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Rethinking the politics of development in Africa? How the 'political settlement' shapes resource allocation in Ghana

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Abstract

Debates over whether democratic or neopatrimonial forms of politics are driving the politics of development in Africa have increasingly given way to more nuanced readings which seek to capture the dynamic interplay of these forms of politics. However, most current analyses fail to identify the specific causal mechanisms through which this politics shapes the actual distribution of resources. A political settlements approach which emphasises the distribution of 'holding power' within ruling coalitions and how this shapes institutional functioning can bring greater clarity to these debates. Our analysis shows that patterns of resource allocation within Ghana's education sector during 1993-2008 were closely shaped by the incentives and norms generated by Ghana's competitive 'clientelistic political settlement', which overrode rhetorical concerns with national unity and inclusive development. This had particularly negative implications for the poorest Northern regions, which have lacked holding power within successive ruling coalitions.

Keywords: Politics, political settlements, resource allocation, education, Ghana

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1. Thinking about the politics of development in Africa

Initial hopes that democratisation would lead to developmental gains in Africa have increasingly given way to the realisation that the adoption of democratic procedures may have actually deepened the clientelist forms of politics that are often blamed for under-development on the continent (for a comprehensive review, see Carbone, 2009). This has led researchers to try and identify the specific ways in which neopatrimonial and democratic processes combine to produce particular patterns of resource allocation aimed at maximising voter support rather than on the basis of need, albeit with different hypothetical assumptions regarding the distributional character of this dynamic. A common assumption is that African politicians target disproportionate public resources towards areas with the most loyal political supporters, both as a reward for existing and previous political backing and as a down-payment for its continuation (van Wyk, 2007; Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007). Others argue that politicians sometimes target public resources towards opposition strongholds or to 'swing' areas, with the aim of inducing them with development benefits (e.g., Banful, 2011; André and Mesplé-Somps, 2011), and that this may even involve the neglect of regional electoral strongholds, on the basis that there are few votes to be swayed in such regions (Briggs, 2012).

However, such approaches tend to identify broad correlations between voting patterns and expenditure outcomes without specifying the causal mechanisms through which this relationship may play out, and are informed by positivist and largely quantitative political science traditions (Harding and Stasavage, 2014; Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007). We argue that such analyses fail to grasp the more complex workings of elite behaviour and elite-popular dynamics. Using original quantitative and qualitative data, we argue that a political settlements approach (Khan, 2010) can offer a more nuanced and persuasive account of the dynamics at work here, particularly through its focus on the 'holding power' that different factions of ruling coalitions possess and how this shapes institutional performance. Ghana provides a particularly interesting case study through which to explore these questions. Heralded as one of Africa's leading success stories of political and economic achievement, critics have recently argued that the underlying forms of politics and power relations that comprise its political settlement are preventing the country from achieving developmental progress in terms of structural transformation and challenging deep-seated inequalities (Oduro, Awal and Ashon, 2014; Whitfield, 2012).

The paper proceeds as follows: Section 2 sets out the political settlements approach and its relevance for exploring the politics of resource allocation in Africa, and introduces the methodological approach employed here. Section 3 presents the regional distribution of political power during the first two-term reigns of each of Ghana's dominant political parties, the National Democratic Congress (NDC, 1993-2000) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP, 2001-2008). Sections 4 and 5 examine the politics of the regional distribution of basic education expenditures during this period and of the Ghana School Feeding Programme, respectively. Section 6 concludes.

2. The politics of public goods provision in Africa: Towards a political settlements approach

Recent thinking around the politics of development has sought to avoid judging developing countries against the ideal institutional types invoked within discourses around 'democratic good governance', to identify the underlying forms of politics and power relations that actually shape the emergence and performance of institutions (Khan, 2010; North, Wallis and Weingast, 2009). The key focus here is on the role of elite bargaining, with the agreements that emerge between powerful groups on what the rules of the game should be closely shaping the types of institutional arrangements that emerge and ensuring that these primarily function to distribute goods and status to powerful groups, without the agreement of whom the underlying arrangements would break down (Khan, 2010). This helps to explain why formal institutions, such as multi-party elections and rational bureaucratic processes for allocating budgetary resources, may not easily displace the 'informal' logics of personalised and clientelist rule. Indeed, the pressures that elections can place on ruling elites, whose primary aim is to secure continued rule in order to maintain control over powerful institutions, may lead to their intensification within the 'competitive clientelist' type of political settlement (Levy, 2014) that has developed in Ghana (Oduro et al., 2014).

In identifying the more significant dynamics that may shape the relationship between political power and the distribution of public resources, a political settlements approach focuses in particular on 'the relative holding power of different groups and organizations contesting the distribution of resources', with holding power 'partly based on income and wealth, but also on historically rooted capacities of different groups to organize' (Khan, 2010: 1). The organisation of the ruling coalition in such contexts is critical, as constituted by the factions that control political authority and state power (Khan, 2010: 63).

In particular, if the ruling coalition considers itself vulnerable to threats from excluded factions with significant holding power, it is more likely to be driven by short-term calculations than to undertake institutional reforms and distribute resources with a longer-term vision of the national interest in mind (Kelsall, 2012). Factions within the ruling coalition will have differing levels of power, and thus differing capacities to influence institutional functioning and resource allocation in line with their interests, whilst 'people outside the coalition have only limited access to organizations, privileges and valuable resources and activities' (North et al., 2009: 56). The key for poor and marginalised groups, then, is to form a faction with significant holding power within the ruling coalition.

