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Civil Society and Democratic Governance in Ghana: Emerging Roles and Challenges

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Abstract

Though the essence of 'civil society' appeared in the writings of Rousseau, Ferguson, Tocqueville and Gramsci, the use of the term did not become prominent until the 18th century. Variously defined, the meaning, applicability and categorization of civil society are embedded in highly contextualized ideological debates of Tocqueville's liberal democracy and Gramscian post-Marxist school of thought. Whilst liberals see civil society as characterized by high social capital, trust and cooperation necessary for democracy, the Gramscian conception assumes a more direct political position and considers civil society an instrument of resistance and activism that promotes challenges to political, social and economic hegemony. The use of the term civil society among Ghanaian scholars has been aligned largely with Tocqueville's neo-liberal perspective. In as much as the role of civil society is applauded, great caution must be exercised in universalizing all civic organizations in Ghana as pro-democratic entities. This article therefore examines civil society from the Tocquevillian perspective, and its influence on the analysis of civil society in Ghana. The essay reviews the works of Gyimah-Boadi, Ninsin, Drah and Ocquaye that adopt Tocqueville's liberalist characterization of civil society and how it has helped to shape democracy and checked the despotic tendencies of the Ghanaian state. It concludes with recommendations on how a broader conceptualization beyond de Tocqueville could enhance the analytical and empirical relevance of civil society in promoting the liberty of citizens against the encroachments of a powerful state.

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Résumé

Bien que l'essence de la «société civile» ait apparu dans les écrits de Rousseau, Ferguson, Tocqueville et Gramsci, l'utilisation du terme n'était pas courante avant le 18ème siècle. Diversement définis, le sens, l'applicabilité, et la catégorisation de la société civile sont intégrés dans les débats idéologiques hautement contextualisées de la démocratie libérale de Tocqueville et l'école postmarxiste de la pensée gramscienne. Bien que pour les libéraux la société civile soit caractérisée par un capital social élevé, ainsi que par une confiance et une coopération nécessaire à la démocratie, la conception gramscienne estime une position politique plus directe et considère la société civile comme un instrument de résistance et d'activisme qui favorise les remises en cause de l'hégémonie politique, sociale et économique. L'utilisation de l'expression «société civile» parmi les chercheurs ghanéens est en grande partie conforme à la perspective néo-libérale de Tocqueville. Dans la mesure où le rôle de la société civile est applaudi, une grande prudence doit être exercée en universalisant toutes les organisations civiques au Ghana en tant qu'entités pro-démocratiques. Cet article examine donc la société civile dans la perspective tocquevillienne, et son influence sur l'analyse de la société civile au Ghana. L'article traite des œuvres de Gyimah-Boadi, Ninsin, Drah et Ocquaye qui adoptent la caractérisation libérale de la société civile de Tocqueville et de la façon dont elle a contribué à façonner la démocratie et freiné les tendances despotiques de l'État ghanéen. Il se conclut par des recommandations sur la façon dont une conceptualisation plus large de Tocqueville pourrait améliorer la pertinence analytique et empirique de la société civile dans la promotion de la liberté des citoyens contre les empiétements d'un État puissant.

Introduction and Background

Broadly, the origin of civil society in Africa's "academic, bureaucratic and policy circles" is assumed to have occurred in the late 1980s with varied

intentions and themes (Obadare, 2014:1). While Obadare (2014) acknowledges that previous studies of the subject in Africa have not seen cross-country comparison as well as continental level deployment of the concept, she has admitted however that there has been thematic expansion to include "strange territories" and "non-traditional subject" areas in the continent (p. 2). In examining the emergence of civil society in Africa, Kew and Oshikoya (2014) looked at the "limitations and contradictions" (p.8) of the concept by highlighting the "patrimonial" political environment in which they operate and their struggle towards democratic tenets and consolidation. Focusing on three cases on the continent (Ghana, Nigeria and Uganda) the authors note that the weak nature of African states defeats the successful development of civil society in the continent since it requires strong states to be able to create an enabling environment for the development and operations of such bodies. Therefore, where states are poorly developed or do not exist, the role and practical existence of civic bodies are meaningless. Indeed, Diamond (2008) refers to the role of autocratic regimes in suppressing the development and flourishing of civic bodies on the continent immediately after the 1990s. The outcome is the development of weak, corrupt and ineffective states and state institutions spreading across the continent of Africa.

