

## The Politics of Managing Ethnic Cleavages, Inequalities, Nation Building and Democratisation in Ghana

Richard Asante

### Abstract

Ghana is made up of diverse socio-cultural groups. Consequently, the management of ethno-regional and other conflicts as well as nation building has been very high on the agenda of post independence governments. This paper examines how Ghana has managed its ethnic, regional and other endemic social conflicts as well as nation building, especially under liberal political conditions. The paper also discusses some of the key challenges and prospects that the governance reforms adopted under democratization hold for Ghana's nation building project. The paper identified the north-south divide, the Ashanti-Ewe rivalry as well as the country's economic problems and vicissitudes as some of the major challenges to national integration. The paper shows that Ghana has combined its electoral system with other public policies to ensure that regional and ethnic cleavages are taken into consideration when politicians make appointment and recruitment into government, the public sector and other key appointive positions. Thus, Ghana's experience hardly validates the contention of postcolonial governments that pluralistic democracy promotes national disintegration. The paper concludes that politicians and policy makers are faced with different types of constraints. Different types of ethnic structures and inequalities as well as the nature of ethno-regional rivalry may require different combinations of reform instrument in order to manage diversity and to build stable and inclusive society.

**Introduction.**

Ghana<sup>1</sup>, like most countries in Africa is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural society. As an entity put together by colonial authorities without regard to ethnic affinities, it is not surprising that inter-group conflicts have occurred under all types of regimes in Ghana. Civilian authoritarian, civilian elected military and quasi-military. Since the emergence of the ethno-regional (class) animosities in the period immediately before independence in 1957, the management of ethnic-regional and other conflicts as well as nation building has been very high on the agenda of post independence governments.

Since the early 1990s, Ghana, like most countries in the sub-region has gone through a process of political liberalization and a return to democratic rule, with the promulgation of a new liberal democratic constitution, political parties have been legalized with an independent and flourishing media, and an upsurge of civil society organizations (CSOs). Unlike other countries in the sub-region, notably, Liberia, Sierra-Leone, and until recently, Cote d'ivoire, and Nigeria, the process of democratization in Ghana has not been accompanied by or degenerated into violent conflicts and instability. In addition, widespread fears of an ethno-regionally-driven implosion in the aftermath of a return to multi-party constitutional rule after 11 years of authoritarian rule, under the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC)<sup>2</sup> have proved unfounded. How has Ghana managed its ethnic, regional and other endemic social conflicts as well as nation building and democratization especially under liberal political conditions? What prospects do the governance reforms hold for Ghana's nation building project and democratization. And most importantly, what key challenges do the reforms pose to nation building, especially

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<sup>1</sup> Ghana is bounded on the west by Cote d'ivoire, on the east by Togo, on the north by Burkina Faso, and on the South by the Atlantic Ocean. It changed its colonial name, The Gold Coast, to Ghana on the attainment of independence from Britain in 1957.

<sup>2</sup> The PNDC led by Jerry John Rawlings was a military regime that ruled Ghana from 1981-1992.

under Ghana's Fourth Republic<sup>3</sup> and liberal constitutional order? These are the key issues address in this paper.

In this paper, the phrase nation building is used interchangeably with state building in two related sense. First nation building refers to the complex process of improving relations among different ethnic groups and religious entities and uniting them under shared political and economic systems. Second, it refers to strengthening the state apparatus to make it more responsive and effective in addressing the welfare of its citizens and managing society in line with its mandated authority (Mengisteab and Daddieh, 1999).

The focus of the paper is on the links between ethnicity and governance reforms in Ghana. Governance reforms in this paper refer to institution building. There are several perspectives to the definition of institutions. Ranis (1989) observes that institutions define how people inhabiting a certain land space and having command over given resources decide to organize themselves for economic activity. Institutions may also be seen as “a set of structures, lasting patterns of behaviors and relationships (roles) that are guided and supported by broad societal values, regulated by certain norms of conduct (rules) and operationalized by organizations” (Dia, 1996). Douglas North (1991) has also defined institutions as the “the humanly devised constraints that structure political, economic and social interaction”. These can be informal (sanctions, taboos, customs, or codes of conduct) or formal (constitution, laws and property rights etc.). Institutions have also been defined to refer to “rules, enforcement mechanisms, and organizations”. (World Bank).

