

Review

Unitarism and presidentialism: Political institutions and corruption in public management in Ghana

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This paper examines the compatibility of democratization and corruption in Ghana. It uses institutional explanations of unitarism and presidentialism as independent variables to explicate why the adoption of democratic government has not addressed the problem of corruption and the consequent inefficiencies in public sector management. While unitarism draws attention to how the supremacy of national institutions and centralization of power make corruption in public management a fact of life in Ghana, presidentialism explains how the supremacy of the presidency undermines legislative oversight functions. The paper concludes that steps should be taken to divest the presidency of some of its powers, and politicians must also promote best practices in the bureaucracy and local government administration in order to address corruption and inefficiency in public sector management.

Key words: Unitarism, presidentialism, institutions, decentralization, corruption.

INTRODUCTION: CORRUPTION IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Good governance or effective public management has long been identified as a missing political desideratum in the management of the public sector in sub-Saharan Africa. The current wave of democratization that began in the early 1990s was expected to undermine corruption by promoting both constitutionalism and accountability in public management. While constitutionalism denotes the application of constitutions in government and political affairs, accountability requires government officials, both elected and appointed, and departments to subject public policy and decision-making to public scrutiny. Strangely enough, corruption has persisted alongside democratization in several sub-Saharan African countries, including Ghana. Incredibly, democratization has become a spur for corruption. As studies on the causes of corruption are at the same time extensive and inconclusive, this paper examines the causes of corruption in Ghana from the perspective of political institutions.

Ghanaians are quite sanguine about the prospects of democratization in national and human development. Yet, the perception of corruption and inefficiency in public management could lead to a backlash of democratization if unchecked. Recent reports by Transparency International have shown steady progress by government at addressing the corruption problem, although it is threatening comprehensive development processes and severely restricting growth. According to the Ghana

Integrity Initiative (the local chapter of Transparency International), the 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010 corruption perception indexes were 3.3, 3.7, 3.9, 3.9, and 4.1 respectively out of a maximum of 10.¹ More starkly, efforts to reduce, if not to eliminate, corruption have become chimerical. This paper uses elite interviews of experts in public sector management and existing documents to explain why corruption has become compatible with democracy in Ghana. By elite interviews, the paper focuses on top-level administrators and researchers who are abreast with political institutions and public management in Ghana. The study also employs purposive sampling in selecting 10 individuals who answered questions on institutions and public management. The interviews were conducted through face-to-face and telephone interactions from October 2009 to November 2010. The question - which political institutions promote corruption in Ghana? - will guide this paper. The paper investigates unitarism and presidentialism as independent variables.

More than a decade ago the World Bank noted that governance is "the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social

¹The websites of the Ghana Integrity Initiative and Transparency International have this information. The websites are www.tighana.com and www.transparency.org.

development" (World Bank, 1994; xiv). In the scheme of the Bank sub-Saharan Africa lacks effective governance to address developmental challenges. Simply put, the Bank's view of governance concerning Africa's economic failures is crises of leadership. In actual fact, political elites in sub-Saharan Africa have largely used their management of the economy to enrich themselves and their cronies at the expense of the poor masses. Ultimately, the absence of transparency and accountability in government, as well as the prevalence of human rights violations, weak legislative and judiciary institutions that will serve as a check on presidential dictatorship, have become the central features of politics and public management in many sub-Saharan African countries. In effect, the pervasiveness of bad governance, with its most enervative effect of the poor getting poorer by the day, has made corruption endemic in sub-Saharan Africa. One of the major challenges with democratization in Africa is the absence of strong, independent parliamentary institutions and civil society organizations deeply committed to the fight against bad governance. Often presidents control the legislative institutions because they have the majority and opposition parties are confined to opposing the policies of the majority. For the reason that opposition political parties lack the numbers to make the changes they desire, they rarely succeed at getting executive branch officials to answer certain questions on their actions and inactions.

By its definition and tenets, representative democracy is supposed to be incompatible with corruption. Pointedly, elected and appointed officials in a democracy are expected to promote the public good in the performance of their functions. Nevertheless, even in some industrialized countries where political institutions and political culture have burgeoned to prevent abuse of public office and controlling individual behaviors, corruption somewhat persists. This portends that, in Ghana, where institutions are generally weak, corruption would be an impediment to human and national development. Institutional explanations of governments and individuals' actions and inactions have long received traction in the literature on governance, public sector management, and comparative public policy. However, as applied to Ghana, this is an effort to show how political institutions offer theoretical and practical explanations for the pervasiveness of corruption in a model of sub-Saharan African democracy. In public management, corruption is viewed as the abuse of public office for personal gains. Similarly, "in the context of the state, corruption most often refers to criminal or otherwise unlawful conduct by government agencies, or by officials of these organizations acting in the course of their employment" (Agere, 2000).

