**The enigma of how ethnicity influences voting choice in Ghana.**

**ALFRED CHYRSTOSTOME BOATENG**

**MONMOUTH COLLEGE**

*Presented at*

*26th Annual Illinois State University Conference for Students of*

*Political Science*

*Normal, IL*

*April 27, 2018*

**ABSTRACT**

Why does ethnicity affect the voting choices of the people of Ghana”? This paper argues that ethnicity plays a huge rule in terms of influencing the voting choices of people during elections. Thus, this paper seeks to understand why this is so. It explores what ethnicity itself is and what others also view of it as. This paper focuses on five factors that ethnicity influences which in turn affect the voting choice of people. These factors are religion, Party identification (Political parties and political candidates), conflicts, chieftaincy and migration.

Additionally, this paper includes regional analysis of elections in Ghana from the 1960 election through the 2016 elections. However, a deeper focus is placed on four elections: 1960, 1972, and 2000 and the 2016 elections. This paper addresses how ethnicity influences party identification which is both political and political candidates, for voters and who or what is responsible for allowing ethnicity to dominate the minds of voters who vote based on ethnicity. These contributors could be chiefs, political parties and candidates and even ethnic conflicts.

Understanding why ethnicity affects the voting choice of people in Ghana will not only help the people Ghana, but also people in other democratic African countries and beyond like the U.S and so on, to not depend wholly on ethnicity but also on other positions to aid the betterment of their country.

**INTRODUCTION**

The main purpose of this research paper is to focus on why ethnicity affects voting choices of individuals in Ghana. I will mainly focus using a comparative point of view to explain what ethnicity, ethnic groups and ethnic identity are and then how ethnicity plays a role during voting in Ghana. Furthermore, I will explore the effects that ethnicity has on voting in Ghana. In this case, what are some positive sides that ethnicity brings about in Ghana as well as some negative effects. I will also identify some possible causal factors of ethnicity and ethnic identity affecting voting choices of people in Ghana. I will also introduce some counter-arguments some scholars have made against these causal factors. There have been many academic literatures from various academic faculties on the issue of ethnicity and voting choices however, this research paper will consist solely of Political science literatures. Within this paper, I have divided my points into sections namely an annotated outline. It’s as follows.

To begin with is the literature review; which highlights the key points of other scholarly authors that have taken and studied ethnicity and voting choices in Ghana. Thus, through the literature review, I will show how people defined ethnicity, how certain factors namely religion, political parties and political candidates, conflicts and chieftaincy, are being influenced by ethnicity which in turn affect how people vote. Also, I will be taking the literature of what some scholars have said about how ethnicity and ethnic identity affect the voting choice of people. How some of these scholars define certain key words like ethnicity, ethnic groups and ethnic identities and some of the causal factors they identified where ethnicity affects voting choices of people in general.

Next is What is ethnicity and ethnic identity: Here, in other to move on to my main focus, I will define what ethnicity and ethnic identity is and show that there is a slight difference between these two however, I will explore their relationship and relevance to this paper and use general examples from other countries as well as Ghana. How is ethnic identity formed? Here, I will elaborate more on how ethnic identity is formed in general and how this is evident in Ghana. Since I elaborated more on ethnic identity above, it is natural to explain more how it is formed. This is because many times, people mistake national identity for ethnic identity, but both are different. Relationship between ethnic identity and national identity: Here, I will now elaborate on how ethnic identity plays a role in national identity and how national identity in turn plays a role in voting as well as ethnic identity. Effects of ethnicity on voting in Ghana: When ethnicity affects voting choices, what are some things that make it evident that ethnicity is in play here. In other words, when ethnicity affects voting choices, what happens next? I will trace these effects historically for the past to present and create some hypothesis for the effects on the future. This is also the importance of this research. Does it affect Ghana in a positive way or negative way?

*Causal Factors*: Here, I will identify possible causes or what ethnicity affects which in turn affect voting choices in Ghana. In other words, what creates the chance for ethnicity to affect voting choices? Below are the causes. Religion: In most countries, religion is what even constitutions were sometimes based on for example the U.S and then later, laws became more secular. This is same for Ghana religion has become so influential that it ties itself to ethnicity so much. But in reality, ethnic groups which belong to specific religions vote in specific ways which in my paper I shall be identifying. *Party identification (both political parties and political candidates) in Ghana*: People identifying certain political parties as ethnic thus, associating themselves with similar ethnic parties. Also, how does this the affect voting? I will also bring to light how ethnic migration affects voting choices in Ghana. Many a times when an ethnic group migrates to a different area in large quantities, they tend to vote more for candidates that favor them all as a whole. Thus, you begin to realize that that locality has begun voting got a party and without looking into migration, you would not understand why it is so. *How does ethnicity create conflicts* which in turn affect the voting choice of people? Sometimes when some ethnic groups do not like each other, they try their best to vote against other parties or candidates associated with their ethnic enemies. Many other instances are here, and I will explore as many as possible. And then lastly within the paper, *how does ethnicity affect chieftaincy* which in turn affects the voting choice of people? Chiefs are the big brains behind the governance of their people. Thus, some people who respect their chiefs so much end up making the same choices as their chiefs. Also, some candidates use chiefs to gain votes.