The promise of such an approach to understanding the politics of public goods provision in developing countries has been revealed in a recent study of education, where Steven Kosack shows that governments only deliver on pro-poor social agendas when poor people become a 'vital constituency' for the powerful entrepreneurs which are critical to the functioning of clientelist political settlements

(Kosack, 2012); as Khan notes, 'ruling coalitions needed the organizational abilities of powerful organizers to construct their ruling coalitions' (Khan, 2010: 58). To the extent that this approach interprets political elite behaviour in purely instrumental terms, whereby the distribution of public goods is driven solely in line with the logic of maintaining power, it risks offering too reductionist an account of politics that ignores the role that ideas play in shaping elite commitment to distributing resources according to a developmental logic (Hickey, 2013). Given that political discourse is vibrant in Ghana and that the dominant parties seek to distinguish between themselves in ideological terms, we include an analysis of the interplay between 'ideas' and 'incentives' in our account here.

2.1 Methodological approach

Analysing the distribution of power within ruling coalitions in relation to resource allocation presents a significant methodological challenge. Our first step involved identifying the proper unit of analysis, namely the type of faction that constructed the main basis of the ruling coalition. As with most political analyses of Ghana, we take it that ethno-regional powerbases remain the critical building-blocks upon which national power is based, and use the country's ten regions as our key units (Langer, 2009; Booth et al., 2004).

To identify and measure the 'holding power' of different actors within a ruling coalition, we borrow from Stefan Lindemann's work on the nature of ruling coalitions in Africa, which focuses on elite access to influential positions within the country's polity and political economy, including through holding ministerial posts in government (Lindemann, 2011).¹ Given that the power of patronage varies significantly across different governmental positions, we identify an 'inner core of political power' (Langer, 2005; Lindemann, 2011), dominance over which would most likely 'reflect not only a power imbalance but also lopsided possibilities of patronage and shares in rents' (Stewart, 2010).

Following Lindemann (2011: 390), we measured the spatial distribution of political power by the inter-regional distribution of: (1) cabinet ministers; (2) deputy ministers; and (3) the 'inner core' of political power, which comprises the President, the Vice President and selected key ministries.² This produces a relative representation for the various regions, which is calculated by subtracting each region's percentage proportion of government ministers from its percentage size in the entire population. Consequently, unity means proportional representation: values lower than 0 indicate underrepresentation and more than 0 indicates overrepresentation. We also use these results to construct a representation index (RI) for each region, calculated as

¹ Although Lindemann also focused on the military and parastatals, we exclude these, as our main interest is on resource allocation patterns rather than either security or economic development.

² We selected these ministries based on what those in government during the period considered to be the most critical government ministries, especially in terms of their shares in the national budget.

an average of the relative representation for the various ministerial positions and the 'inner core of political power'.

To identify whether the distribution of power within ruling coalitions has direct implications for the distribution of public goods, we first use government data from the Ghana Education Service and the Ministry of Education on patterns of per capita educational expenditures across Ghana's ten administrative regions between 1993 and 2008. This allows us to compare directly between the two main ruling coalitions that have ruled Ghana following the return of multi-party politics in 1992, under the NDC from 1992 to 2000, and the NPP from 2000 to 2008.³ We further test the approach through an analysis of a targeted social protection programme, the Ghana School Feeding Programme, which also operates through the education system.

A key focus throughout is to analyse regional allocations as against need. Importantly, we distinguish between formal allocations and *actual expenditures*, to reflect the extent to which decisions about actual spending in clientelist political settlements are more heavily influenced by de facto and often hidden processes of bargaining between high-ranking government officials than by formal de jure policy processes (DFID, 2007). It is within these informal and personalised institutional dynamics that we may be able to track the influence of powerful groups within the ruling coalition. To try and get within this 'black box', we also conducted qualitative interviews with those involved in the actual decision-making processes, including high-ranking party and government officials.

3. Regional distribution of political power in Ghana, 1993-2008

Ghana's 1992 Constitution contains extensive provisions aimed at curbing the promotion of sectional interests in Ghanaian society and at fostering the inclusion of all regions, both in government and in the distribution of government-controlled resources. The Constitution obliges political parties to have 'a national character' by, among others, ensuring that their membership is 'not be based on ethnic, religious, regional or other sectional divisions' (Republic of Ghana, 2007: Article 55(4)). The *Directive Principles of State Policy*, enshrined in the Constitution, takes these provisions further by enjoining the state to 'ensure reasonable regional... balance in recruitment and appointment to public office'⁴, as well as ensure 'even and balanced development of all regions and every part of each region of Ghana'.⁵

Nonetheless, there is strong ethno-regional basis to electoral competition in Ghana's Fourth Republic (Jockers, Kohnert and Nugent, 2010), with the two main political parties more clearly differentiated along ethno-regional than programmatic lines. The NPP has its strongholds in the Ashanti and Eastern regions, while the Volta and three Northern regions have voted strongly for the NDC since 1992. In the December

³ The data and analysis shown here is currently being updated for following two electoral terms of NDC rule (2008-2015) as part of ongoing research funded by ESID.

⁴ Ibid, Article 34 (6b).

⁵ Ibid, Article 36 (2d).

2012 elections, the NDC won over 90 percent of total parliamentary seats in the Volta and Upper West regions, 80 percent in Upper East, and 65 percent in the Northern region. In contrast, of the 47 seats in Ashanti, the NPP won an overwhelming 43 (or 91 percent) and 70 percent of parliamentary seats in the Eastern region. The remaining four regions (i.e., Brong Ahafo, Central, Greater Accra and Western) are generally considered as swing regions.

