

# 1 Making Democracy More Representative of the People

2  
3 *This paper examines the evolving representativeness of democracy through a*  
4 *descriptive analysis of the United States and Ghana, two countries shaped by*  
5 *distinct historical trajectories yet similar democratic tensions between the period*  
6 *1990 - 2025. In this context, we conceptualize democracy as constituted through*  
7 *the interaction of cultural practices and economic structures. Hence, we move*  
8 *beyond procedural accounts to interrogate how power, wealth, media, and*  
9 *institutional design condition meaningful participation. The U.S. case traces a*  
10 *pattern of democratic expansion followed by a seeming decline and the growing*  
11 *influence of social media and artificial intelligence on political polarization and*  
12 *participation. The Ghanaian case examines democratic consolidation following*  
13 *decades of political instability, highlighting electoral reforms, media liberalization,*  
14 *poverty reduction, and expanded civic engagement, while also identifying enduring*  
15 *challenges. Overall, we demonstrate how cultural arrangements, economic*  
16 *hierarchies, and media ecosystems interact to either enable or constrain democratic*  
17 *representation. Findings from our descriptive case studies suggest that democratic*  
18 *erosion and exclusion are not exceptional failures but predictable outcomes when*  
19 *structural inequalities remain embedded within democratic institution. We*  
20 *conclude by advancing a praxis-oriented approach to democratic renewal that*  
21 *integrates institutional reform, economic redistribution, labor protections, media*  
22 *accountability, and ethical governance of artificial intelligence.*

23  
24 **Keywords:** *democratic representation, comparative democracy, political*  
25 *economy, wealth and inequality, social media and artificial intelligence, United*  
26 *States, Ghana*

## 27 28 29 Introduction

30  
31 Even where democracy is well established for centuries, in a nation state, its  
32 continued existence cannot be guaranteed. This fragility suggests democracy must  
33 constantly be critically considered if it is to be enable all groups within society to  
34 have a say in their government. No nation should assume its democratic nature will  
35 continue for future generations just because the democratic history has been long.  
36 Instead, the question of what can be done to strengthen the democracy needs to be  
37 part of a constant societal discourse (EIU, 2024). This essay shines a light on  
38 democracy by comparing two case studies: one in Ghana and the other in the United  
39 States focusing on the period between 1990-2025. The 1990's was chosen because  
40 this is the time when Ghana was making strong moves *to become a democracy*  
41 (Consultative Assembly, 1992) while in the US during the 1990's democracy hit a  
42 stasis fueled by several legislative moves that weakened this system of  
43 representation (Diamond, 2022).

44 These cases consider how direct cultural influences (e.g., legislative voting  
45 acts), and the cultural and economic conditions upon which democracy lies (e.g.,  
46 the relation between race and wealth inequality) influence the representativeness of  
47 a democracy. More specifically, these cases consider what groups get access to  
48 resources (and those that do not) thereby influencing future opportunities, their

1 knowledge of civics and their ability to think critically about the political  
2 information coming from government representatives. Moving further, these cases  
3 also inquire into how social media and AI either reinforce or broaden users  
4 preconceived biases. With these cultural factors in mind, the cases also focus on the  
5 economic sphere beginning with a consideration of the voice of workers (or lack of  
6 voice) to shape work conditions and compensation, as well as wealth inequalities  
7 that leave the poor in a survival mode thereby depending on politicians to  
8 understand and meet their needs. The rich, on the other hand, consistently influence  
9 the processes of voting such as who gets to vote as well as getting politicians elected  
10 by financing their campaigns.

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

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

- 32
- 33 • What does the comparison of the case studies say about the meaning or
- 34 boundaries of democracy?
- 35 • What does the comparison of the case studies suggest is needed to make
- 36 society more representative of the people?
- 37

38 The case studies begin by looking at the cultural factors that influence the  
39 representativeness of a democracy. These cultural factors are divided into direct  
40 factors such as who gets to vote and the cultural conditions that influence democracy  
41 such as the construction of the relation between race, class and schooling. Once  
42 these cultural factors are articulated, the case study moves to the economic  
43 conditions that work with or against democratic ambitions such as wealth inequality  
44 and unionization. While these factors are separated in this descriptive case study  
45 sections, when the paper moves to the discussion the cultural and the economic are

1 woven together to get a holistic view of understanding and strengthening  
2 democracy.

3  
4  
5 **U.S. Case Study**  
6 **Cultural Factors**

7  
8 *Direct Influences*  
9

10 **Voting Rights legislation:** While our emphasis is on the period between  
11 1990's and 2025 it is essential to note that democracy, in terms of its  
12 representativeness, has always been a contested terrain in the United States.  
13 Economically powerful groups have long tried to keep the vote out of the hands of  
14 the less powerful. For example, in the 1700's many Southern states limited voting  
15 to white male landowners (Engerman & Sokoloff, 2005), women did not get the  
16 right to vote until the 1920's and even in the mid 60's blacks still had to deal with  
17 literacy tests and poll taxes (Keyssar, 2009) until President Johnson passed the  
18 Voting Rights Act in the spring of 1965.