In addition to producing projects of modest significance to a country, corruption undermines democratic governance. In some countries in the global south, this provides a recipe for military intervention, as several of these interventions especially in sub-Saharan Africa have somewhat mentioned corruption as one of the reasons.

For the reason that corruption denies many people access to basic services and amenities essential for human survival and advancement, it has deleterious effects on a society, which requires concerted efforts by various entities in both the private and public sectors to combat. A report issued by the African Union (AU) in 2002 indicated corruption costs the continent \$148 billion annually. The report further noted that corruption has led to an increase in the cost of goods by almost 20%, deterring potential investors as well as restricting economic development (Blunt, 2002).²

In Africa, corruption has been conceived as the "outright theft, embezzlement of funds or other appropriation of state property, nepotism and the granting of favors to personal acquaintances, and the abuse of public authority and position to exact payments and privileges" (Harsch, 1993). Similarly, Nye (1967) has observed that corruption engrosses "behavior which deviates from the normal duties of a public role because of private-regarding (family, close clique), pecuniary or status gain; or violates rules against the exercise of certain types of private-regarding influence. These behaviors include bribery, nepotism and misappropriation of state resources.

INSTITUTIONS

Institutions have different designs and functions across several countries, which make them unique at explaining public policies and the activities of political actors in the various branches of government in countries. The new institutionalism, for instance, argues that there has been overreliance on variables outside state institutions in explaining public policies and policy problems. Institutional theory primarily stresses the importance of explaining public policies with reference to the political institutions in a country. Although, there are different strands of institutional theories, for many scholars, institutions structure policy and political outcomes in profound ways (Studlar, 2002; Weaver and Rockman, 1993; Immergut, 1998).

Thus, institutions may explain why the roles of certain state institutions may be similar or different across countries. The existence of rules, regulations and procedures enable institutions to play vital functions in a country, such as determining who gets what, when and how. As a result, political institutions, which operate according to unambiguous statutes, present numerous opportunities for the promotion of efficient public management that undermine corruption or reduce the likelihood of public officials engaging in corrupt practices. Institutional explanations of policy outcomes can focus on the structure of government, territorial sovereignty or distribution of power (federalism and unitarism), the

²Corruption 'costs Africa billions' by Elizabeth Blunt <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/2265387.stm> accessed December 30, 2008.

composition of the executive (parliamentarism and presidentialism) (Studlar, 2002; Gerring and Thacker, 2004), the composition of the legislature (unicameralism and bicameralism), as well as the electoral system (proportional representation and single member districts), the judiciary, and the bureaucracy.

Since the emergence of multiparty democracy in 1992, Ghana has operated a semi-presidential political system that combines the features of the United States' presidential and the United Kingdom's parliamentary governments. In this semi-presidential system, there is some significant element of fusion of powers between the two dominant political branches of the government, the executive and legislature, though the chief executive or president is directly elected by the people. Because of this fusion of powers, some parliamentarians are also members of the executive branch of government.

One of the major weaknesses with political institutions in Ghana and perhaps other transitional societies that has somewhat made corruption compatible with democracy is that, these institutions are still burgeoning and are yet to effectively address the problems in governance and public management. Additionally, the lack of political will to make these institutions effective has made it possible for some individuals in government to influence the decisions and behaviors of the institutions in the country. The political institutions that existed during the era of dictatorship had to within the shortest possible time change their features from their autocratic past to embrace the new form of governance based on the will of the people. Specifically, the first four years of democratization was more similar to the era of dictatorship since all the opposition political parties boycotted the parliamentary elections after alleging that the incumbent head of state stole the presidential elections. This time, there was no independent legislature capable of overseeing executive agencies as the same political party controlled both the legislative and executive branches of government.

The adoption of democratization in 1992/1993 was largely driven by pressures from the international community (especially the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and Western countries) and domestic interest groups. The then de facto Provisional National Defense Council government resisted several attempts by these same groups for the adoption of democratization in the early 1980s; however, the economic hardships of the 1980s forced the government to go to the international financial institutions and some global north countries for financial support. As well, the economic hardships the Soviet Union experienced in the 1980s during the Cold War meant that the Soviet Union was not in a position to support communist-leaning countries in Africa and elsewhere. These led to the government coming up with a timetable to shift the country towards democratic governance. Since the first election of the Fourth Republic in 1993, Ghana has made some strides

in democratization largely because free and fair election has been recognized as a necessary condition for democratic governance. In the 2012 presidential and parliamentary elections, the Electoral Commission has made it clear that it will use a biometric register to further enhance free and fair elections. Some opposition political parties are even pushing for the use of electronic verification in the 2012 presidential and parliamentary elections.

Despite the fact that there are several political institutions in Ghana, this study focuses on two of them—unitarism and presidentialism. This does not imply that institutions like the courts and other executive institutions are less corrupt. Rather, this research is particularly interested in exploring the effects of these two institutional configurations on corruption in the Ghanaian polity. Another, equally indispensable reason is that, the study is more concerned about how the unitary structure of the political system and the composition of the executive branch of government promote corruption. In other words, the perceived corruption-prone customs service, police service, and the courts are outside the scope of this study.

