

‘It’s Our Time to “Chop”’: Do Elections in Africa Feed Neo- Patrimonialism rather than Counteract it?

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This article addresses the concern that democratization may contribute to the reproduction of neo-patrimonialism, rather than to counteract it. The article reports the result of a survey among members of parliament in Ghana regarding their election campaigns. Total spending, sources of funds, and their usage are analysed in the context of the consolidation of liberal democracy. The survey results are supplemented with data collected in 34 interviews with MPs. The data show that MPs are involved in patron–client relationships to a significant degree to reproduce their political power. Furthermore, the prevalence of patronage politics among MPs in Ghana has increased throughout the period of democratic rule. This persistent pattern of patronage politics threatens the very heart of democratic consolidation. Vertical accountability and legitimacy is threatened by alternative pacts of loyalty, expectations of corruption, and tendencies to delegative mandates. Horizontal accountability risks pervasion by ‘big man’ interventions, and by insufficient allocation of time to monitoring the government and legislative activities.

Writing about Ghana’s democratization in the 1990s four distinguished scholars, Diamond, Sandbrook, Gyimah-Boadi and Nugent, said, respectively, ‘at least ten (including the one in Ghana) civilian regimes have held multiparty elections so flawed that they do not meet the minimal criteria for electoral democracy. All these regimes are pseudo-democracies’;¹ ‘the neo-patrimonial tradition is doubtless more deeply rooted in the history and culture of Ghana, not to mention better adapted to its poverty, limited class formation, and peasant origins, than the liberal-democratic tendency’;² ‘but in terms ... of democratic governance, the record is not so good ... Most disturbingly, the structure and culture of patronage has set its roots ever more deeply into our political soil’;³ ‘on 7 January 2001, an epochal day for Ghana, power passed from one administration to another on the basis of successful elections. That day brought Ghana significantly closer to completing the process of transition to democratic rule ... and marked a real step toward democratic

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consolidation'.⁴ Finally, 'over the course of December 2000, Ghana inscribed a new chapter in its political history when for the first time an incumbent government was ousted from office by means of the ballot box'.⁵

Clearly, views are divergent. Gyimah-Boadi even expresses quite different views within a relatively short period of time. Taken together the quotations can be read in at least two – contradictory – ways. First, they could reflect a sequence in which significant steps have been taken towards the consolidation of democracy in Ghana. Ghanaian political leaders are slowly accepting and learning how to behave within a democratic dispensation and thereby making democracy the 'only game in town'.⁶ Alternatively, these quotations can be taken to speak about two parallel and entirely different aspects of democracy: the formal procedures by which one becomes the governor and the actual ways one governs once in power. From that perspective, using procedural evaluation of elections as a basis for an assessment of democracy in Ghana amounts to what Karl called the 'fallacy of electoralism'.⁷ That mistake consists of privileging electoral contestation over other dimensions of democracy.

None of these views is entirely satisfactory. Democratization is sequential, as any process is. At the same time there are good reasons for believing that elections in and of themselves, however good as indicators, are not telling the whole story, even in the context of the limited liberal normative ideal. On the other hand, the quality of the procedural aspects of elections and their outcomes, particularly turnovers, *do* tell us something about the degree of democratization and in which direction it is moving.

What is worrying, however, is that none of the quoted authors discusses the issue of neo-patrimonialism and patron–client relationships in the context of Ghana's first 'real' transition and prevailing electoral practices. Nugent, for instance, cherishes the elections as a historic moment for Ghana; he appears to consider Ghana a more or less consolidated democracy.⁸ The discussion focuses not on threats to democratic practice or content but on explaining the voting behaviour in 2000 and possible strategies for the parties in the coming years. Gyimah-Boadi similarly marks it as 'an important step towards consolidation'. He expresses his satisfaction with the electoral process and holds that the prolonged transition from one Rawlings-led government to another, and most recently to a government led by John Kufour, can be a model for other African countries.⁹

Admittedly, Gyimah-Boadi mentions neo-patrimonialism as a problem to be addressed in general. Yet, we all know that election campaigns in liberal democracies take resources and strive to establish loyalty between political candidates and voters. Patron–client relations are primarily about providing material resources in exchange for personal loyalty. So, do the

two go hand in hand? Do elections in Africa, however free and fair according to international standards, actually feed the 'big-man-syndrome' rather than counteract it?

As two of the quotations at the beginning of this article suggest, the neo-patrimonial form of political rule has not diminished with the introduction of democracy. Rather, there are some indications that it has actually regained strength and intensity with the establishment of a multiparty system.¹⁰ The primary institutional heritage in Africa is neo-patrimonial rule and Ghana is no exception.¹¹ Neo-patrimonialism is an informal political system based on personalized rule and organized through clientelistic networks of patronage, personal loyalty and coercion.¹² Sustaining neo-patrimonial institutions takes regular flows of resources from leaders to followers. To sustain themselves, leaders must therefore extract resources from the state, kin, followers and other sources, which is done in a largely coercive and predatory manner.¹³ Neo-patrimonial systems tend to monopolize material resources, turning the political game into a zero-sum struggle for control of the state, which becomes the key to economic advantage. In essence, this is the 'privatization of the state' in Africa.

It is easy to argue that neo-patrimonial institutions function in order to enrich political leaders and maintain their personal rule.¹⁴ But this form of rule in itself necessitates a tight grip on material and coercive resources in order to prevent competitive patronage networks from rising up and threatening the state from *within the system*. It is as simple as Clapham put it: when there is no money, there is no patronage and no loyalty in this kind of system.¹⁵ As a way of governing, neo-patrimonial systems tend to involve a peculiar type of vertical accountability between ruler and ruled. However, this type of accountability is clearly distinguishable from the accountability in liberal democracies. In liberal democracies, accountability is primarily about public policies, political programmes and prudent use of public resources. In the patron-client relationships typical of neo-patrimonial systems, vertical accountability is a matter of ensuring personal favours and benefits, often at the expense of public concerns and resources.

