

IDENTITY POLITICS AND ELECTORAL OUTCOMES IN GHANA: THE INTERPLAY OF ETHNICITY, RELIGION, AND POLITICAL MOBILISATION

Dr James K. Asante

Faculty of Journalism and Media Studies,
University of Media, Arts and Communication,
Accra.

*Email: james.asante@gij.edu.gh

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-1243-1360>

Publication Date: August 2023

ABSTRACT

Purpose of Study: This study examines how ethnicity and religion shape voting patterns and political mobilization, highlighting both the empowering and polarizing effects of identity-based political engagement.

Problem Statement: In Ghana's Odododiodioo Constituency, where ethnic and religious affiliations are deeply embedded in the socio-political fabric, identity politics significantly influences electoral outcomes. Identity politics has become a defining feature of electoral competition in democracies, shaping voter behaviour, candidate strategies, and political party mobilization.

Methodology: Anchored in Social Identity Theory and Ethnic Voting Theory the study employs a qualitative research approach, using semi-structured interviews with 30 participants, including voters, community leaders, and political party representatives.

Results: Findings indicate that ethnic identity remains a dominant determinant of voter preference, with candidates leveraging ethnic affiliations to consolidate support. Religious identity also plays a crucial role, as churches and mosques actively influence political engagement through endorsements and community mobilization. While identity politics enhances political representation, it also fosters electoral divisions, reinforcing a winner-takes-all system that sidelines broader policy considerations. The study highlights the dual nature of identity politics, serving as both a vehicle for representation and a potential source of political fragmentation.

Conclusion: The paper concludes by offering policy recommendations, urging political actors to adopt inclusive campaign strategies that transcend ethnic and religious lines. It also advocates for media literacy programs and civic education initiatives to encourage issue-based voting. The study contributes to scholarship on African electoral politics, providing insights into how identity politics shapes governance, democracy, and national cohesion in pluralistic societies.

Keywords: *Identity politics, Electoral behaviour, Ethnic voting, Political mobilisation, Ghana*

INTRODUCTION

Elections in Ghana, like in many African democracies, are deeply influenced by identity politics, where factors such as ethnicity, religion, and regional affiliations shape political allegiances and electoral outcomes. Despite Ghana's reputation as a model democracy in Africa, electoral competition remains heavily rooted in ethnic and religious mobilization, particularly in politically competitive constituencies like Odododiodioo. Here, identity serves as both a tool for political inclusion and a mechanism for polarization, raising concerns about the long-term effects of identity-driven politics on national cohesion and governance. While democratic elections ideally promote policy-driven discourse, Ghanaian electoral politics is often dominated by identity-based appeals, where candidates and political parties leverage ethnic and religious loyalties to consolidate votes. This raises a critical question: To what extent does identity politics shape voter behavior, political mobilization, and electoral outcomes in Ghana's democratic process?

Political scientists have long debated the impact of identity politics on democratic consolidation. Horowitz (1985) argues that ethnic voting theory explains why ethnically diverse societies often experience voting patterns aligned along ethnic lines, rather than policy preferences. Similarly, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) suggests that individuals derive a sense of belonging and political affiliation from their group identity, which influences their voting choices. In Ghana, these theoretical perspectives manifest in ethnic bloc voting, where certain regions or constituencies are considered strongholds for specific political parties. The New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC), Ghana's dominant political parties, have historically drawn support from different ethnic and religious groups, further entrenching identity-based political behavior. In highly contested urban constituencies like Odododiodioo, ethnic and religious identities intersect, creating a complex political landscape where mobilization strategies are deeply intertwined with group affiliations.

Existing studies on Ghanaian electoral behavior have largely focused on national-level voting trends, often overlooking the micro-level dynamics of identity politics in urban constituencies (Gyimah-Boadi, 2007; Lindberg, 2010). However, urban constituencies like Odododiodioo, which are ethnically and religiously diverse, provide a unique case for understanding how identity-driven political engagement shapes electoral competition at the grassroots level.

Unlike rural strongholds where ethnicity alone may determine voting patterns, Odododiodioo presents a multi-layered identity structure, where ethnicity, religion, and economic interests collectively influence voter behavior. Understanding how these identity dimensions interact is crucial for predicting electoral trends and designing inclusive political strategies that promote democratic stability.