Unitarism

Unitarism or unitary government denotes the centralization of political power in the national government (Dye and MacManus, 2007; Bardes et al., 2008). When local bodies exist in the country, they do so at the expense of the national government through such systems as fiscal, administrative and policy decentralization. The direct opposite is federalism, which is the sharing of political power between a national/central government and the various states or provinces in the federation. Under federalism, a central government is responsible for the entire country, and states or provincial governments responsible for the governance of particular jurisdictions in the country (Asare, 2007). Obinger et al. (2005) have observed that federalism is an institutional arrangement designed to ensure unity by allowing a certain degree of diversity in the body politic. On the other hand, in unitary political systems, such as Ghana and Kenya, decentralized governments and other local bodies hold their power at the behest of the national government. For instance, devolution in the United Kingdom allows the constituent countries autonomy in certain policy areas, yet the national government can take back those powers granted to them.

The centralization of political power in Ghana has created only one tier of political and policy authority. This suggests that the actions of the national government take precedence over that of local authorities. It has the advantage of ensuring that all segments of the society receive a fair share of the national cake, since the allocation of resources is done by the autonomous

national government. Some studies have indicated that unitary political systems have been more effective than federations in promoting the collective good, especially in terms of human development, social spending, national development (Cameron, 1978; Immergut, 1992; Obinger et al., 2005; Linz, 1996; Castles and Mckinlay, 1979; Gordon, 1989; Castles, 1998), and curbing corruption (Treisman, 2000; Gerring and Thacker, 2004).

In the same manner, Wilensky (2002) and Castles (1998) have observed in their investigation of the economic performance and welfare policies of advanced industrialized countries that centralization of political power is a major determinant in the success stories of countries, such as Sweden, Norway, and the Netherlands. One reason why federalism has become adversative to social and political reforms is that the division of powers between central governments and the various provincial governments rest on a constitutional provision that makes it very difficult to change the primary rules of the political game (Castles, 1998).³

Ghana's unitary political system runs afoul to the compliments of unitarism. Perceptibly, some African pessimists will attribute this to the general explanations of African exceptionalism.⁴ In other words, neither is unitarism reducing corruption nor promoting human development in Ghana, because Ghana is an African country and the problems that plague Africans are uniquely African. While African exceptionalism might explain a piece of the puzzle, it is important to note that the functioning of unitarism, particularly the extensiveness of policy centralization in the national government, is culpable for the ironclad correlation between the structure of the government and corruption. Centralization has endorsed the concentration of policy veto players within the national government.

In spite of unitarism, for purposes of effective political governance and public management, the country is divided into 10 administrative regions, and the 10 regions are as well subdivided into 170 metropolitan, municipal

³Castles (1998: 82-85) gives two additional reasons that seem to suggest that federalism opposes national and human development. One is that federal political systems have several levers of authority such as second chambers representing the states, state legislatures, and state and federal judiciaries that might oppose change. And finally, where states have responsibility for making policies, it is very possible there will be unequal development, since some states may be more capable and economically endowed than others. Countries like Nigeria, the United States, Canada, Australia, and India are quintessential examples. In a dissimilar vein, Obinger and his colleagues (2005) have indicated that there is no consensus in the comparative public policy literature that federalism impedes national development and the expansion of the welfare state.

⁴As social scientists C.R.D. Halisi and Scott Bowman have observed, African exceptionalism — the “idea that the problems that plague Africa are uniquely African” and thus must be analyzed without reference to or reliance on “universal categories of explanation”—“has become the golden rule of analysis” for many students and observers of Africa. C.R.D. Halisi & Scott Bowman, *Theory that Matters: The Intellectual Legacy of Richard L. Sklar*, in *African Politics in Post Imperial Times: The Essays of Richard Sklar lxi* (Toyin Falola ed., Africa World Press 2002), cited in Prempeh, H. Kwasi, "Africa's 'Constitutionalism Revival': False Start or New Dawn?" *International Journal of Constitutional Law*, Vol. 5, No. 469, 2007:2

and district assemblies.⁵ In reality, these administrative regions and districts do not have the policy and decision-making autonomy to adopt policies and programs to check vices inimical to democratic governance and public sector management. Put differently, by following national policy prescriptions, their activities have been largely confined to implementing the policy decisions of the national government (Interviews, 2009/2010). This problem is worsened by the prevalence of a weak, perhaps politicized bureaucracy, which has consistently been viewed by majority of Ghanaians as principals, rather than agents, in the performance of their duties (Interviews, 2009/2010). Clearly, the activities of the national bureaucracy are counterintuitive to any attempts at promoting policies to weaken the grip of corruption on the country.

