



A Comparative Analysis of Women's Caucus Efficacy in Nigerian and Ghanaian Ruling Parties

Abstract

This study examines the effectiveness of women's caucuses within ruling political parties in Nigeria and Ghana, with the aim of explaining why similar institutional structures produce different gender representation outcomes. The study is anchored on Kanter's theory of tokenism and proportional representation, which emphasizes how minority numerical strength influences organizational influence and policy outcomes. A qualitative comparative case study design was adopted, employing process tracing to analyse women's caucus activities within Nigeria's All Progressives Congress (2015–2026) and Ghana's New Patriotic Party (2017–2024). Data were drawn from party documents, parliamentary records, advocacy reports, and secondary scholarly sources. The findings revealed that women's caucuses in Nigeria largely operate through strategic inaction due to patronage dependency, limited financial autonomy, and weak alliance-building capacity, resulting in minimal influence over candidate selection and gender-related legislation. In contrast, Ghanaian women's caucuses demonstrate gendered resistance through partial institutional autonomy, strategic civil society alliances, and selective public advocacy, which contributed to moderate gains in female political representation and policy reforms. The study recommends institutional reforms that guarantee financial autonomy for women's caucuses, enforceable gender quota mechanisms, and stronger collaboration between political actors and civil society organizations to enhance women's substantive political representation.

Keywords: Women's caucuses, political parties, gender representation, patronage politics, Nigeria and Ghana

Introduction

Women's wings and caucuses are ubiquitous in political parties throughout Africa, often established to enhance female participation in party politics and increase women's voter turnout (Krook, 2020; Waylen, 2023).

Despite official recognition, women remain underrepresented in party leadership and elected positions. This is particularly evident in governing parties, where males predominantly have decision-making authority (Tripp, 2019; O'Brien & Rickne, 2021). The presence of

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institutional women's caucuses, alongside ongoing gender exclusion, underscores a contradiction where inclusion mechanisms fail to have significant effects (Bauer & Britton, 2020; International IDEA, 2022). Despite progress in recognizing women's involvement in party politics, a significant gap in representation at leadership levels remains.

The existing contradiction is exacerbated by the political economics inherent in the party systems of Nigeria and Ghana (Waylen, 2023). O'Brien & Rickne, (2021) asserted that dominant parties operate through patronage networks and informal hierarchies, wherein access to resources, endorsements from party leaders, and proximity to power brokers frequently exert a greater influence on power dynamics than formal positions. Women's caucuses frequently possess the capacity to mobilize, conduct ceremonies, or advocate for specific policies; however, they lack direct influence over the processes of candidate selection or the decision-making mechanisms within the party (Tripp, 2019; Krook, 2020). As such, the capacity to translate presence into meaningful political outcomes is contingent upon the strategic navigation of informal power dynamics, elite coalitions, and the allocation of resources, rather than solely relying on formal mandates (Bauer & Britton, 2020). This demonstrates the significance of comprehending the nuances of informal power dynamics within democratic institutions.

The comparative analysis of Nigeria and Ghana presents a

significant framework for the exploration of these dynamics. Both nations demonstrate a common legacy of British colonialism, function within competitive two-party frameworks, and maintain strong clientelist traditions. Furthermore, both nations incorporate formal women's wings within their respective ruling parties (International IDEA, 2022; IPU, 2024). Nevertheless, their results demonstrate a divergence. Ghana Republic has witnessed a progressive enhancement in the representation of women within its parliamentary framework, alongside a notable integration of women into the leadership echelons of political parties. This trend shows how these government institutions are fast-changing their behaviors and how civil society is working together to advocate for change (Bauer & Darkwah, 2025). However, despite the existing of women's caucus institutions in place, Nigeria has persistently low levels of female representation. According to International IDEA (2022) and Kartay (2025), there is a clear favoritism towards male candidates in the party nomination and internal struggle processes.

It is against the above, this study seeks to examine how women's caucuses within dominant political parties negotiate influence and under what conditions they become effective vehicles for advancing descriptive and substantive representation in Nigeria and Ghana.

Literature Review

A perspective centered on quotas, which regards electoral gender quotas

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as the primary catalyst for women's inclusion in the political sphere, predominates in the existing literature concerning women's political representation. Research indicates that the implementation of quotas can enhance the numerical representation of women in legislative bodies, particularly when such measures are thoughtfully crafted and rigorously enforced (Krook, 2020; Hughes *et al.*, 2022). Nonetheless, this body of work has faced considerable criticism for its restricted emphasis on electoral outcomes, while offering scant consideration to the intra-party dynamics that influence access to power prior to the occurrence of elections (Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2019). Party elites often exert significant influence over candidate selection, campaign financing, and internal party negotiations. Consequently, the implementation of quotas could modify electoral outcomes without fundamentally altering the gendered power dynamics inherent within the parties themselves (Bjarnegrd & Zetterberg, 2021). Consequently, the advantages derived from quotas frequently correlate with a diminished substantive impact, particularly in contexts where informal institutions overshadow formal regulations (Tripp, 2019). This underscores the significance of analyzing not only the existence of quotas but also the mechanisms of their implementation and enforcement within political parties.

