What went right?
The role of democracy in Ghana’s puzzling ethnic peace

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Abstract

For many influential prescriptions of how to prevent ethnic groups returning to war, the peace between those in northern Ghana simply should not exist. This thesis asks what we might learn from this abnormal example of inter-ethnic peace. Why is it that peace has lasted when the underlying grievances remain, and could the answer to this reveal an innovative way of resolving ethnic conflict? This study finds that, contrary to Ghana-specific and general inter-ethnic peace theories, a stable peace does not necessarily require resolution of the causes of war or the creation of structures to ensure ethnic groups feel safe from one another. Rather, it observes that if political conditions cause ethnic identity to lose its usefulness as a vehicle for accessing political resources, then the importance of attached grievances dissipates along with it. In Ghana, the advent of stable democratic competition in 1992 is responsible for such a turn of events. By providing access to political resources at the national level, Ghana’s democracy has superseded the importance of inter-ethnic conflict over traditional chieftaincy institutions. It has caused socioeconomic identity, mobilised through the competitive two-party system, to replace local ethnic ties as the most politically salient form of identity. Consequently, not only are once virile inter-ethnic grievances no longer of political import, their holders are now political brethren under a single socioeconomic partisan identity. In making these observations I challenge both an empirical claim that conflict between groups in Ghana is lying dangerously dormant, and a theoretical claim that ethnic conflict can be managed but never resolved. This thesis analyses survey evidence and political, historical and theoretical literature to argue that when the framework for political competition fundamentally changes we see the lines along which persons participate, and the conditions on which they stake their interests, change along with it.
Selon plusieurs prescriptions sur la prévention du renouvellement des conflits ethniques, la paix entre les différents groupes ethniques au Ghana ne devrait pas exister. Cette thèse cherche à identifier ce que nous pouvons apprendre de ce cas anormal de paix inter-ethnique. Pourquoi la paix perdure alors que les griefs demeurent? Qu’est-ce que la réponse à cette question peut révérer sur les façons de résoudre les conflits ethniques? Cette étude trouve que, contrairement aux théories sur la paix inter-ethniques et celles le cas du Ghana, une paix stable ne requière pas nécessairement la résolution des causes de la guerre ou de créer les structures qui font en sorte que les groupes ethniques ne se sentent pas menacés entre eux. Au contraire, si les conditions politiques font en sorte que l’utilisation des identités ethniques comme véhicule pour accéder aux ressources politiques perde son utilité, alors l’importance des griefs qui y sont associés se dissipe également. Au Ghana, l’introduction de compétition démocratique stable en 1992 est responsable pour telle tournure d’événements. En permettant l’accès aux ressources politiques nationales, la démocratie ghanéenne a substitué l’importance des conflits inter-ethniques par les institutions traditionnelles. Les identités socioéconomiques, mobilisées à travers d’un système à deux partis politiques en concurrences, ont remplacé les liens ethniques locaux comme étant la forme d’identité la plus politisée. Conséquemment, non seulement les griefs ethniques ont perdu leur importance politique, leurs porteurs sont maintenant noués par une seule identité socioéconomique partisane. En faisant ces observations, je remets en question une revendication empirique selon laquelle un conflit entre groupes ethniques au Ghana est dormant; ainsi qu’une revendication théorique selon laquelle les conflits ethniques peuvent être gérés mais jamais résolus. Cette thèse fait usage de résultats de sondages, ainsi que la littérature politique, historique et théorique pour démontrer que lorsque le cadre de compétition politique change fondamentalement, nous pouvons nous attendre à voir des changements dans les clivages identitaires au travers desquels les gens participent et dans leur perception des conditions politiques qui satisferont leurs intérêts.
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My late grandfather, John, deserves special mention for always believing in me even when I didn’t. This thesis is for him.
1. The puzzle and the theory to be tested

On the 30\textsuperscript{th} March 1996 delegates of seven ethnic communities from the northern region (NR) of Ghana came together to sign the “Kumasi Accord on Peace and Reconciliation.” This laid out the terms for lasting peace after Ghana’s bloodiest ethnic war, where well over 2,000 were killed and 178,000 displaced between 1994-5.\textsuperscript{1} Developed through multilateral consultation at grassroots and elite level, the Accord committed its participants to preventing the re-ignition of war and to resolving underlying causes through building inter-ethnic trust and the enactment of concrete reforms.\textsuperscript{2} Despite the landmark importance of the Accord many of the agreed upon outcomes have not materialised, particularly those institutional reforms designed to address the grievances that underlay the conflict. Remarkably, however, peace has persisted. In spite of the extent to which the imperatives of the peace accord were overlooked in a region that suffered over 20 ethnic conflicts between 1980 and 1995, it marked the beginning of 20 years and counting without mass ethnic conflict.\textsuperscript{3}

What is responsible for the long peace in Ghana? Founded in 1992, Ghana’s nascent democracy has been widely praised for its competitiveness and openness, and, importantly, for its consistently high participation levels.\textsuperscript{4} This investigation will contend that it has indirectly resolved ethnic grievances concerning subordination in the sphere of traditional politics. Specifically, by enabling access to political resources at the national level political parties have diminished the political saliency of ethnic identity and turned socioeconomic identity into the focal point of Ghanaian political life.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{1} Julia Jönsson, \textit{The Overwhelming Minority: Traditional Leadership and Ethnic Conflict in Ghana's Northern Region} (Oxford: Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity, 2007), 18.
\end{flushright}
First I will detail the causes and dynamics of the war and the peace process. Then the literature review will look at how canonical ethnic conflict theories find the peace to be paradoxical and how existing explanations of the Ghanaian peace have proved scientifically inadequate and overly assumptive. Following this I will outline my theory that democratic party-based competition is responsible for the peace. An evaluation of existing theories of how to manage ethnic conflict will then set-up the party-focused empirical analysis of the Ghanaian democratic landscape in the search for the mechanisms that have enabled peace to persist. Finally, the mechanisms identified will be framed theoretically for the purposes of clear illustration and critical appraisal.

The curious peace

The issue which is generally accepted as the proximate cause of the 1994 war is “the question as to whether the most prominent chief among the Konkomba, the Chief of Saboba, is entitled to the status of an independent ‘Paramount Chief’ with autonomous land rights, or whether he remains hierarchically subordinate to the Dagomba king, the Ya-Na [a paramount chief].”5 In the months leading up to the war the Konkomba petitioned the National House of Chiefs to elevate their chief to paramount status and in so doing deliberately bypassed the unsympathetic Ya-Na to whom the request should have been made (by the Ghanaian constitution).6 Outraged, the Ya-Na demanded the petition be resubmitted to him but unambiguously refused it upon receipt. Conflicts in the years leading up to the 1994 war were fought over analogous issues and, having been left largely unresolved, fed this conflict. The Konkomba petition “reawakened” Nanumba memories of the former’s insubordination that led to their 1981 war, while the coalition of groups that fought the Konkomba in 1994 was

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6 Ibid., 188.
fed by a fear of the proficiency shown by their soldiers pulled into the 1991-92 Gonja-Nawuri war. These conflicts entrenched distaste and fear of Konkomba potential for insubordination, leading to the circulation of rumours and leaflets in 1993 that painted the Konkomba as militants who wished to “rob” them of their lands. These events provided the impetus for the Konkomba paramountcy demand to “explode like a grenade” via the petition.

It seems curious that the proximate cause for a conflict which broke out between members of the Konkomba and Nanumba groups is ascribed to the tension between the Konkomba and a different group; the Dagomba. Delineating the protagonists’ historical antagonisms will demystify this. The 1994-5 war was fought between the Nanumba, Dagomba and Gonja on one side and the Konkomba on the other. The former three are collectively the “majority” ethnic groups of the region. They are stately, centralised, chiefly, and land owning groups that hold authority over “minority” groups (such as the Konkomba) in the traditional sphere. Disagreements over land and political status began in the NR in the 15th or 16th century, when the Dagomba invaded and claimed ownership of land and political control over the Konkomba and other minority groups. The Konkomba, however, consider themselves rightful land owners by autochthony, and claim that “actual, meaningful, authority was never exercised and that they never recognised Dagomba ‘over-lordship.’” Konkomba thus hold grievance with the Dagomba for relegating them “to second rate citizens in the traditional and political administration of the region.” This example reflects a general majority-minority dynamic; the Nanumba and Gonja hold an alliance with the Dagomba and share in the oligopoly over traditional institutions and land. Interestingly, “minority” and “majority” are not even accurate descriptions (the Konkomba outnumber all

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7 Ibid., 194.
8 Ibid., 191.
9 Ibid.
10 Brukum, The Guinea Fowl, Mango and Pito Wars, 2.
11 Jönsson, Traditional Leadership and Ethnic Conflict in Ghana's Northern Region, 10-11.
12 Brukum, The Guinea Fowl, Mango and Pito Wars, 2.
bar the Dagomba), but such are the pejorative connotations of being called “non-chieflly” or “landless” that the former labels are most often used (perhaps precisely because their clear inaccuracy makes them a meaningless label). This dynamic has been manifested and entrenched in numerous ways over the years. Kaye & Beland highlight discriminatory majority group customs, such as tribute requirements and giving minority group members as slave tributes.\footnote{Julie Kaye and Daniel Beland, "The Politics of Ethnicity and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: The Case of Northern Ghana," \textit{Journal of Contemporary African Studies} 27, no. 2 (2009): 182.} Jönsson points out how the British colonial administration “formalised ethnically segregated ‘traditional’ structures” by giving administrative power to majority groups, while Talton highlights the controversial 1978 ruling that state-controlled northern region land rights should be handed over to majority groups.\footnote{Jönsson, \textit{Traditional Leadership and Ethnic Conflict in Ghana’s Northern Region}, 14.; Benjamin Talton, \textit{Politics of Social Change in Ghana: The Konkomba Struggle for Political Equality} (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 147-48.}

The traditional hierarchy alone cannot be responsible for the violence, having existed long prior to the 1981 war. Changes in Konkomba economic and migrant status compounded their grievances. Konkomba success in the yam trade and their growing economic status “sharpened the structural misfit” they felt within their imposed subordinate identity,\footnote{Jay Oelbaum, "Liberalization or Liberation?: Economic Reform and the Paradox of Conflict in Ghana’s Northern Region" (paper presented at the 48th Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, Chicago February 28 - March 3, 2007), 9.} while their mass migration to Nanumba lands saw them experience “nauseating” condescending treatment, being expected to hand over labour, produce and their right to legal self-adjudication.\footnote{Brukum, \textit{The Guinea Fowl, Mango and Pito Wars}, 9.}

The catalyst of the 1994 conflict was a marketplace argument between a Konkomba man and a Nanumba man over the sale of a guinea fowl, which degenerated into threats of war and saw the Konkomba man sever a finger. The next day the Konkomba man’s son shot the Nanumba man, sparking mass fighting on January 31\textsuperscript{st} in Nanun. After three days the conflict
reached Dagomba & Gonja areas where it spread to a total of seven districts, occurring largely in rural areas outside of army-protected district capitals. This saw, among other atrocities, Dagomba kill or drive away the 5,000 Konkomba in Tamale, Konkomba burn almost all majority settlements along the 70km Yendi-Bimbilla road, and Gonja destroy all Konkomba villages in West Gonja (survivors have never returned and are unwelcome according to successive Gonja chiefs).

Initial government efforts to end the conflict were largely ineffective, and the military were roundly accused of bias because of their slow response. The first effort to resolve the conflict was through the government’s Permanent Peace Negotiation Team, which failed to engage the general public and put the warring parties’ elites (themselves of questionable representative legitimacy) “under considerable pressure” to sign peace/ceasefire treaties. The PPNT failed to address underlying motives for conflict, and never published its findings from elite-level meetings. Consequently, fighting reignited in March 1995. This time quick military intervention contained the violence, but neither the government nor traditional peace ceremonies managed to resolve conflict motivations.

The most important attempt at reconciliation was the Kumasi Accord. Spearheaded by an NGO consortium, the Accord was the product of a series of multilateral consultations. It “aimed at creating consensus on the need for peace and reconciliation, building confidence among the warring ethnic communities, as well as searching for solutions to the outstanding issues of conflict underlying the wars.” The process started at the grassroots level and

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18 Jönsson, *Traditional Leadership and Ethnic Conflict in Ghana's Northern Region*, 19.
21 Jönsson, *Traditional Leadership and Ethnic Conflict in Ghana's Northern Region*, 19.
23 Talton, *Politics of Social Change in Ghana*, 175.
moved up. Having initially met with members of different ethnic groups to understand their grievances, the consortium picked out “bridge builders”; those individuals with the most moderate views of their enemies. These bridge builders managed to find common ground on how to approach peace-building and to recruit increasing numbers of community members for further meetings. This expanded the scope of the meetings, such that the discussion of harms felt, self-criticism, the development of a sense of shared losses and the pursuit of mutual-interest reconciliations (e.g. market and school repairs) all played a role. They eventually drew in the groups’ most radical elements, including Youth Associations, lawyers, politicians and chiefs. The consortium created a “non-coercive” forum in which the Accord was written. Following a month’s public consultation the final version was signed.

The agreements which comprised the Accord concerned land disputes, leadership disputes and reconciliation promises. The land agreements made little change to the status quo, while the reconciliation agreements focused on vague promises to decrease ethnic discrimination and the potential for violence. The most interesting of the agreements were those over leadership disputes. Of greatest significance is the agreement that satisfied the major Konkomba grievance regarding political/traditional inequality that underlay the war. This was the Dagomba’s agreement to confer paramount chieftaincy upon the Konkomba.

However, the post-conflict situation has not seen this materialise, and yet still peace has remained intact. While there is some difference of interpretation over the precise outcomes

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26 Youth Associations are important political actors, mobilising the public and amassing arms prior to the 1994 conflict. It is a misnomer; it is a conduit for members of the general public outside of the traditional elite to get involved in political affairs.


28 E.g. reducing arms; easing movement restrictions; lessening provocative acts/utterances/publications; not blaming criminal acts on entire ethnic groups; identifying provocative individuals; teaching values of peaceful coexistence, and; demonstrating “absolute good faith, sincerity and commitment to peace.” See ”Appendix 5: Text of the Kumasi Peace Accord,” 60.
that have followed the Accord,\textsuperscript{29} it is clear that the Konkomba did not receive political equality through paramount chieftaincy. While they have been granted “paramountcy status,” it is purely “nominal.”\textsuperscript{30} Essentially, when the Konkomba chief was elevated the four majority paramount chiefs “were raised to the status of kings” in order to avoid ‘disequilibrium in the system,’ thus negating the effect of elevating the Konkomba chief and leaving the issue of political insubordination unresolved.\textsuperscript{31} Furthermore, the Konkomba never received their paramountcy seat in the Northern Regional House of Chiefs, apparently owing to a “lack of space and chairs.”\textsuperscript{32} These developments have actually served to further entrench their traditional subordination; not only are the traditional authority figures unchanged – now they are kings.

Because of the importance of chieftaincy disputes in causing the war, the direct way in which these were addressed in the Accord and the unequivocal nature of the Accord’s clauses, the fact that minority paramount chieftaincy positions have not materialised leaves open the question of how peace has remained.

Literature review

\textit{The shortcomings of general ethnic conflict theory}

The theoretical literature seeks generally applicable explanations of and solutions to ethnic conflicts. Interestingly, the Ghanaian peace does not fit the expectations of two canonical general models of ethnic conflict. This suggests that studying the Ghanaian

\textsuperscript{29} Talton and the Odotei Foundation state the Konkomba do not have a paramount chief, while Awedoba claims they have been given three (though this was not desired as it splits their power). See both: “List of Paramount Chiefs Northern Region,” Irene K. Odotei Foundation, http://www.chieftaincy.org/index.php/paramount/20-paramount-nr and A. K. Awedoba, \textit{Ethnographic Study of Northern Ghanaian Conflicts: Towards a Sustainable Peace} (Accra, Ghana: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2010).

\textsuperscript{30} Jönsson, \textit{Traditional Leadership and Ethnic Conflict in Ghana’s Northern Region}, 29.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
example may be fruitful for exposing a particular set of conditions under which ethnic conflict is ended.

While our case fits Horowitz’s definition of a ranked relationship, with only one set of groups possessing legitimately recognised elites, it is interestingly anomalous when it comes to his expectations for the results of violent destabilisation in such a system. The goal which motivated the conflict in 1994, the “horizontalization of previously vertical relationships,” is “perhaps the most likely of the changes ranked systems can undergo” through revolutionary action. Importantly, Horowitz expects that once change has begun “rarely will it be possible, without the application of considerable coercion [violence], to maintain a system of ethnic stratification.” Interestingly, the war for horizontalization in 1994 neither ended with surrender under coercion nor distinct changes to the system of ethnic stratification. The Konkombas’ social and political status remained subordinate to the Dagombas’ in the traditional political arena. And so, contrary to Horowitz’s expectations, in the absence of violent coercion both the Konkomba’s disdain about their subordinate status – which instigated the war for social change – and the structural hierarchy that inspired this disdain continue to exist.

This invites the question: why did ethnic conflict end in the northern region of Ghana? The system of stratification was maintained after the process of social change had begun but without the application of considerable coercion towards the subordinated groups. Ghana apparently characterises Horowitz’s “rare” case, whereby the near inevitable movement from initial social unrest to actual social change is stunted by something other than violent

34 Ibid., 35.
35 “Considerable coercion” means violence; he uses the example of the killing of Hutu to maintain order in Burundi.
37 What military intervention did occur was fleeting, and the rural areas where fighting was heaviest were generally outside of its reach.
containment. This rare case barely figures in Horowitz’s musings in *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (which, bar these excerpts, focuses almost exclusively on “ethnic groups that do not stand in a ranked relation to each other”), and yet its existence provides an investigative opportunity to broaden our understanding of the range of conditions and occurrences that can defuse ethnic conflict. Is it the case that opposition to the ranking system was contained or even eliminated, such that the system regained the legitimacy and power of deference that it had previously had over subordinate groups? Or, alternatively, has the original stratification system lost significance because of the increased importance of other political/economic structures, changes in interpersonal relationships between ethnic group members, changes in discriminatory practices and prohibitions, changes in the intensity of ethnic ascriptions, and/or the involvement of a more powerful third-party? This latter question is particularly interesting; if any of these are accurate then nuances may be revealed about the conditions necessary to overcome social/political insubordinate violence in ranked ethnic systems.