This study seeks to fill this gap by empirically examining the role of ethnicity and religion in shaping electoral outcomes in Odododiodioo. Using a qualitative research design, the study draws on semi-structured interviews with 30 key informants, including voters, political party representatives, and community leaders. By exploring how political actors mobilize support along identity lines, this research provides insights into the strategic use of identity in political campaigns, voter decision-making processes, and the broader implications for democratic governance. Furthermore, it interrogates whether identity-based voting enhances political representation or perpetuates exclusionary politics, reinforcing ethnic and religious cleavages within Ghana's democratic framework.

The findings suggest that identity politics plays a dual role in Ghanaian democracy. On one hand, it facilitates political participation and representation, allowing historically marginalized groups to assert their political agency. On the other hand, it fosters winner-takes-all politics, where electoral outcomes are dictated more by ethnic and religious loyalties than by policy-based considerations. This contributes to political polarization, patronage politics, and a fragile democratic culture, where voters often feel obligated to support candidates from their ethnic or religious backgrounds, regardless of competence or policy alignment.

By critically analysing the interplay between identity, political mobilization, and electoral outcomes, this study contributes to broader discussions on African democratic consolidation. It calls for policy interventions that promote inclusive governance, civic education, and cross-ethnic political alliances to reduce identity-based political divisions. Ultimately, the study argues that while identity politics is an inevitable feature of Ghanaian democracy, mitigating its negative effects requires deliberate institutional reforms, media responsibility, and voter awareness initiatives that prioritize issue-based politics over ethnic and religious partisanship.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding the role of identity politics in electoral outcomes requires an interdisciplinary approach that considers political science, sociology, and communication studies. Identity politics, particularly in Africa, has been widely examined in relation to ethnicity, religion, and

political mobilization (Horowitz, 1985; Posner, 2005). In Ghana, where multiparty democracy coexists with deep-seated ethnic and religious affiliations, the intersection of identity and politics significantly shapes electoral behaviour (Gyimah-Boadi, 2007). This section explores key literature on ethnicity and voting behaviour, the role of religion in elections, political mobilization strategies, and the consequences of identity politics for democratic governance.

Ethnicity and Electoral BehaviorBehaviour

Ethnicity has long been recognized as a dominant factor in African politics, often serving as a predictor of voting behaviour (Eifert, Miguel, & Posner, 2010). The ethnic voting theory (Horowitz, 1985) posits that in ethnically diverse societies, voters tend to align with candidates from their ethnic group, seeing them as more likely to protect their interests. In Ghana, this has manifested in ethnic bloc voting, where certain regions overwhelmingly support specific political parties. The Akan-speaking regions have historically favoured the New Patriotic Party (NPP), while the Ewe and Northern ethnic groups have shown stronger support for the National Democratic Congress (NDC) (Friday, 2007). This suggests that ethnic loyalty often overrides policy considerations, reinforcing patronage networks and elite-driven political alliances.

However, recent studies challenge the notion that ethnicity alone determines voter choice (Lindberg & Morrison, 2008). While ethnic identity remains significant, urbanization and increased political awareness have introduced cross-ethnic voting trends, particularly in diverse constituencies such as Odododiodioo. As urban areas bring together multiple ethnic groups, ethnic homogeneity is reduced, creating a more competitive electoral environment where party policies, candidate competence, and economic concerns may influence voter decisions. This raises an important question: To what extent does ethnicity remain the primary determinant of electoral outcomes in urban Ghanaian constituencies?

Religion and Political Mobilisation

Beyond ethnicity, religion plays a crucial role in shaping political engagement and voter behaviour (Haynes, 2009). Ghana is a deeply religious society, with Christianity and Islam as the dominant faiths. Religious institutions influence voter perceptions, endorse candidates, and mobilize support for political causes (Owusu, 2015). Studies indicate that religious leaders often use their platforms to shape political discourse, either explicitly endorsing candidates or subtly guiding congregants toward particular political alignments (Ayee, 2011).