Electoral competition has become increasingly intense in Ghana during the Fourth Republic, with very narrow margins separating the two dominant parties (for example, the 2008 presidential run-off produced a winner by 0.5 percent of total valid votes). And there have been two turnovers since 1992. Ruling coalitions are therefore characterised by a high degree of vulnerability, offering further encouragement to allocate public goods according to an electoral logic. This tendency has been further exacerbated by the growing influence of 'party foot soldiers', who engage in crucial vote-mobilisation efforts for their parties, with ruling elites from both main parties increasingly seeking to appease their base through the distribution of state resources (Bob-Milliar, 2011).

Ghana is, therefore, a particularly relevant case for exploring how the politics of patronage plays out, particularly in terms of comparing between the core/swing voter theses and our emphasis that it is the distribution of power within ruling coalitions that matters most. This regional distribution of political power in Ghana's Fourth Republic, within the Rawlings/NDC (1993-2000) and the Kufuor/NPP (2001-2008) administrations, is set out below in Tables 1 and 2, respectively. Our findings show that whilst the NDC governments of the 1990s included ministers drawn from all ten administrative regions, the regional distribution of power relative to population shares was highly inequitable. Unsurprisingly, the Rawlings' home base of Volta was the most privileged in terms of access to political power, followed closely by the Central Region, with both Ashanti and the Greater Accra region heavily under-represented. The predominance of Volta within the 'inner core' of power became particularly pronounced during Rawlings' second term (1997-2000). Although well represented in broad terms throughout the period from 1993 to 2000, the three NDC-supporting Northern regions had varying experiences in cabinet and the 'inner core' of political power: while the Upper West was slightly overrepresented in both positions, the Northern and Upper East regions were both underrepresented, but with the latter overrepresented at the less powerful level of deputy ministerships (Table 1).

The Kufuor-led NPP government reflected similar patterns of inclusion and exclusion. With no region completely excluded from ministerial positions, once the regional distribution of population is factored in it becomes clear that the NPP's 'electoral vote bank' of Ashanti was the most favoured region. Indeed, throughout the Kufuor governments (2001-2008), the Ashanti, Eastern, Central and Brong Ahafo regions were consistently overrepresented, while the Greater Accra, Volta, Western, Upper East and Upper West were consistently underrepresented.

Within the inner core, the NPP's electoral strongholds of Ashanti and Eastern were the only two regions consistently overrepresented, with the Ashanti region, which constitutes 19.4 percent of the national population, controlling some 24.4 percent of cabinet positions and 39.4 percent of the 'inner core' during the first term. The Northern region was slightly overrepresented during Kufuor's first term in office, but experienced underrepresentation during his second term. However, the bulk of this representation occurred through the less powerful positions of deputy ministers; the three Northern regions and Brong Ahafo were mainly allocated these positions during Kufuor's first term in office, but with both groups largely excluded from full ministerial positions and particularly the inner core (Table 2). This broad trend was noted at the time (Langer, 2009), with one newspaper editorial asking whether Northern elites were only 'meant to play the second fiddle'.⁶ The only excluded region in the first set of 27 ministers during the first nine months of the Kufuor government was the Upper West, in contradiction of constitutional provisions concerning regional inclusivity in the cabinet. Apparently stung by repeated electoral defeats in the Upper West, 'President Kufuor was at pains naming a cabinet minister from that region', and '[i]t took intense lobbying to convince the President to change his mind'.⁷

Thus, although the distribution of power within Ghana's successive ruling coalitions between 1993 and 2008 was generally characterised by regional inclusivity, which appears to have secured sufficient horizontal inclusion of elites to avoid significant threats being made to the stability of the political settlement (Langer, 2009), the quality and quantity of representation varied significantly among regions. The most marginalised group under each ruling coalition comes somewhat unsurprisingly from the regional stronghold of the opposing party, whilst the group incorporated on the most adverse terms seems to be the Northern regions, with Northern elites largely denied access to the inner core of power. This reflects a longer-term trajectory over the post-colonial period, whereby '[w]henver the North was represented in the national government, it was always as a decidedly junior partner' (Ladouceur, 1979: 268). There is a clear political logic to this: whilst both the NDC and the NPP need votes from the North to gain power, the NDC relies on this more heavily and was more generous in its allocation of posts to Northerners, but with neither ceding significant levels of holding power within their ruling coalitions to regions beyond their immediate power-bases.

⁶ Northern Advocate (2004), cited in Kelly and Bening (2007).

⁷ Public Agenda, 'Cold War' in NPP', 18 January 2005.

Table 1: Distribution of political power relative to population shares and Representation Indexes (RI), 1993-2000

Regions	<i>First-term (1993-1996) average</i>				<i>Second-term (1997-2000) average</i>			
	<i>Cabinet</i>	<i>'Inner core'</i>	<i>Deputies</i>	<i>RI</i>	<i>Cabinet</i>	<i>'Inner core'</i>	<i>Deputies</i>	<i>RI</i>
Ashanti	-10.2	-13.7	-2.9	-8.9	-10.4	-14.3	-8.8	-11.2
B/ Ahafo	-1.3	-9.6	-3.3	-4.7	-5.3	-4.8	-2.7	-4.3
Central	16.2	24.5	3.7	14.8	9.0	10.7	-1.5	6.1
Eastern	-7.8	-2.5	3.6	-2.2	1.9	3.2	-0.8	1.4
G/ Accra	-9.9	-9.3	-11	-10.1	-11.1	-10.6	-1.6	-7.8
Western	-0.7	-4.2	6.6	0.6	0.1	0.9	-1.7	-0.2
Volta	15.1	13.9	5.7	11.6	15.9	18.4	3.6	12.6
Northern	-1.3	-0.1	-3.3	-1.6	-0.9	-0.1	0.7	-0.1
U/ East	-5.3	-5.3	1	-3.2	-0.6	-4.9	12.3	2.3
U/ West	5.1	6.3	-0.1	3.8	1.4	1.8	0.5	1.2

Source: Author reference, 2012.

