

# Ethnic plurality, political mobilisation, social divisions and the formation of conflict structures in North-Eastern Ghana

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## Abstract

Political mobilisation is a necessary aspect of any democracy in the world. Since the introduction of democracy in Ghana, political mobilisation has become part of the political process that characterises the selection and choice of leaders. This phenomenon manifests itself differently in different geographical areas of the country. While processes of political mobilisation have received adequate academic attention, the extent to which they are immersed in coincidental ethnic cleavages to engender the formation of conflict structures in the specific region of the Bawku/Kusaug Traditional Area is less studied. This study contributes to the critical literature on political mobilisation by nuancing the debate on political mobilisation to include how political mobilisation reinforces ethnic division and creates contours and pathways through which ethnic conflicts inchoate and sophisticate. The study used a case study design of the qualitative approach to investigate the phenomenon. Twenty-seven participants were selected through an expert purposive sampling technique to partake in focus group discussions and personal interviews. The data collected through these methods were analysed using inductive thematic analysis. The analysis revealed that political mobilisation in Bawku is often anchored through the ethnic elite who mobilise their people along ethnic lines for or against specified political parties. This often creates different political rewards for each ethnic group depending on the political party that emerge victorious in elections. These differential rewards lead to violent confrontations with several economic, social and security consequences. The study therefore suggested strategies to better anchor political mobilisation and ensure peaceful co-existence among ethnic groups in the Bawku/Kusaug Traditional Area, the Upper East, Northern Ghana and Ghana as a whole.

## Introduction

Ghana as we have today is a conglomeration of four formerly distinct territorial components that were brought together around the time of its Independence [1]. These were the Gold Coast Colony which was made up of the Coastal States, Akyem Abuakwa and Akwamu, that came under British colonial rule as a result of the Bond of 1844; the Kingdom of Ashanti, which was annexed by the British at the end of the Ya Asantewaa War in 1901; the Northern Territories, which comprised kingdoms that came under British influence by reason of *treaties of friendship* executed between the British Government and the traditional rulers via the Northern Territories Ordinance of 1901, and the Trans-Volta Togoland – a British Trust Territory which was originally part of the German colony lost to the Allied Forces after the First World War, and was split up between Britain and France and administered under a mandate of the League of Nations [1,2]. The amalgamation of these territories also meant an amalgamation of distinct ethnic groups that inhabited these territories and these had different ancestral and political histories, distinct cultures, norms, values, customs and traditions and nuanced social organisations which could not be easily condensed into a single pot [3].

Historical, economic, political, ethnic and territorial issues fuelled and shaped relationships between and among these four major components of the then Gold Coast. In addition, colonial government policies reinforced inequalities and differences right from the community level- among and between different ethnic and cultural groups- to the national level -between different regions and their populations [1]. While the Gold Coast Colony and the Kingdom of Ashanti had some advantage and privilege in political representation, education and infrastructural development compared to the rest of the Gold Coast due to their strategic importance to the success of colonial objectives, the Northern Territories and the Trans-Volta Togoland were either neglected and or exploited for the development of those territories [2]. Limited economic opportunities in the Northern Territories coupled with extreme poverty, poor climatic conditions, lack of or unexplored resources led young men of the North to seek work in the South [3].

The Northern Territories became the source of migrant labour for the mines and cocoa farms in the South, and this was encouraged by official labour recruitment policies underpinned by the stereotypical belief that men from the Northern Territories were hard-working [4]. In the words of Governor Gordon Guggisberg, “every man of the Northern Territories [was] worth

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his weight in gold ... for the mines, for private enterprise and for the development of those schemes the completion of which are necessary to secure progress and development” [3].

The Trans-Volta Togoland (TVT), which today represents the Volta Region of Ghana and parts of Northern Region, was put under the trusteeship of the British and French by the League of Nations after World War I [2]. On the eve of independence, the British informed the UN of its intention to relinquish the trust agreement if the Gold Coast became independent without the Trust Territories joining [5]. This information to the United Nations increased the pace of agitation by Ewe nationalists who had been campaigning since 1946 for the two Trust Territories of Britain and France to merge as one independent country in order to re-unite the Ewe peoples who had been split up by the Mandate of the League of Nations [5]. The Togoland Congress (TC), a political party under the leadership of S. G. Antor, had emerged to champion the cause of separation of the TVT from the Gold Coast because they believed that if the British Trust Territory integrated with the Gold Coast upon independence, the French would also annex the French-speaking part, leading to a permanent split of the ethnic group [5, 2].