In Ghana, the history and development of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) is closely associated and shaped by the political dynamics of the country. The evolution of civil society in Ghana goes as far back as 1781 when local people in the Gold Coast formed Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) to protect and promote their rights (Darkwah et al, 2006). The Fante Confederacy and the Aborigines Rights Protection Society (ARPS) are notable historical CBOs that fought against the possible encroachment of the rights of indigenes by British colonial authorities (Gyimah-Boadi et al., 2000). Increased local grievances witnessed a corresponding proliferation and vibrancy of CBOs in Ghana (Darkwah et al.), to the extent that activities of CBOs expanded to embrace economic interests and attempts to influence pricing policies in the country. Such advancement allowed local cocoa producers to strongly object to the total

control of the local market by the expatriate-controlled Association of West African Merchants (AWAM) in 1938. Partly influenced by the desire for economic and political liberation, these historical struggles nonetheless feed into the Ghanaian cultural essence of self-help. Undeniably, the concept of civil society or the idea behind it is not new in Ghana. Ghanaian cultural and social norms profess the concept of communalism as a way of learning and burden-sharing. Therefore, the explosion of CSOs as well as their increased activities in Ghana could as well be assumed from this perspective. Indeed, the concept of civil society is often discussed in contrast to the state and the market (Brown and Korten, 1991). It is argued that civil society organizations exist to make up for the failures of both the market and state (Douglass, 1987), and therefore demonstrate the desire of ordinary citizens to provide for themselves in times of need.

However, culture alone is not a sufficient explanation for the proliferation of CSOs and their activities in Ghana. Without an enabling political environment, it would be very difficult to celebrate this unique culture. In many countries, political support for CSOs is either limited or subjected to arbitrary regulations (CIVICUS, 1997). Until the turn of the last two decades, CSOs in the country operated under a difficult political climate (Drah and Oquaye, 1996) suggesting that the type of government in a country invariably affects civil society operations. Certainly, Gibson (2001) notes that the formation and growth of CSOs are greatly undermined by totalitarian rule since such regimes "atomize" individual citizens and create mistrust among them (p.53). Mistrust among citizens suggests that they cannot work together effectively. The promulgation of a liberal constitution in 1992 and the subsequent return to democratic rule in 1993 created an enabling political environment for civil society groups to freely operate in Ghana. The 1963 Companies Code (Act 179), the 1962/1993 Trustees (Incorporation) (Amendment) Law, the 1992 Constitution and Cabinet Directives define the institutional and legal framework for government-CSO engagement in Ghana. Though Article 21(1) of the 1992 Constitution provides

considerable space for the growth of participatory civil society and associational life, it is rather Article 37(2) that gives enormous powers for the formation and participation of civil society in the process of development. It calls on the state to enact appropriate laws that assure

> the enjoyment of rights of effective participation in development processes including right of people to form their own associations free of state interference and use them to promote and protect their interests in relation to development processes.

It further enjoins on CSOs the "… freedom to form organizations to engage in self-help and income generating projects; and … to raise funds to support these actions."

The essence of 'civil society' appeared in the writings of early philosophers such as Rousseau, Ferguson, Tocqueville and Gramsci, though the use and current multidimensional understanding of the term became prominent later after these writings. Variously defined, the meaning, applicability and categorization of civil society are embedded in the highly contextualized ideological debates of Tocqueville's liberal democracy and the Gramscian post-Marxist school of thought. Whilst liberals see civil society as characterized by high social capital, trust and cooperation necessary for the development of political and economic democracy, and also for protecting the individual from the state's overwhelming power, the Gramscian conception assumes a more direct political position and considers civil society as an instrument of resistance and activism that seeks to promote the creation and sustenance of social movements to negotiate or challenge political, social or economic hegemony. The use of the term civil society among Ghanaian scholars has tended to align more to Tocqueville's neo-liberal perspective than the Gramscian post-Marxist thought. It is defined in relation to the political end of promoting democracy and checking the despotic tendency of the state. In as much as the role of civil society is applauded in this regard, great caution needs to be exercised in universalizing all civic organizations in Ghana as pro-democratic entities.

