

THE DEMOCRATIC BENEFITS OF CENTRALIZED INSTITUTIONS IN GHANA

JENNIFER BOYLAN



A democratization scholar, Boylan's research analyses development and identity politics in Ghana through an institutional theoretical framework. She conducted field research in Ghana in June-July 2012, December 2012, and January-December 2013, including a 3-month long survey project which collected 1,932 responses across 6 districts in Ghana. A description of the dissertation follows below.

Decentralization is widely believed to have positive democratic benefits in new democracies, while centralized institutions are characterized as a nasty remnant of prior authoritarian regimes. Using Ghana as a case study, the dissertation explores the contradiction in Ghana's famed democratic success despite its highly centralized political system. The findings show that Ghana's majoritarian electoral rules encourages turnover of power while its centralized system of local government introduces political competition at the sub-national level. Both institutional dynamics encourages more responsive behavior on the part of politicians and offers citizens the opportunity to consider information outside of ethnic identities and dominant party traditions when voting.

Boylan's dissertation is organized as follows. First, the historical background of Ghana's institutions and their effects on

ethnic politics is presented to explain the path through which the current system of centralized government developed. Turning to the current system, particular emphasis is placed on the relationship between the presidentially-appointed District Chief Executives (DCEs) and locally-elected Member(s) of Parliament (MPs) at the sub-national level. Ecological Inference models are then used to prove increasing volatility in ethno-linguistic and tribal group voting patterns; to the author's knowledge, this is the first ever statistical analysis of tribal group voting patterns in Ghana. OLS regressions next demonstrate that vote volatility in presidential and parliamentary elections significantly increased in areas with institutionally-promoted (i.e. Unfriendly District Chief Executive-MP Pairs) high levels of political competition as compared to low levels of political competition (Friendly District Chief Executive-MP Pairs). Finally, survey evidence investigating individual vote motivations suggests that voters, and particularly swing voters, increasingly rely on evaluative rationales in comparison to ethnic identity when making vote decisions.

The work demonstrates the

positive outcomes of centralization in the case of Ghana. In making this argument, the dissertation also makes contributions to the study of ethnic politics by investigating the political behavior of both ethno-linguistic and tribal groups, as well as to research methods by considering how specific combinations of analytic tools (e.g., archival research, in-depth interviews, survey research, Ecological Inference models, and other quantitative tools) can be used to ascertain historical, ethnographic, qualitative, and statistical aspects of the research question.

Jennifer C. Boylan is a political science PhD candidate who will graduate in Fall 2016. Her dissertation is titled, "The Democratic Benefits of Centralized Institutions in Ghana." A former Akan-Twi FLAS fellow, Boylan's doctoral research and graduate studies were funded by a David L. Boren Fellowship, a UF Graduate School Dissertation Fellowship, the Center for African Studies, the Department of Political Science, and a FLAS fellowship awarded through Michigan State University. She currently works for the Center for African Studies curating the weekly email news bulletin.