Note: The 'inner core' is defined to include the President, Vice-President and the Ministers of Finance and Economic Planning, Education, Health, Local Government and Rural Development, Trade and Industry, Roads and Highways, Food and Agriculture Foreign Affairs, Defence, Interior, Attorney-General and Justice, Transport and Communications, Planning and Economic Cooperation, and Mines and Energy.

Table 2: Distribution of political power relative to population shares and Representation Indexes (RI), 2001-2008

Regions	First term (2001-04) average				Second term (2005-08) average			
	Cabinet	'Inner core'	Deputies	RI	Cabinet	'Inner core'	Deputies	RI
Ashanti	5	20	-0.8	8.1	10.4	20.9	5.6	12.3
B/Ahafo	2.7	2.6	4.1	3.1	-1.9	0.7	3.8	0.9
Central	-0.9	0.9	-1.4	-0.5	2.7	0.3	1.3	1.4
Eastern	8.9	7.6	-0.4	5.4	6.6	0.1	8.3	5.0
G/Accra	-6.5	-16.3	-4.4	-9.1	-9.8	-13.3	-2.1	-8.4
Volta	-3.5	-2.3	-6.7	-4.2	-3.5	-1.9	-8	-4.5
Western	-0.5	-4.2	-10.3	-5.0	-6	-4.4	-2.3	-4.2
Northern	0.2	-0.5	15.8	5.2	2.6	-1.3	-4.4	-1.0
U/East	-4.7	-4.7	2.1	-2.4	-1.4	-0.3	-2.4	-1.4
U/West	-0.5	-2.9	2.2	-0.4	0.2	-0.8	0.3	-0.1

Source: Author reference, *ibid.*

Note: In addition to the posts highlighted in Table 1, the 'inner core' is defined here to also include the Ministers for Private Sector Development and President's Special Initiatives, Chief of Staff and Presidential Affairs, and the Senior Minister.

4. The politics of public spending and educational inequality in Ghana

This section identifies regionalised patterns of expenditure on education in Ghana during 1992-2008. It focuses particularly on primary education, and analyses the extent to which the allocations can be understood with reference to the distribution of power within Ghana's ruling coalitions over this period.

4.1 Distribution of educational expenditures in Ghana: 1992-2008

It is important to note at the outset that Ghana is characterised by significant regional inequalities with regards to education, with the three Northern regions lagging in terms of income poverty and human development (GLSS 5, 2008). However, and despite the rhetoric of inclusive national development that characterises political discourse in Ghana, public expenditures have seldom been directly targeted at addressing the problem. One exception here occurred in the early post-independent era, when Nkrumah's government implemented several measures aimed at redressing the colonial legacy of educational inequalities. This included the establishment of a Northern Educational Scholarship Scheme in 1961 (Songsore and Denkabe, 1995), a move driven both by Nkrumah's socialist ideas and emphasis on education as a critical part of Ghana's national development project, and the pressures put on government by Northern political elites.⁸ Although the three-year Public Investment Programmes (PIPs) rolled out from 1986 onwards were supposed to give 'adequate consideration ... to the regional distribution of projects to ensure equitable and balanced development of all regions' (Republic of Ghana, 1995, 13), a review of the 1992-1994 PIP concluded that:

...the Upper West, Upper East, and Northern Regions continued to do badly. Between them they have 19% of the total population but only 11.6% of actual PIP expenditure (Republic of Ghana and World Bank, 1992: 17).

Our own research shows that subsequent patterns of educational expenditures failed to address these imbalances. Based on official annual enrolment and actual expenditure data, Table 3 presents the regional expenditure-enrolment index (EEI) for 1997 for primary, junior secondary and senior secondary education. The EEI is the ratio of each region's percentage share of actual expenditures to their contribution to national enrolment rates, such that an index of 1 indicates proportional spending (Penrose, 1996). With the exception of the Northern Region, whose EEI was equivalent to the national average for primary education, the ratio of all the three Northern regions was consistently below 1.0. These findings corroborate the government's own public expenditure review for 1997, which utilised more comprehensive data that covered both recurrent and development expenditures at all

⁸ For examples of such pressures in Parliament, see Ghana Parliamentary Debates Official Report, 18 Feb-19 March, 1958, p.85.

