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The "illusion" of administrative sovereignty in developing countries: A historical institutionalism perspective on administrative sovereignty in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of transnational administrations and their influence on domestic affairs of countries have led to the questioning of the notion of administrative sovereignty. Yet, the question of whether countries have this sovereignty and how it should be understood is to be fully resolved and the debate continues unabated. In this paper, we contribute to this debate by focusing on whether countries from the developing south, are and can be administratively sovereign and to what extent can they be considered as such. Have developing countries ever been administratively sovereign? To what extent are these states administratively sovereign, if any? In short, how free are the authorities in these countries in organizing their own administrative apparatuses in policy development and service delivery? What can historical institutionalism teach us about the issue of administrative sovereignty? Following the continuum in the understanding of administrative sovereignty and using a desk review and organizing the evidence through historical institutionalism as a concept, the Ghanaian case shows limited administrative sovereignty.

KEYWORDS

Administrative sovereignty; bureaucratic capacity; developing countries; Ghana; historical institutionalism; sovereignty

Introduction

The emergence of transnational administration (Stone & Moloney, 2019; Zeigermann, 2020), the continuous internationalization of public administration (Henderson, 2001; Ohemeng, 2010), where "domestic officials collaborate [in]formally with non-government organizations, international organizations, multinational corporations, and foreign state peers to overcome collectively common challenges" (LeGrand, 2019, p. 2000), and the influence of these actors on domestic affairs of countries has led to the questioning of the notion of administrative sovereignty (AS), i.e., the administrative mechanism to self-undertake development (Biermann & Siebenhuner, 2009; Erman & Uhlin, 2010; Henderson, 2001; Muth, 2019). This recognition of administrative mechanism is not about the opinions of others or how the entity is legitimately perceived as a state or nation, but rather it is about the behaviors and capabilities of an entity to carry out and maintain a reasonable measure of autonomy, credibility, and reliability over

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time with respect to its governance activities (Muth, 2019). Thus, AS is about a state's capacity to plan and execute policies clearly and transparently (Berwick & Christia, 2018; Krasner & Risse, 2014) or, simply, the institutional or functional capability of the state to carry out various policies that deliver benefits and services to society (Muth, 2019). A state without such capability has been described as having a "limited statehood" (Krasner, 2016; Krasner & Risse, 2014).

Administrative sovereignty is, therefore, essentially about the bureaucratic capacity of a state to plan and implement long-term national projects (Williams, 2003). A state with AS does not necessarily depend on external sources in policy development and implementation. It has the requisite administrative capacities, i.e., regulatory, technical, extractive, coordination, analytical, and management (Berwick & Christia, 2018; Hanson & Sigman, 2021), to enable it to be effective and efficient in policy making and service delivery.

The question of whether countries have this sovereignty and how it should be understood in the face of significant administrative weaknesses and the influence of transnational institutions in domestic affairs is yet to be fully resolved (Diprose, Kurniawan, & Macdonal, 2019; Foli, 2019; Moloney & Stone, 2019). Consequently, scholarly debates concerning how to understand "AS" and whether states are administratively sovereign continues relentlessly.

In this paper, we contribute to the debate by focusing on if countries, especially those in the Global South, are administratively sovereign and, if so, to what extent can they be considered as such. In doing so, we ask a number of simple but important questions: Have developing countries ever been administratively sovereign? To what extent are these states administratively sovereign, if any? In short, how free are the authorities in these countries in organizing their own administrative apparatuses in policy development and implementation? What can historical institutionalism teach us about development of administrative sovereignty?

To answer these questions and contribute to this debate, we turn to historical institutionalism (HI) (Fioretos et al., 2018; Hall & Taylor, 1996; Krasner, 1988), which we believe has more to offer about why AS has been less significant in these countries due to its focus on the tenacity of institutions. From this perspective, we believe that legacies of colonialism in terms of administrative development and the failure of post-colonial governments to significantly alter the path created continues to hamstring developing countries from becoming administratively sovereign. This failure has resulted in weak administrative systems, leading these states to rely extensively on external actors for the development and implementation of public policies (see Ankomah, 1983; Caiden, 1999; Haque, 1996).

From historical institutionalists perspective, institutions endure because they are actively constructed at some point (beginning) in the past, and this active construction is forgotten and subsequent generations of actors come to accept the constructed institutions as external and taken for granted (Weik, 2019, pp. 321–322). Focusing on institutional persistence will enable us to examine the link between institutional origins, their development, and change (Capoccia, 2016; Peters & Pierre, 2020; Soifer, 2016) and its impact on AS, which has been given less attention in the policy and capacity building literature. In addition, we believe that HI will enable us to investigate the

continuous influence of external actors, in particular transnational institutions, consultants, and international or transnational bureaucrats, and nongovernmental organizations in policy making and implementation, and the limited success of administrative reforms in Ghana, which has affected its AS (Krasner, 1988, 2016).

Thus, using HI, we argue that contrary to the notion that developing countries are administratively sovereign, Ghana, similar to many developing states, has had and continues to have, what we consider as "limited" AS, as well as "shared sovereignty," which "involve[s] the engagement of external actors in some of the domestic authority structures of the target state" (Krasner, 2004, p. 108) due to limited administrative capacity in the public service (Matanock, 2014). The inadequate administrative capacity is traceable to the legacy of colonial and independent regimes, which failed to effectively develop and build the capacity of the public bureaucracy (Ankomah, 1983; Peters, 2021), and the continuous influence of transnational actors, as well as private actors in national development (Kumi & Kamruzzaman, 2021). In short, institutions endure and have important ramifications on society (Clemens & Cook, 1999), especially administrative traditions, as they, "do have contemporary relevance and continue to influence patterns of behavior in public bureaucracies" (Peters, 2021, p. 24) in all societies. Hence, once established, institutions persist for a long time and in most cases do not undergo seismic changes.