In short, this paper is a sum of all the causal factors leading to why ethnicity affects the voting choice of people in Ghana. Also, this paper and topic is important. It’s important because politics is the back-bone of the country Ghana. At the same time, ethnicity is where people come from and so when it comes to voting, people with or without the influence of their ethnicity vote. However, Ghana is a democracy which means people should be free of external influences including ethnicity, when voting. Even with this, ethnicity influencing voting choices of people has been happening for a long time and now, it appears our ethnic identity has become inter-twined with our national identity which should not be so. This make people vote on a biased basis which affects Ghana in so many ways like choosing incompetent leaders, creating ethnic conflicts and affecting opportunities like jobs, schools and so on. So, I want to understand why this is so and can it be changed?

**Literature Review**

In Ghana, ethnic groups are where people hail from. People from Ghana all belong to an ethnic group. Thus, people will in some ways, be influenced by their ethnic groups. The way they speak, eat, dress and so on (Culture). In a nutshell, culture is subjectivity gained from ethnic groups. Below are some literature reviews that some scholars have viewed on the issue of how ethnicity influences politics in Ghana. But first, my definition of ethnicity and then some scholarly definitions ethnicity.

*Definitions of Ethnicity:* Ethnicity is the fact or state of being a part of a group that share common national and cultural traditions and have similar ideologies. An Ethnic group then becomes a group that share the same ethnicity.

Ethnicity comes from the Greek work “ethnos” which basically describe a community that contain people of similar descent. This means that the people belonging in this community have shared the same experiences, stories and culture over the course of history till present. Ethnicity then can be described or explained as the state of being a part of a social group that has and share the same national or cultural traditions thus, identify with each other based on these similarities they share in their culture like ancestry, culture, nation, society, community, and more.

Max Webber an early 20th century sociologist noted that ethnic groups were artificially and social constructed. This is because ethnic groups were based on subjective beliefs along the lines of a shared community. Through this, people began to build groups and compete for political power as Webber argues. Later, Fredrik Barth (1969) also noted that ethnicity was changing and that depending on a political struggle between groups; people always would change the definition of ethnic codes which would define a member of a certain ethnicity

Thomas Hylland Eriksen in his book, Ethnicity and Nationalism refers to ethnicity as “relationships between groups whose members consider themselves distinctive and these groups are often ranked hierarchically within a society” (Eriksen, 10). With this, Eriksen goes on to make it clear that ethnicity is different from the term race and also, is different from the term Nationalism. This is good because people often mix up these three terms.

Nancy C. Edwards in her article, “Important Considerations in the Use of Ethnicity as a Study Variable”, makes a reference to Morris W (Ed.) in his essay, *The Houghton Mifflin Canadian Diction* that Ethnicity is “the condition of belonging to a social group within a cultural and social system that claims or is accorded special status on the basis of complex, often variable traits including religious, linguistic, ancestralor physical characteristics”

Wsevolod W. Isajiw in his essay, Definitions and Dimensiona of Ethnicity, brings to light four approaches to the definition of ethnicity. The Primordial approach “argues that ethnicity is something given, ascribed at birth, deriving from the kin-and-clan-structure of human society, and hence something more or less fixed and permanent (Geertz, 1963; Isaacs, 1975; Stack, 1986).” The Epiphenomenon approach sees Ethnicity as “something created and maintained by an uneven economy, or a product of economic exploitation” by dividing the economic characteristics of the society into two parts; center and periphery respectively. The Situational approach views ethnicity as “something which may be relevant in some situations but not in others” or "a group option in which resources are mobilized for the purpose of pressuring the political system to allocate public goods for the benefit of the members of a self-differentiating collectivity" (Ross, 1982). Lastly, the subjective approach view ethnicity as “a social-psychological reality or a matter of perception of "us" and "them" in contradistinction to looking at it as something given, which exists objectively as it were "out there"”.

Most often people mistake ethnicity for race but that is not correct. Kanchan Chandra (2006), noted that “ethnic identities are a subset of identity categories in which eligibility for membership is determined by attributes associated with, or believed to be associated with, descent” (p. 398). By ethnicity, Chandra is talking about the social category of “eligibility” in terms of membership to be part of a group which is determined by descent attributes like genetics (color, hair color eyes, physical features like height and so on) and through cultural and historical inheritance (these features include type of food one knows how to cook, names gotten from family and so on). Thus, you can see that race is just a subset of ethnicity but it is not ethnicity.

