GOVERNANCE AND POLITICS IN GHANA
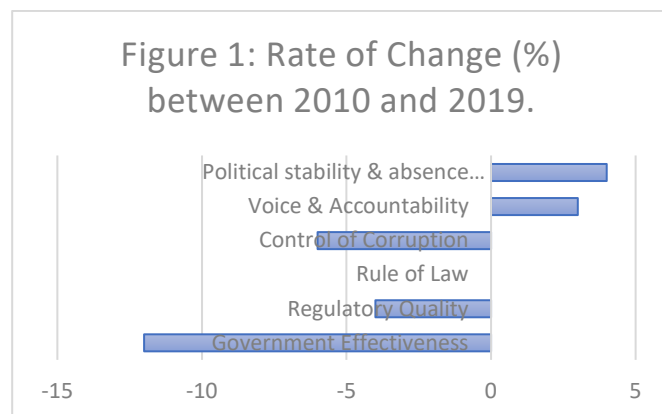# POLICY BRIEF

DECEMBER 2021

Governance and Politics in Ghana: Policy Brief

1. Ghana's progress towards Governance, Politics and Human Rights priorities

Ghana has been justifiably hailed as an oasis of peace and a role model for democratic governance in Africa despite being in a sub-region that in the past has been plagued by civil wars and political instability. Ghana's democratic foundations have grown for over two decades as the country experienced eight consecutive elections without slipping into nationwide violence. Since 2001, there have also been three peaceful transfers of power between Ghana's two dominant political parties, the current ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) – the main opposition party. This makes Ghana rather unique in the African context, as most African countries since the proliferation of multiparty elections in the early 1990s have experienced some form of electoral violence.[1]

Ghana remains a top performer on various governance rankings in Africa. Evidence from the World Governance Indicators (WGI) suggests that within the context of sub-Saharan Africa, Ghana has long remained an above-average performer across most dimensions of governance, ranging from the exercise of voice and accountability to overall government effectiveness. Equally, in the most recent Ibrahim Index on African Governance (IIAG), Ghana ranked 1st in freedom of association and assembly, 3rd in personal liberties, 4th in accountability and transparency, and 8th in overall governance.[2]

These achievements, notwithstanding, the comparative picture masks significant weaknesses within the Ghanaian state itself. Between 2010 and 2019, Ghana's average score on overall *Government Effectiveness* was just 48.2%, depicting the country as a below-average performer. This weak performance is further underscored in Figure 1 below, which analyzes the rate of change in Ghana's performance across six (6) selected indicators during the last decade.

Figure 1: Rate of Change (%) between 2010 and 2019.

- Political stability & absence…
- Voice & Accountability
- Control of Corruption
- Rule of Law
- Regulatory Quality
- Government Effectiveness

(axis: -15, -10, -5, 0, 5)

Source: Author, based on WGI

Of these 6 indicators, Ghana's performance remained unchanged in 1 (rule of law); improved only marginally in 2 (voice & accountability, political stability & absence of violence) and deteriorated quite significantly in 3. The most significant deterioration was recorded in overall government effectiveness (-12%), followed by control of corruption (-6%) and then the quality of regulatory institutions (-4%). The cumulative rate of change across these 6 indicators translates into a deterioration of -15% (Figure 1 above). Evidence from the most recent IIAG dataset points to similar trends,

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[1] Bjarnesen, M. (2020), 'Briefing: The foot soldiers of Accra'. *African Affairs*, 119(475): 296–307.

[2] Mo Ibrahim Foundation (2020), '2020 Ibrahim Index of African Governance Index Report'. Available at: https://mo.ibrahim.foundation/sites/default/files/2020-11/2020-index-report.pdf (accessed September 5, 2021).

with deteriorations across literally all indicators relating to governance, peace, and security. Here, the cumulative deterioration across the selected indicators during 2010-2019 was -20.1%. This overall deterioration seemed to have been driven by declines in the sub-indicators of participation, rights, and inclusion. The analysis shows that the most significant declines in rights over the last decades occurred in media freedoms (-29.3%), digital rights (-16%) and personal liberties (-2.2%).

