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Ethnicity and Voting Behavior in the Ashanti and Volta Regions of Ghana: A Cramp in the Wheel of a Fledgling Democracy?

Joseph Kingsley Adjei
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Abstract
This paper discusses the substance and potential impact of ethnic block voting in two of Ghana’s 10 political regions: Ashanti and Volta. Using the Electoral Commission of Ghana’s dataset for five Presidential election results from 1992 to 2008, the paper confirms ethnic block voting in the two regions. The paper views the phenomenon as detrimental to Ghana’s evolving democracy as it is a potential trigger for civil war, and recommends vigorous education, equitable distribution of resources, and comprehensive development to curb the problem.

Introduction

The commendation from international observers is largely attributable to the fact that the core institution of modern liberal democracy whereby the right of the people to self-government can be exercised is through competitive and participatory elections. However, the extent to which elections fulfill that mission is sig-
significant, depending on citizens' rationale for how they behave at the polls. If voters' behavior is determined by non-evaluative rationales such as clientelism, then the purpose of self-rule by representative governments is defeated. Despite the importance of this aspect of the function of elections as "instruments of democracy," independent surveys of voters' behavior and rationale in multiparty elections in Ghana remain extremely scarce. Most analyses on Ghanaian politics concentrate on transitions at the level of elites, state structures and political institutions or on the conduct of free and fair elections and political participation (Gyimah-Boadi, 2008). Yet since 1992, it has been asserted by writers like Zounmenou (2007) and Gyimah-Boadi (2008) that at least two regions in Ghana, namely, Ashanti and Volta, have persistently engaged in ethnic block voting in all the five elections held. A testimony to this phenomenon is that the two regions have accordingly earned the unenviable accolade of being the "world banks" of the two largest parties, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP)—the Volta Region for the NDC and the Ashanti Region for the NPP. Historically, the two parties which, at separate periods, have ruled the country since 1992, have their respective roots in the region from which each draws their largest support and votes.

The examination of ethnicity and voting behavior, that is, identity and politics in Ghana with particular reference to the Ashanti and Volta Regions in this paper is, therefore, set against the background of general debates about ethnicity and its influence on political action. One perspective holds that social identities are essential and enduring, or primordial in nature (Geertz, 1963). Against this view, others emphasize an instrumental view of ethnicity, maintaining that groups adhere to identities chiefly as a means of claiming resources or defending perceived material interests (Bates, 1983). The constructivist perspective predominating in current scholarship focuses on the mutable and contingent aspects of social identity and collective action (Anderson, 1991). Viewed through a constructivist lens, identities coalesce, wax and wane according to variety of conditions, including structural factors, material inducements, and the strategic calculations of actors.

This paper focuses on the ethnic block voting in the Ashanti and Volta regions of Ghana by examining the pattern of voting in presidential elections for the two regions from 1992 to 2008. I explore the question: What is the potential impact of this voting pattern on Ghana's democracy? I intend to provoke debate on the subject and, possibly, help Ghana to strengthen or reformulate guidelines on national elections to forestall ethnic conflicts and ensure more successes in future democratic elections. The paper is structured in five parts. Following this introduction, I review existing literature on the subject and provide a theoretical framework. In the next section, I describe the data and methods and follow it up with a discussion of the findings. I conclude on the findings from the study and suggest ways to remedy the trend.
Literature Review

The study of ethnic alignments and voting behavior is one of the classical fields of social science inquiry. Yet it remains a notoriously under-researched area in African, and for that matter, Ghanaian politics (Bannon et al, 2004). This is in part due to the fact that post-independence states of Africa gravitated towards authoritarian regimes from the 1960s (when many had their independence) to the early 1990s. This paper is an attempt to break new grounds in the study of Ghana’s democratic dispensation with particular reference to ethnic cleavages and voting behavior.

