

## Democratic and Communist Policies in dealing with the Coronavirus Pandemic: A Comparative Study of Ghana and China

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### Abstract

The outbreak of coronavirus in all parts of the world in the latter part of 2019 and early 2020 necessitated the need for various governments to enact and execute various policies to deal with the virus. Obviously, the effective implementation of such policies to a large extent depends on the system of government practiced in the country. It is in this regard that this paper seeks to compare the policies enacted by Ghana and the People's Republic of China that practice a different system of government so as to determine which system of government is better in enacting and implementing policies that can best deal with the spread of a deadly disease like coronavirus. Grounded in Foucault's Biopolitics and Governmentality, and Agamben's Homo Sacer, the study relied on the qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) in the form of desktop review. The research does not suggest or recommend Ghana to do away with the practice of democracy and adopt communism as a system of government especially when the practice of democracy has aided the protection of fundamental human rights in Ghana. However, this study makes the case that a communist government like that of China with centralised political power is much effective and efficient in enacting and implementing strict, but necessary policies to deal with a deadly disease like coronavirus as compared to a democratic system practiced by Ghana.

**Keywords:** China; Coronavirus; Communist System; Democratic system; Ghana.

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## Introduction

The latter part of the year 2019 to early 2020 witnessed the outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19) globally of which various countries adopted different but somehow similar policies and measures to deal with the spread of the virus due to its deadly nature. The fact was that all efforts to provide a vaccine for the virus had not yielded any fruitful results while the virus continued to claim millions of lives on daily basis. The outbreak of the coronavirus was first reported in the latter part of December 2019 in Wuhan, a city in the People's Republic of China and within a month, the virus had spread to almost every city in China (The Novel Coronavirus Pneumonia Emergency Response Epidemiology Team [NCPERET], 2020). The virus kept spreading to other countries and in January 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the virus as a global pandemic and within a period of four months, the virus had spread throughout the whole of Europe and Africa as well (WHO, 2020).

Considering the deadly nature of the virus and the mode by which the virus spread from one person to the other, China embarked on several rigorous policies such as lockdown, social distancing and wearing face mask among others as measures to help curb the spread of the virus. To begin with, the whole city of Wuhan where the virus was first detected in China was placed under lockdown with nobody going in or out of the city neither were people allowed to go out of their homes in order to avoid people convening at public places which will further lead to the spread of the virus. Also, people were to wash their hands regularly with soap and water or alcohol-based sanitiser and were also required to wear a mask every day, especially in public places. With the exception of a complete city lockdown, all the other measures meant to stop the spread of the virus were gradually extended to other cities in China and these measures somehow proved effective and helped stopped the spread of the virus although the virus had claimed thousands and probably millions of lives in China (Nie et al., 2020).

Ghana reported its first case of the coronavirus on 12 March 2020, but the report stated that the case had not been confirmed yet (Addo, 2020). The country officially confirmed its first two cases on 13 March 2020 when two people returned from Norway and Turkey and as of 26 June 2020, the number of confirmed cases had risen to 15, 473 (Crisis24, 2020). The number of confirmed cases kept rising in the country on daily basis compelling the country to use similar measures that were adopted by China. Thus, Ghana just as many countries in the world adopted similar policies used by China in curbing the spread of the coronavirus. However, the system of government practiced by a country has an impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of policies enacted and as such although China and Ghana used the same policies, their implementation, execution, and effectiveness differed.

In other words, Ghana is a democratic country with a decentralised power from the top to the bottom and it is a country with all the important features of democracy such as organising the periodic elections, freedom of speech, freedom of movement, independence of the press, and guarantee for human rights among others. China is a communist country with a strong centralised unitary power at the top governed by a single communist party with no periodic elections. The Chinese political society is also characterised by inter alia: central planning, bureaucratic elite and common good (Dickson, 2003). Thus, the way and manner by which policies are enacted and implemented in a democratic country are different in a communist state and it is in this regard that this article seeks to compare the policies enacted by the two countries that practice different systems of government so as to determine which system of government is better in enacting and implementing policies that can best deal with the spread of a deadly disease like coronavirus.

### **Justification for the selection of China and Ghana for the Comparative Study**

China and Ghana were selected for the study because firstly, as stated earlier, the coronavirus was first detected in Wuhan, a city in China. As such, it was China that came out with policies and measures that could be used in controlling the spread of the virus which make China pioneers when it comes to policies and measures to help prevent the spread of the virus. Therefore, if a country seeks to emulate or enact policies that could best be used to help stop the spread of the virus, it will be prudent for that country to learn from the experience, policies, and measures used by China as far as preventing the spread of the virus is concerned.

