

POLITICAL PARTY PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE RECENT GHANAIAN PROPOSAL

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ABSTRACT

This paper discussed public views on the effort to introduce partisan politics into local government administration in Ghana. We report findings from a cross-sectional survey research in which questionnaire-based data were collected from a convenience sample of 2270 participants, drawn from the 16 administrative regions of Ghana. From the analysis and discussions, we found out that although 63% agreed that political party participation will increase local activism and where 71% agreed that it can increase participation in district assembly elections, 58% of participants did not support political party participation. Meanwhile 1769 (78%) disagreed that political party participation will promote development. Furthermore, 30% disagreed that political party participation will disparage the authority of the local assemblies, as only 23% disagreed that it will disparage traditional authorities of the people. Moreover, 73% of participants agreed to maintaining the status quo, while 46% agreed to blending party politics with a quota system. Overall, we argued that the introduction of political party-based politics into local governance poses many serious threats ----as it will stifle development in opposition areas, disparage traditional authorities of the people, degrade the value of common good in communities and disparage the authority of the local assemblies. To this end, we recommended that the introduction of party politics in Ghana's local government system should be based on sound research, quality consultation and understanding of the threats.

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Introduction

Political party participation in local governance is not a new subject when considered as a matter imbricated with discussions on decentralisation (Ahwoi 2005; Thrasher 2005; Natalini 2010). In most countries, political parties which are key institutions, determine which candidates are nominated and elected and which issues achieve national prominence (Zhou 2009). As a result of their influence within the political terrain, governments and international organizations which seek to advance participation of citizens in elections, justifiably tend to focus on political parties (Abramowitz & Saunders

2005; Adusei-Asante 2012). However, some scholars have argued that political participation extends beyond parties, since individuals themselves become involved in the electoral process through independent action—particularly at the local level (Tettey 2006; Zhou 2009).

In terms of political party participation in local government elections, the question has been whether political parties of national and state character should participate in local politics so as to gain control over the local government machinery (Ahwoi 2010; Adusei-Asante 2012). Many have argued that political parties should be given the chance to participate in such a relevant

process. In most countries of the world, particularly European countries, national parties actively associate themselves with local politics (Ahwoi 2010). In the UK, elections to town councils are usually on party lines. Ahwoi (2005) and Gyimah-Boadi (2009) further posit that, consultation on decentralisation reforms between state agencies and the citizenry is a necessary end as it turns to affect their everyday life.

For decades, local government elections in Ghana are held on non-partisan basis (Natalini 2010). Several writings and political commentaries have suggested that the constitutional provision that allows for the appointment of District/Municipal and Metropolitan Executives (MMDCEs) should be amended to enable their election through popular votes as a way of promoting accountability (Tettey 2006; Gyimah-Boadi 2009; Antwi-Boasiako 2010; Adusei-Asante 2012). However, other writers have argued that the election of MMDCEs would result in the politicisation of the entire local government system (Asante 2009; Ahwoi 2010; Benson & Ngaaso 2020).

Per article 243(1) of the 1992 Ghana Constitution, MMDCEs are appointed by the President; while per 55(3), Assembly Members are elected on non-partisan bases. Be that as it may, in the case of district assembly elections, political parties have always discretely sponsored candidates; explaining why the major parties have always advocated for the amendment of these two entrenched provisions to pave the way for political party participation within the local governance structure. The current New Patriotic Party (NPP) government, in 2019, proposed the amendment of the said articles in line with its 2016 manifesto pledge (NPP, 2016; Kyerewaa-Owusu, 2017). It was subsequently approved by the Parliament of Ghana to allow for political party participation in local government elections. Based on the constitutional requirements, however, a referendum was required to effect the change. But the idea was abruptly suspended following heated and polarised debates (among politicians, political parties, academia, policy makers, traditional rulers, civil society and ordinary citizens) that eluded national consensus-building over such an important constitutional matter (Asante, 2009).

This work takes cognisance of two scholarly proposals. First, the like of Crawford (2004), argue that the introduction of political party

participation in local government elections will increase local activism and should therefore be legalised. Second, the like of Lust-Okar (2004), have said that the introduction of partisan politics into local governance will disparage the authorities of local assemblies, traditional rulers, and even the central government itself. Given that the current Ghanaian proposal was suspended based on the views of the second group, we examine views about the threats the introduction would pose to Ghana's democratic experiment, and what is the level of community support for having or not having a partisan local governance structure in Ghana (Natalini, 2010).

