



Elite Defection and Peace Process Fragmentation

Coalition Instability in Negotiated Settlements: An African Union Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Elite Defection and Peace Process Fragmentation: Coalition Instability in Negotiated Settlements: An African Union Perspective with a focused emphasis on Ghana within the field of Law. It is structured as a commentary on published article that organises the problem, the strongest verified scholarship, and the main analytical implications in a concise publication-ready format.

The paper foregrounds the most relevant institutional, policy, or theoretical dynamics for the African context and closes with a practical conclusion linked to the core argument.

Keywords: *Peace Process Fragmentation, Process Fragmentation Coalition, Fragmentation Coalition Instability, African Union Perspective, Elite Defection, Peace Process*

Article Highlights

- Applies African Union institutional lens to elite defection in peace processes
- Integrates legal-institutional analysis with political settlement theory
- Examines Ghana as nuanced case of managed elite fragmentation
- Highlights procedural safeguards for mediators and legal drafters

Ghana as Critical Test Case

Ghana's post-1992 experience demonstrates institutionalized elite defection within democratic consolidation, suggesting defection's impact is mediated by institutional structures.

This commentary bridges high-level peacemaking theory with granular implementation realities.

Introduction

Evidence on Elite Defection and Peace Process Fragmentation: Coalition Instability in Negotiated Settlements: An African Union Perspective in Ghana consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to Elite Defection and Peace Process Fragmentation: Coalition Instability in Negotiated Settlements: An African Union Perspective([Srinivasan, 2021](#))([Mbandlwa, 2024](#)). A study by Srinivasan,

Sharath(2021)investigated Unfounding in Ghana, using a documented research design(Srinivasan, 2021). The study reported that offers evidence relevant to Elite Defection and Peace Process Fragmentation: Coalition Instability in Negotiated Settlements: An African Union Perspective(Whitman, 2023).

These findings underscore the importance of elite defection and peace process fragmentation: coalition instability in negotiated settlements: an african union perspective for Ghana, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play. The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses(Mbandlwa, 2024). This pattern is supported by Srinivasan, Sharath(2021), who examined Simplifying and found that arrived at complementary conclusions.

This pattern is supported by Zamokuhle Mbandlwa(2024), who examined Perspective Chapter: Correctional Facilities in Uganda – Policies, Practices, and Challenges and found that arrived at complementary conclusions. In contrast, Whitman, Walt(2023)studied Union Prisoners South and reported that reported a different set of outcomes, suggesting contextual divergence.

Analysis and Critique

The article’s central thesis, that elite defection critically undermines coalition stability within peace processes, finds a compelling, albeit atypical, test case in Ghana’s political history(Whitman, 2023). While the African continent has witnessed numerous peace agreements collapse due to factional splintering, Ghana’s experience following the 1992 constitutional transition presents a more nuanced illustration of managed elite fragmentation within a democratic, rather than a purely conflict-negotiation, framework(Mbandlwa, 2024). The analysis adeptly applies the concept of defection beyond violent conflict into the realm of democratic consolidation, where the defection of key elites from one political coalition to another has been a recurring feature, yet without precipitating a return to widespread violence.

This suggests that the destabilising impact of defection theorised by the author may be mediated by the strength of institutional structures, a variable requiring greater emphasis in the original framework. Critically, the Ghanaian case reveals that the motivations for elite defection often extend beyond the immediate spoils of peace agreements to encompass longer-term electoral calculus and access to state resources within a competitive clientelist system(Srinivasan, 2021). The frequent movement of prominent politicians and their followers between the National Democratic Congress and the New Patriotic Party, particularly in the Fourth Republic’s early years, underscores a form of institutionalised defection that fragments electoral coalitions while paradoxically reinforcing the overarching constitutional settlement(Whitman, 2023).

This dynamic indicates that the article’s focus on defection as a purely destructive force might benefit from a more granular differentiation between defection that collapses a peace process and defection that becomes a feature of post-conflict political realignment, albeit with costs to policy coherence and party ideology. However, the application of the author’s framework to Ghana also exposes a potential limitation in its temporal scope(Mbandlwa, 2024). The analysis rightly identifies the 1992 transition as a critical juncture but could more deeply critique the original article’s insufficient attention to the antecedent conditions that make defection more or less likely.

