ELITES AND DEMOCRACY IN GHANA: A SOCIAL NETWORK APPROACH

ANJA OSEI*

ABSTRACT

This article presents new theoretical and empirical insights into democratization in Africa, using the typology developed by John Higley and Michael Burton to understand elite interaction in Ghana. Social network analysis (SNA) is used to test the main proposition of the Higley/Burton theory, namely that a 'liberal democracy is impossible without a consensually united elite'. Empirical evidence is provided from a unique data set that maps the interaction patterns between Members of Parliament elected to the Ghanaian legislature in 2012. The article shows that MPs in Ghana form a dense and strongly interconnected network bridging ethnic and party cleavages, and that MPs from different parties have developed a measure of trust in one another. These findings not only support Higley and Burton's claim that elite integration is conducive to stable democracy, but also point to new directions in African Studies by demonstrating the capacity of actor-centric approaches to explain processes of democratization in countries that lack the classic structural preconditions for consolidation.

THE QUESTION OF WHY SOME COUNTRIES become more democratic than others has been a constant issue in political science. Two main explanatory approaches can be distinguished: structural and actor-centric. Structural explanations consider wealth, urbanization, industrialization, and education as factors that are positively related to the emergence of stable democracies.[1] Actor-centric conceptions, in contrast, reject the idea that democracy rests on a set of economic and social preconditions,[2] instead emphasizing

1. Seymour Martin Lipset, 'Some social requisites of democracy: Economic development and political legitimacy', *American Political Science Review*, 53 (1959), pp. 69–105.
2. Dankwart A. Rustow, 'Transitions to democracy: Toward a dynamic model', *Comparative Politics* 2 (1970), pp. 337–63.

processes of elite bargaining and strategic interaction.[3] Initially, the third wave of democratization seemed to support the actor-centric idea that democracy can thrive in all kinds of settings.[4] This was especially evident in Africa, where some of the poorest countries – hitherto referred to as 'unlikely democratizers'[5] – introduced multi-party systems. Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle's analysis of African transitions as processes of strategic interaction between popular protests and elite responses lends further support to the strategic approach.[6]

However, from the mid-1990s onwards, it became clear that not all cases of transition would end up as consolidated democracies. A number of successful democracies exist alongside surviving autocracies and hybrid regimes that are neither fully democratic nor autocratic. A 'new crop of preconditionists' began to refine and extend a set of arguments through which to explain the relationship between socio-economic development and democracy.[7] Various other structural variables were investigated, such as the colonial background of countries, their ethnic and religious composition, political culture, institutions, and the existence of a democratic neighbourhood. Overall, structural factors have proven to have significant explanatory power, but there remains a group of countries whose democratic achievements or non-achievements are not well predicted from structural prerequisites.[8] In these 'deviant cases', actor-centric explanations may contribute in important ways to our understanding of political transitions.[9] Interestingly, Africa hosts an unusually high number of deviant cases. In his worldwide study of the determinants of democratization, Jan Teorell finds ten such cases, six of which are in Africa.[10] Similarly, three of the five deviant cases described by Renske Dorenspleet and Petr Kopecký are African countries, as are seven of the twelve deviant cases Michael Seeberg cites.[11]

Thus there is good reason to take a fresh look at actor-centric explanations and specifically the role of elites, which in this article will refer to

3.   Guillermo A. O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, *Transitions from authoritarian rule* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD, 1986).
4.   Sheri Berman, 'Lessons from Europe', *Journal of Democracy* 18 (2007), pp. 28–41.
5.   Larry Diamond, 'The rule of law versus the big man', *Journal of Democracy* 19 (2008), pp. 138–49.
6.   Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle, 'Popular protest and political reform in Africa', *Comparative Politics* 24 (1992), pp. 419–42; Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle, 'Neopatrimonial regimes and political transitions in Africa', *World Politics*, 46 (1994), pp. 453–89.
7.   Berman, 'Lessons from Europe', p. 31.
8.   Renske Doorenspleet and Petr Kopecký, 'Against the odds: Deviant cases of democratization', *Democratization* 15 (2008), pp. 697–713.
9.   Doorenspleet and Kopecký, 'Against the odds', p. 710; see also Jan Teorell, *Determinants of democratization: Explaining regime change in the world, 1972–2006* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010).
10.   Teorell, *Determinants of democratization*.
11.   Doorenspleet and Kopecký, 'Against the odds'; Michael Seeberg, 'Mapping deviant democracy', *Democratization* 21 (2014), pp. 634–54.

political elites, with a focus on MPs. Actor-centric and structural approaches are not mutually exclusive, since structures and human actions are dialectically linked and presuppose each other.[12] However, while structural variables can be tested relatively easily in quantitative studies, the relationship between elites and democracy is much harder to grasp. The aim of the article is twofold. First, it shows the relevance of elite theory to the study of democratization in Africa. Taking the premise that no democracy is possible without a consensually united elite as a starting point, this article presents a first empirical test of the Higley/Burton theory in an African case: Ghana. Second, it demonstrates that a Social Network Analysis (SNA) can be applied fruitfully to the empirical study of elite structures on the continent.

Ghana represents a suitable case for this article because it is clearly a country that has achieved a high quality of democracy in the absence of many of the structural conditions that are said to promote democratic consolidation. Notwithstanding the controversy over how democracy should be measured, few would dispute that Ghana belongs in this category. According to Freedom House, Ghana's quality of democracy has increased continuously over recent decades, and the country is rated as 'free'.[13] At the same time, Ghana was not blessed with a particularly promising starting point: the country is ethnically diverse; has a history of military coups and political instability; and at the start of the multi-party period recorded a low GDP and high unemployment. It is therefore intuitively plausible that an actor-centric approach may be better placed to explain Ghana's democratic consolidation. In this sense, Ghana represents what Harry Eckstein calls a 'crucial case'.[14] Crucial cases are those that 'must closely fit a theory if one is to have confidence in the theory's validity, or, conversely, must not fit'.[15] Ghana is a 'must fit' case: if the proposition that a liberal democracy is impossible without a consensually united elite is valid, then Ghana must reveal precisely the elite structure that the theory predicts.

The article is organized as follows. First, a theoretical section on united and disunited elites introduces the analytical framework and discusses how elite theory can be linked to democratization studies. Based on this foundation, the article argues that democracy requires a profound transformation of elite behaviour towards greater unity. Using SNA, this proposition is tested in the case of Ghana. Empirical evidence comes from a unique data

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12. Anthony Giddens, *Central problems in social theory: Action, structure and contradiction in social analysis* (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 1979).
13. For their evaluation of Ghana, and the methodology that they employ, see <www.freedomhouse.org> (15 July 2015)
14. Eckstein, *Regarding politics*, p. 65.
15. *Ibid.*; see also John Gerring, 'Is there a (viable) crucial-case method?', *Comparative Political Studies* 40 (2007), pp. 231–53.

set that maps the interaction patterns between MPs elected in 2012. It is found that the network is densely connected, and that there are frequent contacts between MPs of different party affiliation and ethnic origin. These findings provide strong evidence for the Higley/Burton thesis that elite unity promotes democratic consolidation. The concluding section of the article puts the research results into comparative perspective and highlights the causal path of elite transformation in Ghana. Special attention is paid to two important factors: the role of the two-party system in the process of transformation, and the interaction between ethnicity and party loyalties as a stabilizing factor for elite unity.