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

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

41 After a ten-year lull in passed legislation that lasted until 2012 and expanded  
42 the representativeness of US democracy, voting rights legislation took a dramatic  
43 turn to working against the Voting Rights Act (VRA) established in 1965. In *Shelby*  
44 *County v. Holder* (2013) the supreme court gutted a key provision of the VRA  
45 removing federal oversight of election changes in jurisdictions with a history of  
46 voter suppression (Persily & Mann, 2013) This decision enabled states to pass new

1 restrictive voting laws which has a disproportionate effect on minority [Black]  
2 voters.

3 Shortly before this decision in 2010 the supreme court also acted to make an  
4 economic ruling in term of contributions to campaigns—Citizens United (Epstein,  
5 2011). They ruled that corporations and unions have the same first amendment  
6 rights as individuals and struck down restrictions on independent political spending.  
7 The ruling paved the way for super PACS and a massive increase in dark money  
8 raising concerns about the concentration of political power among wealthy donors  
9 and special interests.

10 Building on Shelby County, Brnovich v. Democratic National Committee in  
11 2021 the Supreme Court weakened Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, making it  
12 more difficult for plaintiffs to sue over discriminatory voting practices. Although  
13 two other bills were proposed Freedom to Vote Act (proposed, 2021–2024) and the  
14 John Lewis Voting Rights Act never passed the congress and therefore had no effect  
15 on increasing representative democracy.

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

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

### 26 *Underlying Cultural/Economic Conditions*

27  
28  
29 **Social Media/AI:** In all contexts democracy requires communication between  
30 those in power (representatives) and the people in the country. There is also a need  
31 for communication between groups so a common ground of some sort can be  
32 established. Discussing social media and AI are both important factors in  
33 understanding communication between the people and their representatives as well  
34 as between various groups within the society.

35 In the 1990's USA, the internet existed in a rudimentary force and was not a  
36 significant force in American political life. For example, only three million people  
37 world-wide had internet access. However, in the 2000's social media gained some  
38 traction with platforms like Six Degrees (1997) Friendster (2002) and My Space  
39 (2003), although these did not focus on political communication. By 2008 social  
40 media started to takeoff with Barack Obama's grass roots campaign that leaned on  
41 social media to get his message out in an efficient way that reached many homes.

42 By 2012 both major parties in the US tried to expand their bases by using social  
43 media. Studies showed that social media's effect on voter beliefs in falsehoods was  
44 small except with those already in one camp or the other. In 2016, the influence of  
45 social media in politics gained tremendous currency, creating echo chambers by

1 exposing users to content that reinforces their held beliefs thereby deepening  
2 ideological divides (Angelova, 2025; Garrett, 2019).

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

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

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

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

## 38 **Economic Conditions that Influence Democracy**

### 40 *Wealth Inequality*

41  
42 Although the emphasis of this section is on wealth inequality between racial  
43 groups, it is important to go back to the founding of the U.S. The founding fathers  
44 (they were all men), were wealthy landholders, merchants or lawyers with  
45 significant financial interests, many holding public securities that would benefit  
46 from a stable national government. Put, directly they founded the U.S. primarily to

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

5 Wealth inequality in the US has significantly increased across various racial  
6 groups from 1990 to 2025 with wealth becoming concentrated among the top  
7 earners, older generation, and white households, while the bottom half and minority  
8 group have seen little improvement (Saez & Zucman, 2016). For the top 1%, their  
9 share of total U.S. wealth grew substantially from about 17-23% in 1990 to  
10 approximately 26-30.8% by 2022-2024. The share held by the top 10% increased  
11 from 56% in 1989 to 60% in 2022. Conversely, the bottom 50% of the population  
12 has remained low and even declined slightly in relative terms. It was about 3.5% in  
13 1990 and hit a low of .4% in 2011 and stood at about 2.4-2.5% in 2024. In addition,  
14 following the passage of the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act" (OBBBA) in July  
15 2025, tax legislation from 2024–2025 has cemented and is projected to increase U.S.  
16 wealth inequality. The law permanently extends key provisions from the 2017 Tax  
17 Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) that favor high-income earners and adds new tax breaks,  
18 while making cuts to social spending (Jones & Rycroft, 2023).

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

#### 23 24 *Unionization & Wage Inequality*

25  
26 From 1990-2025, union participation has been in steady decline directly  
27 impacting working conditions and contributing to slower wage growth and  
28 increased inequality for the typical worker. Union membership has consistently  
29 decreased from 1990 to 2025 reaching a historic low of 9.9% in the US workforce  
30 in 2024, down from approximately 15.5 % in 1990. Public-sector workers have  
31 consistently higher union membership rates than private-sector workers. In 2024,  
32 the public-sector-sector rate was 32.2% compared to the private sector rate of 5%.  
33 The decline in union membership has impacted both union and non-union members  
34 as unions traditionally set wages. For example, during this time median weekly  
35 wages (adjusted for inflation) were approximately 19% higher in Q1 2025 than in  
36 Q1 1985. While this includes the latter half of the 1980s, it indicates a multi-decade  
37 trend of positive, but slow growth. However, when compared to middle  
38 management and executive salaries during this same period, the gap is dramatic with  
39 CEO compensation for the 350 largest US firms increasing by hundreds of  
40 percentage points in inflation-adjusted terms. One study using the "realized  
41 compensation" measure (actual take-home pay from stock sales) notes an increase  
42 of over 1,094% since 1978, with a significant portion of that growth occurring in  
43 the 1990-2025 period (Lawrence, 2021).

