



Systemic Barriers to Women in Politics: A Reflection on Ghana's 2020 General Elections

Emmanuel Graham 

Department of Politics
York University 
Toronto, Canada

Abstract

In preparation for the 2020 general elections in Ghana, the leader of Ghana's National Democratic Congress (NDC) and former President John D. Mahama picked the former vice- chancellor of the University of Cape Coast and former education minister under his administration Professor Jane Nana Opoku Agyeman as his vice-presidential candidate. This choice was met with criticism from the rank and file of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) with most of the attacks centred on her gender, rather than her meritocratic qualifications. Although Ghana has a higher population of women, they are underrepresented in parliament and political leadership. While there is sufficiently reasonable evidence supporting the assertion that women have potential that can be tapped to meaningfully enhance social, economic and political development of nations, yet very little is done in Ghana to ensure that majority of women are involved in decision-making. This chapter is a post-mortem of Ghana's 2020 general elections, pointing to the pre-election rhetoric against the NDC's vice presidential candidate and post-election reality. It argues that the various institutional arrangement in the numerous political parties in Ghana does not support higher female representation and the enshrined cultural perception is that the woman's role is in the home and not politics. Gender politics can therefore help secure electoral votes but might not transform the male-dominated political-institutional structures and cultural perceptions in Ghana. The



paper concludes with some recommendations on how to increase female representation in Ghana's politics.

Keywords: Ghana, National Democratic Congress (NDC), New Patriotic Party (NPP), Feminist Theory and Gender Inequality

Introduction

There is ample evidence that supports the assertion that the competencies of women can be tapped into for socio-economic development and political development of nations (Allah-Mensah, 2005; United Nations Population Fund, 1994). There have been efforts by non-state actors such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), multilateral institutions and civil society organizations (CSOs), amongst others, to harness the potential of women for the development of nations. These efforts in some instances have yielded positive results, however, there is much room for improvement especially through women in leadership and politics. Indeed, both globally and locally, the representation of women in leadership and politics is limited as they are underrepresented in elections, in leadership positions, in civil service, in private sector and academia, despite the proven abilities of women and girls as leaders and agents of transformations (UN Women, 2021c). Women and girls face several obstacles in political participation such as structural barriers like discriminatory laws and institutional limitations in political participation. The General Assembly of the UN in 2011's resolution on women's political participation state emphatically "that women in every part of the world continue to be largely marginalized from the political sphere, often as a result of discriminatory laws, practices, attitudes and gender stereotypes, low levels of education, lack of access to health care and the disproportionate effect of poverty on women" (UN.org, 2011: 2). More importantly, the resolution also states, "the importance of empowering all women through education and training in government, public policy, economics, civics, information technology and science to ensure that they develop the knowledge and skills needed to make full contributions to society and the political process" (ibid).

Women's involvement and equal participation in politics, public life and leadership across the world is critical for attaining the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, however, reports and research show a lower representation of women in politics in Africa and other parts of the world. Data reveals that women are poorly represented at all levels of decision making across the globe making the achievement of gender parity in political leadership quite difficult (UN Women, 2021b, 2021c). A map of "Women in Politics: 2021" produced by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN Women showed that despite an increase in the general representation of women in political offices - from 21.3% in 2020 to 21.9% in 2021 - significant gender disparities persist especially women's advancement to senior ministerial roles (UN Women, 2021d). Notably, the number of countries with no women holding governmental positions increased during this period. As of 2021, women occupied only 25.5% of national parliaments globally (ibid). According to UN Women (2021a), as of June 2021 women served as President or Heads of States in 22 countries whilst 119 countries have never had a female Head of State (including Ghana). It is therefore projected that gender equality in the top position of power might never be reached until the next 130 years (UN Women, 2021a).

Ghana for example has a higher population of women and yet they are underrepresented in political leadership and over the years, very little has been done to ensure that these women are involved in decision-making at the highest level of the state. For Ghana's 2020 general elections the flagbearer of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the former President John D. Mahama, selected Professor Jane Nana Opoku Agyeman, a distinguished academic and former education minister under his administration as his vice-presidential candidate. This move was criticised by the New Patriotic Party's (NPP) communicators, with criticism being more on her gender, rather than her qualifications. It is from this background that this chapter offers a post-mortem of Ghana's 2020 general elections and the gender dimensions thereof. Although Ghana in 2025, had its first female vice-president—marking a historic milestone—the underlying institutional and structural barriers

to women's political representation remain largely unchanged. The research question guiding this chapter is: *Why does Ghana continue to struggle with embracing female political leadership and achieving higher representation of women in parliament?* The chapter argues that while gender-based nominations can be strategically useful for vote mobilisation, they often fail to challenge or transform the deeply entrenched male-dominated political institutions. By examining the 2020 elections as a case study, this chapter seeks to address the persistent gap in the literature concerning low female representation in African politics and to offer fresh insights into pathways for improving gender inclusivity, drawing lessons from Ghana's experience.

The chapter also seeks to build on earlier research on the topic such as Allah-Mensah (2005) who examined the participation of women in Ghana's politics at the local, party as well as national level. Similarly, Apusigah (2004) investigates the gender effect of vulnerability in terms of decision making and politics in the Upper East Region; she argues that the inhabitants of the Upper East Regions are vulnerable, however, women are much more vulnerable. Other studies such as Manuh (2011) has argued for higher women representation in national governance through proportional representation and quota schemes as a strategy for Ghana to achieve the millennium development goals (MDGs). Moreover, Musah and Gariba (2013) studied women's participation in Ghana's parliament from 1992 to 2008 and argue that socio-cultural and political impediments hinder the successful participation of women in parliament. Recent studies by Asekere (2020), focusing on Ghana's two dominant political parties NPP and NDC found that women's underrepresentation in the party's leadership at the national level is a result of their underrepresentation at the subnational level among other factors. Building on these studies this paper seeks to explain why Ghana continues to struggle with embracing female political leadership and achieving higher representation of women in parliament. This chapter utilizes feminist theoretical paradigms relating to gender, sexuality and identity to analyse the involvement of women in the political sphere of Ghana since the country attained its independence.