United and disunited elites

Scholars studying the relationship between regime types and elite structures agree that elite integration fosters stability.[16] Elite integration has two important dimensions: structural integration, which involves the relative inclusiveness of communication networks among elite persons and groups; and values consensus, which involves a general consensus on the rules of the game.[17] On the basis of these dimensions, John Higley and Michael Burton develop a typology of elite structures and corresponding regime types.[18] According to their view, liberal democracy is only possible with a consensually united elite, which is characterized by 'dense and interlocked networks of communication and influence'.[19] Important elites must have access to central decision making, but they must also share basic values and norms of political behaviour, and recognize bargaining as an acceptable mode of operation.[20] The consensus on values does not necessarily refer to specific issues, but rather to the rules of the game – in other words, elites must agree to disagree.[21] Disunited elites, by contrast, are divided by cultural, ethnic, or political cleavages and deeply mistrust each other.[22] Furthermore, they lack a sufficient amount of structural integration because their communication networks do not cross factional boundaries.[23] Regimes with disunited elites

16. Robert D. Putnam, *The comparative study of political elites* (Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1976).
17. John Higley and Michael Burton, *Elite foundations of liberal democracy* (Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, MD, 2006).
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid*, p. 11.
21. Fredrik Engelstad, 'Democratic elitism: Conflict and consensus', in Heinrich Best and John Higley (eds), *Democratic elitism: New theoretical and comparative perspectives* (Brill, Leiden and Boston, MA, 2010), pp. 61–78.
22. Putnam, *The comparative study of political elites*, p. 119.
23. Michael Burton, Richard Gunther, and John Higley, 'Introduction', in John Higley and Richard Gunther (eds), *Elites and democratic consolidation in Latin America and southern Europe* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992), pp. 1–37.

tend to be unstable because competing elite factions perceive the existing regime as the vehicle of a dominant elite faction that needs to be toppled by violent means.[24] Any regime change towards democracy will therefore remain temporary unless it is preceded or accompanied by a transformation of elite structures and behaviour.[25]

Elite transformations are, however, relatively rare events.[26] They can take two forms: a sudden settlement of disputes, or a slow convergence toward shared norms of political behaviour. Settlements are most likely to take place after conflicts in which all parties suffered losses, or under the threat of an outbreak of violence. Such initial compromises are no guarantee for the thriving of democracy, but they provide the basis for a subsequent broadening of the scope of elite unity. Settlements can only be successful if they are perceived as legitimate by wide sections of the population. Daniel Levine shows that strong parties were central to this process in the case of Venezuela, because they 'provided elites with sufficient leverage to impose settlements on rank and file members'.[27] Another important aspect is the building of new institutions and procedures for handling conflict.[28] Moreover, many authors emphasize the role of personal interactions, which reduce the probability of intra-elite conflict and help to build mutual trust.[29]

Elections are an important step in the process of elite transformation. Michael Burton *et al.* describe this as follows: first, some of the opposing elite factions realize that they can win elections repeatedly by forming broad electoral coalitions.[30] A series of defeats then convinces hostile or dissident elite factions of the necessity 'to beat the … dominant coalition at its own electoral game'.[31] As a result, they abandon anti-system stances, acknowledge the rules of the game, and become trustworthy competitors.[32] The process of elite transformation is usually completed by the electoral victory of previously dissident elites.[33] The key idea here is that consensually united elites are a precondition for democracy because they are able to manage conflicts by non-violent and institutional means. Their dense and interlocked webs of

24.   *Ibid.*, p. 10.
25.   John Higley and Michael Burton, 'The elite variable in democratic transitions and breakdowns', *American Sociological Review* 54 (1989), pp. 17–32.
26.   Higley and Burton, *Elite foundations of liberal democracy*, p. 3.
27.   Daniel H. Levine, 'Venezuela since 1958: The consolidation of democratic politics', in Juan Linz and Alfred C. Stepan (eds), *The breakdown of democratic regimes: Latin America* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD, and London, 1978), pp. 82–109.
28.   *Ibid.*, p. 102.
29.   Anthony Giddens, *The class structure of the advanced societies* (Hutchinson, London, 1973). See also Putnam, *The comparative study of political elites*, pp. 112 ff.
30.   Burton, Gunther, and Higley, 'Introduction', p. 24.
31.   *Ibid.*
32.   *Ibid.*
33.   *Ibid.*

communication give elites mutual security even after missteps and during political crises.[34]

Empirical research on elite structures and behaviour has greatly benefited from the SNA approach, which allows researchers to map social structures and examine relationships between actors.[35] The method can be applied fruitfully to the Higley/Burton theory, because the authors make clear statements about the relationship between elite structures and regimes. As stated above, consensually united elites are connected by dense and interlocked networks; in other words, their networks have a high degree of cohesion. Cohesive elite networks are important for democracies because they allow information and other resources to flow fast and reach a great number of people. It is further assumed that important elites have access to each other and to central decision making.[36] If this requirement is to be fulfilled, the structure of the network must be such that no single actor or faction is able to control the flow of resources, which in turn makes possible the 'politics as bargaining' that Higley and Burton emphasize. A decentralized elite network is therefore a prerequisite for democracy. In authoritarian regimes, by contrast, a star-like network would be expected, in which the most central actor – usually the leader – controls the flow of information and all other resources.

Using SNA, empirical evidence of consensually united elites has been found in Western democracies such as Australia, West Germany, and the US.[37] In all three countries, a densely connected network structure exists.[38] The few studies of disunited elites have revealed an absence of personal contacts between the main factions,[39] and studies on authoritarian regimes found network structures that are strongly centralized around the leadership.[40]

Can these ideas be applied to African countries? In Higley and Burton's book, African cases are mentioned but not elaborated on at length. The theory has attracted little attention in African Studies, where elite politics have been discussed mainly in connection with the phenomenon of neo-patrimonialism. In neo-patrimonial states, a system of formal rules coexists

34. Higley and Burton, *Elite foundations of liberal democracy*, p. 12.
35. Ursula Hoffmann-Lange, 'Methods of elite research', in Russell J. Dalton and Hans-Dieter Klingemann (eds), *The Oxford handbook of political behaviour* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007); David Knoke, 'Networks of elite structure and decision making', *Sociological Methods and Research* 22 (1993), pp. 23–45.
36. John Higley, Ursula Hoffmann-Lange, Charles Kadushin, and Gwen Moore, 'Elite integration in stable democracies: A reconsideration', *European Sociological Review* 7 (1991), pp. 35–53.
37. Gwen Moore, 'The structure of a national elite network', *American Sociological Review* 44 (1979), pp. 673–92; Higley *et al.*, 'Elite integration in stable democracies'.
38. *Ibid.*
39. Higley and Burton, 'The elite variable in democratic transitions', p. 19.
40. Higley and Burton, *Elite foundations of liberal democracy*, p. 10.

with a clientelist system of personal relations.[41] This literature offers interesting parallels to the Higley/Burton theory because it addresses a similar problem: the relationship between elite unity/disunity, on the one hand, and political stability/regime type on the other. However, there is still not much clarity about the relationship between neo-patrimonialism and political regimes. In a recent paper, Leonardo Arriola points to the paradoxical fact that the same arguments have been used to explain both the stability and the breakdown of African regimes.[42] Many authors, including Jean-François Bayart[43] and Donald Rothchild and Michael Foley,[44] have described patronage as a mechanism of elite integration. In this view, patronage networks contribute to political stability by merging competing elite segments – the 'big men' of various ethnic, religious, or regional communities – into a relatively cohesive ruling coalition. At the same time, however, patronage can be a source of instability because elites fracture over access to it.[45] Elite conflicts often spill over into widespread violence, especially when competing elites instrumentalize ethnic, religious, or other potentially divisive identities to garner support.

Whether or not patronage can serve as a mechanism of elite integration depends to a large degree on the availability of resources. Thus, when the economic crisis of the 1980s deprived leaders of their patronage capacity, the breakdown and disintegration of elite accommodation systems resulted in violent conflict in a number of countries.[46] In other countries, it forced leaders to open up the political space and give way to multi-party politics. In a third group of countries, the incumbent regimes were able to survive even the third wave of democratization; this group includes both resource-abundant countries like Gabon and relatively poor ones such as Togo. Arriola is therefore correct to criticize the literature on neo-patrimonialism for having 'failed to specify the conditions under which patronage enhances … stability'.[47] The same argument can be made for the relationship between democracy and neo-patrimonialism: are they irreconcilable, as some authors claim,[48] or do

41.   Gero Erdmann and Ulf Engel, 'Neopatrimonialism reconsidered: Critical review and elaboration of an elusive concept', *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 45 (2007), pp. 95–119.
42.   Leonardo R. Arriola, 'Patronage and political stability in Africa', *Comparative Political Studies* 42 (2009), pp. 1339–62.
43.   Jean-François Bayart, *The state in Africa* (Polity, Cambridge, 2009).
44.   Donald Rothchild and Michael W. Foley, 'African states and the politics of inclusive coalitions', in Donald S. Rothchild and Naomi H. Chazan (eds), *The precarious balance: State and society in Africa* (Westview Press, Boulder, CO, 1988).
45.   Bratton and van de Walle, 'Neopatrimonial regimes and political transitions in Africa'.
46.   William Reno, *Warlord politics and African states* (Lynne Rienner, Boulder, CO, 1998).
47.   Arriola, 'Patronage and political stability', p. 1340.
48.   Mamoudou Gazibo, 'Can neopatrimonialism dissolve into democracy?', in Daniel C. Bach (ed.), *Neopatrimonialism in Africa and beyond* (Routledge, London, 2012), pp. 79–89; Nicholas van de Walle, 'The path from neopatrimonialism: Democracy and clientelism in Africa today', in *ibid.*, pp. 111–23.

they in fact coexist, as others believe?[49] Has the transition to multi-party elections only led to intensified competition among a relatively narrow circle of elites,[50] or have there been more substantial changes in elite behaviour?