First, I begin by reviewing some of the major policy framework that scholar in ethnic studies and governance reforms have held up as solutions for ethnically divided societies. Second, I examine Ghana's ethnic structure, inequalities and levels of polarization and fragmentation within and among the main ethnic groupings, as well as strategies of nation

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<sup>3</sup> Overall, Ghana has four Republic(s). The First Republic covered the period 1960-66. The Second Republic 1969-72, Third Republic 1979-81 and Fourth Republic 1992 to date. The first three republics ended abruptly through coup d'état.

building adopted by post colonial governments between 1960 and 1990, to aid understanding of ethnic behavior and the choices that are open to politicians and policy-makers in crafting reforms that will help manage political competition, diversity and nation building.. Third, I discuss Ghana's electoral and governance reforms adopted under democratization to manage plurality. I conclude by arguing that politicians', citizens and policy- makers are faced with different types of constraints, depending on the dynamic interplay of structures of ethnicity and inequality. Different types of ethnic structures may demand different combinations of reform instruments in building stable and inclusive societies. The paper is not a comparative one and it focuses on some of the institutions and policies that Ghana has adopted to manage ethnic cleavages, inequalities and nation building.

#### **Ethnicity and Governance Reforms in Africa. The debate.**

The practice in development-studies has been to treat ethnicity as pathological. In the 1960s and 1970s, politicians concerned with nation-building and some political scientists argued that democracy was incompatible with multi-ethnicity. It was believed that electoral competition would encourage the formation of political parties along ethnic lines, heighten ethnic consciousness, and plunge countries into chaos. Consequently, the one party system was held up as a cure for the ills of ethnicity. However, experiences in Africa and elsewhere have shown that, the one party state often degenerates into rule by one ethnic group or dictator, leading to the very conditions of instability it seeks to eliminate

With the democratization wave that swept much of the world in the 1990s, most of the countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and Pacific have embraced multi-party politics, but with mixed outcomes. For example, by 1999, only 8 countries had not held competitive party elections in sub-Saharan Africa and about 8 countries that ushered in new governments under competitive elections later experienced a civil war or coup d'états. (Bangura, 2000). Even though most politicians in Africa have embraced multi-party politics in the last decade of democratization, the concept of plurality and the rights that underpin it are strongly contested in many countries.

A related pathological view of ethnicity is the argument in development economics that links the “growth tragedies” of plural societies, especially those in Africa, with ethnic fragmentation. It is argued that ethnic fragmentation encourages rent-seeking behavior and undermines efforts to build consensus on the allocation and management of public goods, creating sub-optimal outcomes and tragic growth. In the 1960s and 1970s, the economic arguments for rapid growth and industrialization converged with the nation-building arguments of politicians and political theorists to support developmental one party and military regime. However, in the 1980s and 1990s, market based adjustment programs and democratization challenged these monolithic authoritarian practices, although doubts still remain in many developing countries about the stabilizing effects of plural forms of governance.

Another major weakness of the pathological view of ethnicity is the tendency for analysts to treat ethnicity as a problem irrespective of the way it is configured in a country’s social structure. The challenge in the ethnicity and governance reforms in Africa and elsewhere in Asia, Europe and the Pacific is how to create institutions that can regulate the struggle for access to the state without plunging societies into chaos.

Another pitfall of the debate on governance, electoral systems design and ethnicity is the tendency by some analysts and scholars on ethnicity to see the reform instruments, as dichotomies-it is either majoritarian or proportionality and power sharing. It also assumes that policies will work in the same way in every ethnically plural society. Lijphart’s in his first book on consociation, *The Politics of Accommodation (1968)*, focused on the Dutch experience, and his subsequent book, *Democracy in Plural Societies (1977)*, in which he tried to apply the concept to a large number of countries, clear conditions were set for the successful application of a consociation. The model was restricted to small number of countries with limited number of ethnic groups (not exceeding five) and mutually reinforcing deep-seated cleavages. As Lane and Errson (2000) have pointed out, Lijphart’s subsequent writings, especially those of the 1990, adopted a much more assertive argument, power sharing is better than majoritarian government irrespective of the social structure.

