

Win the match and vote for me: the politicisation of Ghana's Accra Hearts of Oak and Kumasi Asante Kotoko football clubs*

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ABSTRACT

There is a common perception in Ghana that Accra Hearts of Oak is the soccer club of the National Democratic Congress, and Kumasi Asante Kotoko that of the New Patriotic Party. In this paper we explore the roots of these perceptions by examining the social history of these two clubs specifically, and the Ghanaian soccer league system in general, with an eye for the actors, practices and events that injected political airs into purportedly 'apolitical' athletic competitions. With this social history clearly defining the popularly perceived 'us' versus 'them' of the Hearts/Kotoko rivalry, we analyse on the basis of a modest survey some of the assumptions these widely held stereotypes rely upon. We find that ethnicity and location matter both in terms of predicting one's affinity for a given soccer

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club and partisan inclinations. These factors do not, however, completely dispel the relationship between sports and politics as spurious. Though not conclusive, there is enough evidence collected in the survey to suggest that one's preferred club, even when controlling for ethnicity and location, does have an effect on one's partisan leanings, or perhaps vice versa. This finding highlights the independent role that often-understudied cultural politics can play.

INTRODUCTION

In anticipation of the 2006 FIFA World Cup, a travelogue written by Franklin Foer (2004) quickly established itself as a national bestseller. The author, a senior editor at the *New Republic*, adopts as the task of his work an 'explanation of the world'. In preparation for deriving this 'explanation', Foer did not schedule interviews with world leaders, run regressions on global economic data, or carefully read philosophical texts from days of yore. Instead, he travelled the world in search of soccer matches and the culture that enlivens them. Foer's work is not unique in its aspiration to transform 'the beautiful game' into a metaphor for life beyond the pitch. Much like baseball before it, and boxing before that, soccer has caught the attention of the intellectual classes who yearn to connect with the passions of the common man and put them into a perspective where greater meaning can be found.¹ These myriad accounts, notes Bryan Curtis (2006), steadfastly shun the analytical rigour and problem-solving approach that Michael Lewis' (2003) *Moneyball* brought into the mainstream of baseball writing, and embrace instead an approach 'lyrical, impressionistic, [and] given to giddy rhapsodies'. They are interesting reads for even the casual soccer fan and full of compelling hypotheses, but they are all anecdote with little or no systematic theory-testing or building.

In this paper, we seek to contribute to the growing literature on the nexus between soccer and politics, in a way that is a little more *Moneyball* and a little less *How Soccer Explains the World*. At a minimum this means adopting a less ambitious agenda. In lieu of explaining 'the world', we seek to explain the relationship between Ghana's two dominant soccer clubs, Accra Hearts of Oak (Hearts) and Kumasi Asante Kotoko (Kotoko), and Ghana's two dominant parties, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and New Patriotic Party (NPP). This relationship is one that nearly every Ghanaian has heard of, though some report it as an absolute fact and others swear it is little more than soccer lore.

The paper takes as its point of embarkation a hypothesis drawn from the aforementioned soccer and politics literature. Some soccer clubs, the hypothesis goes, represent more than a jersey and some players. They are signifiers of one's position within a divided society.² If you live in Scotland

and pull for Celtic, it is assumed that you are Catholic. A Rangers fan? That means you are Protestant. If you live in Spain and root for Barcelona you are a cosmopolitan Catalan. A Castilian fan of Franco? Then you probably support Real Madrid. In Ghana these stereotypes suggest that Kotoko is the club of ethnic Asantes, and Hearts that of ethnic Gas; Kotoko the club of the upwardly mobile, and Hearts of the lumpenproletariat; Kotoko the club of the ruling NPP party, and Hearts of their chief opposition, the NDC.

To examine this relationship, two complementary paths of inquiry are taken. First we provide a brief socio-political history of the factors contributing to the politicisation of soccer in Ghana. Regular interactions between Ghana's pre-eminent clubs and their supporters, both on and off the pitch, have been taking place for nearly half a century, and have both responded to and shaped the identity politics that undergird the cultural clashes between Hearts and Kotoko. In line with recent work on sport's relationship with society, we use the tool of social history to tease out and trace the process of politicisation, both real and imagined and all points in between, occurring both within and between these two clubs.³

In the second section, we place the product of this social history, namely the prevailing discourse on the relationship between Ghana's two dominant political parties and its two dominant soccer clubs, under a critical microscope to evaluate its veracity. A question asking respondents about their favourite domestic league soccer club was affixed to an unrelated survey in three distinct areas of Ghana. Combined with the demographic and partisan data collected in the survey, answers to this question enable us to systematically test widely held assumptions about who supports Hearts and who supports Kotoko. Through this analysis, we show that some demographic characteristics correlate with party and club preferences, but there remains a connection between Ghana's political parties and soccer clubs that defies easy demographic explanations. These connections, our data suggest, can best be understood not as a coincidental overlapping of rational choices, but as an integral part of larger socio-psychological 'constellations of alternatives' created in the national political discourse.⁴

THE SOCIO-POLITICAL HISTORY OF THE HEARTS/KOTOKO RIVALRY

Hearts and Kotoko are the two best professional soccer clubs in Ghana. Both are considerably older than Ghana itself, and have dominated the national sporting landscape since the country gained independence in

1957. Between them, Hearts and Kotoko have collected forty of the Ghanaian premier league's forty-nine titles, and neither club has ever been relegated or even seriously faced the possibility of relegation. This supremacy has given the clubs a national following, such that, when matches involving Kotoko or Hearts were moved from Kumasi and Accra during scheduled renovations of the national football stadiums in anticipation of hosting the 2008 African Cup of Nation, smaller venues dispersed throughout Ghana's regions overflowed when hosting the clubs' league matches. When the clubs do play each other on their home pitches, Baba Yara Stadium in Kumasi and Ohene Djan Stadium in Accra, the country's largest two venues are filled to capacity, with crowds reaching upwards of 40,000 spectators.⁵