In all forms of political systems rulers will have to satisfy their 'base', whatever that base might be. In all democracies, members of parliament (MPs) are under pressure to attend their constituents needs. 'Clientelism' in this broad sense exists to various degrees in many systems, including the United States. Among mature democracies, it might be that personalized clientelism is less prevalent in the social democratic countries of northern Europe than in the US. What is particularly damaging about the personalized clientelism that exists in Africa is spelled out below. And that kind of patronage politics is arguably more prevalent in Africa than in the West. Even more crucially perhaps is the fact that countervailing institutions

such as the media, the courts and parliamentary ethics committees are much weaker in Africa. Hence, the consequences of illicit behaviour are more damaging to the prospects of establishing viable liberal democracy.

MPs in formal democracies with a neo-patrimonial system display certain behavioural tendencies.¹⁶ In the absence of central funding from the state, the MP will have to extract resources from other sources to finance election campaigns. These resources are often used to sustain clientelistic networks to a significant degree. In practice, this might entail appeasing both collective and personal bodies. But it is the personalistic character of neo-patrimonial rule that violates the norms of liberal democracy. Such practices include attending to individuals' schools fees, electricity and water bills, funeral and wedding expenses; or distributing cutlasses and other tools for agriculture, or even handing out 'chop-money' (small cash sums) to constituents. This is not simply a buying of votes, however. It is an institutionalized behaviour signifying willingness to take care of 'your people', namely the constituents. It might also entail personal assistance in dealing with the authorities, whether police, courts, headmasters, local government officials or ministries. Such interventions mostly tend to entail the use of resources like time and authority rather than money but these have not been measured here, and, in any case, often 'gifts' will be involved as well.

The function of such giving and taking is to establish and reproduce pacts of mutual loyalty. The clients are (re-)assured that the 'big man' (or 'big woman' for that matter) will attend to their needs in times of hardship in exchange for political loyalty transferred into votes in democratic elections. In this instance, there is little left of the idea of democratic accountability in a liberal democracy. Elected officials are not held accountable for their action, or inaction, with regard to public matters and their political agendas rely on the provision of socio-economic benefits in personalized networks. This may also indirectly affect horizontal accountability in at least two ways. First, the involvement of elected officials in private matters of their constituents as and when they are in trouble with other parts of the state apparatus may create a pattern of mutual favours between elected officials and/or between elected officials and administrative staff. 'You help my people and I'll help yours', as one of this writer's interviewees put it. Second, MPs or other elected officials may become preoccupied with the time-consuming task of attending on their personal clientelistic networks, which are the basis for their power. In effect, they may not be able to allocate a sufficient amount of time and energy to hold other elected officials accountable. Thus, horizontal accountability may be weakened.

After a short conceptual discussion of democracy, the remainder of this article explores the usefulness of supplementary data of a type that could be

collected in many countries in conjunction with the administration of elections. If useful in addressing the lack of indicators on patron–client relations in new democracies, it can serve to qualify the assessment of the prospects for consolidation of democracy that we get from traditional sources.

Democracy, Democratization and Consolidation of Democracy

Any discussion of the potential negative effects of particular behavioural patterns on the possibility of consolidating democracy in Ghana requires a clarification of what is meant here by liberal democracy.¹⁷ There is a conceptual divide between scholars who argue in favour of *degrees* of democracy and those who prefer to conceive differences as *types* of democracy. The ‘degree camp’ typically measures a level of democracy using an index or a scale. The ‘type camp’ has created an abundance (reportedly over 550¹⁸) of nominal and diminished subtypes up and down the ladder of abstraction. This divide has an implication for how consolidation is conceived. Consolidation is not a process of and in itself. It is always dependent on an object: something is being consolidated. With the type approach, it is possible to argue that consolidation may occur for all the different types. They *are* something and that something can be consolidated. Thus, a delegative democracy or a de facto one-party democracy may become consolidated as well as a liberal democracy. With the degree perspective, it seems more awkward to argue for the consolidation of various degrees of democracy. Rather, the country in question must be considered a democracy *before* we can talk of any process of consolidation. Ghana can be considered a democracy, but the data identify behavioural patterns that undermine the possibilities of consolidation.

The baseline used here is the procedural minimum definition originating with Joseph Schumpeter and elaborated by Robert Dahl in his concept of ‘polyarchy’.¹⁹ It requires not only extensive political competition and participation but also political rights and civil liberties which are effectively enforced. Specifically, Dahl identified seven institutional characteristics of a polyarchy.

1. Control over government decisions about policy is constitutionally vested in elected officials.
2. Elected officials are chosen and peacefully removed in frequent, fair, and free elections in which coercion is absent or quite limited.
3. Virtually all adults have the right to vote.
4. Most adults also have the right to run for public offices in these elections.

5. Citizens possess a right, effectively enforced by judicial and administrative officials, to freedom of expression, including criticism and opposition to the leaders or party in office.
6. Citizens have access, and an effective enforced right to gain access, to sources of information that are not monopolized by the government, or by any other single group.
7. Citizens possess an effectively enforced right to form and join political organizations, including political parties and interest groups.

Dahl's formulation has been further expanded by Diamond in three ways to guarantee that the definition allows only fully 'liberal' democracies to be called democracies.