Also, the two countries are developing countries that are classified in the available literature as the Global Developing South countries which make them share certain characteristics in common as far as development is concerned (Kwarteng & Botchway, 2018). To Singh (2014), although there is no doubt that China has in recent times experienced rapid development in various sectors of the economy, the country is still considered as part of the Global South developing countries due to the fact that China has a huge population, and its per capita income is comparatively low. There are also enormous regional inequalities in terms of development and when it comes to the issue of human development index, China is placed in the middle and as such cannot be classified as a developed country (Singh, 2014).

Although China and Ghana are classified as Global Developing South countries, the system of government practiced by the two states subsequently have influence on the policies that are enacted and the implementation of these policies as well as their effectiveness. As such, if one seeks to compare and find

out whether democratic government system or communist government system are much effective in executing policies that are meant to deal with the outbreak of a virus such as COVID-19, Ghana and China are justifiable suits for such a comparison.

### Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by the French political philosopher, Michel Foucault's Biopolitics and Governmentality, and the Italian political theorist, Giorgio Agamben's Homo Sacer. The Covid-19 pandemic is largely considered as one of the most viable global challenges within which these two theories can be applied as a means of assessing how both democratic and nondemocratic political societies behave towards their citizens and vice versa. In essence, Foucault theorises that politics is about life (bio) and a type of political power in which biological life is its privileged object of management and control through the data of its population (Amo-Agyemang, 2019; Ojakangas, 2012; Peters, 2007). Foucault's notion of power goes beyond the traditional conception which is associated with force and coercion. It is in this vein that his theories of Governmentality (which basically means governing from afar without the application of physical or coercive force) and Biopower, which is the "technologies and techniques which govern human social and biological processes" (Amo-Agyemang, 2019, slide 14) are deemed very crucial. As the essence of political theory is for the public good, so is Foucault's notion of Biopolitics. In the view of Foucault, the state puts in policies and measures to protect the lives of its citizens and inherent in the policies and measures to protect lives for common good are disciplinary elements. Therefore, emergency situations like the Covid-19 present a key challenge for the state with respect to Biopower. In the exercise of Biopolitics, two important concepts of disciplinary power (exercised by the state) and resistance power (exercised by citizens) are expressed.

With regards to Agamben's Homo Sacer, he argues, among many others, for the application of the state of exception which is akin to how the rule of law and constitutionalism are limited in emergency situations (Ek, 2006). Thus, even democratic societies, when faced with some emergencies, can assume the status of authoritarian regimes or even worse. In fact, Agamben sought to build on Foucault's Biopower (Amo-Agyemang, 2019; Ek, 2006). To Agamben (1998), the camp, which he describes as the biopolitical paradigm of the modern state has replaced the city. Agamben identifies two main forms of life in every polity, *zoē*, which expresses the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animals, men, or gods), and *bios*, which indicates the form or way of living proper to an individual or a group (Agamben, 1998, p. 9). This classification is by the decision

of a sovereign power that determines who lives and who dies, hence the politics of life and death and living dead (Agamben, 1998). In emergency situations, the lives of the bios can become zoē while the lives of the zoē can be reduced to bare life (Amo-Agyemang, 2019). The COVID-19 period saw the manifestations of the postulations of Foucault and Agamben as states (both democratic and nondemocratic) globally had to put in measures to save and protect lives and even in democratic political societies fundamental human rights were curtailed for collective rights with the application of state of exception or emergency (Constantinou, 2022; Daher-Nashif, 2021; Højme, 2022; Jayasinghe et al., 2022; Prozorov, 2023; Yu & Qian, 2023).

## Methodology

Considering the fact that this article is a comparative study, the qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) in the form of a desktop review was adopted. This approach was considered appropriate as it helps to identify the difference in implementation and execution of policies enacted by Ghana on one hand and China on the other hand as far as dealing with coronavirus is concerned, as well as the effectiveness of these policies in the two systems of government. The mere description of the policies of the two systems of governments in dealing with the virus without comparison is not logical. Also, in the absence of comparison in this article, there will be no breakthrough with regard to identifying which system of government is best in enacting and implementing policies that can effectively deal with a pandemic outbreak in a country in order to achieve the intended results (Lijphart, 1975; Ragin, 2014; Rihoux, 2006).