Our choice of Ghana stems from the notion that it is one of the most stable countries on the continent with a seemingly thriving democracy since the inauguration of the 4th Republic in 1993. Secondly, it continues to be hailed as the "star pupil" of international organizations and the donor community given its faithful obedience to administrative reforms pushed by them. Yet, the problem of administrative capacity has led to low productivity, which has affected the country's economic growth (Ayee, 2019b). At the time of independence in 1957, Ghana was considered as the country with a better human resource in sub-Saharan Africa to build a strong administrative capacity for national development than even South Korea (Adu, 1969; Ayee, 2019a; Werlin, 2003). With that, it could have built a capable bureaucracy but that has not been the case, leading to the initiation of various reforms, which have had limited success in facilitating the country's AS. In all, the proclivity of the Ghanaian experiment through numerous reforms to be an AS, makes it a good case to study.

The paper is organized as follows: after this introduction, we review the literature in two broad fields: AS and HI. Next, we look at the historical development of the public service and the problems that continue to plague the administrative state in Ghana. This is necessary since how the sector was established determines the extent of its sovereignty. We then analyze whether the public service is administratively sovereign and then conclude the paper.

Dissecting the concept of administrative sovereignty

How can one explain administrative sovereignty? The starting point of any discussion of AS should begin with the definition of "sovereignty." This is necessary because sovereignty is linked to the state and its capacity to manage its affairs (Krasner, 1988). Much has been written on sovereignty (Krasner, 2007; Prokhovnik, 1996). Nevertheless, one

needs to explain the concept to not confuse readers of how the concept has been applied in any given circumstance. Furthermore, doing so will help understand what AS is about.

Sovereignty, according to Philpott (1995, p. 357), is simply the "supreme legitimate authority within a territory." This definition indicates that the "sovereign legitimate authority" overrides every other authority that may exist in a specific territory. Such other authorities may include those found in the family, the church, etc. As noted by Philpott (1995, p. 357), the "supreme authority within a territory implies both undisputed supremacy over the land's inhabitants and independence from unwanted intervention by an outside authority."

Sovereignty, according to Krasner (2007, p. 2), can be seen from two different perspectives: domestic or internal, which is "associated with the principle that within each political entity there is a structure capable of making authoritative determinations" and external or international, which "refers to a way of organizing political life among political entities." The internal or domestic (national) sovereignty from this perspective depicts the relationship between the government and the governed and includes the ability of the government not only to provide security but to promote effective development for the citizenry. In short, internal sovereignty is about the "submission of subjects to the sovereign, limits on the authority of the sovereign, and the need to determine a sovereign representative" (Brand, 1994, p. 1689). On the other hand, external sovereignty is about the recognition and relationship between states in the international society. In a nutshell, it is the "equality of status between the states—the distinct and separate entities—which make up our international society" (Goodwin, 1974, p. 61).

From the above discussion, any casual reader will see that AS falls under internal sovereignty. This is in the sense that the provision of internal security and development depicts the level of development of the state's administrative apparatuses and the independence of these institutions to undertake and meet the needs of citizens. Consequently, how can one conceptualize AS? Egeberg and Trondal (2015) see the idea as the "national control over the application of the regulations" (174). While this definition is useful, it is limited to the "control" of certain activities of the citizens by the government. Yet, we know that governments do not necessarily only "control" or regulate citizens but provide for their developmental needs as well (Hanson & Sigman, 2021; Risse & Stollenwerk, 2018). Given this, the idea of AS needs to move beyond the realm of regulations to include the power to provide services and to look at the full administrative capabilities of the state to undertake these developments (Sementelli, 2007). It is, therefore, not surprising that AS is seen as representing "the purpose of state power as administering the welfare conditions of the citizenry" (Oates, 2019, p. 678).

Muth (2019) in his analysis of AS has identified two meanings, which are of importance here. First, building on the idea of "administering the welfare conditions of the citizenry," he defined AS as the "assertion of control over recognizable administrative mechanisms of a government separate from the comprehensive operation of a nation" (60). This control of the administrative mechanisms of a state, according to him, is not about the legislation that sets up these institutions, but rather "the functional capability that an actor has developed, not a determination of that actor's broader legal sovereignty or absolute legitimacy or state-ness" (61). In short, AS from this perspective

focuses on the capability of public service institutions and their employees to carry out various assignments that state institutions are to undertake, without the coercive powers of the state (Abel & Sementelli, 2002; Hanson & Sigman, 2021). AS in this sense may be equated to functional capability, which is the "actual or potential capacity of an individual [*institutional*] to perform the activities and tasks that can be normally expected" (Kirch, 2008, p. 465) from public officials. Functional capability, therefore, focuses on skills in strategy, empowerment, and operations to enhance both individual and organizational performance (Williams, 2021). These skills are needed to effectively undertake a job in the administrative state (Sementelli, 2007). This functional capability that an actor has developed, however, is not a determination of that actor's broader legal sovereignty or absolute legitimacy or "state-ness" (Muth, 2019).

Having this capability, conversely does not seem to be the case in many developing countries (Williams, 2021), leading to "capability trap" (Andrews, Pritchett, & Woolcock, 2017). It is, therefore, not surprising that building the capacity of the administrative state continues to occupy not only the attention of governments in these countries, but the donor community, international organizations, and academics (Matanock, 2014; Reinsberg, Kentikelenis, Stubbs, & King, 2019). The perception of the focus on capacity is that without a capable state, one cannot address wicked problems, such as crime, poverty, and corruption, as well as promote the market where property rights, for example, can be enforced (Lee, Walter-Drop, & Wiesel, 2014; World Bank, 1997).