2. Ghana's Key Governance Deficits and Risks

This section discusses the most critical governance deficits that require attention to help consolidate Ghana's governance gains. Six key issues are identified, namely weakening state capacity in the delivery of public goods and services, endemic corruption and weakening accountability structures, the prevalence of a culture of clientelism and pork-barrel politics; limited exercise of active citizenship; weaknesses/ stagnation in decentralisation and local governance; and the limited participation of women and other marginalized groups in political life.

Weak state capacity

Although Ghana is justifiably hailed as a democratic success story in Africa, overtime most state institutions remain incapacitated and ineffective in delivering on their mandated functions[3], as evidenced in widespread citizens' dissatisfaction with the delivery of public goods at both the national and sub-national levels. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) recently identified '*weak institutional capacities* and inefficiencies for implementation of policies and reforms' as one of the most 'common root causes' to the key development challenges that presently confront Ghana.[4] Although important, these observations raise a critical question regarding the underlying drivers of institutional weaknesses in Ghana. Issues of state capacity in Ghana must be appreciated as the product of the incentives generated by the nature of the political environment. The intense rivalry both between and within political parties for control over state resources has had significant destabilizing effects on bureaucratic capacity in the

delivery of public goods in various ways. First, as a result of the excessive partisanship that characterises the political environment, each ruling party tends to govern mainly based on its election campaign promises, rather than on a broad national development agenda. The result has been 'a perpetual discontinuity in plans, policy direction and projects, following party turnovers in government'.[5] Second, as a consequence of their high vulnerability in power, there are often 'strong incentives for ruling elites across both parties to focus on short-term objectives for political survival'.[6] Third, and more importantly, competitive clientelism means that the administrative capacity and performance of most state institutions have been regularly undermined by the rapid turnover of organisational leaders during political transitions.

Corruption

One of the most obvious governance deficits in Ghana has been the pervasive nature of political corruption. Whether one draws evidence from the WGI, the IIAG or the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index (CPI), the evidence is clear that Ghana has hardly made any *real* progress in reducing the perception of corruption during the last decade. For over two decades, Ghana's CPI has consistently been below average (Figure 2) and the IIAG demonstrates that the clear drivers of deterioration in corruption in Ghana over the last decade have occurred in the areas of public procurement procedures (-25.0) and private sector corruption (-10.4%).[1] In 2019, the majority of Afrobarometer survey respondents (53%) indicated that levels of corruption had increased.[1]

Figure 2: Performance in corruption control, 2010-2019

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
IIAG	47.4	47.4	46.3	46.9	47.6	46.1	48	48.5	45.1	40
WGI	57.6	57.3	55.0	55.5	52.4	52.9	52.4	49.0	52.9	52.4
TI CPI	41	38.5	45	46	46.1	48	47	43	40	41

Source: Author, based on WGI

[3] IMANI Center for Policy and Education (2018). 'Assessing Ghana's performance on governance using the Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG)'. Accra: IMANI. Resnick, D. (2016). 'Strong democracy, weak state: The political economy of Ghana's stalled structural transformation'. IFPRI Discussion Paper 01574. Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute.
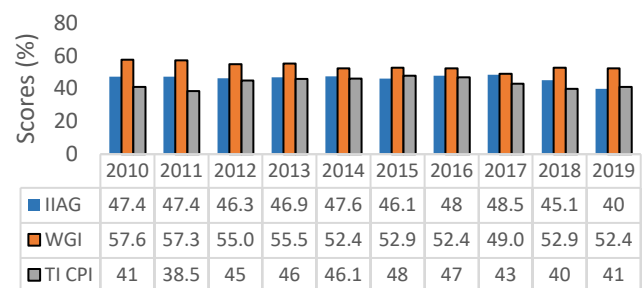[4] UNDP (2018), Draft country programme document for Ghana (2018-2022), p.2

