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State-Society Collaboration in Peacebuilding in Northern Ghana

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Summary of Dissertation

Political violence remain a pressing security concern in sub-Saharan Africa. In Ghana, ethno-political conflicts persist in spite of the country's successful democratic development, challenging the popular view among scholars that lack of democratic institutions account for the high levels of political violence in Africa. Liberal peace theories are premised on the assumption that building democratic institutions will lead to less political violence because these institutions produce more accountability and legitimacy, and less grievances.

To protect citizens from political violence, successive governments in Ghana employ various policies, including ad hoc committees, presidential commissions of inquiries, state of emergencies and curfews in an attempt to resolve conflicts among different groups. The persistence of ethno-political conflicts in the country indicates the failure of such policies. This brings up three related questions: (1) why do ethno-political conflicts persist in Ghana, in spite of the country's successful democratization, (2) why do conventional government policies aimed at resolving ethno-political conflicts fail, and (3) why were attempts to resolve the 1994-95 civil war in the Northern Region more successful than other conflicts in the region.

To address these questions, this study focuses on the concept of state-society relations to develop a framework to analyze the effects of government policies on the dynamics of three ethno-political conflicts in Northern Ghana: the Bawku and Dagbon chieftaincy conflicts and the Guinea Fowl war of 1994-95 in the Northern Region. This framework identifies three types of state-society

relations that explains the success or failure of policies aimed at resolving ethno-political conflicts. These include (a) peace making state, (b) captured state, and (c) isolated state.

Policies of the peace making state are successful in resolving ethno-political conflicts because they involve a collaboration between an accommodative government, a proactive civil society and a responsive traditional society. An accommodative government recognizes that it needs information from, and participation of, civil and traditional societies to resolve ethno-political conflicts. A proactive civil society actively participates in peacebuilding, rather than merely providing relief goods and services during conflict situations, and a responsive traditional society is receptive to new ideas, perceptions, attitudes, relationships and giving peace a chance. The collaboration between these three players enables the peace making state address the root causes of ethno-political conflicts.

This study contributes to the literature on political violence in Africa by challenging the existing view that the lack of democratic institutions, such as free and fair elections accounts for the persistence of ethno-political conflicts and violence on the continent. In this study, we find that new democracies in Africa are unable to achieve a democratic peace dividend because the policy choices of political leaders are crucial for the resolution of ethno-political conflicts.