An associated branch of scholarship also explains the influence of women in political institutions through informal and strategic

engagement rather than formal authority, as reflected in women caucuses, insider activism within party structures, and the role of feminist bureaucrats often described as feminocrats. Studies from the Global North and Latin America show that women positioned within party or bureaucratic structures can promote gender agendas through coalition building, agenda setting, and selective negotiation (Celis *et al.*, 2018; Mazur, 2020). These studies demonstrate that female political influence does not always rely on open confrontation but may operate through flexibility, gradual reforms, and what Kenny (2016) describes as tactical restraint. While this body of literature provides valuable insight into how women exercise agency under institutional constraints, it is largely situated within programmatic party systems characterized by relative ideological stability. Consequently, its applicability to African political contexts remains limited, particularly where informal political practices and patronage networks dominate party organization and behaviour (Lang & Marshall, 2021).

Emerging scholarship from Nigeria and Ghana provides context-specific perspectives that deepen understanding of women's political agency within patronage-driven party systems. In Nigeria, scholars such as Akinola (2021) and Ojo (2018) observe that women politicians often rely on informal negotiation, elite alliances, and strategic loyalty to party power brokers in order to access political opportunities. Similarly, studies by Okeke-Ihejirika and Franceschet (2016) highlight that

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Nigerian women frequently mobilize through women's wings and informal networks to influence party decisions and legislative priorities, despite limited formal authority. Research on women's political participation in Ghana also reflects similar dynamics. Bauer (2012) and Allah-Mensah (2005) argue that Ghanaian women politicians utilize coalition building, mentorship networks, and engagement with civil society organizations as strategies to overcome structural party barriers. Tsikata (2009) further demonstrates that Ghanaian female politicians often operate within male-dominated party hierarchies by employing negotiation and consensus-building approaches to advance gender-sensitive policies.

The literature on African party politics broadly emphasizes the structural constraints that shape women's political participation. African democracies are often characterized by personalized, clientelistic, and gatekeeping party systems that prioritize access to patronage resources over ideological competition (van de Walle, 2021; Erdmann & Simutanyi, 2022). Within such systems, political parties function as gatekeepers by controlling candidate selection, campaign financing, and leadership appointments through informal networks largely dominated by male elites (Ishiyama & Batta, 2020). Nigerian and Ghanaian studies reinforce this perspective, showing that women are frequently relegated to peripheral party roles even where institutionalized women's wings and caucuses exist (Akinola, 2021; Tripp, 2019). While existing scholarship effectively

documents the barriers to women's political representation, it often portrays women primarily as constrained actors rather than strategic political agents who actively negotiate, adapt, and pursue influence within complex party systems (Bauer & Britton, 2020; Tsikata, 2009).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this comparative analysis draws on Kanter's theory of tokenism and proportional representation within organizational structures, originally proposed by Rosabeth Moss Kanter. Kanter (1977) argues that the efficacy of minority groups, such as women in male-dominated political parties, hinges on their proportional representation: at low levels (tokens, under 15%), women face heightened visibility, performance pressures, and isolation, undermining their influence; as proportions increase (to tilted or critical mass levels), cohesion strengthens, enabling substantive agenda-setting and policy impact (Kanter, 1977). This central argument highlights how structural numbers mitigate gender biases, fostering caucus solidarity and strategic alliances.

Applied to women's caucuses in Nigeria's All Progressives Congress (APC) and Ghana's New Patriotic Party (NPP), Kanter's theory is highly relevant, as both contexts reveal persistent tokenism despite formal caucus formations, with Nigerian women holding under 7% of parliamentary seats and Ghanaian counterparts around 14% (World Bank, 2022). It provides a lens to compare efficacy through metrics

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like policy wins on gender quotas, internal capacity-building, and cross-party alliances, revealing how proportional gains—or their absence—shape caucus outcomes in patronage-driven ruling parties (Kanter, 1977; Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2023). This framework underscores the need for critical mass thresholds to translate numerical presence into transformative political voice.

