

Chieftaincy Conflicts in Northern Ghana: The Role of Traditional Mechanisms and Diaspora Engagement

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ABSTRACT

Compared to other African countries, Ghana is known as a relatively stable democracy. However, there are various forms of social, political, ethnic, and religious instability that have persisted in Ghana for many decades and posed some risks for the indigenous Ghanaian diaspora. These instabilities are typically categorized as either inter- or intra-ethnic conflicts. The article gives an account of several relevant conflicts in the Northern parts of Ghana that turned into violent clashes. The authors explore the rationale behind these conflicts, as many of them were provoked by contestation for traditional power and authority. The research employs qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) and case study by indicating regions prone to chieftaincy conflicts. Eight cases were selected from three regions in Northern Ghana, where such conflicts provoked violent clashes and uprisings in the diaspora, and also may have led to deaths and displacement of people. The research relies on the data from official reports, datasets by international organizations, and academic articles to adopt a comparative perspective. It also examines the strategies of managing, resolving, and transforming the conflicts to identify the combination of factors that could lead to an enduring solution. The article concludes that the integration of traditional dispute resolution mechanisms in combination with community involvement leads to more successful conflict resolution.

KEYWORDS

Ghana, chieftaincy, conflicts, resolution strategies, diaspora, QCA, Northern Regions

Introduction

In the post-colonial era, Africa has witnessed many conflicts of varying magnitudes. These conflicts have mostly risen from various arguments and disagreements, including contestation over the right to land, chieftaincy succession rights, and resource allocation. Many West African countries have seen such conflicts, as notable examples are Liberia, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, and Burkina Faso.¹ However, Ghana is a West African country that is hailed as very peaceful against the background of other African countries that have been affected by civil wars, rebellions, and general instability. This absolute evaluation of Ghana's peaceful nature has created a façade hiding the underlying problems of internal conflicts, including inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic violence, and armed confrontations, particularly in the northern parts of the country, which have even drawn the attention of international organizations (e.g., the United Nations Development Programme) and several peace councils. For the Ghanaian diaspora, which has historically consisted of dozens of ethnic groups, such conflicts significantly hinder a peaceful dialogue within the country.

The presence of such conflicts has been attributed to the creation of secular, political or traditional authorities in the regions that had not experienced these forms of governance before the era of colonialism.² Security in the northern parts of the country has been constantly undermined by the increasing unrest leading to the loss of lives, destruction of property, displacement of people, and depletion of Ghana's scarce resources. Researchers have expressed varying views on what the primary causes of chieftaincy conflicts may be. Some schools of thought posit that the emergence of these conflicts is a result of attempts by various anthropologists and colonial administrations to encroach on some African lands and to categorize them into centralized and non-centralized groups. Other researchers opine that the primary causes of chieftaincy conflicts go beyond the issue of colonialism.

Chieftaincy conflicts in the northern parts of Ghana represent a persistent challenge to peace, stability, as well as social and political development in the entire region.³ These conflicts usually arise from tribal competition over traditional leadership and land tenure issues, as they are fuelled by past rivalries, power struggles as well as social and economic differences.⁴ The prolonged nature of chieftaincy disputes not only causes disruptions to the local government structures but also destabilizes the unity of the community, hampers investment for the communities and region, and perpetuates vicious circles of violence and insecurity.

Despite various efforts by traditional leaders, governmental institutions, and civil society to mediate and resolve chieftaincy conflicts, sustainable and lasting solutions have remained elusive. The absence of a comprehensive approach and poor understanding of the effective strategies and key factors that may contribute to conflict resolution significantly hamper any attempts to alleviate chieftaincy conflicts in the northern parts of Ghana.

Literature on chieftaincy disputes in these regions primarily focuses

1 Abubakari, Longi 2014, 113.

2 Suler 2020, 1.

3 Awedoba 2009.

4 Bukari et al. 2017, 114–115.

on the descriptive analysis of various individual cases or a qualitative assessment of conflict dynamics. While these studies may provide many valuable insights into the complex nature of chieftaincy conflicts, there is a literature gap on the factors contributing to successful strategies and their various outcomes in resolving these disputes. In appreciating the nuanced connections between numerous factors, such as stakeholder involvement, organizational frameworks, cultural standards, and external mediations, it is crucial to devise evidence-based approaches to navigate and resolve chieftaincy conflicts efficiently and successfully.

Therefore, there is a persistent need for empirical research that can analytically investigate the operative strategies used in the resolution of chieftaincy conflicts in Northern Ghana. By engaging a thorough methodological approach, such as qualitative comparative analysis (QCA), and focusing on secondary data sources, such as scientific publications, this article aims to fill the literature gap and provide actionable insights that can inform policy interventions, community initiatives, and conflict resolution practices in the Northern regions. Addressing this knowledge gap is essential for promoting a more holistic approach for sustainable peace, fostering social cohesion and unity, and advancing collective efforts towards resolving chieftaincy conflicts in Northern Ghana.