44  
45  
46

1 **Ghanaian Case Study**  
2 **Cultural and Economic Factors**

3  
4 Ghana is one of few African countries that has gained global acclaim for its  
5 stable democracy and commitment to the rule of law over the last 35 years. Like  
6 many African countries however, the country was once noted for political instability  
7 between the period 1966 – 1981 when military governments were a thing. In this  
8 essay, we take a look at some factors that have led to Ghana’s democratic  
9 renaissance and related issues. Key among these being electoral reforms, voting  
10 rights, wealth distribution and liberalization of the media landscape. Following  
11 which we discuss some challenges for democratic representation in the country.  
12 First, we present a brief overview of Ghana’s political terrain before 1990.

13  
14 *The period before 1990: political instability, and a deteriorating economy*

15  
16 As the first Sub-Sahara African country to gain independence from colonial rule,  
17 Ghana quickly established itself as a beacon of hope for Africa’s independence  
18 movement (French, 2025; Onyeneho, 2023). Barely a decade after proclaiming the  
19 country’s independence, Kwame Nkrumah, the country’s first native president was  
20 overthrown in a military coup d’état (Asante, 2020; Gutteridge, 2023). It was the first  
21 of five intermittent coup d’états between the period 1966 and 1981. Two of these  
22 (1979 and 1981) had been led by Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings<sup>1</sup>. Shortly after  
23 his second coup d’état, declining economic fortunes forced Rawlings and his  
24 Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC<sup>2</sup>) to seek support from Bretton Woods<sup>3</sup>  
25 (Harnack et al., 2000). However, such support will only be available on certain  
26 conditionalities. Key among these including reforms across Ghana’s public  
27 institutions and a return to multi-party democracy (Leite et al., 2000).

28 To make this possible, the country needed a new constitution and to also lift the  
29 ban on political activism. The national committee for democracy (NCD) was  
30 formed in 1991 (Awal, 2012; Harnack et al., 2000), and was tasked with  
31 consolidating upon the positive achievements made in the country’s participatory  
32 democracy (Gyimah-Boadi, 1991). Hence, the processes towards a new constitution  
33 were to reflect the values and beliefs of all Ghanaians. Hence, “proposals were to  
34 be placed before a 260-member Consultative Assembly (CA) made up of 117  
35 representatives from the District and Metropolitan Assemblies, 121 representatives  
36 of various ‘recognized’ public organizations and associations and 22 government  
37 appointees” (Gyimah Boadi, 1991, p.6).

38  
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<sup>1</sup>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.

<sup>2</sup>Interim government formed by Jerry Rawlings after the 1981 coup d’état.

<sup>3</sup>Referring to the IMF, the World Bank, and other international finance corporations based in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, USA.

1 Criminal libel law, state control and a rigid media landscape

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

11  
12 Electoral reforms and the democratic experiment

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

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

<sup>4</sup>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](https://www.commonlii.org/gh/legis/num_act/cc196029115.pdf)

<sup>5</sup>For details, see “The stolen verdict : Ghana, November 1992 presidential election : report of the New Patriotic Party. (1993). In. Accra, Ghana :: New Partiotic Party.

<sup>6</sup>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.

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

### 11 Liberalization / decolonization of the media landscape

12 Besides electoral reforms, Ghana’s decision to liberalize its media landscape is  
 13 another factor that have helped strengthen democratic participation in the country  
 14 (Osei-Owusu, 2015; Tettey, 2017; Williams & Kwofie, 2022). As a result, Ghana  
 15 now boasts of a robust media landscape which has since shifted from the colonial  
 16 model of radio to a decolonized model of radio (Akrofi-Quarcoo & Gadzekpo,  
 17 2020; Mohammed, 2025). These coupled with the repeal of the criminal libel law in  
 18 2001 (Act 602) has empowered Ghanaians to participate freely in the civic discourse  
 19 without fear of being reprimanded. Both sides of the country’s political divide have  
 20 been quick to leverage these in support of their ideologies.

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

### 31 Wealth (re)distribution

32 Ghana significantly reduced poverty levels over an estimated 50% since the  
 33 return to democratic governance (Gradín & Schotte, 2020; Osei-Assibey, 2014).  
 34 These were made possible through the implementation of the Structural Adjustment  
 35 Program (SAP) and other policy interventions, as well as the discovery of crude oil  
 36 in commercial quantities. This created jobs and spurred growth in the country’s  
 37 services sector, culminating in the attainment of a lower middle-income by 2010.  
 38 Available data from Worldscorecard (2025) shows that Ghana’s GDP per capita  
 39 increased from a paltry US\$1,738 in 1992 to US\$8,037 in 2024. In particular,  
 40 policies such as the free compulsory universal basic education (FCUBE<sup>7</sup>), the single  
 41 spine salary structure, the free maternal healthcare, national health insurance act,  
 42  
 43

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<sup>7</sup> 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).

1 free senior high school (FSHS) and others have been instrumental (Chandramohan  
2 & Amedahe, 2009; Darkwa & Acquah, 2022).