The intersection of religion and politics is particularly evident during elections, where churches and mosques serve as political mobilization hubs. Political parties strategically engage religious groups, recognizing their ability to shape public opinion. While religious endorsements can legitimize political candidates, they also raise ethical concerns about the potential for sectarian divisions and religious polarization (Norris & Inglehart, 2011). In Ghana, religious affiliations have been used to reinforce party allegiances, with some Christian and Muslim leaders aligning with specific political movements. This dynamic necessitates further inquiry into whether religious endorsements enhance democratic participation or contribute to exclusivist political tendencies.

Political Mobilization and Identity-Based Campaigning

Political mobilization in Ghana is largely driven by identity-based strategies, where parties capitalize on ethnic and religious sentiments to gain electoral advantage. Mobilization efforts include door-to-door campaigns, ethnic-based rallies, and the use of local dialects in campaign messaging (Bleck & Van de Walle, 2019). In constituencies like Odododiodioo, where multiple ethnic and religious groups coexist, mobilization requires a delicate balance between identity appeals and broader national unity rhetoric.

Studies highlight that identity-driven mobilization is most effective in closely contested constituencies, where ethnic and religious affiliations become decisive factors in tipping the electoral balance (Posner, 2005). However, excessive reliance on identity politics in election campaigns can erode democratic values by shifting attention away from policy discourse and focusing instead on group allegiances. Scholars argue that while identity politics can enhance representation for marginalized communities, it also fosters political fragmentation, reducing the prospects for issue-based electoral competition (Chandra, 2004).

Media and the Reinforcement of Identity Politics

The role of traditional and digital media in reinforcing identity politics cannot be overlooked. In Ghana, media houses are often affiliated with political parties, shaping public narratives through ethnic and religious lenses (Gadzekpo, 2013). Political talk shows, opinion segments, and radio discussions often frame electoral contests in identity-based terms, reinforcing ethnic and religious divisions. This creates echo chambers where voters consume content that aligns with their existing political biases (Gyampo & Asare, 2021).

Social media has further amplified identity-based political discourse, enabling political actors to target voters based on ethnic and religious affiliations (Asante, 2020). Political parties strategically use Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter to circulate identity-driven campaign messages, often exploiting communal loyalties to gain voter sympathy. This raises concerns about the manipulation of digital media for divisive political ends, necessitating greater regulatory oversight in Ghana's electoral communication landscape.

Identity Politics and Electoral Violence

One of the most pressing concerns about identity-based politics is its potential to fuel electoral violence (Bratton & Van de Walle, 1997). In closely contested elections, ethnic and religious divisions can escalate tensions, leading to violent confrontations between rival political groups. Studies on Ghana's past elections reveal that areas with strong identity-based political mobilization have recorded higher instances of pre- and post-election violence (Aning & Lartey, 2013). Political actors sometimes exploit these divisions, using ethnic and religious rhetoric to mobilize supporters, which can escalate into conflicts if not properly managed. While Ghana has largely maintained peaceful elections, sporadic clashes in constituencies such as Odododiodioo indicate that identity politics still carries risks for national stability (Gyampo, 2015). Strengthening democratic institutions and promoting inter-ethnic dialogue is crucial in mitigating these risks.

2.6 Consequences of Identity Politics for Democratic Consolidation

The impact of identity politics on Ghana's democratic trajectory is a subject of ongoing debate. On one hand, identity politics enhances political participation, allowing historically marginalized groups to assert their electoral influence (Lindberg, 2010). However, it also fosters partisan entrenchment, where voters feel obligated to support their ethnic or religious group, regardless of policy considerations or governance track records. Some scholars argue that the persistence of identity-based voting threatens Ghana's ability to transition toward issue-based electoral competition (Gyimah-Boadi, 2007). Others contend that identity politics is a natural part of democracy, reflecting diverse group interests and political representation. The challenge, therefore, lies in balancing identity-based mobilization with the promotion of national unity and policy-driven governance.