This study adopts QCA as a research method. This methodological approach offers a rigorous scheme for conducting any study that is limited by a small number of cases to identify sufficient and necessary conditions for an outcome.¹ The crisp-set scoring is used to classify factors (variables), and the TOSMANA computer software is used to conduct the analysis, identify possible combinations of factors, and check the sensibility of findings.

The methodology of this research focuses on two social theories. The first is Johan Galtung's theory of structural violence, which posits that structural violence operates through a combination of institutional mechanisms, cultural norms, and power dynamics, as it creates conditions that limit individuals' capabilities, opportunities, and overall well-being. Unlike the presence of direct violence, which involves the use of physical harm and numerous visible acts of aggression, structural violence is often subtle, pervasive, and deeply ingrained in social structures.² The second one is Robert Putnam's theory of social capital, which highlights the value of social networks, connections, and interactions within communities. It posits that social capital defines the social bonds, trust, cooperation, and reciprocity shared among individuals and groups that contribute to the functioning of any society.³

The study concentrates on the northern regions of Ghana, specifically the three major areas: the Northern Region, the Upper East Region, and the Upper West Region. The selection of the three entities for the analysis is based on the historical antecedents of chieftaincy conflicts that have persisted into recent years, drawing attention to the need for a comprehensive understanding of the conflicts in building the best combination of conflict resolution strategies to curb this menace. Examples of such conflicts include the Dagbon chieftaincy conflicts in the Northern Region,

1 Kane et al. 2017, 104.

2 Galtung 1969.

3 Putnam 1995.

the Bawku chieftaincy conflict in the Upper East Region, and the Wa chieftaincy conflicts in the Upper West Region, among others, which have spread across the diaspora in other regions, especially in the Southern parts of Ghana. In addition, the two newly created regions of the north (the North-East and Savannah regions) were established in 2016. As they were carved out of the major traditional or administrative regions of the north (the Upper East Region and Northern Region respectively), these entities are not isolated; rather, they are considered part of the traditional regions. The article is also based on eight case studies focusing on chieftaincy conflicts in these three regions. The outcome of each case is a successful resolution, as the identified variables are the strategies for solving each of these conflicts.

Overview of Chieftaincy Disputes in Northern Ghana

The chieftaincy institution emerged in a natural way along the evolution of societies. It could be traced to the desire of individuals to form a distinct group to assert and maintain dominance over others.¹ Article 277 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana defines chiefs as individuals who belong to royal lineages and have successfully undergone the legitimate process of nomination or selection followed by their formal installation as a chief in accordance with relevant customary laws and practices.² This classification is narrow because it fails to recognize other traditional leaders in the country. To handle several chieftaincy matters, the 1992 constitution of Ghana sets up the following institutions: the National House of Chiefs (NHC), the Regional House of Chiefs (RHC), and Traditional Councils (TC). It is required that the NHC consist of five paramount chiefs which are to be elected by the RHC.

The main functions of the NHC are to advise any person(s) or authority that is charged with any responsibility for any issue relating to or affecting chieftaincy and to compile customary laws of succession that are applicable to each stool. The NHC also has appellate authority in any cause or issue that may affect chieftaincy. This appellate authority is exercised by its existing Judicial Committee (JC), which also consists of five persons that are appointed by the House and given assistance by a member of the bar with about ten years of experience in the field who is appointed by the NHC on the recommendation of the Attorney-General. The RHC consists of members as the Parliament may see fit. The Constitution instructs the RHC to review and make decisions on appeals from traditional councils regarding the nomination or election of individuals classified as chiefs. Additionally, the RHC is tasked with conducting studies to provide general recommendations for resolving any chieftaincy disputes that may arise in the region. The Traditional Council consists of one paramount chief and various divisional chiefs. Its major function is determining, per the appropriate customary law and usage, the viability of the nominations or elections of any person as chief. Simply put, it performs functions that are similar to those of the NHC and RHC but at the paramountcy (grassroots) level.

¹ Mair 1997.

² "Article 277. Definition of Chief," The Constitution of Ghana, 1992, accessed August 5, 2025, https://lawsghana.com/constitution/Republic/constitution_content/282.

Chieftaincy disputes are usually caused by the inappropriate use of money or partisan politics to influence the lawful process of selection, enskinment, or destoolment of chiefs. It is concluded that the benefit and worth that has been attached to the institution of chieftaincy has attracted many young aspirants to contest for the position of chief. As a result, there is a large number of potential candidates emerging, and this makes it quite difficult for one candidate to win without any incident of disputes arising. There are various examples of chieftaincy conflicts in Ghana, more specifically in the northern parts of the country, and these include the Nanumba-Kokomba, Konkomba-Gonja, Dagbon, Nanumba, Gonja-Vagla, Bimbilla, and Gonja-Kpandai conflicts.