This article therefore seeks to examine civil society from the Tocquevillian perspective, and how this conception has influenced the analysis of civil society in Ghana. The essay reviews the works of scholars such as Gyimah-Boadi, Ninsin, Drah and Ocquaye that adopt Tocqueville's liberalist characteri-zation of civil society and how it has shaped or been shaping the political end of democratic consolidation, as well as how it has checked or been checking the despotic tendencies of the Ghanaian political state. It will conclude with recommendations on how a broader conceptualization beyond de Tocqueville could enhance the analytical and empirical relevance of civil society as a factor in promoting the liberty of citizens against the encroachments of a powerful state. There is a vast literature on the work of civil society and how it enhances democratic development. Yet, there is not much work that has explored the relevance of most of the literature vis-à-vis democratic governance. The objective of this paper therefore is significant in drawing a confluence of the collective activities of civil society organizations in promoting and deepening political democracy in Ghana.

A Note on Methodology

This study employed a mix of methods, including primary and secondary data sources. The secondary data source enabled the collation of data on civil society in Ghana comprising largely of journal articles, books and reports produced by think tanks. This was corroborated by data gathered through a nationwide survey in which citizens' level of awareness and perception of government's compliance to the African Union's legal instruments and policy frameworks were measured. The survey was justified by the conviction that citizens need to engage their governments on the account of their track record and performance. The country was divided into three sectors for the purpose of the survey, namely the Southern, Middle and Northern sectors. In the Southern sector, the Greater Accra region and specifically the Ga East District was targeted; in the Middle sector, the Brong Ahafo region and specifically the Tano North District was

selected, and in the Northern sector, the Northern region and specifically the Tamale Metropolis was elected. These districts were chosen to reflect the varied socio-cultural profiles in the country including religion, occupation, education, and social class of the Ghanaian population. In each of these districts, 250 adults were interviewed. The survey instrument was structured on the basis of the principles that underpin the African Union's instruments promulgated to enhance the promotion and protection of human rights, political participation and good governance in African countries. Specifically, the data related to civil society and its role in enhancing political participation, transparency, equitable distribution of resources, accountability and the fight against corruption in the country. This data is derived from responses to the questionnaire.

Theoretical Framework

In this paper, civil society is conceived from its organizational perspective (following de Tocqueville) rather than its material (according to Hegel) or its ideological (following Gramsci) manifestations. Perceived this way, civil society can be variously defined along the lines of Bratton's distinction of the concept. Bratton (1994) draws the contours of civil society from that of the state or political society, noting that civil society is "public" and not confined to the domestic or household arena where collective action guides individuals to achieve their shared goals (p.56). The conception of civil society as an entity outside the realm of the state and political society is noted by Carr and Norman (2008) and also by Perkin and Court (2005). Perkin and Court specifically define civil society as organizations outside the "arena" of the household, the private sector and the state that "negotiate matters of public concern" (p.2). Collectively, all these definitions assume civil society to be institutions outside the domain of the family, state and the market. On the other hand, the World Bank (2010) defines civil society as consisting of "…non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic consideration." This definition adequately captures the

notion of civil society by delineating the boundaries that reasonably separate organizations classifiable as civil society and factors that bond them together. It is on this same wavelength that Alfred Stepan distinguishes civil society institutions, such as neighbourhood associations, women's and religious groups, from the institutions of political society, which include political parties, legislatures, and elections (Stepan 1988: 3-4). Drah's (1993) definition of civil society as "the presence of a cluster of intermediary organizations/associations that operate between the primary units of society (like individuals, nuclear and extended families, clans, ethnic groups, and village units) and the state" (p. 73) epitomizes this distinction. Drah notes further that "these intermediary groupings include labour unions and associations of professionals, farmers, fishermen, women, youth and students; religious and business organizations, cultural and recreational clubs, as well as political parties" (Drah 1993: 73). His only point of departure from similar definitions is that political parties are excluded from the definition of civil society, as they are conceived more as agents of political society or the state.

In a clear departure from the Liberalist conception of civil society, Lemarchand (1992) bemoans the "persistent tendency of political scientists to locate state and society in separate conceptual niches: one inhabited by a potentially predatory species and the other by a defenceless and fully domesticated pigeon" (p.177). He notes that such a categorical distinction is not only unhelpful in our attempt to critically appraise civil society and their role in democratization but is practically not universal. For example, he notes that "nowhere in Africa is there a clear line of demarcation between state and society" (p.178) since the two spheres do not only "interpenetrate each other" but have delicately merged in "complex ways and at different levels" (p.178). The African case, according to Lemarchand, "makes little sense" from Hegel's conception of civil society as "social, economic and ethical arrangements separate from the other entity called a state" (p. 178). The same example

overrides what he labelled the "Gramscian metaphor" of the state as the powerful, overbearing bully that needs a check from civil society organiza-tions.

