



Towards the Underpinning Principles of Traditional Governance in Northern Ghana and Their Implications for Democratic Governance

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Abstract

This article discusses northern Ghanaian traditional government ideas. These civilizations were under colonial chieftaincy. The goal is to analyze these systems' democratic qualities and their potential to inform Ghana's Westminster-based democracy. In Ghana's Upper East and Upper West regions, the Boosi village of Bongo and the Dagara community of Nandom were investigated. The study used Transcendentalist-inspired qualitative research. This ethnographic study used literature reviews, focus groups, key informant interviews, and in-depth consultations. The research illuminates typical democratic regimes' clear allocation of powers between the executive, legislative, and spiritual branches. The executive branch, which includes leaders, is crucial in many areas, including arts and culture, land and agriculture, health and welfare, justice, security, economic growth, and communication. The notable legislative branch promotes gender equality, traditional practices and heritage, national development, and collaborative local government. Restorative justice promotes peaceful collaboration in conventional courts. The spiritual sector protects the spiritual domain, performs sacrificial rites, purifies, appeases deities, and communicates with numerous beings under Tengansob/Tendana. Convergence on important communal issues occurs even if each division acts autonomously. Participation, rule of law, openness, accountability, and inclusion underpin collaborative governance. According to the study, competent conventional governance promotes peace, conflict resolution, and financial growth. The research disputes prevailing beliefs about conventional governance, suggesting that they include systems for oversight and democratic decision-making. Understanding customary systems' democratic components can help Ghana's democratic governance.

Subject Areas

Culture

Keywords

Democratic, Traditional Governance, Implications, Customary Systems

1. Introduction

The paper delved into the three systems of governance (legislature, executive, and judiciary), as well as spiritual, at the grassroots of the northern part of Ghana, with much emphasis on democracy, where the separation of power is key. Paraphrasing Asante (2001) [1], democracy is a system of government that allows space for the participation of all in equal decision-making and action, thus spreading control over power. The godfathers of democracy put it aptly that “democracy is the government of the people, by the people, and for the people” (Ntsebeza, 2005) [2]. The import of this statement is to promote inclusion, participation, and harmony; in short, insurance of good governance. However, governance is often misconstrued as a system of structures with checks and balances of the structures and institutions rather than processes and outcomes (Owusu, 1991) [3]. Thus, good governance is equated with having a separation of powers between the Executive, the Judiciary, and the Legislature (those everyday institutions of the Western style democracy that ensure checks and balances) as well as indigenous democracies (ways of governing at the local communities).

How about a form of governance system with a different set of structural arrangements, a different number, and a nexus of institutional arrangements that have also stood the test of time? Government of the people, by the people, and for the people built on these structures that have also ensured a different type of participation, voice, and space for all—with inherent checks and balances. Would that not qualify as being “democratic”?

From distant history to date, Traditional Governance and its corpus of Institutions have been caricatured as not being democratic based on the erroneous impression that the traditional head/chief wielded and yielded all the power. There are no checks and balances for this institution, and hence, it is dictatorial and oppressive. The same arguments posits the fact that before the advent of colonialism, which came along with the institution of chieftaincy to some societies that used to be acephalous, the societies and communities then were “undemocratically governed”. Hence, in contemporary times, the chieftaincy institutions still remain and continue to be perceived as “undemocratic”. To strengthen this negative connotation, it is argued that chiefs are not democratically elected/selected and, therefore, lack legitimacy.

However, without prejudice to the jurisdictions of so-called democratic elections worldwide (Europe and America), traditional communities have procedures

for the selection and election of leaders (Ntsebeza, 1999 [4]; Nyamnjoh, 2003 [5]). One critical component of this selection process is the spiritual dimension—the dead (the ancestors) are key players in the process of selecting leaders. The reasoning is that, in the African governance systems, the exercise of leadership is not purely for mundane purposes—spirituality is a critical precedence and an antecedent. Hence, spirituality is both a precedent and an antecedent in the governance system in indigenous democracies.

In this article, we attempt an in-depth investigation and critical digesting of the principles underpinning traditional governance systems of societies of northern Ghana that had chieftaincy imposed on them by the colonial masters, with the view to establishing the extent to which these systems are democratic and how this can inform the current Westminster-style democratic governance in Ghana.