Gurr’s analysis of what caused ethnic warfare to wane in the 1990s also fails to encompass the Ghanaian case. He attributes this general wane to states turning towards what he calls the “new regime.” Such states display three core features: the protection of minority rights to non-discrimination, self-governance and self-determination; the provision of democratic institutions that enable the pursuit of collective interests, and; the settling of disputes through negotiation and mutual accommodation (whether instigated by coercion or diplomacy). Unfortunately, laments Gurr, “a depressingly long list of states and ethnic movements that reject… [the new regime’s] principles will challenge it violently.” For Gurr, the combined application of these principles is necessary if we are to see prolonged ethnic peace; for example, in the absence of a history of policies of ethnic accommodation,

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40 Ibid., 61.
Indonesia’s democratic transition alone was unable to prevent ethnic resistance (it lacked the other necessary features of the new regime). The resolution of Ghana’s ethnic conflicts does not, however, follow this rubric. Of the three elements of Gurr’s new regime, the Ghanaian case can only be seen to have guaranteed one; the development of democratic institutions. The Accord’s promises to elevate minority groups to positions of self-governance have not been realised. Correspondingly, though their dispute was settled by mutual accommodation, the agreed upon reforms were not carried through, such that this feature of the new regime is absent also. Why, then, would the worst affected minority groups place the value of negotiations above the value of warfare? While in Chechnya “neither side gained much that could not have been won through negotiations before the Russian tanks rolled,” in Ghana the process of negotiation has not achieved anything meaningful in terms of self-determination and collective rights. What is curious, then, is that Ghana has not descended into prolonged ethnic violence as Gurr would predict. What, then, can explain this prolonged peace where there should be war? Out of the three necessary features of the new regime Ghana exemplifies only one: the development of democratic institutions. Is this alone capable of defusing ethnic conflict (contrary to the expectation of Gurr’s three-part model)?

*Current scholarship on ethnic conflict in Ghana*

Current assessments of peace in Ghana are unable to explain its paradoxical nature following the failure to implement the Accord. Many scholars have concluded that the potential for conflict continues to exist through dormant but salient grievances, and that it will stay this way until traditional institutions are reformed. This, however, is an assumption too far.

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41 Ibid., 60.
Kaye and Beland’s analysis is a good example of the confusion in the current literature that is generated by the coexistence of failed peace measures and lasting peace. They praise the peace-building process for using conflict resolution and transformation strategies to generate interdependence, encourage responsibility-taking, and emphasise chieftaincy structures’ functions of cohesion and stability while infusing them with modern values of equality.\(^{42}\) Having praised the structure of the process Kaye and Beland detail that interview “respondents reveal[ed] that the issue of Konkomba paramountcy remains problematic” with “issues of land and chieftaincy… remain[ing] in flux.”\(^{43}\) Accordingly, they claim, “institutional reforms are necessary to address embedded inequalities that maintain cycles of violence.”\(^{44}\) Further they suggest that adversarial relationships have not been sufficiently blunted (perhaps due to the dissolution of the Accord’s cross-ethnic Youth Association); while ‘those who took part in the processes came out changed people,’ respondents from the general public “indicate that NGO responses failed to provide adequate peace education in order to bring these changes to the conflict communities.”\(^{45}\)

This claim that the northern region is stuck in a cycle of violence is, however, unfounded. Regardless of the lack of progress made toward peace-keeping goals the conflict has not reignited. Kaye and Beland assume that the lack of change in terms of inter-ethnic relations automatically entails a problematic and dormant antagonism between them. This is a projection; it does not heed the possibility that though these inter-ethnic cracks still exist they are no longer salient enough politically to generate conflict.

According to Jönsson a combination of the peace negotiation process, “negative experiences of conflict, changing patterns of block mobilisation, increasing Konkomba


\(^{43}\) Ibid., 190, 93.

\(^{44}\) Ibid., 194.

\(^{45}\) Ibid., 191, 95.
political participation and Ghana’s current era of stability and economic improvement have all decreased the perceived desirability and viability of violent change.”\textsuperscript{46} However, for Jönsson, as for Kaye, this still only papers over the cracks, because “basic [conflict] risk factors, such as... neo-traditional institutions and the ethnic exclusiveness of these institutions, have not been resolved.”\textsuperscript{47} In spite of identifying numerous plausible ways conflict motives may have diminished, Jönsson maintains two assumptions that undermine them; first, that the basic risk factor of chieflessness remains just as salient as always (even in dormancy), and second that this risk factor exists in a vacuum where the only way to diminish its saliency is to tend to it directly (by, say, providing representation in traditional institutions). The problem here is that Jönsson assumes that those numerous developments which have decreased the desirability of violent change since the Accord have not affected the saliency of original grievances precisely because they do not directly appease initial grievances (as, say, the Accord attempted to). As such, these grievances remain dormant and dangerous. This investigation will illustrate how an indirect resolution of grievances is plausible.

Wienia describes the peace as an “ominous calm.”\textsuperscript{48} According to him there are “two halves” to the clauses of the Kumasi Accord, one aimed at the “prevention of violence” and the other at “consensually solving the conflict issues.”\textsuperscript{49} The former has been largely carried out and ensured “calm”, but the latter has not such that “unity” has not been achieved.\textsuperscript{50} He worries that “the mechanisms triggering previous episodes of violence have not been cleared.”\textsuperscript{51} However, he believes that if “tolerance” replaces the “consensus” based approach

\textsuperscript{46} Jönsson, \textit{Traditional Leadership and Ethnic Conflict in Ghana's Northern Region}, 5.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 38.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 191.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 2.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 188.
of the Accord then this ominous calm could be transformed into lasting peace.\textsuperscript{52} According to Wienia, signs already show that “political competition and moral disapproval may have produced a peace which appears to be pretty robust” and consequently claims that “you don’t have to agree in order to live in peace.”\textsuperscript{53} Thus, unlike Kaye and Jönsson, Wienia accepts that the counterintuitive peace does not necessarily mean that conflict has to be lying in a dormant state. Rather, he leaves open, though does not investigate, the possibility that the process of achieving permanent peace may have begun \textit{indirectly} through attacking the symptoms of violence rather than the cause.

Talton’s approach is refreshingly different. He sees lasting peace as a result of a combination of the Konkomba achieving economic autonomy and political representation through democratic institutions, as well as the lessening importance of ethnicity for identity and political mobilisation.\textsuperscript{54} Talton is able to make this conclusion by taking a rationalist approach; ethnicity has little symbolic importance independent of its usefulness as a mechanism for group mobilisation in the pursuit of political legitimacy. Accordingly, despite being “stifled” in the traditional realm he claims that the opportunity for achieving political legitimacy was not lost for the Konkomba.\textsuperscript{55} Increased representation in democratic institutions could, and perhaps has, provided the platform on which they can achieve political legitimacy and “render their traditional status largely irrelevant.”\textsuperscript{56} Thus, Talton sees liberal democratic developments as capable of neutralising grievances that others have assumed lie

\begin{footnotes}
\item Ibid., 195, 91.
\item Ibid., 195.
\item Talton also refers to the spread of Christianity as having provided the Konkomba with “a means of identification beyond ethnicity” post-1994 and thus providing some level of emancipation from ethnic troubles. I find this argument unconvincing for a couple of reasons. First, Christianity was fairly widespread in northern minority groups before the 1994 war. Second, it has not gained strategic/political significance in this time and there are no incentives to attach more cultural significance to this over ethnicity. Nonetheless, it may still be a contributing factor to the lessening saliency of ethnicity; for example, Talton points to churches acting as a “community of support.” Unfortunately, I have not been able to find significant other research on the subject to complement Talton’s claims. Talton, \textit{Politics of Social Change in Ghana}, 191.
\item Ibid., 146.
\item Ibid., 181.
\end{footnotes}
If traditional institutions do not have sacred irreplaceable importance then grievances need not necessarily be directly solved. Instead they may be indirectly resolvable by appealing to more general interests.

Unfortunately, focusing predominantly on analysis of early developments during “power and authority under colonial rule,” Talton does not address certain counterpoints or contemporary factors. Both Owusu-Mensah and Jönsson claim that there are powers and status-benefits that are still unique to chieftaincy institutions, challenging the idea that representation via modern democratic institutions will satisfy the Konkomba. For Owusu-Mensah “chieftaincy in Ghana is the custodian of customary values and norms… it occupies the vacuum created by the modern partisan politics,” while for Jönsson chiefs hold a unique role in running community development projects and are the “link between state and people, representing their people symbolically… rather than democratically.” In this investigation we will consider the ways in which chieftaincy may have lost its significance in these departments during the development of Ghana’s new national political landscape.

Furthermore, Talton does little to causally identify how these mechanisms might manifest themselves. His methodological approach does not provide the analytical rigor one would expect considering his rationalist approach, relying heavily on interviews to gauge “popular historical memory.” While not without value this approach fails to effectively assess the structure of institutions and political incentives. Consequently he does not contemplate the way in which his conclusions could have a significant impact on the structure of the political landscape. This investigation aims to rectify this serious shortcoming.

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57 Ibid., 12.
59 Jönsson, Traditional Leadership and Ethnic Conflict in Ghana's Northern Region, 22.
60 Talton, Politics of Social Change in Ghana, 12-13.
concluding remarks of this investigation I return to consider the problems this creates for Talton’s claims, as well as how my investigation has been able to overcome these.

Theory

A falsifiable approach

There are two types of peace that could describe the Ghanaian case. On the one hand, the antagonisms responsible for conflict could be lying indefinitely dormant, unresolved and volatile. On the other, these antagonisms could have somehow been resolved indirectly, i.e. without the demands that characterise grievances being directly satiated. The former, as has been shown, is the prevailing view of existing scholarship on the subject. This perspective is, however, logically tenuous because it avoids addressing the central paradox of how conflict has not re-erupted even though the peace accord has failed. The claim that conflict is dormant is an unscientific and empirically unviable conclusion because it is an unobservable and untestable hypothesis. As there is no way to directly falsify this hypothesis there is equally no way to unreservedly prove it correct without investigating alternate, empirically sound hypotheses. The parallel alternative to the dormancy argument is an inductive claim; since peace has existed since 1995 peace will continue to exist indefinitely. Equally, the only way to support the dormancy argument is to claim the existence of an as of yet unknown catalyst that can reignite conflict, and that until this appears the dormant grievances will not have any observable impact.

The only way to address this empirical shortfall in the current literature is to hypothesise that the current peace in Ghana exists because the conflict has been resolved. The argument that conflict is dormant leaves open the question of whether, despite not being addressed directly due to the failure of the peace accord, the salience of the issues underlying the
conflict might have been reduced *indirectly* by events after the conflict. Talton takes this approach, claiming that representation in democratic institutions has indirectly resolved grievances about traditional institutional subordination. However, his claims are hampered by a lack of clear evidential demonstration of causal mechanisms. Refining and operationalizing his vague claims into causal hypotheses offers an empirical opportunity that conflict-dormancy arguments do not: it is empirically and scientifically viable. If it is proved correct we have determined that conflict is not dormant because it has been resolved by means external to the peace accord, and if it is proved incorrect we provide some weight to the conflict dormancy arguments that their purely speculative approach cannot itself provide.

*The theory to be tested*

Based on the limitations of current scholarship the following theory will be tested: the reason the Peace Accord’s failure has not reignited war is because it is possible to indirectly resolve the grievances that underlie past conflict. The key qualifier here is that the solution is *indirect*. This means that it was not necessary for the Accord to provide solutions that matched the causes of subordination; i.e. it was not necessary to alleviate the grievances associated with being subordinated in the traditional sphere by providing adequate representation in the traditional sphere. I will investigate the possibility that the development of political parties in the new democratic environment has satisfied a general interest in accessing political resources.

Thus, the following hypotheses will be tested (where H2 specifies H1):

*H1: grievances over specific types of historical subjugation, such as subordination in traditional politics, can be overcome or resolved via indirect means*
Chapter 1

H2: political parties in a multi-party democracy can resolve an ethnic group’s specific historical grievances by satisfying a general interest in access to political resources

An assumption inherent in H1 and H2’s focus on indirect solutions will also be investigated:

H3: ethnic affiliation in Ghana’s northern minority groups is salient only as a tool for achieving political aims and does not have ascriptive, symbolic and irreplaceable political significance.

Proposed contribution to knowledge

According to Reiter, “we know relatively little about how wars end, in contrast to the mountain ranges of ideas and scholarship we have about how wars start.”61 The theoretical literature on ethnic conflict and how it ends typically focuses on finding predictable thematic similarities between cases; what usually causes wars, and what usually stops them? However, this approach is not theoretically exhaustive, as it is also essential that policymakers “understand how to end the wars that their nations have become involved in.”62 Taken alone the approach that seeks to understand the majority of cases risks overlooking the informative value of the abnormal case; what if there are uncommon ways in which wars can be ended? Simply because they are not observed in the majority of cases does not entail that pragmatic insights from them are not transferable. As the success of attempts to end wars depends on real policy choices, the study of an unusual case, like Ghana’s, is important; it may provide otherwise unrecognised pragmatic insights that can inform post-war policy choices. This is particularly important because the Ghanaian case may show how to navigate the problem in a way that other states have failed to. If a form of democratic representation can alleviate

62 Ibid., 2.
grievances based on traditional insubordination by appealing to a broader interest in political equality then this can be upheld as a model of policymaking excellence rather than seen as an idiosyncratic, outlying and unpredictable anomaly. Ghana is the “rare” case identified by Horowitz, and often overlooked in favour of more common cases, but it is full of possible insights that may hold the keys to finding peace in a minefield of possible ways back to war.

Research design (methodology)

In order to determine whether democratic political parties are responsible for the long peace in Ghana, this study must determine the amount of focus placed upon these organisations over time. This is a thus a time-series study looking at developments from 1994 (when the war broke out) to the present. It is not possible to gain information on the ethnic background of Members of Parliament or of local government bodies. As such, the centrality and importance of democratic institutions in the political lives of minority elites/public and those of the general population at large will be operationalized by measuring the level of interest in, and focus on, becoming represented in democratic institutions. It will do so by investigating:

1. The extent to which elites have re-oriented their political mobilisation towards achieving democratic representation through political parties
2. The extent to which elites and the public have changed their perspective on where it is important to be represented, placing less emphasis on traditional institutions.
3. Whether elites have put less resources over time towards achieving representation in traditional institutions

While I do have some research contacts in Ghana these sorts of ethnicity-specific records are simply unavailable.
4. Changes in the prominence of particular political elites; have elites with institutional focuses and personal backgrounds different to those of chiefs gained prominence or been created anew (e.g. elected educated professionals)?

5. Whether the general public is politically satisfied by democratic representation

These will be measured using a number of different sources. Data from non-governmental Civil Society Organisations (such as the Ghana Center for Democratic Development and the Afrobarometer) will be used to determine the level of public interest in democratic representation and institutions, the expectations the public has of their MPs, their level of satisfaction, and more. I will also carry out qualitative analysis of contemporary and historical literature, from political scientists and historians, which looks at developments in the traditional and democratic spheres and relations between ethnic group members over time. Furthermore, I will extensively employ theoretical models from political science literature to interpret the mechanisms discovered and reach clear conclusions.

In terms of limitations, this study will lack the ability to explain what will predictably happen in other cases (i.e. external validity). However, this is not its aim; rather, it seeks to understand the particular circumstances that need to be present for certain sorts of variables to have an effect. As mentioned earlier, this gives it a possible pragmatic usage in terms of illuminating an unusual success story and the corresponding conditions for its success. If elements of this success are general enough as to be transferable then these could prove useful in post-conflict reconciliation policymaking procedures. Another limitation is in the limited sources available. With few records available online and few media and civil society publications written on an area of Ghana that is predominantly rural and underdeveloped, I will rely mostly on secondary academic sources. I am also restricted in terms of not having the material resources to conduct my own empirical research.
2. Evaluating and applying theories of peace building after ethnic conflict

The theoretical literature on the circumstances and institutions which are most conducive to securing peaceful relations between groups is instructive for two reasons. First, it identifies mechanisms which, if present in a particular case (such as Ghana), could explain peace. Second, if these mechanisms are not present in Ghana this provides an opportunity to probe alternative mechanisms for explaining peace. This unearths plausible ways in which democratic representation can secure peace, which in turn guides the empirical analysis of Ghana that follows in chapter 3.

According to Lake and Rothchild “information failures, problems of credible commitment, and the security dilemma” make groups attempting to reach a negotiated peace settlement apprehensive, insecure and vulnerable to polarisation by ethnic activists.\(^1\) They claim that these issues will likely lead to renewed conflict unless their recommended mechanisms are put in place. Of particular interest to the Ghanaian case is the problem of credible commitment. Here the smaller group in a peace negotiation needs assurances that the more powerful group will not renege on its promises at a later date; if these are not forthcoming then continuation of war may feel safer than trusting the other group’s word. “Power-sharing, elections engineered to produce the interdependence of groups, and the establishment of regional autonomy and federalism” are, according to Lake and Rothchild, key mechanisms that can prevent such a regression to war, and all were absent in Ghana.\(^2\)

With the relevant safeguards absent in Ghana, groups had good reason to suspect that others would renege on the articles of their peace agreement. They would have been correct as the agreement was not kept. Furthermore, Ghana suffered from the continued existence of

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\(^2\) Ibid., 42.
divisive ethnic activists, in the form of ethnic Youth Associations, which according to Lake and Rothchild should accelerate “the vicious cycle of ethnic fear and violence.” Yet in spite of all this ethnic conflict has not reignedited. Part of the reason that Lake and Rothchild’s account does not encompass the Ghanaian case is because of its narrow focus on the security aspects of ethnic conflict, i.e. the extent to which a fear of imminent or potential violent attack exists. By choosing not to discuss the range of grievances that groups may have towards each other, they overlook the possibility of finding peace via interest satisfaction and the diminishing saliency of ethnic identity rather than via credible security promises. Furthermore, when an agreement to rectify ethnic grievances in Ghana was broken a return to war did not occur. This suggests that we need to look beyond the scope of post-war negotiations and their outcomes in order to find a cause of peace in Ghana.