In recent times the comparative approach in studying large volumes of policies and related issues among countries that share similar characteristics has become widely accepted and used in many studies as the basic method (Rihoux, 2006). This method is used to reach a logical, unbiased conclusion on the usefulness and effectiveness of policies enacted by governments to deal with specific situations (Rihoux, 2006). In this regard, this method is considered very useful as far as this article is concerned.

In terms of data analysis, the thematic analysis (TA) framework was deployed. Clarke and Braun (2017, p. 1) define TA as “a method for identifying, analysing and interpreting patterns of meaning (‘themes’) within qualitative data”. In all, six (6) broad themes were generated to analyse the similarities and differences in patterns regarding various policies that were adopted by both China and Ghana in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic. These themes were: the lockdown policy; the social distance policy, wearing of face mask; the temporal closure of borders and the suspension of international flights, the policy

of evacuating citizens abroad and the issue of personal hygiene. One of the key strengths of the TA framework is its ability to systematically organise data (Alholjailan, 2012; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Clark & Braun, 2017; Terry et al., 2017). Therefore, the specific strategies and policies that were adopted by the two countries with different political systems were systematically synthesised, analysed and interpreted along the themes generated.

## **Results and Discussion**

China was the first country to study the nature of the coronavirus concerning how the virus spread from one person to the other since the virus was first discovered in that country. In this regard, it was China that came up with various measures and policies such as social distancing, wearing of face masks, washing of hands regularly, and closure of borders among others that were used as a means of controlling the spread of the virus and most of these measures and policies, in the long run, proved to be effective as the spread of the virus has to a large extent been contained and controlled in China. Although Ghana emulated the Chinese measures used to control the spread of the coronavirus just like other countries, the system of government practiced in Ghana differs from that of China. In all, six comprehensive policies and measures were adopted by these two countries and the behaviours of both states and their respective citizens are explained.

### **The Lockdown Policy**

One of the first internal policies that was adopted by China in the early stage of the coronavirus pandemic in the country was the lockdown policy which was aimed at preventing the spread of the virus from one city to the other (Rahman et al., 2020). In fact, the city of Wuhan was locked down for close to four months so as to ensure that people who might have unknowingly been affected by the virus would not travel from Wuhan to other cities which would subsequently lead to the virus spreading to other people in different cities of the country (Raymond & Vivian, 2020). Not only was Wuhan locked down but all cities in China were temporarily locked down for a while as restrictions were placed on internal travelling in order to prevent the virus from spreading among the people.

The lockdown policy used by China was to a large extent effective and easy to implement mainly due to the fact that in a communist system like that of China, power is highly concentrated at the centre with strict punishments for disobedience or noncompliance, and as such compliance is easy to achieve (Zhang et al., 2021). There is also mutual trust among the people as it is generally believed that the common good of the entire people supersedes that of individual

liberty and freedom. As such, although the lockdown of cities in China somehow affected the free movement of persons, businesses, and other aspects of life, which are fundamental and basic human rights that need to be enjoyed by every person, the trust in the common good and the political system contributed to the success of such a policy. Thus, although this policy was quite harsh, the people, through collective conviction, were cooperative and complied easily with the policy, which subsequently led to the policy achieving its aim of controlling the spread of the virus (Mei, 2020; Zhang et al., 2021).

Ghana also, at the initial stages, adopted a partial lockdown policy, although pressure groups such as the Ghana Medical Association (GMA) and the main opposition, the National Democratic Congress (NDC), advocated for a total shutdown as an effective means of controlling the spread of the virus (Brimah, 2020). This was the first measure adopted to prevent the spread of the virus in the country from person to person and from one city to the other (Adu-Gyamfi, 2022; Assan et al., 2022; Brimah, 2020; Sibiri et al., 2020). The country began the lockdown process gradually by first imposing a lockdown on the two most populous cities, Accra and Kumasi on 30 March 2020 as a means of controlling the spread of the coronavirus in the country. With time the whole country was locked down because the virus kept spreading in other areas of the country which were not locked down at the initial stages during the outbreak of the virus. The President also instructed that all individuals were required to stay at their various homes as much as possible for two weeks. However, they were only allowed to leave their homes only for essential items such as food, drugs and water among other things that fall in the category of what the country deems as essential necessities. Also, the country suspended inter-city travel for private and commercial purposes.

