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# The Quest for Democratic Stability in Two Limited Access Order Systems: Ghana and South Korea in Perspective

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## Abstract

Researchers contemplating the experiences of Ghana and South Korea often emphasize a divergent pattern of economic development. Such endeavors, generally articulated with reference to mid-twentieth century benchmarks, often suggest Ghana had relatively better prospects of economic development. However highlights from these efforts often miss the fact that the ruling elites of both states faced and resolved similar strategic imperatives in the quest for democratic stability. Using North et al.'s notion of limited access orders, I contend that the two elite systems initially confronted pressures of systemic violence and economic stagnation. In the quest for democratic stability, the respective elite constituencies adopted the same tactic of selective inclusion so as to generate rents to secure the credible commitment of potentially disruptive elites. If recent political developments are credible indicators, it may be argued that both states are maturing into stable democracies. This notwithstanding, Ghana's elites seem to lag behind South Korea when it comes to engineering a benign fusion of democratic stability with deep horizontal economic empowerment. Given this, South Korean elites can offer useful insights to their Ghanaian counterparts.

## Keywords

elite coalitions – political instability – democratic stability and limited access order systems

## 1 Introduction

Ghana and South Korea, both with a colonial past had their immediate processes of state formation strongly dictated by the terms upon which the WWII ended (Duara, 2011; Jerónimo and Pinto, 2015; Collins, 2016). Given that the gestation period of the decolonization process evolved between the first and second world wars, it can be argued that the period over which the modern state took shape in both cases was of a shorter time span when compared to what pertained in Europe (Ossenbrügge and Heeg, 2002; Gustafsson, 2010). In addition to the short time span, both states unlike the European genre at their inception, lacked the basic prerequisites with which to sustain the liberal systems instituted at independence. With this in mind, it comes as no surprise that the State in Africa, after its inception has been trapped in crisis and with limited capability to develop (Lumumba-Kasongo, 2002). In particular, the people of Ghana and South Korea had not been adequately schooled by their colonial administrators in the appropriate attitudes needed to nurture the liberal system of government that were put in place at independence (Croissan, 2002; Dhawan, 2015; Ninsin, 2016).

In addition, both states lacked an independent industrialized middle class who could serve as the link between government and the governed and whose economic interests may have mediated as well as diluted the political basis of interaction between the governing elite and the plebian. As a result, these tendencies worked together to hold back the pace of political and economic structural transformation in both states. Consequently, both states in the immediate post-independence era, were not cohesive enough to absorb the normal shocks of political contestation. Development economists (Anaman, 2006; Crucianu, 2017; Aryeetey, et al., 2003; Weisbrot and Ray, 2011; Kim, 2015; Weisbrot and Rebecca, 2011.) who often focus on the broad pattern of economic divergence of the two states miss the politics attending the processes of structural transformation. By so doing such, analyses are unable to detect that either by default or design the elites of Ghana and South Korea re-engineered their states with innovative strategies different from what was bequeathed at independence.

The innovative strategies in question involved, among others, elite investment of rent to coopt the support of rivals who were capable of resorting to violence in pursuit of their interests. While in Ghana ruling elite monopoly over rent generation systems has been used to institute a dependent relation between government and rival actors, the governing elites of South Korea have set up an interdependent system between ruling elites and their potential