2. Review of Literature

2.1. Government or Governance

Governance was hardly recognized as a critical or even a pertinent factor in any serious discussion on development until comparatively recently. The formulation of development strategies of economic planning generally, whether by national governments or international development institutions, barely adverted to the relevance of governance or law. The involvement of the Bretton Woods institutions in the development process appeared to be predicated on the premise that the nature of a country's governance fell strictly beyond the preview of their legitimate concerns (Asante, 2001) [1].

In principle, however, it has been acknowledged that the nature of internal governance could have a deleterious impact on the economy of a country, but this principle was subordinated to the concept of “non-interference in the internal political affairs of member countries”. Now the linkage between governance and development is no longer contested. Good governance is now acknowledged as a necessary condition for sustainable development (Asante, 2001) [1].

The World Bank's 1992 Development Report, “Governance and Development”, defined governance as “the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources” (World Bank Report, 1992) [6].

According to the UNDP Report (1996) [7], “governance is the exercise of economic political and administrative authority to manage an economy's business at all levels”. Governance entails mechanisms, processes, and institutions through which the citizenry, singularly, motley, or otherwise, could articulate its interests, exercise legal rights, meet legal obligations, and resolve differences. The UNDP's approach to the subject is to illustrate the dynamic nature of good governance and authority of legal power.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) observes that: “governance is the exercise of political authority to manage a country's resources for social and economic development”. Good governance necessarily

involves the role of public authority institutions in establishing the enabling environment in which economic agents operate and in which the distribution of benefits as well as the relation between the government and the governed, are determined. Although power relations clearly underpin governance, the OECD definition, just as in the case of the UNDP, is at pains to define good governance in terms of authority or legal power.

The European Union notes that good governance is the transparent and accountable management of human, natural, economic, and financial resources for equitable and sustainable development. These, it is emphasized, must be within the context of a political and institutional environment that upholds human rights, democratic principles, and the rule of law. In this scheme, good governance entails clear decision-making procedures at the level of public authorities, transparent and accountable institutions, the primacy of law in managing and distributing resources, and the building of the capacity for elaboration and implementation of measures that are directed at preventing and eschewing corruption.

According to the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy document (GPRS) of 2003 to 2005, “An Agenda for Growth and Prosperity”, “governance, that is the act of governing, denotes the responsive relations between the state, the private business sector and civil society such that social wellbeing, social justice, and equity are attained and maintained in an environment of sustained economic growth, freedom, rule of law and respect for human rights”. Government, as an institution, comprises the political leadership and the public service. There must be a symbiotic relationship between these two levels for effective governance.

Civil society comprises community and pressure groups, non-governmental organizations, professional associations, labour movements, the media, and other associations representing social and occupational groups, including the poor, vulnerable, and excluded. Governance is dependent upon the efficient and decentralized management of public policy in which people are empowered to participate in and influence the process of poverty reduction and the sustainable growth of the economy. Most essential is the need for legal, regulatory, and institutional frameworks that promote and sustain the accountability of government machinery by the public at large. Good governance defines an ideal that is difficult to achieve in its totality. However, to ensure sustainable human development, actions must be taken to work towards this ideal. Major donors and international financial institutions, like the IMF or World Bank, are increasingly basing their aid and loans on the condition that reforms ensuring good governance are undertaken.

A critical examination of the varied definitions of governance elucidated above indicates the following eight major characteristics that epitomize good governance: participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus orientation, equity and inclusiveness, effectiveness and efficiency, and accountability. These characteristics ensure that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account, and the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard

in decision-making.

2.2. Traditional Governance in Northern Ghana

Figure 1 below describes the structural relationship that is typical of traditional administration in northern Ghana. From this structure, the spiritual world is the major driving force and implicitly regulates the performance of all other institutions. Chieftaincy is the centre of administrative and judicial functions in traditional societies, but the power position of the chief is mitigated by parallel institutions—the community as in the elders, and the spiritual world as in the “Tindana” and kingmakers and various spirit media.