Chieftaincy conflicts have been defined as being the foremost menace to Northern Ghana's social, economic, cultural, and political development.¹ For instance, in 2001, it was estimated that approximately 171 chieftaincy cases were pending before the RHC. There were also over 44 cases on appeal at the NHC.² As of 2007, 17 chieftaincy disputes were pending before the Upper West Regional House of Chiefs, including the Wa conflict, the Nadowli conflict, and the Jirapa conflict. In the Upper East Region, the majority of these disputes included the Bawku conflicts, Bolga skin affairs, the Zaare skin affairs, and the Zuarungu skin affairs. In 2008, there were 63 cases pending before the NHC, while the RHS considered another 400 cases.³

Chieftaincy disputes in Ghana are rooted in colonialism. As the literature states, the colonial masters, in their quest to substantiate their rule in Africa, established various administrative structures that ended up forcing many ethnic groups and traditional structures, including chieftaincy, into symmetrical organizations, destroying the roots of these traditional institutions.⁴ Besides, chieftaincy conflicts are sometimes fuelled by political interventions.⁵

The northern parts of Ghana have a rich history of chieftaincy systems that is deeply entrenched in cultural, traditional, and political frameworks. Conflicts have taken about a thousand lives in Yendi.⁶ The Konkomba-Nanumba and the Dagomba-Nanumba conflicts in 1994 and 1995, respectively, resulted in the loss of about 2,000 lives, 18,900 animals, and 500,000 tubers of yams, as 60,000 acres of crops were destroyed.⁷ It is also estimated that the government of Ghana spent about \$9 million to restore peace in Dagbon.⁸ Moreover, about 78,000 people were displaced, as their properties were destroyed because of the conflict.⁹

Many government employees abandoned their posts in Northern Ghana because of these chieftaincy disputes.¹⁰ The finances that may have been used to provide certain basic needs were spent to maintain peace in the conflict-ridden parts of northern Ghana.¹¹ The cultural significance of chieftaincy is immersive where chiefs

1 Anamzoya, Tonah 2016.

2 Draman et al. 2009, 12.

3 Anamzoya, 2010.

4 Awedoba 2009; Mawuko-Yevugah, Attipoe 2021, 325.

5 Albert 2008, 49.

6 Alhassan et al. 2017, 61.

7 Tsikata, Seini 2004, 29.

8 Alhassan et al. 2017, 61.

9 Mahama 2003.

10 Mahama, Longi 2013.

11 Awedoba 2009.

are often hailed as custodians and guardians of tradition and local customs. These conflicts usually revolve around problems relating to legitimacy, succession, or even the interpretation of culture and tradition. The case of the Bimbilla chieftaincy conflict, which is characterized by the contestation over who the rightful occupant of the skin is, portrays the clear cultural importance of chieftaincy.¹

Chieftaincy Disputes and the Diaspora

Chieftaincy conflicts in the northern parts of Ghana, which have their roots in ethnic tensions, land disputes, and chieftaincy affairs, have affected the diaspora immensely. Several people from the conflict-affected areas have migrated to the southern parts of the country (Greater Accra and the Ashanti region), resulting in a diaspora that is more dispersed and displaced. These forms of migration have imported the conflicts from the original conflict zones to the diaspora, both locally and abroad.

According to the National Security Council, 503 cases involving chieftaincy, land, and ethnic disputes have been recorded in 2025 so far. A total of 130 out of the 503 recorded cases pose existential threats to the peace of the country, its diaspora, community, and national security, and put a burden on the government budget, particularly the ongoing Bawku and Nkwanta conflicts.² These conflicts have severely affected commercial activities not only in the conflict areas but also among the members of the diaspora at large, as businesses and trips within and across these areas are curtailed.

In 2024, there were clashes between Mamprusis and Kusasis in Ashaiman in the Greater Accra Region, involving two ethnic groups engaged in the Bawku conflict. Several of these ethnic conflicts in the conflict zones of Northern Ghana have occurred in the Ashanti region, prompting mediation activities to be held by the Asantehene, the king of the Ashanti Kingdom.

Additionally, on July 23, a Kusasi chief from the Ashanti Region was killed by unknown gunmen at his residence.³ This incident is believed to be linked to the Bawku conflicts involving the Mamprusis and Kusasis, which have been imported to the Ashanti Kingdom. These conflicts have even permeated secondary schools in Ghana, thereby affecting engagement in various sectors of the country. For instance, two male students at the Nalerigu Senior High School were killed by unknown gunmen on July 26, 2025. On the same day, shootings occurred at the Bawku Senior High School and took one student's life. These killings are suspected to be linked to the Bawku conflicts. All educational institutions in both Nalerigu and Bawku have since been closed, and the state military apparatus has been deployed in these conflict zones to enforce peace. Several of these killings and attacks have occurred in various parts of the country rather than in the original places of these conflicts, affecting the Ghanaian diaspora at large.