*Phobia: 'Never say die 'til the bones are rotten'*⁶

Hearts records its official date of establishment as 11 November 1911, when they introduced their kits to the public and played their first official match.⁷ The most popular story concerning Hearts' infancy involves the creation of a soccer club by a group of young men in Ussher Town, a neighbourhood situated by the sea in an area known today as 'Old Accra'. Ackom Duncan, a native of Saltpond in Ghana's Central Region, is said to have taken up managerial duties of the ragtag bunch in order to challenge what was then the leading soccer club in the Accra Metropolitan area, the 'Accra Invincibles', a club made up largely of residents of the neighbouring Jamestown area of Accra. Hearts took little time to become a fixture in the Greater Accra region's pre-independence amateur soccer competition, the Guggisberg Shield, winning the title six out of twelve times. In 1957, Hearts joined the first nationally organised league competition of the newly independent state of Ghana and won the inaugural tournament, going on to win nineteen domestic league titles and two continental cups.

Hearts has always had strong connections to the Ga state and Ga traditional authority in Accra, but never to the same degree as Kotoko with the Asante nation. In the early days of the Guggisberg Shield competition, Nii Tackie Tawiah II took the field for Hearts. The man who would become Ga Mantse (head of the Ga traditional state) later took the post of club chairman until his enstoolment in 1944. Another Phobian who would rise to political prominence after his playing days were over was Joseph Ankrah. In the late 1930s and early 1940s Ankrah was Hearts' stand-out right wing. In 1966 he would become the first, and at present only, Ga speaker to take up the position of head of the Ghanaian state, when his

National Liberation Council (NLC) overthrew Nkrumah's Convention People's Party (CPP) government. Despite these examples of a prominent Ga traditional leader and politician siding with Hearts, the Ga community has never been monolithic in its soccer preferences, and Hearts has always had a much broader constituency in the national capital. Accra Standfast, and later its offspring the Accra Great Olympics, have been lesser, though still significant, attractions for Ga-speaking soccer fans. When Standfast left the municipal league in the late 1940s to form a breakaway Ga Football Association, Hearts refused to join them and as a result did not play their cross-town rival on a regular basis again, with Standfast disintegrating on its way to eventually folding in the early 1950s.⁸

*Fabulous: 'Wo kum apem a, apem be ba'*⁹

Having won twenty-one domestic league titles and two continental championships, 'Fabulous' Kumasi Asante Kotoko was established initially under the moniker Ashanti United in 1924 and then rechristened the Kumasi Titanics a few years later. The name of the club was changed yet again to Kumasi Asante Kotoko in 1935, a particularly important year in Asante history. It was the year that the Asante Confederacy, dissolved in 1901 by the British, was restored, and the Asantehene (the King of the Asante) returned to the ceremonial stool. That the club was in this year dubbed Asante Kotoko and given the porcupine as its mascot, a name and symbol synonymous with the Asante military wing, was no coincidence. The name Kotoko evoked not just Asante pride, but a populist form of militant Asante nationalism which, like the porcupine's quills, is thought to be an inexhaustible source of strength (Allman 1990). Nana Agyeman Prempeh II, Asantehene at the time and a fixture at Kotoko's early matches, was appointed the club's 'Life Patron', with final authority concerning club decisions resting exclusively in his lap.

From newspaper accounts of their early matches, it is apparent that when Kotoko played, it was seen as representing all of the Asante nation rather than merely the municipality of Kumasi. Descriptions of matches between Kotoko and clubs drawing support primarily from the other ethnic groups illustrate this proclivity. In a newspaper article covering a 1939 match between Accra Standfast and Kotoko, the words 'Ga' and 'Asante' are used throughout the report to describe the fans of the clubs, though significantly not the clubs themselves (*Asante Pioneer* 1940). The club's own published annual report from 1940 fuels this perception by ending with the following call to arms: 'The old order changeth, giving way to the new. You have taken the footsteps of your ancestors but in a

different way. They with guns, bows and arrows, you with your hands and legs, and with your play' (Amoah 1940).¹⁰

A HISTORY OF MIXING SOCCER AND POLITICS

In the period immediately after independence, the government of Ghana recognised the importance of sports in general, and soccer in particular, as a vehicle for nation-building (Versi 1986: 33–4).¹¹ Soccer played an important part in the independence celebrations of 1957, as Nkrumah encouraged English footballer Stanley Matthews to join Hearts for a few matches to publicise the creation of an annual national soccer league competition. The stated purpose of this league was to cultivate a sense of national identity in the newly independent republic (Darby 2002: 37). Clubs were chosen, and in some cases created, from all over the country to take part and to give the league its national character.

In 1960, the Sports Directorate took the unusual step of creating an official government soccer club, the Real Republikans. The club competed on a non-scoring basis in the league. It was considered the establishment club par excellence and the side was to be drawn from all the clubs in the top flight of the Ghanaian league, with each club contributing two players. Clubs in the league had no control over whom the government would select for the Republikans squad, and this fact was a source of intense friction between the independent clubs and the government. Given the political faultlines that had developed in the 1950s, some of the most bitter player-related conflicts occurred between Nkrumah's Sports Directorate and Kotoko.