Up North, it was not all calm. The Northern representatives who were mainly chiefs had mounted a strong opposition to Dr Kwame Nkrumah's CPP. They united to create the Northern People's Party (NPP) in 1954, led by Chief S. D. Dombo, one of the influential Legislative Assembly members from the Northern Territories [6]. The main objective of the NPP was to obtain and promote “respect for the culture of the peoples of the Northern Territories; to obtain ‘political and social advancement’” and to fight for a progressively increasing representation of Northerners in the administrative and services sector of the country [7]. The Ashanti Kingdom and the Colony, just like the other regions of the Gold Coast, also had their own suspicions, reservations and secessionist tendencies on the eve of independence [7]. There was mutual suspicion between Ashanti and the Colony. The coastal neighbours of Ashanti feared being dominated by the Ashanti should they come together under one political entity. On its part, Ashanti feared domination by the Colony. Even though in the early 1940s there were efforts at rapprochement between the Colony and Ashanti, these mutual suspicions did not die off completely. The formation of the National Liberation Movement (NLM) in 1954 further worsened their suspicions [5]. The immediate objective for the creation of the NLM was to press for higher prices for cocoa which was the major cash crop of the Ashanti and other forest zones of the South. As a result, the movement gained popularity in the Ashanti, Akyem Abuakwa and the Krobo areas which had large tracts of cocoa farms. The remote impetus for the NLM's formation, however, was the perceived marginalisation of the traditional ruling class by the Convention People's Party (CPP) under the leadership of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah. In addition, the chiefs were also suspicious of the centralist policies of the CPP and feared marginalisation in the CPP's eventual governance of the country after independence [6].

In effect, it is evident from the above that the preparations for

modern political democratic construction in Ghana were marked by manifest interplay of elements of mistrust, suspicion, and divisive relationships among and between regions and ethnic groups in the colony. The above exposition demonstrates the difficulties experienced in Ghana during the early stages of democratisation and state formation. It exposes the problems of bringing separate social cleavages together under one political umbrella. Ghana, after these initial social and political cleavage turmoil, transitioned from inter regional conflicts at independence to a mix of conflicts at two separate levels: on the political arena where it suffered years of interrupted democratic processes that were laced with intermittent coups d'état; and at the intra-communal level where the institutional transformations led to interethnic and intra-ethnic conflicts that have existed till today. The main objective of this paper therefore is to understand how cultural plurality, political mobilization and social division constellate to create contours through which conflicts inchoate and escalate in the Bauku/Kusaug Traditional Area. Specifically the study seeks to understand: (1) the nature of political mobilization in the Upper East Region (2) the nexus between political mobilisation and ethnic mobilisation in Bawku/Kusaug Traditional Area (3) the link between political mobilization, ethnic mobilisation and ethnic conflicts in Bawku/Kusaug Traditional Area. The findings of from this study will inform the formation of policies and development of strategies to address issues of ethnicity and general social cleavages in political mobilisation modern democracies. It would also provide scientific data for those who are interested in issues of democratization and conflict resolution so that they could develop strategies that would enhance political participation while eliminating factors that would constitute barriers to social cohesion.

Having offered a background to the study, the rest of the paper is divided into five sections. The first section reviews literature on political mobilisation and ethnic conflicts in Ghana, the second provides the methodology that was developed to carry out the research. The third section presents the results of the study, the fourth discusses the results and the fifth provides a conclusion and policy recommendations.

### **Post-Colonial Political Mobilisations in Ghana**

Events in Ghana shortly after independence saw the springing up and proliferation of many regional, tribal, ethnic and religious based political parties and associations not only in direct opposition to the ruling party – the CPP, but also in the pursuit of interests and goals that were aimed at satisfying various cleavages and ethnic groups [8,5]. The CPP saw this as a threat to national unity, and the security of Ghana's budding democracy that had just started in the newly independent country. To forestall this development, and to ensure the continuous legitimacy of the CPP, the then CPP government took advantage of its majority in parliament to pass the Avoidance of Discrimination Act (ADA) in 1957 [9]. The ADA prohibited all ethnic, regional, geographical, territorial and religious based parties and political organisations in Ghana. From then onwards, all political parties with such characteristics were compelled to fold up since they were declared illegal with severe consequences to the leaders

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and membership of such parties [10]. The disbanded parties, however, united to form the United Party (UP) in 1957 [10].

The process of decolonisation in Ghana had two important consequences for regional and local politics in the country. In the first place, the removal of the British colonial officials from local government made way for local political initiatives. In this regard, locals who were chosen to replace the British officials were either initially employed in teaching or worked in chieftaincy structures, and were involved in local conflicts before their employment into local government positions [11]. Some of them were also CPP adherents and thereby gained the favour of the CPP government that got them employed into those positions. The employment of these individuals, therefore, reinforced already existing divisive tendencies among and between ethnic groups and communities that were divided along the CPP/NLM/NPP local politics in the run-up to independence [5]. Conflicts and adversarial competition “erupted between villages, among chiefs and along ethnic lines” at the time [6].

Secondly, the withdrawal of British colonial officials also gave way to the proliferation of alliances and political outlets. This is because, whereas before then the people had a common “external” ally in the person of the colonial Governor – represented at the local level by the District Commissioner – who was the key individual capable of supporting local groups and individuals in the pursuit of their interests; this situation changed after decolonisation when structures for self-governance were set up from the local to the national level, spanning from local councils through the district councils and the regional councils up to the seat of government in Accra [12]. These various hierarchical levels were soon to be played off against one another both in composition in terms of who filled what positions in these structures, and in the functions and jurisdictions of the various structures [6, 5].