Table 3: Expenditure/enrolment rates, 1997

Regions	Primary	Junior high	Senior high
Ashanti	1.3	1.18	1.00
Brong Ahafo	13	1.55	2.20
Central	1.1	0.76	0.67
Eastern	0.4	1.41	1.33
Greater Accra	1.0	0.03	0.74
Volta	1.4	1.47	1.04
Western	0.9	1.0	1.5
Northern	1.0	0.79	0.56
Upper East	0.7	0.97	0.62
Upper West	0.1	0.16	0.09
Ghana	1.00	1.00	1.00

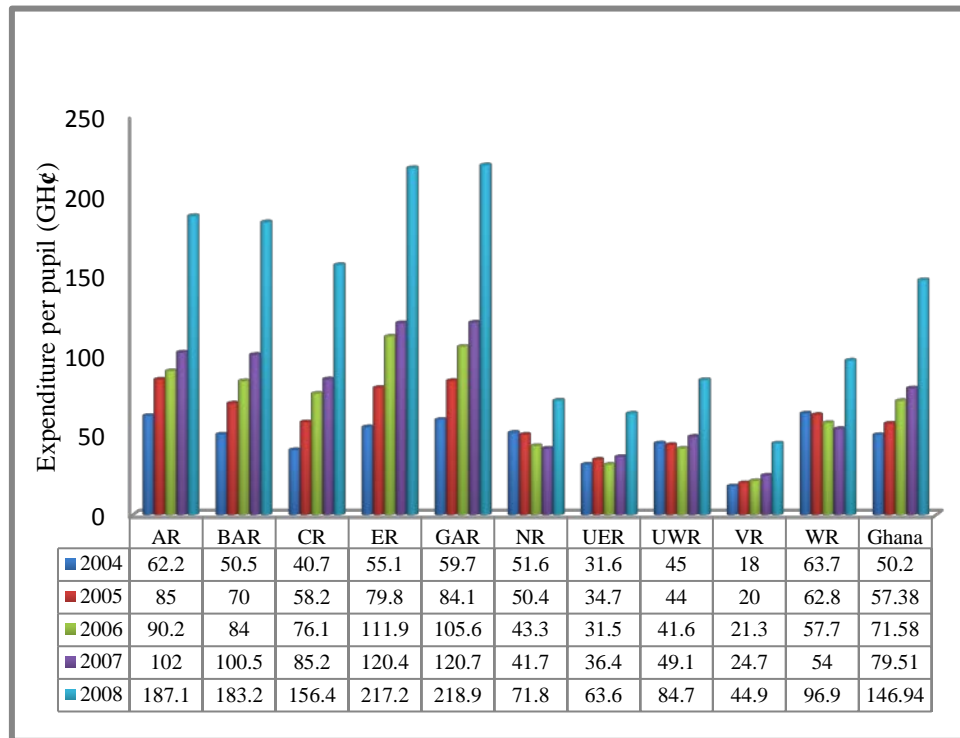
Sources: Based on MoE enrolment data and actual expenditure data extracted from GES Internal Budget Books.

levels of education, and concludes that ‘the least expenditures were made in the Northern, Upper West and Upper East regions with the share of Upper East region being only 0.8%’ (Ministry of Finance, 1998: 12-13).

The promise of the NPP’s *Education Strategic Plan (2003-2015)* that: ‘in allocating resources, particular emphasis will be given to poorer areas... in order to reduce inequities within the system’ (GoG, 2003: 8), did not come to fruition. Figure 1 shows that annual per child expenditures in Northern Ghana consistently fell below the national average during 2004-2008, except for the Northern Region in 2004. The most marginalised of all ten regions during this period was Volta, with per capita expenditure in 2008 at GH¢45, compared to a national average of GH¢147 and over GH¢200 in both Ashanti and Greater Accra (Figure 1).

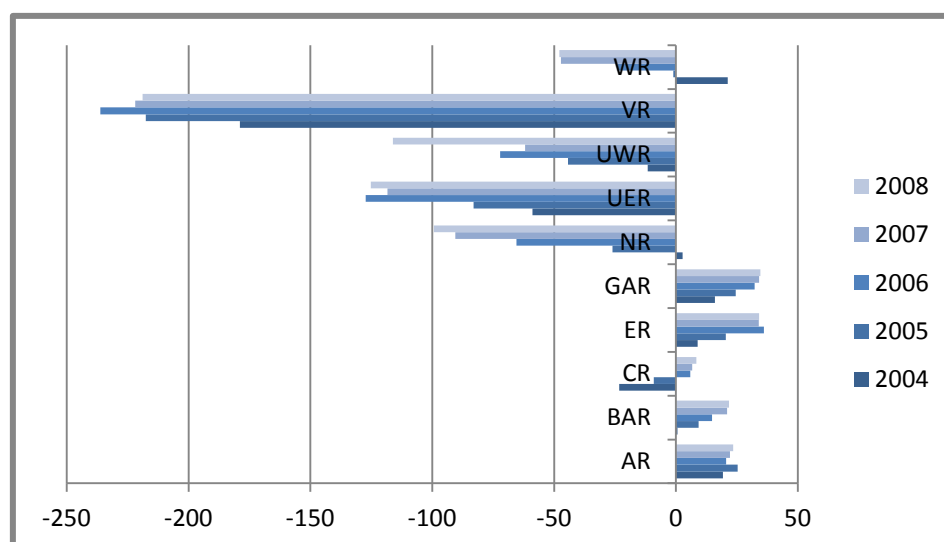
Figure 2 sheds more light on the extent of regional inequities on educational subsidies by reporting the extent to which per capita expenditure in each region either exceeded or fell below the national average. This shows that in 2008 the per pupil actual spending in the Eastern and Greater Accra Regions was more than 34 percent higher than the national average, but was an extraordinary 219 percent lower in Volta. The extent of under-spending in Northern Ghana is also evident, with per child spending in the two Upper regions more than 100 percent lower than the national average in 2008. These findings corroborate a recent World Bank study, which finds that the poor in the Northern and Upper East regions receive less than 30 percent of the resources per primary school pupil compared to their southern counterparts (World Bank, 2011). The rhetorical commitment of political elites to enhancing equitable access to education is belied by the evidence, which reflects a

Figure 1: Regional per child expenditure (in GH¢) for basic education, 2004-2008



Source: Authors' computations based on GES enrolment data and actual expenditure data from GES Accounts Office, Accra.