What the preceding paragraph indicates is that, two of the main problems impeding Ghana's unitary political system to address corruption and other numerous policy problems are traceable to the absence of an effective, independent local government system and a weak bureaucracy. As indicated, a unitary political system per se is a recipe to promote equal national development. Nevertheless, the functioning of the bureaucracy and decentralization, which the paper now addresses, eclipses the viability of unitarism in promoting the common good.

The bureaucracy

The national bureaucracy is primarily the policy implementation agency of the executive branch of government. In spite of the grotesque evidence against colonialism in sub-Saharan Africa, including Ghana, the British bequeathed to Ghana one of the most effective and efficient administrative states in the continent (Interviews, 2009/2010).⁶ In particular, the administrative state was structured along the lines of the British merit-based model, and it was also devoid of politics in providing services to the Ghanaian people (McSheffrey, 1983; Amonoo, 1981). However, the political neutrality of the bureaucracy was compromised right after independence when the destiny of the country was entrusted to Ghanaians.

Notably, two studies have shown that the first Ghanaian president of the country, Kwame Nkrumah, felt the bureaucracy was an instrument of the British and that the institution must be purged from its colonial aspirations (Amonoo, 1981; Price, 1975). According to Amonoo (1981), Kwame Nkrumah undermined the capacity and effectiveness of the bureaucracy by denying agencies funding and meddling in the recruiting and selection process. To worsen the predicament of the bureaucracy,

⁵Recently the government announced the creation of additional districts which are yet to take off. This will increase the number of decentralized bodies.

⁶Studies on the evolution of the national bureaucracy have reached this conclusion (Amonoo, 1981; Price, 1975).

Nkrumah decided to rely on a coalition or a subsystem comprising himself and some bureaucrats, who accepted his political views 'hook, line and sinker' to implement his policies (Amonoo, 1981). As a result, many senior bureaucrats who were critical of the regime were sidelined.

As Amonoo (1981) and Price (1975) point out, Nkrumah and the bureaucrats who shared his beliefs ended up making the entire bureaucracy subservient to the state, particularly the executive branch of government. Gyimah-Baodi (2004) attributes the inability of the bureaucracy to function effectively and contribute to national development to the beliefs of political elites, which oppose bureaucratic reforms and autonomy. Nkrumah and other political elites in his administration used their overwhelming influence over state resources to build patronage systems that stymie national administrative reforms, while simultaneously ensuring that their cronies get employment in the bureaucracy. Subsequent chief executives as well as political parties since the era of Nkrumah have done little to undermine this rent-seeking behavior of the bureaucracy (Interviews, 2009/2010).

In essence, while there are laws in place to ensure that hiring into the bureaucracy is based on merit, hiring decisions tend to be made on merit some of the time, especially in positions that require specific technical qualifications, such as the sciences and engineering (Interviews, 2009/2010). In specific terms, adverse selection has received more traction than the merit-based system in recruitment into the administrative state.⁷ This may be explained in part by the rejection of due process in the recruiting and selection practices of some of the government agencies. Recently, the Public Accounts Committee of Parliament, in a report on the activities of the National Disaster Management Organization (NADMO), noted among others that, politicization in recruiting has had a negative effect on the activities and image of the organization. Many Ghanaians certainly believe that politicians and other networks in the country even influence recruiting and selection in the various security agencies (Police, Army, Immigration, Customs, and etc.). Interestingly, to the ordinary, and more so the savvy, Ghanaian, the bureaucracy is synonymous with inefficiency, ineffectiveness, and corruption.

Similarly, the prevalence of patronage in the appointment of the heads of the various government departments encourages corruption. While patronage cannot be ruled out entirely in such appointments, because of the extensiveness of partisanship in the Ghana, for the most part, the unquestioned commitment of the appointees to their principals (politicians and political parties) blithely undermines their efficiency and rarely

⁷ Adverse selection is used in bureaucratic studies, economics, insurance, and other disciplines to denote how the selection of the wrong workers will inevitably undermine the goals of an organization. More often than not, adverse selection creates asymmetric information between workers and consumers/public.

promotes the collective good of the society (Interviews, 2009/2010). Whenever there is a change of government, the leadership of most state agencies and corporations are replaced with people who mostly share the worldview of the new president or his political party. This usually compromises the alleged neutrality expected of the bureaucracy (Peters, 1997; Huber and Shipan, 2002), since they are led by people who are often partisan in the performance of their duties (Interviews, 2009/2010). This is reminiscent of the spoils system in the United States under President Andrew Jackson in the 19th century when all appointments to the government bureaucracy were based on political connections rather than on impersonal measures of merit (Mosher, 1982). Mosher (1982) further argues that Jackson's conception of governance was that popular election gave the victorious party a mandate to select officials from its own ranks.