Methodology

This study adopted the quantitative approach of a descriptive cross-sectional survey design that provides descriptive, inferential and explanatory information (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011; Burns & Grove, 2011; Polit & Beck, 2010). The convenience sample of the study was 2270 randomly selected participants, comprising 1044 (46%) males and 1226 (54%) females; drawn from the 16 administrative regions of Ghana. The age composition of the participants was as follows: 1135 (50%) aged between 18 and 35; 866 (38%) aged between 36-50; 157 (7%) aged between 51 and 60; and 112 (5%) aged 61 years and above. Indeed, the sample population was highly literate with 1465 (65%) having obtained tertiary education and 781 (34%) having obtained secondary education. One percent of the sample preferred not to disclose their educational status. Among the sample were 452 (20%) unemployed, 753 (33%) self-employed, 640 (28%) public sector workers and 425 (19%) private formal employees.

The study adopted the multi-stage sampling procedure which was purposive, stratified and propositional. As such, a purposive sampling technique of a close and open-ended questionnaire instrument was used since most of the participants were highly literate. Secondly, the regions were stratified within the context of rural and urban Metropolitan/Municipal and District Assembly (MMDA) settings, using the stratified sampling technique. Finally, on the basis of propositional sampling, the number of questionnaires administered within the respective regions were reflective of the population size of a region and the number of MMDAs within the region. A structured questionnaire tagged 'Citizenry Assessment of Political Participation

in Ghana's Local Governance' was used in the study that focused on three thematic areas: support for political party participation, concerns about political party participation and options for political party participation. The quantitative instrument which consisted of 7 items had a response rate of 98 percent which, according to Babbie (2005), is an excellent one since a response rate of even 50 percent is adequate for analysis and reporting. The data gathered were analysed using descriptive statistics of charts, tables, figures and graphs at 0.05 alpha level, where frequencies and percentages were computed with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (IBM SPSS Version 20) software.

Discussion of Results

The discussions are organised under three main sections---support for political party participation in local governance; concerns about political party participation; and options for political party participation.

Support for Political Party Participation

A primary objective of the research was to explore support for political party participation in local governance in Ghana. From the results showed in Table 1, 1313 (58%) did not support political party participation, 888 (39%) supported, while 69 (3%) were neutral. Also, in exploring the positive effects of political party participation in respect of the promotion of development, the following results showed: 979 (43%) strongly disagreed, 790 (35%) disagreed, 143 (6%) were not sure, 265 (12%) agreed, and 93 (4%) strongly agreed. (Figure 1). In terms of increasing local activism, the response is as follows: 506 (22%) strongly agreed, 935 (41%) agreed, 523 (23%) not sure, 198 (9%) disagreed, and 108 (5%) strongly disagreed (Figure 2).

Table 1: Support for political party participation in local governance.

Support for political party participation		Frequency	Percent
Responses	I don't support political party participation	1313	57.8
	I support political party participation	888	39.1
	Not sure	69	3.0
Total		2270	100.0

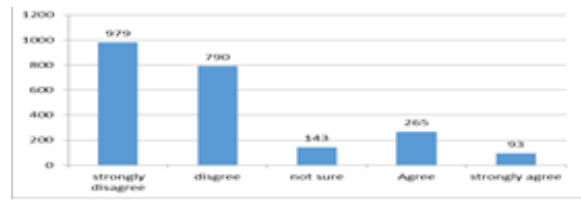


Figure 1: Political party participation will promote development.

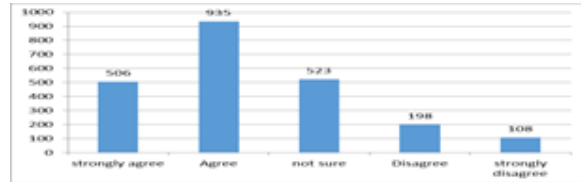


Figure 2: political party participation will increase local activism.

The age distribution of the 506 participants who strongly agreed follow as: 18-35 years (258) and 36-50 years (216). Among the 935 that agreed, 449 were aged between 18-35 years while 324 were aged between 36 and 50. In terms of gender, 223 females strongly agreed and 461 agreed; whilst 283 males strongly agreed and 474 agreed.

In respect of the view that political party participation could increase participation in district assembly elections, 556 (25%) strongly agreed, 1041(46%) agreed, 395 (17%) not sure, 201 (9%) disagreed and 77(4%) strongly disagreed. (Figure 3).