Similarly, Horowitz's seminal work in 1985, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, analyzed several electoral systems and rules for the promotion of moderation without giving undue preference to any one type. However, in subsequent articles and book on South Africa, which largely were a reaction to Lijphart's List Proportional Representative (PR) and consociation system, Horowitz became very critical of the List PR and consociation, and extolled the virtues of the alternative or preference vote over the single transferable vote (STV), and the STV over the List PR. In other words, he advocated for majoritarianism.<sup>4</sup>

Reilly and Reynolds (1999) in their article on ethnicity and governance introduced contextual issues-such as the nature of group identity; the intensity of the conflict; size and number of distribution of ethnic groups-. However, in spite of their sensitivity to different types of ethnic structure and inequalities, Reilly and Reynolds also fell in the same trap as Horowitz and Lijphart by treating the electoral and governance reforms as closed or mutually opposed policies that cannot be combined by countries. Reilly and Reynolds also used the different types of electoral systems- Alternative Vote (AV), List Proportional Representation (PR) and Single Transferable Votes (STV) - to classify countries as if the electoral systems are independent variables. (Bangura 2001).

### **Ghana's Ethnic Cleavages and Structure.**

Ghana is a country of about 20 million people comprising a variety of socio-cultural groupings. The country has approximately about ninety-two separate ethnic groups. These groups are, often classified into a few large groups, namely, Akan, Mole Dagbani,

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<sup>4</sup> Studies on ethnicity and governance reform have produced two competing policy frameworks for managing plurality: Majoritarian reforms and consociation/power sharing. Majoritarian reform encourages vote pooling and moderation while supporting adversarial politics; while consociation or powers sharing arrangements accepts ethnic parties as given and seeks to promote plurality not within the contending parties but at the governmental level itself. Consociation accommodates ethnic divisions. Under the List PR type- parties draw up a list of ranked candidates, corresponding to the number of seats to be filled in parliament. Here electorates vote for parties and not individual candidates and popular votes gained are proportional to the seats allocated in parliament. AV and STV are the main mechanism for the promotion of plural or moderate parties (preference or alternative vote (AV), the single transferable vote (STV). Analyst who favor majoritarian government generally opts for AV. The STV is a proportional system that gives scope to smaller parties.

Ewe, Ga Adangbe, Guan, and Gume (Gurma) According to the 2000 Population and Housing census data, the predominant group is the Akan, (49.1%), followed by the Mole Dagbani, (16.5%), the Ewe, (12.7%), the Ga Adangbe, (8.0%), the Guan (4.4%), the Gurma, (3.9%), the Grusi (2.8%), Mande–Busanga, (1.1%), and then others, (1.5%). (Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) 2000).

The various subdivisions in the main ethnic groups as well as the geographic distribution of these populations make understanding the intricacies of ethnicity in Ghana a complex affair. For example the largest group, the Akans consists of Asante, Fanti, Brono, Akyem, Akwapim, Kwahu, Denkyira, Wassa, Nzima, Sefwi etc. are spread over the Western, Central, Eastern, Ashanti and Brong Ahafo regions, with an enclave in the Volta region. But there is an Akan speaking person in almost every corner of the country. Similarly, the Mole Dagbani and Gonja who are concentrated in the Northern Savannah zone could be found in most parts of the country. And so are the rest of the other ethnic groups. Within these broader groups, jealousies and rivalries make distinctions between the subdivisions all the more complex.

For example, since the passage of the Emergency Power Act<sup>5</sup>, by the Convention People's Party's government led by Dr. Kwame Nkrumah in 1958, which separated the Brono-Ahafo area in the Ashanti region and created it as a separate region with its own House of Chiefs, Brong-Akans and Ashanti –Akans have feuded persistently over whether or not the latter is a vassal state of the Ashanti kingdom. Furthermore, Akan settler farmers and their hosts in predominantly Akan cocoa growing areas in the Eastern Region, and Ashanti settler farmers and their hosts in the Western Region have lashed at each other over settler rights versus landlord claims.

