

WOMEN'S POLITICAL REPRESENTATION AND AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IN GHANA

POLICY NOTE NO 1:2019



Women's Political Representation and Affirmative Action in Ghana.
NAI Policy Note No 1:2019

© Nordiska Afrikainstitutet/The Nordic Africa Institute, January 2019

The opinions expressed in this volume are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Nordic Africa Institute (NAI).



You can find this, and all other titles in the NAI policy notes series, in our digital archive Diva, www.nai.diva-portal.org, where they are also available as open access resources for any user to read or download at no cost.

Rights and Permissions

This work is available under the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 license (CC BY 3.0). You are free to copy, distribute, transmit, and adapt this work under the following conditions:



ATTRIBUTION. If you cite this work, the attribution must include the name(s) of the author(s), the work's title and copyright notices.

TRANSLATIONS. If you create a translation of this work, please add the following disclaimer along with the attribution: This translation was not created by The Nordic Africa Institute and should not be considered an official Nordic Africa Institute translation. The Nordic Africa Institute shall not be liable for any content or error in this translation.

ADAPTATIONS. If you create an adaptation of this work, please add the following disclaimer along with the attribution: This is an adaptation of an original work by The Nordic Africa Institute. Views and opinions expressed in the adaptation are the sole responsibility of the author or authors of the adaptation and are not endorsed by The Nordic Africa Institute.

THIRD-PARTY CONTENT. The Nordic Africa Institute does not necessarily own each component of the content contained within the work. The Nordic Africa Institute therefore does not warrant that the use of any third-party-owned individual component or part contained in the work will not infringe on the rights of those third parties.

Please address all queries on rights and licenses to The Nordic Africa Institute, PO Box 1703, SE-751 47 Uppsala, Sweden, e-mail: publications@nai.uu.se.

Cover photos used with CC permission

FRONT: University of Ghana, Accra, October 2015. Students in political science. Photo: Dominic Chavez, World Bank.

BACK: Accra, July 2012. Women walking. Photo by Rachel Strohm.

ISSN 1654-6695

ISBN 978-91-7106-842-2

Women's Political Representation and Affirmative Action in Ghana

With only 13 per cent female representation in parliament, Ghana is lagging behind most other African states. A proposal for affirmative action is currently being debated. This policy note assesses the barriers to women's political representation in Ghana, and gives recommendations on how the issue might be addressed.