Lemarchand's argument on civil society is very relevant to the development of the discourse on the concept. However, his general position that there is no clear division between state and civil society in Africa is disputable. Lemarchand's article on *"Uncivil States and Civil Societies: How illusions became reality"* was written in the early nineties, immediately after the end of the Cold War and the period of the second wave of democratization, and these events may have influenced this blanket assumption. Gyimah-Boadi (2004) argues, a decade after Lemarchand's assertion, that civil society organizations played a huge role in Africa's democratic process by complementing the organizational deficits of the post-Cold War state. This was possible through a paradigmatic shift in which CSOs moved away from their hitherto "crude anti-state activities" (p.99) to engaging constructively with governments in post-transition and democratic countries. Therefore, at the period when Lemarchand thought there was no clear-cut division between the state and society in Africa, civic organizations were lending a helping hand to their governments to successfully move to democracy. The core debate at this stage was whether democracy should be built bottom-up or top-down and CSOs played a lead role in that debate.

Some analysts emphasize the significance of establishing democracy from the bottom-up where it can be well entrenched at the grassroots level rather than from the top-down. A bottom-up democratic building process guarantees participation from both political and social forces in society. Civil society has therefore re-emerged as a useful analytic concept to grasp this dimension of political change in Africa (Meyns 1992/93: 583). Meyns (1992/93), for example, argues that "when a process of dismantling autocratic statist rule is underway, the establishment of institutions needed to guarantee the respect of basic rights, in particular parliamentary representation, and to facilitate the emergence of pluralist society as well as the expression of diverse opinions, in short, the strengthening of civil society, is of prime importance for all groups in society

opposed to statist rule. In the process, the state-society relationship achieves a new balance" (Meyns 1992/93: 584). Thus, civil society plays a crucial formative function in prompting political openings and in preparing the way for the revival of party politics (Bratton 1994: 76). In fact, it has been argued that for democracy to become sustainable, it has to grow roots in society (Meyns 1992/93: 597).

Civil society and democratic governance in Ghana

Scholars have thrown light on the existence of different dimensions of civil society. Whilst Hegel and Marx and Engels emphasize the material nature of civil society, Ferguson and de Tocqueville (1899/1956) highlight the organizational dimension of the concept. Yet, Gramsci and Havel focus on the ideological. According to Bratton (1994) these three dimensions constitute the observable dimensions of the theoretical concept of civil society. For example, de Tocqueville argued in his *Democracy in America* (1899/1956) that the state should be checked and supervised by the "independent eye of society," consisting of "a plurality of interacting, self-organized and constantly vigilant civil associations" which had the functions of nurturing basic rights, advocating popular claims, and educating citizens in the democratic culture of tolerance and accommodation (cf. Bratton 1994: 54).

Overall, there has been in recent times a common concern, among political thinkers, with restoring civil society, and its significance for state legitimacy, to the centre of political research. Though variously manifested, the meaning, applicability and categorization of civil society is embedded in a highly contextualized ideological debate of Tocqueville's liberal democracy and Gramsci's post-Marxist school of thought (UNECA, 2011:4). The liberal democratic ideology defines civil society as the intermediary body between the state and the individual or family UNECA, 2011a). Conceived from the liberal point of view, civil society is characterized by high social capital, trust and cooperation to develop political and economic democracy and also protect the

individual from the state's overwhelming power. However, the Gramscian interpretation assumes a more direct political position and considers civil society as an instrument of resistance and activism that seeks to promote the creation and sustenance of social movements to negotiate or challenge political, social or economic hegemony (UNECA, 2011). Though there seems to be a gradual shift towards the Gramscian-based conception of civil society during the last decade (UNECA, 2011a), the neo-liberal ideology has been dominant since the end of the Cold War in 1989.

The use of civil society in Ghana embraces more of Tocqueville's neo-liberal perspective than the Gramscian post-Marxist thought. For example, Gyimah-Boadi (1994, 1996) and Drah and Ocquaye (1996) see civil society in Ghana as a variety of voluntary organizations that work to consolidate democracy and democratic tenets by checking the despotic tendency of the state. Specifically, Gyimah-Boadi (1998) sees a surge in the activities of civic groups as being vital to the process of democratic governance in Africa. He notes that civil society organizations such as trade unions, professional associations and religious groups contributed to the disbandment of authoritarianism in the early 1990s, and a surge in this same role will enhance democracy in Ghana. The role of civic organizations in democratic governance is manifest in different activities and process.

