

TRIAL OF DEMOCRACY VERSUS DEMOCRATIC TRIUMPHALISM: A FOCUS ON GHANA

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Abstract

The volume of empirical literature on Ghana's democratization is overwhelming. Two contrasting positions have come to dominate the Ghanaian democratization political discourses. While some Afro-optimist scholars argue that Ghana is the model of democracy in Africa and hence it is in the era of democratic triumphalism, on the contrary, other Afro-pessimist scholars contend that Ghana has since independence been experiencing a complex and contradictory historical legacy of democratic governance - where liberalism exists side by side with patronage politics and hence it is still in the era of trial of democracy. The goal of this paper is to investigate how Ghana's democratic governance exists side by side with widespread cronyism and nepotism. The data for this paper came from scholarly articles, newspaper reports, and in-depth interviews.. This paper draws a number of conclusions. First, on the theoretical level, Ghana has a beacon of democratic rule and hence it is a model of Africa's democracy. Second, empirically, the country's relative electoral democratic success story is largely cosmetic due to pervasive cronyism and nepotism which impede active civic political participation. It thus, recommends institutional reforms not only to promote domestication and socialization of democratic norms, culture and values but also making it internalizeable and enforceable.

Keywords: Democratic Triumphalism, Trial of Democracy, Cronyism, Nepotism, Cosmetic Democratic Gains

Introduction

As with many countries in Africa or elsewhere in the developing world in general and Ghana in particular, persistent militarism and military adventurism resulted in the interplay of democratic and authoritarian regimes coupled with constant regime changes in Ghana's geopolitics in the mid-1960s to the late 1980s (Hutchful, 1989; Fobih, 2011). As it is to be expected, from the 1960s to the late 1980s, Ghana's democracy underwent series of chequered transformation processes. Ghana has since the mid-1960s been experiencing a contradictory historical legacy of democratic governance (van de Walle, 2005; Abdulai, 2009). However, the shift at the turn of the 21st century in the development paradigm and policies of the donor countries including the United States and the Bretton-Woods Institutions changed the political dynamics in many African countries of which Ghana is no exception - from the dominance of authoritarian informal or personal rule to the reestablishment of fledgling multiparty democracies (Akwetey, 2005; van de Walle, 2005). Despite the uneven trends in the development of democracy, a few of many "Third-wave" democracies³⁶ in Africa including Ghana have been striving hard to sustain and consolidate their democracies (Ayee, 2001).

³⁶ Some African countries that are said to have made relative electoral democratic gains include, Botswana, Mauritius, South Africa, Cape Verde and of course, Ghana, among other relatively successful emerging democracies.

This paper argues that Ghana has made relatively significant progress in deepening its electoral democratic process since the 1992 democratic transition and this is exemplified by the 2000 and 2008 democratic turnovers. However, some major democratic deficiencies still remain in the customization and socialization of democratic norms as well as institutionalization of its electoral process (Fobih, 2012; Bratton, 1998). These deficiencies which constitute though far from exclusive, the crux of the country's democratic construction and constancy have not been adequately examined empirically by academics and policy-makers. This paper therefore explores and analyzes the challenges of socializing, customizing and institutionalizing democratic norms and values in Ghana's hybrid - democratic system (van de Walle, 2005).

The broad narrative of this paper consists of five sections. Following the introduction, it focuses on contradictory debates on Ghana's electoral democratic success story under the Fourth Republic, with regard to the reemergence of the 1992 multi-party constitutional rule. The third section explores some of the issues that continue to pose major challenges to socialization and customization of democratic norms and values in Ghana. The fourth section deals with methods of information gathering, summary of findings and discussions and follows with the fifth section which deals with conclusion and then suggested institutional frameworks for addressing the challenges of electoral democratic construction.

