

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Ghanaian opinions on democracy, inter-communal violence and conflict in sub-Saharan Africa

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**This survey research explores and presents the opinions of people in Ghana on several key areas: democracy and inter-communal violence, conflict in sub-Saharan Africa, Kenyan electoral violence during December 2007/February 2008 and salient issues and problems in Ghana. The study drawing on 407 participants reveal the following: A preference for representative democracy, agreement that there is no perfect electoral system, economic inequality which leads to higher levels of armed conflict, voting irregularities and exploitation of ethnic-tribal sentiments which is a factor in election violence, discrimination and perceptions of superiority which is problematic and ethnic-tribal allegiances that are strong in Ghana.**

**Key words:** Ghana, opinion survey, democracy, electoral violence, ethnicity, inter-communal violence and conflict.

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Electoral violence, ethnicity, democratization and inter-communal conflict and violence are social issues confronting people in sub-Saharan Africa. There is consideration of such recent violence during Kenya's 2007 presidential election or inter-communal violence in Nigeria between Muslims and Christians, the veiled and often unrecognized tension between Southerners and Northerners in Ghana and the Sudan.

In a seminal paper on social networking, Granovetter (1973) argues, "the personal experience of individuals is closely bound up with large-scale aspects of social structure." Social networks often influence what individuals know, perceive and infer (Felmlee, 2001; Wasserman and Faust, 1994). Although, inter-communal and intra-communal violence and large scale conflict like war between nations, military represents three of society's most salient activities. Our understanding of political experiences of people in the African continent remains significantly incomplete. Inter-communal violence and conflict, often referred to as ethnic conflict and tribalism are series of the most powerful forces in Africa and in the world. However, its study has recently been relatively neglected in the Western world with respect to

Africa and framed as issues of tribalism, nationalism and democratization, yet inter-communal violence and conflict exert a strong presence and influence in Africa and other parts of the non-Western world. Although there have been numerous scholarly studies on collective identity in reference to class, gender, race and religious community in the West, there is little agreement about the role of ethnicity as it may influence, as opposed to political components of nationalism, political consensus and collective will, national identity or political participation and voting (Lipset, 1981; Somers, 1993). The issue of nationalism and national identity also serves a dual purpose such as fostering fraternity and community or aggression, antagonisms and oppression (Snyder, 1990; Hayes, 1990, Snyder, 1993).

McKay (1982) has given suggestive explanation on how ethnic groups are formed. Fundamental explanation suggest that people will often attach themselves to a given geographical area or territory in which they live or from an area which they are having religious and/or kinship attachment. Such elemental attachments help explain the overall ethnic strength of bonds among a people or group solidarity coupled with a shared sense of

ethnic identity. McKay also suggests mobilization as an orientation, which is an artefact of the manner in which ethnic identities and attachments are socially constructed by people and that some ethnic groupings may actually pursue different interest which does not appeal to all ethnics which share similar reality or have identical goals. However, Erikson's (2002) research does not provide support for McKay's understanding of ethnic identity, but Erikson places a greater emphasis on shared interest and this shared interest is not purely a matter of choice; and ethnic identities are not ascribed or achieved but they are both.

Brown (1997) distinguished between three types of explanation for ethnic conflict: 1) systemic 2) domestic and 3) perceptual, and that ethnic conflict is more likely to occur in areas of the global community where ethnic groups live in proximity to each other and where there is an effective and strong central (or local) authority. Brown also adamantly suggests that ethnic conflict and violence will occur in absence of an effective and strong central authority.

This seems to bear fruit when one considers the leadership of Osni Mubark control over Egypt, and the influence of former leaders, such as Yaser Arafat over the Palestinian Government and among the Palestinian people in the Israeli occupying territories, former President Saddam Hussein's grip over Iraq prior to the second Persian Gulf war/crisis and Mabutu's power and authority in the former Zairian country now called the Republic of the Congo. Ethnic and racial formation is generally associated with the consequences of government policy and intergroup competition within ethnically diverse societies. However, in relatively homogenous societies, lifestyle variation may often exist, but they are usually not expressed as ethnicity; instead, class, gender, religious, subcultural and age differences may become more essential (Omi and Winant, 1992). On the face of this observation there appears to be a grain of support.

For example, considering the plight of Liberian refugees in ethnically diverse Ghana during the 1990s, subcultural differences often take on the dimensions of ethnicity rather than racial differences. Subcultural differences will surface in beliefs, values, customs, lifestyle, language, dress, knowledge and the use of symbols, all of which help differentiate in-group and out-group members, there-by increasing the propensity for competition and conflict over valuable resources, particularly for scarce and valuable ones.

## **ETHNICITY**

Ethnicity, as a sociological concept, can often function as a significant cause of violence and conflict, particularly in

political engendered violence in sub-Saharan Africa. It is with little question that ethnic groups are considered social formations which are distinguished communal characters of boundaries, language and culture, to mention just three or many argued characteristics. Nnoli (1989) notes that ethnicity is considered a "social phenomenon" which is characterised by interaction among members of various ethnic groupings. An occurrence directly and indirectly linked with ethnicity is ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism (Sumner, 1906 [2002]) can be defined and understood as making false assumptions about the ways of others based on our own limited experience. The key word here is assumption because we, as social beings, are not aware that we are being ethnocentric, that is, we do not understand that we do not understand. Ethnocentrism may manifest itself either positive as in loyalty and identity or, negative as in ethnic prejudice and hostilities towards an out-group.

Ethnocentrism is perceptual and often manipulated by an individual or a group who are interested in the control of scare resources, such as those who seek and want to control state power or scarce and valuable resources. Ethnocentrism and ethnic violence may serve as a casual factor in the weakening or breaking down of society into contrasting and conflicting group alignments, which have occurred recently in such countries as Rwanda, Kenya, Somalia and Côte d'Ivoire.

Ethnicity is conceptually an important social fact in Africa because it requires extraordinary and separate analysis and treatment form on how ethnicity is understood and treated in Westernised countries. Ethnicity is in need of readjustment of misconceptions associated with the concept and usage in Africa. When used to refer to Africa, ethnicity often is directly and indirectly associated with disparaging connotations attached to tribe or tribalism and its associations often are linked inherently to 'bad' or 'semi-bad' (Hameso, 2001). Tribe and tribalism is often used to explain ethnicity and are used to suggest and denigrate native social institutions and political leadership of post-colonial institutional arrangements in Africa.