8. Absence of 'reserved domains' of power for the military or other political forces that are not accountable to the electorate.
9. Established and effective mechanisms for 'horizontal accountability' of officeholders to one another, constraining executive power and protecting the rule of law.
10. Extensive provisions for political and civil pluralism, as well as for individual and group freedoms.²⁰

In terms of measuring the extent of liberal democracy using this definition, Freedom House's annual survey of freedom around the world is arguably the best available empirical indicator. The institute's 22 indicators cover all these dimensions to some degree.

Ghana qualified as a near-liberal democracy after the elections of 1996 and graduated as a full (if, still imperfect) liberal democracy in 2000. Hence, it is only now that we can start to speak about the process of consolidating liberal democracy in Ghana.

Conceptualizing consolidation is as hotly contested an issue as the nature of democracy itself. Suffice to say that for the purposes of this analysis consolidation is taken to mean preventing democratic erosion and

TABLE 1
FREEDOM HOUSE RATING OF GHANA, 1992-2001

Year	Political rights	Civil liberties	Status
1991	6	6	Not free
1993	5	4	Partly free
1995	4	4	Partly free
1997	3	3	Partly free
2000	2	3	Free

Source: <<http://www.freedomhouse.org/ratings>>.

by extension its breakdown, to use Schedler's terminology.²¹ Originally identified by O'Donnell as a 'slow death' of democracy eventually leading to a *democradura*,²² students of democratic consolidation have now improved their knowledge about the different routes that erosion of democracies might take. They include: a reassertion of military supremacy, by the progressive diminution of existing spaces for civilian control; state weakness which may subvert the rule of law; the rise of hegemonic parties which may suffocate electoral competition; the decay of electoral institutions which may affect the fairness of voting; incumbents' use of state resources and media which may violate civil and political rights; the introduction of exclusionary citizenship laws which may circumvent democratic inclusion.²³ What has not been discussed enough in this literature is the possibility that both vertical and horizontal accountability may be undermined by other, structurally induced, patterns of behaviour. If voting behaviour, holding elected officials accountable, and enforcement of administrative and political horizontal accountability are dependent on personal relationships of the patron–client kind, then liberal democracy may be corroded by the rust of personalized rule in democratic disguise so much as to threaten democracy's very legitimacy and survival.

Elections and Campaign Funding: MPs in Ghana

None of the recent comments on Ghana's first 'real' transition in 2001 discusses the issue of neo-patrimonialism and patron–client relationships in the context of multiparty electoral practices. Persisting neo-patrimonial structures within a liberal democratic dispensation may erode principles of liberal democracy and thus undermine the possibilities of a consolidation, in several ways.

First, in conjunction with a more open political arena and multiparty politics, patronage seeking might turn election campaigns into a 'harvesting season' for the electorate. The year of the election becomes the time when it is time to reap the fruits from the parliamentary tree, so to speak. In established liberal democracies the electorate expect politicians to 'deliver the goods' when the election has been won, but by this we mean that they expect the politicians to pursue promised *public* programmes. In a patron–client environment, the electorate may push politicians to provide the 'rewards' before the election and in the form of personalized favours.

Second, as the political game is opened up for more players in a winner-takes-all game, the bids tend to get higher. Clients may utilize a greater room for manoeuvre for electoral blackmail. The political contest may be turned into an economic competition based on the strength and extension of

patronage networks. Majorities are made by social loyalty based on material resources rather than political agendas.

Third, accountability may be turned into a matter of distributing patronage. MPs may become free to act at will on policy issues as they assure loyalty by providing assistance to clients in personalized networks. The accountability of MPs is lost in a similar way as the accountability of presidents elected in Latin American 'delegative democracies'.²⁴ From the other end, being listened to as a citizen, or group of citizens, becomes a matter of personal ties with 'big men'.

Fourth, MPs will spend a large chunk of their time and energy on local and personal matters, finding personal or state resources to meet demands from constituents. The MPs' functions as law and policy makers, watchdogs of the government and opinion leaders in society, decay as a consequence. In other words, horizontal accountability may suffer. Policy development and legislative action may become dysfunctional as well, as a result of MPs being away from the national assembly seeking solutions to constituents' problems. Interference with national and local authorities in their work may lead to officials misbehaving, violation of rules and procedures and undermining of the rule of law in general when MPs seek to reproduce personal loyalties.

Fifth, strong pressures from constituents for personal assistance incommensurate with resources available to MPs in terms of their salary and local development funds may work as an incentive for politicians to engage in corrupt practices.

Finally, the significance of patronage politics in election campaigns would work to deter sincere but comparatively less wealthy individuals from seeking office, so reducing the quality of elected leaders. By the end of the day, such tendencies might provide a basis for anti-democratic propaganda and action. In the end, it might affect the appearance of democracy in the eyes of the public when the outcome of the system depends not on democratic procedures but on personal affection in patron-client systems.

In sum, the funding of MPs' election campaigns and the way the MPs use their resources can be critical as indicators of how 'healthy' democracy is and whether the soil is fertile for consolidation. None of the available indices and measurements of democracy target this important aspect, to which the article now turns.

'Chop'-Money and Election Campaigns²⁵

The writer conducted a series of semi-structured interviews and a survey of MPs in Ghana.²⁶ Additional information came from observing their

behaviour within the premises of Parliament, in their residences, on the campaign trail in the constituencies and at ceremonies like funerals and weddings, over two years. The interviews were conducted primarily during the election campaign starting six months ahead of the December 2000 general elections. These semi-structured interviews focused on the issues of campaign funding, the conditions of being an MP, the relationship to the executive and the constituents. The questionnaire was administered as a post-election survey in May and June 2001.²⁷ The survey is the primary source of the data presented here. The interviews and the observations were used to inform the questionnaire as well as to provide a better understanding regarding how to interpret the statistics provided by the survey.

