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Doctoral Dissertation

**Gendered Pathways to Power: The Role of Social Capital in Shaping Political Journeys in
Ghana**

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Abstract

Gender inequality persists globally, especially in politics, where women encounter significant barriers to equal participation and representation. Unlike the Western framing, where non-binary identities are central to the gender inequality discourse, the Ghanaian context limits the discussion to binary and biological determinism, conceptualizing gender inequality as the disparity between men and women. In Ghana, political gender inequality reflects broader societal challenges related to gender roles and representation. Despite previous research examine this phenomenon from various angles, a gap remains in exploring how politicians' access to and utilization of social capital contribute to gender inequality in politics. This thesis employs social capital theory, drawing from Bourdieu's and Nahapiet and Ghoshal's frameworks, to investigate how social capital and its utilization shape female political participation in Ghana's Northern and Greater Accra regions. Engaging with 30 politicians (16 females, 14 males) from both regions. Studying gender gaps locally in the Northern and Greater Accra regions, instead of nationally, enabled the examination of specific social, cultural, and economic factors influencing gender relations. It also identifies unique barriers and facilitators to gender equality in the Northern and Greater Accra regions. It also captures detailed data on micro-level interactions and community dynamics, providing rich insights into the lived experiences and everyday practices contributing to gender inequalities in the Northern and Greater Accra regions. The study reveals that female politicians encounter challenges accessing social capital for political participation, especially in the Northern region, due to intricate interplays of gender and sociocultural and political dynamics. The research findings suggest that the evolution of political agency among Ghanaian politicians involves a complex interplay of economic status, development gaps, socio-cultural norms, and personal experiences. These factors significantly affect politicians' access to social capital, hence increasing the gender gap in political participation. Additionally, the study highlights the interconnectedness of cognitive, structural, and relational aspects of social capital, impacting how female politicians utilize these capitals, thereby influencing their political participation. Female politicians, particularly in the Northern region, often lack access to cognitive social capital, hindering their comprehension of the political landscape. Relationally, they primarily engage with fellow females, lacking access to cross-gender networks essential for acquiring external information. Structurally, female politicians, especially in the North, struggle to connect with influential figures, thereby missing out on reciprocal benefits vital for political participation. In the Greater Accra region, inherited family social capital

significantly impacts the political participation of female politicians, whereas socio-cultural barriers in the Northern region undermine the efficacy of inherited family social capital. The thesis underscores the potential for female politicians to overcome structural barriers by creating networks in male-dominated spheres beyond their political space, thereby gaining an edge in politics. However, for women, particularly in the Northern region, establishing such professional and educational networks beyond the political space proves challenging and often unattainable.

Keywords: Female Politicians, Gender Inequality, Greater Accra Region, Northern Region, Political participation, Social Capital

Introduction

Chapter overview

This section introduces and lays the foundation for the thesis. It outlines the study's background, identifies the research problem, states the objectives, and describes the methods used. Next, it details the primary and secondary research questions that informed the main objectives. An overview of the contributions made by the research is then presented. The section ends with an outline of the thesis.

Background

In this thesis, I examine the complex relationship between social capital and female politician's political participation in Ghana. The motivation for this study arises from the longstanding issue of women being underrepresented in leadership roles across various organizational contexts, particularly within mainstream politics, which is often perceived as male dominated venture. Throughout this thesis, I explore the gender dynamics involved in the acquisition and utilization of social capital within the political landscape, demonstrating how different forms of social capital can be leveraged to enhance women's participation in mainstream politics. Similar to many countries, particularly those in the global south like Ghana, political participation is often viewed through a gendered lens, with men being considered the norm and primary actors in political positions. Scholars have identified various cultural, socioeconomic, and deeply entrenched patriarchal systems as contributing factors to the underrepresentation of women in politics (Jaquette 1982; Karp and Banducci 2008; Rule 1994; Sapiro 1991). These factors limit women's access to opportunities for political engagement.

While the gender difference in politics have garnered significant attention in international discourse and among international organizations, the marginalization of women remains prevalent in almost every country. This is especially pronounced in Ghana, where sociocultural and religious factors serve as formidable barriers to women's participation in politics. Since Ghana's independence, national governments, in collaboration with international entities like the United Nations, have strived to achieve a more balanced political landscape. This commitment has triggered extensive research on women in politics in Ghana (Akita 2010; Bawa and Sanyare 2013;

Darkwa 2016b; Ichino and Nathan 2017; Madsen 2019a, 2019b; Munemo 2017; Musah and Gariba 2013; Odame 2010; Osei-Hwedie and Agomor 2018; Shiraz 2015), as well as policies to advance women's positions in Ghana, including the Convention on the Elimination of Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).¹ While the policies implemented by international bodies and the Ghanaian government have made some strides in acknowledging women as key players in mainstream politics, the number of women attaining significant positions in Ghana's political landscape still lags far behind their male counterparts. For instance, in the 2020 Ghana general parliamentary elections, only 40 women out of 275 total parliamentarians were elected, representing 14.5% of women.

The pursuit of gender-inclusive politics in Ghana traces its roots back to the era of the country's first president, Kwame Nkrumah, particularly through his 1960 affirmative action policy. This policy was a response to the significant role women played in Ghana's independence movement of 1957. Acknowledging their vital contribution, Nkrumah's Convention People's Party (CPP) took a groundbreaking step in 1960 by directly appointing 10 women to Parliament.² This move went beyond mere symbolic representation; it was a deliberate effort to strengthen the presence of women in legislative spheres and initiate their broader engagement in politics.

Analysing the presence of women in contemporary Ghana's mainstream politics shows that the policies and interventions towards gender neutralizing politics in Ghana have achieved insignificant growth. In the case of the Greater Accra and Northern region of Ghana divide, the issue of women representation in politics is far better than the case of women in the Northern region. For instance, as of 2020, the last election before the beginning of this thesis, and over 6 decades after the Nkrumah's Convention People's Party (CPP) initiative —the Greater Accra region is represented by 13 female parliamentarians, and the Northern region lacks female parliamentary representation entirely. In the Greater Accra region, 13 out of 34 parliamentary seats

¹ Convention on the Elimination of Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is an international legal instrument that requires countries to eliminate discrimination against women and girls in all areas and promotes women's and girls' equal rights.

² In 1959, the Representation of the People (Women Members) Act was enacted, allowing for the election of women as National Assembly members (Arhin 2000). The legislation granted ten women membership in the National Assembly, with equivalent privileges, rights, and conditions of service as other members elected under the Electoral Provisions Ordinance of 1953. Their election was to be conducted through Women's Electoral Colleges, either through a special election or in conjunction with the general election. However, the 1959 Act was superseded in 1960 by a new law, which introduced a different method for electing women members. This new approach mandated that elected women represent various administrative regions within the country.

account for 38% of female parliamentary representation, while the Northern region, with 18 parliamentary seats, has no female representatives. This situation underscores Ghana's challenge in achieving, not only the Nkrumah's Convention People's Party (CPP) initiative dream of achieving gender neutrality in Ghanaian politics, but has shown Ghana's inability to archive the Beijing Platform for Action's 2005 benchmark of 30% female representation— a reminder of the significant strides yet to be made particularly in the Northern region (Declaration 1995; Women 1995, 2015).

Numerous studies conducted not only within Ghana but also spanning various geopolitical regions across Africa, the Global South, and the Global North have identified the underrepresentation of women in mainstream politics (Dolan, Deckman, and Swers 2021; Krook 2010b; Nwabunkeonye 2014; Paxton, Hughes, and Barnes 2020; Tripp 1999). This underrepresentation is attributed to specific sociocultural and economic dynamics rooted not solely in the outcomes of globalization but also in historical precedents. Research on the gender gap in politics in Ghana is well-developed and covers many topics. These include the history of the issue, women's participation in local government, national and international politics, political parties, electoral systems, women's empowerment, the impact of past policies and education, social and cultural challenges and strategies, and both local and global contexts (Agomor 2016; Akita 2010; Boateng 2017; Darkwa 2016a; Ichino and Nathan 2017; Musah and Gariba 2013; Osei-Hwedie and Agomor 2018; Sossou 2011).

Current studies also show that factors such as religious beliefs, deep-seated patriarchal values, division of labour, socio-cultural norms and customs, economic challenges, and inadequate education serve as major obstacles to women's full participation in politics and professional sectors (Akita 2010; Bauer and Darkwah 2020; Bawa and Sanyare 2013; Boateng 2017; Darkwa 2016a; Nyadroh 2022; Shiraz 2015). The managing of professional and family responsibilities also poses a significant impediment to women's ascent in political spheres (Eagly and Carli 2007a:8; Nkomo and Ngambi 2009:56; Paxton et al. 2020:72). The demands of childbirth, childcare, and household duties restrict women's availability for political engagement and other professional commitments (Bauer 2019:24; Selwaness and Krafft 2021:573).

The question that remains deeply concerning is: how do patriarchal values, sociocultural norms, religious practices, and socioeconomic factors intersect to perpetuate the underrepresentation of women in Ghanaian politics? Addressing this question is crucial for gaining

deeper insights into the root causes of women's underrepresentation in politics, in Ghana. By understanding these sociocultural, religious, and economic dynamics, effective policies can be formulated to address the structural barriers hindering women's political participation. To contribute to this ongoing discourse, the current study focuses on the concept of social capital as a broader social construct that surrounds women's sociocultural and economic contexts. Exploring the interplay of social capital not only sheds light on how socio-cultural and economic factors undermine women's political engagement but also unveils avenues through which social capital can be leveraged to enhance women's participation in politics.

Social capital encompasses the shared relationships, networks, values, and trust that allow individuals and communities to collaborate effectively (Putnam 1993). In many societies in Ghana, social capital is instrumental in stimulating economic growth, bolstering governance, and enhancing community unity (Amoako-Gyampah, Acquah, Adaku, and Famiyeh 2021). Given Ghana's intricate traditional systems and emphasis on community-oriented structures, Ghana provides a distinctive lens through which to examine the impact of social capital. Historically, Ghanaian society has revolved around communal existence, emphasizing kinship bonds, and rooted in foundational structures such as clans, chieftaincies, and extensive family networks (Salm and Falola 2002). This emphasis on the collective, rather than individual ambitions, has fostered an environment in which relationships and networking are highly valued see, e.g. (Gyimah-Boadi and Prempeh 2012). The chieftaincy institutions, integral to Ghanaian culture, utilize social capital to mediate conflicts, administer resources, and deliver social amenities (Boateng and Afranie 2020). Their authority often relies not on coercive power, but on respect, trust, and the moral authority vested in them by the community.

Though social capital assertions many benefits, an over-reliance on it can inadvertently solidify existing power hierarchies, potentially giving rise to inequalities (Bourdieu 1986). For example, individuals excluded from certain networks or communities may face challenges accessing resources or opportunities in those networks. In Ghana, social capital intrinsically influences its political sphere (Osei and Malang 2018). Ranging from traditional governance systems to contemporary electoral politics, the intricate web of relationships, trust, and communal values is deeply embedded in Ghanaian political dynamics. Gaining a deeper appreciation and understanding of this interplay can shed light on the intricacies of Ghana's governance, highlighting both its successes and obstacles.

Research suggests that networking and social ties, and social capital in general, are pivotal for equitable political participation (Hays and Kogl 2007:203; Mutz 2002:839). As Putnam (2000) describes, social capital is not merely about connections; it acts as a “*lubricant*” that eases societal interactions and actions. For women in politics, this 'lubricant' often translates to mentorship, peer support, and networking opportunities, which can unveil avenues that might otherwise appear inaccessible. However, individuals’ ability to access these social capitals may be influenced by several factors, including gender, sociocultural context, and socioeconomic status. Bauer (2019:24) posits that when women secure roles outside their domestic sphere, they are likely to enter traditional political mobilizing platforms, such as trade unions and professional groups, areas they were previously marginalized from. Even within these platforms, many women face challenges in networking and fostering meaningful connections, primarily due to the entrenched gender biases in the largely male-centric political space (Lutter 2015:333, 346). Notably, female politicians often find themselves side-lined from influential networks crucial for career progression, instead being more aligned with women-centric networks that lack financial autonomy. Occasionally, it is not about external limitations; women sometimes gravitate towards networks with lesser political influence driven by their personal motivations and preferences.

This thesis builds on the previous studies see, e.g. (Osei 2012; Osei and Malang 2018), exploring the interplay between gender, social capital, and agency, and its cumulative effect on political participation in the Northern and Greater Accra regions of Ghana. This thesis hence investigates how social capital functions in shaping the political participation of politicians (especially female politicians) in the Northern and Greater Accra region.

Socio-political overview of Northern and Greater Accra Ghana

Ghana, has consistently championed gender equality and fostered women's political participation, as evidenced by its endorsement of international treaties and legislation upholding women's rights – a history that will be explored in chapter 1. Since its independence in 1957, Ghana has witnessed a significant evolution in gender politics. This includes the advocacy for enhanced women's representation in parliament, efforts by women's empowerment organizations to boost their numbers in these spaces, and the introduction of gender quotas (Boateng et al. 2021:217). While political participation stands as a fundamental pillar of democracy, it presupposes that women in Ghana should have the rights to actively engage and occupy pivotal

roles in the nation's political decision-making process. Yet, the evident underrepresentation of women in Ghanaian politics persists as a pressing concern.

The focus of the thesis centred on the distinct cultures of the Northern and Greater Accra regions. Historically, both the Northern (home to the Dagomba's) and Greater Accra (inhabited by the Ga's) regions have been part of Ghana for over a millennium (Boahen 1966:215). Yet, a distinct developmental gap separates them (Osei-Assibey 2014:523, 529). This divide traces back to the colonial era (Adumpong 2020:2). The British colonists, drawn by the South's abundant cocoa, gold, and other resources, predominantly developed this area. Post-independence, this southern-centric development approach persisted, further widening the gap with the Northern region (Akrofi, Akanbang, and Abdallah 2018:40).³ The presence of the capital city in the Greater Accra region has perpetuated this trend, channelling most developmental initiatives there.

Despite regional disparities, both the Northern region and the Greater Accra region predominantly follow patrilineal descent systems. Both regions are predominantly male driven in terms of traditional power access. They are also distinctly shaped by the pervasive influences of Islam and Christianity, respectively (Fuseini and Kalule-Sabiti 2015:1833). The Northern Region of Ghana is predominately characterized by a mosaic of Muslim communities, including Sunni, Tijaniyyah, Ahmadiyya, Shia, Qadiriyyah, and Mouride and a fraction of Christians. While each group has its distinct practices and beliefs, there are overarching similarities and shared tenets that bind them. However, it is paramount to recognize the range of individual and community practices within these broad categories. Such variations often significantly influence views on gender equality. Ethnic communities such as the Dagomba, Gonja, and Kusase exhibit more pronounced Islamic restrictions on women. These restrictions often manifest in more autonomous decision-making domains (Fuseini and Kalule-Sabiti 2015:1833–35, 1839–40).

In contrast, the Greater Accra region stands out as a dynamic religious centre, where Christianity predominantly influences the spiritual fabric of its populace. This region is home to a myriad of Christian denominations, including the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Charismatic, Seventh-day Adventist, Orthodox, African indigenous churches,

³ The political significance of the South–North divide is evidenced by the efforts of Ghanaian parties to achieve a balance in nominating presidential candidates, their running mates, and ministerial appointees (Osei and Malang 2018).

Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints with a fraction of Muslims (see fig 1.10). Each denomination brings its unique stance on gender equality. While the Greater Accra region generally presents an egalitarian and advanced environment, it is essential to note that this progressiveness can vary due to the distinct policies of each religious group.

Women in the Greater Accra region enjoy some financial independence and are active decision-makers at home, however they remain underrepresented in formal sectors, especially in politics (see table no. 1.2; fig 1.7). As of May 2024, only 40 women occupied parliamentary seats, with 13 hailing from the Greater Accra region and none from the Northern region (Ghana Electoral Commission 2020).⁴ The contrast between the Northern and Greater Accra regions lies not just in numbers, but in the socio-cultural contexts that influence gender dynamics, access to social capital, and women's political representation (Osei-Assibey 2014:523, 529; Sossou 2011:4–6) - a topic delved deeper into in chapter one (1). Women's limited access to crucial networks in these regions poses significant challenges, preventing them from bridging the representation divide. Such networks are vital, fostering collaboration and amassing invaluable social capital.

The preceding discussion not only highlights the marginalization of women in politics but also underscores the sociocultural and economic factors that may impede their participation, such as patriarchal and religious values, and economic conditions. These factors limit women's potency to acquire the necessary resources for their political career such as access to information, economic access, and social networks. As demonstrated in the discourse, these factors contributing to women's underrepresentation in politics vary significantly between the Northern region and the Greater Accra region. To unravel how these dynamic interactions of sociocultural, religious, and economic elements are influenced by social contexts and their implications for women's political participation, the current study focuses on comparing Northern Ghana and the Greater Accra region. To better achieve the study's objectives, I have formulated research questions that encompass both theoretical frameworks and empirical realities surrounding women's political engagement in Ghana.

Theoretical direction and research questions

In this thesis, *I explored the concept of social capital and its implications for political participation, particularly focusing on women as central figures.* I examined how varying

⁴ <https://ec.gov.gh/2020-presidential-election-results/2020-parliamentary-results/>

sociocultural and economic contexts in Northern region and Greater Accra influence the access to, and utilization of social capital for political participation. While the concept of social capital typically revolves around the resources individuals acquire through their social relationships, the definition of "capital" varies among scholars, leading to diverse conceptualizations of social capital. For example, can receiving motivation and emotional support from one's social network be considered a form of social capital? Answering this question requires engaging with the various perspectives through which scholars have approached the concept of social capital. Throughout the thesis, I delved into the perspectives of different scholars on social capital to understand the complexities of the resources that women in politics either lack or utilize in their political careers, such as those related to material capitals, economic, symbolic, cognitive, and psychological.

Bourdieu (1986) emphasizes the structural aspects of social capital, focusing on networks and resources embedded within social relationships. In conceptualizing social capital, Bourdieu distinguishes between material and symbolic forms. Material social capital pertains to tangible resources acquired through social networks, including connections with family, friends, colleagues, and other affiliations. These tangible resources encompass various assets such as economic capital, artifacts, and other tangible assets. Conversely, symbolic social capital, as emphasized by Bourdieu, comprises resources of a more intangible nature, including trust, information exchange, and psychological support. While Pierre Bourdieu did not explicitly delineate between material and symbolic social capital as some other theorists have, his work intersects with concepts aligning with both aspects.

Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) highlight the significance of structural, relational, and cognitive dimensions in understanding social capital. They employ structural social capital to characterize the patterns of social networks, including centrality, density, and diversity, positing that networks with dense, diverse, and centrally positioned connections attract more social capital, aligning with Pierre Bourdieu's insights. On the other hand, they utilize relational social capital to assess the quality and strength of social ties, examining how this quality and strength may either impede or facilitate access to material and symbolic capitals. Finally, Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) use cognitive social capital to explain how shared norms, emotions, and psychological stimuli may contribute to one's ability to access resources in their network.

While Bourdieu (1986) and Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) may offer distinct approaches to understanding the mechanism of acquiring social capital, their conceptualization of what

constitutes "capitals" shares similarities, encompassing both symbolic and material forms. In this thesis, integrating the perspectives of Bourdieu (1986) and Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) affords me comprehensive insights into the diverse social capitals and sociocultural narratives surrounding political participation. Informed by Bourdieu (1986) and Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), I classify forms of psychological and emotional support, such as motivation, information sharing, and advice, as symbolic social capital. Additionally, I consider tangible resources accessible to women and political actors through their relationships with family, friends, and others in society.

In his book "Forms of Capital (1986)," Pierre Bourdieu argues that individuals have the capacity to transform one type of capital into another based on their agency, or their ability to make independent choices within a given social context (Campbell 2009). Agency, in this context, refers to individuals' capacity to act autonomously, guided by their internal beliefs about their social realities rather than being solely influenced by external factors. Consequently, politicians may possess cultural and symbolic capital and then utilize these resources to gain economic advantages (Bourdieu 1986). For instance, someone might gather information through their social network and then use that knowledge to generate financial gains for political participation. Through the process of capital conversion, politicians can leverage what they possess or have acquired to achieve various sociocultural, socioeconomic, and political objectives. Capital conversion can manifest in two forms: "intra-transactional" and "inter-transactional." Intra-transactional conversion involves transforming one form of capital into another of its kind, such as exchanging symbolic social capital for another form of symbolic social capital, like converting information into motivation for political engagement. On the other hand, inter-transactional conversion encompasses transactions that transcend their original forms, such as transitioning from symbolic to material capital or vice versa.

In this thesis, as part of understanding the reasons for political participation, I explore the various individual, sociocultural, and economic factors that shape political actors' agency and how such agency is leveraged in political engagement. In this study, agency is conceptualized as forms of symbolic and material capital that individuals acquire through their interactions and observations of others and their social realities. Though the acquisition of social capital can greatly influence politicians' political success, perspectives from Bourdieu (1986), Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), and other scholars suggest that accessing social capital may be challenging due to various sociocultural processes, such as religious orientations, cultural norms, gender dynamics, and

socioeconomic status. Acknowledging this reality, the current study also examines how sociocultural and economic factors influence women's access to social capital, including the challenges they face in accessing social capital for political participation.

To unravel nuances of social capitals, agencies, and sociocultural dynamics that surround women political participation in Ghana, the following research questions are formulated.

1. ***How do female political actor's access social capitals through cognitive, structural, and relational dimensions for political participation?*** Fundamentally, individuals may acquire symbolic or material social capital, but the ways in which they obtain these capitals vary significantly. Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) introduced cognitive, structural, and relational dimensions to encapsulate these diverse acquisition methods. Following this framework, I explore the various perspectives from which political actors access the forms of social capital essential for their political engagement. Throughout the thesis, I conducted regional analyses, focusing on both Northern and Greater Accra regions, and incorporated gender analysis to uncover how sociocultural dynamics and gender influence individuals' political agency.
2. ***In what ways do access to and utilization of social capital influence women's political participation?*** Individuals can convert various forms of social capital, whether material or symbolic, into other types of capital. Throughout their political careers, individuals acquire different forms of social capital, and I explore how they transform these acquired social capitals—be it structural, cognitive, or relational—to foster their political development and participation.
3. ***What sociocultural factors and regional differences hinder female political actors' access to social capital?*** This inquiry draws from scholarly discussions on gender and access to social capital. According to Bourdieu (1986), although social capital is crucial for individuals to attain leadership roles, including political participation, various contingencies such as sociocultural, economic factors, and demographics may constrain individuals' access to social capital. To understand these contingencies, I examine how gender, sociocultural disparities, and regional differences particularly prevalent in Northern and Greater Accra regions, hinder women's access to essential social capital necessary for their political advancement.

4. *How do political actors develop their political agency and extend it to access social capital and engage in politics?* To address this question, I examine the diverse sociocultural and economic factors influencing male and female politicians' decisions to participate in politics. This approach is based on assumption that individuals' engagement in politics is influenced by their sociocultural, economic, and political realities. Understanding these motivations is crucial for comprehending political agency and its impact on political involvement.

While previous research has largely examined the impact of social capital through quantitative analysis (see. eg. Carreras and Bowler 2019; Lin 2017; Masoudi, Mohammadi, and Azin 2021; Molina-morales and Teresa 2010), focusing on network density, this current study takes a qualitative approach to understanding social capital and its role in shaping female politicians' political participation. I contend that relying solely on quantitative methods overlooks the nuanced aspects of relationships and the contextual backdrop within which social interactions unfold. For example, not all connections within a network may be equally advantageous, as the quality of relationships and the degree of trust and reciprocity among individuals differ (Plickert, Côté, and Wellman 2007). Additionally, the prevailing social norms and cultural values within a community can influence how social capital is formed and leveraged (Halpern 2005). Therefore, to address these research questions, the data on which this thesis is built upon utilized a qualitative methodology, incorporating semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and documents.

I conducted interviews with 30 politicians from both the Northern and Greater Accra regions of Ghana, exploring their views on social capital, how they build their political agency, and their career journeys within the political space. I also did some non-participant observations and used some relevant documents. These methodologies were specifically chosen to unearth detailed insights about the role and understanding of social capital in the Ghanaian political context, informed by the first-hand experiences of politicians. A thematic analysis was employed to process the gathered data.

The data from the thesis reveals that the political participation of female politicians in both the Northern and Greater Accra regions of Ghana is notably shaped by their access to and utilization of social capital (elaborated in chapter 4 and 5). Cognitive, structural, and relational forms of social capital are key factors influencing women's engagement in politics, though

discrepancies are evident between the two regions (Alcorta et al. 2020; Lake and Huckfeldt 1998; Nakhaie 2008). In the Northern region, female politicians often face significant obstacles in accessing social capital, especially in cognitive and structural aspects, attributed to entrenched cultural norms and power dynamics. Conversely, in the Greater Accra region, female politicians enjoy a more inclusive and diverse political landscape, fostering enhanced access to social capital.

The data from the thesis suggests the pivotal role of social capital and its interplay with individual's political agency for political engagement. Construction of political agency, undeniably, serves as the cornerstone of individuals motivation to engage in a particular social discourse, including politics (Campbell 2009). Politicians, driven by their individual agencies, find these impulses deeply intertwined with the complex mesh of political, social, and cultural contexts.

This thesis also shows that individual agency for political participation do not operate in isolation. They emerge from a blend of societal, geographical, personal, familial, and economic influences. Crucially, agency exhibit a spectrum of dimensions. Politicians navigate through a myriad of these political agencies, which are subject to change over time. Delving deeper into this research's data (elaborated in chapter 8), it is evident that a significant portion of female politicians' step into the political space driven by a desire for systemic change – be it in policies, laws, or societal norms that resonate with their personal and communal experiences. Some are spurred by the belief that they can echo the distinct needs and challenges faced by other women more effectively, acknowledging that diversity in representation paves the way for holistic policymaking. A minority are driven by their essential skills and expertise tailored for politics. Additionally, some are influenced by their familial political roots, choosing to uphold and extend an existing legacy. Paying attention to how female politicians access and utilize social capital in the Northern and Greater Accra regions of Ghana and how they cultivate their political agency sheds light on the reasons behind the underrepresentation of women in politics especially in the Northern region.

Rationale of study

Numerous research have delved into the challenges confronted by women striving to enter and maintain their stance within Ghana's parliament and political party sectors (Akita 2010; Bauer and Darkwah 2020; Bawa and Sanyare 2013; Boateng 2017; Markwei et al. 2019; Musah and Gariba 2013; Odame 2010; Shiraz 2015). These works highlight the fairly common burden placed on women regarding domestic, familial, and professional roles while breaking into politics (Bawa

and Sanyare 2013; Markwei et al. 2019). Studies further discuss the intricacies within the political sphere, detailing women's retention strategies post-election and how they navigate a predominantly male sphere (Boateng 2017). The findings suggest that the political trajectories of Ghanaian women significantly deviate from those of their male counterparts (Coffe and Bolzendahl 2011; Hern 2021). This divergence is often attributed to the male-heavy political setting, which establishes rules that primarily cater to their interests (Akita 2010; Dolan et al. 2021).

Some scholarly works have approached these challenges through the lens of social capital access and its application within the political domain (Alcorta et al. 2020; Lowndes 2004; Osei and Malang 2018). While evidence underscores the role of social capital within politics and the interplay of its structural, cognitive, and relational dimensions in developed nations, there exists a conspicuous void in literature focusing on the experiences of women in Africa. This omission encompasses aspects of political participation, societal norms, gender roles, and the access to and utilization of social capital. The existing literature has yet to deeply probe how differing socio-cultural contexts and access to social capital and political agency can explain the underrepresentation of women in politics. This thesis aims to address this gap, exploring how social capital access and utilization impacts gender-specific political participation in the Northern and Greater Accra regions of Ghana.