The first is their responsibilities during elections and transitional processes. According to Gyimah-Boadi (1998), civil society organizations have a played tremendous role in advancing democratic governance during elections and also in transitional periods in most African countries. Even in countries where these processes were relatively advanced, civic groups focused purely on consolidating the relative democratic successes achieved by acting as watch-dogs for citizens' rights. However, there are great challenges arising from these responsibilities, specifically, the difficulty in fighting an ever powerful oppressive state. In order to overcome this obstacle, civil society organizations formed networks to protect both their interests and those of other citizens. Networks have assumed many labels in the field of international development

including coalitions, alliances, partnerships and consortia (Milward and Provan, 2001). They have been variously defined in the literature according to their purpose, level of collaboration; type of activities they engage in, and the structure of the partnership (Taschereau and Bolger, 2006). Whereas Plucknett, et al. (1990) think of networks as a platform where members contribute resources and participation for their own benefit, Perkin and Court (2005) see networks as the "formal and informal structures that link actors (individuals or organizations) who share a common interest on a specific issue or a general set of values" (p.2). Networked civic groups also embellished the strategies that they used to engage the government. They have become more sophisticated, less confrontational and encourage more thoughtful policy debates.

Networks such as the Northern Ghana Network for Development (NGND), the Northern Network for Education and Development (NNED), the West African Network for Peace building (WANEP) and the Network for Women's Rights (NETRIGHT) have all rolled out programmes that have created huge impacts in the policy arena. Jones and Villar (2008) identify five key dimensions of possible policy impact initiated by CSOs. The most important of these dimensions, for our purposes, are attitudinal change (whereby CSOs try to influence policy by "framing debates", drawing attention to new issues, affecting awareness and changing the attitude and perceptions of policy stakeholders); discursive commitments (CSOs influence government and policy actors to change the language and rhetoric concerning a specific policy); and procedural change (whereby CSOs are able to open new space for policy dialogue and debate). Similarly, Sutton (1999) identifies series of activities that could help impact the outcome of a policy. Among them are CSOs' ability to carry out a ground-breaking research which defines a problem and clarifies an appropriate course of action to resolve it (p.31), and sharing lessons learnt from practical policy experiences. Box 1 below summarizes the activities of the networks selected for this study under each stage of the policy process.

Box 1: CSO Networks and the Policy Process

	Agenda Setting	**Policy Formulation**	**Policy Imp'tation**	**Policy Evaluation**
WANEP	Through quality research & policies such as National Security Brief which highlights security issues.	Through early warning Programs such as the Ghana Alert Project, Ghana Peace Watch and bi-annual publications.	Built capacities of personnel in government and private sectors to implement security policies,	Security policies in Ghana especially in Bawku and Yendi, where security problems persist.
NETRIGT	Establishment of MOWAC, agenda on establishment of Commission on Gender and Equality.	Gender-based analysis of the GPRSP; women's land rights; Aid Effectiveness and Financing for Development; Women's Manifesto; Beijing +5 & +10 reviews.	Built capacities of government agencies and NGOs to implement government policies; organized seminars and workshops.	Evaluated policies related to women's rights; land reform policies; etc.
NGND	Research on the deduction of the DACF; press releases.	Mole meetings, SADA and policies on Northern Development.	Capacity building workshops; seminars and trainings.	Implementation of SADA and other development projects in Northern Ghana
NNED	Set several policy agenda through quality research on absenteeism, conditions of service in educational sector, etc.	ESAR Platform, Monthly Development Participation Meetings, Education Sector Thematic Advisory Committee, etc	Oversees the implementation of Capitation Grant, School Feeding Programme etc.	Budgetary allocation to Capitation Grant, the School Feeding Programme

Source: Synthesis from the literature.