Ethnic conflict appears to have a significant contributory influence on the breakdown of social institutions in society into splinter groups and formations where members set themselves off from the main body and form an independent association, usually as a result of dissension. Splinter group ethnocentrism often plays and functions as a catalyst in community and inter-communal conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa. Nnoli (1978) explains ethnic rivalry in Nigeria as a product of the colonial contract phenomenon and concept of tribalism. Ethnocentrism, violent inter-communal conflict and tribalism is suggestive and gives evidence to the abyss and violence in countries such as Kenya, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia,

Nigeria, Rwanda, Somalia and Zimbabwe which may be described on a continuum from weak-to-collapsed state institutions. Ethnocentrism often produces social, economic and political inequalities which, in turn, are associated with loyalty and duty to an ethnic or cultural group and patronage over connections to the state or nation.

Prevailing widespread economic inequality, such as uneven development and poverty, has the potential to influence collective behaviour in sub-Saharan Africa. Youths and young adults are adversely impacted by economic development and they are predominating as actors in ethnic violence and conflict. When youths and young adults migrate to urban capital cities and urban centres in Africa (e.g. Accra, Lagos, Nairobi, Brazzaville, Freetown, N'Djamena, Cotonou, Monrovia and Harare) to improve their life chances, they often will live in squalid, run-down conditions as they struggle to seek meaningful and rewarding employment. These young people are often incorporated into ethnic enclaves in overcrowded urban centres or become internal displaced persons in their respective home country.

Stressful condition, perceived or real, leads to anxiety or relative deprivation (Stouffer, 1949; Runciman, 1966). Relative deprivation gives rise to hopelessness, indignation, reaction and may lead to conflict and violence (Rubin et al., 1994). Relative deprivation, as described here, is argued about what brought about violent conflict, during the recent past in Africa (e.g. Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Sierra Leone, Algeria, Egypt, Somalia and the Sudan). Ethnicity, ethnocentrism, competition for scarce resources are understood to influence conflict and violence in sub-Saharan Africa.

## DEMOCRACY AND THE MEDIA

Democratic issues, ethnicity, violence and the media are four talking points that dominate conversations and talking points in Africa. The interrelationships among these four talking points are intertwined complexities, incongruities and misunderstandings. Joseph (2008) suggests that the unique trait of good democratic governance is its assurance of citizen voter participation, freedom of association, transparency, accountability and freedom of expression which translates into a goal to reduce inequality and access to scarce national resources (e.g. wealth).

According to Gumede (2008), most African countries can be considered a mixture of diverse ethnic groups and languages which makes building democracy (democratic institutions) a complicated task but not unworkable, and most political parties are generally dominated by the

same ethnic group; thereby, campaigning on ethnic, blood and clan grounds rather than on policies and issues. Stewart (2008) explains horizontal inequalities of places and people into groups, where people come to see themselves, and inequalities between groups mobilises people to engage in politics in peaceful form, but may also result in violence. Importantly, horizontal inequality will have political, economic and cultural dimensions. However, democracy may lead to dangerous situations in a multi-ethnic society unless democracy is accompanied with policies to protect groups in society and there is a critical need for fair distribution of economic resources and a system for monitoring policies and distributions (Stewart, 2008).

Corruption, criminal activities, issues of democratic transformation and economic marginalisation of Africa are major social issues that are associated with unpredictable episodes of ethnic violence and armed conflict influence, and contribute for a need to search and generate wealth in Africa. Bayart et al. (1999) contended against criminal activities which have become an essential part of the political process; such activities are illegal trafficking of diamonds, minerals, drug smuggling and the poaching of rare and protecting animals.

Criminalisation of the state has influenced elected official in Africa and oppositional party members involvement in drug scandals. Akrofi-Quarcoo (2006) suggests drug arrest in Ghana has resulted in political scandal and a number of high-ranking law enforcement officials and parliamentarians have collaborated with drug dealers. In 2005, Mr. Eric Amoateng, a member of parliament in Ghana, was arrested for smuggling heroin to the United States. Mr. Amoateng and others were arraigned on 14 November on charges of conspiracy with the intent to distribute heroin. For the average Ghanaian, there is a saying 'Obiara did wo ni edzuma ho' which translates all people "chop" around their work, and the culture of "Chop", the need to consume is widespread in Ghana (Akrofi-Quarcoo, 2006).

Soola (2009) reminds us that a strong print and electronic media are critical as a base for democracy, and good governance and democracy must guarantee the rights of free speech, publication and association. However, the media can play a negative role in influencing hate and mob violence as in Rwanda's horrific ethnic violence and attempts at genocide in 1994, or the media can have a positive role in informational campaigns to improve health and education and critically democratising and broadening peaceful political discourse.

## VALUABLE RESOURCES

Non-European indigenous people way of life are

vulnerable to major alteration or destruction by Western beliefs and capitalist expansion merely because Western folk-ways and mores differ in manifest and latent ways from African cultural traditions, sometimes so significant from that which is found in western culture, controlling for language. This is particularly associated with and representative of religious beliefs and market behaviour. Although there are differences, they tend to share certain characteristics. For example, to mention two, both westerners and non-westerners are increasingly becoming mobile where frequent movement makes them difficult to control and they are increasingly becoming influenced and dependent on the mass media reflecting western values. Small indigenous and ethnic communities have quickly been undermined by capitalism, that is, their communal ownership of valuable resources, notability, their land and minds. In terms of land, communality often generates all sorts of problems for westerners and capitalist. For example, community held land is not easily and readily sold or purchased and become more of a concern for preservation and less subject to exploitation by external financial or real estate group interests because of the requirement of group/community consensus (Hardin and Baden, 1977). However, according to Posey (1996), such a situation, that is land, might be judged in the culture of capitalism to be "free for the taking" because traditional and communal knowledge that would be recognized as property if held by an individual or what has come to be known as "natural person" such as a corporation, can be or taken out of the communal trust.

In regards to the issue of the mind, specifically group mind and completion of faith, there are numerous methods which may be employed to dominate a people. This would include, but not limited to militarily and economic control of knowledge, and proselytizing faith and religious conversion. The literature is abound with documentation on the domination of a group of people or society militarily, as Joseph Nye (1990) calls America using hard and soft power to lead the world, government control (Bodley, 1990; Jalali and Lipset, 1992-1993; Nagel, 1993; Nye, 1990); or economically by extending credit to countries starting with Britton Woods monetary system of management and the world debt during the 1940s (Low, 1993; Guttman, 1994; Caulfield, 1996; French, 2000) and as recent as micro credit to individuals (Wahid, 1994; Schuler and Hashemi 1994, Rahman 1999).