This situation not only has an impact on the conflict areas but also affects the diaspora as a whole, as social and economic activities have come to a standstill

1 Suler 2020.

2 "130 of 503 Reported Chieftaincy, Land and Ethnic Disputes Pose Existential Threats – National Security," GhanaWeb, August 2, 2025, accessed August 4, 2025, <https://clck.ru/3NZjJA>.

3 Gilbert Mawuli Agbey, "Naa Abdul-Malik Azenbe: Kusasi Chief Shot Dead in Asawase," Graphic Online, July 23, 2025, accessed August 4, 2025, <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/naa-abdul-malik-azenbe-kusasi-chief-shot-dead-in-asawase.html>.

in these regions. These conflicts are believed to be largely financed by members of the conflict-affected areas living abroad or in other parts of the country. Ethnic groups from these zones perceive each other as enemies, even outside their communities, making it difficult for them to interact or work together outside the conflict-affected regions. This, to a large extent, impedes engagement across the diaspora as it influences the peace in the country, as well as productivity, security, and democratic dispensation of the state that is widely recognized as a beacon of democracy in the West African sub-region.

This backdrop demonstrates the importance of diaspora engagement as a conflict resolution mechanism so that resolution efforts target not only the conflict zones but also the diaspora. This could raise awareness about the conflicts and their effects through advocacy campaigns, promote understanding among different ethnic groups, and thereby break stereotypes and build relationships that contribute to peacebuilding. Other factors include diaspora investment in development projects that create jobs and improve living conditions in conflict-affected areas. Additionally, politicians and influential people from these areas could mobilize and create safe spaces for engagement and peacebuilding.

Conflict Resolution Strategies

The theories and practices used in conflict resolution strategies offer significant insights into how disputes can be settled. Traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, state intervention, and third-party mediation have already been employed. However, the effectiveness of each theory and practice varies.

Traditional mechanisms play a vital role in resolving conflicts in Northern Ghana, as they are usually the first intervention mechanism to be used. For example, in Dagbon, the intervention of the Andani and Abudu gates – the Kampakuya Naa and the Bolin Lana, respectively – was a traditional attitude to resolving the conflict involving these two ethnic groups.¹ Another example is the Barka Naa system in Mamprugu, which comprises lineage heads and community elders and also functions as a traditional conflict resolution mechanism. The Barka Naa, who is known as the senior elder, mediates conflicts, provides counsel, and facilitates all negotiations between various conflicting parties to achieve resolution and maintain harmony within the Mamprugu kingdom.² This mechanism has often included mediators (middlemen) and councils of elders, who apply customary laws and traditions to adjudicate conflicts.

State intervention also played a pivotal role as a strategy in resolving disputes in Northern Ghana. For example, during the Yendi chieftaincy crisis in the early 2000s, the Ghanaian government established the Wuaku Commission to investigate the causes of the disputes and propose ways to settle them.

Military intervention is another mechanism that has been employed in resolving chieftaincy disputes in Northern Ghana, as it is usually the last option to be used. An example is the Bimbilla Chieftaincy conflict in 2014–2015. This long-standing dispute in the Nanumba North District of the Northern Region led to various periodic

1 Issifu 2015, 30–31.

2 Bawa, Singh 2017.

outbreaks of violence. The government of Ghana deployed military and police forces to maintain order as well as enforce curfews in Bimbilla. This intervention was a response to violent clashes between the rival factions claiming the right to the skin (chieftaincy). Another example is the Yendi Chieftaincy Conflict of 2002, which is also known as the Dagbon crisis. This dispute over succession to the Dagbon skin also led to significant violence.

There have been instances where third-party mediation has been used. This approach involves individuals or organizations that are not directly involved in the conflict, as they help promote negotiations for a resolution. For example, in the Nkonya-Alavanyo conflict, the National Peace Council acted as a mediator to facilitate peace talks and agreements between the two conflicting parties.¹

The communities where these conflicts occur usually initiate conflict resolution efforts on their own. For instance, in Bimbilla, the local leaders and its community members have attempted to mediate and resolve the chieftaincy conflict. This experience has reflected the significance of community-based initiatives in the resolution of conflicts.²

There are certain cases where all these approaches (traditional, state, community-based, and military methods) are combined. For example, the Mamprusi-Kuasasi conflict in the Upper East Region, where various actors have worked together, as they acknowledge the role of traditional authorities and state institutions.³

Despite the diversity of approaches, chieftaincy conflicts in Northern Ghana persist, which prompts the need for a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of these strategies and the factors contributing to their success.