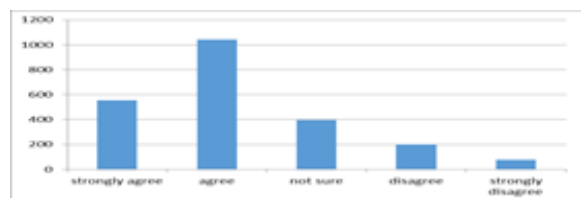


Figure 3: political party participation can increase participation in district assembly elections.

The results showed that there is support for the view that political party participation can increase participation in district assembly elections. In terms of educational status, 532 of those who either strongly agreed or agreed were secondary graduates and 1041 were graduates from tertiary institutions. Regarding the issue of nurturing political talent at the local level through political party participation, 1472 (65%) agreed and 597 (26%) strongly agreed.

From the results, it may be argued that support for the introduction of partisan politics

into local government administration in Ghana does not exist in the manner imagined in the 2016 NPP manifesto (NPP, 2016). And as Kyerewaa-Owusu (2017) also suggests, the NPP proposal might have been just a useful rhetoric and not one of practical relevance which, the citizens are not willing to accept. However, the lack of support may also have been occasioned by political manipulations by both the governing party and the opposition as delineated in the work of Lust-Okar (2004). Consequently, there might be the need to conduct research into what can be done to change the mind-sets of the people from opposing a future proposal.

Concerns about Political Party Participation

A second objective of this work was to understand views about the proposed political party participation in local governance. In exploring the concerns of participants in respect of covert political participation in local governance, we got the following responses: 649 (29%) strongly agreed, 835 (37%) only agreed. In that case, 1484 (66%) participants were uncomfortable with the current existence of covert political party participation in local governance.

At another level, majority of the participants identified with the view that political party participation is a bad omen for Ghana. The results showed 489 (22%) strongly agreed.

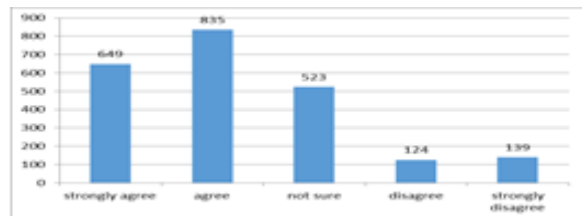


Figure 4: Views on whether participants had concern with covert political party participation.

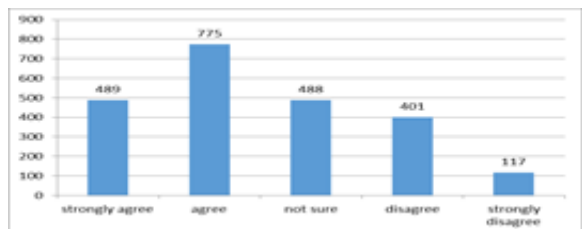


Figure 5: Political party participation is a bad omen for Ghana.

Aside from the immediate above reason, it is the majority considered view that development in opposition areas will be stifled under political

party participation. Results are shown in Table 2 below:

In terms of gender 632 males and 834 females agreed that political party participation will stifle development in opposition areas, whilst 248 males and 169 females disagreed.

The views concerning whether political party participation will disparage the authority of the local assemblies were more inchoate and are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 2: Political party participation will stifle development in opposition areas.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	531	23
Agree	935	41
Not sure	350	15
Disagree strongly	378	17
Disagree	76	4
Total	2270	100

Table 3: Political party participation will disparage the authority of the local assemblies.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	289	13
Agree	840	37
Not sure	676	30
Disagree strongly	428	19
Disagree	37	7
Total	2270	100

Regarding the concerns that political party participation in the local governance system will have disparaging effects on traditional authorities, 332 (15%) strongly agreed, 776 (34%) agreed, 632(28%) were not sure, 486 (21%) disagreed whilst 44 (2%) strongly disagreed (Table 4).

The gender analysis showed that, a total of 293 males and 328 females either agreed or strongly agreed that political party participation will disparage traditional authorities of the people.

Also, 498 (22%) strongly agreed and 535 (24%) agreed that political party participation will degrade the value of common good in

communities; whilst 515 (22%) were not sure and 722 (32%) disagreed (Table 5).