Ethnic rivalries of the colonial era and the effects of colonialism have also created tensions between Ashanti's on the one hand, and Fante's on the other hand. Ashanti's expansionist ambitions, conquest and domination over majority of their southern

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<sup>5</sup> The emergency Power Act was introduced and applied in Kumasi in 1958 by the CPP government partly as a reward for the people of Bono-Ahafo who voted massively for the CPP in the 1956 elections. It was also meant to weaken ethnic sentiments and loyalties between Bono-Akans and Ashanti Akans.

counterparts brought them into direct confrontation with some of the states in the coast, especially, Elmina and the British colonial authorities.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, the Northern region like its counterparts in the South is also far from being homogeneous. There are no less than fifteen different ethnic groups in the region with varied histories, customs and traditions. Besides the Konkomba- Bimoba clash, the rest have been between ‘majority’ and ‘minority’ ethnic groups.

These conflicts have left in their wake destruction of life and property. Even more alarming is the atmosphere of insecurity and distrust that these conflicts have engendered which has affected all socio-economic activities in the Region.

Even though the immediate causes of these conflicts differ, the remote causes are similar if not the same. They arise from several years of relegation of certain ethnic groups, so-called ‘minority’ groups to ‘second rate citizens’ in the traditional and political administration of the region or attempts to by-pass some of the ‘gates’ in the system of rotation to the chiefship. (Brukum 1999). The majority ethnic groups have cunningly taken the lands of these areas to themselves through sometimes false information and manipulation of colonial authority. The impression created is that these four groups – Mamprusi, Dagomba, Gonja and Nanumba own all the lands in the Northern region. They are therefore, the ‘landlords’ the ‘ruling class’. In fact the relation between the ‘ruling class’ and their ‘landless subjects’ is at best an acceptance of a situation of mutual mistrust and at worst, open confrontation<sup>7</sup>.

In short, ethnic groups in Ghana are not confined to specific geographical areas. Internal migration and foreign immigration have rendered the various areas less and less homogeneous over time from the point of view of tribal distinction. In addition to the geographical spread of the various ethnic groups, the ethnic map of Ghana is almost coterminous with its religious map. Christians who constitute 69% of the population are

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<sup>6</sup> See [www.ghanaweb.com/Ghana](http://www.ghanaweb.com/Ghana) Home Page/history/pre-colonial.php, accessed on 20 September 2003.

<sup>7</sup> For further discussions on the ethnic groups and conflicts in the Northern Regions of Ghana see, Brukum N.J.K 1999. “Ethnic conflicts in the Northern Region of Ghana. Case study of the Conflicts in the Gonja District.1980-1994” in Mike Oquaye (ed) **Conflict and Conflict Resolution in Ghana.**

found largely in the southern sections while the Muslims who formed 16% live mainly in the Northern section. The spatial distribution of the two major foreign religions, Islam and Christianity almost coincides with the division of the country into the northern half that is poor and disadvantaged, and the southern half which is wealthy and more developed.

### **Socio-Economic Inequalities in Ghana**

The driving forces of inequality in Ghana, like in most societies, are determined by factors such as geography (especially when examining the differences between the poor North and the prosperous south, and the Rural-Urban divide), gender, disability and class.

More specifically, inequality of opportunities among the peoples of Ghana is often the result of the combined effect of objective factors such as differential resource endowment, history and public policy, as well as subjective factors such as attitudes and prejudices (Ghana Human Development Report 1997). Cumulatively, the effects have been across regions.

There are wide disparities with respect to the distribution of medical and health facilities, access to telephones, consumption of electricity, small-scale industries, schools and other key social services, particularly between the north and the south, rural-and urban areas. For example, at independence having been largely neglected and left relatively underdeveloped under colonial rule, the Northern Region declared a social and economic distance from the rest of the country and its leaders argued that their people were not ready to be governed as part of independent Ghana without special protections<sup>8</sup>.

In the southeast, having been colonized by Germany, and governed later on as part of the UN Trusteeship Territories together with Togoland, the Ewe exerted irredentist pressures

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<sup>8</sup> For exhaustive discussions on socio-economic inequalities in Ghana, see Gyimah-Boadi and Asante (2003). *Ethnic Structure, Inequality and the Governance of the Public Sector in Ghana* (upcoming).

towards their cousins in Togoland. The Ashanti also demanded special protections for their cocoa and mineral wealth as well as their culture. (Austin 1964.).