In the period immediately before and after independence, the National Liberation Movement (NLM), led by J. B. Danquah and his supporters in the Asanteman Council, became the most vocal component in Ghana's anti-Nkrumah oppositional forces. As the movement derived much of its support from Kumasi and its environs, the NLM and the Danquah–Busia political tradition that would follow it became closely associated with Kotoko in the 1960s, as it has been ever since.¹² To kick-off the 1962 season, Kotoko and a number of other clubs threatened to boycott the national league when its two star players were drafted to play for the Republikans. As a result the league banned Kotoko from playing home matches for the season. For making similar complaints Hasaacas, the Western Region's premier club, was expelled from the league altogether (Bediako 1995: 17).

These complaints were just the beginning of a pattern of grievances against the national government felt at some point by supporters of all clubs in Ghana. A perception arose that certain governments were partial

to certain clubs, and that some governments (and, by extension, some political traditions) were more partial to either Kotoko or to Hearts. Smaller clubs with far fewer supporters and even less influence had a ceaseless complaint. They felt that they were being discriminated against by the sports authorities in favour of the bigger and more popular clubs, and tended to side with whichever goliath was out of power at the moment in petitioning the league for more favourable treatment.

This politicised sports history ultimately had an effect on what it meant to be a fan of a particular club, or the adherent of a particular political tradition. Thus, for a Kotoko supporter, the extremist fan/conspiracy theorist would suggest that the CPP government, and later those led by Rawlings, were against them and more favourable to the establishment clubs based in the country's capital city, particularly the Republikans and Hearts.¹³ These governments, by their acts of oppression and discrimination against Kotoko, were not just attacking a soccer club, but attempting to suppress the social identities, specifically the Asante ethnic identity in this case, wrapped up in the club's persona.

For a Hearts fan, the conspiracy theory would be that the NPP government and its earlier incarnations in the Danquah–Busia tradition and Ghana's Akan business and political establishment are firmly in the camp of Kumasi Asante Kotoko and, therefore, do not want to see Hearts succeed. Disputes over players that are resolved in court, investigations of irregularities in player transfers, hearings of the disciplinary committee of the Ghana Football Association, investigations of incidents at stadiums by various committees, and indeed all other actions or decisions that require governmental input, are resolved in Kotoko's favour when the Danquah–Busiaists are in power. Especially for the Ga supporters of Hearts, these fears were enmeshed with their perennial concerns about land alienation issues, and their sense of being under siege from outsiders, particularly Akans (Quarcoopome 1992).

THE HEARTS/KOTOKO POLITICAL RIVALRY

The politicisation of the rivalry between Hearts and Kotoko is a reflection of two overlapping phenomena: the bifurcation of Ghana into two dominant political traditions, and the failure of the soccer clubs to put in place independent institutional structures to sustain themselves financially. Despite their large support bases, covering operation costs for both Kotoko and Hearts is dependent on the generosity of wealthy and influential patrons. Traditionally popular perception holds that the two clubs have attracted a different, and arguably rival, set of sponsors. Personalities

who have held influential positions in Kotoko have largely been members of Kumasi's traditional and business elite. When they have dabbled in politics, they have for the most part been strong supporters of the Danquah–Busia tradition. The personalities behind Hearts have mostly been Accra-based businessmen and political leaders. They have tended to support the Nkrumahist political tradition. Today, with the demise of the Nkrumahists as a political force and the supplanting of the Nkrumahist tradition by Jerry Rawlings's regime, the leading personalities of the Hearts have tended to come from the NDC half of the political divide.

The (P)NDC and Accra Hearts of Oak

From the mid 1980s, the political nature of the Hearts/Kotoko rivalry, which had hitherto been mostly putative, became increasingly the source of public debate. This disruption of the status quo was a direct result of the overt relationship between Hearts and the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC). We have already mentioned that the association between Kotoko and political parties in the Danquah–Busiaist tradition dates back to the immediate post-colonial period. The current form of the relationship between Hearts and the rival Rawlingsist political tradition is far more recent in origin. Led by Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings, the PNDC military regime was in power from 1981 to 1992. In 1992, a new constitution was promulgated, and Rawlings assumed the presidency as a democratically elected leader under the banner of the NDC. As with the CPP, the primary locus of opposition to the (P)NDC was the Ashanti Region, and Kotoko again assumed its role as the club of the opposition. Rawlings made it clear that Hearts was the club of the establishment by showing up to matches between Hearts and Kotoko wearing Hearts' well-known 'rainbow' colours. On one much discussed occasion in 1989, Sarfo Gyamfi, the captain of Kotoko, refused to shake the hand of Rawlings during the customary pre-match formalities of a match played to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the 4 June revolution in protest of what opposition forces saw as a bogus holiday celebrating an illegitimate coup (*Daily Graphic* 2004).

The connections between the (P)NDC and Hearts leadership are numerous. A number of personalities in the government had strong overt sympathies towards Hearts prior to taking power, including Rawlings himself. In 1990, for example, Hearts formed a nine-member committee to administer its African Cup Winners Cup campaign. The committee was headed by Kofi Totobi Quakyi, Secretary of Information for the PNDC government. Also on the board were Ato Ahwoi, PNDC Secretary

of Fuel and Power and subsequently Hearts chairman, and John E. A. Mills, a former chairman of the Ghana National Sports Council and three-time presidential candidate for the NDC (*West Africa* 1990). A recent report suggests that the latter two were de facto owners of the club from the mid 1990s through 2005 (GNA 2005). Other (P)NDC members with close connections to Hearts include the late Ato Austin, one-time chairman of Hearts' board of directors and PNDC Secretary for Information; Commodore E. M. Mensah, current Hearts board chairman and former PNDC Secretary for Agriculture; and E. T. Mensah, former player in Hearts youth squad as well as PNDC Secretary and NDC Minister for Youth and Sports.