As posited by Hooper (2001), feminist theory offers pivotal insights into the manner in which gendered social dynamics and institutional frameworks constrain the agency of women. Such analytical tools facilitate an understanding of the contributions made by women, including their involvement in the Convention People's Party (CPP), alongside the enduring obstacles they encounter within a profoundly patriarchal political landscape. Ghana's political milieu epitomises extensive global trends wherein female leadership frequently encounters systemic and cultural impediments. Despite the attainment of notable milestones—from women's pivotal roles during the quest for independence to the historic nomination of Professor Jane Naana Opoku-Agyemang as a candidate for the vice-presidency, the political arena remains predominantly male-centric. This chapter scrutinises these occurrences, critically analysing the nexus between feminist theory and empirical evidence to investigate how women's agency disrupts patriarchal norms and reshapes the political discourse in Ghana.

After the introduction, the rest of the paper is organised as follows; gender inequality and women politics section discuss the issues of gender and inequality, the subsequent section, gives a brief history of women in Ghana's politics since independence. The next section discusses the possibilities of having a female president in Ghana. The following section focuses on the 2020 general elections and its gender dimensions. The penultimate section discusses the issues of women representation in parliament trying to examine if it is increasing over the years and the last section is the concluding remarks and recommendations.

Feminist Theory, Gender Inequality and Women in Politics

The paper is anchored on feminist thinking on gender, sex and identities with regards to women in politics. It is important to state that most gender theories revolve all around:

“(1) physical embodiment, including the body and the role of reproductive biology; (2) institutions and the gendered

social processes that they encompass, including the family, the economy, the state; and (3) the discursive dimension of the gendered construction of language and its constitutive role in the gender order (Hooper, 2001: 20)".

Feminist theory tries to understand gender and inequality, women and men's social relations and experience in politics, at home, at work and many more.

Some of the issues that feminist theorist focusses on are gender inequalities, its forms and manifestations. It also explores various themes such as objectification (mostly sexual), discrimination, oppression, stereotyping and others. Feminist theorisation emerged as early as the 18th century (Wallstonecraft, 1792) but it garnered more attention from the late 1960's (Betty Friedan 1963; Audrey Laude 1984). It advanced that women were under oppression due to the direct patriarchal system and pervasive sexism.

Broadly, scholars have discussed four main approaches to feminist theory although there are more approaches. These four feminist theories are Liberal, Marxist, Social and Radical Feminisms (Jaggar and Rothenberg, 1993). Liberal feminism stresses the notion of equality of opportunity for women who have been subjugated for years in their family, work and society (Jaggar and Rothenberg, 1993). Marxist feminism points out to the origins of women operations and private property whereby women and children became the property of men. Socialist feminism brings out the class aspect of cultural and dominant institutions such as patriarchy family system (ibid). According to Rhodes (2005), Marxist feminism and socialist feminism have the following in common; critique of patriarchy, transformative orientation and focus on economic structures, however, whilst Marxist feminism's focuses on capitalism as the root cause of women's oppressions, socialist feminism examines a more interconnection approach by addressing the connections of capitalism and patriarchy. Rhodes (2005) also mentions that socialist feminism examines the class dimension of women's exploitation in the workplace and investigates women and women of colour and their working condition (ibid). Finally,

radical feminism is a woman centred view or approach, which challenges the male dominated order (Rhodes, 2005). Radical feminism also argues that the subordination and oppression of women is rife in social orders and economic systems which cannot be removed by change and is of the view that the gender system needs to be aborted.

An important aspect of feminist theory is that gender inequality is a human right issue and it remains an important global issue with huge consequences, not only for the lives and livelihoods of women and girls, but also is important for human growth and development, particularly to address the challenges of inclusive growth. The McKinsey and Company (2021) report on their website states that “gender inequality is not only a pressing moral and social issue but also a critical economic challenge. If women—who account for half the world’s working-age population—do not achieve their full economic potential, the global economy will suffer” (2021: np). Feminist and other scholars interested in gender studies have emphasised the essence of women representation in political and public offices and how women’s involvement in democracy can facilitate greater transformation, which has been an important discourse over the years. It has been argued that gender equity is critical for any state to achieve “economic growth and genuine democracy” (Goetz, 1998: 242). Gender equity can also be said to be a “welfare issue”

[that is] “it is about enhancing the quality of human and social reproduction through women’s improved education or health. But more than that, it is a matter of social justice and social transformation aimed at redistributing resources and social value more equally between women and men, a process which includes undermining the gendered public/private segregations which marginalise women in the worlds of politics and economic production” (ibid).

Gender equity is also considered as a prerequisite for sustainable development and advocacy across the globe continues in its bid to promote women participation in politics. In Africa, women began to make their presence known in electoral politics from the

early 90s, for instance women contested for presidency in Kenya and Liberia, some sought for party nomination for presidential candidacy in Nigeria, Angola, Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Tanzania and São Tomé and Príncipe (Tripp, 2001). The involvement of women in politics, especially the legislature, has been argued to have several benefits beyond women. For example, Thomas and Welch (1991) in their research on women in the United States of America's legislature noted that women were most successful in passing laws that focused on family, children and women. Additionally, women or female politicians add a different impetus to the notion of women representation as Flammang (1985) argues that women politicians have been seen to have a different approach to their public service giving them more credibility. These women have been more receptive to their constituent, they have been more approachable and are having better human relations serving their constituent (ibid).