One of the most powerful ways to dominate a group of people or community is through religion and religious conversion. Similar to military, government, and economic influence and control of a people or community, religion is an important social institution that may influence inter-ethnic violence and conflict. It is without doubt, some forms of

religious belief exist, globally.

Whether such beliefs are monotheistic (e.g., Judaism, Christianity, or Islam), polytheistic (e.g. Hinduism), enlightenment (e.g. Buddhism), sects, and cults are generally categorized under the heading religion. The question is: can religion be operationalised? Defining religion beyond the conceptual level is easier than defining what a religion is or is not. Religion may be understood as a system of symbols, belief, values, expectations, and practices of which an individual, group, or community adheres to as sacred; is rarely, if ever, called into question, and in which an individual, group, or community fight to protect and preserve (Durkheim, 1965; Weber, 1922). Much has been written regarding the functional (Durkheim, 1965; Myers, 1993; O'Dea and Aviad, 1983), exploitative (Marx, 1972[1843]; Genovese, 1972) nature of religion, and the exclusiveness and inclusiveness of religious groups (Roof, 1999; Wuthrow, 1998). The historical is replete with examples where religion has been used as a tool for oppression and exploitation and it is at the root of many conflicts thought-out the world, even today.

It is not at all astonishing given the strong, influential effect religion has on an individual or people's verbal and non-verbal behaviour, and it is not uncommon that there are powerful relationships that develop and exist between religious identity, social and political attitudes and behaviour towards others. Religious identification generally is a predictor or causal factor in explaining how traditional a person or group of people will respond to social and political circumstances. On average and controlling extraneous factors, generally, people who have deep seated religious convictions and involvement tend to be more supportive of traditional authority and gender orientations (Balch, 1980 and 1995; Morgan, 1987).

For example, religious affiliation has a powerful influence on the extent to which gender issues fall in comparison to other groups of people and the larger community or nation as a whole (Morgan, 1997). For example, Muslims, Christian and Jews from the Middle East are relative more conservative than their counterparts in the United States or Europe, as a sum total. Religion may also determine or pressure attitudes towards social interaction, such as sexual behaviour. Woodruff (1985) found there was an association made between the extent to which how high the religious devotee stands with respect to religious beliefs, practices, and convictions, and will often influence less sexual activity and conventional sexual behaviour. Religion can also function as a basis for emancipation but it may also be the basis of group prejudice, which may lead to exclusion, group oppression, coercion, and repression. The association between religious beliefs, practices, and prejudice has held the attention of scholars for

generations, particularly with respect to in-group and out-group conflict and violence.

Preconception (e.g. notions, fixed ideas, prejudices, presumptions) is one of the many interesting capacities and facts about people, other than language; it is our ability to allow preconceptions to funnel how we come to identify and interpret information about our world. Group and individual preconceptions, notions, fixed ideas, prejudices, and deductions assist people to form and sustain their beliefs, whether if they are true or false. The widespread and frequent manner in which people structure their beliefs include but are not limited to: 1) our notions of control and how we interpret behavior; 2) people are regularly and frequently influenced by sketchy or anecdotal information rather than valid and reliable information, 3) people often do not understand the differences between causality and correlation from cause and effect and, 4) peoples' opinions, thinking, and beliefs can generate their own conclusions (Kinder and Sears, 1985; Rothbart and Birrell, 1977; Milgrim, 1974). The creation, structure, and sustainability of human preconceptions can be considered one of many factors that influence inter-communal conflict and violence.

When people are influenced by preconceptions, impressive social events, or memorable confrontations, than factual information, often will produce collective behavior that is generally communicated through rumor. Collective behavior may be rooted in either rationality or irrationality; it may be highly expressive and volatile. Competition and collective behavior is often indirectly or directly associated with varying levels of social change. Preconceptions, coupled with collective behavior, may influence hysterical contagion (Gehlen, 1977) and scapegoating that occurs when a group collectively recognizes or categorizes another group as threat to the perceived elite structure or the social order. This will therefore incur-rectly lay responsibility at the doorstep of the other group for economic, political, and or social problems they have not produced. When people are perceived to be outsiders or non-group members they are often perceived as utilizing or wasting valuable and scarce resources and ethnic conflict and violence sometimes results, reflecting the fear of the other, the outsider, or xenophobia (Jenkins, 1983).

On average, people are significantly influenced by memorable and impressive events than factual information. Consider the following statement: which color is more vibrant, is it orange, green, blue, or white? Is an elephant heavier than a cat in a vacuum? Do more people live in Ghana or in Mauritania? The interesting point here is what is readily more available in our individual or collective reminiscence is what is generally presumed to be commonplace. Answers to such questions are a function of the powerful anecdotes which are

often more compelling than factual information and that people are often lethargic in deducing meticulous occurrences from what is considered general fact or reality (Macleod and Campbell 1992; Allison and others, 1999). Gerrig and Prentice (1991) noted that in unrealistic, imagined, or illusory based events that occur in one time such as stage shows, reality based television programs, mock newscasts, and movies, people often believe imagery later two times; this influences or penetrates our decisions, opinions, and actions. One of the most fascinating human characteristics and social phenomena to occur among people is to imagine or picture a correlation, when in fact, a correlation does not exist in social reality. Empirical researches on the effects of illusory correlation among people have existed for more than fifty years (Hanslins, 1967; Langer, 1977; Troler and Hamilton, 1986). This phenomenon 'illusion of correlation' is particularly relevant. When people gamble or engage in risky behavior or have some occurrence of premonition they will often see a correlation between the odds of play and winning, or the premonition. For example, a person may notice or assume that when they have in their possession or what they believe to be a lucky charm/amulet or article of clothing will convey good fortune. People will often believe in the premonitions or signs and later occurrences. However, people infrequently discern, otherwise consider those unusual or extraordinary moments in time when certain events did or did not correspond with a premonition or sign (Crocker, 1981).

People's beliefs can actually generate or produce their own confirmation. Often and in most cases our expectations will influence behavior which is explained by what has come to be known as the Self-fulfilling prophecy and the Thomas Theorem. When people apply a label in a social context, the label will often change behavior and justify the application of the label, which in turn has a powerful effect on expectancy (Cardenas, 1996) and on deviations from social norms. Thomas (1928) suggested if people come to define a situation as real, then, they are real in their consequences. For example, if crime is perceived to be on the rise in a community, other people living in another community may come to believe that crime also may increase in their community, which in turn may influence their behavior to take precautions. This situation may also hold for how people perceive a particular group of people as a threat, but the fact is the perceived group may not be a real threat.