Local government structures were designed to co-exist side-by-side with the traditional chieftaincy institutions which continued to form an essential framework for the forging of local political alliances. In the context of the historical experience where chiefly families had more access to the few educational institutions established in some areas of the Gold Coast, especially in the *Northern Territories*, chiefly families had more schooled members than other non-chiefly families [12]. Consequently, the elections conducted for the choice of representatives to the local, district and regional councils were either won by educated sons of chiefs who worked for the colonial administration under the indirect rule system or by educated chiefs themselves [12, 11, 6]. Only in rare circumstances were these elections won by the very few non-chiefly-but-educated individuals of the time. This was without prejudice to the automatic representation of chiefs forming a defined percentage of the membership of the local and district councils [6]. Thus, a form of “neo-traditional” system, fused with modern political offices and elites (hybridisation), was created allowing chiefly offices to be converted into offices within the modern political system, a practice described as reciprocal assimilation of elites [12, 11, 6]. This development further deepened the alteration of the social and political

structure of the country [7, 5, 2, 4]. From a purely traditional system purposefully organised during colonial rule to make the indirect rule system to succeed, to a modern democratic system of governance which elite were however drawn from the previous leadership of the traditional system, making it difficult to call it a purely modern democratic system of governance [10, 4].

Until 1958 all divisional chiefs equally served as local council chairmen and also had the privilege to select among chiefs of their traditional jurisdiction and closest relatives to take up posts as “traditional members” in the local and district councils, because the law provided for traditional members’ representation at the councils [10, 4]. One’s chances of getting elected to become a councillor and/or gaining political power and influence increased proportionally if one was both educated and a member of a chiefly family. With this melange of traditional and modern political institutions and functions, divisional chiefs by their privileged position dominated the political scene at all three levels of local, district and regional councils.

Today, this *direct* fusion of traditional and modern political and administrative institutions and functions does not only still exist in Ghana, but deeply felt in the Ghanaian political culture and in the construction of governance from all levels of the political and administrative structure – district, regional and national [11]. The traditional governance system runs parallel to the modern political system, with similar governance objectives but not fused structural functions. Chiefs are recognised by the 1992 Fourth Republican Constitution as part of the governance system in Ghana, even if the same constitution circumscribes the functions of the chief as non-political and *excludes* them from active party politics [13]. The story was different immediately after independence.

As party politics became gradually entrenched after independence, and politicians continued to attach more and more importance to the role of the chief in rallying popular support from their constituents for political parties during election [6]. Coupled with the inter-mingling of chiefs and their close allies in local government, the CPP government (after independence) became more and more involved in the determination and installation of chiefs all over the country [6]. Sometimes the CPP did this without recourse to peculiar, established local traditional rules for the selection and installation or dismissal of chiefs [7]. Consequently, any suspected (perceived) or real (whether subtle or open) allegiance/support by a chief for any other political party, either than the CPP, was tantamount to that chief’s own call for his (self) dismissal. Such chiefs would be quickly replaced by a rival aspirant who is flirting or ready to flirt with and rally votes for the CPP [10, 2]. This phenomenon was to sow the seeds of conflict between and among different rival groups, families and chieftaincy gates-families-, and to last into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with the current intractable chieftaincy conflicts that exist throughout the country. One example of such chieftaincy conflicts started by such occurrences that still exists today is the Bawku chieftaincy conflict. Another is the Abudu versus Andani chieftaincy gates conflict in Dagbon (Yendi).

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Another avenue for conflict in this transitional era was the chief's reticence to accept being an equal citizen of equal right within the budding structures of local governance where chiefs and non-chiefs were supposed to have equal status in the discussion and decision-making process at the local government level. The desire to "rule" in the councils as if they were under their chieftain huts was in contrast with the pseudo Western-established democratic principles that were being developed in the new nation, leading to conflict with other non-chiefly educated elites in the councils [14,15]. In [14], We read A. P. S. Termaghre, then commissioner for the Lawra District in a statement of advice to his successor, state that: "... (D)o not forget to reconcile with the chiefs...(c)hieftaincy is a very sensitive institution and (chiefs) wish to remain above the ordinary member of the masses... The Traditional Council arrogates strong feelings to dominate both the party and the (local) Council and their activities. With careful education this tendency (*sic*) can be uprooted" [14].

Yet another form of conflict that manifested itself (if not worsened) at the dawn of independence was that between organised kingdoms/chiefdoms and communities that were made to rule or oversee non-chiefly communities during colonial rule. In some instances, as in the case of the Bawku conflict, the ruling peoples emanated from a different kingdom (Nayiri) and were preferred by the colonial government to help implement the indirect rule system due to their organised system of leadership as opposed to the Kusasi who were an acephalous society without chieftaincy. Many such instances existed in the then colony, especially in the Northern Territories [16, 17]. After independence, and influenced by the mass nationalist mobilisation against colonialism across Africa, same sentiments of liberalism were manifested at the micro level. At this micro level, communities that hitherto cooperated with imposed chiefs during colonialism saw it the appropriate moment to equally emancipate themselves, and hence have their "self-rule". Consequently, a number of inter-ethnic, chieftaincy, and land conflicts spitted over the country, especially in the Northern Territories and Trans-Volta Togoland areas where many acephalous societies and cultures existed or where more powerful and more structurally organised social groups were made to "rule" other groups [18]. These equally led to territorial issues after independence and during attempts to rezone the country for administrative purposes. The non-violent conflict between the Kwahus and the Ewes of the Afram Plains in which petitions have been submitted to successive governments for change of its name to reflect the ethnic group that owns the plains is an example. In addition, the 1994 violent conflict between the Konkombas and Nanumbas traces its origins to such historical relations [18].