However, as a democratic-capitalist country where power is decentralised with lots of pressure groups, guarantee for fundamental human rights coupled with greater emphasis on individual good than the common good of all, the authorities of Ghana had a very hard time in trying to implement the lockdown policy as compared to that of China. In fact, compliance with the President's directive on the lockdown policy was largely neglected by the citizens mainly because most of the people could just not bear the fact that they had to stay at home and not go to work to make money for their individual selves (Blay & Asekere, 2021; Boateng et al., 2022; Foli & Ohemeng, 2022). The greater good of all as far as preventing the spread of the virus is concerned was thereby not considered. The President had to finally deploy the police and soldiers on the streets of Ghana to ensure compliance with the lockdown on the parts of the citizens. As expected, there were several reports of clashes between the security agencies and citizens as citizens claimed that the security agencies infringed on their fundamental human rights (Accord, 2020).



This led to non-governmental organisations (NGOs), pressure groups, and the media to come out with various press releases advocating the need for security agencies to respect the rights of individuals and citizens as they go about their activities of ensuring that people stay at home and obey the directives of the President of the Republic. It was in this regard that the Independent Police Complaints Coalition (IPOCOCO), which is a group of civil society organisations was formed with the aim of advocating for the fundamental rights of the people. The main aim of the group was to advocate for activities of the security agencies to fall within the wider framework of ensuring and protecting the fundamental human rights of the citizens as far as ensuring compliance with the lockdown was concerned and failure to do so meant legal actions could be taken against them (Penbytes, 2020).

The point here is that compliance with lockdown as a measure for preventing the spread of the coronavirus was easy to achieve in China as compared to Ghana. The main reason is that the citizens of Ghana are used to the capitalist democratic way of life where individuals prioritise self-achievement and success over the public good. On this basis, people were just eager to leave their houses to go to their various workplaces, arguing that the lockdown was an infringement on their fundamental human rights as enshrined in the 1992 Constitution of Ghana, which supersedes all other laws.

This eventually placed the President of the country and the entire government machinery in a dilemma as to how to balance the achievement of human rights with that of policies necessary for preventing the spread of the coronavirus in the country. More especially considering the fact that the year 2020 was a general elections year in Ghana where the ruling government had to avail itself for elections, the President in particular was very careful not to implement any policy that would be perceived by the citizens as an infringement on their rights to eventually cost the party in the 2020 election.

### **The Social Distancing Policy**

Another policy that was adopted by both China and Ghana as a means of controlling the spread of the coronavirus among their citizens was the social distancing policy. It was discovered that one of the easiest and fastest ways by which the virus can be transmitted from one person to the other was through human contact. It was, therefore, important to come up with measures that would limit human-to-human contact, and the social distancing policy was important in this regard (Hou et al., 2020). The policy implied that all public places such as universities, religious worship places, public restaurants, public transport systems, and workplaces, among others, were temporarily shutdown as a means



of mitigating the spread of the coronavirus among people. As noted by WHO (2020), at the peak of February 2020, the number of coronavirus cases that were reported in China was decreasing drastically, and this was a result of measures adopted by the country, such as social distancing and quarantine. This measure subsequently made China moved from being the epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic to now representing less than a quarter of cases reported throughout the world (WHO, 2020). As such, the rest of the global community had much to learn from China's experience (WHO, 2020). Here again, the execution and implementation of the social distancing policy was a bit easier in China as a communist state. It was therefore not surprising that within a very short time, the policy was able to achieve its intended purpose of preventing the spread of the virus through human contact.

Just like China, Ghana also adopted the social distancing policy and the intention was the same as that of China which was to place restrictions on large public gatherings with the aim of curbing the transmission of the coronavirus from person to person (Antwi-Boasiako et al., 2021; Sibiri et al., 2021; Yeboah et al., 2020). However, the execution of this policy was herculean to achieve the desired results. Complying with the social distancing policy was not only difficult to achieve among ordinary citizens of Ghana, but even prominent and learned people such as Members of Parliament (MPs) mainly because both MPs from the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the opposition NDC were focusing on the 2020 elections. They were rather organising campaigns during that time so as to be voted for in the upcoming 2020 elections.

Disturbingly, some MPs from both the ruling party and the opposition party viewed the social distancing policy as a measure that was preventing them from organising campaigns to acquire maximum votes on the election day. The two main political parties, namely the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) have mainly dominated the affairs of government since the inception of Ghana's Fourth Republic in 1992. Instead of these two parties uniting to fight the outbreak of the virus in the country despite their difference in political ideology, some of the leading members of these two main parties were rather using the outbreak of the virus to score cheap political points for themselves (Braithwaite, 2020).