The Concept of Ethnicity and Ethnic Group

“Ethnicity” defies a single definition. Consequently, there are as many definitions and conceptualizations of the term as there are writers on the subject. Etymologically, the word “ethnic” derives from the Latin word “ethnicus” and the Greek words “ethnikos” and “ethnos” which mean national, gentile, nation, people (Jenkins, 1997). Reading (1976) defines ethnicity as membership of an ethnic group. Thus the definition of ethnicity, ipso facto, includes an ethnic group. Zanden (1990) and O’Donnel (1994) view an ethnic group as one with a particular culture—a way of behaving and thinking that makes it distinctive, perhaps including religious beliefs, language, dress, cuisine, folk practices, gestures and mannerisms—and a sense of community. This view is complemented by Chalfant and Labeff (1988) who conceptualize an ethnic group as a collection of individuals that defines itself and is defined by others as having a cultural system that distinguishes the group from others in society. To them, language and religious beliefs are the most frequent characteristics of ethnic groups. They further argue that the differences between ethnic groups and other groups may be minimal, but the ethnic group has objective aspects—visual differences and behaviors, seen by people outside the group.

Writing in a similar vein, Giddens (1996) delineates ethnicity as cultural practices and outlooks that distinguish a given community of people. In other words members of ethnic groups see themselves as culturally distinct from other groupings in a society, and are seen by those others to be so. For Weber (1978), an ethnic group is based on the belief shared by its members that, however distantly, they are of common descent. Perhaps the most relevant part of Weber’s conceptualization to this paper is his argument that ethnic membership does not constitute a group; it only facilitates group formation of any kind, particularly in the political sphere. He argues, on the other hand, that it is primarily the political community, no matter how artificially organized that inspires the belief in common ethnicity. Weber (1978) seems to be suggesting that the belief in common
ancestry is likely to be a consequence of collective political action rather than in its cause; people come to see themselves as belonging together—coming from a common background—as a consequence of acting together. Collective interests thus do not simply reflect or follow from similarities and differences between people; the pursuit of collective interests does, however, encourage ethnic identification.

Jenkins (1997) agrees with Weber when he argues that in terms of collective action, the sense of ethnic communality is a form of monopolistic social closure: it defines membership, eligibility and access. Ethnic group members have a shared sense of what is correct and proper, which constitutes individual honor and dignity. This shared sense of values serves as social cement that binds the group together. Nwaezeigwe (1998) is of the view that ethnicity is an instrument of groups’ consciousness which serves to elevate one’s pride and sense of being. Thus in voting, ethnic group members would vote for members of their group vying for national positions to promote their welfare. It must be noted that the existence of ethnic groups by themselves is not a problem; however, their existence creates problems when members develop ethnocentrism—the tendency to measure all cultural traits on the basis of one’s ethnic culture.

**Ethnicity and Attraction to Political Power**

Weber (1978, p.29) understands power to mean “the chance of a man or a number of men to realize their own will in communal action even against the resistance of others.” He argues that the basis from which such power can be exercised may vary considerably according to the social context, that is, historical and structural. In terms of political power, the group wielding power in society takes decisions that affect all members and also controls the distribution of resources. Thus ethnic groups compete for political power in order to have control not only over the people but also the resources and their distribution.

Nnoli (1995) asserts that ethnicity holds individuals together, gives them internal cohesion, encourages them to provide natural security for each other and promotes their sense of identity and direction. To him, ethnicity offers a personal solution to the problems of exploitation, oppressions, deprivation and alienation. Furthermore, he notes that in the context of an interventionist state, the ruling class uses the state to build up their business enterprises. The struggle of the ethnic factions of these classes for state patronage in the process of embourgeoisement generates and promotes ethnicity in the context of who wields power.

Osaghae (2000) opines that since its colonial beginnings the African state has centralized the production and distribution of resources, patronage and privileges, and this has made it the object of political competition. He also makes a case for economic deregulation as a recipe for managing the ethnic problem.
Maitama-Sule (2000) traces the quest for power and the resultant ethnic conflicts to ambition and greed. These negative instincts of man have continued to sour human relations and fortunes, with the result that incidents of population displacement are on the increase on a large scale, and the misery associated with such displacement is getting more and more acute.

Ethnocentrism has led many ethnic groups to seek their own independent political life, or to bring into a single organization multiple political groups within their borders. Ethnocentrism has been the dynamic urge behind political expansionism in many instances: political subjugation of the less powerful has been justified as propagation of a superior culture (Lundy and Warme, 1988). This is where voting in national elections could be influenced by one’s ethnic affiliation. Since all ethnic groups seek to perpetuate their cultures, a vote for a member in national elections is a confirmation of the “we” against “them” posture without recourse to national welfare.