It must also be emphasized that, apart from governments persistence failures to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the bureaucracy, by 1993, recommendations by commissions and committees set up by government to improve the conditions of work of bureaucrats and promote effective public management were never implemented (Ayee, 1993). In the same way, Ayee (2001) has noted, among others that, administrative reforms in Ghana have failed largely due to the absence of commitment from high-level political elites, as well as the deleterious consequences of undertaking reforms that do not take into account the motivations and involvement of bureaucrats.

Likewise, it is common knowledge among the masses in the country that a large segment of employees in the administrative state are actively engaged in bribery and corruption. In actual fact, apart from the routine corruption within their departments, some of them require compensations from individuals for the services they render as well (Interviews, 2009/2010).⁸ These activities are clearly an affront to the principal-agent theorizing, since bureaucrats are supposed to be the agents in their relations with the masses (tax payers), who are the principals.⁹ Tellingly, the primacy of politics in the activities of the bureaus presents acute problems, as is the lack of professionalism essential to addressing the complex policy implementation problems facing the country.

Decentralization

The most debilitating effect of policy and decision-making

⁸ Quite a number of Ghanaians have come to accept it as a fact of life.

⁹ Principal-agent theory has been applied to various disciplines and relations involving different actors. In legislative studies, for instance, lawmakers are the agents of their constituents, while bureaucrats also are agents of lawmakers (the principals) (Moe 1984). Elected officials and those paid by the tax payers are the agents of the masses, broadly conceived. The study argues here that the masses are the principals because government departments are set up to serve the needs of the masses.

centralization in the national government is that local bodies do not have any room to be innovative. The move towards decentralization in Africa, especially in the 1990s, began with the recognition of a strong centralization impulse (Olowu, 1998) that worked against good governance. Decentralization also fits with the neoliberal worldview of divesting the national government of several of its responsibilities and encouraging the development of market forces as well as a mechanism for restricting the African state along more distributional lines (Bangura, 1999). Although the 1992 Constitution is unequivocal about the establishment of an effective local government system that will address problems in local communities, the political will to make it effective has been lacking since the emergence of the Fourth Republic in 1993.¹⁰ In reality, while the two dominant political parties, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC), have espoused the virtues of decentralization, especially in terms of how it can reduce corruption in the national government, they have not made any significant commitment to follow the strictures of effective decentralization practices (Interviews, 2009/2010). In the same way, the two dominant parties routinely trumpet, if not exaggerate; the importance of decentralization, but the evidence in the decentralized institutions suggests the contrary.

Local government administration in the country predates the Fourth Republic. The various de facto leaders that governed the country before 1992 even flirted with it in an effort to enhance their legitimacy. Nonetheless, the involvement of cities and communities in policy issues that affect them received unparalleled traction following the adoption of the 1992 Constitution. In the last four decades or so, decentralized political institutions have become political and policy orthodoxies, predominantly in countries committed to increasing the participation of their citizens in governance, as well as bringing the activities of government closer to the people.

Some of the other advantages of decentralized political institutions cited in the literature are: (1) dispersing of power among several leaders, which is considered more democratic and accountable than having a single authority making all national policies; (2) improving and enhancing policy efficiency and responsiveness, since the authorities in certain communities and municipalities would be predisposed to addressing the concerns of their people better and quicker than a national bureaucracy preoccupied with numerous policy problems; (3) the promotion of policy innovation because when localities

have policy autonomy they can design programs that can address policy problems in their communities; (4) incorporate economic, social, spatial, and environmental issues into the development planning process on an integrated and comprehensive basis; (5) establish a national development planning system to integrate and coordinate development planning at all levels and in all sectors (Ayee, 1994, 2004; Dye and MacManus, 2007). Other decentralized bodies can also learn from the experiences, failures and successes of innovative communities and districts (Gray, 1994; Asare, 2007; Dye and MacManus, 2007; Asare and Studlar, 2009).

Despite the fact that decentralization is deserving of praise in Ghana, politicians in the national government (lawmakers and those in the executive branch of government) have in time and again refused to heed to the constitutional requirement for the establishment of an effective local government system. Broadly, the present local government system is in throes of political and administrative inefficiency (Interviews, 2009/2010). The chief executives of the various metropolitan areas, municipalities and the districts are appointed by the president. After a presidential election, party leaders in the various constituencies as well as nationally recommend individuals that have been supportive of the winning party in certain constituencies. This is besides the several people who see the elected president in droves to lobby for these positions (Interviews, 2009/2010).

While partisanship has been the main litmus test for the president to appoint the chief executives, it is essential to stress that, this same partisanship underwrites the appointees' loyalty and accountability to the president and rarely to the communities where they work. Though this appointment must receive approval from at least two-thirds of the members of the assembly in the districts, municipalities and metropolitan areas, in practice, assembly members have more often than not been predisposed to accepting the nominee of the president.¹¹ Usually, such appointees are able to garner the support of about 70% members of the various assemblies, including assemblies where the members of parliament are from the main opposition political party (Interviews, 2009/2010).