The drawing of district boundaries for administrative purposes got inspired from native authority boundaries. Unfortunately, native authority boundaries were already pregnant with conflicts of ownership and belonging since some pieces of land were already contested by a number of native authorities with regard to which native authority owned which administrative district and vice versa. This array of conflicts, inspired by the interplay of ethnic, chieftaincy and native authority boundary conflicts on the one hand, and local government and development initiatives

on the other hand was baptised in [14]. As the conflicts of "the time when politics came" in the 1950s and 1960s [14].

The time when modern politics came to Ghana "marked a profound shift in which all the long-standing local political rift became charged with party politics. The instrumentalisation was mutual: political parties – in particular the CPP – took advantage of local tensions to gain a foothold, while local litigants looked on to party friends" in the regional and national political arena for support in asserting their own interests [14]. The involvement of supra-local power blocks impacted local conflicts with an unprecedented divisiveness among the various cultures of the country [5]. Within this context, *politics* was that *external* element of power or force exerted by national power elites and which confronted a harmonious local traditional community that has its own guidelines and manners [7, 10, 11, 6, 14].

### **A Theoretical Lens: Political Process model of ethnic mobilisation**

Heightened political mobilisations along ethnic lines in the early 1970s in the global north prompted academic theorisation of the phenomenon given rise to varied theoretical perspectives that sought to explain such ethnicised political processes [19]. Prominent among these theories were the culturists, the reactive ethnicity, the competitive and the political process perspectives of ethnic mobilisation [19]. The cultural perspective argues that groups get socially knitted together because they are socialised into the same culture and so see themselves a social unit [20, 21, 22]. Mobilising such people therefore becomes easy since they act as a group. Once the significant persons among them are convinced the rest would follow suit [21]. The reactive ethnicity perspective considers ethnic mobilisation as a process prompted by a sense of deprivation caused by an unequal distribution of shared resources [23, 19]. The competition perspective argues that people become mobilised along ethnic lines because they want to be better positioned in society than the ethnic groups within the same community. This leads them into competition with such groups in terms of which group is better educated, richer, has more influential people and control the social environment [19]. The political process theory of ethnic mobilisation argues that ethnic mobilisation shape and is shaped by the political environment which structures opportunities and interests and determines how agents and agencies within that political landscape access these interests and opportunities [19]. Once these are created but access practices are more social and relational than they are legal, social mobilisation along social identities such as ethnicity, religion and nationality becomes inevitable [24]. While the other perspectives of ethnic mobilisation also explain the process of ethnic mobilisation, the political process perspective was the major theory adopted to guide this study and the other perspectives were adopted to support this perspective. This was because the political process theory, though limited in explaining how culture and resource deprivation prompt ethnic mobilisation, better explains the situation in Bawku/Kusaug Traditional Area. Proponents of this perspective believe that divisions in society are not simply reproduced in politics, neither are they purely the result of strategic actions. Divisions are created through politics within

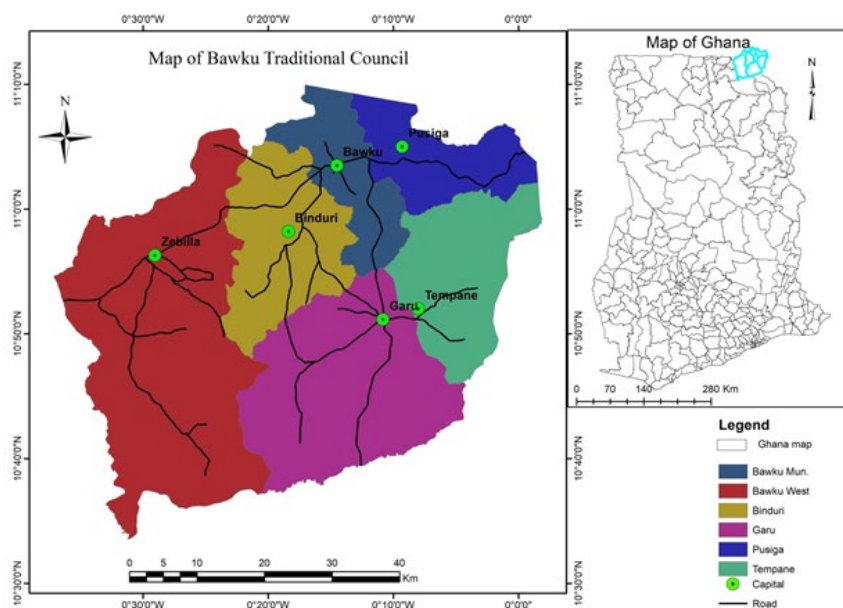
the context of dominant perceptions and practices in society, ethnicity therefore becomes an instrumental cleavage in negotiating recognitions and asserting rights to access (). The main tenets of the political process model of ethnic mobilization are that ethnic mobilization is a product of political culture politics structures and shapes access to opportunities and interests it creates and the practices of access determines the nature of political mobilization Where access is determined by social and relational factors rather than legal rights, political mobilisations equally unfold along social cleavages ethnic mobilization could further shape the dominant political culture when they become increasingly pronounced[1-4].