The interviews and observations broadly paint the same picture. MPs in Ghana wake up almost every morning to face a queue of constituents (often 10–20 persons) that expect them to take time to address their concerns and provide various sums of money. People tend to be poor and they expect the – in their eyes – wealthy MP to assist them. During parliamentary sessions, when MPs are in the capital, Accra, they are often delayed by having to see constituents and endeavour to meet their demands. Sometimes this involves finding someone a job or a place to stay, putting them in touch with someone else for jobs, contracts, or other services, or just talking to them about family issues, planning funerals and other private issues. Once in parliament, other individuals call on them. MPs are often as much as an hour late for committee meetings or do not come at all. In general, attendance in the chamber is poor. This might or might not be a consequence of a different cultural perception regarding time. In any event, it has consequences for how Ghana's democratic institutions function. Democratic responsibilities do not get the priority they ought to have; crucial functions are not performed as well as they should be. Once proceedings in parliament are over for the day, MPs will be approached in the parking lot or at home. In the constituencies, days will be spent on solving problems that individual constituents or their relations have, as well as on handing out small gifts. Campaigning is often about walking around various neighbourhoods, talking to people about what they do and what their life is, while one of 'the boys' (runners and bodyguards) continues to feed the MP with small notes for handouts from a brown envelope.

As the elections came closer, the interviewed MPs increasingly mentioned blackmail messages delivered by the constituents. A typical phrase could be 'there is nothing to 'chop', you know, and you give it to me, or...'. As far as I could understand from the interviews and observations, incumbent MPs stopped travelling back home to their constituencies in the latter half of 2000 unless they had substantial amounts of money to spend. As some of them put it, 'it would amount to suicide'. The MPs and

candidates from the biggest opposition party, the National Patriotic Party (NPP), also had to go through primaries and many of them testified that even in these intra-party races patronage played a significant role. 'Five thousand cedis [worth fifty pence in British currency at the time] can buy a lot in rural areas', as one of the MPs said. All interviewees expressed great concern that the amounts they were forced to spend on personal patronage to constituents had increased dramatically as compared to previous election campaigns. It reflects the fact that the competition had never been keener. In 2001 1,078 candidates stood for parliament²⁸ compared to 780 in 1996 and 463 in 1992.²⁹ Many incumbent MPs faced five or six contestants in the race. The general expectations of a close run were also much higher this time. It could be sensed in all the interviews. Several opinion polls were also conducted in 2000 showing widely disparate results.³⁰

It is perhaps indicative that the only one of the 34 MPs interviewed who claimed not to distribute personal patronage lost his seat. The other incumbent MPs all admitted to having spent substantial amounts on personal handouts, paying for bills and sponsoring various social events. Incumbent MPs also claimed that pressures on them were much higher than on their rival contestants. People perceived incumbent MPs as wealthier, and in control of state resources, which they should be obliged to share with 'their people'. 'Legitimate' spending on items like reading books for schools, waterholes, roofing for community buildings, footballs and other items for youth clubs and the like, does not really 'count', according to the interviewees. Typically, they claim to have been approached with 'I know this roofing for the school and all that, but what do you do for me?' In a nutshell, MPs have to prove their concern for 'their people' in concrete material terms on a personal basis to an extent that tends to occupy half or more of their available time and take significant resources.

The Election-cum-'Chopping' Campaign 2000 – a Post-Mortem

MPs were asked in the questionnaire about sources of funding, the total amount spent on the campaign and on what items the money was spent. In addition, MPs who participated in the 1996 and 1992 election campaigns were asked to provide comparable data from their previous experiences.³¹ Of course, a certain amount of discretion must be used with regard to the data. As the years pass, MPs could easily forget how much they actually extracted and used for various purposes. However, the interviews suggest that MPs in Ghana are quite consistent and reliable in their reports about spending during previous elections. There is very little hesitation and repeated questions to the same persons produced consistent results. The oral

tradition seems to make them perfectly able to keep the records in their head for many years.

How much to 'Chop'?

According to the survey results, MPs' spending on the election campaign trail has increased enormously. In 1992, almost all MPs spent a maximum of one year's salary as an MP. The interviews indicate that most of them actually spent less. During the 1996, campaign only two-thirds of the MPs kept spending at this level whereas in the 2000 race a tiny proportion of less than 15 per cent of the MPs kept such a low profile. In 2000, almost half of the MPs spent an amount equal to two or more annual salaries on their campaign. During the 1996 election campaign, only roughly 10 per cent of the contestants spent this much. In sum, the cost of campaigning exploded³² at the same time as political competition increased, the playing field had been levelled, and democracy had reportedly 'matured' in Ghana.

If spending tripled or more, are there any indications that the use of personal patronage increased with it? Indeed, there are. Whereas only about one-third of the MPs in the 1992 campaign spent more than 25 per cent of their outlays on personal patronage, half of them did so in 1996. During the

TABLE 2
HOW MUCH IN TOTAL DID YOU SPEND ON YOUR ELECTION CAMPAIGN?

	Campaign 2000	Campaign 1996	Campaign 1992
Spent max. 1 year salary	14	68	92
Spent 1-2 years salaries	40	22	8
Spent min. of 2 years salaries	46	10	0
Total	100 (n=73)	100 (n=41)	100 (n=24)

Figures are percentages.

Source: Survey by author.

TABLE 3
HOW MUCH OF YOUR TOTAL SPENDING ON YOUR ELECTION CAMPAIGN DID YOU SPEND ON PERSONALIZED PATRONAGE?