The NPP and Kumasi Asante Kotoko

The connections between Kumasi Asante Kotoko and Ghana's ruling NPP Government are equally clear. The NPP is the modern-day party of the Danquah–Busia tradition. It came to power in 2000 after winning a closely contested election against the NDC. The NPP derives much of its electoral support from the Ashanti and Eastern Regions. The current president of Ghana, John Kufuor, is a former Chairman of Asante Kotoko. Dzane-Selby, another former chairman of the club, contested the NPP presidential primary in 1992. Yaw Osafo-Maafo is yet another former club chairman who contested the 2008 NPP presidential primary. Patrons of the club, such as George Adu-Poku and Kennedy Agyepong, are also big donors to the NPP. Kotoko, despite Hearts being the club of the establishment for the twenty-year period of the (P)NDC regime, is perceived as wealthier and better run than Hearts; their kit is usually of a better quality, souvenirs professionally made, and website maintained. This is partly because the Asantehene is rumoured to be a bottomless supply of resources for the club. Similar accusations have been made with regard to the Asantehene's relationship with his preferred political party. It is reported that one of the first actions of the current Asantehene was to use the centennial celebration of the rebellion of Yaa Asantewaa as a tool to market the then candidate of the NPP, John Kufuor (McCaskie 2007: 163).

Clash of the Titans

The Hearts/Kotoko rivalry shares similarities with other sports rivalries around the globe. It is always intense and occasionally violent, it is based on a perceived sense of alienation and persecution by both clubs at various

stages in their histories, and it has been exacerbated by national politics. Giulianotti (in Armstrong and Giulianotti 2004: 63) explains that 'football fan sub-cultures ... display significant geographical and cultural differences between one another. Thus the ferocity of football-centred emotions is neither simple to explain nor static in volume or intent.' What it means to be a fan of either Kotoko or Hearts has changed at various points in Ghana's post-independence history. Today, the club of the establishment is clearly Kotoko, with its links to the current president and its long association with the Danquah–Busia tradition. The aggrieved and perpetually discriminated against club is Hearts. These roles could be reversed as soon as the 2008 election.

As discussed above, both Kotoko and Hearts continue to have links with local traditional rulers, Kotoko with Asantehene and Hearts to a lesser extent with the Ga Manste. One popular perception about the clubs is that Kotoko is an Asante club and Hearts is one of several Ga clubs. We test this perception in the next section of the paper. However, it is suggested that the nationwide popularity and success of both clubs and the politicisation of the rivalry make such statements oversimplifications. Kotoko today receives significant support from non-Asantes and non-Akans. Hearts support is arguably even more ethnically diverse. Kotoko support associations, known as 'Circles', have several branches in Accra. Hearts support associations are called 'Chapters', and can be found all over the country, including an active and dynamic Kumasi Chapter.

Today, such is the association between the two clubs and the two parties that, in the run up to the 2000 elections when John Kufuor, then presidential candidate of the NPP, offered Hearts a donation to assist the club in its preparations towards the African Club Champions campaign, it was initially refused. During the same election cycle in 2000, a banner was reportedly unfurled during a soccer game at the Accra Sports Stadium stating that the Hearts were solidly behind the NDC's presidential candidate Professor John E. A. Mills (*Daily Graphic* 2004). A few months later, in the aftermath of the 9 May Stadium disaster which resulted in the death of 127 fans, those who felt justice was both slow and poorly served were keen to point out that the newly installed government was NPP and most of the fans who perished were supporters of Hearts (GCDD 2001). More recently, in 2003, an anti-government demonstration organised by the NDC to protest against the policies of the NPP went through the streets of Accra and ultimately ended up at the training grounds of Accra Hearts of Oak, at which point both Hearts and NDC songs were sung (Obeng 2003).

DISAGGREGATING THE SOCCER/PARTY CONNECTIONS: A MODEST SURVEY

To test some of these assumptions, this discussion relies upon a single question on Ghanaian soccer which was affixed to the end of an unrelated survey.¹⁴ The question reads – ‘Do you follow Ghanaian football, and if so which team do you support?’ Possible answers include ‘No, I do not follow Ghanaian football’, ‘Hearts of Oak (Phobia)’, ‘Asante Kotoko (Fabulous)’, and ‘I follow another team.’ Combined with collected demographic characteristics and respondents’ self-identified partisan identification, this question allows one to construct a rough sketch of what a characteristic Phobian or Fabu looks like demographically. It also allows one to rank identifying attributes including ethnicity, age, level of schooling, occupation, place of residence and favourite club for their impact on partisan proclivities.

The survey was administered to 600 randomly generated registered voters in three parliamentary constituencies: Odododiodio (located in the heart of Accra very near the Hearts’ practice facility), Bantama (within easy walking distance of Baba Yara Stadium, Kotoko’s home pitch), and Nabdam (a small rural constituency in Ghana’s far north that is nearly 200 km by road from the nearest Premier League club, Real Tamale United). Though this modest survey cannot hope to describe the relationship between Ghana’s two dominant soccer clubs and its two dominant political parties for the entirety of Ghana in any comprehensive way, similarities between these three diverse constituencies can be cautiously extrapolated.

Identifying Phobians and Fabu with demographic indicators

Having offered identity politics as one of the underlying motivators of the Hearts/Kotoko rivalry, we first use the collected data to test a number of hypotheses derived from the social history of the two clubs and their interactions. These hypotheses can be placed in two general categories: those focusing on socio-economic social cleavages, and those focusing on sectional social cleavages.