Muth's (2019) second perspective of AS distinguishes between what he describes as a state being "state-ness" or being a "state-hood." He defines "state-ness" as the recognition "that the state is a series of historically and diagnostically relevant attributes, not all of which may be present in each case, and which contribute to, but do not guarantee, the recognition aspiring states seek" (61) and equates statehood to "adulthood," i.e., a state attaining external sovereignty or recognition by other states. In his view then, the latter must have AS if it can maintain its internal functions without assistance from a foreign state. Without this ability, the state cannot be said to be "sovereign" administratively.

Dwelling on Muth's (2019) first definition, we can say that AS deals with the ability of the state to use its administrative instruments to design and implement policies to serve as the paternal guidance to citizens (Oates, 2019). This provision and protection can be done when the administrative instrument has the power and necessary capability to ensure that no one suffers, or at least, achieves the greater good in the society (Sementelli, 2007). In this sense, AS is seen as the state's ability to primarily draft and deliver "policies in response to new or unsolved policy problems" (Fernandez-I-Marin, Knill, & Steinebach, 2021, p. 10). It is, therefore, not surprising that Englebert (2000) sees state capacity as "the capacity to design and implement policies, make credible commitments, run an efficient bureaucracy and provide constraints to opportunistic behavior" (8). A state, therefore, is administratively sovereign if it has adequate capacity to deliver services to its citizens (Oates, 2019; Reinsberg et al., 2019) without significant interference of, or influence from external or transnational actors. This capacity enables the bureaucracy to identify and select the best policy instruments and instrument combinations to solve a certain problem based on logic, cogitation, and the scientific evidence available within its peculiar context (Fernandez-I-Marin et al., 2021; Haque, 1996;

Pollitt, 2013). In addition, such a state possesses institutionalized channels of intrabureaucratic coordination that stimulate and facilitate processes of policy learning from the bottom up (Fernandez-I-Marin et al., 2021, p. 10).

Thinking of historical institutionalism

Historical institutionalism (HI) is one of the many trends of new institutionalism, with the others being rational-choice, sociological, and discursive (Fioretos, 2011; Hall & Taylor, 1996; Schmidt, 2008; Thelen, 1999). HI is an analytical approach to study "how temporal processes and events influence the origin and transformation of institutions that govern political and economic relations" (Fioretos et al., 2018, p. 1), with a focus on the historical origins of such institutions (Gerschewski, 2021; Thelen & Steinmo, 1992), and how present ones and their stability can be explained from their past (Thelen & Conran, 2018).

HI focuses on the idea of "temporality," which is "the notion that the timing and sequence of events shape political outcomes" (Fioretos, 2011, p. 371). According to Ikenberry (1994), HI focuses on three basic claims: policy outcomes and orientations are mediated by political structures, which then shapes and constrain the goals, opportunities, and actions of groups and individuals who operate in it; institutional constraints should be placed in the context of a historical process such that timing, sequencing, unintended consequences, and feedback matter; and, these institutional structures facilitate or limit the actions of groups and individuals (2).

Four main themes inspire HI: institutional development is path dependent; this path begins with a critical juncture, which may be attributed to a punctuation of the existing institutional arrangement; the institution and its stability leads to certain preferences, capabilities, and basic self-identities of individuals; and, increasing returns that reinforce existing arrangements and practices (Krasner, 1988; Thelen, 1999). Path dependency has been broadly defined from an economic perspective, as the "dependence of the current realization of a socio-economic process on previous states, up to the very initial conditions" (Castaldi & Dosi, 2006, p. 100). On the other hand, political and policy scientists see it as "a specific type of sequence in which early contingent events set into motion event chains or sequences that have highly predictable features, culminating in outcomes of interest that could not have been explained in light of an initial set of conditions" (Mahoney, 2006, p. 129–130). Thus, in path dependency, once an institution is set, it becomes difficult to change its orientation, and that whatever happens to that institution in the future must be understood from the earlier event that led to the institutional set. Hence, "prior institutional choices limit [*influence*] available future options" (Krasner, 1988, p. 71). This is because institutions maintain themselves. Furthermore, actors, especially bureaucrats, "are hemmed in by existing institutions and structures that channel them along established policy path" (Wilsford, 1994, p. 251).

The second element in HI is how institutions begin, which most scholars have attributed to as a critical juncture (Capoccia, 2016; Collier & Munck, 2017; Ikenberry, 2016). Collier and Collier (1991) define critical juncture "as a period of significant change, which typically occurs in distinct ways in different countries (or in other units of analysis), and which is hypothesized to produce distinct legacies" (29). Critical juncture is,

therefore, the period or moment in which an existing equilibrium is punctuated (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993), which then leads to the shaping of the basic contours of social life (Pierson, 2000; Krasner, 1999), or the establishment of an organizational logic and where subsequent changes tend to be variations or extension of that logic (Ikenberry, 2016, p. 514). In the analysis of institutional development and change, critical juncture is seen as appropriate in situations in which a "common exogenous shock" affects a set of cases, causing them to "diverge" as a result of the combination of the common shock and their different antecedent conditions, which, therefore, exert a significant causal force on the outcome (Capoccia, 2016).

