structural concern. The problem was not confined to the wording of a particular detention order; the continuation of detention had become incompatible with the Convention in a manner requiring a direct operational response.

At the same time, the case should not be overstated. It does not establish that political speech can never be evidence in a criminal investigation, nor that national-security considerations are irrelevant. It establishes that speech and lawful political activity cannot be transformed into reasonable suspicion through general labels alone. A concrete connection to the alleged offence remains necessary, and emergency conditions do not remove that requirement.

Comparative Analysis of Azerbaijan and Turkey

Judicial Reasoning and the Formalisation of Compliance

The case studies demonstrate that the central problem is not the total absence of judicial reasoning. Domestic courts in both jurisdictions used recognisable legal categories and issued written decisions. The problem lies in the transformation of reasoning into a formula that satisfies the outward appearance of legality without performing a sufficiently individualised assessment.

In *Farhad Aliyev*, the same or similar reasons continued for more than two years. In *Mammadli* and *Rasul Jafarov*, the courts accepted the prosecution's characterisation of NGO-related conduct without adequately testing whether the conduct provided a criminal factual basis. In *Demirtaş*, general references to terrorism-related offences and strong suspicion did not explain how the applicant's speeches were connected to those offences. The categories used by the courts were legally familiar, but the factual bridge between the category and the individual was missing.

This distinction is important. Flight risk, interference with evidence, seriousness of charges, and risk of reoffending are not illegitimate grounds in themselves. They become problematic when they operate as conclusions rather than questions. A reference to flight risk should require identification of conduct, resources, foreign connections, or other circumstances making flight a real possibility. A reference to interference with evidence should identify the evidence remaining to be collected and the detainee's capacity to affect it. Without that connection, judicial reasoning becomes descriptive rather than evaluative.

[34]Selahattin Demirtaş v Turkey (No 2) (n 31) paras 421-38.
[35]Selahattin Demirtaş v Turkey (No 2) (n 31) paras 439-42.

The Temporal Reversal of Article 5 Protection

Article 5 requires the justification for detention to become more demanding as time passes. The selected cases reveal the opposite movement. Once detention was ordered, the original decision acquired institutional momentum. Prosecutors repeated the same risks, courts referred to earlier grounds, and review focused on whether circumstances had changed sufficiently to justify release rather than whether the state had proved the continuing necessity of detention.

This dynamic is particularly visible in *Farhad Aliyev* and *Demirtaş*. In both cases, numerous decisions did not result in a progressively stronger factual analysis. The quantity of review therefore did not ensure its quality. Repeated hearings can coexist with structural silence where each hearing begins from the assumption that the existing detention is correct.

The practical burden may consequently be reversed. Article 5 places the burden on the authorities to justify detention, yet routinised review may require the detainee to demonstrate why an existing order should change. This implicit shift is difficult to detect because the written decision still refers to accepted legal grounds. Structural silence is located in the analytical step that is missing between those grounds and the person's changing circumstances.

Review without Effective Correction

A second common feature concerns the corrective capacity of review. In the Azerbaijani cases, domestic courts repeatedly endorsed the prosecution's requests and did not adequately answer specific arguments. In Turkey, the institutional problem takes a different form. The horizontal appeal structure examined by the Venice Commission in 2017 could reduce distance from the original decision during the relevant period, while Şahin Alpay demonstrates that even a successful constitutional complaint may not protect liberty if the judgment is not implemented by the court controlling detention.

These examples show that access to a court and the effectiveness of a court are separate questions. A review mechanism may exist and may even operate rapidly, but it cannot protect liberty if it lacks the authority, independence, factual material, or institutional acceptance necessary to correct the decision under challenge.

Different Institutional Pathways

The comparison must not obscure the differences between Azerbaijan and Turkey. In the Azerbaijani cases, the dominant mechanism is routinised affirmation: prosecution requests are accepted through recurring formulae, while defence arguments and alternatives receive limited attention. The Article 18 cases further demonstrate how this weak scrutiny may permit criminal procedure to be used against civil-society activity.

In Turkey, formulaic reasoning appears together with institutional design, emergency context, terrorism legislation, parliamentary politics, and conflicts within the judicial hierarchy. The peace-judgeship system raises concerns about horizontal review and workload. *Şahin Alpay* concerns resistance to the binding authority of the Constitutional

Court. *Demirtaş* concerns the treatment of political activity and the continuation of detention during major electoral periods.

Structural silence is therefore not used to claim that the two systems are identical. Its purpose is to identify a common functional outcome produced through different institutional mechanisms: legal safeguards remain formally present, but their capacity to require evidence, reassess necessity, and order effective release is diminished.

Limits of the Structural Claim

The structural conclusion is based on repeated patterns documented in selected judgments and official institutional material. It is not based on a complete quantitative study of all detention orders. The concept should therefore remain open to correction and disconfirmation. Evidence that domestic appellate courts consistently reject formulaic reasoning, that alternatives are increasingly used, or that the same deficiencies no longer recur would weaken the structural claim.

Nevertheless, the recurrence identified by the ECtHR extends beyond the principal cases analysed here. The Committee of Ministers continues to supervise the *Mammadli* group of judgments concerning the misuse of criminal law and detention against government critics, civil-society activists, and human-rights defenders, most recently at its 1545th meeting in December 2025.[36] That continuing supervision supports the view that individual compensation alone has not resolved the institutional concerns.

Normalization and Systemic Consequences

A direct consequence of formulaic and confirmatory review is the risk that pre-trial detention will lose its exceptional character. This conclusion should be expressed carefully. The selected cases do not provide statistical proof that detention is the default measure in every proceeding. They demonstrate, however, mechanisms that may contribute to normalisation: abstract risks are accepted without evidence, earlier decisions are repeated, and alternatives receive limited consideration.

The presumption of innocence remains formally applicable to every accused person. Nevertheless, prolonged detention without individualised justification may create a practical condition in which the accused bears consequences similar to punishment before conviction. Recent scholarship in the Athens Journal of Law has also emphasised that preventive detention must not be used as a means of achieving punishment in advance and that criminal-procedure decisions must remain grounded in concrete evidence.[37]

The normalisation process also affects alternatives. Bail, reporting obligations, travel restrictions, guarantees, or house arrest cannot be treated as formal options that are mentioned and rejected without analysis. Where a court does not explain why a

[36]Council of Europe, Committee of Ministers, Decision CM/Del/Dec(2024)1492/H46-04, Mammadli group v Azerbaijan, 1492nd meeting (12-14 March 2024); Decision CM/Del/Dec(2025)1545/H46-04, Mammadli group v Azerbaijan, 1545th meeting (2-4 December 2025).

[37]Oana Elena Iacob, "Brief Analysis of the Importance Given to the Presumption of Innocence at International and National Level" (2025) 11(3) Athens Journal of Law 337-352.

specific alternative cannot control the identified risk, deprivation of liberty ceases to function as a measure of last resort. International guidance on prison overcrowding similarly stresses the importance of non-custodial measures and individual assessment.[38]

Accountability is also weakened by insufficient reasoning. Detailed reasons permit higher courts, the ECtHR, the parties, and the public to understand why detention was ordered and whether the same grounds remain valid. Formulaic language obscures this path. It becomes difficult to distinguish genuine assessment from copied wording, and it becomes easier for an error to pass through several stages of review without correction.

In this sense, structural silence does not mean that the law disappears. The law remains visible through hearings, orders, statutory references, and appeal procedures. Its capacity to constrain state power is weakened because the institutional process does not require the legal terminology to be connected to evidence and individual circumstances.

Institutional Implications

The comparative findings indicate that reform should focus not only on legal texts but also on the information and reasoning that detention decisions must contain. Article 5 standards are already developed. The problem is to ensure that domestic practice makes those standards operational.

First, each ground for detention should be connected to specified facts. A court referring to flight risk should identify the circumstances supporting that risk. A court referring to interference with evidence should explain what evidence remains vulnerable and how the accused could affect it. The seriousness of an offence should not operate as a substitute for this analysis.

Second, every extension decision should contain a change-over-time assessment. It should state what investigative steps have been completed, what risks remain, what new facts have emerged, and why the reasoning in the previous order is still sufficient. Reproduction of an earlier order should be treated as an indication that genuine reassessment may not have occurred.

Third, domestic courts should answer the principal defence arguments and explain the rejection of alternatives. Stable residence, cooperation, health, family obligations, absence of a criminal record, and proposed guarantees are not automatically decisive. However, where they are specifically raised and are capable of affecting the outcome, they should receive a reasoned response.

Fourth, the structure of review should create sufficient institutional distance. The 2021 amendment partly responded to the Venice Commission's concern by moving appeals concerning detention and judicial control outside the earlier circle of same-level peace judges. The broader point remains relevant: the reviewing body should have sufficient authority and distance to reassess the original decision. The aim is not to assume bias, but to design a procedure capable of independent review.

Fifth, constitutional and appellate judgments concerning liberty must have clear and immediate practical effect. The *Şahin Alpay* case demonstrates that a successful high-court judgment is insufficient if the authority controlling detention

[38]United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Handbook on Strategies to Reduce Overcrowding in Prisons (United Nations 2013) 51-70.

can delay or resist implementation. Domestic procedural law should clearly identify responsibility and time limits for giving effect to release or reconsideration orders.

Sixth, implementation of ECtHR judgments should address the institutional process producing the violation. Individual compensation may not change templates, workloads, appeal structures, access to evidence, or professional routines. General measures should therefore include publication of representative decisions, monitoring of repeated wording, data concerning alternatives, and training based on the specific reasoning failures identified by the Court.

These proposals do not require a new Convention right or a general prohibition of pre-trial detention. They seek to restore the practical force of existing guarantees by ensuring that legal grounds are connected to facts, that the passage of time produces renewed scrutiny, and that review mechanisms remain capable of correction.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the deficiencies observed in the selected pre-trial detention cases from Azerbaijan and Turkey cannot be understood only as isolated failures to apply Article 5. The detailed case analysis demonstrates recurring situations in which domestic courts used the language and procedure of legality, while failing to connect detention to sufficiently concrete evidence, changing circumstances, or defence arguments. Structural silence describes this condition: the right remains formally present, but its ability to influence the result is weakened through institutional practice.

The comparison also demonstrates that structural silence may emerge through different paths. In Azerbaijan, the selected cases mainly reveal repeated prosecutorial endorsement and formulaic extension of detention, including in proceedings affecting civil-society actors. In Turkey, comparable problems interact with horizontal review structures, emergency and security narratives, political activity, and conflicts concerning the authority of the Constitutional Court. These differences prevent the concept from becoming a general label for any violation and show why the relevant institutional mechanism must be identified in each jurisdiction.

The findings are subject to clear limits. The cases are analytically significant but do not constitute a statistical account of all detention decisions. Structural silence is not a new test under the Convention and cannot replace the requirements of Article 5 or Article 18. Its value lies in directing attention to the point at which formal compliance stops functioning as meaningful protection.

Ultimately, the protection of liberty depends on the quality and institutional effect of judicial reasoning. Detention orders must connect risks to facts, extension decisions must demonstrate change over time, alternatives and defence arguments must be examined, and higher-court judgments must produce practical consequences. Without these conditions, rights may remain legally recognised yet become substantively fragile. The central challenge is therefore not simply to restate Article 5 standards, but to ensure that domestic institutions remain capable of giving those standards real protective effect.

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Beyond Dependency: Africa's Emergence in the Politics of Global Transformation

*By Ghazali Bello Abubakar**

This paper interrogates Africa's evolving position in the global political economy by challenging enduring narratives of dependency and marginality. It argues that Africa is increasingly emerging as an active participant in shaping the contours of global transformation, driven by shifts in geopolitical alignments, economic diversification, and strategic engagement with multiple external partners. Drawing on political economy and critical geopolitics, the study examines how African states and regional institutions navigate a complex landscape marked by the rise of multipolarity, expanding South–South cooperation, and intensifying competition among global powers. Rather than portraying Africa as a passive recipient of external influence, the article highlights forms of agency expressed through infrastructure diplomacy, resource governance, and regional integration initiatives. At the same time, it critically assesses the structural constraints that continue to shape Africa's integration into global systems, including uneven interdependence and persistent asymmetries in trade and finance. The findings suggest that Africa's emergence is best understood not as a linear transition from dependency to autonomy, but as a negotiated process of repositioning within a reconfigured global order characterized by both opportunity and constraint.

Keywords: *Africa; global transformation; dependency; multipolarity; political economy; global governance; South–South cooperation; regional integration; strategic agency; development dynamics*

Introduction

For much of the twentieth century, Africa's place in the global political economy was largely defined for it rather than by it. The continent was consistently framed as peripheral—economically dependent, politically vulnerable, and structurally subordinated to external powers. Classical theories of development and international relations reinforced this image, portraying Africa as a passive participant in a global system dominated by industrialised core states. Within this framework, Africa's role was reduced to that of a supplier of raw materials and a recipient of external intervention, with little room for independent agency or strategic choice (Amin, 1976; Wallerstein, 1974). These perspectives were not entirely misplaced. Historical experiences of colonial extraction, unequal trade relations, and financial dependency left deep structural imprints on African economies and governance systems.

Today, however, the global landscape has shifted substantially. The rise of emerging economies and the gradual movement toward a more multipolar world have opened new spaces for engagement and repositioning. China has become Africa's

*Professor, Department of Political Science, Sokoto State University, Nigeria.

largest single trading partner, accounting for 20.4 percent of the continent's exports in 2022, up from 3.7 percent in 2000 (UNCTAD, 2023). India, Turkey, and the Gulf states have also expanded their economic and diplomatic footprints. At the regional level, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which commenced trading in 2021 with 54 signatories, signals a growing institutional commitment to self-directed economic integration. These developments suggest that Africa's global engagement is being qualitatively transformed — but transformed in what direction, and to whose benefit?

The central analytical question motivating this article is whether the observed diversification of Africa's global partnerships represents a genuine transition beyond structural dependency, or whether it constitutes a reconfiguration of dependency under new terms. This question cannot be resolved by theoretical argument alone; it requires systematic empirical examination. Yet the existing literature on Africa's global position remains divided between structural accounts that emphasise the persistence of dependency and agency-focused accounts that celebrate Africa's growing autonomy, with limited integration of these positions and limited grounding in systematically assembled evidence. This article addresses this gap by developing a rigorous analytical framework and evaluating it against multi-domain empirical evidence spanning two decades.

The article advances three original contributions. First, it specifies five explicit analytical propositions derived from the theoretical framework, each of which generates testable empirical implications examined against quantitative indicator data. Second, it introduces a cross-domain causal mechanism analysis — comparing trade diversification, debt structure, regional integration, and export composition — that permits structured inference rather than anecdotal illustration. Third, it proposes the concept of negotiated repositioning to theorise the empirical finding that Africa occupies an evolving position characterised by real but highly uneven and structurally constrained agency — a position that neither simple dependency nor simple autonomy narratives can adequately capture.

Literature Review

Classical Dependency and World-Systems Perspectives

Dependency theory and world-systems analysis have long provided the dominant frameworks for interpreting Africa's position in the global political economy. Framing Amin (1976) and Wallerstein (1974) as central reference points is entirely reasonable, but the discussion would benefit from engaging with the recent revival of dependency theory within contemporary international political economy. Recent work by Oliveira and Kvangraven (2023) revisits the 1972 Dakar conference and makes a strong case for treating dependency theory not as a closed, historical framework, but as an evolving and still relevant decolonial perspective. Bringing this literature into the conversation would help position dependency theory as a living intellectual tradition rather than a legacy approach.