This article proposes to move away from the 'elusive concept'[51] of neopatrimonialism and to look at elite unity or disunity more specifically. This perspective allows a better understanding of how political competition is structured in Africa, and how these elite structures are linked to democracy. Second, it links Africanist scholarship to political sociology and opens up a dialogue between area-specific and more universalist approaches. Interestingly, a number of scholars working on Africa have advanced arguments that are akin to the Higley/Burton thesis discussed here. Especially in the cases of Ghana and South Africa there is some evidence that democracy has succeeded because of an underlying elite consensus.[52] Elite disunity, by contrast, is often seen as an obstacle to stable democracy.[53] While such works are important and insightful, we need more and better data to test these claims empirically. The next section will therefore introduce SNA as a promising research tool that can be deployed to achieve this aim.

Using social network analysis to test the Higley/Burton thesis in Ghana

A systematic investigation of elite unity and disunity can further our understanding of the variation between regime types on the African continent and elsewhere. On the methodological front, there is much to be gained from SNA. Although elite sociology has successfully employed it to study elite structures empirically, Africanists have used its terminology in a more metaphorical way to describe the network-like dyadic structure of clientelism.[54] SNA does not resolve the many conceptual and empirical problems inherent

49.   Linda J. Beck, *Brokering democracy in Africa: The rise of clientelist democracy in Senegal* (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, NY, 2008). Anne Pitcher, Mary Moran and Michael Johnston, 'Rethinking patrimonialism and neopatrimonialism in Africa', *African Studies Review* 52 (2009), pp. 125–56.

50.   Patrick Chabal, 'Power in Africa reconsidered', in Ulf Engel and Gorm Rye Olsen (eds), *The African exception* (Ashgate, Aldershot, 2005), pp. 17–34.

51.   Erdmann and Engel, 'Neopatrimonialism reconsidered'.

52.   Lindsay Whitfield, '"Change for a better Ghana": Party competition, institutionalization and alternation in Ghana's 2008 elections', *African Affairs* 108 (2009), pp. 621–41; Alexander K. D. Frempong, 'Political conflict and elite consensus in the liberal state', in Kwame Boafo-Arthur (ed.), *Ghana: One decade of the liberal state* (Zed Books, London, 2007), pp. 128–64; Johanna Odonkor Svanikier, 'Political elite circulation: Implications for leadership diversity and democratic regime stability in Ghana', *Comparative Sociology* 6 (2007), pp. 114–35.

53.   See, for example, Nic Cheeseman, 'The internal dynamics of power sharing in Africa', *Democratization,* 18, 2 (2011), pp. 336–65.

54.   Examples include Michael Bratton and Nicholas van de Walle, *Democratic experiments in Africa: Regime transitions in comparative perspective* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997); Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa works: Disorder as political instrument* (James Currey, Oxford, 1999), and Gero Erdmann and Ulf Engel, 'Neopatrimonialism reconsidered'. In their work, all these authors make frequent use of the term 'clientelistic networks' as a metaphor to describe relationships between actors.

in the study of clientelism, but it can make the relationships between actors visible.

The ability to test theories is generally seen as the primary strength of quantitative, cross-country research.[55] As many researchers have shown, however, it is possible to test theories using single-case studies.[56] For this method to work, two conditions must be fulfilled: the theory must be developed into a testable form,[57] and the case to be investigated must be carefully selected. The next section will first develop a test for the theory of interest, outlining how SNA works, and thereafter describe the process of data collection in Ghana.

With regard to the first point, the theory developed by Higley and Burton readily lends itself to deductive hypothesis testing because it makes certain clear statements about the relationship between elite structures and regimes. The hypotheses that are derived can be tested by means of SNA methods. There is no room here to provide a detailed introduction to network analysis; consequently, only a few core concepts directly related to the analysis are highlighted. To begin with, networks are composed of nodes and ties. In social networks, the nodes are the actors, and the ties are the relationships between them. There are three levels of analysis: the node level, the dyad, and the complete network.[58] Actors (nodes) have specific characteristics, such as gender and age. These characteristics often influence the formation of a dyad; in friendship networks, for example, women may have more relationships with other women, and men with other men. The network itself consists of chains of interconnected dyads. The ties in a network can be directed, meaning that one node is a sender of something that flows through a network (such as information or resources) while another node acts as a receiver. Moreover, ties can be valued. The value of a tie describes the intensity of a relationship – for example whether actors interact very often, often, or only sometimes. A number of software packages are available for the empirical analysis of social networks. For this article, all calculations were performed using UCINET.[59] In addition, Visone[60] was used for the visualization of the networks shown in Figures 1 to 4.

55.   John W. Creswell, *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (SAGE, Los Angeles, CA, 2014).
56.   Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case studies and theory development in the social sciences* (MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2005); Arend Lijphart, 'Comparative politics and the comparative method', *The American Political Science Review* 65 (1971), pp. 682–93; Harry Eckstein, *Regarding politics: Essays on political theory, stability, and change* (University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 1992).
57.   George and Bennett, *Case studies and theory development,* p. 116.
58.   Stephen P. Borgatti, Martin G. Everett, and Jeffrey C. Johnson, *Analyzing social networks* (SAGE, Los Angeles, CA, 2013), p. 2.
59.   Stephen P. Borgatti, Martin G. Everett, and L. C. Freeman, *Ucinet for Windows: Software for Social Network Analysis* (Analytic Technologies, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2002).
60.   Ulrik Brandes and Dorothea Wagner, 'Visone: Analysis and visualization of social networks', in Michael Jünger and Petra Mutzel (eds), *Graph drawing software* (Springer, Heidelberg and Berlin, 2004), pp. 321–40.
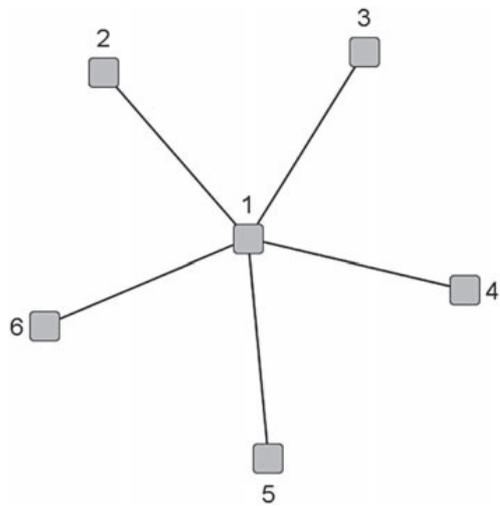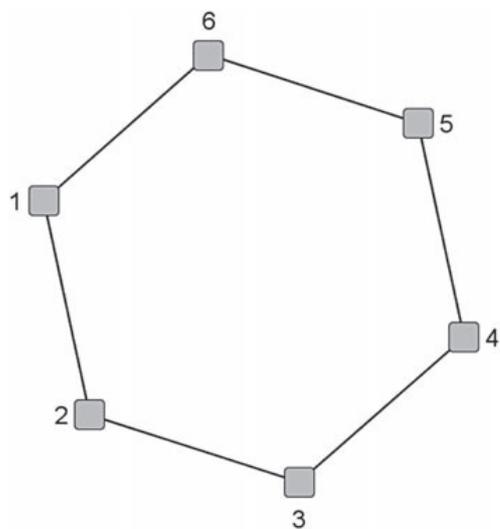
Figure 1. Star network.

