



# An Assessment of Women's Participation in the National Democratic Congress of Ghana

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## Abstract

This study investigated the challenges that confront women's participation in Ghana's party politics using the National Democratic Congress (NDC) the longest ruling party since Ghana returned to multi-party politics in 1993. The survey involved 633 NDC card holding women drawn from eight constituencies nationwide through a multi-stage sampling technique. Logistics regression analysis identified five main challenges as inadequate financial resources, socio-cultural beliefs, violence associated with political competition, sexual harassment and ability to organize or mobilize people. The prospects of women's participation in party politics are bright because education which is the bedrock of effective political participation did not feature as a key challenge.

**Keywords:** *Ghana, Party Politics, Political Participation, Women*

## Introduction

The role of women in party politics is no longer new in development discourse. Generally, it is recognized that for development of any kind to be successful, women should be inclusive. Democratic literature makes it clear that both men and women have equal rights to contribute meaningfully to the development of their countries all over the world. Indeed, one of the key features of democracy is the principle of equality where each member of the society has the same weight (UNFPA, 2014; Ballington, 2005). There is enough historical evidence that women in Africa such as Queen Amina of Hausa Empire, Queen Yaa Asantewa of Gold Coast (Ghana), Empress Helena and her successor Sabla Wangel of Ethiopia have all played significant roles in the political history of their countries (Agomor, 2004).



In spite of their remarkable contributions and glorious past, majority of women are at the periphery of party politics in Africa. Globally, women constitute the majority of the voting public yet they are disadvantaged in competitive politics. Comprising over fifty percent of the world's population, women continue to be under-represented in political and public life. Many scholars argue that equitable participation of women in politics and government is essential to building a vibrant democratic society; and that democracy cannot effectively deliver for all of its citizens if half of the population remains marginalised in the political arena (Ballington, 2005; Fatile, Akhakpe, Igbokwe-Ibeto, & Oteh, 2012).

The need to address the distressing and pervasive marginalisation of women at various stages of public decision-making processes led to the establishment of international treaties, conventions, and resolutions such as the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against women (CEDAW) (1979); Beijing Platform for Action (1985); Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR); International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR); and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) (2015). Ghana is a signatory of these international instruments, and her 1992 Constitution and Political Parties Act, Act 574 also require that a party member should not be discriminated against on grounds of gender, race, colour, ethnic origin, religion, wealth, economic or social status (Ghana, 2000). Indeed, the Constitution of all political parties indicated that the members of their political parties have the same right to vote, stand for an election, pay dues, and participate in decision making. Many studies did report that progress on women's political participation remains at snail's pace. Currently, women constitute only 19 percent of the membership of legislative assembly worldwide, except in few countries such as Rwanda, Cape Verde and South Africa where women account for over 30 percent of legislators and cabinet ministers (Ballington et al., 2012: 8; UN Women, 2015).



Whilst there is no edict in Ghana that debars women from participating in politics or in areas of socio-economic life, women of Ghana often face daunting challenges in their bid to exercise their political right of participation. The advocated ideal of gender parity in national legislature is still a distant aspiration. While it is imperative to boost women's involvement in party politics, the more fundamental question raised is about the gender sensitiveness of the democracy practised in Ghana. The prevailing intra-party politics makes it even more difficult for women to get party nomination to contest elective posts because of the few female party membership.

Many studies have been done on the challenges to low participation of women in party politics and public life at and national global levels, but not enough empirical evidences have been provided. We contribute to the literature by providing empirical evidence based on card holding members of a specific political party. This study is motivated by the fact that women's effective participation in multi-party politics has become a global issue. However, not much attention has been given to the role of ruling political parties, the main vehicle for political participation in democracy. This study therefore fills the gap in the literature by examining the socio-economic, cultural, political challenges women's effective participation in Ghana using National Democratic Congress (NDC) women as a case study.

### **Women's Political Participation: The Ghanaian Experience**

The most serious setback for women's political involvement in the Gold Coast began during the colonial era. At the onset of British colonialism, indigenous women's involvement in public life was severely undermined owing to the introduction of colonial education which segregated women and denied them access (Yartey, 2013; Allah-Mensah, 2005; Konde, 1992; Manuh, (1991). Yarety (2013) corroborates Allah-Mensah's (2005) assertion that colonial rule did not attach any importance to female education; a situation which was somewhat aided by the patriarchal African value system and the prevalent customary gendered role pattern.