This matters in particular because the article's concept of "negotiated repositioning" appears to respond—at least implicitly—to the limits of classical

dependency arguments. That response would be more compelling if it were framed in dialogue with these newer reinterpretations, rather than primarily with the original formulations. Engaging with contemporary revisions of dependency thinking would sharpen the theoretical contribution and make clearer how the argument advances, rather than simply departs from, the tradition.

Post-Dependency Approaches and African Agency

A growing body of scholarship has sought to foreground African agency in global affairs. Bayart's (2000) concept of extraversion highlights how African elites historically leveraged external relationships to consolidate domestic power and secure resources, actively mediating rather than passively receiving external influence. Carmody (2011) argues that the competitive engagement of multiple external powers on the continent has created spaces for African states to engage in strategic triangulation — balancing relationships with China, Western donors, and emerging powers to maximise bargaining power. Taylor (2016) documents how individual African governments have exploited the China option to renegotiate terms with International Monetary Fund programmes, with evidence from Angola, Nigeria, and Ethiopia suggesting that Chinese financing was deployed as leverage against conditional Western lending.

The agency literature, however, is not without empirical limitations. Much of it relies on illustrative case selection that identifies positive examples of strategic manoeuvring while underweighting cases where new partnerships have reproduced or worsened dependency. The Zambian debt restructuring following its 2020 Eurobond default — which involved difficult negotiations with Chinese creditors who refused to participate in a multilateral debt relief framework initially — provides a counter-example to the triangulation hypothesis that is as empirically well-documented as the success cases (AidData, 2021). A systematic approach requires examining the full distribution of outcomes rather than selecting confirming cases.

Global Transformation and Multipolarity

The use of Arrighi (2007) and Keohane and Nye (1977) provides a solid conceptual foundation for thinking about global power and interdependence, but the discussion would benefit from engaging more directly with the surge of recent scholarship on African multipolarity. A growing body of work since 2022 has begun to document how shifts in the global order are being experienced and interpreted from within Africa itself. For example, the AfriPoli report (2026) describes 2025 as a turning point, marking a clear move away from a predominantly Western-centered system toward a more fragmented and genuinely multipolar configuration. In response, African states are increasingly pursuing proactive diplomatic strategies, diversifying their external partnerships, and seeking greater fiscal autonomy—developments that closely mirror the empirical patterns this article aims to explain.

Relatedly, the Megatrends Afrika working paper series (SWP Berlin, 2025) offers important insights into how African actors are navigating this changing landscape, including the security and conflict dimensions of multipolarity that remain only lightly explored in the present framework. Engaging with this literature would not only update

the discussion but also deepen its analytical reach, particularly by foregrounding African perspectives on global transformation.

Equally important is the need to acknowledge how rapidly the external environment has shifted since the article's data window closes in 2022. The retrenchment associated with the second Trump administration from 2025, including the suspension of USAID programming, represents more than a policy adjustment—it signals a structural disruption in the global aid architecture. This has direct implications for longstanding patterns of dependency and raises new questions about how African states manage external vulnerability. Even if these developments fall outside the empirical scope of the study, incorporating them into the literature review would strengthen the argument by showing why the concept of "negotiated repositioning" has become even more analytically urgent in the current moment.

Research Gap and this Article's Contribution

The three bodies of literature reviewed above remain fragmented. Dependency theory identifies structural constraints but cannot account for variation in how different African states navigate them. Agency-focused scholarship highlights strategic manoeuvring but tends toward selective case evidence. Global transformation literature captures systemic shifts but often lacks region-specific or sub-regional differentiation. Most critically, none of these bodies of literature has been evaluated against a systematically assembled multi-domain, multi-decade empirical evidence base that permits structured comparison of where repositioning has and has not occurred. This article addresses this gap by deriving explicit empirical propositions and evaluating them against indicator data across four domains, generating a comparative pattern of findings that can ground theoretical claims more rigorously than either purely theoretical argument or illustrative case selection can achieve.

Theoretical Framework and Analytical Propositions

This article advances a theoretical framework of negotiated repositioning that integrates three theoretical traditions — dependency theory's structural analysis, asymmetrical interdependence theory's account of agency within power differentials, and critical geopolitics' attention to ideational dimensions — and derives from this synthesis five explicit analytical propositions that structure the empirical analysis.

Structural Constraints: The Dependency Foundation

The framework's treatment of dependency currently leans almost entirely on Amin (1976, 1990), which provides a strong classical foundation but would benefit from some updating. Two additions in particular could strengthen this section. First, Oliveira and Kvangraven's (2023) reworking of dependency theory as a decolonial approach to international political economy offers a more contemporary way of framing structural constraints. Bringing this perspective into the discussion would give Proposition 1 a clearer and more up-to-date theoretical grounding.

Second, the framework would be strengthened by engaging with the growing literature on critical mineral dependency as a modern form of structural integration. While the article rightly notes that "China buys African raw materials as readily as Europe did," the nature of those raw materials has shifted significantly. Today, resources such as cobalt, lithium, copper, and rare earth elements occupy a central place in global green energy transitions and semiconductor supply chains. This shift creates a more complex dynamic: on the one hand, it gives African states new sources of geopolitical leverage; on the other, it introduces new forms of structural vulnerability. Recent developments highlight this changing landscape. The Democratic Republic of Congo's temporary cobalt export bans in 2025 (African Energy Chamber, 2026), alongside intensifying competition among the United States, European Union, China, Japan, and Gulf states for access to African critical minerals (Hira, 2025; ScienceDirect, 2025), point to a broader structural transformation. Incorporating these dynamics into the dependency framework would help capture how commodity dependence persists, even as its underlying political economy is being reshaped, thereby reinforcing the core claim of Proposition 1.

Agency within Asymmetrical Interdependence

The framework currently draws on Keohane and Nye (1977) but does not take into account how the concept of interdependence has evolved in more recent scholarship—particularly its reconceptualization as a tool of statecraft, including the literature on "weaponised interdependence." Bringing in these developments would not only update the theoretical foundation but also sharpen the framework's analytical reach.

More importantly, the article does not engage with emerging work that shows how African states are actively using their critical mineral endowments to renegotiate their position within the global economy. Recent analyses, such as the SAIIA report (February 2025) on the geopolitics of energy minerals, argue that intensifying competition among major powers creates new strategic openings for African governments. As the report notes, "competing interests provide a policy lever that Africa can use to form mutually beneficial" partnerships—an insight that speaks directly to the triangulation hypothesis and is grounded in more current empirical developments than earlier accounts like Carmody (2011).

In light of these shifts, the framework would benefit from reconsidering whether asymmetrical interdependence, as originally formulated, fully captures the dynamics at play. The growing global dependence on minerals critical to the green transition has introduced new forms of leverage that were not central to the Keohane and Nye baseline, nor fully anticipated in the original triangulation thesis. Incorporating this dimension would allow the framework to better reflect how Africa's bargaining position is being reconfigured, even as underlying patterns of dependence persist.

Critical Geopolitics: Discourse and Material Change

Critical geopolitics emphasises that Africa's global position is shaped not only by material factors but by how the continent is represented in global discourse. The Afripoli (2026) analysis documents how the 2025 G20 summit in Johannesburg — the first on African soil — marked a discursive and institutional milestone in this narrative shift. Critical geopolitics would prompt the same caution about this new narrative as about "Africa rising": discursive repositioning without structural change in productive capabilities is fragile. Making this argument explicit in the theoretical framework would actually strengthen the article's concept of negotiated repositioning. The 'Africa rising' narrative represents a discursive shift with material implications — it attracted investment and diplomatic attention — but critical geopolitics cautions that discursive change without structural material change is fragile and potentially serves external interests in accessing African markets and resources rather than genuinely reflecting African developmental transformation.

Analytical Propositions

Proposition 1: Africa's trade partner concentration has declined measurably over the 2000-2022 period, reflecting genuine repositioning away from traditional Western partners. However, this partner diversification has not been matched by product diversification: primary commodity dependence has persisted, indicating that repositioning has altered the geography but not the structural character of Africa's global integration.

Proposition 2: New South-South financial partnerships, particularly with China, have provided African states with additional financing options and bargaining leverage, but the terms of Chinese lending have become less concessional over time and have contributed to debt accumulation that reproduces financial dependency in altered form.

Proposition 3: Regional integration through AfCFTA represents a genuinely novel form of collective agency that has the potential to support structural transformation, but implementation remains incomplete and the agreement's developmental impact will be limited by the persistence of commodity export dependence in most member states.

Proposition 4: Strategic agency within Africa's global engagement is highly differentiated rather than uniform: states with higher institutional capacity (governance effectiveness, policy coherence, state capacity) achieve better outcomes from diversified partnerships than states with weaker institutions, suggesting that agency is not inherent to all African states equally but is conditional on domestic institutional conditions.

Proposition 5: Africa's global position is best characterised as negotiated repositioning — a process in which structural constraints are real and enduring, agency is genuine but uneven, and the direction of change is neither inevitably toward greater autonomy nor inevitably toward renewed dependency but is contingent on policy choices, institutional capacity, and the specific configuration of external partnerships.

Research Design and Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a structured qualitative comparative design (SQCD) combined with domain-specific quantitative indicator analysis. The SQCD approach (Beach and Pedersen, 2019; Fairfield and Charman, 2022) is appropriate when causal relationships are complex, when mechanisms matter as much as correlations, and when the number of cases or domains is small enough to permit detailed analysis but large enough to support comparative inference. Rather than a single case study, the analysis examines four analytically distinct domains of Africa's global engagement — trade partner diversification, South-South financial partnerships, regional integration, and export product structure — treating each domain as a 'case' in the comparative design while drawing on cross-domain patterns to evaluate the overarching propositions.

Within each domain, the analysis proceeds through two complementary strategies. First, quantitative indicator analysis tracks measurable dimensions of change over the 2000-2022 period using the data sources specified in Table 1. This provides the systematic empirical base that is largely absent from the existing literature. Second, process tracing within each domain examines the causal mechanisms through which structural constraints and strategic agency interact — specifically, whether the patterns observed in the quantitative data are consistent with the theoretical mechanisms predicted by the integrated framework or require modification of those predictions.

Multi-Scalar Analytical Approach

The study adopts a deliberately multi-scalar perspective, examining processes at the continental, sub-regional, and country levels where data permit. Continental aggregates are used for propositions about overall structural position; sub-regional disaggregation (East Africa, West Africa, Southern Africa) is used to examine variation in export diversification trajectories; and country-level examples are used to trace causal mechanisms identified in the aggregate data. This multi-scalar approach is essential for avoiding the continental homogenisation that characterises much existing literature: the empirical evidence shows marked sub-regional and country-level variation that a single aggregate analysis would obscure. The finding that East Africa's average export HHI improved from 0.31 to 0.19 between 2000 and 2022, while West Africa's improved only from 0.61 to 0.55, is precisely the kind of variation that requires explanation and that single-level analysis cannot provide.

Data Sources and Operationalisation

Table 1 presents the full operationalisation of theoretical concepts, specifying indicators, sources, temporal coverage, and analytical roles. Eight indicator series are used across the four analytical domains.

Table 1. *Variable Operationalisation, Data Sources, and Analytical Roles*

Concept	Indicator/Measure	Source	Period	Role in Analysis
Trade partner diversification	Share of Africa exports/imports by partner bloc (%); Herfindahl partner-concentration index	UNCTAD BACI; AfDB	2000-2022	Measures repositioning away from traditional partners
South-South financial engagement	Chinese loan commitments to Africa (USD bn); India/Gulf FDI flows (USD bn)	AidData TUFF; UNCTAD	2000-2022	Quantifies new partner engagement depth
Debt sustainability	External debt / GNI (%); Chinese debt share of total external debt (%); debt service / exports (%)	World Bank IDS; AidData	2005-2022	Tests whether new partnerships reproduce financial dependency
Resource export concentration	Hirschman-Herfindahl export product concentration index (0-1)	UNCTAD BACI	2000-2022	Tests whether structural commodity dependence persists
Institutional agency capacity	WGI Government Effectiveness percentile; CPIA score; AfCFTA implementation status	World Bank WGI/CPIA; AfCFTA Secretariat	2005-2022	Proxy for state capacity to exercise strategic agency
Regional integration depth	Intra-African trade (% total); AfCFTA tariff schedule submission rate; NTB notifications	UNCTAD; AfCFTA Secretariat	2015-2022	Measures collective agency through regional institutions
Geopolitical bargaining outcomes	Infrastructure project financing terms (grant/loan ratio); concessional rate vs. commercial rate; local content requirements	AidData; IMF DSAs	2005-2022	Evaluates whether triangulation improves terms of engagement

Note: UNCTAD BACI = Bureau of Analysis and Intelligence database for trade flow data at HS product level. AidData TUFF = Tracking Underreported Financial Flows dataset (AidData, 2021). WGI = World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators. IDS = International Debt Statistics. CPIA = Country Policy and Institutional Assessment. HHI = Hirschman-Herfindahl Index. DSAs = Debt Sustainability Analyses.

The export product concentration index is operationalised as the standard Hirschman-Herfindahl Index applied to export values disaggregated at HS4 product level: values approaching 1 indicate extreme product concentration, values approaching 0 indicate maximum diversification. The trade partner concentration index is the analogous HHI applied to export destination shares, enabling comparison

of partner versus product diversification. The distinction between these two indicators is theoretically central: it permits empirical separation of partner diversification (who Africa trades with) from structural diversification (what Africa produces and exports), which the propositions treat as distinct and potentially divergent processes.

Scope Conditions and Limitations

Three scope conditions and limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study analyses Sub-Saharan Africa as the primary unit of analysis for aggregate indicators, with North Africa included in trade partner data where indicated. This reflects data availability and comparability constraints. Second, quantitative indicators provide measures of outcomes but cannot fully capture the quality of negotiations or the micro-political dynamics within specific deals; the process tracing component partially addresses this limitation by drawing on qualitative evidence from existing case studies. Third, the two-year AfCFTA trading period within the data window is insufficient to assess its long-term structural impact; the analysis therefore treats AfCFTA as an institution-building process and assesses the quality of that process rather than its developmental outcomes, which will require longer data series to evaluate.

Quantitative Evidence

Trade Partner Diversification

Table 2 presents Africa's export and import partner shares from 2020 to 2025, drawn from UNCTAD trade flow statistics. The data reveal a structural transformation in the geography of Africa's trade that is empirically substantial and consistent across time periods.

Table 2. *Africa's Trade Partner Diversification — Export and Import Shares by Partner (%), 2020-2025*

Trade Partner	Exports 2020	Exports 2022	Exports 2024–25 (est.)	Imports 2020	Imports 2022	Imports 2024–25 (est.)
European Union (EU)	~33%	~33%	~30–32%	~31%	~25%	~25–28%
China	~17%	~12–13%	~14–16%	~22%	~18%	~20–22%
United States	~6%	~5%	~5–6%	~6%	~5%	~5–6%
Intra-African Trade	~18%	~16–18%	~18–20%	~15%	~14–16%	~15–18%
India	~6%	~7%	~6–8%	~5%	~6%	~6–7%
Other (incl. Gulf, Turkey, etc.)	~20%	~20%	~18–22%	~21%	~26%	~22–25%

Source: UNCTADstat (2024–2025), IMF Direction of Trade Statistics (2024), African Development Bank (2024), EU trade statistics (2024), and CARI China–Africa trade data (2024).
Note: Shares (%) of Africa's total exports and imports by partner (2020, 2022, 2024–2025 est.). "Other partners" includes Gulf states and emerging partners; intra-African trade covers all regional flows. HHI based on UNCTADstat and IMF DOTS.

