

# Regionalism, ethnicity, and politics in Ghana

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## Abstract

*One basic feature that characterises all African countries is cultural diversity. Like most African countries, one way to measure diversity among the people of Ghana is ethnicity. There are several researches on the direct relationship between language, place and politics. Spoken language, directly linked to ethnicity in Ghana is political and geographical in nature. It is, therefore, clear that ethnic identity and languages spoken are the symbols and values that form a focal point for group cohesiveness, and this may vary through time. This study, therefore, examines ethnicity in Ghana through time in space using GIS to map the variations from the known spatial divisions and political lens then uses voting patterns to understand politics of affection among various ethnic groups in the country. The paper concludes that, although the geographical concentrations of ethnicity can be mapped to specific places, migration has diffused greatly the sole concentration of one ethnic group in a specified place. It also questions the hypothesis that voting in Africa is largely based on ethnic considerations, place and language based other than development. It does this considering the recent trend of voting patterns in the country.*

**Key words:** Regionalism, Ethnicity, Politics; Economy of Affection; Ghana

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## **Introduction**

Like most African countries, Ghana is ethnically diverse, and the basis of the diversity is largely seen in the different languages spoken and other cultural traits depicted by different ethnic groups. According to Anyidoho and Dakubu (2008), for the people of Ghana, language appears to be the main marker of subnational ethnic identity. Ghana is one of the countries with a high degree of linguistic heterogeneity. The exact number of spoken languages in Ghana is hardly accurately known (Obeng, 1997). It is, however, believed that Ghana's indigenous languages can be categorized into ten major language groups with over forty-six sub-groups, but these groups do not conform to a one-to-one matching with the then ten regions<sup>1</sup> of the country (Bodomo, 1996).

Many writers on West Africa assert that there is a conflict between ethnicity and nationalism, which threatens the stability of the sub-continent (Yeros, 2016; Bayart & Ellis, 2000; Wallerstein, 1960). In fact, the relationship between ethnicity and nationalism is complex. Although ethnicity is in some respects dysfunctional for national integration, it is also functional in other instances (Wallerstein, 1960). People who speak similar languages regard themselves as one group. This in effect, increases their affection for each other even, sometimes outside the original places of origin. Communal sharing of burdens and benefits among people speaking the same languages and from the same ethnic group in most cases encourages the spirit of reciprocities among such people (Canda et al., 2019).

It is established that there is a direct relationship between, language, place and politics (Anyidoho, 2008). Moreover, those spoken languages are directly linked to ethnicity in Ghana and linked to politics (Anyidoho & Dakubu, 2008). It is, therefore, clear that ethnic

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<sup>1</sup> In 2018, Ghanaians held a referendum to increase the number of the country's geographical regions from ten to sixteen.

identity and languages spoken are the symbols and values that form a focal point for group cohesiveness, and this may vary through time and its intensity diffuses with time as well. Just as it has almost become a norm in academia, the world of politics and the media, the concepts of 'ethnicity,' 'linguistic groups' and 'ethnic groups' are used interchangeably in this study in spite of the technical distinction in their meanings to absorb and replace the word 'tribe' whose meaning seems a bit problematic (Lentz & Nugent, 2000).

The spirit of affection among ethnic groupings extend to all forms of voting, especially to national political voting in many African countries (Hyden, 2008). Ethnic members have a sense of reciprocity among their members who vie for political appointment, seek employment in their institutions and seek favour from them. It is not surprising that voting in Ghana is largely based on ethnicity, especially between the two leading political parties (Jackson, 2018). If people living in the same area, speaking the same language are obligated to vote for their own, do they extend the same logic when they migrate to other areas and hence feel distant from their ethnically geographical area? What about when the relationship becomes so fluid to the extent that future generations cannot speak their native languages nor afflicted to their ethnic demanding duties? This is possible because of migration. Migration of ethnic groups on mass basis form part of the Ghanaian history. It has also become common that individuals or families migrate on their own to other parts of the country. Largely, ethnic groups were geographically concentrated at certain places, but due to migration, people from different ethnic groups now expand and diffuse (Lichter, 2012). The expansion also in most cases leads to dilution and less concentration of same ethnic group members and languages. This is an example of the geographical phenomenon known as expansion diffusion (Kerswill, 2006), and by definition, does not implicate population movements. The study of this type of diffusion was central to the concerns of 19th and 20th century dialect geographers, later refined by the application of models from human geography, particularly hierarchical

diffusion (Kerswill, 2006). Britain (2003) investigated the linguistic effects of relocation diffusion, by which cultural elements such as languages are transmitted to new places through human migration.