Constitutional rule in Ghana led to a proliferated civil society (Gyimah-Boadi, 1997), which has focused on improving the quality of analysis and

deliberation in the National Assembly through memoranda and expert testimony (Gyimah-Boadi, 1997). An epitome of thoughtful policy debates through the platform of civil society in Ghana is the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) Presidential debate series. The IEA Presidential debates have been ongoing over the years and arguably, they have created the opportunity for voters' assessment of the policies of political parties; allowed for a peer review of the capabilities of their fellow aspirants, and have significantly shifted campaign messages from personal attacks and vilification to issue-based ones. The IEA has also expanded this accountability process to embrace debates among vice-presidential candidates who are just a heartbeat away from the presidency. Recently, the Ghana Centre for Democratic Development (CDD) embellished this process by subjecting parliamentary aspirants of some selected constituencies across the country to this accountability process where their constituent members had the opportunity to interrogate them on salient issues. Unlike the CDD parliamentary debates, the criterion for participating in the IEA's Presidential debate is to have a representation in the Ghanaian parliament. This means that Ghanaians have not had the opportunity of subjecting all Presidential aspirants seeking to govern the country to the same level of scrutiny. The Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) in 2012 took upon itself the responsibility of organizing a separate debate for the other Presidential candidates without parliamentary representation. As novel as this has been, it lacked the publicity and vigour associated with the IEA's presidential debates. In the 2012 election debate, both the sitting President and his Vice-President participated for the first time in the history of the IEA debate series. This accountability procedure initiated by the IEA, a civil society organization, promoted democratic governance in Ghana.

Beyond the IEA Presidential debate series, civil society organizations embark on democracy-enhancing activities such as domestic election monitoring to ensure peaceful, free and fair elections, rather than focusing on pressuring government based on their own individual narrow interests. This goes to buttress the agency arguments, by Linz and Stepan (1978; 1996) and Diamond, Linz, and

Lipset (1995), about the important role of political elites (and civil society) and their adherence to democratic rules in institutionalizing democracy. The Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) in Ghana has made this responsibility more forthcoming. CODEO has deployed election observers in the past and in the 2012 election it deployed 4,000 election observers cross the country. Besides deploying observers, it has in an election year issued monthly pre-election observer reports, with the 2012 November report being the sixth and the last that sought to analyze the general pre-election environment ahead of the 2012 general election. CODEO also deployed the Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT) system in election 2012, which helped more than 4,000 independent observers to collate and analyze their reports at the various polling centres across the country.

Liberals posit that the contribution of CSOs to development might be important for political rather than economic reasons, because these organisations are significant bolsterers of civil society by virtue of their participatory and democratic approach. They have grappled with such issues as CSOs' efficiency, impact and scale, which have gained prominence in the literature on NGOs since the early 1990s. Taken together, these represent a concern with the proliferation of political activities of the CSOs (McNicoll, 1995; Keller, 1996; Layton, 2004; White, 2004). There is a growing agreement, however, that civil society, civic culture, and social capital are all important for strengthening democracy and enabling conflict resolution. The early academic discussions of civil society did not see it as self-initiating, self-regulating and advocating a common cause, or expressing a common passion (Diamond, 1994; Keller, 1996). Liberals see civil society as the setting for the associational life of individuals who carry their rights within them and are governed by the rule of law. Where civil society is considered to be weak, there will be underdevelopment, corruption, lack of 'democratic culture', and democratic consolidation will be threatened (Teshome, 2008; 7; Lewis, 1992; 33-35). Largely, Ghana's democratic development and the gradual growth of a robust economy are associated with the increasing policy space provided to civic groups in the country.

"Alternative Civil Society"

Ninsin (1998), writing about the democratic reforms that led to the Ghanaian transition in the 1990s, distinguished between two categories of civil society. He notes that the struggle for democratic reforms was a contest between "pro-democracy civil society" and an "alternative civil society." He defines "pro-democracy civil society" as the genuine civic groups that aim to promote democracy in Ghana; and "alternative civil society" as comprising of mainly loosely formed civic associations with close ties to the government of the day, and which were being used by the latter to further its political agenda. In his subsequent writings, Drah (2003) reiterates Ninsin's classification of Ghanaian civic organizations into two broader categories; the "corporatist" and the "voluntary-pluralist." The "corporatist" civil society "comprises intermediary groupings which are sponsored and often sustained by, and hence subservient to, the state" (p.25), whereas the "voluntarist-pluralist" civil society denotes the presence of an "array of strictly non-governmental civil associations voluntarily and interdependently established to pursue their own interests without necessarily ignoring those of society as a whole" (p.25).