The former set of hypotheses focus on what can be labelled the subtle ‘socio-economic airs’ of the clubs. Kotoko has a reputation as the well-heeled club of Ghana’s business class with its finances rarely brought into question. Hearts are considered the more rough and tumble club, dependent on public sector contacts and constantly in and out of court for bills in dispute. Though these perceptions are full of obvious deviant cases, Phobians who have achieved great wealth in private enterprise and Fabu

who rely on access to government resources for their Spartan financial existence, one would expect to pick up on some socio-economic differences between the two clubs' supporters at the aggregate level if these stereotypes are more than mere soccer legend.

The latter set of hypotheses addresses the ethno-regional conflict played out in the Hearts/Kotoko soccer rivalry. Not only are Hearts and Kotoko based in Ghana's largest and second largest cities, Accra and Kumasi, but they are also based in the capitals of two distinct ethnic groups, Ga and Asante, and supported, both financially and emotionally, by the political heads of these two groups, the Ga Mantse and Asantehene. If the sectional hypotheses are borne out, one would expect at a minimum Ga to claim allegiance to Hearts and Asantes to claim allegiance to Kotoko on an aggregate level, exceeding what could be expected given a null hypothesis.

Socio-economic factors in the Hearts/Kotoko rivalry

Admittedly, measuring the relationship between a soccer club's personality and its fans with socio-economic indicators is an exercise in inexact abstraction. This acknowledgment does not mean that the undertaking is beyond utility. Comparing Hearts and Kotoko supporters on the basis of their age, education and type of employment, one would expect to see noticeable and significant differences if the clubs attract fans according to their socio-economic airs. If there are no differences, as is borne out in the data, a slew of popular rival hypotheses derived from the social cleavage literature are rejected.¹⁵

In Ododiodio, the average Phobian is in his/her early thirties, has a blue collar job in the service sector, and attended school through the JSS-level (middle school). The average Fabu in Ododiodio was different from the Phobian only in being a few years younger. This pattern is repeated for Bantama, except that among survey respondents Kotoko supporters are a few years older than Hearts supporters. Both groups average a JSS-level education and work a blue collar job in the service sector. In Nabdam supporters of both clubs are most likely to be farmers, in their thirties, and with no formal education. These findings of similar demographic profiles for the average Hearts and Kotoko fans in three dissimilar constituencies are supported by a number of cross-tabulations run for each constituency. Using education, age and occupation (blue/white collar, public/private and employed/unemployed) as predictors of the respondent's preferred club yields no statistical significance for any constituency under consideration.¹⁶

TABLE 1
Proximity predictors of soccer support

	Ododiodio	Bantama	Nabdram	Total
Hearts supporter	67 % (133)	14 % (28)	14 % (28)	32 % (189)
Kotoko supporter	19 % (37)	61 % (121)	14 % (28)	31 % (186)
Another team	8 % (16)	5 % (9)	—	4 % (25)
Do not follow league	7 % (13)	21 % (42)	72 % (144)	33 % (199)
No answer	1 % (1)	—	—	0 % (1)
Total	100 % (200)	100 % (200)	100 % (200)	100 % (600)

$\chi^2 = 361.7$ (df = 8), $P = 0.000$.

Sectional factors in the Hearts/Kotoko rivalry

As a predictor of club preference, at least in the cases of Ododiodio and Bantama, sectional indicators are far more reliable than socio-economic ones. When broken down by city (see Table 1), the relationship between Kumasi and Kotoko supporters and Accra and Hearts supporters is both as expected and quite significant. Knowing nothing more than the fact that an individual lives in the Bantama neighbourhood of Kumasi, predicting that said person is a Fabu fan will be correct more than half of the time. In the Ododiodio section of Accra, the odds similarly favour a randomly selected individual being a Phobian. The picture in Nabdam is more ambiguous. There are noteworthy numbers of Namnam who follow both clubs, but probably due to the limited availability of national media in the area and the historical dearth of clubs in Ghana's northern regions, most Namnam do not follow the Ghanaian Premier League at all.

Suggesting with cross-tabulations and a χ^2 test that a soccer club is more popular near its home pitch than near its chief rival's home pitch will win one few awards. Few league matches are televised and the radio stations in Accra and Kumasi give preference to the local club's match in their broadcasts. In addition to these decidedly rational reasons to support the home club, there is the psychological attachment between a resident of a city and the club that takes that city's name onto the pitch. The data set does, however, allow us to test the power of alternative sectional cleavages that are geographically influenced but not geographically bound. Based on our reading of Hearts' and Kotoko's social histories, we test in addition the power of ethnolinguistic identities to predict club support.

Tables 2 and 3 display ethnolinguistic categories for both Ododiodio and Bantama constituencies as they relate to soccer club preferences.¹⁷ Of the 128 self-identified Ga speakers in the three-constituency survey, nearly

TABLE 2
Ethnolinguistic predictors of soccer support (Ododiodio)

	Akan	Ewe	Ga	Northern	Other	Total
Hearts supporter	37 % (19)	62 % (8)	79 % (100)	60 % (3)	75 % (3)	67 % (133)
Kotoko supporter	45 % (23)	23 % (3)	7 % (9)	20 % (1)	25 % (1)	19 % (37)
Other answer	18 % (9)	15 % (2)	14 % (18)	20 % (1)	–	15 % (30)
Total	100 % (51)	100 % (13)	100 % (127)	100 % (5)	100 % (4)	100 % (200)

$\chi^2 = 39.2$ (df=8), $P = 0.000$.