In this context, my research enhances existing knowledge by providing a comparative analysis of two local regions with distinct socio-cultural and economic conditions, complementing both national-level studies and region-specific case studies. Focusing on the role of social capital, it extends current understanding by applying Bourdieu (1986) and Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) concepts of social capital, tailoring it to the unique context of how female politicians employ social capital in their political professional domain. The study delves deeper to explore how these Ghanaian female politicians' access and utilize the structural, relational, and cognitive dimensions of social capital, and how this influences their political participation.

Limitations of the study

This thesis offers insightful analysis into the career paths of politicians within the political sphere, exploring how these trajectories are shaped by factors such as access to social capital, gender ideologies, political agency, and the socio-cultural environment. However, it also uncovers a notable limitation: the geographical limitation. With only 30 participants from the Northern and Greater Accra regions, the study might not fully represent the diverse experiences of politicians

throughout these areas. This restriction affects the broader applicability of the results to all politicians within these regions. Although qualitative research prioritizes depth over breadth, the limited number of participants restricts the scope for wider inferences. Additionally, by concentrating on politicians from specific areas (Northern and Greater Accra regions), the distinct cultural, economic, and political settings might hinder the relevance of the findings to other Ghanaian regions. The regional focus suggests that the outcomes may not accurately reflect the experiences of politicians in other parts of the country, where there may be significant differences in cultural, economic, religious, and political environments.

Moreover, despite the study's attempt to ensure comprehensiveness through triangulating multiple data sources, its exclusive reliance on qualitative data could limit the ability to generalise findings. The inclusion of quantitative methodologies in subsequent research has the potential to increase understanding and broaden the generalizability of how accessing and utilizing social capital, along with political agency, impacts the political engagement of female politicians across Ghana

Thesis outline

The thesis consists of nine chapters organized into four main sections: literature and theoretical background, methodology, results, and conclusions. It apportions two chapters for the literature review and theoretical framework, one chapter each for methodology and conclusions, and allocates five chapters for presenting the results. Chapters one and two serve as the foundation of the thesis, focusing on the literature review and theoretical framework.

Chapter one (1) of this thesis delves into the historical context of women's roles in politics across sub-Saharan Africa, providing a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of women's political engagement before, during, and in the post-colonial era. This literature review reveals a predominant connection between the current underrepresentation of women in African politics and the colonization that occurred across the continent centuries ago (Madsen 2019a:74; Osunyikanmi 2011:58; Segueda 2015:8). The literature review narrows its focus to Ghana, the case study. It comprehensively examines the evolution of gender politics in Ghana, tracing the journey from pre-colonial times, through the colonial period, and into the era of independence. The review uncovers that, similar to other African nations, pre-colonial Ghana was governed by traditional leaders (Marfo and Musah 2018:65; Mawuko-Yevugah and Attipoe 2021:319–20). Notably, in the pre-

colonial era, Ghanaian women enjoyed substantial social and political influence, their perspectives were valued, and their input was frequently sought in political decision-making processes (Steedstra 2009:105; Stoeltje 1997:43, 2003; Tamale 2018:5). However, this balance shifted during colonization – the British imposed domestic ideals on women's roles in Ghana, consequently diminishing their public authority (Manuh 1988). Additionally, colonialism in the Gold Coast significantly impacted religious beliefs, introducing Christianity and Islam, which have been linked to the deterioration of women's status in Ghanaian society (Igboin 2011:97; Segueda 2015:8–9).

After Ghana gained independence in 1957, its first president, Kwame Nkrumah, initiated a progressive move in 1960 by enacting the Representation of the People (Women Members) Act, establishing one of Africa's earliest electoral gender quotas (Bauer 2019:608–9). Initially successful, subsequent governments failed to sustain the momentum of this affirmative action program, resulting in persistently low female representation in parliament (Kwaku Ohemeng and Adusah-Karikari 2015; Torto 2013). The chapter then discusses the pivotal role of political parties in advocating for gender equality (Morrison 2004:421), focusing on the dominant National Democratic Congress (NDC) and New Patriotic Party (NPP) in Ghana.⁵ Despite symbolic support for women, evidence suggests that genuine empowerment remains elusive equitably (Osei-Hwedie and Agomor 2018). The chapter delves into the Northern and Greater Accra regions, highlighting their differing socio-cultural contexts, which shape gender dynamics (see table no. 1.2). While the Greater Accra region exhibits more liberal attitudes, both regions face challenges in achieving gender equality.

Chapter two (2) provides an in-depth theoretical exploration of the concept of social capital within the framework of sociopolitical networks, crucial for understanding political career progression. It uses Bourdieu's (1986) definition of social capital to analyse the nuanced power dynamics and relational structures that underpin politicians' networks. By integrating insights from Bourdieu (1986), Nahapiet, and Ghoshal (1998), the study further divides social capital into relational, cognitive, and structural dimensions. This theoretical framework of Bourdieu (1986),

⁵ In 1992, Rawlings reconfigured his autocratic Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC), which had exercised autocratic control over the country since 1981, into a political party known as the National Democratic Congress (NDC). Alongside several smaller opposition parties, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) emerged as the primary opposition force. Originating from the Busia-Danquah tradition, a well-established political legacy in Ghana, the NPP identifies as a centre-right party advocating for liberalism and free-market policies, while the NDC espouses a more social democratic and pro-poor stance (see Jonah, 1998).

Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) serves as a lens through which the intricacies of politicians' socio-cultural interactions, network formations, and the mobilization of network-based resources for political participation are examined. The chapter highlights the pivotal role of social capital in navigating political landscapes, particularly focusing on how these theoretical models apply to the study of political participation in diverse socio-cultural settings. This investigation lays the groundwork for a nuanced analysis of the interplay between social capital, social norms, political agency, and gender dynamics in political participation, areas previously less explored within the context of developing countries.

Chapter three (3) outlined the methodological frameworks utilized for data collection and analysis. Employing a comparative-case study approach, I examined the distinctions in social capital access and utilization between female politicians in Ghana's Northern and Greater Accra regions, each characterized by its unique socio-cultural traits (refer to table no.1.2). Beginning with an explanation of the comparative-case study approach, the chapter then detailed the employed data collection methods, such as interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis, primarily using purposive and snowball sampling for participant recruitment. Additionally, strategies for participant recruitment were explored. For data analysis, a thematic analysis approach was used, with the latter part of the chapter addressing data analysis procedures and ethical considerations in the research process.

Chapter four (4) examines the acquisition of social capital by female politicians in both the Northern and Greater Accra regions. It explores their access to social capital using Nahapiet and Ghoshal's (1998) cognitive, structural, and relational framework. It revealed that female politicians in Ghana's Northern and Greater Accra regions use diverse strategies to access social capital, tailored to each region's socio-cultural dynamics. Differences in access to informal networks and resources exist, with traditional gender roles and inadequate infrastructure in the North hindering access to relational, structural and cognitive capital. In Greater Accra, better resources are offset by entrenched biases within political institutions. Nonetheless, female politicians demonstrate resilience through grassroots mobilization and coalition-building, enhancing cognitive capital.

Chapter five (5) examines the second question of the thesis: *How do access to and utilization of social capital affect women's political participation?* It does so by examining the structural, cognitive, and relational dimensions of social capital, following the framework outlined by Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998). Building upon the insights gained from Chapter 4 regarding how

female politicians access social capital, this chapter investigates how they leverage it and the ensuing effects on political participation. It reveals that in Ghana, female politicians create social networks crucial for leveraging social capital and political engagement, as gender biases and societal norms often exclude them from established male networks. These self-formed networks, although less influential, are vital for information gathering, resource mobilization, and connecting with key political figures, focusing on shared goals and women's empowerment. The study highlights the necessity of both close and distant connections for political success, revealing that influential men often form networks with women primarily for self-advancement. This hence sharpens women political participation.

Chapter six (6) explores *What sociocultural factors and regional differences hinder female political actors' access to political social capital?* This chapter explores the complex interplay between location and its intersection with cultural, religious, socio-economic, educational, and political literacy, revealing how these elements collectively shape the social capital available to female politicians in the Northern and Greater Accra regions of Ghana. The chapter highlights that education, political literacy, and regional development are pivotal in determining the access women politicians in both regions have to political social capital. However, the effects of these factors are deeply intertwined with regional characteristics and socio-cultural contexts.

Chapter seven (7) of this thesis highlights the multifaceted challenges women face in accessing social capital, primarily due to regional political party dynamics, political party framework, leadership perspectives, and networking barriers in the party space. Societal norms within regional structures and party framework often restrict women's active participation and access to certain social groups within the party space. Female politicians in the Northern region face significant societal barriers embedded in their socio-religious context, more so than their counterparts in Greater Accra. While the political environment in Greater Accra is somewhat more inclusive, it still does not grant women full access to all political networks. This chapter also delves into the strategies employed by female politicians to overcome these numerous challenges in these two regions.

Chapter eight (8) explores the development of political agency among politicians in both the Northern and Greater Accra regions, revealing that individual agency for political participation is not formed in isolation but arises from a combination of societal, geographical, personal, familial, and economic influences. The chapter examines the factors influencing the development

of political agency and how politicians extend this agency to access social capital and engage in political participation.

Chapter nine (9) is the discussion and conclusion chapter, where I summarize all findings to demonstrate their relevance to the main research question. Additionally, I elaborate on their theoretical and practical implications. The chapter also includes recommendations for future research.

Chapter one

Politics in sub-Saharan Africa and Ghana

1.0. Historical background of the position of women in politics in sub-Saharan Africa

This section explores the dynamics of women's political participation in Sub-Saharan Africa, tracing its trajectory from before the arrival of colonizers, through the changes during the colonial period, to the current state of women's political involvement in post-colonial Ghana.

1.1.1. The status of women political participation in sub-Saharan Africa before, during and after colonialization

Sub-Saharan Africa is the area of Africa situated below the Sahara Desert. It is a diverse region comprising numerous countries with varied cultures, languages, and landscapes (Gann and Duignan 1999). The majority of sub-Saharan African nations were colonized by European powers such as Great Britain, France, Portugal, Belgium, Germany, and Spain (Sharkey 2013; Widmer 2021). However, Ethiopia and Liberia, having successfully resisted colonization, were established through resistance and by freed slaves respectively (Mazrui 1997). Ethiopia and Liberia, although not subjected to complete colonization in the conventional manner, were still profoundly influenced by external forces, shaping their political landscapes and societal structures, which also affected gender dynamics (Jackson 1970). While these influences may not have been as overt as in other colonized African nations, they nonetheless left lasting effects on women's political engagement (ibid).

In sub-Saharan Africa, women's suffrage first emerged as a concern within countries that were colonized by the France and Great Britain, which included Ghana, Nigeria, Togo (Bauer 2019:14–15). In Ghana, women were given the right to vote during the mid-1950s, which made Ghana the first African state to give rights to female citizens to vote (ibid). Growth and progress in women's representation over sub-Saharan Africa varies widely among countries and regions (Nkomo and Ngambi 2009:60). This goes to show that some countries in sub-Saharan Africa like Rwanda have reached gender equality in parliament but that does not paint the picture for the whole of sub-Saharan Africa. According to Bauer (2019:38, 41) women are still underrepresented with only minimal changes in some countries and there is no guarantee women representation is always increasing.

The low number of women in politics in sub-Saharan Africa is mostly linked with the colonialization of most sub-Saharan African countries that happened centuries ago. Colonialism is mainly blamed by scholars for the decline of female political participation in sub-Saharan Africa (Madsen 2019a). Studies have shown that colonialization effaced women's political institutions because the colonizers could only see and comprehend the politics of men (Madsen 2019a:74; Osunyikanmi 2011:58; Segueda 2015:8). Low number of women in politics and public life is not different in the United Kingdom, the longest colonizers that ruled over Ghana. Historically, women in the United Kingdom have been underrepresented both in politics and public life (Uberoi et al. 2022). Though the situation of women in the United Kingdom has in recent years seen some improvements, men are still overrepresented in senior positions. As of 2022, there are 225 members of House of Commons that are women, which is the highest record of women since 1918, representing 35 % of all members of the house of commons (Uberoi et al. 2022:6). There are 229 female members of the House of Lords, which makes up 28 % (ibid).

Women in the United Kingdom up until 1918 were not allowed to stand for parliamentary positions. They were historically relegated to the home setting, however there was a drastic increase of women representation in the civil service following the first world war (Zimmeck 1984:912). As of 1919, there were 235,500 women occupying permanent positions in the UK civil service. Nevertheless, the increase was short lived as the men returned from military service (Lowe 2011:75–76). This contributed to women losing their positions in the civil service and also women been prevented from participating in jobs that involved engagement with foreigners, agriculture, and security force. There was also a law that prevented married women in the United Kingdom from engaging in the civil service up until 1946. This law served as a marriage bar which tend to force women to leave their post after marriage to take care of the family (Uberoi et al. 2022:28). It is really no surprise that the British colonizers empowered Ghanaian men by educating them in their schools and regulated the women to the home settings to be caregivers.

This was not the case in the pre-colonial era, where some sub-Saharan African women wielded some form of social and political influence and their opinions were valued and often sought before political decisions were taken (Tamale 2018:5). Sub-Saharan Africa women served as Queen mothers and had a say in decision making in their various communities. This changed when the colonizers arrived in some parts of sub-Saharan Africa with their own systems of

governance which did not give power or respect to the traditional councils in Africa that acknowledged the power of women in administrating the daily affairs of the communities.

According to Osunyikanmi (2011:60–61), religion and traditional patriarchal norms of sub-Saharan Africans which they mostly adopted from colonizers have also had a large influence on women's participation and involvement in decision-making in most sub-Saharan African societies. He explained that religion and patriarchal norms prevented women from accessing economic opportunities that would enable them to be economically independent to contest with the males in the field of politics. The Christian and Islam religion has its roots in colonialism and trade which tend to relegate women to the background. The colonizers introduced these religions to sub-Saharan Africans, which saw men as superior to women.

Aside religion, the poor economic growth and development status of women are also seen as main causes of low participation of women in politics in sub-Saharan Africa (Kassa 2015:4). Women in most sub-Saharan African countries are denied the access to land, property, involvement in formal work and are not given the right to control their own finances. These limitations have had an effect on how women can be self-determining and make their own decisions (Lund 2011:11). All these limitations are heavily attributed to the colonial era where women in some sub-Saharan African countries like Ghana were not allowed to make decisions or have access to their own properties or even allowed the right to education and formal work.

Some scholars have also attributed challenges faced by women in the political space to political party rule system in sub-Saharan African countries (Tordoff 2016). These systems came along with the independence of most sub-Saharan African countries. These systems served as the main source of power transfer in sub-Saharan Africa (Tordoff 2016:4–6) although few countries had military coups d'état including Ghana, Nigeria and Ethiopia (Owusu 1989:375; Tordoff 2016:4–7) to change government at a point in time. The series of coup d'état in some sub-Saharan African countries can also be blamed for the low number of women in governance, this is because during those times women were mostly seen as sexual objects and subordinate to men (Kombeto et al. 2021:1508–9). During that era, there was military invasion to change power and these soldiers abused women to satisfy their sexual desires. During these period women and the ordinary men were not able to voice out on issues bothering them because they were vulnerable. Only the military which were made of men in uniform were allowed to make decision and rule.

This period continued in most sub-Saharan African countries till the 1990's where most countries returned to democratic governance and sub-Saharan African became politically active with transitions to popular democracies (Tripp 2001:144). In the 1990's, sub-Saharan African women started to fight for their presence to be seen in the political field hence they started to form their own political movements, this is because the already existing parties did not give women the chance to participate in their affairs (Tripp 2001:143). These political parties mostly knew the politics of men since they had fought for democratic governance from the military governments. Party wings marginalized women because they only saw women as a channel to use to mobilize votes from the electorates. These parties did not seek to empower women but only use them as a means to win elections from the masses (Tripp 2001:145). They utilized the services of women to enable them acquire power but did not see then fit to share power with them.

According to Stoeltje (1997), during this era of women fighting for their voice to be heard in the sub-Saharan African region, they pressured their various governments to include women in decision making and also address women related issues. In Kenya, women groups demonstrated during the 2002 presidential elections to advocate for more women to hold positions in government (Nzomo 2003:22–23). In Namibia, women organizations during the 1999 elections created the women's manifesto to empower more women to participate in politics (Frank 2000). This manifesto imposed a form of a quota on political parties to include at least 50% women candidates on party lists for elections (ibid). The recent wave of democratization that began in 1990's in sub-Saharan Africa, increased women participation across Africa from 0.94 % in the 1960 to 9.90 % in 2000 (Tripp 1999:2).⁶ In 2007, women in sub-Saharan Africa increased their numbers in formal political structures to 17.4 % (Nyadera and Kisaka 2019:130).

Despite the setbacks on the path of women, from colonizers, independence, political parties' systems and series of coup d'état, politics in sub-Saharan Africa has seen an increase in the membership of women since the mid-1990s (Arriola and Johnson 2021:1; Tripp 2001:146). This is attributed to increased educational opportunities for girls and women's experience in creating and sustaining associations which made it easier for women to take advantage of the new political openings in the 1990's (Tripp 2001:144). As of 2021, sub-Saharan Africa with Ghana been part, has 23.6% of women in parliament with Rwanda having the highest of over 50% of

⁶ <http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/arc/world250900.htm>

parliamentarians being women (Bauer 2021).⁷ This height reached by sub-Saharan African women shows how women in sub-Saharan Africa, are persistent in fighting for their involvement in decision-making across sub-Saharan Africa despite the outcomes not been reached in all countries.⁸

As of July 2021, sub-Saharan Africa could boast of having a country (Rwanda) that has more women than men, with 61.3% women, in parliament, and Namibia following closely with 44.2% (Inter-Parliamentary Union Report 2021).⁹ These dramatic gains in Rwanda have been attributed to the implementation of the gender quotas such as reserved seats combined with voluntary party quotas for women, constitutional guarantee, and innovative electoral structures (Powley 2005:154–55). Others have also tried to justify this increase in women in parliament by arguing it to the lack of men due to the Hutu - Tutsi war which is not different from how women representation in the civil service increased in the United Kingdom when the men were off for military duty during the first world war (Uberoi et al. 2022). However, it can also be argued that the lack of capable men made the society fall on women in Rwanda. But that can be contested since the society has kept it that way even after the war, so that may mean the women placed in these positions are doing something right to enable them to continually gain the votes of the electorates and also the gender quotas in place are working well. Since in the case of the United Kingdom the upward rise of women in the civil service was revised after the men returned from the war (Lowe 2011:75–76).

As it was mentioned earlier, this success attained by women cannot be seen in all countries despite the slight increase in the number of women at the highest levels of political power in sub-Saharan Africa. There is also a large number of countries that are still fighting for gender equality in the highest levels of political power (Paxton et al. 2020:17–18). This shows that despite the equality gains by Rwanda, gender inequalities issues in parliament and the political field are still prevalent in the sub-Saharan region; this has triggered many studies on the low involvement of women in politics in sub-Saharan African countries (Yoon 2017).

⁷ This is attributed to a demographic collapse—that is, the vast scale of male deaths during the massacre/genocide, which created a gap by reducing competition for coveted positions, thereby facilitating women's entry into the power structure (see. Burnet 2008; Burnet 2012)

⁸ Even in Rwanda despite the well representation of women at other levels of government Rwandan women remains very poor and patriarchal attitudes are entrenched (Wallace, Haerpfer, and Abbott 2008)

⁹ <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2022-03/women-in-parliament-in-2021>

In summary it is noted that despite the progress made in some sub-Saharan African countries, majority still are struggling with low participation and representation of women in decision making and these have been attributed to colonialization, religion, patriarchal norms, poor economic standing, and traditions (Osunyikanmi 2011:60–61; Tamale 2018:11–12). The next subsection will delve into the situation in Ghana, where I examine the gender politics in pre-colonial Ghana: the era before the European colonizers arrived in Ghana.

1.2. Gender politics in pre-colonial Ghana

Before colonization, Ghana was ruled by traditional leaders (Marfo and Musah 2018:65; Mawuko-Yevugah and Attipoe 2021:319–20), these traditional rulers were responsible for settling disputes, and steering the affairs of their communities (Donald 2003:87; Mawuko-Yevugah and Attipoe 2021:319–20). The traditional rulers served as government for the people and ensured the communities were always in order. These traditional councils were headed by both women and men who worked hand in hand to ensure the growth of the society and power did not lie in the hands of one gender (Steegstra 2009:105; Stoeltje 1997:43, 2003). The position of women in the traditional councils showed how Ghanaian women wielded political power before colonialization (Segueda 2015:5). The roles of the Queen mother and the chief vary, yet they operate concurrently. This phenomenon is further evidenced by the fact that many societies in Ghana, particularly those with matrilineal traditions prior to colonization, exhibited dual and parallel structures, particularly in the Southern sector where women enjoyed rights equivalent to men (Steegstra 2009:105; Stoeltje 1997:43). However though, most Ghanaian societies were dual and parallel, it did not mean equality but rather both men and women complemented each other in the society (Stoeltje 1997:44).

The dual and parallel nature of governance of Ghanaian societies was not only represented in the roles played by both men and women but also in their traditional religion, where women were given maximum respect. This respect could be seen in how Ghanaians named their traditional gods. Most of the traditional gods were named after women, "Asaase Yaa" meaning the earth is female in the Twi language, "Atta Naa Nnugbo" (the God of the males and females in the Ga language), these names showed how egalitarian the society was in the traditional religious settings (Segueda 2015:10). This also highlighted Ghanaians religious lives and how religious they were before the invasion of the colonizers. Some scholars have documented mobilization, decision-

making and activism roles played by African and Ghanaian women during the colonial and pre-colonial days (Bouilly, Rillon, and Cross 2016:338; Steegstra 2009:105; Stoeltje 1997:43).

When we look at the way traditional leaders served in pre-colonial societies in Ghana, it demonstrates how women wielded political power in many diverse ways. One of the primary ways or avenues where Ghanaian women were involved in decision-making is their role as Queen mothers. They served in the capacity of Queen mothers, though the traditional leaders were largely males, women had a fair share of political opportunities, they enstool chiefs and had a major say in who must be enstooled as a chief (Steegstra 2009:109; Stoeltje 1997:43). Women had specific powers which did not depend on the male consolidators (Stoeltje 1997:43).

Given the huge responsibility to enstool a chief that would serve as the head of the community meant that Ghanaian women before colonialism had a huge responsibility and the society accorded them that maximum respect. The roles accorded Ghanaian women during this era made women self-sufficient in their social, economic, and political lives which enabled them to create checks and balances (Nkomo and Ngambi 2009:62). These checks and balances made it possible for women to have their fair share of participating in the decision-making process of the society since they were not seen as inferior but co-rulers in their capacity as Queen mothers (Mensah, Antwi, and Dauda 2014:206-207; Stoeltje 2021). The Ghanaian society during the pre-colonial era respected the women in the community, this resulted in women having the privilege to access information, had the trust of the community, and work hand in hand with the people in the community for the equal benefit of the community which is termed as women having equal access to social capital (Bourdieu 1985:16–17; Putnam 2000). These positions and activities of Ghanaian women in that era enabled them to be actively involved in more public associations which enabled them to increase their social capital.

In summary, one can conveniently conclude from sociological historic antecedents and findings of scholars such as Allah-Mensah (2005) and (Hern 2021) that women have been instrumental in governance in Ghana and have played essential roles in political activities before colonialization, however they were consigned to the home setting during colonial era which has lived on to this present day. The follow subsection examines state formation and gender politics during colonial era under the European rule.

1.2.1 State formation and gender politics in Ghana in pre-colonial Ghana and European rule

Ghana, until independence in 1957 was known as the "Gold Coast", this name was given to Ghana by the Portuguese in the fifteenth century when they arrived in Ghana and found so much gold around the southern belt. The name signified the abundance of Gold found in the territory (Hilson 2002:14), which attracted a lot of Europeans who later became the first colonial masters of Ghana. The Gold Coast was later adopted to by the English colonisers. Gold mining developed in the rainforest of Ghana around the fourteenth (Hilson 2002:21). This stimulated long-distance trade and had much impact on state formation in the southern zone of Ghana (Hymer 1970:13–14) which includes the current Greater Accra region (capital of Ghana). The trading connected individual tribes, ethnic groups, and eventually set in motion the formation of sedentary settlements and state formation (Songsore 1979:4). This trade movement in Ghana also led to the formation of sister states in the North of Ghana like Dagomba, Mamprussi, and Mossi in the fourteenth century to the middle of the fifteenth century (Songsore 1979:3).

During the fifteenth century, known as the Trans-Atlantic era, West Africa experienced the onset of European exploration along its coast. This exploration laid the groundwork for heightened European participation in the transatlantic slave trade in later centuries. While the Portuguese were among the earliest Europeans to reach the Ghanaian coast in the late 15th century, Ghana saw European invasions in the 17th century (Falola and Fleming 2009:128). The first Europeans arrived in Ghana in 1471 as Christian missionaries to spread the gospel and introduce Christianity to the locals. After they arrived in Ghana and realizing the richness of the land with natural resources, they decided to settle among the people and trade with the locals. The invasion and settlement in the Gold Coast were to trade gold, spices, ivory, and slaves with European textiles, mirrors, copper, iron products and spread the gospel. This brought about a change in the political, economic, and social development of individuals' states found in the Gold Coast (Hymer 1970:1).

The discovery of natural resources in Ghana promoted trade and the invasion of the colonizers which both had much impact on state formation. These had an impact on gender roles and norms in Ghana. Most of these natural resource trading activities were done in the Southern sector hence allowed both males and females to be involved. However, the men were mostly involved in the hard work of the mines in the Southern sector (Coquery-Vidrovitch and Raps 2018). The men from the Northern sector which was not blessed with lot of natural resources had to move

to the Southern belt to work in the factories and mines to fill the vacant spaces in then labour shortages in the mines. This labour transfer had women in the Northern sector been consigned to the home setting to take care of the household while the men moved down South to work in the factories (Coquery-Vidrovitch and Raps 2018:5). This also meant that women in the North would have less contact with other social networks unlike women in the South who had the privilege to engage in trade with people from distance groups. The labour transfer also caused a division in labour in social cultural settings and lead to women been denied the right to own financial rights. This was because women in the North were not allowed to earn income like the women in the South of Ghana (includes Greater Accra region) because they were relegated to the home settings.

Despite Ghana being colonized by Portuguese, Dutch, French, and the Danes. Ghana was declared a British Crown Colony in 1874 after the British successfully sacked all the other European colonizers. Hence most of the ideologies governing the societies have lingered on from the British because they had a longer stay in Ghana and heavily impacted on the ideologies of the Ghanaian society.

1.2.2. Colonialization, gender, and politics in Ghana under the British rule

The preceding sections have established a foundational understanding of the gender disparities in the political space during European rule. This section of the chapter narrows our focus to the profound effects of British colonial rule on the socio-political fabric of Ghana, specifically regarding the marginalization of women in politics. It was during this colonial epoch that the governance of the economy, education system, and political institutions were recalibrated in ways that deeply affected women's societal roles (Manuh 1988).

The British administration imposed new economic and educational structures, aligning them with the colonial interests that fundamentally differed from the indigenous Ghanaian systems (Prah 2003). These structures were characterized by their emphasis on creating a male-dominated workforce and political class, which was achieved, in part, by restricting women's access to formal education and economic opportunities (Aniekwu 2006). The gendered division, drawn along the lines of the colonial blueprint, persistently devalued women's contributions and skills, relegating them to subsidiary roles within the public and private domains (Aniekwu 2006:144–46).