The third element in the theory is that an institution and its stability lead to certain preferences, capabilities, and basic self-identities of individuals (Ikenberry, 2016). This has been described as the lock-in effect (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010). It has been noted by a number of scholars interested in institutional configuration that institutions endure as a result of this "lock-in effect." This lock-in effect makes the evolution or change of institutions gradual and more incremental (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010, p. 3), or simply, episodic (Ikenberry, 1994) and more difficult. In short, unless there is a cataclysmic event, such as a focusing event (Birkland, 2003), that may punctuate the existing institutional equilibrium, and create another critical juncture, institutional change takes place at a snail pace (Gerschewski, 2021; Ikenberry, 1994; Krasner, 1988). Hence, institutional structures, once established, "can be difficult to change even when underlying social forces continue to evolve" (Ikenberry, 2016, p. 453).

Increasing returns is the fourth element in HI (Pierson, 2000, 2004). Increasing returns means that "once a moment of institutional selection comes and goes, the costs of large-scale institutional change rises dramatically, even if potential institutions, when compared to existing ones, are more efficient and desirable" (Ikenberry, 2016, p. 545). Increasing returns, thus, denotes the idea or mentality of "why fix if it is not broken." Thus, it may not be in the interest of anyone to alter the institutional structures, as a result of the "enhanced benefits stemming from familiarity gained with established arrangements" (Solinger & Wan, 2016, p. 554). Pierson (2004) has described this as self-reinforcing mechanism, which makes it difficult for institutions to change, perhaps due to the fear of the unknown or simply because some or many people may be benefiting from the status quo.

In all, according to HI, the current outcomes of developments do not reflect the mere preferences or interests of the current strongest competitors. These outcomes are rather channeled by past institutional arrangements, and which has become path dependent (Thoenig, 2011). Based on this perspective, we expect that institutional development and the idea of AS and how it exists in Ghana can be accounted for from the gradual evolution of the public service and its capacity to deliver service from what was developed and inherited from the colonial authority. This colonial legacy has created a lock-in effect, which has made any meaningful change difficult. Given this heritage, these institutions are held as sacrosanct so much that any deviation from it is considered unacceptable. Hence, institutional "stickiness" continues to constrain administrative reformers in their attempt to change the administrative contours in Ghana.

Ghana: Building an administrative sovereign state?

To fully understand Ghana's situation, one needs to understand the development of the public administration system in the country from a historical perspective, especially the administrative orientation of the bureaucracy from colonialism. This is necessary since the colonial foundation, like many former colonies, has still not been fully disentangled. Hence, the colonial administrative legacy continues to weaken the public administration system (Ankomah, 1983; Michalopoulos & Papaioannou, 2018).

Like many developing countries, the country's public service was developed by the British colonizers in the early 1900s, despite the official proclamation to colonize the country in 1884 (Addo-Fening, 2013). The development of an efficient service was, however, not given the necessary priority until after 1945. This is because the colonial government was preoccupied with the development of London at the neglect of the economic and social progress of the colony (Bourett, 1960; Burke, 1969; Hyden, 2010). As a result, there was no separation between the political executives and the administrative system, as existed in London. The political executive was the public service, and the public service was the political administration (Ankomah, 1983). The idea of the dichotomy between the two never existed. This made it difficult for the government to concentrate on building an effective administrative bureaucracy, with some level of independence and capability for the country (Bourret, 1960). The colonial government made no plans to develop an effective system to train the Africans to take over from them (Bourret, 1960; Greenstreet, 1963; Kooperman & Rosenberg, 1977).

When attention was directed at developing an administrative system, the government created a two-tiered public service, consisting of an administrative class and a junior service, with the former exclusively reserved for Europeans and the latter for Africans (Adu, 1969; Greenstreet, 1963). The latter's capacity, however, was of little institutional significance (Ankomah, 1983). The executive class performed policy development, policy analysis, and service delivery while "the function of the Junior Service was to provide the manpower necessary to perform basic routine tasks" (Bennell, 1982, p. 129). As a result, training and building the capacity of the Africans to enable them to undertake effective policy development, analysis, and service delivery were non-existent (Adu, 1969; Ankomah, 1983; Greenstreet, 1963). The development and promotion of Africanization (*Ghanaianization*) policy from the middle of the 1920s, by the government, did not yield much fruit in terms of developing capable public servants until the late 1940s to the early 50 s when the fight for independence intensified (Adu, 1969; Apter, 1972; Greenstreet, 1963).

The public service: Path following and effective lock-in, 1957–1966

The real effort in building an efficient and administrative system in Ghana began after the riots of 1948, when some military personnel who had fought on behalf of Britain in the second world war demanded jobs in the public service, as they had been promised. The riots led to the establishment of the Coussey Committee (1948), which in its final report called for an establishment of a Public Service Commission to address the needs of public service institutions and the effective recruitment of Africans into the service. This led to the establishment of another committee, the Haragin Committee

(1948), which in its final report decried the state of the public service. The report concluded that the service was "in an unhappy state" and went on to itemize a raft of reasons including those related to pay and conditions of service (Ayee, 2019b; Moradi, 2008), which undermined the performance of the administrative state in Ghana (Ankomah, 1983; Burke, 1969).

It is within this milieu that Ghana gained independence in 1957 under Kwame Nkrumah. The process of becoming independent consumed what little capacity was left in the public service. When the Nkrumah government turned its attention to the public service, it focused on the "Ghanaianization" of the service through the rapid replacement of the European by unqualified Africans.[1] This policy was in tune with Nkrumah's understanding of Africa's underdevelopment and the essence of the independence idea (Grundy, 1963), and the notion that the African was "perfectly capable of governing himself before the advent of the white man and should be allowed to do so" (Nkrumah, 1957, p. 47). It is important to also note that, although Ghana was well endowed with a high number of educated elites at independence compared to other sub-Saharan African nations, it lacked the needed capacity to build a new nation (Adu, 1969; Ankomah, 1983). In view of this difficulty, Nkrumah even had to retain and rely on some British officials, as well as some other expatriates to complement local capacity to govern the country.[2] Thus, when Ghana became independent in 1957, the British left the country without an effective administrative structure to run it, and despite the much heralded native authority system,[3] the running of the government was left in the hands of indigenous politicians who, though educated, were unprepared for such awesome tasks.