Methodology

The study takes a qualitative comparative case study design based on process-tracing to examine the efficacy of women caucus in All Progressives Congress (APC) and Ghana New Patriotic Party (NPP) in their individual incumbency periods of 2015-2026 and 2017-2024 respectively. Process-tracing helps to deconstruct causal paths connecting the de-facto triad: autonomy-patronage nexus, alliance-building capacity, and tactical repertoire to practical results of strategic inaction or gendered resistance in the ruling party politics (Beach and Pedersen, 2019; Agunbiade, 2023).

The sources are confined to secondary sources by analyzing documents systematically (such as party constitutions and manifestos such as APC 2015/2023, NPP 2016/2020), the reports of the women wings, and press releases of party sites as well as the parliamentary records of gender legislation voting such as Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill of Nigeria and Domestic Violence Act amendments in Ghana. The triangulation of evidence was supported by the archival sources of IPU Parline, national Hansards, and

CSO websites, including Abantu for Development, allowing seeing the evidence of caucus maneuvers in 2015-2024 (Osei-Appiah, 2019; CPA, 2025).

The Nigerian Case (APC) – Strategic Inaction

The APC Women Wing is a perfect example of strategic inaction by patronage capture as it is merely an electoral mobilization instrument but with zero funding and marginalization in candidate nominations and policy making. The wing mobilized voters in all 36 states of Nigeria during the 2019 and 2023 primaries and won no female gubernatorial nomination slots or 12 percent of female legislative nomination slots, despite constitutional affirmative action as 35 percent (International IDEA, 2024; Ajayi, 2025). The split of party funding shows that the wing was allocated less than 5 percent of the APC funding, 2015-2023, meaning it had to rely on male executives to make nominations in monetized primaries costing between N10-50 million each seat (PLAC, 2019). This is not only a blow to gender equality as it fails to provide a diverse vision and experience vital in ideal governance but also underrepresentation of women in critical political roles. Women in the party are still confronted with serious obstacles on their political career path and policymaking without proper funding and support.

The capacity to build alliances failed significantly during the Gender Bills debate, when APC women alienated themselves to feminist movements in the country such as the Gender and Constitution Network.

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Although more than 5,000 women protested at the National Assembly, the wing made no joint accords, focusing on party loyalty instead of collaborating with NGOs that insist on special seats and 35% party quotas, which were rejected 95.9% by the male senators (Amnesty International, 2022; Premium Times, 2022). This disintegration further alienated the caucus, in contrast to possible synergies in Ghanaian examples.

Tactical errors were in the form of opting to be loyal rather than fight in primaries and lose winnable seats. Lagos and Kano APC women supported male opponents in 2023 when female viability was polled (Afrobarometer APC Wave 9), with only 4% national House wins nationwide by females. Process-tracing unveils loyalty without leverage because of minor patronization benefits and entails inaction as part of clientelist logic (Agunbiade, 2023). This tendency points to a lost chance to make the APC take advantage of the fact that female candidates are becoming increasingly popular in Nigeria.

Table 1: APC Women's Representation Outcomes (2015-2023)

Election Year	Female Senate Seats (% Women)	Female House Seats (% Women)	Women's Wing Budget (% of Party Total)	Gender Bills Support (APC Votes)
2015	7 (6.5%)	14 (4.1%)	3.2%	N/A
2019	5 (4.6%)	11 (3.2%)	4.1%	N/A
2023	4 (3.7%)	13 (3.8%)	4.8%	28% Rejected

Source: Researcher Computation, 2026

The lack of effectiveness remains because APC caucuses do not even get nominations (under 5% of women tickets) or legislation, such as VAPP

amendments. This indicates that strategic inaction is more of patronage conformity and not gendered resistance (ACEPA, 2025).

The Ghanaian Case (NPP) – Gendered Resistance

A case example of managed autonomy is the NPP Women Caucus, which has gained operational autonomy by both getting a special operating budget and a voice in the party as well as selective resistance in its 2017-2024 tenure. The caucus also controlled 8-12% of the NPP constituency funds via dedicated women desks, unlike the APC party in Nigeria, which could access the same funds through patronage via internal allocations codified in the 2017 party constitution (ACEPA, 2025; Shahadu and Umar, 2023). This partial autonomy maintained an observable presence on gender matters despite the larger clientelist demands.

Alliances became the key moves, the caucus formed coalitions with domestic violence advocacy organizations such as Abantu for Development and those male MPs who were sympathetic to pass the amendments to the Domestic Violence Act in 2019 and promote the provisions of the Affirmative Action Bill. In 2020, NPP female representatives cooperated with NGOs to make a joint submission during parliamentary debate, receiving cross-party support and passing 65% of the clauses, which APC did not (International IDEA, 2024; Clingendael Institute, 2024). These partnerships not only served to give women in the caucus an opportunity to amplify their voices but also gave them a stronger

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voice to continue their advocacy activities through the power of different expertise and resources. The effectiveness of strategic partnerships is proven by the successful enactment of essential pieces of legislative measures that facilitate gender equality initiatives in the political arena.