	Patronage 2000	Patronage 1996	Patronage 1992
Max. 25 per cent	43	50	65
25 per cent or more	57	50	35
Total	100 (n=72)	100 (n=36)	100 (n=23)

Figures are percentages.

Source: Survey by author.

2000 election race more than half of the MPs spent over 25 per cent of their funds on sustaining personalized patron–client relations. Hence, it is not only that the total figures spent on campaigning by MPs have skyrocketed. The relative share spent on reproducing patronage structures in the midst of what is supposedly a process of democratic consolidation has increased as well.

These figures reflect a story told in many of the interviews. There is a Ghanaian traditional custom of giving small gifts for services rendered. The research finds that this tradition of giving small gifts has grown out of proportion and been exploited, or aggravated, during the process of democratization in the 1990s. At the same time, people expect politicians to live and dress by a certain standard and to display wealth publicly. Everybody will then come to take their share: friends, relatives, family, supporters and businesspersons. During 2000, competition was much more intense than in 1996 and 1992. At the same time, a lot more people than before were dependent for their living on others as the economic situation worsened.³³ The fact that excessive use of patronage tends to follow increased spending in general in Ghana is further illustrated by Table 3. A higher level of spending on the election campaign trail in Ghana is clearly associated with a higher share of spending on ‘chop-money’ and other personalized benefits.

The increasing cost of incumbency is also reflected in the survey: all 24 respondents who had been MPs since 1993 reported spending high or very high sums on their 2000 election campaigns. It is perhaps noteworthy that female MPs tend to spend significantly more than men do on average irrespective of party affiliation. This possibly lends support to claims that women are facing a gender-based bias discouraging their political participation, although the small number of respondents (seven) makes any conclusion extremely tentative.

TABLE 4
THE LEVEL OF SPENDING COMPARED WITH SHARE SPENT
ON PERSONAL PATRONAGE

Total spending on 2000 campaign	Personalized patronage max 25%	Personalized patronage 25–50%	Personalized patronage more than 50%
Spent max. 25mn	5	4	0
Spent 25–50mn.	14	12	2
Spent min. 50mn.	11	18	4

Note: This table provides numbers of respondents rather than percentages. N=70.

Source: Survey by author.

Who is Footing the Bill?

The structure of funding seems stable despite the increasing costs. The relative distribution of most important source of funds (see Table 4) has not changed very much from 1992 to 2000. What has happened however, is that in 2000 the most important source of funding provided proportionately less of the total funds than before. For the 1992 campaign one out of three of the MPs report that the most important source of funding provided 75 per cent or more of their funds. This shrank to one in five MPs in 1996 and almost diminished to about one in ten during 2000. This is a reflection of what many interviewees testified: during the 2000 campaign, they had to use every possible venture in order to raise funds. Quite a number of the MPs even travelled abroad during the spring 2000 in search of sponsorship.

Behind these figures lies a clear divide between the parties (see Table 5). The MPs of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) have had a clear majority in Parliament throughout two successive terms and the party simultaneously held the office of the president. More than 60 per cent of these MPs received the largest chunk of funds from their party. Only 5 per cent of the MPs from the former opposition parties, mainly belonging to the

TABLE 5
THE MOST IMPORTANT SOURCE OF FUNDING FOR MPs

Primary source of funding	2000	1996	1992
Salary	36	41	48
Party	31	26	17
Family and other individual donations	32	33	35
Business	1	0	0
Total:	100 (n=72)	100 (n=39)	100 (n=23)

Figures are percentages.

Source: Survey by author.

TABLE 6
THE MOST IMPORTANT SOURCE OF FUNDING FOR MPs OF
DIFFERENT POLITICAL PARTIES

Primary source of funding 2000	MP/other salary	Party	Family/other individ. donations	Total
NDC	19	62	19	100 (n=32)
NPP/other	50	5	45	100 (n=38)
Independents	50	0	50	100 (n=2)

Figures are percentages.

Source: Survey by author.

NPP, reported their party to be the most important source of funding. On the other hand, the former opposition MPs seem to have utilized their own salaries as MPs and/or other salaries to a much higher degree as well as donations from extended families and other individuals.

In the political and public debates in Ghana concerning election campaigns it has often been alleged that the then ruling party, the NDC, misappropriated state resources and channelled them through the party into individual MPs' election machinery. The figures reported here might be thought to support that argument. However, there is another, perhaps more serious, side to the figures above as well. For if the general reasoning about patron-client relationships in neo-patrimonial states like Ghana contains some truth, then the structure of funding of NPP MPs could also pose a problem. According to the patronage-politics thesis, loyalties have to be reproduced and reconfirmed in a never-ending cycle of distribution of benefits. If the new government won their cherished victory by means acquired from primarily private sources, these private providers will claim returns on their social investment. In the interviews, some of the leading figures of the NPP anticipated this problem. Among the comments were: 'we'll have to do the same that the NDC did, of course. If you support me and then you need a contract I'll have to give you one, that's Africa', and things like 'the pressures will be too much, too much!' or 'if I become a minister my supporters will expect me to deliver, like the NDC did.'

What is encouraging is the hard line against corruption and other illicit practices announced in the media by the new president, John A. Kufour. The 'zero-tolerance' of corruption provides at least a possible building block for any elected officials who want to start a new era in Ghanaian politics. Even so, against the backdrop of what is known about the logic of patron-client relationships in general and in Ghana in particular, the figures reported above give cause for concern. This concern goes far beyond the personal distribution of 'small-chops' during the election campaign and afterwards but stretches to areas like ministerial and other government staff positions, media campaigns, contract and licenses, interference with the police and the juridical system and other illicit administrative practices.