[5] Gyimah-Boadi, E. and Prempeh, H. K. (2012). 'Oil, politics, and Ghana's democracy', Journal of Democracy 23(3), 94-107. Mills, C. A. (2018). 'Politics, policy, and implementation: The "Ghanaian Paradox": Africa in Focus'. Washington, DC: Brookings Institutions.
[6] Whitfield, L., Therkildsen, O., Buur, L. and Kjær, A. M. (2015). The Politics of African Industrial Policy: A Comparative Perspective. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.157.

Not only is corruption perceived to be worsening, but also a growing number of Ghanaians have become increasingly skeptical about the wider political class and government's commitment to reducing it. In the context of increased electoral competition in a winner-takes-all political system, the growing cost of running electoral campaigns and the absence of state funding for political parties, corruption and rent-seeking have become the principal means for winning elections and maintaining alliances within ruling coalitions. As elections have become more competitive, running successful campaigns has become increasingly costly and so the need to reward entrepreneurs who provide financial support to ruling coalitions has heightened.

Corruption in Ghana needs to be understood as a constituent part of a wider set of exchanges within patron-client networks through which incumbent elites over the years construct political compromises with clients who would otherwise threaten the political stability of the system.[7]

The prevalence of patron-client relations

Another major governance deficit relates to the prevalence of patron-client politics in the provision of public services. Despite the deepening of electoral democracy in Ghana, political clientelism and nepotism are widely noted to be increasing.[8] In Ghana's competitive clientelist political settlement, the two main parties compete in the selective distribution of state resources and public sector jobs as a means for winning elections and maintaining political power – a problem recently acknowledged by both the NDC and NPP.[9]

The prominence of party foot soldiers within the two main parties has added a new dimension to the politics of patronage in Ghana. The foot soldier phenomenon is part of the patronage logic that drives Ghana's electoral politics: foot soldiers are prepared to be recruited into vigilante squads as a means to obtaining patronage, and political elites are prepared to pay them for their services because of their importance in winning elections and maintaining ruling coalitions.[10]

Yet, this form of exchange threatens the very foundation of accountable and responsive governance because the criteria for defining the merit in the distribution of state resources is based on support for political party operations rather than on citizenship entitlements and rights.[11]

Partly, as a result of the clientelist orientation of politics at both national and sub-national levels, weaknesses in social accountability structures, and wrong perceptions about state-society relations, it is evident that most citizens are not prepared to hold public officials accountable, even in the face of widespread dissatisfaction with the quality of public service provisioning.

Limited exercise of active citizenship

Democratic regimes thrive on active citizenship – the commitment and capacity of ordinary citizens to hold public officials accountable and play active roles in claiming their socio-economic and political rights. Yet, there is overwhelming evidence that the exercise of citizenship among most Ghanaians is yet to progress far beyond the political ritual of voting in presidential and parliamentary elections.[12] A recent analysis of Afrobarometer survey data shows that despite the constitutional guarantees regarding citizens' rights to mobilize and demonstrate in the interest of community and national development, most Ghanaians are not ready to exercise the right to embark on demonstration or protest marches. There remains a low level of trust for elected leaders and most state institutions, with the result that most citizens never interfaced with their elected representatives at both the national and local levels.[13]

Persistent weaknesses in decentralization and local governance

There remain significant democratic deficits in Ghana's local governance system. The President still appoints each metropolitan, municipal, and district chief executive (MMDCE), as well as 30% of District Assembly members. Rather than professional competency, party political affiliation remains the main basis of appointing both MMDCEs and local Assembly officials. Key local government officials such as MMDCEs have therefore been extensions of the

[7] Khan, M. H. (1998), 'The role of civil society and patron-client networks in the analysis of corruption'. In OECD/UNDP (eds.), *Corruption and integrity improvement initiatives in developing countries.* UNDP, New York, pp.85-99, p.85.