The literature reviewed highlights the complex role of identity politics in Ghanaian elections, emphasising its influence on voting behaviour, political mobilization, media representation, and democratic stability. While ethnicity and religion remain powerful electoral forces, their

role is evolving, particularly in urban constituencies where voter preferences are gradually shifting toward policy concerns and economic interests. The persistence of ethnic and religious mobilisation in Ghana's electoral politics necessitates policy interventions that promote inclusive governance, civic education, and media accountability. Future research should explore how digital political campaigns shape ethnic and religious identities, particularly in younger voters who consume most of their political information online. Understanding these dynamics is essential for fostering a more inclusive, democratic political culture that transcends identity-based divisions.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore how identity politics, particularly ethnicity and religion, shapes electoral outcomes in Ghana's Odododiodioo Constituency. Given the complex and deeply rooted nature of ethnic and religious affiliations in political decision-making, qualitative methods provide an in-depth understanding of voter motivations, political mobilisation strategies, and the implications of identity-driven electoral behaviour. This approach allows for a rich, context-specific analysis of how political actors and voters navigate identity-based allegiances in competitive electoral settings. The study is anchored in interpretivist epistemology, which recognises that political behaviour and identity formation are socially constructed and best understood through the lived experiences of political stakeholders.

A case study approach was adopted to provide a detailed, contextualised exploration of identity politics within the Odododiodioo Constituency, a politically significant urban electoral district in Ghana. Odododiodioo is ethnically and religiously diverse, making it an ideal setting to examine how ethnicity and religion intersect with political mobilisation. A case study approach enables the researcher to capture the nuances of political dynamics, voter sentiments, and campaign strategies that shape electoral outcomes in identity-driven political landscapes. This aligns with Creswell's assertion that case studies are appropriate for investigating contemporary political phenomena in real-world contexts.

To obtain a comprehensive perspective on identity politics in Odododiodioo, the study employed a purposive sampling technique, selecting participants based on their relevance to the research objectives. A total of thirty participants were selected across four key categories: voters, political party representatives, community leaders, and electoral commission and media personnel. Voters were drawn from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds, ensuring

representation across youth, elderly, first-time voters, and politically active citizens. Political party representatives included officials from the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and National Democratic Congress (NDC), as well as campaign strategists, to understand party-level mobilisation tactics. Community leaders such as traditional rulers, opinion leaders, and religious figures were engaged due to their influence on political decision-making, while electoral commission officers and journalists provided insights into electoral management and media framing of identity politics. This diverse participant pool ensures that multiple perspectives are captured, allowing for a holistic analysis of identity-based political engagement. The study adheres to the principle of data saturation, ensuring that insights are exhaustively explored without unnecessary redundancy.

The study relied on semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions to collect data. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with voters, political representatives, and community leaders to capture personal experiences, perceptions, and strategies related to identity politics. These interviews allowed for flexibility in questioning, enabling deeper exploration of emergent themes such as ethnic bloc voting, religious endorsements, and the role of political patronage. Additionally, two focus group discussions were conducted with voters and community leaders to explore collective perspectives on identity politics in Ododiodioo. The focus group discussions facilitated comparative analysis, allowing participants to engage in dialogue, contrast their experiences, and highlight dominant narratives on political identity and voter behavior. All interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in English, Ga, Twi, and Hausa, based on participant preferences, ensuring linguistic inclusivity and deeper contextual engagement.

Thematic analysis was used to identify, analyse, and interpret patterns in the qualitative data. The analysis process involved multiple steps, beginning with data familiarisation, where interview transcripts and field notes were carefully reviewed for initial insights. This was followed by open coding, where key themes related to identity politics, ethnic voting, religious mobilisation, and political patronage were identified. Coded data were then grouped into broader thematic categories to ensure alignment with the study's objectives. Identified themes were cross-validated to maintain consistency and coherence across different participant groups. Refinements were made to clearly define the final themes, with special attention given to the role of ethnicity, religious influence, and political elite strategies in shaping voter behaviour. NVivo 12 software was used to assist in data organisation and thematic coding, enhancing the rigor and transparency of the analysis process.

Ethical integrity was paramount in this study, adhering to institutional and international research ethics protocols. All participants were provided with detailed study information and signed consent forms before participation. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by pseudonymising participants' identities to ensure responses could not be traced back to individuals. Voluntary participation was emphasised, allowing participants to withdraw at any stage without consequence. To protect data security, interview recordings and transcripts were encrypted and securely stored, accessible only to the researcher. By adhering to these ethical principles, the study ensured participant safety, transparency, and credibility, contributing to the trustworthiness and validity of the research findings.