Women participation in politics and political decisions has been an important discussion in Ghana over the years (Allah-Mensah, 2005; Apusigah, 2004). Allah-Mensah (2005) posits that there is a growing awareness that women have massive potential that can be tapped into for socio-economic development. It has also been argued that since Ghana has a higher population of women, their presence in politics and parliament would improve the nature of debates and policy making processes (ibid). Despite these potentials, Ghanaian women, and the general participation of women in local, national and international politics have been limited for several reasons. These include some like; women mostly lacking resources, lacking political experience, lacking the needed education and connections to run for office and the cultural perception that women's role is in the home rather in politics remains (Tripp, 2001). It is within this framework that this chapter seeks to examine the role of gender in Ghana's 2020 general elections.

Women in Ghana's Politics Since Independence

The contributions of women during Ghana's struggle for independence align with socialist feminist frameworks, which emphasise the interplay of gender and institutional structures. There are several instances that show the important contribution of women in Ghana's politics in the struggle for independence as well as after independence. For instance, in their support for the CPP, it has been recorded that several women such as traders supported the CPP financially and provided other services that contributed to the election of Kwame Nkrumah as Ghana's prime minister and president (Allah-Mensah, 2005). Some instrumental women who contributed to the struggle for Ghana's independence were Sophia Doku, Hanna Cudjoe, Leticia Quaye and Ama Nkrumah and they were appointed as the propaganda secretariats of the CPP with the responsibilities organising the women's League of the CPP (Tenu, 2019). The women's section or wing was responsible for women and youth development. . These women were efficient organisers who managed to assemble several people at rallies within a short notice (Manuh, 1991) and their efforts led the to the first affirmative action bill which was drafted in 1960s thus giving way for the unopposed election of ten women as members of parliament in Ghana (Allah-Mensah, 2005). This was the first time an African state had introduced and implemented the quota system (ibid). This accomplishment refutes the presumption that gender equality is a contemporary phenomenon and illustrates that Ghanaian women played a pivotal role in advocating for political reform well prior to its global acknowledgment. While these efforts were pioneering, they also reveal the challenges of sustaining institutional reforms that advance gender equity. Radical feminism critiques the limitations of such reforms, arguing that patriarchal systems often resist meaningful change (Rhodes, 2005) and this is evident in the post-independence era, where the lack of structured policies for women's political participation led to their marginalisation during military regimes. Indeed, one must critically assess the longevity of initiatives such as affirmative action and the sustainability of their repercussions. While the affirmative action legislation represented a progressive advancement, the lack of

enduring institutionalisation of women's political participation in subsequent decades raises concerns regarding the institutional barriers that persist. By contemplating this historical backdrop, it becomes clear that contemporary efforts to augment women's political representation may obtain significant insights from the approaches utilised by these pioneering women, particularly concerning their tactics for mobilisation and coalition-building. Additionally, the significant contributions of women like Sophia Doku and Hanna Cudjoe to Ghana's independence, reflect the principles of socialist feminism, which examines how gender and class intersect in systems of oppression (Jaggar and Rothenberg, 1993). By organising rallies and mobilising resources for the CPP, these women defied societal norms, demonstrating that gender equality in political participation was achievable even in male-dominated spaces.

In the post-independence era, the Nkrumah administration formed the Women's Movement in 1960 to support the government's post independent agenda and policies. After the coup of 1966 until 1992, there was no specific system in place to offer higher women representation in Ghana's politics and parliament. Although few women were elected into parliament such as in 1969, she was only one woman from 140 members of parliament, two women were elected in 1970 and only five were elected in 1979 (Prah, 2004: 5). The military era was not conducive for women to participate in politics, it was characterised by abuse of women in several ways with several women being flagged at market places for not conforming to the military dictates (Prah, 2004). Prah (2004:6) mentions that "the military did not have any agenda for women". The military era, characterised by systemic abuse and exclusion of women, aligns with radical feminist critiques of patriarchy as an entrenched social order that marginalises women (Rhodes, 2005). The absence of a structured agenda for women under military regimes further underscores the need for radical systemic reform to ensure women's political inclusion. This neglect reflects a broader pattern in authoritarian regimes where women's issues are deprioritised or ignored altogether in several African countries and this not only curtails women's

political involvement but also exacerbates their marginalisation in societal decision-making.

In 1982, the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC), a military government headed by Chairman Flt Jerry John Rawlings, who was the head of state and head of government, created the avenue for the formation of the Federation of Ghanaian Women (FEGAWO). Subsequently, due to the economic crises that plagued Ghana in 1983, the Rawlings administration was forced to adopt several economic policies of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) in the name of Ergonomic Recovery Programme (ERP) (Prah, 2004). These programmes supported the rights of women which were propagated by the UN as “Women in Development” (ibid). It has been argued that the Rawlings administration was literally forced to comply with these measures as demanded by the international community (Amoah-Boampong, 2018; Prah, 2004). Indeed, the PNDC leadership

“used gender politics for its own ends. In this regard, the 31st December Women’s Movement was formed in 1982 and Nana Konadu Agyeman Rawlings, wife of the PNDC chairman, Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings, became president of the organisation.

The ostensive purpose of the 31st December Women’s Movement (31st DWM) was to encourage women to become involved in the affairs of the Ghanaian state; however, it acted as an apparatus to mobilise women under the PNDC’s patronage networks expanding its female constituencies” (Amoah-Boampong, 2018: 36).