Applying this theory to the situation in Bawku/Kausal Traditional Area, the tenets of the theory resonate so well with the political process in the traditional area. Events that preceded the independence of Ghana unfolded along ethnic cleavages in the Bawku/Kusaug Traditional Area. The political mobilization processes was not without fault as the main parties that contested the 1956 elections mobilized supporters largely along ethnic lines. The Northern People’s Party (NPP) was widely supported by the Mamprusis while the Convention People’s Party was supported by the Mamprusis. The constellation of political parties along ethnic groups was informed by the political environment of the time. While the cephalous groups were sceptical of Nkrumah’s CPP due to his unconventional posturing towards the institution of chieftaincy and feared that he may disallowed some of the privileges enjoyed by chiefs and so opted for the NPP, the Kussasi people were so obsessed with what they described as a Mamprusi hegemony and viewed the ante-chieftaincy posturing of Nkrumah as a beam of hope and so supported him strongly with the intent that should he win, they may get a leverage to break what they saw as the hegemony of the Mamprusi people over them. Later events fitted correctly into these projections as both the Mamprusi people and the Kusasi people supported differentiated political parties which had often made decisions

that favour one group against the other in changing political regimes, thus creating an unending cycle of competing interests which has submerge the traditional area into violent conflicts since 1957 to date. As this article is being put together, violent conflict is still unfolding in the Bawku/Kausal Traditional Area.

### Methodology

**The study Area:** The study was conducted in Bawku/Kusaug Traditional Area of the Upper West Region of Ghana. The researcher intentionally uses the term Bawku/Kusaug because the name of the traditional area is one of the hotly contested issues in the Kussasi-Mamprui conflict. While the Mamprusi people prefer to call it Bawku Traditional Area, the Kussasi people refer to it as Kusaug Traditional Area. The traditional area is bordered by Burkina Faso to the North, East Mamprusi District to the South, Nabdam District to the West and the border between Ghana and Togo to the east [26]. Politically, the traditional area consists of both traditional and local government authorities which perform distinct but complementary functions of governance. Per the constitution of Ghana, the local government authority is the highest administrative body in the traditional area [27]. The local government is represented by district assemblies headed by district chief executives while the traditional authority operates through the chieftaincy institution and is headed by a paramount chief. There are six district assemblies in the traditional area (Figure 1). There are many ethnic groups in the traditional area. These include the Kussasi, Mamprusi, Mossi, Busanga, Hausa and Dagomba. The Kussasis and the Mamprusis are the major ethnic groups in the traditional area. The multi-ethnic composition of the traditional area has had implications for peace and cross-ethnic relations [17]. A protracted inter-ethnic conflict between the Mamprusis and the Kusasis has fast spread to envelop all other minority ethnic groups as they are stereotyped either as pro-Mamprusis or pro-Kusaasis.



**Figure1:** Map of Ghana Showing Bawku Traditional Area

**Source:** Adopted from [13]

## Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative approach using a case study design which provided the researcher with an opportunity to engage in in-depth interactions with participants to discover deeper levels of political mobilisation in the traditional area since independence, the levels of ethnicised political mobilisation and the nexus between ethnicised political mobilisations and ethnic violence in Bawku/Kusaug Traditional Area. Participants for the study were selected through an expert purposive sampling technique in which only participants who are considered as having expertise in the study phenomenon are selected to participate in a study [25]. Twenty-seven participants were selected through this technique. The ethnic distribution of the study area as well as the gender of participants was highly considered in the selection process. Five participants were selected from the five major ethnic groups in the region which were Kusasi, Mamprusi, Morsi, Dagomba and Hausa (Table I). Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions were the main methods of data collection that were adopted to gather primary data from the participants. The Focus group discussions were organised along ethnic lines in other nuanced the data. The Focus Group Discussions gathered data from participants about their experiences of political mobilisation at the community level or as a social

group while the Key Informant Interviews solicited data on the lived experiences of participants as individuals or at the household levels. Throughout these processes, the ethical issues of informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, data falsification and data fabrication were considered

Collected data were analysed using inductive thematic analysis where themes emerged from the data (). The interviews and group discussions were recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were read severally by the researcher to get familiar with the data set. After this the researcher developed axial codes from the data. These codes were so nuanced that they covered every aspect of the data set. After the initial coding, excerpts from the data were categorised and placed under the various codes, excerpts with similar meanings were placed under the same code. The axial code were then put together to develop subthemes. The subthemes were reviewed to ensure that the entire data set was covered and no meaningful information was left out. Themes that were not supported by the data set were discarded and those that were too long were broken down into two or more sub-themes provided they were supported by the data set. After the review and reshaping of the sub-themes, they were then organised into main themes for interpretations and discussions.

