

ABSTRACT

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As a case study in decentralisation, the present article highlights a clear imbalance between assumptions underlying Ghana's current formula and what actually occurs in practice in terms of political development. The focus is on how intra and inter ethnic relations between two historically marginalised groups have been affected by decentralisation and recent local elections in the newly established Kpandai district, Northern Ghana. It is shown that local democratisation has been a double edged sword; for the majority, settler community, sheer demographic force was mobilised at local elections to dominate the new district assembly with an emerging, inexperienced, ethnically modern political class. For minority groups however, loss at local elections proved a reminder of their previous marginalised status, resulting in renewed emphasis being placed on settlement history, traditional indigenous claims and their symbolic status as a chiefly group. It is found that district creation has become instrumentalised and ethnicity utilised, by both local politicians and chiefs as a social and political resource, to forward and reinvigorate embedded modern vs. traditional values, as both realms clamour to establish and initiate community developmental activities in order to enhance and legitimise respective power registries. On the one hand, historical community boundaries and ethnic identity awareness between chiefly vs. non-chiefly, indigenous vs. settler group have become reproduced, whilst on the other all community representatives are forced to work together and new arenas of cross ethnic cooperation have opened up.