

Land administration and conflicts in Ghana and Zimbabwe: A historical perspective

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Ghana and Zimbabwe share British colonial heritage, but their postcolonial development paths differ in many ways. The administration of land and the sub-soil mineral resources continue to play an important role in determining the fate of the wealth of these two nations. This comparative study seeks to trace land administration regimes in the two nations with particular attention to how land disputes and conflicts manifest and get addressed. The study uses a comparative historical and postcolonial lens on land administration, reforms, and the incidence of and resolutions of land-related conflicts.

The historical lens traces how relics of the colonial land administration shaped paths taken (or not taken) at independence. The postcolonial lens will trace local and international factors that shaped and continue to shape postcolonial land administration and the implication for conflicts. While knowledge of land administration exists for these two countries, comparative analysis remains essential for cross-country patterns and lessons, especially given that the projected population boom in Africa and climate change will put more pressure on land with implications for conflicts. Ghana and Zimbabwe represent polar examples of how the land has been administered historically. In Zimbabwe, land administration largely falls under the national government with chiefs playing a subordinate role (Chavhunduka et al., 2021). In Ghana, the power of chiefs dominates and constrains national land policies (Amanor, 2022; Totin et al., 2021; Lawry et al., 2017).

The overarching research question of this study is: *How did colonial and postcolonial land administration systems shape the scope and nature of conflicts and land disputes in Zimbabwe and Ghana?*

With this question, the study **a)** documents the land administration systems in both countries since colonial times by focusing on key turning points in land administration. This is done by briefly documenting the overarching British colonial land policies in both countries, especially the shift from pre-colonial land administration based on chieftaincy to colonial land systems, which gave birth to legal pluralism. Particular attention will be paid to how the logic of colonial land administration pitted traditional systems against statutory systems (Obeng-Odoom, 2016). The study will also delve into the developments in the postcolonial period where Kwame Nkrumah and Robert Mugabe's approaches to the land question set trajectories for land administration in both nations. The last element is how the land system is being managed now, as pressure for climate and environmentally friendly development pathways is increasing. This part thus addresses the question of land management institutions (customary or statutory) tracing uniqueness and lifting generalizable patterns.

The second aspect of the study is to **b)** document the scope of land-related conflicts and how they manifest in the two countries, including the conflict resolution mechanisms. At the heart of this is a goal to trace how effective the land administration systems have been in both countries, thus assessing contextual and generalizable patterns of land conflict management. This helps to typologize institutional mechanisms – i.e., to lift commonalities beyond their empirical occurrence to a more abstract level of mapping what may be applicable across similar African systems where land administration falls under legal pluralism with at

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least traditional and statutory elements. This part answers the question of the incidence of land-related conflicts in both countries and how they have been mitigated with possible implications for theory and practice.

The study will depend largely on the major turning points in land administration (e.g., major land reform policies/programmes) and insights from empirical literature. The comparative angle will be diachronic, given that the two countries differ in the independence timeline. The main aim is to investigate if and how land administration in Ghana and Zimbabwe has shaped the incidence of disputes and conflicts related to access to land. Casting land conflicts in this long-term perspective can complement policy perspectives emanating from international relations literature (e.g., on land grabbing) (Rousseau, 2020; Liao et al., 2020) as well as provide a long-term lens for thinking about climate change-related land conflicts.

The study is anchored by land policy frameworks and comparative literature to answer these questions. The historical (colonial) antecedents that shaped land administration and reforms in both countries are essential. In addition, the study will also use land ownership and conflict data available through national surveys and other third-party surveys, including the Afrobarometer. The study uses secondary data for descriptive analysis that unpack regional, gender, and rurality of land-related conflicts and how they have been resolved.

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