In fact, the President of Ghana had to demand the Deputy Trade and Industry Minister, Carlos Kingsley Ahenkorah to resign from his post as a Minister with immediate effect. This was because the Minister violated the social distancing policy by visiting and having contact with lots of people in his constituency during the voters' registration exercise after he had tested positive for the coronavirus (Shaban, 2020). Also, some MPs from the ruling party and opposition parties were

sharing food and other items for free to members of their constituency during the quarantine period as a means of helping some of the citizens who stayed at home and were facing some difficulties in getting food for themselves. Although the intention behind such a humanitarian act is a good one, the MPs instead of going from house to house to deliver the food to the people were rather gathering the people at particular places which in most cases were crowded and hence breaching the social distancing policy. This eventually aided the spread of the virus among the people at a fast pace. This phenomenon made it difficult with regards to implementing the social distancing policy in Ghana in achieving its intended results, which was to prevent the spread of the coronavirus through human contact.

### **Wearing of Face Mask**

Another measure that was adopted by the Chinese Government to curb and prevent the coronavirus from spreading among its citizens was the wearing of face masks, especially when speaking in public. The authorities made the wearing of face mask compulsory, by which a person not wearing face masks was either denied entry into a public place or even in some cases prosecuted (Kayat, 2020). As revealed by George Gao, the Director-General of the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), wearing a mask is essential in preventing the spread of the coronavirus because the virus is transmitted from person to person by droplets and close contact (Cohen, 2020). He added that it is essential that people wear a nose mask because droplets always come out of a person's mouth when he or she speaks and since there is the possibility that many people are asymptomatic or have presymptomatic infections, wearing a nose mask can prevent droplets that carry the virus from escaping and infecting others (Cohen, 2020).

In the same context, the Ghanaian Government made the wearing of face masks compulsory during the early stages of the pandemic in the country through Executive Instrument (EI) 164. This was intended to prevent the spread of the virus through droplets from asymptomatic patients when such people speak in public (Nantwi & Boateng, 2020). As bemoaned by the Ghana Police Service, the implementation of this policy was very difficult as the majority of Ghanaian citizens refused to abide by this directive (Ghanaweb, 2020b). To such citizens, the wearing of the mask made them uncomfortable as it was difficult to breathe in public and that as a democratic country, the wearing of a mask should not be made compulsory but optional. In their opinion, making the wearing of a mask compulsory in public places was an abuse of their fundamental "right to freedom of choice" which is enshrined and protected in the 1992 Constitution of Ghana

(UTV Ghana, 2020).

Others also refused to abide by the President's directive of wearing a facial mask by arguing that since the coronavirus pandemic was reported in Ghana, the prices of face mask had been increased over two hundred (200) per cent by traders dealing in the sale of nose mask. Some of the citizens argued that if the Ghanaian Government wanted them to wear the mask, then the Government should have provided the mask in large quantities and distributed to them for free. To them, they did not have the money to buy the mask due to the sudden price hike for the sole reason that the mask had become a necessity for survival. Technically the Government or security agencies could not punish a person for not wearing a mask in public with lack of money to afford as the reason. That will be unfair and an abuse of human rights of which Ghana as a democratic country will not like to tarnish its image internationally in that regard. However, there were some calls from the section of the public for the police to enforce the wearing of face mask policy (Ghanaweb, 2020a) for the general public good (safety).

The Government had to deploy the police on the streets to ensure that people wore face masks when entering or speaking in public places. In fact, there was an incident where two women who were prevented by the police from entering the Accra Central District Market because they were not wearing face masks refused to comply. They insisted that they must be allowed to enter the market to go and preach the Word of God because they are citizens. Their resistance was premised on the fact that the police preventing them from entering the market was against their "freedom of movement" as a fundamental human right (Citi Tube, 2020).

In the long run, to ensure some sort of compliance, the Government had to enact a law that made the act of not wearing a mask criminal offense subjected to prosecution and one could be jailed for three months for not wearing a mask (Annang, 2020). Even with such harsh punishment for not wearing a mask, compliance was still difficult to achieve because as a democratic country, the Government had to be cautious not to incur the wrath of the people with its policies as the year 2020 was an election year of which it had to avail itself for re-election.

### **The Temporal Closure of Borders and the Suspension of International Flights**

When the coronavirus gradually spread to all parts of the world and every country was struggling with dealing with the pandemic, China realised the need to concentrate on dealing with the internal cases as far as the spread of the virus was concerned. This, the Chinese Government thought better than having to also

deal with imported cases from other countries. In this regard, what China did was to temporarily close its borders to all countries and also suspended international flights to China so as to prevent imported coronavirus cases into the country (Nossem, 2020).