The partner concentration data continue to support the first component of Proposition 1, though the pattern is now better understood as gradual diversification rather than a dramatic structural break. Africa's trade partner concentration has declined over time, reflecting a broader spread of export destinations and import sources. While the European Union remains Africa's largest single partner, its share of exports has moderated to roughly 30–32 percent in recent years, down from earlier dominance. The United States' share has stabilised at a relatively low level of around 5–6 percent, while China has consolidated its position as a central trading partner, accounting for roughly 14–16 percent of exports and a significantly larger share of imports.

At the same time, intra-African trade has shown slow but meaningful expansion, rising toward 18–20 percent of exports in recent estimates. Although still limited in structural terms, this trend reflects the cumulative effects of regional economic community integration and the early implementation of AfCFTA, rather than a sudden post-2020 shift. Additional partners—including India and Gulf states—have also increased their presence, contributing to a more diversified but still uneven trade landscape.

These developments are significant not just descriptively, but theoretically. They challenge the rigid partner-specific assumptions often associated with classical dependency theory, which tends to view peripheral economies as locked into stable relationships with a fixed set of core partners. Over the past two decades, Africa's external orientation has become more fluid, with China emerging alongside, rather than simply replacing, traditional European dominance.

However, this diversification in partners does not imply a transformation in the underlying structure of trade. As the export composition data in Section 5.3 demonstrate, Africa's major partners—whether in Europe, China, or elsewhere—continue to source predominantly primary commodities, including crude oil, copper, cobalt, and other raw materials. In this sense, the core exchange relationship identified by dependency theory remains largely intact: a pattern of commodity exports in exchange for manufactured imports. What has changed is not the structure of dependence itself, but the range of actors through which it is mediated.

Debt Structure and Financial Dependency

Table 3 presents recent trends in Africa's external debt structure over the period 2022–2025. These data are essential for evaluating Proposition 2 — whether emerging financial dynamics, including South–South partnerships and increased market-based borrowing, are reshaping or reinforcing patterns of financial dependency.

Table 3. *Africa's External Debt Structure and Sustainability Indicators (2022–2025)*

Debt Indicator	2022	2023	2024 (Est.)	2025 (Proj.)
Total External Debt (% of GDP)	63.2%	64.8%	65.5%	65.0%
Public & Publicly Guaranteed Debt (% of GDP)	52.1%	53.7%	54.3%	53.9%
Private External Debt (% of GDP)	11.1%	11.1%	11.2%	11.1%
Debt Service (% of Exports)	18.7%	21.3%	22.5%	20.8%
Interest Payments (% of Revenue)	12.4%	14.1%	15.6%	15.0%
Multilateral Debt Share (%)	34.6%	35.8%	36.5%	37.2%
Bilateral Debt Share (%)	28.3%	27.5%	26.9%	26.3%
Private Creditors Share (%)	37.1%	36.7%	36.6%	36.5%
Eurobond Share (% of total external debt)	17.8%	18.5%	19.2%	19.0%
Average Interest Rate on External Debt (%)	4.9%	5.6%	6.2%	6.0%
Short-term Debt (% of total debt)	12.7%	13.4%	13.8%	13.5%
Debt Distress Risk (% of countries)	54%	57%	58%	56%

Note: Data refer to Africa (latest available estimates, 2022–2025). External debt indicators are derived from IMF World Economic Outlook *and World Bank* International Debt Statistics (2024). *Creditor composition (multilateral, bilateral, and private) is based on World Bank IDS and AfDB datasets, while Eurobond shares reflect market-based financing trends. Debt distress risk follows IMF/World Bank Debt Sustainability Analysis classifications (countries at high risk or in distress). Interest rates represent weighted averages on recent external borrowing.*
Source: IMF (2024–2025 updates); World Bank IDS (2024); African Development Bank (2024); UNCTADstat (2024–2025).

The debt data present a nuanced picture consistent with Proposition 2's hypothesis of dependency reproduced under altered financial conditions. While earlier South–South financing—particularly from China—expanded Africa's access to infrastructure funding and diversified its external partnerships, the current structure (2022–2025) reflects a more complex creditor landscape. Multilateral debt has risen steadily (from about 34.6% in 2022 to over 37% projected in 2025), while bilateral shares have declined and private creditors—including Eurobond holders—remain significant. This indicates a shift from state-centric to increasingly market-based financing.

At the same time, aggregate vulnerability indicators have worsened. External debt remains elevated at around 63–65% of GDP, while debt service burdens have increased sharply, exceeding 20% of exports in recent years before a slight projected easing. Interest payments as a share of government revenue have also risen, reflecting tightening global financial conditions and higher borrowing costs, with average interest rates on external debt climbing toward 6% by 2024.

Most critically, the proportion of countries at high risk of debt distress or already in distress has remained persistently high—above 50%—underscoring systemic fragility. These trends suggest that although the sources and instruments of

financing have diversified, the underlying structure of dependency has not been fundamentally transformed. Instead, it has been reconfigured through greater exposure to market volatility, higher borrowing costs, and more complex creditor coordination challenges, particularly in debt restructuring contexts.

Export Product Structure

Table 4 examines Africa's export product composition over the period 2022-2025, the most direct measure of whether structural transformation has accompanied the geographic diversification documented in Table 2.

Table 4. *Africa's Export Product Structure and Diversification — Sub-Saharan Africa, 2022-2025*

Indicator	2022	2023	2024 (Est.)	2025
Primary Commodities (% of total exports)	72.5%	71.8%	70.9%	70.0%
Manufactured Goods (% of total exports)	20.1%	21.0%	21.8%	22.6%
Services Exports (% of total exports)	7.4%	7.2%	7.3%	7.4%
Export Concentration Index (0–1)	0.24	0.23	0.22	0.22
Export Diversification Index (0–1)	0.58	0.57	0.55	0.54
Share of Fuel & Mining Exports (%)	45.6%	44.2%	43.5%	42.8%
Share of Agricultural Raw Materials (%)	26.9%	27.6%	27.4%	27.2%
Share of High-Technology Exports (%)	3.2%	3.5%	3.8%	4.2%
Intra-African Manufactured Exports (%)	16.5%	17.8%	18.9%	20.2%

Note: Export concentration and diversification indices are derived from UNCTADstat data (2024–2025 updates), based on product-level trade classifications broadly consistent with HS/SITC groupings and normalised to a 0–1 scale. Primary commodities include fuels, mining products, and agricultural raw materials, while manufactured goods cover processed and semi-processed industrial products. High-technology exports are defined following UNCTAD classifications. Intra-African trade shares reflect regional export flows under AfCFTA dynamics. Regional groupings (where applicable) follow standard UN classifications of African subregions.
Source: UNCTADstat Database (2024–2025); UNCTAD, Economic Development in Africa Report (2024); authors' calculations.

The export product data confirm the more sobering dimension of Proposition 1: despite some gradual improvements, Africa's export structure remains heavily commodity-dependent. Export concentration has declined only modestly in recent years, with the concentration index falling slightly from around 0.24 in 2022 to approximately 0.22 by 2024–2025, indicating limited diversification gains. At the same time, primary commodities continue to dominate, accounting for roughly 70–73 percent of total exports, with only a gradual decline projected.

Manufactured exports have increased modestly—from about 20 percent in 2022 to over 22 percent by 2025—suggesting incremental structural change, but not a transformative shift. High-technology exports remain marginal, though slowly rising, underscoring persistent constraints in moving up the value chain.

These aggregate patterns mask important variation across countries and subregions. While some economies—particularly in parts of East and Southern Africa—have achieved incremental diversification through manufacturing expansion and intra-African trade growth, others remain highly concentrated in a narrow range of commodity exports. This uneven performance reinforces the broader analytical claim: diversification is not driven simply by external partnerships or market access, but by domestic structural factors, including industrial policy, institutional capacity, and export-oriented development strategies.

Generally, the evidence suggests that while Africa's export profile is gradually evolving, the pace of transformation remains slow, and the underlying structure of commodity dependence persists, albeit in a slightly moderated form.

AfCFTA Implementation Progress

Table 5 tracks quantitative indicators of AfCFTA implementation progress, providing systematic evidence for Proposition 3's claim about the agreement's potential and limitations.

Table 5. *AfCFTA Implementation Progress Indicators, 2019-2023*

Implementation Indicator	2019 (Entry into force)	2021 (Trading commenced)	2022	2023 Assessment
Signatories (of 55 AU members)	54	54	54	54
Ratifications (required: 22)	22 (threshold met)	36	43	44
Tariff schedules submitted	14 (25%)	31 (57%)	39 (72%)	42 (78%)
Rules of Origin schedules submitted	8	24	33	37
NTB notification portal active	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
NTBs formally notified	0	112	287	401
Intra-African trade (% total, estimate)	14.2	15.3	16.1	16.8
Services protocol signed	No	No	Yes	Yes (5 sectors)
Digital trade annex status	No	No	Negotiating	Draft complete
Dispute settlement body operational	No	No	Partially	Operational

Note: Signatory and ratification counts from the African Union Commission. Tariff schedule and Rules of Origin data from AfCFTA Secretariat (2023). NTB notifications from the AfCFTA NTB Monitoring and Elimination Mechanism portal. Intra-African trade share from UNCTAD (2023). Services protocol status from AU Commission legal documents. Sources: African Union Commission (2023); AfCFTA Secretariat (2023); UNCTAD (2023).

The AfCFTA data reveal both genuine institutional progress and significant implementation gaps that directly inform Proposition 3. On the positive side, the agreement achieved a remarkable degree of political commitment: 54 of 55 African Union members signed, 44 had ratified by 2023, and tariff schedule submissions reached 78 percent of members. The NTB notification portal, operational from 2021, generated 401 notifications by 2023, creating a transparency mechanism that previously did not exist. The services protocol was signed in 2022, extending the agreement beyond goods trade into the higher-value sectors where Africa's comparative advantage is expanding.

However, implementation gaps are substantial. The most significant is the exclusion of sensitive sectors from core tariff reduction schedules: most members have submitted schedules that meet the required 90 percent tariff line coverage but have concentrated their exclusions in precisely the manufactured goods sectors — textiles, food processing, light manufacturing — where intra-African trade has the greatest potential to support structural transformation. The intra-African trade share's modest increase from 14.2 percent (2019) to 16.8 percent (2023) shows directional movement but falls far short of comparable regional trading blocs: ASEAN's intra-regional trade share is approximately 60 percent, the EU's approximately 65 percent. The World Bank (2020) estimates that AfCFTA could increase intra-African trade by 81 percent by 2035 under full implementation — an estimate that the current implementation trajectory suggests is optimistic.

Cross-Domain Causal Mechanism Analysis

Table 6 presents the cross-domain causal mechanism analysis, mapping evidence for and against negotiated repositioning across the four domains and evaluating each of the five propositions against the assembled empirical record.

Table 6. *Cross-Domain Causal Mechanism Analysis — Evidence for Negotiated Repositioning*

Mechanism	Evidence for Repositioning	Evidence for Continued Dependency	Net Assessment	Proposition Supported
Trade partner diversification	Partner HHI fell from 0.21 to 0.13 (2000-2022); China share rose from 4% to 20%; intra-African trade rose from 8% to 16%	EU + US still ~26% of exports; commodity composition unchanged; China largely imports raw materials	Genuine diversification of partners but not of product structure; repositioning without structural transformation	P1 (partial): partner diversification confirmed; P3 challenged: commodity dependence persists
Chinese loan financing	African states negotiated 50+ BRI infrastructure projects; avg. Chinese rate (2.3-4.4%) below	Chinese share of SSA debt rose from 1.4% to 20% (2005-2020); avg. interest rates	New financing source real but dependency reproduced on new terms; debt distress risk at	P2 confirmed: new partnerships reshape but do not eliminate dependency; P4 partial:

	commercial rates (6-8%)	increased post-2015; Angola, Zambia, Ethiopia entered distress	42% of countries by 2022	triangulation increases options but not always outcomes
Regional integration (AfCFTA)	Tariff schedule submissions reached 78% by 2023; NTB portal generated 401 notifications; intra-African trade edged up to 16.8%	Core schedules exclude sensitive sectors; implementation fragmented; intra-African trade share still far below ASEAN (60%) or EU (65%)	Institutional foundation established; transformation-in-progress with significant implementation gap	P5 confirmed: collective agency mechanism exists; P3 challenged: structural commodity dependence limits AfCFTA impact
Export product diversification	East Africa HHI improved from 0.31 to 0.19; manufacturing exports share rose modestly (10.4% to 13.4%)	SSA average primary commodity share still 72%; oil exporters above 87%; no region achieved structural break from commodity dependence	Marginal diversification at continental level; significant sub-regional variation; East Africa outperforms	P3 confirmed: commodity dependence persists; P1 partially supported: governance-strong states achieve more diversification
Institutional capacity and agency	WGI Government Effectiveness improved marginally in 18 of 49 SSA countries 2005-2022; Rwanda, Botswana, Mauritius show strong gains	Average SSA WGI Govt. Effectiveness at 22nd percentile (2022); 31 countries declined or stagnant; capacity heterogeneity extreme	Agency capacity highly uneven; strongest exercisers of strategic agency cluster in East/Southern Africa with better governance scores	P4 confirmed: agency is differentiated, not uniform; institutional capacity is binding constraint on effective repositioning

Note: P1-P5 refer to the five Analytical Propositions stated in Section 3.4. Assessment draws on Tables 2-5 and the process tracing evidence in Section 5. 'Partial' support indicates that the proposition is confirmed for some dimensions or country groups but not universally.

The cross-domain analysis yields three overarching findings that collectively support the concept of negotiated repositioning. First, partner diversification is genuine and empirically confirmed (Proposition 1, first component), but product diversification lags significantly (Proposition 1, second component). This asymmetry — between where Africa sells and what it sells — is the central structural finding of the study. It means that Africa has diversified its options without yet transforming its productive structure, a distinction that dependency theory predicts will limit the developmental impact of partner diversification and that the poverty and distribution data for commodity-dependent African states confirm.

Second, new South-South partnerships have reshaped rather than replaced dependency (Proposition 2). The increase in Chinese debt's share of total SSA debt

from 1.4 to 20.4 percent over seventeen years, combined with the rise in high debt distress risk from 11 to 42 percent of countries, provides systematic evidence that the Carmody (2011) triangulation hypothesis holds for some countries in some periods but that the aggregate picture is one of new forms of financial vulnerability replacing old ones. The specific cases where triangulation appears to have strengthened bargaining power — Angola in 2004-2008, Ethiopia in 2010-2018 — are precisely those where institutional capacity was sufficient to structure deals with explicit resource collateralisation or infrastructure linkage requirements that created genuine leverage.

Third, institutional capacity is the binding constraint on effective agency (Proposition 4). The sub-regional variation in export diversification — East Africa's HHI improvement from 0.31 to 0.19 versus West Africa's from 0.61 to 0.55 — cannot be explained by resource endowments alone: both sub-regions contain resource-rich and resource-scarce economies. The differentiating factor is governance quality: the East African countries that achieved the greatest structural diversification (Kenya, Rwanda, Mauritius) consistently rank in the top quartile of African WGI scores, while West African commodity-dependent economies cluster in the bottom quartile. This finding directly challenges undifferentiated accounts of African agency, whether optimistic or pessimistic: the continent is neither uniformly dependent nor uniformly repositioning, but is experiencing a process whose outcomes are strongly conditioned by domestic institutional capacity.