Figure 2. Circle network.

As previously noted, the theory of Higley and Burton has two dimensions: structural integration and value consensus. Structurally, consensually united elites are connected by cohesive and decentralized networks that integrate all important elites. In terms of behaviour, they share a basic understanding of the rules of the game. One simple but insightful concept of cohesion is network density. Density is calculated by dividing the number of ties present in a network by the number of theoretically possible ties. The density measure takes on values between 0 (when no ties exist at all) and 1 (for a complete network in which every actor is connected to every other actor). It must be noted that density is sensitive to the overall
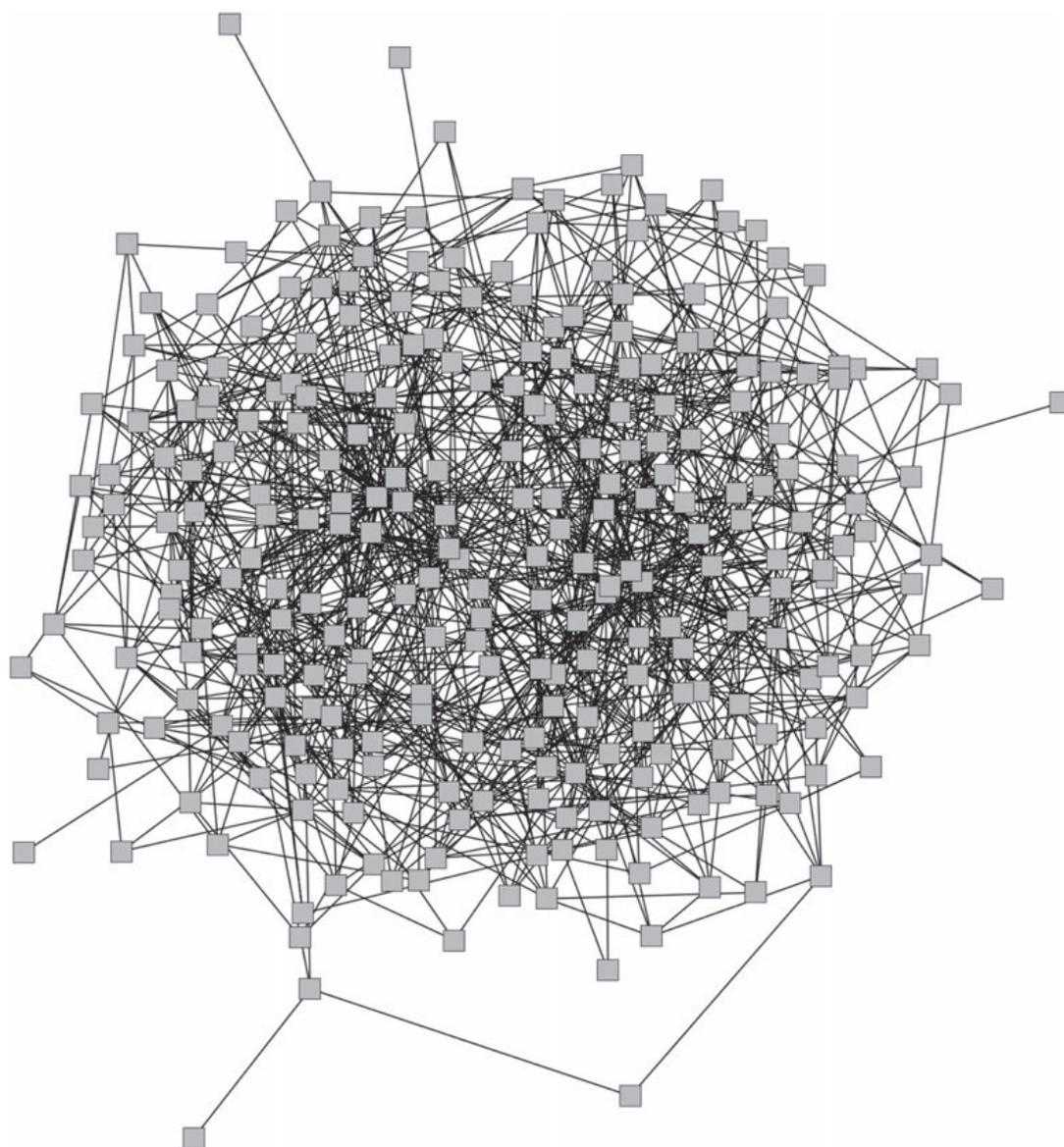
Figure 3. The network of Ghanaian MPs.

network size: in a friendship network of five people, it is reasonable to assume that everyone will be connected to everyone else, but for a huge network like that of national elites, this is hardly possible. It follows that the larger the network grows, the sparser it will become.

While densities are best compared over networks of the same size, there are other useful measures of cohesion that are less influenced by variation in sample size – for example, fragmentation, which denotes the number of pairs that cannot reach each other. This measure takes on the value 0 when all nodes are reachable and 1 when all nodes are isolates. In disconnected networks, it is also possible to examine the number of components. The
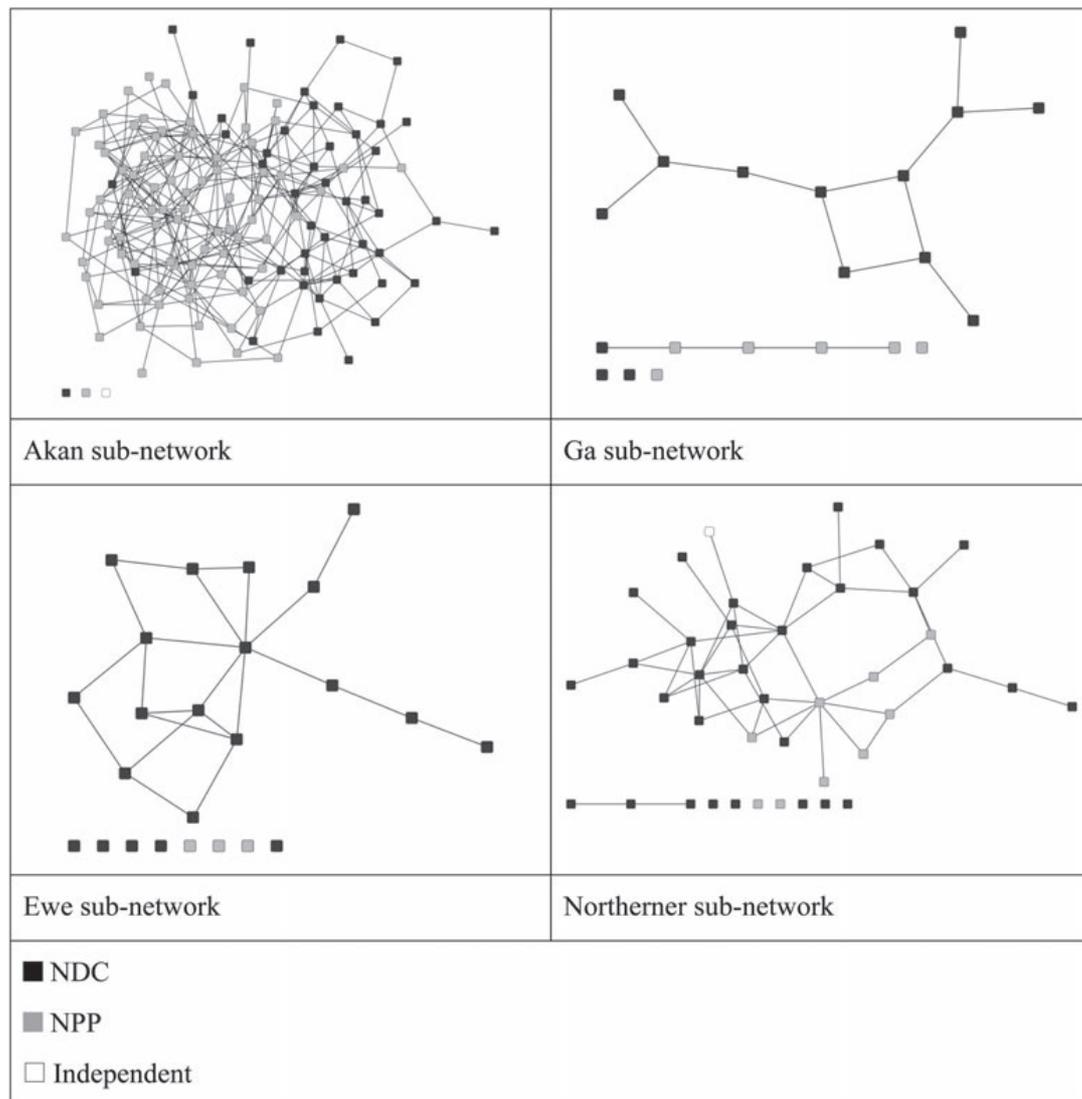
Figure 4. Ethnicity and party: interaction effects.