Stedman and Rothchild claim that the mediation and implementation of negotiated settlements has a dual purpose; to end war and structure future relations to “facilitate a transition to what Adam Przeworski calls a ‘self-enforcing’ regime” whereby all parties gladly submit “to the uncertain interplay of the institutions.” This idea of a self-enforcing regime could help to explain why groups have remained civil towards each other in Ghana; i.e. by finding safety and satisfaction in their institutional environment. This is where democratic institutions may play a role; the institutions themselves may be able to structure political life in such a way that the salience of a grievance about insubordination in the traditional sphere loses importance.

But are the mechanisms which Stedman and Rothchild describe for achieving this sort of self-enforcing regime apparent in Ghana? The first of these are confidence-building measures (CBMs), which seek to assure groups that their adversary “is trustworthy and its intentions

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^3 Ibid., 53, 55.
benign” through “small, transparent mutual tests of commitment, supported by third-party verification of compliance and common forums where the parties can discuss their behaviour, motivations and perceptions.”\(^5\) The Kumasi Peace Accord and accompanying peacemaking process overseen by the NGO consortium are insufficient because “rhetorical commitments to peace… cannot be regarded as CBMs” since they only pronounce and do not prove benign intent.\(^6\) The second mechanism they identify is political security-building measures, such as “competitive election systems,” which can lessen insecurity among political minorities.\(^7\) Interestingly, they state that if these measures are not arrived at during post-conflict negotiation then there is “a high probability that serious conflict will emerge… when the accords are put into effect.”\(^8\) Competitive elections were instigated in Ghana completely separately to the peace process, and yet violence did not resurface in the peace implementation phase. This gives us probable cause to ask whether these could be indirectly responsible for peaceful relations.

Finally, Rothchild, in his major work *Managing Ethnic Conflict in Africa*, claims that majoritarian democracies (or “polyarchies”) allow for the articulation of interests in terms that are amenable to pragmatic negotiation, “creating the most propitious circumstances for conflict management” through mechanisms that enable “constructive competition.”\(^9\) While democracies “emphasize the negotiable and less complex dimension of divergent economic interests”\(^10\) through their bargaining culture, in hegemonic regimes non-negotiable identity-based grievances are tangled up with negotiable ones in a way that incites conflict.\(^11\) As such, “whether an ethnically related group acts like any other interest group, competing in the

\(^{5}\) Ibid., 29, 18-19.
\(^{6}\) Ibid., 30-31.
\(^{7}\) Ibid., 31.
\(^{8}\) Ibid.
\(^{10}\) This does require that the competition between groups is based on distribution, as is the case in northern Ghana, rather than fundamental disagreements in belief system
Chapter 2

marketplace for publicly controlled resources, is therefore likely to reflect the structural incentives and reciprocal perceptions that prevail in each situation.”  

This leads Rothchild to claim that “polyarchic... regimes are processors rather than makers of demands” which “channel social conflict along predetermined paths.”  

However, for this to be possible a series of polyarchical “trust-promoting” mechanisms need to be installed to give “elites a reason to prefer moderate behaviour” and engage in consistently cooperative action. There are four such mechanisms, and unless all of these are instigated as a package Rothchild claims that the benefits of the majoritarian democratic system will be unrealised and uncooperative behaviour will continue. These mechanisms include: proportional allocation of developmental resources; electoral arrangements to ensure broad minority participation in decision-making and representation (such as regional vote thresholds for presidency elections or proportional representation with diverse candidate lists); power-sharing at the centre (e.g. coalition-building), and; decentralisation or regional autonomy (to devolve powers and make controlling the centre less pressing). While Ghana has pursued some decentralisation and its parties (particularly the NDC) have sought to allocate resources based on need rather than group affiliation, it certainly lacks both electoral arrangements to enhance minority participation and power-sharing mechanisms. That two of Rothchild’s four so called essential conditions for encouraging ethnic groups to act cooperatively are absent in Ghana and yet dangerous uncooperative behaviour has not continued suggests that the political interests of aggrieved ethnic groups may have been somehow altered.

This calls into question Rothchild’s claim that democracy’s success is in its ability to turn conflict between groups into discussion and negotiation between those same groups, and that it does this by channelling existing interests down constructive pathways without

12 Ibid.
13 Ibid., 43, 44.
14 Ibid., 50.
substantially altering the content, potency or vehicle of those group interests. A feasible alternative is that the substantive content of political affiliation and association has been changed in the democratic context from being ethnically-focused to party-focused. This can explain why peace remains in Ghana in spite of a lack of trust-forming mechanisms because these become unnecessary when ethnic identities are no longer primary in the political sphere. It seems plausible that democracy can be said to have separated ethnic competition from resource competition, such that elites now compete predominantly along party lines instead of ethnic lines when attempting to achieve representation and when carrying out their representative duties of resource negotiation. If this is the case, democratic institutions have defused inter-ethnic competition rather than become a mechanism for its being played out in a particular way. They may have, then, not channelled interests as Rothchild claims but instead provided the context in which different sorts of groups with different sorts of interest focuses will dominate the political landscape and play a primary role in the political lives of persons (i.e. parties above ethnic groups). Because elected elites in a majoritarian regime rely on achieving broader support than any other candidate, and because conflict-prone essentialist outlooks may destabilise the system, “state elites have an incentive to view intergroup relations in more pragmatic terms.” Thus political elites will choose to act through cooperative and broadly-defined forms of association (i.e. parties) to achieve greatest gains in political support and economic rents. For example, elites are more likely to engage in economic redistribution to the “less advantaged ethnoregions of their country,” a policy which would be in the interests of minority ethnic groups in Ghana’s north. As Bates notes, ‘ethnic groups persist… largely because of their capacity to extract goods and services from the modern sector’; if the mechanisms are not in place to make this possible, and ethnic

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15 Ibid., 42.
16 Ibid., 44.
tensions do not re-emerge, then we need to ask which alternative forms of association are being used to extract these services.\(^\text{17}\)

Have political parties filled this void in Ghana, and in so doing both satisfied minority desires for representation and generated cross-cutting cleavages which diminish the saliency of ethnic difference?

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 75.
3. Testing the party-based theory of inter-ethnic peace in Ghana

Fourth time lucky: introducing Ghana’s democratic success story

Before launching into a discussion of whether democratic parties are causal of peaceful relations in northern Ghana, it is worth recognising that I am certainly not the first person to look for reasons to praise Ghana’s Fourth Republic. After three short lived democratic administrations in 1960-64, 1969-72 and 1979-81, in 1992 democracy finally began to find its footing in Ghana, and 23 years later it is still going strong. The republic has managed to avoid blurring the line between state and party, having experienced two peaceful turnovers in power (in 2000 and 2008) and developed a highly competitive two-party system composed of the socially democratic National Democratic Congress and the free-market focused New Patriotic Party (for example, in 2008 the election was so closely fought that the winner of the first round lost in the second). As Gyimah-Boadi puts it, Ghana “has enjoyed vast improvements in the quality of each successive election under its Fourth Republic,” with the Electoral Commission solidifying itself as a non-partisan arbiter, media and human rights freedoms expanding “from one election to the next,” and voter turnout consistently sitting above 70%.1 Violence surrounding the elections has been minimal (more on this later), even during the tense court challenge that followed the narrow victory of NDC candidate John Dramani Mahama by 0.7 percentage points.2 The NPP claimed that “over-voting had occurred,” and after more than eight months considering this challenge the Supreme Court decided to uphold the result.3 Encouragingly, this decision was peacefully accepted by the NPP who “urged supporters against resorting to violent forms of protest.”4 Praised for its

4 “The 2012 General Election in Ghana,” 333.
stability, balance and competitiveness, here I attempt to discover whether Ghana’s democracy has had an unanticipated pacifying effect on ethnic conflict.

**Why is democracy a compelling source of peace in Ghana’s north?**

Having identified party political affiliation as a plausible mechanism of peacekeeping in chapter 2, we will see if it can be applied to Ghana with analyses of voting behaviour, attitudes towards democracy, leadership style preferences, the strength of party affiliation, and how meaningful party affiliation is to Ghanaians. The more meaningful and central it is in Ghanaian political life the more convincing it is that democratic party politics have alleviated grievances about under-representation in the traditional sphere.

On a general note, in their study of voting behaviour Lindberg and Morrison find that only one in ten Ghanaian voters are “decisively influenced by either clientelism or ethnic and family ties,” with around 85-90% of people voting on “mature” evaluative grounds by critically appraising party/leader capabilities, promises and track records.\(^5\) Thus, only a small proportion exchange “political support for personalized favours and benefits” or “follow the lead of a close family or kin [e.g. ethnic group] without further reflection.”\(^6\)

In order to understand whether party politics holds central importance in the politico-economic public lives of citizens we first need to ask how much general interest there is in a democratic system. Results from Afrobarometer surveys will be used extensively here to illustrate political attitudes.\(^7\) First, consider this question asking respondents which of the following is closest to their view: (a) we should choose our leaders in this country through regular, open and honest elections, or; (b) since elections sometimes produce bad results, we

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\(^6\) Ibid., 102, 03.

\(^7\) "Afrobarometer Data: Ghana, Rounds 1-5,” (1999-2012).
should adopt other methods for choosing this country’s leaders. In essence, this question asks respondents whether democratic or non-democratic leadership is most important and legitimate to them. Based on Ghana’s past experiences, the latter of these would refer to either one-party military rule or traditional chiefly leadership. In the 2002-03 survey of the NR 74% of people preferred the democratic choice of their leaders; by the 2010-12 survey this had risen to 94% (and 98% for the Konkomba NR minority ethnic group specifically), above the national average of 92%. How does this finding relate to the curious long peace between the NR’s ethnic groups? This suggests that NR inhabitants are growing more and more satisfied with the leaders they elect. It is possible, then, that democratic representation has alleviated grievances of insubordination and lacking representation in traditional politics.

Further supporting this is another question asking respondents which of these statements is closest to their view: (a) since elected leaders should represent everyone, they should not do anything that favours their own group over others, or; (b) once in office, elected leaders are obliged to help their home community or group first. In the 2002-03 survey 58% of northern region respondents agreed that leaders should represent all equally, with 36% believing they have an obligation to help their kin first and foremost. By the 2010-12 survey this had changed, with 89% of respondents preferring equitable representation and only 9% in support of kin preference. This is more striking when broken down further. While 29% strongly agreed that kin should hold preferential status in 2002-03, this figure plummeted to 2% by 2010-12. So what does this tell us about the northern region? While the question regarding leadership-type preference showed us that Ghanaians prefer democratic leaders, it did not tell us the sort of relationship they expect to have with their representatives. Here we

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8 Data from earlier rounds are, unfortunately, not disaggregated broadly enough to include statistics on the Konkomba, making a comparison impossible

9 A slightly different version of these options were given in the earlier surveys: (a) since everyone is equal under the law, leaders should not favour their own family or group, or (b) once in office, leaders are obliged to help their own family or group.
can see that persons are ever more interested in their democratic representatives treating them as it is their mandate to do – as part of their equal duty to all their constituents – than as a form of client in a patron-client relationship. This is important for two reasons. First, it shows that a commitment to a democratic style of leadership has followed an increasing interest in democratic representation; it is not simply a proxy or conduit for the perpetuation of neopatrimonial relationships. Second, it illustrates that Ghanaians are capable of adapting their expectations of their leaders to new circumstances; in this case, adapting from traditional patronage relationships at the local level and authoritarian rule at the national level to equitable democratic relationships at both levels. Thus, it is feasible that minority groups, aggrieved about under-representation, could have adapted their expectations for representation to the style available to them; i.e. democratic representation.

So far it has been established that northern Ghanaians have an interest in equal representation via democratically elected leaders, and that this may be capable of defusing grievances about under-representation in the traditional sphere. However, the increase in individual support for a particular set of institutions and attached values does not itself entail a change in what constitutes the predominant and most socio-politically salient unit of collective association (i.e. from ethnicity to party). As already explained, my theory requires this to be the case.

So, how close do northern Ghanaians feel to their political parties? Significantly close according to the Afrobarometer. The average proportion of people during 1999-2012 that feel close to a political party is 63% nationally, 69% in the NR, 65% for the majority Dagomba ethnic group, and 62% for the minority Konkomba. Furthermore, in the 2002-03 survey 48% of party-affiliated Ghanaians claimed they felt very close to their party. By 05-06 this had increased to 62%. These figures are even more significant for the northern region specifically, where 53% in 02-03 and 69% in 05-06 felt very close to their party. These
observations establish that a distinct majority of Ghanaians feel close to a political party, that a substantial number of these feel very close to a party, and that in the northern region as many – if not more – persons are close to a party, and very close to that party, than is the average across Ghana. Moreover, a two-party system has stabilised in Ghana, with affiliation to either the NDC or NPP applying to 92% of Ghanaians that feel close to a party and to 87% of NR constituents (where the NDC always gains a majority, but only once by a considerable margin). With less party fluctuation it is more likely that these parties will be able to develop a dedicated support-base.

Lindberg and Morrison ratify these claims about party affiliation in Ghana, finding a large proportion of voters to be core party supporters, and make interesting discoveries about the link between socioeconomic status and party affiliation in Ghana. On the former point, strong party affiliations are played out at the ballot box; approximately 80% of Ghanaians are part of a “core voting population” that will consistently vote for the same party.10 This contravenes the “commonplace view that African parties and voters are fluid.”11 Regarding the latter point, Lindberg and Morrison make two interesting and related conclusions. First, they find that “core and swing voters cannot be distinguished by structural criteria,” such that urban voters are not more likely to be core supporters than their rural counterparts.12 This reinforces the findings of the Afrobarometer, i.e. that rural voters (e.g. in the NR) are at least as close to national political parties as urban voters. Second, they find that core voters’ choice of alignment, on the other hand, can be understood in terms of structural criteria such as “the rural-urban divide, income, and occupation.”13 This indicates that party support appears to reflect commonplace Western connections between socioeconomic demographic features and

11 Ibid., 574.
12 Ibid., 566.
13 Ibid.
voting rationale. This connection, as we will see, is core to explaining the contemporary dominance of parties and their pacifying effect on previously warring northern region groups.

In order to understand the significance of these findings we need to qualitatively examine the party system in Ghana. What does party-affiliation mean to Ghanaians? Does party politics satisfy their interest in political representation and access to resources? And what makes voters align with particular parties? The fact that persons in the NR are at least as close to political parties as their compatriots around the country allows us to make inferences about NR citizens from observations about party affiliation in Ghana at large.

In a study of how political parties have developed and contributed to democratic consolidation in Ghana since independence, Morrison helps to explain how party affiliation has formed in Ghana by identifying methods adopted by the two main political parties to embed themselves as fixtures of Ghanaian political life. First, parties have gained political significance through their involvement in “political socialization,” providing basic information which citizens need to form opinions and determine who to vote for or identify with. Thus, parties “facilitate participation” by enabling persons to turn the things they care about into viable political opinions. This helps to socialise people into the party framework for decision-making because their opinions and demands are now inherently structured – or “package[d]” – in terms of policy preferences attached to party identities (adding weight to the idea that parties are the new vehicles for political representation, above ethnic groups). This process of socialization has been helped by the ideologically and organisationally “stable cleavages” of Ghana’s two main parties since independence in 1957; “political identity in Ghana has been formulated largely by the ideologies of the Nkrumahists and

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15 Ibid.
16 Ibid., 433.
Danquah-Busiasts,” the former championing populist state-centric socialist development and the latter liberal development and a market economy.\(^\text{17}\)

Second, both main parties have moved towards the middle-ground in an attempt to capture votes that may swing the tightly competitive elections their way; as such, “despite the perceived party differences among constituents, the manifestos and projects reveal more consistency in promoting Ghana as a community of unified purpose: economic development, progress, and liberal society.”\(^\text{18}\) Unity is particularly important here; the domination of Nkrumah’s (the first president of independent Ghana) vision of national unity “remains so compelling that it still sets the terms for contests,” such that a party approach that does not attempt to develop cross-cutting cleavages is considered “reprehensible.”\(^\text{19}\) That Ghanaian parties across the board promote identification with membership of a broad Ghanaian community adds weight to the plausibility that parties have diminished the social and political saliency of narrow ethnic affiliations; seeking to win elections on a parochial appeal to such communities is simply unacceptable. Furthermore, it is in the parties’ interests to “spread their tentacles broadly” to pick up as many undecided voters as possible, and in spite of a lower presence in rural areas like the NR parties have still gained significant support in far flung regions.\(^\text{20}\) Another tactic used to attract the broadest range of voters possible has been the creation and promotion of simple, powerful, and easy to consume party images. One method of doing this has been to highlight their distinctions in terms of leadership style; NDC leaders typically seek to appear as one of the people, while the NPP plays on their professional acumen and business qualifications. Because of the difficulty of developing broad party support across cleavages Ghanaian parties have often used “centralized personalism,” with their organisation reliant on simple but powerful ideological messages

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 422.
\(^{18}\) Ibid., 434.
\(^{19}\) Ibid., 433.
\(^{20}\) Ibid., 435.
attached to commanding leadership figures.\textsuperscript{21} For citizens used to the idea of strong chiefly leadership figures this would have been easier to digest.

But how have these tactical choices been disseminated to the population at large? The independent media has been key in the development of party support; private newspapers, radio, and television stations have been “major vehicles of public education and electioneering” since privatisation began in 1992.\textsuperscript{22} Of these, radio had the furthest reach into rural populations with nationwide coverage achieved by 1998.\textsuperscript{23} Media outlets have also independently grown into “remarkably successful independent sources” for detailed investigative political reports.\textsuperscript{24} The Electoral Commission and the National Commission on Civic Education also put out print, audio and video information to describe the electoral process and the civic rights of citizens, which has proved particularly useful for rural citizens.