### **Strategies of Nation Building in Ghana (1960-90).**

Post colonial governments especially that of the first Republic under Kwame Nkrumah, took energetic measures towards nation building. The Nkrumah government justified the use of authoritarianism as necessary for containing ethno-regional tensions that emerged immediately before Ghana gained independence from Britain in 1957. The process started with the passage of Avoidance of Discrimination Act in December 1957. This law banned the formation of political parties along, ethnic, religious and regional lines. This law effectively suppressed all the existing parties that had raised the question of federalism. The process of democratic closure continued with the expansion of presidential powers, the elimination of constitutional checks on executive power and finally the formalization of single –party in 1964.

However, the distribution and redistribution of economic and symbolic as well as bureaucratic and political appointments seems to have been the main strategies used for nation building. In this regard, efforts were made under both civilian and military authoritarian and democratic regimes in Ghana to spread the provision of economic infrastructure (especially roads, bridges, post office) and social services (clinics, health post, schools etc.) in all the regions. For example, in the field of education special attention was paid to the historically disadvantaged Northern regions. In addition to a system of free-primary and middle school education for all Ghanaians, special facility was given to children from the Northern Regions for secondary and university education.

Ghanaian governments also pursued a policy of full employment in the state enterprises in particular, and expanded the public sector that led to the creation of over 300 state enterprises and a bloated civil service, thereby making the government the leading employer by the 1970s. In addition, cabinet, bureaucratic and technocratic positions in government and the public sector, as well as membership of ruling military regimes were informally balanced to reflect the cultural and ethnic diversity of the country. (Gyimah-

Boadi and Daddieh 1999). Although, these strategies of nation building worked fairly well and succeeded in containing ethno-regional animosities during the period under review, increasingly they have proved untenable in the new political dispensation and economic restructuring that concurrently got under way in 1992.

### **Governance Reforms and Electoral System of Ghana.**

Over four decades into independence, Ghana continues to face high levels of inequalities. This is particularly evident, in the north-south divide, rural-urban disparities, gender, ethnic polarization particularly the Ashanti-Ewe rivalry, and over-representation of Akans (the majority ethnic group) in the public sector. Post independence governments have express concern about these inequalities and have made various attempts to address it.

First, in an attempt to deal with the ethnic question, the CPP soon after independence was forced to pass the Avoidance of Discrimination Act to prohibit the formation of political parties on ethnic, regional or religious lines. The 1992 constitution and the Political Parties Laws provide for elaborate and far –reaching rules to check ethnic polarization thereby promoting national integration.

- The 1969, 1979, and 1992 Constitutions, all contain provisions aimed at curbing ethnic based electoral politics. Leadership and membership of Political Parties are not to be restricted to any particular ethnic group. Names, symbols, colour, or motto should not have exclusive or particular sectional significance or connotation. Nor should parties be formed for the sole purpose of seeking the welfare, advancement or interests of members of any particular group. (Articles, 35 (1), 42 (5), 55(4) of the 1969, 1979, and 1992 Constitutions respectively. However, elections held under these constitutions indicate that ethnicity remains an important issue.

The Directive Principles of State Policy contained in the 1992 Constitution also seeks to manage political competitions and inequalities in the public sector by stressing on

national integration. For instance, Article 34 (5) requires the state to actively promote national integration by prohibiting discrimination and prejudice on the grounds of place of origin, circumstances of birth, ethnic origin, gender or religion, creed or other beliefs. In this regard, the state is required to take appropriate measures to: Foster a spirit of loyalty to Ghana that overrides sectional, ethnic and other loyalties; and strive to achieve reasonable regional and gender balance in recruitment and appointment to public office. (Republic of Ghana 1992)

The significance of all these constitutional provisions is that they seek to regulate political competition, manage ethnic diversity and to promote state building by setting out the rules for all Ghanaians, irrespective of one's background and ethnic affiliation.

Similarly, the 1992 constitution contains notable proclamations and extensive enforceable provisions on good governance and participation. It also contains certain innovations such as the explicit recognition of "Economic Rights"; "Educational Rights"; Cultural Rights and Practices"; "Women's Right"; Children's Right"; along side the traditional constitutional concern with civil, political, private, and property rights.