Ghana's Electoral Democratic Success Story: Contradictory Debates

The volume of empirical literature on Ghana's democratization is overwhelming (Gyimah-Boadi, 1994; 1999; 2001; 1999; 2009; Ninsin, 2006). Scholars such as Haynes (2003) and Joseph (1998) argue that the internal socio-economic and political disorders coupled with disproportionate rate of public outcries and according to van de Walle (2005), the attaching of foreign aid and grants to democracy by the international donors augmented the domestic pressures on most African governments including Ghana to trigger political reforms. Generally, optimism among Ghanaians grew as a result of the restoration of constitutional rule (Abdulai, 2009) and this assertion is confirmed by Gyimah-Boadi (2001) who notes that the return to constitutional rule in 1992 has given impetus to rating Ghana highly on some basic measures of democratic credentials including protection of fundamental civil liberties, human rights and media pluralism among other democratic outcomes. To buttress his point, Abdulai and Crawford (2008), Lindberg and Morrison (2008) and Daddieh (2011) confirm that, there have been periodic electoral democratic gains in Ghana. For instance, Abdulai and Crawford (2008) support Ghana's periodic electoral democratic success story by indicating that Ghana has not only successfully conducted five free and fair general elections but also credited with five successful district elections.

Two contrasting positions have therefore come to dominate the discourses on Ghana's democratization processes. While some Afro-optimist scholars such as (Abdulai, 2009; Lindberg and Morrison, 2008; Daddieh, 2011) argue that Ghana is the model of democracy in Africa and hence it is in the era of democratic triumphalism, on the contrary, other Afro-pessimist scholars including (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997; Haynes, 2003; Jockers et al., 2010) contend that Ghana has since independence been experiencing a complex and contradictory historical legacy of democratic governance such that liberalism co-exists with patronage politics and hence it has not only been experimenting with democracy but also unable to construct and maintain credible democratic institutions and hence it is still in the era of trial of democracy. The new sociopolitical matrix being promoted in some countries in Africa including Ghana, which were previously dominated by authoritarian regimes, has led to the emergence or strengthening of opposition parties in order to challenge incumbent governments (Gyimah-Boadi, 2001; Yagboyaju, 2011; Keith and Lindberg, 2011). Hence the

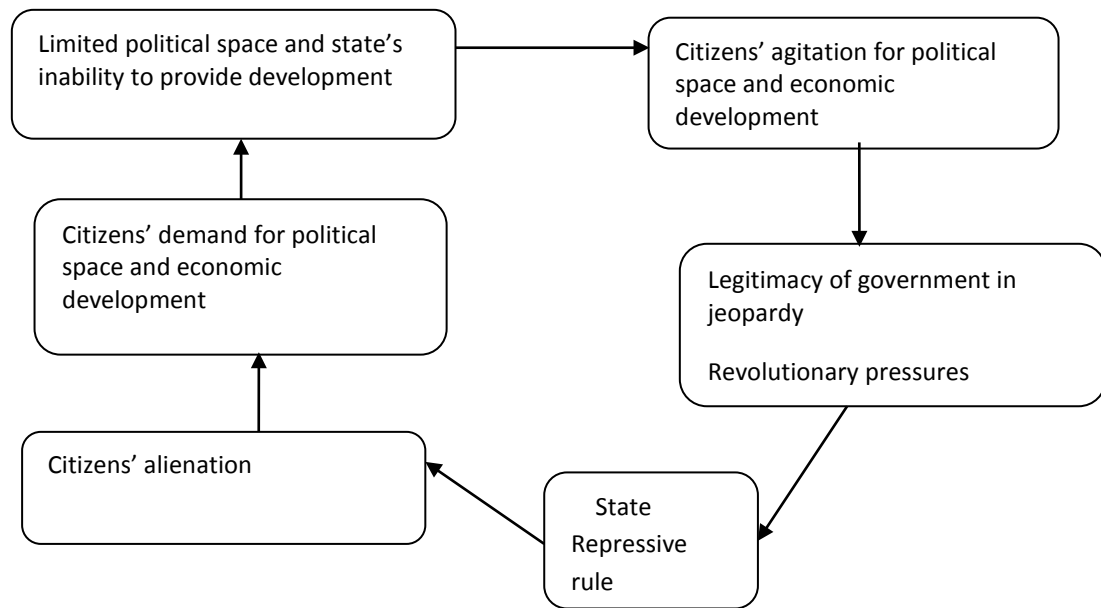
drive towards electoral politics is a significant step in the direction of promoting democratic governance in many African countries of which Ghana is no exception.