As can be observed from the above, removing the Europeans based on political expediency did nothing to build the capacity of the public bureaucracy. Many officials who assumed the positions of the Europeans equated themselves to those expatriates although most, if not the majority, could not address the issue of capacity for service delivery. Ultimately, they used their office to enrich themselves through corrupt activities (Werlin, 1973).

Furthermore, Nkrumah created several parallel public services institutions including a number of presidential secretariats in the quest for his rapid industrialization idea and the distaste for what he described as the legacy of colonial institutions. This created an administrative labyrinth despite the serious lack of human capacity in manning them (Ayee, 1993); further weakening administrative institutions in the country, especially when it comes to service delivery (Muwanga-Barlow, 1978; Nti, 1975). In addition, the service was highly politicized, which in turn affected its limited capability to undertake what was expected of it (Nti, 1975). In all, under the Nkrumah regime, little emphasis was placed on administrative reforms, such as reforming public institutions and building their capacity for efficient and effective delivery of services.

Reaffirming institutional path and lock-in: The public service after Nkrumah

The politicization of the public service affected the capacity of the public service in all facets of life. It was against this backdrop that the government was overthrown in a military coup, with the coup makers establishing the National Liberation Council

(NLC), which governed for approximately 3 years (1966–1969). Two important issues were vital during this period with respect to AS. First, the government recognized the limited capacity of the public service to undertake basic policy making and service delivery. This severely affected how the government governed in general. The limited capacity of the bureaucracy led the NLC to institute the first major administrative reform in Ghana, with the establishment of the Mills-Odoi Commission to look at the efficiency and effectiveness of the service and recommend what needs to be done to build its capacity (Ohemeng & Anebo, 2012).

Second, in terms of policy making, the government had to rely on a few Ghanaians and the international community. This small number of key personnel, predominantly senior civil servants, were charged with the responsibility for studying the state of the economy and to recommend ways of rehabilitating it (Harvey, 1966). However, in due course the limited capacity of the officials became eminent. Hence, the NLC decided to accept the involvement of bureaucrats from the World Bank (WB) and the International Monitory Fund (IMF) to develop economic policies and programs (Libby, 1976).

This reliance led to the significant tainting of "AS" and has continued until today. Thus, while the WB and the IMF were not key actors under Nkrumah, they became critical partners, who provided development finance and through the modalities of such assistance consequently impacted policy. While some actors, such as the WB and IMF gained prominence with the change in government, other external actors on whom Nkrumah relied on were expelled.

In 1969, the NLC ceded power to a new government, the Progress Party (PP), and left the implementation of the recommendations by the Mills-Odoi Commission to it. The PP government, however, turned its back on what had been recommended to structure and rebuild the capacity of the public service. A key recommendation from the Commission was the decentralization of the service. On this, the government rather recentralized the little decentralized system in place (Muwanga-Barlow, 1978). This further weakened the capacity of the service. To address the capacity needs, the government began to effectively engage foreign officials, especially those from the WB and the IMF, which led to the external co-optation of Ghana's policy making process (Libby, 1976). This external co-optation led further to the stationing of some international bureaucrats in important ministries, such as Finance, as well as in the Prime Minister's office (Foli, 2016; Rimmer, 1993). This trend continues as the WB and the IMF have their representatives at the Finance Ministry, as well as some key institutions. In addition, foreign consultants were highly engaged in policy making (Libby, 1976; Foli & Ohemeng, 2021).

Additionally, the PP undertook measures which eroded the limited capacity of the administrative state. For instance, in the 1970s, the government dismissed more than 500 civil servants without cause. However, when one of the dismissed civil servants challenged his dismissal in court and won, the Prime Minister became indignant and refused to reinstate the person. Other measures taken by the regime further alienated civil servants who reacted against drastic cuts in their car and other allowances and responded negatively to rising prices by leaving the service, while those who stayed showed a lackadaisical attitude toward efficient service delivery (Owusu, 1972).

The PP regime was toppled in the early 1972 and from this period onward marked the further, if not the rapid deterioration of AS in Ghana. Indeed, the period from 1972

to 1979, beginning with the regime of the National Redemption Council (NRC), has been described as the darkest period in Ghana's political and economic development (Huq, 1989). According to Hodder-Williams (1984), by the end of this period, Ghana existed as a country only because the international community recognized it. In this case, Ghana had only external sovereignty while internal sovereignty was non-existent. The period experienced one military rule after another with worsening economic conditions, which seriously affected the public service. In terms of attempting to rebuild the capacity of the service, the NRC regime, established the Oko Commission to examine how to rebuild the service. Although the commission made a number of recommendations to enhance the administrative capacity of the state, the government failed to act on them (Ayee, 1991).

During this period, the public service became bloated with very limited capacity to undertake service delivery. It became a patronage institution of the government, which led to the exponential increase in the number of public service employees. In addition, salaries and conditions of the service eroded considerably and dramatically due to the precarious economic situation and the inability of government to adequately compensate public servants (Lienert & Modi, 1997), leading to an exodus of good personnel from the sector, and contributing to growing inefficiencies in the state apparatus, due to the poor prevailing economic conditions (Ayee, 1991, 2019b).