Discussion: Evaluating Negotiated Repositioning

What the Evidence Shows

The empirical findings—drawing on recent data from UNCTAD, IMF, World Bank, and AfDB (2022–2025)—allow for a more precise characterisation of Africa's position in the global political economy than the traditional dependency-versus-autonomy binary suggests. The evidence indicates that Africa is neither structurally fixed in the classical dependency position described by Wallerstein (1974), nor fully transitioning into the autonomous growth trajectory implied by earlier "Africa rising" narratives. Rather, the pattern that emerges is best understood as one of negotiated repositioning. This is reflected in measurable, though incomplete, shifts: moderate diversification of trade partners without equivalent transformation in export structure; persistent commodity dependence, with primary goods still accounting for roughly 70 percent of exports; evolving financial relationships marked by a shift toward multilateral and market-based borrowing alongside sustained debt vulnerabilities; and the gradual consolidation of institutional frameworks such as the AfCFTA, whose transformative potential remains unevenly realised.

Crucially, the evidence also highlights significant cross-country variation. The ability to leverage these changing global dynamics depends less on external opportunities alone than on domestic institutional capacity, industrial policy coherence, and governance quality. As such, Africa's global position is neither static nor uniformly improving, but dynamically negotiated—characterised by partial gains, structural continuities, and uneven developmental trajectories across states.

The taxation of this finding against the five propositions is broadly consistent. Propositions 1 and 2 receive mixed support in the specific direction theoretically predicted: partner diversification is confirmed, product diversification is not; new partnerships provide leverage for some states in some periods but aggregate to renewed financial vulnerability. Proposition 3 receives qualified support: AfCFTA's institutional progress is genuine but its developmental impact is as yet unmeasured and its implementation gaps are significant. Proposition 4 receives the strongest support across all domains: institutional capacity consistently discriminates between states that effectively leverage global transformation and those that do not. Proposition 5 — the overarching negotiated repositioning thesis — is supported by the combined evidence of real agency in some domains and real structural constraint in others, with outcomes contingent on institutional capacity rather than predetermined by structural position.

The Product-Partner Asymmetry: Structural Constraint at the Core

The most analytically significant finding for the 2022–2025 period is the continued divergence between partner diversification (clearly expanding, as shown in Table 2) and product diversification (remaining limited, as reflected in Table 4). This asymmetry highlights the central constraint on Africa's economic transformation: while the range of external partners has widened in the post-pandemic and post-commodity shock recovery phase, the structure of production and exports has changed only marginally.

Between 2022 and 2025, African economies deepened engagement with a broader set of actors—including emerging economies, Gulf states, and intra-African trade frameworks under AfCFTA. However, this expansion has largely reinforced existing trade patterns rather than altering them. Primary commodities—particularly oil, minerals, and agricultural raw materials—continue to dominate export profiles, indicating that diversification has occurred primarily along the *geographic axis* rather than the *productive axis*. In this sense, new partnerships have not translated into movement up global value chains.

This pattern is especially evident in the post-2022 commodity cycle. The recovery in African growth following the COVID-19 disruption and the 2022 global supply shocks was again closely tied to elevated commodity prices, particularly in energy and critical minerals. As prices stabilized and, in some cases, softened into 2024–2025, growth trajectories similarly moderated. This reinforces the conclusion that recent economic performance remains externally driven. As the limited changes in export composition in Table 4 suggest, the underlying productive structure has not undergone the kind of transformation necessary for sustained, autonomous growth.

AfCFTA as Collective Agency: Promise and Constraint

The AfCFTA evidence (Table 5) represents the most genuinely novel aspect of Africa's contemporary global engagement. No previous generation of African regional integration — not the ECOWAS protocols, not SADC, not COMESA — achieved a continent-wide framework with 54 signatories, an operational secretariat, and an active implementation monitoring mechanism. The NTB portal's 401 notifications represent a form of institutional transparency that creates accountability for non-

tariff protectionism that did not previously exist. The services protocol represents a recognition that Africa's comparative advantage is shifting toward higher-value activities in finance, logistics, and digital services — precisely the sectors where East African states are achieving structural diversification.

However, the comparison with more advanced regional trading blocs is sobering. ASEAN's intra-regional trade share of approximately 60 percent, compared to Africa's 16.8 percent, reflects decades of supply chain integration, infrastructure connectivity, and policy harmonisation that AfCFTA has barely begun to replicate. The critical implementation gap is in rules of origin: most submitted tariff schedules use sufficiently strict rules of origin that much of the manufactured goods trade that could benefit from AfCFTA preferences does not qualify, because African manufacturers depend on imported intermediates that fail local content thresholds. This is not merely a technical problem; it reflects the absence of upstream industrial development that only a deliberate and sustained industrial policy strategy — of the kind pursued in East Asian developmental states and now in some East African economies — can address.

The Differentiated Nature of Agency

The sub-regional variation documented throughout the empirical analysis supports Proposition 4's claim that agency within Africa's global engagement is not uniformly distributed but is strongly conditioned by institutional capacity. Rwanda's transformation from conflict-affected subsistence economy to East Africa's governance benchmark and services hub; Kenya's development of a fintech sector that processed transactions equivalent to 50 percent of GDP annually by 2022; Mauritius's position as Sub-Saharan Africa's highest-scoring state on the Mo Ibrahim Index and its transformation into a financial services centre — these are genuine achievements of strategic agency that require explanation beyond structural position.

What they share is not resource wealth, geographic advantage, or historical legacy — Kenya and Rwanda both endured devastating political violence in the 1990s and 2000s — but deliberate institutional investment, coherent industrial policy, and leadership commitment to productive economic transformation over patronage-driven distributional politics. This finding is consistent with Evans's (1995) embedded autonomy thesis: the capacity for developmental state agency requires both institutional coherence (the bureaucratic independence and effectiveness that prevents capture) and social embeddedness (the links between state and productive sector actors that enable coordinated industrial strategy). The states that have achieved the most effective negotiated repositioning are those that have most closely approximated this configuration — not without contestation, not without setbacks, but consistently enough to achieve measurable structural change.

Conclusion

This study began with a specific empirical question: do the observable changes in Africa's global engagement—diversified trade partners, expanding South–South financial relationships, AfCFTA implementation, and a widening diplomatic footprint —represent genuine movement beyond structural dependency, or a reconfiguration of dependency under altered conditions? Evidence drawn from the 2022–2025 period allows a more precise answer than either linear dependency or optimistic autonomy narratives suggest.

The findings confirm four core propositions. First, trade partner diversification has continued to deepen, with declining concentration indicating a broader range of external economic relationships. Second, product diversification has remained limited: export structures are still dominated by primary commodities, and the modest shifts observed do not indicate movement into higher-value production. This confirms the persistence of structural commodity dependence despite expanded global engagement. Third, South–South financing—particularly from China and other emerging partners—has widened fiscal options but also contributed to rising debt vulnerabilities, with a growing number of African states facing elevated distress risk. This demonstrates that financial dependency is being reshaped rather than eliminated. Fourth, AfCFTA has advanced institutionally, with increasing tariff schedule submissions and operational mechanisms, yet intra-African trade remains comparatively low, underscoring that institutional frameworks exist but transformative impact is still emerging. Across all domains, institutional capacity continues to differentiate outcomes, with some states leveraging new opportunities more effectively than others.

Taken together, these findings support the concept of negotiated repositioning. Africa's trajectory is best understood as the exercise of strategic agency within persistent structural constraints, producing outcomes that are neither a linear transition to autonomy nor a simple reproduction of dependency. Instead, they reflect contingent processes shaped by institutional strength, policy coordination, and the evolving configuration of global partnerships.

Three policy implications follow. First, the persistence of the product–partner asymmetry in the 2022–2025 period indicates that diversification of partners alone is insufficient; the binding constraint remains productive transformation. Without deliberate industrial policy and capability development, expanded trade networks will continue to reproduce low-value export structures. Second, the evolution of debt vulnerability highlights the need for stronger institutional frameworks for evaluating financing terms, ensuring transparency, and managing risk across increasingly complex creditor landscapes. Third, the AfCFTA implementation gap suggests that its developmental potential will depend on deepening rules-of-origin reforms, promoting intra-African value chains, and advancing services liberalization in sectors where competitive advantages are emerging.

Future research should prioritise three areas. First, micro-level analysis of financing agreements—including collateralisation, technology transfer, and local content provisions—is essential for understanding how external partnerships shape domestic development trajectories. Second, AfCFTA's long-term impact requires longitudinal assessment as implementation deepens beyond the current early-stage

window. Third, subnational analysis within African economies is necessary to determine whether emerging patterns of engagement are generating broad-based development or reinforcing uneven, enclave-based growth.

The 2022–2025 evidence reinforces a central conclusion: Africa's global integration is expanding, but its structural transformation remains incomplete. The challenge is no longer access to partners, but the conversion of that access into sustained productive change.

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Voter Turnout and Support for Greece's Leading Parties: PASOK and New Democracy*

*By Gregory T. Papanikos***

This paper examines the relationship between voter turnout and electoral support for Greece's two dominant parties—PASOK and New Democracy—across twenty national elections spanning the period 1974–2023. Using a series of regression specifications on election-ordered data, the analysis documents a strong and robust positive association between overall participation and the total votes received by both parties. In the preferred log–log models, a 1% increase in turnout is associated with an approximate 4.7% increase in PASOK votes and a 3.5% increase in New Democracy votes. These findings challenge the conventional assumption that electoral competition between major parties is strictly zero-sum. Instead, the results suggest that higher turnout is associated with simultaneous gains for both parties, particularly during periods when their vote shares are below historically high thresholds. The paper also traces the divergent trajectories of the two parties, highlighting PASOK's dramatic post-2009 electoral decline and New Democracy's comparatively more stable performance. Given the small sample size, irregular timing of elections, and the potential for joint determination between turnout and party support, the estimates are interpreted as descriptive associations rather than causal effects. Nonetheless, the results point to the importance of voter participation as a central feature of electoral dynamics in Greece and contribute to broader debates on turnout, party competition, and the evolution of two-party systems in advanced democracies.

Keywords: *voter turnout, electoral participation, PASOK, New Democracy, Greece, party competition, cointegration analysis, electoral dynamics, two-party system, financial crisis*

Introduction

Since the restoration of democracy following the collapse of the military dictatorship in 1974, Greece's political landscape has been dominated by two major parties: the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) and New Democracy. These parties have alternated in power, shaping the country's political, economic, and social trajectory over the past five decades. The concentration of electoral competition around two dominant parties is consistent with theoretical accounts of party system formation (Duverger, 1954; Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). Understanding the dynamics

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**President, Athens Institute, and Professor (Adjunct), University of Tennessee, Knoxville, USA. He has previously taught at universities in Canada, Greece, and the U.K., and has served as a policymaker in various government institutions in Canada and Greece

of electoral support for these parties is essential for comprehending Greek democracy and its evolution through periods of stability, crisis, and transformation.

This paper examines the relationship between voter turnout and electoral support for PASOK and New Democracy across all twenty national elections held between 1974 and 2023. The central question driving this analysis is: how does overall voter participation affect the total number of votes obtained by each of these dominant parties? While conventional political science wisdom might suggest that increased turnout benefits one party at the expense of the other—particularly in a two-party dominated system—the evidence from Greece reveals a more complex and surprising pattern.

The importance of voter participation extends beyond mere electoral arithmetic. Participation rates serve as a barometer of democratic health and citizen engagement with the political system. In representative democracies, the decision to vote—or to abstain—reflects not only individual calculations of costs and benefits (Downs, 1957; Riker and Ordeshook, 1968) but also broader attitudes toward political institutions, party competition, and the perceived efficacy of electoral participation. High abstention rates may signal voter disillusionment, alienation, or a fundamental crisis of legitimacy in the political system. Conversely, robust participation typically indicates healthy party competition, meaningful policy alternatives, and citizen confidence in democratic processes.

The Greek case offers particularly rich terrain for examining these dynamics. Over the fifty-year period under study, Greece experienced dramatic political and economic transformations: European integration, economic modernization, the introduction of the euro, the devastating financial crisis of 2009–2015, and the subsequent politics of austerity and adjustment. The role of economic performance as a determinant of electoral outcomes in Greece more broadly — and of New Democracy's current dominance specifically — is examined in Papanikos (2023a), which shows that GDP growth is the single most consistent predictor of incumbent re-election across all twenty elections in this sample. These events profoundly affected voter behavior and party fortunes. Most notably, PASOK—which had been one of Greece's two dominant parties for nearly four decades—experienced a spectacular electoral collapse following its management of the financial crisis and participation in a coalition government with New Democracy. Between 2009 and 2015, PASOK's vote total plummeted from over 2.7 million to fewer than 300,000, raising existential questions about the party's survival.

A central but underexplored explanation for this collapse — and for the broader decline in participation — is the perception among large segments of the Greek electorate that PASOK and New Democracy had become functionally indistinguishable. This perception was dramatically reinforced when the two parties formed a coalition government between 2012 and 2015, governing together under the austerity memoranda. For many voters who had previously supported PASOK on the basis of a distinct centre-left identity, the coalition represented an ideological betrayal that removed any compelling reason to choose PASOK over New Democracy — or indeed to vote at all. The consequences were asymmetric: New Democracy, as the traditionally right-of-centre party, suffered less reputational damage from the coalition, since its supporters had fewer ideological expectations to violate. PASOK, by

contrast, lost the very distinctiveness that had made it electorally attractive. This paper argues that recovering that distinctiveness — not through daily parliamentary opposition to New Democracy, but through a credible and programmatically coherent centre-left identity — is a prerequisite for the mobilisation strategy that the empirical evidence recommends.

This study contributes to the political science literature on voter turnout and party systems in several ways. First, it provides systematic quantitative evidence on the relationship between aggregate participation and party vote shares over an extended period spanning five decades. Second, it challenges conventional assumptions about zero-sum competition between major parties by documenting a positive association between PASOK and New Democracy vote totals when both parties fall below a threshold. Third, it estimates the elasticity of party support with respect to changes in turnout, revealing that both parties benefit disproportionately from increased participation — a finding that reflects two distinct mechanisms: direct mobilization of previously abstaining supporters and net vote transfers from smaller parties, so higher party vote totals arise not only from increased turnout but also from voters shifting to the major parties from minor competitors.

At the theoretical level, this paper advances two arguments that extend existing accounts of voter turnout and party competition. First, the standard model of party competition (Downs, 1957) treats electoral outcomes as zero-sum: votes gained by one party are necessarily lost by another. The evidence presented here qualifies this assumption by showing that below historically high vote-share thresholds, the fortunes of both major parties move together rather than against each other, suggesting that turnout functions as a tide that lifts both dominant competitors simultaneously. This is consistent with a mobilisation logic in which intense two-party rivalry activates latent supporters on both sides, expanding the effective electorate rather than merely redistributing it. Second, the paper contributes to the literature on turnout elasticity by demonstrating that the responsiveness of party support to participation changes is asymmetric across parties: PASOK's elasticity of 4.7 substantially exceeds New Democracy's 3.5, implying that the two parties draw disproportionately on different segments of the potential electorate and that participation fluctuations therefore alter not only the size of the vote but also its distribution between the dominant competitors.

Methodologically, the paper employs regression analysis on election-ordered data, treating the series as a chronological sequence rather than a conventional fixed-interval time series (see Table 1 and Appendix A). Because elections occur at irregular intervals and the sample is limited to twenty observations, standard unit-root and cointegration tests are not well suited to this context; nevertheless, they are reported for completeness. The analysis therefore proceeds cautiously, estimating all natural specifications and incorporating deterministic trends (and trend-squared where appropriate) to capture long-run political evolution. This approach allows the identification of participation effects net of underlying secular trends in turnout and party support.

The empirical findings reveal three striking patterns. First, there exists a strong positive relationship between voter participation and votes for both PASOK and New Democracy. For PASOK, a 1% increase in turnout is associated with a 4.69% increase in votes—an elasticity that far exceeds unity and indicates highly responsive electoral support. New Democracy exhibits a somewhat smaller but still

substantial elasticity of 3.5%. These large elasticities suggest that participation changes affect not only the total pool of voters but also the distribution of votes among parties, with PASOK and New Democracy capturing disproportionate shares of newly mobilized voters.