In the light of these findings, we can return to Lindberg and Morrison’s discovery that structural socioeconomic features line up with party support in order to answer the following question: are voters actually voting based on socioeconomic structural features? There are certainly a number of reasons to think so. As Lindberg and Morrison note, the core support of the NDC is saturated by the majority of voters that live in rural areas (60%), are less-educated (55-58%), and work in unskilled labour (60%), while the NPP’s core support contains most of the voters that live in urban areas (64%), are highly educated (63%), and work in skilled labour (65%).\textsuperscript{25} The aggrieved northern region minority groups, such as the Konkomba, neatly fit the categorisation of an NDC voter; they are rural farming communities. While parties aim for simple and punchy images to increase their reach neither is entirely “catch-all” as they each have their own idiosyncratic socioeconomic focus. The NDC deliberately

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 433.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 437.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 433.
\textsuperscript{25} Lindberg and Morrison, "Exploring Voter Alignments in Africa: Core and Swing Voters in Ghana," 578, 80.
espouses itself as a “populist, working class and agrarian party” and has an historical association with redistributive economics, while the NPP is concerned with “protecting a free-market liberal state to advance [the] private commercial interests” of urban elites.26

In the light of this it does not seem that the concentration of particular socioeconomic classes/groups within the core support of specific parties is coincidental. First, we can see that each party’s image aims at capturing a particular socioeconomic support base. Second, we can see that their core supporters, those that will consecutively vote for the same party, do in fact predominantly come from these backgrounds. If the parties advertise themselves along simple socioeconomic lines, and the rural and urban public have become closely attached to these parties, the most logical explanation for this affiliation is that they associate with the dominant socioeconomic party image and vote based on these lines. Thus, socioeconomic status is of primary importance to Ghanaians in democratic decision-making.27 This is ratified by results from a forthcoming study which asks voters in poorer Ghanaian communities how important different considerations are when it comes to voting for their MP. The two things that these communities consider most important to them in deciding who to vote for are the candidates’ “ability to provide development projects directly” and their “ability to lobby for development projects for the constituency,” with 77% saying the former matters “to a large extent” and 84% the latter.28 These considerations are based on the particular socioeconomic needs of poorer communities; i.e. infrastructural development.

Therefore, not only do parties supply voters with choices in terms of socioeconomic development; voters themselves demand socioeconomic development from their ideal candidate. Thus, voters across the country, including in the northern region, look to their

26 Ibid., 577.
27 Ibid., 582.
democratic representatives to provide the resources that are most important to them. Democracy has opened up a new form of representation, one which is trusted with satisfying the dominant public facing interests of Ghanaians. Consequently, it is logical to conclude that the chiefly representation no longer holds the importance it once did. As will be elaborated in the next chapter’s analysis, this means that party-based participation can indirectly resolve grievances concerning political inequality in the traditional sphere. Furthermore, individuals are coming to associate themselves with groups beyond their ethnic particularities. As such, because fighting occurred in rural areas it is likely that new bonds of partisanship have developed between minority and majority groups, as the policies pursued by the NDC are in their shared interests. The generation of a broad party identity can encapsulate these previously warring factions under a banner of mutual socioeconomic interest.

How did parties come to be defined by socioeconomic identity?

So far we have seen that support for democratic party-focused representation is strong, that socioeconomic identity holds core political importance for Ghanaians, and that parties appear to define themselves along socioeconomic lines. This has given good reason to suspect that party-based representation has resolved ethnic grievances concerning under-representation by refocusing the lines along which political resources are accessed. However, two further avenues of investigation are necessary to make this explanation compelling.

First, precisely why parties have come to define themselves along socioeconomic as opposed to ethnic lines is not yet entirely clear; answering this question is an important part of illustrating the inseparable bond between party identity and socioeconomic identity and consequently the existence of a distinct alternative to ethno-political association. This requires showing just how parties were able to develop independently from the once considerable power of chiefs, and thus consequently why they did not become ethnically
defined in the way that traditional politics was (and as has been the case in many developing and developed nations). Second, in order to prove that party-based representation is able to satiate the interests underlying a desire for chiefly representation (and thus diminish grievances constitutive of inter-ethnic conflict) it is essential to show that parties compete to control the specific variety of resources that chiefs once held power over. If chiefs continue to maintain power over political resources which are untouchable by parties then the latter cannot have indirectly defused ethnic grievances over representation or managed to change the most politically salient identity from ethnic to socioeconomic association.

Both of these avenues of investigation require building an historical roadmap that charts the diminishing significance of chiefs and ethnic politics over time, as well as the increasing significance of socioeconomic identity in the new democratic landscape. This will illustrate how parties have been able to develop specifically socioeconomic identities and how they have gained access to the resources over which inter-ethnic conflict was fought. With this information it will be reasonable to claim that parties have eliminated the importance of outstanding ethnic grievances – and the political saliency of ethnicity in general – by making political competition based on socioeconomic identity the most conducive form of competition for achieving access to important resources. This adds weight to the central hypotheses of this study; that ethnic political organisation is salient only so far as it is useful for attaining political resources, and consequently that other forms of organisation (such as non-ethnic parties) can assume this role.

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Chapter 3

The diminishing role of chiefs and the rise of parties

Owusu outlines compelling reasons to think that changes in the control of economic resources in Ghana in the early 20th Century (pre-independence in 1957) were the foundation on which new Ghanaian political elites arose and the two-party system developed. An increase in education and urbanisation during this period created a new type of elite, a new “positive reference group for a majority of the population” which was not dependent on the traditional sources of patronage income which chiefs controlled. As the chief had always “justified his leadership in the economic realm primarily,” the creation of these new economic and social roles threatened his leadership position. Even though at the time of his writing Ghana had only just ended its first (relatively brief) experience with democracy, Owusu already believed that “class may in time end up as the dominant feature of the social stratification” and that (although he thought the traditional status system may never be completely replaced) “political conflicts are to some extent class conflicts” in Ghana.30 In the early 20th Century political action increasingly took the form of labour protest movements from workers and some chiefs and was based on class and group economic self-interest. This meant that when parties were formed “they had to rely almost wholly… on the direction of economic interests for support.”31 Chiefs could have chosen to align with these new elites and exert some measure of control from within the party framework, but they did not; why is this?

Owusu claims this is a result of chiefs being unsure that the new parties (particularly the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC)), which wanted to achieve self-government through independence from imperial Britain, would serve their interests. Chiefs had developed a reliance on the imperial framework for the maintenance of their administrative power; when

31 Ibid., 144.
the Aborigines’ Rights Protection Society (ARPS) was formed in 1897 it aimed to “improve the economic position of the chiefs… vis-à-vis the administration and foreign business or commercial interests.”\(^{32}\) Importantly, any demands for change and protests that ARPS made did not seek a break from colonial rule but simply reform. This is because their relationship with the imperial administrators was mutually beneficial; they each helped the other to exploit Ghana’s primary resources of cocoa and other raw materials.\(^{33}\) As such, chiefs felt that nationalist calls for independence threatened this beneficial relationship, so instead of supporting the political parties which desired independence they ‘turned to the Colonial Government for support in their defence of the traditional system’ in the hope that “the colonial system, if pushed a little, would serve their interests better than any.”\(^{34}\) As already mentioned, though, the chiefs were in two minds as to whether to resist or cooperate with foreign capital and imperial power because of their commitment to their constituents (which did see some chiefs get involved in early economically-based protest movements). As such, while the first chairman of the UGCC believed that the chiefs ‘neither could make up their minds whether to swim with the people or sink with imperialism,’ Owusu believes that their hesitation was a result of their “not [being] prepared to sink with anybody.”\(^{35}\) As politics moved towards party-based socioeconomic competition, chiefs’ misgivings about the possibility that party interests didn’t line up with their own isolated them from their development, while a diminishing reliance of new local elites on patronage ebbed away at chiefs’ controlling stake in political affairs.

In post-independence Ghana various institutional processes eroded chiefs’ powers and cemented the centrality of distinctive, non-ethnically defined socioeconomic parties in their place; according to Abotchie these processes have made the chief “anachronistic” in

\(^{32}\) Ibid., 141.  
\(^{33}\) Ibid., 120.  
\(^{34}\) Ibid., 122, 41.  
\(^{35}\) Ibid., 145.
contemporary Ghana. While traditionally chiefs had carried out judicial, administrative, legislative, economic, cultural and military functions, “modern institutional mechanisms have taken over most of these functions rendering the position of the chief merely ceremonial and, therefore, in the view of some, obsolescent.”

As a military leader the chief had significant arms at their disposal, but with the post-independence creation of a national army this capacity was eradicated. As a judicial head the chief would settle legal disputes and sentence punishments for criminal acts, ranging from fines to the death penalty; in post-independence Ghana these were scaled down to the arbitration of minor domestic disputes and the collection of small fines respectively. As a legislator he instituted customary laws on such issues as land, trade, sanctions, but the emergence of constitutional law largely overruled the imperatives of customary law, while the new local government structure critically debated these laws and reduced the chief to the role of interpretative counsel and enforcement. His economic responsibilities had been broad and consisted of imposing taxes and collecting tributes, maintaining monopolies over resources such as gold and gunpowder, seizing war booties, mobilising communal labour and collecting fines. With modern parliamentary authority over tax collection and with economic resource control now shared between the private and public sector the chief lost their main sources of income, such that even their “stool lands are [now] subject to appropriation by the central government when required for national development.” Nowadays chiefs receive an income from the government but are easily out-earned by their subjects who are members of the new economic elite and who ‘command more social and economic respectability.’

These economic developments in particular help to explain why chiefs were unable to

37 Ibid.
38 Ibid., 176.
39 Ibid.
bottleneck resources and prevent the new elites from emerging; they had long lost their power over these sorts of resources to the educated, urban elite which were capable of competing over these resources where they were now concentrated – in the private sector (through business) and state-level public sector (through parties). With its loss of relevance in economic matters chieftaincy gained a negative reputation as “money-wasting… conservative, and even a counter-revolutionary force which is believed to be a hindrance in nation building and healthy social development.”

As we can see, the areas in which chiefs have lost influence and power are those areas in which parties are well set-up to access. Consequently, this adds weight to the claim that persons from previously warring ethnic groups in the north now see parties as the conduit of their political interests, replacing the role that chiefs had once played.

That these changes have occurred largely before the transition to modern democratic rule poses a potentially troubling question for my analysis; why have groups in the northern region been fighting over traditional institutions until so recently, and how can it be that only in the modern democratic era this has stopped? According to Abotchie this is because the outlook of Ghanaians in rural areas is undergoing a slower process of change to that of the rest of the country. Even with the loss of their practical powers chiefs have retained prominence because of the traditionalism of many societies. With approximately 60% of Ghanaians still living in a form of “traditional society” the chief has been a leadership figure that can help to translate modern government policies for their people. This helps to explain why the acceptance of modern bureaucratic administration has been gradual in spite of its dominant role in political decision-making and economic matters.

So, what is it about the new democratic landscape that has diminished the importance of chiefly leadership and disputes over this? As I have suggested, parties have acted as the

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40 Ibid., 177.
mechanism by which persons in traditional societies have been able to develop the sort of attachments, convictions and allegiances that have enabled a break with the attachment to the anachronistic institution of chieftaincy. Abotchie details how “in traditional societies chiefs naturally act as interpreters of government policies to their people, and have thus remained an important link between their subjects and the government.” So, even with the loss of the majority of their powers chiefs remained the representative force in traditional societies. Thus while for many years the door has been open for a more relevant form of representation it was not until parties had the solid foundation of stable democratic rule that they were physically able to reach out to rural traditional communities and become the dominant vehicle of association. Parties gave policy-making at the national level a direct spokesperson that it had previously lacked, making the chief’s interpretative middle-man role obsolete, and provided a representative voice in the distribution of central resources that chiefs could not offer. Owusu goes one step further, claiming that chieftaincy did not just hold the door open for parties but generated a public outlook conducive to participatory democracy by setting the themes of the democratic revolution around “social justice, public accountability, probity, and people power.” As such, by maintaining a middle-man role well after becoming significantly less politically powerful chiefs actually provided continuity for their subjects while embedding important public values, acting as a valuable placeholder for a more politically relevant form of representation to take over.

41 Ibid., 178.
Ghana’s new democracy and socioeconomic party organisation

In part this exposition has illustrated how post-independence chiefs lost significance and influence to new educated urban elites, and thus why these new elites rather than chiefs came to dominate party politics. Because of this the door was left open for parties to follow a non-ethnic scripture in their formulation. With this in mind, what is it about the new democratic environment post-1992 that has made it fruitful for parties and their elites to organise themselves around a specifically socioeconomic identity? Building on the earlier discussion of how the NDC and NPP appeal to broad yet distinct socioeconomic groups, I will illustrate the extent to which these appeals are symptomatic of a necessarily intertwined relationship between socioeconomic identity and party organisation in the current democracy.

The election of representatives to Ghana’s current parliament is carried out through a first-past-the-post (FPTP) system to determine the winners in single-member constituencies. Though the central danger of employing this system is its weakness in mediating between immutable ethnic/cultural differences, the “less fractionated environment in Ghana” – owing to the diminished significance of traditional ethnic public figures – has enabled Ghanaian elites through political parties to reap the possible benefits of the system by finding “success in interest aggregation.” With the confounding element of chieftaincy out of the picture, the national democratic framework in contemporary Ghana provides a clean slate on which candidates must compete for the middle-ground in order to become the first to pass that all important post; in so doing they must find a way to win over as many individuals as possible without overly thinning out their message. So, party elites contend for votes along socioeconomic lines in order to appeal with a finely balanced combination of breadth and distinctiveness and thus become part of a minimum winning coalition. However, rather than

43 Morrison, “Political Parties in Ghana through Four Republics: A Path to Democratic Consolidation,” 433.
being ideological in contemporary Ghana this support and party-organisation is based on a combination of exploiting thinly-socioeconomic cognitive shortcuts and a fear of tribalism.

Fridy’s explanation for voter and party behaviour in contemporary Ghana begins from a claim that parties in Ghana do in fact have inherently ethnic foundations. Interestingly, though, the FPTP system ensures that the way in which this ethnic element is perceived actually enhances the non-ethnic, socioeconomic nature of how parties seek to appeal to voters and how voters make decisions come election time. In his extensive analysis of voting patterns in Ghana’s 2004 presidential and parliamentary elections, Fridy finds that the NPP and NDC have a distinctive core support in Asante (a sub-group of Akan) and Ewe ethnic groups respectively, and that “voters of other backgrounds, who make up the vast majority of Ghanaian voters, view the dominant parties as representative of Asante and Ewe interests but do not themselves vote as a block and base their evaluations of the ‘Asante’ and ‘Ewe’ parties ultimately on things other than ethnicity.”44 This is a result of the way in which parties organise themselves in the contemporary FPTP democratic environment. In order not to alienate these other groups, who due to their vast numbers (70% of the population) are the determinate swinging force in Ghanaian elections, politicians must avoid campaigning under an ethnic banner and must opt for a broader socioeconomic one.45 As such, both main parties publicly warn against tribalism in their campaigns and seek to communicate the substance of their ideological positions as the social democratic (NDC) and market-oriented (NPP) parties.46 These efforts are necessary precisely because they recognise that in order to appeal to enough voters they have to dilute their appearance from simply “the party of the Akan/Ewe.”47 Consequently, “it is in both of these parties’ interests to run as far away from

46 Ibid., 302, 00.
47 Ibid., 303.
these labels as possible,” and they have managed to do this.48 Thus, as Jeffries notes, to talk about electoral politics in Ghana as based around “ethno-regional blocs” is “seriously misleading.”49

Fridy finds that the abounding party stereotypes (which inform cognitive shortcuts employed at election time) are that the NDC is the “party of lower class uneducated rural Ewe speakers” and the NPP the party of “upper class well-educated urban Akan-speakers.”50 Even though most voters are unable to identify the precise ideological foundations of each party (fewer than 3 percent were able to do so in a survey),51 they are able to identify with the socioeconomic aspect of the stereotypes of typical party-voters which trickles-down from party campaigning.52 Thus, even though not ideologically-charged, socioeconomic party support is prevalent; what does reach voters as a result of each party’s ideological campaigning is who the party works for rather than what the party stands for. Effectively, then, the need to achieve substantial support across Ghana in its FPTP system “discourages politicians from turning national votes into a zero-sum ethnic censes” and has forced parties to organise themselves around an easily translatable and relatable image of socioeconomic kinship.53 The ethnic tinge to party politics has been consigned to the background, “a dirty little secret to be suppressed,” and not just because of the persistent influence of Nkrumah’s unity rhetoric (as discussed earlier); in contemporary party politics the unpopularity of ethnic appeals has an inherently pragmatic purpose. To be clear, this does not necessarily conflict with the idea that persons vote on an evaluative basis; as Lindberg and Morrison found, voters consider the track records and capabilities of their candidates as well as their promises.

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48 Ibid.
51 Ibid., 300.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid., 281.
Rather, these two insights are quite compatible; the evaluation of candidates would logically contribute to the party’s stereotypical appearance (i.e. candidates which are ineffective are damaging to the party’s image). This dynamic ensures that Ghana’s democracy remains fluid, forcing parties to stay attentive to their image by proving themselves to be leaders capable of helping their particular brand of supporter.

To roundup, this chapter has illustrated the depth of support for democratic party-based representation in contemporary Ghana. Importantly, it has shown that parties in Ghana have shaped the political landscape along broadly inclusive socioeconomic lines, with constituents demanding effective and beneficial distribution of public resources from their party-based representatives. As such, voters have begun to identify themselves in primarily socioeconomic, rather than ethnic, terms when it comes to political matters. Having gained access to the sorts of resources which chiefs once controlled, these parties have been able to diminish the importance of disputes over chieftaincy (including, importantly, conflict in the north) and thus reframe the Ghanaian political environment around socioeconomic identity.

In the following chapter I theoretically frame precisely how the prevalence of socioeconomically defined parties and high support for them satisfies public demand for representation, how this can defuse inter-ethnic tensions without eliminating ethnicity as an entity, and how activity in the democratic system self-enforces loyalty to its peaceful mechanisms of conflict resolution.
4. Theoretically framing the argument

Group size and political saliency

Having outlined the compelling link between the rise of parties as the dominant form of political association and the decline of ethnicity as politically salient it is important to complete the picture by theoretically framing the argument. This will illustrate the structural factors, conditions and incentives that make it possible for parties to lessen the saliency of ethnicity and attached grievances. For this, Posner’s model of political identity choice is particularly useful.