Religion and ethnicity affecting politics and voting choice is a topic few venture into. There haven’t been much scholarly literature on how ethnicity affects religion which in turn affects politics in general as well as in Africa and lastly, Ghana. Usually these two topics are separated when we involve politics or voting choice of people. This is the more reason why research needs to be done on such a topic because it is real and exists but people do not pay attention to it.

Looking at the U.S, Even though the first Amendment of America states that there is absolute freedom concerning religion in America. It has been observed that the religions of Presidential candidates affect the support they get from Americans. The first amendment states that Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances. De facto rules that even though it is against the rules it is still being practiced. According to Pew Research survey two thirds of republicans said their president must have similar religious belief, only 40 percent of Democrats shared the sentiment. Most Americans saw the two Democratic frontrunners- Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders- as less religious than their GOP rivals, and half of adults said they would be less likely to support an atheist candidate. A presidential candidate that is a Muslim will have less support just because of his or her religion. Jim Wallis brings to light the idea of the religious right and religious left. And the religious left tend to disregard religious teachings and ways due to political discourse. Thus, presidents that are chosen are much more of the religious left if they are religious at all. This is because, since the United states is much more of a secular country thus for a religious president or leader to be much more into politics, they put their religious believes on a moratorium and thus, disregard their religious ways due to political duties. Also the religious rights only distort the teachings of Jesus and even other religious figures like the bible and Quran and thus, tend to make certain religious decisions that seem wrong to the eyes of others.

In Africa the most dominant religions are Christianity, Islamic religion and the traditional religion. Orville Jenkings (2003) notes that “religion reflects the distinctive cultures of a group” Jenking notes that religion is a characteristic of ethnicity and ethnicity is also a part of culture thus people who have identical religions and identical cultures are more likely to share identical ethnicities as well. Dovlo Elorm in his article *Religion and the Politics of Fourth Republican Elections in Ghana (1992, 1996),* noted that during the 1992 and 1996 elections in Ghana, the NPP and NDC begun to concentrate more on Christian constituencies for votes. The NDC concentrated on independent and spiritual churches while NPP concentrated more on the mainline churches. After about sixteen years, it was noted that perceived interests of the independent churches still remained with the NDC through the Late President Professor Atta Mills in the 2000, 2004 and 2016 elections concentrated more on the independent churches (Dovlo, 2006).

In terms of the Islamic group, Dovlo has also noted that the Islamic religion which is Ghana’s second largest religion was also targeted throughout various elections especially during the 2000 and 2006 elections with both the NPP and NDC promising to set up various organizations to help expenses for the HAJJ pilgrimage since campaigning issues wanted to alleviate poverty conditions among the Muslims to get them to vote for them. Dovlo also notes that during elections, palaces of chiefs were visited to appeal for votes. These chiefs are the leaders of traditions in most ethnic groups thus to get a chief to vote for a candidate would mean a whole ethnic group voted for the candidate since the chief is the head of the people.

Conclusively, religion plays a huge rule in politics but as Jenkings brings to light, religion is ethnic even if one might not see it due to this when religion is influencing politics, one can see ethnicity also at play.

When it comes to ethnicity and voting, many scholars have brought to light that politics which are seen in divided regions in a country tend to breed conflicts as people tend to struggle for power and dominance politically (Horowitz, 1985; Rabushka & Shepsle, 1972). Horowitz (1985) also noted that people vote in order to express their identities as belonging to a particular ethnicity. This is what gives rise to ethnic party formations and over time; these ethnic parties become solidified on the grounds of ethnicity and ethnic ideas. In democratic developing countries especially countries in Asia and Africa, “ethnic ties based on kinship and family, language and dialect, tribal customs and local communities, as well as shared religious faiths, have long been regarded as playing a critical role in party politics” (Norris & Mattes, 2003, p. 1). Looking at ethnicity from this aspect, it becomes a tool for political mobilization. Ethnic parties in this sense becomes a source to appeal to ethnically when it comes to certain reforms that certain ethnic groups want. Through this people would want their voices to be heard on a national level in a democracy and to do this, they would want their ethnicities to be a part of governmental organs which are in charge of reforms and progress in the country. When things are not going well like lack of jobs on the side of a particular ethnic group, people would want to have their ethnic parties there to help (Chandra, 2004). in order for people’s voice to be heard or patronized, people vote along the lines of ethnicity for a fast and better reform since ethnic groups share common beliefs and common interests thus, ethnic parties in a position where they can make changes and reforms to benefit their groups is what voters target (Robert Mattes,1995). People also vote along the lines of ethnicity for co-ethnic candidates who also share common interests or whose interest aligns with that of the voters as Horowitz (1985) notes. Stanley Fish also brought to light that “In essence, identity politics is an affirmation of tribe against the claims of ideology” (Fish, A13). Here, people would then vote for candidates so that ideologies (which is shared) can continue to thrive in other for people to benefit from actions taken at a governmental level; making voting more psychological. Since all these ideas rest in the minds of voters, they would choose people who can hear them out easily and understand them easily.