**Table 1 Summary of Participants**

Method of Data Collection	Group	Men	Women
Focus Group Discussions	Kussasi	2	2
	Mamprusi	2	2
	Mossi	2	2
	Hausa	2	2
	Busanga	2	2
	<b>Total</b>		10
Personal Interviews	Academia (Political Analysts)	1	0
	Bawku Traditional Council	1	0
	National House of Chief	1	0
	CSOs/NGOs	0	1
	BEWDA	0	1
	BIEPC	1	1
	<b>Total</b>		4
<b>Sub-Total</b>		14	13
<b>Total</b>		26	

Source: Author's Compilation, 2022

\*BEWDA: Bawku East Women Development Association

\*BIEPC: Bawku Inter-Ethnic Peace Committee

## Results

### Nature of Political Mobilisation in Bawku Traditional Area

The analysis of the data revealed the political history of Bawku/Kusaug Traditional Area has unfolded along ethnic lines as actors explored cleavages and divisions within the traditional area to reap political benefits. One of the participants who was a political analyst explained the situation to the researcher as this: "When you talk about partisan politics, mobilisations started in

earnest in this area during the 1956 elections when the Northern Peoples' Party (NPP) canvassed the support of the Mamprusi people and the CPP canvassed that of the Kusassi people and other acephalous tribes in what is now the Upper East Region of Ghana. Nkrumah promised to make Bawku a paramountcy independent from the Mamprugu Kingdom should they vote for him. They did vote for him and he fulfilled their promise to them. To me, this was the beginning of the monster we now have in Bawku.

Another participant who was a member of the Kusaug Traditional Council also explained

"The politicians started this all and throughout the post-colonial

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political history of Kussaig Traditional Area, politicians have exploited the ethnic division between the Kussasi and the Mamprusi people for their political benefit, from the CPP/NPP era through the CPP/UP era, to the NDC/NPP era, mobilisations have occurred largely along ethnic lines. Sometimes these lines are intentionally blurred to give the public a different picture but internally, they remain very magnificent all the time as far as politics are concerned.

A third respondent who was a member of the National House of Chiefs also explained

“The Kussasi ethnic group was mobilized by Nkrumah and they, with intent, threw their weight on the side of the Nkrumah’s CPP. This was paid off by the recognition of Abru-grago I as a Bawkunaba as against Yerimiah Mahamah who was from the Mamprusi side. The NPP was also exclusively organized along ethnic lines as almost all the Mamprusi people supported the part.

These responses indicate that as from the start of modern democracy in Ghana, ethnicity was explored to give undue advantage to political parties who were contesting for the vote of Ghanaians resident in Bawku/Kussaig Traditional Area. This has continued over the years. Throughout the post-independent era as political activities in the area have often anchored along political lines. One of the participants who was a member of the National Peace Council further explained the situation to us as this:

“Politicians continue to take advantage of this divide between the Mamprusi and Kussasi people. After Nkrumah left, the National Liberation Council which overthrew Kkrumah handed power to Busia in 1969 and during this period, the 1966 Chieftaincy Amendment Decree which confirmed Abru-grago as a Bawkunaba was removed and Prince Adams Azangbeo was installed as the legitimate. This again was changed when PNDC, a pro Nkrumah Military regime which later transitioned to the National Democratic Congress (NDC) came to power.

What this means is that the two main political parties at the immediate post-independence era pitched camps with the two dominant ethnic groups in Bawku/Kausal Traditional Area. Nkrumah’s CPP pitched camp with the Kusasi ethnic group while the main opposition party the United Party pitched camp with the Mamprusi ethnic group. These parties constitute the main political traditions in Ghana. The NPP emerged from the UP party and the NDC has strong links with the CPP. What this means is that political mobilization of new political parties which emerged from earlier political parties still unfold along ethnic lines because new generations have always taken after their forefathers by supporting parties that have links with the once their forefathers had once supported. Since 1956, both the Kussasi and Mamprusi people have supported different political parties in changing political regimes anytime elections are to be held.

### **Political Mobilisation and Ethnic Mobilisation**

The study found that political mobilization engendered ethnic

mobilization by ethnic elites who appropriate their positions as opinion leaders to galvanise support of their people for a particular political party which they feel would more likely promote the interest of their people. In the event that such political parties win elections, the ethnic elite are often rewarded with appointment to very significant political positions such as Ministers of State, Regional Ministers and District Chief Executive Officers. This positions them in a situation where they can lobby for opportunities for their ethnic group and also promote their interest as against the interest of other ethnic groups. One of the participants who was a member of the Bawku West Women Development Association explained the situation to the researcher as this:

“It suffices to say that political mobilization leads to ethnic mobilization. As we are here the people in Accra do not know any of us. When they are coming, they have to pass through some of our leaders. This means that they have to also convince others to support them and with the ethnically divisive situation in Bawku, such social mobilisations are done purely along ethnic lines another participant who was a member of the Bawku Inter-Ethnic Peace Committee also explained:

“We live in a situation where politicians want votes, they need our support, they mobilise us to galvanise support for them. We also have to mobilise others. This mobilisation is calculated because you have to go to where you think the people are prepared to listen to you. In this way, the mobilisation unfolds largely along ethnic lines. So for sure, political mobilisation leads to ethnic mobilisation.