In addition to the above rules, under the 1992 Constitution, the Political Parties Law (PNDC Law 281), 1992, the Representation of the People Law (PNDC Law 284), 1992 Representation of the People (Parliamentary Constituencies) Legislative Instrument (LI 1538), 1992, Ghana's electoral system has the following basic features:

1. Universal adult suffrage for citizens who are 18 years and above (it used to be 21 years up to the advent of the Second Republic, 1969 – 1972);
2. Secret ballot
3. Presidential and parliamentary and local government elections on the basis of first- past-the-post;

4. Presidential election where the winner requires more than 50% of the valid votes cast;
5. A run-off presidential election within 21 days in case no winner emerges on the first ballot. In such an event, the run-off between the two candidates who obtained the highest votes. The one who gets the higher votes becomes the president;
6. No minimum voter turn-out is required for presidential, parliamentary and other elections;
7. The president serves for two terms of four years (altogether 8 years) and is not eligible for re-election thereafter;
8. Presidential and parliamentary elections are held every four years

Article 50 of the 1992 constitution explicitly states “where two or more candidates have been nominated the election shall be held and the candidate who receives the largest number of votes cast shall be declared elected”.

Although Ghana’s electoral rules are geared toward the promotion of majoritarian outcome, it also provides some safeguards for inclusion of groups and regions that do not support or voted for the ruling party to be represented in government. For instance, the Directive Principles of State Policy contained in the 1992 constitution, inter alia requires the government of the day to ensure reasonable regional and gender balance in recruitment and appointment to public office” and also to promote “appropriate policies that overrides sectional, ethnic and other loyalties”

Although the electoral system is based on the winner-take-all arrangement, where only one party wins while every other candidate loses even if they happen to have a substantial number of votes, the maximization of votes by the competing political parties vying for political power promote plurality within the party system.

Significantly, the more than 50 percent required by the constitution for a candidate to become a president, encourages political parties and elite to forge alliances and also to broaden their support by seeking for votes outside their traditional ethnic strongholds.

For instance, the NPP won the 2000 elections largely because of the capacity of the party to repackage and markets itself as a national party.

Furthermore, the New Patriotic Party (NPP)<sup>9</sup> was also able to transform itself as a party perceived as one of educated middle class and urban dwellers to one that appealed to rural dwellers. It is interesting to note that, the choice of Alhaji Aliu Mahama, a Dagomba (Northerner) and also a Muslim, by John Agyekum Kufuor as his running mate for the 2000 presidential elections, appears to have further boosted and improved the image problems of the NPP considerably. For the first time in the history of Ghana, a Northern Muslim is occupying the vice- presidency position.

There are also several provisions in the 1992 constitution that sought to affirm the desire to promote political inclusiveness and national unity. For example, each of the ten regions in Ghana elects a representative each to the Council of State (the main advisory body for the president). The constitution also requires the President to consult with the Council of State regarding appointment into some key and sensitive public sector institutions. The institutions include among others, The Military High Command, The Head of the Police Service, The Head of the Bureau of National Investigations (BNI), The Head of the Civil Service, The Chairman and Members of the Public Services Commission (PSC) (the main body responsible for appointment and recruitment into the Ghanaian public sector) and Ambassadorial positions.

Overall, governance reforms and electoral rules were tailored to handle some of the complex problems and challenges presented by multi- ethnic and multi religious societies. Nevertheless, the majoritarian system clearly has its drawbacks in terms of effective representation. For example, it excludes minority parties who may have done well in their total votes received but do not receive fair representation. In most societies, especially male dominated once as well as male dominated party structures, the

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<sup>9</sup> The NPP led by HE. John Agyekum Kufuor is the ruling party in Ghana. It defeated the National Democratic Congress ( NDC) government led by Jerry John Rawlings who ruled Ghana, first as a military leader from 1981-92, second as an elected President from 1993-2000. The two parties are largely perceived as Akan/Ashanti based and Ewe based respectively. While Kufuor is an Ashanti, Rawlings is a half Ewe and half Scottish.

majoritarian system tends to exclude women. Even though electoral rules as contained in the 1992 and previous constitutions of Ghana were meant to promote national integration and to de-ethnicize politics, encourage cross-ethnic alliances and voting behavior, it seems, however, that ethnicity as a mobilizing force is still a reality in Ghana.