Inter-communal, and for another matter intra-communal violence and conflict, often referred to as ethnic or tribal conflict, is one of the most least understood and powerful social forces in the world because it is multi-causal. However, the study of inter-communal violence has generally focused on events relative to the European continent (e.g. Ireland, Spain, Bosnia, and Herzegovina) and

framed as issues of nationalism and democratization, yet inter-communal violence and conflict exert a strong presence and influence in Africa and other parts of the non-Western world. Moreover, when research is conducted in the form of opinion polling in non-African countries pertaining to inter-communal violence in Africa, such research often neglects the opinion of the people concerned and findings are generally reduced to talking points relative to nonspecific and vague concepts as tribalism. In an effort to correct under representation in the research, this study is conducted to add to the literature on opinion polling, and capturing in part, the views of Ghanaians on selected relevant factors that may help explain the subjects of democracy, political participation, perceptions, inter-communal violence and conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa.

## **SURVEY METHODOLOGY**

Although there have been numerous scholarly studies on collective identity in reference to class, gender, race, and religious community in the West, there is little agreement about the role of ethnic influences, as opposed to political components of nationalism, political consensus and collective will (or the national identity or political participation and voting (Lipset, 1981; Somers, 1993). The issue of nationalism and national identity also serves a dual purpose such as fostering fraternity and community or, aggression, antagonisms, and oppression (Snyder, 1990; Block, 1993, Hayes, 1990 in Snyder).

In the measurement of democracy, inter-communal violence and conflict, the researcher administered an in-depth study of public opinion in Ghana. The key researcher independently supported the research activities without external funding. The survey polling was administered and conducted in two phases. The first phase was conducted in the city of Accra, the capital of Ghana, within the Osu and Contentment Community Areas during the period of 24<sup>th</sup> July through 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 2008. The second phase was conducted in the Cape Coast Municipality, the Central Region, Ghana, from 18<sup>th</sup> August through 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 2008.

The opinion research utilized a 4 page, 44 item Likert-Type scale closed-response category questionnaire. The nature of the Likert scale generally consists of a series of questionnaire items or statements to which respondents indicate their agreement or disagreement. The scale is highly reliable with regards to a particular orientation or opinion or attitude complex, thereby, producing an ordinal scale which generally requires non-parametric statistics. The research received 407 (N=407) completed questionnaires. Thirty-seven questionnaires were discarded because of the overwhelming number of non-responses and/or for not being anonymous to questionnaire items. Twenty-six data collection instrument were not returned to the researcher. Completed and returned questionnaires for the research yielded an 86.5 percent response rate.

### **Methodological caveats**

Readers should be aware of the possibilities of misinterpretations and errors when using information generated and contained in this report. The analysis contained within this report is based on a non-random sample procedure rather than on nationally random sample

of all Ghanaians. In addition, given how each questionnaire item was constructed, the relative variations in spoken and written English Language use and the interpretations of the respondents may yield misinterpretation and errors.

The results reported in this study should not be based on raw numbers but rather on percentages. Reported percentages may not (exactly) total to 100% due to rounding and the percentages reported in the narrative may not correspond with reported percentages in tables due to rounding. Moreover, results reported for subgroups have potential for somewhat larger variation than those for the entire population.

The reader is further cautioned not to use the findings contained in this report as the sole source for presentation and should locate and consult other data sources to support conclusions. The sample of respondents for this research was conveniently chosen from the Cape Coast Municipality in the Central Region and the Osu and Contentment areas of Accra, the Capital of Ghana. Readers should be aware of possible misrepresentations and errors when using information provided in this report due to sampling bias. As suggested above, the analysis and results are reported in percentages and the results of non-random sampling of subgroups have potential for large variations than those typically found in non-biased samples. Moreover, it is imperative the reader should be cautioned not to use the findings of this report as the sole source for presentation of information and should locate other pertinent data sources to support any conclusions.

## **FINDINGS**

As previously mentioned, the intent of this survey was to measure the opinions and variations among people polled in Ghana on a number of questions pertaining to the broad and often nebulous subject matter relating to democracy, inter-communal violence and conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa and on the recent Kenyan election that has given rise to violent confrontation during the period, December 2007 – February 2008. The findings of this survey are presented in a similar manner in which the questionnaire items were presented to the participants in the research. The first series of questions focused upon generating basic structural demographic information of all people having completed the questionnaire. The second series of questionnaire items, referred here as structural non-demographic items, are categorized into three areas: Questions asking respondents about their opinions related to ethnic-tribal violence in Sub-Saharan Africa; questionnaire items asking to reflect on the recent Kenyan electoral violence that has given rise to violent confrontation during December 2007 and February 2008, and; questions asking respondents to reflect on issues and problems associated with Ghana.

### **Respondents' structural demographic characteristics**

Overall, 407 people successfully participated in the survey. Sixty-six percent (N = 269) of the respondents were males and 33.9% (138), females. On average,

slightly less than half of the respondents (49%) reported their age between 18 and 24 years; 20% reported their age between 25 and 35 years. Those indicating their ages between 36-45 and 46-55 years represented 15 and 13%, respectively, while 3% were 56 years and above. With respect to marital status, religious affiliation, and years of education completed, approximately, 78% indicated being single and 22% reported being married. Seventy-four percent indicated their religious affiliation as Christian, 26% as Muslim and less than one percent, Traditional African religion. Fifty-nine percent specified they completed senior secondary education, approximately 19% have completed some college or university education, and 14% have obtained the advanced degree beyond the first university degree. When considering ethnic/tribal identification, just about 34% reported their ethnic identification as 'Akan', Fante (13%), Ewe (13%), Ga (3%), other (28%), and those not responding (10%). Ninety-five percent of the respondents in the study reported a Ghanaian nationality. When participants in the research were asked "what region of Ghana they were born", on average, 33% reported they were born in the three upper regions of Ghana (Northern, Upper West, and Upper East Regions), whereas, nearly two-thirds (63.3%) of the respondents were born in what is colloquially referred to as the "Southern" part of Ghana (Greater Accra, Eastern, Volta, Central, Western, Ashanti, and Brono Ahfo regions). The remaining four demographic variables assessed whether respondents were registered voters, voted in a previous election, intend to vote in the next election, and the extent to which they perceive themselves as conservative. Eighty-six percent identified themselves as registered voters, 53% did not vote in the previous national election, and 74% pointed out they intend to vote in the next national elections. In terms of the extent to which respondents are conservative, 17% reported not being conservative, whereas, approximately 37% are moderately conservative, 27% slightly conservative and 19% strongly conservative.