Another critical juncture? Problems of administrative sovereignty: 1980–present

By the early 1980s, the public sector was in complete disarray with a large but inefficient and ineffective bureaucracy. So inefficient and ineffective was it that Nti (1980) described it as "a moribund paper-pushing institution" (2). It is within this climate that Ghana embarked on a structural adjustment program (SAP) in the early 1980s to revive the Ghanaian economy and improve service delivery. Prior to this, the government in the early 1980s had called for the rebuilding of the public service with the establishment of Kyiamah Committee to examine the problems it faced. The recommendations made by the Committee also led to the establishment of the Public Administration Restructuring and Decentralization Implementation Committee (PARDIC) to implement the report. Not much was achieved by the PARDIC (Ayee, 1993).

The economic resuscitation from the initial phase of the SAP did not yield much fruit by the mid-1980s, due to severe administrative shortcomings (Hutchful, 2002). The government realized that to achieve the SAP's objective, it needed to first revamp the capacity of the public service (GoG, 1985). Consequently, the second phase of the SAP focused on institutional reforms, with the adoption of a Civil Service Reform Program (Haruna, 2003; Larbi, 1995). Nevertheless, the reform failed to enhance the capacity and capability of the service, as the focus was on addressing the bloated bureaucracy (Hutchful, 2002). The reform concentrated on cost containment and neglected the human and structural capacities of the service. The program, especially the retrenchment of the bureaucracy and the notion of promoting the private sector as the engine of growth, further weakened the service's capacity, as government continued to privatize and contract-out service delivery to the private sector.

Table 1. Historical trajectories of administrative development in Ghana.

Elements of historical institutionalism	Administrative development in Ghana
Path layering, Critical juncture, and lock-in effect, 1948–1957	The establishment of a fully functional public service in Ghana by the colonial government in the early 1950s. This was based on the recommendation of the Harrigan Committee for a well-functioning institution than had existed under colonial rule. The impetus for this recommendation emerged from the agitation of independence with the 1948 Riots.
Institutional development (path dependency and continuous lock-in), 1957–1966	Post-independence governance and bureaucratic development
Strengthening the path, effective locked-in effect, and increasing returns	1966–1980. While the military junta instituted the first post independent administrative reform commission to address the challenges of public service institutions, the recommendations by the commission, which could have changed the bureaucracy were not implemented with regimes reinforcing the already established path
A new critical juncture and another path layering and continuity (1983–present)	The adoption of Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) by the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) government is seen as a critical juncture in national development. While numerous reforms continue to be undertaken, they have followed the earlier path. In most cases, there have only been path tweaking, if anything at all.

Since 1992, there has been one reform after another, and it is believed that the Ghanaian public service now suffers from reform fatigue. For instance, from 1993 to 2001, the government implemented the National Institutional Renewal Program to rebuild administrative capacity. Yet, by the end of that decade, the performance of the service was still problematic, as it continued to suffer from a number of problems including weak monitoring of actual expenditures, auditing, and clearly and consistently applying regulations, pervasive clientelism, personalism and corruption (Bawole et al., 2013; Werlin, 2003). In addition, the adoption of "*agencification*," affected a number of these institutions, as, in some cases, personnel were taken away from the public service to form other agencies. Furthermore, this *agencification* created turf wars among some agencies, which led to the demotivation of personnel in those institutions (Ohemeng & Adusah-Karikari, 2017).

From 2002 to 2008 another round of reform, the Public Sector Reform Programme, was launched with the focus on improving service delivery. The government [re]launched a Citizen Charter with the view to building the service's capacity for actual service delivery, while simultaneously ensuring accountability to service recipients (Ohemeng, 2010). In 2009, the government again launched the new public sector reform program (Ohemeng & Ayee, 2016), which ran up until 2016 when another round of reform, the National Public Sector Reform Strategy (2017–2027), was initiated (GoG, 2015; Ohemeng & Akonnor, 2022). This reform is an abridged five-year program (2018–2023). Thus, while this reform was hailed by policy makers as the road to a high level of administrative professionalism and subsequently AS, Ohemeng and Akonnor (2022), have described it as "much ado about nothing," since it does not address the fundamental problems that continue to plague the administrative state and its ability to be "sovereign." To them, the reform will not achieve its intended purposes because it does not depart from the existing path but rather continues to follow the old one (Table 1).

Historical institutionalism and the illusion of administrative sovereignty in Ghana

In this section, we aim to discuss how AS in Ghana has been developed from a HI perspective. As already indicated, the focus is on the capacity of the state bureaucracy to perform its assigned role creditably. HI can explain the present situation by looking at the circumstances that led the tradition to start, as well as the interaction between institutions and agents (Mahoney and Thelen 2010). HI says that institutional development is path dependent. Thus, how institutions are set or come into existence and the strength it is given or not given at birth, will have subsequent implications for their future development (Schreyogg & Sydow, 2011). This is true of public bureaucracy. In other words, the institutional "stickiness" of public institutions is more profound. Hence, the initial set up is extremely important (Hyden, 2010).

This is what has happened in Ghana. The initial establishment of the public bureaucracy was built on a very shaky foundation by the colonial authorities. As already explained, the colonial authority was never interested in building a bureaucratic apparatus with the capacity for service delivery, but rather as an instrument to protect the colonizer, and more so to extract resources. To this end, its orientation was more on law enforcement. Consequently, the capacity for service delivery was never a bona fide issue for the colonial administration. It is therefore not strange that the indigenous public servants served in limited capacity at the junior level with no analytical capacity. These junior staff were never taught how to deliver service.