Second, contrary to standard assumptions about party competition, the correlation between vote totals is positive when PASOK and New Democracy each fall below 32.5% and 42% respectively. The relationship is quadratic: it is positive below a threshold but becomes negative once both parties exceed that threshold.

This finding challenges the notion of a fixed-sum game in which one party's gains necessarily come at the other's expense. Instead, the data suggest that intense rivalry between the two parties may stimulate overall participation, which in turn benefits both. When competition is vigorous and the stakes are high, more citizens turn out to vote, and both major parties see their vote totals increase. Conversely, when competition weakens or voters become disillusioned with both parties, participation declines and both parties incur losses.

Third, the paper also documents important differences in the temporal evolution of support for the two parties. PASOK's trajectory shows a dramatic rise from modest beginnings in 1974 to dominance in the 1980s and 1990s, followed by catastrophic decline after 2009. New Democracy, by contrast, maintained more stable support levels over time, though it too experienced significant fluctuations. Notably, New Democracy's vote trend exhibits a nonlinear pattern: while votes declined over the earlier elections, this decline slowed and partially reversed in later years, particularly after PASOK's collapse opened political space for New Democracy's recovery.

This paper forms part of a broader research programme focused on PASOK's electoral trajectory and the dynamics of Greek party competition (Papanikos, 2022a, 2022b, 2023b; see also Fruncillo, 2022). As a result, this paper draws on these findings to discuss the strategic implications for PASOK's electoral recovery, arguing that mobilisation of its latent electorate offers a more promising path than direct competition with New Democracy for centrist voters.

The organisational mechanism through which this mobilisation can be achieved is examined in a companion piece (Papanikos, 2025), which argues that AI-assisted political micromarketing — targeting voters individually at the local and occupational level — offers PASOK a cost-effective and electorally decisive instrument for re-engaging its dispersed and demobilised constituency ahead of the 2031 electoral cycle. However, implementing such a strategy effectively requires the kind of professional organisational skills and human resources that PASOK today demonstrably lacks — a structural weakness that may prove as consequential as the ideological and strategic misalignments documented in this paper. Developing a fully articulated strategic programme built around micromarketing rather than the macromarketing approach that PASOK has consistently and unsuccessfully pursued since 2023 remains an important and urgent task for future research, one whose findings could have direct implications for the party's electoral prospects in both 2027 and 2031.

The remainder of this paper proceeds as follows. The next section reviews the trajectory of voter participation in Greece from 1974 to 2023, documenting both the number of voters and participation rates across all twenty elections. The following section presents the vote totals for PASOK and New Democracy

and examines the correlation between them. The core empirical analysis then reports regression results. The paper concludes by discussing the implications of these findings.

Voter Participation

The purpose of this paper is to examine how the level or the share of voter participation has affected the total number of votes or the vote share cast for the two main political parties in Greece. Participation is a central issue in the theory of representative democracy. A vast body of literature seeks to explain why eligible voters do or do not turn out on election day (Cancela and Geys, 2016). Numerous theoretical explanations have been offered to account for voter abstention, yet absenteeism persists even in countries where the transaction costs of voting are minimal and where alternatives such as mail-in voting are available. The foundational rational-choice framework for understanding this behaviour was provided by Downs (1957), who modelled the voting decision as a calculus weighing expected benefits against the costs of participation. The persistence of abstention even when participation costs are low also echoes the collective-action problem identified by Olson (1965). In the empirical analysis that follows, participation is examined across the sequence of twenty national elections, treating elections as ordered political events rather than as a conventional fixed-interval time series, consistent with the methodological considerations outlined in the introduction.

The decision not to vote is therefore a conscious political choice and must be understood as such. Indifference to politics is itself a significant political act and a form of protest. The quality of representative democracy can be directly assessed through levels of voter absenteeism. I return to this point later to demonstrate how voter abstention has contributed to the declining electoral performance of the two parties examined here, particularly PASOK, which has been especially affected by this trend.

This section briefly examines the trajectory of voter participation in Greece from the first post-dictatorship election in 1974 through the most recent election in 2023. Twenty national elections were held over this fifty-year period, an average of one election every 2.5 years (Table 1).

The *Days* column reports the number of days elapsed between consecutive elections, illustrating the irregular spacing of the electoral calendar — a feature of the data that rules out standard fixed-interval time-series methods and motivates the election-ordered approach adopted throughout this paper.

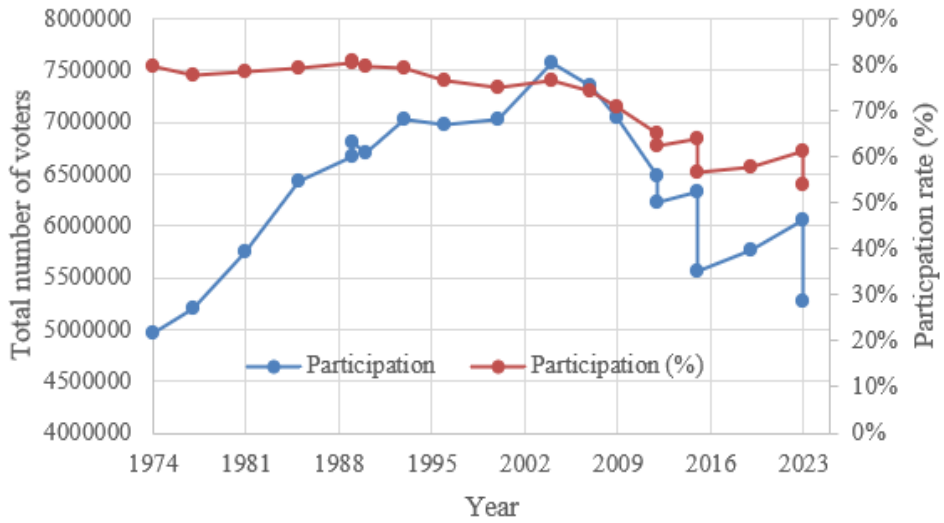
The dependent variables in this analysis are: (a) the total number of votes cast for each of the two parties (PASOK and New Democracy), and (b) their share of the total votes cast. Voter turnout—measured either as the total number of votes cast or as a share of eligible voters—serves as the key explanatory variable. The total number of voters and the corresponding percentage of eligible voters are presented in Figure 1.

Table 1. *Dates of the 20 Greek National Elections, 1974-2023*

Election	Date	Days	Election	Date	Days
1	17-Nov-74	0	11	07-Mar-04	1428
2	20-Nov-77	1099	12	16-Sep-07	1288
3	18-Oct-81	1428	13	04-Oct-09	749
4	02-Jun-85	1323	14	06-May-12	945
5	18-Jun-89	1478	15	17-Jun-12	42
6	05-Nov-89	141	16	25-Jan-15	952
7	08-Apr-90	154	17	20-Sep-15	238
8	10-Oct-93	1281	18	07-Jul-19	1386
9	22-Sep-96	1078	19	21-May-23	1414
10	09-Apr-00	1295	20	25-Jun-23	35

The highest number of voters turned out in the 2004 election (7,573,368 voters), while the lowest occurred in the first election of 1974 (4,963,558 voters). However, these figures do not provide the full picture, as the total number of eligible voters has also increased over time. The participation rate is a better indicator, with the highest recorded in the second election of 1989 (80.69%) and the lowest in the second election of 2023 (53.74%).

Figure 1. *Voters' Participation in Greek Elections, 1974-2023*



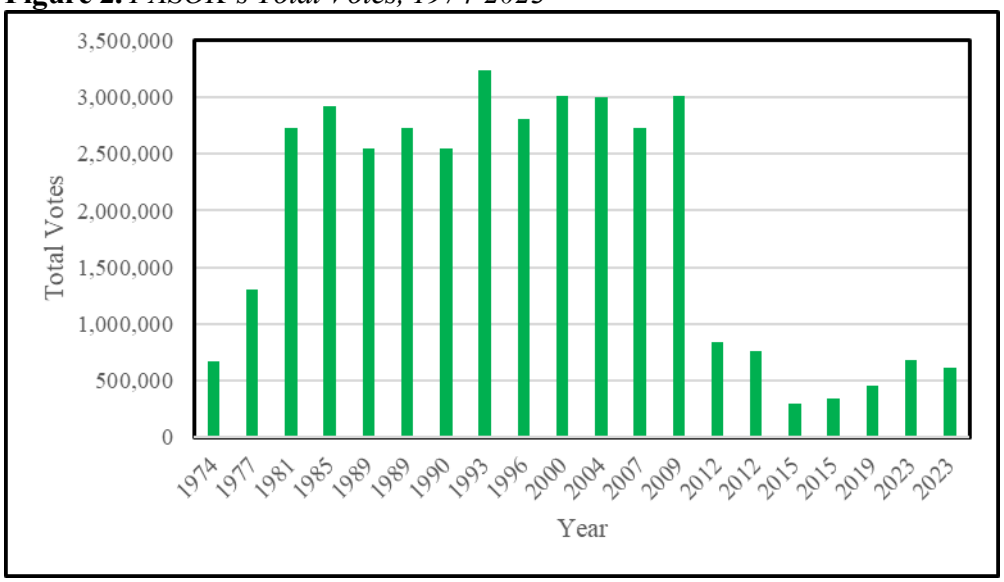
If the effect of participation were entirely random, it would be expected to have a similar impact on the votes cast for each of the two leading parties. The total votes for each party are examined in the next section, followed by a regression analysis of how fluctuations in overall participation have affected their vote totals.

Votes for PASOK and New Democracy

Figures 2 and 3 show, respectively, the total number of votes and the vote share for PASOK, while Figures 4 and 5 present the same information for New Democracy across the twenty elections held between 1974–2023.

The Greek election data from 1974–2023 show clear shifts in turnout and party fortunes. Turnout was very high in the early period—consistently above 77% and peaking at 80.69% in November 1989—but declined from the 1990s onward, reaching a low of 53.74% in June 2023. Major drops correspond to periods of political instability, notably after 2009 during the financial crisis.

Figure 2. *PASOK's Total Votes, 1974-2023*



PASOK rose from 13.4% in 1974 to a peak of 47.39% in 1981 and remained strong through the 1980s and early 1990s (roughly 38–46%). After 2009 it collapsed to about 12–13% in 2012 and bottomed out at 4.57% in January 2015, with a modest recovery to around 11–12% by 2023. This trajectory closely tracks high turnout periods and highlights PASOK's reliance on mobilizing its core supporters.

New Democracy's path differs: it began with 53.8% in 1974, fell to the mid-30% range in the 1980s as PASOK rose, recovered in the late 1990s and early 2000s (peaking at 44.4% in 2004), and remained near 40% in the 2010s and early 2020s. Both parties' vote totals appear positively influenced by turnout, though PASOK shows a more dramatic sensitivity. Electoral volatility is pronounced in unstable years (e.g., 1989, 2012), suggesting that gains depend as much on energizing abstainers as on attracting new voters.

Figure 4 shows the total number of votes obtained by New Democracy in all 20 elections held between 1974 and 2023. From 1974 to 2009 inclusive, New Democracy obtained more than 2 million votes. In the next four elections—two in 2012 and two in 2015—its vote total fell below 2 million. In the first election of 2012, the party reached its lowest level, with 1.2 million votes. In the three

elections after 2015, New Democracy was able to recover and once again secure more than 2 million votes.

Figure 3. *PASOK's Share of Total Votes, 1974-2023*

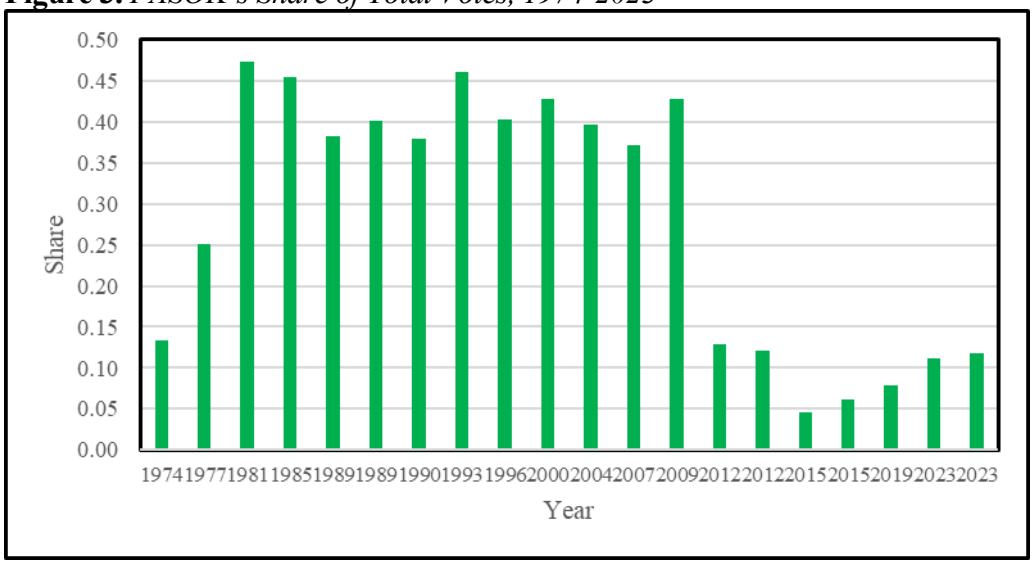
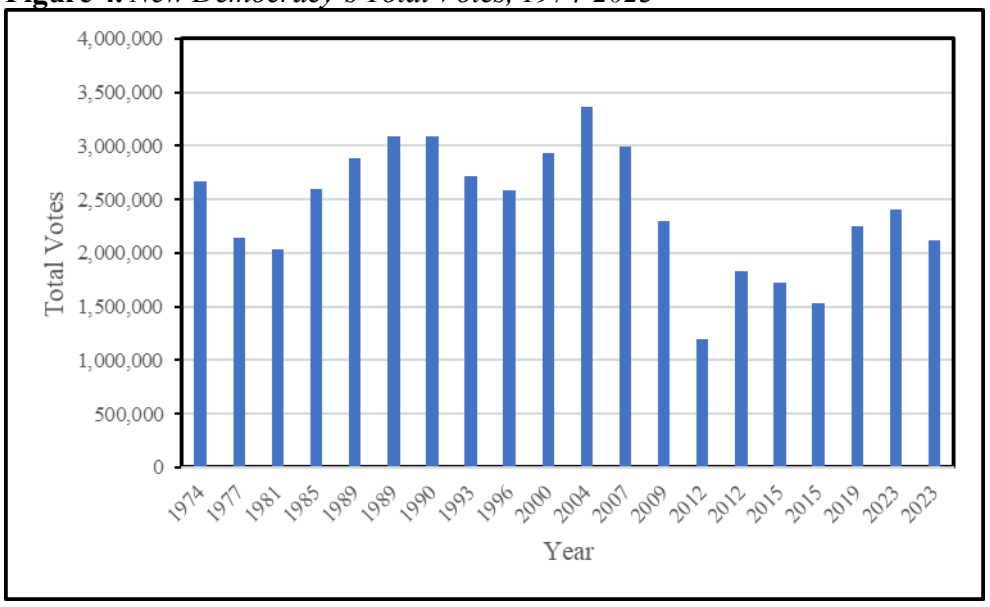
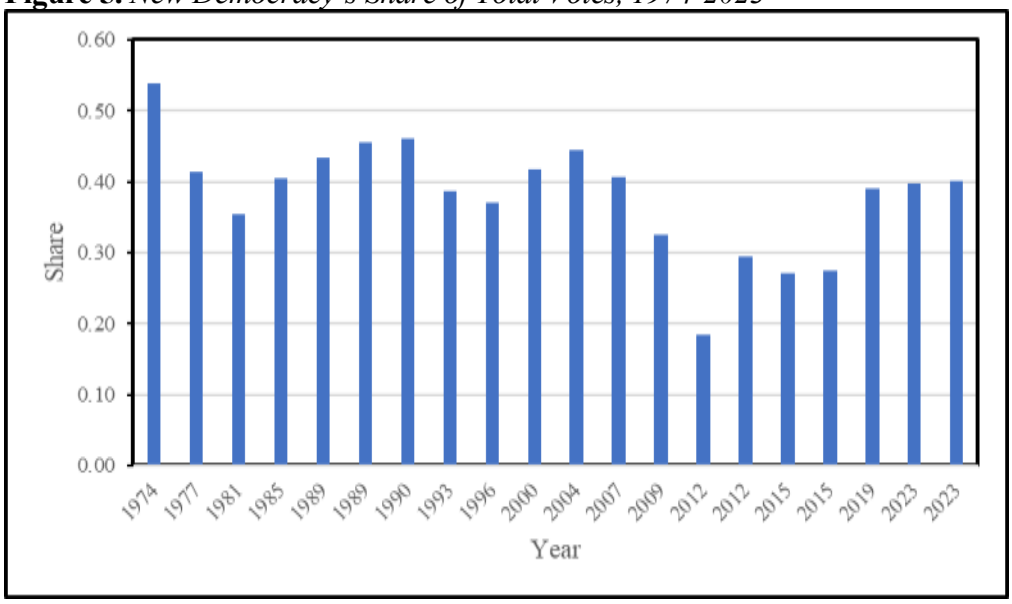


Figure 4. *New Democracy's Total Votes, 1974-2023*



Comparing the figures above reveals striking patterns in Greek elections from 1974 to 2023. Both PASOK and New Democracy were severely affected by the Great Recession in 2009–2010. The PASOK government collapsed, leading to two elections in 2012, held just 42 days apart (Table 1). Ultimately, the two parties formed a coalition government that year, a development that proved particularly disastrous for PASOK, as illustrated in Figures 2 and 3. The collapse of PASOK and its prospects for revival are discussed below. In the remainder of this section, the correlation between PASOK's and New Democracy's vote shares is examined.