[8] Abdulai, A-G (2021), 'Competitive clientelism, donors and the politics of social protection uptake in Ghana'. Critical Social Policy 41(2):270-293. CDD-Ghana (2020), 'Continuing challenges to anti-corruption and public accountability ahead of another election'. Democracy Watch, Volume 39, November 2020. Accra: Ghana Centre for Democratic Development.

[9] NDC (2020). Jobs, prosperity, and more: the people's manifesto. National Democratic Congress Manifesto for Election 2020.

[10] Ayelazuno, J. A. (2018), *Neoliberal Globalisation and Resistance from Below: Why the Subalterns Resist in Bolivia and not in Ghana.* London: Routledge

[11] Abdulai, A-G., Alidu, S. M., and Ibrahim, M. (2020), 'Civil Society, Philanthropy and the Promotion of Active Citizenship in Ghana: A Political Economy Analysis'. Report prepared for the STAR Ghana Foundation. Accra: STAR-Ghana Foundation.

[12] (Abdulai et al 2020)

[13] Studies show that the level of trust in public institutions has implications on the exercise of active citizenship: citizens are likely to engage in deliberations with public institutions/officials only when they believe that such institutions are committed to advancing their interests.

executive branch at the local level, and as such, remain largely unaccountable to local populations (Abdulai, 2017). While there is now a significant degree of inter-party consensus replacing the current (presidential appointment) mode of selection of MMDCEs with direct election by local communities to reinvigorate Ghana's stalled decentralisation agenda and advance local democracy and development,[14] the main parties still differ on the question of whether to hold local government elections along party lines. As a result, progress towards the election of MMDCEs has somewhat stalled and requires more consensus building at the political party levels outside of parliament.

In addition, sub-national governmental structures that have been created to provide mechanisms for grassroots political participation have remained largely dysfunctional. Unit committees and other sub-district structures lack the requisite human and material resources to operate effectively.

Deteriorating human rights environment

Progress toward the goals of Ghana's human rights vision especially progress toward the specific Sustainable Development Goal (SDG): goal 16, is difficult to determine. There has been negligible change in the homicide rate which remains at 2 per 100,000 population. Other indicators show that

- Sense of personal security has declined. Feeling unsafe in the neighbourhood is up for both urban and especially for rural citizens from 3.5 to 5.5 per 100,000.
- Reporting violence to the police has improved from 27.7 to 30.5 per 100,000 people and in rural Ghana from 24 to 27.9.
- Human rights in the justice sector have improved for unsentenced detainees whose proportion of all detainees has dropped from 18.24 to 13.14
- Registration of births is up from 63% (2011) to 71 percent (2017).

3. Leave no-one behind

Who is left behind in pursuit of good governance, peace, and stability goals? Women, young people, persons with disabilities and the poor are particularly disadvantaged.

Limited participation of women in political life

Another persistent governance deficit relates to Ghana's disappointing progress in promoting gender parity in public and political office. Though no laws limit the participation of women in the political process, and they do participate, but not in the same numbers as men. Women hold fewer leadership positions than men.[15] Currently, female representation in Ghana's Parliament is a paltry 14.5%[16], compared to 61.3% in Rwanda, 46% in Namibia, 32.9% in Uganda, and 31.9% in Zimbabwe. Cultural and traditional factors also limit women's participation in political life. Existing research highlights insults, concerns regarding physical safety, and overall negative societal attitudes toward female politicians continue to hinder women from entering and participating actively in politics at both national and sub-national levels.[17]

Limited youth participation and representation

The youth have long represented an important constituency for political and electoral mobilization in Ghana.[18] More than a third (35.9%) of Ghana's population falls within the age bracket of 15 and 35 years, according to the 2015 Labour Force Survey. The youth in Ghana continue to have limited participation and representation in leadership and decision-making processes. The exclusion of the youth in governance and decision making is deeply rooted in both the nature of Ghanaian politics and traditional practice[19]. At the level of parliament, the proportion of members of parliament who could be classified as youth when they entered parliament stands at 4.4% of the total 275 legislature, a slight decline from the 4.75% of 2016.[20]