Ghana's democratic experience has been relatively stable though (Gyimah-Boadi, 2001), merely holding frequent elections do not necessarily mean it has consolidated her democracy (Haynes, 2003). Pervasive electoral manipulations coupled with political tension and acrimonies (for instance, Ghana's 2012 elections petitions that lasted for over eight (8) months in 2013) give impression that Ghana's Fourth Republic is in an era of trial of democracy rather than democratic triumphalism (van de Walle, 2005; Haynes, 2003). Democratization of state institutions and its politics in Ghana have failed to counteract the negative tendencies of patronage politics and its practice and rather led further to amplification of patronage politics (van de Walle, 2005; Lindberg, 2003). Pervasive patronage politics in itself is not only antithetical to democratic rule but also, has high propensity to propel political and social exclusivity and disorders and in so doing, it derails the process of deepening democracy and hence it tends to prevent democracy from consolidating itself (Bratton and van de Walle 1997; deGrassi, 2008).

A cursory analysis of the history of democracy in Ghana turns to prejudice the thinking towards democratic survivability in the country. According to Abdulai (2009), Ghana's democratic practice since the mid -1960s has gone through chequered experiences. Hutchful (1989) and Luckham (1985) note that democratic rule in Ghana between 1960 and 1992 was interspersed with military rule. Morrison (2004) and Abdulai (2009) attest to this fact by arguing that within the first two decades of the post-colonial Ghana, the country had experienced chequered multiple democratic governance. Consequently, Ghana was plunged into a decade of not only a military authoritarian rule but also a sturdy repressive rule characterized by a "culture of silence," intimidation, human rights abuses and, worse of all, constant fear of 'political assassination' and indeed, 'real assassinations' (Oquaye, 2001; Abdulai, 2009). Abdulai (2009) maintains that this oppressive rule coalesced with exclusivity turned to produce socio-economic disorders, political tension and general insecurity.

Chabal and Daloz (1999) theorize the outcome of such an appealing political conditions in Africa in general as characterized by i) an informalization of politics (i.e. Africa's political system is not actually institutionalized because of pervasive personal rule and prevailing vertical links between patron and client, purposely and profitably holding in sway democratic norms and values), ii) productivity of economic failures (Africa's inability to develop due to dubious policy choices and external constraints constitute the logical outcome of a singular dynamic by which patrimonial networks are entrenched at the expense of the continent's economic growth) as well as iii) re-traditionalization of society (the resurgence of ethnicity, witchcraft and other cultural traits in Africa, an indication of the continent's move backward or evidence of its multi-faceted path to modernization). Chabal and Daloz (1999) conclude that collectively, these elements spur pervasive political acrimonies or what they called political instrumentalization of disorders. Similarly, Chazan (1993; 1998:2) summarizes these political developments in Africa succinctly as "political disengagement" or "political recession." Some decades of deepening 'political disengagement' or 'political recession' and economic exclusivity resulted in cycle of repressive governance and politico-economic alienation and hence the public tended to decry what they perceived to be "governmental illegitimacy" (Brobbe, 2009) (See fig.1).

Fig. 1 Vicious Cycle of Repressive Rule- Citizens' Alienation and Legitimacy Crisis in Ghana



As a result, Ghana over the years has been experiencing a crisis of legitimacy (Aidoo, 2008; Brobbey, 2009; Abdulai 2009). As fig 1 shows, Ghana's Fourth Republic has since been suffering from crisis of legitimacy. This is as a result of an absence of countervailing authority to hold the excessive powers of the presidency in check. Worse still, the Articles 70(1a-e and 2), 74(1), 78(1), 79(1), 86(2,I and vi), 89(2a,i-iii and 2d), 144(1-5) among others of Ghana's 1992 Constitution endorse winner-take-all system and also guarantee the presidency gargantuan powers not only to control both political power and economic resources but also antagonize the oppositions and invariably exclude them from national governance. This winner-take-all system coupled with economic marginalization and state's inability to ensure development accordingly lead Ghanaians to agitate for political inclusion and economic assimilation. Often government's failure to open up the political space to include the oppositions coalesced with masses' economic alienation further compel the citizens to question the legitimacy of the government. Thus persistent political exclusion and economic marginalization coupled with repressive governance give impetus to further questioning the governmental legitimacy and hence a vicious cycle of repressive rule and legitimacy crisis (jeopardy). Indeed, the level of legitimacy jeopardy is inconsistent with the generally held view that Ghana is a beacon of democracy and a model in the African continent.