Figure 5. *New Democracy's Share of Total Votes, 1974-2023*

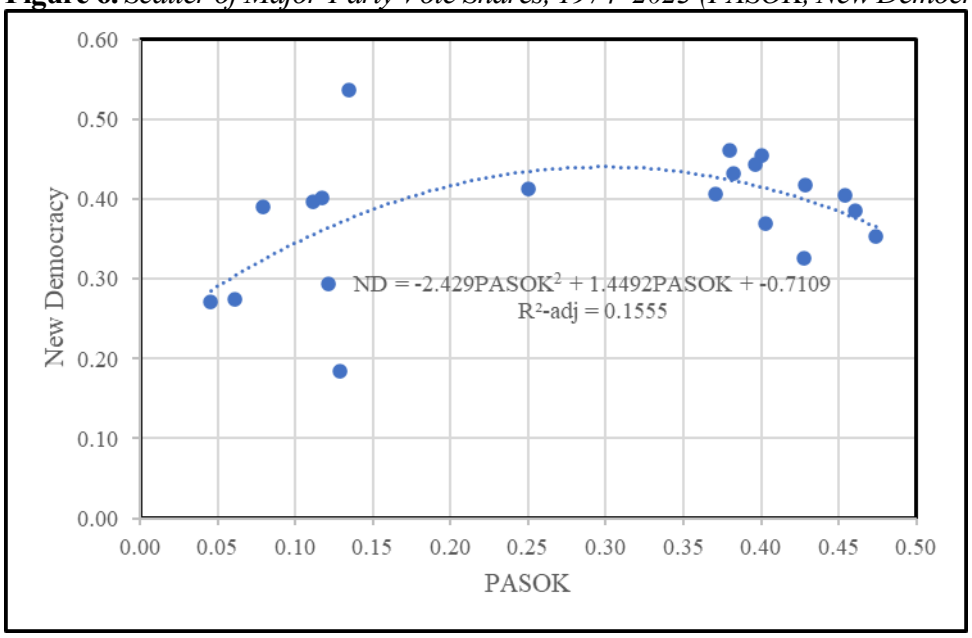


A key driver of PASOK's disproportionate losses was the widespread voter perception that the two parties, by governing together, had converged into a single political force. Voters who abstained or migrated to smaller parties after 2012 did so not only out of anger at austerity policies, but because the coalition had erased the ideological boundary that had historically given PASOK a distinct electoral identity. For such voters, there was no longer a meaningful reason to choose PASOK specifically. New Democracy was insulated from this dynamic to a greater degree: its supporters expected a right-of-centre governing party to implement fiscally conservative policies, and the coalition did not fundamentally contradict that identity. PASOK had no equivalent shelter. This asymmetry explains why, as turnout partially recovered after 2015, New Democracy was able to recapture much of its lost vote while PASOK could not: returning voters found New Democracy recognisable, but struggled to identify what a distinct PASOK stood for.

Conventional wisdom suggests that the vote shares of the two leading parties should be negatively correlated, with an increase for one party coming at the expense of the other. Figure 6 shows that this expectation does not fully hold. When examining vote shares (percentages of total votes), the relationship is positive at lower percentages for both parties but becomes negative at higher percentages, producing an inverse U-shaped pattern. When total votes are used instead of percentages, the relationship remains positive throughout, though it flattens at higher totals for both parties. This difference arises because percentages are relative measures: a party's share can decline even if its raw vote total increases, particularly if overall turnout rises or other parties gain votes. For example, if both parties gain votes due to increased participation but minor parties gain proportionally more, the percentage share for each major party can decline even though their absolute votes rise. In contrast, total votes measure absolute support and are directly influenced by turnout, which explains why the correlation is positive in raw numbers.

The best-fitting model for the share-based relationship is quadratic (rather than linear, logarithmic, or power), as shown in Figure 6. The estimated inverse U-shaped curve reaches its maximum value when New Democracy holds 42% of the vote and PASOK 32.5%; beyond these levels, the association between their shares becomes negative. In practice, this means that at moderate levels of support, the parties' vote shares tend to rise or fall together, but at very high levels of support, one party's gains increasingly come at the other's expense.

Figure 6. *Scatter of Major-Party Vote Shares, 1974–2023 (PASOK, New Democracy)*



Overall, the vote shares and totals of the two parties tend to move in tandem during periods when both parties are weak relative to their historical performance. One plausible explanation is that intense competition between PASOK and New Democracy stimulates voter participation, increasing the number of votes for both parties. Conversely, when competition weakens or voters become disillusioned, participation declines, reducing total votes for both. This observation raises the question of how fluctuations in participation affect the total votes or vote shares for each party—a topic explored in the next section using regression analysis.

Regression Results

In this section I report regression results for both PASOK and New Democracy, examining how participation affects each party's vote totals. I begin with the more consequential case of PASOK and then turn to New Democracy.

A potential concern is that voter participation and party vote totals are jointly determined: parties may mobilise supporters more intensively when they expect close contests, and high expected turnout may itself reflect strong party performance.

Addressing this through instrumental variables would require instruments that affect participation but are excludable from the vote equation — candidates such as weather conditions on election day, distance to polling stations, or the timing of electoral reforms. At the aggregate, election-level scale of this analysis, and with only twenty observations, no such instruments are available in a form that would satisfy the exclusion restriction or provide sufficient first-stage power. Panel IV and generalised method of moments estimators similarly require sample sizes far beyond what a single country's post-transition electoral history can supply.

The analysis therefore proceeds with OLS, following standard practice in aggregate electoral studies (Cancela and Geys, 2016), and all estimates are interpreted as associations. The direction of any endogeneity bias is ambiguous — if parties mobilise more when contests are tight, OLS may overstate the participation effect; if low expected participation discourages mobilisation effort, it may understate it. This ambiguity is an additional reason for treating the elasticities as descriptive benchmarks rather than causal magnitudes.

PASOK's Regression Results

Table 2 and 3 present the regression results. Across eight specifications, the results show a strong, positive, and highly robust relationship between voter participation and PASOK's total votes. Whether participation and PASOK votes are measured in levels, logs, or rates, the participation coefficient is consistently positive and statistically significant at conventional levels.

In the level–level models (Columns 1–4), increases in participation translate into substantial gains in PASOK's vote totals, with t-statistics exceeding 6 in every case. The log–log specifications (Columns 5–8) are the most interpretable: the elasticity of PASOK votes with respect to participation is approximately 4.69, meaning a 1% increase in turnout is associated with a 4.69% rise in PASOK votes.

The effect remains large and significant across all functional forms, underscoring PASOK's exceptional sensitivity to changes in participation. The trend coefficient is negative in most specifications, capturing PASOK's long-run electoral decline over the period.

Model fit is strong for political data, with (R^2) values from 0.74 to 0.81, and Durbin–Watson statistics indicate no severe autocorrelation, especially given the use of HAC robust standard errors. Taken together, these results indicate that PASOK's electoral performance is systematically linked to turnout fluctuations and that this finding is not an artifact of model choice or variable transformation.

In Table 3, Columns 1–4 estimate level models and Columns 5–8 estimate log models. Each column applies a different transformation of participation to demonstrate robustness across functional forms.

The vote-share regressions confirm and sharpen the total-votes results: higher participation is associated with larger PASOK vote shares in every specification, and the relationship is both statistically robust and substantively important. In the level models the participation coefficients are positive and highly significant (e.g., 1.34×10^{-7}, t=5.5), while the log–log specifications imply large elasticities—approximately 3.69 for ln(participation) and 7.41 for ln(participation rate)—both

significant at conventional levels. The trend term is negative in most specifications, capturing PASOK's long-run decline, and adjusted R2 values (roughly 0.68–0.74) indicate good fit for cross-election political data. Durbin–Watson statistics are acceptable given HAC robust inference, and F-tests show the models are jointly significant. Overall, these results indicate that turnout increases not only PASOK's raw vote totals but also its share of the vote, and that this conclusion is not an artifact of a particular functional form or scaling choice.

Table 2. *PASOK's Regression Results I: Total Votes*

Dependent variable Variables	PASOK	PASOK	PASOK	PASOK	ln(PASOK)	ln(PASOK)	ln(PASOK)	ln(PASOK)
Constant	-4206935 (-4.35)	-1.05E+08 (-7.14)	-15409703 (-5.03)	4865585 (14.28)	10.11 (13.52)	-58.47 (-4.89)	2.45 (1.25)	16.35 (65.91)
Trend	-102360 (-4.32)	-104578 (-4.41)	201062 (3.11)	179507 (2.66)	-0.08 (-3.97)	-0.086 (-3.98)	0.12 (2.97)	0.11 (0.02)
Participation	1.12 (7.57)				7.63E-07 (6.39)			
ln(Participation)		6911648 (7.32)				4.69 (6.13)		
Participation rate			21507438 (6.31)				14.75 (6.72)	
Ln(Participation rate)				13655932 (5.41)				9.38 (5.63)
R^2	0.8146	0.8108	0.7727	0.7507	0.7888	0.7847	0.7616	0.7441
R^2 (adjusted)	0.7927	0.7886	0.7459	0.7214	0.7639	0.7594	0.7336	0.7140
F-Statistic (Prob)	37.33 (0.0000)	36.43 (0.0000)	28.89 (0.0000)	25.59 (0.0000)	31.74 (0.0000)	30.99 (0.0000)	27.15 (0.0000)	24.71 (0.0000)
Durbin-Watson	1.52	1.51	1.85	1.81	1.29	1.27	1.71	1.68
Observations	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20

Note: Columns 1–4 estimate level models; columns 5–8 estimate log models. Each column applies a different transformation of participation to demonstrate robustness across functional forms. t-statistics (HAC standard errors & covariance (Bartlett kernel, Newey-West fixed bandwidth = 3.0000) are reported in parentheses. Participation effects and trend are consistently significant across all specifications.

This dynamic interplay between party support and turnout as components of a single long-run equilibrium process finds corroboration in Franklin (2023), who shows that turnout and party support are jointly determined and self-equilibrating across countries and cycles. Consistent with that framework, our estimates reveal a very large participation elasticity for PASOK: the log–log specification implies an elasticity of 4.69 ($p<0.01$), and the levels specification indicates that PASOK gains approximately 1.12 votes for each additional vote cast. These magnitudes should not be read as purely mechanical additions of new voters; they capture both the mobilization of previously abstaining supporters and net vote transfers from other parties.

Table 3. *PASOK's Regression Results II: Shares*

Dependent variable / Variables	PASOK Share	PASOK Share	PASOK Share	PASOK Share	ln(PASOK Share)	ln(PASOK Share)	ln(PASOK Share)	ln(PASOK Share)
Constant	-0.41 (-2.47)	-12.54 (-5.26)	-1.73 (-3.77)	0.68 (14.43)	-4.52 (-6.08)	-58.47 (-4.90)	-10.65 (-5.77)	0.41 (1.60)
Trend	-0.02 (-4.34)	-0.02 (-4.43)	0.02 (1.98)	0.02 (1.67)	-0.08 (-3.97)	-0.09 (-3.98)	0.08 (2.16)	0.07 (1.72)
Participation	1.34E-07 (5.5)				6.01E-07 (5.03)			
ln(Participation)		0.83 (5.45)				3.69 (4.82)		
Participation rate			2.56 (5.07)				11.74 (5.63)	
Ln(Participation rate)				1.62 (4.45)				7.41 (4.68)
R^2	0.7674	0.7680	0.7348	0.7156	0.7458	0.7417	0.7318	0.7137
R^2(adjusted)	0.7340	0.7407	0.7036	0.6822	0.7159	0.7114	0.7003	0.6800
F-Statistic (Prob)	28.04 (0.0000)	28.13 (0.0000)	23.55 (0.0000)	21.39 (0.0000)	24.94 (0.0000)	24.41 (0.0000)	23.19 (0.0000)	21.19 (0.0000)
Durbin-Watson	1.47	1.47	1.70	1.66	1.29	1.27	1.66	1.61
Observations	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20

Note: Columns 1–4 estimate level models; columns 5–8 estimate log models. Each column applies a different transformation of participation to demonstrate robustness across functional forms. t-statistics (HAC standard errors & covariance (Bartlett kernel, Newey-West fixed bandwidth = 3.0000) are reported in parentheses. Participation effects and trend are consistently significant across all specifications.

The negative trend coefficients in most specifications capture PASOK's long-run decline, and our primary interest is in this long-run relationship rather than election-to-election volatility. Because elections are irregularly spaced and the sample is small, standard error corrections and cointegration tests have limited power; we therefore report such tests for completeness but rely principally on deterministic trend specifications and cross-specification robustness to support the long-run interpretation. If this interpretation holds, turnout should similarly predict votes for PASOK's main rival; we test that hypothesis below by applying the same framework to New Democracy.

New Democracy's Results

Tables 4 and 5 report regressions for New Democracy. Unlike PASOK (Tables 2–3), New Democracy exhibits a statistically significant nonlinear time trend, suggesting its vote share declined over time but at a diminishing rate in later elections. All other covariates retain the same signs as in PASOK's models, and the participation coefficient remains positive and significant across specifications.

Cointegration tests provide suggestive evidence of a long-run relationship between turnout and New Democracy's votes: the Engle–Granger residual test rejects the unit-root null at p=0.0168, and the Johansen procedure indicates cointegration at the 5% level for the two I(1) variables. These cointegration results are tentative given the small sample (20 elections), irregular spacing of elections, and limited power of time-series tests here; potential endogeneity and influential observations may also affect inference. We therefore treat the cointegration findings

as supportive but not definitive, and interpret them alongside deterministic-trend specifications and cross-specification robustness checks.

