

DEMOCRATIC BREAKDOWN AND SURVIVAL: A TALE OF TWO TRANSITIONS IN GHANA

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My current research project is a study of why democratic institutions survive in some contexts and temporal periods but break down in others. While many scholars argue that British colonialism is conducive to later democratization, outcomes remain highly uneven across former British colonies. My project specifies four types of British colonial rule through combinations of two dimensions of the historical experience. Each of the four colonial types is hypothesized to condition the prospects for democratic survival in the post-colonial period by shaping democratic experience, strength of state-society links, and administrative development.

In this past year, part of this research took me to Ghana, which serves as an important test of a colonial theory in Africa given its comparatively auspicious start. The Gold Coast served as Britain's model African colony from 1946 to 1957 as progressive reforms guided the path toward Independence under a popularly-elected nationalist party. Indeed, post-WWII

reforms included the first African majority legislature and were initiated partly because the British deemed the Gold Coast to be the most politically advanced of the African dependencies, a 'model colony' ready for orderly and constitutional progress toward self-government. The Gold Coast did not exhibit the racial problems typically associated with colonies of white settlement, it was relatively prosperous from cocoa, and it enjoyed significant reserves. The colony did not suffer from centripetal ethnic conflicts, but had largely resolved these issues through negotiation and election. Rather, it enjoyed a mass-based independence movement led by a charismatic leader, Kwame Nkrumah, which pushed for early self-government and was greeted after 1951 with relative British acquiescence. Despite the country's enviable position, Nkrumah's government had within the first few years of Independence passed legislation that severely restricted political activities and fused party and state. Given its auspicious start, this research asks why Ghana's democracy

transformed into a one-party state after three years of independence?

From March – November 2015, I conducted dissertation research at the National Archives of Ghana in Accra as well as several of its regional branches in Cape Coast, Kumasi and Tamale. During this time, I served as a Research Affiliate at the Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) and studied Hausa with a tutor in one of Accra's Hausa-speaking neighborhoods, Sabon Zongo. I conducted archival research in order to examine the dynamics of power transfer associated with decolonization and independence as an important generation of political power structures. The striking feature of Ghanaian colonial history is that its early nationalists were not the ones to inherit the independent state; rather, this group was bypassed twice for this coveted position, first by the traditional rulers and second by Nkrumah's commoner's party. Thus, the debates over the shape of the nation stemmed most predominantly from an elite vs. a popular nationalism, though the former was activated through alliances with groups with diverse lenses including regionalism, ethnicity, and religion in addition to class. Despite electoral successes between 1951 and 1957, Nkrumah's government was unable to consolidate its authority over the population while embracing democratic processes.

I plan to compare this breakdown with a more lasting democratic episode in Ghana's history by asking why Nkrumah's democratic regime in 1957, a centerpiece of successful political institutional transfer from British colonialism, succumb to authoritarian pressures whereas Rawlings's democratic transition in 1992, though heavily guided by an authoritarian arm, resulted in stabilized democratization.

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