In the sphere of politics, the colonial legacy has been particularly enduring. It insidiously woven gender discrimination into the political tapestry of Ghana, setting a precedent that has

continued to hinder women's political ascent (Manuh 1988). As the country developed post-independence, these ingrained disparities presented significant barriers to women seeking political office or participation in governance. The colonial imposition of a gendered hierarchy in education, economics, and governance has thus had a lasting impact on the political empowerment of women in Ghana, framing the challenges they face in contemporary society. This section, therefore, examines how the management of crucial societal sectors by the British colonial administration has sustained gender biases, resonating through the decades to the present day and shaping the current discourse on women's political representation in Ghana.

Systemic societal transformations, notably the processes of modernization such as urbanization and industrialization, have exerted significant influence on the marginalization of women in the political arena (Lele 1986; Rai 2013). This is evidenced by the persistent gender disparity in politics, a phenomenon evident across various nations, including Ghana. The roots of this discrimination in Ghana can be traced back to the social and economic frameworks established during British colonial rule (Manuh 1988). These frameworks imposed a segregation of public and private roles, with education and the labour market being domains where gender-specific roles were particularly rigidly defined (Aniekwu 2006; Manuh 1988; Prah 2003). Within these colonial constructs, men consistently occupied a higher status, while women were relegated to a lower one.

The authority wielded by Queen mothers eroded during colonialization – the British introduced the domestic idealization of women's roles in Ghana, hence limiting their authority in the public domain (Manuh 1988). Colonialism under the British resulted in an extensive alteration of the pattern of social life in Ghana, which affected the role of women within the Ghanaian societal context (Prah 2003:3). The gender dynamics of cultural changes imposed by the colonial administration undermined the traditional sources of power women generated, leading to marginalization and subordination of women politically and socially (Aniekwu 2006:144).

The accessibility of education, a critical determinant of socio-economic standing, was frequently restricted for women, impairing their potential for civic engagement and political leadership. The British opted to train the male population over the female. Thus, the colonizers played a huge role in creating class and gender differences in Ghana and offering men; power and political advantage (Aniekwu 2006:144–46). The labour market, shaped by colonial policies and attitudes, entrenched discrimination through practices such as unequal pay and institutional

barriers to career advancement for women, effectively limiting their representation in political decision-making.

Additionally, the colonial administration often codified the expectation that women were to prioritize familial and reproductive responsibilities, thereby reinforcing the relegation of women to the private sphere (Manuh 1988). This not only curtailed their public and political engagement but also institutionalized gender roles that favoured male dominance in the political sphere. The convergence of these factors—colonial legacy, gendered division of roles, educational and professional inequity, and the disproportionate assignment of domestic duties—created structural impediments that have continued to perpetuate the discrimination of women in Ghanaian politics

The creating of class among the Ghanaian society with gender divide, was done by the colonizers rewarding people who attended colonial schools (men) political power and political advantage over people who did not have the privilege to attend such schools who were mostly Ghanaian women (Aniekwu 2006:147). This was not different in historical British societies, where British women were made to be housewives after marriage, most lost their jobs in the civil service when the men returned from the first world war (Lowe 2011).

As of 2022, women representation in the politics and public sphere in the United Kingdom, has seen an increase but there is still men overrepresentation in senior positions (Uberoi et al. 2022). It is there for not a surprise that the legacy continued in Ghana, where women were not allowed to enrol in higher educational centres and had limited access to education. These were some of the interventions made by the colonial masters in order not to give much power to the average Ghanaian women. These interventions ended up creating a huge gender divide among men and women in the colonial era that has lingered on till this day. Most women consequently became illiterate and settled for self-employed ventures. This resulted in class differences and a low number of women in top professional and administrative positions.

Colonialization did not only relegate Queen mothers to the background, but colonialization came along with Christianity, Islam religion which is attested to be responsible for the degrading status of women in the society in general (Falola and Fleming 2009:132). There has been emphasis on how gender inequalities attenuating cannot be discussed in detail without religion, and its impact. Ghana's ideologies and social norms have been deeply rooted in religious beliefs, a characteristic that has persisted from the colonial era through to today.

Colonialization and trade introduced other forms of religions to Ghanaian society, which was beforehand a traditional society who have their own gods. Ghana became a country predominantly Christian in the South, with a sizable Muslim majority in the North. Islamic religion was introduced to the Northern section of Ghana by Arabian traders that traded in shea butter with the Northerners. While the colonizers who came as missionaries introduced the Africans and Ghanaians especially those in the Southern sectors to a male God who requests women to be submissive to the male gender and allowed patriarchy to rule (Essien and Ukpung 2012). This resulted in reducing the role of the Ghanaian woman to that of a submissive wife and kept her out of the public space. Life in pre-colonial and colonial Ghana was heavily influenced by religion (Igboin 2011:97; Segueda 2015:8), colonialism altered the religious belief of Ghanaians by introducing Christianity and Islamic religion which has been attested to be responsible for the degrading status of women in Ghanaian society (Segueda 2015:8–9).

Ghanaian women were consigned to the background and hardly involved themselves in any public associations, acquisition of properties, and social networks especially women in the rural areas like the Northern region of Ghana (Gyan and Mfoafo-M'Carthy 2021). The Northern sector is populated with Muslims. In the Islamic settings, it is argued that women hardly have the right to education and self-sufficiency. They are mostly controlled by the men and not allowed to make decisions. These religious values and restrictions in the Islamic settings undermines women autonomy. Ghanaian women are governed by social and religious norms that did not give them the privilege to voice out their opinions in community building or even matters that had to do with their personal wellbeing. This can account for the difficulty in accessing political power among women during and after colonialism since they did not have equal access to education, public space, and the labour market (Danquah et al. 2021).

1.3. Women in the juxtaposed of pre- and democratic political situation in Ghana

Ghana gained independence in 1957 under the leadership of the first president of Ghana in the person of Kwame Nkrumah of the Convention Peoples Party (CPP). In 1960, Kwame Nkrumah passed the representation of the people (women members) act, which is one of the first electoral gender quotas for parliament in Africa (Bauer 2019:608–9). This act in 1960 led to the appointment of 10 female parliamentarians to occupy almost 9% of the 114 Member of Parliament seats in Ghana (Madsen 2019a). This act was to acknowledge the roles played by women during the independence struggle (ibid). This also showed the power wielded by Ghanaian women which

enabled them to contribute to the independence struggle in 1957 (Madsen 2019a; Madsen 2019b). This attest to the fact that women in the pre-colonial and colonial Ghana, were very capable of building social capital by organizing themselves, giving information, and others to help fight for independence (Bouilly et al. 2016:338; Steegstra 2009:105).

Numerous sources indicate that women were publicly active in various forms: political struggle, armed conflict, financing the fight for independence (Nkansah 2009; Tsikata 1989). Scholars studying the history of women's political activity in Ghana estimate that the majority of women were engaged in various forms of the political struggle (Manuh 1993; Tsikata 1989). Ghanaian women during the independent struggle mobilized themselves and rallied with the men to fight for freedom and liberation from colonial rule. Most Queen mothers like Yaa Asantewaa the Queen mother of Ejisu in the Ashanti kingdom singlehandedly fought the colonizers, she was one of the women who stood the odds to fight for the freedom of her society. She led a war against the British though she was captured and enslaved at the Seychelles islands. She was not the only woman that helped during the struggle, market women in Ghana also went on street demonstrations to rally with their men to advocate for independence. Ghanaian women also invested their economic resources in these protests and rallies. Market women also mobilized themselves and took part in upsetting civil acts that was tailored to undermine the colonial economy of the British. This act by these market women contributed to making political change possible (Manuh 1993; Tsikata 1989).

The passion and zeal Ghanaian women showed during the struggle led to the affirmative action program, which was purposed to appoint more women into the public offices and make the public sphere easily assessable by women (Torto 2013). However, after Ghanaian women contributed immensely to the decolonization process, by organizing riots, and protests during the colonialization era which led to the independence of Ghana (Nkansah 2009:32–33). Most successive governments have not acknowledged the roles played by these women and less is written about them in the independence struggle literature. Succeeding governments have not also followed the 1965 affirmative action program which would have led to an increment in the number of women in public office despite rhetoric to the contrary (Kwaku Ohemeng and Adusah-Karikari 2015; Torto 2013).

Women in Africa and Ghana after independence, are still under oppression and face colonialism from their own African elites who deny them certain rights and privileges like access

to economic and political power (Aniekwu 2006:144). Scholars have argued that without the immense support and contributions from women, independence would have come much later (Nwokora 2021). Even though there has been liberation from the colonial rule in Ghana, Ghana did not return to the state where traditional chiefs had a lot of authority in the society and the roles of women are relegated just like in the colonial era. Which reveals that Ghana and most sub-Saharan African countries though independent still holds on to certain ideologies by their colonizers.

Ghanaian elites (men), that were trained in the schools relegated women to the home setting and only empowered men through education. This indicates that despite the liberation and independence from the rule of the colonizers most sub-Saharan African countries like Ghana carried on the ideologies of their colonial masters of women being inferior and not capable of serving in leadership (Wiesner-Hanks 2021). Ghanaian women did not have the opportunity to certain basic rights such as the right to education, the right to work, the right to own economic resources, the right to voice out their opinions or work in the public space, right to association which was freely enjoyed by men. These rights mentioned are more related to determining their trajectory in the political field.

After Ghana gaining independence and power from the British, government was at a point in time changed through military coup d'état which lasted for over three and half decade. The military era was not gender and human friendly since it could only comprehend the politics of the military. During this era, citizens were not elected for political office since the state were run by the military forces who were mostly males (Bauer 2019:10). This era further totally excluded women from political participation and reinforced male domination. According to Allah-Mensah (2005:16), *“military regimes in Ghana were not only averse to women’s political participation and contribution to public life but also largely inhibited women’s full contribution to the development of politics and administration.”* The military era is blamed for the declined women political participation after it began to kick off in the 1960’s (Allah-Mensah 2005; Darkwa 2016a).

However, in 1992, Ghana returned to democratic rule. During this time, Ghana had its first trial with multi-party politics and democracy under the former head of Armed Forces Revolutionary Jerry John Rawlings. He remained in power until January 7th 1993 when he won the first democratic elections after military rule. It was during this era that women groups and advocates started to voice out and advocate for their presence in the field of politics (Tripp

2001:144–46). Women groups in Ghana gained their voice and wanted to be involved in decision-making.

1.3.1. Institutionalization of women's action

The institutionalization of women's initiatives, notably through the founding of specialized institutions, has been crucial in promoting women's rights and their engagement in politics.¹⁰ The rise and expansion of these institutions have been key in establishing forums that support and enable women's entry into political spheres, indicating a substantial move towards gender parity in politics. These organizations have arisen to address and promote solutions for gender imbalances in political engagement and representation.

Following the independence struggle and Kwame Nkrumah's acknowledgment of women, their participation in the government was brief due to military coups. The initiative to appoint women to recognize their contributions during the struggle was closely linked to CPP ideologies, but it abruptly ceased with Nkrumah's overthrow in 1966. The CPP did not only want to empower women in the field of politics. During independence in the 1960's, under the CPP government two dominant women groups were formed to advocate for women inclusion. These women organizations were the Ghana Women's league and the Ghana Federation of Women. These two organizations merged to form the National Council of Ghana Women (NCGW) (Awumbila 2001). Their core priority was to ensure that more girls were educated, ensure that more gender educational policy be passed, protest against international injustice against women and charity donations to children. However, because of their close associations with the Convention People Party (CPP), their activities also ended abruptly during the military era which overthrew the head of CPP, Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana (Britwum 2017).

Over the years, not only has the number of these organizations grown, but there has also been a substantial increase in women's involvement, underscoring a heightened recognition of the significance of gender equality in governance and decision-making (Apusigah, Tsikata, Mukhopadyay 2011; Beckwith 2003). Their impact surpasses mere advocacy, resulting in concrete policy shifts and shifts in societal attitudes regarding women's roles in politics. Through focused initiatives such as strategic lobbying, public outreach, and direct involvement in political

¹⁰ <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/regional-organizations-gender-equality-and-the-political-empowerment-of-women.pdf>

procedures, they have achieved legislative changes and cultivated an atmosphere conducive to women's political participation (Tsikata 2007).

The effectiveness of these organizations in improving women's political participation is clear from the rise in women's representation in political institutions and the growing acceptance of women in leadership positions. This shift underscores the achievement of their goals and emphasizes the evolving landscape of political involvement and leadership, driven by a commitment to gender equality (Madsen 2019). Essentially, the establishment and continuous endeavours of organizations devoted to women's rights and political engagement have played a central role in enabling women to access political platforms more effectively (Apusigah, Tsikata, Mukhopadhyay 2011; Madsen 2019; Ofei-Aboagye 2000). Their contributions have been crucial in progressing towards the broader objective of attaining gender equality in politics, representing a significant step forward in fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

The institutionalization of women's action in Ghana was also achieved through some government initiatives. The P/NDC government under Jerry John Rawlings showed much commitment towards gender related issues and equality (Manuh 2007:130). These efforts included passing of the interstate law that gave widows the right to inherit their late spouse who dies without a will and abolition of widowhood and ritual servitude called the “*trokosi*” in the Volta region of Ghana (Bauer 2019:612). Before these laws were passed, when a man dies without a will in Ghana, his property goes to his extended family leaving out his wife and children. The “*trokosi*” is a tradition whereby young female virgins are made to go and serve a priest chief for the offence of a relative. The young virgins do not only serve but are turned to sex objects by the chief priest.

The NDC also organized regional seminars to empower women from the early 1990's led by the 31st December Women's Movement, which was headed by the wife of President Jerry John Rawlings, Nana Konadu-Agyeman Rawlings, this movement was the women's wing of the revolution (Manuh 2007:130) in collaboration with the National Commission for Democracy (Allah-Mensah 2005). The 31st December Women's Movement did well to serve and advocate for women's issues in the 1990's.

However other women groups were not given the privilege to be formed since the 31st December Women's Movement had some close relation with the government in power, so it was some sort of a monopoly women's group in Ghana. The monopoly by this movement was stopped

in the early 2000's when the NDC administration led by Professor John Evans Atta Mills lost the election to the NPP administration led by John Agyekum Kufour. This period allowed for other autonomous women's groups to emerge.

Despite the education and advocacy by the 31st December Women's Movement and other women groups, since 1992, no woman has contested the presidency even at party level until the year 2008 when the wife of former President Jerry John Rawlings of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), Nana Konadu Rawlings, contested but lost to a male candidate during the NDC primaries. This was the beginning of women contesting for the presidency at the party level. She later went independent to contest the presidency at the national level (Osei 2013:555). In 2012, Akua Donkor followed the trail blazer and formed her own party, Ghana Freedom Party (GFP) and contested the presidency at the national level but lost.

Table 1.1: Females and males' representation in parliament after Ghana independence 1960-2020

Year	Candidates		Total	Elected		Total
	Males	Females		Males	Females	
1960				104	0(10) ¹¹	104(114)
1965				188	0(10)	188 (198)
1969				139	1	140
1979				135	5	140
1992	417	23	440	184	16	200
1996	723	57	780	182	18	200
2000	988	95	1083	181	19	200
2004	849	104	953	205	25	230
2008	959	101	1060	210	20	230
2012	1199	133	1332	245	30	275
2016	1022	136	1158	245	36	275
2020	788	126	914	245	40	275

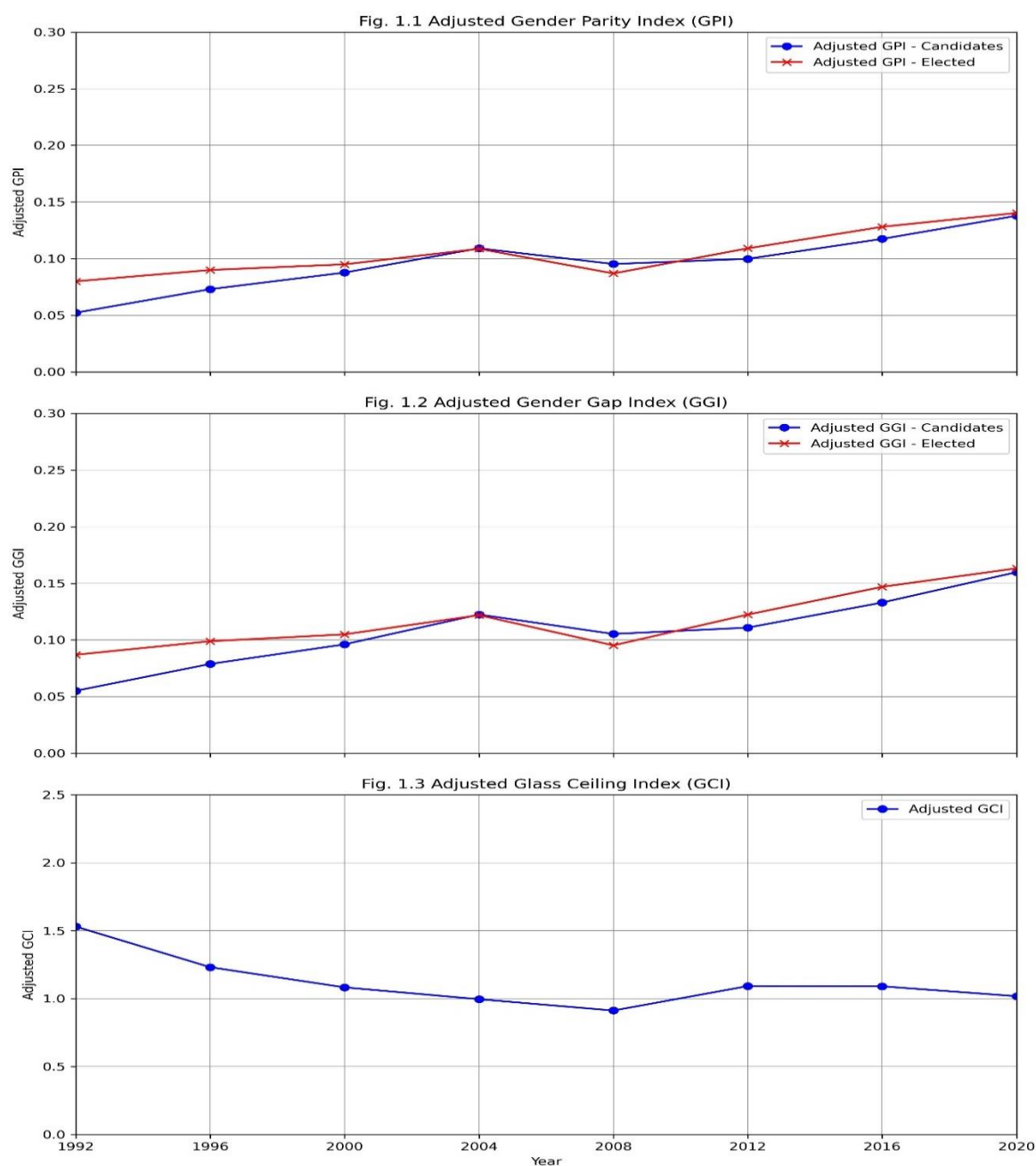
Source: Electoral Commission of Ghana

Table 1.1 indicates that, the percentage of women in parliament has increased slightly since Ghana returned to democratic rule in 1992. However, female representation in Ghana's parliament stands at 14.5%, significantly lower than the African average of 24%. These statistics also

¹¹ In 1960, following Ghana's independence in 1957, the nation held its first parliamentary elections. While 104 men won seats through the general elections, an additional 10 female members were appointed through Kwame Nkrumah's affirmative action policy. This policy was a response to the significant role women played in Ghana's independence movement. Nkrumah's Convention People's Party (CPP) acknowledged their vital contribution by directly appointing 10 women to Parliament in 1960 and 1965, marking a groundbreaking step towards gender equality in governance.

highlight the eagerness of Ghanaian women to assume parliamentary and leadership positions following Ghana's transition back to democracy in 1992.

Before the military rule in Ghana, there was a gender quota that appointed the first 10 women who served in parliament. However, after the military rule the women who entered parliament varied for the seats themselves and hence had to be voted for. The number of female candidates running in elections each year has gradually increased since 1992.



Source: Electoral Commission of Ghana

Analysing data from five consecutive parliamentary elections in Ghana from 1992 to 2020 (table 1.1) provides significant insights into the extent and dynamics of gender inequalities in political access. This period marks an era with available data, as records on the number of candidates from the earlier period of 1962 to 1992 were unavailable. The study utilizes three key indices to measure disparities in political participation and success: the Gender Parity Index (GPI), Gender Gap Index (GGI), and Glass Ceiling Index (GCI). Each index is calculated using adjusted data to account for the rising number of seats in Ghana's parliament over time, ensuring that the representation of women is analysed relative to the total opportunities available each election year. To facilitate a fair comparison across different electoral periods, data normalization adjusts each year's candidate and elected official counts to the parliament size of that period, accommodating structural changes in the parliament.

Figures 1.1 to 1.3 present the trends in gender inequalities in parliamentary elections in Ghana (1992-2020). Gender Parity Index (GPI): The GPI assesses the ratio of female candidates or elected members to the total number of positions. Throughout the 1992-2020 period, the GPI for both candidates and elected members indicates that while women's participation in politics has increased, it remains below a 1.0 mark—the ideal indicator of gender parity. This persistent disparity, despite showing a relatively consistent ratio of women progressing from candidacy to election, highlights the ongoing challenges in achieving equal representation. The GPI lines for both candidates and elected members tend to follow a similar trajectory, suggesting that the rate at which women participate as candidates is proportionately reflected in their election outcomes (see Fig 1.1).

Gender Gap Index (GGI): This index measures the proportional representation of females relative to males. The GGI shows fluctuations over the years, illustrating that the gap between female and male representation varies significantly across different elections. There are moments where the GGI for candidates and elected members diverge, which could indicate years when female candidacy did not translate as effectively into elected positions. The overall trend in the GGI suggests a slow but inconsistent narrowing of this gap, with periods where the index rises indicating improvements in female representation relative to males, and dips suggesting setbacks (see fig 1.2).

Glass Ceiling Index (GCI): The GCI provides an indication of whether systemic barriers disproportionately limit women's progress from being candidates to securing elected positions. Observing the GCI over the 28-year period, there is a noticeable general decline, suggesting that the barriers contributing to the glass ceiling effect are lessening. However, with values generally remaining above 1, it's evident that significant obstacles still prevent women from achieving parity with men in elected positions (see fig 1.3).

In summary, from 1992 to 2020, the GPI and GGI reveal an upward yet gradual trend in female participation, both as candidates and elected members, though full parity has not been achieved. The GCI's overall downward trend suggests improvements in women's electoral success over time. However, these indices collectively signal that despite progress, women in Ghanaian politics face persistent structural challenges. The analysis also suggests that the observed trends could be influenced by various socio-political factors. Cultural influences, such as traditional gender roles and societal biases, may still impact the candidacy and election of women, limiting their representation and success in politics. Economic factors also play a significant role, as women might face greater financial constraints in campaigning, which can affect their visibility and electability. Furthermore, the political environment, while slowly changing, may still harbour institutional and systemic barriers that hinder women's full participation and success, such as gender quotas and electorate rules.

This detailed examination of the gender dynamics within Ghana's political participation from 1992 to 2020 underscores the importance of recognizing and addressing the multifaceted barriers that women face. Despite the incremental progress indicated by the GPI, GGI, and GCI, much remains to be done to achieve true gender parity in the political space. For instance, the slow increase in representation of women in parliament saw a decline trend between 2004 and 2008. In 2004, there were 25 elected female parliamentarians which reduced to 20 in 2008. The decline can be attributed to a lot of factors but two of these factors were highlighted by EISA (2012).¹² These factors are the inability of the two major political parties to mainstream women within their structures and lack of a legislative framework to enhance women political participation (ibid).

Despite the government of Ghana and women rights groups working on ways to improve women's participation in decision-making in Ghana, it was not until 2001 that a Ministry of

¹² <https://www.eisa.org/document/eom-report-2012-final-report-ghana-the-commonwealth-eisa/>

Women's and Children Affairs was established (Manuh 2007:131). The women ministry was to advocate for women rights and issues in parliament. In 2010, this Ministry of Women's now named Gender and Children Affairs upon deliberations on how to address the gender inequality in public institutions drafted the Affirmative Action Bill, which has been presented to parliament for deliberations and waiting to be passed into a law. The Affirmative Action Bill mandates the Ghanaian government to enforce fair gender representation across all levels, including parliament and political parties, once it becomes law.¹³ The Affirmative Action Bill positions itself as the most assured method of guaranteeing adequate representation for women in Ghana's decision-making spaces.

According to Bame (2016), the Affirmative Action Bill is a step in the right direction, because it would help increase the number of women in decision-making in Ghana. He further revealed that the goal of this bill is to ascertain and equalize areas of social, cultural, economic, and educational imbalance and discrimination against women in Ghana (ibid). However as at 2023, the Affirmative Action Bill has not been passed by parliament despite all the campaign promises by the two main political parties (NDC and NPP) to ensure its enactment. During a media dialogue in Accra, the manager of Abantu for Development, a non-governmental organization, Ms. Harrison Hamida attributed the deliberate delays in passing of the bill to both political parties seeing the bill as a threat to power and power sharing. She further quizzed about how the bill was listed before parliament three times as one of the items to be discussed but never materialized (Graphic online May 2022).¹⁴ These shows how the political parties have failed to honour their campaign promises to pass the bill because they did not want to threaten the male supremacy in the political field by sharing power with the women.

In 2020, the current biggest opposition party, the National Democratic Congress (NDC), named Naana Opoku Agyeman as the vice-presidential candidate. This appointment by the NDC made a statement in the country that shifted the presidential competition between having both vice and presidential candidates as men to focus on the gender aspects of politics. This is the first time

¹³ <https://abantu-rowa.com/affirmative-action/#:~:text=Ghana%20legislated%20an%20Affirmative%20Action,democratic%20dialogue%20and%20social%20cohesion.>

¹⁴ <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/politics/abantu-urges-parliament-to-pass-affirmative-action-bill.html>

in history of politics in Ghana that a female candidate has been selected by any of these two major parties to partner their presidential candidate.

In summary, Ghanaian women were excluded from major decision-making after independence (Kwaku Ohemeng and Adusah-Karikari 2015:366). After years under military leadership, Ghana returned to democratic rule in 1992 under the leadership of Jerry John Rawlings (Ayee and Boafo-Arthur 2007:165). This led to more activism among civil society groups and forming of women groups (Tripp 2003:234). These groups served as a platform to help women build their social capital and network to fight for a common goal; that is to be given a place in governance. Despite all these efforts by government and women groups, nearly 60 years after independence, only 14.5% of MPs are women out of 275 members— which is scarcely more than the 8.8% under President Nkrumah's affirmative action measure that brought 10 women into parliament in 1960.

1.4. Electoral systems, gender quotas, and gender gaps

Structural and objective factors influencing women's participation in politics are closely tied to the electoral system within a specific political, social, and economic context. The method of vote counting by political parties' shapes outcomes, with quotas proving effective in reducing the gender gap in politics. Data show that countries with low socio-economic development have seen increased political representation of women due to the implementation of gender quotas in electoral systems (Rosen 2017).

Electoral systems play a crucial role in the political landscape and gender representation. However, it is important to note that gender inequalities in politics are influenced not just by the electoral system itself, but by how it functions within a specific context. Politicians' decisions based on vote counting methods can result in varying proportions of women and men in parliament. Systems like proportional representation (PR) generally offer better opportunities for women compared to majoritarian systems like single-member district (SMD) systems. PR systems, which allocate seats based on the proportion of votes each party receives, lead to more inclusive and diverse legislatures, representing broader political views and demographic groups, including women (Lijphart 2012; Norris 2004).