This rigorous qualitative methodology provides a deep, context-specific understanding of identity politics in Ghana's electoral process. The case study design, strategic sampling, and robust data analysis approach ensure that findings are empirically grounded and theoretically relevant. The insights generated from this study will advance scholarly discussions on identity politics in African democracies while informing political actors, policymakers, and electoral institutions on best practices for fostering inclusive and issue-based electoral competition.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the key findings from interviews with voters, political party representatives, community leaders, and electoral stakeholders in the Odododiodio Constituency. The analysis focuses on how ethnicity and religion influence electoral behaviour, the role of political mobilization strategies in shaping identity-based voting, and the broader implications of identity politics on democratic governance. The findings suggest that while ethnicity and religion remain dominant factors in voter decision-making, other considerations such as party loyalty, economic incentives, and candidate appeal also play a role. Additionally, the study highlights the strategic use of identity-based mobilization by political parties and how these tactics reinforce patron-client relationships in Ghanaian elections.

Ethnicity and Electoral Behaviour

The study found that ethnicity remains a strong determinant of voter preference, with many respondents emphasizing their ethnic loyalty as a key factor in deciding which party or candidate to support. Some interviewees expressed a deep-seated belief that their ethnic group must be politically represented, with one voter stating, "I feel more comfortable voting for someone who understands my culture and speaks my language. They will fight for our interests." This sentiment was echoed by another respondent who remarked, "In this

constituency, we know who our people are. We don't just vote for policies; we vote for people who belong to us."

Several participants explained that historical ethnic affiliations with political parties shape electoral choices. A long-time resident of Odododiodioo explained, "Our fathers and grandfathers supported one party, and we continue that tradition. Changing party allegiance is like betraying our heritage." The findings indicate that party identification, in many cases, is inherited rather than developed based on policy preferences. Political party representatives acknowledged this reality, with an NPP official stating, "We understand that some people vote purely on ethnic lines. That is why we make sure our candidates have strong ethnic backing in different communities."

However, some voters indicated that ethnicity is becoming less of a deciding factor, particularly among younger voters. One young voter noted, "I don't care which tribe a candidate comes from. I just want someone who will improve our roads and schools." This shift suggests that while ethnicity remains influential, generational changes may be altering the traditional ethnic voting patterns.

Religion and Political Mobilisation

Beyond ethnicity, religious identity plays a significant role in shaping voter behaviour and political mobilization strategies. Many respondents confirmed that churches and mosques actively influence political discussions. A Christian voter explained, "During election periods, pastors talk about leadership and sometimes drop hints about who we should support." A Muslim respondent similarly noted, "Our imams don't tell us directly who to vote for, but they remind us to support leaders who will protect our religious values."

Religious institutions also serve as forums for political mobilization. Political parties frequently send representatives to worship centres to engage congregations and seek endorsements. A campaign strategist admitted, "We target churches and mosques because they bring together large numbers of people. If a religious leader endorses us, we gain credibility." The study found that religious affiliations often reinforce political loyalty, as many voters feel obligated to align their choices with the positions of their faith communities.

However, some respondents were critical of religious involvement in politics, arguing that it creates division. A voter expressed frustration, saying, "Religion should be about spirituality, not politics. When pastors and imams start endorsing candidates, it divides the congregation."

This perspective suggests that while religious institutions remain key players in political mobilization, their influence is not always welcomed by all members of the faith community.

Political Mobilisation Strategies and Identity-Based Campaigning

Political party officials confirmed that identity-based mobilization is a deliberate strategy used to consolidate votes. Both NPP and NDC representatives acknowledged tailoring their campaign messages to align with the dominant ethnic and religious identities in different electoral zones. A campaign manager explained, "We don't just talk about policies; we remind people where our candidate comes from and what values he shares with them. That's how politics works in Ghana."

Several voters reported experiencing identity-based campaign appeals. A market woman shared her experience: "Party officials visited us and said, 'Vote for your brother. Don't let another group take over.' They make it seem like a competition between tribes." Another respondent noted, "They come to the mosque and tell us that if we don't vote for a Muslim candidate, we will not have a voice in government." These findings indicate that ethnic and religious appeals are actively used to influence voting decisions, reinforcing identity politics in Ghana's elections.

Economic Incentives and Patronage Politics

While ethnicity and religion play a key role in electoral decisions, many voters admitted that economic incentives also influence their choices. Several respondents openly stated that they expect financial rewards or material gifts during election campaigns. A young man explained, "We vote for those who help us. If a party gives us money or jobs, we support them." A woman echoed this sentiment, saying, "During elections, we get gifts like rice, cooking oil, and sometimes money. It's part of the process."