In a recent article Barkan argues that the neo-patrimonial regime in Ghana has shown itself to be able to resist and co-opt pressures at first, but will be worn down over time. The protracted transition creates new incentives that leads new leaders to emerge, who have more to gain from a uncompromised democratic system.³⁴ Ghana's new government looks more like the 'recycling of elites' so often discussed elsewhere in Africa. For example, the President himself was a deputy foreign minister in the democratically elected government of Dr Busia (1969-1972) and a minister ('secretary') in the Provisional National Defence Council under Jerry J.

Rawlings for a short while in the early 1980s. The majority leader in Parliament, senior minister and chairman of the Economic Management Team, is J.H. Mensah, a politician of long standing who was minister of finance as long ago as Dr Busia's government (1969–1972). The question is whether the Barkanian withering away of the neo-patrimonial system will unfold with this leadership, or, instead, will the younger members of the administration be co-opted into a system that is strong and appears to have been naturalized among Ghanaians? The record in Africa is poor. Even new leaders, elected by free and fair elections, once in office, often behave much like the old autocrats.³⁵ Will Ghana stand out? Perhaps she will. At least, President Kufour has made strong statements about stamping out corruption. Whether he is going to be able to do it is another question.

In the Eyes of the Beholder: Sharing what has been 'Chopped Away'?

In a survey conducted in the spring 2000, the Ghanaian *Center for Democracy and Development* (CDD-Ghana) could establish that across the various political, professional, religious and other elites in Ghana there is a widespread expectation that public officials and political office holders will be 'chopping' from their positions. In other words, they are appropriating public resources for private gain.³⁶ A vast majority (80 per cent) of the elite representatives also believe that the situation has worsened during the era of multiparty politics.³⁷ In a general corruption survey issued by the World Bank and conducted by the same research institute, it was reported that 66 per cent of the households spend at least 10 per cent of their monthly income on bribes and other 'gifts'.³⁸

In other words, petty corruption is widespread in Ghana. Even more so, many people do not see anything wrong with it and do not think about it as corruption. This relates to one of the themes that came up in the interviews: the culture of gift giving that has always existed in Ghana. This has been turned into a weapon in the political war over parliamentary and executive power. Even more worrying, there seems to be a widespread expectation on behalf of the people of Ghana that officials and politicians should distribute patronage from state resources and opportunities or are already doing so. People then come to see their personal share as a form of informal tax refund. The problem is that this system feeds corruption in general and puts in doubt the legitimacy of the democratic system for the long haul.

There are indications that even though two-thirds of Ghanaians cognitively connect the concept of democracy with various democratic procedures or political rights, their understanding is extremely vague. They also seem to value democracy instrumentally as well as intrinsically.³⁹ One relevant question for future research must be whether the instrumental value the people of Ghana

ascribe to democracy has to do with the increasing returns they might be able to take home as a consequence of elections. And, does their understanding of democracy include the possibility for them to extract various forms of personal material, and non-material, assistance from the MPs?

‘Chopping’ Away Democracy?

Finally, it should be emphasized that the argument here is primarily a structural one. Traditions of gift giving, poverty, low levels of education, general expectations of politicians, path dependencies in the history of politics in Ghana, all can reasonably be assumed to have contributed to creating the situation that exists. It would be unfair to blame the individual MPs of today for what has happened. Yet, the future of liberal democracy in Ghana is to a great extent in their hands.

In one of the most coherent analyses of the state of democracy in Ghana after the elections in 1996, Ninsin, in a postscript, sums up positives for the process of democratic consolidation. He mentions, among other things, a relatively free press, vigorous civil society organizations, and strong foreign support. Ninsin acknowledges the lack of discussion about the role of elections and electoral politics in nurturing democratic norms, attitudes and practices. He then tries to fill the gap. His two main arguments seem to be that, first, as an exercise in consensus building among political elites to forge the institutional bases for orderly democratic politics, the elections of 1996 were well used; but second, as an exercise in democratic choice by the sovereign people of Ghana concerning who should govern them, the elections were of much less value.⁴⁰

Herein lies perhaps the central point. It is quite possible that we are witnessing an unfolding situation where the elites have forged a consensus on formal democratic procedures on how to select who will govern. Yet, the very same elites succumb to or promote a way of managing politics (including the process of being elected) that can be identified as building on personalized patron–client relations. Even if similar phenomena exist in mature democracies, the extent to which they are being practised and the consequences of their practice are more damaging in Africa. We know that the operative logic of such systems runs contrary to key democratic ideals concerning vertical and horizontal accountability, the meaning of elections and the nature of elected offices. It remains to be seen whether Ghana’s new government will manage the task of repudiating pressures for a continuation of ‘chopping’ (that trickles down the system) or not. It also remains to be seen whether the (partly) new set of MPs in parliament are ready to challenge the practice of ‘chopping’ and gifts that threatens the very heart of parliament as an institution.

Ghana represents a case of relatively successful democratization in Africa. It was the showcase for International Monetary Fund and World Bank-sponsored economic reform in the 1980s. In the 1990s, it has been promoted as a showcase for political reform and peaceful democratization as well. There might be countries that are more successful in Africa, but the vast majority are worse off. Ghana has come far and her MPs and other leading politicians have come far in their efforts to transform the political system to achieve a liberal democracy. Other countries can learn lessons from Ghana but they should also be aware of the tremendous challenge that persisting neo-patrimonial structures pose for the future.