This paper looks at development of regionalism, ethnicity and voting through time and space in Ghana and hence, assesses the future of ethnic concentration in geographical space using Geographic Information System (GIS) to map the variations from the known spatial divisions and political lens. The paper argues that, although the geographical concentrations of ethnic groups can be mapped to specific places, migration has diffused greatly the sole concentration of some languages to some specified places. It also delves deeper into the hypothesis that voting in Africa is largely on ethnic, place and language base other than development. It does this based on the recent trend of voting patterns in Ghana.

### **Economy of Affection, Regionalism and Voting for Affection in Ghana**

The term “economy of affection” was first coined by Hyden to denote a network of support and interaction among structurally defined groups connected by blood, kin, community or other affinities (Hyden & Hydén, 1983). The underlying assumption is that affective or solidarity bonds provide the necessary social cement to hold individuals and communities together in a variety of exchange situations. Such bonds are inseparable from 'the principle of reciprocity embedded in customary rules (Lemarchand, 1989). Based on his research conducted in East Africa, Hyden posits that the peasant mode triggers an economy in which the effective ties such as those based on common decent and common residence, prevail. He calls this an economy of affection. In that kind of system, to him, familial and communal ties provide the basis for organised activities. The main feature of economy of affection is reciprocity that is structurally induced (Hyden, 2008). The social logic of reciprocity is

unquestionably the most significant defining characteristic of the economy of affection (Lemarchand, 1989).

Based on the social logic of peasant mode, the economy of affection negates many of the power relationships that characterize the modern economies including democracy. As Hyden (1980: 192) rightly puts it 'the most important effect of the economy of affection is not at the political but at the social level. It performs an important welfare function in that, within the social networks, based on the principles of that economy, unofficial redistribution of wealth takes place.' (Lemarchand, 1989).

According to Hyden (2008), the functional purposes of the economy of affection can be grouped into three: basic survival, social maintenance, and development. He believes these values were destroyed as a basis for subsistence in Europe and Asia by the emergence of capitalism and that they continue to be found in East Africa because village economies there have not by then been 'captured' by the world capitalist economy (Walters, 1992). The ability of leaders to mobilise the relations of affection for political purposes made a difference in the end the struggle for colonialism. According to this thesis, both villagers and city-dwellers are tied together in webs of kinship and tribal obligation that mitigate against the accumulation of wealth or capital necessary for the formation of industrial modes of production or class-based societies (Walters, 1992).

It is based on Hyden's claims that similar studies have confirmed that such values are not only found in the rural areas of Africa but that they extend into modern state structures, like voting and urban living. There is the view that the peasant mode of subsistence is strong and persist parallel to the capitalist or modern economy in Africa (Danso-Wiredu, 2016). This is why relations between kin, family, and tribal networks are more important for Hyden than descriptions of emerging class and forms of industrialised production (Walters, 1992). Networks grounded in social relations are highly resilient to the tenets of democracy rather

than the rationalised democratic processes. This becomes subject to the continuing demands of the 'affection' that stems from the peasant mode of production.

Nepotism is the most common manifestation of this in most African countries including Ghana (Osei-Hwedie & Osei-Hwedie, 2000), that most of the wage employment are in the public and parastatal sectors, and jobs are often awarded on the basis of kinship ties rather than competitive merit (Osei-Hwedie & Osei-Hwedie, 2000; Beekers & Van Gool, 2012). In addition, because of the need to obtain state permits for so many price-controlled items, the allocation of market goods has been pushed into the economy of affection. Those who have created their own linkages along the kin, tribal, political party, or other lines cause this allocation. In other words, many urbanised Africans appear to respond more to the needs and benefits of their village-based networks, rather than what might be regarded elsewhere as the standard practice.

In order to reproduce their leadership, those in higher positions must ensure regular flows of personal patronage to individual followers. In such patron-client relationships, vertical accountability modelled based on economies of affection means, exchanging political support for personalized favours and benefits (Beekers & Van Gool, 2012; Kurer, 1996). These in turn reproduce parts of mutual loyalty and voters choose representatives based on how good they are as patrons. The empirical studies that exist indicate that Members of Parliament (MPs) in Ghana's multiparty systems do spend large shares of their campaign funds on personalized networks. The implications for voting behaviour are distinct from those of voting based on performance and programmatic evaluation (Lindberg & Morrison, 2008). Votes are exchanged based on the ability of the affection of the voters towards the presidential or parliamentary candidates and how they had previously looked after their people; providing gifts, paying for fees, finding jobs, and showing concern on a personalized basis (Lindberg & Morrison, 2008).