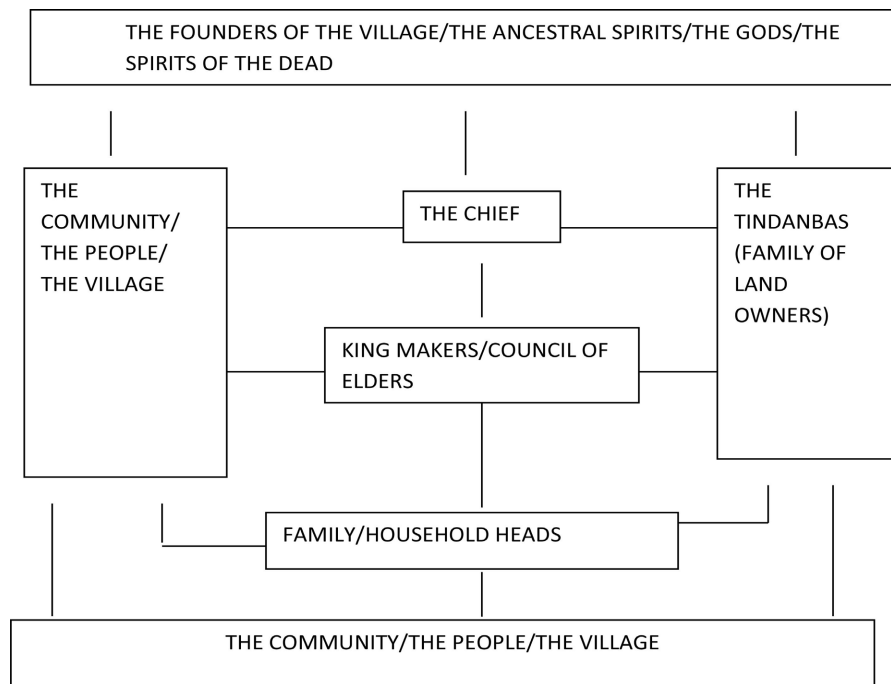


Figure 1. The traditional structure of governance in Northern Ghana (Source: Adopted from Millar (1999)).

The most revered spiritual world has a weak link with chieftaincy but a very strong link to the land owners (Tindanas) and the institutions that have spiritual roles to perform. These two institutions mitigate chieftaincy by serving as checks and balances. They regulate the powers of the chief, and they prescribe and mete out punishments in the case of excessive abuse of power by a chief (Nukunya, 2003) [8]. This ensures probity, accountability, and transparency in a chief’s performance. The family heads are empowered by the support of their family members, and some of them form the council of elders, which advises the chief. This council is instrumental in influencing policy direction, formulation, execution, and sanctions. In addition to the fact that the people are represented by the council of elders who are themselves members of families, it will be noticed that the people have an even stronger link with “Tindanas” and the spiritual offices. They have

daily contact and access to these institutions. There are, therefore, multiple opportunities for influencing local policy and its implementation and for redress or hearing. All of these functions are supposed to be life-long positions, hence the elaborate regulatory mechanisms and multiple communication channels (Nukunya, 2003) [8].

This structure is politically stable, has a predictable political climate, and has opportunities for the people to influence or contribute towards their future. It is these same structures that are used for conflict (civil wars/strife) prevention, resolution, and management. They also deal with issues of population, migration, and the environment. These functions are only true and operational if the institutions are not corrupted by modernization or Western influences/interferences are reduced to the minimum (Nyamnjoh, 2003) [5].

The people are governed by unwritten laws and regulations that are guided by history and by posterity. The laws define and protect the rights of the people and regulate the community. They guarantee freedoms within specified confines.

This structure of the traditional governance system has, since time immemorial, ensured participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus orientation, equity and inclusiveness, effectiveness and efficiency, and accountability with the goal of ensuring that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in the decision-making process (Nyamnjoh, 2003) [5].

It must be emphasised, however, that the structure is not without limitations. With the passage of time and so-called modernisation, the inherent lapses of the traditional governance system have been made even more evident. A few comments on the inherent lapses of the system would be worthwhile at this point:

- ❖ Lack of gender sensitivity in the decision-making process. A great majority of traditional governance structures in Northern Ghana do not have women occupying positions such as chiefs, “Tindanbas”, the council of Elders, Clan heads, etc. As a result, their voices in the decision-making process are greatly constrained; a similar scenario is observed when it comes to the involvement of youth and the vulnerable and excluded in the decision-making process;
- ❖ Similarly, the role of women and non-natives in property ownership is also very minimal or, at best, insignificant;
- ❖ The situation has been exacerbated in recent times by the desire of some chiefs to respond to the modern government system by pitching allegiances with political parties, and this is affecting their credibility in the eyes of the people.

These notwithstanding, on the whole, the traditional governance structures emphasize endogenous development, which guarantees good governance and sustainable development.