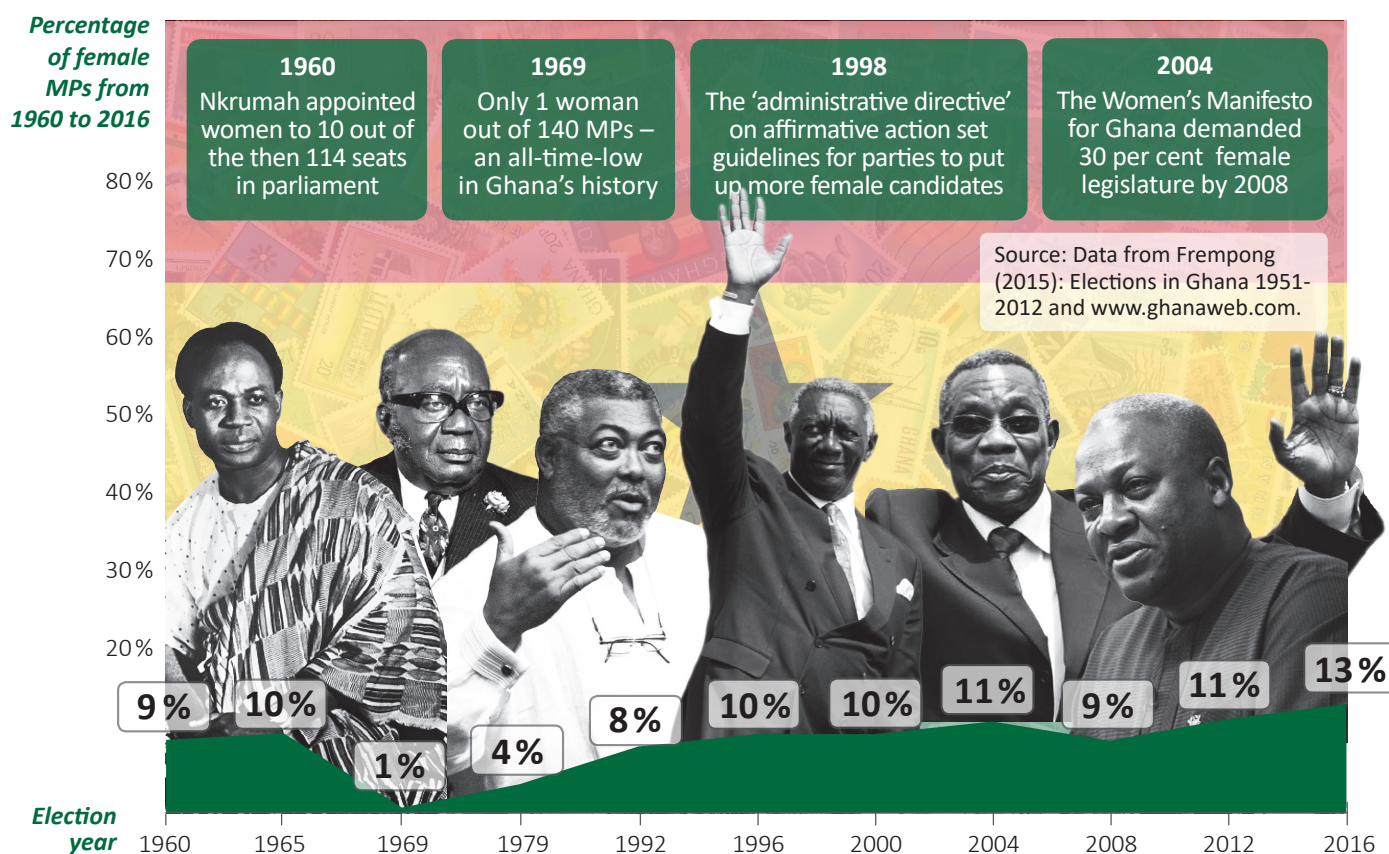
DIANA HØJLUND MADSEN, Senior Researcher, the Nordic Africa Institute