Many scholars have also argued that due to ethnic voting and formations of ethnic parties, come conflicts. Ethnic parties create more divisions among ethnic groups and results in disagreements and conflicts among ethnic groups (Hislope, 1997). Alvin Rabushka and Kenneth Shepsle (1972) noted that other way ethnic parties create conflicts is how ethnic parties try to get more voters to vote for similar ethnic members so that working in a governmental level in a democracy will be achieved easily. Since ethnic party members share similar ideas, they tend to be quick with voting and as a one can see, in a democracy majority carries the vote. This then means that the more the similar ethnic members are in a particular governmental branch, the easier and faster ideas can be put into action. However, this undermines and does not foster cooperation from different types of ethnic groups or ethnic parties. In other words, it creates division and competition because no one wants to remain the minority. As more competition evolves, in other for ethnic parties to mobilize more members to support them, they distinguish themselves from other different ethnic parties who are in competition with them by using “us” and “Them” to distinguish that the opposition party is not part of them in every aspect especially in ideologies (Koelble, 1995). Richard Gunther and Larry Diamond (2003) also note that ethnic parties worsen the case by promoting ideologies along cultural lines thus other cultures feel inferior and as a result in other to attain such fine power, they resort to undemocratic acts and violence. By appealing to voters along the lines of ethnicity, parties also tend to mirror such actions from time to time and then in the end, people think that politicians rather creates ethnic conflicts (Horowitz, 291).

Several scholars however, have also noted that rather than creating conflicts, ethnic parties can foster intergroup familiarities and accommodations. Promoting ethnic parties to support many subcultures in a broad sense in politics is good as it rather creates cooperation among ethnic groups. Also, this secures and gives other ethnic groups the hope that they can secure their ideologies and interests in other elections to come calms the idea to stir up conflicts (Daalder, 1974; Lijphart, 1968). Thus, the wider the representation of ethnic groups the better people have the chance to stand for change in status quo democratically. Frank Cohen notes “By making institutions more accessible and making ethnic cleavages more explicit, ethnic groups will engage in more frequent but less intense conflict. They will use moderate means of resistance to effect change in the status quo” (Cohen, 613).

Sherrill Stroschein (2001) also noted that ethnic parties from as a result of ethnicity as well as ethnic candidates do not cause conflicts but rather, exist as a result of conflicts. They merely highlight already existing conflicts. But they can rather resolve conflicts. This is because they allow people to channel their anger and conflicts towards pother ethnic groups, into voting for reforms which enables people to resort to democratic strategies of winning rather than violence (Stroschein, p. 61). In support of this a much recent research by Birnir (2007), brings to light that ethnic identity politics serves as an abbreviation whereby political choices can be collected more effectively and flexibly thus, it represents people more efficiently and effectively. It also becomes a ground on which even the minority is considered in a democracy. She notes that if violence should arise, then it came about due to a political institutional factor not from ethnic factors.

Conclusively, ethnic parties and candidates thus, are necessary when it comes to voting choices as these various scholars have noted.

Chieftaincy as few sources have noted that it affects the voting choice of people because ethnicity influences and leads chieftaincy. In the 2008 elections, Dovlo notes that chiefs were much heard on television stations and radio stations hyping certain candidates so that people would vote for them. Ethnicity as noted by certain few scholars,

Migration, just like religion, is another factor that some few scholars have proven to be influenced by ethnicity and in turn it affects the voting choice of people. Thus this is also the more reason why I took it on myself to research how migration affects the voting the choice of people through ethnicity in Ghana.

To conclude with, these factors stated above which affect the voting choice of people in Ghana which are all influenced by ethnicity namely, Religion, Party identification (Political party and candidates), ethnic conflicts, chieftaincy and migration. Thus, as I state my hypothesis that, ethnicity affect the voting choice of the people in Ghana as ethnicity affects the above five factors.

**Religion**

Religion affecting politics in Ghana has been a topic that most people do not really look into. However, it is evident that it affects the voting choice of people. However, ethnicity plays a huge rule where it affects religion thus within this section, it will be made a bit clearer how this happens. The four most dominant ethnic groups in Ghana namely Akans, Ewes, Gas and Northerners have all noticeably allied themselves with particular religions which in turn affect their voting choices. Most Akans are Christians, Most Ewes are either traditionalist or Christians, most Gas are either Christians or Traditionalist and most Northerners are Muslims.