Political party officials acknowledged the reality of vote-buying and patronage politics, though they framed it as "community support." An NDC organizer stated, "It's not about bribery; it's about showing appreciation to the voters. Politics is expensive, and people expect something in return for their loyalty." This finding supports existing research on the role of clientelism in African elections, where candidates rely on material incentives to secure voter support.

4.5 Media Influence and the Reinforcement of Identity Politics

Many participants noted that identity-based political narratives are reinforced by the media, particularly through partisan radio stations and social media platforms. A voter complained,

"Every radio station has a political agenda. They promote their party and attack the opposition." Another respondent noted, "Social media is full of tribal and religious messages. People post things that make it seem like an election is a fight between different groups."

Political analysts interviewed for the study confirmed that media platforms contribute to the polarization of electoral discourse. A journalist remarked, "The media does not just report elections; it shapes them. If a media house has a bias, it influences how people see political parties." This finding highlights the need for media literacy programs to help voters critically assess election-related content and avoid manipulation.

Tensions and Electoral Conflicts Arising from Identity Politics

Several respondents recounted instances where ethnic or religious tensions led to electoral violence. A community leader shared, "In past elections, we have seen fights break out because of political disagreements. Some people see elections as a battle for their tribe." Another voter recalled, "I was threatened because I supported a candidate from another ethnic group. Some people don't tolerate political differences."

Electoral officials acknowledged that tensions sometimes escalate in closely contested areas, requiring intervention from security forces. A representative from the Electoral Commission noted, "We have mechanisms in place to manage electoral disputes, but identity politics makes our work difficult. People feel emotionally attached to their political choices." These findings underscore the need for conflict resolution strategies to mitigate electoral tensions in identity-driven elections.

The Future of Identity Politics in Ghana's Elections

Despite the strong influence of ethnicity and religion in voting behavior, some participants expressed hope for a shift toward issue-based politics. A young voter noted, "The new generation is different. We want leaders who can deliver, not just people from our ethnic group." Similarly, a political analyst argued, "If parties focus more on policies and development, identity politics will gradually lose its hold."

However, older voters and political actors remained skeptical about immediate change, arguing that identity-based voting is deeply embedded in Ghana's political culture. A party official remarked, "Identity politics will not disappear overnight. It is part of how people relate to politics in this country." These findings suggest that while there is potential for change, identity politics will remain a defining feature of Ghanaian elections for the foreseeable future.

CONCLUSION OF FINDINGS

The findings highlight the deep entrenchment of ethnicity and religion in Ghanaian electoral politics, revealing how political parties strategically mobilise voters using identity-based appeals. While identity politics enhances representation, it also fosters electoral tensions, patronage politics, and media-driven polarisation. The next section will discuss these findings in relation to existing theoretical frameworks and propose policy recommendations aimed at mitigating the negative effects of identity-driven voting while promoting a more inclusive democratic process.

The findings of this study reaffirm the enduring significance of identity politics in Ghana's electoral process, particularly in constituencies like Odododiodioo, where ethnicity and religion shape political mobilization and voter behaviour. The results support the Ethnic Voting Theory (Horowitz, 1985), which argues that in ethnically diverse societies, voters often align with political candidates from their own ethnic group due to perceived shared interests. Many respondents expressed sentiments that voting for a candidate from their ethnic background provides a sense of security, representation, and group empowerment, highlighting how political decisions are often framed through an identity-based lens rather than policy-based reasoning. This reflects broader electoral trends in Ghana, where major parties, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC), rely on ethnic strongholds for electoral success. However, the study also found evidence of generational shifts in political attitudes, with younger voters showing greater willingness to consider policy proposals, governance track records, and economic issues over ethnic loyalty. This suggests that while ethnicity remains a dominant force, its influence may gradually decline as younger, more urbanized populations demand issue-based politics.