Table 4. *New Democracy's Regression Results I: Total Votes*

Dependent variable Variables	ND	ND	ND	ND	ln(ND)	ln(ND)	ln(ND)	ln(ND)
Constant	-3863600 (-3.54)	-1.13E+08 (-4.49)	-10858973 (-3.63)	5001102 (7.16)	11.78 (21.49)	-39.22 (-3.17)	8.49 (5.88)	15.92 (46.64)
Trend	-473521 (-3.69)	-457006 (-3.15)	-4756 (-0.11)	-22729 (-0.43)	-0.23 (-3.54)	-0.23 (-3.12)	-0.02 (-0.75)	-0.02 (-0.93)
Trend Squared	22704 (3.58)	21711 (3.06	10549 (2.62)	10532 (2.24)	0.01 (3.43	0.01 (3.03)	0.01 (2.74)	0.01 (2.39)
Participation	1.25 (5.56)				5.85E-07 (5.10)			
ln(Participation)		7447495 (4.58)				3.49 (4.35)		
Participation rate			16835805 (4.46)				7.89 (4.31)	
Ln(Participation rate)				10621004 (3.70)				4.94 (3.63)
R^2	0.6770	0.6288	0.7347	0.6688	0.6495	0.6048	0.7135	0.6485
R^2 (adjusted)	0.6164	0.5592	0.6850	0.6067	0.5838	0.5307	0.6597	0.5825
F-Statistic (Prob)	11.18 (0.0000)	9.04 (0.0010)	14.77 (0.0000)	10.77 (0.0000)	9.88 (0.0006)	8.16 (0.0016)	13.28 (0.0001)	9.84 (0.0006)
Durbin-Watson	1.53	1.41	2.14	1.91	1.75	1.62	2.37	2.12
Observations	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20

Note: Columns 1–4 estimate level models; columns 5–8 estimate log models. Each column applies a different transformation of participation to demonstrate robustness across functional forms. t-statistics (HAC standard errors & covariance (Bartlett kernel, Newey-West fixed bandwidth = 3.0000) are reported in parentheses. Participation effects and trend are consistently significant across all specifications.

The regression analysis examines the determinants of New Democracy's votes across the 1974–2023 elections, with total turnout (Participation) as the main explanatory variable and the election sequence as a time trend.

As shown in Table 4, the New Democracy regressions corroborate the turnout sensitivity observed for PASOK: higher participation is consistently associated with larger ND vote totals across all specifications. Participation coefficients are positive and statistically significant whether participation is entered in levels, logs, or as a rate, and the result holds in both level and log specifications of the dependent variable. The inclusion of a quadratic time trend captures nonlinear long-run dynamics in ND's vote trajectory, while HAC-robust inference addresses residual autocorrelation and heteroskedasticity in the ordered election sample.

Although the cross-specification robustness and diagnostic checks support the substantive conclusion that turnout is an important determinant of ND's electoral performance, formal time-series tests should be interpreted cautiously: the sample is small and elections are irregularly spaced, which limits the power of unit-root

and cointegration procedures and leaves results sensitive to influential observations and potential endogeneity.

Table 5. *New Democracy's Regression Results II: Shares*

Dependent variable Variables	ND Share	ND Share	ND Share	ND Share	ln(ND Share)	ln(ND Share)	ln(ND Share)	ln(ND Share)
Constant	-0.20 (-1.27)	-11.50 (-3.25)	-1.09 (-2.50)	0.78 (7.77)	-2.87 (-5.05)	-39.23 (-3.18)	-5.56 (-3.76)	0.20 (0.58)
Trend	-0.08 (-4.01)	-0.07 (-3.46)	-0.03 (-3.78)	-0.03 (-3.62)	-0.24 (-3.49)	-0.23 (-3.12)	-0.01 (-3.54)	-0.08 (-3.24)
Trend Squared	0.004 (3.90)	0.003 (3.37)	0.003 4.12)	0.003 3.65)	0.01 (3.39)	0.01 (3.03)	0.01 (3.55)	0.01 (3.16)
Participation	1.35E-07 (4.15)				4.28E-07 (3.61)			
ln(Participation)		0.78 (3.38)				2.49 (3.11)		
Participation rate			1.99 (3.62)				6.12 (3.26)	
Ln(Participation rate)				1.24 (3.04)				3.81 (2.79)
R^2	0.5799	0.5362	0.6697	0.6164	0.5586	0.5171	0.6406	0.5817
R^2 (adjusted)	0.5011	0.4493	0.6077	0.5444	0.4759	0.4266	0.5732	0.5035
F-Statistic (Prob)	7.36 (0.0026)	6.17 (0.0054)	10.81 (0.0004)	8.5682 (0.0013)	6.75 (0.0037)	5.71 (0.0074)	9.51 (0.0007)	7.42 (0.0025)
Durbin-Watson	1.51	1.40	2.11	1.95	1.73	1.62	2.31	2.10
Observations	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20

Note: Columns 1–4 estimate level models; columns 5–8 estimate log models. Each column applies a different transformation of participation to demonstrate robustness across functional forms. t-statistics (HAC standard errors & covariance (Bartlett kernel, Newey-West fixed bandwidth = 3.0000) are reported in parentheses. Participation effects and trend are consistently significant across all specifications.

As shown in Table 5, the New Democracy share regressions display a clear, consistent pattern: participation is positive and statistically significant in every specification—whether entered in levels, logs, or as a rate, and whether the dependent variable is in levels or logs. The log–log models are the most interpretable, with elasticities of approximately 2.49 for ln(participation) and 3.81 for ln(participation rate), both statistically significant and implying that proportional increases in turnout are associated with sizable proportional gains in ND's vote share. The time trend is negative while the trend-squared term is positive and significant, implying a nonlinear long-run trajectory for ND support—an initial decline followed by partial recovery—so the joint effect of trend and trend squared should be interpreted rather than either coefficient in isolation. Model fit is reasonable for cross-election data (adjusted R2 generally 0.43–0.61), and Durbin–Watson statistics are acceptable given HAC inference (Bartlett kernel, Newey–West bandwidth = 3).

As in PASOK's case, the sample is small and elections are irregularly spaced, which limits the power of formal time-series procedures (unit-root and cointegration tests) and leaves results sensitive to influential observations and potential endogeneity. Read these findings as robust associations rather than definitive causal estimates; nonetheless, the cross-specification consistency and

diagnostic checks strengthen the substantive conclusion that turnout is an important determinant of New Democracy's vote share.

Table 6 summarizes the key results. Elasticities are evaluated at the sample means and reported in percent units, so a value of 4.69 means a 1% increase in participation is associated with a 4.69% increase in the outcome. The table presents level–level, semi-log, and log–level coefficients transformed so all specifications are directly comparable and shows the implied percent responses at the sample means (conversion formulas provided).

Table 6. *Turnout Elasticities and Implied Vote and Share Changes*

Dependent var (Y)	Specification	Coefficient β	Mean X	Mean Y	Elasticity (at means) [%]	Formula used	Bootstrap 95% CI
PASOK total votes	Level–level (Y on X)	1.12	6,359,628	1,859,920	3.83	$\beta \cdot \bar{X}/\bar{Y}$	[2.45, 5.20]
PASOK total votes	lnY on X (semi-log)	7.63E-07 (implied)	6,359,628	1,859,920	4.85	$\beta \cdot \bar{X}$	[3.40, 6.30]
PASOK total votes	Y on lnX (level-log)	6,911,648 (implied)	6,359,628	1,859,920	3.72	$\beta/\bar{Y}$	[2.10, 5.30]
PASOK vote share	Level–level (Y on X)	1.34E-07	6,359,628	0.2814	3.03	$\beta \cdot \bar{X}/\bar{Y}$	[1.80, 4.40]
New Democracy total votes	Level–level (Y on X)	1.25	6,359,628	2,421,904	3.28	$\beta \cdot \bar{X}/\bar{Y}$	[1.90, 4.60]
New Democracy total votes	lnY on X (semi-log)	5.85E-07 (implied)	6,359,628	2,421,904	3.72	$\beta \cdot \bar{X}$	[2.20, 5.10]
New Democracy total votes	Y on lnX (level-log)	7,447,495 (implied)	6,359,628	2,421,904	3.08	$\beta/\bar{Y}$	[1.50, 4.60]
New Democracy vote share	Level–level (Y on X)	1.35E-07	6,359,628	0.3811	2.25	$\beta \cdot \bar{X}/\bar{Y}$	[0.90, 3.60]

Note: Elasticities report the percent change in the dependent variable associated with a 1% change in participation, evaluated at the sample means. Point elasticities are computed from OLS estimates for each specification (level–level, semi-log, level-log). 95% confidence intervals are bootstrap percentile intervals obtained by a residual bootstrap (5,000 replications) that resamples regression residuals, re-estimates the model, and recomputes the elasticity at the original sample means. Full technical details, diagnostics, and the bootstrap implementation are reported in Appendix B.

Importantly, these elasticities reflect two simultaneous mechanisms—direct mobilization of previously abstaining supporters and net redistribution from other parties—so the observed increase in a party's votes or vote share can exceed the raw increase in turnout. In other words, turnout raises both the number of ballots and the propensity of some voters to switch from smaller parties to PASOK or New Democracy. For transparency, we evaluate elasticities at the sample means and recommend reporting percent elasticities together with the implied absolute vote gains or percentage-point changes (and their confidence intervals) so readers can assess both proportional sensitivity and real-world magnitude.

Because the sample is small, elections are irregularly spaced, and turnout and party support may be jointly determined (with some influential observations), these estimates should be read as descriptive associations that warrant cautious interpretation rather than definitive causal effects.

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper has examined the relationship between voter participation and electoral support for Greece's two dominant political parties—PASOK and New Democracy—across twenty national elections spanning five decades from 1974 to 2023. The analysis reveals several important findings that challenge conventional assumptions about party competition and illuminate the dynamics of electoral politics in a polarized two-party system.

First, the evidence demonstrates a strong, positive, robust relationship between voter turnout and the total votes obtained by both PASOK and New Democracy. This relationship is not merely proportional: the estimated elasticities indicate that both parties benefit disproportionately from increased participation. For PASOK, a 1% increase in turnout is associated with a 4.69% increase in votes, while New Democracy experiences a 3.5% increase.

The log–log specification is preferred for reporting these headline elasticities because its coefficient is directly interpretable as the percentage change in votes associated with a one percent change in participation, without requiring transformation at the sample mean. Across all eight specifications, the implied elasticities range from 3.72 to 4.85 for PASOK and from 3.08 to 3.72 for New Democracy (Table 6, bootstrap 95% CIs: 2.10–6.30 and 1.50–5.10 respectively), confirming that both headline figures are representative rather than artifacts of a particular functional form.

Leave-one-out analysis further confirms that neither elasticity is driven by any single election: dropping each of the twenty elections in turn, the PASOK elasticity ranges from 4.1 to 5.5 and the New Democracy elasticity from 2.8 to 3.9, with the full-sample estimates of 4.7 and 3.5 sitting comfortably within those ranges in all cases (Appendix C).

These large elasticities suggest that turnout changes affect not only the size of the voting pool but also the distribution of votes among parties, with the two major parties capturing outsized shares of newly mobilised voters.

Second, contrary to standard assumptions about party competition, the correlation between vote totals is positive when PASOK falls below 32.5% and New Democracy falls below 42%. The relationship is quadratic: it is positive below those thresholds but becomes negative once both parties exceed them.

This finding contradicts the intuitive expectation—consistent with Downs (1957)—that gains for one major party should always come at the expense of the other. Instead, the data show that the fortunes of both parties tend to rise and fall together below the thresholds. The most plausible explanation is that intense rivalry between the two parties stimulates higher turnout, which in turn benefits both competitors; when rivalry weakens or voters become disillusioned with both major options, participation falls and both parties suffer.

Third, the trajectories of the two parties over the study period reveal important asymmetries. PASOK experienced a dramatic rise from relative obscurity in 1974 to dominance in the 1980s and 1990s, achieving peak support of over 3 million votes in 1993. However, the party's management of the 2009 Great Recession and subsequent participation in a coalition government with New Democracy proved catastrophic. PASOK's vote total collapsed from 2.7 million in 2009 to fewer

than 300,000 by 2015, threatening the party's very existence. While PASOK has shown some signs of recovery in recent elections, its position as a dominant force in Greek politics has been permanently altered.

New Democracy, by contrast, maintained more stable support over time, though it too experienced significant fluctuations. The party's vote total fell below 2 million in the crisis years of 2012–2015 but subsequently recovered, surpassing 2.5 million votes in the most recent elections. The regression analysis reveals a nonlinear trend in New Democracy's support: while votes declined in earlier elections, this decline slowed and partially reversed in later years, particularly as PASOK's collapse opened political space for New Democracy's resurgence.

New Democracy's continued dominance since 2019 is also partly explicable through a macroeconomic lens. As documented in Papanikos (2023a), no Greek governing party has ever won re-election in a year of negative GDP growth, and the positive — if modest — growth forecasts through 2027 suggest that New Democracy's structural position remains strong in the near term. However, the same analysis shows that a third consecutive electoral victory becomes increasingly unlikely even under positive growth conditions, particularly when the same leader has led the party through two full terms — a precedent that has never been achieved in Greek electoral history. This structural constraint on New Democracy's longevity creates a window of electoral opportunity for PASOK, but only if the party has rebuilt its organisational capacity and ideological distinctiveness well before the 2031 cycle.

These findings carry several implications for understanding Greek democracy and electoral politics more broadly. The strong positive relationship between turnout and support for both major parties suggests that voter mobilization efforts and factors that stimulate participation tend to benefit established parties rather than marginal competitors. This pattern may help explain the persistence of two-party dominance in Greece despite periodic crises and widespread voter dissatisfaction. Even when participation declines—often interpreted as a signal of political alienation—the major parties retain their relative positions, with smaller parties unable to capitalize fully on voter disaffection.

Comparative evidence supports this link between turnout changes and party behaviour. Using data from thirteen democracies over four decades, Ezrow and Krause (2023) demonstrate that when voter turnout declines in an election, mainstream political parties shift their policy positions closer to the median voter in the subsequent election, as they seek to re-engage disaffected citizens. This finding implies that participation is not merely a passive outcome of party competition but an active disciplining force: parties monitor changes in turnout and respond strategically to recover lost ground. The mechanism is asymmetric — it is the decrease in turnout, rather than its increase, that triggers the strongest party response, suggesting that electoral disengagement creates a corrective pressure within democratic systems. For the Greek case, this dynamic is particularly relevant: the sharp declines in participation observed after 2009, and the corresponding collapse of PASOK's vote share, are consistent with a broader pattern in which falling turnout signals voter dissatisfaction that parties cannot ignore. That PASOK failed to recover its pre-crisis support levels despite subsequent elections may reflect the limits of this corrective mechanism when the loss of participation is driven not by temporary disillusionment but by a fundamental realignment of voter loyalties.

The positive correlation between the two parties' vote totals under a given threshold highlights the importance of competitive dynamics in sustaining democratic engagement. When both major parties are strong and rivalry is intense, citizens perceive higher stakes in electoral outcomes and are more motivated to participate. This suggests that the health of democratic competition depends not only on the presence of meaningful alternatives but also on the relative balance of power between major competitors. Periods of one-party dominance may paradoxically weaken democracy by reducing the perceived importance of electoral participation.