The study highlights how ethnic diversity in local communities as well as along the migratory routes of the ethnic groups and languages affect vote choice in Ghana. This is possible based on previous studies on voting patterns in Ghana among ethnic groups. Evidence shows that prominent ethnic groups are directly linked to major political parties; the NPP is associated with the Akans, Ghana's largest ethnolinguistic group with over 47% of the country's population, and particularly with the Ashanti and Akim subgroups (Ichino & Nathan, 2013; Asante & Gyimah-Boadi, 2004). This strong association predates Ghana's current democratic period to predecessor opposition parties led by Akan elites in the independence era. The NDC remains closely associated with the Ewe ethnic group of its founder, former President Jerry John Rawlings and other minority groups in the country. Until date, the Volta Region remains the highest vote contributor to the NDC because of observation that might be attributable to the fact that the Founder of the Party is an Ewe. Economy of affection is therefore, used to support the justification of the trends of voting in Ashanti and Volta regions. The concept is then challenged at the discussion level as its worth in the changing trends of voting in the country.

### **Research Methodology and Limitations**

The paper largely uses processed data from the literature. The researcher conducted a systematic literature review on the topic where it looked at migratory routes, spatial aggregation of ethnic groups and their impact on previous elections conducted in the country. It also concentrated on the history of elections in Ghana and results based on various geographical regions in Ghana. This information was supported by using GIS to map the languages and the migration routes of some of the languages in Ghana. The information gathered were then analysed qualitatively based on the running themes that cropped out of the systematic desktop studies.

The main rationale for the study was to use election results in Ghana since the colonial era to examine the relationship between ethnicity and regionalism on the one hand and voting pattern on the other hand in Ghana. Although the paper has inherent empirical limitations, attempts have been made to use election results from colonial times to analyse what empirical evidence provides to make it very reliable and valid. It must however be pointed out that use of results of the 1954 and 1956 as well as the 1969 elections vis-a-vis the results of 1979 and all the elections held in Fourth Republic (that is from 1992 to 2020) in the analysis is a bit problematic and poses a limitation to the study. All elections held in the 1950s and that of 1969 were parliamentary elections, while all the other elections were presidential elections. A comparison of results of the two strands of elections can affect the conclusion. It is unlikely, however, that these limitations seriously affect the conclusions of the study. The reason is that a blend of results from the two strands of elections dating back from the colonial era to date rather makes the conclusions drawn more reliable as the pattern has not seen a dramatic change over the period.

### **Regionalism: The Spatial Aggregation of Ethnicity in Ghana**

Ghana has about fifty non-mutually intelligible languages considered as indigenous in the country, almost all belonging to the Mabia (Gur) and Kwa branches of the Niger-Congo phylum with the exception of two languages belonging to the Mande branch, Ligby and Bisa (Anyidoho & Dakubu, 2008). The Akan language has more than 10.5 million native speakers based on the 2010 populations and housing census statistics (this is estimated to be over 14.6 million in 2020 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2020), and many more second-language speakers.

Linguistically and culturally, Ghana is divided into two parts. The languages spoken by those at the southern part are classified within Niger-Congo as Kwa, although some of them are very dissimilar from each other. Akan consists of many dialects, Nzema and its close

relatives, and the Guan languages, which are all closely related. Those at the eastern part of southern Ghana; Ga-Dangme, Ewe, and other spoken languages in Volta Region are unrelated. To the north, in the savannah regions, the languages belong to the Gur family, principally the Oti-Volta and the Grusi branches of Central Gur (Anyidoho & Dakubu, 2008). The Gur languages have recently been classified as the Mabia language given the cultural affinity that exists among the languages that belong to this group (Bodomo, 2020).

In both North and South, some languages have historically been the languages of expanding empires. In the South, several Akan-speaking kingdoms went through expansionist phases, but by far, the most powerful in recent times was Ashanti. The Ashanti dialect of the Akan language continues to expand as a second language in urban areas such as Accra, the capital, and to some extent throughout the country (Anyidoho & Dakubu, 2008). Since the 1960s, the Akan name has been used in Ghana as an umbrella term for the mutually intelligible different languages that most Ghanaians speak. Akan includes all the varieties of the Twi languages; Ashante, Akim, Akuapem, Akwamu and Wassa; Fante includes Borebore, Agona, Gomoa; as well as Bono, the dialects spoken in the Northern part of the linguistic area of the then Brong-Ahafo Region (Anyidoho & Dakubu, 2008). There are ten or possibly more Guan languages, each spoken by a few thousand people and scattered in a crescent from Gonja in the Northern Region, down the Volta River valley to the coast at Senya Beraku west of Accra.

Ewe is the third largest ethnic group and the language spoken in the country (13.9% of the population, based on the 2010 population Census) and the largest to have been affected by colonial boundary demarcation, perhaps almost half of Ewe speakers are in Togo, and its close linguistic relatives are in Togo and the Republic of Benin (Anyidoho & Dakubu, 2008). Within Ghana, the Ewe language has spread from east to west, sometimes at the expense of languages that were already there, and is used as a second language among some of the smaller linguistic groupings in the Volta Region (Dakubu & Ford, 1988).

