Public Policy Making in Ghana: The Role of Politics and the Media

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Abstract
This study examines the influence of politics and the media on policy making from the perspective of political system theory and rational theory. The role of politics and media in policy making in Ghana can be defined in two stages. The study identified that, from the 1960s where the system of government was one-party, through the military regimes. Policy making was the right of the ruling elite and few bureaucrats. The media coverage was limited to the state media. In 1992, when Ghana adopted the multi-party democracy, public policy making process expanded to include civil societies, individuals, political parties and all interest group. Politics influence on policy becomes dominant during electioneering year where the two major political parties NDC and NPP trade policy ideas in exchange for votes. The media also has played a major role in policy making by providing platform and setting agenda for policy discussion. The media also serve as a source of policy information to the citizens. The study concluded by suggesting to constitutional bodies to develop, a comprehensive national development plane binding on all political parties, regulating media ownership and employment of experts and media professionals to work in the media sector.
Keywords: public policy, politics, media

1.0 Introduction
According to some scholars, public policy making is not just a technical activity of government, but it is a process that is influence by many environmental factors. These environmental factors influence the policy decision and its impact on citizens. Policy making in developing countries differ from the developed countries. Developing countries differ in terms of the political systems they operate and the level of economic growth. Many developing countries are in the transition stage of practicing democracy and some are still controlled by authoritarian leaders. Literatures have confirmed that, the political system of a country has an influence on policy making. Developing countries who are practicing democracy has seen improvement in policy making process by engaging individuals and interest groups in decision making. The media has also been given some level of freedom to set agenda that influence the policy making process. On the other hand, in the authoritarian countries, political leaders try to control information dissemination and as a result limiting the influence of the media on policy making.

Ghana as a developing country has over the years gone through several reforms on public policy making. One breakthrough is the practice of multi-party democracy which has changed the face of policy making in Ghana. The practice of democracy has led to wider political engagement on policy making, giving greater freedom to the media to influence political process.

Justification for this study is to examine how politics and media influence policy making in Ghana after independence up to the adoption of democracy. Political engagement and the media practice went through some challenges in the political processes. In early 1960s, Ghana was practicing one-party system which did not allow other political parties to influence the political process. The military involvement in the political process also limited the operation of the media. During these periods, policy making was the right of the ruling elite and only the state media could inform citizens on political issues. Public policy making changed significantly after the adoption of multi-party democracy. This allowed political parties to develop alternative policies through parties manifestoes with the intention to influence the policy making process and the same time to influence the opinions of the voters. The press freedom has also allowed the media to influence the policy making process by mediating between the policymakers and the public.

This study was conducted to contribute to the study of policy making in developing countries which Ghana is no exception. The study is purported to increase students and researchers understanding of political processes and the media influence on public policy making.

2.0 Theories of Policy Making
2.1 Political System Theory
Public policies are done as a respond to the demands of the environment. This theory explains the functions of state institutions in the context of political processes to make decisions that will provide solutions to social problems. Public policy as a system theory operates in an environment that consist of various systems (the social system, the economic system, the biological systems) which are considered as externalities and have influence

on the political system in the context of policy making (Anderson 2009)

The influence of the external environment on the political system of policy making can be explained in three components. The first component of environmental influence is the "demands" from the environment; individuals and groups in the society have their interests and values that need to be satisfied and as a result may demand or make claims for action from policy makers. One other element of the first component is "support"; individuals and groups upon their demands will abide by the decisions taken by the political system. The second is the "output" side of the political system which consist of the laws, rules, and judicial decisions; when individuals and groups regard them as authoritative and binding on them, then it becomes public policy. The third is the "feedback" which shows the output which in other words is the policy made as a respond to the individual and group demands and how it affects the environment and the political system. The policy output will continually lead to new demands which will eventually lead to further output and as a result will cause the policy process unending (Anderson 2009).

Political system theory adoption in the study of policy making is that, it helps researcher to inquire into the policy making processes. It provides understanding on how the policy environment influence public policy making and on the other hand, how policy will affect the environments. However, there has been some critics on the theory. Some scholars argued that, the theory does not give details on the processes and procedures of policy making within the political system. Some further argued that, the theory only makes the government and policy makers as a respondent to individual and group demands.