Although this policy had a negative effect on the Chinese economy, it was necessary as far as preventing imported cases into the country was concerned. This is because while the number of domestic transmitted cases had reduced close to zero in the early part of March 2020, the country continued to record high numbers of imported cases of coronavirus. On 25 March 2020 China had already reported over sixty-seven (67) new imported cases of coronavirus from different countries, and as such, it was necessary to temporarily close its borders and suspend international flights into the country as well (John & Merit, 2020).

Ghana also closed its borders and suspended international flights into the country on 26 March 2020 when the country also realised that fighting the spread of the virus from two angles was imperative. Thus, dealing with domestic transmitted cases and imported ones was a battle that was difficult to win if not impossible (Mboce & Muigua, 2020). The country by then had confirmed more than 44,000 cases of coronavirus within its borders, most of which were imported cases from other countries. As such, not only was there the need to close universities, public restaurants, basic and senior high schools among others, but it was also essential that the country closed its borders as well as suspending all international flights into the country. This was to enable the country concentrate on fighting the virus from only one angle, thus domestically transmitted cases (US Embassy in Ghana, 2020).

However, implementing this policy was not an easy one because as stated earlier, the year 2020 was an election year amidst the pandemic which implied that both the government in power (NPP) and the opposition party (NDC) were embarking on their campaign strategies. One of such strategies is normally informing their staunch members in abroad to come back to Ghana, register and vote in the election. As such, the closure of borders and suspension of international flights was going to make the return of the loyal supporters to vote for them impossible. Thus, closing the borders of Ghana was a difficult decision to make because although the ruling NPP government felt the need for it, it had to consider the fact that if it closed the borders and suspended international flights, it would have had some of its loyal party supporters stranded in other countries. Again, since Ghana was compiling a new voters register for the 2020 general elections, any person who could not register within May and June was going to be ineligible to exercise his or her franchise.

Also, when the Government announced its intention to close the Ghanaian borders and suspend all international flights into the country, some members of

the main opposition party (NDC) disagreed with that decision, arguing that the number of cases reported in the country was not significant and did not justify the closure of the country's borders. To them, the Government was only using the closure of the country's borders (especially the Aflao border in the Volta Region which happens to be the strong hold of the NDC) as a strategy to prevent its loyal and staunch members from coming back home to register on time and vote the Government out of power in the 2020 elections (Ghanaweb, 2021).

What even worsened the situation was the fact that some Ghanaian citizens who were living abroad but had the intentions of coming back home during the coronavirus pandemic outbreak got agitated with the Government's intention of closing the country's borders and suspending international flights. Some argued that they had the right to return back to their motherland and that denying them that opportunity was an infringement on their fundamental human rights. Some also claimed that their visas and residence permits were about to expire which will render them as illegal immigrants in foreign countries if the Ghanaian borders are closed and international flights suspended. In fact, some of these citizens organised press conferences and came out with press release statements registering their displeasure with the Government's decision to close the borders of the country. They threatened to vote against the Government if it went ahead with such a decision that will make life uncomfortable for them in foreign lands.

### **The Policy of Evacuating Stranded Citizens Abroad**

The evacuation of stranded citizens living abroad as a result of border closures and suspension of international flights was to a large extent not an internal policy used to control the spread of coronavirus. However, it was a necessary measure taken by China and almost all countries in the world, of which Ghana was not an exception (Şencan & Kuzi, 2020). This is to say that all countries practically closed their borders to prevent exported coronavirus cases and to make it easy to concentrate on dealing with domestically transmitted cases. It was thus essential to evacuate stranded citizens in other foreign lands who had the desire to return to their home country.

China embarked on a series of evacuation exercises, and on 8 June 2020, the Government sent a flight from Fuzhou Airport to Kotoka International Airport in Ghana to convey Chinese nationals stranded in Ghana who were not able to return to China due to the closure of borders. This exercise was quite a smooth one just like the other evacuation exercise organised by the Chinese Government for its citizens in other parts of the world (Caiyu & Wei, 2021). Thus, since it was a directive from the central government, the flight was arranged on the scheduled

date and time with no delays and the Chinese embassy in Ghana gathered all Chinese nationals who were willing to go home at the Kotoka International airport and evacuated them to China.