The real word of reforms reveals a much more complex picture. As the Ghanaian experience shows electoral reforms, which encourage moderation and plurality, have not been restricted to electoral systems. Ghana has added other rules, such as ban on ethno-regionally based political parties, compulsory location of party head quarters and establishment of party offices in the national capital and regions, decentralization, affirmative action programs etc. In other words, Ghana has combined the majoritarian winner –takes- all electoral arrangement with other public policies that seek to ensure that regional and ethnic cleavages are taken into consideration when politicians make appointment and recruitment into government and the public sector and other key appointive position.

### **Challenges.**

Governance reforms and the current political dispensation present several challenges to nation building in Ghana. First, the historic and competitive December 2000 elections<sup>10</sup> aggravated the country's existing political and social tensions. It also put some of Ghana's perennial problems, nation building and governance reforms into shaper focus.

In spite of the governance reforms the competing political groups have found themselves unable to resist playing the “sectarian card” and voting patterns have followed at least mildly ethno-regional lines. To illustrate, there has been ethnic polarization in two key areas: the Ashanti-Ewe divide and the north-south divide. Time series voting data suggests that the Ashanti and Ewe have been less flexible in their voting behavior.

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<sup>10</sup> Ghana has had three successful elections under the fourth republic, which started in 1992. These are the elections of 1992, 1996 and 2000. The 2000 elections is very historic in the countries history in that for the

Indeed, just as in the 1992, 1996, there was partial bloc voting in Ashanti for the NPP with the Bantama constitution in the second city of Kumasi dubbed as “Ghana’s Florida” and full bloc voting for the NDC in Volta (the World Bank of votes for the NDC<sup>11</sup>). This voting pattern broadly shows that the country is polarized along ethnic and political party lines and therefore underscores the need to re-examine the country’s electoral and governance reforms.

There is also at least superficial evidence of a surge in social tensions in the new political era. For example, the recent clashes between the two factions in the Dagbon conflict that led to the murder of a prominent Dagomba Chief Ya Na Yakubu Andani, the Paramount Chief of the Dagbon Traditional Area in Ghana’s Northern Region and thirty others perhaps poses a major threat to peace and stability in Northern Region in particularly and Ghana in general. Although, this violence is certainly evidence of ethnic tension in the country, most observers believe that the case in point is an exception. Besides, the north-south divide remains intractable. It assumes religious and material dimension, while the north is largely Muslim and is resource poor, and lags behind the south (Christian) in most social and economic indicators. However, unlike the recent situation in Cote d’Ivoire, the north-south divide in Ghana has not been translated into civil war between the north and the south

Furthermore, Ghana is also faced with intractable problem of economic management. Indeed, economic growth has suffered a major setback since 1992 when the concurrent process of political liberalization and economic restructuring got under way. Thus, the economic problems present serious challenges to the management of ethno-regional and other social conflicts in Ghana. Additionally, decentralization, which seeks to empower disadvantaged and vulnerable groups to manage their own affairs especially at the local level, has not been effective. More so, women who constitute about 52 percent of population are under represented in public office. The low participation of women in

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first time an elected President was able to complete its tenure of office (i.e. two terms of office 4 years each), lost elections and handed over to an opposition party.

<sup>11</sup> For comprehensive discussions on ethnic undercurrents in elections in Ghana, see Gyimah-Boadi and Asante 2003 (upcoming).

public office is a long-standing issue, which is mainly attributed to cultural barriers. Nevertheless, it underscores the need for re-examination of governance reforms in Ghana.

### **Prospects.**

Notwithstanding the above challenges, Ghana's experience hardly validates the contention of postcolonial governments that pluralistic democracy promotes national disintegration. The main ethnic groups in Ghana are internally fragmented. The largest fragmentation is among the Akan, which is the largest ethnic group and made up of about 20 sub-groups. The fragmentation suggests that the Akan group do not behave as coherent political unit.