2.2 Rational Choice Theory

This theory has gained prominence in the political science for the study of political behavior. The theory officially originated from the economics. Economist use this theory by applying microeconomic principles to analyze the concept of political behavior. Anthony Downs an economist used the theory to analyze the choice of voters (Anthony Downs 1957) cited in Anderson (2009). He hypothesized that, the voter and the political parties are all rational decision makers and will do anything to ensure maximization of interest. Political parties who seek to come to government will tend to outline policies that will influence voters to buy into their ideology to enable them to win more votes. On the other hand, parties in government will formulate and implement policies that will respond to the demands of the voters. this is because, political parties are rational institutions and therefore, make decisions to maximize their self-interest. However, voters also vote in a way that will maximize their interest. In doing so, they vote for parties that formulate policies that meet their demands.

One other assumption by this theory is that, political actors make decision in a rational way that will satisfy their self-interest. James Buchannan the economist assumed that, decision by politician are motivated by their self-interest rather than the state interest Anderson (2009).

3.0 Proposed Framework for Policy Making in Ghana

The framework explains how politics and the media influence the policymaking process in Ghana. From the media side, the actions of individuals, the various interest group and political communicators who operates on the media platform affects the opinions of the general public on policy issues which subsequently leads to policy agenda setting. On the other hand, political ideologies and the party manifesto influence the policy agenda setting. However, the media and the politics try to influence each other in the policy making process.
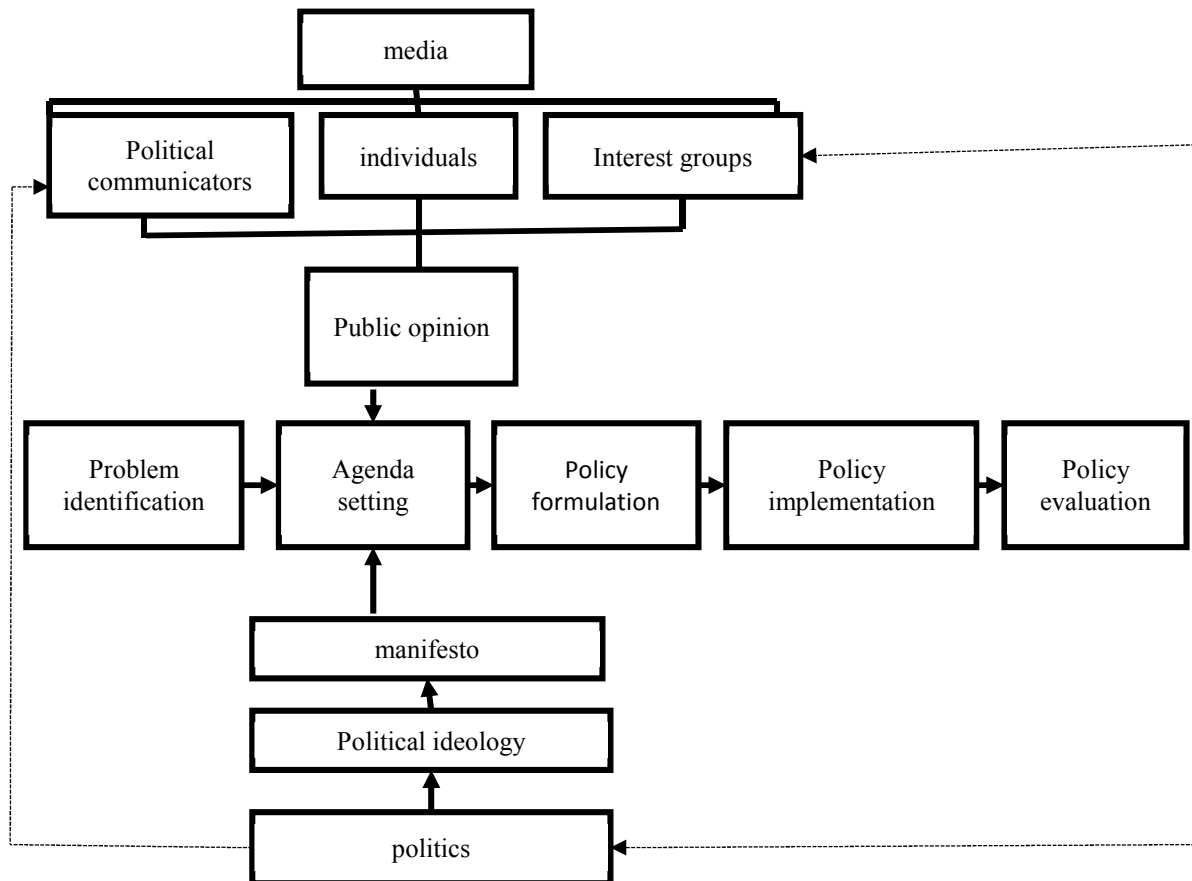
Source: authors construct