3 **Unionization:** Workers right and welfare are widely respected and upheld in  
4 Ghanaian organizations. Mostly, there is the freedom to join any organized labour  
5 platform of choice; most of which have umbrella bodies superintending over their  
6 nationwide activities. Nonetheless, most if not all of these unionized workers fall  
7 under the auspices of the Ghana Trades Union Congress (GTUC) which negotiates  
8 minimum wage and salary increments on behalf of organized labor. Coupled with a  
9 disjointed labor front and allegations of corruption amongst union leaders, these  
10 negotiations typically result in no more than 10 - 20% increments, a trend that  
11 mostly favors those in the middle to upper income bracket. As at today, minimum  
12 wage in Ghana still remains under \$2, a little below the global poverty line.  
13

#### 14 Challenges for democracy and political representation in Ghana

##### 15 Systemic Inequality

16  
17 Certainly, prevailing trends in Ghana have not bridged the gap between the rich  
18 and poor as had been envisaged. The situation is attributed to the underlying  
19 systemic and structural issues that keep frustrating pro-poor growth and social  
20 protection initiatives (Dim & Asomah, 2025; Osei-Assibey, 2014). Most of these  
21 issues have long existed before the promulgation of the 1992 Republican  
22 constitution. For instance, the country's natural resources and economic  
23 opportunities are traditionally concentrated in the south, largely due to a favorable  
24 rainfall pattern, mineral rich forests and arable lands as compared to the North.  
25 These were instrumental in the colonial regime's decision to move Northerners to  
26 farm on cocoa plantations in the south (Kuusaana, 2022; Sutton, 1989). This trend  
27 still persists today in the form of seasonal migration, the benefits of which accrues  
28 mostly to Southern farmer owners. Naturally, this also created a contemptuous  
29 ethno-tribal relationship between the farm owners and labourers. Such complex  
30 interactions also manifest through voting patterns and ideological preferences  
31 within these areas (Adams & Agomor, 2015).  
32

##### 33 Winner takes all system

34 Like many contemporary democracies, Ghana runs an executive presidential  
35 system which grants enormous powers to the president and the ruling party. In  
36 Ghana's case, the situation has led to a scenario where the country's democratic  
37 institutions have been 'rhetorically decentralised' but 'practically recentralised'  
38 (Anaafo, 2018). More to do with how the consolidation of power in the Executive  
39 branch enables them to control the respective local governance structures through  
40 political appointments. Thus far, this has inured to the benefits of Ghana's elites due  
41 to instances of clientelism, neopatrimonialism and political patronage (Dim and  
42 Asomah, 2025). In particular, the "alternations of power between the two major  
43 political parties [i.e., NPP and NDC] have been historically accompanied by shifts  
44 in access to public resources" (Dim and Asomah, 2025, p.6).  
45  
46

1 Political party financing

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

13  
14 Free speech, social media and algorithms

15 In Ghana’s case, the liberal media landscape provided a fertile ground for the  
16 internet boom and proliferation of social media that occurred from 2010 onwards.  
17 Since then, these social media platforms have offered the means for Ghanaians to  
18 hold governments accountable without having to go through ‘*traditional*  
19 *gatekeepers*<sup>9</sup>’. That coupled with Ghana’s youthful population have made social  
20 media the new ‘*norm*’ for political and civic engagement in the country (Dzisah,  
21 2018; Van Gyampo, 2017a). Nevertheless, with such tools also came new  
22 challenges that threaten the foundations of Ghana’s democracy. These challenges  
23 emanating from the underlying mechanisms and excessive freedoms that social  
24 media platforms grant its users (Dzisah, 2018; Van Gyampo, 2017b). More  
25 specifically, the algorithms that powers these platforms tend to aggregate  
26 information into trends without necessarily checking for accuracy. Hence, there is  
27 the tendency for an issue to trend although it may not be true. Furthermore, the  
28 incentives given to creatives to generate content on these platforms not only projects  
29 dominant narratives but could also incite ethno-tribal<sup>10</sup> and political conflicts<sup>11</sup> as  
30 has been witnessed in Ghana recently.

31  
32 Representation of Ghanaians in the diaspora

33 Furthermore, representation of Ghanaians in the diaspora also remains an  
34 outstanding issue that is yet to be resolved. This category of Ghanaians serves as a  
35 major economic backbone for the country through their remittances back home  
36 which now exceed foreign direct investments (FDI) in the country. Yet, they are  
37 unable to participate in national elections from their respective jurisdictions abroad.  
38 To this end, an amendment was made in 2006 through the representation of people

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<sup>8</sup>With reference to the use of money and other financial incentives to influence electoral outcomes.

<sup>9</sup>Used with reference to editors and editorial processes required on mainstream media platforms.

<sup>10</sup>Referring to social media tensions between supporters of the Asantehene and Dormaaahene respectively. See <https://www.myjoyonline.com/urgently-help-resolve-the-asantehene-dormaa-hene-feud-chieftaincy-minister-to-national-house-of-chiefs/>

<sup>11</sup>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-injured/>

1 abroad law (ROPAL). A law which sought to allow such persons to vote in  
 2 successive national elections. However, due to the lack of clear-cut procedures,  
 3 funding and logistical challenges, the bill is yet to see implementation.

#### 6 **Implications of the Case Studies**

8 As noted earlier, this section compares the two case studies to see new  
 9 possibilities for change that makes democracy more representative of the people.  
 10 By doing so, we also hope to see democracy through a wider lens and not just in  
 11 procedural terms. We begin with what can be done.