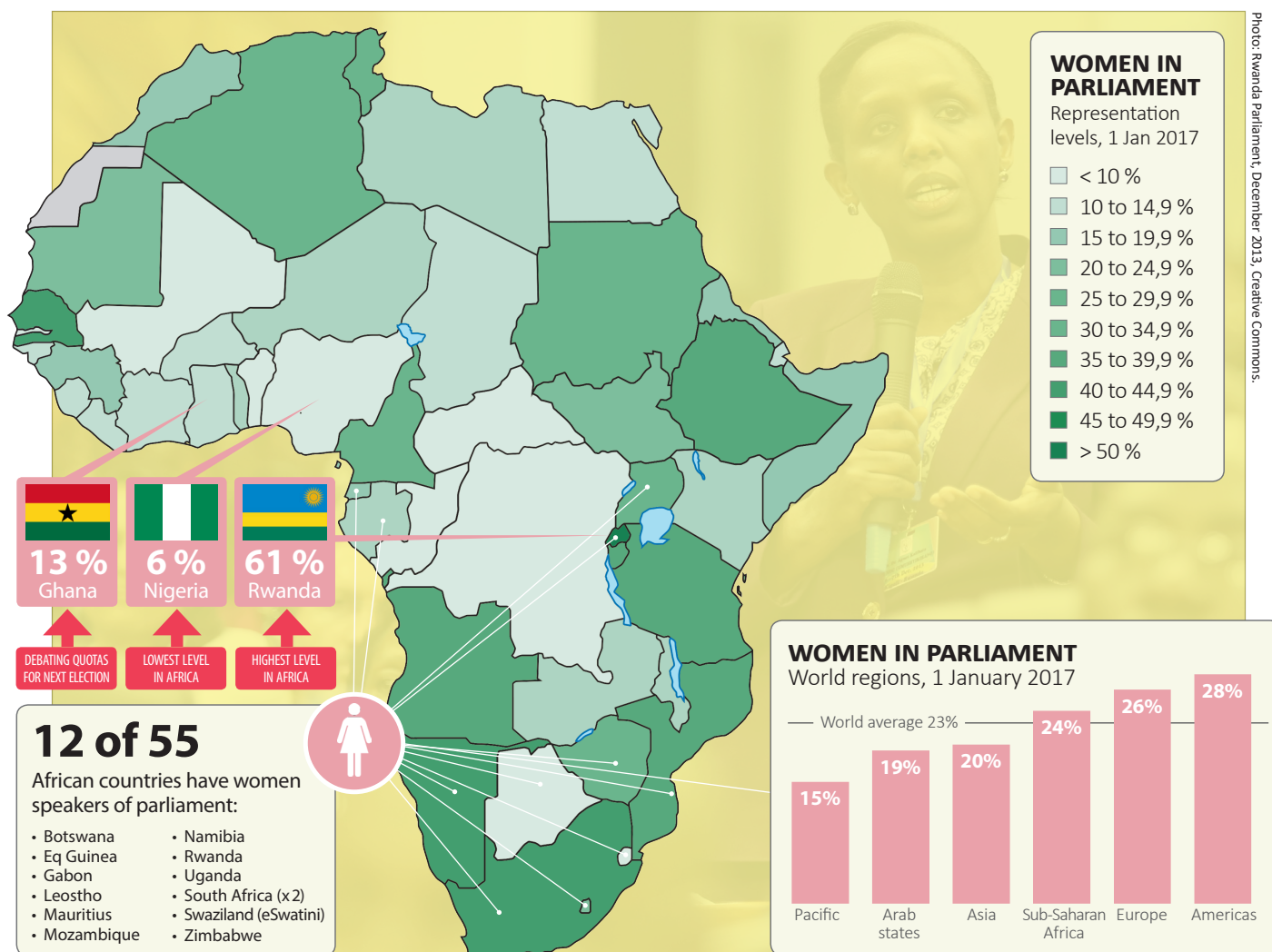
Ghana is often portrayed as a role model for democracy in West Africa, thanks to the relatively peaceful transition of power since the country's first democratic elections in 1992. But it lags behind other African countries in terms of the gendered aspects of governance: Women's political representation in parliament in the last election (2016) was 13 per cent.

Although Ghana is formally a multi-party system, in reality two parties attract over 98 per cent of the vote: the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) and National Demo-

cratic Congress (NDC). These have 24 and 12 women MPs, respectively, out of a total of 275 MPs.

Paradoxically, Ghana was one of the first countries in Africa to introduce a quota: in 1959, the Convention People's Party (CPP) government, led by independent Ghana's first prime minister, Kwame Nkrumah, passed the Representation of the People (Women Members) Act. This ensured the nomination and election of ten women to parliament, and was acknowledgement of the important role of women during the struggle for independence. However, the initiative was tied to the CPP





The level of female representation in parliament in Ghana, 13%, is far below the average both in the world (23%) and in Africa (24%). The percentage calculation is based on women representation in unicameral parliaments or the lower house of parliament. All data reflects the situation on 1 January 2017. Source: UN Women, 2017.

and died with the overthrow of Nkrumah (by then the country's president) in 1966.

The period 1966–1981 saw a series of coups d'état, punctuated by two civilian governments (1969–1972 and 1979–1981). The presence of the military, and the fact that no women were appointed to high-ranking positions, reinforced male domination. Jerry Rawlings' military regime – the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) (1981–1992) – did adopt some progressive laws on women's rights, and a number of women made it into senior positions – for example, Susanna Al-Hasan (who had been Ghana's first female minister under Nkrumah) was brought into the PNDC.