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NOTES

1. Larry Diamond, 'Is the Third Wave Over?', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.7, No.3 (1996), p.30.
2. Richard Sandbrook and Jay Oelbaum, *Reforming the Political Kingdom: Governance and Development in Ghana's Fourth Republic* (Accra: Center for Democracy and Development, Ghana, 1999), p.44.
3. Emmanuel Gyimah-Boadi, 'Six Years of Constitutional Rule in Ghana: An Assessment and Prospects of the Executive and Legislature', in *Six Years of Constitutional Rule in Ghana* (Accra: Friedrich Ebert Foundation and Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1999), p.14.
4. Emmanuel Gyimah-Boadi, 'A Peaceful Turnover in Ghana', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.12, No.1 (2001), pp.103-4.
5. Paul Nugent, 'Winners, Losers and Also Rans: Money, Moral Authority and Voting Patterns in the Ghana 2000 Election', *African Affairs*, Vol.100, No.400 (2001), p.405.
6. Juan J. Linz, 'Transitions to Democracy', *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol.13, No.3 (1990), pp.143-64.
7. Terry Karl, 'Dilemmas of Democratization in Latin America', *Comparative Politics*, Vol.23, No.1 (1990), pp.1-21.
8. Nugent (note 5).
9. Gyimah-Boadi, 'A Peaceful Transition' (note 4).
10. C.f. Kwame A. Ninsin, 'Elections, Democracy and Elite Consensus', in Kwame A. Ninsin (ed.), *Ghana: Transition to Democracy* (Dakar: CODRESIA, 1998); Sandbrook and Oelbaum (note 2) pp.24-5, 27-8.
11. The characteristics of the African states have been labelled in many ways, among these 'lame leviathan' and 'patrimonial administrative' by Thomas Callaghy, 'The State as Lame Leviathan: The Patrimonial Administrative State in Africa', in Zaki Ergas (ed.), *The African State in Transition* (Hampshire and London: Macmillan, 1995); 'soft' by Joshua B. Forrest, 'The Quest for State 'Hardness in Africa'', *Comparative Politics*, Vol.20, No.4 (1988), pp.423-42; and by Donald Rothchild, 'Hegemony and State Softness: Some Variation in Elite Responses', in Zaki Ergas (ed.), *African States in Transition* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987); 'vampire state' by J. Frimpong-Ansah, *The Vampire State in Africa: The Political Economy of Economic Decline in Ghana* (London: James Currey, 1991); 'rentier state' by Douglas A. Yates, *The Rentier State in Africa: Oil Rent Dependency and*

- Neocolonialism in the Republic of Gabon* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1996); 'accountable authoritarian' by Joel D. Barkan, 'Kenya: Lessons from a Flawed Election', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.4, No.3 (1993), pp.85–100; 'parasitral' by Paul Kennedy, 'Political Barriers to African Capitalism', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol.32, No.2 (1994), pp.191–213; 'extractive' by John F. Clark, 'Zaire: The Bankruptcy of the Extractive State', in Leonardo A. Villalón and Phillip A. Huxtable (eds.), *The African State at a Critical Juncture* (Boulder, CO.: Lynne Rienner, 1998), pp.109–25 and by John F. Clark, 'Realism, Neo-Realism and Africa's International Relations', in Kevin Dunn and Timothy Shaw (eds), *Africa's Challenge to International Relations Theory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), pp.85–102; and 'patron-clientistic' by Karuti Kanyinga, 'The Changing Developmental Space in Kenya: Socio-Political Change and Voluntary Development Activities', in Peter Gibbon (ed.), *Markets, Civil Society and Democracy in Kenya* (Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute, 1995), pp.69–120. However similar, the differences between these definitions are not discussed here.
12. C.f. Michael Bratton and Nicholas van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in a Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.269.
 13. E.g. Peter M Lewis, 'Economic Reform and Political Transition in Africa: The Quest for a Politics of Development', *World Politics*, Vol.49, No.1 (1996), p.100; Christopher Clapham, *Third World Politics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985); and Christopher Clapham, 'Democratization in Africa: Obstacles and Prospects', *Third World Quarterly*, Vol.14, No.3 (1993), pp.423–38.
 14. E.g. Thomas Callaghy, *The State-Society Struggle: Zaire in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984); Robert H. Jackson, 'Quasi-states, Dual Regimes and Neoclassical Theory: International Jurisprudence and the Third World' *International Organization*, Vol.41, No.4 (1987), pp.519–49; Robert H. Jackson, *Quasi-states: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Robert H. Jackson and Carl Rosberg, *Personal Rule in Black Africa*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982); Victor T. LeVine, 'African Patrimonial Regimes in Comparative Perspective.' *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol.18, No.4 (1980), pp.657–73.
 15. Clapham, 'Democratization' (note 13) p.427.
 16. These tendencies (discussed below) might differ slightly in majoritarian versus proportional systems. Ghana operates a majoritarian system based on the first-past-the-post principle in single-member constituencies. Hence, the following is based on the assumption of MPs operating in such a system.
 17. Like Diamond, I use the term 'liberal' here to refer not to an economic regime characterized by a limited state and an open market-based economy, but to a political regime in which both individual and group rights and liberties are well protected *both de jure and de facto*. This still leaves room for substantial variation in the balance on individual rights versus responsibilities.
 18. See David Collier and Steven Levitsky, 'Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research' *World Politics*, Vol.49, No.3 (1997), pp.430–51.
 19. Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper, 1947), p.269; Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1971), p.3; and Robert Dahl, *Modern Political Analysis*, 5th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1991), pp.72ff.
 20. Diamond (note 1) pp.23–4.
 21. Andreas Schedler, 'What is Democratic Consolidation?', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.9, No.2 (1998), pp.91–107.
 22. Guillermo O'Donnell, 'Transitions, Continuities, and Paradoxes', in Scott Mainwaring, Guillermo O'Donnell and J. Samuel Valenzuela (eds), *Issues in Democratic Consolidation: The New South American Democracies in Comparative Perspective* (Notre Dame, IL: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), pp.17–56.
 23. Schedler (note 21) pp.97–8.
 24. Guillermo O'Donnell, 'Delegative Democracy', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.5, No.1 (1994), pp.55–69.