#### 13 *Democracy, the Constitution and Wealth inequality*

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

18 The US constitution was written and approved in 1787 while the Ghanaian  
 19 constitution was approved through referendum in 1993. One notable difference  
 20 between both is that the Ghanaian constitution builds upon three other versions  
 21 (1957/1960, 1969, 1979) that were abrogated after the intermittent military  
 22 takeovers. However, just like the US constitution, the Ghanaian constitution does  
 23 not explicitly mention the clause that “*all men (sic) are created equal*”. The  
 24 significance of this is that the constitution is the supreme law of the land while other  
 25 documents are, therefore, secondary (Wood, 2021). Though the above -mentioned  
 26 statement was in the Declaration of Independence, in the U.S. case, this document  
 27 could not be built upon as is true of amendments to the constitution. In the US case  
 28 there were four amendments that spoke to all men are created equal: The 14<sup>th</sup> in  
 29 1868 that focused on equal protection under the law, the 15<sup>th</sup> in 1870 that voting  
 30 rights could not be based on race criteria, the 19<sup>th</sup> in 1920 that voting rights could  
 31 not be based on “sex” and the 26<sup>th</sup> in (1971) that one was entitled to a vote at the age  
 32 of 18 years old (Vile, 2021). While these amendments moved toward the notion of  
 33 all men are created equal in practice the judgement of what constitutes *equal* was  
 34 left to the supreme court. For the first 200 years of the US constitution, the supreme  
 35 court supported legislation that moved toward an inclusive notion of equality, and  
 36 yet this same supreme court was reluctant to say so explicitly.

37 In the Ghanaian case, whereas the 1992 Republican constitution does not  
 38 explicitly mention the equality of men, it hints at this in articles 1(1), 12(2), 55(2)  
 39 and (10) respectively. For instance, in article 1(1), the constitution assigns  
 40 sovereignty to “the people of Ghana in whose name and for whose welfare the  
 41 powers of government are to be exercised”. However, a closer hint towards the idea  
 42 of equality is enshrined in article 12(2) which states “[e]very person in Ghana,  
 43 whatever his race, place of origin, political opinion, colour, religion, creed or gender  
 44 shall be entitled to the fundamental human rights and freedoms of the individual  
 45 contained in this Chapter but subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others  
 46 and for the public interest”. This is followed by article 55 (2) and (10) which grants

1 universal adult suffrage and the right to political activism for all Ghanaians. These  
2 clauses are not only an amendment of the original constitution promulgated in 1960  
3 but also borrows ideas from those promulgated in the 1969 and 1979 constitutions  
4 (Mensah, 2022). For instance, the 1960 constitution did not have any such “clear  
5 provisions for fundamental human rights” except for those espoused under “the  
6 solemn declaration by the president before the people” (Mensah, 2022, p. 259). On  
7 the contrary, the 1969 (article 12) and 1979 (article 19) constitutions of Ghana had  
8 similar provisions just as those espoused in article 12 (2) of the current constitution.  
9 Thus, unlike the US, it took Ghana less than a decade to amend its original  
10 constitution and collectively 30 years after independence to move towards  
11 correcting representational injustices in its constitution albeit a lot of grey areas still  
12 remain.

13 With respect to electoral democracy, on that first day of the approved  
14 constitution all Ghanaians could vote whereas in the US it took close to 200 years  
15 and still voting for everyone was not guaranteed. This conflict about equality and  
16 democracy showed up clearly in the dismantling of the John Lewis Voting rights  
17 act by the Supreme court and in Trump vs US where the notion that no one is above  
18 the law was rebuked by the Supreme court thereby giving a president immunity  
19 from almost all prosecution related to their job as president (Delahunty & Yoo,  
20 2024). Unlike the US, the right of all Ghanaians to vote is not a contested issue in  
21 Ghana. However, the real issue is about who qualifies as a Ghanaian as well as  
22 whether all Ghanaians are equal before the law. The former emerging from the  
23 creation of Ghana as a nation state by the colonial regime.

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

35 Nonetheless, the major bone of contention is now about the equality of all  
36 Ghanaians before the law. For instance, in the recent case of the Republic v. Kwame  
37 Baffoe (2025), the judge ruled that “all men are equal, but some are more equal  
38 before the law”. By inference, the judge was suggesting that the president and other  
39 high-ranking officials deserves preferential treatment before the law. Thus,  
40 confirming a widely held perception among Ghanaians that elitist groups always  
41 have their way with the law (Osae-Kwapong, 2025). Akin to the US scenario, such  
42 instances suggest that, the notion of equality of all men as enshrined in the Ghanaian  
43 constitution is just a matter of interpretation, in which the judiciary are the supreme  
44 arbiters.

45  
46

1 *Rationale for the status quo*

2  
3 Why have both countries been so reluctant to make an unequivocal statement,  
4 a legal statement that all men are created equal? In the US for instance, the situation  
5 is partly attributed to the “monied class” that owned the land and eventually the  
6 capitalist class that accumulated gaudy sums of money wanted to implement laws  
7 that would maintain their privilege and wealth. For example, of the 55 delegates at  
8 the Constitutional Convention, twelve including George Washington, owned and  
9 managed large slave-operated plantations, six delegates were major land speculators  
10 and thirty-five were lawyers who earned money often through dealing with debts  
11 and property rights on the frontier which allowed them to accumulate significant  
12 wealth. They also had access to intimate details about the economic system built on  
13 private property right which compensated them both financially and socially. The  
14 delegates were interested, at least partially, in maintaining their wealth and social  
15 position above others and therefore had questions of where the democracy would  
16 lead them.