Shortly after his coup, Rawlings' wife, Nana Konadu Agyeman-Rawlings, established the 31 December Women's Movement – a mix between a mass organisation and an organ of the revolution. The post-coup period was marked by a climate of fear, with women market

traders being victimised by Rawlings, who blamed them for the tough economic conditions. However, it was also a time of growing awareness of the need to reform and to improve the socio-economic position of women. With this came a sense that Ghanaian women had been 'liberated', and the 31 December Women's Movement with its rallying efforts and mobilising of supporters became a forerunner for what is now the women's wing of the NDC. Some of the first female politicians in the 1992 and 1996 elections had a background in the movement.

Ghana has adopted various international conventions on women's rights and political representation, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Beijing Platform for Action (BFA), African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, and the Maputo Protocol. A further important milestone was the 1998 'administrative directive' on affirmative action: this provided guidelines for

the National Electoral Commission to encourage political parties to put up more female candidates in pursuit of 40 per cent representation of women in parliament. However, it has not been implemented.

Arguments for affirmative action policy

Why is gender-balanced political representation important? First, there is the notion of 'justice': since women represent half of the population, it is only fair that women should occupy half of the parliamentary seats. Second, there is the argument of 'different experience': as women have different gender roles, they also have different experiences, which should be acknowledged. Third, some argue that only women can represent women's interests, as women and men have different and conflicting interests. Fourth, women in politics may serve as role models for girls and other women. Fifth, without balanced representation there is no democracy; thus women in politics foster the development of democracy. However, for women in politics to make a difference, they should have distinct views on women's/gender issues, bring these perspectives into politics, or bring a different style and set of role expectations to politics.

Affirmative action (or gender quotas) could take various forms:

- a voluntary candidate quota adopted by individual parties: e.g. a 'zipper system', with women and men alternating (50:50) on the party list;
- a statutory candidate quota: e.g. a certain percentage of women among the candidates on the list (often 30

per cent linked to a critical mass);

- a quota of reserved seats mandated by law or the constitution.

Often results-based quotas are more effective, with either a separate 'women-only' list for a given constituency or a 'best-loser' system (under which a number of seats are set aside for those losing female candidates who polled the most votes). However, some people fear that the 'label-effect', where women who owe their election to the quota could be more pliable, exhibit more loyalty to party leaders (and the party line) and merely function as 'token' representatives. Research carried out in Uganda, however, shows that women elected under a quota system perform just as well as 'non-quota women' in terms of their speaking time in parliament and the different type of qualifications and experiences they bring to parliament.

Barriers to women's political representation

Some African countries have already introduced a quota system for women in parliament – Rwanda (2003), South Africa (1994) and Uganda (1989). But Ghana is not yet on this 'fast track'. There are several reasons for the low representation of women in parliament.

First, the 'first-past-the-post' electoral system comes with an in-built winner-takes-all bias that can lead to distorted patterns of representation.

Second, the substantial monetarisation of politics sees women from (often) economically disadvantaged posi-

International conventions adopted by Ghana

- CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN (CEDAW)
An international 'Bill of Rights for Women', adopted in 1979 by the UN. Ghana signed the convention in 1980 and deposited it in 1986.
- BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION (BFA)
An agenda for women's empowerment, adopted at the UN's 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995.
- AFRICAN CHARTER ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS
An international human rights instrument, also known as the Banjul Charter, under the aegis of the AU. It came into effect in 1986.
- THE MAPUTO PROTOCOL
A charter on women's right to social and political equality with men, adopted by the AU in 2003.



Photo: Dico, Government of South Africa

Hanna Tetteh (on the right), Ghana's former minister of foreign affairs (2013-2017), is one of few female top politicians in Ghana. Here together with Maite Nkoana-Mashabane (in the middle), South Africa's minister of international relations and cooperation in a meeting in Accra in May 2016.

tions struggling to compete at the constituency level. A 2017 report by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy reveals that on average, women politicians spend less than their male counterparts on election campaigns. Generally speaking, women finance their campaigns through fundraising in their private and professional networks; private savings (based on negotiation with their husbands); loans and gifts, which often come with the expectation of favours in return (indeed, female parliamentarians have been the subject of rumours that they exchange sexual favours for campaign gifts). Both major parties, the NDC and NPP, have adopted an initiative to halve the filing fees for women candidates, in recognition of the fact that women are often more economically disadvantaged. However, the major expenditure is the campaign, not the filing fees.