These responses imply that there is a strong link between political mobilization and ethnic mobilization in Bawku/Kussaig Traditional Area. In the process of mobilizing support by political parties, they fall on certain elites within the traditional area and these elites in turn fall on their kith and kin to mobilise support for these political parties, thus engendering ethnic mobilisation. While most of these mobilisations appear to be pushing for the common good of the community, some a masked and tailored at achieving individualised goals as certain individuals tend to leverage on this to pursue their personal interests. All ethnic elites who had strongly mobilised support for political parties had often ended up landing lucrative political appointments for themselves and others too leveraged of the ethnic cleavages created by political mobilisation to get elected into revered political offices. One of the participants who a member of one of the CSOs explained the situation to the researcher as this:

“I have my reservations on all these mobilisations processes. It is okay to galvanise support but must this be done along ethnic lines? Sometimes I feel the elites are just taking advantage of this ethnicity of a thing to promote their interests. Awani Akuguri who mobilized support for Nkrumah and later championed the installation of Abru-grago Azoka I became the first Member of Parliament for Zebila constituency, Ndebugri had held multiple political positions and was later elected a member of parliament for Zebila. Cletus Avoka is still enjoying his position as a Member of Parliament. From the Mamprusi side, the likes of

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Amande Adams, Salifu Imoro, Salifu Mahami and Rahaman Guma have all enjoyed varied political positions. This is not wrong but why can't they mobilise people across ethnic divides?

What this means is that political mobilisation in Bawku is done strictly along ethnic lines which also means that people do not support political parties based on their manifestoes or what they can do for them as citizens but they do so because some elites from their ethnic cleavage have told them to do so. This in turn, benefits such elites as they get appointed to various political offices for making their people throw their weight to a ruling government. This certainly has implication for equity, good governance and peace.

### **Political Mobilisation, Ethnic Mobilisation and Ethnic Conflict**

The study found that the political mobilisation processes which unfold largely along ethnic lines in Bawku/Kusaug Traditional Area have generated sustained tension between the Kussasi and the Mamprusi people which often escalate into violence of significant magnitude. While the Kussasi earlier got dissatisfied with the colonial arrangement which placed them under the leadership of Mamprusi chiefs, they acceded until the political processes of 1956 provided them with an opportunity to make a very strong move of installing Abugrago Azoka I as a Bawkunaba (Bawku Chief). Many of the participants expressed the views that they did this because they felt the political environment at that time was favourable for such a move. One of them who was a member of the Bawku Inter-Ethnic Peace Committee explained the situation as this:

“The Kussasi, although had very genuine concerns, they did not voice this out until Nkrumah was elected president. This correlated with the fact that the CPP won greatly in the Kussasi dominated areas and lost miserably in the Mamprusi dominated areas. It will be difficult to convince me that these events are mere coincidences. These events sparked the conflict between the Kussasi and the Mamprusi people which is still on-going sixty-six years after.

This means that the intractable conflict between the Kussasi and the Mamprusi people was started as a result of the political mobilisation that preceded the 1956 elections in which the Mamprusi people seemed not to have supported Kwame Nkrumah's CPP which eventually won the elections. The Kussasi however, did support the party greatly and so had the confidence that they would be supported by the ruling government should they make a move to break what they considered a Mamprusi hegemony and the best way to do this was to install a Bawkunaba contrary to the then existing custom which granted only the Nayiri of Mamprugu the power to install a Bawkunaba. One of the participants who was a leading member of one of the CSOs explain to the researcher as this:

“The then CCP government probably lost the chance to resolve the conflict at its insipient stage but rather set a precedence that has continued to hurt the peace of Bawku to this day. Nkrumah could have found a better way of resolving this conflict by

creating a win-win situation for the conflict. There could have been two paramountcies in Bawku so that the Kussasi could have their own chief while the Mamprusi would also have theirs. This has worked in other jurisdictions before, but by upholding the installation of Abugrago, many people from the Mamprusi extraction felt it was a reward to the Kussasi people for supporting him in his presidential bid and so waited for another political regime to also fight back. This has continued till today even though the party colouration of the conflict is being recently diluted but I know it still exists.

Another participant who was a member of the National Peace Council also explained:

“The perception that Nkrumah rewarded the people by upholding the installation of Abugrago Azoka I made the Mamprusi people to seek a reversal after Nkrumah was overthrown. When Busia came to power in 1969, the Mamprusi people also successfully negotiated a nullification of Abugrago's installation, Busia's party, the United Party was supported strongly by the Mamprusi people. When J.J Rawlings came to power through a military coup d'etat, the Kussasi fought back and had Abugrago Azoka I re-installed posthumously and succeeded by his son Abugrago Azoka II. This was changed when NPP came to power and changed again when NDC returned to power.

What these responses imply is that political mobilisations in changing political regimes had continuously unfolded along ethnic lines in Bawku and this has engendered strong ethnic mobilisation which had often turned into inspiration for violence. Whenever a party which either the Mamprusi or Kussasi group support comes to power, the group wins a case against the other on who is the rightful Bawkunaba. Although the current Bawkunaba remains recognized across two political regimes, this does not mean that there are no political colouration to the conflict as to whether or not he receives the support he needs from the current government which is considered by the Kussasi people as a pro-Mamprusi government is something that could be interrogated. In any case, before now, anytime there was a change of government there was a change in the Bawkunaba and this had often sparked violent conflict. This means that there is a nexus between political mobilisation, ethnic mobilisation and ethnic conflict in Bawku/Kusaug Traditional Area.