Ninsin's categorization, though quite influential, did not provide much detail to enable a specific demarcation of the features of CSOs deemed "alternative" to the liberal norm. His argument and definition of an "alternative civil society" fail to provide the calibre, scope and the *modus operandi* of these bodies except the fact that they have close ties to the government of the day and work in ways to promote its interest. The limitation of this explanation is wide. How about civil society organizations that have close ties to a political party in opposition and work to promote the interest of such a party? Or the CSO that was established and supported by a government to do its bidding, but that government lost power and is now in opposition, yet the CSO still renders similar service to the opposition party just as when it was in government. It is in the throes of this dilemma that Drah's (2003) classification comes in handy.

Though Drah's explanation of a "voluntarist-pluralist" civil society is not the same as Ninsin's "pro-democracy" civil society, their definition of "corporatist" and "alternative" civic bodies overlap. The idea of lack of independence of these bodies by virtue of being financially dependent on an entity whose interest they protect is clear to both categories. Other writers support the position that "alternative" civil society organizations rely on favours from the state or the institutions in whose interest they work, thus undermining their autonomy (Makumbe, 1998; Gyimah-Boadi, 1996). This arrangement interferes not only with their capacity to hold their paymasters to account but also they steadily lose the confidence of the population whose interest they were supposed to serve in the first place. The consequence is the routine alignment of alternative civic bodies with state policy institutions on whom their survival is based rather than against them (Hearn, 2001).

The challenge that remains is that in Drah's definition the allegiance of "corporatist" civic groups is to the "state" and to Ninsin, it is to the "government." In political science terms, "state" and "government" are not the same entity. Yet, we can assume that both authors are referring to a source of authority that these bodies owe allegiance to. If this is right, would civil society organizations that are established, supported and protected by the donor community also be considered "alternative"? This is because they may become subservient to that authority and do its bidding. Clearly, it becomes very difficult to conceptualize "alternative" civic bodies with the limited definitions provided by these two authors. Suffice it to say, however, that the role civil society groups play can become a complementary yardstick to measure the level of "alternative" in them.

From a liberal point of view, civil society groups are "characterized by high social capital, trust and cooperation to develop political and economic democracy and also protect the individual from the state's overwhelming power" (UNECA, 2011a: 12). However, from the Gramscian perspective, civic bodies become "an instrument of resistance and activism that seeks to promote the creation and sustenance of social movements to negotiate or challenge

political, social or economic hegemony" (UNECA, 2011a; 12). In Ghana, both "pro-democracy" and the "alternative" civil society perform one of these theoretically-laden functions of "resistance and activism" and opening the frontiers of democracy by checking the state's despotic tendencies. However, consistency and equal application of these functions could be a potential source for telling the difference between the "alternative" and the "pro-democracy" groups. We define "equal application" as being the even-handedness in approach and strategy with which civil society groups' deal with the authority (i.e., the state, government or donors) regarding an issue; and consistency regarding the frequency with which they speak to similar occurrences in different regimes or governments.

Indeed, in Ghana there has been a proliferation of numerous civic organizations that can be easily passed as "alternative" in terms of the political orientation of their leaders and the source of their allegiance. For example, the Association for Accountable Governance (AFAG) and the Danquah Institute (DI) are known to have close political affinity to the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and have publicly acted in ways that inured to the benefit of the party. Some of the executive members of the Danquah Institute (DI) are also known NPP executives and party functionaries, including the founding CEO (Gabby Otchere Darko) and the current CEO (Mustapha Hamid). The same can be said about the Research and Advocacy Platform (RAP) convened by Felix Ofosu Kwakye, an outspoken National Democratic Congress (NDC) supporter (and now a Deputy Minister for Communications) as well as the Committee for Joint Action (CJA) which has suddenly relegated its watchdog role under the current government since majority of its leaders are ministers and key functionaries of the party in power. The relationship that exists between these individual members of these bodies may not be enough evidence to assume such bodies as "alternative" civic groups unless there is established evidence that link them to financial and other support from these parties.