When it comes to its area, the Northern region of Ghana is the largest in the country, as it covers about 70,384 km² – approximately 29.5 percent of Ghana's total area. The capital city of the region is Tamale, the third largest city of the country. According to the 2021 census, the total population of the region is 2,310,939 people, with the proportion of males and females being 1,141,705 to 1,169,234.⁴ Due to the importance of traditional power in the region, various conflicts have been present for decades, as ethnic groups and political parties interested in the right of succession to the seat of traditional power covertly and overtly manipulate people to create disturbances. They can lead to the uprising of chieftaincy conflicts threatening both the country and region.

QCA Analysis

This study employs the qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) approach to examine the complex relationship between factors that contribute to the resolution of chieftaincy conflicts in Northern Ghana. QCA is an approach that allows for the identification of relevant and sufficient conditions for outcomes, rather than just

1 Agyei 2024.

2 Suler 2020.

3 Kroger 2003.

4 "2010 Population & Housing Census. National Analytical Report," Ghana Statistical Service, May, 2013, accessed August 4, 2025, <https://clck.ru/3NZJKD>.

correlations between variables.¹ QCA provides a well-structured framework to analyze the complex patterns across various cases while sustaining the depth of qualitative analysis. This allows for a more nuanced understanding of the factors for successful resolution strategies in chieftaincy disputes, which can inform policy and practice in this area.

The adopted methodology is designed to give a systematic comparison of the selected chieftaincy conflicts in Northern Ghana, namely Yendi (Dagbon), Bimbilla, Kpandai, Nadoli, Funsu, Bawku, Waala, and Chuchuliga, to identify the combinations of strategies that lead to successful resolution in this type of conflict. The research goes further in adopting a systematic approach, as it starts with case selection, proceeds with the identification of variables, moves on with data collection, and finishes with a comparative analysis. The research is based on a systematic attitude, which includes case selection, variable selection, outcome selection, and configurational analysis.

Case Selection. The authors purposefully selected eight conflict-prone areas in the northern parts of Ghana. The inclusion criterion for the abovementioned areas is based on the presence of chieftaincy conflicts that have involved armed violence, loss of life, displacement of people, and affected economic development. These cases include the Dagbon chieftaincy conflicts in Yendi, the Nanumba-Konkomba conflict in Bimbilla, the Mamprusi-Kuasasi conflict in Bawku, the Wa skin chieftaincy title in Wa, the Gonja-Nawuri chieftaincy conflict in Kpandai, the Nadoli chieftaincy conflict, the Funsu chieftaincy conflict, and the Chuchuliga skin affair in the Bulsa traditional area. These cases highlight the complex and often contentious nature of chieftaincy conflicts in the Northern parts of Ghana, which can have far-reaching consequences for the affected communities and the diaspora at large. Efforts to resolve these disputes often involve traditional, religious, and political leaders, as well as the intervention of state institutions like the police and the judiciary. As a result, other conflicts that did not reach the scale of destruction experienced in the selected areas and did not involve any mediation or resolution mechanisms outlined in Table 1 were excluded.

Variable Selection. To identify suitable variables, conditions were defined across cases. There are five variables: Traditional Mediation (TradMed), Political Intervention (PoliInter), Legal Recourse (LegRec), Community Dialogue (ComDia), and Military Intervention (MiliInter).

Traditional mediation refers to the involvement of traditional leaders from the conflict areas, who convene with the conflicting parties to resolve the conflict through dialogue and negotiation (e.g., the Dagbon and Mamprugu conflicts).

Political intervention stands for the involvement of political leaders or government officials to implement mediation efforts. This is typically achieved through the establishment of committees tasked with investigating the underlying causes of the conflict and proposing mechanisms for resolution (e.g., the Yendi chieftaincy dispute).

Legal recourse is a resolution mechanism in which the parties submit their disagreements to a court of law for adjudication and accept the ruling of the court (e.g., the Ga Mantse case in Accra).

1 Kane et al. 2017.

Military intervention is a strategy that involves the deployment of state security forces to the areas of conflict to maintain or enforce peace (e.g., the Bawku conflict). Community dialogue involves bringing together various stakeholders, including community members and the parties to the conflict, to engage in discussions aimed at proposing solutions and resolving the dispute. The conflicts selected as cases are dependent variables, as the five described strategies are independent variables. They are identified to examine the factors that have led to conflict resolution on the identified dependent conditions (see *Table 1*).

Table 1.

CASE SELECTION OF CONFLICTS AND VARIABLES MAPPING
ВЫБОРКА КОНФЛИКТОВ И ПЕРЕМЕННЫХ

Conflict	Variable 1: Traditional mediation	Variable 2: Political intervention	Variable 3: Legal recourse	Variable 4: Community dialogue	Variable 5: Military intervention	Outcome
Yendi	Used	Engaged	Not Accessible	Used	Implemented	Resolution
Bimbilla	Not used	Not engaged	Accessible	Used	Implemented	Resolution
Kpandai	Not used	Engaged	Not Accessible	Not Used	Implemented	Resolution
Nadowli	Used	Not engaged	Accessible	Not Used	Not Implemented	No Resolution
Funsi	Used	Engaged	Not Accessible	Not Used	Not Implemented	No Resolution
Bawku	Used	Engaged	Accessible	Used	Implemented	No Resolution
Waala	Used	Engaged	Accessible	Used	Not Implemented	Resolution
Chuchuliga	Used	Not engaged	Not Accessible	Used	Not Implemented	Resolution

Source: compiled by the authors.