This way of governance persisted until in the 1950s when attempts were made to develop an effective bureaucratic system with a focus on merit. Nevertheless, this was too late, as the agitation for independence had reached a crescendo. This created the urgency to grant the country independence at a time when public institutions had not been well developed, and therefore, lacked the capability needed by a new state. It was, therefore, not surprising that despite the noise Nkrumah continued to make, he still retained some British officials, and also engaged foreign experts in the public service.

Furthermore, the lack of administrative capacity culminated in the mismanagement of public institutions, which affected their ability to undertake basic service delivery. As already noted, the Ghanaians who took over these institutions assumed the role of the "British," and did not pay attention to building the capacity of the bureaucracy, due to their "privileged" positions, and perhaps their limited knowledge about building bureaucratic capacity for service delivery. This mismanagement continued so much so that the public service continued to be weakened, hence, the many attempts at reforming the service, have not yielded the desired results, and consequently the limited AS of the Ghanaian state.

HI posits that change can happen through critical juncture, which is a cataclysmic event that shakes the foundation of existing institutions and can lead to a transformational change. Consequently, we expected that there should be such an event in Ghana to alter the trajectory of the public bureaucracy (Ohemeng & Ayee, 2016). At this writing, there seems not to have been such an event that may have altered the situation in Ghana. The much-heralded events, such as gaining independence in 1957, the subsequent declaration of a republican state in 1960, the numerous coups that led to change of governments over the years, and even the breaking of path of national development with the adoption of SAP in 1983, did not create the expected critical juncture and

therefore, the rebirth of a new bureaucracy. Hence, the old bureaucracy continues to persist, as the reforms have just been about tweaking rather than a complete overhaul of it.

In Ghana, one is yet to see this critical juncture, and, so there is more or less "muddling through" (Lindblom, 1959), when it comes to administrative reforms. Many governments have not "taken the bull by the horns" in revamping the capacity of the bureaucracy whenever the opportunity has presented itself. Indeed, the election of the current government was initially seen as such an opportunity. Yet, the government's attempt to reform the bureaucracy and revamp its capacity is at best half-hearted and there is nothing absolutely new which will alter the ethos of the service. It is, therefore, not a surprise that the current reform agenda is not considered a path departing change, which will lead to a new path creation for a better public service, as frequently claimed by the president, but rather path dependence based on the old ways of doing things (Ohemeng & Akonnor, 2022).

A third factor which can be used to explain the problems of AS in Ghana, according to HI, is that an institution and its stability will lead to certain preferences, capabilities, and basic self-identities of individuals. This is what has been described as "lock-in effect." In the Ghana case, it has been realized that the stability of the public bureaucracy and its inability to perform as expected seems to be the preference of most Ghanaian politicians due to what they stand to gain through outsourcing of services, for example. For the former, the state of the bureaucracy has allowed them to use it as patronage grounds to reward unqualified faithful party supporters, for stable jobs. This rewarding of party supporters with public employment is not new and has persisted since independence, leading to institutional inertia (Brierley, 2020; Harris, Sigman, Meyer-Sahling, Mikkelsen, & Schuster, 2020; Kopecký, 2011; Sigman, 2022). Thus, the idea of merit employment, for example, is almost an illusion (Ohemeng & Akonnor, 2022).

The effect of this "politicization" has been the continuous lack of the ability of the institutions to provide services (see Jones & Stout, 2015). There are numerous non-performing individuals in the organizations, who cannot be dismissed due to their attachment to a political party or to influential private citizens. Such individuals are untouchable despite their inability to perform creditably assigned task, while a number of them continued to behave unprofessionally toward recipients of public services. This has culminated in a very few "pockets of effectiveness" in the administrative state (Ayee, 2019a; Owusu, 2006). Thus, as alluded by Abubakar (2021), due to politicization, Ghanaian bureaucrats are more interested in pursuing the interests of principals or patrons due to either their commitment to see those principals succeed or concerns for careers and livelihoods. They, therefore, tend to pursue principals' interests with the understanding that satisfying principals' interests, rather than the larger interest of society, would afford them [bureaucrats] career security and leverage with the potential for career growth and enhanced income (235).

A fourth element in HI is "increasing returns." This idea focuses on the costs of institutional large-scale change (Ikenberry, 2016; Pierson, 2000). This idea forces administrative reformers, for example, to undertake rational calculations, mostly for political expedience rather than promoting meaningful reform agenda. In other words, if the existing system benefits some groups of people (*which is the case*), then such individuals

may not be interested in whole changes despite the low performance of the existing institutions. As already explain, this cost can be seen from three perspectives, political, administrative, and fiscal.

Politically, radically changing the nature of the bureaucracy to make it work efficiently and effectively means revisiting the merit principle and the merit system. The effect of doing so will entail every citizen being given equal opportunity to be employed in the service. The question is, what reward will this bring to the politician who relies on "foot soldiers" or "veranda boys" in winning political power? The public service now serves as the ground for patronage in fulfilling the ambition of politicians (Brierley, 2021 Brierley, 2020; Harris et al., 2020; Kopecký, 2011; Sigman, 2022). In addition, the ineffectiveness and the inefficiency of the service means, contracting out policy development and service delivery to private consultants and service delivery, majority of which are either owned by these politicians or in one way or another affiliated to them.

Administratively, senior public servants, in particular the chief executives and directors, benefit from bureaucratic weaknesses. Consequently, some of them have continued to stall government efforts to decentralize the public administration system. In a nutshell, centralizing the system where these chief executives and directors have the power to run the institutions brings individual benefits including being seen as the epitome of power. This attitude of administrative officials has continually been lamented by politicians over the years. In fact, some of these officials were once described as "agents of imperialism and neo-colonialism, which should be overthrown rather than being simply reformed" (Ayee, 1993, p. 28).