Third, the culture in parliament works against female parliamentarians: women are labelled ‘girlfriends/wives’ or ‘small girls’, thereby dismissing their professional expertise. Women MPs have even, on occasion, been asked by male MPs not to be so vocal, as they are not in the kitchen now (suggesting that that is where they (rightly) belong).

Fourth, the stereotypical representation of women in politics prevails, with women who are powerful and outspoken being labelled ‘Lady Yaa Asantewaa’ (a colonial warrior queen mother) or ‘iron lady’. Several proverbs support the notion that politics is man’s business – e.g. ‘it is a woman’s job to sell garden eggs, not gunpowder’. Generally speaking, female parliamentarians are subjected to an extra degree of scrutiny. Moreover, women in politics are attacked verbally (and in some cases even physically) for their gender and sexuality.

The failed 2015 NPP women’s seats initiative

In 2015, the NPP introduced an initiative on parliamentary seats for women’s seats within the party (then in opposition). Any constituency where a woman was the incumbent MP could only be contested by another female NPP candidate – a limited form of affirmative action policy. Although the initiative concerned only 16 constituencies (out of 275), it was quickly shelved, since it created turmoil inside the party. First of all, the idea was a top-down initiative from Nana Akufo-Addo (now the country’s president) and a group of female MPs and advocates for women’s rights within the party. No proper work was done to prepare the ground, and potential male candidates in the affected constituencies were dead against the idea. Second, there was an attempt to sneak the initiative in through the back door, avoiding much

debate in the party. Third, no fruitful insider-outsider dynamics were in place to lobby for the initiative: there was little or no dialogue between national women’s organisations and the female MPs who were pushing for it. Fourth, in one of the constituencies ethnicity seemed to be a more important factor than gender.

Since the initiative was introduced just a year before parliamentary elections, unity of the party was the most important consideration. Besides, the party wanted to prevent prospective NPP male candidates from running as ‘independents’ instead. It was also feared that the opposition NDC would parachute strong male candidates into the constituencies concerned. To some extent, the initiative backfired when some of the experienced female MPs lost their seats; however, the generally positive election result for the NPP in 2016 meant that parliament gained a new crop of women.

In the most recent primary elections (2015), the NDC expanded its electorate in order to prevent vote buying. The results show a rise in the number of women who won their primaries.

Training of women MPs

On the supply side, women’s organisations have carried out training sessions for female MPs. The former minister of gender, children and social protection, Otiko Afisah Djaba, also initiated capacity building of the women’s caucus in parliament. But such capacity-building initiatives have been criticised. Although the training may benefit especially new MPs, more experienced parliamentarians claim they ‘do not need more capacity building’. If not properly designed, such initiatives risk passing the problem of low representation of women onto women themselves, instead of addressing its structural causes.

Abantu for Development, an NGO with a regional office in Ghana, recently launched a campaign advocating for affirmative action. Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF), a pan-African women’s rights network, has also been advocating for women’s political representation: it forwarded a list of potential female candidates to political decision makers. Generally, more strategic cooperation is needed between female MPs and women’s organisations to promote gender/women-friendly policies. This would also create more fruitful insider-outsider dynamics between the female MPs and the national women’s organisations, and this may in turn contribute to a shift from descriptive (numbers) to substantive (policies) representation.

The affirmative action bill

Elsewhere in Africa, change has brought opportunities to promote women's political representation: for example, a quota was introduced in post-conflict Rwanda; and in Senegal constitutional reforms have created openings for change. But change of that kind has not occurred in Ghana. Instead, the process of affirmative action there started with a roundtable event in 2011, initiated by the (now) Ministry for Gender, Children and Social Protection and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA). Its purpose was to review the 1998 guidelines (the 'administrative directive' above) and draft new legislation.