2.3. Democratic Governance

Modern democratic governance is characterised by multi-party democracy. Multi-party democracy is not easy to define because, in the first place, it is an amalgamation

of different dimensions and perspectives, and secondly, the paradigms of multi-party democracy and democratic values are without exhaustion for a long period of time (Dunn, 2009 [9]; Muwowo, 2015 [10]). That notwithstanding, one can safely argue that the first paradigm can be traced to Athenian origins in the days of Plato (c427-347 BCE) and Aristotle (c 384-322 BCE). Though the two denounced the multiplicity of democracy in favour of a regime of politico-military elites, it was headed by a philosopher king. In Ancient Athens, various sections of society participated in the running of the affairs of the state and government through different ways of recruiting all free adults, defined as citizens, who took turns in the running of the affairs of the state and in the decision-making process of the entire of the whole government (Oyugi, 1988) [11].

Dunn (1973) [9], on his part, points out that in the 17th century, multi-party democracy was a kind of ‘Western Liberal Democracy’. He further states that when the market economy developed to a highly sophisticated level, politics itself became a commodity in society, and the idea of choice between the various brands emerged. Thus, multi-party democracy was like a two-sided coin. On the one hand, it could be viewed as a corporate social rule of citizens, and on the other, it is a commodity in the market society (Muwowo, 2015) [10].

Etymologically, multi-party is a compound word. The word ‘multi’ connotes plural or more than one, while party means a section group or community. In the Dictionary of Government and Politics, 2nd Edition, Collins defines multi-party as a situation where there are several political parties existing in the same country (Abdulai & Crawford, 2021) [12]. Whereas the Oxford English Dictionary 2nd Edition, on its part, defines a multi-party as comprising ‘several parties or members of several parties’. It further adds that an ‘electoral or political system which results in the formation of three or more influential parties’. On its part, ‘democracy’ is etymologically made of ‘demos’ (people) and ‘xratos’ (rule or authority). Thus, democracy is a rule of the people and by the people (Abdulai & Crawford, 2021) [12].

When the words ‘multi-party democracy’ come together, they make the following meaning, ‘multi-party’ (involving many parties) and ‘democracy’ (rule by the people). Hence, multi-party democracy means a political system that enables the participation of many political parties in the legislative structure of government. Thus, in the opinion of Muwowo (2015) [10], such a definition does not centre on the people’s authority but on the authority of political parties in the legislative structure of government. The system that prevails under the multi-party democracy enables each party, which is an amalgamation of people (demos) to:

- Achieve the highest potential for development.
- Exercise liberty, which allows each political party the greatest amount of freedom consistent with order.
- Have equality, which maintains that all men, women, and children are created with equal rights and opportunities.
- Fraternity, which postulates that individuals will not misuse their freedom but

will operate in creating a wholesome society (Haynes, 1993) [13].

The above view espoused by Haynes (1993) [13] is supported by more recent studies of Abdulai and Crawford (2021) [12]. Who understands multi-party democracy as ‘a kind of mixed government’. Muwowo (2015) [10] will explain that the latter’s view is based on the fact that political theorists have always looked for a set of limits on the exercise of powers of governments and to prevent that power from being exercised by a section of the community to the detriment of other sections. Haynes (1993) [13] proceeds with his observation that the theory of mixed government was based on two assumptions. First of all, every section of the community was likely to abuse its position if the government was left solely in its hands. Secondly, the only effective check on the exercise of power by one section was the exercise of the countervailing of power by other sections (Abdulai & Crawford, 2021) [12]. The only way to ensure that the concept of multi-party democracy will provide the right basis of development will be dependent on the exercise of the appropriate checks and balances on the party in power if one has to apply the assumption of the abuse of power by a cross-section of people, to the problem of the control of power by a cross-section of people.

2.4. The Theory of Separation of Power

The research adopted the servant leadership theory of separation of power by Charles Louis due to its applicability to the topic under investigation.

It is widely accepted that for a political system to be stable, the holders of power need to be balanced against each other. The principle of separation of powers deals with the mutual relations among the three organs of the government, namely legislature, executive, and judiciary.

This doctrine tries to bring exclusiveness in the functioning of the three organs, and hence, a strict demarcation of power is the aim sought to be achieved by this principle. This doctrine signifies the fact that one person or body of persons should not exercise all the three powers of the government.