The main reason why most Akans are Christians predates back to the time of colonization. Akans are from the sudden parts of Ghana thus, that is where most Europeans settled since it was close to the sea. Thus, their influence with Christianity over the Akans who were at first deeply rooted in traditional religious practices began to grow. At that time the Gas were not yet settled in Ghana. The Northerners however, were not exposed to these external influences thus; they continued to be deeply rooted in their traditional and Islamic beliefs. Ewes also had not yet arrived in Ghana thus they also were not influenced by Christianity. Today, you find that Christianity among the Akans has become more of an ethnicity as well were it sounds very outmoded and out of context for an Akan to say I am a traditionalist. Also, the Northerners whom the majority of them are Hausa who majority of them migrated to the sudden parts of Ghana also have their religious beliefs rooted in Islam. Thus their ethnic identity has become so intertwined with their religious beliefs that rather than calling them Hausa, people call them Muslims. But for Ewes, Gas and some Akans, some ethnic practices are always observed alongside the Christianity but most often Christianity takes precedence over their traditional actions unlike the Northerners and Hausas who belief in Traditional religion and Islamic religion respectively (Ghanaweb.com, 2007).

Before Ghana’s independence in 1957, Muslims and people of Northern extraction attempted to form political groupings based on their religiosity and ethnicity. The Muslims of the country organized a party they named the Muslim Association Party (MAP). Muslims of the Zongo communities formed the MAP in early 1954 in order to make sure their position in the Ashanti kingdom was recognized. The Muslims in this region were mostly known for their spirituality and help when it came to the Ashanti’s fighting the British. Since that period had come to an end, they were not needed again and for that reason needed. And also, a large number of Muslims resented the restrictions placed by the Convention People's Party (CPP) controlled municipal councils on Muslim traders in the markets and needed to find a way to be involved. Northern people’s party (NPP) was also formed for the Muslims in the North who believed that was the only way they could get involved. The MAP and the NPP were against the CPP. They lost woefully in the elections to CPP and thereafter decided to be more nationalistic after CPP passed the Avoidance of discrimination bill. Even after, Dr. Hilla Limman (one of their own) was overthrown by J.J Rawlings. It should be noted that if religion does not affect ethnicity it does not directly affect voting choices, thus religion affects ethnicity which in turn affects the voting choices of the people. Most Akans in Ghana are Christians and most Northerners are Muslims.

**Political Parties and Political Candidates**

Most often, Patriotism becomes so embedded in our souls and hearts that when we hail from certain backgrounds, we develop a diehard do or die feeling for our backgrounds. We tend to do things even if it is wrong to support such backgrounds like family for example. Most of us love our families so much we might end up doing anything for them. Well, it’s same for political parties and candidates who hail from certain ethnic groups or have certain ethnic backgrounds in Ghana. From elections to elections, people have been influenced by their ethnicity and aligned themselves with political parties that matched their ethnicity. People would vote for political parties that were made up of more of their ethnic group members. Akans would go for NPP and Ewes/Northerners would go for Ndc now because these two most prominent political parties have backgrounds rooted deeply in ethnicity. NPP was built on an Akan background and NDC was built on an Ewe background thus, most voters do not even see that a party’s agenda does not align with theirs but provided they are from their ethnic background or party, they would still vote for them.

During the 1992 elections, it could be seen that ethnicity played a role in the political elections at that time. Madina, a rural area in Accra, was one of the cities that show this as Oquaye notes. He notes that there was a “split in this new township on tribal lines” (Oquaye, 15). Those that settled in the Zongo areas (mostly Northerners) supported Limann. Those that supported Rawlings where from “Ayigbe town” and they were Ewes and those that supported Adu-Boahene were Akans living in Kotwikrom. The Gas however, were dispersed and at this point, were swing voters.

Oquaye brings to light during the 1992 election, a research showed that the Ashantis were more leaned towards liberty and were against mass killings which occurred prior to the election year. In short, the Ashantis had a bad ideology towards Rawlings and were prepared to vote against him. In the end, “Adu-Boahene had 60-5% of the votes from the Ashantis against Rawlings’ 32-9%” (Oquaye, 17). However, when it came to the Volta region, Rawlings won with a total of 93% while Adu Boahene won 1-6%. This throws more light into how ethnicity affected the 1992 election. Also, to support this, “Ethnic ties based on kinship and family, language and dialect, tribal customs and local communities, as well as shared religious faiths, have long been regarded as playing a critical role in party politics” (Norris & Mattes, 2003, p. 1). When it comes to politics and ethnicity, people from same ethnic groups try to find themselves for political and ethnical solidarity so that their ideologies will match. Therefore, people from certain ethnic groups tend to have more votes during elections from their ethnic groups more than from others. This is another reason why Rawlings won more votes from the Volta Region and from the Ewes while Adu Boahene won more votes from the Akans and Ashantis because the candidates themselves were from the same ethnic groups that they got more votes.