Over the past three centuries, several Akan-speaking communities have also established themselves East of the Volta, now, the Oti region. In the North, there have historically been several expanding kingdoms, including; Gonja and Dagbon. However, in the eighteenth century, Ashanti defeated both kingdoms (Anyidoho & Dakubu, 2008). Their languages, Gonja and Dagbani, respectively, are established in their home areas.

The languages of the Northern Ghana, especially in the Upper East and Upper West Regions, were in many cases first written by Catholic missionaries who came into the area from Burkina Faso. They produced mainly religious materials, but most of these were not published until recent years (Anyidoho & Dakubu, 2008). These were used in church-run schools, but there were very few schools of any kind before the 1960s. They are made-up of the Mole-Dagbani, which includes; Dagomba, Nanumba, Dagaaba, Frafra and Mamprusi, while generally concentrated in the Upper East, Upper West and Northern regions, are spread across parts of the country (Sule-Saa, 2000). The situation of Ga is entirely different. According to the 2010 census Ga and Adangbe is the language of less than 8 per cent of the population of the country. That is estimated to be 7.4% of the ethnic population in 2021 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021).

**Table 2: Ghanaians and their Spoken Languages**

Language	Percentage of the Population
Akan	47.50%
Mole-Dagbani	16.60%
Ewe	13.90%
Ga-Adangbe	7.40%
Mande	1.10%
Others	13.40%

Source: Authors Tabulation of information from 2010 Population and Housing Census<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> These percentages remain almost the same in 2020 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2020). The actual figures from the 2021 Census are yet to be released.

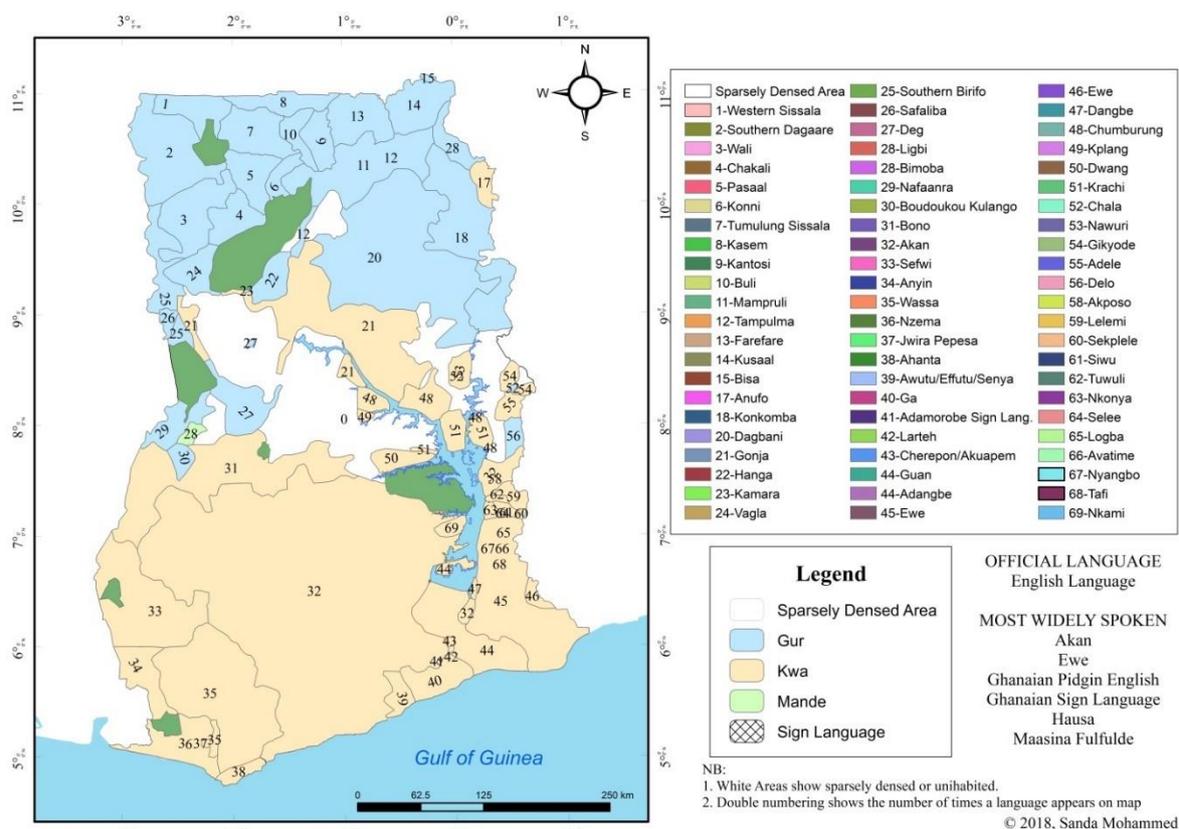


Figure 6: Spatial Representation of Ethnic Groups in Ghana

### Migratory Routes of Some Ethnic Groups in Ghana

Migration is defined as movement across the boundary of an aerial unit; this could be within or outside a country (Castles, 2000). It is reasonable to suggest that the migration of people is a leading cause of contact-induced change; in other words, migration is a key extra-linguistic factor leading to externally motivated change (Kerswill, 2006). In every case of migration, except where a homogeneous group of people moves to an isolated location, language or dialect contact ensues (Thomason & Kaufman 1988; Trudgill 1994; Kerswill, 2006).