17 In the Ghanaian context, the British had administered the then colonial territory  
18 through locally trained bureaucrats and other loyalists who later became elites in  
19 Ghanaian society. Among these locally trained bureaucrats were children of  
20 prominent chiefs, businessmen, cocoa farmers and traders who aligned with the  
21 colonial regime to protect their own interests (Gocking, 2014). This created a system  
22 of political patronage which exists till today and may have manifested in the  
23 processes leading to promulgation of the 1992 Republican constitution. For  
24 instance, Gyimah Boadi (1991) mentions that whereas the committee of experts that  
25 drafted the 1992 Republican constitution had some political credibility, same cannot  
26 be said for members of the NCD and CA. The latter two had been filled with  
27 appendages of the PNDC regime, who for one reason or the other were looking to  
28 protect their own interests. This was also a deliberate strategy to safeguard the  
29 regime from some sort of national trial as had happened elsewhere (Gyimah-Boadi,  
30 1991). Thus, except for a few differences, the Ghanaian scenario portrays a very  
31 similar scenario to the American scenario where patronage and classism may have  
32 superseded the broader national interest.

33 Going back to the US case, the delegates wealth at the 1787 constitutional  
34 convention also fundamentally shaped their skepticism toward “pure” democracy  
35 leading them to build a system of checks and balances designed to protect property  
36 and prevent “mob rule” (Beard, 1913). Democracy was viewed by these delegates,  
37 in part, as an approach to governance that could lead to mob rule. “Mob rule,” in  
38 turn, led to instability of the privileged status of the wealthy delegates because it was  
39 thought the uneducated masses and the poor might vote to redistribute wealth. As a  
40 result, the founders preferred a republic over a democracy. James Madison argued  
41 that a republic would dilute the power of the poor and protect the nations “true”  
42 interests (Madison, 1787). To insulate the government from popular fluctuations the  
43 delegates also built-in filters into the Constitution (e.g., the Senate was initially  
44 chosen by State Legislators, and the electoral system limited the democratic  
45 influence of the popular vote). One limitation of this historical view is that it could  
46 be claimed we are imposing presentist values and conditions to a historical situation

1 that is no longer the case - but how much has changed in turns of the importance of  
2 wealthy political leaders that are interested in protecting their wealth and privilege.

3 In Ghana’s instance, wealth may not have directly influenced the drafting of  
4 the constitution. However, the need to maintain political power, status and privilege  
5 may have played a part in the constitutional development processes. As Gyimah-  
6 Boadi (1991) observes, “people who ha[d] found lucrative careers in the [PNDC]  
7 regime” (p.14), in particular those appointed unto the NCD and CA were in favor  
8 of a pro-government stance. This stance included a desire for “the PNDC [to]  
9 continue in office” as well as denouncing “the evils of multi-party politics”  
10 (Gyimah-Boadi, 1991, p. 7). In doing so, these privileged few were not only seeking  
11 to centralize power in the regime but were also looking to extend the tenure of the  
12 regime. Such that it would allow them an opportunity to hold on to their positions  
13 and invariably influence the sharing of the national cake. It appears then, that the  
14 consultative processes beneath the drafting of the 1992 constitution was just a matter  
15 of formality over functionality, one that did not necessarily see all Ghanaians to be  
16 of equal stature before the law. In that vein, we may deem Ghana’s transition back  
17 into democratic governance as a grant by the military regime and not a negotiated  
18 outcome by the people (Gyimah-Boadi, 1991). Whichever way it was, Ghanaians  
19 were eager to embrace it due to the excesses of a military regime that very often  
20 infringed upon their fundamental human rights.

### 21 22 *Current influences on democratic governance*

23  
24 How have these dynamics shaped democratic governance in both the US and  
25 Ghana? Of the 50 Senators in the US senate today, many would be considered in  
26 the top 10% of the US population in terms of wealth. In fact, several senators  
27 average 3.2 million in wealth which is well above the top 10%. Nearly half of the  
28 senators are confirmed millionaires compared to 7-8% of the general population.

29 Senators also include the ultra-wealthy with net worth exceeding 50 million.  
30 The wealth of congress members is more difficult to determine because they only  
31 report between 1 million and 5 million dollars of wealth. Further, as was true of the  
32 founders who had insider knowledge of land on the frontier open for purchase  
33 current politicians often have insider knowledge on the equity markets. This  
34 became such a concern as of late that the Stop Treading on Congressional  
35 Knowledge Act (STOCK) was recently put into place. While this may have been  
36 well intentioned when you go to the details, the penalty for using insider knowledge  
37 to make equity trades is just 200 dollars. This bill is unlikely to hold anyone  
38 accountable and will not serve as a deterrent (U.S. Constitutional Convention, 1787)  
39 to using insider knowledge to enhance politician’s wealth. Furthermore, with the  
40 decline of collective bargaining through the demise of unionization that could  
41 improve wages and working conditions the gap between politicians’ wealth and  
42 power and those who work in our factories and manufacturing shops grows ever  
43 wider.