The theory of the Doctrine of Separation of Power was first propounded by Charles Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, a French Enlightenment political philosopher and scholar, and in 1747, he published in his book ‘*Espirit des Louis*’ (The Spirit of the Laws). Montesquieu found that if the power is concentrated in a single person’s hand or a group of people, then it results in a tyrannical form of government (Shackleton, 2017) [14].

To avoid this situation with a view to checking the arbitrariness of the government, he suggested that there should be a clear-cut division of power between the three organs of the state, *i.e.*, the Executive, Legislative, and Judiciary.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Area

The research was conducted amongst the Boosi of the Bongo in the Upper East Region of Ghana and the Dagara of Nandom in the Upper West Region of Ghana. These areas were particularly chosen because of the local language advantage of

the researchers, familiarisation with the area due to earlier research in the regions, and cost implications.

3.2. Research Philosophy and Approach

This paper emerges from a transcendentalist research philosophical perspective; hence, the approach is purely qualitative in order to unpack the narratives that are very compelling to the subject of Traditional Governance. Qualitative research involves collecting and analysing non-numerical data (e.g., text, video, or audio) to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences. It can be used to gather in-depth insights into a problem or generate new ideas for research. It is commonly used in the humanities and social sciences, in subjects such as anthropology, sociology, education, health sciences, history, etc. How to understand how people experience the world? While there are many approaches to qualitative research, they tend to be flexible and focus on retaining rich meaning when interpreting data. This is an Ethnographic Research (Yin, 1984 [15]; Dwyer, 1979 [16]).

Hence, this research is an Ethnographic Survey of three critical differentiations of the chieftaincy institution: cephalous and acephalous, vis a vis democratic governance. The tools used for data collection and data management were:

PHASE ONE: *Literature search*: This was largely for investigating secondary data. The subject of democratic governance was especially a desk study that was triangulated with verifications from a purposeful sample of a few key informants and critical stakeholders. They comprise 1 Retired Educationist, 2 Retired Politicians, 3 Politicians in active service. Cross-validations of findings were also processed with this sample.

***Introspection of researchers*:** Their team of 4 researchers are indigenes of northern Ghana. Though with varied origins and spoke different languages, some of the languages pertained to the region understudy. Our lived experiences and spoken local languages also served as a critical knowledge base and helped inform the investigations.

PHASE TWO: *Focus group discussions coupled with key informants and stakeholder consultations*: The theme of traditional governance required that the investigation be focused on the subject and rely on the extensive inputs of key informants, interspersed with stakeholder consultations. A sample of 2 Chiefs, 18 Elders, and 4 Tendambas were reached at the end. *Conversational and Discourse Analysis was employed in soliciting privileged information* (Bernard, 1988 [17]; Krueger, 1988 [18]).

PHASE THREE: *In-depth consultation*: Using Checklist, Structured Interviews, and Open Interviews (Hakin, 1989 [19]; Strauss and Corbin, [20] 1990). A purposeful sample of critical stakeholders as representatives of relevant structures. A sample of 2 Chiefs, 8 Elders, and 2 Tndambas were purposefully chosen for this phase. Here, Conversational and Discourse Analysis was employed in soliciting privileged information.

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1. Separation of Powers

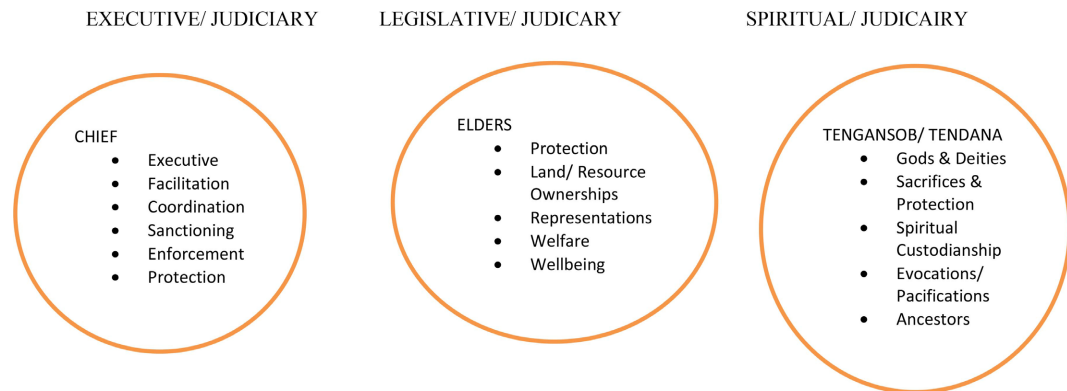


Figure 2. Separation of powers for traditional democratic governance.