Ghana's experiment with the winner-take-all electoral politics after over two decades has given impetus to hotly and contested debates. The two overly emerged schools of thoughts include those who hold the view that 'winner-take-all' politics in the Ghanaian body politic has not been helpful due to its inherent 'politics of exclusivity' and economic marginalization (Ala-Adjetey, 2005; IEA, 2013). The other group maintains that it is a good practice because it makes governance easy and therefore must be maintained. The point of departure of this paper is that the pro winner-take-all group focuses exclusively on the governability and rather glosses over legitimacy and the degree of autonomy (an all-inclusiveness).

Empirical evidence, contrary to both the anti and pro winner-take all, revealed that "the challenge of Ghana's governance structure does not only reflect winner-take-all system per se (albeit its extensive criticisms as promoting zero sum power struggle, hyper-aggressive way of winning power or winning power by all means) but also unacceptable political culture

and attitudes of politicians in particular and most Ghanaians in general.”³⁷ Further evidence revealed that “Ghanaians would not be so bothered about who rules, reigns or governs the country proviso the individuals can be better-off or well-off in a given conducive economy (in which businesses could thrive, ensure economic boom, political stability etc.) and that rather, it is imperative to initiate political culture and attitudinal reforms.”³⁸ In a similar interview, it was revealed that “politicians do not only seek power to amass wealth but also to promote patronage politics at the exclusion of the opposition and non-party acolytes.”³⁹ In view of this, “there is the need to address the issues of corrupt practices and selfish interested politics that have become pervasive among politicians and the electorate alike.”⁴⁰ “A major blame should rather be heaped on the ill-manner at which politicians conduct themselves in the electoral processes.” In fact, this paper shares this view and maintains that the general conduct of Ghanaians is often very detrimental to healthy democratic practice. Admittedly, the bad attitudes of politicians often play down the political culture, norms and values in the Ghanaian body politic.

Meanwhile, an analysis of the process of democratic consolidation in Ghana reveals that all is not well (Haynes, 2003; Van de Walle, 2005). The erratic nature of the process of democratic consolidation as the evidence in this paper confirms, has generated an interesting contending and contradictory debate. While Jockers *et al.* (2010) hold the view that Ghana’s democratic consolidation is a “convenient myth” and conclude that Ghana’s democratic system is rather not ingrained and not consolidating, a view which does sound like a repetition of van de Walle’s (2005) position that democracy in Ghana is “merely surviving” and not consolidating, also seems to conflict with others such as Lindberg and Morrison’s (2008) who argue that democracy in Ghana is consolidating because it exhibits signs of “matured” democracy.

The Afro-pessimist scholars argue that the sudden democratic reversals in some parts of Africa such as the political assassination of President Melchior Ndudaye of Burundi in 1993 after only four months in office, the military putsch that overthrew the democratically and constitutionally elected President of the Gambia in 1994, the coup that almost destabilized the Republic of Togo in the immediate post-Eyadema era and recently, the political turbulence in Mali among other political upheavals⁴¹ in other parts of Africa are sufficient evidence of the disruptive potentialities inherent in Africa’s latest efforts at democratization. Thus, enduring patronage networks politics is indeed, an antithetical to the process of consolidating democracy in Ghana (deGrassi, 2008; van de Walle, 2005). Institutionalization of patronage politics has, and continues to hold sway in the democratization of state institutions and its politics and hence democratic experience in Ghana presents an impressive façade.