### **Structural non-demographic questions**

#### **The diversity of Ghanaians' opinions on which factors that lead to ethnic-tribal violence**

The first series of questions assessed the extent to which opinions differed on factors that lead to ethnic-tribal violence in Sub-Saharan Africa. The influences of political parties, economic inequality appear to be the most important factor that is likely to bring about ethnic-tribal violence. On average, 49% indicated local policy factor is more associated with violence than either regional (27%)

or national policy (25%). In asking respondents whether political parties play an important function in supporting or suppressing ethnic-tribal unity (e.g. communalism), there was approximately less than 6% difference in their responses-37.7 and 39.6%, respectively. However, about 27% noted political parties suppress communalism or collective behaviour. The majority of respondents are of the perspective that the higher the level of economic inequality, the higher the risk of domestic armed conflict in sub-Saharan Africa (73%), and slightly more than 20% (19.2%) did not know if economic inequality influences armed conflict.

On the general question of which issue is considered the most important in explaining ethnic violence, the responses are diverse. Thirty-three percent of those polled indicated failure to convict those responsible for ethnic conflict as most important. Slightly more than 25 percent (26.0%) noted political engineered ethnic violence as the second most important issue, failure of security forces (19.9%), and political instigated ethnic violence (17.0%). On an additional question of which factor is more likely to bring about ethnic violence in sub-Saharan Africa, 45% suggested perceptions of superiority are more likely to bring violence than prejudice (29.5%), when politicians excite people to act aggressively (16.5%) or when politicians threaten people with violence (9.7%).

### **No perfect electoral system**

When respondents were questioned on electoral violence, issues facing established democracies and whether there was a perfect electoral system, responses were diverse. A slight majority (51.4%) perceive vote count irregularities is more likely to be associated with electoral violence and power-hungry politicians exploiting ethnic sentiments resulted in a 9.1% difference (42.3%) than vote count irregularities. There was a 2% difference in responses when participants were asked if not being able to cast a vote (4.2%) or if incumbent being sworn in for a second term (2.2%) is associated with electoral violence in sub-Saharan Africa. In a similar analogous question associated with voting, a thin majority (51.4%) stipulate the most difficult issue confronting established and new democracies in sub-Saharan Africa is the management of ethnic conflict. Twenty-five percent reported the second most difficult is the spreading of nationalism. A strong majority of those surveyed agreed (86.7%) there is no perfect electoral system which fits every country and that arrangements have to be tailored to each particular national context and choices involving trade-offs; on average, 2% were not in agreement.

### **Stability of government and the economy**

There appears to be some support, on the surface, for the general assumption and preference for stability of government, maintenance of civil order, and stability of economic system. To some extent, more than two-thirds (68.3%) reported it is true nations can maintain stability of government notwithstanding being deeply divided into distinct cultural community. Fifty - two percent indicated maintaining order in the nation, followed by giving people more to say in important government decisions (37.3%), protecting freedom of speech (7.4%), and fighting increasing cost of living prices (2.9%) are important for a country. Similarly, stability of the economy (57.0%) exceeded that for progress towards less impersonal and humane society (18.9%), and progress towards a society where ideas are more important (20.9%), and where three percent (3%) cited environ pollution as a major concern.

### **Extent of trust**

One of the interesting areas of inquiry in sociological research is the measurement of social distance and trust. The research was interested in the measure of the extent of trust among Ghanaians. In this regard there appears to emerge differences in the extent to which respondents are willing to trust others. It is presumed, if a person, on average, is willing to accept all those preceding it in a list of social situations. Clearly, a majority of those polled have trust towards their family (66.8%) whereas; approximately 29% were somewhat trustful of their family. When asked if there was trust of neighbour, there was a 5% difference between trust (55%) and no trust of neighbour (45%). On the extent of trust in meeting people, people of another religion, another ethnic group, and different nationalities, Ghanaians are slightly more reserved in giving trust to those they meet for the first time (60.5%) as compared to trusting (39.5%). In trusting people of another nationality, it displays a similar pattern in responses for trusting (39.8%) and not trusting (60.2%). However, participants, to some extent, have trust towards people of another religion (57.5%) and people of another ethnic group (51.8%), comparatively.

### **Governing systems**

Responses on six questions pertaining to impression of governmental systems varied. Unquestionably, Ghanaians have a very good impression and preference for a representative political system (88.0%), followed by a monarchical governmental system 48.0%.

Respondents did not report a generally good notion of a governmental system ruled by a strong leader (56.0%) or by when the army rules government (85.2%). A government system headed by a self-appointed leader generated a comparatively bad notion among those surveyed (92.3%). When asked if a government system guided by professionals was good (43.6%), a slight majority indicated it was bad (56.3%)

### **Source of learning**

On the question people use different sources to learn about what is going on around them, in Ghana, and in the world, survey participants show contrast in their sources of obtaining information. The largest percentage (37.0%) of the people use news broadcast on television as a primary source, excluding in-depth reporting. Though, news broadcast on television, radio, and in-depth electronic reports (e.g. television and radio) collectively represented approximately two-thirds of all respondents (66.8%) source of obtaining information. Nearly 16% (15.7%) appear reliant on the print media (e.g. newspapers) and about 11% (11.3%) utilize the internet for sources of information. Talking with friends and colleagues, and books were 3 and 4% respectively

### **Top priority for Ghana's leaders**

Participants were asked to provide responses centred on which of the three issues Ghana leaders should prioritize in addressing. To some extent, less than two-thirds (64.0%) articulated reducing ethnic conflict and violence as a top priority. Approximately, 25% indicated someone accepting a bribe in the course of their professional duties, and 11% declare protecting the environment as the third priority Ghana's leaders should consider.

### **Kenya elections**

The survey assessed two general areas pertaining to electoral violence. Two questions channelled to respondents were on the source of Kenya's electoral violence and what is the source of violence in Kenyan communities. These two questions attempted to differentiate between electoral violence and violence in Kenyan communities that may have been independent of the electoral process. On the first issue source of Kenya's electoral violence respondents noted alleged election irregularities (31.0%) and power - hungry politicians exploiting ethnic sentiments (35.9%) as sources of



electoral violence. When participants considered anticipated post election violence (9.8%), distrust of one ethnic group against another (12.8%), and ethnic divisions (10.6%) as a source of electoral violence in Kenya, responses averaged out to approximately 11%, respectively.

### **Kenyan style of election violence not likely**

Slightly greater than two-thirds (68%) of all respondents indicated Ghana would not likely experience similar violence as Kenya in the December 2008 Ghanaian elections. Twenty-three percent were unsure whether violence would occur and less than ten percent reported violence would occur during the elections.