### **Discussion**

The study found that political mobilization in Bawku/Kusaug Traditional Area is often anchored along ethnic lines where the two major ethnic groups in the traditional area throw their weight against opposing political parties. This means that if one supports one party, the other would not support that same party. Different political parties at different times have exploited this divide to garner support along ethnic lines. Such ethnicised mobilisation has been the nature of political activities in Bawku Kusaug Traditional Area. This finding is consistent with that of [28] when they found that political mobilisation in many African countries occur along ethnic lines with very few people showing interest in the political message of parties or candidates before supporting them. [29]. also reported that issues of social relationships, consanguinity and ethnicity are more important



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to many African electorates than economic or social welfare issues. This is also consistent with the cultural theory of ethnic mobilization which says people become attached to individuals who share the same culture as theirs and so would go along with them at all cost in times of competition. On the contrary [30]. Found that electorates in South Africa were mobilised more along racial than ethnic lines. This is probably because cleavages in South Africa were drawn more along racial than ethnic delineations.

The study also found that political mobilisation often engender ethnic mobilisation in Bawku as much of the mobilisations are anchored through ethnic elites who in turn mobilise their ethnic groups for or against a political party seeking to win elections. This is consistent with the findings of [31]. Who investigated the patterns of voting in Nigeria and found that most of the electorates were convinced by the elites from their ethnic groups to vote for a particular candidate whom they themselves did not know anything about. Also investigated electioneering in Kenya and found that political mobilisation in many provinces of the country were anchored through ethnic elites who in turn mobilised their kith and kin for or against a particular candidate. These findings are however, in sharp contradiction with what was found by Makgala and in Botswana when they investigated the democratic processes that informed the choice and election of candidates during voting and found that many of the electorates were politically informed and voted based on the issues and perceived capabilities of the candidates and not because their leaders or ethnic elites told them to [32, 33]. This means that while issues of ethnicity and ethnocentrism may inform political choices in some democracies in Sub-Saharan Africa, there are cases where people support political parties or candidates based on real economic and social issues.

The study further found that political mobilisation engenders ethnic mobilisation and ethnic mobilisations create counters and pathways through which conflicts inchoate and escalate. This means that there is a nexus between political mobilisation, ethnic mobilisation and ethnic conflicts. This is consistent with the tenets of the political process perspective of ethnic mobilisation which argues that the political environment creates opportunities and interests and develop structures and mechanisms of access and if access is restricted through social and relational structures, political mobilisation would occur largely along ethnic lines and these would create social strife of varied magnitude as each social unit would want to acquire most of the opportunities for its members. The finding is also consistent with the findings of when he found that democracies have come to create varied interests and opportunities which people often mobilise along ethnic lines to access them creating competition and conflict. Justin and De also found that political and ethnic mobilisation has been responsible for the civil strife in South Sudan since their independence in 2004 [34, 35]. Also found that the Rwandan genocide of 1994 was rooted in political and ethnic mobilisation. Further found that many of the social unrest in many African countries at the immediate post independent era were rooted in ethnicised political mobilisations. This means that political mobilisation when anchored on ethnic cleavages will degenerate

into rivalry creating enabling environment for ethnic conflicts to thrive [36, 37].

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Political mobilisation processes when anchored largely on an ethnicised basis as it was done in Bawku/Kusaug Traditional Area, create impetus for ethnic mobilisation and this transition into ethnic rivalry creating enabling conditions for conflict to unfold and escalate. In multi-ethnic geographies like those of Bawku/Kusaug Traditional Area, political mobilisations need not be centred on ethnic cleavages. The main danger to avoid is doing anything in that will reinforce coinciding cleavages instead of enhancing cross-cutting cleavages necessary for peaceful democratic governance in a pluralistic societies like that of the study area. Political mobilisations should therefore be based on common interests and ideologies rather than on social identities. When politics are shaped by consanguinity rather than ideologies, impetus for mobilisation along social groups is created. Soon after, the competition shift from presenting the best political ideas to promoting individualised and largely ethnicised interests. Democratisation should be anchored on neutral non-sentimental political ideologies where candidates and parties win support not because of where they come from but how their political ideologies resonate with the majority of the electorates. When this happens, parties and candidates would desist from appropriating ethnic cleavages to expand their support base but instead would concentrate on selling their ideologies and convincing people into buying those ideologies. This would avoid ethnic mobilisation which often than not generate ethnic conflicts and would also increase issues of accountability and engender good governance. Based on these conclusions, the researcher made the following recommendations:

The people of Bawku/Kusaug Traditional Area should make concerted effort to come to rge understanding that their problem is caused more by the political mobilisation processes in the area than it is caused by ethnic differences and so work together to fashion practical ways of addressing the chieftaincy issues such agreeing on a rotation plan or creating a new traditional area out of the old one so as to address the differences between them and avoid being manipulated by political and ethnic elites for personal political gains.

The leadership of political parties should encourage and educate their members to anchor mobilisation processes across ethnic cleavages rather than take advantages of ethnic differences to amass cheap political support at the expense of peace and development of the people of Bawku/Kusaug Traditional Area.

The Government of Ghana should find an acceptable means of addressing the long history of ethnicised political mobilisation processes in the traditional areas so that issues of ethnic mobilisation for political support may be eliminated and social identification may cease to mean ideological differences or competition which requires the elimination of an enemy.

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