Outcome Selection. This step seeks to identify whether the resolution of the conflicts in the selected cases has been successful. This is done by using the combination of variables. The calibration of the outcome is sustained using the definition of conflict resolution proposed by Peter Wallensteen in 2002. The international peace researcher defined conflict resolution as “a situation where conflicting parties enter into an agreement that solves their central incompatibilities, accept each other’s continued existence as parties, and cease all violent activities against each other.”¹ This definition mentions three main elements: the presence of an agreement, the acceptance of each other’s existence, and the cessation of violence. The article considers a chieftaincy conflict resolved if all three elements are present or partially present.²

Configurational Analysis. By using the QCA, the research identifies the present patterns that cut across the selected cases to finally determine the combination of factors leading to a resolution.

1 Wallensteen 2002.
2 Wallensteen 2019, 141.

Table 2.

PRESENCE OR ABSENCE OF VARIABLES IN CONFLICTS
НАЛИЧИЕ ИЛИ ОТСУТСТВИЕ ПЕРЕМЕННОЙ В КОНФЛИКТЕ

Conflict	TradMed	PoliInter	LegRec	ComDia	MiliInter	Outcome
Yendi	1	1	0	1	0	1
Bimbilla	0	0	1	1	1	1
Kpandai	0	1	1	0	1	1
Nadowli	1	0	1	0	0	0
Funsi	1	1	0	0	0	0
Bawku	1	1	1	1	1	0
Waala	1	1	1	1	0	1
Chuchuliga	1	0	0	1	0	1

Source: compiled by the authors.

To prepare the data for the QCA analysis, the authors used theoretical and empirical information to create a dichotomized table by coding all selected variables (see Table 2). The dichotomization and coding went as follows:

- a) Traditional Mediation and Community Dialogue are coded 1 if used and 0 if not used as a means of resolving conflict.
- b) Political Intervention is coded 1 in case of a state engagement and 0 in the opposite situation.
- c) Legal Recourse is coded 1 if accessible to solve the conflict and 0 if not.
- d) Military Intervention is coded 1 if it was implemented as a resolution strategy and 0 if not implemented.
- e) Outcome is coded 1 for any case of successful resolution (Yendi, Bimbilla, Kpandai, Waala and Chuchuliga) and 0 if the resolution has been unsuccessful (Nadowli, Funsi and Bawku).

The data for these variables were collected from various sources on traditional mediation,¹ political intervention,² legal recourse,³ community dialogue,⁴ military intervention,⁵ and resolution.⁶

In preparation for the QCA analysis, a crisp-set QCA (csQCA) was conducted using the dichotomized table where the binary system (1 and 0) was used to identify causal conditions. This analysis was conducted using the TOSMANA (Tool for Small-N Analysis) software to assess the necessary and sufficient conditions for resolution of chieftaincy conflicts. Through feeding the dichotomized table into the software, a truth table and the logical minimization results were obtained (see Table 3).

Using this systematic approach ensures that the data is structurally and systematically analyzed to identify the combination of factors contributing to successful resolution of conflicts.

1 Issifu, Bukari 2022.
2 Kondor et al. 2024.
3 Agyekum 2002; Ibrahim et al. 2024.
4 Akudugu, Mahama 2011.
5 Olsen 2009.
6 Wallensteen 2019; Avruch 2022.

Table 3.

COMBINATION OF VARIABLES CONTRIBUTING TO RESOLUTION OF CONFLICTS
СОЧЕТАНИЕ ФАКТОРОВ, СПОСОБСТВОВАВШИХ ПРЕКРАЩЕНИЮ КОНФЛИКТОВ

Conflict	TradMed	PoliInter	LegRec	ComDia	MiliInter	Outcome
Bimbilla	0	0	1	1	1	1
Kpandai	0	1	1	0	1	1
Chuchuliga	1	0	0	1	0	1
Nadowli	1	0	1	0	0	0
Funsi	1	1	0	0	0	0
Yendi	1	1	0	1	0	1
Waala	1	1	1	1	0	1
Bawku	1	1	1	1	1	0

Source: compiled by the authors.

The results show that a single factor from the QCA analysis never stands as the only factor leading to a resolution of any of the chieftaincy disputes in this research, but instead a combination of these factors may indeed lead to a successful resolution (see Table 4).

Table 4.