44 Unlike the US, there is little data to describe the exact wealth being held by  
45 Ghana’s political class. However, Ghana’s political landscape reveals a very  
46 interesting pattern about how the democratic process further widens the gap between

1 the rich and poor. Starting from the colonial regime, those who entered the country's  
 2 bureaucracy later joined the country's political class. They became the pioneers of  
 3 contemporary Ghanaian politics who in turn sought to nurture the next crop of  
 4 politicians. With such nurturing came a form of patronage, in which the understudy  
 5 politicians commonly upheld these pioneers as 'godfathers'. Having a 'political  
 6 godfather' meant access to a support network and financial resources, both of which  
 7 are key to electoral outcomes in Ghana. In exchange, political protégés are required  
 8 to offer their loyalty and service to these 'godfathers' by protecting their  
 9 [godfathers] interests wherever possible. Similar to the US, these interests often  
 10 include the need to gain insidious knowledge about government contracts and key  
 11 aspects of the economy. In Ghana's case, there are little to no legal clauses that  
 12 prevent politicians from using such knowledge to enrich themselves. Hence, it is  
 13 common place for politicians to buy state property or be awarded juicy government  
 14 contracts. Often, these are the hidden incentives behind the quest to enter parliament  
 15 or political office in Ghana.

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

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

39 In the case of the US, this internal conflict started with the oversights in the  
 40 constitution and became more pronounced with Citizens United that flooded politics  
 41 with dirty money of billionaires. This way, from the constitution onward, US law  
 42 protected capitalism and property rights to ensure that the wealthy 1% remain in a  
 43 dominant position in the political process (Overtz, 2022). In Ghana's case, whereas  
 44 article 55 (5) of the 1992 constitution directs for "the internal organisation of  
 45 political parties to conform with democratic principles", a lot of grey areas remain  
 46 about how best to approach or enforce this clause. As a result of this vacuum, there

1 is an influx of money and display of wealth to among other things induce electorates.  
 2 Unlike the US however, it cannot necessarily be claimed that Ghana’s constitution  
 3 is skewed towards protecting capitalism and property rights. Afterall, it was a pro-  
 4 socialist regime that led processes for the 1992 Republican constitution. However,  
 5 if we think in terms of how the regime infiltrated the process with their affiliates, we  
 6 can make a claim that the constitution was largely drafted to protect the interests of  
 7 the regime and its cohorts who occupied the upper echelons of Ghanaian society at  
 8 the time. Like the US, such a hierarchy in Ghana may have compromised the  
 9 representative nature of democracy itself and has rarely been challenged because it  
 10 is hidden in the democratic narrative that focused primarily on voting rights.

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

14  
 15

## 16 **Democracy, Social Media and AI**

17

18 Social media in both Ghana and the U.S. also played a role in challenging the  
 19 representativeness of democracy through the use of algorithms that creates echo  
 20 chambers. This not only creates wide divides that are difficult to bridge but  
 21 diminishes the common ground which is the foundation for a highly functioning  
 22 democracy. AI, primarily thrives on data, for which reason it prioritizes the past and  
 23 the “is” over the ought, what ought to be. The truth, therefore, is in an instrumental  
 24 form that focuses on the means separated from the ends that direct users to think  
 25 about what should be (Bucher, 2018). Let’s dig a bit deeper into social media and  
 26 AI with a focus on how social media and AI influence democracy but more  
 27 importantly what can be done to modify this negative effect on democracy.

28 Why do the social media companies use algorithms to determine your priorities  
 29 and then send messages to your profile or places on the site you visit that reinforce  
 30 your perspectives? Social media platforms are interested in making profits and  
 31 doing so means they need to encourage engagement—meaning an increase in the  
 32 time you scroll through content on your preferred site. The longer you stay active  
 33 on a site, in turn, the easier it is to match ads to your likes and priorities. While  
 34 algorithms do personalize your experience on the site, they also produce an echo  
 35 chamber that is the key for the huge profits these companies—corporations produce  
 36 (Angelova, 2025). Meta, for example, has a market capitalization on 1.8 trillion and  
 37 a profit of 60 billion in 2025. Tik Tok reached a dollar valuation with 33 billion in  
 38 ad revenue. Clearly, these two companies have extreme amounts of power, and they  
 39 use it to shape laws and politics which serve their interests. (Sims, 2026; Schultz,  
 40 2025).

41 Meta, for example, has one lobbyist for every six members of congress.  
 42 Organizations like Amnesty International argue that popular sites like Tik Tok and  
 43 Meta manipulate opinions at scale and suppress competition through lobbying and  
 44 thereby poses a direct threat to human rights and democratic values. Reports from  
 45 the U.S. Office of the Director of National intelligence also suggest that these sites  
 46 threaten free expression in democratic societies. While it is common to critique

1 social media in terms of how it can create divides and produce extreme positions  
2 through an echo chamber (Angelova, 2025), less common is any consideration of  
3 the way these social media corporations influence laws and use their vast economic  
4 resources to deny protections to people’s data as well as limiting what they pay in  
5 terms of taxes while protecting their privileges. Again, economic hierarchies fueled  
6 by the reluctance to say anything negative about capitalism allow these companies  
7 to work openly against democratic priorities (Magalhães, 2025).