The minister for gender, children and social protection is spearheading the drafting process. The bill has been back and forth to the Attorney General's Department and even came before parliament in 2017, but not in due course implying that it was not passed. In autumn 2018, a government reshuffle took place, and Otiko Afisah Djaba was replaced as minister for gender, children and social protection by Cynthia Morrison. Some speculate that this was on account of Djaba's failure to deliver on the affirmative action bill. However, the bill as it is currently drafted does not focus exclusively on gender and has a broader framework than just women in politics – a fact that has been criticised by women's organisations.

While the long-term goal is to secure 50 per cent representation of women in politics, it is suggested that the initial target should be 30 per cent, in line with the recommendations of the Women's Manifesto for Ghana.

However, even this target has its opponents, and male representatives of both main parties argue for a gradualist approach over the long term. Some argue pragmatically that at the next election (2020) a number of male MPs will retire from 'safe' constituencies, where any candi-

date from the incumbent party is almost guaranteed to be elected (for example, the NPP has a stronghold in the Ashanti region and NDC in the Volta region). These 'safe seats' could be taken up by female candidates. Others suggest that the number of seats in parliament should be increased and that the additional seats should be reserved for women. The battle over affirmative action in Ghana is still ongoing, but the processes of gender and institutional change seem to take place very slowly.

Recommendations

- Political parties should overcome their mutual suspicion and engage in cross-party work to boost the number of women in politics through common initiatives.
- A results-based quota in line with the 'women-only list' or 'best loser' system should be implemented and carefully monitored.
- A change of electoral system should be considered: proportional representation is more women friendly, as it is more open to newcomers.
- Political parties should share their experiences of their gender policies and institute policies to address different forms of violence against women in politics – from verbal abuse to physical attacks – especially at election time.
- As the culture in parliament seems to militate against having more women in parliament, sessions for MPs on gender mainstreaming could help ensure that parliament's practices are in line with national policies on gender mainstreaming.
- Beyond their efforts in capacity building, women's organisations should aim for more strategic cooperation with female parliamentarians. Women's organisations should continue both to promote the measures set out in the Women's Manifesto on women's political representation and to advocate for the affirmative action bill.
- Donor organisations and development cooperation partners should make women's political representation part of the policy dialogue, in line with their strategic priorities on gender equality. They should earmark funds for initiatives on women's political representation – for example, electoral financing of female candidates. This has been done successfully in other African contexts: for example, in the 2009 elections in Malawi, where donors and the government assisted women aspirants with financial resources and publicity.

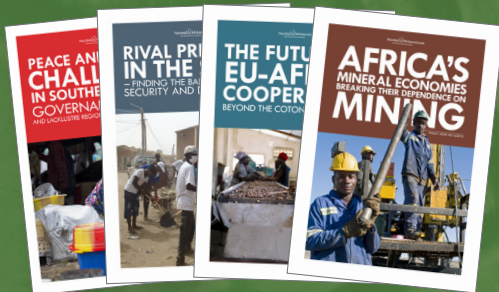


The Women's Manifesto for Ghana was first issued in 2004 by the Network for Women's Rights in Ghana and Abantu for Development. A revised edition was launched a few months before the 2016 Elections.



DIANA HØJLUND MADSEN is a senior researcher at the Nordic Africa Institute. Her main research areas are gender mainstreaming, women's rights and women's political representation, with a focus on Ghana and Rwanda.

About the Author



NAI POLICY NOTES is a series of short briefs on policy issues relevant to Africa today, intended for strategists, analysts and decision makers in foreign policy, aid and development. They aim to inform public debate and generate input into the sphere of policymaking. The opinions expressed in the policy notes are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Institute.

About our Policy Notes



THE NORDIC AFRICA INSTITUTE (Nordiska Afrikainstitutet) is a centre for research, knowledge, policy advice and information on Africa. Based in Uppsala, Sweden, we are a government agency, funded jointly by Sweden, Finland and Iceland.

About the Institute