component ratio is understood as the number of components divided by the number of nodes; this measure achieves its maximum of 1 when all nodes are isolates and its minimum of 0 when there is only one component.[61] In broadest terms, the bigger the main component, the greater the overall cohesion in the network.[62] There are many other concepts used to quantify the structure of a network, but the methods described above are sufficient to provide an idea of the interconnectivity of elites. Thus the first hypothesis is: elites in Ghana form a cohesive and dense network.

61.   Borgatti *et al.*, *Analyzing social networks*, p. 151.
62.   *Ibid.*, p. 151.

The next concept of importance for this study is centralization. Centralization, understood as a property of the whole network, can be measured in various ways, but all measures take on the same values for two extreme scenarios: The star network (Figure 1) has the highest centralization score of 100 percent; whereas the circle (Figure 2) has the lowest score of 0 percent.

Closely related is the concept of centrality, which describes the position of individual nodes in a network. For the present article, the rather simplistic idea of degree centrality is applied. Degree centrality denotes the number of connections that a given node has. A further distinction can be made between 'out-degree', the number of ties that a node sends out to others, and 'in-degree', the number of ties that a node receives. Because there is no absolute measure or cut-off point, all we can say for the moment is that elite networks are more likely to promote democracy if they more closely resemble the circle rather than the star. This idea can be formulated as the second hypothesis: elite networks in Ghana are decentralized.

In addition, the formation of ties in a network can be related to certain attributes. One of the most familiar concepts is that of homophily, which is based on the idea that 'similarity breeds connection'.[63] Many social network studies have found contacts among similar people to be more frequent than contacts among dissimilar people.[64] Homophily is important to the study of elite interactions in two different ways. First, the theory suggests that democratic consolidation requires both a consensus on general rules and interactions among all elites – that is, there must be interactions between people of differing party affiliations and ethnic origins. Second, elite fragmentation and conflict in Africa is often discussed in relation to identity issues. The literature also argues that ethnic identities play a role in party formation and competition.[65] For a democratic country, we would therefore assume that elites engage in inter-party relations and in inter-ethnic relations. Homophily can be assessed using the E-I Index, which measures the ratio between external (E) and internal (I) ties. The normalized E-I Index takes on values between -1 and $+1$, where -1 indicates total homophily, and where all existing ties are formed among members of the same group. An E-I Index of $+1$, in contrast, denotes complete heterophily, meaning that all ties are formed between members of different groups.

Finally, the Higley/Burton framework presupposes mutual trust and shared political values. However, measuring the extent to which elites do in fact share a political value system is rather difficult. This article is therefore

63. Miller McPherson *et al.*, 'Birds of a feather: Homophily in social networks', *Annual Review of Sociology* 27 (2001), pp. 415–44.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 416.
65. See Sebastian Elischer, *Political parties in Africa: Ethnicity and party formation* (Cambridge University Press, New York, NY, 2013).

restricted to using inter-party trust as an indicator for a consensually united elite. The fourth hypothesis is: Ghanaian elites trust one another.

Operationalizing these hypotheses requires certain decisions to be made as to what counts as the "elite" and how data on this group can be collated. There are many different conceptions and definitions of the term 'elite'. For the sake of clarity, this article uses the definition proposed by Higley and Burton. They define elites as 'persons who are able, by virtue of their strategic positions in powerful organizations and movements, to affect political outcomes regularly and substantially'.[66] In principle, this very broad definition can include business, government, and military leaders, but also top position holders in parties, professional associations, and other interest groups. As a social stratum, the 'elite' has no clear boundaries, and the inclusion or exclusion of individuals in empirical studies is subject to the research question as well as to practical considerations (for example, constraints on time or the financial resources available). In addition, the term 'elite' has remained particularly elusive in the Africanist literature; it is therefore largely unclear how elites can be differentiated from other social groups. As a consequence, the definition of the sample of people to be included in the survey posed a great challenge for this study. Because the main focus of interest is the political system, MPs in Ghana were chosen as the target group. This selection follows the logic of the positional method, which identifies elites according to the formal positions they hold. This method may have disadvantages if one is seeking to include informal power relationships, but it has the tremendous advantage of generating a network with clear boundaries. Moreover, legislatures number among the most crucial institutions in democratizing countries.[67]

Data collection took place in close collaboration with the Centre for Democratic Governance, Ghana between June and August 2013. The Centre's excellent contacts in Ghana's Parliament proved an invaluable asset. A number of steps were taken to ensure the collaboration of the MPs. First of all, the parliamentary leadership was officially informed about the objectives of the project. In addition, a letter was sent to each MP stating that all data would be used for scientific purposes only and that no sensitive information connected to individual names would be published. Ten interviewers were then recruited for the fieldwork; four of them were employees of the Research Department of Parliament, which kindly supported our efforts.

MPs were interviewed using a standardized questionnaire. Two types of data were collected: attribute data (biographical data, career patterns, and

66. Higley and Burton, *Elite foundations of liberal democracy*, p. 7.
67. See Michael Steven Fish, 'Stronger legislatures, stronger democracies', *Journal of Democracy* 17 (2006), pp. 5–20; Joel D. Barkan (ed.), *Legislative power in emerging African democracies* (Lynne Rienner, Boulder, CO, 2009).

values) and relational data. For the collection of the relational data, a name generator was used: 'Looking back over the last six months, who are the people in the Parliament of Ghana with whom you have discussed important political decisions? Please give me their names.' A similar question was first used in the General Social Survey and has since been a standard tool for obtaining network information.[68] Scholars have debated to what extent variations in the wording of name generators might yield different networks. However, on the basis of experiments, Stefanie Bailey and Peter Marsden have argued that networks do not vary substantially across various name generators.[69]

Another issue is whether there are specific cultural dimensions that should be taken into consideration when relational data are collected. This question is particularly difficult to evaluate because there has been almost no experience with name generators in standardized surveys in Africa. The reaction of some MPs at least hints at an understanding of 'discussing political decisions' as a form of rather intense social contact, in many cases even amounting to friendship. This is further confirmed by the fact that the question on the intensity of contact shows very little variance: a large majority of MPs indicated that they interacted 'very often' with all the people they nominated (the other possible answers on a five-point scale were 'often', 'sometimes', 'a few times', and 'not at all'). Due to this consistency, these tie values are not included in the analyses in this article.

The questionnaire also included a measure of inter-party trust. MPs were asked to state how much they trusted the New Patriotic Party, National Democratic Congress, People's National Convention, and Convention People's Party on a five-point scale ranging from 'very much' to 'not at all'. For this article, an index of inter-party trust was constructed using the mean values of all four variables.

Elite unity and disunity in Ghana since independence

For the majority of the nation's history, Ghanaian elites were deeply divided. From a simplistic and generalized perspective, two broad camps can be identified. On one side, there is the Busia-Danquah tradition, which has always been associated with the wealthy professional and business elites in the south of the country, most of whom belong to the Akan ethnic group.