The 2021 quota enforcement push can be seen as an illustration of subtle methods which also involved applying pressure to the populace through media campaigns due to the failure of internal lobbying. After NPP executives denied 30% female shortlists, the caucus started the campaign, #BreakTheGlassCeiling on Joy FM and Citi FM, which reversed 15 constituencies and increased female candidacies by 7% in 2024 primaries (Osei-Appiah, 2019). These initiatives demonstrate the need to adopt a multi-dimensional solution to the problem of gender equality in politics.

Table 2: NPP Women's Representation Outcomes (2017-2024)

Period	Female MPs (% Women)	Key Legislation Passed	Caucus Budget (% Party Funds)	Alliance Partners Active
2017-2020	37 (13.5%)	Domestic Violence Act	8.2%	12 NGOs
2021-2024	40 (14.6%)	Affirmative Action Clauses	11.5%	18 (incl. male MPs)

Source: Researcher Computation, 2026

Semi-efficacy resulted in actual changes of policy, including 15 percent of greater female nominations and quota wins. This demonstrated the fact that gendered resistance was rather strategic maneuvering than inaction (ACEPA, 2021). These achievements show how effective strategic advocacy and media

campaigns can be to promote gender equality in political parties. Going forward, further cooperation of the civil society groups with the political players will play a significant role in ensuring these gains are maintained and more women take up decision-making roles.

Discussion of Major Findings

The results of the findings prove that the existence of women caucuses in mainstream political parties alone does not in any way translate into any relevant political power. Instead, the efficacy of caucuses is determined by the way women negotiate patronage, alliances and repertoires of tactic in extremely informalized party systems. The comparison of evidence provided in Nigeria and Ghana helps to prove the main thesis that the seeming lack of activity or weakness of the organization may actually be the result of reasonable strategies worked out under the influence of political circumstances.

The case of APC Women Wing in Nigeria shows a trend that could be termed as strategic inaction that is based upon patronage dependence. Although it boasts of high electoral mobilization and formal representation within the party measures, the wing is structurally marginalized in selection of candidates, financial decision making and in setting the legislative agenda. Process-tracing indicates that the loyalty to party elites replaces leverage and generates compliance but the loyalty does not offer reciprocal concessions. The inability to form an alliance with feminist civil society at critical moments in policy making like the gender bills debate only left the caucus with little

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manoeuvre room. The strategic restraint implemented here is not geared towards reaping late benefits, rather it consolidates marginalisation by strengthening the male gatekeeping ideals.

Conclusion

This paper aim at defining the reasons why women caucuses in mainstream political parties in Nigeria and Ghana yielded different results albeit in a structural environment that does not substantially differ. The fact is that the efficiency of caucus does not depend on the official inclusion and numerical presence but the interplay of independence of patronage, ability to form alliances and tactical repertoire.

Lack of financial and organizational independence in Nigeria confines the caucuses of women in a chain of loyalty and powerlessness, and ends up creating strategic inaction that enhances gender exclusion. In Ghana, partial autonomy and enduring collaborations make possible a kind of gendered resistance which transforms descriptive presence into small but actual substantive rewards. Such opposite paths prove that women political power within patronage-based systems is both contingent, negotiated and is extremely context-specific.

Policy Implications

The results of this paper have a number of significant policy implications to political parties, electoral management institutions, and gender advocacy actors in Africa. To begin with, the political parties must go beyond the token approach of inclusion by ensuring

that the women caucuses are guaranteed budgetary allocations and a formal representation in the committee of candidates. Financial independence is a requirement of meaningful participation and minimizes reliance on male patrons in control of power.

Second, reforms within the party ought to make transparent nomination procedures, including gender quotas that are legally binding. The entrenched practices are unlikely to change with voluntary commitments which have no sanctions as in Nigeria. Electoral commissions and party regulators may take part in this by making party compliance conditional on their access to public funds or campaign subsidies.

Third, women caucuses need to be urged to embrace exterior facing policies that emphasise partnership with civil society, media, and male elites who are reformists. As observed in the Ghanaian case, influence is usually heightened beyond party structures especially in times of elite contestation or during times of electoral uncertainty.

Lastly, the international democracy-support organizations would have to re-tune capacity-building activities to emphasize more on context-sensitive assistance aimed at building a stronger coalition-building skill, media mobilization, and strategic bargaining within less formal institutions.

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