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

23 Habermas (1984) refers to this separation as instrumental rationality, a form of  
24 technical knowledge that is used to manipulate the environment or other people that  
25 are seen as objects to be managed. In contrast, he suggests we engage in  
26 communicative rationality that requires humans to debate and agree on norms and  
27 values through open uncoerced conversation which links the ought and the how to.  
28 According to Habermas, instrumental rationality has colonized the “lifeworld” and  
29 therefore stands in the way of a strong democracy that tries to do more than pick a  
30 leader and instead is the social practice of communicative rationality.  
31 Communicative rationality is how a society thinks out loud to solve its problems  
32 fairly. An example might clarify these points. Say, a notable leader stated he wanted  
33 to increase the price of homes as opposed to making homes more affordable for first  
34 time buyers because this would be a great result for the economy. The means are  
35 clear: increase the price of a home. But the ends are not clarified and hide within  
36 the term good for the economy without saying who would benefit. However, if one  
37 debated the term good for the economy one could consider if it was more important  
38 for those who owned a home to make a greater profit or for those who couldn’t  
39 afford a home to start to build wealth by owning this sort of abode. The leader  
40 assumed a good economy should focus on the current homeowners who are rich  
41 enough to own a home while ignoring if the non-homeowners need to be supported  
42 to have a good economy. If both groups had a say in a future law, guided by this  
43 sort of conversation, a debate could occur on who should benefit from the so-called  
44 good economy. US society has largely lost the will to talk across differences and  
45 argue about values and norms and as a result instrumental rationality has in fact  
46 taken over the lifeworld and therefore threatens democracy.

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

20

#### 21 Social media, AI and wealth (re)distribution

22 How do these algorithms affect wealth distribution in democratic societies? The  
23 main strength of AI is the ability to analyze big data in real-time. Seeing this  
24 potential, governments and organizations are fast leveraging the technology for  
25 analytical workflows. Say a government wants to determine the effects of a policy  
26 on various categories of people, it can use AI to run a simulation model to predict  
27 the corresponding outcomes. Going back to our housing example for instance, AI  
28 can easily predict the effects of rising cost of housing on various groups of people  
29 and the broader US or Ghanaian economy in general. A major challenge emerges  
30 when banks and financial institutions leverage AI in determining who gets access to  
31 mortgage facilities or a home ownership loan. Since AI mimics patterns in its  
32 training datasets, it does not consider the circumstances of an applicant like a human  
33 analyst may do. However, the data that is used for training AI models often have  
34 biases and discrimination built into them. Moreover, there are still over 2.2 billion  
35 people worldwide who do not have access to digital connectivity, for which reason  
36 they are not represented on social media platforms (Signé, 2023). This means that,  
37 the voices, perspectives and aspirations of such people are automatically excluded  
38 whenever data from social media is harvested for AI training. These and many other  
39 examples show how, AI maybe biased or skewed towards particular groups by  
40 default. In the context of the housing example, these nuances may determine which  
41 category of people are selected or not selected for a mortgage in the US or a home  
42 ownership loan in Ghana. Whichever way that is, using AI for decision-making  
43 could further entrench housing disparities and wealth inequality in democratic  
44 society(ies). Then again, what happens to global inequality when governments and  
45 international organizations leverage AI for analytics or policy work? We can keep  
46 asking these questions on and on.

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

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

22           First, there is the urgent need to rethink the distributive aspects of democracy  
23 especially in capitalist societies such as the US, such that the ripple effects of wealth  
24 creation may accrue to the top 10%. Inter alia, such a rethinking must occur through  
25 the institutional mechanisms such as the constitution, corresponding laws and  
26 policies that determine the rules of the game. In that regard, countries such as the  
27 US may have to learn lessons from Ghana who have recently moved towards  
28 reviewing its constitution to reflect changing societal needs. Likewise, nascent  
29 democracies like Ghana and others may also learn lessons from the US scenario  
30 where a disequilibrium in the country's institutional mechanisms have led to the  
31 concentration of wealth among 1% of American citizens. More specifically, by  
32 focusing on where and how the US got it wrong in terms of wealth (re)distribution  
33 and creating equal opportunities for all. To reduce wealth disparities and systemic  
34 inequalities, there is an urgent need for democratic societies such as the US and  
35 Ghana to invest in affordable and equitable healthcare services, paying living wages  
36 instead of minimum wages as well as other robust social protection mechanisms to  
37 provide a better safety net for citizens. For that reason, both the US and Ghana may  
38 need to look towards the Nordic democracies such as Denmark, Sweden, Norway  
39 and others who have made significant advancements in that regard.

40           Second, current scenarios across the US and Ghanaian media landscape require  
41 an urgent need to (re)think what constitutes free speech and a free press. This is  
42 because of how political propaganda have overshadowed substantive content within  
43 both countries. As the fourth estate in democratic societies, the role of the media is  
44 essentially to keep citizens informed about happenings within society, such that  
45 citizens can exercise communicative rationality and contribute to the national  
46 discourse. The role of the media therefore is to act as an honest broker of news and

1 other informative content, not about spewing falsehoods and half-truths in the name  
 2 of political propaganda. Addressing these fundamental concerns have become even  
 3 more critical due to the growing lack of censorship and the disruptive potential  
 4 posed by social media, AI and the underlying algorithms. From all indications, the  
 5 AI era is upon us now and will be with us until we achieve the singularity where  
 6 everything will be interconnected. This means that democratic societies such as the  
 7 US and Ghana must put in the necessary guardrails to protect their citizens from  
 8 becoming puppets in a global marionette show. These guardrails may include very  
 9 strict privacy and data protection mechanisms such as promoting digital avenues  
 10 where there is no monetization of content, data belongs to users, and most  
 11 importantly the users are creators that create spaces of difference that bring  
 12 differences between users and helps them discuss ends and its relation to means.

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

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