### **Contributors to stability and instability**

Participants were asked which factor is more likely to contribute to stability or instability in Africa. On the notion of stability, a greater percentage (41.6%) identified political stability as an important factor than national security (24.6%) and economic stability (21.9%). However, on the general inquiry over the past ten years which factors contributed to instability in Africa, respondents were more diverse. Roughly 26% note the 'political cycle of instability in Africa' than either politicians becoming corrupt and taking advantage of their position (22.6%) and the inability to avoid tribal conflict which has plagued many Africa nations (22.6%). Of interest, approximately 4% mention tension between Christian and Muslims as a factor.

### **The main problem in Ghana**

Many of those polled differ in their views with respect to Ghana's present and future economic health and identifying which of eight pre-selected main problems exist in Ghana. On the general question how satisfied are you today with the Ghanaian economy,' apparently, a slender but larger percentage of respondents are dissatisfied (52.6%) as compared with those who are satisfied (47.4%) with the Ghanaian economy. When posed with the question concerning their level of confidence about the Ghanaian future economy, participants, on a margin of two-to-one, are more confident (68.3%) than not being confident about Ghana's future economic health (31.7%). Nonetheless, when asked to identify the main problem in Ghana, the responses were fairly nebulous, with corruption (26.8%) and poverty (20.6%) as two of the main problems in Ghana, which was followed followed by unemployment (16.2%), economic problems

(12.8%), cost of living (10.8%), ethnic-tribal tensions (2.0%), and lastly, common crime (1.7%).

### **Discrimination**

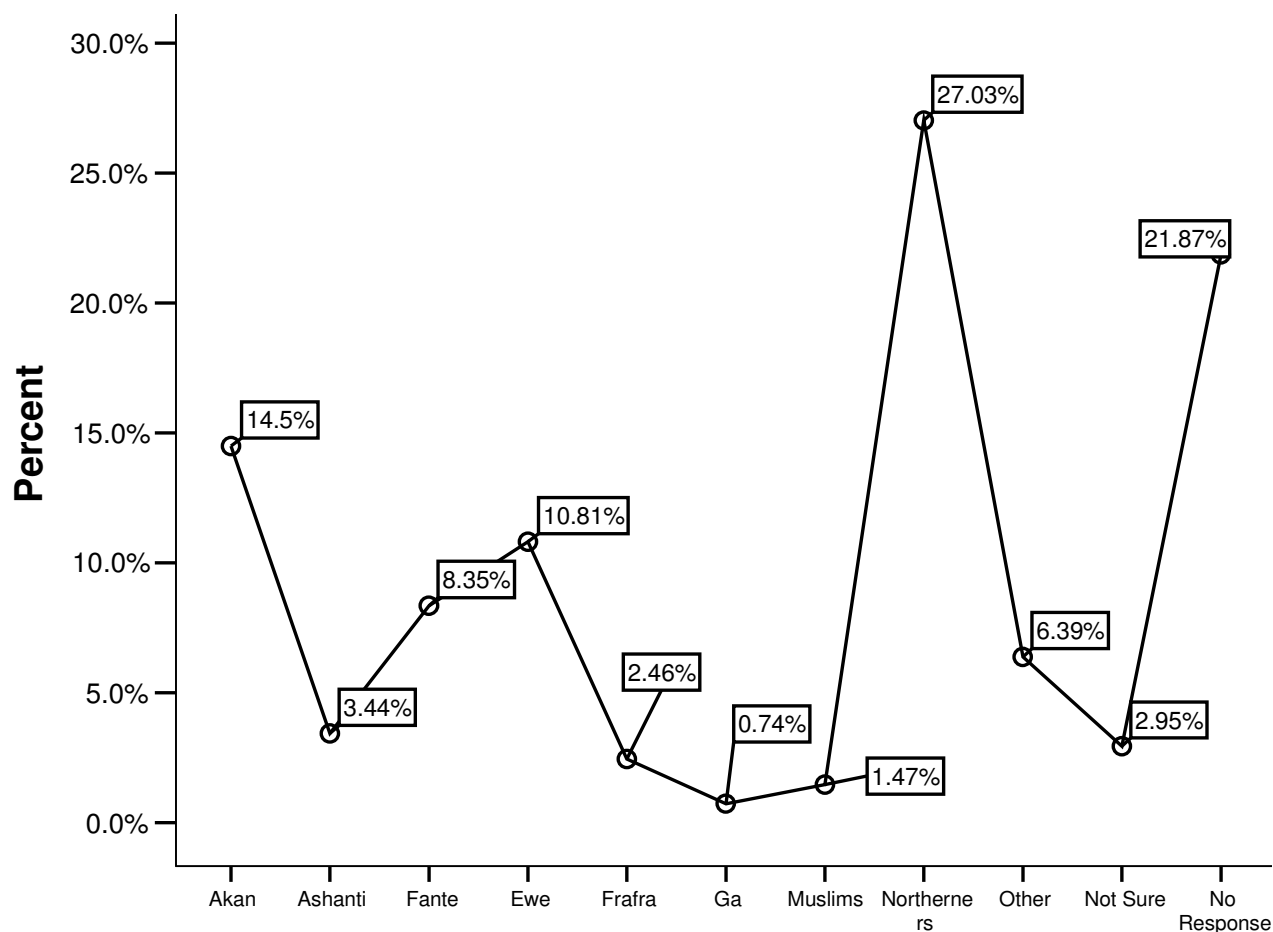
The overt negative and unequal treatment of the members of a social group or stratum of society appears to be a factor among many Ghanaians. When the research measured the extent to which those having participated in the survey if they have ever experienced being discriminated because of their ethnic or tribal affiliation, a majority (56.5%) noted they experienced discrimination as reflected against those who had not experienced discrimination because of their ethnic or tribal association (43.0%).

### **Group identification and allegiance**

Socialization is a process by which people learn the expectations of society, and socialization is the basis of identity, which is how an individual defines oneself. In an endeavour to measure the extent of ethnic-tribal identification and allegiance, the survey asked three general questions: Which statement best describes national identity in Ghana, Which statement best describes ethnic-tribal identification in Ghana and, Does the average Ghanaian have an allegiance more to ethnic-tribal ties or to a Ghanaian identity. The three questions aimed to understand how participants understood identification and allegiance of others and not their own identification or allegiance. On the question describing ethnic-tribal identification, roughly 80% of those polled, collectively suggested, that ethnicity-tribal identification is the most important (36.9%) and other respondents suggested it is extensive in Ghana (43.7%) whereas 18% indicated ethnic-tribal identification does not exist in Ghana. The pattern and extent of ethnic-tribal identification is analogous to those who reported national identity in Ghana is modest (57.2%) compared with those reporting an extensive degree of national identity (38.1%). Moreover, more than two-quarters of the respondents point out there is more of an allegiance to ethnic-tribal ties (76.6%) than to an allegiance to a national Ghanaian identity.