The 31st DWM was supposed to be a neutral entity with the goal of advocating for women empowerment but many studies have revealed that it had strong political connections to the PNDC and subsequently led to the formation of the NDC, a metamorphose version of the PNDC which was a military government (Allah-Mensah, 2005; Amoah-Boampong, 2018; Prah, 2004). Several women who had contested the district elections in 1988 and later in 1992 general elections had strong connections to the 31st DWM and many NDC women

parliamentarians at that time, were all connected to the 31st DWM (Allah-Mensah, 2005). Women representation and participation remains low at the parliamentary level due to the increasing number of seats over the years and the amount of women representation keeps diminishing when compared with their male counterparts. The two major political parties, the NDC and the NPP have made some effort to facilitate the increase of women participation in electoral politics. For instance, during the 2012 general elections (Madsen, 2019), eight women were elected from the Greater Accra Region, four women from the Ashanti Region which is an NPP strong-hold and four from the Volta Region which is NDC's stronghold, five from the Central Region, two women from NDC in the Upper East and Upper West (Madsen, 2019). Similarly in the 2016 elections two women were elected from the Northern regions and upper East Regions (ibid). Several efforts have been made to increase women's participation in politics and leadership in Ghana as a whole, such as, the appointment of Her Ladyship Georgina Theodora Wood as the first female Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Ghana in 2007, Madam Joyce Adeline Bamford-Addo appointment as the first female Speaker of Parliament in 2009, the first female electoral commissioner Mrs Charlotte Osei in 2015 as well as Mrs Jean Mensa in 2017 (Madsen, 2019). Although the two major political parties have campaigned and tried to expand women's involvement and participation in Ghana's politics and democratic governance, the ratio of women compared to men is marginal. Therefore this chapter discusses in many details in the subsequent sections factors which have led to the marginalisation of women in Ghana's politics.

Ghana's First Female Vice President/President

For the first time in the history of Ghanaian politics, a major political party, the NDC selected a woman, Prof. Jane Opoku-Agyeman, as the running mate for their flagbearer, J.D Mahama. There have been other female presidential candidates from smaller political parties in 2016 like Brigitte Dzobgebuku, who was the vice-presidential candidate for the Progressive People's Party (PPP) and Nana Konadu Agyeman-Rawling was the presidential

candidate for the National Democratic Party (NDP). Their electoral performance, however, was abysmal as the PPP only obtained 1.0% and the NDP 0.2% of the total valid votes (EC-Ghana, 2016). The news of Prof. Jane Opoku-Agyeman's nomination was met with diverse opinions by the populace and the question that lingered in people's minds was: is Ghana ready for a female vice president and a possible female president? In answering this question, this research will point out the competence and experience of Prof. Jane, most of which was outside of politics which comparatively exceeds several leaders Ghana has had, be it civilian or military since Ghana attained its independence in 1957. Some of such leaders are Lt. Gen. Joseph Arthur Ankrah (1966-1969), Brigadier Akwasi Afrifa (April 1969-September 1969), Gen Ignatius Kutu Acheampong (1972-1979) and Flt. Lt Jerry John Rawling (June 1979-September 1979 as a military leader, and 1993-2001 as civilian leader). The point needs to be emphasised that it appears that when it comes to male politicians, competence is one thing and competence becomes another concern when dealing with female politicians. It is not the same standard and yardstick when debating this issue rather it becomes gender-based arguments which lack merits.

Before the discussion of the competency and qualification of Prof. Jane Naana Opoku-Agyeman for vice presidency, we need to outline what the constitution of Ghana says about the qualification for presidency. Chapter 8, article 62 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana, a person shall not be qualified for election as the president of Ghana unless:

- he/she is a citizen of Ghana by birth
- he/she has attained the age of forty years; and
- he/she is a person who is otherwise qualified to be elected a Member of Parliament, except that the disqualifications set out in paragraphs (c), (d), and (e) of clause (2) of article 94 of this Constitution shall not be removed, in respect of any such person, by a presidential pardon or by the lapse of time as provided for in clause (5) of that article (Government of Ghana, 1992).

Similarly, the provisions of article 62 of the 1992 Constitution apply to a candidate for election as Vice-President:

- he/she is a citizen of Ghana by birth
- he/she has attained the age of thirty-five years; and
- he/she is a person who is otherwise qualified to be elected a Member of Parliament, except that the disqualifications set out in paragraphs (c), (d), and (e) of clause (2) of article 94 of this Constitution shall not be removed, in respect of any such person, by a presidential pardon or by the lapse of time as provided for in clause (5) of that article (Government of Ghana, 1992).

During the announcement of the selection of Prof. Jane Naana Opoku-Agyemany, former president, John Mahama described her as a “God-fearing, a distinguished scholar, a conscientious public servant and a role model” (Mahama, 2020). He further mentioned that the NDC has demonstrated over the years their commitment to appoint females into various public offices such as Ghana’s first female Speaker of Parliament, the first female Foreign Minister, the first female Attorney General, the first female Chairperson of the Electoral Commission, the first female Chairperson of the National Commission for Civic Education and the first female Chairperson of the Council of State (ibid).

The Professor has several experiences and qualifications which are available online for all to see. Her 53-page curriculum vitae speaks volumes for this distinguished professor and her achievements (Graphic Online, 2020). She was born on November 22nd 1951, in the Cape Coast in Gold Coast (Ghana) and she holds Master and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degrees from the York University in Canada attained in 1980 and 1986 respectively. She has served on many boards, committees and councils including UNESCO in 2009. Prof. Opoku-Agyeman also has four honorary doctoral degrees and over 17 recognition/awards such as being the Fulbright Senior Scholar in 1993/1994, the Global Leadership award from the University of South Florida in 2012 as well as the Leading Woman Achiever Award in 2018, amongst others (ibid). She was the first female Vice Chancellor of a public university in Ghana, the University of Cape Coast and

prior to that, she had held several academic positions such as being the Director for the School of International Training in the History and Cultures of African Diaspora. She also moderated Ghana's 2012 presidential debate with Kojo Opong organised by the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA).