It follows, therefore, that migration has profound sociolinguistic consequences, as the demographic balance of the sending and receiving populations is altered. Socio-linguistically, the critical directional parameter is that of in-outmigration, these change the demographic balance of the location under study in terms of age, socio-economic class, ethnicity, other

socio-cultural factors and language. At the same time, social network densities will change both for the migrants and the destination societies, with the result that language change and language shift may be increased (Kerswill, 2006).

In the developing countries, rural-urban mass migration is a phenomenon of the latter part of the 20th century, with Sub-Saharan Africa being the latest region to be affected (Boyle et al., 1998). In West Africa, the dominant sociolinguistic effect appears to be an increase in individual multilingualism and the spread of lingua franca. This phenomenon is common in Ghana as well. Accra, for instance has seen massive in-migration. This has led to the indigenous ethnolinguistic group, the Ga, becoming a minority in the city - 300,000 out of a population of over 2 million in 2000 (Grimes, 2000), with Twi now the main lingua franca with considerable numbers of users in most parts of the city (Kerswill, 2006). These figures have virtually remained the same. The Ga-Dangme constitutes 29.7% of the population of Greater Accra whilst the Akans constitute 39.8% of the population in 2021 (World Population Review, 2021). However, among northern migrants in Accra, Hausa is increasing its use as a lingua franca, reflecting its existing lingua franca status in the North (Dakubu, 2000). The influx of rural migrants to Accra, Kumasi and other cities and towns in the country has led to the diffusion of the concentration of some of the indigenous languages in the country.

### **Voting Patterns among Major Ethnic Groups in Ghana**

Social anthropology has seen politics in Africa as embedded in wider social contexts (Tom Young, 1993). In a traditional rural setting, an individual is a member first of all of a family and then of an ethnic group before climbing into politics or becoming a member of a political party. The demands the members of the ethnic groups make on the person vary with the

complexity of the ethnic system of government, as does the degree to which family and ethnic loyalties are distinct (Wallerstein, 1960; Druckman, 1994; Bates, 2019).

There are three distinct concepts, which writers on African ethnic royalties are often confused about and these are loyalty to the family; loyalty to the ethnic community; and loyalty to the ethnic government (Wallerstein, 1960). The three concepts are interwoven. The role of the ethnic group in providing food and shelter to the unemployed, marriage and burial expenses, assistance in finding a job has been widely discussed in the literature (Posner, 2005; Bates, 2019; Schatz & Ogunmefun, 2007; Overå, 2007). An ethnic member who climbs to the top in politics does not forget these obligations. They show affection to their members in the provision of these services. Those who remain in the community therefore, do not forget these gestures and also reciprocate by given more votes to the person to remain at the top (Lampel & Bhalla, 2007; Kolm, 20).

Such actions sometimes, with the hope of majority backing at the grassroots led to authoritarian regimes from the mid-1960s to the early 1990s (Lindberg & Morrison, 2008). Much of what is happening about African politics stem from this period, leading to mainstream concepts like clientelism, neo patrimonialism, personalism, prebendalism and rentier state (Lindberg & Morrison, 2008; Adesokan et al., 2017). Many lessons on voters' behaviours are, therefore, influenced and driven by ethnic, clan, or family ties. African politics have thus, typically emphasized the presence of personal alignments and clientelistic politics continuing in the multiparty era alongside ethnic and family ties or geographic factors (Lindberg & Morrison, 2008). Scholars maintain that ethnicity is a strong predictor of vote choice in multi-ethnic and nascent democracies. According to Lindberg & Morrison (2008) for example, elections in these countries produce group voting where party support overlaps with a country's census because voters choose their co-ethnics or block-vote in multi-ethnic coalitions. Existing studies highlight two broad channels that may link ethnicity and voting

behaviour: strong assertions of identity and expectations of patronage or policy favouritism-politics of affection (Barak & Long, 2013).