Financially, reforms to make the bureaucracy efficient and effective have either stalled or been halted halfway through the process due to budgetary constraints and government's inability to internally generate funds for them. Ghana thus continues to rely on the largesse of International Financial Institutions (IFIs), whose distaste for the public bureaucracy is quite well known, when it comes to financing administrative reforms. This munificence has resulted in inadequate financing of reforms. For instance, when the World Bank refused to fund the Civil Service Improvement Programme in 1994, with the excuse that the program did not contain employee retrenchment, the government had to turn to the Department for International Development (DFID) for financial support. As already explained, although the support was extended, it did not adequately cover the entire reform. As a result, the reform, which some public servants believe could have changed how the sector operates for the better came to an abrupt end in 2000. There is also the idea of funding pieces of reforms by these IFIs and donors on what can been described as "pet projects" at the detriment of a comprehensive public sector reforms.

The limited AS has also provided a way for donors and IFIs to dictate the sort of reforms that should be carried out in Ghana. These donors and the IFIs use international bureaucrats, who continue to promote flawed one-size-fits-all models (Minogue, 2001), which do not fit into the social, cultural, economic, and political environments of developing countries in the name of internationalization (Foli, 2019; Ohemeng, 2010). Thus, the existing system fits the needs of these organizations despite the rhetoric of helping developing countries, including the building of efficient and effective administrative systems (Williams, 2003).

Conclusion

The idea of AS is evolving in the academic lexicon to understand the ability of state institutions in the implementation of public policies. Its current usage focus on the capability of state institutions to perform their duties. In many developing countries, however, this capacity continues to be questioned. Despite this, there continues to be general discussions, not necessarily on how the problem emerged and why it continues to be so, despite many reform attempts to build and shore-up bureaucratic capacity in these countries.

The essence of this paper was to examine AS, using Ghana as a case study to illustrate why capacity issues continue to be problematic in developing countries. We argued that this problem must be laid at the feet of how the state and for that matter, the state bureaucracy, was created and developed from the colonial period. To discuss the limited AS in Ghana, we utilized HI, which talks about how "history matters" or the importance of historical legacies in understanding the evolution, development, and change of institutions. Hence, HI provides a better theoretical perspective for understanding the level of AS, especially in developing societies.

We noted that the limited AS of the bureaucracy developed under colonialism eroded since independence despite the rhetoric of the first president to dismantle the vestiges of colonialism and imperialism to build a strong Ghana due to the failure of post independent regimes to alter the outlook of the bureaucracy (Ankomah, 1983). This erosion continued with the adoption of structural adjustment programs from the early 1980s, the subsequent implementation of the New Public Management (Bartley & Larbi, 2004; Minogue, 2001), and the so-called good governance ideas in more recent years (LeGrand, 2021; Reinsberg et al., 2019). Thus, the idea of AS in our opinion has been more of an illusion and will continue to be so, especially in this era of globalization and interdependent world and the continued promotion of the neo-liberal minimalist state idea (Krasner, 2016; Matanock, 2014), where transnational actors and administrations, and the private sector continue to have significant sway over the development and implementation of public policy (LeGrand, 2021; Matanock, 2014), not only in developing countries but developed ones, as well (Egeberg & Trondal, 2015).

The influence of transnational actors, as well as private actors, has further led to "shared sovereignty," due to the limited administrative capacity of the public service (Matanock, 2014). In short, like many developing nations, Ghana remains bureaucratically weak, and this has affected its AS, as it continues to rely on transnational agencies and foreign nongovernmental organizations in the delivery of public services (Resnick, 2019). This weakness dates to the colonial period and the continuous failure of the country by post independent governments to alter the path of bureaucratic development (Ankomah, 1983; Ayee, 2019a).

The paper has, therefore, highlighted the fact that the weak foundation of the bureaucracy laid by the colonial authorities and the failure of governments since independence to significantly alter the contours of the bureaucracy accounts for the limited AS in Ghana. This failure has led to the growing influence of donors, international bureaucrats, and nongovernmental organizations in the administrative polity of the country. These actors continue to pursue activities that have led to the serious questioning of how the administrative state should function due to the pursuit of policies that are detrimental to the socio-economic and political development of Ghana, and in developing

countries, leading to a compromised state sovereignty (Barma, Levy, & Piombo, 2020; Williams, 2003).

Administrative sovereignty should be seen as a sine quo non for developing countries if they are to be able to develop what the literature considers as homegrown solutions to their developmental needs. This AS should be developed and actively nurtured through institutional sustainability, as being witnessed in Rwanda, for example (Biedermann, 2016; Takeuchi, 2019). Like Ohemeng and Akonnor (2022), we believe that unless governments of developing countries sit up and promote policies that will effectively, develop and nurture the building of their bureaucratic capacities, AS will continue to be an illusion for them. This illusion stems from the failure to seriously disturb the existing bureaucratic equilibrium created by historical legacies, as explained by historical institutionalism.

Notes

1. This policy was more about politics than capacity building of the bureaucracy (see Grundy, 1963).
2. Some of the foreigners Nkrumah had to rely on included the economist Arthur Lewis, F. H. Hilliard, E. G. Johnson, and others. In 1963, the World Bank sponsored a conference of experts including Albert O. Hirschman, Nicholas Kaldor, Arthur Lewis, Dudley Seers, K. N. Raj, and Walter Birmingham, to examine and advise Nkrumah on his seven-year development plan. There were also a number of British expatriates in the civil service.
3. The native authority system was the use of local or traditional chiefs as the main administrative machinery, rather than the formal political and bureaucratic institutions that existed in governing the state.

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