4.0 Policy Making Process
4.1 Identifying Policy Problems
Public policy problems can be identified through the demands of the individuals and groups in the society. Individuals groups most often raised concerns on issues that need government attention and solution. Their demands are made to the governmental institutions responsible for handling policy issues. Publicized demands for government action can lead to identification of policy problems. Various stake holders like the media, protective and promotional interest groups play a major role in identifying policy problems.

4.2 Agenda Setting
After a problem is identified by individuals or groups that need governmental action, the issue must come to the policy makers attention. The media and interest groups play a major role in agenda setting. The media provide platform for individuals, groups, political parties to discuss the issue that will draw public attention to the problem. Sometimes some issues are invincible to policy makers or institutions that are responsible for providing solution. One major case in Ghana in the year 2017 was the illegal mining activities that destroyed the major water bodies in Ghana. The issue though was so visible to policy makers but their action towards it was non-decision. However, when the media led by Daily Graphic front page banner (12th April 2017) that got individual and groups attention to the issue also led government to respond to the issue. A decision was eventually taken which can be classified as a policy to stop mining activities along rivers bodies and the temporary ban on issuing mining license to companies in the extractive industry. Policy agenda can be set by policy makers when their attention is draw to the issues or the media and interest groups can also lead a campaign to draw government attention to policy problems

4.3 Formulating Policy Proposals
The next level after a policy identification and agenda setting in the policy making process is the formulation of policy proposals. Policy proposal is most often done through political channels and interest group. This is the stage where policy makers develop pertinent course of action that will solve the problem. In many cases, alternative proposals are developed to allow them to choose the best alternative in dealing with the situation. One major concern at this level is self-interest of individuals and groups and because of that, policy makers are

confronted with several competing proposal to deal with the problem. One must understand that, policy formulation does not always result into law or having executive order from the president. Some policy formulation decision can also be non-action. For a successful policy formulation, formulators must take some factors into consideration by asking question like, is the policy technically sound? to what extent will the policy solve the intended problem? and among others.

4.4 Implementing Public Policy
Policy implementation in the cycle of policy making is when policy makers are satisfied and convinced that a course of action will solve the problem. The proposed policy now goes through legislative processes to be passed into law. Passing a policy bill into law necessary does not solve the problem; there are many cases where state institutions responsible for enforcing a policy look unconcern after the policy has been passed into law. For a public policy to remedy the problems it was meant to solve, officials must take practical action which will enforce the law. There must be official whose mandate is to supervise the process. Source of funding is very key to successful implementation of public policies. One major challenge to developing countries of which Ghana is no exception is funding. Some policies rely on external funding for its implementation. Many a time, most developing countries formulate good policies that are capable for deriving the economy, but funding unavailability has made many of these policies unsuccessful.

4.5 Evaluating Public Policy
Public policies initiated by policymakers within some period may be evaluated to see if the policy has brought positive change. Public Policies are evaluated by government agencies, by outside consultants, by interest groups, by the mass media, and by the public. The policy process being a cycle, problems identified during the evaluation can be readjusted or can lead to a revision of the whole policy. Sometimes a policy implementation will lead to another public problem which sometimes can be identified during the evaluation process. In this case, policy makers can device solution to prevent it from becoming a major problem which sometimes may increase the cost of solving it.

5.0 The Role of Politics in Public Policy Making.
Politics play a major part in policy making through the activities of political parties. The major reason for forming political parties is to get the key to hold power and because of this function, parties whether the ruling government or the opposition try to influence the type of public policies that are formulated and implemented. The governing party tries to formulate policies as commitment to promises made during campaign and on the other hand, opposition parties try to suggest alternative policies to the voters as the best course of action that can solve their problems.