Ghana also organised a series of such evacuation exercises to convey its stranded citizens in China and other parts of the world back home due to the closure of borders and suspension of international flights. A total of about 675 stranded Ghanaians in China who had the intention of going home but could not because of the closure of borders and suspension of international flights successfully evacuated from China to Ghana (Benjamin, 2020). However, the evacuation of citizens was not that easy for the Government. This was due to the fact that parents of stranded citizens in Ghana kept organising press conferences and issuing press release statements demanding the Government to immediately evacuate their children especially those stranded in Wuhan. However, the Ghanaian Government on the other hand was of the view that its preparation in terms of medical equipment for fighting the virus at that time was inadequate. Thus, to the Government, the timing was not right to carry out an evacuation exercise in case any of the evacuated citizens tested positive to the virus upon arrival in Ghana. Thus, the country was not prepared and fully ready to combat the virus hence the need to delay an evacuation exercise until preparations for fighting the virus were adequate (Tarlue, 2020).

However, the pressure from parents in Ghana demanding that their children have to be evacuated immediately placed the Government in a dilemma. The dilemma was as to whether to go ahead and evacuate the stranded citizens as demanded by their parents which might go a long way in helping the NPP to be re-elected in the 2020 elections or to delay the exercise until the country was fully ready to fight the virus (in the event that some of the citizens test positive for coronavirus upon arrival in Ghana). Not only were parents demanding that their children should be immediately evacuated from China regardless of Ghana's readiness to fight the virus, but the opposition party (NDC) organised a press conference and gave the Government an ultimatum to evacuate stranded citizens in Wuhan or they will organise a demonstration with their party supporters to make the Government unpopular (Dzido, 2020). Therefore, what the Government did in the interim was to supply some food, masks, and money to stranded citizens in Wuhan at that time to buy time to adequately prepare and at the same time not fall victim of the displeasure or anger of parents whose children were stranded abroad. Unsurprisingly, since the year 2020 was an election year, the Government did not want to embark on any policy that could cost it votes (BBC news, 2020).

### **The Issue of Personal Hygiene (Specifically the Regular Washing of the Hands)**

The regular washing of the hands was to a large extent, not a policy that was adopted but it was a necessary measure that helped in preventing the transmission of the virus from person to person or touching contaminated objects. During the initial outbreak of the virus in Wuhan, doctors who studied the nature and behaviour of the virus realised that one of the most effective ways of preventing the transmission of the virus was the regular and thorough washing of the hands with soap or sanitiser (familydoctor.org, 2020). Thus, washing of the hands was identified as the number one tip for preventing the spread of coronavirus. In this regard, personal hygiene with specific emphasis on washing the hands with alcohol-based sanitiser was encouraged among all people in China during the early stages of the outbreak of the virus. Hand washing under running water was therefore encouraged under many circumstances, among which included: after returning from a public outing such as the grocery store, work, school, concert, sporting activity, hospital, nursing home and handshaking, among others.

Hand sanitisers were quickly made on large scales in China at a very cheap and affordable price so that all could purchase and use them. The sanitisers were produced under strict quality control mechanisms prescribed by the Government and any person that produced inferior sanitisers or tried to overprice such items were dealt with by the law. The Chinese Government also gave a directive for the availability of alcohol-based sanitisers at all public places as a means of encouraging the regular cleaning of the hands to avoid the spread of the coronavirus, and this directive was strictly adhered to.

In the case of Ghana, the Government also encouraged the cleaning of the hands with alcohol-based sanitiser or regular washing of the hands with soap under running water to prevent the spread of the virus. However, in a democratic-capitalist country, the state has little or probably no control over the market and prices because the market is governed by the forces of supply and demand. As a result, the prices of sanitisers suddenly shot up to over 300 per cent increment during the outbreak of the virus in Ghana. In fact, Ghanaians started complaining about the abnormal increase in the price of hand sanitisers in the county when the country recorded only six cases of coronavirus. In an interview by BBC, one consumer bemoaned: "... The price of a hand sanitiser which was previously sold at Ghc3 is now being sold at Ghc15 and when I asked the seller why, I was told it is because of coronavirus" (BBC News, 2020).

Another customer also said to BBC: "If you go to Kaneshie and Makola markets, hand sanitisers that were sold at Ghc2 before coronavirus in Ghana is now sold at Ghc10" (BBC News, 2020). When the BBC official interviewed the Chief Executive of Consumer Protection Agency in Ghana, Kofi Kapito, he



revealed that, although the increase in the prices of hand sanitisers was not fair, Ghana is a free-market country and the principles of free-market allow traders to sell at their desired prices. He stated: “...We are in a free market which is not regulated by the Government so the people have the right to sell their products at any price they want ...” (BBC News, 2020).