Given the controversy over the process of democratic consolidation in Ghana, the position of this paper is that widespread patronage proclivities though far from exclusive, constitute the difficult and daunting task which impedes the process of consolidating democracy. Thus, an all important question which one needs to ponder and reflect is how precisely or exactly does it impede it or to what extent does patronage politics constitute an impediment to the process of deepening democracy in Ghana? The point of departure of this

³⁷An interview with Dr. Samuel Bekoe, the President of UTAG during the consultation on the issue of winner-takes-all interaction organized by Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), IEA’s Conference Hall, Accra, July 14, 2014.

³⁸ *ibid*

³⁹ *ibid*

⁴⁰ *ibid*

⁴¹Other political upheavals include, the usurpation of power by the military in Madagascar and the Republic of Guinea, political violence in Kenya and recently, the coup d’état in Egypt.

paper is that multiple factors, complex and contradictory in nature simultaneously spur and negate democratic constancy. Out of these factors, patronage politics bears an inordinate (holding all other factors constant) responsibility. In what follows this paper explores and analyzes the multiple factors that pose ominous challenges to Ghana's electoral democratic construction, constancy and the socialization and customization of democratic norms and values in the Ghanaian body politic.

Challenges of Socializing and Customizing Democratic Norms and Values in Ghana

The idea of the system of democracy under either a parliamentary or presidential system of government is associated with elections, because an election is indispensable mechanism in promoting democratic governance in contemporary democracies (Frempong, 2011). In the discussion of the importance of elections in the process of democratic consolidation, Huntington (1991) noted that, 'elections are inevitable aspects of democracy so democracy is unthinkable without elections.' Elections play a critical role in democratic development and consolidation in both advanced and emerging democracies across the world and constitute an integral part of contemporary democratic practice (Frempong, 2011).

Some objectives very central to elections include serving as the springboard for members to compete for votes and power, and controlling policy-making in the state. Winning elections helps to form a government and to contribute effectively towards shaping public policy by generating reliable information for the public, raising the electorate's political awareness and promoting government accountability (Agyeman-Duah, 2005). Elections also serve as a means by which members are offered opportunities to exercise their franchise to seat or unseat presidential candidates as well as members of the legislative bodies (Frempong, 2011). While the citizens of Ghana under the Fourth Republic have taken some important steps toward promoting democracy and made significant inroads in sustaining the country's democracy, as well as developing its electoral system in the post-transition era, it continues to face a number of institutional and behavioural challenges (Fobih, 2011; Brobbey, 2009). The findings in the study highlight some of the fundamental challenges facing the electoral process and the consolidation of democracy in Ghana, which require the effort of politicians, government officials and institutions as well as the entire citizenry to find better solutions to these problems.

To begin with, one of the central issues that obstruct electoral politics in Ghana is widespread patronage politics characterized the democratic procedures at the level of primaries, districts and general elections (Lindberg, 2003; van de Walle, 2005; Fobih, 2011). Widespread patronage politics characterizes party membership drives and all levels of elections constitute some of the central issues in Ghana's electoral politics (Frempong, 2011; Fobih, 2011). The electoral campaign platforms of political parties and community and individual voter electoral decisions are guided by patronage. Parties in Ghana solicit support and membership by offering promises of petty patronage incentives and future development programmes to communities. Donations made to communities come along with the political message and are indirectly intended to offer the politicians the opportunity to promote their party's interests at such community gatherings⁴². This inducement often influence would-be members or guide voters in their decision to support one party over another (Frempong, 2011).

As Ninsin (2006) noted, through this kind of relationship, voters create opportunities for their communities' improvement both by soliciting development programmes and simultaneously trying to achieve the maximum material gains to improve their living conditions. Likewise, according to Anthony Downs (1957), as rationale beings who sought to

⁴² The Western Regional Secretary of the NDC noted in 2005 campaign platform (See Fobih, 2011).