Ethnic Composition of Ghana

There have been several views among scholars of ethnic studies about the composition of ethnic groups in Ghana. One school of thought classifies ethnic groups in Ghana on the basis of language. Consequently, this school of thought suggests that there are five major ethnic groups made up of Akan, Ewe, Mole-Dagbani, Guan and Ga-Adangbe (Agyeman, 1996). The flaw in this classification is that it ignores factors such as increased migration, national integration, formal education, and modern communication channels given expression by the proliferation of frequency modulation (FM) stations which have facilitated the learning and speaking of languages and dialects other than one’s own ethnic language or dialect. Thus within the complexity of modern societies of Ghana, the ability to speak a language or dialect impeccably is increasingly becoming independent of one’s ethnic group.

Closely related to the language based classification of ethnic groups is another school of thought that has subdivided the major language groups into subgroups. Thus the Akan are sub-divided into 10 ethnic groups; the Ga-Adangbe into five groups; the Ewe into 22 groups. This gives a total of 57 groups (Agyeman, 2005).

The 1960 population census gave a list of 92 ethnic groups speaking a total of 34 distinct and mutually unintelligible languages. On the basis of linguistic and cultural criteria such as claims to common ancestry, land tenure, marriage and inheritance, Osei Kwame (1980) has classified the 92 ethnic groups of Ghana into five (see footnote): (i) the Akan group including Twi, Fante, Anyi-Baule and Guan; (ii) the Ga-Adangbe and Krobo; (iii) the Ewe made up of the Ewe and coastal Anlos; (iv) the Central Togo group including Nkonya, Buem, Lolobi, Nchumuru, Atwode and other Togo remnant linguistic groups; and (v) the north-
ern group including the Mole-Dagbani, Gurma and Grusi. Asamoah (1990) argues that there are about 41 nationalistic (ethnic) groups in Ghana. He mentions the major ones as the Akans, the Ewes, the Dagombas, the Gas, the Manprusis and the Gonjas and notes further that most of the ethnic groups have sub-units. The most recent information on the ethnic groups in Ghana is provided by the 2000 Population and Housing Census.

The 2000 Population and Housing Census provide a breakdown of the ethnic groups and their respective population size in percentages as follows:

**Table 1: Composition of Ethnic Groups in Ghana**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Sub-division</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Akan</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>49.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mole-Dagbani</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ewe</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ga-Adangbe</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guan</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gurma</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grusi</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mande-Busanga</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other groups</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Political Parties in Ghana**

Since 1992 seven political parties have evolved in Ghana and contested national elections. They include the National Democratic Congress (NDC), the New Patriotic Party (NPP), the Great Consolidated Peoples Party (GCPP), and the Convention Peoples Party (CPP). Others are the Peoples National Convention (PNC), the United Ghana Movement (UGM), and the Ghana National Party (Ghana Electoral Commission, 2011). The two largest parties are the NDC which is the current ruling party, and the NPP which ruled the country from 2000 to 2008. In all national elections many of the smaller parties enter into alliances with either the NDC or NPP, seeing that they could not win by themselves. The NDC has its stronghold in the Volta Region\(^1\) (one of the ten regions of Ghana and home to the Ewe ethnic group) because its founder hails from the region. The NPP, on the other hand, has its stronghold in the Ashanti Region, the home region of some of the founders of the party.

\(^1\) The Volta Region and the Ashanti Region are two of the 10 political administrative regions of Ghana.
It is difficult to classify any of these parties as ethnically based by inspection. This is because the Fourth Republican Constitution of Ghana provides for the establishment of party offices in at least, two-thirds of the 230 constituencies. The essence is for parties to have a nation-wide support rather than parochial ethnic roots.

Voting Behavior and its General Determinants

What is voting behavior? The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, Volume 16, edited by David L. Sills defines voting as a means of aggregating individual preferences into collective decisions. It may also be seen as an official expression of one’s choice among the possibilities offered or suggested, usually by marking a piece of paper (a ballot) secretly, or by calling out or raising one’s hand. It must be noted that what is of this paper’s concern is secret ballot. Voting in an election is a political behavior. Giddens (1996) defines voting behavior as committed loyalty to one or the other contestant in elections. Thus in examining voting behavior in this study, one is interested in the pattern of voting as reflected in Ghana’s presidential election results since 1992.