TABLE 3
Ethnolinguistic predictors of soccer support (Bantama)

	Akan	Ewe	Ga	Northern	Other	Total
Hearts supporter	11 % (20)	33 % (1)	100 % (1)	38 % (6)	–	14 % (28)
Kotoko supporter	65 % (115)	33 % (1)	–	25 % (4)	50 % (1)	61 % (121)
Other answer	24 % (43)	33 % (1)	–	38 % (6)	50 % (1)	26 % (51)
Total	100 % (178)	100 % (3)	100 % (1)	100 % (16)	100 % (2)	100 % (200)

$\chi^2 = 20.3$ (df=8), $P = 0.009$.

80 % classify themselves as followers of Hearts. Only 7 % of Ga speakers claim an affinity for Kotoko. These findings suggest that knowledge of an individual's self-reported ethnolinguistic identity, at least in the case of Ga speakers, is an even better predictor of which club the individual supports than their physical location.

The ethnolinguistic category 'Akan' is not as helpful, but this owes more to the category's bluntness than to Kotoko's lack of a substantial ethnic support base. As an ethnolinguistic label, Akan incorporates a number of social groups whose dialects are generally mutually intelligible but who have never constituted a unified political entity (Kiyaga-Mulindwa 1980). If one considers the various ethnic identities that comprise the Akan language family individually, predictive abilities increase.¹⁸ Out of the 165 self-identified Asantes in the survey pool, nearly 70 % describe themselves as supporters of Kotoko while less than 10 % claim a preference for Hearts. Again this ethnic identity serves as a better predictor than locality.¹⁹ The only other Akan group with an $N > 10$ picked up in the survey pool are Fante speakers, who favour Hearts over Kotoko by a small margin in Kumasi and by a rate of slightly more than two to one in Accra.

THE NEXUS BETWEEN SOCCER CLUBS AND POLITICAL PARTIES

Having identified some of the most likely predictors of soccer club preference, the discussion turns to a two-tiered analysis of the relationship between Ghana's Premier League soccer clubs and the Fourth Republic's political parties. The first component of this analysis is an examination of the relationship between an individual's club preference and party preference. There is an open and quite vocal debate in Ghana as to whether or not there is a correlation between these two variables, and this paper seeks to bring some empirical evidence to the table. The second component of this analysis is a re-evaluation of the preceding analyses in light of the strong correlations found in the first part of the analysis. Here the question is asked: why does someone's favourite club say so much about the way they vote? We draw upon the above descriptions of Phobians and Fabu to test the potential for spuriousness in our detected soccer/political party relationship.

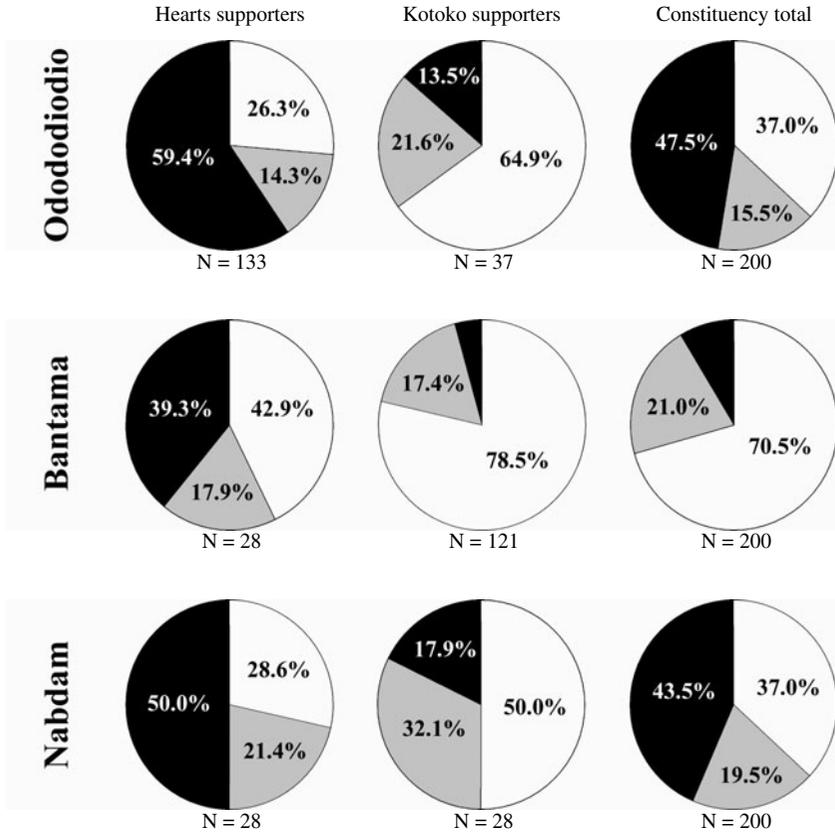
An unexpected correlation?

To test whether or not there is a relationship between Ghana's two dominant soccer clubs and its two dominant political parties, a simple comparison of the voting preferences for Hearts and Kotoko supporters is performed for each constituency under consideration. The results of this comparison are displayed in Figure 1. In interviews with several politicians from both sides of the aisle and editors of both *Hearts News* and *Kotoko Express*, there was a near universal declaration that the linkages between Hearts and the NDC and Kotoko and the NPP are overblown.