maximize their utility, voters choose a party or a candidate on the basis of the benefits that were likely to accrue to them when that party or candidate took over the reins of power. Downs (1957) presents a rational calculus of voting that has inspired much of the later work on voting and turnout. Particularly significant was his conclusion that a rational voter should almost never bother to vote. This conclusion, especially as elaborated on by Riker and Ordeshook (1968) has shifted the attention of modern political scientists from explaining why people don't vote to explaining why they do though. Downs(1957) notes that the “swing electorate” are generally located in the middle of the political spectrum, so obviously politicians would spend an inordinate amount of time and resources trying to woo these so-called independent or what he calls the ‘median voters’ or ‘persuadable voters.’ On the contrary, this paper finds this assertion too generalized and fallacious in that how could politicians be very sure that all the electorate who receive incentive actually vote for them. The available empirical evidence has been that some electorate in some circumstances, are made to swear an oath of loyalty in exchange for electoral incentives⁴³. However, this act is not often prevalent in all other constituencies.⁴⁴

Meeting a community’s socioeconomic needs boosts the community’s confidence in that party to meet its collective interest. It is also a way of forging a new social contract with an elected government, which means benefiting from the distribution of development projects and patronage to groups and individuals (Lindberg, 2003). Due to patronage in Ghana’s party system, voters’ choice of candidates or parties is very often guided by the view that the candidates or parties should serve as a link between them and the state in the distribution or allocation of financial and material resources (Lindberg, 2003). In this regard, it does not only create a linkage between one’s willingness to support a party and its candidates, and the expectation of reward in the form of development projects and other resources for the community, after winning the election but also lead to collective political behaviour (for example, voting in Ashanti (NPP’s stronghold) and in Volta (NDC’s stronghold) has always been reflecting “block voting” (Jockers *et al.* 2010).

While some patronage practices, such as meeting community development needs, may be acceptable in political competition and even occur in the advanced democracies, other strategies used by parties in Ghana to induce prospective members and win votes during elections are unacceptable and give rise to clientelism(Fobih, 2011). Personalities and clientelist networks predominate in Ghana’s party system, since some politicians and public officials regard politics and public office as a means to personal enrichment at the expense of public interests, and use state power and resources to cultivate political loyalties largely on the basis of ethnic and regional solidarity (Joseph, 1998). Some party leaders at the constituency level claim that the party leaders at the national and regional levels control power and resources, and distribute patronage to the members at the grassroots, constituency and unit levels (Joseph, 1998). For example, at the constituency and unit levels, there is a strong presence of patron–client relationships between the party leaders and the grassroots members (van de Walle, 2005).

Whereas parties and their candidates ‘grease the electorates’ palm’ to gain their support and votes, the majority of the electorate in Ghana also believe that ‘pulling the right strings and knocking on the right doors’ by supporting a winning party could offer them benefits in the form of jobs, material gains and other favours for themselves and their communities, which they believe serve as a trade-off for their votes (Lindberg, 2003; van de Walle, 2005). It is therefore common knowledge in Ghanaian politics that some candidates and parties offer financial and material incentives in the form of bribes to potential individual

⁴³An interview with some constituency members of the ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC) Madina, a Sub-burb of Accra, Ghana prior to 2012 general elections

⁴⁴Ibid.

voters and supporters, ranging from money, clothes and sewing machines, to other material goods (Lindberg, 2003; Fobih, 2011) or in the form of what this paper refers to as ‘social massage.’

Due to the patron–client relationship between the party’s elites and the grassroots members, membership in Ghana’s political parties is categorized into two main classes, namely the ‘Big Men and Small Boys’ (Nugent, 1996). Indeed, some of the so-called ‘Big Men’ who constitute the leadership and wealthy members of the party sometimes enter politics to acquire wealth and/or increase their wealth in order to enable them to play key roles within the party (Nugent, 1996). This act indeed, has led some scholars to conclude that elections feed patronage politics or counteract it (Lindberg, 2003; van de Walle, 2005). This paper argues that elections invariably ‘grease the wheel of progress.’ And hence Bayart (1993) has associated those politicians with self-centered and greed politics and thus concludes that they engage in what he calls the ‘politics of the belly.’