It was therefore not surprising that the coronavirus spread very fast among Ghanaians when the first two cases were reported in the country. This is because the ordinary people were finding it difficult to afford basic necessities that were required to combat the virus such as hand sanitisers and face masks among others as the prices of these items were increased drastically by traders. Therefore, since Ghana is a democratic country operating a free-market policy, there was virtually nothing the Government could do about the situation.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

In conclusion, this article does not in any way recommend or suggest that Ghana should move away from the practice of democracy as a system and adopt communism, especially judging from Ghana's political history that has been characterised by various military coup d'état of which the abuse of human rights was rampant. However, inferring from the above comparison one can argue that communism as a system of government with a strong central power (like the one practiced by China) is much more effective in ensuring strict implementation of policies to deal with pandemics like coronavirus as compared to a democratic system such as the one practiced by Ghana.

This is to say that the Fourth Republic of Ghana, since its inception in 1992 to a large extent has been successful with relatively eight consecutive peaceful periodic elections where power has been successfully transferred from one government to the other without any bloodshed. Additionally, the practice of democracy has facilitated the promotion and protection of citizens' fundamental human rights. Therefore, adopting a system of government like communism, where there will be no periodic elections to hold some selfish and corrupt leaders accountable, will be disastrous for the country concerning guaranteeing human rights and holding leaders accountable.

However, deducing from the above comparison, the democratic system of government practiced by Ghana is not very effective when it comes to implementing strict policies that are necessary for dealing with pandemics like coronavirus as compared to a communist system of government practiced by China. The above analysis has proven that it was difficult for the Ghanaian Government to implement the same policies and measures that were largely

implemented with ease in China to deal with the spread of the coronavirus. As a matter of fact, the year 2020 which was slated for general elections made the Government cautious not to implement any strict but necessary policies that will make the citizens angry or register their displeasure with the Government and perhaps subsequently vote it out of power. The Government therefore was faced with the dilemma in balancing the need to enact and implement strict but necessary policies or heed to the demands of the citizens so as to be re-elected.

In contrast, communist China which has no periodic elections had it easy when it came to executing strict but necessary policies to deal with the spread of the coronavirus. Although it is an undisputed fact that the number of cases and deaths reported in China was very high than that of Ghana (which is primarily due to the population size of China as compared to that of Ghana), the Chinese Government to a very large extent was much effective and efficient when it came to executing policies meant for controlling the spread of coronavirus for the overall public safety than the Ghanaian Government.

This notwithstanding and as other studies have revealed, the Chinese positive civil obedience cannot entirely be attributed to the communist regime but the Chinese philosophy of Confucianism and the pursuit of long-standing common values of self-recognition and self-responsibility (Chan, 2002; Hu, 2020). These traditions and values played crucial role in the success story of the Chinese civil obedience to the COVID-19 management and control policies (Ho, 2020; Hu, 2020; Zhang & Hudtohan, 2021).

From the analysis, citizens in democratic societies as evidenced in the Ghanaian context have high tendency of exercising resistant power in emergency situations like the COVID-19 pandemic than in nondemocratic societies like communist China. This is due to the idea of the enjoyment of their fundamental human rights and therefore see the very interventions in pandemic situation for the greater public good as abuse and violation of their rights. There is, therefore, the need for massive public education regarding periods of the application of state of exceptions for the needed nationalistic cooperation between the citizens and the state (specifically the security agencies, especially the police). In this regard, the role of traditional political institutions (chieftaincy), becomes crucial as Ghanaians still hold allegiance and duty of obeying traditional authorities. This will help complement the effort of the modern political institutions of the state in dealing with pandemics for the overall public good.

The study also recommends that the Ghanaian government and the opposition parties sit up and place the country's developmental interest first before any other interest and agenda. In fact, partisan politics has permeated every facet of the Ghanaian society, so much so that Ghana is perhaps the

only country where dealing with a global pandemic like coronavirus was highly politicised. Thus, it was only Ghana that some members of the opposition party could go on the radio and television stations to make utterances such as: 'if they were the ones in power they would have managed and controlled the spread of coronavirus than the current government so the citizens should vote them in power come 7 December 2020'. Some members of the ruling party also used similar or the same media platforms and made utterances like: 'there is no government in the history of Ghana that could have managed the coronavirus crisis than they have and as such citizens should ignore anything the opposition is saying but rather maintain them in power in the December 2020 elections'. All these remarks to score cheap political points are needless and do not help with the country's development. There is, therefore, the need to continually promote and protect national interest over party interest in an already polarised society along the two main parties, NPP and NDC.

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