25. 'Chop' is here used in the West-African meaning of metaphorically or literally 'to eat'. In that part of the world the presence of corruption is often expressed with something like 'these people chop a lot' whereas the same word is used when asking for patronage with a phrase like 'there is nothing to chop'.
26. I conducted more than 50 such interviews in Ghana of which 34 were with former or incumbent MPs. A few of the MPs were informants in the way that I conducted several interviews with them over almost two years. This made it possible to follow-up on discussion on various topics and to get a sense of the correctness of the information I received. Interviews were not taped for obvious reasons in an environment such as this and they were all given on condition that names would not be disclosed in public.
27. It would arguably have been desirable to conduct the survey closer to the elections. That was not possible, however, because of the MPs' work schedule in the new parliament.
28. The National Electoral Commission of Ghana, *Official Results* (Accra: National Electoral Commission of Ghana, 2000); see also Daniel A. Smith, *The Structural underpinnings of Ghana's December 2000 Elections*, Occasional Papers (Accra: Ghana Center for Democratic Development, CDD-Ghana, 2001), pp.19–26.
29. Kwasi A. Badu and John Larvie, *Elections in Ghana 1996: Part I* (Accra: Friedrich Ebert Foundation and National Electoral Commission of Ghana, 1996), pp.17 and 38.
30. In the public press these contradictory opinion polls were given great publicity, for example *The Accra Mail*, Vol.2, No.94, 30 November 2000, predicting a clear win for NPP and J.A. Kufour whereas *The Dispatch*, Vol.3, No.98, 29 November–5 December 2000, claimed that NDC and Prof. J.A. Mills would retain their hold on power. As pointed out to me by Dr Stephen Snook, however, none of the opinion polls met the minimum standards of survey research.
31. In all 76 out of 200 MPs responded (38 per cent). This figure is admittedly low by many standards. However, for anyone who has tried to do similar surveys with MPs in a Africa knows the difficulties of obtaining responses from 'bigshots'. From that vantage point, the return rate is actually quite high. In general, the respondents as a group turned out to be very representative of parliament at large. The gender distribution was almost a perfect match with seven (9.2 per cent) of the 76 respondents female. The party representation in the survey was also very close: 43.4 per cent of the respondents belonged to the former ruling party NDC as compared to 46 per cent in parliament. There were 41 responses or 53.9 per cent, from opposition parties as compared to 52 per cent in parliament. Two independent MPs (2.6 per cent) replied to the questionnaire whereas they have a 2 per cent share in parliamentary seats. Regional distribution also fairly representative (percentage of survey responses/percentage of total number of seats in parliament): Greater Accra 8.0/11.0, Central Region 5.3/8.5, Eastern Region 10.7/13.0, Western Region 12.0/9.5, Volta Region 5.3/9.5, Ashanti 16.0/16.5, Brong Afaho 14.7/10.5, Northern Region 14.7/11.5, Upper East 6.7/6.0, and Upper West 6.7/4.0.
32. The value of the national currency, the cedi, has decreased throughout the period. The exchange rate (annual average according to International Monetary Fund International Financial Statistics) in latter half of 1992 was at \$1=¢550, in 1996 \$1=¢1,750 and in 2000 \$1=¢6,750. It would not be appropriate to adjust the election spending figures to their dollar equivalent, however, since domestic price and wage development has not kept pace with the exchange rate. The exchange rate fluctuation primarily reflects the increasing domestic debt of the government. It primarily affects imported goods and transportation. The vast majority of Ghanaians living in the rural areas and consuming primarily domestically produced goods and services have therefore not been affected to the extent that the devaluation of the currency suggests. Furthermore, some of the essential commodities that are sensitive to changes in exchange rates and world market prices like electricity, fuel/transportation, water, etc. have been indirectly and directly subsidized to different degrees in the 1990s. There are other indices that could be used such as the World Bank's Consumer Price Index. But such indices tend to include a large chunk of exchange rate dependent goods and services. I have therefore chosen to compare the expenses to the salaries and allowances of the MPs. This also has the advantage of focusing on how much of their income as MPs they actually spend on campaigning and reproducing political support and to what extent the supplement their

- salaries from other sources. Since lack of sufficient resources and low salaries are often mentioned as a breeding ground for corruption, this perspective is arguably preferable.
33. Kwasi Anus-Kyeremeh, A.K. Bonnah Koomson, A. Essuman-Johnson and Kwame Karikari, *The State of Governance in Ghana in 1999* (Accra: Institute of Economic Affairs, 2000).
 34. Joel D. Barkan, 'Protracted Transitions Among Africa's New Democracies', *Democratization*, Vol.7, No.3 (2000), pp.227-43.
 35. Bruce Baker, 'The Class of 1990: How have the Autocratic Leaders of Sub-Saharan Africa Fared under Democratization?', *Third World Quarterly*, Vol.19, No.1 (1998), pp.115-27.
 36. Center for Democracy and Development, Ghana (CDD-Ghana), *Elite Attitudes to Democracy and Markets in Ghana*, CDD-Ghana Research Paper No.3 (Accra: CDD-Ghana, 2000), p.10.
 37. *Ibid.*, p.15.
 38. *Ibid.*
 39. Michael Bratton and Robert Mattes, 'Africa's Surprising Universalism', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.12, No.1 (2001), pp.107-21.
 40. Ninsin (note 10).

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