In the meantime, Clapham (1985) notes in his discussion of African politics that patron–client relationship is fundamentally a one of exchange in which a superior (patron) provides financial and material support to the inferior (the client), and the client, in turn, provides support for the patron. The base of this is an unequal relationship between patrons and clients, and the benefits accruing to each of them from the exchange may be uneven (Clapham, 1985). The ‘Big Men’ distribute part of their financial and material acquisitions in the form of social benefits to the lower classes, who have been termed ‘Small Boys’ and who are more or less uneducated, poor grassroots supporters, mostly in rural, but also in urban areas, in exchange for political rights (Lindberg, 2003: 2010; Nugent, 1996).

In this way, power is concentrated in the hands of the ‘Big Men’ and the members in the lower ranks of the party not only serve the interest of the leaders, but also have a limited chance of upward mobility in the parties’ leadership (Nugent, 1996). As Fox (1994) rightly noted, clientelism is a form of social and political control. Hence political parties and some voters see patron–client relations as an exchange of favours between the parties and the electorate as some people are co-opted by the parties through various forms of patronage (Fobih, 2011).

During the Rawlings’ NDC era, contracts were awarded to individuals ‘not for reason of professional competence, but political partisanship’, and contractors perceived to be members of the opposition parties were victimized (Fobih, 2011). While bribery in elections is a crime and is seriously monitored in many advanced democracies, in Ghana this practice has so permeated the party system that the party leaders and supporters do not see anything wrong with patron–client relations (van de Walle, 2005).

Methods, Summary of Findings and Discussions

The data for this paper came from books, scholarly articles from peer review journals, magazines and newspaper reports. A semi-structured intellectual elite interview (productive Dialogue) was utilized in information gathering in respect of qualitative primary data as well as patronage analytical framework was deployed. Using purposive sampling technique, this paper investigated the politics of Ghana’s democratic stability in the light of widespread cronyism and nepotism. Findings of this paper are two-fold, theoretical and empirical.

Theoretically, it revealed that patronage politics is not only so widespread than academics have acknowledged but also Ghana has a contradictory historical legacy of democratic governance. Both liberalism and patronage politics do not only co-exist but also interwoven. This however, makes it difficult to distinguish what is socially considered a gift from political inducement. While liberalism promotes debates and dissenting views, patronage politics engenders sycophancy, corrupt practices and disenfranchises the electorate. As already indicated, after over two decades of re-democratization patronage politics and

liberalism do not only exist side by side but also patronage politics is much more pervasive than liberalism. The simultaneous existence of patronage politics and issue-based politics tend to obscure the deepening of democracy and its constancy. Suffice to say that patronage politics is a global phenomenon, the extent to which it is embraced in the Ghanaian body politic needs much to be desired. It is associated with corrupt practice though it is not illegal and as such does not receive social censure. It is publicly circumscribed but privately resorted to. Consequently, Ghana has since the inception of 1992 multiparty democracy been experiencing chequered periods of democracy and policy shorttermism.

Empirically, it revealed that “Ghanaians are practicing what Akan people call “Kabi na menkabi amanbuo” to wit “freedom of speech” or for want of better expression “No Action Talking Only (NATO) democracy.” Patronage politics is much more entrenched than has been acknowledged by academics or researchers. A clear case of patronage political entrenchment was well articulated by one of my respondents as follows: “this network you are talking about has a historical antecedent, our forefathers, fathers and even contemporaries deploy it as a social network mechanism for not only strengthening national integration but also serve as a foundation for social capital development.” He added, “apart from serving as ‘interim social relief,’ it also ensures redistribution of state resources.” Another respondent indicated that: “In Ghana today, you may find it extremely difficult to get a job, secure contract, appointments or even gets admission if you do not know any big man” and/or, if the big man does not know you.” “In absence of a ‘connection’ or ‘networks’, nothing really works!” Several of such responses have been encountered in the field. It is instructive to point out that, a number of popular Akan adages including for instance; “Ebi she w’anomu a ena wotobi a ebene” to wit “A bird in hand worth two in the bush;” “Ketewa bi ara nswa” meaning “Little mercy also deserve appreciation,” indeed, reinforce the entrenchment of patronage politics in the Ghanaian body politic. An overwhelming majority of the respondents interestingly, claimed that they often receive “the fair share of the national cake through the distribution of resources by the politicians and therefore they find nothing wrong with that.” This indeed, corroborated Lindberg’s (2003) earlier study which argues that “‘It’s our time to Chop”:

The entrenched patronage politics therefore distorts the process of electoral democratic institutionalization (especially, through buying of votes, (Bratton, 2008). Indeed, these findings are inconsistent with Lindberg and Morrison (2008) who claim that Ghanaian voters often vote on the basis of an evaluative –rationale (previous performance) rather than on non-evaluative-rationale basis (such as buying of votes).

Since the inception of multiparty democratic politics, the Ashanti Region⁴⁵ still remains the stronghold of the NPP, while the Volta Region⁴⁶ also remains the stronghold of the NDC. Ironically, neither NPP nor NDC has ever won elections (in the case of presidential) when put all votes in their strongholds alone together.⁴⁷ However, it is only recently that NPP and NDC made some inroads regarding obtaining some votes (albeit insignificant) from Volta and Ashanti regions respectively. Leading members of the two parties attested to the fact that “the political divide is so entrenched to the extent that even if a “tree’ is covered with NPP’s party colours to contest an election with NDC candidate (albeit popular supports and better social standing) in the Ashanti region, the NDC candidate is destined to experience a humiliating defeat.” Similarly, if a “stone” is covered with NDC’s party colours and to contest an election with NPP candidate (albeit popular supports and high

⁴⁵Bantama, a suburb of Kumasi, the capital of Ashanti Region is considered “the World Bank” of the NPP, Daily Guide September, 2012.

⁴⁶Ketu South, a suburb of Ho, the capital of Volta Region is also noted to be “the Florida” of the NDC, Daily Guide September, 2012,

⁴⁷Morrison, M. K. C “Political Parties in Ghana through Four Republics:” A Path to Democratic Consolidation’, Comparative Politics. Journal of Democracy.. (2004)

social reputation) in Volta region, the NPP candidate is also no doubt to experience an embarrassing defeat.”⁴⁸

These responses however reaffirm the degree of penetration of both nepotism and cronyism in the Ghanaian body politic.

Conclusion and Suggestions

On the basis of the findings discussed, this paper draws a number of conclusions. First, on the theoretical level, Ghana is a model of Africa’s democracy though evidence of interwoven of patronage and liberalism reaffirms that Ghana’s democratic politics gives an impressive façade. Besides, patronage politics is not only a complex and a contradictory phenomenon but also versatile, and that theoretical versatility is an asset for the study of a complex phenomenon such as electoral politics in new democracies. Second, empirically, the country’s relative electoral democratic success story is largely cosmetic. Patronage politics serves as electoral incentive/inducement (particularly, for voter turnouts) as well as disenfranchises electorate (i.e. through buying of votes), It is publicly denounced but privately resorted to. It is considered to be corrupt practice even though it is not illegal and hence does not receive any social censure. Finally, the amplification of patronage politics dims active civic political participation, whilst a reduction in patronage politics would promote active civic political participation in Ghana. The path to wholesome practice of democracy can be difficult especially on the African continent.

This paper therefore recommends behavioural reforms which would not only promote domestication and socialization of democratic norms, culture and values but also making it internalizeable and enforceable. The process of democratic consolidation does not only require minimization of the level of patronage politics and promotion of issue-based politics but also building of strong institutions as opposed to ‘strong men.’ After over two decades of Ghana’s practice of liberalism, patron-client networks has been much more pervasive than liberalism and hence policy-makers and stakeholders should find ways to discourage patronage politics. Institutionalization of electoral politics should not only focus on shepherding the process of campaigning but also provide legitimate political contact methods as part of general overhaul of the institutions of democratic elections. With tolerance, innovation, confidence in relevant institutions and willingness to place public interest above individual preference much would be achieved by way of deepening democratic practice. It is hoped that the Ghanaians would deem it necessary to strengthen the relevant institutional structures to consolidate the relative landmarks or gains made so far.

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