It was also established in this paper that it will be fair to examine the functions of civil society groups' vis-à-vis the consistency and equal application of their responsibilities to all governments. The CJA, for example, has completely reneged on its responsibilities under the current NDC administration and has failed to show up when policies implemented by the current government became a basis for massive demonstrations under/against the NDC administration. The same can be said about the RAP. It is however difficult to determine what the DI and AFAG will do when the tables of power turn. The import therefore is that "alternative" civil society groups are more likely to perform the democratic functions carried out by "pro-democratic" groups but the intention, motive and the consistency with which they do it could vary from "pro-democracy" ones. For example, an "alternative" civil society group may carry out a research that enhances the general public's understanding of a policy issue, a function that "pro-democracy" ones also perform. However, the intention may be helping their financiers to achieve their objective more than educating the general public on that issue. The educative function may just be an after-thought. In this case, the intention is to show either how inconsistent the other party opposed to the "alternative" CSO's financiers are or to expose lack of integrity with the motive of aiding its financiers achieve their political objective. These actions gain more potency when their financiers are in opposition or at a disadvantage and wanes when the tables turn. Therefore the lack of consistency in the execution of the responsibility could also be a point of departure for "alternative" and "pro-democracy" CSOs.

Challenges of CSOs in Ghana

Despite the pioneering role assumed by civic groups in democratic governance, they still face huge obstacles including sustained campaign of official intimidation, severe material and organizational deficiencies and inadequate funds to sustain their programmes. Emanating from these challenges, the Ghanaian citizenry have expressed doubts about the democratic role that these institutions play in the country. For example, Table 1 below, presents the

statistics on citizens' views on the contribution of civil society organizations to political participation in the country.

Amazingly, 72.2% of the sample selected thinks CSOs did not contribute to political participation in the country while 37.6% think otherwise. Even though there has been enough policy space granted by the 1992 Constitution for CSOs to enhance political participation, there is still weak political will to commit to these constitutional provisions.

Table 1: Role of civil society in enhancing political participation in Ghana

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	177	35.4	37.6	37.6
	No	163	32.6	34.6	72.2
	I don't know	131	26.2	27.8	100.0
	Total	471	94.2	100.0	
Missing	System	29	5.8		
Total		500	100.0		

Field Survey (2014)

Also, citizens' perception on the role of CSOs in enhancing transparency in the country was not different from their response on political participation. The response, and as presented in Table 2 below, shows that 47.6% of respondents believe CSOs were not doing enough to enhance transparency in Ghana.

It is important to state that the response to the question of transparency might have been influenced by citizens' perception that public officials are corrupt and live opulent life styles, which are arguably above their earnings. Similar recent public opinion surveys conducted by Transparency International (in collaboration with Ghana Integrity Initiative, its local chapter in Ghana), the Centre for Democratic Governance *Afrobarometre* Survey Round 8 and the

Institute for Economic Affairs' public opinion survey (2014) all affirmed citizens' perception of high incidence of corruption in the country.

Table 2: The role of CSOs in enhancing transparency in Ghana

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	101	20.2	21.1	21.1
	No	228	45.6	47.6	68.7
	I don't know	150	30.0	31.3	100.0
	Total	479	95.8	100.0	
Missing	System	21	4.2		
Total		500	100.0		

Source; Survey (2014)

Conclusion

Broadly, all the literature reviewed tends to suggest that civil society organizations play a significant role in not only democratic governance but also towards its consolidation. The formation of civil society networks has actually enhanced the capacity of CSOs to perform their watchdog role. These networks have been able to aggregate the respective interests of their members into a collective one and have fended off governments' desire to be overbearing. Emboldened by constitutionalism, which provides an enabling political environment, civic associations have fostered democratic governance by speaking against the dictatorial tendencies and actions of the government, educating the citizenry on their rights and responsibilities, and providing evidence for policy alternatives when confronting the government. The IEA has gone a step further by using its flagship presidential debate programme to drum home the need for an issue-based campaign. The idea is that by focusing on issues and not on personalities, the process of accountability is being deepened.

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Appendix

List of Abbreviations

CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
CBOs	Community-Based Organizations
ARPS	Aborigines Rights Protection Society
AWAM	Association of West African Merchants
NGND	Northern Ghana Network for Development
NNED	Northern Network for Education and Development
WANEP	West African Network for Peace building
NETRIGHT	Network for Women's Rights
MOWAC	Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs
GPRSP	Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
DACF	District Assembly Common Fund
SADA	Savannah Development Authority
ESAR	Education Sector Annual Review
IEA	Institute for Economic Affairs
CDD	Ghana Centre for Democratic Development
GBC	Ghana Broadcasting Corporation
CODEO	Coalition of Domestic Election Observers
PVT	Parallel Vote Tabulation
AFAG	Association for Accountable Governance (AFAG) and the
DI	Danquah Institute
NPP	New Patriotic Party

RAP	Research and Advocacy Platform
NDC	National Democratic Congress
CJA	Committee for Joint Action