The use of party identification as the central criterion in the selection of chief executives suggest that, in some instances, those nominated by the president may not fit the profile of individuals who can propel grassroots democracy as well as ensuring the promotion of best practices in the adoption, formulation, implementation, evaluation, and monitoring of public policies in their jurisdictions. Time and again, there are clashes on

¹⁰Chapter 20 of the Constitution stresses the following in addition to other measures to enhance local government administration: (a) Parliament shall enact appropriate laws to ensure that functions, powers, responsibilities and resources are at all times transferred from the Central Government to local government units in a co-ordinated manner;(b) Parliament shall by law provide for the taking of such measures as are necessary to enhance the capacity of local government authorities to plan, initiate, co-ordinate, manage and execute policies in respect of all matters affecting the people within their areas, with a view to ultimately achieving localization of those activities.

¹¹Usually, the president appoints individuals to the position of chief executive based on their support for the president's political party in that district, municipality or metropolitan area. At times, too, these individuals are rewarded for their support to the party nationally or regionally. All in all, patronage is the variable that best explains these appointments.

agenda setting, policy adoption, formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation between these chief executives and the professional staffs in the decentralized administrations (Interviews, 2009/2010). These conflicts should be predictable because the professional staff, apart from their knowledge of public sector management, tend to have either bachelor's level or graduate level educational qualifications and have spent a number of years on the job. In fact, the experience and education of the professionals bring them at odds with the chief executives, especially when the former tries to explain to the latter the strategies to be followed to achieve certain policy goals and the benchmarks for measuring successes and failures (Interviews, 2009/2010).

Moreover, because most appointees to the position of chief executive lack the requisite skills in public sector management, they rarely have programs in place to check corruption at the grassroots level. More importantly, the initiative to champion policies targeted at promoting accountability, effective and efficient service delivery, best practices in procurement and contract awards, conflict of interest, community empowerment and participation, privatization, and ex-ante analyses are lacking in most of the local government institutions (Interviews, 2009/2010). Also, under the cloak of partisanship and collaborations with other senior officers in the local government system, most of the chief executives sometimes divert moneys meant for development projects in their jurisdictions into their private projects. When the NDC lost the 2000 presidential elections to the NPP; the new government took steps to prosecute some of the chief executives in the previous regime for allegations of corruption. In the same manner, the last NPP government had to dismiss some chief executives because of alleged corruption and other practices inimical to effective public sector management. In sum, if corruption is a norm for some policy actors in the national government, in the decentralized institutions, it is indescribable in its sordidness.

Presidentialism

Presidentialism has defined the political system since the emergence of the Fourth Republic. Presidentialism in a country suggests that there is an individual, who combines the functions of head of state and head of government. Aside his/her juggernaut role in setting the national agenda as head of government, the president also functions as chief legislator, chief diplomat, and commander-in-chief (Bardes et al., 2008; Ethridge and Handelman, 2008). Presidential governments have features that distinguish them from parliamentary political systems. Though Ghana's Constitution allows the office of the presidency to be controlled by a nationally elected president, in practice, the political system is semi-presidential or hybrid political system, because the same

presidential or hybrid political system, because the same fundamental law requires more than 50% of the cabinet to be selected from Parliament. In other words, there is compatibility between membership of cabinet and the legislature. Unlike the strict presidentialism, as in the United States and Nigeria, this system hardly ever produces a deadlock between the executive and the legislative branches of government, since some politicians simultaneously play key roles in both branches of government (Tsebelis, 2002).

The literature on types of government systems, especially as it relates to the composition of the executive, has been explicit on the adverse effects that face any country that adopts a particular system. For instance, relating to how the two main systems of government, presidentialism and parliamentarism, enhance the stability of democracies, Linz (1996) argues that while parliamentary government gives flexibility to the political system, presidentialism makes the system rigid. On the other hand, the central role of separation of powers and checks and balances in presidential governments serve as a check on executive powers and, consequently, makes the executive branch more accountable to the legislature. The integration of both systems in Ghana should serve as a catalyst to minimize the disadvantages inherent in any particular system, as it is to maximize the advantages of both systems in public management. However, abuse of public office for personal gains by politicians in the executive branch of government, surprisingly, has persisted alongside this novelty. A number of factors may explain this incongruity. First, the integration of the two systems has rather given more powers to the president at the expense of the legislature. Lawmakers in the president's party have come to view the simultaneous appointment into the executive branch of government as far more rewarding than serving only as parliamentarians, who hardly ever make policy (Interviews, 2009/2010). This penchant for executive positions is further underpinned by the public's perception that serving in the executive branch of government gives a lawmaker more media attention, societal recognition and respect than those that are solely confined to the legislative business (Interviews, 2009/2010).¹² It must be highlighted that this constitutional provision has partly been responsible for the inferior role of the legislature as a watchdog branch of government. Prior to the adoption of the 1992 Constitution, Ghana was under a dictatorship and several factors might have influenced the framers of the Constitution in somewhat promoting the integration of the legislature and the executive. One was to avoid the challenges inherent in the parliamentary government of the Second Republic and the strict presidential government of the Third Republic. Moreover, the tendency to embrace a system that would still make the then military leader dominant in the politics and the policy

¹²Kwesi Jonah (Political Scientist) of the University of Ghana corroborated this statement in an interview.

process of the country by controlling both the executive and the legislature might have been the single most important reason for some fusion of powers.