Posner, recognising that many more identifiable differences between persons exist than are politically salient and divisive, asks “why do some cultural differences matter for politics and others not?”1 Posner contends that the size of an ethnic group relative to the size of the political arena in which it is operating can determine whether or not it becomes politically salient. In Malawi, Chewas and Tumbukas are large groups relative to the country as a whole, so they “serve as viable bases… [and] coalitions in the competition for political power,” while in Zambia these groups “are small relative to the country as a whole and, thus, not useful to mobilize as bases of political support.”2 Thus, where identity groups are big enough political elites will mobilise them into “politically salient” cleavages.3 Posner’s structuralist claim about what drives the political saliency of differences counters claims that this depends on the degree, type (primordialist account), or source (constructivist account) of difference between groups, or the level of fractionalisation in a country (in line with Laitin and Fearon’s

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2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., 529-30.
assessments), “all that matters is cultural demography.” Specifically, Posner observes that since competitive party elections began in Malawi in 1994 each group has been associated with a particular political party and has voted along ethnic lines. While no violence has occurred observers believe it could easily do so. In Zambia, on the other hand, “Chewas and Tumbukas tend to view each other as ethnic brethren and political allies” and have always “overwhelmingly supported the same party.” According to Posner, politics in developing nations:

“revolves around the competition for control over scarce patronage resources – things like jobs, schools, clinics, roads, import and export licences, tariff exemptions, and access access to credit. Because these resources are controlled by the national government, the key to gaining access to them is to build a political coalition that can either capture political power outright… or become a strong enough political force to exert pressure on the person who holds that office.”

Achieving access to these resources requires mobilising a support base that is considerable enough in size to make competing for power at the centre a viable option. Posner states that a common way politicians achieve these competitive factions is by “exploiting cultural divisions,” making them politically salient. This accounts for the political saliency of the divide between Chewas and Tumbukas in Malawi and its absence in Zambia. In the former, these groups make up a considerable portion of the population (28% and 12% respectively), with politicians organising political competition along these support

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6 Ibid., 531.
7 Ibid., 538.
8 Ibid.
lines “by invoking the threat posed to the community by its… rivals.” In the latter they are a peripheral population (7% and 4% respectively), such that the cleavage remains un-mobilised and politically inconsequential. Instead, politicians in Zambia choose to mobilise their support bases along broader cultural lines. As such, Chewas and Tumbukas are considered “part of a common coalition of ‘Easterners’” which speak a common language and make-up just over 20% of the population.

In Ghana, the ethnic groups involved in conflict at the local level in the northern region are inconsequentially small at the national level, and as such go un-mobilised by national politicians; the Dagomba constitute 3.1% and the Konkomba only 1.6% of the national population. As Posner states, political elites have an interest in achieving access to key resources which in Ghana are now, in the new democratic regime, controlled in the national political centre. Thus, the political elites that seek to represent members of northern ethnic groups need to appeal to a broader group identity if they are to share in access to resources at the centre. Posner’s study thus provides weight to the party-based understanding of how northern majority and minority group members orient themselves politically in Ghana following the war of 1994. With national democratic institutions as the dominant/most influential political system it is not sensible for political elites to orient themselves along narrow ethnic lines but it is sensible to do so along socioeconomic party lines, since these parties provide the most effective access to power and resources within such a system. This suggests that one of the big impacts of democratisation in Ghana is that it has provided the tools with which local political elites can become directly involved in national level politics; while national politics did exist pre-democracy, the ability to fight for resources at the centre

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9 Ibid., 539.
10 Ibid.
was confined to privileged elites in the inner circle who had no true accountability to the population at large. Now local elites have to appeal to their constituents for votes to access these resources, and thus have to mobilise them along the cleavage which strategically captures just enough of the electorate to create an efficient minimum winning coalition; i.e. socioeconomic division. This process of scaling up meant that majority and minority groups in the north of Ghana which were previously combatants (or competitors) for resources at the local level were both captured under the same socioeconomic party line of the NDC. Democratic multi-party competition therefore generated the context in which previous adversaries could become “brethren” by opening up national politics to local elites and requiring that they appeal to their constituents in the broadest terms possible.

Furthermore, it is not just political elites that encourage the strategic political mobilisation of particular groups, the public do as well by being responsive to appeals made in these terms; “just as politicians seek to build coalitions of viable sizes, voters also seek to gain entry into coalitions that will permit one of their own to win political power.”

This supports the idea that voters in Ghana are actively interested in being affiliated with a party precisely because it provides them with a way to access central resources. The non-ethnically focused party structure in Ghana is deemed politically useful by both elites and the general public. As such, this supports the general hypotheses of this study. First, that ethnicity is politically salient only so far as it provides access to political resources, and second that an interest in representation in traditional institutions can be satisfied via representation in whichever body enables access to the desired political resources (in this case, a democratic body).

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It is important for the most general claim of this study – that representation in democratic institutions has defused ethnic conflict – to be able to link a reduction in the political salience of ethnicity to a reduction in its social salience. Posner finds that Chewas and Tumbukas in Zambia are more trusting of each other and Easterners in general than of other groups in the country. Posner is careful to recognise that this may not be a result of political stratification and could simply be the result of the size of the social landscape; while in Malawi the Chewa and Tumbuka groups are large enough to be integral to how persons mentally map out their social landscape, they are too small to do this in Zambia. Nonetheless, in both situations it is the “national frame” that is responsible for the amount of positive association between ethnic groups because it “dictates a political strategy (and conjures up a mental mapping of the country’s relevant groups) that overlooks the differences between Chewas and Tumbukas and aggregates them as a single entity.”

In Ghana, it is the advent of democratic institutions and parties which has generated greater association at the national level by broadening the social landscape. As such, they can be held responsible for diminishing the political and likely the social saliency of ethnicity in the northern region by encompassing members of previously adversarial minority and majority groups under the same socioeconomic banner.

The irrelevance of cultural content

While the party-based analysis of political saliency in Ghana shows a structural alignment with Posner’s example, i.e. that political saliency depends on relative group size, it sees mobilisation along substantively different cleavages; i.e. socioeconomic as opposed to cultural ones. The NDC appeals to the lower income and typically rural voter and the NPP to the urban business elite. In the north, local political elites can achieve access to state

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13 Ibid., 541.
resources as part of a party structure. As more people across the country buy into party affiliations, this is the local political elites’ best shot at accessing the resources they want. Does Posner’s analysis give reason to believe that it is possible to make a group affiliation politically salient if it is not based on culturally substantive foundations?

In short, yes it does, providing further reason to believe it is possible that party-affiliation has become the most politically salient type of group affiliation for Ghanaians.14 In another part of his study, Posner looks into the possible impact that arbitrary administrative boundaries might have on cleavages. Posner asks members of the Tonga ethnic group in Zambia whether they would prefer to have someone from the same region but not the same ethnicity as a political leader or vice versa. He finds that there is no bias for a member of one’s own ethnic group; 46% would prefer a fellow Northerner candidate over their fellow tribesperson. Posner concludes that cultural difference is not a necessary condition for the emergence of a politically salient cleavage; “whether or not a cleavage matters would seem to depend not at all on the material from which it is built. That material can be as sturdy as the traits, customs, norms, and practices that a professional ethnographer might identify or as flimsy as an arbitrary boundary drawn by an uninformed colonial officer.”15 What matters is whether or not the cleavage in question is the right size in the national political arena to be

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14 This categorical comparison between (and substitution of) an ethnic identity for a party identity is not looked at by Posner, owing to its irrelevance in the context of his case study, but it is surprisingly absent from Chandra’s complex critical assessment of the narrowness of most constructivist theories of ethnic politics (including Posner’s) when it comes to appreciating just how large the range of available and possibly salient identities is. Chandra criticises Posner’s ethnic identity matrix model for being “two-dimensional” in a world where the breadth of choice between ethnicities is ‘almost without boundaries.’ Even so, Chandra himself neglects the possibility that non-ethnic identities might have political salience as well. This, I believe, comes down to Chandra not accounting for how and why Posner narrows down to two cleavages; by relative group size because not all cleavages have the same potential for saliency. If relative group size is important then Chandra should not treat ethnic identity in isolation from other forms of potentially politically salient identity, such as party-affiliation. This is because Chandra should not pre-empt a conversation about how ethnicity fits into political life by framing it in terms of a battle between different forms of ethnic identity. This ignores, without good reason, the possibility that ethnic identities do not exist in isolation from other forms of identity and that it is not necessary to have at least one specifically ethnic identity holding primary political saliency at any one time. See Kanchan Chandra, Constructivist Theories of Ethnic Politics (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 27-28.

conducive to political mobilisation. As such, “innate cultural differences do not necessarily have greater power than noncultural differences to generate political or social division,” such that arbitrary boundaries are not necessarily less politically or socially meaningful.\(^{16}\) This provides supportive reasoning for the claim made in my study that socioeconomic affiliation has replaced ethnic affiliation as the most politically salient cleavage in the lives of Ghanaian NR residents, regardless of its lack of cultural content, with parties the most conducive units for achieving power and resources at the centre. In this respect, then, the political entrepreneurs that developed parties in Ghana had to look at the cleavages available that would be viable for political mobilisation at the national-level; they could not simply exploit existing ethnic cleavages, for this would not have been a viable tactic for competing at the political centre. Rather, they “must be attuned to the… demography that they have to work with.”\(^{17}\) As such, they sought to refocus political discourse along socioeconomic lines.

Finally, Posner’s study outlines the fact that a change in the format of a political arena is capable of changing the political saliency of group identities and even developing new forms of group identity. In Zambia the Chewas and Tumbukas became a part of a group known as Easterners in which they had never previously been; “whatever salience there may have been to the Chewa-Tumbuka cleavage in Zambia prior to the drawing of the Zambia-Malawi border has clearly been altered by the fact that Chewas and Tumbukas now operate in a political and social environment with a new, much broader, frame of reference.”\(^{18}\)

This provides weight to the idea that the advent of national democratic institutions in Ghana not only diminished the saliency of ethnic allegiances but created a new form of dominant political organisation, i.e. the political party. Such parties are more effective for

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16 Ibid.
17 Ibid., 544.
18 Ibid., 543.
achieving representation and resources because they are more appropriate to the “new, much broader, frame of reference” in Ghana.

A simple model of ethnic identity choice

We can further this understanding of the conditions under which different identities become salient by looking at Posner’s “simple model of identity choice” from another of his works, *Institutions and Ethnic Politics in Africa*. This outlines a structure for understanding the power relations and incentives at play when groups decide whether to align politically with one ethnic identity or another. Does this model apply only to ethnic cleavages, or also others like socioeconomic/class cleavages? Posner states that the logic of ethnic cleavage structures “extends to non-ethnic cleavages like class,” though it is unclear whether a cleavage choice scenario can include both ethnic and non-ethnic identities; a choice could be between race and language or religion and tribe, but could it be between tribe and socioeconomic class (as I propose in the northern Ghanaian case)? Structurally it appears so; this will become clear through an adaptation of his simple model of ethnic identity choice to the Ghanaian case.

His model outlines a choice scenario between associating with one of two different types of ethnic cleavage, such as race or language. Call these cleavage spectrums A and B. A set of different groups populate each spectrum \((a_1, a_2\ldots a_i)\), e.g. English, Portuguese, or French speakers. Individuals fit into one group only on each spectrum. Importantly, we “assume that individuals will choose the ethnic identity that will maximize their access to resources.” Posner identifies four different categories of actors – \(w\), \(x\), \(y\), and \(z\). As the largest group, \(w\) will always have access to power, but whether they choose to associate politically as

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20 Ibid., 131.
21 Ibid., 132.
members of their A identity or their B identity will determine whether those who fall into x or y will have access to power (see table below). \( W \) chooses which identity to associate with based on which will provide the smallest minimum winning coalition because this entails that the resources gained will have to be shared between fewer persons.

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Once members of \( w \) have decided which identity to align themselves with this group collectively holds power (the “ins”). For example’s sake, let’s say they chose to align with their A identity, such that \( x \) is included in the winning coalition. Now, “the particular dimension of cleavage that defines the difference between the ‘ins’ and ‘outs’ then becomes the axis of conflict in the political system” (see table below).\(^{22}\) This is because the outs will come to view political competition as being about what makes the ins different to them and will frame their grievances about exclusion from access to resources in terms of why the ins are “getting more than their fair share.”\(^{23}\)

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>( b_1 )</th>
<th>( b_2 )</th>
<th>( b_3 )</th>
<th>...</th>
<th>( B_m )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
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<td>“Ins”</td>
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<td>( a_1 )</td>
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<td>( a_2 )</td>
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<td>( a_n )</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Outs”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{22}\) Ibid., 136.
\(^{23}\) Ibid., 139.
First of all, this model can be used to illustrate why ethnicity became a salient axis of conflict in Ghana’s northern region. Recall that the groups which dominated traditional institutions in Ghana were “majority” groups. These groups each had their own ethnic identity (as the Dagomba, Nanumba and Gonja) but shared similar chiefly centralised leadership structures. Alone any one of these groups would have struggled to control resources; the largest group, the Dagomba, make up only 33% of the NR’s population. Therefore it made sense to organise as ethnic allies around their shared form of chiefly leadership. This decision to politically associate based on their shared majority identity as opposed to their individual ethnic identities allowed them to be part of a group that was big enough to monopolise political power and correspondingly access to key resources; it was a minimum winning coalition. Though the majority label is a broader umbrella term it still makes sense to treat it as just another cleavage; as Posner states, “two or more groups [that] might be combined under a single umbrella label – for example, Irish and Italians in New York as ‘European Immigrants’… can be accommodated in the model not by allowing them to form a coalition [and thus removing their individual identities from the equation] but by adding another cleavage dimension.” Once the majority groups had set-up political and associated resources to be distributed in their favour, as illustrated by subordination in the traditional chiefly sphere, the majority-minority cleavage became the lens through which excluded communities would frame their grievances. The majority groups were the “ins” and the minority groups the “outs.” When tensions hit a critical point these grievances spilled over into open conflict. As such, the minority-majority cleavage emerges as the central axis of political division “not because… [such] identities are inherently or historically stronger”

24 Ibid., 132-33.
than others, like individual ethnic identities, but because of the “relative sizes” of these groups in the dominant arena of resource competition.25

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Majority (&quot;ins&quot;)</th>
<th>Minority (&quot;outs&quot;)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dagomba</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mamprusi</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nanumba</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gonja</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Konkomba</td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Kon.</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gurma</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grusi</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chokosi</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nchumburu</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pop. (%)26</td>
<td>50.1</td>
<td>26.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Political identity choice where the northern region is the dominant arena of resource competition; the numbers signify each group’s percentage of the regional population27

Explaining Ghana’s saliency shift

So how can this model be useful in explaining the proposed shift in the most politically salient form of cleavage in northern Ghana (from the majority-minority ethnic cleavage to socioeconomic party competition)? Posner shows how changes in political boundaries can alter the dominant axis of political association; this part of his model can be adapted to outline the structural logic within the adoption of party affiliation as the dominant form of political association for northern Ghanaians. Posner imagines a scenario where a Los Angeles political district is split into two, the “north” and “south.” Here the two saliences at play are race and language. Before the split English-speaking Latinos had the pivotal role;

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25 Ibid., 139.
26 Other Ghanaians by birth (19.9%) and non-Ghanaians by birth (3.6%) make up the rest of the population.
27 Ghana, "2000 Population and Housing Census: Summary Report of Final Results." Note: the 2010 census outlines ethnic populations only in terms of much broader categorisations, such that population data on the groups relevant to conflicts in the Northern region are not available post-2000.
being in both the majority race and language groups they would be in power regardless of whether they chose associate as English speakers or Latinos in political coalition-building. In the south district, following the split, their numbers became relatively small in comparison to the English-speaking Asian population. As such they lost their pivotal role. In order to be in a winning-coalition they now relied on the English-speaking Asian population choosing to align themselves with their language rather than their racial group if they are to achieve access to power. This gives English-speaking Latinos an incentive to pressure English-speaking Asians to choose to associate along language lines in political coalition-building.

The Ghanaian case is slightly different though still understandable through a similar framework. The boundaries of the political arena changed in Ghana with the advent of the current democracy. This entailed that the majority groups which were numerically dominant in the northern region were now a minority in the national arena (see table below). Much like the English speaking-Latinos they could no longer define what would constitute the most salient form of political identity. Rather, this depended on the actions of the population at large. The wider population had formed inclusive party structures which were the only option for these relatively small groups to achieve access to political and economic resources at the centre.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic group</th>
<th>Population (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Akan</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ewe</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ga-Dangme</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern “majorities”</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern “minorities”</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
But what does this have to do with democratic institutions? So far I have focused predominantly on the importance of the relative size of a group in comparison to the size of the dominant political arena, and while the importance of having a competitive ability to influence national level politics has been alluded to it is important to spell it out clearly.

We can understand the Ghanaian case by looking at why Posner claims that one-party states can foster competition at the local constituency level while multi-party rule generates it at the national level.\textsuperscript{28} In one-party rule competition revolves primarily around ethnic cleavages that are of salient size at the local constituency level because the electorate are not making a choice which has any impact on the shape of politics at the national level. This is because all candidates represent the same party, such that the influence of the general public is stunted nationally; “where the outcome of the presidential election is determined in advance, the only electoral contest of consequence is the one over who will represent each parliamentary constituency.”\textsuperscript{29} In multi-party politics, on the other hand, elites and the general public are able to significantly affect the key ground of the political centre and will thus coordinate around groups which are big enough to do so. As such, because political parties are competing for power at the national level the important choice is not for the candidate but for the party they represent. This “transforms the constituency-level conflicts in which they [parliamentary candidates] are engaged into contests for national power.”\textsuperscript{30} While single-party rule in Ghana did not involve popular elections in any form it had the same effect of confining political affairs to a local arena, allowing ethnic cleavages of a significant size at this level to hold saliency in terms of competition over local resources. This arena was

\textsuperscript{28} Posner, \textit{Institutions and Ethnic Politics in Africa}, 143-45.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 144.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
enlarged when voters were able to elect a president and an MP that had affiliations to a party competing at the national level. In order to make use of this ability to affect politics at the centre it is necessary for the general public and elites to compete on identity lines that are large enough to be significant in this arena. Thus competition is best pursued through socioeconomically defined party-based coalitions as opposed to parochial ethnic affiliations. As such, democratic party-based competition is an essential part of adapting Posner’s model to the Ghanaian case.