Voting based on affection, which has characterised African democracy is also endemic in Ghanaian politics (Lale, 2014; Useh, 2015; Fiawoo, 2017). Historically, it is believed that political parties in the country have their routes from dominant ethnic groups, typically concentrated in certain geographical areas in the country. Ethnicity, regionalism and religion have since the colonial era influenced and continue to influence the voting pattern and support for political parties in Ghana. Apart from the first two political parties formed in Ghana, namely the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) and the Convention People's Party (CPP), almost all the other parties formed during the colonial period were ethnically, regionally or religiously based (Asante & Gyimah-Boadi, 2004). The National Liberation Movement (NLM) formed on 19<sup>th</sup> September 1954, which became the archrival to then ruling CPP, was formed in and drew its support from the then Asante (which today, comprises the Ahafo, Ashanti, Bono and Bono East regions). The Togoland Congress (TC), the Northern People's Party (NPP) and the midget party, Ga-Shifimokpee (Ga Standfast Movement) were all formed to contest the CPP in the general elections. The elections held in the run-up to the country's independence, were based in the Trans-Volta Togoland, the Northern Territories (comprising the present North East, Northern, Savannah, Upper East and Upper regions), and the Greater Accra regions respectively. It was only the Muslim Association Party (MAP), which was a confessional, or a party based on religion as per Hodgkin's classification of political parties (Hodgkin, 1961; Boahen, 2000; Asante & Gyimah-Boadi, 2004; Asah-Asante & Brako, 2019).

Ethnicity and regionalism played out in the budding general elections held in the country in 1954 and 1956. Out of the 104 parliamentary seats, the CPP swept 71 seats across the entire country, winning 38 out of 44 seats in the Colony, 16 out of 21 seats in Asante, 8 out of 26

seats in the Northern Territories and 9 out of the 13 seats in the Trans-Volta Togoland in the 1954 election. The party's performance in the 1956 independence election was not completely different from that of the 1954. The NPP won 12 and 15 seats out of the 26 seats in its Northern Territories stronghold in the 1954 and 1956 elections respectively, while the Togoland Congress won 2 out of the 13 seats in its TVT stronghold in both elections. The Asante-based NLM won 12 out of the 21 seats in its stronghold. It is significant to note that apart from their strongholds, none of the regionally based parties won any seat in any of the constituencies (Austin, 1970; Asante & Gyimah-Boadi, 2004; Frempong, 2015).

Ethnicity powerfully resonated in the 1969 election, which ushered Ghana into the Second Republic. Of the 140 parliamentary seats, it was only Busia's Progress Party (PP) and Gbedemah's National Alliance of Liberals (NAL), which contested 138 seats each. K. A. Busia, an Akan, swept all the seats in the Akan speaking regions of 22 in Ashanti, 13 in Brong Ahafo, 15 in Central, 18 Akan speaking constituencies out of the 22 seats in Eastern and 10 out of the 16 in Western. It also won 13 out of the 16 seats in the Upper and 9 out of 14 in Northern and 3 out of 9 in Greater Accra regions, not all of whose populations are predominantly Akan. The leader of the NAL, K. A. Gbedemah, an Ewe from the Volta Region, also swept 14 out of 16 seats in his home region, 5 out of 14 in Northern region, 4 of the 22 in Eastern, 3 of 16 in Upper region and 3 of 9 in Greater Accra (Asante & Gyimah-Boadi, 2004; Frempong, 2015; Boahen, 2000). It is significant to note that Gbedemah failed to win any seat in the Akan speaking constituencies just as Busia also did not win a single seat in the Volta region.

In Ghana's Fourth Republic, the ethnicity/regionalism index continues to play a significant role in election support and victories. The two indices influence voting pattern and the choice of leaders by the Ghanaian electorates as far as the dominant parties that have been alternating political power are concerned. The electorate in the Volta region have, since the

budding election in the country's Fourth Republic, been voting massively for the National Democratic Congress (NDC) whose founding father, Jerry John Rawlings, is a native of the region. The New Patriotic Party (NPP), on the other hand, has also been sweeping votes from the Ashanti and Eastern regions where the two presidents the party has produced, namely John Agyekum Kufour and Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo Addo hail from. The Ashanti and the Akan speaking communities in Eastern region have remained the strongholds of the NPP, just as the Volta region has been the stronghold of the NDC (Asante & Gyimah-Boadi, 2004; Amamoo, 2007; Danso-Boafo, 2012). Notwithstanding this fact, the NPP has not been performing extremely well in some constituencies in Ashanti Region such as Asawase, New Edubease, Sekyere Afram Plains and in some cases, Ejura-Sekyereodumase which are predominantly populated by migrants usually from the northern belt and the Ewe from the Volta Region.

A study conducted by Lindberg & Morrison (2008) in Ghana chose one safe haven constituency from each of the regions in Ghana, which one of the two major political parties was dominant: Ho-West, controlled by the NDC in its home base, the Volta Region; and Kwabre in the Ashanti Region, controlled by the NPP. In all the elections held in recent times, the two political parties have won with wide margins in their respective constituencies above.