The influence of politics on policy making is the political agenda setting; Walgrave and Lefevere (2010) believed that, political parties have their agenda which can be operationalized in many ways. They mentioned that, parties through their manifestoes normally state their policy priorities that they will consider when voted to power. Though it is agreed that, political agenda has influence on policy making, however, Walgrave and Van Aelst (2006) argued that, not all political agenda have actual impact on public policies. They further explained that, some political agenda are rhetoric which are considered as mere words of politician and have little influence on policy making and on the other hand, some agenda are substantial which have direct impact on public policy making. Politics on the other hand influence policy making by instigating public debate or political communicators communicate a problem that need governmental action. The media at this point complement the effort of politics on policy making by providing platform for discussion.

6.0 The Role of Politics on Public Policy from The Ghanaian Perspective
Policy making mostly is influenced by the political environment (democracy, dictatorship, authoritarian etc). the policy environment of Ghana is influence by the political system that has been practiced over the years. It is obvious to understand that, the political influence on policymaking after independence and during the military regimes is different from the policy environment Ghana is experiencing after the coming into force of the 1992 constitution.

According to Amoako-Tuffour (2008), after the independence of Ghana, public policy making was the property of politicians and because of that, individuals and interest groups participation was not felt during the period. It is also believed that, during the period of one-party government and the military regimes, public policies were solely designed by the politicians and few bureaucrats and is described by Ohemeng (2005) as a "closed circuit network". From the period of independence to 1966, the political system of Ghana was one-party system and due to that, it was one sided political influence on public policy making. There were no opportunities for other political parties to suggest alternative public policy to the citizens for consideration through election. However, the one-party dominance on public making ended after the 1966 military coup that overthrown Dr.

Kwame Nkrumah. Amoako-Tuffour believed that, the political environment of military government did not open the public policy making doors to other political parties and civil organizations; policymaking was a monopoly enjoyed by actors within the government.

Public policy making changed dramatically in Ghana after Ghana accepted to democratize the political system from military dictatorship. The ban on political parties was lifted which led to a multi-party democracy in Ghana. It's worth believing that, the multi-party system has changed the face of public policy making in Ghana. Political parties now must contest for election to appeal to the citizenry by persuading them with policies they will implement when given the key to government. Through the development of party manifesto, parties outline their policy directions and then present them to the voters to make choice. One other way the democratic political system influence policy making is that, opposition parties try to get voters awareness by proposing an alternative policy that can solve an existing problem. However, the activities of the opposition parties also put the ruling government on its toes to design policies that will solve societal problems.

Election years in Ghana is the period where politics exhibit its influence on public policy making. The two major parties the National Democratic Party (NDC) and The New Patriotic Party (NPP) trade policy ideas to the voters. They also try to influence the media agenda setting on issues that must be discussed on the media house especially the print and the electronic. The two major political parties in Ghana in the past two elections used their parties manifestoes to influence policymaking especially the education sector. In the 2012 and the 2016 elections, the current government (NPP) emphasized so much on free senior high school for all Ghanaians. On the other hand, the NDC party who won the 2012 and lost the 2016 election policy was centered on providing access to quality education. the NDC government at the time, campaigned on providing 200-day senior high schools to the deprived community to increase access. The major emphasis here is on how during these periods, educational policy in Ghana was influence by political parties manifestoes.

7.0 The Role of The Media on Public Policy Making

The media plays a major role on public policy making process through the provision of platform for policy problem discussion. The public main source of policy information is mainly from the media. The media influence what politicians especially the political communicators discuss by setting the agenda. Some decades ago, the source of policy information was through the traditional media channels; the use of television, radio, and newspapers were the dominant channels where policy information can be assessed by the citizens. According to media scholars like (Prior 2007; McNair 2000), they believed that, the media "*provide transparency and accountability, increasing public awareness or education, chronicling events/recording history, and providing a place for public discussion*". In the past decade, the emergence of social media has changed the face of media influence on policy making. Even the traditional media channels now adopt the social media platform to informed citizens on policy problems. The use of Facebook, twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram are used recently by policymakers, politicians, government institutions to disseminate and solicit for policy concerns. The social media has increased citizen participation in policy making in many countries.

One function of the media is agenda setting where television producer, newspaper editor, radio program producers decide the kind of information they should put before the citizens. The media provide platform for civil societies and politician to discuss issues which eventually leads to forming of public opinion. According to this author, (McCombs 2004) the media affects policy indirectly by shaping the opinions of people about a policy. To further understand how the media influence public opinion, these researchers, (Bruns 2008; Benkler 2006) stated that, the mass media traditional role was mediating between society and political institutions where the media only pass on information from the policymakers or politician to the citizens, but the emergence of social media has brought some direct participation or engagement between the citizens and politicians to circumvent the traditional media, and directly influence each other within the social media environment. Bruns further indicated that, during the agenda setting process of policy making, Twitter provides the opportunity for more direct forms of democracy.