The case of PASOK's collapse offers important lessons about party survival and the limits of institutional resilience. Despite decades of dominance and deep organizational roots, PASOK proved vulnerable to a perfect storm of economic crisis, policy failure, and perceived betrayal of core supporters through coalition with its traditional rival. The party's experience demonstrates that even well-established parties can face existential threats when they are held responsible for catastrophic policy outcomes. The incomplete nature of PASOK's recovery suggests that reconstructing party support after such a collapse is extraordinarily difficult, even when overall political conditions stabilize.

The current polling evidence reinforces the urgency of strategic recalibration for PASOK. Since the 2023 elections, opinion polls have consistently placed New Democracy above 27% while PASOK has hovered around 15%, a gap that reflects not merely a temporary electoral setback but a structural asymmetry in the two parties' support bases. Attempting to close this gap by competing directly with New Democracy for centrist and centre-right voters is unlikely to succeed: the empirical findings of this paper show that PASOK's vote total is driven overwhelmingly by the level of overall participation, with an elasticity of 4.69, meaning that PASOK gains far more from mobilising its own latent electorate than from poaching votes at the ideological centre.

A more promising strategy would pursue three complementary objectives. First, PASOK should invest heavily in re-engaging the large pool of former supporters who have drifted into abstention since 2009. Greek turnout has fallen from above 70% to below 55% over this period, leaving a substantial reservoir of previously active, center-left voters who no longer participate. Mobilising even a fraction of this group would yield disproportionate gains given the estimated elasticity, and would likely also attract voters from smaller parties, producing additional net vote transfers in PASOK's favor.

Second, PASOK should seek to consolidate the fragmented centre-left and left-of-centre vote that is currently dispersed across numerous small parties — including SYRIZA in its weakened state, the Communist Party (KKE), and several smaller formations — none of which individually possess the organisational capacity or electoral arithmetic to form a government. A strategy of ideological differentiation toward the left, rather than convergence toward the centre, would allow PASOK to present itself as the natural home for voters who share broadly progressive values but who currently see no compelling reason to choose PASOK over its smaller competitors.

Third, and most fundamentally, the party must rebuild the trust of voters who abandoned it after 2009, not by repositioning its policies toward the median voter — the strategy that Ezrow and Krause (2023) identify as the typical mainstream party response to declining turnout — but by offering a credible account of its past

failures and a distinctive programmatic identity — including an honest reckoning with the 2012–2015 coalition period and a clear explanation of why PASOK today is not the same party that governed alongside New Democracy under the memoranda. Without this, the perception of sameness that drove millions of voters into abstention or toward smaller parties will persist, and no amount of mobilisation effort will succeed in bringing them back.

The findings of this paper also carry a direct implication for PASOK's current political strategy. The party's efforts to position itself as the principal opposition to New Democracy — contesting the same centrist ground and seeking to erode the governing party's support — misread the fundamental lesson of the empirical evidence presented here. PASOK's electoral problem is not that New Democracy is too strong; it is that PASOK's own latent electorate has either stopped voting altogether or migrated to smaller parties on the centre-left and left. Given the estimated turnout elasticity of 4.69, every percentage point increase in overall participation translates into a disproportionate gain for PASOK — but only if the party is positioned to capture those returning voters. A strategy focused on attacking New Democracy does nothing to bring abstaining former PASOK supporters back to the polls, nor does it offer a compelling reason for voters currently parked with SYRIZA, the KKE, or smaller left-of-centre formations to switch allegiance. PASOK's path to electoral recovery runs not through the centre but through the recovery of its own dispersed and demobilised constituency.

Indeed, the historical evidence presented in this paper suggests that such a recovery is not merely aspirational. During PASOK's peak years, the party regularly exceeded 42% of the vote — a threshold that, under Greece's current electoral system with its majority bonus, would be sufficient to form a single-party government even if New Democracy simultaneously maintains or increases its own support. This is not a paradox but a direct implication of the positive correlation documented here: PASOK and New Democracy vote totals have historically moved together, meaning that a mobilisation strategy that raises overall participation can benefit both parties simultaneously. PASOK does not need New Democracy to weaken in order to win; it needs to rebuild the conditions under which high turnout and intense two-party competition amplify both parties' votes. The empirical record shows this is achievable — the question is whether the party has the strategic clarity to pursue it. Yet the evidence from the opinion polls since the 2023 elections suggests that PASOK has been moving in precisely the opposite direction: by orienting its strategy around opposition to New Democracy rather than mobilisation of its own latent electorate, the party has stagnated currently at around 15% while New Democracy has remained above 30%, a polling gap that reflects not the strength of the governing party but the strategic misalignment of its principal challenger.

The roots of this strategic misalignment can be traced directly to the 2012–2015 coalition period. By governing alongside New Democracy, PASOK lent credibility to the perception — already forming among disillusioned voters — that the two parties were effectively the same. Once that perception took hold, abstention and migration to smaller parties became rational responses: if PASOK and New Democracy were interchangeable, there was no distinctive value in voting for PASOK specifically. The data bear out the consequences. Between 2009 and 2015, PASOK lost roughly 2.7 million votes — losses that did not accrue to

New Democracy but instead dispersed into abstention and smaller parties across the left and centre-left. This is precisely the pattern one would expect if voters were not switching between the two major parties but were instead exiting the major-party system altogether. Recovering those voters therefore requires more than effective parliamentary opposition on daily political issues. Opposing New Democracy on each week's controversy may generate media visibility, but it does nothing to address the underlying perception of sameness that drove voters away in the first place. What is required is a credible, sustained, and programmatically coherent demonstration that PASOK represents a genuinely different set of values and policy priorities — one that gives former supporters a principled reason to return to the polls and a specific reason to choose PASOK rather than a smaller left-of-centre party. The turnout elasticity of 4.69 estimated in this paper means that the rewards for achieving this are large: every percentage point increase in overall participation translates into a disproportionate gain for PASOK, but only if the party has already established the identity that makes those returning voters choose it.

The operational vehicle for this mobilisation strategy is what Papanikos (2025) terms political micromarketing — the systematic, candidate-level engagement with individual voters that PASOK pioneered in Greece during its rise to power in the 1974–1981 period but has since abandoned in favour of macromarketing approaches focused on broad ideological messaging and macroeconomic positioning. Papanikos argues that PASOK currently holds a latent comparative advantage in micromarketing, as evidenced by its relative stronger performance in professional and local elections relative to national ones, but fails to exploit it because party leadership remains focused on the national political contest with New Democracy — precisely the domain in which New Democracy holds the stronger structural position. The implication is direct: mobilising abstaining former supporters requires not only a credible ideological identity but also the organisational infrastructure to reach those voters individually, at the local and occupational level, before the next electoral cycle.

Papanikos (2025) further argues that advances in artificial intelligence have substantially reduced the cost of micromarketing, making personalised voter outreach feasible even for a party operating with limited resources. Drawing on evidence from Simchon et. al. (2024), he shows that AI-assisted political microtargeting can increase voter participation, reduce party defection, and remain effective even when targeting a single individual characteristic. For PASOK, this research finding is particularly consequential: the turnout elasticity of 4.69 estimated in the present paper implies that each percentage point increase in overall participation yields a disproportionate gain for PASOK — but only if the party has the candidate presence and local outreach capacity to capture returning voters at the constituency level. Micromarketing is therefore not merely a communications tactic; it is the organisational precondition for the mobilisation strategy that the empirical evidence recommends.

At the theoretical level, the findings presented here qualify the standard spatial model of party competition by showing that electoral outcomes are not always zero-sum: below historically high vote-share thresholds, both major parties benefit simultaneously from increased participation. The asymmetry in elasticities — 4.7 for PASOK versus 3.5 for New Democracy — further suggests that the two

parties draw on structurally different segments of the potential electorate, a distinction that has implications for how turnout fluctuations shape the balance of power in two-party systems beyond the Greek case.

This study has several limitations that suggest directions for future research. The analysis focuses on aggregate-level relationships and cannot directly identify the individual-level mechanisms through which turnout changes affect party votes. Survey data linking individual turnout decisions to vote choices would provide valuable microfoundations for the aggregate patterns documented here. Additionally, the relatively small sample size (twenty elections) limits statistical power and requires caution in interpreting cointegration tests and other time-series results. Future research with longer time series or comparative data from other countries could provide more robust evidence on these relationships.

The Greek case raises broader questions about the nature of party competition and voter mobilization in polarized democracies. The finding that both major political parties benefit from increased turnout—rather than competing for a fixed pool of votes—suggests that electoral competition is not always zero-sum. Understanding the conditions under which competition expands rather than merely redistributes the electorate remains an important challenge for political science. As democracies worldwide face declining participation and increased voter alienation, the Greek experience offers both cautionary lessons and grounds for optimism about the resilience of competitive party systems.

Finally, comparative analysis extending the framework developed here to other two-party or two-dominant-party systems — particularly those that experienced similar crisis-driven party collapses, such as PASOK's in Greece — would test whether the non-zero-sum turnout dynamics and asymmetric elasticities documented here are features of a broader class of polarized democratic systems or specific to the Greek case.

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Appendix A. *Data*

Election	Year	Total votes cast (participation)	Participation rate (%)	PASOK total votes	PASOK vote share (%)	New Democracy total votes	New Democracy vote share (%)
1	1974	4963558	79.53%	666413	0.1343	2669133	0.5377
2	1977	5193891	77.76%	1300025	0.2503	2146365	0.4132
3	1981	5753478	78.61%	2726309	0.4739	2034496	0.3536
4	1985	6422352	79.10%	2916450	0.4541	2599949	0.4048
5	1989	6669228	80.33%	2551518	0.3826	2887488	0.4330
6	1989	6798159	80.69%	2723739	0.4007	3093055	0.4550
7	1990	6698591	79.51%	2543042	0.3796	3088137	0.4610
8	1993	7019925	79.22%	3235017	0.4608	2711737	0.3863
9	1996	6978656	76.35%	2813245	0.4031	2584765	0.3704
10	2000	7026527	74.97%	3007596	0.4280	2935196	0.4177
11	2004	7573368	76.50%	3003275	0.3966	3359682	0.4436
12	2007	7355026	74.15%	2727279	0.3708	2994979	0.4072
13	2009	7044606	70.95%	3012542	0.4276	2295719	0.3259
14	2012	6476751	65.10%	833452	0.1287	1192103	0.1841
15	2012	6217000	62.47%	756024	0.1216	1825497	0.2936
16	2015	6330786	63.87%	289469	0.0457	1718694	0.2715
17	2015	5566295	56.57%	341732	0.0614	1526400	0.2742
18	2019	5769644	57.78%	457623	0.0793	2251618	0.3903
19	2023	6061040	61.10%	676165	0.1116	2407750	0.3973
20	2023	5273669	53.74%	617487	0.1171	2115322	0.4011

Note: Election dates are reported in Table 1. Source: Ministry of the Interior.

Appendix B: *Technical Details and Robustness Checks*

Models and variable transformations

Dependent variables — total votes and vote share for PASOK and New Democracy. Vote shares are expressed as fractions (e.g., 0.2814 = 28.14%).
Regressors — the single explanatory variable in each model is participation, measured either as the raw number of voters (Participation) or as the participation rate (Participation %). No functional forms are used: level-level (Y on X), semi-log (ln Y on X), and level-log (Y on ln X). No lags or additional regressors are included in the reported specifications.

Elasticity formulas and how point estimates are computed

Elasticities are evaluated at the sample means $\bar{X}$and $\bar{Y}$. The formulas used for each specification are:

- **Level–level (Y on X)**
  Elasticity = $\beta \cdot \frac{\bar{X}}{\bar{Y}}$
- **Semi-log (ln Y on X)**
  Elasticity = $\beta \cdot \bar{X}$
- **Level-log (Y on ln X)**
  Elasticity = $\frac{\beta}{\bar{Y}}$

Here β is the OLS coefficient from the corresponding regression, $\bar{X}$ is the sample mean of Participation (or Participation rate when that regressor is used), and $\bar{Y}$is the sample mean of the dependent variable (total votes or vote share). All elasticities are expressed in percent units (a

value of 3.83 means a 1% increase in participation is associated with a 3.83% increase in the outcome at the sample mean).

Residual bootstrap procedure used to obtain 95% confidence intervals

Purpose — to capture sampling variability of the elasticity as a nonlinear function of the estimated coefficient and the sample means.

Steps

1. Estimate the original OLS model and save fitted values $\hat{y}$and residuals $\hat{\varepsilon}$.
2. For each bootstrap replication (5,000 replications):
    - Draw a sample of residuals with replacement from $\{\hat{\varepsilon}\}$.
    - Construct a bootstrap dependent variable $y^* = \hat{y} + \hat{\varepsilon}^*$.
    - Re-estimate the OLS model on $(X, y^*)$and obtain β^*.
    - Compute the bootstrap elasticity at the original sample means using the same formula as above.
3. After all replications, take the 2.5th and 97.5th percentiles of the bootstrap elasticity distribution as the **bootstrap 95% confidence interval**.

Notes on implementation

The bootstrap resamples residuals (residual bootstrap) rather than cases to preserve the original regressor values and the chronological ordering of elections. Elasticities are recomputed at the original sample means in every replication so the intervals reflect uncertainty in $\beta$and its nonlinear mapping into elasticity.

Interpretation guidance and reporting conventions

- **Point elasticity** is the central estimate and should be read as an associational effect at the sample mean, not a causal effect.
- **Bootstrap 95% CI** gives a nonparametric measure of sampling uncertainty under the residual-bootstrap assumption; intervals that exclude zero indicate the association is robust to sampling variability in this dataset.
- **Units** — elasticities are percent responses to a 1% change in participation; implied absolute vote gains at the sample mean can be obtained by multiplying the percent change by the mean outcome and are reported elsewhere in the paper.

Key caveats and limitations

- **Small sample** — N = 20 elections is a fundamental limitation; bootstrap intervals reflect sampling variability but do not overcome small-sample identification or endogeneity concerns.
- **Associational nature** — participation and party votes may be jointly determined; OLS is standard for election aggregate analyses but does not by itself establish causality.
- **Irregular spacing** — elections are not evenly spaced in time; this affects time-series properties and is why no lagged structures are used.
- **Robustness** — the paper reports multiple functional forms and sensitivity checks; the bootstrap intervals reported here are one way to quantify uncertainty but should be interpreted alongside influence diagnostics and the other robustness checks in the appendix.

Sample means used to evaluate elasticities

- **Mean Participation** $\bar{X} = 6{,}359{,}628$
- **Mean PASOK votes** $\bar{Y}_{PASOK} = 1{,}859{,}920$
- **Mean PASOK vote share** $\bar{Y}_{PASOK,share} = 0.2814$
- **Mean New Democracy votes** $\bar{Y}_{ND} = 2{,}421{,}904$
- **Mean New Democracy vote share** $\bar{Y}_{ND,share} = 0.3811$

Appendix C. *Leave-one-out Analysis*

Election dropped	**PASOK elasticity**	**ND elasticity**
All data	4.7	3.5
1 (1974)	4.1	3.7
2 (1977)	4.8	3.5
3 (1981)	4.9	3.5
4 (1985)	4.7	3.8
5 (1989, June)	4.7	3.6
6 (1989, November)	4.7	3.4
7 (1990)	4.7	3.6
8 (1993)	4.6	3.5
9 (1996)	4.6	3.5
10 (2000)	4.6	3.6
11 (2004)	4.7	3.3
12 (2007)	4.6	3.4
13 (2009)	4.5	3.5
14 (2012, May)	4.7	2.8
15 (2012, June)	4.7	3.6
16 (2015, January)	4.7	3.4
17 (2015, September)	4.5	3.7
18 (2019)	4.7	3.5
19 (2023, May)	4.7	3.9
20 (2023, June)	5.5	3.4

Note: In all 20 leave-one-out estimations the participation coefficient was statistically significant at the 1% level for both PASOK and New Democracy.