Single-member district (SMD) systems, also known as majoritarian or first-past-the-post (FPTP) systems, involve electing one representative per electoral district. This winner-takes-all

method tends to favour larger parties and well-established candidates, usually men with considerable political and financial resources (Norris 2004). The competitive nature of SMD systems often marginalizes smaller parties and less well-funded candidates, including women. As a result, SMD systems can widen the gender gap in political representation, making it difficult for women to compete equally (Matland and Montgomery 2003)

Gender quotas are policy measures aimed at increasing the representation of women in political institutions, taking forms such as legislated candidate quotas, reserved seats, and voluntary party quotas. Quotas are an effective tool in reducing the gender gap in politics. Rosen (2017) study finds that gender quota legislation has significantly boosted women's parliamentary representation globally, especially in less developed countries. The effectiveness of quotas varies: voluntary political party quotas work better in developed countries, while reserved seat quotas have a major impact in the least developed countries. Electoral candidate quotas are effective universally but only when accompanied by placement mandates, strong sanctions for non-compliance, and a minimum threshold of at least 30%. These findings emphasize the importance of tailored quota designs and the consideration of a country's socioeconomic context to optimize the impact of gender quotas on women's political representation (Rosen 2017).

Research shows that gender quotas can improve women's representation in Single-Member District (SMD) systems, although effectiveness varies with context and design. National-level quotas significantly boost women's political representation across electoral systems (Paxton, Hughes, and Painter 2010). However, SMD systems favour established and resource-rich candidates, complicating quota implementation (Krook 2018). Effective strategies include mandatory legislated quotas with enforcement mechanisms, which are more successful than voluntary quotas (Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2005). Placing women in winnable districts is crucial for sustained gender parity improvements (Christensen and Bardall 2015)

Long-term studies confirm that gender quotas increase women's representation, even in SMD systems (Paxton et al. 2010). According to Rosen (2017) quotas can generally enhance female representation across different electoral systems, while McAllister and Studlar (2002) note quotas success in programmatically oriented systems. Quotas also challenge stereotypes and improve public perceptions of women in politics (Phillips 1995), and women elected through quotas tend to advocate for women's issues, enhancing substantive representation (Childs and Krook 2009). Christensen and Bardall (2015) research highlight effective gender quota

implementation in SMDs, showing significant impacts on the gender gap. France's equal nomination quotas have increased women's representation in the National Assembly (ibid). Quotas enhance female candidates' legitimacy as directly elected officials, contrasting with less competitive selection methods improvements (Christensen and Bardall 2015). Over time, effective quota implementation increases women's political representation, leading to more inclusive governance (ibid).

Ghana uses the single-member district (SMD) electoral model, utilizing the First Past the Post (FPTP) system to select representatives for the National Assembly (Parliament). Ghana is divided into multiple electoral constituencies, each of which elects one member of Parliament (MP). Within Ghana's electoral landscape, particularly in culturally diverse regions examined in this study, the gender of candidates significantly impacts women's electoral success and representation in Parliament. SMDs tend to favour entrenched political figures with substantial resources, thereby amplifying gender inequalities and favouring men. This electoral framework, especially prevalent in the northern regions, aligns with traditional gender norms that often privilege men in leadership positions, while women may face perceptions of lower competence and suitability for public office. Cultural expectations confine women to domestic roles, discouraging political involvement, compounded by limited access to financial resources crucial for campaigns (Bawa and Sanyare 2013; Shiraz 2015). Additionally, women encounter barriers accessing social and political networks dominated by men, further hindering their electoral prospects.

Political parties in Ghana influence women's candidacy through support mechanisms like gender quotas or leadership programs, but the absence of such measures in many parties obstructs greater female representation (Ichino and Nathan 2017; Osei-Hwedie and Agomor 2018). In the FPTP system, winning votes in constituencies is pivotal, posing challenges for women who may struggle to mobilize local support despite national backing, thereby impeding their electoral success. Gender dynamics within Ghana's electoral system, combined with societal norms, structural hurdles, and party policies, contribute to the obstacles women face in electoral contests. Enhancing female representation necessitates policy changes within political parties, shifts in societal perceptions of gender roles, and improved access to resources and support for women candidates.

As earlier mentioned, one major channel that has the potential to increase the roles and numbers of women in politics are political parties (Dalton, Farrell, and McAllister 2011; Ichino and Nathan 2017; Morrison 2004; Norris 2004; Shvedova 2005). Political parties are fundamental to the successes and failures of electoral politics and democracy (Morrison 2004; Shvedova 2005). The next section examines political parties and their internal party structures in relation to women political participation.

1.5. Political parties in Ghana: Impediments or advocates for enhancing women's roles in politics

Political party rule system came along with the independence of most sub-Saharan African countries (Agomor 2019:60). This system served as the main source of power transfer in Africa (Tordoff 2016:4–6), though along the way there were military government in most African countries. This system of political parties being the main source of exchange of power had an effect on women representation in political affairs (Allah-Mensah 2005; Tripp 2001). This is because women were marginalized and men dominated most, if not all political institutions and therefore were the ones making the rules. This made the field of politics to be associated with male expertise (Dahlerup and Leyenaar 2013:554). This new development of political parties transgresses to the traditional levels where women were not given the chance to participate in even clan-based politics pushing women to the home setting.

Studies have shown that political parties are the main agents of representation and main actors with access to elected positions in democratic politics (Katz and Mair 1995; Morrison 2004; Norris 2004). Political parties in democratic countries have huge access to state power, such powers include translating their party's political manifestos into policies (Allah-Mensah 2001; Katz and Mair 1995). This goes to show how political parties in democratic countries can serve as the main agent that can be used to increase women's involvement in politics (Caul 1999:83). Though the development of political parties in Ghana dates back to the 19th century, Ghana witnessed a major turning point in 1992 when multiparty democracy was restored by the PNDC junta (Agomor 2019:72) under the late President Jerry John Rawlings. This era is marked as the fourth republic. The dawn of the Ghana's fourth republic witnessed the formation of new political parties and reorganization of the existing political parties with a parliamentary system and a local government system with representatives directly elected by the electorates.

In the contemporary political structure of Ghana, there are two main political parties: National Democratic Congress (NDC) and New Patriotic Party (NPP). Though Ghana operates a multiparty system, only these two political parties have held on to power since 1992. The study capitalizes on these two main political parties because they are the only ones with female representation in parliament and it has also been argued that candidates especially women who are affiliated with these two political parties are more likely to gain access to parliament than women who go to the polls as independent candidates (Allah-Mensah 2001). This is evident in the 2016 and 2020 elections results where only women who were affiliated with the two main political parties won their parliamentary seats (Ghana Electoral Commission 2020). However, most often women do not get the nod of their parties at the party level to be selected as parliamentary candidates to represent the party.

The two main political parties in Ghana have women wings, which is to help increase the participation of women in their party, especially in leading positions. However, previous studies in Ghana have shown that, women wing in political parties are created to make the political party appear to be gender sensitive in the public's eye, not to really empower women since women are not given leadership positions in these political parties (Hamah 2015:20–21). Hence it is attested that these women wings are created in the political parties to maintain the existing patriarchy in the party, while the men still occupy the influential positions and women fill the subordinate positions (*ibid*). In the long run, the establishment of women's wing in political parties only tends to shift the focus of women away from the key leadership positions within the party structure.

More so, though these political parties have access to resources for an electoral campaign which is very expensive they do not help the women by providing them with financial support. According to Shvedova (2005:37), when women are empowered financially it could help increase the number of women elected to parliament and executive positions of the party. Having strong financial backing is very important in the field of politics because politics entails campaigning which involves logistics, traveling and others which is heavily dependent on money. Though it is not the political party's responsibility to help candidates financially in terms of campaigning expenditure. According to Musah and Gariba (2013:470), it is extremely expensive for all candidates during the primaries and the general elections, which puts a lot of constraints on women who would want to contest since they do not have such huge amounts to invest. Unlike most men who are financially endowed. Women and men who are not financially capable end up not been

able to campaign well and hence lose in the long run because they are financially handicapped though the political parties have reduced their filing fees by half for female candidates.

Both political parties did not give a lot of women the nod at the party level to contest the party primaries and a lot of women did not also contest. They were either disqualified during vetting or lost at the primaries of the party. The situation undermines the enhancement of democracy since the gender gap in parliament has not been substantially reduced by these two dominant political parties (Osei-Hwedie and Agomor 2018:397). Though political parties are capable of encouraging females to contest in the parties' strongholds to increase more women. Since reducing only, the filing fees has not helped to empower women to take up more leadership roles in the field of politics.

Party primaries are the mechanism by which candidates for the general elections are elected by the delegates, the mechanism of these selections at the party level is noted to be less gender-friendly (Bauer 2019:614). It is noted that when women stand for general elections on any of the two political parties ticket the probability of winning is very high, this goes to show that winning the party primaries is very important, because even though *“traditional gender ideology”* plays an essential role in determining the outcome of the general elections, party affiliation is more significant than gender (Darkwa 2016a). This can be attested in the 2016 and 2020 elections, where women who contested on the tickets of these two parties had a higher chance of winning the general elections.

However, the challenge now is that only few women stand the chance to win the primaries at the party level, this is as a result of the *“structural and direct violence in the Ghanaian political environment”* that does not allow lot of women to contest the election and the unwillingness of political parties to *“make the fundamental structural changes needed to engender intra-party-political processes to provide women with the needed opportunities for effective participation”* (Darkwa 2016a:12,23). The political parties knowing the power they hold in empowering women do not want to change some of their fundamental's structures which can enable women to win the primaries.

These two parties engage in delegates voting system during the primaries and election of party executives. Delegates are people elected by the members of the party to represent their constituency in electing party leaders. Delegates are only a small fraction of the party card bearing

voters of the party. Each constituency selects nine delegates. However, men dominant in taking delegate positions as women are often selected for only women organizer position. This system of voting has already given the men some leverage over women because they have the numbers.

Candidates winning at the primaries is essential, but it is noted that the primary selection process of candidates in the political parties was at a point in time not formalized at all. Since the 2004 elections, both the NDC and NPP have followed “*fairly standard and noncontroversial rules*” for candidate selection for primaries, as set out in their party constitutions. This is not to say, however, that the process is not still subject to conflict and manipulation. (Daddieh and Bob-Milliar 2012:208) confirmed that during the primaries of these two major political parties the majority of candidates are men: “*This gender reality lies in the face of the solemn pledges made by all the political parties to promote gender equality as well as increased female representation in the legislature*” (ibid). It goes to show that the primaries have not been gender-friendly to the women hence does not encourage more women to contest.

1.5.1. Internal politics and party policy towards increasing women representation in the New Patriotic Party and New Democratic Party

During the 2020 elections, 40 female members of parliament, representing 14.5% of parliamentary seats, were elected on the ticket of the NDC and NPP. The NDC is a social-democratic party that is committed to the values of social democracy. The eighty-page 2016 manifesto of the NDC dedicated about 10 paragraphs to women issues. The manifesto talked about strengthening the gender legal framework by working on the Affirmative Action for women which is almost at its completion stage. The manifesto also makes the commitment to ensure 40% women's representation in all executive positions at all government levels (National Democratic Congress Manifesto 2016:27).¹⁵ In their 2020 manifesto, NDC still promised to have 30% representation allocated to women and also ensure that the approval of the much-debated bill for Affirmative Action is passed for women if they win the 2020 elections (National Democratic Congress Manifesto 2020:78).¹⁶ They as well pledged to facilitate easier access to land for women, this would enable women to have financial power to be able to contest elections.

Considering the political parties' commitment to promoting equality, it is essential to examine the actual situation within the NDC party. By closely observing the level and manner of

¹⁵ <https://www.codeghana.org/assets/downloadables/2016-Manifesto.pdf>

¹⁶ https://ndcgh.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/The-NDCs-Peoples-Manifesto-2020_.pdf

women's participation in the NDC's internal party structure in 2023, we can gain a clearer understanding of the party's true dedication to its manifesto. In 2022, The NDC elected their national executives at a party primary, out of 25 positions contested 9 women were elected with 3 being women organizers. Which represents 27% of the national executives, that means that they could not even adhere to the Affirmative Action for women in their part space, which is committed to 30% women representation (National Democratic Congress Manifesto 2020:78).

The New Patriotic Party is a centre-right and liberal-conservative party in Ghana and the political party in power as of 2023. In their 192 pages 2016 manifestos of the NPP party, there were two pages dedicated to opportunities for women (New Patriotic Party Manifesto 2016:129-130). They plan to make education free for all Ghanaian children up to high school in order to increase female enrolment in schools to promote gender equality. The NPP planned to appoint at least 30% of women to occupy available public office positions (ibid). In addition, they pledged to enforce the reservation of 30% of the poverty credit funds to women enterprises that would empower women to be more financially independent. Last but not least; the NPP implemented the domestic violence bill (New Patriotic Party Manifesto 2016:129-130).¹⁷ This bill was to empower women to report domestic violence cases.

At the party level, looking at the current party structure of the NPP is not that different from the NDC. As of 2024, the party structure is made up of 19 executive members with 5 women, 2 representing the executives of women's wing of the party, representing 17%. This is a clear contradiction of the party's manifesto of having at least 30% in leadership positions (ibid). However, in their 2020 manifesto, the NPP did not really give much attention to gender or allocate any page or column to gender related issues, the president, Nana Akufo-Addo apologized for the delay in getting the Affirmative Action Bill through parliament.

In 2020, 22 out of the 51 women that contested the NPP primaries had the affirmation to contest the 2020 parliamentary elections on the ticket of the party. While the NDC gave 23 women the nod to contest the parliamentary elections on their ticket out of 29 that contested. The figures from both parties revealed the enthusiasm of the Ghanaian women in party politics and their eagerness to enter parliament, however they struggle for a foothold during party primaries (Agomor 2016:5). With 81 women from the other smaller parties or were independent candidates.

¹⁷ <https://npp-usa.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/2016-manifesto-full.pdf>

In total, 126 female candidates contested parliamentary seats in the whole of Ghana with 40 winning their seats during the 2020 general elections.

Both parties in their 2020 manifestos promised the adaptation of a 30% quota of appointments for women and the approval of the Affirmation Action Bill. However, comparing the number of women that contested the parliamentary elections on these two parties' tickets and the number of women in their executive council, it is evident that both parties did not adhere to their 2016 and 2020 manifesto (National Democratic Congress Manifesto 2020; National Democratic Congress Manifesto 2016; New Patriotic Party Manifesto 2016). Both the NDC and NPP reduced their filing fees by 50% for female contestants to serve as a form of empowerment for more women to contest the primaries, but it did not increase the number that contested the primaries, this is because contesting the primaries involves a lot which is beyond the filing fees. According to (Bauer and Darkwah 2019), contesting the primaries involves campaigning the length and breadth of the party structures and delegates which comprises a huge cost which is more than the filing fees that was reduced by 50 percent for women (Osei-Hwedie and Agomor 2018:398).

In 2015, the NDC reformed its primary process, because it realized that the smaller the number of delegates the easier it is for the contestants to buy their votes. So, they increased their delegates to discourage vote buying, because the larger the delegate size the more impossible or difficult it is for contestants to engage votes buying. Vote buying is a common practice in Ghana during the primaries and general election, where candidates tend to give money, food, motorcycles, and other items to electorates to ensure that they are voted for. According to (Ichino and Nathan 2017), increasing the number of delegates by the NDC during primaries and elections of the executives was to increase the number of women that won the elections and primaries, and it yielded the results. Though increasing the number yielded some positive results, one thing important fact is that majority of these delegates are males hence increasing the number amounts to having more male delegates.

The NPP also in 2015, also proposed an internal policy which was to ensure that parliamentary seats that were held primarily by women would be only contested by women during the party's primaries. This internal policy was welcomed by the women in the NPP and the country as a whole. The NPP then made it known to the country how their government was ensuring to improve women political participation in their party by at least thirty percent through this means. However, one unfortunate thing is that most male members of the party did not approve and felt

that would mean too much advantage given to women. They also argued that the policy might in the end cause the party to lose majority of its seats if the electorates and grass root do not approve of the women candidates that won the party primaries. The male members based their argument on the fact that some female members were not popular in the constituencies earmarked for the policy hence would give the NDC a chance to win the seat easily (Madsen, Aning, and Hallberg Adu 2020:4). This argument led to the abandonment of the internal policy during the 2020 primaries and elections.

This goes to attest that both the NPP and NDC, have failed to attain the equality mark in elections, appointments to positions of leadership and enhancing women political participation in Ghana as revealed by Abdulai and Crawford (2010:39). It is evident that, despite political parties reducing filing fees for female candidates by 50%, women still encounter significant obstacles in engaging in politics. This indicates a failure of both political parties to include women in policy formulation, resulting in ineffective outcomes. It highlights the necessity of consulting with affected demographics when crafting policies to ensure their efficacy. This crucial step was evidently overlooked in this instance, as evidenced by the policy's results. Furthermore, it highlights that while these political parties may have internal policies to promote women's political participation, their primary concern appears to be winning rather than empowering women. The next section dives into the difference between the Northern and Greater Accra regions which are the main underpinning of this thesis.

1.6. The Northern and Greater Accra regions as different socio-cultural environments

Ghana, located in West Africa, shares its northern boundary with Burkina Faso, marked by straight lines running east to west. To the east, it shares a long, slightly deviating north-south border with Togo. On the west, Ghana is bordered by Côte d'Ivoire with a north-south boundary. The southern border of Ghana is its coast along the Gulf of Guinea, where key cities like Accra and Tema are located. Ghana is culturally diverse and divided into 16 administrative regions, each with unique boundaries and characteristics essential for local governance (fig 1.4).¹⁸ These regions are made up of people with similar cultures and ways of life (Lentz and Nugent 2000:11–15).

This study is focused on comparing the Northern and Greater Accra regions of Ghana because of their historical, religious, traditional, and developmental differences which is a major

¹⁸ Ghana became a 16-region country in February 2019, following a successful December 2018 referendum that created six new regions from the existing ten.

determinate of gender inequality and social capital (Adumpo 2020:5; table no.1.2; fig 1.4). To understand the characteristics of Northern and Greater Accra region of Ghana in terms of social capital access, how it is utilized in the political field, and how it shapes politicians' political participation in the political field, it is worth examining the overall situation in Ghana.

Figure 1.4: The Map of Ghana, Highlighting regions and their capital cities



Source: (The permanent mission of Ghana to the United Nations)¹⁹

Ghana has seen an annual growth of 2.5 percent in population growth over the last 30 years. According to Ghana Statistical Service (2021),²⁰ the new population figure of 30.8 million represents an increase of 6.1 million people since 2010 during the last population census. Women in Ghana make up 50.7 % of the total population as against 49.3 % males, meaning there are over

¹⁹ <https://www.ghanamissionun.org/map-regions-in-ghana/>

²⁰

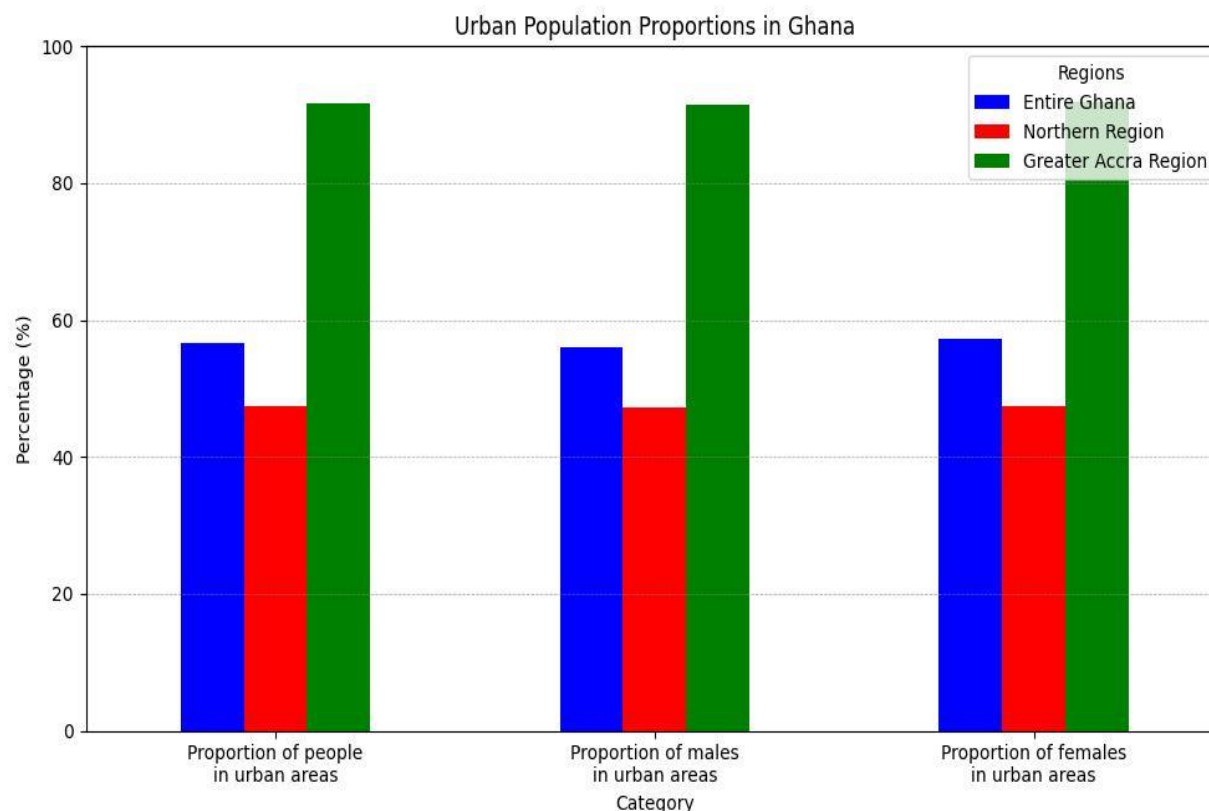
<https://statsghana.gov.gh/gssmain/fileUpload/pressrelease/2021%20PHC%20Provisional%20Results%20Press%20Release.pdf>

430,000 more females than males, giving a national sex ratio of 97 males to every 100 females (ibid). Females make up a greater proportion of the population and outnumber the men in 10 out of the 16 regions. Ghana over the past two decades has enjoyed steady and robust growth economically (Ato-Mensah and Long 2021; Molini and Paci 2015). Ghana's economic structure shifted from agriculture into services which enabled the country to experience advancement in productivity. This development resulted in employment adjusting with a progressive shift from the rural areas to the urban areas (Molini and Paci 2015:5). This has resulted in a fairly high share of the population in the rural areas still living in poverty (ibid). As of June 2021, over 3.57 million people in Ghana still live-in extreme poverty (USAID 2020).

In recent years, Ghana has achieved significant performance in terms of poverty reduction, economic growth, and development (Ato-Mensah and Long 2021:1291; Molini and Paci 2015:1–3). It ranks 142nd out of 189 countries in the Human Development Report (HDR) according to USAID reports from 2020. The HDR's Gender Inequality Index, which measures empowerment of women in terms of economic status, education, socio-cultural, and health indicators, places Ghana 133rd out of 189 countries (USAID 2020). Known for its stability, good governance, and relatively well-developed institutional capacities, Ghana supports the gradual achievement of human rights and attained lower-middle-income country status in 2010. Over the years, Ghana has been steadily improving its Human Development Index score, moving from 0.45 in 2000 to 0.63 in 2021. As of 2021, Ghana is ranked 129th in the world, making it one of the most improved countries in terms of the HDI, despite still being recognized as a lower-middle-income country (UNDP, Human Development Report, 2022). However, while economic growth has accelerated, inequality has worsened, with the Gini coefficient increasing from 37 in 1992 to 42.3 in 2013, according to the Ghana Standards Survey (2014).

56.67% of Ghana's population, which amounts to 17,472,530 out of 30,832,019 people, reside in urban areas. 55.9 % of men reside in urban areas, whereas 57.3 % of females live in urban areas, indicating a higher proportion of females than males residing in urban areas. However, between 250 thousand and 400 thousand in the urban areas and over 3 million people in the rural live in extreme poverty (Ghana Statistical Service 2021; table no. 1.2; fig 1.5).

Figure 1.5: Urban Populations Proportions in Ghana, Northern and Greater Accra



Source: Ghana Statistical Service 2021

In Ghana, there exists a disparity in economic status between men and women, with women generally experiencing greater poverty. This is evident in the contrast between the employment rates of the male and female working-age populations. As of 2021, 56.15% of working-age males were employed, compared to only 44.73% of females (refer to table no. 1.2; fig 1.7). This discrepancy suggests various barriers hindering women's participation in the workforce, such as limited access to economic opportunities, the burden of unpaid care work, reliance on informal employment, restricted access to education and training, and cultural norms discouraging women's employment. Consequently, these factors contribute to the higher incidence of poverty among Ghanaian women compared to men. Ghanaian women at the micro-level are overly represented in low-skilled work and the informal sector (USAID 2020). Women in Africa and Ghana are also noted and found to perform dual productive and reproductive responsibilities (LeBaron and Gore 2020:1112). This often results in women having a double day hence cannot have time and the resources to invest in acquiring social capital.

Table 1.2: Ghana's demographic and socioeconomic table: Ghana and Northern vs Greater Accra regions

Category	Entire Ghana	Northern Region	Greater Accra Region	Definition notes: data source
Population size and distribution	30.8 million*	2,310,943	5,446,237	The total number of individuals within a region.
Population growth rate	2.5% over the last 30 years	3.7	2.1	The rate at which the number of individuals in a population increases in a given time period as a fraction of the initial population.
Age structure 2021	10,890,453	1,011,689	1,637,592	The distribution of the population across different age groups, typically categorized as young (0-14 years), working-age (15-64 years), and elderly (65 years and above).
	18,619,021	1,225,338	3,627,065	
	1,322,545	73,912	191,035	
Sex ratio	97	97	96	The ratio of males to females in the population, usually expressed as the number of males for every 100 females.
Fertility rate	3.1	4.4	2.2	The average number of children that would be born to a woman over her lifetime.
GDP per capita	\$2,410.88	23,532	63,027	The gross domestic product divided by the population, reflecting the average economic output per person.
Women's political representation	40	0	13	The percentage of women in political positions of power, such as parliament.
Education level of women	Primary (3,138,227) Secondary Certificate (53,307)	Primary (184,489) Secondary Certificate (2,377)	JHS (559,205) Secondary Certificate (13,920)	The highest level of education that women in the population have completed.
Economic participation of women	52.97	45.73	58.88	The rate at which women are employed or actively looking for employment in the labour market.
Access to healthcare	68.8	64.8	60.3	The ease with which individuals can obtain health services, which can vary by location,

% covered by health insurance				<i>socioeconomic status, and other factors.</i>
Mortality rates (Male)	76.067	5.416	7.938	<i>The number of deaths per 1,000 males within a year.</i>
Mortality rates (Female)	56.132	3.881	6.300	<i>The number of deaths per 1,000 females within a year.</i>
Literacy rate (Male)	78.42	53.41	92.18	<i>The percentage of males aged 15 and above who can, with understanding, read and write a short, simple statement on their everyday life.</i>
Literacy rate (Female)	66.31	34.33	84.17	<i>The percentage of females aged 15 and above who can, with understanding, read and write a short, simple statement on their everyday life.</i>
Employment rate (Male)	56.15	52.27	60.97	<i>The proportion of the male working-age population that is employed.</i>
Employment rate (Female)	44.73	37.47	50.55	<i>The proportion of the female working-age population that is employed</i>
Urbanization	56.6	47.4	91.6	<i>The proportion of people living in urban areas. The proportion of females living in urban areas.</i>
Urbanization (Male)	55.99	47.32	91.53	<i>The proportion of males living in urban areas.</i>
Urbanization (Female)	57.32	47.50	91.79	<i>The proportion of females living in urban areas.</i>
Age at first Childbirth (Female)	22	21.5	23.6	<i>The average age at which women have their first child.</i>
Religious affiliation	21,932,708 are Christians out of 30,753,327	1,532,977 are Muslims out of 2,306,808	4,587,515 are Christians out of 5,437,084	<i>The particular religion to which individuals in the population identify themselves as belonging.</i>

Source: Ghana Statistical Service 2021²¹, Ghana Electoral Commission²²

The research draws on data obtained from two different socio-cultural regions, due to their specific cultural, religious, and social norms, as well as levels of modernization. The rationale for

²¹ <https://census2021.statsghana.gov.gh/gssmain/fileUpload/reportthemelist/Volume%203%20Highlights.pdf>

²² <https://ec.gov.gh/>

selecting these two socio-cultural areas lies in the necessity to compare their respective modernization processes, various societal structures, on the access and utilization of social capital by politicians. This comparison aims to explore how disparate socio-cultural values and levels of modernization influence gender inequalities in the political sphere.