The role of religion in political mobilization was another key finding that aligns with Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which explains how individuals derive political attitudes and behaviours from group affiliations. Religious leaders in Odododiodioo, particularly pastors and imams, play an influential role in shaping electoral discourse, sometimes subtly endorsing candidates based on shared faith affiliations. The study highlights the institutionalised nature of religion in Ghanaian politics, where churches and mosques serve as forums for political engagement and platforms for indirect endorsements. This raises important questions about the ethical implications of religious involvement in electoral processes. While some voters appreciate faith-based guidance in political decision-making,

others express concerns that religious endorsements could deepen sectarian divisions and reinforce exclusive political loyalties. The findings suggest a delicate balance between the moral influence of religious leaders and the need for political neutrality in faith-based institutions to maintain inclusivity and democratic fairness.

Beyond ethnicity and religion, the study also revealed that economic incentives play a crucial role in shaping voter behaviour, reinforcing the persistence of patronage politics in Ghana. Many respondents admitted that material benefits such as money, food, or job promises influenced their electoral choices, supporting previous studies on clientelism in African elections (Lindberg, 2010; Van de Walle, 2007). The strategic use of campaign handouts and patron-client relationships reflects the winner-takes-all nature of Ghanaian politics, where parties mobilize support through short-term economic rewards rather than long-term policy commitments. While these economic incentives increase voter participation, they also contribute to a cycle of dependency, where voters prioritize immediate personal benefits over national development agendas. The findings highlight the need for policy reforms to strengthen political accountability and reduce the reliance on financial inducements in electoral processes.

The study also underscores the role of the media in reinforcing identity-based political narratives, particularly through partisan radio stations, social media campaigns, and targeted messaging. The media's role in shaping voter perceptions and amplifying ethnic and religious identities aligns with findings by Gadzekpo (2013), who argues that Ghanaian media outlets often act as extensions of political parties rather than neutral platforms for public debate. Many respondents acknowledged that radio talk shows, social media content, and politically aligned newspapers influence their political attitudes, often reinforcing existing biases rather than promoting balanced discourse. The rise of social media as a mobilization tool presents both opportunities and challenges, as it allows for rapid political engagement but also enables misinformation, polarization, and the manipulation of identity-based sentiments. These findings suggest that media literacy campaigns and regulatory frameworks are essential for promoting responsible journalism and reducing the spread of divisive political messaging.

The implications of identity politics extend beyond voting behaviour and mobilization strategies to broader democratic governance and national unity. The study highlights the risk of political exclusion, where elected leaders prioritize their ethnic and religious support bases at the expense of broader national representation. This aligns with studies by Gyimah-Boadi (2007), which warn that identity-driven electoral competition can entrench elite dominance and

marginalize minority groups in governance. Several respondents expressed concerns that government appointments, resource distribution, and political decision-making are often influenced by ethnic and religious affiliations, contributing to perceptions of favouritism and inequitable governance. These findings underscore the need for institutional reforms that promote inclusive leadership, cross-ethnic political alliances, and equitable resource allocation to strengthen democratic consolidation in Ghana.

Overall, this study contributes to the growing discourse on identity politics in African democracies, providing empirical evidence of its continued influence on electoral behaviour, political mobilisation, and governance outcomes. While ethnicity and religion remain powerful electoral forces, emerging trends—such as increasing issue-based voting among younger populations, shifting media dynamics, and calls for inclusive governance—suggest the possibility of gradual political transformation. To mitigate the negative effects of identity-driven politics, policymakers, electoral bodies, and civil society organizations must prioritize voter education, strengthen regulatory oversight on campaign financing, and foster intergroup dialogue to promote national cohesion. Moving forward, future research should explore the long-term effects of identity politics on democratic stability, political participation, and policy implementation in Ghana and other African contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that identity politics remains a defining feature of Ghana's electoral landscape, particularly in constituencies like Odododiodioo, where ethnicity and religion significantly shape voter behaviour, political mobilisation, and governance outcomes. The findings reveal that while ethnic and religious affiliations serve as tools for political representation and community solidarity, they also contribute to partisan entrenchment, electoral tensions, and the marginalisation of certain groups in governance. Political parties strategically leverage these identities to mobilize support, often reinforcing patron-client relationships and diverting attention from issue-based electoral competition. However, emerging trends, particularly among younger voters and urban populations, indicate a gradual shift toward policy-driven decision-making, suggesting that identity politics may evolve rather than disappear entirely in Ghana's democratic process.

