

Abstract:

The unexpected success of Ghana's democratic transition stands out amongst an array of other struggling democratic African countries. Conversely, Malawi's experience has demonstrated the more typical case of weakening democracy and the reemergence of authoritarian impulses. In a comparative analysis of both countries democratic trajectories, this study seeks to determine the reasons behind Ghana's success and Malawi's democratic weakening. Ghana's unprecedented steady democratic progress and Malawi's "democratic backsliding" offer a rare opportunity to better explain Africa's democratic transition in the twenty-first century. My research addresses a major gap in the literature on democratization, a bulk of which has examined experiences of countries in Southern Europe, the former Soviet Bloc, and Latin America. Using four factors of analysis, elections, democratic institutions, the political economy, and civil society, this attempts to discern which of these factors best accounts for Ghana and Malawi's divergent democratic trajectories. In addition to scholarly articles and books, this study utilizes field research from Ghana, consisting of in-depth interviews of academics, journalists, and other long time observers of democratic politics.