Due to their position of power, proximity to the populace, and primary duty to uphold customs and traditions emanating from the Ghanaian Constitution, traditional leaders (Chiefs, Elders, and Tengansob/Tendana) have a significant role to perform. The ideal way to express judicial independence and the separation of powers in a newly created or revised constitution is as a fundamental component of the rule of law at any level of government. A check on legislative and executive power should be provided by the courts. According to the power-separation theory, power separation occurs when the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government all function independently of one another and do not interfere with one another's performance. According to the power-separation idea, no governing body's organ should impede the operations of any other body. Decentralized power is promoted under this theory. It restrains arbitrary behavior and defends people's rights and freedoms. We can make use of the knowledge and skills of a great many people thanks to it. As a result, under the conventional governance system, the multiple leaders perform separate functions in addition to the joint responsibilities they play, which will be covered in the following section of the research.

Executive

According to the Chiefs, they are the controller of all activities of their communities. No action can be taken by any other leader in their communities without their permission, as indicated in **Figure 1** (Millar, 1999) [21].

Our interactions with the chief revealed that they play the following significant roles: Arts and culture, land and agriculture, health and welfare of their people, justice, security and home affairs, economic development, environment, and tourism. Natural resource management, enforcement of the laws of their land, sanctioning of offenders, and communication and information.

During key informant interviews, 8 of the Chiefs give us a detail of the roles they play in their various communities as summarised as follows: Promote Indigenous knowledge systems, music, oral history, and commemorative events and

promote the preservation of heritage resources.

“... We play a role in land administration, we suggest/advise government on agricultural development and improvement of farming methods, promote sustainable use of land, advise government and participate in programmes geared to prevent cruelty to animals, advise and play a role in traditional health practices and rituals including initiation schools, advise and participate in nation-wide health campaigns, e.g. cholera, HIV/AIDS, TB, etc., facilitate community access to pensions and social grants, promote the protection of the vulnerable, including children, the elderly and the disabled, play a role in the administration of the traditional system of justice, play a role in the provision of safety and security to traditional communities, play a role in the registration of births, deaths and customary marriages, act as authorities for the administration of oaths, play a role in the restoration of peace in rural areas, support local economic development initiatives, promote environmental management, promote sustainable use of cultural resources within communities, promote sustainable traditional approaches to water resource management, play a role in communication and information dissemination of government policy and programmes...” (Key Informants, 2023)

The above submission is in line with the UNDP Report (1996) [7], which sees governance as the exercise of economic, political, and administrative authority to manage an economy's business at all levels. Governance, therefore, entails mechanisms, processes, and institutions through which the citizenry, singularly, motley, or otherwise, could articulate its interests, exercise legal rights, meet legal obligations, and resolve differences.

Legislative

In terms of legislation, it is important that institutions of traditional leadership promote democratic governance and the values of an open and democratic society. During an interview session, one of the elders stated that:

“... The elders' primary duties include advancing gender equality within the institutions of traditional leadership, promoting freedom, human dignity, and the realization of equality and non-sexism, working to uphold tradition and culture, fostering nation-building and promoting peace and harmony among people, and promoting the values of cooperative local governance in their interactions with all branches of local government and organs of the community...” (Key Informants, 2023)

The elders further stated that while traditional courts promote restorative justice based on community rehabilitation of the offender, where the family and institution of traditional leadership play a central role in doing so, the formal Courts typically apply punitive justice, which is the primary aspect of Roman-Dutch Law. Traditional courts also place a strong emphasis on the family and the institution of traditional leadership. Insofar as this is the case, traditional courts serve as a tool for fostering social cohesion, unity, and peace, whereas formal courts primarily punish offenders and, if necessary, exclude them from society. Therefore, there is always a loss and a winner in the eyes of the traditional leaders; there is never a

loser or a winner. This, according to them, fosters harmony and peaceful coexistence and avoids the development of an aversion to rage and hatred.

Traditional leadership institutions are not impervious to change and evolution. The difficulty lies in making sure the institution isn't compromised in the process, that it maintains African ideals, and that its function within the framework of cooperative governance is clearly defined in connection to the democratic states.