She was later appointed as the minister of education by President Mahama from February 2013 to January 2017 and it was during her term of office that teacher absenteeism was reduced drastically from 27% to 7%. She also helped abolish the quota system in the colleges of education, which helped increase enrolments to 15 400 students from 9 000 in these colleges. She also helped increase the amount of mathematics and science teachers at senior high schools to improve science and mathematics results (Bondzie, 2020). She made several contributions in the health care industry by establishing the West African Centre for Cell Biology and Infectious Pathogens (WACCBIP) and as educational minister, she led consultations to secure funds from the World Bank to establish (WACCBIP). The WACCBIP in 2020 reported to have been successful in sequencing the genomes of the COVID 19 (SAR-COV- 2), which was critical information in the development of COVID-19 vaccine (ibid). She also became the vice chancellor of the Women's University in Africa, based in Zimbabwe (Graphic Online, 2020). Scholars such as Tamale (2020) have argued that women in high-ranking political positions can inspire systemic change and serve as role models for younger generations. Professor Opoku-Agyemang's academic achievements, public service and global recognition position her as a trailblazer whose leadership could reshape Ghana's political landscape, however, despite having all these qualifications and experience in public service, the NPP and its commentators argued and criticised her for not being fit for the job. Below are some of the commentaries and gender related issues raised with little being based on her performance as a minister of education and other public service rendered by her.

Ghana's 2020 General Elections and Gender Issues

The 2020 general elections were keenly contested by the incumbent government of the NPP, led by President Nana Akufo-

Addo and the opposition, the NDC, led by the former President John D. Mahama. This was Ghana's 8th general election since the return to a multiparty democracy in 1992 which ushered in the fourth republic. The 2020 general elections were unique in several aspects; firstly, it was a competition between an incumbent president and a former president who had lost the 2016 elections after serving for one term (Gyampo and Graham, 2022). Secondly, both the incumbent President Nana Akufo-Addo and the former President John D. Mahama had all served one term as president and so it was a contest for a second term which was big for both presidential candidates. Thirdly, President Akuffo had appointed a new electoral commissioner, Mrs Jean Mensa with two new deputies, after the Chief Justices' report recommended that the former commissioner, Mrs Charlotte Osei and her two assistants be dismissed for breaches to procurement laws. Fourthly, the world was plagued by the coronavirus, known as COVID -19, which led to several people being infected and some dying and as a result, many countries implemented restrictions on movements with major lockdowns (Gyampo and Graham, 2022). Finally, John Mahama had picked a female vice-presidential candidate which was met with several criticisms by the opposition NPP and the gender manifestation was rife as discussed below.

A major gender issue, which has a strong cultural underpinning, was the sex or femininity of the vice-presidential candidate of the NDC which was a huge concern for many commentators especially those in the ruling NPP. There were videos circulating on social media in which Benard Antwi-Boashiako, the Ashanti Regional Chairman of the NPP, made some abhorrent statement about Prof. Jane Opoku-Agyemang (Ghana Page, 2020). He accused her of being a witch, wicked person and a thief and stated that she was part of the forces supporting the cancellation of the Free Maternal Healthcare programme which was implemented under the Kufuor administration. In his accusation of Prof. Jane Opoku Agyemang he said, "She will pay for all the pregnant women who died due to financial issues after the free maternal healthcare programme was scrapped" (Ghana Page, 2020). The majority leader of parliament and member of the NPP as well as other members

of parliament, downplayed the importance of the NDC's vice presidential selection stating:

“You ask yourself, what value is this woman going to add to that ticket? And that is where I find it extremely difficult. I mean the woman, a calm woman, a woman of poise and balance. She speaks good English, yes but is it good enough to satisfy the ticket to ensure quality improvement in the governance?...let's assume that John [Dramani Mahama] becomes the President, let me emphasize the point, perish that thought, and the next day, he is no longer, is this woman capable of being described as the President of this country?”(ghananewsonline.com, 2020).

Subsequently, Bernard continued to critique Prof. Jane's appearance and looks, saying that “when you look at her face and hair closely, she looks like a witch. Jane Naana Opoku Agyemang is a very wicked woman and an accomplice to theft” (GhanaPage, 2020). Other party officials described her as old and for being in her menopause years, for example, an NPP commentator, who is popularly known as Abronye DC on a Kumasi-based Wontumi FM radio programme stated that:

“Maame Jane is in her late 60s...and this woman cannot even help reason with John Mahama if he becomes president. This I know is not possible for John Mahama to win another election but do you think the NDC lacks the men to that extent of appointing a female vice who is a due to menopause may not be able to reason well with Mahama?” – he said (Bantie, 2020).

Similarly, another NPP communicator, Mr Francis Ebo Mensah, who was the Greater Accra Regional director, during a radio discussion on NEAT FM also questioned whether she was married. He argued that he had studied her, he had investigated her and there are issues which are hidden and personal and further asserts that he has gone in search of her husband and has seen pictures of her family and children, nonetheless he quizzed rhetorically if she still is married (Peacefmonline.com, 2020b).

Furthermore, the achievements of the vice-presidential candidate were questioned and touted as insignificant. The general secretary of the NPP, Mr John Boadu, in an interview on

Peace FM argued that she was not a match for the vice president in terms of politics and governance and in his view the NPP are better managers of the economy with more pragmatic measures than the NDC. He queried rhetorically “What track record can the NDC’s appointed running mate boast off? With all her years as an academician, what major achievement can you credit to her all these years?” (Peacefmonline.com, 2020a). The NPP’s director of communication, Mr Yaw Buaben Asamoah, in a press statement concluded that, Prof. Opoku Agyeman’s performance as an education minister was “nothing to write home about... the choice of Prof. Jane Naana Opoku-Agyeman by John Dramani Mahama is a clear indication that he does not take the Ghanaian electorate seriously” (GhanaWeb, 2020).

The various criticism of the selection of Prof. Jane Naana Opoku-Agyeman as discussed above was centred around her gender such as her femininity, her appearance/looks, her age and had little to do with her achievements. This corroborates earlier studies that showed how politics is seen as a man’s game (Celis et al., 2013) and that political life is designed to suit men and not women whose roles are based on their reproductive ability and physical appearance amongst others. Similarly, Hooper (2001: 20) states that gendered issues revolve around “first, physical embodiment, including the body and the role of reproductive biology; second, institutions and the gendered social processes that they encompass, including the family, the economy, the state”. This gender-based criticism also re-emphasises the central argument of this chapter that although gender-based nominations may mobilise votes, it does not succeed in disrupting the deeply entrenched male-dominated structures of political institutions.