In Ghana, the Ashantis and the Ewe account for only approximately 28 percent of the population, leaving 72 percent of Ghanaians without a clear ethnic party. Scholars of Ghanaian elections address this problem by asserting that the Ashantis and the Ewe possess reliable ethnic alliances, such as the Akan supporting the NPP and northern groups, especially the Mole-Dagbani, aligning with the NDC (Iddi & Dakar, 2016; Abdallah & Osei-Hwedie, 2016; Hoffman & Long, 2013)

Even in Accra, where migrants consist of the majority of the population, ethnicity predicts vote choice for those who have affiliated parties, but the correlation is imperfect. A survey conducted by Ichino & Nathan (2013) finds that, 80% of Akans in Greater Accra region supported the NPP in the 2012 presidential election, while 84% of Ewes, 67% of Northerners, and 73% of Gas supported the NDC. Importantly, all votes in Ghana's presidential elections count equally. Each party thus, has an incentive to pursue votes everywhere, even in strongholds of the other party (Ichino & Nathan, 2013).

The 2016 elections, although to some extent followed the politics of affection, there were great changes across the country, with NPP for the first time winning more seats in seven out of the ten regions. Details of the countries elections from 1992 to 2016 presented in regional forms with a contrast between the two main political parties in the country are shown on tables 2 and 3. The results from the 2016 and 2020 general elections show a changing trend of voting, where, the endemic politics of affection is diffused in some of the regions, apart from Ashanti and Eastern for NPP and Volta and Oti for the NDC.

Table 2: Regional Representations of Presidential Election results of NPP and NDC from 1992 and 2016

Year Region	1992 (%)		1996 (%)		2000 (%)		2004 (%)		2008 (%)		2012 (%)		2016 (%)	
	NPP	NDC												
Western	22.78	60.74	40.89	57.3	49.13	44.83	57.7	39.96	49.5	45.52	43.28	56.59	49.26	48.68
Central	25.95	66.49	43.32	55.22	49.69	43.51	58.8	38.94	45.97	50.58	45.53	52.12	53.22	43.43
Greater Accra	37.05	53.37	43.32	53.99	53.1	42.09	51.71	46.64	46.03	52.11	46.92	52.31	52.42	46.69
Volta	3.61	93.24	4.73	94.55	7.9	86.28	13.68	84.06	15.38	82.46	17.93	80.11	22.69	75.55
Eastern	42.66	52.6	43.6	55.23	52.94	43.34	60.3	38.38	57.14	41.1	56.91	42.03	62.38	36.55
Ashanti	60.54	32.87	65.8	32.79	74.8	22.51	76.97	21.84	72.53	20.01	70.86	28.35	76.27	23.03
Brong Ahafo	29.54	61.95	35.98	61.73	50.58	44.63	51.95	46.11	50.56	47.7	47.45	51.39	53.75	45.07
Northern	16.3	62.97	33.01	61.13	29.57	50.76	34.72	57.83	37.79	57.3	39.38	57.92	41.37	56.1
Upper East	10.48	53.97	17.35	68.99	24.88	49.82	31.69	53.26	35.25	56.06	29.29	66.43	34.93	60.32
Upper West	37.09	50.96	14.2	74.61	15.51	62.29	32.22	56.65	37.72	54.36	29.26	65.54	35.94	58.37

Authors Tabulation of Election Results from Peacefmonline.com, Accessed in June 2020

Table 3: 2020 Regional Presidential Results

Region	NPP	NDC
Ahafo	55.07	44.9
Ashanti	71.64	26.08
Bono	58.22	40.4
Bono East	44.29	54.69
Central	52.71	45.87
Eastern	60.46	38.47
Greater Accra	48.1	51.04
Northern	46.08	52.93
North East	51.37	47.01
Oti	35.67	62.78
Savanna	35.19	62.97
Upper East	34.44	63.29
Upper West	29.88	67.42
Volta	14.14	84.81
Western	51	46.24
Western North	44.98	53.59

Source: Authors Tabulation of information from [Electoral Commission of Ghana](#)

## **Discussion and Conclusion: Politics of Affection Threatened? The Changing Trends of Regionalised Voting in Ghana**

Though it is proven that the administrative regions show a predominance of certain ethnic groups and are thus, typically taken as proxies for ethnicity, no one region in the country is ethnically homogeneous (Arthur, 2010). This is basically as result of migration within the country in the past, of which it has become intense in recent times, especially rural-urban migration. Migration is also explained as one of the reasons for the gradual dissipation of the otherwise rich ethnic culture in the country. As people migrate to new places, especially, individual migration, they marry, intermingle and, therefore, dilute their learnt culture from their original places of origin. There is evidence of people with names of ethnic groups of which they cannot speak the languages associated with their names nor perform any of their traditional cultural traits. New generations of children have less effect of the reciprocal relationships, which exist, with the economy of affection; hence, they also relax on the politics

of affection. Table 2 and even the results from the 2020 elections shown in Table indicate that Ghanaian voters are sometimes difficult to predict, especially, in the Greater Accra and Central (especially, in the Kasoa area) regions where ethnic diversity is clearly evidenced.