68. Ronald S. Burt, 'Network items and the General Social Survey', *Social Networks* 6 (1984), pp. 293–339.
69. Stefanie Bailey and Peter V. Marsden, 'Interpretation and interview context: Examining the General Social Survey name generator using cognitive methods', *Social Networks* 21 (1999), pp. 287–309; Bruce C. Straits, 'Ego's important discussants or significant people: An experiment in varying the wording of personal network name generators', *Social Networks* 22 (2000), pp. 123–40.

In opposition to this group, there is a leftist tradition that has always favoured an anti-elite political orientation. This tradition began with the CPP (Convention People's Party) and Kwame Nkrumah, who was hailed for his opposition to urban elites and his sympathy for mass politics. More recently, the leftist orientation has been represented by the social-democratic National Democratic Congress (NDC).[70] Whereas the Busia-Danquah tradition has major strongholds in the Ashanti and Eastern regions, their opponents have generally found more support in less-developed areas, such as the three regions in northern Ghana and the Volta Region.[71] It is noteworthy that Ghana currently has one of the few two-party systems in Africa. Compared to other countries on the continent, political parties have strong roots in the society and enjoy the support of great numbers of core voters.[72]

Between 1957 and 1981, power alternated between military and civilian governments. In every republic, however, party formation reproduced the polarization between the two political traditions. In 1981, the Provisional National Defence Council military government under the leadership of the charismatic Jerry John Rawlings proclaimed a revolution in defence of the common man. At first Rawlings tried to establish himself as an alternative to the two older political traditions. However, he shared a strong anti-elite and leftist rhetoric with the Nkrumahists, and his government also absorbed some of the old CPP networks and cadres to build its own power base.[73]

The first steps towards a greater elite unity were taken in the 1990s. In the face of growing reform pressure from donors and domestic groups alike, Rawlings recognized that his regime would not be able to withstand the demands for political liberalization. At first, the reform process was slow and did not involve substantial consultation with the opposition. After a constitutional referendum, the first elections were held in late 1992. The main contestants were the liberal-democratic New Patriotic Party (NPP), a party representing the Busia-Danquah tradition, and the National Democratic

70. Kwesi Jonah, 'Political parties and the transition to multi-party politics in Ghana', in Kwame A. Ninsin (ed.), *Ghana: Transition to democracy* (CODESRIA, Dakar, 1998), pp. 83–107.
71. For more on party politics and recent elections see Kevin S. Fridy, 'The elephant, umbrella, and quarrelling cocks: Disaggregating partisanship in Ghana's Fourth Republic', *African Affairs* 106, 423 (2001), pp. 281–305. See also Whitfield, '"Change for a Better Ghana"'.
72. See Staffan I. Lindberg and Minion K. C. Morrison, 'Exploring voter alignments in Africa: Core and swing voters in Ghana', *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 43, 4 (2005), pp. 565–86.
73. Paul Nugent, 'Banknotes and symbolic capital', in Matthias Basedau, Gero Erdmann, and Andreas Mehler (eds), *Votes, money and violence: Political parties and elections in sub-Saharan Africa* (Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Uppsala, 2007), pp. 252–75; Nicolas Amponsah, 'Political traditions and electoral politics in Kintampo North and South, Sissala West and Wa Central', in Kwame Boafo-Arthur (ed.), *Voting for democracy in Ghana: The 2004 elections in perspective* (Freedom Publications, Accra, 2006), pp. 287–307.

Congress (NDC), an organization created by Rawlings as a platform for his presidential ambitions.[74] There were also some smaller Nkrumahist parties, which did not make any serious electoral impact. In the end, Rawlings was able to win the presidential elections with a clear majority. In response, the opposition boycotted the parliamentary elections, and the NPP issued a statement that claimed a 'stolen verdict'.[75] The atmosphere following the 1992 elections was heated, increasing the pressure on the government and the opposition to agree on basic political rules. Under the threat of political chaos, a breakthrough was finally achieved by the Inter-Party Advisory Committee (IPAC),[76] which brokered a consensus on key issues in the electoral process. The 1996 elections were again won by Rawlings, but this time the result was accepted by all opposition parties. Besides the IPAC, the Ghana Political Parties Programme, organized by the Institute of Economic Affairs, an Accra-based NGO, proved to be another facilitator of inter-party dialogue. Party leaders continue to hold monthly meetings to discuss important national issues.[77]

It can be argued that the Ghanaian experience fits well into the pattern of elite settlements, which are most likely to take place under the threat of an outbreak of violence.[78] According to Higley and Burton, the process of elite unity must be completed by the victory of formerly dissident elites.[79] In Ghana, this was the case when the opposition NPP won the December 2000 election. Each of the subsequent elections was closely contested between the NPP and the NDC, with smaller parties being increasingly sidelined. In 2008, power passed back to the NDC in another democratic election. The power transfers in 2000 and 2008 have made Ghana one of the most democratic countries in Africa. Elites seem to have reached a common understanding on electoral procedures and the norms of political competition. This is a major achievement.

However, in 2012, Ghana faced a serious test of its democratic maturity when then-Acting President Atta-Mills unexpectedly died shortly before the election.[80] The election went ahead as planned and was again won by the

74.   Paul Nugent, 'Living in the past: Urban, rural and ethnic themes in the 1992 and 1996 elections in Ghana', *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 37, 2 (1999), pp. 287–319; Jonah, 'Political parties and the transition to multi-party politics in Ghana'.
75.   For more on the election, see Richard Jeffries and Clare Thomas, 'The Ghanaian elections of 1992', *African Affairs* 92, 368 (1993), pp. 331–66.
76.   The IPAC is a loose, non-statutory, and voluntary body that comprises the EC and all political parties. See Kwesi Jonah, 'Inter-party dialogue in Ghana' (Institute of Economic Affairs, Accra, 2005).
77.   Interview, Ransford Gyampo, Researcher at the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), Accra, Ghana, 24 June 2013.
78.   Michael Burton *et al.* 'Introduction', p. 15.
79.   *Ibid.*
80.   Some domestic and international media sources expressed concern over the stability of Ghana's democracy after Atta-Mills's sudden death. There were fears of civil unrest but also of

NDC and its presidential candidate, John Mahama. Although the process was declared free and fair by domestic and international observers, the defeated NPP claimed electoral fraud and filed a lawsuit to challenge the result. In August 2013, the Ghanaian Supreme Court finally dismissed the claims of voter fraud and declared that Mahama had been elected legitimately.

From the perspective of elite theory, this development can be interpreted in two different ways. On the one hand, the dispute over the electoral result can be viewed as a worrying sign with potentially negative consequences for democracy in the country. Ghana's growing oil industry has raised the stakes in electoral races, and the already fierce competition between the parties has become more intense. In the dispute over the 2012 results, there were strong rhetorical confrontations in the media; however, there were no calls for violence and no riots. For this reason, the electoral petition can also be seen as a positive sign that Ghanaian elites have learned to play by the rules of the game. Instead of taking their case to the streets, the NPP sought a solution by constitutional means. The fact that the opposition finally accepted the ruling of the court without any violent protest demonstrates that a consensus on the rules of the game has indeed been achieved. Although a great deal of hostility is displayed in the media, MPs from both parties seem to intermingle quite freely in Parliament. As one MP explained, 'We disagree on politics, but we eat together.'[81] Another MP admitted that the deep antagonism between the NPP and the NDC was a delusion on the part of the voters, because 'in Parliament we are one'.[82] Interactions take place not only informally in parliamentary corridors, but also in institutions such as IPAC, which still plays an important role in national politics. The next section takes the analysis to another level to demonstrate how this consensus is reflected in the elite network structure.

Composition and density of Ghana's elite network

The Sixth Parliament of Ghana consists of 275 MPs. Of these, 148 belong to the NDC, 123 to the NPP, and one to the People's National Convention (PNC). In addition, there are three independent MPs. Nearly all MPs (253, or 92 percent) took part in the survey. On average, each MP named five people with whom he or she discussed political issues at least from time to time. For this article, it is assumed that a tie between two MPs exists if at least one individual reported talking to the other. As a result, most of the

increased political infighting in the NDC. See, for example, *The Guardian,* 'Will Ghana's success story continue after John Atta Mills?', 25 July 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2012/jul/25/ghana-success-john-atta-mills> (26 May 2015).
81.   Interview, MP, Dunkwa, Central Region, Ghana, 10 October 2012.
82.   Interview, MP, Accra, Ghana, 28 September 2012.