Increasing Women in Parliament

Table 4.1: Women in Ghana’s Parliament Since 1960

Years	1960	1965	1969	1979	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016	2020
No. of seats	114	198	140	140	200	200	200	230	230	275	275	275
Men	104	179	139	135	184	181	181	205	210	244	239	235
%	91.20%	90.40%	99.30%	96.50%	92%	90.50%	90.50%	89%	91.30%	88.70%	86.90%	85.40%
Women	10	19	1	5	16	19	19	25	20	31	36	40
%	8.80%	9.60%	0.70%	3.50%	8%	9.50%	9.50%	11%	8.70%	11.30%	13.10%	14.50%

Source: Author’s creation with data from electoral commission of Ghana and Parliament of Ghana

Liberal feminist views advocating for egalitarian opportunity for women underscore the necessity for affirmative action to rectify the ongoing underrepresentation of women within the Ghanaian Parliament. Table 4.1 above shows a marginal increase in women in parliament from 1960 to 2020, yet there were significant drops in 1969, 1979, and 2004. It also shows that the increase is marginal compared to the percentage of women in the country and women voters as Ghana has a higher female population than male. It is important to mention that 2020 saw the highest number of women elected as members of parliament, which is 40 (see Table 4.2), whilst the lowest was when there was only one in 1969. Forty (40) women MP, twenty (20) from the NPP and twenty (20) from the NDC though commendable, is nevertheless low compared with 235 men despite the Ghana’s adaptation of Convention of the Elimination of All Kind of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the African Charter on human and People’s Right, Beijing Platform for Action (BFA) and the Maputo Protocol.

The limitations of women participation in Ghana politics are multifaceted. The socialist feminist theory suggests that structural inequities are particularly pertinent in elucidating the socio-economic and cultural barriers confronting women in Ghana politics. Restricted access to resources, patriarchal party dynamics and informal gender biases persist in obstructing women’s capacity to compete effectively during elections. Evidence from the 2020 general elections support the argument of this chapter that Ghana is not ready for an increase in the

number of women in parliament for the following reasons. Firstly, the gendered institutional structures of political parties remain and many of these women struggle to access funding for campaigns with weak support and commitment from their party leadership. Both the NPP and the NDC have, over the years, set aside the Affirmative Action Bill and it has gone through many rigid to-ing and fro-ing (Madsen et al., 2020). President Nana Akufo-Addo in 2019 at the Women's Deliver conference claimed that part of the delays in the passage of the Affirmative Action Bill is due to the lack of dynamism and activism from women.

Recent debate that has led to the delay in the Bill has been on issues of raising the number of parliamentary seats and for political parties to reserve safe seats for women in their various strongholds (ibid). Sadly, the party manifestos of both the NPP and the NDC had little to say about women empowerment and representation in parliament. In the NPP's 216-page 2020 Manifesto, the word count for women was eleven (11) which was mainly about supporting women in business, protecting women, women in sports amongst other things with nothing on women in parliament. The manifesto also mentioned that the party will pass the Affirmative Action Bill twice, on page 161 and page 190 respectively (NPP's-Manifesto, 2020). Moreover, commitment for the Affirmative Action Bill was absent in the NPP's 2016 manifesto. Comparatively, the NDC's 2020 manifesto mentioned women thirty-three times (33) which mostly focused on market women, assemblywomen, business women, women farmers etc. On the issue of the Affirmative Action Bill, the NDC's manifesto 2020 stated that the NPP has failed in passing the bill, so the NDC was going to strengthen several legal and policy framework by enacting the Affirmative Action Bill, the Property Rights of Spouses Bill, amend the Intestate Succession Bill and Domestic Workers Law (NDC-Manifesto, 2020), nonetheless the manifesto was silent on women in parliament.

Secondly, the informal gendered and cultural bias in parliament and the verbal abuse of women in parliament still remains. There is also a stereotyping of women in politics making it difficult for women to be successful in parliament. This was confirmed in a recent interview of Mavis Hawa

Koomson, a member of parliament of Awutu Senya East Constituency and Minister of Special Development Initiatives conducted by journalist Paul Adom-Otchere (Adom-Otchere, 2021). When Mr Adom-Otchere asked Mrs Koomson if the appreciation of women as key actors in Ghanaian politics was getting better, she said “the role of women in politics generally is not getting better and that it is rather becoming worse” (Adom-Otchere, 2021). She explained that female politicians go through a lot of “embarrassment” and stressed that “they think if you are a female and a politician you are a prostitute” (ibid). Despite these challenges, she affirmed her belief that soon Ghana would have a female president or vice-president. It is important to mention that earlier studies have pointed out that women are afraid to get into politics because of false sexual-related accusations leveled against successful female politicians (Asekere, 2020). In these instances, these women fear to be tagged wrongly since many people believe that politics is for men and this has affected some of the confidence in women to get involved in politics (ibid). Earlier works by scholars such as Allah-Mensah (2005) cite many instances of this happening such that it discourages women to take part in Ghanaian politics.