The argument behind these claims almost always follows the same script. First the interviewee suggests that people assume Hearts is an NDC club because notable members of the Hearts family include important NDC politicians. E. T. Mensah is usually the first example offered, likely because of his playing history, but he is often followed by John Evans Atta Mills and Ato Ahwoi. When it comes to Kotoko, Kufuor's role as the club's former chairman is always mentioned, and Yaw Osafo-Maafa's service to the club in a similar capacity follows shortly thereafter. Without fail these comments are trailed by a short pause allowing the interviewee to think of an anecdotal example that will unravel the argument he has just made. Dan Botwe, former Secretary General of the NPP and Minister of Information in Kufuor's government, and avid Hearts supporter, is the most oft-cited, though not only, deviant case.²⁰

Yet these attempts to downplay the relationship between soccer rivalries and party politics are not supported at the aggregate level in the surveyed

FIGURE I
Soccer fans and their political parties.



Key: **NDC**, **NPP**, **Other**²³

Ododiodio $\chi^2 = 28.1$, $p = 0.000$; Bantama $\chi^2 = 44.3$, $p = 0.000$; Nabdum $\chi^2 = 9.8$, $p = 0.045$

constituencies. In three very different constituencies, respondents who support Hearts are more likely to support the NDC than respondents who support Kotoko, and respondents who support Kotoko are more likely to support the NPP than respondents who support Hearts. This relationship is both statistically significant and substantively interesting. In each constituency under consideration there are 'Dan Botwes' who buck the trend and support the NPP and Hearts or the NDC and Kotoko.²¹ These isolated examples do not, however, disconfirm the general trend. On average, changing an individual in our sample's club preference from Hearts to Kotoko nearly doubles the NPP's chances of claiming that individual as

TABLE 4
Soccer's independent impact on partisanship

	Asante				Ga			
	Hearts	Kotoko	Other	Total	Hearts	Kotoko	Other	Total
NPP	62.5 %	81.4 %	69.4 %	77.0 %	25.0 %	55.6 %	44.4 %	29.9 %
NDC	18.8 %	1.8 %	5.6 %	4.2 %	63.0 %	22.2 %	44.4 %	57.5 %
Other	18.8 %	16.8 %	25.0 %	18.8 %	12.0 %	22.2 %	11.1 %	12.6 %
Total	100 % (16)	100 % (113)	100 % (36)	100 % (165)	100 % (100)	100 % (9)	100 % (18)	100 % (127)

Asante $\chi^2 = 11.7$ ($df = 4$), $P = 0.020$; Ga $\chi^2 = 7.8$, $P = 0.100$.

a supporter. Transforming a respondent from a supporter of Kotoko to a supporter of Hearts makes that person more than four times as likely to identify with the NDC.

Controlling for spuriousness

While these numbers are interesting and should prompt self-motivated politicians to take their sports even more seriously than they already do, there is a potential problem of spuriousness in the correlation between sports clubs and political parties. Amongst survey respondents, Ga speakers side with the NDC over the NPP at a rate of nearly two to one. Asante speakers picked up in the survey identify themselves as NPP over the NDC at a rate of nearly twenty to one. Since these two ethnic groups tend to overwhelmingly support Hearts in the case of the former and Kotoko in the case of the latter, ethnic identity may be the independent variable driving both partisanship and one's preference for a particular club.

This explanation is not, however, totally satisfying as the club that individuals support has some relationship with voter preference, independent of ethnicity. To demonstrate this point we take Asante respondents who identify themselves as Hearts supporters and compare them with Asante respondents who identify themselves as supporters of Kotoko. We perform a similar comparison with Ga-speaking respondents. The results of this comparison are displayed in Table 4. Among Asantes in the sampled population, a change in an individual's club attachment from Hearts to Kotoko makes it nearly 20 percentage points more likely that this individual will vote for the NPP. Amongst Ga in the sample group, a change in an individual's club attachment from Kotoko to Hearts makes it 40 percentage points more likely that this individual will vote for the NDC.²²

The point that one's soccer club preference affects, or is affected by, one's party preference is made again in a comparison of Hearts and Kotoko supporters in Nabdam. Nabdam is an ethnically homogenous constituency where nearly everyone is a Nabit speaker, and those few residents who are not are almost exclusively from neighbouring Gurune-speaking communities. This homogeneity renders ethnicity an unworkable independent variable. As already mentioned, in Nabdam education, occupation and age are statistically unrelated to soccer club preference. These socio-economic demographic characteristics are thus likewise incapable of explaining differences in partisan preferences between supporters of the two clubs. Yet there is a substantial difference between Hearts supporters and Kotoko supporters in the sample with regard to party preference. Phobians in this northern constituency, far-removed geographically from both Kumasi and Accra, are nearly twice as likely to support the NDC as the NPP. The situation is nearly exactly reversed for Fabu in Nabdam.



The survey results and social histories of the clubs presented above show that there is at least some factual basis for the widely held beliefs about Hearts and Kotoko's relationship with Ghana's two dominant political parties. Some of this relationship can be explained by obviously overlapping cleavage structures. People in Ghana, at least when it comes to Hearts and Kotoko, tend to support clubs from their general vicinity. Evidence from the survey suggests, however, that most of this relationship is driven not by proximity, as one might expect, but by ethnic affiliations which, like soccer club support and party preference, tend to cluster geographically.

If the story ended with the finding that the politics of soccer are really just the politics of regional or ethnic competition in another guise, the result would surprise few. Not only are ethnic politics a terrain well covered in the literature on African politics, but alignments between sectional communities (ethnic, religious, regional, *etc.*) and soccer clubs are the generators of much of the growing body of soccer-and-politics literature. The story does not, however, end with ethnicity. While we believe that more research needs to be conducted to properly identify what exactly is driving the relationship between soccer and politics in Ghana, and that larger-N studies that address varied cases are necessary to move beyond our tentative conclusions, the above survey takes an important first step: it provides empirical evidence suggesting a relationship between the parties and the clubs that appears to be independent of other affiliations and identities.