Different sections of the Akan group vote differently. Even though individuals of Akan ethnicity are general, dominant in the public sector, Akan fragmentation has encouraged cross-ethnic coalitions and allowed Akans to vote for individuals and candidates and leaders of non-Akan origin. Similarly, Non-Akan voters have also supported parties that are dominated by the Akan group. In spite of the Akan dominance of the Ghanaian public sector, there is also sufficient representation of the other major groups and governance reforms is supportive of ethno-regional balance and political inclusiveness in furtherance of the nation building project.

Furthermore, the lopsided voting behavior by the Ashanti and Ewe would never secure them electoral victory in competitive elections since the two groups especially the ewes are not large enough. The Ashanti and Ewe constitute 15 percent and 13 percent respectively of the Ghanaian population. Moreover, despite the fact that the Ashanti's are part of the larger Akan group, they have not been able to mobilize the rest of the Akan group to follow their choices in the political field. This means that the two groups, the Ahanti and the Ewe will continue to seek for alliance from other groups to be electorally viable. This fosters political inclusiveness. In other words, the maximization of votes

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encourages parties to seek for votes outside their ethnic strongholds and to work with individuals from other ethnic groups, to de-emphasize ethnicity in politics.

The ban on ethno-regionally based parties has been some how effective. This is because parties that were previously ethnically/regionally based have been forced to repackage their programs and transform themselves into national parties, and have sought for votes outside their narrow ethnic/regional base, which in the past did not yield much dividend to them. As noted, the NPP was able to transform itself as a party perceived as one of educated middle class, urban dwellers, and Akan/Ashanti based to one that that appealed to rural dwellers and other ethnic groups. This improved the image problems of the party and contributed largely to the party's victory in the 2000 elections.

Even though there is no fixed formula in making appointment into the public sector in general, successive governments have been sensitive to ethno-regional issues and have adopted ethnic mixing formulae where all the major ethnic groups are represented in cabinet and to some extent other key public sector institutions. The ethnic mixing policies adopted by politicians will be continued in subsequent years. As noted, a Muslim holds the position of Vice president from the Northern Region. For example, the Volta and Upper West regions of Ghana are represented in cabinet even though the two regions voted overwhelmingly for the opposition NDC in the 2000 elections. Most importantly, the current administration and the other political parties have officially committed themselves to continuing with the reforms and to work with civil society organizations to improve upon it. Indeed, this is a positive step towards nation building and democratic consolidation in Ghana.

### **Conclusion.**

Ghana is a country that is made up of a variety of socio-cultural groups. However, ethnic rivalries during the pre-colonial era and colonialism have all impacted differently on the various ethnic groups and regions in the country. In addition, the uneven distribution of

socio-economic amenities in post independence era presents serious challenges to nation building and democratization in Ghana.

As a multi ethnic society, nation building has been very high on the agenda of postcolonial governments. Indeed, they have been used as an excuse by some postcolonial governments for the adoption of statist strategies of economic development and authoritarian modes of governance. For example, while statist and socialist economic policies facilitated welfare and distributionist programs for securing loyalties of diverse groups, authoritarianism provided governments with coercive instrument to keep fissiparous ethno-regional tendencies and social tensions under control.

Clearly, the strategy of nation building especially via distribution and welfare programs was reasonably successful primarily because the economy during the first thirty years was quite strong. This strategy has become untenable, given Ghana's prevailing economic problems and vicissitudes. Similarly, the new political dispensation has imposed several restrictions on the use of authoritarianism or coercive use of force.

Significantly, governance reforms and public policies in Ghana are geared toward addressing some of the complex challenges presented by the heterogeneous nature of the Ghanaian society. In this regard, governance reforms in the form electoral rules, decentralization, and affirmative action policy have been combined and adopted to manage nation building.

However, a careful attention to the crafting of reforms and electoral rules that are sensitive to but not trapped in ethnic cleavages and inequalities is a crucial challenge to politicians, policy-makers and citizens in nation building. Since ethnic identity is only one form of identification and fluid, reforms should be based on sound principles of universal citizenship, and efforts should be made to promote reforms that are likely to reflect cross-cutting cleavages, inequalities and national in character rather than narrow ethnic interest. (Bangura 2001). In short, governance reforms should be sensitive to the wider goals of nation building, which can promote economic development and deliver social services to all citizens without discrimination.

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