### **Least respected group**

The study asked respondents to identify which ethnic-tribal group is the least respected in Ghana (Figure 1). The type and number of response to the question were capacious and at times indistinguishable from other ethnic groups. However, the research was able to collapse the diversity of responses into the following nine



**Figure 1.** Least respected ethnic-tribal group in Ghana  $n = 407$ , mean = 28.14, SD = 40.12.

categories: Akan, Ashanti, Fanti, Ewe, Frafra, Ga, Muslims, Northerners, Other, and Not Sure. On average, Northerners as a category (27.0%) was identified as the least respected group. When considering Akan speakers collectively, as a linguistic group (e.g. Akan, Ashanti, and Fanti), their overall percentage (26.2%) approached that of Northerners as the least respected group. However, respondents polled were ethnic less likely to identify Ga (74%) and Frafra (1.74%) as the least respected ethnic group in Ghana. Interestingly, approximately 22% did not provide a response to the question in identifying the ethnic-tribal group least respected in Ghana.

#### **Ethnic loyalties, competition, democracy and control of violence**

Four broad questionnaire items attempt to appraise the level of ethnic loyalties, ethnic religious competition, democracy, and the ability of government to control

ethnic-tribal violence. When participants were asked if ethnic loyalties work against attempts at democracy and democratic reform, respondents were approximately evenly divided on the question, nearly 49 percent noted ethnic loyalties work against, while 51% noted ethnic loyalties work with attempts at democracy. On a similar question, can democracy flourish in Africa alongside ethnic-tribal loyalties? There was a 20% difference in responses, in which 60% said that democracy can flourish alongside tribal-ethnic loyalties, while 40% said that democracy could not flourish alongside ethnic-tribal loyalties.

Ghanaians are more likely to concur that ethnic-religious competition will lead to outcomes that are normally more violent and deadly. Forty-six percent communicated there is a moderate extent, while 36.60%, a great extent. Ethnic-religious competition outcomes are normally violent and deadly. On the other hand, 14% reported that there is a small extent and about 4% reported that such competition will not become violent and

deadly. The concluding questionnaire item indicated which form of government is more likely to control ethnic violence and conflict in Africa. More than three-quarters (75.9%) of all responses unambiguously indicate a representative government by the people and for the people would be more likely to control ethnic violence than one headed by a royal family (4.2%), government system where one person has nearly total control (5.4%) or a government that has virtually complete control and surveillance over all aspects of society (7.9%).

### **Recapitulation, discussion and general observations**

The survey on inter-communal violence and conflict was independently supported by the principal researcher and it is the first of its kind to estimate the variation in opinions among Ghanaians on inter-communal violence and conflict. The objective of this project was designed to measure the overall extent to which there are variations among people polled in Ghana on a number of questions pertaining to the subject matter of inter-communal violence and conflict, electoral violence, the source and potential of ethnic violence and conflict in sub-Saharan Africa.

The results indicate that there are differences in the overall general sample polled on number issues. On the general area which factor is most likely associated with ethnic violence in Sub-Saharan Africa, those surveyed described local policy (48.9%) than either independently regional or national policies is likely to be associated with causes of ethnic violence. Nearly 40% were not sure if political parties support or suppress collective behaviour. A clear majority (73.7%) highlighted the higher the level of economic inequality, the higher the level of armed conflict in Africa, which supports result indicating that the failure to convict (37.1%) people responsible for ethnic violence and failure (19.9%) of security forces in preventing ethnic violence adds in understanding and explaining in Africa. On a more salient and interpersonal level, prejudice (29.5%) and perception of superiority (49.5%) seem to have a great possibility and likely to bring about ethnic violence and conflict.

Research participants nearly and overwhelming are in agreement that there is no perfect electoral system (86.7%). Fifty-one percent suggested perceived vote counting irregularities and power-hungry politicians exploiting ethnic sentiments are linked with electoral violence and the most important issue that confronts established and (relatively) new democracies in Africa is the management of ethnic conflict (51.4%). On three similar questions, more than half of all respondents suggested that nations can maintain stability of government regardless of being deeply divided ethnically (68.3%),

maintenance of public order is important for a country (52.3%), and 57% pointed out a stable economy is the most important for a country in Africa. When participants were asked to give their opinion on which form of governmental system is preferred, just about 92% indicated having a governmental system with a self-appointment is dreadful followed by a government system where the army is in power; this was weighed against 88.5% whom indicated a governmental system that is representative in character is ideal.

The general extent of trust towards family (66.8%) is greater than for an individual affiliated with another religion (57.6%), one's neighbour (55%). The general level of distrust (48.1%) compared to trust (51.8%) of people of a different ethnic group is roughly even among those polled, and 60% lack trust for people of another nationality.

In regard to the violence in Kenya during her presidential election in December 2007, the general sources of electoral violence were identified as alleged election irregularities (31%) and the exploitation of ethnic sentiments by power-hungry politicians (35.9%), which seems to parallel responses for violence instigated by top official (30.7%); and also distrust of the electoral process (33.2%) as sources of violence in Kenyan communities. When asked if similar style violence may occur during Ghana's presidential election (December 2008), a majority (68.0%) inferred Kenyan style violence is not likely. The 2008 Ghanaian presidential elections occurred without any violence and did not reflect any degree of the violence that manifested in Kenya during its 2007 presidential elections.

Two interesting findings in the survey appear to be related to sentiments of personal discrimination and the identification of which ethnic-tribal group is considered the least respected in Ghana. Slightly more than 55% of all those whom participated in the research indicated having experienced discrimination. Perceptions and experiences of being discriminated against may lead to collective behaviour such as riots that are generally stereotyped of people acting alone irrationally; however, behaviour during riots are often socially organized and typically follow predictable sociological patterns. When one considers the underlying social structures condition such as the unequal distribution of perceived scarce and valuable resources, riots and other forms of violent interaction are typically sparked by precipitating events, such as confrontation with oppositional groups, police or security forces. For riots or other similar forms of collective rancour to occur, generally a number of precipitating factors are present such as brutality, deprivation, unaddressed injustices and grievances (Olzak, 1983; Shanahan and Olzark, 1999; Tiernary, 1994).