Table 4: Political party participation will disparage traditional authorities.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	332	15
Agree	776	34
Not sure	632	28
Disagree strongly	486	21
Disagree	44	2
Total	2270	100

Table 5: Political party participation will degrade the value of common good in the community

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	498	22
Agree	535	24
Not sure	515	22
Disagree strongly	525	23
Disagree	197	9
Total	2270	100

The results showed four main principal concerns regarding political party participation--- it will stifle development in opposition area; it will disparage the authority of the local assemblies; it will disparage traditional authorities of the people; and it will degrade the value of common good in communities. These concerns, combining with the view that there is covert political party participation in local government in Ghana, provided a strong justification for reasons why participants were opposed to political party participation in local governance. Thus, propositions for reforms in the local government system in Ghana as noted in the literature (Tettey 2006; Gyimay-Boadi 2009) have to be grounded in other initiatives other than proposals for political party participation.

Options for Political Party Participation

Having adduced the concerns of the participants on the subject matter, we further solicited their varied views on their preferred options. The first question sought the participants' views on the issue of maintaining the status quo as reflected in both Figure 5 and Table 6.

Table 6: Views on maintaining the status quo as the option.

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	694	31
Agree	948	42
Not sure	361	16
Disagree	154	7
Strongly disagree	113	5
Total	2270	100

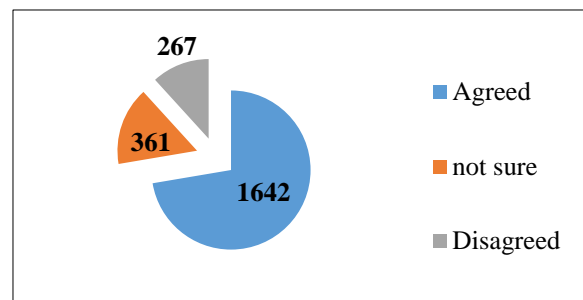


Figure 6: Views on maintaining the status in local governance in Ghana.

The results in Figure 5 show that 1642 majority participants (73%) comprising 741 males and 901 females do support maintenance of the status quo, whilst only 267 (11%) made up of 187 males and 80 females disagreed and 361 (16%) also comprising of 112 males and 239 females were not sure; confirming that majority of the Ghanaian population are against the introduction of political party participation in local governance.

The second question sought their views about having a different system other than the introduction of political party participation in local governance. Table 7 reflects the results as: 1636 (72%) comprising of 771 males and 865 females were in favour, 285 (13%) were not sure, and 449 (15%) made up of 105 males and 229 females disagreed.

The third question sought the views of participants about blending party politics with a quota system. The results in Table 8 show that 1048(46%) agreed, 301 (13%) strongly agreed, 555 (24%) were not sure, whilst 366 (16%) disagreed. A total of 677 out of 1135 youth were in support of blending party politics with a quota system.

Table 07: Views on the introduction of a system other than political party participation in local governance.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	797	35
Agree	839	37
Not sure	285	13
Disagree strongly	221	10
Disagree	128	5
Total	2270	100

Table 8: Blending party politics with a quota system.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	301	13
Agree	1048	46
Not sure	555	24
Disagree strongly	253	11
Disagree	113	6
Total	2270	100

Per the results, it is clear that political party participation as an option in local governance is opposed by majority of participants of all age categories, though not in total support of the *status quo* as they are opened to supporting other systems that exclude political party participation. There is a call for alternative ways that strengthen the local government system including quota systems, gender balance, recentralisation of the decentralisation process amongst others (Ahwoi, 2010; Ahwoi, 2005; Antwi-Boasiako, 2011; and Asante, 2009).

Conclusions

In this paper we discussed public views on the effort to introduce partisan politics into local government administration in Ghana. The following results were obtained regarding political party participation into local governance: participants were opposed to the introduction of partisan politics into local governance; it will not promote development; it will increase local activism; it will increase participation in district assembly elections; there is covert political party participation in local governance; political party participation is good but a bad omen for Ghana; development in

opposition areas will be stifled; political party participation will disparage the authorities of the local assemblies and traditional leaders; it will degrade the value of common good in communities; and the *status quo* should be maintained, though with a blended quota system that will ensure that development is not stifled in opposition areas.

Against the backdrop of this survey, we recommend *inter alia* that the introduction of party politics in Ghana's local government system should be approached with caution. Any attempt at its introduction should be based on high quality independent research, quality consultations among all stakeholders and sound understanding of the threats. For us, this is a far-reaching solution to the current debate that does not allow for consensus-building and therefore, a headway for the quality enhancement of local governance in Ghana.

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