Were die-hard Phobians somehow indoctrinated at matches into the NDC party fold? Did supporters of Kotoko start rooting for the club because their presidential candidate happens to prefer the Porcupine Warriors? Our data does not provide answers on the causal direction of the discovered relationship, and this is without a doubt an area which deserves further study. What does seem clear is the support our findings give to cultural explanations of political action. Summarising Green, Palmquist and Schickler's (2002) *Partisan Hearts and Minds*, David Brooks (2004) urges his readers to adopt their social-psychological understanding of politics in order to understand partisanship in the American case. 'People have stereotypes in their heads about what Democrats are like and what Republicans are like', Brooks contends, 'and they gravitate toward the party made up of people like themselves.' Though there is no evident rationality-based explanation for the independent relationship between Hearts and the NDC, and Kotoko and the NPP, this somewhat fuzzy cultural explanation not only feels quite comfortable given the facts, but does so while foreclosing on the all too familiar tendency to exoticise political contests in Africa.

NOTES

1. Notable examples of this trend include Buford 1990; Hornby 1992; Kuper 1994; and Weiland & Wilsey 2006.
2. For the general tendency to assign cultural meanings to soccer clubs see Riordan & Krüger 2003. For work specifically on the Scottish and Spanish leagues used in the examples below see Finn 2000 and Ball 2001 respectively.
3. Just a few well-done recent examples of these soccer-related social histories include Alegi 2004; Armstrong & Giulianotti 2001 and 2004; Finn & Giulianotti 2000; Wagg 2004; and many of the articles published in the journal *Soccer & Society* since its inception in 2000. Specific to Ghana, Akyeampong (2002) produced an excellent social history of boxing in the Bukom area of Accra.
4. We consciously borrow the phrase 'constellations of alternatives' from Lipset & Rokkan (1967: 2).
5. For a recent history of the clubs' successes on the pitch see Effah & Bediako 2004.
6. Hearts' nickname and slogan.
7. Hearts' original kit was not rainbow-coloured. The club did not adopt its famous red, yellow and blue until 1917.
8. This history of Accra Hearts of Oak derives from both informal interviews and a reading of Borquaye 1968.
9. Kotoko's nickname and slogan. The slogan translates into English as: 'If you kill a thousand, a thousand more will come.' It was the slogan of the Asante military during their campaign against the British.
10. This resort to ethnic ties to bind fans to their club is not unique to Asante Kotoko. A number of clubs in Ghana were created with strong associations to particular ethnic groups, e.g. Susubiribi (Akyem), Adansi United (Adansi), Accra Standfast (Ga). In some ways, this is not unexpected. The quickest way to drum up support for a new soccer club and ensure its financial stability was to appeal to local ethnic identity. It should also be noted that, with the exception of Asante Kotoko and arguably Nkwakaw's Okwahu United, such clubs have tended not to last.
11. Nkrumah is not unique in having this ambition (Schatzberg 2001: 106).
12. In an interview given by Kotoko's director after J. B. Danquah's death, B. K. Edusei reports that he learned from Danquah's wife that 'among the articles he took to prison where he died was this [Asante Kotoko Sporting Club] membership card' (Kodwo-Mensah 1967: 16).

13. In one famous incident in Kotoko lore, the Real Republikans allegedly threw a game to allow Hearts to win the League in the 1961–2 season. Kotoko's official website suggests that the Republikans 'allowed Hearts to beat them to prevent Kotoko from winning the league'.
14. The survey was administered as part of a study of the interaction between social cleavages and political parties, and has been reported in Fridy 2007.
15. Class analysis was fundamental to early attempts to study parties as interest aggregators (e.g. Lipset & Rokkan 1967) and has remained an important factor (e.g. Evans 1999) through the present.
16. Statistical insignificance was determined through a χ^2 test ($P > 0.1$).
17. Nabdram does not fit into this discussion because, in the sample collected, there is complete ethnolinguistic homogeneity.
18. Amongst others, the Akan linguistic group includes Akuapem, Asante, Akyem, Baoulé, Brong and Fante speakers in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire.
19. The number of cases is too small to attribute great worth to the findings, but it is interesting to note nonetheless that of the nineteen self-identified Asantes registered in the Odododiodio survey, Kotoko supporters outnumbered Hearts supporters by a ratio of 10:6. Were this finding to hold up under the weight of a larger survey population, it would indicate that ethnicity matters when choosing a club to support but environment can vitiate the impact of ethnic sentimentalities. With only one Ga speaker in the Bantama survey, the impact of the environment on sports affiliations is impossible to infer or even hypothesise about.
20. Dr Nyaho Tamkloe (*Accra Mail* 2001) has put these sentiments down in print.
21. Though the evidence is not great, in each of the three constituencies there are more respondents who support the NPP and Hearts than NDC and Kotoko.
22. We have set Table 4 up using club preference as our independent variable and partisan proclivity as our dependent variable. This set-up suggests that it is club preference which precedes, and we argue influences, political party proclivity. Given an alternative hypothesis suggesting people select their political parties first and their soccer clubs second, the variable positions could be reversed to yield a greater percentage of Asante-speaking NPP supporters following Kotoko than Asante-speaking NDC supporters, and a greater percentage of Ga-speaking NDC supporters following Hearts than Ga-speaking NPP supporters.
23. Survey respondents were asked if they are registered with a political party. Those who answered no to this question were asked whether they support one party or another. Registered members and supporters of the NDC are classified as NDC. Registered members and supporters of the NPP are classified as NPP. 'Other' includes those who identified with a party other than the NDC or NPP, those who identified as independents, and those who refused to answer the question.

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