Despite the ethnic diversity within these regions, they are predominantly inhabited by the Mole-Dagbani people in the North and the Akan community in the Greater Accra region.²³ Notably, the Greater Accra region has a population of 5,446,237, surpassing the Northern region's population of 2,310,943. This demographic difference is significant, considering the Northern region's larger land area of approximately 25,459 sq. km compared to the Greater Accra region's smaller size of 4,450 sq. km.²⁴ The Northern region shares its borders with Togo to the east and the Savannah and North East regions to the south and north, respectively, while the Greater Accra region is centrally situated along Ghana's coastal belt. It shares borders with the Eastern, Central, and Volta regions, with the Gulf of Guinea spanning its southern coastline for 220km from Langma near Kasoa in the west to Ada in the east (see fig 1.4). The Northern and Greater Accra regions of Ghana display notable diversity both in geography and socio-economic attributes.

According to previous research, education, industrialization, urbanization, socio-economic status, and social norms are the major determinates of social capital and possible reasons for the low representation of women in politics (Muzayanah et al. 2020:547; Podgorskaya and Schitov 2021:10). The Northern and Greater Accra region can be viewed as two regions with given discrepancies in their socio-cultural environments which are key determiners of gender inequality, social capital, and representation of women in politics (Osei-Assibey 2014:523, 529; Sossou 2011:4–6). To compare the Northern and Greater Accra region of Ghana in terms of social capital acquisition, how it is utilized in the political field, and female politicians' political participation in the political field, it is substantial to first compare the population of people in both regions in the context of Ghana. Greater Accra is the most populous region with 5,446,237 and the Northern region has a population slightly half of Greater Accra, 2,310,943 (refer to table no. 1.2).

²³ <https://census2021.statsghana.gov.gh/gssmain/fileUpload/reportthemelist/Volume%203%20Highlights.pdf>

²⁴ <https://ghs.gov.gh/northern-3/> , <https://ghs.gov.gh/profile-greater-accra-region/> / <https://mofa.gov.gh/site/directorates/regional-directorates/greater-accra-region>

The disparities in population size in these two regions have largely been observed since 1960 when Ghana conducted its first post-independence census.²⁵ However Northern region observed the largest change in population with an almost 50% increase over its population in 2010 (Ghana Statistical Service 2021). The Northern region is not very populous but is predominately rural unlike the Greater Accra region which is largely urban and very populated (Yeboah 2021:48–49). The Northern region's urbanization rate is notably lower at 47.4%, in stark contrast to the Greater Accra region's 91.6%, which significantly exceeds the national average of 56.6% (refer to table no. 1.2; fig 1.5). This indicates a greater proportion of individuals residing in rural areas in the North compared to the Greater Accra region.

Most of the people in the Northern region do migrate to the Greater Accra to seek employment opportunities. The majority of people living in the North are young married women, old people, and children (Adumpong 2020:91; Yeboah 2021:49). These categories of people, are those who cannot travel or are restricted, hence have to stay up North to take care of the home. The migration rate of Northerners to the Greater Accra region is very high, especially for the men and single women that migrate for economic-related reasons and other reasons. However, women especially married women were discouraged from migrating because of cultural reasons pertaining to patriarchy (Setrana and Kleist 2022). This act of migrating and seeking greener pastures in the South especially Greater Accra region gives men more economic and financial power over the women.

Historically, the Northern region has experienced slower infrastructural development, often linked to the lasting effects of colonization (Akrofi et al. 2018:40). Studies suggest that during colonial times, the South, including the Greater Accra region, received preferential treatment for development due to its rich natural resources and fertile land. Despite achieving independence, the Northern region continues to struggle with developmental inequalities, despite efforts by successive governments to address the gap between the Northern and Greater Accra regions. Colonial resource allocation favoured the resource-abundant South of Ghana including Greater Accra, leading to lasting disparities with the less developed, resource-poor North, characterized by significant infrastructural and economic differences. After independence, successive

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https://statsghana.gov.gh/gssmain/fileUpload/pressrelease/2021%20PHC%20General%20Report%20Vol%203A_Population%20of%20Regions%20and%20Districts_181121.pdf

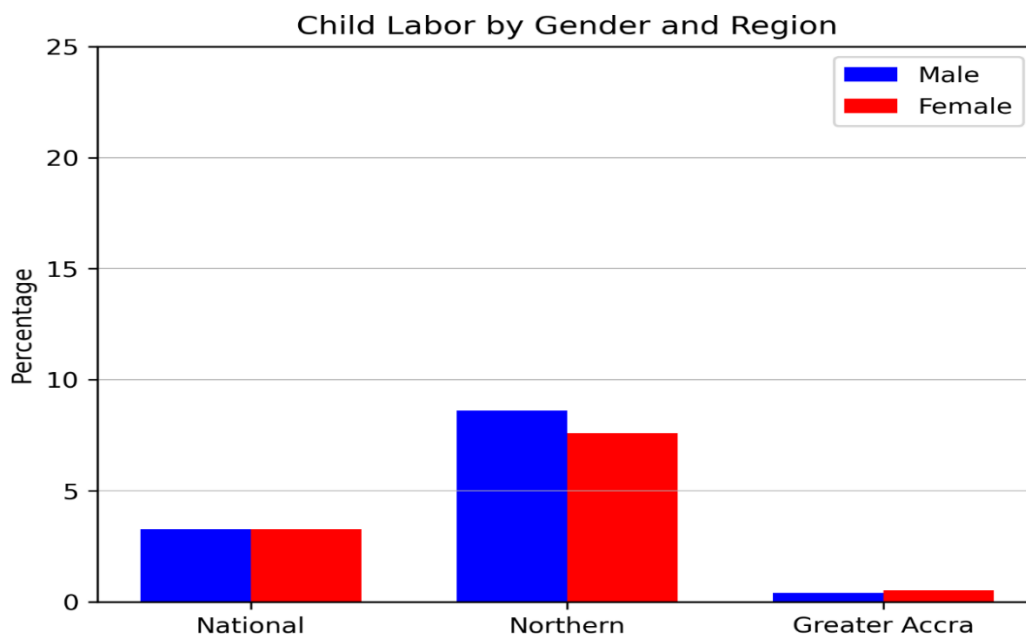
governments continued the legacy of the colonial masters, by depriving the Northern sector of development (Akrofi et al. 2018:40). Bridging the developmental divide between Ghana's North and South influences women's societal status overall and, consequently, their participation in politics, intensifying the regional disparities in infrastructure and economy. Most parts of the Northern zone remain underdeveloped in areas of education, sanitation, unemployment, health, infrastructure (Adumpo 2020:83–84, 87). This lack of economic development can result in a high level of gender inequalities issues (Nassar, Nastacă, and Nastaseanu 2021:60). When there are no work opportunities and development available for citizens, it gives the men the leverage to impose their dominance over women and children, since they are likely to travel to other places for work (Adaawen and Owusu 2013:30, 36). Which the women are likely not to because of their children and household duties (Lobnibe 2008:60,65).

Though Ghana in 2012 was the first country to achieve goal number one of the Millennium Developments Goals (MDG's), which states that the *"poverty rate must be halved"*. This achievement did not reflect in the Northern region where three-fifths of people still live in extreme poverty. The poverty rate in the Northern region remains greater than 50% (Awumbila 2006:150; USAID 2020). According to economic and demographic trends, poverty would completely be eradicated in the Southern regions by 2030 while it is expected that 60% of the population in the North would still be poor by 2030. According to the 2020 USAID reports, since 2012, poverty has stagnated particularly in the North of Ghana. The reports further indicates that people from the Northern region face economic discrimination. Despite government and NGO's interventions to improve livelihoods, poverty still exists in the Northern region as compared to the Greater Accra region (Adumpo 2020:167). Like the situation at the global scale, poverty in Ghana has been skewed at the disadvantage of women (Awumbila 2006:151–53).

Many residents in the Northern region live below the poverty line, relying on informal economic activities for sustenance. Agriculture forms the backbone of the Northern region's economy, with a large portion of the population engaged in small-scale farming. However, recent unfavourable climatic conditions and urbanization, which has encroached upon farmland for housing, have posed significant challenges, reducing the viability of farming as a sustainable livelihood (Honyenuga and Wutoh 2019). Consequently, economic conditions for Northern inhabitants have markedly worsened. Child labour is prevalent in the Northern region, with a

notably higher rate of 8.6% compared to the national average of 3.2% and the Greater Accra region's 0.5 % (fig 1.6).²⁶

Figure 1.6: Child Labour by Gender and Region (Northern and Greater Accra)



Source: Ghana Statistical Service 2021

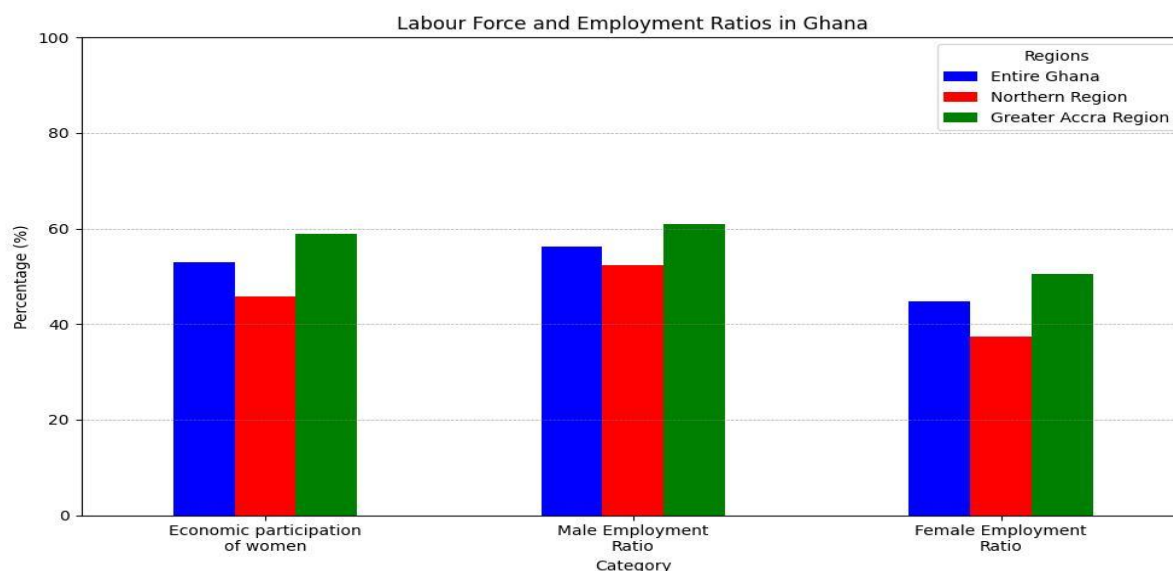
Conversely, the Greater Accra region, home to Ghana's capital city, stands out as markedly more developed compared to the Northern region. Serving as an economic hub, it draws people from across Ghana, presenting a distinct socio-economic landscape characterized by higher urbanization rates, advanced infrastructure, and abundant employment prospects. Many individuals migrate to the Greater Accra region primarily for commercial activities and better prospects, given its thriving business environment. The majority of its population (42%) is engaged in sales and service occupations, with agriculture accounting for only 9.1%. Reflecting the urbanization trend seen across many African nations, the Greater Accra Region struggles with population influx, which strains housing, transportation, and environmental sustainability. In contrast, the Northern region, hindered by slower economic growth, contends with elevated poverty levels, particularly impacting political participation opportunities, especially for women. With a poverty rate of approximately 55%, the North faces greater economic hardship compared

²⁶ <https://census2021.statsghana.gov.gh/gssmain/fileUpload/reportthemelist/Volume%203%20Highlights.pdf>

to the Greater Accra region, where the poverty rate stands at around 20%, notably lower than the national average of 35% (refer to table no. 1.2). This divergence not only highlights the Greater Accra region's prosperity but also underscores the economic challenges confronting the Northern region, contributing to wider regional inequalities.

The employment gap between Ghana's Northern and Greater Accra regions is striking. In the Northern region, reliance on subsistence agriculture restricts job diversity, while the Greater Accra region's advanced and diverse economy offers a wider range of employment across service, industry, and commerce sectors. This contrast is evident in the disparity of employment rates among the male and female working-age populations in the North compared to those in the Greater Accra region (refer to table no. 1.2; fig 1.7). Most people in the Northern region still lack work opportunities especially women, they face a lot of difficulties converting their labour into more productive self-employment ventures that can be monetized. This is because women in the Northern region are mostly involved in farm work that is owned by the men mostly their husbands and they work on these farmlands as a duty, not as a paid work hence do not acquire monetary gain (Zakaria 2017:155–56).²⁷ The few who have access to education also face barriers in joining the labour market hence migrate to the South especially Greater Accra region to seek greener pastures.

Figure 1.7: Labour Force and Employment Ratios in Ghana, Northern and Greater Accra



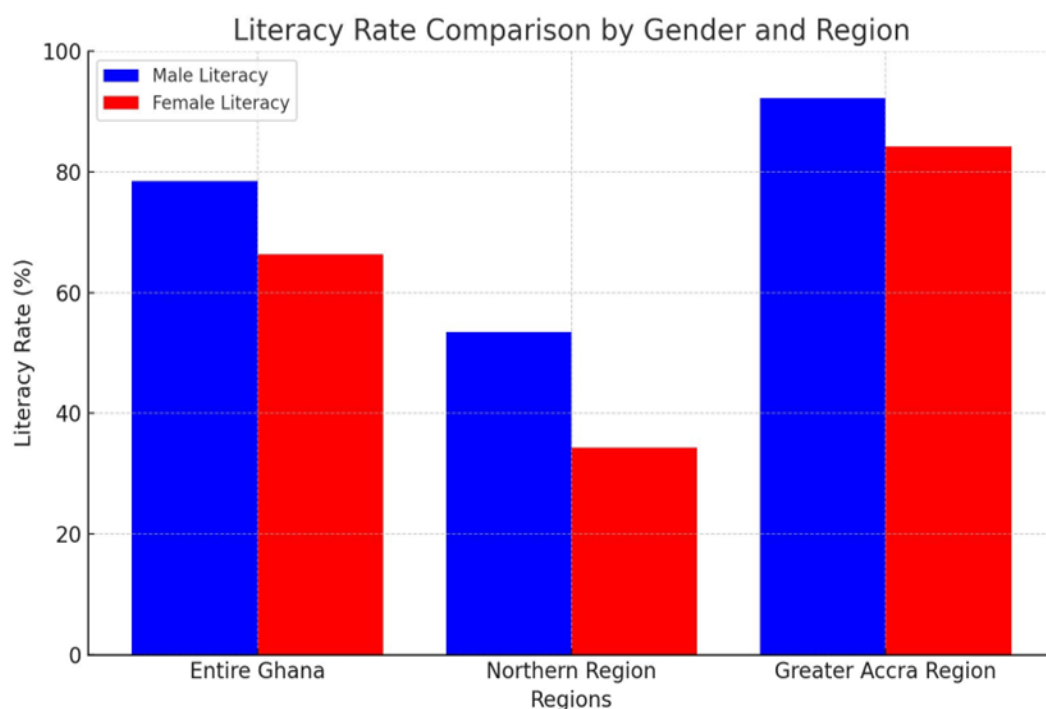
Source: Ghana Statistical Service 2021

²⁷ <https://census2021.statsghana.gov.gh/gssmain/fileUpload/reportthemelist/Volume%203%20Highlights.pdf>

Differences in urbanization levels further emphasize the regional inequality. The Northern region's urbanization rate, at 47%, starkly contrasts with the Southern region's 91.7%, which notably exceeds the national average of 56.7% (refer to table no. 1.2; fig 1.5). Urbanization in the South facilitates enhanced access to political resources and networks, fostering greater participation of women in politics, while the predominance of rural areas in the North acts as a hindrance. These differences provide a diverse environment for studying the impact of socio-cultural and developmental factors on social capital access and utilization and its influence on politician's political participation. This comparison underscores the significant socio-economic disparities between the two regions, with the Northern region facing higher rates of child labour and poverty, and lower urbanization rates, which adversely impact access to social capital and political participation, particularly for women. In contrast, the Greater Accra region benefits from higher urbanization, advanced infrastructure, and more diverse employment opportunities, fostering a more prosperous socio-economic environment.

Education stands as a pivotal element of human capital and social capital, playing a crucial role in dismantling gender inequality within society (Du, Xiao, and Zhao 2021:503). Overall, 78.4% of men in Ghana above 15 years are literate while 33.6% of women above 15 are illiterates (refer to table no. 1.2). Despite Ghanaian women constituting a significant portion of the population, they often face various socio-economic challenges that contribute to their higher levels of poverty, lower educational attainment, and underrepresentation in politics compared to men. The disparity in education in Ghana is skewed at the disadvantage of the female especially those in the Northern region. In 1996, the government in power tried to address the regional disparities between the Northern and the Southern zone by giving the Northern sector free education and subsidized utility bills (Yaro 2013:7–9). However, these policies have not brought the desired results of bridging the development gap between the Northern and Southern sectors (Tackie et al. 2020:528).

Figure 1.8: Literacy Rate Comparison by Gender and Region

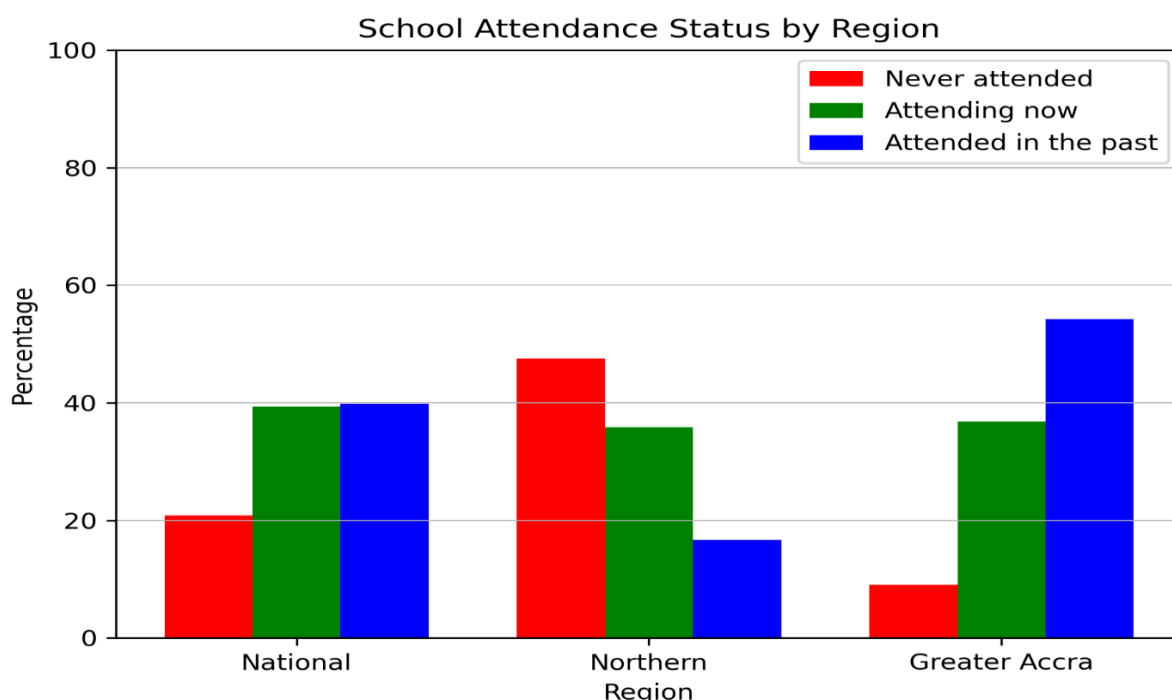


Source: Ghana Statistical Service 2021

The analysis of education data reveals gender inequalities, showing that women are more frequently illiterate across the country, particularly in the Northern region. As illustrated in Figure 1.8, while 30.2% of the population in Ghana is illiterate, this figure rises to 34.4% among women and falls to 25.9% among men. A comparison between the Northern and Greater Accra regions reveals drastic differences. The proportion of the population aged 6 years and older who are literate in the Northern region is 48.1% among males and 34.8% among females. The Greater Accra region, which has the largest share of literate people in the whole of Ghana, shows a literacy rate of 91.1% for males and 84.9% for females. As the literacy data indicate, there are enormous differences between regions. However, these disparities also underscore the persistent gender differences in both regions. For instance, Greater Accra demonstrates higher literacy rates and a narrower gender gap, the Northern region shows significant gender disparities and lower overall literacy rates: in the Northern region, the gender gap in literacy is 13.3% points, whereas in the Greater Accra region, the gap is 6.2% points. This comparison highlights not only the regional disparities in educational attainment but also the enduring gender differences in literacy rates within both regions.

Regular school attendance is crucial for improving literacy rates in Ghana, as the two are closely linked, particularly in developing countries like Ghana.²⁸

Figure 1.9: School Attendance Status in Ghana, Northern and Greater Accra



Source: Ghana Statistical Service 2021

Figure 1.9 reveals significant insights into educational access and participation in The Northern and Greater Accra regions. Greater Accra Region exhibits the lowest percentage of individuals who have never attended school at just 9%, indicating a relatively high level of initial educational access compared to other regions. This contrasts sharply with the Northern Region, where nearly half the population, 47.5%, has never attended school, highlighting a substantial educational gap.

While the rates of current school attendance in Greater Accra and the Northern Region are relatively similar, at 36.8% and 35.8% respectively, they both fall slightly below the national average of 39.4%. This suggests that ongoing school enrolment across these regions is not significantly different, despite their economic and geographical differences. The most pronounced disparity emerges in the percentage of the population that attended school in the past. Greater

²⁸ <https://www.iicba.unesco.org/en/node/100>

Accra leads with 54.2%, suggesting a high turnover in educational attendance where a large segment of the population has some schooling experience but may not be currently engaged. In contrast, the Northern Region records only 16.7% in this category, which could indicate fewer opportunities or lower retention rates in formal education historically.

The data presented reveals pronounced regional disparities in educational access and attainment across Ghana, illustrating a stark contrast between regions in terms of historical and current educational opportunities. The Northern Region, in particular, confronts significant challenges, marked by a substantial portion of its population having never accessed schooling, coupled with low historical attendance rates and a notable illiteracy rate, especially among women. This lack of educational attainment is a critical concern, potentially hampering the region's development and contributing to wider socio-economic disparities. In contrast, the Greater Accra Region, while showing similar rates of current school enrolment, demonstrates a much higher rate of historical school attendance. This suggests that Greater Accra has benefited from more consistent access to education over time, providing its population with better opportunities to engage in the educational system. These discrepancies in educational access between the Northern and Greater Accra regions not only highlight the uneven distribution of educational resources but also reflect broader implications for the labour market and political participation. Regions with lower educational attainment like the Northern Region are likely to experience gaps in labour market participation and reduced political influence, perpetuating a cycle of inequality and underrepresentation of women in labour market, public life and politics, since education is one of the most important factors that define social position (table no 1.2).

The Northern region is also well known for 'child brides' which continue to deny girls of education. The female is married off at a young age hence depriving her of an education. As of 2021, 84.17% of females aged 15 and above in the Greater Accra Region were literate, whereas over 65% of females in the Northern Region were illiterate (refer to table no.1.2). This represents markedly lower level of educational attainment among women, accompanied by a higher incidence of female illiteracy and diminished female participation in the labour market in the Northern region. This inequality can be ascribed to various factors, including potential inadequacies in educational opportunities within the Northern Region, religion, and cultural norms that may impede women's education. Child bride is defined as a formal marriage or informal union

involving a girl under the age of 18.²⁹ According to Fuseini and Kalule-Sabiti (2015), Muslims in the South are likely to be educated then Christians in the South. This attests that women in the North are passionate about education but the settings are not giving them the privilege to attain education.

In Ghana, religious beliefs constitute the fundamental basis of social identity and values (Fuseini and Kalule-Sabiti 2015:1832). Though these two regions are religiously heterogeneous, the Northern region is predominantly occupied by individuals of Islamic descent, while the Greater Accra region is largely dominated by Christians (see table no 1.2; fig 1.10). Gender roles and what is expected of each gender have their roots from religious beliefs and practices, which also influences family values. Each religion has its moral codes and ethics that is obeyed by the people that practice those religions. When a member of such religions does not comply, he or she is seen as an outcast. In some Christian centres it is a moral norm for a woman to cover her hair and only allow her husband to see it. Also, some teachings of these religions influence women to accept all decisions made by the men since they are taught to see the men as the gods of the home. Therefore, every step taken by the women, must be approved by the men. This can be seen in the daily lives of women where they do not have a voice even when it comes to decision-making in the family settings. Thus, the Christian and Islamic religion has attenuated gender roles by negotiating identities in light of cultural prescriptions concerning appropriate gender relations in Ghanaian societies.

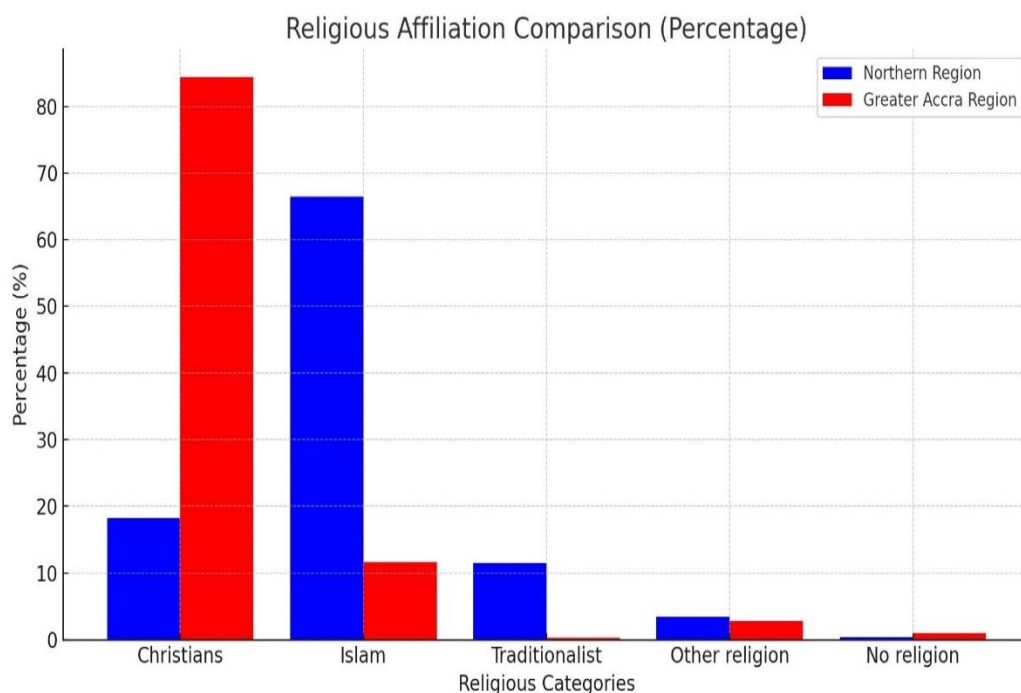
Scholars are of the view that Ghanaians have an external religious influence from the colonial era which brought about a major religious distinction in the Northern and Greater Accra regions (Awedoba 2006:2; Fuseini and Kalule-Sabiti 2015:1833). During the colonial era and early trading days, Islam religion gained its ground in the Northern region due to contacts with the Arabian traders that came to trade with the Northerners (Launay and Soares 1999:499). These traders spread the Islamic religion in the North because of their commercial activities in that area. The spread was made by educating the locals through the religious centres and schools they established in the North.