Spiritual

A series of interview sessions were conducted at different times with the Tengansob/ Tendana, who are the spiritual leaders of their communities, to find out the specific roles they play. According to these spiritual leaders, they are the spiritual owners of everything in their communities, including land. They mentioned their roles during interview sessions as follows:

“We play the roles of spiritual protection of the community, we offer sacrifices any time there is the need, spiritual cleansing of the land any time it is defiled, appeasing the gods to ensure the continuity of their blessings and protection of the their communities, exorcism; to expel demons or evil spirits from people or places that are possessed or are in danger of being possessed by them and pouring libation (invocation, supplication and conclusion)” (Key Informant Interviews).

According to them, they do all the spiritual communications within their communities and beyond. They said they communicate with the living, the living-dead (ancestral spirits), the gods, plants, rivers, hills, mountains, animals, including insects, the wind, jinns, any strange spirits that come to their communities, etc. They said they, at times, communicate without uttering a word. For example, they said communication between the living, the living-dead, and God is done through the ritual slaughtering of an animal. This is exactly what Mokgobi (2014) [22] said about communication between the living and the dead. The practice of ritual slaughtering in traditional African religion is similar to the animal offerings carried out by people in the Old Testament of the Bible. It can be argued that the main difference is that people in the Old Testament were making animal sacrifices directly to God, whilst traditional African religious believers make animal sacrifices to God through their departed relatives who have attained the status of being ancestors and, therefore, mediators between their living relatives and God as indicated by Van Dyk (2001) [23].

4.2. Convergence of Powers

Though the various arms of traditional governance function individually, they at times come together under one umbrella to take collective decisions on serious matters bordering the community. This is typical of the traditional structure of governance, as indicated by Millar (1999) [21]. Collective/collaborative governance is an innovative model of governance that is solutions-oriented with a focus on public value, where diverse stakeholders can work in partnership to improve the management of public resources and delivery of services. This brings about good governance with characteristics such as participation, rule of law, transparency,

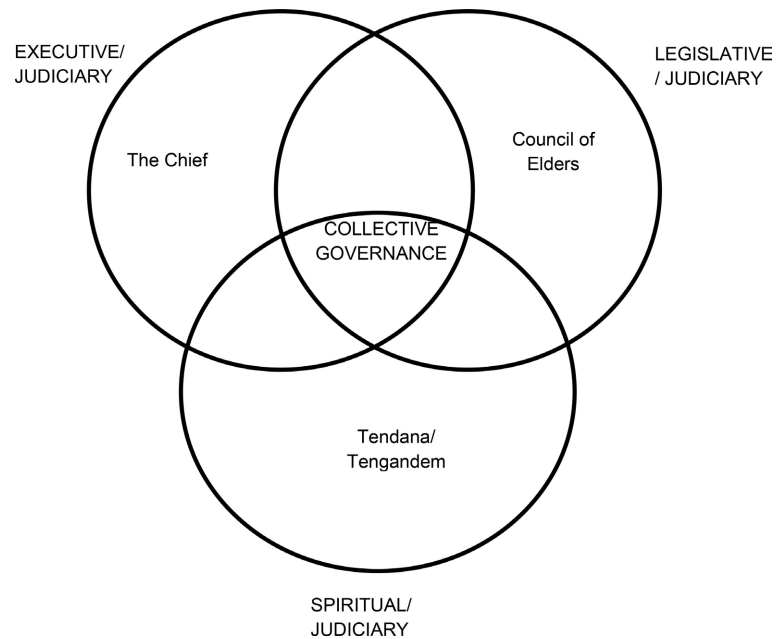


Figure 3. Convergence of powers for traditional democratic governance.

responsiveness, consensus-oriented, equity, inclusiveness, effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability, which can easily be noticed. This is purely democracy, as indicated by Abdulai Crawford (2021) [12] and Asante (2001) [1].

The advantages of effective collaborative governance include enabling improved and shared understanding of complicated issues involving many parties as well as enabling these stakeholders to work and reach an agreement on solutions. It can support better problem-solving, problem-targeting, and action-delivery by policymakers. According to the response, elements tending in the same direction are frequently combined. According to Nunkuya (2003) [8], each community's leaders bear a direct common duty for maintaining law and order, resolving conflicts, and fostering peace through legislation and policy development.