Since 1993, lawmakers have always looked up to the president for cabinet positions and other ministerial appointments. Majority of lawmakers in the president's party envision to be called upon to serve in a certain capacity. As a result, there has always been a dearth of lawmakers on the majority party side who are committed to upholding the edict of checks and balances, which is a prerequisite for making executive institutions accountable and responsive (Interviews, 2009/2010). Obviously, one can be assured that lawmakers appointed by the president to serve in the executive branch would not vote contrary to the president's expectations, as are those eying presidential calls. This relationship between the president and the several lawmakers seeking executive appointments suggests that, should there be any policy contretemps between the president and the parliament; the former's position would take precedence over that of the latter. Moreover, this is harmful to representative democracy, since the parliamentary business of checking corrupt practices is more often than not relegated to the margins by lawmakers in the president's party. Essentially, what the public gets in return for electing lawmakers to the national parliament is profoundly counterintuitive to democratic governance. At best, and in practice, Ghana's Parliament exists to provide legitimacy to the policy prescriptions of the president.

Article 103 (3) of the Constitution stresses that "Committees of Parliament shall be charged with such functions, including the investigation and inquiry into the activities and administration of ministries and departments as Parliament may determine; and such investigation and inquiries may extend to proposals for legislation". In view of this, the public accounts committee (PAC) of Parliament holds hearings in camera, where representatives of ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) of government are asked questions regarding their activities, why they took certain decisions, and others. At the sittings of the PAC, which is broadcasted live on Ghana Television, Ghanaians get first hand information about the malfeasance in public organizations, as well as cautions, and the threats of prosecution lawmakers' issued to the offending government agencies and agents. The PAC is headed by a leading member of the main minority party, which ensures that governing parties cannot proscribe investigations into certain issues they consider unacceptable to the fortunes of their parties.

Unnecessary partisanship or ultra-majoritarianism has characterized the activities of Parliament and this has meant that the majority party in Parliament has not shown the desire to pursue malfeasance and other corrupt practices by government agents and agencies. This is largely because the leaders of the various agencies often are members of the political party in power (Interviews, 2009/2010). According to Ninsin (2008), ultra-majoritarian

politics is where "the executive has aggressively employed its constitutional powers as well as its majority party in parliament to drive the legislative process to achieve policy goals regardless of contrary views in and outside parliament, and in spite of its implications for the democratic order". Recently, the Ghana branch the African Parliamentarians Network against Corruption (APNAC) bemoaned the failure of Ghana's Parliament to perform its oversight responsibility in checking the activities of State Owned Enterprises, particularly in areas of public sector procurement resulting in the country lurking behind in its fight against corruption.¹³

On critical national matters, where you expect Parliamentarians to aim at reaching consensus because of the costs and the pain these policies impose on the state and ordinary citizens, respectively, voting patterns, debates, and discussions mostly reflect the positions of their political parties and party leadership rather than what will benefit Ghanaians. The National Health Insurance Bill, the Representation of the People's Bill, and the STX Housing Bill are some of the important bills that have become laws, but the voting patterns reflected excessive partisanship between the two dominant political parties, NDC and the NPP.

Finally, presidentialism has made the presidency far more superior than the other branches of government. The legislative branch does not have the political clout to serve as an institutional check on corruption within executive departments. This is akin to what Prempeh (2007) calls the imperial president in Africa. According to Prempeh (2007), the imperial president received traction following the decolonization of the continent in the 1960s, which led to the newly emergent African leaders' use of supra-constitutional measures to enhance their legitimacy. Imperial presidency in Ghana is rooted in the Constitution. Some basic provisions of the Constitution, such as the wide latitude given the president to appoint not only cabinet ministers, but also chief executives of local government, municipal, and metropolitan agencies, as well as the chief executives and board members of many state organizations, undergird the predominance of the president in setting the national agenda. As applied to Ghana's political and policy processes, the imperial presidency paints a picture of presidential dominance.

By and large, presidentialism, as it relates to the dominance of the executive branch of government in setting the national policy agenda, has made the presidency the most respected and recognized institution in the country. As majority of Ghanaians have been used to showing overwhelming deference to the presidents and their teams, so have the latter group been suspected of divvying up some of the resources of the country among themselves. In whole, this completely suggests a dangerous, albeit a harmful, practice which runs afoul to democratic governance in the country.

¹³Daily Guide June 15 2011(Awudu Mahama)
<http://www.dailyguideghana.com/?p=16416>, accessed on July 27 2011.