Table 1. Number of respondents

Party	Number of MPs in the 6th Parliament	Number of survey respondents	Number of people represented in the network
NDC	148	139	148
NPP	123	111	122
PNC	1	1	1
Independent	3	2	2
Total	275	253	273

non-respondents are included in the network. All calculations were performed on a symmetrized matrix, with the exception of the in-degree measure (see below). There were only three MPs (one NDC, one NPP, and one independent) who did not take part in the survey and who were not nominated by any other person. These people were excluded from the network. One additional person, the Speaker of Parliament, had to be included owing to the number of nominations.[83] Altogether, this yields a network of 273 nodes, as shown in Table 1. The full network is displayed in Figure 3.

It is evident that the parliamentarians are highly connected to one another. The network consists of one big component, and there are no isolated nodes and no visually detectable fragmentations. Therefore, both the component ratio and the fragmentation measure take on the value 0. The density of the complete network is 0.029. In other words, roughly 3 percent of theoretically possible connections are realized. These measures of network cohesion are summarized in Table 2.

The existence of one big component (component ratio = 0, fragmentation = 0) is a strong indicator of network cohesion. In principle, each actor can reach any other actor either by direct or indirect connections. The average geodesic distance (the shortest possible path from one actor to another) is three, meaning that most actors can be reached over three nodes. The largest distance (diameter) is six. While these results quite clearly indicate the cohesiveness of the network, the density score needs some discussion. As noted before, density is sensitive to the size of the network and there is no absolute measure on whether a network is dense or not. The findings, however, compare well to other elite network studies. In their study on the US, Australia, and West Germany, Higley *et al.* find density scores ranging from 0.026 to 0.038 for networks of 227 to 418 nodes.[84] They take this as an

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83. In Ghana, the Speaker of Parliament is elected from among the MPs of the majority party. Because the Speaker is not allowed to serve simultaneously as an MP, his or her seat in Parliament is declared vacant and is filled through a by-election.
84. Higley *et al.*, 'Elite integration in stable democracies', p. 41.

Table 2. Measures of network cohesion

Components	Component ratio	Density	Fragmentation
1	0	0.029	0

evidence for their assumption that comprehensive elite integration has occurred in these countries.[85] Tetiana Kostiuchenko finds densities between 0.018 and 0.044 percent for various sub-groups of an elite network in Ukraine.[86] Against the background of these comparable studies the first hypothesis – that elites form a cohesive and dense network – can be confirmed.

Overall centralization in the network is 12.982 percent. When we compare this figure to the star network (Figure 1) with a centralization of 100 percent and the circle (Figure 2) with 0 percent, it can be concluded that the network is relatively decentralized. This confirms the second hypothesis.

Centrality scores for individual actors vary widely. There were 25 MPs who sent out ties but received none. There are also some highly central actors. The most central person receives 43 in-degrees, followed by two people with 33 incoming ties each. In all, ten people have a centrality degree greater than 15. Among these are key parliamentary officials, such as the minority and majority leaders and the minority and majority chief whips. This finding is not surprising. These people may have been chosen to hold these offices because they were already influential actors in their respective parties. The function itself further enhances their status and requires them to maintain frequent contact with other MPs. One question that arises is whether the nomination of people in parliamentary leadership positions is just an instance of name dropping. A name dropper is a person 'who knows exactly which contacts are the 'right' names to give, thus placing himself right in the centre of the network'.[87] The survey is indeed vulnerable in this regard, but there are two facts that speak against widespread name dropping. Although 43 in-degrees might seem like a high number, it also means that the most central person was named by only 17 percent of the MPs. Moreover, there are office holders with low in-degree scores, as well as individuals who do not hold an official function but have high in-degrees. These findings suggest that central positions in the network result from a combination of formal and informal power.

As has been shown, the network is densely connected, but to what extent is the formation of ties influenced by shared attributes such as ethnic origin

85.   *Ibid.*, p. 36.
86.   Tetiana Kostiuchenko, 'Elite continuity in Ukraine: When networks matter(?)', *Historical Social Research* 37, 2 (2012), pp. 14–25.
87.   Higley *et al.*, 'Elite integration in stable democracies', p. 50.

Table 3. Party E-I Index

Party	E-I Index
NDC	-0.114
NPP	0.090

and party affiliation? With regard to party affiliation, there is no indication of a strong tendency towards homophily. Under a model of independence – meaning that the attribute 'party membership' has no influence on the existence of a relationship between two actors – the expected E-I Index for the full network is −0.006. The observed E-I Index is −0.023. Thus, connections among MPs who belong to the same party are slightly more frequent than expected under the model of independence, but the deviation is very low. The results for the individual parties are displayed in Table 3 below. These values are so close to zero that neither a strong homophilous nor a strong heterophilous tendency can be observed. Only nine MPs out of 271 (3.3 percent) have contacts exclusively within their own party.

Before presenting the results for ethnic homophily, a discussion of the measurement of ethnicity is required. Ethnicity is a contested concept, and many scholars in African Studies emphasize the situational and instrumental aspects of ethnicity. This fluidity makes categorization and measurement extremely difficult. At the same time, however, ethnicity continues to be discussed as a central feature of African politics. In the survey, MPs were asked to indicate to which ethnic group they belonged. What is actually being measured here is the MPs' self-perception. The sensitivity of the question is fully confirmed by the fact that there are a huge number of missing values here. The matter is further complicated by the fact that some people named broad groups like Akan, while others referred to subgroups included in the broader Akan group. Table 4 shows the ethnic distribution of MPs according to the categories used in the Population and Housing Census of the Statistical Service of Ghana.

Evidently, the legislature is fairly representative, but the N for many groups is very small. The article therefore refers to the concept of 'politically relevant groups'[88] and codes ethnic groups along the lines of the Ethnic Power Relations Dataset.[89] Thus, the Akan,[90] Ewe, and Ga were included

88.   Julian Wucherpfennig, Nils B. Weidmann, Luc Girardin, Lars-Erik Cederman, and Andreas Wimmer, 'Politically relevant ethnic groups across space and time: Introducing the GeoEPR Dataset', *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 28 (2011), pp. 423–37.
89.   Lars-Erik Cederman, Brian Min, and Andreas Wimmer, 'Why do ethnic groups rebel? New data and analysis', *World Politics* 62 (2010), pp. 87–119.
90.   The dataset draws a further distinction between 'Asante' and 'other Akans'. Whether or not Akan-speaking people can be treated as a political entity is a controversial issue. For

Table 4. Representation of ethnic groups

Group	% in the 2010 Census	% in the survey	NDC	NPP
Akan	47.5	57.6	38.5	81.0
Ga-Dangme	7.4	9.4	12.3	6.0
Ewe	13.9	10.7	17.2	3.0
Guan	3.7	4.0	6.6	1.0
Gurma	5.7	4.0	4.1	4.0
Mole-Dagbani	16.6	11.2	16.4	4.0
Grusi	2.5	2.2	3.3	0
Other	2.5	0.9	1.6	0.9
N (missing)	–	224 (18.5)	122	100

in the analysis as individual groups, whereas the Gurma, Grusi, and Mole-Dagbani were merged into the category 'Northerners'. The Guan group and the 'others' were more ambiguous and were therefore excluded. For the four ethnic groups, the expected E-I Index under the model of independence would be 0.169; the observed value is −0.124. The E-I Index is statistically significant. The deviation from the expected value is small, such that we still cannot speak of widespread homophily. There are, however, interesting differences between the groups (see Table 5). The Akan group reveals a somewhat homophilous tendency, whereas the other groups seem to form more heterophilous ties. Forty out of 216 MPs (18.51 percent) had contacts only within their own ethnic group.