This still leaves a question open: why would new “in” and “out” groups not develop in national party politics, leading to potentially violent adversarial relationships? Answering this requires supplementing the structural explanation derived from Posner to explain how parties have been able to generate cooperative and peaceful relationships and respect for the democratic process. To do this Przeworski’s minimalist democratic theory will be employed.

How and why are party relations non-violent?

So far this study has observed that strong socioeconomically-based party affiliations exist in Ghana, illustrated the plausible mechanisms and the historical developments at play in their entrenchment, and explained why it is prudent and logical that socioeconomic identity has (through the vehicle of parties) replaced ethnicity as the most politically salient form of identity in the northern region. However, what is not clear is why new forms of extreme adversarial, and potentially violent, conflict have not developed on the national stage; if new and supposedly arbitrary group relations can become just as politically salient as deeply engrained ethnic identities (as Posner claims) then why have parties not taken on the conflictual nature of relations seen at the sub-national level? This is a question about how and why the party system in Ghana has the capacity to promote and sustain peaceful and productive political interaction. These insights will be found by supplementing the structural
incentive-based model of the party system pulled from Posner’s model of identity choice with Przeworski’s minimalist instrumentalist theory of democracy. This will illustrate how the fine balance and nature of the democratic system entails that party competition is of great significance to persons while remaining cooperative/non-violent in nature.

Ballots as “paper stones”

Why does democracy and party competition in particular have anything to do with peace between groups in Ghana? I argue that democratic procedures and the nature of democratic competition provide the mechanism by which non-violent cooperative relations have triumphed over possible reversion to more adversarial means in this new environment.

The foundation for this claim is the impermanence of leadership in competitive democratic systems. As has been outlined, the political parties which developed in Ghana appealed to socioeconomic identities broad enough to draw enough votes to make a national minimum winning coalition. Because of the quite even division of Ghanaians along socioeconomic lines of party-affiliation there is no permanent “in” coalition in Ghana; the winning coalition depends on electoral results. Rather than be assured of being an “in” or an “out” group, as Posner’s model illustrates, each group recognises that it has a competitive shot at being an “in” group at any given election, as is shown by the closeness with which elections are fought and regular exchanges of power. As such, Ghanaian ethnic groups have to give themselves up “to the uncertain interplay of the [democratic] institutions.”31

This has important implications for the nature of political relations in Ghana. Without permanent “in” groups or coalitions Ghanaian national politics provides an environment in which exclusion from access to central resources cannot easily be blamed on one particular

group. The likelihood that the losing party will feel unfairly done by is reduced because losing is accepted as part of the fair basic structure of the system rather than seen as a personal affront from the winning party. This means that Ghana exemplifies Przeworski’s minimalist conception of how democracy functions. Przeworski makes the basic assumption that humans would rather avoid solving conflicts through bloodshed if possible, and argues that democracy makes this possible. This is because “the mere possibility of being able to change governments can avoid violence.”32 This works even if the government in power is decided by a coin toss. Because governments do not have to act responsibly to be elected in such situations they technically have no immediate incentive not to abuse their power (up to the point of full usurpation of the system), while the losing side have no immediate incentive not to violently rebel and throw them out. However, they do both have a structural incentive to respect democratic procedures. As long as each side has a good chance of winning at any given coin toss, and the payoffs of winning are sufficiently large, in the long-run “they are better off continuing to comply with the coin toss rather than fighting for power.”33

While a coin toss is a good analogy for not being able to predict the outcomes of future elections, it is very important that periodic voting actually determines the leadership. This is because “voting constitutes ‘flexing muscles’: a reading of chances in the eventual[ity of] war,” illustrating the bloody costs of not abiding by democratic procedures.34 If all voters have equal physical capacity for war the outcome of a vote tells the loser that if they disobey the outcomes of the election they will likely lose in open confrontation, and tells the winner that if they do not hold elections again they will suffer significant resistance. But with the professionalization of war not all persons have an equal capacity for violence, making the armed capabilities of rebel groups (in particular) and state groups less predictable. This

33 Ibid., 46.
34 Ibid., 48.
means that each party cannot be absolutely sure of the outcome of violent conduct. This actually increases the payoff of respecting electoral procedures; assuming elections are competitive it is not clear to the usurper just how damaging a revolt could be nor to a revolting party just how much resistance they will face or how much damage they could do (and even if they achieve power the scale of any future rebellion is unknown). This makes it more fruitful to either flip the coin again (so to speak) or wait for the coin to be flipped, knowing they can regain or achieve power at a later date. As such, “bloodshed is avoided by the mere fact that… the political forces expect to take turns.” 35 We can thus describe “stable democracy as a system of institutionalized uncertainty about the future.” 36

This is essentially what the competitive two-party system in Ghana has achieved. It ensures that at any given election there is a good chance that the candidate that wins will reflect one’s interests when it comes to the distribution of public resources. Correspondingly, each person also knows they are not permanently excluded when the vote goes against their preferred candidate because they will have a competitive chance at achieving desirable representation in future elections. Therefore, the mere possibility of being able to change the government is enough to defuse the potential for violent revolt; democracy in Ghana is a “self-enforcing equilibrium.” 37 As such, not only has democracy enabled parties to politicise socioeconomic identity and correspondingly defuse inter-ethnic antagonisms at the local level, it has also created a forum in which the likelihood of using violence for any means is heavily frowned upon because each party has a vested interest in respecting the institutions and procedures that allow for democratic change. A highly competitive multi-party electoral system prevents permanent exclusion by providing regular plausible opportunities to be represented in a winning coalition and discourages the violent alternative by illustrating the

35 Ibid., 46.
comparable strength of the competing group. In Ghana, that a highly competitive two-party system with strong core support exists alongside a low incidence rate of electoral violence and a shining record for peaceful turnovers (two for two so far) is testament to this.\textsuperscript{38} As can be seen in the table below, elections have become so competitive that in 2008 the winner in the first round of voting was the loser in the second round (the winning party’s vote share is highlighted in grey).

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<th>NDC</th>
<th>NPP</th>
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<td>captures voters which</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>are rural, less-</td>
<td>are urban, more-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presidential</td>
<td>educated and in</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>unskilled work</td>
<td>skilled work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>58.4</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>57.4</td>
<td>39.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>44.5 (43.1)\textsuperscript{39}</td>
<td>48.8 (56.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>52.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>47.9 (50.2)</td>
<td>49.1 (49.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>47.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>46.9</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NDC</th>
<th>NPP</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parliamentary</td>
<td>Parliamentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>77.5</td>
<td>Boyocotted\textsuperscript{40}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>33.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>49</td>
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</table>

\textsuperscript{38} Fear of electoral violence has been present at most elections, particularly those where the race was close. Nonetheless, Ghana’s elections have remained largely undisrupted. The 2000 election was a turning point in this regard. In the lead up to this election there was significant “public anxiety” about the possibility of civil conflict due to the strong support for the opposition party. This anxiety was well-founded; Ghana had never experienced a democratic turnover in power, and its only leader thus far had been at the forefront of quasi-military takeovers in the 1970s and 1980s. Thanks to the efforts of civil society groups, the electoral commission, and international assistance “well-founded fears about election-day violence and its potentially dire consequences did not materialize.” Importantly, power was handed over without resistance from the incumbent party. See: Emmanuel Gyanmah-Boadi, ”A Peaceful Turnover in Ghana,” \textit{Journal of Democracy} 12, no. 2 (2001): 104, 11.

\textsuperscript{39} Ghana uses a two-round presidential voting system. If one candidate does not achieve 50% of the votes in the first round of voting the election goes to a second round between the candidates with the two highest individual vote shares in the first round.

\textsuperscript{40} The NPP boycotted parliamentary elections after claiming the presidential election was rigged. This led to reforms to prevent double-voting, such as the use of indelible ink. No further elections have been boycotted.
In Ghana, the impermanence of leadership is even more pronounced than in Posner’s examples, and thus democracy here is even more conducive to peaceful relations. This is because in Ghana there is no one group that has the power to define the dominant cleavage (i.e. a pivotal group), whereas in the Los Angeles South district there is one; the English-speaking Asian population. This group will be pressured by other groups which share only one of either their racial or linguistic identity with them to compete politically in terms of this particular identity. Because the English-speaking Asian population are guaranteed to be in the winning coalition, if they regularly choose to associate on one identity-cleavage basis rather than another this may cause the consistent losers to foster hostile grievances towards this group. On the other hand, because no one group in Ghana is ever permanently in power, with each just as reliant as the others on success at the polls, the likelihood of hostile grievances developing towards the other party, even if it consistently wins, are smaller; it is one group’s success in an environment of fair competition which has caused another’s exclusion, not their unilateral decision to continuously side with other groups to make a winning coalition (as English-speaking Asians in LA South are capable of doing).

What this means is that the payoffs of not revolting that Przeworski outlines are smaller for consistently excluded groups when there is a pivotal group than when there isn’t one. These payoffs still exist, but they are certainly perceived as bigger in a highly competitive environment like Ghana’s where the outcomes of democratic procedures are truly uncertain from one election to the next rather than dependent on the whim of a pivotal group. As outlined above, this uncertainty about the outcome of elections in countries like Ghana also
has the important effect of increasing the perceived costs of not respecting electoral procedures; the closeness of an election makes it more likely that a loser could successfully revolt and claim power and that once they have claimed power they could lose it to a counter-revolution at a future point in time.

To conclude this section, here we have illustrated the mechanisms and motivations that have made possible the rational, strategic, and peaceful structure of relationships between groups at the national level in Ghana. By displaying the highly competitive nature of party politics and the reliance of each party on the uncertain outcomes of democratic processes to achieve power, we can see why party politics has generated a form of political interaction where the rules of the game are respected of the kind not seen at the local level during the northern region’s wars. Thus, democracy not only impacts the type of identity that is politically important but the way in which political competition is carried out. This explanation means that there is no reason to suspect that political parties cannot be just as politically salient as ethnic groups; it is simply that the intensity of these political associations is expressed through the casting of ballots rather than the casting of stones. Thus, democratic party competition is “conflict without killing” where “ballots are ‘paper stones.’”

Considering criticisms of the models used and alternative explanations

In the preceding sub-section the claims of my empirical analysis – on how the replacement of ethnic- with party-affiliation has decreased violent inter-ethnic conduct – have been framed in terms of Posner’s model for explaining identity choice and Przeworski’s model for explaining why democracy incentivises non-violent relations. There are two central benefits to this exercise. First, it lays out the claims of my analysis in terms of clear structural incentives, conditions and restrictions. Second, by laying out the analysis in these structural

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terms it illuminates assumptions which I am making in terms of how structures are organised and the way in which persons choose to act within these. This last point is what we pick up now from a critical angle; are the assumptions and claims which I have made about the structure and content of choice scenarios and the way in which people make decisions within these both fair and accurate?

By using Posner’s framework I have assumed a structuralist model alongside a rational choice model of individual decision-making in my understanding of what makes particular identities more politically salient than others. Are there reasons to think that making these assumptions is problematic, both from an empirical and a theoretical perspective?

By implementing a Przeworskian model I have chosen to understand Ghana’s democracy as self-enforcing and to understand this self-enforcement in purely incentive-based terms. Are there theoretical reasons for finding this stripped-down explanation of democratic stability problematic, and if so do these illuminate possible problems with, or ambiguities in, using it to explain the Ghanaian case?

Determining whether or not the use of these models is sound requires asking the following: First, do criticisms of, and alternatives to, the models which I have used to explain the formation and content of structures and the decision-making of persons show possible holes in the models I have applied? Specifically, I am interested in whether any theoretically plausible holes are borne out by empirical observations of the Ghanaian case. Thus, this critical appraisal asks whether, by assuming these models, I have overlooked other plausible ways for explaining the outcomes of the Ghanaian case. If it turns out that my analysis, application and modification of Posner’s and Przeworski’s models provides a compelling and solid explanation of peace between groups in the north of Ghana that cannot be outdone by an
alternate model or approach which is critical of its assumptions, we have good reason to continue to support this explanation.

What are the potential issues with the use of Posner’s model?

Posner adopts a structuralist model for explaining why certain identities become the most politically salient ones in a particular society. According to this model “all that matters” for determining the dominance of a particular group cleavage is “the sizes of the groups that the cleavage defines relative to the political and social arenas in which they are operating,” such that “group size, not depth of attachment, is what drives the individual-level choice and thus the society-level cleavage outcome.” This entails that Posner rejects a number of alternate approaches which focus on aspects other than relative group size for explaining the political saliency of group cleavages. First, he rejects explanations which claim that certain types of cleavage are more politically salient than others; race or ethnicity over class, for example. Second, he rejects explanations which claim that the larger the degree of cultural difference between groups the more politically salient this difference is. This explanation would expect, for example, that a Muslim-Christian cleavage would be more politically salient than an Anglican-Lutheran one. Finally, he rejects explanations which claim that the type of cleavage which becomes politically salient depends on the particular stage of historical development that the country is in. One such argument claims that democracy survives better when per capita income is increasing and income inequality is decreasing.

Importantly, though, Posner is careful to stress that his “goal is not to suggest that group size is always the most relevant factor,” but rather that it can be the most relevant factor in

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43 Institutions and Ethnic Politics in Africa, 139.
certain scenarios where these competing explanations are not accurate. In line with this approach, rather than claiming the general and universal significance of this model I am showing its relevancy to the Ghanaian case. As previously stated, then, the following critical assessment of the model aims to see whether other models and/or criticisms are able to uncover shortcomings or misunderstandings in general, and importantly whether any of these are borne out in the Ghanaian case. If the latter is not the case then we have good reason to claim that group-size is of greatest relevance in the Ghanaian case for explaining the changing saliency of ethnicity.

Systematically assessing the claims of each of these alternative explanations will show how an explanation which relies on the relative size of groups is necessary for explaining how the groups of greatest political saliency changed in Ghana. This assessment will also reiterate how group size is not sufficient for explaining this shift. While it is able to show that strong incentives exist for refocusing on socioeconomic party identities as opposed to narrow ethnic ones in the national arena, it does not explain the mechanisms by which this can become a reality. This is where democratic processes and party organisations are essential.

*Some cleavages are more powerful than others*

We begin by looking at the alternative claim that some types of cleavage are simply more powerful than others. In the case of Ghana this could translate in one of two possible ways; either ethnicity is a more powerful cleavage than socioeconomic identity or vice versa.

Starting with the former, it could be the case that ethnicity is simply a more powerful cleavage structure than socioeconomic identity. This could explain why such bloody conflict occurred between ethnic groups but not between parties in Ghana. Because the failure of the

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44 “The Political Salience of Cultural Difference,” 530.
Kumasi Peace Accord has not led to renewed warfare this view would have to contend that the powerful potential of this ethnic difference is lying dormant, liable to break out into conflict at an indeterminate point in the future. This is a point made in the literature on the current peace in Ghana, as outlined at the beginning of this investigation; i.e. the idea that, in spite of physical violence having died down, the region remains stuck in “cycles of violence.” The central problem with this explanation is that it is not falsifiable; there is no way to prove concretely that conflict lies dormant. Yet we have seen many good reasons for thinking that the incentives associated with challenging for control over ethnically driven institutions have diminished over time, being assumed by national institutional structures. The fact that the rise of parties and the development of party-affiliation aligns with the decreasing saliency of ethnic difference in the north gives weight to this understanding. As such it is a stretch to suggest that ethnic grievances and the political salience of ethnic association have remained unaffected by the advent of persons being able to participate in the contest over important national political resources through parties conducive with competition at this level (especially as the 1994 war was fought over restricted access to political resources). Therefore, the argument that conflict is dormant suffers from a bigger problem than not being falsifiable; while it is not implausible that ethnicity is in theory a more powerful cleavage than socioeconomic identity, by choosing not to engage with visible and testable reasons why ethnicity may have become less salient this argument fails to explain or account for the impact (or lack of impact) that the new democratic environment has or has not had on the distribution and availability of political resources and the mechanisms of political participation. Essentially, in order to claim that ethnic grievances are held in stasis one also has to explain why all the structural changes to Ghanaian politics have had negligible impact on the political and economic lives of the members of northern ethnic

groups. Thus, an argument which depends on the ever-present power of ethnic identity has to explain how it can remain static while so much else is in transition, an argument which is severely stunted by the evidence I have presented in this study.

On the other hand, let’s say that the argument goes that socioeconomic identity is inherently more powerful than ethnic identity. This may claim that the creation of socioeconomically directed parties took the limelight away from ethnic association in the north of Ghana. This interpretation does not, however, cause any difficulty for the rational choice structuralist model of incentives which I have adopted. This is because socioeconomic identity is defined in inherently pragmatic terms. Rather than rely on the essentialisation of one particular arbitrarily assigned feature of a person over another (e.g. race over language group), claiming that socioeconomic identity has superior importance is to suggest that people care more about pragmatic socioeconomic considerations than, for example, ethnic or linguistic ones. Now, while I do not wish to make this claim myself, the implication of it would not cause any problems for my use of Posner’s structuralist rational choice framework.

*Greater difference equals greater saliency*

A second standpoint for criticising my usage of Posner’s model comes from the literature that claims a connection between cultural difference and the saliency of group difference. Caselli and Coleman (henceforth Caselli) claim that the likelihood that two groups will engage in violent or non-violent conflict\(^\text{46}\) – i.e. that their cleavage is highly salient – is directly related to the level of difference between these groups. They propose that when a group is considering engaging in conflict it will assess “the amount of post-conflict leakage

\(^{46}\) Non-violent conflict can refer to competition between specifically “ethnic” parties or dominance/exploitation of one group by another
[of the resource being fought over] due to infiltration by members of losing groups."\(^{47}\) This depends on the homogeneity of their society; essentially, the more homogenous the society, the more likely that members of the losing group in a conflict will be able to pass themselves off as members of the winning group and access their spoils from the conflict. As such, where homogeneity between groups is higher conflict will be less likely because the potential gain of each group, should they win, is “dilute[d]” by the ease with which their opponents could infiltrate their camp and “participate in the distribution of the spoils.”\(^ {48}\) Concordantly, the easier it is to police resource distribution following conflict the more this “leakage” is “minimize[d].”\(^ {49}\) According to Caselli this is precisely why societies with diverse ethnic groups are more likely to experience conflict; it is easier to prevent leakage. Thus, the easier it is to distinguish ethnic groups (e.g. by colour or language) the harder it is to switch groups (both psychologically, say if one has to change religion, or physically), and the bigger the spoils to be gained are, the more likely conflict is to emerge.