Prior to the restoration of multiparty democracy in 1992, the National Commission for Democracy which was tasked to lead the democratisation process engaged in several consultative processes, informed by feminist views on democratic politics. Main issues raised by women civil society organisations included, inter alia, the promotion of basic human rights of the vulnerable and the marginalised; and political inclusion of the female gender (Ninsin, 1996; Bluwey, 1998). Allah-Mensah (2005) observed that, based on the recommendations for Affirmative Action in Ghana submitted by the National Council on Women and Development (NCWD), administrative directive was “to provide a set of guidelines for systematic and sustained implementation of the various aspects of Affirmative Action towards equality of rights and opportunities for women in Ghana”. The directive noted that Ghana was an active member of the UN which adopted the CEDAW which the government had duly ratified without reservations and the government had also participated fully in the deliberation of the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 and these two facts were the basis of its affirmative action policies.

Since the inception of the Fourth Republic in 1993, Ghanaian women have shown consistent enthusiasm to contribute to the democratic processes by actively contesting for public offices. Though no female has contested the presidency, women parliamentary aspirants have increased tremendously under the Fourth Republic. This has, however, not resulted in more women parliamentarians. In her study of *Women in Politics and Public Life in Ghana*, Allah-Mensah (2005: 29) identified political parties as one powerful institution with the potential to enhance women’s political participation in Ghana. She stressed that the nature of women’s involvement in internal party organisation following the return to multiparty democracy in Ghana, gives an impression of women’s political consciousness and the parties’ commitment to gender balance. Ghanaian political parties have ways of influencing policies in favour of certain people like that of women and especially within the party hierarchy. Though Allah-Mensah (2001) maintained that the creation of women’s wings does not necessarily make political parties gender sensitive, political parties in Ghana have constituted women’s wings as part of their organisational structure to enhance women’s involvement in party



politics. Allah-Mensah (2005) further observed that the encounters of women in Ghana's party politics are not too different among the various political parties. The bulk of the women executives are within the women's wings and at lower ranks at the national level. Positions like treasurer, secretaries and vice are mainly occupied by women; a phenomenon which is widespread in organisational formation in Ghana

Yartey (2013) revealed that Ghanaian women who aspire to enter parliament on party tickets struggle for a foothold during party primary elections. Supports from male colleagues have been quite mixed. Whilst some party male members offer different forms of assistance to promote women aspirants, others are subtly antagonistic towards women who express interest in parliamentary jobs and party executive posts. Moreover, getting more women into positions in the party and in politics generally require some financial strength which is one of the problems encountered by most Ghanaian women aspirants. This is very pervasive owing to the economic status of many women in Ghana and the fact that poverty in Ghana is more widespread among women than men.

### **Research Methodology**

This study is a quantitative research to assess the challenges of women's political participation in the NDC. A combination of probability and non-probability sampling techniques was employed to select the respondents. The respondents were drawn from eight (8) constituencies in four (4) regions of Ghana's ten administrative regions. Greater Accra Region was purposively selected in addition to three (3) other regions which were randomly chosen using multi-stage sampling techniques. Greater Accra is the administrative capital of Ghana, housing seasoned women politicians, of the selected political party (NDC), with diverse ethno-religious and socio-economic political backgrounds.

In terms of the distribution of the questionnaires, 80 questionnaires were assigned to each of the 8 constituencies – giving a sum of 640 respondents nationwide. About 80% of the questionnaires were administered on women at NDC rally for their primaries in November 2015. The rest was administered in party offices and homes from November



2015 to January 2016. In all, 633 respondents representing 98.9% response rate was used for the analysis. The response rate was high because the questionnaires were administered face to face. The Statistical Package Stata 20 was used in analysing the field data. Also logistic regression was employed to examine the challenges of gender mainstreaming in the NDC party.

### **Findings of the study**

Survey respondents were asked to rate on a scale of one (minimum) to five (maximum) their levels of agreement with each of the identified challenges of participation in the party. The findings of the study are presented with logistics regression results. These are discussed below.

### **Logistic model and discussion of findings**

This section of analysis uses logistics model to analyze the challenges facing NDC women in politics. The probability of observing the respondent participation in politics (Voting as delegate) is then equal to:

$$\Pr\{y = 1\} = \frac{e^{\text{intercept} + \text{slope} * X}}{1 + e^{\text{intercept} + \text{slope} * X}}$$

Where X is a vector of our independent variables.

Also in our model we controlled for age, marital status, education, religion and employment.

Though lack of education has been hyped in the literature (Allah-Mensah, 2005; UN Women, 2015) as key impediments to women's political empowerment, the results of this present study did not affirm so. The findings of this current study clearly identified inadequate financial resources, socio-cultural believes, violence associated with political competition, sexual harassment and ability to organize or mobilize people as the main daunting challenges facing gender mainstreaming in the NDC.