Inclusively, Whitfield also notes that “there is a general overlap between region and ethnicity, like most African countries. Election results since 1992 show an ethno-regional pattern to voting” (Whitfield, 63). Most often, the three regions in the northern parts of Ghana go for NDC (New Democratic Congress). The southern sides mainly the Akan-dominant regions mostly vote for NPP as Whitfield notes. With this, one can generalize that the general Pattern with these two parties will be Akans for NPP and Northers for NDC this will go on for some time since it is a usual pattern. It has been there since 1992 and even in recent elections it is seen.

**Migration**

When one says ethnicity, what comes to mind usually in Africa is “rural areas”. Why is that? Noah L. Nathan notes in his article, Local ethnic Geography, Expectations of Favoritism, and Voting in Urban Ghana that Usually, the “relationship between ethnicity and vote choice is often drawn from studies of rural areas” (Nathan). However, urban areas in Africa are spreading fast. As statistics show, there are over 100 million more urban residents now than in the 1990s as Nathan notes. Urban voters are less likely to lean towards an ethnic side and are less inclined to lean on traditions, chieftaincies which are all ethnic.

Due to a higher level of education, people in urban areas are much more policy-driven than ethnically driven when it comes to voting as Nathan notes. As a matter of fact, recent studies show that ethnicity is actually less important and less essential in an individual level when it comes to urban areas and communities (Green, 2014; Robinson, 2014). This basically means that voters in the urban level practically vote for parties that will end up being beneficial to them after elections. But then has anyone stopped to think for a second that why is it that during each elections cycle, candidates appear with various and different manifestos that were even different from other flag bearers of the same parties during past elections but then if a particular keeps voting for a particular party, they are more inclined to vote for that same party despite the fact that the candidates and manifestoes being different? A good example here is looking at an urban city like Accra. Statistics show that during the 2000’s elections through to the 2016 elections except for the 2012 elections, why did majority of the people in Greater Accra keep voting for the NPP? Whiles prior to these election years as well as in the 2012 elections, they voted for the NDC party? (http://africanelections.tripod.com/gh\_detail.html; http://www.fact-checkghana.com/statistics-presidential-parliamentary-election-results/). Coherent with this, statistics show that the population of Greater Accra changed from 491,817 in 1960 to 2,905,726 in 2000. (http://www.ghana.gov.gh/index.php/about-ghana/regions/greater-accra). Also, Statistics show that the major ethnic groups settling currently in the Greater Accra with their population percentages are the Akan (39.8%), Ga-Dangme (29.7%) and Ewe (18%). These statistics changed from the year 2000 when Akans begun moving into Accra becoming the major group in Greater Accra.

Now let’s examine what changed in 2012. In 2012, it was quite evident that ethnicity did not really play a huge part in Accra. This year was when swing voting occurred most. People voted for John Dramani Mahama due to candidate character and pragmatism. Mahama knew how to talk for the people of Ghana to adhere to him. In one of my Interviews with one of the Members of Parliament for a region in Cape Coast Ghana, he explained that Mahama had a calm character which people who were not even a part of the NDC party admired thus, “we could all see it coming that he was the people’s man. He wasn’t the only one who made such similar statement. Some market women I also interviewed also said they voted for Mahama because he knew how to appeal gently to the people. Surprisingly enough, these women were Akans which based in previous studies, ought to have voted for NPP and not an NDC character.

As stated above, usually Akans are more inclined to vote for the NPP whiles the Ewes are more inclined to vote for the NDC. For the Ga’s these people are swing voters and would support who they see fit. Also, because we have not had a Ga person as a presidential candidate, it is quite unclear as to if they would be more ethnical in terms of voting like the Akans or Ewes. In summary, by looking at an urban area like Accra, it is quite clear that ethnicity has shaped voting statistics in there.

From this, it is also evident that migration is also a causal factor when it comes to why ethnicity affects the voting choice of people in Ghana. People move from one place to another and then as time goes on, people of the same ethnicity fill an area and then they begin to gear their votes towards a particular party and that is what happens in most urban areas like Accra especially.