So, how does this compare with Posner’s model? Both are attempting to explain what makes ethnic group cleavages more salient, though they differ in that while Posner is attempting to explain why one cleavage is chosen above another to be the most politically salient Caselli looks at why a particular cleavage might become so politically salient that it creates subjugation or open violence. In this latter approach Caselli challenges the idea that the particular content of a cleavage structure is unrelated to its saliency. So, does this provide a compelling alternative to Posner’s model when applied to the Ghanaian case, and does it illuminate any issues with the structuralist interpretation I am advocating?

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\(^{48}\) Ibid.

\(^{49}\) Ibid., 162.
Recall that I have, following Posner, suggested that in Ghana there is a shift in saliency from ethnicity to party-affiliation due to the change in the size of the political arena. If, alternatively, Caselli’s model could encompass these changes it would have to take the increase in the saliency of parties and the decrease in the saliency of ethnicity separately. Such an explanation would look like this: ethnic conflict in the north is no longer salient because the gains available from it are no longer worth fighting for, while the distance between each new class group is not large enough for the parties that reflect these identities to incite conflict.

The issue with this explanation is that it at best manages to describe surface changes in Ghana without explaining or providing the framework for the mechanisms responsible for these changes. First, the central tenet of the argument, that ethnic conflict depends on the level of likely resource leakage, does not have any explanatory usefulness when the political arena fundamentally changes or when other forms of cleavage arise. When attempting to explain why a cleavage loses saliency it defers its explanation to decreasing gains. This alone merely describes the fact that a lower payoff exists. Posner’s model, on the other hand, is able to provide a compelling reason for why payoffs change; because of the relative size of groups in the dominant political arena. Second, Caselli’s model is unable to account for a cleavage based simply on socioeconomic identity. He claims that two features are at play in determining the potential a cleavage has for conflict; the homogeneity of the different groups in a particular cleavage structure and the ease with which they can attempt to infiltrate the winner’s resource management. Class groups are neither homogenous (i.e. difficult to distinguish) nor easy to infiltrate (one cannot simply choose to be a member of a wealthy urban economic elite overnight). Even if it is possible to over time infiltrate a new economic class, Ghana’s history of party support does not support the idea that this has happened. Rather than see more people flock to the NDC following its considerable victories early in
the current republic we have seen a balancing out of the competitive environment with gains in support for the NPP. This leads us to expect that inter-party conflict should be very much on the table; individuals are not, by and large, infiltrating the winning group and are entrenching clearly distinguishable class groups. And yet we have not seen it, as earlier explained using Przeworskian logic. As such, Caselli’s model is unable to explain peace between parties in Ghana; if anything, conflict should be more likely.

With the central explanatory mechanism of Caselli’s argument (i.e. the likelihood of resource leakage) unable to explain peace between parties, any explanation he would make of why parties gained prominence would rely solely on the same grounds as that which explains the decreasing saliency of local ethnicity; a change in the gains available from associating with a particular cleavage (i.e. increased gains from associating with parties). This has two implications. First, this is merely descriptive and unable to explain why the gains of associating with a party increase (or even exist) in the first place in the way that Posner is able to in his account of relative size. Second, if changes in saliency can purely be explained by the ability of the cleavage to enable access to resources then there is no reason to think that the level of the difference between groups within a cleavage has anything to do with their saliency. Thus, in the Ghanaian case we have no reason to doubt that relative size, not difference, is responsible for changes in the saliency of ethnic and socioeconomic cleavages in Ghana.

Nonetheless, the relative size of groups is not able to explain how party-affiliation has become possible and attractive. This is a result of the particular institutional environment that democracy has created. By enabling mass participation on a national scale through party structures, and doing so in a way that enables losers at election to remain loyal to the outcomes of the electoral system in the hope of achieving success in the future, democracy has made it possible to access resources at the national level in a stable electoral environment.
Without the rallying and participatory capacities of parties there would be no dissemination of politicised socioeconomic identities and thus no available source of identity through which to become a genuine competitor of decent size at the national level.

Economic development and the changing saliency of cleavages

Posner’s model relies on a size-based structural interpretation of the incentives behind choosing to associate along particular identity lines. In so doing it overlooks the possibility that the salience of a particular cleavage and the tension attached to it could be reduced by certain other means. In particular I am interested to engage with a plausible way in which economic factors may have reduced the salience of ethnicity in the north. The broad question is whether an increase in economic means for minority groups in the north is responsible for lessened ethnic tensions. A compelling explanation on these lines is that a rise in the general economic means of previously subjugated minority groups in the north has encompassed individuals from these groups under the same socioeconomic identity group as majority group members. This argument finds the answer to why ethnic tensions have been diminished in terms which are purely economical and entirely separate from the ability persons have to access political resources.

There are some good reasons for thinking this is the case. Previously subjugated groups in the north have developed significantly in economic terms relative to their competition in the region; take, for example, the increased success of Konkomba yam farmers over the past few decades.50 The levelling out in economic status may consequently have developed non-ethnic socioeconomic ties between ethnic groups previously distinguished by their ranked political and economic relationship (for example, the majority Dagomba group and the now significantly more prosperous minority Konkomba group). This claim is in line with my

50 Talton, Politics of Social Change in Ghana, 191.
argument so far – the distinction is to claim that this socioeconomic identity generated inter-ethnic ties in a self-contained manner. This counters my claim that the competitive party framework made it possible to make this otherwise dormant identity meaningful and politically salient by changing the size of the competitive political and economic arena.

The problem with this explanation is that it does not account for the continuation, or even accentuation, of competition between groups in this new economic context. This is because evening out economic positions between different groups does not stop, and may even further invigorate, competition between these groups for access to limited local resources. Talton makes such a claim, stating that increased success in the yam trade “lessened the politicization of Konkomba ethnicity.”

The issue here is that this looks at economic competition one-dimensionally. While the Konkomba may have become more satisfied with their position through economic successes, and thus less in need of representation in traditional political institutions, this does not account for the interests of their prime competitors; the majority groups. As discussed earlier, the Konkomba’s decision to break out on their own in the yam trade significantly dented the interests of majority groups whom had earned money from acting as the middlemen in trade deals, while their decision to resist tribute demands had a similar effect of disrespecting the majority groups’ economic predominance. Furthermore, Konkomba economic success actually predates the conflicts and has been attributed as a cause of the 1981 war having “sharpened the structural misfit” they felt in the traditional sphere.

Clearly, then, economic levelling alone was unable to diminish inter-ethnic antagonism.

The potential for kinship between groups of a similar socioeconomic position could only become salient if these groups were somehow entered into a larger arena of competition

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51 Ibid.
52 Oelbaum, “Liberalization or Liberation?: Economic Reform and the Paradox of Conflict in Ghana’s Northern Region,” 9.
whereby the groups that previously considered themselves competitors now shared a mutual interest in accessing resources not held by either of them. At the regional level these groups fought for limited resources held by each other. If, however, they became capable of competing for resources held at the national level then their shared socioeconomic identity becomes salient because of needing to compete with wealthier regions for access to resources which none of the local groups have. Essentially, it only becomes salient once a meaningful and competitive contrast, or cleavage, exists between itself and another type of socioeconomic group. The political saliency of socioeconomic identity in this way was made possible by the party structures which enabled participation at the national level and made socioeconomic identity an effectively-sized cleavage through which to compete for access to national resources. Without parties broadening the political arena the socioeconomic identity shared between groups in the north would not be important because it would not have a competitive antagonist. In essence, it would not be part of a salient cleavage. It is only in comparison to other, wealthier and considerably more urbanised Ghanaians in the rest of the country that northern regioners have any incentive to consider themselves as having a mutual political cause. In the case of northern Ghana this identity group is made up of less-skilled, less-educated, rural, and poorer voters which are captured by the NDC party. This party pursues socialist leaning distributive economic policies and is in competition with the laissez-faire economic policies of the NPP, which favours the growing urban business elite.

*Is there temporal dissonance in the explanation?*

One potential issue with the claim that parties in Ghana’s contemporary democracy are responsible for diminishing ethnic grievances is quite a simple one; the birth of Ghana’s contemporary democracy (in 1992) preceded the start of the war (in 1994). How can I make the claim that the party-system is responsible for indirectly alleviating grievances associated
with the war if it existed when the war broke out? If the party-system had this impact, why did it not prevent the war?

There are three main reasons – which I hope have been visible throughout this study – for dismissing this concern. First, the features of the democratic multi-party system which diminished the saliency of ethnicity did not appear overnight in Ghana; there was a time-lag between the establishment of parties in the Fourth Republic and their becoming central to the lives of citizens in far flung rural areas (which had historically been isolated from national level politics). As identified in chapter 3, various developments led to dramatically increased visibility and accessibility of parties after the first elections in 1992. It wasn’t until 1998 that radio technology had achieved national dispersal, allowing party broadcasts and independent radio commentary (licensed only in 1995) to reach rural citizens.\(^\text{53}\) The administrative, financial and organisational capacity of parties increased dramatically by 1996, with the NPP’s financial means increasing tenfold from and the NDC’s by almost double this again, such that their role in democratic socialisation and ability to rally support took time to gain significance.\(^\text{54}\) Furthermore, the capacity of the EC and the NCCE to engage citizens in the democratic process was given a significant boost for the 1996 elections, with international development organisations USAID and DANIDA funding them “to train electoral workers and promote public awareness of why and how to vote” (with over $23m in total spent by outsiders to ensure the smooth passage of the elections).\(^\text{55}\) It is understandable that participatory resources were not fully fleshed out immediately as democracy began in 1992, but as advances came about rural persons were able to connect with parties and recognise their use for achieving access to central political resources. While data for the early elections

\(^{53}\) Morrison, "Political Parties in Ghana through Four Republics: A Path to Democratic Consolidation," 437, 33.  
\(^{54}\) Ibid., 436.  
is unavailable, this trend is visible in the increase in the number of northern region voters that considered themselves core party supporters from 53% in 2002-03 to 69% in 2005-06.  

Second, the three preceding examples of democratic rule in Ghana were the experiences of 1960-64, 1969-72 and 1979-81. In the first case parliamentary democracy was turned into a one-party state by its leadership, and in the second and third the governments were removed by military coups. In none of the three preceding examples of democracy had the promise of the first administration materialised into a second set of elections. Thus, the significance of the successful 1996 multi-party elections should not be understated. These “raised high hopes for democratic development in the Fourth Republic.” They showed “vast improvements” in the democratic credentials of the Republic and the impartiality of the EC. Perhaps most importantly they assuaged fears that real competition would not materialise; in 1992 the main opposition parties boycotted the parliamentary elections, “resulting in a de facto one-party parliament that was little more than a rubber stamp for the executive.” The 1996 elections were hotly contested by all parties, and in 2000 the fear that Ghana might be “developing a ‘party-state’ political system in which the NDC was permanently entrenched in power” was put aside with its first successful transfer of power. With this in mind, it would be a stretch to suggest that many Ghanaians were confident they would enjoy consistent and fair elections in the years to come, and that party competition would be anything more than short-lived or nominal in nature. By 1994, when the war began, it is unlikely that the new democracy was particularly central in the political considerations of those in the isolated and traditionalist rural parts of the northern region where the conflict predominantly occurred.

56 "Afrobarometer Data: Ghana, Rounds 1-5."
57 Gyimah-Boadi, "A Peaceful Turnover in Ghana," 104.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
Finally, the war of 1994 was not self-standing; it was the bloody culmination of a series of smaller conflicts and associated grievances which had been building for many years. As discussed in chapter 1, the tensions that underlay the 1994 war were linked to unresolved conflicts between minority and majority groups from 1981 (over forced tribute payments) and 1991-92 (over majority group control of minority areas).\(^6^1\) The causes of these conflicts can be drawn back to the formalisation of majority control under colonialism, and perhaps even further to military domination of minority groups in the 16\(^{th}\) century.\(^6^2\) It is understandable that it would take some time for new democratic reforms and opportunities – which were not yet clear to, or impactful on, NR inhabitants – to breach existing tensions in the region.

**What are the possible issues with the Przeworskian model used?**

Before looking at these issues it is important to make a qualification about the use of Przeworski’s model in this study; it is primarily supplementary to Posner’s model. Using Posner I have laid out the structural conditions and incentives of political competition which explain why political actors find one cleavage more politically satisfying than another, and using Przeworski I am able to situate these mechanisms playing out over the course of multiple elections (i.e. why a political actor continues to be satisfied by the competitive party environment and thus remains loyal to it). This lens fleshes out my central use of Posner to illustrate Ghana’s continuously stable and non-violent democratic system.

**How institutional constraints affect the incentives-based model**

Shapiro, questions Przeworski’s claim that it is not important to worry about “democratic commitments.”\(^6^3\) His assertion rests on the idea that democracy is “a system of

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\(^6^1\) Jönsson, *Traditional Leadership and Ethnic Conflict in Ghana’s Northern Region*, 18.
\(^6^2\) Ibid., 10-11.
spontaneous or self-reinforcing compliance,” because it is in everyone’s self-interest to maintain the system, but Shapiro asks whether this entails claiming that we are “living in a pure incentives-based world” and whether it would be problematic if it did. Shapiro points out that even Przeworski recognises there are instances where politicians give up power they have no chance of getting back at a future date, as for example President Clinton did in 2000. The question, then, is why do politicians sometimes play by the rules in such situations? Shapiro believes the answer lies in the fact that no decisions are made in a “contextual void… [because] political decision making is always constrained by inherited institutions and practices.”

We must then ask about Ghana whether parties stop themselves from usurping power or whether institutional constraints primarily limit their actions. The first thing to notice about this criticism is that it does not pay attention to the part played by the loser in this story. According to Przeworski’s model the party in office chooses not to usurp power not just because they know they can achieve incremental gains over future elections but because the costs of a violent uprising from their evenly matched opposition could be devastating. Nevertheless, to play out this criticism further let’s consider the possibility that even if this protectionist motivation to not usurp power does exist it may not be the primary consideration influencing decision-makers; this may rather be found in institutional commitments. So what is it about a democratic institutional framework that can inspire loyalty to the uncertain outcomes of their processes?

Shapiro makes a very valuable point here that in a well-ordered democratic system “all-or-nothing politics” can be avoided by “ensuring that the stakes in any given contest are

64 Ibid.
65 Ibid., 90.
comparatively low.” What this entails is making sure that any issue that is on the table for decision-making by a power-wielding politician is always up for revision or reconsideration at a later date, and that all issues are never on the table at any one time. A good example in Ghana is the solidity and foundational importance of their current constitution. A constitutional review is currently underway; it has been ongoing since 2010, will likely require significant cross-institutional consensus on any changes eventually made, and is being closely monitored by civil society organisations. By pointing out the complex environment in which decision-making is made, Shapiro provides material that can flesh out my usage of Przeworski’s model. What these institutional constraints show is that as the quantity of resources controlled by any particular central authority increase the number of checks and balances must also. In practice this means that the payoffs from usurping power are diminished because it will only ever be a portion of power that can be usurped. The parliamentary system in Ghana, for example, is kept fully separate from the executive office. Saying this, the executive office has often been criticised for holding too much power over appointments within other wings of government. For example, in local government the District Chief Executives (the highest local position) are picked by the president and merely ratified by local politicians. However, these sorts of added powers may actually provide the impetus to stay loyal to the system, especially in a young democracy. Knowing that, once in office, a party can make significant changes may encourage their loyalty to the system, while as a whole the system remains balanced by considerable separation of powers and by the fundamental authority of the constitution.

66 Ibid.
Chapter 4

Income inequality and the support of democratic procedures

Lipset’s classic modernisation theory claims that democracies develop as countries become more economically developed. In more recent work Przeworski and Limongi challenge this “endogenous” explanation for democratic development, finding considerable evidence to suggest that democracies “appear randomly with regard to levels of development, but… die in the poorer countries and survive in the wealthier ones.”69 This is not a modernization argument both because it does not look for the source of democratic development and because it does not find it in the process of modernization. Rather, it is an “exogenous” explanation for the conditions under which a democracy remains stable or “survives,” claiming this is more likely the higher the per capita income of a country.70

What interests us are the explanations given for why higher per capita income entails democratic survival. One offered up by Przeworski and Limongi in this particular article, albeit in minimal detail, is based on the idea that “the marginal utility of consumption is lower at higher levels of consumption;” i.e. that when per capita income is higher, or at least growing, the “gain from winning the struggle for dictatorship is smaller.”71 However, per capita income levels are alone not determinate of democratic stability. Also important is the level of income inequality in a country; “democracies are less stable in societies that are more unequal to begin with, [and] in societies in which household income inequality increases.”72 These claims are one way of substantiating the other argument of Przeworski’s which I employ in this study, i.e. that if the payoff from staying loyal to the system is large enough then the bloodshed cost of overthrowing elected leaders, or of these leaders usurping power, is too significant to risk.

70 Ibid.
71 Ibid., 166.
While under Ghana’s current democratic system per capita income has increased, as expected by Przeworski and Limongi, income inequality has simultaneously grown. As Osei-Assibey points out, “there is growing evidence that while the incidence of income poverty in general has reduced [since 1983], income distribution has widened.”73 Thus, while Ghana has managed to raise a proportion of its worst-off citizens from poverty this has not coincided with income increases equitable to that which the better-off experience. By Przeworski and Limongi’s logic, this entails that while net payoffs for staying loyal to the democratic regime have increased these payoffs have not been shared evenly across the board. As such, wealthier persons benefit more from the status quo because they receive a comparatively larger share of the “pie.” With the fruits of economic advancement shared unevenly across the country we might expect to see more volatility towards democratic procedures in poorer areas, such as the northern region. This is because the worst-off have less of an incentive to wait for the next election instead of revolting or usurping power. They receive less of the collective pie than their richer counterparts and thus have less to lose from the breakdown of the political system which controls the distribution of this pie. Considering the north consistently shows strong support for the NDC party we might expect to see its local support-base acting in a particularly non-cooperative and possibly even violent manner, but we do not. Does the fact that income inequality has increased in Ghana mean that we cannot use Przeworski’s incentive-based model to explain how democracy has been well supported by poorer rural voters, like those in the north? And does this pose a problem for the wider claim that socioeconomic identification and party competition are politically satisfying and thus diminishing ethnic grievances?