[14] Prempeh, H. K. (2019), 'Ghana Looks to Democratize its Local Government'. IDEA International newsletter. Available at: https://constitutionnet.org/news/ghana-looks-democratize-its-local-government
[15] https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/GHANA-2020-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf
[16] In the most recent parliamentary elections held in 2020, only 40 women got elected among the 275 Members of Parliament. This translates into just 14.5%, far short of the 30% minimum threshold recommended by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

[17] https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Ghana-2020-Human-Rights-Report.pdf
[18] This study follows the definition of youth provided by the Danish Youth Council (i.e., persons from 15 to 34 years).
[19] UNDP (2007) Ghana Human Development Report: Towards a more inclusive society
[20] https://www.youthbridgefoundation.org/meet-ghanas-new-youth-mps-of-ghanas-8th-parliament-elections-2020/

Limited participation of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in political life

Persons with disabilities in Ghana face different types of challenges in their participation in politics and governance.[21] This is despite the existence of legal regimes that explicitly prohibit discrimination against persons with disabilities and protects the rights of persons with disabilities' access to health services, information, communications, transportation, the judicial system, and other state services.[22] Participation among PWDs in politics and government is very low in Ghana.

Though some PWDs are appointed to the district assembly, the processes surrounding these appointments remain less transparent while most of these appointees lack the technical capacity to contribute meaningfully to discussions/decisions at the Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies (MMDAs). Vitally, though PWDs are entitled to 3% of the District Assembly Common Fund (DACF) assigned to them at the various district assemblies, PWDs have limited control over the use of this fund.[23]

4. Conclusions and recommendations

The overall implication of this analysis is for development practitioners to take political economy analysis more seriously as a basis for thinking through realistic policy solutions within specific contexts. Based on the challenges identified in this brief, the following areas are suggested for UNDP's considerations in terms of its future programming:

- Building state capacity: A strategy of building specific pockets of effective institutions would be a more realistic way of improving the performance of public sector organisations in the long run. This is because as ruling elites face a credible threat of losing power, both the excluded elite factions and other powerful elites within the ruling coalition, the imperative of short-term political survival will always take precedence over the long-term task of building bureaucratic capability. In such

contexts, reformers are likely to make a better impact if attention is focused on building specific pockets of effective state agencies rather than trying to engage in wholesale reforms of the public sector.

- UNDP should continue to support Ghana's anti-corruption efforts. This will require going beyond technical solutions (e.g. sharing of best practices and providing targeted training to key state and non-state actors) to the adoption of politically smart approaches. At the minimum, this should include providing support for helping to build and sustain anti-corruption coalitions around specific corruption scandals. It will also require taking advantage of specific windows of opportunities such as election periods and the first 100 days of new governments. UNDP could foster collaborations with civil society, the media and religious leaders who seem to be passive in Ghana's anti-corruption efforts.

- Promoting active citizenship: provide support for civil society in promoting active citizenship and reorienting citizens' understanding of public goods provisioning from a rights-based perspective. An important factor that underpins the current culture of non-accountability on the part of local government officials relates to the limited knowledge of ordinary citizens on the services to which they are entitled under their citizenship rights.

- UNDP's efforts in local governance reforms should prioritize: 1) strengthening the sub-district structures; and 2) sustaining momentum in pushing for citizens' participation in the selection of MMDCEs as a way of enhancing their responsiveness and accountability to local populations.

[21] Sackey E (2014). Disability and political participation in Ghana: An alternative perspective. Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research; 17(4): 366-381. https://doi.org/10.1080/15017419.2014.941925

[22] https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/GHANA-2020-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf
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