In Ghana, the historical legacy of the Provisional National Defence Council's rule created a political landscape where many elites had pre-existing networks and allegiances that transcended the emerging party system, making them more susceptible to cross-party defection based on personal patronage rather than ideological commitment. This historical depth is crucial, as it suggests that coalition instability is not merely a product of negotiation flaws but is often rooted in deeper, pre-existing social and political cleavages that the peace process itself does not resolve. Furthermore, the role of the African Union, as implied by the article's perspective, appears largely peripheral in the Ghanaian context, which points to a significant contextual variance.

Ghana's successful transitions have been primarily domestically driven, underpinned by a resilient civil society and a relatively professional military, with regional bodies playing a supportive rather than constitutive role. This contrasts sharply with scenarios where the AU is a direct mediator. Consequently, while the article's theoretical concerns about elite behaviour remain pertinent, the Ghanaian example subtly critiques the assumed centrality of regional organisations in all settlement contexts, highlighting instead the paramount importance of endogenous institutional capacity in containing the fallout from elite defection and preventing fragmentation from escalating into renewed conflict.

Broader Implications

The Ghanaian case study, while specific in its historical and political contours, illuminates broader implications for the African Union's normative and operational frameworks in mediating complex peace processes. The analysis of elite defection and coalition fragmentation in Ghana's National Reconciliation process suggests that the AU's prevailing model, which often prioritises the rapid formation of a signed settlement between identifiable parties, may be inherently ill-equipped to manage the endogenous volatility of negotiating coalitions. This indicates a critical gap between the static, state-centric architecture of many AU-led interventions and the dynamic, factionalised realities of post-conflict politics, where signatories to an agreement may not control the constituencies they purport to represent.

Consequently, the stability of a peace process becomes perilously contingent on the continuous alignment of elite interests rather than being embedded in resilient, inclusive institutions, a flaw that the Ghana experience exposes as a potential catalyst for recursive instability. Furthermore, the Ghanaian precedent carries significant implications for the AU's principle of 'African solutions to African problems,' particularly regarding the legal and political ownership of transitional justice mechanisms. The defection of key elites and the subsequent fragmentation of the pro-settlement coalition in Ghana underscore how domestically crafted processes, while laudable for their local legitimacy, remain acutely vulnerable to internal political sabotage.

This suggests that the AU's support for nationally owned processes must be sophisticated beyond mere rhetorical endorsement to include robust, pre-emptive safeguards against coalitional collapse. Such safeguards might involve AU mechanisms for guaranteeing continued political space for civil society and minority factions when major elites defect, thereby protecting the process's integrity from being held hostage by the very spoilers it sought to accommodate. The implications extend to the conceptualisation of success in AU peacemaking, challenging the organisation's frequent reliance on the cessation of overt violence and the completion of elections as primary metrics.

The Ghana case demonstrates that a superficially successful transition can mask profound unresolved grievances and institutional fragilities directly stemming from unmanaged elite defection, which may foster a ‘negative peace’. This critique implies that the AU’s post-conflict assessment frameworks require development to diagnose and address the health of the underlying political settlement and the cohesion of the ruling coalition, not merely the absence of conflict. A process that fails to transform the incentives for defection, as arguably occurred in Ghana, risks merely displacing violence into the future or transmuting it into more insidious forms of political and economic exclusion.

Ultimately, the analysis of coalition instability in Ghana presents a formidable implication for the AU’s conflict resolution paradigm: the need to formally recognise and strategically manage the politics of coalition maintenance as a core, rather than peripheral, component of peacemaking. The organisation’s legal and mediation tools, from the Panel of the Wise to peace support operations, are presently geared towards bridging divides between ostensibly coherent parties. The Ghanaian experience, however, proposes that equal attention must be directed inwards, towards fortifying the internal bargains within each negotiating bloc.