Figure 2: Difference (%) of GoG per child spending from national average by region, 2004-2008



Source: Authors, based on Figure 1.

significant level of political targeting in terms of basic education expenditures. Whilst Volta region benefited most under the NDC governments (1990s), it experienced the worst form of marginalisation under the NPP regime (2000s) during which the Ashanti, Eastern and Greater Accra regions became the highest beneficiaries of per capita educational expenditures. The only regions that consistently experienced substantial levels of marginalisation under both political regimes were the three Northern regions, where the government's subsidy per school-going child remained well below the national average, despite their low school enrolment rates.

Importantly, the evidence suggests that while budgetary allocations were somewhat informed by equity considerations, actual expenditure distribution was not.⁹ A comparison of the percentage differences between the regional budgetary allocations and actual expenditures reveals that a major source of these inequities relates to substantial deviations between budgeted sums and actual resources released. Table 4 points to a dramatic redistribution of resources in favour of the Greater Accra, Ashanti, and Eastern Regions, and a corresponding chronic under-funding for the Volta and three poorer Northern Regions during 2004-2008. We now turn to the reasons for this, including an analysis of whether these continuities and change can best be explained by the core/swing voter arguments, or whether these are more strongly correlated with the distribution of political power among regional elites.

Table 4: Deviations between budgetary allocations and actual basic education expenditures (%), 2004-2008

Regions	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	Average
Ashanti	3.2	19	19.3	-9.7	60.7	18.5
B/Ahafo	-16.1	-8.3	6.7	-13.5	52.4	4.2
Central	-17	-5.8	14.7	-12.9	54.1	6.6

⁹ Evidence elsewhere shows that regional spending patterns in the health sector followed the same trend during the 1990s and 2000s; authors' reference).

more strongly reflect the holding power of different regional factions within successive ruling coalitions than regional voting patterns per se. The experience of the northern regions is particularly relevant here, in that despite voting consistently for the NDC since 1992, they did not attract substantial per capita public education expenditures during the 1990s, as did Volta, nor did we see any concerted effort by the NPP to channel greater public resources to these regions in order to bolster its political support by inducing opposition strongholds with development largesse. In this respect, the disproportionate government spending in the Volta and Ashanti regions needs to be understood not simply as a product of their electoral loyalties to the NDC and NPP, respectively, but more importantly by the holding power of these regions within respective ruling coalitions of these regimes, including through the dominant role played by elites from these regions in high-ranking government positions.

This analysis concurs with Hutchful's earlier research on education sector expenditures under the PIP, which showed the more privileged regions in the South to have done 'so much better because they were much better represented in the power structure' (Hutchful 2002: 119). Importantly, these problems date back to the colonial era, when British colonial policies treated the North primarily as a pool of cheap labour and deliberately delayed the introduction of European-style education in the North, such that while the first secondary school in Southern Ghana was established in 1876, the North had its first government secondary school in 1951 (Quist, 2003). Such policies were to have long-term consequences for the development prospects of Northern Ghana, not least as it delayed the emergence of a Northern educated elite (Kimble, 1963: 536), which in turn set a tone for the marginalisation of these regions in national politics and in the distribution of public resources. Importantly, our argument reinforces Tony Killick's discovery of 'regularly large deviations between the estimates in the budget and the eventual actuals', and his argument that such deviations resulted from the ability of powerful political elites to manipulate resource allocation processes in their own interests (Killick, 2008). These dynamics, which reflect the workings of heavily regionalised ruling coalitions within a broader competitive clientelist political settlement, are further apparent in other government schemes in Ghana.

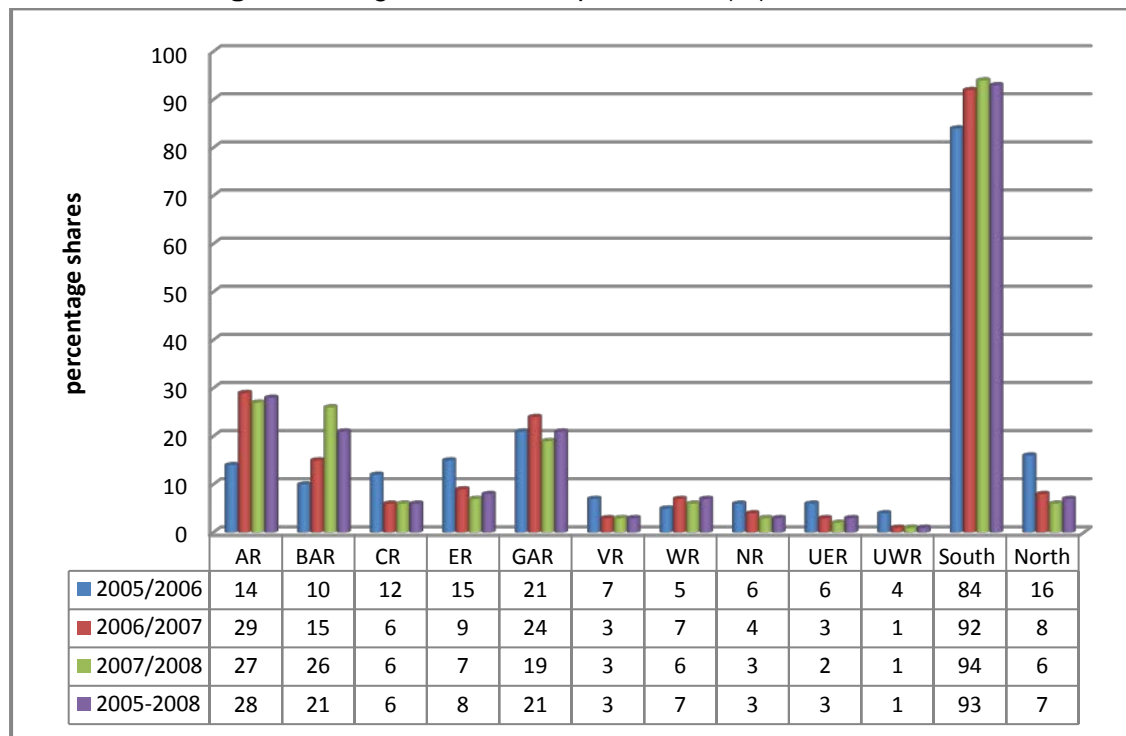
5. The Ghana School Feeding Programme: bridging regional inequalities in primary education?