Table 4.2:List of All Women Members of Ghana's Eighth Parliament

	Name	Constituency	Party	Regions
1	Tina Gifty Naa Ayeley Mensah	Weija Gbawe	NPP	Greater Accra
2	Sarah Adwoa Sarfo	Dome Kwabenya	NPP	Greater Accra
3	Lydia Seyram Alhassan	Ayawaso West Wuogon	NPP	Greater Accra
4	Sheila Bartels	Ablekuma North	NPP	Greater Accra
5	Ursula Owusu	Ablekuma West	NPP	Greater Accra
6	Dakoa Newman	Okaikoi South	NPP	Greater Accra
7	Sophia Karen Adukuaku	Domeabra/Obom	NDC	Greater Accra
8	Rita Naa Odoley Sowah	La Dadekotopon	NDC	Greater Accra
9	Theresa Lardi Awuni	Okaikwei North	NDC	Greater Accra
10	Zanetor Agyeman Rawlings	Klottey Korle	NDC	Greater Accra
11	Agnes Naa Momo Larley	Krowor	NDC	Greater Accra
12	Linda Obenewaa Akweley Ocloo	Shai Osudoku	NDC	Greater Accra
13	Cudjoe Comfort Doyoe	Ada	NDC	Greater Accra
14	Nana Dokua Asiamah Adjei	Akropong	NPP	Eastern Region
15	Gifty Twum-Ampofo	Akim Abuakwa North	NPP	Eastern Region
16	Abena Osei-Asare	Atiwa East	NPP	Eastern Region
17	Mensah Betty Nana Efua Krosby	Afram Plains North	NDC	Eastern Region
18	Gizella Tetteh	Awutu Senya West	NDC	Central Region
19	Queenstar Pokuah Sawyerr	Agona East	NDC	Central Region
20	Naana Eyiah Quansah	Gomoa Central	NPP	Central Region
21	Mavis Hawa Koomson	Awutu Senya East	NPP	Central Region
22	Cynthia Mamle Morrison	Agona West	NPP	Central Region
23	Ophelia Hayford	Mfantseman	NPP	Central Region
24	Joycelyn Tetteh	North Dayi	NDC	Volta Region
25	Della Sowah	Kpando	NDC	Volta Region
26	Dzifa Abla Gomashie	Ketu South	NDC	Volta Region
27	Angela Oforiwa Alorwu-Tay	Afadzato South	NDC	Volta Region
28	Helen Adjoa Ntoso	Krachi West	NDC	Oti Region
29	Dorcas Affo-Toffey	Jomoro	NPP	Western Region
30	Adelaide Ntim	Nsuta Kwamang Beposo	NPP	Ashanti Region
31	Mavis Nkansah Boadu	Afigya Sekyer East	NPP	Ashanti Region
32	Patricia Appiagyei	Asokwa	NPP	Ashanti Region
33	Francisca Oteng Mensah	Kwabre East	NPP	Ashanti Region
34	Ama Poma Boateng	Juaben	NPP	Ashanti Region
35	Freda Prempeh	Tano North	NPP	Ahafo Region
36	Elizabeth Ofosu Agyare	Techiman North	NDC	Bono East Region
37	Akanvariva Lydia Lamisi	Tempane	NDC	Upper East Region
38	Akuka Albert Alalzuuga	Garu	NDC	Upper East Region
39	Zuweru Mohammed Ibrahimah	Salaga South	NDC	Savannah region
40	Lariba Abudu	Walewale	NPP	North East Region

Source: MyJoyOnline.com (2020)

Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

In summary, while the political culture of Ghana is still a patriarchal one, the strength and agency of female leaders indicate how gender equity in politics can change all this. Through

feminist theory, this chapter has shown how the structural and cultural constraints to women's participation obscured their important contribution. The journey of gender equity in Ghanaian politics is not over and must be continued to overcome institutional disadvantages and make political life inclusive. One cannot overemphasize the role of women in politics and although Ghana does not have a female president and higher women representation in parliament. the following recommendations can foster this process; firstly, political parties must show zero tolerance for verbal abuse of women politicians. Secondly, women empowerment organizations must intensify their lobby for an inclusive government and thirdly, political parties need to institutionalise and enforce gender safe seats for their women leaders to contest for primaries. More research should focus on the potentials of women in politics in Ghana and make appropriate policy recommendations for the government

References

- Adom-Otchere, P. (2021). *The role of women in politics is not getting any better, it's becoming worse - Hon. Hawa Koomson*. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wIE9ITzoG38>
- Allah-Mensah, B. (2005). *Women in politics and public life in Ghana*. Accra: Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES).
- Amoah-Boampong, C. (2018). Historicising the Women's Manifesto for Ghana: A culmination of women's activism in Ghana. *Legon Journal of the Humanities*, 29(2), 26–45. <https://doi.org/10.4314/ljh.v29i2.2>
- Apusigah, A. A. (2004). Gender, vulnerability, and the politics of decision-making in Ghana: The case of the Upper East Region. *Ghana Journal of Development Studies*, 1(2), 6–26. <https://doi.org/10.4314/gjds.v1i2.35004>
- Asekere, G. (2020). Women participation in sub-national level politics in Ghana's Fourth Republic. *Asian Research Journal of Arts & Social Sciences*, 12(3), 44–58. <https://doi.org/10.9734/arjass/2020/v12i330192>

Gender and Feminist Meditations

- Bantie, R. (2020). 'Menopause will not allow 68-year-old Jane Naana to give Mahama any good advice' – Abronye DC. *BBC Ghana Reports*. Retrieved from <https://thebbcghana.com/menopause-will-not-allow-68-year-old-jane-naana-to-give-mahama-any-good-advice-abronye-dc/>
- Bondzie, A. S. (2020). A woman's place is in politics – The case for Ghana's first female vice president. *Centre for Development Studies*. Retrieved from <https://blogs.bath.ac.uk/cds/2020/09/08/a-womans-place-is-in-politics-the-case-for-ghanas-first-female-vice-president/>
- Celis, K., Kantola, J., Waylen, G., & Weldon, S. L. (2013). Introduction: Gender and politics: A gendered world, a gendered discipline. In *The Oxford handbook of gender and politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199751457.013.0034>
- Flammang, J. A. (1985). Female officials in the feminist capital: The case of Santa Clara County. *Western Political Quarterly*, 38(1), 94–118. <https://doi.org/10.1177/106591298503800108>
- Friedan, B. (1963). *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company
- Ghana Page. (2020). Video: Jane Naana-Opoku Agyemang is a witch, mallam and very wicked – Chairman Wontumi. In *GhPage*. Retrieved from <https://www.ghpage.com/jane-opoku-agyemang-witch-mallam-very-wicked-wontumi/137910/>
- GhanaWeb. (2020). NPP gives a list of why Mahama's running mate has nothing good to offer. Retrieved from <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/NPP-gives-a-list-of-why-Mahama-s-running-mate-has-nothing-good-to-offer-1000585>
- GhanaNewsOnline.com. (2020). Mahama's running mate not fit for president – Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu. Retrieved from <https://ghananewsonline.com.gh/mahamas-running-mate-not-fit-for-president-kyei-mensah-bonsu/>
- Goetz, A. M. (1998). Women in politics & gender equity in policy: South Africa & Uganda. *Review of African Political Economy*, 25(76), 241–262. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03056249808704312>