RESULTS OF QCA ANALYSIS
РЕЗУЛЬТАТЫ КАЧЕСТВЕННОГО СРАВНИТЕЛЬНОГО АНАЛИЗА

Yendi + Chuchuliga	Yendi + Waala	Bimbilla	Kpandai
TradMed {1} *	TradMed {1} *	TradMed {0} *	TradMed {0} *
LegRec {0} *	PoliInter {1} *	PoliInter {0} *	PoliInter {1} *
ComDia {1} *	ComDia {1} *	LegRec {1} *	LegRec {1} *
MiliInter {0} +	MiliInter {0} +	ComDia {1} *	ComDia {0} *
		MiliInter {1} +	MiliInter {1}

Source: compiled by the authors.

The first result, which is applicable in Yendi and Chuchuliga, reveals the reliance on traditional mediation and community dialogue, devoid of legal recourse and military intervention. In these cases, the use of cultural conflict resolution mechanisms places an emphasis on the importance of local customs and direct community involvement in resolving the disputes. By prioritizing these various traditional mediation mechanisms, these communities demonstrate a commitment to indigenous practices that resonate with their values and norms.

The second result, which is observed in Yendi and Waala, shows a collaborative approach involving the combination of factors: traditional mediation, political intervention, and community dialogue – without military interventions. This strategy shows the necessity of adopting various forms of intervention to tackle conflicts. The merger of traditional methods and political structures enhances both the legitimacy and success of the resolution process, thereby helping to foster greater community participation. Such an approach indicates that communities

are recognizing the importance of drawing from both traditional and institutional frameworks to resolve disputes.

In comparison, the third result, which is relevant in the case of Bimbilla, shows that when traditional and political mechanisms are deemed ineffective, communities may resort to formal legal actions. It also involves the combination of community dialogue and military intervention, suggesting an environment where aggressive measures were deemed necessary. The inclusion of military intervention indicates heightened tensions and instability, proving that conflict resolution in such scenarios can often escalate beyond community discussions, necessitating formal and forceful responses. Hence, this result shows the vulnerability of community dynamics when conflicts reach a critical threshold.

Finally, the fourth result, which is observed in Kpandai, features political intervention, legal recourse, and military intervention – without traditional mediation and community dialogue. This arrangement shows that there was a breakdown in community dependence and relations, whereas formal and more aggressive strategies became the available resolution for managing disputes. The absence of traditional and community-based approaches raises relevant questions about the resilience of these mechanisms in addressing chieftaincy conflicts. It suggests that when community bonds are fraying, reliance on formal institutions and military measures may not only escalate tensions but also undermine long-term resolutions.

Discussion

Resolution of chieftaincy conflicts in Northern Ghana is a challenging yet significant issue that needs careful consideration of local traditions, community dynamics, and also external influences. The QCA results highlight relevant insights into the resilience of various resolution strategies adopted across several communities.

This research focuses on two major assumptions.

Assumption 1. Conflict resolution is more likely to be successful when traditional resolution devices are integrated with strong community involvement and ownership of the process;

Assumption 2. NGOs, governments, and international organizations provide lasting solutions to chieftaincy conflicts.

These assumptions serve as the foundation for exploring frameworks for conflict resolution in chieftaincy disputes in Northern Ghana. These findings are consistent with the studies, including our previous ones, showing that strong civil society instruments contribute to maintaining and sustaining socio-political stability in Ghana.^{1,2}

The results of the QCA demonstrate that if traditional mediation is adopted in combination with community dialogue, greater success is achieved in resolving disputes. For instance, in Yendi, the emphasis on traditional mediation, with community members actively participating in the dialogue, resulted in successful resolution without any reliance on legal recourse or military intervention. This outcome largely aligns

1 Копотаев et al. 2024, 326.

2 Festus Kofi Aubyn, "The Risk of Violent Extremism and Terrorism in the Coastal States of West Africa," Accord, December 10, 2021, accessed August 4, 2025, <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/the-risk-of-violent-extremism-and-terrorism-in-the-coastal-states-of-west-africa/>.

with Assumption 1, which reiterates that the possibility of conflict resolution increases if traditional mechanisms are combined with genuine community engagement.

The use of traditional conflict resolution practices is deeply rooted in the cultural sphere of Northern Ghanaian societies. These mechanisms often reflect the values, beliefs, and social norms of the community, which can make them more successful than the use of formal legal systems.¹ The research also suggests that the use of traditional justice mechanisms often brings about higher acceptance rates among the community members because these resolutions are mostly perceived as being culturally legitimate.² When conflicts are resolved in a way that respects local customs, the results are more likely to be accepted by all parties concerned, leading to a more sustainable peace.