The specific ways in which the distribution of power within Ghana's ruling coalitions shapes budgetary allocations is brought into still sharper relief in the case of the Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP), a social protection programme aimed at bridging regional inequalities in primary education. The GSFP was launched in 2005 as part of Ghana's efforts towards the MDGs on hunger, poverty and universal primary education, and aims to provide children in public primary schools with one balanced meal per day of school attendance. In line with its aim of specifically targeting 'the most deprived districts/communities and the poor', the selection of GSFP beneficiary districts was planned to be guided by a set of needs-based criteria,

including the levels of poverty and school enrolment rates in the various regions and districts (GoG, 2006: 19-20).

Yet the actual implementation of the GSFP showed a distinct deviation from this pro-equity approach, and again more closely reflects the regional distribution of power within the NPP's ruling coalition. Despite both educational inequalities and food insecurity problems being at their worst in the North in general and the Upper East and Upper West regions in particular (GSS, 2003), this is not reflected in actual expenditure patterns for GSFP. During 2005-08, total GSFP expenditure was about GH¢50.5 million, of which only 3.6 million (representing 7 percent) went to the three Northern regions. A comparison of the allocations for the 2005-06 and 2007-08 academic years shows that the Northern regions' share of total GSFP expenditures *decreased* by about 67 percent, while that of the South *increased* by 12 percent. The Ashanti region received the highest amount, with 28 percent, compared to only 1 percent for the poorest region, Upper West (Figure 3). Although designed to target 'the most deprived districts/communities and the poor', it is the poorest Northern regions that benefited the least from the GSFP. Within the South, the then oppositional stronghold of Volta was most disadvantaged, performing as poorly as the three Northern regions (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Regional GSFP expenditures (%), 2005-2008



Source: Computed from data obtained from GSFP National Secretariat, Accra.

5.1 The politics of the GSFP

When the Government of Ghana (GoG) developed the idea of the GSFP, it had the twin objectives of reducing regional inequality and enhancing the political legitimacy

of the ruling NPP. This introduced a significant contradiction between targeting the most deprived districts whilst aiming to cover every single administrative district in Ghana (GoG, 2006: 20 and ii). The latter objective swiftly outweighed the former, with the rhetorical commitment to national unity closely aligned to the logic of competitive politics, which requires that development largesse be distributed across the widest spectrum of voters and enables politicians to take credit for bringing home the bacon. When the implementation of the GSFP started in late 2005, it focused on one primary school drawn from each of the 10 administrative regions, before being scaled up to two and then five schools per district by the end of 2005-06, with no effort to concentrate on 'the most deprived districts'.

Whilst this inclusive nationwide focus was initially welcomed by local politicians, who stood to gain political capital from being associated with it, strong political incentives soon came into play which disrupted this distributional approach. According to one GSFP official:

When we started the programme, it was fantastic; one region, one school. ...All of a sudden, we were beginning to experience pressures across board. So instead of continuing with that pattern, it just dropped.¹⁰

Shortly after implementation started, there developed a strong a feeling within government circles that:

Even if you send them [GSFP schools] to certain areas, they will still not vote for you. So why not just limit it somewhere? So if you were not in the good books of the then administration, don't expect to get. It was like a pay-back period.¹¹

This seem to explain why the then ruling NPP's vote bank, namely the Ashanti region, soon became the highest recipient of GSFP expenditures, accounting for 28 percent and 29 percent of GSFP spending in 2007 and 2008, respectively (Figure 3). Although Brong Ahafo, one of the most favoured GSFP regions, is more of a swing region than an NPP stronghold, a crucial parliamentary by-election was at stake in the Nkoranza district in the region at the time, and the available evidence shows that the significantly large amount of GSFP expenditures in Brong Ahafo was specifically channelled to this district immediately prior to this poll. As one senior GSFP official explained:

They [politicians] used to lobby us a lot. If there is a by-election from any district, be rest assured that that district that time will get all the schools.¹²

¹⁰ Interview, GSFP official, 4 November 2011.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Interview, GSFP official, 4 July 2011.