Christianity however was concentrated in the coastal belts of Ghana which included the Greater Accra region because of the early contacts with the European missionaries. These

²⁹ Child bride is defined as a formal marriage or informal union involving a girl under the age of 18.

colonialists laid the foundation for the development of Christianity in the Southern belt. They started by organizing churches and teaching the locals the bad side of their traditional religion. They professed the supremacy of their God over the African and Ghanaian local gods. They referred to these gods as lesser gods. They established schools which were divided by gender. They had schools exclusive for males and schools exclusive for females. Though both religions spread their tentacles among the locals through education, it is noted that the Christian missionaries did more by building a lot of schools in the South than the Islamic traders in the North (Fuseini and Kalule-Sabiti 2015).

Figure 1.10: Religious Affiliation Comparison (Percentage)



Source: Ghana Statistical Service 2021

In present-day Ghana, a clear religious and cultural dichotomy still marks the Northern and Greater Accra regions (refer to table no. 1.2; Fig 1.10). In Ghana, religious beliefs constitute the fundamental basis of social identity and values (Fuseini and Kalule-Sabiti 2015:1832). The Northern region, predominantly Muslim, observes traditional roles that often limit women's participation to the domestic sphere, as highlighted by both the Greater Accra region, where Christianity prevails, shows a different societal model, encouraging women's involvement in both

the workforce and education, reflecting a more liberal stance towards female autonomy (Eger 2021:213–14, 231). Muslim scholars in the North advocate for women's primary role in the home, emphasizing childcare and domestic responsibilities, a view not prevalent in the Greater Accra region (Odame 2014). This traditional outlook contrasts sharply with the liberal values of Greater Accra, where women enjoy freedoms to work, own property, and engage in public life (Britwum and Akorsu 2016:10–11). The restrictions in the North extend to limiting women's access to social and economic capital, largely confining them to unpaid labour and domestic chores. This contrasts with Greater Accra, where women's financial independence, gained through wage-earning activities, empowers them in family decision-making and personal wellbeing (Fuseini and Kalule-Sabiti 2015:1834).

Polygamy, practiced among most Muslims societies in Ghana, serves as a symbol of gender disparities.³⁰ It encourages men to marry multiple wives, perpetuating male dominance and exacerbating the financial constraints and limited domestic influence experienced by women (Rahman 2019). In contrast, Christian norms discourage polygyny, fostering more egalitarian household dynamics (Ardayfio-Schandorf 2006). This goes to attest to how liberal the Greater Accra region and Christianity is with regard to empowering women.

According to Shiraz (2015:63, 70), religious and socio-cultural settings define to a large extent the level of women participating in the public space. The social stigma of the public sphere and its activities not being a part of women's roles and responsibilities deters a lot of women from participation in the public sphere in Ghana, especially in the Northern region. This is because society has assigned some responsibilities for women which conflicts with ending in the public sphere. Most societal norms project a good woman to mean a woman who holds the family honour by making sure the family needs are well taken care of and not involving herself in the public sphere (Musah and Gariba 2013:466–67). These societal norms are mostly practiced in the Northern region where their beliefs are originated around male supremacy and patriarchy (Ngulube 2018:39). These cultural beliefs tend to create cultural gender perceptions in both men and women to weaken the interest of women in participating in the public space in the Northern region. These socio-cultural practices create discrimination issues for women who fight against

³⁰ In the Islamic context, a polygynous marriage allows a Muslim man to have up to four wives, provided he follows specific conditions outlined in the Quran and the Hadith. This practice is based on Islamic teachings that emphasize justice and equality among the wives. Polygamy is more common in rural and traditional communities where cultural practices and Islamic teachings support it.

the odds to participate in public affairs. They face discrimination such as being labelled as "too known" (arrogant and disrespectful) since they have decided to involve themselves in a perceived men's world (Kuusokub 2011:79–80).

In Ghana, chieftaincy is one of the traditional institutions that survived the influx of western cultures and colonialization (Essel 2021:122). In the pre-colonial era, the chieftaincy institution was the main system of governance in Ghana (ibid). However, this system of governance changed after colonialization. Traditional African governing institutions are varied. The chieftaincy institutions in Ghana have become solely male-dominated with a few women holding some positions in some societies after colonialism (Essel 2021:122). Among the Southerners' women played a complementary role to men, women served as Queen mothers (Stoeltje 1997:43). In the Northern region, in ethnic groups like the Mamprusi, Gonja, Dagombas, etc. women before colonialism held very important positions in the traditional council (Odame 2014:387–88). The traditional system of leadership did not only skew at the disadvantage of women, generally, power given to traditional leaders reduced after colonialism.

Queen mothers in the South of Ghana still hold some extraordinary amount of power (Odame 2014:388; Steegstra 2009:105; Stoeltje 2021:43). They are independent and still hold massive authority in ruling the community. Scholars and studies have revealed that there have been paramount changes being witnessed in the Northern region concerning women's involvement in traditional council and leadership (Odame 2014:382). Women have been regulated to less powerful positions in the traditional council in the Northern region. The Greater Accra region had long had Queen Mothers who were and still are very powerful in the society (Steegstra 2009:108), they are very influential in decision-making.

Queen mothers in the South of Ghana are recruited through the female genealogy (Stoeltje 2021:106,108). Their power is demonstrated by how they occupy their stools which is a sign of authority in the South of Ghana (Stoeltje 2003:4). However, in the Northern region, the office of the Queen mother is recognized traditionally in only a few communities like the Gonja. Most communities have female leaders which they called "Pognaa" (women chief in Dagaaba) or "Magazia" a term that originated from Hausa (Awedoba 2006:2; Odame 2014:388), these women are only responsible for leading and mobilizing their female colleagues to engage in communal activities. According to Odame (2014:381, 387) and Awedoba (2006:4), traditional councils and institutions in the North are solely made up of men. These men in the traditional councils make

vital decisions regarding women and enforce customary practices, many of them harmful to women. The difference that exists between the North and the South in terms of women's traditional leadership is mostly based on the powers and positions given to women in the traditional councils (Astanga 2011; Stoeltje 2021:2). In conclusion, we can attest to the fact that women in the North hold less power traditionally than women in the South in current-day Ghana.

Ghana is a country that is characterized by mixed lineage systems under patriarchal structures which are governed by civil laws. There are regional differences between the South and the Northern regions especially. However, both the Northern and Greater Accra regions have ethnic groups that have systems of patrilineal descent. This means that both regions inherit paternally, the men have the power to inherit property unlike in the Ashanti region where inheritance is maternal, and women have a lot of power traditionally and decision-making is more egalitarian (Stoeltje 2021). These two regions are more male-dominated in terms of access to traditional power and have communities that are heavily influenced by Islam and Christianity respectively (Fuseini and Kalule-Sabiti 2015:1833). However, the Northern regions have ethnic groups like the Dagomba, Gonja, Konkomba, and Kusase that had Islamic restrictions on women that were more pronounced and appear to be more autonomous in domains of decision-making (Fuseini and Kalule-Sabiti 2015:1833–35, 1839–40). Unlike the Greater Accra region which has an egalitarian and more developed setting which is dominated by Christianity (ibid).

It is revealed that despite modern developments across Ghana, Northern women's engagement remains limited to the private sphere, impacting their social capital and political participation. Cultural norms and educational barriers restrict their involvement in politics to lower ranks, if at all (Munemo 2017; Musah and Gariba 2013; Ngulube 2018:39; Odame 2010; Shiraz 2015; Sossou 2011:4). This is in stark contrast to women in Greater Accra, who have historically participated in the public sphere, contributing significantly to the region's economic activities and enjoying greater access to social capital (Brown 1996:26–27; Tsikata and Seini 2004:8–9). While the Northern region remains far behind the Greater Accra region in development terms, there has been significant progress in the Northern region over the past decade though not largely skewed to the advantage of women. This research is needed to understand the experiences and perspectives of politicians with a focus on how social capital, including trust, social norms, relationships, gender shape their political experiences and how these dynamics vary in these two regions.

Chapter conclusion

This chapter extensively examines the historical context of women's political involvement in sub-Saharan Africa, tracing its evolution from pre-colonial to post-colonial times. It highlights the influence of factors such as colonialism, state formation, and women's activism on women's roles in politics. Specifically focusing on Ghana, it discusses the impact of European dominance on gender dynamics, emphasizing the marginalization of women during British colonial rule. Additionally, it explores the resilience of Ghanaian women in resisting colonial oppression and challenging patriarchal norms. The chapter also discusses the changing landscape of women's activism in both pre- and post-democratic Ghana, including the emergence of women's organizations advocating for gender equality. The also briefly touches on electoral systems, gender gap and gender quotas

The chapter further analyses the role of political parties in Ghana in promoting women's representation, examining party policies and internal dynamics of major parties like the New Patriotic Party and the New Democratic Party. Through this analysis, it provides insights into the challenges and opportunities for women in Ghanaian politics. Finally, the chapter examined the Northern and Greater Accra regions as different socio-cultural environments, recognizing the diversity of experiences and challenges faced by women in different contexts. By contextualizing women's political participation within regional dynamics, the chapter elaborates on the importance of intersectionality and localized approaches in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment.

In subsequent chapters, this thesis explores social capital as a theoretical lens for understanding the underlying factors contributing to gender inequality in political participation within the Northern and Greater Accra regions of Ghana.

Chapter two

Theoretical framework

2.0. Introduction

Scholars have extensively examined the gender gap in politics, offering diverse theoretical perspectives (Connell 1990; Norris 2003). To tackle gender inequalities within the political sphere in Ghana, this thesis requires a theoretical framework that not only explains the underlying mechanisms but also offers practical strategies for closing the gap. Among the available theoretical perspectives, social capital theory is a compelling choice for analysis due to its unique ability to address the multifaceted nature of gender disparities in politics.

Social capital theory argues that networks, trust, and norms significantly influence political participation (Coleman 1988; Putnam 1993). Social capital theory is crucial for understanding gender inequalities in politics for three main reasons. Firstly, it offers insight into how varying access to and the usefulness of social networks can affect political participation and representation across genders (Putnam 1993). The historical exclusion of women from numerous traditional political networks and platforms highlights the importance to examine the quality and extent of their social capital in the field (Daby 2021; Tripp 1999). Secondly, social capital goes beyond mere connections; it includes the quality of these connections, such as trust and reciprocity, which are fundamental for political mobilization and support (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998). This enables an examination of how gender inequalities in experiences and development of social trust and reciprocity can shape politicians' political participation. Lastly, employing social capital theory for this thesis, enables us to bridge the divide between individual actions and structural constraints, leading to a comprehensive understanding of how systemic barriers and societal norms differently influence political engagement of politicians (Bourdieu 1986). It also enables an examination of ways in which social structures in the Ghanaian society and relationships can influence political participation.

In socioeconomic and political context, where communal ties and social networks significantly influence individuals' access to various opportunities, particularly in politics, this theoretical perspective holds significant position in examining individuals' tendency to engage in active politics (Grischow 2007). Through an analysis of how social capital functions within Ghana's distinctive sociopolitical landscape, this study seeks to uncover specific social

mechanisms that either hinder or support women's participation in politics. This entails examining how diverse forms of social capital (such as familial networks, community associations, and professional groups) may have varying impacts on the political aspirations and endeavours of female politicians in Ghana.

2.1. Review of social capital theories

Social capital is a very broad and contested term which has spread and been used through multiple disciplines in the social sciences. Social capital attempts to understand human behaviour based on how humans relate to each other and how these social relations and connections benefit the individuals in that network (Rutten, Westlund, and Boekema 2010:863). A lot of social science scholars have given different but similar diverse definitions of social capital. For the past two to three decades, a lot of research has taken interest in digesting the different perspectives of social capital.

Bourdieu, Coleman, Putnam, Burt, Nahapiet and Ghoshal, Fukuyama and other scholars provide unique perspectives on social capital, emphasizing its diverse dimensions and implications (Adler and Kwon 2002; Bourdieu 1986; Burt 1998; Coleman 1990b; Fukuyama 2001; Lin 1999a; Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998; Portes 1998; Putnam 1995a). Bourdieu (1986) grounds his concept in the broader framework of social reproduction and cultural capital, highlighting the role of social networks in accessing resources and maintaining status. (Coleman 1990b) focuses on the functional aspect of social networks in achieving individual and collective goals, particularly in the absence of formal institutions. Putnam underscores the importance of civic engagement in fostering trust and reciprocity within communities, vital for democracy and social cohesion (Putnam 1993, 1995a).

Burt's (1998) approach centres on structural holes and network brokerage, emphasizing the advantages of bridging disconnected groups for accessing diverse resources. Nahapiet and Ghoshal elaborate on social capital's role in organizational performance, considering its structural, relational, and cognitive dimensions. Fukuyama (2001) discusses social capital in the context of informal norms that promote cooperation among individuals or groups, highlighting shared values, trust, and norms within a community. These norms guide behaviour, fostering cooperation, reciprocity, and collective action. While these scholars' approach social capital from distinct theoretical perspectives, they all acknowledge its profound impact on individual behaviour,

community dynamics, and societal outcomes. This section of the thesis thoroughly explores these notions and their relevance to this thesis's analysis.

Social capital, in Bourdieu's view, comprises the actual and potential resources linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition. Through this lens, social networks are not just a sum of social interactions but are also infused with power—capable of granting or denying access to various resources and opportunities. Bourdieu's theory of social capital is part of his broader sociological framework, which also includes concepts like cultural capital, economic capital, and symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1977, 1980). He argues that these forms of capital play a critical role in the reproduction of social structures and inequalities.

According to Pierre Bourdieu, social capital is "*the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of durable network or more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintances*" (Bourdieu 1986:248). He is overt that social networks are built around mutual benefits and advantage, hence one must be able to give what one is receiving in a social network. Bourdieu further describes social capital as a representation of 'power' as a tool to access relationships and power as a tool to access resources. Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social capital primarily emphasizes the structural and relational dimensions of social life.

Bourdieu's social capital theory suggests that social capital is mobilized strategically by individuals to advance their position within the social field. This strategic mobilization indicates that individuals are not passive recipients of social capital but are actively engaged in leveraging their networks to achieve personal or group aims. The success of such strategies depends on the individual's ability to effectively use their social capital, which is intrinsically linked to their motivations and goals. Everyday interaction helps society actors to accumulate social capital, which goes to explain how Bourdieu relates social capital to size of one's network and the volume of past accumulated social capital commanded by the agent (Bourdieu 1986:249).

Though one may be able to gain such benefits from one's networks, it is differentially distributed based on one's potential for accumulating social profit and controlling of the capital. This elaborates how Bourdieu views social capital as a sphere of formal and informal exchanges which empower individuals in a group to differently pursue other forms of capital (Bourdieu 1986).

These forms of capital are economic capital, which is material and financial in nature and cultural capital, which incorporates norms, skills, and symbolic goods (Wacquant 2007).

In Bourdieu's view, the notion of differential distribution of potential resources is caused by the clustering of individuals' positions in the social network which has an effect on how individuals' access and utilize social capital in the social network. These clustered positions of individuals in the network and the interactions contribute to the relative distributions of resources and how these resources can be initiated. The positions of individuals in the social network hence places them at an unequal advantaged position when they are fighting for scarce resources in the networks. According to Bourdieu, economics alone cannot explain these phenomena of how dominant classes in the social networks retain their positions and how they are advantaged over others in the society.

Pierre Bourdieu theorizes that social capital comprises the resources emanating from social structures (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:119). He explains that social structures are replete with hierarchical positions occupied by individuals, highlighting the intrinsic link between social capital and the stratification within society. Bourdieu's discourse extends notably to the realm of cultural capital, which he conceptualizes as the means by which individuals enhance their position within the social hierarchy through the deployment of their cultural knowledge. This perspective is elaborately presented in his seminal work, "Distinction" (1984), where he examines the interplay between cultural artifacts, knowledge, and the foundational economics underpinning social class relations.

Bourdieu's theory of social capital, defined as the resources derived from social structures, offers a lens to understand the disparities in resource access among politicians competing within the same political party. Such disparities, according to Bourdieu, stem from the varying positions these individuals hold within the party's hierarchy. The social network, characterized by a clustering of hierarchical positions, effectively becomes a legalized mechanism for the distribution of rewards and the interpretation of the network's structural dynamics (Bourdieu 1984, 1989).

Social capital—resources derived from networks of relationships—is used strategically by the elite to reinforce social boundaries, thus ensuring that those from less privileged backgrounds remain marginalized from networks that confer economic and cultural advantages. (Bourdieu 1986). This has led to Bourdieu's perspective on social capital to be critiqued for its seemingly

pessimistic view, predominantly focusing on the middle and upper classes while ostensibly excluding the lower class from its scope. This oversight has led to criticisms of Bourdieu's model as being discriminative, suggesting that it inadequately addresses the experiences and challenges of the lower socioeconomic strata.

In the case of the political space, those that are up the social structure with their positions being organically related to the positions in the social network, have some authority in the social network. They tend to entrench their positions in the social network by using resources reproduced from all forms of capital. In the political space, the individuals that are up the social structure set rules, these rules then became standards for every new member to follow to be accepted in that space. These rules favour them and hence when one wants to join their circle one must try to identify to their rules. Most individuals are denied the chance to join the circles when they are not able to identify themselves by these rules. This concurs with Bourdieu's assertion (1986:248–49) that social capital functions as an instrument for perpetuating social inequality within social groups through the disparate distribution of resources among society's members. Social capital therefore reproduces social inequality in social groups. However, Bourdieu argues that this social inequality produced by social capital may serve as mechanism that can increase integration among specific social groups.

Bourdieu's conceptualization of social capital is significant in this thesis as it facilitates an understanding of the social interactions among politicians, constituents, community leaders, fellow politicians, family, and friends. This understanding is grounded, explicitly relational, and attentive to dynamic power relationships over time. Additionally, his perspective on social capital enables an exploration of politicians' agency for entering the political sphere in Northern and Greater Accra region and how these agencies shape their paths within the field, as evidenced by the paths of their networks of relationships.

Bourdieu was particularly interested in how society is reproduced and how the dominant classes retain their position in the societal structure. In the political field, the class that hold powerful positions have a close circle that is difficult to penetrate by others, these networks hence have a form of integration within their circle. Bourdieu perspective on social capital, enables the study to examine and understand the social interaction and lived experiences among politicians and electorates in the Ghanaian context in terms of social-cultural settings, relationships, trust, and shared values. Bourdieu's perceptive enables an examination of the attentive dynamic power

relationships over time between the politicians and how they access and utilize social capital in the field of politics. Bourdieu definition of social capital further enables the study to critically examine power relationships in social groups and how resources are distributed in any given context. These contexts can be politician's social environment, work environment, and religious space.

Bourdieu (1986) highlights the structural dimensions of social capital, concentrating on the networks and resources intertwined within social ties. In his conceptualization, Bourdieu differentiates between material and symbolic forms of social capital. Material social capital refers to concrete assets acquired through social networks, encompassing ties with family, friends, colleagues, and other affiliations. While Pierre Bourdieu did not explicitly delineate between material and symbolic social capital as some other theorists have, his work intersects with concepts aligning with both aspects. Material social capital often obtained from associations with individuals who possess resources or from involvement in social institutions offering material advantages. For example, being part of a professional network may grant access to job referrals or business opportunities, constituting material social capital. These tangible resources involve various assets like economic capital, physical possessions, and other tangible goods. Material social capital can provide individuals with advantages in various aspects of life, such as employment, education, health care, and economic advancement.

Conversely, symbolic social capital, emphasized by Bourdieu, consists of intangible resources like trust, information exchange, and psychological support. It shapes individuals' perceptions and their ability to access opportunities, resources, and support networks. For instance, individuals with high symbolic social capital may be renowned for honesty and integrity, fostering trust and cooperation within their social circles. Symbolic social capital can be accrued through association with influential figures or groups, possession of specialized knowledge or skills, or by exhibiting cultural markers such as education, language proficiency, or refined taste. These intangible resources facilitate cooperation, collaboration, and mutual support among individuals, contributing to societal social cohesion.

Both forms of social capital are intertwined and exert significant influence on social interactions, opportunities, and outcomes within communities. In summary, Bourdieu's concept helps the study to analyse the network ties, how to access them, imposing normative behaviours of those in the network, how they create a shared interpretative framework for those in that space

and inequality related to social capital (Bourdieu 1986). Drawing from Bourdieu's concept of social capital and incorporating insights from gender and politics literature, this study examines its influence on the political participation of female politicians.

Robert Putnam is well-known as the public face of the social capital theory. According to Putnam, social capital is "*the features of social organizations such as networks, norms and trust that facilitate action and cooperation for mutual benefit*" (Putnam 1993:35). Putnam argues that social capital is a quality that can ensure interpersonal cooperation for mutual benefit. Putnam agrees with Coleman on the issue of trust and how it helps members of the social network to benefit in the network. Putnam views trust as the main ingredient that characterizes the political culture of a modern society. He further explains how engagement in voluntary networks enables individuals to produce trust and norms which causes them to bond with each other to produce resources for their mutual benefits. Putnam emphasizes trust as the aggregate indicator of social capital in social networks.

When members of a given societal framework elect to establish a financial consortium where they collectively pool predetermined sums on a regular basis to facilitate the initiation of entrepreneurial endeavours by individual members, a framework of trust and normative behaviour emerges among the participants. This framework mandates that each member dutifully contribute their agreed-upon share at the appointed intervals. Additionally, it stipulates that each member is entitled to receive financial support from the collective in turn, thus engendering a reciprocal exchange mechanism within the group. This arrangement underscores the intrinsic interplay between trust and reciprocity within the realm of civic engagement, wherein mutual reliance and cooperative behaviour are paramount.

Putnam linked associational participation, economic growth, and democratic ethos at large population levels. He emphasized on social capital concept serving as a test of democratic strength of the American society. Putnam placed emphasis on social relations in his concept of social capital. Social capital is a collective trait and "*a universal lubricant of social relations*" (Putnam 2000:19). However, it is noted that social capital relations are engendered by informalities which facilitate modern economies (Tzanakis 2013:7). In these social relations, Putnam highlighted two ways in which social capital operates: bonding and bridging (Putnam 2000). Bonding social capital is between close relations that have personal and direct contact with each other. While bridging social capital is a wider relation, involving more people who are likely not to have personal or

direct contact with each other. Bridging social capital expands networks while the bonding social capital aids in increasing cohesion in the social network. These operating two ways of social capital can be seen operating in a political field. Which explains why Putnam views social capital as a determinant of political involvement. Putnam argues that strong ties (bonding) are developed between groups that have individuals with like minds (Putnam 2000:22).

Aside Putnam (2000), Coleman also sided with the assertion of like-minded individuals developing strong ties. Coleman (1988) is a scholar that was interested in relationships and social networks. Coleman (1988: S98), also defined social capital as *“not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors . . . within the structure”*. He agreed with (Bourdieu 1984, 1986, 1989) and Granovetter (1985) , that relations in a social network that produces social capital involves some aspect of social structure. Social capital hence involves social structure which facilitates certain actions and relations of the individuals within the structure. Though Coleman (1988:S95), aligns with Bourdieu’s definition that social action in a social network is conditioned by social structure, he argues that social structure precludes the individual who can use embedded social capital as a resource and hence social capital adds to the integration of social structure. He emphasized how utility-maximizing quest of the individual’s self-interest determines the goals of the individual in the social network. He combined the insights of sociology and economic theory by linking social capital with economics. Coleman accomplished this by highlighting how social capital can be used to make sense of the overly rational and individualist models of traditional economics.

Coleman views social capital as productive tool, which gives individuals belonging to a social network access to resources they could not have if they did not belong to the social network. This goes to show how social capital is very instrumental in accessing resources that are likely unattainable when one does not belong to a particular network. Social capital therefore eases an individual’s activity in a structured context (Coleman 1990a) and helps to provide access to social connections that can help achieve goals. Coleman’s interest in examining whether conceptual tools, efficient at the individual levels, can be utilized at the macro level led him to make some revelations. His findings revealed that social capital can be used at both levels without requiring a separate theory of social structure to explain the social structure working at the micro and macro level.

Coleman (1988:S95–120) just like Putnam also emphasized the importance of trust to activate social capital in a social network. Trust produced in a social network among individuals is part of the social structure. Trust that is built in these social networks by individuals enables individuals have an assurance that favour done in the social network can be reciprocated by others in the social network. Coleman (1988), accentuated on closure of groups enabling individual members to build trust, through the creation of shared values and norms. Having shared norms and values embedded in the group increases the levels of social capital in the group. He argues that in an open group the tendency for norms and values to be violated is very high compared to a closed group with like-minded members.

Coleman (1988:S107), unlike Bourdieu argues that there is no provision for inequality as a result of the differences in power arising from the differences in social capital. Bourdieu views social capital as a scarce resource that tends to create class that is perpetuated by structured inequality and contributes to the reproduction of the existing social order (Bourdieu 1986:248). Which is different from Coleman's definition of social capital, he argues that social capital has a nature that is similar to a public good (Coleman 1988:S95–120). He contends that though social capital has the attributes of a public good, networks are becoming more open-ended and wider hence resulting less in-group social groups. This has resulted in social capital becoming more of a shared public good. Coleman's social capital approach highlights a broader view of the concept. Coleman (1990) viewed social capital not as a tool held and accessible to powerful elites as argued by Bourdieu, he explored the values for all kinds of individuals including the less powerful and marginalized. Coleman views social capital as essentially residing in social structure in relationship which sets it apart from both financial and human capital. (Coleman 1988) emphasizes how social structure predates the agent who can use embedded social capital as a resource.

According to Coleman social capital is a resource that is not individually owned but a publicly owned resource that is embedded in social relationships (Coleman 1988:S98). In the field of politics for instance, when one has a neighbour that can go on house-to-house campaign for the candidate to influence others to vote for the candidate. The candidate has some access to a form of social capital in that neighbourhood. This form of social capital this candidate has may not be same for another candidate whose neighbours do not trust her vision enough and do not have shared norms with the candidate to support her campaign. And this type of social capital is not one that can be sold, because it is based on trust, shared norms, and values which develop from the weaving-

together of people in communities. This shows how social capital according to (Coleman 1988:S104-5), is very useful to everyday interaction, information and norms which can facilitate certain benefits but can also serve as a hinderance to others. If a candidate is privileged to share norms and interact with certain people, he or she is advantaged to win the votes of these people however if the candidate does not share values and interact with these people due to certain restrictions then the candidate is at the disadvantaged side.