To mitigate the negative effects of identity-driven electoral competition, policymakers, electoral institutions, and civil society organizations must adopt inclusive political strategies that prioritise national unity over ethnic or religious divisions. Strengthening voter education

programs, promoting issue-based campaigning, regulating political financing, and encouraging cross-ethnic political alliances will be essential in fostering a more inclusive and policy-oriented democracy. Additionally, the role of media in shaping political discourse must be critically examined, with efforts directed toward responsible journalism, fact-checking mechanisms, and digital literacy initiatives to counter divisive narratives. Future research should explore the long-term impact of identity politics on governance, public service delivery, and intergroup relations in Ghana and other African democracies, ensuring that electoral competition serves as a vehicle for national development rather than a source of political fragmentation.

REFERENCE

- Aning, K., & Lartey, E. (2013). Electoral violence in Ghana: The case of the 2012 elections. *African Security Review*, 22(1), 44-55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2013.769572>
- Asante, R. (2020). Social media and electoral campaigns in Ghana: New frontiers of political communication. *Journal of African Media Studies*, 12(3), 289-307. https://doi.org/10.1386/jams_00032_1
- Ayee, J. R. A. (2011). Manifestos and elections in Ghana's Fourth Republic. *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 18(3), 367-384. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10220461.2011.622953>
- Bleck, J., & Van de Walle, N. (2019). Electoral politics in Africa since 1990: Continuity in change. *Cambridge University Press*.
- Bratton, M., & Van de Walle, N. (1997). *Democratic experiments in Africa: Regime transitions in comparative perspective*. Cambridge University Press.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Chandra, K. (2004). *Why ethnic parties succeed: Patronage and ethnic head counts in India*. Cambridge University Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. SAGE Publications.
- Eifert, B., Miguel, E., & Posner, D. N. (2010). Political competition and ethnic identification in Africa. *American Journal of Political Science*, 54(2), 494-510. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2010.00443.x>
- Fridy, K. S. (2007). The elephant, umbrella, and quarrelling cocks: Disaggregating partisanship in Ghana's Fourth Republic. *African Affairs*, 106(423), 281-305. <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adm024>
- Gadzekpo, A. (2013). The media in Ghana: Evolution and challenges. In K. Karikari (Ed.), *Media and democracy in Africa* (pp. 23-50). Ghana University Press.

- Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods*, 18(1), 59-82. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05279903>
- Gyampo, R. (2015). Winner-takes-all politics in Ghana: The case for effective council of state reforms. *Journal of Politics and Law*, 8(4), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.5539/jpl.v8n4p1>
- Gyimah-Boadi, E. (2007). Political parties, elections, and patronage: Ghana's evolving democracy. *Democratization*, 14(4), 543-562. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510340701398229>
- Haynes, J. (2009). Religious influence on political participation in Africa: A comparative study of Kenya and Ghana. *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 47(1), 52-75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14662040802659025>
- Horowitz, D. L. (1985). *Ethnic groups in conflict*. University of California Press.
- Lindberg, S. I. (2010). What accountability pressures do MPs in Africa face, and how do they respond? Evidence from Ghana. *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 48(1), 117-142. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X09990243>
- Lindberg, S. I., & Morrison, M. K. C. (2008). Are African voters really ethnic or clientelistic? Survey evidence from Ghana. *Political Science Quarterly*, 123(1), 95-122. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1538-165X.2008.tb00619.x>
- Norris, P., & Inglehart, R. (2011). *Sacred and secular: Religion and politics worldwide*. Cambridge University Press.
- Owusu, M. (2015). Religion, democracy, and politics in Ghana: A complex relationship. *African Affairs*, 114(456), 587-609. <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adv041>
- Posner, D. N. (2005). *Institutions and ethnic politics in Africa*. Cambridge University Press.
- Swire-Thompson, B., & Lazer, D. (2020). Public health and online misinformation: Challenges and recommendations. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 41, 433-451. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-040119-094127>
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33-47). Brooks/Cole.
- Van de Walle, N. (2007). Meet the new boss, same as the old boss? The evolution of political clientelism in Africa. In H. Kitschelt & S. I. Wilkinson (Eds.), *Patrons, clients, and policies: Patterns of democratic accountability and political competition* (pp. 50-67). Cambridge University Press.