8.0 The Ghanaian Media and Policy Making

The media in Ghana in recent times has influence policy making by setting agenda for discussion and providing platform for stakeholders' involvement. The democratization of the Ghanaian political system has granted the media a range of freedom to operate. Some media practitioners even described the Ghanaian press as the fourth organ of government which plays a watchdog role. Before the coming into force of the 1992 constitution, the media role on national development was restricted by the military government. The media landscape of Ghana had a breakthrough when the NPP government in 2001 repealed the criminal libel law. The daily graphic (2001) reported that, the repeal of the criminal libel law has received the endorsement of the public.

The press freedom has enabled the media to influence policymaking in Ghana through the electronic and the print. The media ownership in Ghana is in two categories (the state owned and the private owned media). the state own electronic media which is the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation, comprised of the national radio,

television and 10 FM radios one in each region of Ghana and the print media the daily guide and the Ghanaian times were the major media platforms in Ghana after the independence. The state media was the only channel through which the public get access to policy information and it was and still controlled by the government.

Private ownership of media started in 1988 which even allowed foreign media such as the voice of America, radio France intermediate and BBC broadcast on 101.3fm to accessed operational licenses Fuller (2004). The private media has played a significant role on policy making in Ghana by providing a wide access of policy information to the public. Policy agenda setting by the media are often initiated by some private station like Peace FM, Adom FM, Joy FM, Citi FM, TV3, Metro TV, Joy TV; they are the most listened and viewed media house in Ghana. Their breakfast show which are mostly political discussion provide platform for political communicators, policymakers and citizens to deliberate on problems facing the society. Though the state media provide wide coverage in the country but due to the control of the government has made them very cautious about information its present to the public. However, the state media still plays a major role on policy making. During the electioneering year, the state media provide free platform to the various political parties to present their policies to the voters.

Latest development on media ownership in Ghana is the establishment of media houses by influential political personalities. This development could be linked to the perceived influence of the media on policy making and the opinions of the voters. However, many practitioners have criticized the development on the basis that, it will affect the neutrality of the media.

9.0 Conclusion

Countries development is dependent on various policies they formulate and implement. This has made the study of policy a very important component of economic development. This study reviewed related studies on how the political environment (politics) and the media influence public policy making in Ghana. Existing literatures confirmed that, politics influence policymaking in Ghana through setting policy agenda. Most of the agenda settings initiated by political actors coded into a document called party manifesto which outline policies the party intend to adopt when voted to power. The study also revealed that, many policy information is communicated to the public through political communicators. The multi-party system of Ghana has influenced policy making because, it provides a pool of public policy alternatives to policymakers to choose from.

The existing studies have also proved that, the media influence policy making through the provision of platform for discussing policy problems. The Ghanaian media over the years have influence policy through political programs that provide platform and agenda for individuals, policymakers and civil society to discuss and suggest solutions to societal problems. The adoption of democracy in Ghana has also stimulated the influence of media on policy making through the freedom of press. The study revealed that, the private ownership of media houses in Ghana has also help increased the influence of the media on policy making. It can be concluded that, the sometimes act as an intermediary between policy makers and politicians at one end and the citizens at the other end.

10. Recommendation

This study believes that, politics and policy making cannot be separated. Due to this belief, the study suggests that, a development plans which must be binding on any government should be developed which will act as a guide to political parties to formulate their policies when drafting their manifestoes. From the Ghanaian perspective, this will resolve the problem of counter policies that sometimes send the nation's development a step back.

This study also suggests that, due to the influence of political decision on policy making, political parties should seek the service of policy experts on various sectors to ensure feasibility of the policy which will eventually save the country from financial loses.

On the part of the media, this study recommends that, because of the impact of information on the opinions of citizens, the media houses should employ professional practitioners who are experts in their area of programs they host and write on. This is to prevent the dissemination of information that can have negative effect on the behavior of the citizens.

One concern to this study is the media ownership in the private sector. The emergence of politician establishing media houses is a threat to media neutrality and should be a concern to The National Media Commission (NMC). The study suggests that, the NMC should regulate media ownership in Ghana to prevent possible instigating of citizens by politicians which may lead to political conflict.

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