CONCLUSION

The preceding analysis has indicated that both presidentialism and unitarism are largely to blame for the prevalence of corruption and inefficiency in public management in the country. Unitarism, which implies the centralization of political power in the national government, has not only underwritten the supremacy of national institutions over decentralized bodies, but also the appointment of chief executives in decentralized entities have spurred corruption and inefficiency at the local level. By this same token, presidentialism has sanctioned the dominance of the executive branch of government over the judiciary and legislative branches of government. Astonishingly, and perhaps unfortunately, the executive's stranglehold on public policy is fortified by the partial, but apparent, fusion of powers that characterizes the relations between lawmakers and the executive branch.

It must be stressed that, while the masses hostility towards corruption has not been virulent because of the absence of a popular movement against corruption, it is vital that policy makers take proactive steps to address the problem before the unexpected happens.

However, the increasing political consciousness among the electorates is a clear sign that the future is bright for a strong popular movement against corruption. The media and other professional groups such as the Ghana Bar Association are equally important in the fight against corruption. The media, for instance, can expose corrupt politicians through investigative journalism. The independence of the media in the country should make this feasible. Since many Ghanaians are inexorably mired in lack and misery, any efforts to address the corruption problem must be holistic, in order to respond to the problem in local government administrations. Are majority of Ghanaians antsy because of corruption? This is certainly yes, because the masses have always been told to look for better days that do seem to be in the distant future. To put it bluntly, the singers of the chorus - better days- appear to have a strong elitist accent, leading to policies that tend to favor a few. Essentially, any antagonism towards democratization by the masses will be grounded on the pervasiveness of corruption and inefficiency in public management.

The rigid relationship between unitarism and corruption suggests that the problems inherent in the bureaucracy and local government administration must be addressed. First, the bureaucracy must operate as a professional organization where the actions and inactions of individuals are governed by clearly defined rules, policies, and procedures. As a hierarchical organization, top-management officials should not be allowed to influence recruitment in their departments, as it is undertaking activities that promote corruption. For instance, recruitment into the bureaucracy should be publicized nationally, and final decisions on successful applicants

must be made by an independent body appointed by the civil service commission. This is against the backdrop that best practices in recruitment can lead to efficiency and professionalism that will counter corrupt practices. Also, a performance-based incentive scheme should be introduced to encourage supervisory employees ensure that their subordinates are not shirking or sabotaging the activities of their departments. Since it is commonplace that workers in the state bureaucracy at times charge extra fees for performing services to the people, strict supervision could guarantee that corruption is reduced to the barest minimum in even the most corrupt institutions.

Similar institutional reforms in local government administration are necessary to control the corruption problem in local government. In this perspective, the appointment of chief executives should be based on certain approved credentials, particularly experience and/or qualifications in public management and decentralization. Chief executives with such credentials can design policies to control corrupt practices in their jurisdictions. In addition, limitations on the authority of the chief executives in the decentralized institutions will ensure that they do not amass the resources for developmental projects. The call by a section of the country that chief executives of decentralized institutions should be elected can make the local government more responsive to the demands of people living in their jurisdictions. The election will further ensure that the local people own their development agenda, as they might not reelect chief executives who would not fulfill their campaign promises.

More importantly, the Ministry of Local Government can also train workers in local government settings best practices in accountability, effective and efficient service delivery, procurement, policy implementation, monitoring and evaluation, participatory planning, and conflict of interest as a way of undermining all corrupt practices that have become the norm in many decentralized institutions. Effective local government system can spread best practices from one locality to another locality. For instance, Asare (2009) has noted that "the establishment of effective, accountable local government systems with autonomy in certain policy sectors could lead to policy innovation, since some local governments will be in a position to adopt policies that may end up addressing the concerns of other local governments". This will eventually lead to the convergence of innovative policies because jurisdictions or localities that are policy laggards will draw policy lessons from the experiences, successes and failures of innovative jurisdictions.

The negative effects of presidentialism concerning corruption can be minimized by making the legislative institution a co-equal branch of government. The current system, where some lawmakers simultaneously serve in the presidency, has proven to be ineffective at addressing corruption in executive departments. While this has apparently affected the professional development of the

legislative institution, the watchdog role of lawmakers has been compromised as well. It is in this vein that the Constitutional review process which is underway can help address the inferior status of the legislature in the Ghanaian polity and propose measures to make state institutions more accountable and transparent in their activities. Similarly, constitutional reforms can enhance the authority of Parliament to address corruption in executive agencies.

If democracy is meant to be a benign, rather than malignant, force in the country's development, then those who have been entrusted with the mandate of public management by the voters should rise up to the everyday challenges posed by corruption in the public sector. In sum, the twin evils of democratic tyranny and ineptitude have been spurred by the unitary and presidential institutions in the country, and the likely solution, rather than palliative, to these evils is political will by the executive branch of government to promote strong legislative oversight over public sector management.

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