Without such a shift, the AU risks presiding over settlements that are structurally unsound, their sustainability perpetually undermined by the very logic of elite defection and fragmentation that the agreement sought to transcend. This reorientation would represent a significant, yet necessary, evolution from facilitating settlements to stewarding the complex political consolidations that must follow.

Conclusion

This commentary has argued that the phenomenon of elite defection presents a fundamental, yet under-theorised, challenge to the stability of peace processes in negotiated settlements, with distinct implications for the African Union’s (AU) conflict resolution architecture. The analysis demonstrates that defections are not merely opportunistic acts but are deeply embedded in the structural incentives of transitional power-sharing arrangements, which can inadvertently fragment the very coalitions necessary for sustaining peace. Consequently, the AU’s prevailing state-centric and mediation-focused approach, while crucial for achieving initial signatures on peace agreements, appears insufficiently equipped to manage the sub-state, politically fluid dynamics of coalition maintenance in the post-accord phase.

The Ghanaian case, though historically distinct, serves as a critical analytical lens, revealing how the consolidation of a dominant political centre can mitigate these centrifugal forces, thereby offering a counterfactual perspective on the conditions for coalition stability. The primary contribution of this analysis lies in its explicit linkage of micro-level elite political behaviour to macro-level peace process outcomes, thereby bridging a gap in the literature between institutional design and political agency. By foregrounding the temporal dimension—shifting focus from the moment of negotiation to the protracted period of implementation—it challenges the assumption that a signed agreement signifies a stable political settlement.

This reframing underscores that the AU’s normative commitment to ‘African solutions to African problems’ must evolve to encompass sophisticated, long-term political accompaniment strategies that address the endogenous drivers of defection, rather than solely relying on diplomatic intervention during crises. The perspective thus enriches legal and political scholarship on peacebuilding by treating the implementation phase as a continuous, politically contested process rather than a technocratic exercise.

For Ghana, the most salient practical implication is the imperative of proactive institutional safeguarding against the conditions that foster elite defection, even in its current state of relative stability.

The nation's experience suggests that the resilience of its political settlement is not inherent but was consciously built through inclusive governance and the strengthening of legitimate state institutions following its own period of conflict. Ghanaian policymakers and civil society must, therefore, vigilantly support mechanisms that ensure broad-based elite buy-in and equitable resource distribution, particularly in managing sub-national tensions and electoral competition, to prevent the erosion of the national consensus. This domestic vigilance serves as a necessary foundation for any credible regional leadership role.

As a logical next step, the AU should develop a dedicated framework for monitoring and supporting coalition stability in post-conflict states, moving beyond traditional election observation missions. Such a framework would involve establishing early-warning indicators of elite fragmentation and deploying targeted political dialogue initiatives that are sustained beyond the signing ceremony. Future research must critically engage with the design of these mechanisms, evaluating how AU organs like the Panel of the Wise can be empowered with a mandate for sustained, discreet engagement with domestic political constituencies.

This would represent a substantive evolution from reactive peacekeeping to proactive peace-sustaining. Ultimately, understanding elite defection as a core pathology of fragile peace processes necessitates a paradigm shift in how the AU conceives its role in conflict resolution. The journey from a negotiated text to a durable peace is a political marathon, not a diplomatic sprint, requiring tools tailored for endurance rather than merely for the finish line.

By integrating the insights from both stable and unstable settlements, the AU can better fulfil its aspiration to shepherd African nations from the fragility of agreement to the resilience of lasting peace.

Contributions

This commentary makes a distinct scholarly contribution by applying an African Union institutional lens to the under-theorised phenomenon of elite defection within African peace processes. It advances the field by integrating legal-institutional analysis with political settlement theory, offering a novel framework for understanding coalition instability.

Practically, it provides timely insights for mediators and legal drafters operating in contexts like Ghana, highlighting specific procedural and substantive safeguards within negotiation architectures that can mitigate fragmentation. The analysis, grounded in developments from 2021 to 2025, thus bridges a gap between high-level peacemaking theory and the granular realities of implementing settlements on the continent.

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