Coleman singled out how social capital influences the creation of human capital on the next generation (Coleman 1988:S109-110). Social capital is more of supporting to keep the legacy not by just stating facts but also actions which builds relationships the next generation can hold on to. So, in this sense we can argue that social capital is more about helping and supporting others, not necessarily wanting to gain anything in return for your help. They do these helping actions because they believe it is the right thing to do. In the case of politics: voters, or party faithful's support politicians because they believe they share same values and norms. They also believe if they vote for them, it is the right thing to do. Some electorates though do not have direct contact with the politicians, do all in their might to solicit for votes for them because they believe they are the right candidate to bring development to their constituencies and communities. These development, electorates or party faithful's may not be alive to witness but they do it for their next generations.

Coleman's notion of social capital has broadened the debate on the concept by expanding it from just understanding it from networks and its memberships to associating it with community and the public good. He highlighted how social capital is different for every individual, what one may value as social capital in one context may be useless to the other (Coleman 1988:S98). He emphasized how social capital can benefit the less privileged, which was exempted in Bourdieu's theory of social capital. Coleman theorization of social capital delves more into community social capital boundaries instead of only examining the individual social capital boundaries. His theorization enables social capital to be measured at the organizational level, community level and country level. This theorization of social capital can be used to study political parties, social groups, and parliament, because they encompass relationships and the members of political parties and how they work together to win political power. Therefore, this thesis can argue that they are like-minded individuals, who know each other, have similar visions and goals that have come together in a closed group to win political power. This type of enclosed circle is what Coleman

describes as network closure. This network closure is what Coleman accentuated as important in accumulating more social capital.

Fukuyama (1995, 2001) argues that the social capital of an organization or a closed group does not only benefit the individuals in the group but also influences the productivity of the organization or group as a whole not only the individual. In the case of political parties, when more individual members of a particular party win their parliamentary seats during the national elections, the party becomes the majority in parliament. This enables the party to enforce their manifesto in parliament, especially in the Ghanaian system of parliamentary rule where majority is always in charge of the country's affairs. We can therefore agree with Fukuyama's (1995) assertion that social capital does not only benefit the individual members of parliament but the party or group as a whole.

According to Burt (2002:202), "*social capital is a metaphor about advantage*". Individuals gain differently, some receive higher benefits from their efforts than others. Burt attributes the inequality in returns as a result of some individuals been more abled, intelligent, more skilled, and articulate than others (Burt 2002:202). According to Burt, though there are inequalities associated with the distribution of returns of social capital in societies, he argues that people who are better connected gain higher returns. These individuals are people who are able to hold a connection between individuals who have loose ties spanning "structural holes" in the network (Burt 1992). Thus, in the absence of any relationship between two groups, a structural hole exists (Burt 2002). He argues that when one is well connected and holds certain positions in the social structure of these groups that is an asset which he terms as social capital. Those individuals are people he calls "brokers"; they are at a higher advantage of accessing information, resources, and other favours in the network system. Bourdieu's critique of network analysis in the study of social capital contrasts with Burt's approach. While Burt's work emphasizes the importance of networks in building social capital, Bourdieu differentiates between the structure of a social field and the enduring networks through which this structure is expressed (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:113–14).

Social capital is therefore defined as a function of social structure that produces advantage to members (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Burt 2000; Burt et al. 1992; Coleman 1990a; Putnam 1993). And in this system of advantage some people are privileged to benefit more than others. Hence, we can conclude that despite the different definitions of social capital, there is an agreement that social capital is a kind of capital that creates a competitive advantage for some individuals or

groups to pursue their goals. In the field of politics, where the field is dominated by males and they are up the social structure ladder, it produces an added advantage to their candidature and hence leaves the women at a competitive disadvantage.

Some scholars also did not pay much attention to the inequality generated by social capital since they viewed it as a public good (Burt 1992; Coleman 1988; Putnam 2001). They were mostly interested in the shared norms and how to develop group action. In general, we can agree that social capital is generated from social relationships which are guided by social obligations and norms that come with this relationship in the social networks. Hence members of these social groups are able to gain resources due to the fact that they are members of the group and follow the social obligations of the group. These also allows members to exchange resources with the faith that there would be reciprocity, which in the long run reinforces the importance of trust in relationships.

In summary, it is revealed that there is no single definition of social capital, though some capitalized on the work of others to build their social capital theories. One thing that is eminent in all these theories of social capital is the multi-dimensional way social capital can be used across disciplines and how network ties and its access play an integral role in accessing social capital.

2.1.1. Theoretical foundations: Bridging Bourdieu and Nahapiet & Ghoshal's contributions to social capital

Bourdieu and other scholars of social capital theory recognize that capitals can take on symbolic or material forms. However, there are differing perspectives on how social networks contribute to the acquisition of these capitals. Bourdieu (1986) emphasizes the structural constraints and inequalities within social systems, suggesting that social capital is unevenly distributed, favouring certain groups or individuals due to their social connections and positions. In contrast, Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) argue that the structural attributes of social networks play a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of social capital in achieving collective goals. Networks characterized by high density, centrality, and connectivity are more likely to facilitate collaboration, knowledge sharing, and mutual support, ultimately enhancing organizational performance and growth. Thus, comprehending and harnessing the structural dimensions of social capital is vital for maximizing its benefits within both organizations and communities.

With this knowledge in hand, I chose to extend my analysis by combining Bourdieu's (1986) and Nahapiet and Ghoshal's (1998) framework. Nahapiet and Ghoshal's (1998) framework which fundamentally provides insights into how the organizational structures and dynamics within political space can either support or impede the accumulation and utilization of social capital by female politicians. This enables me to emphasize the relational aspect of social capital, in Nahapiet and Ghoshal's (1998) framework, which is rooted in Bourdieu's theory (1980). Understanding these dynamics can offer valuable insights into the challenges faced by female politicians within the political party space and can inform strategies for promoting gender equality and inclusive governance.

Nahapiet and Ghoshal present a comprehensive viewpoint that integrates the intricacies of social interactions. Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998:243), defines social capital as *“the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or group.”* They categorized social capital across three dimensions: structural, relational, and cognitive, which largely stems from Bourdieu's social capital theory which is the core of the study. These dimensions correspond to different aspects of social relationships and networks. By delineating these three dimensions, Nahapiet and Ghoshal enhance our understanding of how social capital functions within organizations and groups. They emphasize the importance of not only accessing diverse networks but also fostering strong, trust-based relationships and promoting shared understanding among members. This perspective resonates with Bourdieu's focus on the social embeddedness of capital, but expands upon it by highlighting the significance of trust, collaboration, and shared knowledge in leveraging social connections for political party success. Thus, Nahapiet and Ghoshal's conceptualization augments Bourdieu's framework by offering insights into the relational dynamics that underlie the formation and utilization of social capital within the political sphere, thereby complementing Bourdieu's perspective in the analysis of this thesis.

The relational dimension of social capital has to do with the presence or absence of trust and reciprocity (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998:251; Nalwanga 2021:46–48) that create social norms and encourage emotional connection. Trust is very important in social networks relations. Good working relationships are characterized by long-term working relationships coupled with norms of conformity. In an organization, leaders build interpersonal relations through interactions and getting familiar with workers' skills and abilities (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998:254–56). For

instance, when there is trust in a network, it ensures an easy flow of information from the individuals to the actors in the network and vice versa which can ensure career success at an organization. In the case of the political party, if the politicians have trust in each other and support each other's vision to win a position, they freely give out information which can be used against their opponents which would enable a successful win. However, if there is a lack of relational social capital, gaining social capital becomes difficult and might lead to failure.

The relational dimension of social capital pays attention to how social capital is better developed through ties and connections. This dimension of social capital focus on the relational aspect and networking side of social capital which is more related to understanding groups that are privileged or disadvantaged from benefiting from social capital which is not different from Bourdieu works which dived more into the inequalities generated from the social capital access (Bourdieu 1980). This thesis views this aspect of social capital as resources and networks created through distinct relationships that have their relational history. Mostly linked to reciprocal exchange and trust built over time which is rooted in relationship (Nooteboom 2007). According to Bourdieu (1986:249–50), this dimension of social capital rises from “*lasting*” and “*durable*” relationship hence requires a lot of investment and reciprocity. Hence those who are not involved or cannot invest the same energy tend out to lose on the social capital therefore creating power differentials among social networks (Bourdieu 1986).

The relational dimension hence suggests that though an individual may have inherited social capital from family that enabled an easy access into the party space, how one is able to build trust in that space enables one to also have maximum social capital in that space. These social ties promote information and resource sharing and support achievement of individuals' goals in the network. The benefit from the ties also involves mentoring which includes offering advice and counsel to the members of the network, but this can only happen when there is a connection and trust between the mentor and the mentee.

According to Granovetter (1985:504), attainment of an individual goals in a network is based on the personal relation within the social structures of the network. Which goes to show that though there are many people in a network, individual goal attainment is linked to quality of their relationships with the actors and emotional attachments. In this regard this study argues that family social capital may impact politicians' career, but it would depend on what sort of relationship they have with the powerful actors of the network and political party.

The cognitive dimension focuses more on shared norms, common goals, and mutual support, which can shape attitudes and the extent to which politicians feel empowered to participate in political activities (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998:251). It helps to convey a sense of identity among a group and its goals. According to Tsai and Ghoshal (1998), a social organization's members that have shared vision and common goals are likely to share resources and information and this can facilitate relational social capital development. Coleman (1990) and Nalwanga (2021:48–50) argues that a lack of shared understanding of a working field, guidelines, organization goals, and unclear individual roles can lead to organizational chaos at the workplace and there would be no collective responsibility. This is because there would be lack of coordination of activities which in the long run affect organizations' visions. It is also noted that an organization that has members that have shared language and narratives can discuss and share ideas that would help each other. Cognitive social capital helps to create commitment among members of an organization or groups since the individual and the group have a common goal they are working to attain. This shared organizational culture and goals tends to encourage the flow of information and resources.

The third dimension of social capital that is structural relates to the tangible part of social capital. These are aspects that are readily observed by the existence of network ties (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998:251). This aspect also indicates the presence of a network that have access to people and resources, which indicates it emphasizes on the size of the network and centrality of the networks (Burt 1992). This dimension of social capital helps actors in the network to mobilize social capital (Bourdieu 1986). Through interactions with actors of the network, individuals become comfortable with each other and tend to freely share information. Development of this dimension of social capital depends on network ties. We can argue that the structural aspect of social capital relates to the properties of social systems and of the networks of relations as a whole (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998:251). In the case of this study, structural aspects of social capital may be defined as the network of people who a politician knows that he or she can call upon for benefits such as information, financial help, and assistance. In this case I enquire if the family social capital of these politicians allows them access larger social networks.

In the case of the structural aspect of social capital, it is heavily dependent on the number of ties one has, who the person has the ties with, and how strong the ties are to gain the assistance one needs (Nalwanga 2021:43–46). This shows that one important thing aside belonging to a social

network that can generate social capital, is the strength or weakness of ties and the willingness to share resources with fellow members (Burt 1992; Granovetter 1973). Coleman (1988) demonstrated the relevance of bonding social capital (strong ties) in developing social capital because the people in the networks are closely connected and probably have shared goals and norms.

2.2. Building social capital

Social capital is a broadly contested concept and has been used in different ways (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Burt 1992; Coleman 1990b; Putnam 1993). However, when it comes to how to build social capital in the political space much has not been done on that topic by scholars (Fukuyama 1995; Putnam 1993, 1995a; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Literature makes it clear that social capital resides in social networks (Lin 2017; Timberlake 2005), but members must act or conform to norms to mobilize resources. Since social network, size and relation in one's network can help to build social capital. This has led to an investigation of how relational network structures in the political field influence the development of social capital.

Social capital stems from regular social interactions, deep-rooted within the interconnections among individuals (Coleman 1988). Consequently, it transcends personal knowledge or skills, although fostering individual expertise often results from its presence within relational networks (ibid). I start with the assumption that social capital emerges from relational networks, and the absence of such connections equates to a lack of social capital production. Building social capital involves using different ways to make relationships, trust, and cooperation stronger in communities and groups. Studies have shown some important ways to do this. Of particular significance is the potency of social capital in disseminating information, fostering solidarity, mobilizing resources, achieving collective objectives, and shaping communal behaviours (Zusmelia et al. 2022). This underscores the pivotal role of social interactions and shared experiences in building social capital.

Building social capital involves creating places where people can share what they know and what they have experienced. This can make people feel confident of themselves and better about who they are (Fitts and McClure 2015). By fostering a sense of community and mutual support, individuals can cultivate social capital that contributes to their overall well-being and empowerment. Also, local groups play a big role in building social capital. When people in these

groups interact and work together, it helps build up social capital (Nguyen 2020). This shows how working together at the community level is important for building social capital.

But to understand how social capital is developed in the political space, it requires acknowledging the importance of establishing environments that promote social interactions and collaboration among individuals with diverse backgrounds and common concerns. Neiman and Schroedel (2019) argue that such interconnected spaces, where people unite to address shared issues, can generate social capital that facilitates the formulation of politically effective responses to local, national, and global injustices. This highlights the role of inclusive environments in fostering social connections and trust, essential components of social capital. Research has revealed that social capital can be cultivated in the political space through face-to-face interactions, community involvement, engagement in local governance, and participation in grassroots movements (Hooghe and Stolle 2003). Being present at community gatherings, volunteering for political causes, joining local clubs, and engaging in civic duties all play a role in building social capital within political settings.

Furthermore, traditional methods of political engagement, such as attending town hall meetings, discussing politics with neighbours, collaborating on community initiatives, and forming alliances with like-minded individuals, are vital for developing social capital in politics (Sirianni 2009). These social interactions assist politicians in building trust, establishing networks, and reinforcing social connections (both within specific groups and across diverse communities), all of which are crucial for political participation and collective endeavours.

Research indicates that social connections within specific groups and across diverse communities can be classified as either bonding or bridging social capital (Claridge 2018; Putnam 2000; Woolcock 2001). Bonding social capital is a type of social capital that describes the connections, relationships, and networks found within families, friends, and neighbours who share similar identities, backgrounds, or interests (Kopren and Westlund 2021:4; Malecki 2012:1026). This form of social capital is characterized by close interpersonal bonds, mutual trust, and a sense of belonging among its members. Within bonding social capital, individuals primarily interact with others who are similar to themselves, reinforcing existing norms, values, and identities (Claridge 2018; Putnam 2000). These networks offer emotional support, solidarity, and collaboration, nurturing a sense of community and social unity. Bonding social capital establishes inward-looking networks that reinforce homogeneity and promote group cohesion (Putnam 2000:22–23),

facilitating collective goal pursuit through cooperation among individuals who share common values and objectives, predominantly within close-knit family, friendship, and neighbourly circles.

While bonding social capital effectively enhances relationships within a particular group, it may inadvertently exclude or marginalize outsiders, potentially exacerbating social fragmentation by reinforcing divisions among different societal groups (Claridge 2018; Putnam 2000). This occurs because bonding social capital tends to strengthen exclusive identities and homogeneous groups, leading to notable positive social effects (*ibid*). However, these exclusive identities can also foster in-group deviant behaviour (Bowd 2008:96). Closed groups are cautious about establishing external connections critical for bridging divided groups (Putnam 2000).

In contrast, bridging social capital establishes connections among members of disparate or distant groups, collaborating to advance a cause or access external resources, distant acquaintances, colleagues, and associates (Woolcock 2001:195–96). Unlike bonding social capital, which relies on shared social identity, common origins, or status positions within society to determine membership (Szreter 2002:576), bridging social capital draws participants from a diverse range of backgrounds. It excels in linking to external resources and facilitating information dissemination (Putnam 2000:22). In bridging social capital, individuals engage with others who may not share their characteristics, promoting diversity, tolerance, and mutual understanding (Putnam 2000). These connections enable the exchange of information, resources, and ideas across different social groups, fostering collaboration, cooperation, and social cohesion (*ibid*). Participants are driven to interact by a shared goal or activity that they value and benefit from collectively, which they cannot achieve alone and which is not accessible through their existing bonded networks (Szreter 2002:576).

Bridging social capital serves a crucial role in contemporary societies by bridging connections across various social divides, including community, socio-economic status, education, religion, and political affiliation (Kopren and Westlund 2021:12–13). These networks are outward-looking and involve individuals from diverse backgrounds and cleavages (Putnam 2000:22). Bridging social capital plays a crucial role in fostering trust, facilitating social mobility, and promoting inclusive societies. By bridging these divides and forging connections among diverse groups, bridging social capital contributes to social cohesion, collective problem-solving, and the resilience of communities. However, building bridging social capital can pose challenges for women, as it tends to reinforce the inclusion of those in positions of power (Bruegel 2005:11).

Furthermore, those in power may be unwilling to include women in these networks or share power with them, thus making it challenging for women to access bridging social capital in the political space.

The generation of bridging social capital relies on individuals' ability to transcend their social and political identities and connect with those who differ from them (Putnam 2000:411). Bridging social capital can generate broader identities and reciprocity, while bonding social capital reinforces narrower identities. Opportunities to build bridging social capital arise whenever individuals interact with strangers. Memberships in associations that reflect the broader society are particularly conducive to fostering bridging social capital (Claridge 2018). Basically, bonding and bridging social capital are integral aspects of social capital development, each contributing significantly to the resilience, cohesion, and effectiveness of communities and societies.

In general, developing social capital involves actively taking part, building trust, and forming networks that encourage cooperation and joint efforts. Through meaningful interactions, resource sharing, and fostering supportive environments, individuals and communities can reinforce their social capital, resulting in improved social unity, resilience, and overall well-being. In the context of this study, examining how social capital influence political participation, I found it beneficial to analyse it through cognitive, structural, and relational dimensions. Nahapiet and Ghoshal's (1998) framework delves into social capital, examining its structural, relational, and cognitive aspects. This enables a detailed analysis of how politicians access and utilize relationships, trust, norms, information, and shared codes within their networks to bolster their effectiveness and influence (Acquaah 2007). Applying this framework to female politicians in Ghana facilitates an understanding of how their social connections and interactions influence their ability to participate in politics.

The subsequent section delves into the dynamics of social capital in the workplace, exploring structural and gender perspectives.

2.3. Dynamic of social capital in the workplace, structural and gender perspectives

This section explores the intricate nature of social capital within the workplace, investigating both its structural configurations and the nuanced effects of gender dynamics. It begins by elucidating the core concepts of vertical and horizontal social capital, emphasizing their pivotal roles in shaping workplace dynamics and organizational ethos. The discussion then shifts

to examine the gendered aspects of social capital, spotlighting how unequal access impacts career progression and social integration in professional settings. By blending theoretical frameworks with empirical evidence, this section offers a comprehensive understanding of social capital's operation in workplaces, addressing challenges posed by existing social hierarchies and implications for gender parity. Through this lens, the chapter seeks to untangle the intricate interplay among social capital, workplace structure, and gender dynamics, providing a nuanced perspective on social dynamics in professional contexts.

Scholars have identified various forms of social capital in the workplace, acknowledging their distinctions while recognizing interconnections between them (Lin 1999b). The studies consistently underscore a central theme: workplace social capital centres on the inherent social structures of the organization. These structures shape and facilitate individuals' actions within the organizational framework (ibid). Crucially, workplace social capital relies on interpersonal relationships, rooted in trust within the workplace context (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998).

Within workplace settings, social capital manifests in two primary forms: vertical and horizontal. Vertical social capital, also known as linking social capital, delineates the connections between employees and their supervisors. It encompasses interactions spanning hierarchical levels, facilitating formal power dynamics (Framke et al. 2019:889). Conversely, horizontal social capital, which encompasses both bonding and bridging social capital, refers to relationships among peers within the same hierarchical stratum. This form of social capital rests on trust, reciprocity, social networks, friendships, and cooperative behaviours among colleagues.

Trust and reciprocity play pivotal roles in social capital development within the workplace, extending beyond mere interpersonal bonds to drive work efficiency and positive organizational outcomes. However, cultivating trust among peers or across hierarchical levels is a nuanced process, not easily achieved (Wojciechowska 2021:2). Both vertical and horizontal social capital are intertwined with broader societal functions like political participation and trust, highlighting their significance not only in workplace dynamics but also in broader social and political space.

Trust is built upon a history of interactions and mutual exchanges (Pretty and Ward 2001:211). Consequently, in the early stages of relationships, trust remains fragile as individuals engage in the process of acquainting themselves, evaluating the benefits, costs, and potential drawbacks (ibid). However, any uncertainties dissipate once both parties begin to derive mutual

benefits from the relationship. Workplace social capital, in its broader context, relies on social virtues rather than individual attributes (Pretty and Ward 2001). Individuals maintain their social connections in the workplace through norms established either by themselves or by society and their immediate environment. In today's dynamic professional environment, workplace social capital significantly shapes career paths, organizational culture, and overall success.

Research indicates that gender profoundly shapes how individuals accumulate social capital in the workplace (Woehler et al. 2021). Understanding social capital in the workplace aids in comprehending gendered power dynamics, as it is utilized to delineate spheres of influence (Bruegel 2005; Lin 1999b). This disparity in access to social capital presents fewer opportunities for women to leverage it for career advancement (Bruegel 2005:9–10). Gender profoundly influences how individuals accumulate and leverage social capital within organizational contexts (Eagly and Carli 2007b:144–45). Research consistently demonstrates that the processes by which men and women activate, seek resources from, and effectively mobilize their networks affect the returns on men's and women's network characteristics (Brass 1985; Woehler et al. 2021).

The gendered dynamics of social capital shape how women navigate and persevere amidst various forms of male exclusion, striving to establish networks within their socio-cultural contexts to counteract this exclusion (Bruegel 2005:10). Women often gravitate towards social networks that offer potential avenues to challenge male dominance in their respective societies. However, these networks are often constrained and unable to effectively challenge such dominance, lacking access to diverse hierarchies and groups due to their limited economic capital.

While my primary focus is on social capital, it is crucial to acknowledge its interconnection with other social factors, primarily economic ones. Access to economic resources serves as a pivotal mechanism of social differentiation and inequality. Many scholars use the term "economic capital" to denote economic resources, typically labour income (Dasgupta 2000). Ownership of economic capital significantly influences access to influential social networks. Consequently, scholars argue that the accumulation of social capital by one group may not necessarily benefit another group (Pena-López, Rungo, and Sánchez-Santos 2021:678, 689). Due to the limited access to financial capital, women often find themselves excluded from higher echelons of social networks where such access is prevalent (ibid).

In earlier times, African women primarily focused on networking to pool resources and safeguard their husbands' well-being and savings (Tripp 1992). Consequently, any resources they acquired were merged with those of their spouses to manage household responsibilities. This practice resulted in women granting their husbands greater access to financial capital (Lambrecht 2016:194–97). With increased financial resources, men were able to establish social networks with peers of similar status, thereby excluding women from such networks (Kumra and Vinnicombe 2010:526–27). This inequality in access to social capital is evident, favouring male-dominated groups due to their financial prowess and resources, which often pose a high cost for women to join (Bruegel 2005:10; Håkansson 2021). Consequently, these hierarchical structures and resource disparities often push women to the sidelines, prompting them to form networks to support themselves, especially in environments where male exclusion is prevalent, such as in politics and formal workplaces (Rudman and Glick 2021:37–43; Tripp 1992).

The intricate interplay between economic power and gendered nature of social capital is a key factor in comprehending gender segmentation across different aspect of the society. Gender segmentation denotes the division of labour markets, industries, or occupations along gender lines, where specific roles are predominantly occupied by individuals of one gender. This division frequently stems from societal norms, stereotypes, and institutional barriers that hinder access to particular professions or positions based on gender.

Social networks have long been recognized as catalysts for gender segmentation since the 20th century (Bott 1971). Research by Ibarra (1992:423–25), further supports this notion, establishing a connection between segregated networks and the perpetuation of distinct gender roles. These findings underscore the social construction of gender identities through networks, shaped by norms, values, trust, and shared preferences. Consequently, gendered forms of social capital emerge, characterized by bonds that are challenging to overcome due to the entrenched division of labour in social-cultural settings (Kumra and Vinnicombe 2010).

The resulting job divisions often serve as barriers for women, limiting their access to certain spaces and networks. This exclusion from influential networks, which possess significant trust, financial resources, and reciprocal benefits, further disadvantages women. Despite financial constraints hindering women's entry into powerful networks, grassroots initiatives aimed at fostering equality have emerged, reinforcing women's confidence.

Women started to gain confidence, from consciously raising groups into networking within various nodes of power especially in the political parties, education, media trade unions, and professional associations (Bruegel 2005:12). However, fear of isolation and resistance from dominant male groups have hindered women from assuming leadership positions (Acker 1992:421–23). Consequently, women often find themselves relegated to subordinate roles, undermining the original intent behind the formation of these networks. The resistance faced by women in male-dominated networks highlights the dual nature of social capital (Bruegel 2005:12). While social capital can foster inclusion and collaboration, it also perpetuates exclusionary practices, particularly when powerful male groups seek to maintain their dominance and fraternity (Bruegel 2005:10; Timberlake 2005:41). These dual dynamic underscores the complex interplay between social networks, gender dynamics, and power structures within society.

Women often face challenges in gaining acceptance within their professional spheres, leading to difficulties in establishing social capital (Lutter 2015:332; Timberlake 2005:41). Despite assumptions of progress towards gender neutrality in the workplace, it remains deeply gendered and structured to accommodate male preferences (Timberlake 2005:41). These dynamic places men predominantly in authority, allowing them to set standards based on masculine norms, thereby making it arduous for women to gain acceptance (Glapka and Braid 2018:53). Consequently, women often rely on the social capital of influential sponsors within organizations (Kumra and Vinnicombe 2010:525).

Social capital research by Burt (1998) suggests that women frequently leverage the social capital of others and may advance more swiftly with hierarchical networks. However, access to such networks remains a challenge, particularly in male-dominated fields like politics, where social capital plays a crucial role in attaining leadership positions (ibid).

2.4. Women political participation and social capital access in political party space

Putnam (1993) defines social capital as features of social organization such as trust, networks, support, and cooperation that works together for mutual benefits of those in that social organization. In the context of this study, social capital manifests through the collaborative efforts of political party officials, families, electorates, and politicians, aimed at securing electoral victories while ensuring reciprocal support for those instrumental in achieving success. Within the political field, the party space serves as one of the primary domains for political endeavours.

According to Glapka and Braid (2018:49), this space significantly influences the dynamics of gender negotiation and reproduction.

Social capital, as explained by Putnam (1993) functions as a public good, affording advantages to all members of the network over time. Thus, within a political party, it is assumed that membership implies shared trust, network ties, and a common language, facilitating collective action toward attaining political power, thereby granting entitlement to the party's social capital (Coleman 1988). However, this assertion is refuted by Duverger (1954), who contends that political parties operate as social entities characterized by hierarchical social structures, wherein specific individuals wield authority over others within the organization. Consequently, notwithstanding the party's overarching objectives, a select cadre of leaders exerts control over access to power within the political party space (Katz and Mair 1995). These influential figures cultivate trust amongst themselves, often limiting entry to outsiders. The trust cultivated within these social networks fosters reciprocity and perpetuates existing social hierarchies within the party, potentially engendering class distinctions (Bourdieu 1986:248).

Moreover, these power dynamics may lead to decision-making biased towards personal interests rather than the party's collective goals, potentially resulting in cronyism (Lin 2017). Consequently, individuals outside these influential networks often find themselves marginalized, unable to access the resources and social capital inherent within the party's social structure, thereby perpetuating exclusionary practices (Coleman 1988).