Table 6 displays some network measures for the ethnic sub-networks in comparison to the full network. Among the sub-networks, the Akan group is the most cohesive: the network has fewer components than the other three sub-networks and shows a lower value of fragmentation. The component ratio, which describes the relationship between the components, indicates that the Ga, Ewe, and Northerner networks are composed of a greater number of smaller components or isolated nodes. Compared to the full network, however, all of the sub-networks are significantly less cohesive. This fits very well with the findings on the low presence of ethnic homophily in the overall network. Figure 4 visualizes the sub-networks. Party affiliation is shown as different node shades to demonstrate interaction effects between party membership and ethnicity. From the figure, it is evident that NPP and NDC MPs of Akan origin are closely related to one another; in contrast, the Ga and Ewe networks are not only dominated by the NDC but also show a quasi-exclusion

example, the NPP is sometimes portrayed as an Akan party. However, there are political conflicts within the group that involve not only the Asante but also other sub-groups including the Akyem and the Fanti. For this article, the decision to merge all Akan MPs into one group was mainly taken because the information on the subgroups was incomplete (because a large number of MPs indeed identified themselves as Akan).

Table 5. Ethnic groups E-I Index

Group	E-I Index
Akan	−0.451
Ga	0.543
Ewe	0.371
Northerners	0.258

Table 6. Ethnic groups' sub-networks

	Akan	*Ga*	*Ewe*	*North*	*Full network*
Components	4	6	9	9	1
Component ratio	0.02	0.25	0.35	0.21	0
Density	0.04	0.08	0.08	0.05	0.03
Fragmentation	0.046	0.565	0.638	0.429	0
Nodes	129	21	24	41	273

Table 7. Inter-party trust

Party	Inter-party trust (mean)
NDC	3.12
NPP	2.79

of NPP MPs from the interaction structure. For the Northerners, the picture is mixed. These findings confirm the third hypothesis.

Finally, it is important to ask whether the various parties trust one another? Overall, most MPs trusted the opposing party only to a certain extent. The mean value for NDC MPs on a five-point scale was 3.12; for NPP MPs, 2.79 (see Table 7). Thus, most values are clustered around the answer 'I trust the other parties somewhat'. This relatively moderate level of trust stands in contradiction to the frequent inter-party contacts of individual MPs. It must be noted, however, that the question treats parties as an entity. It is possible for a person to mistrust other parties as political institutions but still entertain friendships with individual members of these parties. Viewed in this way, the finding fits rather well into the overall picture of outwardly displayed party hostilities. Again, it is interesting to compare this to other studies. Based on a survey of German MPs, Best[91]

91.   Heinrich Best, 'Associated rivals: Antagonism and cooperation in the German political elite', in Heinrich Best and John Higley (eds), *Democratic elitism: New theoretical and comparative perspectives* (Brill, Leiden and Boston, MA, 2010), pp. 97–116.

reports that 65 percent of the respondents feel a degree of togetherness with MPs of other parties, while 35 percent state that they have nothing in common with them. Eighty percent of the latter group nevertheless had contacts with MPs from other parties. Obviously, such contradictory patterns are by no means limited to Ghana and deserve further research in future studies. Thus, the fourth hypothesis can be confirmed, albeit with some qualifications.

Conclusion

This article has used new empirical material to corroborate the findings of scholars like Lindsay Whitfield, Alexander Frempong, and Johanna Svanikier, who have argued that Ghana's democratic success is deeply connected to a change in elite behaviour.[92] The observed parliamentary network comes close to what Higley and Burton describe as a *consensually united elite*. The network is densely connected, there are frequent contacts between all MPs, and information can flow easily. Once created, consensually united elites tend to be remarkably persistent.[93] While this is good news for the future of democracy in Ghana, it is equally important to highlight the conditions under which this elite consensus came into being. Two aspects are particularly important: the role of the two-party system in the process of elite settlement, and the interaction between ethnicity and party loyalties.

The Ghanaian experience fits well into the pattern described by the literature on elite settlements. Tensions between government and opposition were high, especially in the 1992 elections, and when the situation began to seriously threaten the stability of the country, the first steps toward an elite consensus were taken.[94] The process was completed by the opposition victory in 2000 and another peaceful transfer of power in 2008, but such an initial consensus is no guarantee of a consolidated democracy. The deepening of elite unity depends on the creation of institutions that allow the successful management of conflicts.[95] Many authors have stressed the salience of the two main political traditions in the country: the Busia-Danquah tradition and the Nkrumah tradition.[96] These political poles were the source of bitter elite struggles between the 1960s and 1990s, but also laid the foundation for today's two-party system by structuring the political space into easily recognizable camps.

92. Whitfield, '"Change for a Better Ghana"'; Frempong, 'Political conflict and elite consensus'; Svanikier, 'Political elite circulation'.
93. Higley and Burton, *Elite foundations of liberal democracy*, p. 12.
94. Frempong, 'Political conflict and elite consensus', p. 137.
95. Levine, 'Venezuela since 1958', p. 83.
96. Jonah, 'Political parties and the transition'; Nugent, 'Living in the past'.

Political parties in every new republic tended to form along the traditional cleavage, and with the weakening of the Nkrumahists in the 1990s, the NDC effectively took over the political space on the left of the NPP. The emerging two-party system had important consequences for elite politics. First, the small number of actors reduces collective action problems and makes cooperation more feasible.[97] Second, the existence of strong parties with high numbers of core voters lends legitimacy to the process of elite settlement. This confirms Levine's view that the successful implementation of elite agreements hinges on strong political parties.[98] The two-party system provides a regular and routine channel for political contestation. Both parties have huge followings, and therefore the costs associated with breaking up the consensus are high. Neither of the parties would be guaranteed to gain anything, but would instead face opposition from a large segment of Ghanaian society. Electoral competition is no longer perceived as a zero-sum-game – today, losers are not threatened with political demise but can hope to be more successful in the next election. In this way, trust and mutual security have been gradually established: 'What were once innovations in intergroup relations become, through continuous and routine use, conventional expectations of common treatment.'[99]

This elite consensus is further stabilized by an interaction effect between party loyalties and ethnic affiliation. The role of ethnicity in elections has been debated energetically among scholars of politics in Ghana. Kevin Fridy argues that many voters tend to see the NDC as an Ewe party and the NPP as an Akan party.[100] Nevertheless, none of the parties can win elections by appealing only to its core voters, and this provides a clear incentive for reaching out to all ethnic groups. At the elite level, the dynamics between party loyalties and ethnic identities are equally complex. The data presented in this article add important findings to the discussion. As Figure 4 shows, Akan elites tend to network more with each other, but this homophilous tendency is moderated by party membership. In other words, an ethnically based feeling of solidarity bridges political cleavages and, as a result, reduces the potential for violent conflicts between the parties. For some of the smaller groups, however, it is the other way round. Ga and Ewe tend to interact only with those fellow ethnics who are in the same party – in their case, party loyalties override ethnic solidarity. The crisscrossing of party affiliation and ethnic identity at the elite level serves as a major stabilizing factor for Ghana's democracy. The fact that group solidarities of

97.   Mancur Olson, *The logic of collective action* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2009 [1965]).
98.   Levine, 'Venezuela since 1958: The consolidation of democratic politics', p. 102.
99.   *Ibid.*, p. 103.
100.   Fridy, 'The elephant, umbrella, and quarrelling cocks'.

different kinds moderate each other strengthens elite unity and reduces the likelihood of ethnic mobilization strategies.

Elite consensus does not mean the absence of political conflicts. What it does mean, however, is that elites build enough mutual trust to be able to handle these conflicts in a non-violent way. In Ghana, this change in elite behaviour is most obvious in the dispute over the election results in 2012. Although the outward display of political animosities remains a part of the political ritual between the opposition and the ruling party, both parties chose to handle the issue by constitutional means instead of taking it to the streets. This does not automatically imply that more extreme political orientations within the parties are completely repressed. For Parliament (as an important and influential segment of the national elite), however, it can be safely argued that a consensus on the rules of the game has been achieved.

This article has shown that elite structures are central to the democratic process. The evidence suggests that actor-centric approaches, and especially the Higley/Burton thesis, contribute significantly to our understanding of democratization in Africa. Furthermore, the article has introduced social network analysis (SNA) as a useful methodological tool. Although the Higley/Burton theory holds true in the case of Ghana, the findings should be treated with some caution until comparative studies are conducted. As the relationship between elites and regimes can only be assessed fully when Ghana's elite structure is compared to those of other African countries, there is a pressing need for similar studies in the future.