Reports of various interview sessions indicate that collective governance is seen by the respondents as good governance at the traditional level and has the following advantages, which are in line with the opinion of Muwowo (2015) [10].

Economic Development

Without a functioning government, a state's economy cannot grow continuously. Production, distribution, investment, and even consumption face a number of challenges as they all contribute to economic growth. Such barriers can be eliminated, and the equitable distribution of state resources is made possible with the establishment of good governance.

Social Development

Good governance is essential for social development. The role of it does not end only with economic development. The result of development ensures that every class of people in society enjoys the basis of fairness. People of different religions, castes, and classes live in a society. Now, if there is no fair distribution of wealth

among all these people, social discontent will increase.

Again, the proper distribution of wealth is not enough. We have to make arrangements so that the minority people can walk without fear. In the same way, various reform laws have to be enacted to reduce the gap between men and women in society.

Political Development

It has a significant impact on political evolution. It is impossible to develop excellent governance in a nation when the political elite is not actively working to do it. Its success is largely reliant on the political establishment's norms and regulations, as well as the leadership's honesty.

In order to create healthy competition and effective governance among themselves, political institutions and political parties must work cooperatively together and develop policies for the general welfare of the populace. For instance, co-operation between the administration and the opposition aids in the establishment of democracy in a nation. (Key Informants, 2023).

5. Conclusions

The main goal of the paper was to conduct an in-depth investigation and critical digesting of the principles underpinning traditional governance systems of northern Ghanaian societies that had chieftaincy imposed on them by colonial masters, with the goal of determining the extent to which these systems are democratic and how this can inform Ghana's current Westminster-style democratic governance.

- The study, therefore, concluded that there are principles underpinning traditional governance systems of northern Ghanaian societies. The study also concluded that northern Ghana's traditional rulers used collective governance where they are operating Legislative/ Judiciary and Spiritual/ Judiciary.
- Another conclusion was that the elders' main responsibilities are to advance gender equality within traditional leadership institutions, promote freedom, human dignity, and the realization of equality and non-sexism, work to uphold tradition and culture, foster nation-building, and promote peace and harmony among people, and promote cooperative local governance in their interactions with all levels of local government and communitarian organs.
- Two modes of governance systems were identified: Complete separation of powers, as in **Figure 2**, and call convergence of powers where there are overlaps, as in **Figure 3**. This is a major finding that departs from conventional forms.
- The Chiefs, Elders, and Tendana are the supra-structures of the governance systems, and they act in consonance on behalf of the communities they represent.
- The role of spirituality as a major check-and-balance for the entire system is very important. It ensures sanity and level-headedness and reduces the incidence of the abuse of powers. The repercussions for violations are dire for all the components representing the interests of the community. The element of

spirituality is completely absent from conventional forms of democratic governance. This may be a major missing factor in regulating all the vices of democracy in Africa's governance systems.

- The socio-economic developmental prospects of indigenous governance systems are undeniable. The Area and Zonal contours of our current local governance systems are not taking advantage of the structures identified in this study. Denying their existence has been a bane to sustainable development.

6. Recommendations

- ***Towards African Alternative:*** This study highlights the need for an ***African Alternative*** to the Westminster democratic governance. Such a system will need re-engineering of both that which is documented in this study and the Westminster to optimise their collective strength but minimise their weakness. An integrated House of Chambers in Parliament could be one pathway.
- ***Towards Good Democratic Practice:*** Integration of spirituality to ensure ***Good Democratic Practice*** in Africa is a strong recommendation from this study. For example, instead of swearing in of Presidents, etc, with the Bible or Quran, traditional deities could be evoked as well.
- ***Towards A Pluralistic Democratic World:*** Building a ***Pluralistic Democratic World*** should be the goal of Africa. It is informative that the Arabs have lived with their Kingly Traditions, and the Chinese have their version, both tacitly approved by the Western Democracies. In contrast, Africans are suffering from the yoke of an imposed Western-style democracy.
- The Area and Zonal Councils of our current Local Governance Systems need re-structuring to give room for traditional governance systems to establish their presence in the socio-economic development of the rural communities since they are also governance systems in their own right.

Further Research Areas

- This research did not distinguish between the Acephalous and Cephalous Communities of northern Ghana. A further study with such a distinction as a goal might provide deeper insights.
- The study did not go into the Gender dimensions of Traditional Governance. A gender focus would provide additional lenses.
Youth in Traditional Governance is another grey area worth investigating.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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