

‘WE ONLY VOTE BUT DO NOT KNOW’  
THE SOCIAL FOUNDATIONS OF PARTISANSHIP IN GHANA

By

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To Sarah

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Though the process of writing a dissertation can feel like a solitary affair at three o'clock in the morning with a deadline fast approaching and several pages still to be written before dawn, the process of retrospection that accompanies the writing of an "acknowledgments" section brings with it valuable perspective. In hindsight I can see that the actual writing of my dissertation only seemed so tedious and mind-numbing at times because it kept me away from the people who brought so much joy to the practice of discovery which surrounded all those solitary hours behind the computer. These individuals bear no responsibility for the mistakes I have made in cobbling together a social story of Ghanaian party politics, but they deserve much of the credit for whatever the dissertation's redeeming qualities.

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When one is dealing with political matters such as those presented in this dissertation the question of whether or not to reveal public sources is one worth pondering. There is a tension between a simultaneous desire to both recognize and protect that has prompted me to divide these sources into two groups. The first group consists of party functionaries, members of government, and/or Members of Parliament who shared with me their personal opinions about Ghanaian party politics. These individuals are owed thanks but are not identified by name here. My firsthand experience working with CDD-G has taught me that the Ghanaian media and party machines can use social scientific analysis to bludgeon opponents regardless of the findings and I want no part of that process. The second group consists of public sector bureaucrats and university employees who went above and beyond the call of duty to ensure that I found various public records. Included in this group are Dr. Kofi Agyekum and Alhaji Mohammed Dauda Sulley (University of Ghana); Samuel Yorke Aidoo, Kwame Damoah-Agyeman, Edward K. Dorgbor, Idrissu Mahama, and Nat Quaye (Electoral Commission); Francis "the librarian" and

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My stay in Accra would not have been nearly so comfortable had it not been for Kwabena Twum-Barimah, better known as TwumB, and his wife Afia. During my undergraduate years I studied abroad at the University of Ghana-Legon for a semester. My American roommate John and I decided our dormitory room was too big for only two students when our Ghanaian neighbors had been assigned six to eight so we invited two “bedless” students to join us. One of those students was TwumB. When I called him to notify him that I was returning to visit Ghana in 2000 he made sure I had a bed and did the same thing when I returned again for my dissertation research. Though my schedule kept me out of town for months at a time and away from the apartment most evenings and weekends, the occasional home cooking and beers on the

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACP	Action Congress Party
AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
APRP	All People's Republican Party
AYO	Anlo Youth Organization
CDD-G	Center for Democratic Development - Ghana
CPP	Convention People's Party
CYO	Committee on Youth Organization
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EGLE	Every Ghanaian Living Everywhere
FYO	Federation of Youth Organizations
GCP	Ghana Congress Party
KVIP	Kumasi Ventilated Improved Pit Latrine
MAP	Moslem Association Party
NAL	National Alliance of Liberals
NDC	National Democratic Congress
NIP	National Independence Party
NLC	National Liberation Council
NLM	National Liberation Movement
NOPP	Northern People's Party
NPP	New Patriotic Party
NRC	National Redemption Council
PAP	People's Action Party
PCP	People's Convention Party

PPF	Popular Front Party
PHP	People's Heritage Party
PNC	People's National Convention
PNDC	Provisional National Defense Council
PNP	People's National Party
PP	Progress Party
SDF	Social Democratic Front
SMC	Supreme Military Council
TC	Togoland Congress
UGCC	United Gold Coast Convention
UNC	United National Convention
UNIGOV	Union Government
UNP	United National Party
UP	United Party



Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School  
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“‘We Only Vote but Do Not Know:’ The Social Foundations of Partisanship in Ghana” focuses on the relationship between social cleavages and political parties in Ghana. In the decade following independence Africanist scholars, influenced by modernization theories, were keen to characterize the fledgling party systems they found as prone to sectional political cleavages given electorates comprised primarily of illiterate peasants. The popular prescription of the day was urban-dominated nationalizing parties at the cost of competition. When the “third wave” washed over African shores more than a quarter century later scholars began to look at the role political parties’ play in politics but have done so without much recognition of the past debate. Instead there is a tendency to focus on party organizations as merely players within formal electoral institutions. My study tries to capture the nuanced social analysis that marks the earlier Africanist discourse in political science while simultaneously acknowledging and learning from contemporary scholarship.

Rather than assuming that parties organized along *Gemeinschaft* social cleavage lines are bad and those organized along *Gesellschaft* lines are good or that politically-mobilized identities are fixed social realities as did so many of the early Africanist scholars, my study allows for flexible hypothesis generation. Two research questions guide this exercise. First, what types of

social cleavages undergird the Ghanaian party system? To answer this question election results are mapped and several regressions are run using district-level socioeconomic and sectional indicators from the 2000 census to predict electoral outcomes. The results of this analysis suggest that ethnicity is the driving force behind Ghanaian partisanship, but not in the zero-sum way that the early Africanist scholars studying parties predicted. The New Patriotic Party (NPP) tends to dominate in Asante regions and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) in Ewe areas regardless of socio-economic characteristics but these two ethnic groups make up slightly less than 30% of the total Ghanaian population. In order to determine how the more than 70% of Ghana's population not self-identified as Asante or Ewe view the two dominant political parties, a complementary "cognitive shortcut" survey was administered in three disparate constituencies. Results from this survey suggest that voters not self-identifying as either Asante or Ewe still view Ghana's party system as cleaved along the described ethnic lines, but vote for either the "Asante" party or the "Ewe" party based largely on specific localized political disputes.

As a follow-up question, my study asks what actors, events, and/or social structures led to these particular cleavages being mobilized in lieu of other potential cleavage structures? Unlike the generators of party systems in Europe described by Lipset and Rokkan as "revolutions," the Asante/Ewe political cleavage was created through a number of fits and starts. These identities became politically salient independently as reactions to Nkrumah's "nationalizing" government. The Asante identity, presented by the National Liberation Movement (NLM), drew upon symbols of Asante defiance from their drawn-out war with the British. The Ewe identity, presented by the Togoland Congress (TC), was fomented by Ewe-speakers' peculiar position in a UN-mandated territory ceded to the British after Germany's defeat in World War I, and more importantly the colonial and Nkrumah governments' reactions to their claims. When Nkrumah

was deposed, these two formerly aligned political groups had the cultural and organizational tools to fill the political void and present voters with oppositional forces across the subsequent three republics.