Other reasons could also be attributed to modernisation and enlightenment. This is more or less link to those who trust in demographic predictors of voting than ethnicity. According to these studies, the NPP attracts well-educated, wealthier, urban voters while the NDC appeals to the less well-educated and poorer voters, especially, those living in rural areas (see also, Hoffman & Long, 2013). There are two main arguments for why voting patterns occur along these lines. The first addresses the different policies each party advocates. According to these scholars, the NPP is a market-oriented party, while the NDC espouses a populist economic program. The second argument suggests that differences in the policies reflect the dissimilar ethnic bases of the parties. Specifically, the NPP represents the interests of the Ashantis, while the NDC stands for those of the Ewe in the Volta region and groups living in northern Ghana, economically marginal parts of the country. The NDC's populism thus reflects the economic interests of these groups.

The size of swing votes in Ghana has also received much attention. Based on patterns of vote switches between the NDC and the NPP, scholars contend that approximately 15 percent of Ghanaian voters are open to voting for either party, but they disagree on the motivations of swing voters. Some scholars argue that swing voters vote as ethnic blocks. The competing hypothesis argues that voter characteristics, not ethnicity, define them. Specifically, voters that are more educated and those who are most concerned about government performance are more likely to switch votes (Hoffman & Long, 2013). The swing voters are therefore, those voters who have diminished politics of affection. Hence, they vote based on performance and not because of economy of affection and reciprocities.

Ghana is undergoing significant urbanization. Since 1990, the metropolitan area of the capital, Accra, has grown from 1.5 to nearly 4 million people recently. In addition, 54.68 percent of Ghanaians lived in urban areas as at 2016 (GSS, 2017). Urbanization has produced wide variation in the wealth and ethnic composition of the Ghanaian cities' neighbourhoods. Slums co-exist alongside middle class and wealthy neighbourhoods. Many neighbourhoods of the city are diverse, but there are also segregated enclaves for each major ethnic group (Ichino & Nathan, 2013). Accra is the indigenous homeland of the Ga ethnic group. Although Ga chiefs hold traditional ownership over land, Gas have become a minority as earlier stated. As of 2010, the Greater Accra Region was 40% Akan, 27% Ga, and 20% Ewe, with the remaining 13% comprised mostly of Northern ethnic groups. If voters in Accra are usually unpredictable, then it can conclude that voting as a form of reciprocity has less weight in Accra than in Ashanti, Volta or Northern Regions.

The study largely confirms that of Tony Walters (1992), Hyden (2008) and Bates (2019) that members of ethnic groups vote for one of their own with the expectation that they can gain favours from them when they eventually get the nod and form government after electoral victory. It has become quite evident that ethnicity and regionalism have featured prominently and powerfully resonated the formation of political parties in Ghana and the holding of the budding 1954 and 1956 elections. The two indices have also characterised voting pattern in the country from the pre-independence era up to the present day. It is not surprising that voting in Ghana is largely on ethnic basis, especially between the two leading political parties. However, researchers are still baffled with Central and Greater Accra regions, which have always been a deciding factor in who wins the elections. These two regions sometimes deviate from the norm of ethnicity and economy of affection as argued by some scholars (Iddi & Dakar, 2016; Abdallah & Osei-Hwedie, 2016; Hoffman & Long, 2013) The Central and Greater Accra enclaves have since 1992 become swing regions and a major decider of who

wins the presidential race. Cape-Coast and Accra, the capitals of Central and Greater Accra regions respectively are cosmopolitan areas. People of almost all ethnic backgrounds reside in both settlements, including those from the strongholds of the two dominant political parties. Many of the inhabitants are also enlightened who, in most cases, vote after a careful analysis of the performance of the party in power, but not merely been influenced by ethnic and other agents of political socialisation.

At the same time, results from the 2016 and 2020 general elections show a changing trend of voting, where, the endemic politics of affection is diffused in some of the regions, especially, apart from Ashanti and Eastern for NPP, Volta, and Oti for the NDC. The 2016 and 2020 results, therefore, raise questions on the direct linkage of the politics of affection. It can be said therefore that, Ghanaians, especially the youth in the country expect results from their elected officials and therefore, can easily change the voting trends if their needs are not met. This assertion can only be affirmed with subsequent election results.

The paper upholds the position of the earlier scholars, the study that ethnicity and regionalism have since the colonial era significantly influenced voter choices in Ghana, other considerations such the level of enlightenment of the electorate in a particular constituency, performance of a party in governance and attractive manifestoes have of late played a significant role in elections. This accounts for the performance of the two dominant parties in the swing regions of Central and Greater Accra regions in particular. The position that the ethnicity and regionalism are the sole determinants of voter choices in Ghana does not wholly stand in recent times.

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