Interests in voting behavior came to the limelight in the 1960s in Western Europe. Consequently, Lipset, Seymour, and Rokkan (1967) developed the structural theory of voting behavior. The main thrust of the theory is that social identities were the basic determinants of party support in Western Europe. These identities centered on regional cleavages, class inequalities and sectarian cleavages over church and state that split Christendom between Catholics and Protestants. The multiplier effect of this was that when mass franchise was extended to most people, they voted on the bases of these cleavages and identities. Some social and political theorists argue that the structural theory of voting behavior received a lot of criticism and became unpopular in the late 1970s when smaller minority parties began to make headway and gain foothold in parliamentary representation (Dalton et al, 1984). This may suggest that as societies develop, regional and ethnic cleavages in voting behavior give way to rational evaluative voting.

One of the most significant theories on voting behavior is offered by Horowitz (1983). To him, the impact of ethnicity on voting behavior in ethnically segmented society is so huge that psychologically, casting a vote is an expression of group loyalty and identity. Voters subsume all other considerations under ethnic identity and vote accordingly. Horowitz (1983) opines that where ethnicity rules, an election simply assumes the character of a racial census. It is clear from these theories that voting behavior can be influenced by ethnicity. Yet it is difficult to conclude that voting behavior is solely determined by ethnic affiliation. What then are the general determinants of voting behavior?

Leeds (1975) points out that generally, voting behavior in democratic national elections is determined by many factors including primary and secondary
group influences, one’s education, desire to maintain the status quo, demographic factors, and the influence of political campaigns.

Primary group influences involve fairly close face-to-face contacts between and among people. The family, friends, work associates, neighbors and the local community can all be decisive as far as determining voting pattern is concerned (Agyeman, 2005). Leeds (1975) agrees that there are likely to be strong pressures towards uniformity of political opinions among members of a primary group. People may support a particular party because it has always been supported by the family. Agyeman (1996) explains that in rural areas of Ghana, people’s voting behavior is largely influenced by primary group influences. Secondary group membership has also been seen to influence one’s voting behavior. Leeds (1975) argues that as societies grow larger and become more complex, the relative frequency between people is carried on in secondary groups. Zanden (1990) delineates secondary groups as two or more people who are involved in an impersonal relationship and have come together for a specific practical purpose. It is noted that where a secondary group is influenced by a political ideology, its members vote in support of that ideology.

Bourret (1961), Leeds (1975) and Jenkins (1997) agree that activity at school, college, university or in a youth group can lead to formation of political ideas affecting allegiances and voting. In Ghana, a sizeable proportion of students in universities and other tertiary institutions are members of the “wings” of political parties and this affiliation is likely to affect their voting behavior. The desire to maintain or change the status quo has also been argued to influence voting behavior. In other words, the individual’s social and economic position at the time of voting could influence how he or she votes. Those in gainful employment or occupation will under normal circumstances be swayed by their position to preserve the status quo. Hence Marx (1844) states that a voter acts according to his/her relationship to the means of production. Thus Rex (1991) is right in arguing that majority of the unemployed and others who do not benefit from the status quo would vote against incumbents or the current party in power, hoping that their situation would improve with new political power holders.

Leeds (1975) views demographic factors as influential to voting behavior and argues that women, the middle-aged, and older voters tend to be conservatives. In Ghana, the aged, especially those who saw the struggle for independence tend to support parties that claim to be Nkrumahist, that is, parties that have their roots in the ideology of Kwame Nkrumah, the founder of the nation (Agyeman, 2005).

Some political analysts including Zanden (1990) agree that political campaigns are the most influential activity preceding elections. The reasons are not far-fetched. In the first place, party campaigns identify a group or groups with specific ideologies for the electorate to make informed choices. Secondly, campaigns are useful in gaining the allegiance of the doubtful and uninformed voters. Political parties campaign to avoid losing voters and their votes to rival parties.
Finally, in developing countries, and in Ghana for that matter, where majority of the electorate are illiterate, political campaigns help to educate the electorate on party manifestos and programs.