- Government of Ghana. (1992). *Constitution of the Republic of Ghana*. Ghana Publishing Corporation. Retrieved from http://www.ghana.gov.gh/images/documents/constitution_ghana.pdf
- Graphic Online. (2020). Who is Prof Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang? Retrieved from <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/politics/who-is-prof-naana-jane-opoku-agyemang.html>
- Gyampo, R. E. V., & Graham, E. (2022). Ghana's 2020 General Elections: An assessment of the journey and processes. *The African Review*, 49(1), 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1821889x-20224913>
- Hooper, C. (2001). *Manly states: Masculinities, international relations, and gender politics*. Columbia University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7312/hoop12074>
- Jaggar, A., & Rothenberg, P. (1993). *Feminist frameworks: Alternative theoretical accounts of the relations between women and men* (3rd ed.). McGraw-Hill Book Company.
- Madsen, D. H. (2019). Gender, power, and institutional change – The role of formal and informal institutions in promoting women's political representation in Ghana. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 54(1), 70–87. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909618787851>
- Madsen, D. H., Aning, K., & Hallberg, A. K. (2020). A step forward but no guarantee of gender-friendly policies: Female candidates spark hope in the 2020 Ghanaian elections. Retrieved from <https://nai.uu.se/news-and-events/news/2020-12-03-a-step-forward-but-no-guarantee-of-gender-friendly-policies-female-candidates-spark-hope-in-the-2020-ghanaian-elections.html>
- Mahama, J. (2020). John Mahama's address – Outdoor of the 2020 running mate. Retrieved from <https://www.johnmahama.org/news/john-mahama-s-address-outdoor-of-the-2020-running-mate>
- Manuh, T. (1991). Women and their organizations during the Convention Peoples' Party period. In K. Arhin (Ed.), *The life and work of Kwame Nkrumah* (pp. 156–176). Accra: Sedco.
- Manuh, T. (2011). Towards greater representation of women in national governance. *Governance Newsletter-IEA Ghana*, 17(6), 4–6.

Gender and Feminist Meditations

- McKinsey & Company. (2021). How advancing women's equality can add \$12 trillion to global growth. Retrieved from <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/employment-and-growth/how-advancing-womens-equality-can-add-12-trillion-to-global-growth>
- Musah, B. I., & Gariba, I. (2013). Women and political decision-making: Perspectives from Ghana's parliament. *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences*, 5(3), 443–476.
- MyJoyOnline.com. (2020). Meet the 40 female MPs-elect of the 8th Parliament. Retrieved from <https://www.myjoyonline.com/meet-the-40-female-mps-elect-of-8th-parliament/>
- NDC. (2020). *2020 manifesto*. Retrieved from <https://www.ndc.org.gh/images/2020manifesto.pdf>
- NPP. (2020). *NPP 2020 manifesto*. Retrieved from <https://citinewsroom.com/2020/08/npp-2020-manifesto-full-document/>
- Peacefmonline.com (2020a) A Big Mistake To Appoint Prof Naana Opoku-Agyemang As Running Mate - John Boadu To NDC. Retrieved from <https://www.peacefmonline.com/pages/politics/politics/202007/417980.php> (accessed 7 September 2021).
- Peacefmonline.com (2020b) Are You Still Married? NPP Communicator Asks NDC Running Mate, Jane Naana. Retrieved from <https://www.peacefmonline.com/pages/videos/202007/27899.php> (accessed 7 September 2021)
- Prah, M. (2004). Chasing illusions and realizing visions: Reflections on Ghana's feminist experience. *Gender Activism and Studies in Africa*, 3, 27–40.
- Rhodes, J. (2005). *Radical feminism, writing, and critical agency: From manifesto to modern*. State University of New York Press. <https://doi.org/10.1353/book4874>
- Tamale, S. (2020). *Decolonization and Afro-feminism*. Daraja Press.
- Thomas, S., & Welch, S. (1991). The impact of gender on activities and priorities of state legislators. *Western Political Quarterly*, 44(2), 445–456. <https://doi.org/10.1177/106591299104400212>

Systemic Barriers to Women in Politics

- Tenu, C. (2019). Obstacles to gender parity in political representation: The case of the Ghanaian Parliament. *Memorial University of Newfoundland*. Retrieved from <https://research.library.mun.ca/14094/1/thesis.pdf>
- Tripp, A. M. (2001). Women and democracy: The new political activism in Africa. *Journal of Democracy*, 12(3), 141–155. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2001.0060>
- UN Women. (2021a). Facts and figures: Women’s leadership and political participation. Retrieved from <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures>
- UN Women. (2021b). In focus: Women and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Retrieved from <https://www.unwomen.org/news/in-focus/women-and-the-sdgs>
- UN Women. (2021c). What we do: Leadership and political participation. Retrieved from <https://www.unwomen.org/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation>
- UN Women. (2021d). Women in politics: 2021. *Digital Library: Publications*. Retrieved from <https://www.unwomen.org/digital-library/publications/2021/03/women-in-politics-map-2021>
- United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). (1994). Issue 7: Women empowerment. Retrieved from <https://www.unfpa.org/resources/issue-7-women-empowerment>
- UN.org. (2011). Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 19 December 2011. Retrieved from <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N11/466/62/PDF/N1146662.pdf>