**Ethnic conflicts**

Ethnic Conflicts have been some a good factor which affects the voting choices of people in Ghana. Due to the grudges people bear against each other in their ethnic groups, is amplified and since in Ghana people are patriotic when it comes to ethnicity, they do not mind resulting to violence to settle ethnic disputes. This idea has become so broad that even people who are living in different urban areas since they cannot resort to violence channel their violence into voting. George M. Bob-Milliar in his article, *7 Things to Understand about elections in Ghana*, notes that “resentment runs deep in Ghana and understanding the political ramifications is critical. Many Ghanaians resent the Ashanti ethnic group – the core support base of the NPP – due to its historical accumulation of money and power through alliances made with whites during the slave trade and colonial era” (Bob-Milliar, 2016). In 1970, Prime Minister Kofi Busia’s Progress Party, “an ideological forerunner for NPP”, decided to deport people who were Nigerian descent after they had lived and became part of Ghanaians for decades. Even today, people with close ties either through religion, family or civic bonds, to those who were deported bear a grudge against the NPP and would never vote for them (Bob-Milliar, 2016). Apparently majority of the Gas are Nigerian descent. This is mostly why Greater Accra has become a swing region rather than strictly NPP despite Akan’s being the majority in Greater Accra due to migration. This has also become quite a battle against the Gas and Akans and thus, it has become more ethnical than political. Also, the NPP hates the NDC due to its history of authoritarianism which was spear headed by Jerry John Rawlings during his 1981 coup. Due to the fact that Rawlings is Ewe and NPP’s are mostly Akans, it has developed into an ethnical hatred thus, affecting other candidates who become flag bearers for NDC even if they are not Ewes. However, in 2008, a Fante, John Evans Atta Mills (NDC) won presidential election and Nana Akuffo Addo (NPP) also Akan descent, lost. This proves that despite the conflicts held among parties and voters, when it comes to candidates of same descent, people forget about the conflicts and hatred and concentrate on the candidates and what they have to offer. Also, looking at the 2000 and 2004 elections Atta Mills lost to John Kufuor also Akan descent. This proves the point that when it comes to conflicts, people are willing to set aside their differences when both candidates are from same ethnic background. Thus ethnicity ends up influencing such turn of events.

**Chieftaincy**

A chief is the traditional leader of an ethnic group thus it’s the chief’s duty to ensure that traditional ideologies and cultures are observed and carried on throughout history. However, due to certain ethnic believes some chiefs in Ghana try to further certain parties in order to further their ethnic ideologies and believes.

Chiefs from various ethnic groups influence the ideologies of people from the chief’s ethnic group. Chiefs are leaders. They set the bylaws that govern the people in their communities. Thus, people do not question what the chief believes. Here, if the chief believes that a political party’s ideology matches with his, then he will go along with it. This means his followers will follow his idea as well. An example is the 2016 elections where the chief of the Ashanti kingdom was deeply in support of Akuffo Addo and the results for the Ashanti region confirmed that the Asante’s voted for Akuffo Addo. With this, my hypothesis is that chieftaincy along the lines of ethnicity affects politics.

According to [www.ghanaweb.com](http://www.ghanaweb.com), people follow chiefs much more than their own ideologies. Bob-Milliar notes that “chiefs do align with politicians and undermine the legal system...” (Bob-Milliar, 2016). as I noted above, people align with certain ethnic parties to further common interest and so can be said about the Asante Hene. Also, Bob-Milliar noted that “land grievances often underlie electoral violence. In Ghana, politicians do not have the ability to allocate or expropriate land”. What this means is that for politicians to continue to recruit people and lands for campaigns and further political interest, they would need the favors of respective chiefs who own the lands thus, they find ways to align themselves with chiefs along the lines of a common interest in order to further their interest.

As I noted above, during the 2016 elections, the newly selected president Nana Akuffo Addo went to pay homage to the Asante Hene(as shown in figure one at the end of my page) to thank him for his support. Both who are Akans would now be able to further various Akan interest and much easily. Also, when the Asante Hene’s mother’s funeral as being held in 2017, Akuffo Addo came to fully support the Asante Hene through the customary rites and ethnic requirements of funerals as shown in figure 2. In short, in the 2016 elections, it was evidently seen that the Asante Hene contributed in elections by supporting the NPP to win by exploiting his charisma which he gained from his ethnicity and kinship. The Asantis have pride in their gold and the Asante Hene, king of the Asantis, is highly respected throughout the nation.

It’s not just in the 2016 elections you would see chiefs involving themselves into politics specifically voting. But this was a more recent example which could be seen.

In short, chiefs along the lines of their ethnicity influence their people to vote for the kinds of candidates they believe have common interests with them and also share similar ethnicity. Akans will always vote for Akans, Northerners will always vote for Northerners, and Ewes will always vote for ewes and even Gas too should they get this chance. However, Chiefs who also share this same mentality become the spear heads for such conventions and actions.

**Rebuttal of why ethnicity doesn’t matter when it comes to voting choices**: In some cases, there are people that do not believe that ethnicity influences the voting choice of people. How so? Whitfield notes that ethnicity is not a huge factor in influencing politics even though it does exist as I stated previously. How is this so? He noted that Pragmatism is a huge factor rather than ethnicity. In terms of pragmatism, Whitfield notes that during the 2000’s elections, by referring to Nugent’s study noting that “The NPP’s victory is attributed to a combination of Rawlings’ absence as a presidential Candidate, the NDC national executives forcing candidates onto candidates and leading some NDC members to stand as independent candidates, economic stagnation and high inflation, and innovations in the NPP’s electoral campaign to cater to the urban youth vote” (Nugent 2001). This means that the election was mostly party driven rather than ethnically driven.