I would suggest that neither of these is the case. This is primarily because of an erroneous assumption in the claim that persons will be less likely to be loyal to the system as

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the *absolute* utility they gain from remaining loyal either decreases or increases less than it does for others. The problem here is that it is assumed that an absolute increase in a particular resource has the same impact on any given person’s subjective commitment to the political system. On the contrary, the fact that the Ghanaian government has overseen the raising of a significant number of people out of poverty could very well be enough to satisfy poorer persons, even though these persons continue to receive fewer benefits than their wealthier counterparts.\(^74\) In essence, the less one has to begin with the greater the satisfaction attained from each resource unit that comes one’s way. A UN report on poverty reduction illustrates this in action. It points out that while nationally in Ghana poverty decreased by 52% between 1991-92 and 2005-06, the northern region “has largely been excluded from that broader trend,” with its poverty levels declining by 11% only.\(^75\) Nonetheless, the small increases in income in the northern region have had a significant impact. The report details that while women producing shea butter are earning only a relatively small amount more for every 100 kilogrammes sold ($11), this “modest extra income has already changed the lives of many of the women.”\(^76\) As such, it is not so clearly necessary that decreasing inequality accompanies increasing per capita income for loyalty to a political system to remain high; even if particular segments of society receive less than others in absolute terms for their loyalty, they may still find the system to be the most satisfying because of marginal gains it allows them.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that this is the ideal state of affairs; there is certainly room for improvement in terms of upping the tempo of equitable redistributive development projects to remove more Ghanaians from poverty. Nonetheless, regardless of the absolute change in poverty levels it is presumptive to claim that those that gain less in absolute terms are less committed to the uncertain interplay of democratic institutions. Their commitment

\(^{74}\) Ibid., 1.
\(^{76}\) Ibid.
concerns their subjective perception of what is gained rather than the absolute amount. As such, while the payoffs for remaining loyal to the political system may be smaller in absolute terms for those in the poorer northern region, this does not necessarily make it less valuable, and less worth protecting, than it is for those wealthier persons who gain more in absolute terms. Competition to achieve a more favourable resource distribution for the less well-off is still best pursued within the current system.
The curious peace in Ghana following the ethnic conflict of 1994 has provided an opportunity to investigate previously understudied (or even unstudied) political conditions and mechanisms that have made this peace possible. I will briefly sum up the findings and claims made in this investigation before considering the contribution it makes both to the literature on Ghanaian peace (surveyed in chapter 1) and to the general theoretical literature on peace-building after ethnic conflict (surveyed in chapter 2). The latter two exercises will also provide greater detail of the general conclusions to be drawn from this study.

Despite the failure of post-conflict efforts at reconciliation to directly resolve ethnic grievances in the northern region of Ghana, peace has remained intact. At the beginning of this study I proposed the theory that conflict is not dormant; rather, ethnic grievances have been indirectly resolved. As we have seen, the central mechanism responsible for this is political parties. By enabling citizens of the northern region to by proxy take part in competition over national political resources, parties have politicised the recently forged socioeconomic identity of groups across the country. In the north this has had a striking impact. Not only has it refocused resource competition from the ethnically charged and antagonistic regional level to the national level, it has correspondingly seen socioeconomic identity replace ethnic identity as the most politically salient form. As such, minority and majority groups which were ethnic adversaries are now partisan brethren.

With participation at the national level in place, the competitive two-party environment has instilled a self-enforcing system of incentive-based, non-violent political activity. The highly competitive nature of party politics in Ghana provides persons across the country with a strong incentive to respect democratic procedures. As part of large socioeconomically
defined political associations, each person recognises that they have an excellent shot at achieving favourable representation at any given election, such that losing one is not disastrous and certainly not worth rebelling over. As such, “bloodshed is avoided by the mere fact that... the political forces expect to take turns.”\(^1\) Thus, not only do parties enable participation at the national level, they make a democratic Ghana a satisfying system to be a part of.

The contribution to understanding inter-ethnic peace in Ghana

The current literature identifies numerous possible causes of the inter-ethnic peace in Ghana. Jönsson outlines many of these in this short excerpt:

“Negative experiences of conflict, changing patterns of block mobilisation, increasing Konkomba political participation and Ghana’s current era of stability and economic improvement have all decreased the perceived desirability and viability of violent change… [and] further inter-ethnic conflict in the NR has [also] been avoided through a combination of the NGO peace negotiation and sensitisation effort and other positive external factors.”\(^2\)

On top of this, Talton observes that “party politics represent[s] the new force for change since the end of the conflict… [and has] increased interethnic fellowship and cooperation between Konkomba and neighboring communities throughout Ghana.”\(^3\)

Unfortunately, these observations have largely been poorly evidenced and, worse still, have taken a back seat to claims that, in spite of all the positive changes, conflict still lies dormant between ethnic groups. To take just a few examples, Jönsson claims that “basic risk

\(^2\) Jönsson, Traditional Leadership and Ethnic Conflict in Ghana’s Northern Region, 38.  
\(^3\) Talton, Politics of Social Change in Ghana, 191.
factors, such as the tying of land ownership to ethnicity and neo-traditional institutions and the ethnic exclusiveness of these institutions, have not been resolved,” Kaye and Beland claim that the region is stuck in “cycles of violence,” and Wienia that the region is only experiencing an “ominous calm” between ethnic groups.4

My aim in this investigation has been to concretely identify the mechanisms behind the reduction of incentives for violence, many of which have been at least noted (if not fully explored) in the current literature. What I aimed to do differently to the existing literature was to show how the features which have caused peace in Ghana are not just papering over the cracks but fundamentally changing the cracks themselves (or cleavages, if you like).

One of my central claims is that by enabling democratic participation in the competition for national resources, parties have tapped into socioeconomic identity and managed to make it the most politically salient form of identity. It is important to recognise a subtlety in this claim that I believe is lost on the current literature; identities are multifaceted rather than binary, i.e. they do not merely exist or not exist. They can exist and be politically salient or exist and not be politically salient, be mobilised or un-mobilised, and exist alongside other forms of identity or alone. Importantly, what the analysis of the causes of conflict and the post-conflict environment has shown us is a simple commonality between the two; competition over political and economic resources is rife in each. What matters, then, is which identity is chosen at any one time for political mobilisation. As such, by continuing to recognise the existence of a particular identity we don’t have to assume that grievances are part of the package deal. The two are separated by whether or not this particular identity is politically salient. Furthermore, if a cleavage, like ethnicity, continues to exist it certainly does not have to be considered as the pivot by which to understand the interests of and

incentives available to Ghanaians. In this regard I have attempted to show that the way in
which the current literature on the peace in Ghana continues to treat ethnic groups as units in
themselves is problematic, and that part of the journey to fully understanding the impact of
new democratic institutions is to let go of this notion of permanent political self-
identification.

As we have seen, in a way that I hope is both empirically and theoretically compelling,
party politics has mobilised a socioeconomic identity in the north that spans ethnic groups,
dominating political affairs and diminishing the contemporary salience of previous ethnic
grievances. As such, even if “embedded inequalities” in the traditional sphere continue to
exist, these inequalities are simply no longer salient.\(^5\) This investigation has shown that you
do not need to directly attend to grievances in order to resolve them; by identifying the
general interests that underlie these grievances (i.e. access to political and economic
resources), changing the arena within which persons compete for these, and changing the
identity cleavage through which this competition is channelled, we can resolve such
grievances indirectly by making them contemporarily irrelevant.

At the beginning of this study I determined that I wanted to look in more detail at the
mechanisms which Talton identified as minimising the subjugation of the Konkomba,
particularly his emphasis on the role played by democracy. Using a largely historical, non-
analytical and non-theoretical approach, Talton claims a number of features to be present in
the elevation of the Konkomba. Due to this method, however, he was unable to clarify the
mechanisms by which these might be possible or how they might manifest themselves.
Looking back now at the end of this project I find a remarkable similarity between his

Conclusions

conclusions and my own structuralist and minimalist incentive-based understanding, nowhere more so than the following passage:

“The narrative of this book does not culminate in the solidifying of a Konkomba ethnicity. Ethnicity defined the society in which Konkomba operated and gained access to resources and power. Konkomba leaders adopted ethnicity and other accepted power motifs, including chieftaincy and political unity, to gain political legitimacy... Konkomba postcolonial political activism tacitly embraced chieftaincy and organized around ethnicity as tactics to achieve greater social equality and compete with their neighbors economically and politically. Konkomba leaders also embraced party politics and the democratic process. Their movement demonstrates that no clear line exists between traditional and modern politics.”

Many of the claims that Talton makes I believe I have ratified, clarified and extended. More importantly, though, unlike Talton my insights tell us a story that is not about the satisfaction of the Konkomba as an ethnic group and as such does not leave open the possibility that their grievances are alive and well. My story does not accept the static, and consequently inaccurate, tale of ethnic cleavages that treats them as immovable and pivotal. Neither does it assume that it is not necessary to tease out the sharply different lines along which political participation now occurs. It shows that it is now misleading to refer to leaders as “Konkombas,” and illustrates the inaccuracy of claiming that “no clear line exists between traditional and modern politics.” It tells us a story where we question whether “Konkomba” is any longer a meaningful and consequential political label, and concludes by showing us that it is not. The diminished saliency of ethnicity accompanies the newfound saliency of

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6 Talton, Politics of Social Change in Ghana, 192.
7 Ibid.
socioeconomic cleavages expressed through party politics, revealing a political landscape in which minority and majority groups are no longer adversaries; now they are brethren.

The contribution to theories of peace after ethnic conflict

Recall that some pages ago, in the first chapter, I outlined the value of studying the abnormal or “rare” Ghanaian case. Here peace has remained in spite of the failure to implement a peace accord or to implement various mechanisms identified in the literature as being conducive to peace. That it is so unusual means it is typically overlooked by political scientists who seek to identify the conditions under which peaceful relations are usually achieved. These scholars seek the modal conditions for peace; i.e. the conditions which are most commonly present when peace is achieved. The theorists evaluated in chapter 2, including Lake, Rothchild and Stedman, are of this methodological persuasion. While the value of this broad approach is clear, it is (ironically) limited in scope. By looking out for the most prevalent conditions for peace these theorists are able to uncover only a small number of what is potentially a large range of such useful conditions. By closely analysing a single abnormal case we have been able to find unusual, but nonetheless transferable, insights about the range of plausible institutional mechanisms for ensuring peace between ethnic groups. Rather than treat the abnormal case as an anomaly we have approached it with the possibility in mind that it might turn out to be a rare form of best-practice.

So, now we can revisit the dominant theories in the field of ethnic conflict management to see whether the results of this study illustrate an alternative range of conditions for managing peace.

According to Lake and Rothchild “ethnic conflict is not caused directly by inter-group differences… and centuries-old feuds” but rather by “groups begin[ning] to fear for their
Accordingly, their suggested mechanisms for managing ethnic conflict are focused around providing each group with the feeling that they are entirely secure from their adversary deciding to engage in violent conduct at any point in time. If this cannot be provided then regression to war is highly likely. These mechanisms foremost include “power-sharing, elections engineered to produce the interdependence of groups, and the establishment of regional autonomy and federalism.”

The Ghanaian case, which exhibited none of these mechanisms, shows us that by focusing solely on the security-dilemma Lake and Rothchild have overlooked other plausible mechanisms for ensuring peace. Importantly, they have overlooked the possibility that the saliency of the cleavage on which ethnic antagonisms are based could change over time. In Ghana we observed that political parties changed the size of the political arena that previously isolated ethnic groups are able compete in. This saw socioeconomic identity become the most expedient and consequently the most salient form of cleavage along which competition for political resources could occur. Lake and Rothchild’s model asserts that “ethnic conflict can be contained, but it cannot be entirely resolved” and as such that “we can only hope to contain ethnic fears, not permanently eliminate them.” I vehemently disagree with these assertions. My analysis has shown that this treats ethnic relations as a permanent security dilemma, not accounting for how ethnic identity may change in saliency and be usurped by another form of identity in primary political importance. If the ethnic cleavage loses saliency then group-focused democratic protection mechanisms, such as power-sharing, are not necessarily needed; here a competitive majoritarian system of governance with executive, legislative and judicial separation of powers can achieve peaceful relations along non-ethnic lines. It is even plausible that Lake and Rothchild’s peace-building mechanisms

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9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., 42, 57.
might turn their evaluation of inter-ethnic fear into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Building institutions in order to separate groups from, and protect them against, their historical adversaries risks entrenching antagonistic relations between groups and may even rule out the potential for other cleavages to outgrow ethnicity in importance (as was the case in Ghana).

This is not to say that there are not similarities between my approach and theirs. For example, they state that since undertaking violence is costly, if the end of it is to secure a material bargain then “the same *ex post* agreement could be reached without the use of force, and the resources that would have been expended in violence divided somehow between the parties *ex ante.*”\(^1\) This bears strong similarities with Przeworski’s notion that political players size each other up, recognise that the costs of usurping power are not worth it and strike a bargain that will prevent any uprising from occurring; thus, the same *ex post* agreement is made *ex ante* the occurrence of any violence. The weakness here is not in their understanding of the dynamics of war and negotiation, but in their narrow application of these to supposedly entrenched inter-ethnic antagonisms. As we have seen in Ghana, ethnic group members can have multiple identities at once and which one they choose to act on will depend on the size of the arena they are able to compete in. Furthermore, by fixing ethnic groups as their unit of analysis, Lake and Rothchild fail to appreciate that the political resource interests held by these groups are foundationally held by the individuals that constitute them, and thus that they could be attached to a different identity group should one become politicised.

As previously mentioned, the Ghanaian case is not a generally representative one. One aspect of this is that ethnic conflict here took place at the sub-state level, which is potentially problematic for broader application of insights drawn from it. Lake and Rothchild base their theory in situations where parties are fighting for control of the maximal political arena, such

\(^1\) Ibid., 45-6.
that it is not possible to expand its size (as is fundamental in Posner’s model). Nonetheless, this need not take away from the relevance of these insights. The size of the political arena itself does not have to be changed in order for a more politically expedient form of cleavage to occur. If ethnic groups make up a portion of the population that is significantly lower than 50% then a socioeconomically-focused bi-partisan system, as in Ghana, provides a better opportunity to achieve a minimum winning coalition. Nonetheless, this is a reminder that any insights drawn from a single case must be applied with selective care.

Moving on, Stedman and Rothchild claim that post-conflict negotiations have a dual purpose; to end conflict and structure future relations to “facilitate a transition to what Adam Przeworski calls a ‘self-enforcing’ regime” whereby all parties gladly submit “to the uncertain interplay of the institutions.”12 Clearly, I agree! However, we diverge on the substance of these mechanisms. According to Stedman and Rothchild the keys to a successful post-conflict landscape are in implementing measures that build confidence and political-security specifically between the feuding groups. The former must be enforceable and build trust between groups through tests of commitment to the terms of peace. The failed peace accord in Ghana does not live up to this. My analysis shows that these sorts of measures are not necessary in every case (so long as the conditions exist under which the saliency of the antagonistic cleavage can decrease). One of the political-security measures which should be instigated in post-conflict negotiations if future conflict is to be avoided is a competitive electoral system. The Ghanaian case shows that it is not necessary to have competitive elections come as part of the post-conflict package. Moreover, it is even possible that not having its electoral system framed in terms of inter-ethnic competition has provided the basis on which democracy in Ghana has been able to act as a clean slate on which a new socioeconomic cleavage could take centre stage.

Finally, we return to Rothchild’s solo work on *Managing Ethnic Conflict in Africa*. The empirical investigation and theoretical framing have confirmed my predictions in chapter 2. Recall that Rothchild claims that “polyarchic… regimes are processors rather than makers of demands” which “channel social conflict along predetermined paths.” Because of this they are only capable of managing, not eliminating, inter-ethnic grievances. Such management entails finding ways to directly satisfy each party in their grievances towards the other; in the Ghanaian case this would have involved the reorganisation of the traditional sphere and elevation of minority groups to full paramount chieftaincy status. In this investigation we have seen how a simple two-party polyarchic democratic regime need not necessarily channel social conflict along pre-determined paths. On the contrary, it can provide the conditions in which inclusive, socioeconomically-defined parties are able to create a new channel along which competition for political resources can occur.

Thus, Rothchild’s assumption that ethnic conflict can either be managed or continue in the same vein is one-dimensional (see table below). It overlooks another path that ethnic antagonism can take; gradual movement towards insignificance. Thus, a two-dimensional model is more appropriate (see table below). On one dimension ethnic grievances are either directly managed or they are not. On the other dimension, ethnicity is either politically salient or not. As has been shown by this investigation, ethnic grievances can exist unmanaged while ethnicity is not politically salient. Consequently, rather than having to deal with these grievances directly – “managing” them as Rothchild terms it – these grievances can lose importance if ethnicity loses its salience. As such, the alternative to management of ethnic grievances is not necessarily elimination; ethnic grievances and ethnic identity can continue to exist and not require management if their political saliency has disappeared.

Conclusions

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<td>My model</td>
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My hope in undertaking this investigation has been to show how the Ghanaian case illustrates narrowness in the current ethnic conflict and peace literature, and to modestly broaden the known range of political conditions which are conducive to inter-ethnic peace. If compelling it will have illustrated how a close study of the abnormal case can provide otherwise unrecognised insights about the ways in which institutions and political decisions can affect the stability of ethnic relations. In tender post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation circumstances it is paramount that as much information of this kind as possible exists for policy makers.


Morrison, Minion KC. "Political Parties in Ghana through Four Republics: A Path to Democratic Consolidation." *Comparative Politics* (2004): 421-42.


