

# Review of: "Contentious Biometric Voters Registration and Democratic Politics under COVID-19: The Myth of 'Social Distance' in an African State?"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Instead of writing 'civil election', the author should instead use the more common term 'general election', i.e., an election which elects both the president and the legislature on the same electoral day.

Although 'social distance' and 'social distancing' have become the generally used terms during the COVID-19 pandemic, the correct, medical term would be 'physical distancing', since the measures adopted by various countries, including Ghana, meant that people were supposed to hold physical distance (of 1 meter, 1.5 meters or 2 meters, in most cases), in order to minimize exposure to airborne particles (sneezing, coughing) which might transmit the virus. 'Social distancing', conversely, actually means minimizing social interaction. The pandemic saw a rise in mobile and online communication, especially through social media, and thus did not necessarily decrease interpersonal interactions.

The paper should discuss the fact that the turnout was actually higher at the 2016 Ghanaian general election. Also, the author should provide some examples of parliamentary constituencies where the NPP candidates benefited from lower turnout. Also, it would help the readers understand the Ghanaian context if the paper discussed turnout and COVID-19 infection rate variations in different regions of the country. Further, one might wonder whether there were different reactions to pandemic-related public health measures and restrictions among different religious communities of Ghana? Finally, since currently (summer 2023), the pandemic is officially over (per WHO pronouncement), the paper should write about the pandemic in the past tense. In addition, it would be interesting to know whether there have been discussions in Ghana (either in parliament, by NDC members, media, or among political scientists) to introduce a two-round electoral system for the parliament as well, in order to boost competitiveness and increase legitimacy of elected representatives. Two-round systems for legislatures are usually used by Francophone African countries, but if there were discussions about electoral reform in Ghana, the readers would benefit if this were included in the paper.

The author writes about postponement of elections during the 2020 pandemic year in Africa. However, the paper would benefit from mentioning other (competitive) elections (either general or parliamentary), which were held at the same time in other parts of the world. These include, for example, general elections in Taiwan, Ireland, Croatia, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, Bermuda, United States, Belize, Guyana, Bolivia, Israel, and New Zealand. In some of these cases, the pandemic greatly reduced the turnout (e.g., in the July 2020 Croatian parliamentary election, the turnout was just 46.4 percent, as opposed to 54.6 percent in 2016). It would be interesting whether there was a trade-off between higher turnout

in Ghana but also higher infection rates after the election.

Regarding the biometric voter register, it might also be worth exploring practices in other countries. For example, in Croatia, vote registration is automatic and linked to police records of official residence status on national ID cards, the electoral commission does not compile its own register. When citizens move to a new residence, the voter records are updated and a new polling station in the vicinity of the voter's residence is assigned. Since ID cards include information on citizenship, non-nationals cannot appear on voter rolls.