By mid-2007, the Nkoranza district alone had 30 GSFP schools, compared with only 32 schools spread across the 18 districts in the Volta region. The number of GSFP beneficiary schools in Nkoranza also compared very favourably with those of the three Northern regions – all the main opposition NDC's electoral strongholds. The four electoral strongholds of the then opposition NDC, namely Volta and the three Northern regions, were both poorly represented in the NPP governing coalition and consistently attracted the lowest GSFP allocations during the period under discussion. Our interview data helps reveal how the inequitable distribution of GSFP spending closely reflects the unequal distribution of power within the ruling coalition discussed above, via the capacity of different regional political elites to lobby for GSFP resources for their constituents. This political targeting was facilitated by the role of key ruling party activists within GSFP's implementation structures. One senior civil servant responsible for coordinating the programme at the Local Government Ministry explained the skewed patterns of GSFP expenditures, with reference to the '...political heads who were in charge... that is what brought about the wrong targeting'.¹³ Explaining the underlying drivers of this 'wrong targeting', a GSFP official noted that:

mostly, it was the case where DCEs [District Chief Executives] and some Ministers or MPs will just come here with some lists for us to input, or at times with caterers visiting the Programme's Secretariat with a list of schools accompanied by introductory letters from influential political figures.¹⁴

Such pressures on GSFP officials would seem to have increased in the period leading to the December 2008 elections, with one newspaper article captioned, 'Politicians take over school feeding' (Public Agenda 2008). The Dutch government, which had earlier pledged to support the GSFP at an annual budget of about 11 million Euros for four years (2007-11), had by 2008 withdrawn its support for it, on grounds that:

The implementation of the programme is excessively politicised. The role of the national secretariat is not always clear and the rationale for decisions is rarely explained. Many decisions affecting implementation, such as school selection... are not made transparently (SNV, 2007: 3).

Our evidence thus helps reveal a two-stage process, through which the incentives created by Ghana's particular political settlement led to the capture of GSFP by powerful factions within the ruling coalition. The first step involved moving the programme away from a targeted to a nationwide form of distribution that, although justified through the rhetoric of national development, was driven more clearly by the political logic of pork-barrel politics to help ensure that politicians from all regions would have something to take back to their constituents. However, when it came to

¹³ Interview, Senior government official, Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, 27 July 2011.

¹⁴ Interview, GSFP official, 4 July 2011.

actually disbursing expenditures, this more benign and potentially more inclusive form of patronage politics was trumped by a more exclusive form, with resources captured by dominant factions within the ruling coalition. The pattern of this capture directly reflected both the regional distribution of holding power within the ruling coalition at multiple levels, and the highly personalised functioning of the public service within Ghana's competitive clientelist political settlement.

6. Conclusion

[W]hen people have power, they not only appoint their people [to strategic positions], but when a decision is to be made and resources to be distributed, they find a way of getting more to their people. So it is the space that you have to operate that also creates opportunities for you... If you are not represented, you are not counted.¹⁵

Our research challenges current efforts to understand the politics of public goods provisioning in Africa through the prism of voter preferences, including recent research on Ghana, which suggested that the regional strongholds of the ruling parties '...will receive lower levels of resources than other criteria (such as population) would suggest' (Briggs, 2012: 609). A political settlements perspective can offer a more nuanced approach to understanding how democratic and clientelist political dynamics shape the distribution of public resources in contemporary Africa. It moves beyond any straightforward link between voter preferences and elite behaviour in polities to examine how these are mediated by a more complex field of power relations. Focusing on how elites and broader social groups struggle to gain holding power within ruling coalitions, and also the ways in which these struggles shape the character and performance of bureaucratic institutions, enables a clearer view of the actual mechanisms that shape the distribution of public resources.

In the case of Ghana, this approach shows how dominant factions have been able to secure higher levels of resource allocation to their regions, whilst excluding those from outside and playing rhetorical lip-service to factions within the ruling coalition, but with weak levels of holding power. This deployment of holding power is both enabled by and helps to reproduce the personalised and informal ways in which bureaucratic institutions and policy processes operate within clientelist political settlements (Levy, 2014). This helps explain the wildly differing fortunes of the main party strongholds when in or out of office, and why the North has both been adversely incorporated into successive ruling coalitions and suffered from low levels of resource allocation. We would suggest that these factors collectively explain much of the continued spatial inequality experienced by Ghana in the post-colonial era, whilst acknowledging that the historical roots go much deeper.¹⁶ The increasingly

¹⁵ Interview, MP and Former Minister of State, 7 June 2011.

¹⁶ Author reference. How this will play out within the current NDC regime, which will by 2016 have been led by a Northerner for the majority of its two-term reign, is soon to be investigated by the authors. However, it seems to be business as usual in at least some regards, with recent media reports accusing a Deputy Minister of Education of trying to use his position in government to channel a large number of school projects to the constituency in which he

competitive electoral conditions in Ghana further exacerbate this, with incumbents intensely aware of the costs of losing power, and also the failure of Northerners to generate significant levels of holding power through the collective action of their regional leaders. Our evidence also supports the emphasis that political settlements analysis places on the role of interests rather than ideas as the dominant force that shapes elite behaviour. The apparent commitment of Ghana's political elites to inclusive development and national unity appears to be simply rhetorical and used in part to provide discursive cover for the logic of pork-barrel politics. When judged against the actual delivery of public goods, even this potentially more inclusive form of resource allocation gives way to more exclusive patterns of patronage-based distribution. Ideas clearly matter in Ghana, both in terms of doing the important discursive work of helping to hold together a polity that remains riven by ethno-regional differences, and in shaping what elites perceive to be their interests. However, we find little evidence of an elite commitment to development, based on promoting a wider national project and social justice, which is powerful enough to trump the perceived interests of ruling elites in maintaining power through the clientelist distribution of resources to powerful factions of their ruling coalitions.

stood as a Parliamentary candidate for the ruling NDC in the December 2012 parliamentary elections.

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