**Logistic regression results: Challenges facing NDC women in their political participation**

	Odds Ratio	Standard Error	P-value
Lack of financial resources	0.898	(.078)	0.080+
Education and training	1.098	(1.11)	0.170
Religious faith doctrine	1.066	(0.67)	0.693
Cultural beliefs	0.852	(.067)	0.088+
Character assassination	1.002	(0.02)	0.960
Violence associated with political competition	0.826	(.070)	0.061+
Lack of support from spouse/partner	1.125	(1.39)	0.134
Sexual harassment	1.262	(.052)	0.002*
Ability to organize or mobilize people	0.649	(0.045)	0.000**
Reproductive role	1.051	(0.45)	0.519
Domestic responsibilities	0.870	(1.32)	0.156
<b>Control variables</b>			
Age	1.173	(1.47)	0.141
Marital status	0.971	(0.27)	0.791
Education	0.900	(1.21)	0.226
Religion	0.983	(0.16)	0.875
Employment	1.050	(0.60)	0.550
Observation	633		
Pseudo R-squared	0.08		

+ p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01 (significant level)

As Shvedova (2005) emphasised, the contribution of women to party democracy and institutionalisation of political parties cannot be underestimated. However, the male dominance in Ghanaian politics has a tendency of encouraging political parties to marginalize women's involvement and interests. Nonetheless, for political parties to remain resilient in the political system, active participation of womenfolk is crucial. Thus, women's ineffectiveness in party's organisation due to participation setbacks portends adverse consequences on party's fortunes. Firstly, the prevalence of financial hindrances coupled with expensive ballot access fees to run as nominees of the NDC implies that non-affluent, but politically ambitious women would not find it easy to access public offices using NDC platforms and may therefore resort to other political parties that provide financial reliefs to female politicians. This will further widen the gender gap of political representation within the NDC.

Secondly, the use of violence for political ends is destructive to women's inclusion in party democracy as amplified in this study. Political violence affects the nature of political competition and the reputation of the political party. The equitable participation



of females in party democracy is an indication of women's political emancipation, and is healthy for democratic deepening and party institutionalization (Walters, 2005). Yet, as incidences of political violence continue to frustrate women's political participation within the NDC, it can wane female membership subscription and women's empowerment suffers in the long run. Also, as political violence continues to kick out women from NDC's internal politics it can earn the party a bad reputation as a violent political tradition without women's interests at heart.

Thirdly, the incidence of character assassination and gender-based harassments against women implies that the NDC as a political party would experience low involvement of women in its internal politics. This is because women by their very nature eschew aggressiveness and require to be treated with dignity. Hence, most women would find it uncomfortable to enhance their political participation within the NDC and would therefore prefer to be affiliated to political parties that provide a congenial atmosphere for women's political participation. This can affect the party's electoral fortunes as Ballington et al (2012) posit that a political party that promotes women's involvement benefits from the large female population votes and vice versa. The findings of this study also support the viewpoints of Matland (2005) and Ballington et al (2012) who argued that the marginalization of women in party politics is the bane of effective party building since women's contribution to political parties propels parties to victory.

## **Conclusion**

Application of logistic regression to our model using control variables and challenges facing NDC women in their political participation provided an empirical result that shows us five (5) main challenges but at different levels of significance. This study showed that the challenges facing NDC women's political participation have deleterious implications on gender mainstreaming and the party's institutionalisation. To adequately address the daunting financial obstacles that women who venture politics face, it is recommended that whilst the NDC makes a conscious effort to reduce ballot access fees further for female aspirants, the women wing of the party is encouraged to source for





supplementary funds to support female candidacies across the constituencies. To address the issue of political violence and character assassination which often deter most women from party politics, it is recommended that stiffer disciplinary measures should be sanctioned against party members found culpable. Also, intra-party grievance procedures must be non-cumbersome and made known to party members for easy accessibility to mitigate incidence of resorting to violence and other unorthodox means to settle political scores. Furthermore, individual females are admonished to appreciate the vicissitudes of political life and live above reproach in the male-dominated public life to enhance their own political participation. Subsequently, special women's conferences and seminars must be organised periodically to discuss pragmatic ways of promoting female political participation *inter alia*: effective feminine political campaign strategies; sourcing for campaign funds, as well as sharing political experiences. Although thorough investigation has been conducted for this case study, other researchers are encouraged to employ comparative approaches involving women of several political parties to help us appreciate the various peculiarities of women challenges when venturing party politics in Ghana.

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