**Theoretical Framework**

The study is guided by the framework of ethnic identity theory which has been conceptualized using Tajfel’s (1981) social identity theory. Social identity theory posits that identity develops from both an individual’s sense of belonging to a particular group and the affective component accompanying that sense of group belonging, and, consequently, those who maintain favorable definitions of group membership will also exhibit positive self-esteem (Burke, 1991). Thus, the main preoccupation of ethnic group members is to protect the social climate in which individual members have their lives embedded.

The main thrust of the theory is that individuals behave according to the norms and values of the groups to which they belong. Members of the group see themselves as “insiders” while those who do not belong to the group are viewed as “outsiders” (Mitchell, 1981). The individual’s personality becomes synonymous with the group. This being so, individuals seek to protect their groups by building solidarity and normative protective culture that socializes group members into believing that theirs is the best. This orientation influences the behavior of ethnic group members. Thus during elections, they would vote for a candidate from their ethnic group, who, by their ethnocentric classification, is the best to protect their political, economic and social interests.

In this regard, voters in Ashanti and Volta regions of Ghana vote massively for the NPP and NDC respectively, since either the leading members of their favorite party are from their region or the founders of the party are affiliated to the region by ethnic membership. For the NPP, most of its founders are from the Akan ethnic group, which is dominant in the Ashanti Region. Similarly, the founder of the NDC is Ewe from Volta Region, the home of the Ewe ethnic group. As the data shows, voting in the two regions clearly depicts ethnic influences on voters.

**Data and Methods**

The study uses secondary data exclusively. The data were sourced from Electoral Commission of Ghana website (http://www.ec.gov). This is very reliable and the place from which many researchers have sourced data. Data taken from this website for this paper are certified presidential results from 1992 to 2008 covering five elections. The focus is on results from the Ashanti and Volta regions which have consistently demonstrated ethnic block voting for the two largest and strongest parties in Ghana, the NPP and the NDC respectively. Also, together the
two regions have a sizable percentage of the voter population of Ghana. Parliamentary results are not included because parliamentarians represent their constituencies which are largely made up of their ethnic group members. On the other hand, presidential candidates have the whole country as their constituency.

Table 2: Ghana’s Presidential Results 1992-2008: Performance of NDC and NPP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region/Election Year</th>
<th>NPP Percent</th>
<th>NDC Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1992 Election</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashanti</td>
<td>60.5</td>
<td>32.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volta</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>93.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996 Election</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashanti</td>
<td>65.8</td>
<td>32.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volta</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>94.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000 Election</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashanti</td>
<td>75.1</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volta</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>86.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004 Election</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashanti</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volta</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>84.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008 Election</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashanti</td>
<td>72.4</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volta</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>88.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Electoral Commission of Ghana

Analysis

The data on presidential results from 1992 to 2008 presented in Table 2 indicate a similar voting pattern. Voters in Ashanti (the ethnic region of most of the founders of the NPP) vote heavily for the party as against the NDC which always scores low voter percentage in that region. Similarly, the NDC always scores its highest percentage of voters in the Volta Region (the ethnic region of its founder) while the NPP always scores its lowest voter percentage in the region. This is clear from the results.

In the 1992 presidential elections, the NPP scored as high as 60.5% in the Ashanti region while the NDC had 32.9%. It is interesting to note that the converse occurred in the Volta region where the NDC got 93.2% as against a low of 3.6%. Similarly, in 1996 the NPP scored 65.8% in the Ashanti Region while the NDC had 32.8%. In the Volta Region, 94.5% of voters decided for the NDC while 4.7% decided for NPP. In the 2000 presidential elections, Ashanti voters gave 75.1% of their votes to the NPP as against 21.6% for the NDC. The trend did not change in 2004. In the most recent presidential elections in 2008, which saw the NDC beat the incumbent party NPP, the NDC scored 26.1% in the
Ashanti Region while the NPP had 72.4%. The Volta Region again scored the highest percentage vote for the NDC with a score of 88.8% as against NPP’s 14.9%. It must be noted again that the Ashanti Region which is the stronghold of NPP is predominantly inhabited by the Akan ethnic group. On the other hand, the Volta Region is predominantly occupied by ethnic Ewes.