Also, this brings me to the second feature of Ghana’s political system which is “party identification.” People mostly align themselves with certain political parties and gain loyalty towards their parties. Lindberg and Morrison mentioned in Mustapha and Whitfield’s book, notes that “about 82 per cent of the electorate are loyal Party supporters, forming core voters of each party” (Mustapha and Whitfield, 63). What we can formulate from this is that elections and politics in Ghana are based on patriotic voters who are hardcore party members rather than from ethnic groups.

Also, political candidates in terms of their character also matter rather than their ethnicity. During the 2012 elections in Ghana, Akuffo Addo representing the NPP lost and Mahama representing the NDC won. Why is that so? This was because at that point in time, people were more interested in the candidates and what they had to offer in their manifestoes rather than the Parties’ ethnic identity because people saw the economy as poor and wanted a reform thus, yes ethnic groups wanted to vote for their ethnic members however, Akuffo Addo lost because people felt more comfortable with Mahama’s personality and promising manifestoes rather than Akuffo Addo’s. Also, even though Akuffo Addo promised parents free SHS education for their children, he still lost because voters wanted a candidate who had experience and prior to the election Mahama was an incumbent running again for presidency when he took office after the untimely death of the late president whom Mahama was a vice president to. However, during the 2016 elections, Mahama lost to Akuffo Addo because people believed that his personality towards politics in Ghana changed and found Akuffo Addo more fitting for running the Country. Ichino and Nathan in their 2013 article *Crossing the Line: Local Ethnic Geography and Voting in Ghana*, they brought to light people are more likely to vote for candidates that are from different ethnic groups rather than that of the voters. The writers brought to light that this is because most often political candidates tend to not fulfil their promises when ethnic members who rather thought that since they are from same groups, the candidates would give them much more attention during policy making but the candidates betray them and do different things particularly things for rural areas. Thus, people focus more on the candidates rather than on ethnicity.

**FIGURES**

FIGURE 1. FIGURE 2

****

**Conclusion**

To conclude with, ethnicity is a driving factor which affects the voting choice of people in general. In Ghana, ethnicity is something held high in esteem yet people fail to see how it affects the voting choice of people. This is the purpose of this research. Thus, the hypothesis that ethnicity affects voting choices in Ghana is true and this is seen as the five causal factors which ethnicity influences which in turn affect politics namely, Religion, Party identification, migration, ethnic conflicts and chieftaincy, all in their own ways influences the way people vote. Religion will always continue to influence politics throughout the world and from this view, with the combination of ethnicity influencing it, it becomes even more impossible to see when such actions will end. Party identification proves as a backup for all people as well as a representation for people’s ideas thus people will always align themselves with similar ethnic parties and ethnic candidates so that their ideologies can be furthered. When it comes to migration, many would think this is something impossible and less important but as shown above, migration along the lines of ethnicity proves that people travel with their ethnic ideologies and thus vote for same candidates and parties despite their location. Also, with Conflicts, people always vote along the lines of ethnic grudges thus this shapes the ways they end up voting for people. Lastly, when it comes to chieftaincies, chiefs are spear heads and in charge of mobilizing their followers well thus, candidates who share similar ethnicity with influential chiefs receive votes from the territories of such chiefs.

Conclusively, ethnicity has influenced the voting choices of people for long and to know this, one can predict future elections. Also, it is important to know how ethnicity affects voting since we all hail from an ethnic background and this helps to further democracy since one can know how to relate with ethnicity during elections.

**WORK CITED.**

Norris, P., & Mattes, R. (2003). Does ethnicity determine support for the governing party? (Afrobarometer Working Paper No. 26). Retrieved January 5, 2014)

<https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Ethnicity-and-Religion-in-Ghana-s-Politics-128679>

Ichino and Nathan. 2013. “Crossing the Line: Local Ethnic Geography and Voting in Ghana” American Political Science Review.

Posner’s book, Institutions and Ethnic Politics in Africa, has an Introduction with a good literature review but his cases are other African countries.

A classic article on ethnic politics: Horowitz, 1971, “Three Dimensions of Ethnic Politics, World Politics.

WWW.GHANAWEB.COM

LOCALIZED ETHNIC CONFLICTS AND GENOCIDE (ARTICLE).

ETHNIC POWER SHARING: THREE BIG PROBLEMS (ARTICLE).

THE ETHROCRACY TRAP (ARTICLE).

THE ETHNIC ARMED CONFLICT DATABASET- https://dataverse.harvard.edu/file.xhtml;jsessionid=454c72dea79854660e25e98b3f9e?fileId=1481629&version=RELEASED&version=.0

Lindberg and Morrison. 2008. “Are African Voters Really Ethnic or Clientelistic? Survey Evidence from Ghana.” Political Science Quarterly.