On the question which ethnic-tribal group is the least

respect, a greater percentage indicated northerners (27%) as the least respected in Ghana. As previously noted, the second least respected ethnic were identified as Akan (14.5%), but Akan speakers collectively (e.g. Akan, Ashanti, and Fanti), as a linguistic group, (26.2%) were identified as the least respected in Ghana. A hidden but often felt and sometime noticed is the tensions that exist in the Cape Coast municipality, which surfaces in conversation between members who are considered Akan and Ewe speakers. Ewe speakers are generally found in considerable number along the general area of the Eastern region of Ghana and Ewe speakers linguistically are also found in Ghana's eastern boarder nation of Togo.

It is generally understood in Ghana, and on average, that Northerner take more likely to Islamic than of the Christian faith. A difference if cultural practices between the two communities appear to be tolerated on the surface but subsurface there appears to be a considerable tension. This tension may be indirectly or directly related to attempts at religious conversion which in turn may produce religion-related violence. When speaking to some people in private, one may hear comment such as "those Christians are troubling with their public proselytizing" and "Southerners are arrogant" or "those Muslims are polygamist wanting Islamic law" and "Northerners are backward moving." Such ephemeral comments are examples of slight subsurface indicators of tensions that exist between Northerners and Southerners or between Muslims and Christians in Ghana.

Religious conversions and religion related violence against individuals and religious structure have been in the news for sometime in West Africa. Globally and historically, such conversions have been controversial, resulting in violence. This sensitivity of Northerner versus Southern in the allocation of scarce and valuable resources, coupled with experience of having feelings of been prejudiced against and experiencing perception of superiority in others, could become the catalyst by which Ghana's relatively stable internal ethnic relations become dangerously volatile and unstable politically for West Africa.

What is particularly interesting is that nearly 22% of all respondents did not respond to the question: "Which ethnic group is least respected in Ghana?" It is the researcher's contention that the number of respondents declining to identify the least respected group may be partially associated with a sense of not remaining anonymous in the survey or by others in indicating a particular group as least respected. Such opinion polling behaviour may extend from the observation that Ghanaians are more likely not to collectively engage in group debate or replying to a survey instrument. That is, it is not uncommon to find survey participants are given assistance

by someone in replying to a questionnaire instrument, which may reflect the com-munal and discursive nature of reaching a decision among some Ghanaians. Such research participant behaviour produces both validity and reliability methodological problems in conducting survey research in Ghana.

The prevalence of the comparatively high opinion that ethnic competition ranges between moderately to a great extent ((82%), with a considerable degree of opinion indicating ethnic-tribal identification (80.6%) and allegiance to ethnic-tribal ties, (76.7%) is presently adding to the probable future greater ethnic tensions and violence in Ghana. Though, Ghana's level of internal strife is not comparable to its neighbours, and the potential for destabilising ethnic violence looms under the social fabric of Ghanaian society.

There is a general impression among Ghanaians that the violence which has occurred in other West Africa countries is less likely to occur in Ghana. Power (2008) has suggested that there was false dawn of ethnic conflict. He cites the research of Fearon and Laitian (2000) that in Africa, along with Europe, there were hundreds upon hundreds, even thousands of different pairs of ethnic groups but there were less than a dozen violent conflicts prior to the beginning of the millennium. However, on closer examination and to a certain extent Power's appears partially correct in that there were a small number of violent conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa compared to the 1980s and 1990s. On the other hand, if we take a closer examination at violent conflicts that are not acknowledged by the international media, one will begin to notice there were more than one would expect. Consider the Wa Naa and Dogbana chieftaincy disputes, and the clashes in Bawku, the Upper East Region, Ghana (2002), the ongoing clashes between Christians and Muslims in Northern Nigeria, recent Ivorian disagreement and conflict over presidential elections, December 2008 Coupe in Guinea, the violent confrontation between Ethiopia and Eritrea, Ethiopia and Sudan, Ethiopia and Somali, cross boarder violence between Chad and the Sudan, and between the Islamic parties and the government in Algeria.

Ethnic mobilization becomes increasingly important in all politics since World War one and the most common cause of state-level violence has not been external wars, but internal ethnic conflict (Said and Simmons, 1976). However, since political cleavages become tangible at the national level, it is generally necessary for extensive structural differentiation to overwhelm communities within a country. (Ragin, 1979) And cultural distinctiveness must be spiked, otherwise, those group or community members who are disadvantaged and experience exclusion will simply let go their distinct cultural practices in favour of assimilation or absorption (Gellner, 1969). The findings

of this survey suggest ethnic identification and allegiance is above average, and discrimination is a factor. And cultural distinctiveness, coupled with experiences of exclusion and political factionalisms aggravated by economic factors, may be the tipping stone(s) that give rise to ethnic mobilization which in turn may spark inter or (intra) ethnic conflict and violence.

The findings of this survey suggest that Ghana may have just below the surface of its social structure factors which may ignite inter-communal violence despite being considered by many to be a stable country in West Africa. At least, five general precipitating factors are: 1) increasing economic inequality, 2) growth in individual and group perceptions of prejudice and discrimination, 3) the escalation of the lack of trust beyond one's family, 4) explicit stigmatization of the least acceptable ethnic groups and, 5) increasing tension in ethnic-religious competition, if aggravate over time, has the potential to produce inter-communal violence that may destabilize Ghana and create tension in West Africa. Wide spread inter-communal violence in Ghana may bring about a refugee crisis for Anglophone West African nations, creating additional situations for other dimensions of inter-communal violence.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

It would be interesting to conduct a follow-up survey which explores in more depth the opinions of Ghanaians regarding prejudice, discrimination, and exclusion; the extent of social distance between Northerners and Southerners, and the political and social competition between Christians and Muslims. Some issues that would be interesting to explore in such a survey would be:

1. How much do Ghanaians understand the prevalence of prejudice and discrimination in Ghana?
2. How much are they (Ghanaians) aware of the scope to which social distance is practiced in Ghana?
3. How much do respondents know about the solutions to prejudice, discrimination, and exclusion?
4. How much do respondents care about issue related to ethnic violence and conflict?
5. To what extent do respondents know which group behaviours contribute to inter and/or intra-communal violence and conflict?
6. What solutions may be implemented to reduce ethnic tension and conflict in Ghana?

There are numerous well known proverbs throughout many cultures and these commentaries or idioms often serve as reminders, reflections of social reality, and are expressive and instrumental references. The seven expressions help illustrate the hidden and potential impact of inter-communal:

"It is peace that provides milk" - Somalia

"War has no eyes" - Swahili

"Peace is costly but it is worth the expense" - unknown

"Do not vacillate or you will be left in between doing something, having something and being nothing." - Ethiopia

"I object to violence because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent" - Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

"Peace we want because there is another war to fight: against poverty and disease" -Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.

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