Cramping the Democratic Process?

Democracy projects equity and fairness in the distribution of resources including appointments to high offices. Thus if ethnic affiliation is allowed to influence the election/selection of leaders, achievement and competence will be sacrificed for nepotism and incompetence. Professor Adu Boahen (1989) raised this concern when he questioned the reason why the then Head of State, Flt. Lt. J.J. Rawlings, had appointed the heads of National Security, Police, Army, Bank of Ghana, and Investment Bank all from the Volta Region—the ethnic region of the Head of State. This trend changed only by a small margin after 1992 when the country was ushered into multiparty democracy and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) assumed power. The NPP, with Akan roots, also demonstrated a similar bias in appointments from 2001 to 2008 with Akans dominating political appointments. This trend reinforces ethnic block voting.

Democracy also operates more effectively when there is a strong sense of national identity (Anderson, 1991). Buttressing this point, Nueberger (2000) provides four reasons why ethnic identification leading to ethnic block voting is detrimental to democracy. First, with no overarching identity, there is very little consensus on what is in the state’s interest; each ethnic group seeks the interest of its members. Second, in ethnic block voting, people consider identity rather than issues and policies. Third, ethnic block voting is a recipe for rigging elections in the face of elections being a zero-sum game in resource control. Finally, a corollary of the struggle for resource control through undemocratic voting process is the increase in the likelihood of civil war. Thus ethnic block voting is detrimental to the tenets of democracy, and if it is allowed to fester among other ethnic groups in Ghana, it will constitute a cramp—a strain—or a pain in the neck of Ghana’s growing democracy.

Limitations

A major limitation of the study was the exclusive use of secondary data in the form of presidential election results. This could have been complemented with primary data particularly from the two regions studied. I therefore suggest that the study be replicated by either combining secondary and primary data or using primary data exclusively. Also I suggest further research on inter-ethnic relation-
ships in Ghana with particular reference to marriage, business partnership, and distribution of national resources.

Though it is true that the two parties receive majority of their respective votes from the two regions studied, using two regions out of 10 as the unit of analysis could produce results that are not representative of the total voter population of Ghana. I suggest further research or replicating this study using all the 10 regions.

In summary, it must be noted that studies on voting behavior and partisan alignments will continue to occupy the attention of social science researchers and political activists. It is in this respect that this study must be seen as an exploration into one of the problems that have bedeviled African politics.

Conclusion

This paper started with the purpose of finding out whether ethnic block voting in the Volta and Ashanti Regions could be a cramp in Ghana’s young democracy. The data and discussion confirms the potential threat of the phenomenon to the fledgling democracy. This is particularly so when viewed against the fact that the two regions together constitute a substantial amount of the voter population of Ghana. Thus the ethnic identity theory which provides that individuals would identify with their group members because “theirs” is the best is confirmed. It must also be added that as indicated early on in this study the smaller parties always enter into alliance with either of the two parties in contention, hence the ethnic affiliation influence of their supporters is difficult to determine.

Another fact that is established by the study is that the Ewe ethnic group is more ethnically inclined than the Akans. This is because in the five presidential elections discussed above, the highest score recorded for the NPP in the Volta Region (Ewe dominated) is 14.9%. On the other hand, the NDC has scored as high as 41.1% in the Ashanti Region (Akan dominated).

The Way Forward

Ghana is still an evolving democracy and has a lot more to learn from advanced democracies. It is true that the democratic institutions in the country have, by and large, improved as far as their independence and dealing with electoral conflicts are concerned, the electorate need more education on democratic behavior. National education to sensitize the people on nationalism as against parochial ethnic identities must be vigorously pursued. In addition, political parties must promote the national course in their campaigns and avoid appealing to particular ethnic groups. Democracy is about the best choice and competence of power holders; it does not serve the interest of ethnic competitors; that is, anocracy, not democracy.
Governments have a vital role to play. Resources must be equitably distributed to ensure comprehensive development of the country so that no ethnic group or geographical region is put at a disadvantage. Finally, it is imperative for Ghanaians, particularly those from the Volta and Ashanti regions, to understand the electoral history of Africa which is replete with civil wars triggered by ethnic politics, with fresh memories from Kenya, Ivory Coast, and Zimbabwe.

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