Additionally, community involvement is important for fostering an environment that is conducive to any form of resolution. A sense of ownership over the resolution process gives empowerment to individuals and groups in the community, thereby encouraging them to take an active role in suggesting solutions. This is particularly significant in resolving chieftaincy disputes, where the power structures and historical imbalances can escalate to the diaspora across other regions of the country (an example is the recent surge in Bawku, which was exported to the Nalerigu Senior High School and township as well as the Ashanti Kingdom) or complicate a resolution process. Community involvement also requires the establishment of platforms for dialogue, allowing the community members to voice their concerns, negotiate, and ultimately reach consensus. It is indicated that communities that prioritize such participatory approaches tend to experience a reduction in violence and conflict recurrence.

Conclusion

The results of the QCA demonstrate that the integration of traditional resolution mechanisms in combination with community involvement leads to a more successful outcome across Northern Ghana. In the validation of Assumption 1, the analysis highlighted the relevance of culturally important mechanisms of conflict resolution, which are grounded in community engagement. In addition, Assumption 2 is validated by showing the importance of NGOs, governments, and international organizations in providing necessary support and resources for sustainable solutions in chieftaincy conflicts. As these factors interplay within the complexity of chieftaincy disputes, promoting a holistic and inclusive approach to conflict resolution will provide a pathway to a lasting peace and harmony in the region.

The role of external actors – NGOs, governmental bodies, and international organizations – is also essential in strengthening the possibility for conflict reprisal and resolution in the local context. Assumption 2 reiterates that these formal bodies can offer critical resources, frameworks, and mediation advice that could lead to lasting solutions of chieftaincy disputes across the diaspora. Based on the QCA results, the region of Bimbilla showed the relevance of political interventions in combination with traditional mechanisms when community-based strategies were deemed insufficient.

1 Asaaga 2021, 13.

2 Rosen 2018.

In these cases NGOs often serve as third-party facilitators that mediate discussions between conflicting parties, bridge cultural gaps, and provide resources for training in conflict resolution techniques. By emphasizing a collaborative approach, these institutions can help create a more accommodating environment for a community dialogue to flourish. Their presence as facilitators can also attract the attention of governmental bodies and international agencies, catalyzing broader efforts towards sustainable peace and stability.

Governments play dual roles in addressing chieftaincy disputes. They can help reinforce institutional frameworks that support traditional dispute mechanisms or, otherwise, impose legal structures that may escalate conflicts. The success of governmental involvement depends largely on whether it respects and integrates traditional systems. Successful state intervention can foster collaboration, but it is also necessary that any governmental action be perceived as supportive rather than coercive. This requires a keen understanding of local customs and the willingness to engage with traditional authorities.

In addition, international organizations bring added credibility and neutrality to conflict resolution efforts. When conflicts involve several community factions, the legitimacy conferred by an unbiased third party can facilitate dialogue and encourage participation of all stakeholders. Despite all the potential benefits these institutions can bring, their involvement must be approached with extreme caution. There are various concerns that external interventions, if not grounded in local realities, can lead to a disconnect between resolution mechanisms and community needs. This disparity may instead foster dependency or resentment, complicating the process of conflict resolution. It is important that NGOs, governments, and international organizations engage in partnerships with local communities and respect their customs throughout the process of resolution.

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Разрешение конфликтов о вождествах в Северной Гане: роль традиционных механизмов и вовлеченность диаспоры

АННОТАЦИЯ

На фоне некоторых других африканских государств Гана известна как относительно стабильная демократия. Однако существуют различные формы социально-политической, этнической и религиозной нестабильности, которые сохраняются в Гане на протяжении многих десятилетий и определяют ряд рисков для диаспоры и коренных жителей страны.

Подобные проявления нестабильности обычно классифицируются как конфликты, которые являются либо межэтническими, либо внутриэтническими. В данной статье на примере северных регионов Ганы рассматриваются некоторые конфликты, которые сопровождались ожесточенными столкновениями. Авторы исследуют причины этих конфликтов, многие из которых связаны с борьбой за традиционную власть и авторитет. Для достижения цели исследования используется качественный сравнительный анализ (QCA) и казусноориентированный подход (*case study*) – применительно к регионам, в которых прослеживается склонность к возникновению конфликтов о вождествах. Для анализа были отобраны восемь случаев в трех регионах Северной Ганы, где конфликты сопровождались ожесточенными столкновениями, восстаниями представителей диаспоры, гибелью и перемещением людей. Для изучения стратегий управления, разрешения или трансформации подобных конфликтов, а также для выявления комбинаций факторов, которые могут привести к их наиболее устойчивому прекращению применяются сведения из правительственных отчетов, баз данных международных организаций и научных статей. Эти данные позволили сформировать сравнительную перспективу. Авторы приходят к выводу, что более эффективному разрешению конфликта способствует интеграция традиционных механизмов разрешения споров с участием сообществ.

КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА

Гана, вождество, конфликты, стратегии разрешения, диаспора, качественный сравнительный анализ, северные регионы

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