Chapter conclusion

This chapter thoroughly explores various scholars' perspectives on social capital, clarifying the rationale for employing Bourdieu's social capital theory with Nahapiet and Ghoshal's model in analysing this thesis. It focuses on their concepts of agency and diverse dimensions of social capital, such as relational, cognitive, and structural aspects. Additionally, the chapter delves into the developmental processes of social capital and also examines its dynamics within the workplace, while also considering structural and gender perspectives. Furthermore, it sheds light on women's political participation and their access to social capital within the political party sphere. This theoretical review establishes a robust foundation for analysing the complexities of social capital access and utilization by female politicians, and its subsequent impacts on their political participation in the Northern and Greater Accra region of Ghana. This chapter not only enriches our theoretical understanding but also sets the stage for insightful empirical analyses into

the intricate interplay between social capital, gender and political participation in Ghana's political space. And how it can explain the gender inequality in the Ghanaian political space.

Chapter three

Research methodology

3.0. Introduction

This chapter offers a thorough exploration of the methodologies utilized in gathering and analysing data for this thesis. Employing a qualitative comparative case study approach, it utilized diverse data sources to enrich the breadth and depth of data collection, investigating how access to and development of social capital can impact politicians' political participation in the Northern and Greater Accra regions of Ghana. Additionally, the chapter discusses aspects of the research methodology which includes, researcher's positionality, sampling strategy, techniques for data gathering and analysis, and adherence to ethical guidelines.

3.1. Rational for methodology

The study used a qualitative approach to investigate the access and development of social capital among politicians in the Northern and Greater Accra regions of Ghana. It specifically aimed to examine how this access and development influence political participation and how it could relate to the intensification of the gender gap in politics within these regions. The qualitative design was selected to gain insights into how social capital is developed among politicians. Such methods are particularly well-suited to understanding the ways in which norms—shaped by culture, religion, and societal influences—connect to social capital in the political sphere. Furthermore, qualitative techniques facilitated the identification of political career challenges that politicians encounter in relation to access and utilization of social capital. The focus on individuals' perceptions and experiences was crucial for the study, guiding the development of research questions that referred to the daily interactions of politicians with their social networks in a political context (Creswell and Poth 2016). Additionally, these methods enabled a more nuanced exploration of the complex relationships between politicians' experiences and their perceptions within the political landscape.

Previous research on social capital and political participation has largely relied on quantitative methods (Carreras and Bowler 2019; Masoudi et al. 2021). These studies often yield results indicating a positive correlation between networking activities and political outcomes. These studies show that when people have stronger social connections and trust in their communities, they are more likely to participate in traditional political activities. However, they

frequently overlook the intervening processes of accessing, developing, and utilizing the social capital that arises from these networking activities in diverse social environments. The present study sought to delve deeper into these overlooked aspects, exploring how social capital is accessed and utilized within various socio-cultural contexts by politicians, and how it impacts their political participation.

Thus, the study opts for a qualitative methodological approach to explore the daily lives of politicians from their own perspectives more profoundly. This method helps in examining evolving social processes, as highlighted by Van Mannen (1979). Patton (1987:7) emphasizes that qualitative methods are particularly effective in interpreting the intricacies of social processes and their interactions, offering a unique perspective on the context of the study.

When addressing the gender gap in politics through the stories of women politicians and their experiences of various barriers, qualitative research becomes particularly useful. Quantitative research offers breadth and the ability to generalize findings through statistical rigor, while qualitative research provides depth and detail. Quantitative research categorizes data primarily through numerical inputs that fit into predefined ‘bins’, qualitative research deals with narrative data that necessitates thematic analysis, coding, and interpretation. This process is inherently iterative and extensive, involving continual refinement and nuanced understanding of data categories to ensure their accuracy in representing the collected data. Researchers must remain adaptable and responsive to emerging themes, systematically adjusting their categorization frameworks as new insights develop. This approach foregrounds the human elements—emotions and values, experiences, and personal narratives—that numeric data might not fully encompass. In the context of studying the gender gap in politics, qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews, ethnographic studies, and case studies enable researchers to explore the nuanced realities faced by women in the political space. These methods help uncover the subtle dynamics of discrimination, societal expectations, and personal challenges that women politicians encounter, which often are not visible through quantitative measures alone. This detailed exploration is vital for comprehensively understanding the complex phenomena of gender disparities in politics. By documenting and analysing the lived experiences of women politicians, qualitative research reveals the barriers that contribute to the gender gap. It also provides insights into the strategies women employ to navigate and overcome these obstacles, offering a richer picture of the issues at hand.

Moreover, the qualitative methodological approach was instrumental in gathering and categorizing data to reveal the types of strategies women employ to access and utilize social capital in their political careers. This involved a detailed examination of personal narratives, observational data, and contextual analysis, which collectively contributed to a richer, more contextual understanding of the social mechanisms at play. It also ensured the identification of emerging themes and provide detailed descriptions (Cassell and Symon 1994). Through this process, the research was able to identify specific strategies that are employed by women in politics, highlighting how these strategies are adapted to the unique challenges and opportunities presented by their social and political environments. This comprehensive analysis sheds light on the complex interplay of social capital, gender, and politics, providing key insights into the barriers and enablers of women's success in political spheres.

Though this is a qualitative study, I made references to census data showing the demographic and social structure of Ghana and the regions under study. In my study, I employ a combination of various data sources to enhance the validity and reliability of the explanations grounded in external evidence. The qualitative data collected offers insights into the experiences of politicians. However, these experiences are deeply embedded within their social and cultural contexts. To analyse this context comprehensively, I utilize a dual approach: examining both objective data from sources such as census records, election results, party manifesto, gender training manual and subjective perceptions of external conditions as reported by the respondents through their personal experiences. For instance, when investigating the educational gender gap and its subsequent impact on the gender gap in access to social capital and political careers, as well as how the gender gap in the labour market shapes the gender gap in economic resources and political careers, this dual approach proves particularly effective. ‘Objective’ data, such as literacy rate and enrolment and graduation rates by gender, and levels of educational attainment, provide a foundational understanding of the external environment. These data might show disparities in educational achievements between men and women, which can influence their access to social capital. Qualitative data, such as interviews with female politicians, might reveal how these educational disparities impact their social networks and opportunities. For example, women with lower access to political training and education may find it more challenging to build influential networks that are crucial for political careers. These personal accounts highlight how educational disadvantages translate into reduced social capital and limited political opportunities.

Similarly, labour market access statistics, including employment rates, wage disparities, and career progression by gender, offer objective insights into economic disparities. These data provide a clear picture of how women are underrepresented in higher-paying, influential positions compared to men. Qualitative data, such as personal narratives from women in the workforce, reveal the lived experiences behind these statistics. Women may describe barriers such as gender discrimination, work-life balance challenges, and limited career advancement opportunities in the field of politics. They also face additional burdens of domestic work and the roles of wife and mother, which act as significant barriers to social capital access and utilization. These stories illustrate how labour market disadvantages lead to fewer economic resources for women, which in turn affects their ability to build social capital in the field and engage in political activities.

By integrating these two perspectives, my study aims to provide a nuanced and robust explanation of the interplay between social and cultural context and the respondents' experience in shaping gender gaps and their cumulative effects on political careers and access to social capital in politics. This approach allows for a comprehensive analysis of how structural factors, such as educational and labour market inequalities, and personal perceptions and experiences shape the broader landscape of gender disparities in political participation. This enriches the understanding and provides a solid framework from which the qualitative analysis can delve into the nuanced personal experiences and perceptions of politicians.

3.2. Comparative case study approach

To explore the influence of social capital on the political participation of female politicians in the Northern and Greater Accra regions, the thesis utilized a comparative case study approach.³¹ This approach allows for a thorough examination and comparison of social capital access, utilization, and their effects on political participation among politicians in these regions, and identifying recurring patterns, challenges, and successes. Comparative case study approach is particularly effective in uncovering how different factors interact in similar yet different contexts, providing valuable insights into the complexities of social and political dynamics within a country. Such a comparative case study not only enhances the depth of understanding specific regional characteristics but also contributes to a more nuanced interpretation of how these characteristics

³¹ Case study research encompasses both single and multiple case studies. However, in certain fields like political science, there is a concerted effort to differentiate sharply between these two approaches, often using terms like the comparative case method to highlight the unique nature of multiple-case studies (see Agranoff and Radin, 1991; George 1979; Lijphart 1975).

might be representative or exceptional in a broader national or even continental context. Furthermore, this approach facilitates data triangulation, enhancing our understanding of each case and improving the accuracy of the results (Creswell and Poth 2018:98–100).

Each region will serve as a separate case study due to the unique nature of their modernization and variations in cultural patterns. This decision stems from the necessity to compare the social capital of politicians across these regions, as I believe that regional structures may influence politicians' social capital access and utilization. To address this, the study utilizes a comparative case study approach, enabling examination of both the Northern and Greater Accra regions to assess how access to social capital impacts politicians' political participation. Moreover, it facilitates examination of similarities and differences within these regions, enhancing comprehension of their respective interests and dynamics.

The respondents were selected from the Northern and Greater Accra regions of Ghana to facilitate a comparative analysis of two distinct socio-cultural and developmental contexts. The Northern region, characterized by higher poverty rates, lower urbanization, and predominant Islamic influence, contrasts sharply with the more urbanized, economically developed, and predominantly Christian Greater Accra region. This selection allows for an in-depth exploration of how differing socio-cultural values and levels of modernization impact access to social capital and political participation, particularly regarding gender inequalities. The study compares how these two different contexts may shape the gender gap in politics, access and the utilization of social capital by politicians.

In conclusion, selecting these two regions provides a rich basis for understanding how different socio-cultural and developmental contexts influence politicians' accumulation and use of social capital in the political space. The contrasting environments of these regions offer a broad spectrum of insights into the role of social capital in varying developmental scenarios, thereby enriching the study's examination of social capital's impact on political careers in a developing country context.

3.3. Research participants and recruitment

This research employed snowball and purposive sampling techniques for participant selection, due to the specific target population - male and female politicians from Northern and Greater Accra regions of Ghana. These sampling techniques are most effective when the

population sample is small and difficult to reach (Atkinson and Flint 2001; Chambliss and Schutt 2016:105; Noy 2008:330). These methods were chosen given the nature of the participants - politicians, who are often difficult to contact and, even when contact is established, may be reluctant to grant interviews or agree to be recorded. It also ensured that information was obtained from relevant experts, thereby guaranteeing in-depth and valuable data. The participants, given their strong connections to their socio-cultural environments and political fields, contributed significantly to the richness of the data.

Gaining access to the participants was a considerable challenge due to various factors. Many were pressed for time and hence frequently postponed interviews. Some were hesitant to partake in the interview, fearing that I could be an opposition party member seeking potentially damaging information. Certain party executives, particularly from the Northern region, even demanded payment before the interview, under the assumption that I was affiliated with an international organization. Overall, reaching the participants proved to be a tough endeavour.

I benefited from a previous contact in parliament - a research assistant to a male member of parliament. She facilitated an initial introduction to the first male parliamentarian. Also, during the preliminary interviews stage, I was able to arrange an interview with my member of parliament through the assistance of local community campaigners (commonly known as 'area boys'). I provided a comprehensive explanation of the study's target population and research details to my member of parliament who also recommended other politicians who fit the scope of the study (Clark et al. 2021). Recognizing the potential biases inherent in snowball sampling, including the risk of collecting similar responses from a homogenous group, I sought to diversify the study's participant pool. I kept these recommendations to a maximum of two people to avoid repetitive responses. Furthermore, a well-known individual active in the political sphere of the Northern region helped in reaching politicians from that area, as gaining their participation was challenging.

The process of accessing participants was not just about initiating conversation; it also involved obtaining their consent for recorded interviews. Given the difficulty of fully documenting information through notetaking during interviews, audio recording was important. However, several participants, especially current parliamentarians, party officials, or those planning to run for office again, were uncomfortable with being audio recorded due to concerns about potential misuse of the recordings. In these situations, I negotiated with them that I would pause the

recording whenever they wished not to have specific information on tape. Despite this, 7 participants declined recording entirely, hence I relied on taking notes during their interviews.

This study involves a total of 30 politicians or political actors from the Northern and Greater Accra regions of Ghana, with 16 females and 14 males.

Table 3.1: Research participants

Region	Gender	Current MP	Former MP	Failed Primary Candidates	Party Executives
Northern Region	Female	0	1	3	4
Northern Region	Male	2	2	1	2
Greater Accra	Female	2	2	2	2
Greater Accra	Male	2	2	1	2
Total participants	30	6	7	7	10

Both male and female participants were required to meet specific criteria. They must have a command of the local language and culture, have a parent or spouse originating from the region, and have resided in the region for educational purposes or have worked there for a significant period during their upbringing. Importantly, they must have previously run for election in these areas. These criteria ensured that the participants had an in-depth understanding of the people, the socio-cultural norms, and the political landscape of the region. A critical requirement was that the participants must be politicians who had competed for elected positions, as opposed to political figures appointed to their positions. The study differentiated between the two types of political participation - contested elections and appointments. The focus was on understanding social capital in the context of political participation among politicians who had earned their positions through elections.

The sample size of the study was determined based on a few factors. First, there was a scarcity of female participants in the field, making access to them a challenge. Second, the selected

sample size was sufficient to address the research questions, as evidenced by the fact that no new codes emerged from the final two interviews. As Partington (2002) suggests, when no new codes are identified, it indicates that the data collection has reached a point of theoretical saturation.

3.4. Data collection

This study employed a qualitative methodology for data collection, Patton (2002) states that qualitative data can be drawn from various sources such as in-depth interviews, biographical interviews, observations, and document analysis. Thus, this study primarily utilized semi-structured interviews as the main data source, with non-participant observations serving as an auxiliary technique. The observations were conducted during interviews and several formal and informal meetings with female politicians. In addition to these primary data collection methods, document analysis of general election results and party primary results, constitution and 2020 manifestos of the NDC and NPP, gender training manual for the parliament of Ghana was also utilized. This secondary data was sourced from the Electoral Commission of Ghana and the political parties' documents for the period 1992 to 2020.

Using multiple methods of data collection allowed for an in-depth understanding of individuals' actions within their specific social contexts. According to (Patton 2002:248), this multi-pronged approach contributes significantly to the trustworthiness of the data, as studies exclusively relying on a single data collection method might be susceptible to errors. The rationale for employing multiple data sources was to achieve data triangulation. Methodological triangulation was employed to enhance the accuracy of the data collected in this thesis. This technique involves using more than one data collection method and was selected from among several triangulation strategies available in research methodology. Other forms of triangulation include investigator triangulation, which involves multiple researchers; data triangulation, which utilizes various data sources; and theoretical triangulation, which incorporates different disciplinary theories to interpret findings (Denzin 1978).

The choice of methodological triangulation was driven by its capability to reduce the inherent imperfections found in individual data sets, thus aligning well with the research objectives and questions. Especially data from interviews require triangulation because they present the subjective views of respondents. This is particularly problematic when we aim to describe behaviours and social facts that extend beyond the subjective representations of the respondents, such as the extent of social capital, network of contacts, and the resources associated with these

contacts. According to Creswell and Poth (2018:100), employing multiple methods such as interviews, documents, and observations is particularly effective for achieving robust data triangulation.

3.4.1. Semi-structured interviews

The use of semi-structured interviews in this research allowed me to achieve a more profound understanding of the experiences and intricate stories that these politicians have lived within their political careers, as suggested by Patton (2002). It also allowed me to maintain a core set of questions while also allowing for conversational flexibility. This flexibility facilitated in-depth exploration of particular subjects and the ability to pursue intriguing points brought up by politicians. Such flexibility proved vital in examining the complexities of their experiences, decision-making processes, and the contextual factors surrounding their political participation. Given the multifaceted and intricate nature of politicians' experiences, nuanced exploration was necessary for a comprehensive understanding. As Schwandt (2007:163) emphasizes that individual perspectives gathered from interviews provides a rich, revealing, comprehensive, and explicit narrative, that adds significant depth to study.

The study's data collection occurred across three phases. The initial phase, running from December 2021 to February 2022, comprised 8 interviews. This was followed by the second phase, spanning from November 2022 to April 2023, during which an additional 22 interviews took place. Additionally, 4 follow-up interviews were conducted via Skype, WhatsApp, and Clubhouse in May 2023 as part of the third phase of data collection, coinciding with the analysis stage. Altogether, I conducted 30 interviews over a 10-month period. During this period, I carried out interviews with current parliamentarians, aspirants who were unsuccessful at the party level, former members of parliament, and party executives from both the Northern and Greater Accra regions of Ghana. This timing was considered optimal as it fell outside the intense campaign season, allowing participants to freely contribute without interruption from official duties or campaign obligations. The initial contact with participants was made through institutional emails and phone calls, following a referral from the first two interviewees.

A number of interviews took place in the Northern region of Ghana, as several participants had returned there for the festive season to be with their constituents. Other interviews were carried out in the national capital, Greater Accra region, at venues such as the parliamentary complex, party offices, and participants' home office. All interviews, irrespective of their location, were

conducted in quiet environments conducive for undistracted conversation, which included constituency office spaces, homes, and the parliamentary complex. In some cases, follow-up interviews were required and, due to the participants' unavailability in Ghana. Those participants were unable to participate in a follow up face-to-face interview due to being out of the country, hence 4 follow-up interviews were carried out via Skype, WhatsApp and Clubhouse. Despite the circumstances, these interviews were conducted in comfortable settings, either at the participants' homes or office spaces, as indicated by the background visuals in the video.

The first data collection stage presented a challenge with participants who disallowed recording but permitted notetaking. I found it difficult to maintain a balance between interviewing, note-taking, and identifying potential areas for further probing. During the first stage interviews, I experienced anxiety while conversing with political figures. This feeling significantly subsided during the second data collection phase as I grew more accustomed to the research environment. However, this problem was mitigated during the second data collection phase as my interaction skills improved. This allowed for the extraction of high-quality information from the participants and facilitated additional probing for those from the first data phase. I also developed shorthand writing skills to capture more details during non-recorded sessions. My consistent presence around the parliamentary complex and the political party areas made me a recognized face, encouraging participants to share their political journeys more openly. I can confidently say that I successfully cultivated social capital in this space.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted using a pre-prepared interview guide that I developed. The interview guide was designed based on key themes associated with the study's research questions and further developed from responses from first data collected from Ghana in 2021. The first stage interviews served as a useful exercise in understanding the interview process and honing my interviewing skills. This prepared me for the second data collection phase. The guide was crafted to gather information on each participant's political career path, their social experiences, activities within their social networks, and the challenges and successes they have encountered. The emphasis on the social experiences of politicians, as highlighted in the literature, underscores the importance of social capital in their political participation success and outcomes.

Given the specific objectives of the research, a comprehensive review of each participant's entire life history was deemed unnecessary. Therefore, the interview questions were organized into themes, streamlining our exploration of the intended areas of inquiry. The initial sections probed

their career trajectory, political agency, familial background, and education. Once these areas were addressed, I moved on to questions about their social relationships and networks, their social life, their political success strategies, and their sources of assistance. The latter part of the interview concentrated on their life beyond party and parliamentary domains, focusing on their community involvement, their constituency activities, the influence of social and gender norms, their social environment, and how they engage with and access their social networks.

The interview guide was designed with a degree of flexibility, enabling me to delve deeper into responses when it is necessary (Merriam 1998:74). This flexibility allowed participants to elaborate on their narratives when needed, thereby helping collect meaningful data. For example, I posed open-ended questions such as “can you tell me about how your career in politics began?” This type of question afforded participants the latitude to respond based on their individual perspectives, potentially giving rise to new themes.

During the first and second data collection stage, as it was my first formal meeting with some of the participants, I prioritized building rapport at the start of each interview. This was aimed at creating an environment in which the participants felt at ease expressing their thoughts and discussing both their professional and personal lives with someone they had just met. In an effort to cultivate this rapport and trust, I clearly communicated the aims of the study at the start of every interview and assured participants of their anonymity. I also provided each individual with a detailed consent form to read, ensuring they fully understood the purpose and scope of the research.

The consent form provided comprehensive details, including the purpose of the research, potential risks, data processing methods, data storage location, and estimated interview duration. However, the participants did not sign it but gave verbal consent. I informed the participants about the intention to audio record the interviews, except for any questions likely to reveal their identities or content they found uncomfortable. Consequently, on several occasions, the recording was paused, and notes were taken, resuming only when the participants gave their approval. I highlighted the necessity of recording the interviews to ensure accurate transcription while ensuring the use of pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality. Out of the 30 participants, 3 females and 4 males chose not to consent to audio recording. However, they willingly agreed to the taking of research notes and observation during the interview session.

During the interview sections, I let participants lead the conversation, as their narratives were likely to answer many of the preconceived questions. However, when certain questions were not addressed in their narratives, I redirected them to these topics and asked for additional clarification on emerging themes. This method empowered the participants to openly discuss their political careers and relationships, possibly shedding light on the visible and hidden roles of social capital in the political field, including its formation, accessibility, and use. This participant-led approach was time-intensive, so at times, I had to steer participants back to the initial questions to keep the interview on track.

In summary, although the interview guide helped structure the interview, it also provided ample room for participants to discuss other issues they deemed significant. This ensured a level of consistency in the data gathered, which not only enabled the answering of the research questions but also supported the uniformity of responses for data analysis. On average, interviews lasted between 50 to 80 minutes. For the 23 participants who agreed, interviews were recorded with a voice recorder. Simultaneously, I jotted down notes during the recording to delve deeper and comprehend the raised issues without interrupting the interview's natural progression. However, for the 7 participants who declined to be recorded, detailed notes were taken to ensure the completeness of the data.

In the Northern and Greater Accra regions, participants were more comfortable conducting interviews in English, supplemented with elements of the local dialect (some jargons and quotes). To facilitate effective communication, I enlisted the help of an assistant fluent in the native dialect and familiar with the Northern environment. I provided comprehensive training to the assistant who assisted me in the Northern region. Initially, I familiarized him with the research project by explaining its objectives, questions, and methodology. Subsequently, I thoroughly educated him on the data collection tools and procedures, including a review of the interview protocols. Additionally, I made sure the assistant reviewed the of ethical guidelines and protocols of the study so that he is aware of how important it is safeguarding the participants rights and privacy.

Throughout the data collection phase in the North, I remained present, not only observing the interactions and providing guidance, but also interjecting with further probing questions when necessary. I also ensured that for participants who declined recording, I took detailed notes while the assistant briefly jotted down phrases and jargons that were not in English. Meanwhile, in the

Greater Accra region, since I understand most of the major local dialects, there was no need to hire the services of an interpreter or assistant.

3.4.2. Non-participant observations

Non-participant observations were incorporated as an additional data collection method alongside the semi-structured interviews. While the main data was obtained from interviews, I also took on the role of an observer rather than a participant (Creswell and Poth 2018:168). This method allowed me to directly observe how participants built and maintained social relationships, as well as their interaction patterns both in their workplaces and broader social environments. My role during these sessions was solely observational, without any direct involvement in the proceedings. Also, I carefully observed participants' behaviours during the interviews, closely listening to their responses to the posed questions, and diligently taking field notes as suggested by Bryman (2012:432). Shortly after each interview, I compiled the field notes, summarizing the key points from the interview and blending in my own reflections and interpretations.

To avoid "going native", I deliberately limited my involvement during the observation process, so as not to unintentionally align with any research participant (Creswell and Poth 2018:57). Since some participants did not authorize audio recording of the interviews, I dedicated substantial thought to effectively using the data collection tools at my disposal, so as not to miss any valuable information. I made it a point to arrive at the interview venue two hours early to observe the setting and participant interactions. I also extended the observational period post-interview to capture additional details. There were instances where my fieldwork and field study roles overlapped, particularly during situations where participants did not consent to audio recording. This was due to the inherent similarities between observational and interview activities (Merriam 1998:94). In these circumstances, I made it a point to record observational notes after the interviews, given that note-taking was also a part of the interview process. Throughout the interviews, I also kept a mental record of observations, ensuring that none of the significant details from these sessions were overlooked. This approach allowed me to maximize the information collected during each interview.

In addition to the observational work during the interview sessions, I also carried out observational studies over a span of three months (December 2021 and November 2022 to December 2022). I dedicated a month to observe activities within the parliamentary complex, a space where most parliamentarians operate from. Being already scheduled for interview sessions

at the parliamentary complex, I took advantage of these appointments to arrive early, providing me ample time to study their interactions with colleagues and visitors in their work setting. Hence prior to meeting with these high-profile participants, I took proactive steps to ensure that I am well-prepared to avoid asking irrelevant questions or feeling intimidated in their presence. This includes me spending considerable time at the parliamentary complex, to observe and familiarize myself with the activities there. These observations were accurately noted for reference before formal interviews.

The interviews at the parliamentary complex were primarily scheduled for the afternoon, prompting my early arrival at 8 a.m. to observe the interactions of the female politicians in my study upon their arrival. Through keen observation of their body language, I separated their dynamics with colleagues and any underlying tensions. Additionally, I noted their lunch companions, offering insights into their personal connections. On days when I was not scheduled for an interview, I was able to be in the space thanks to my friend who works there as a research assistant. In this setting I was asked not to audio or video record any observation.

The scope of the observation extended beyond the parliamentary complex, reaching their home offices across various districts and regions. This was enabled by the festive season during which some politicians preferred hosting the interviews at their home offices. I visited the home offices of female politicians in their districts. In these settings, I observed which members of the community typically visited during interview times, assessed the accessibility of these politicians, and observed their interactions with constituents. These observations were usually conducted in the afternoon from 4pm, as I noticed that constituents were more available after their workday. With this I informed the participants about these observations but I was asked not to audio or visually record any observation.

The festive season also allowed me to attend annual social events organized by the political parties, where I observed the politicians' interactions with party members. At year-end parties hosted by political parties, I witnessed interactions among colleagues and constituents, and at non-exclusive parties, I observed attendee demographics and interactions. Participants whom I had interviewed extended invitations for me to join their annual party celebration, as I expressed interest in observing its proceedings. In this setting also I was asked not to audio or video record any observation.

Additionally, I visited regional and district party offices to observe how executives interacted among themselves and with party members. The festive season further presented a unique opportunity to observe how some politicians engaged with their constituents in different settings such as mosques, churches, and other community events. Some, despite being Muslims, participated in Christian celebrations such as Christmas in churches. I observed their reception, interactions, comfort level, and companionship during these events. Even though I abstained from participating in any group activities, I worked towards building an insider's identity to observe the politicians more closely, adhering to Dwyer and Buckle (2009) recommendations.

I also observed their engagement within the community, observing their participation in various community events, charitable activities, and grassroots organizing initiatives. This sparked my interest when a primary election candidate, who ultimately did not succeed in the party primaries, extended an invitation for me to accompany her in donating to market women and raising awareness about breast cancer. Finally, I attended a parliamentary session for further insights. A research assistant working with one of the male members of parliament booked this for me. I attended from the beginning to the end of the session.

Non-participant observations adhered for this thesis to a structured framework, with a strong emphasis on networking dynamics—both within their professional and personal spheres—examining their group engagement and decision-making influence. I highlighted their active participation and impact, as well as the roles they assumed, discerning between core and peripheral involvement and exploring their donation patterns. Detailed notes on verbal and non-verbal communications were recorded during these observations. Following each session, reflective notes were penned to capture my personal interpretations and potential biases, ensuring a critical and introspective data collection approach. Additionally, observational insights were documented in a dedicated diary for further analysis.

3.4.3. Document analysis

The research also a compilation of pertinent documents from the Ghana Electoral Commission and the two principal political parties, the NDC and NPP, over the period of 1992 to 2022. This approach was part of the data collection methodology, aimed at providing a thorough understanding of the relevant social issue. Given my intermittent presence in Ghana's political landscape, it was crucial to examine these documents for a detailed perspective, particularly concerning campaign and election periods.

These documents encompassed general election results from 1992 to 2020, political party primary election results, political party structures, Ghana's constitution, gender training manual for parliament of Ghana, political party constitution and 2020 political party manifestos. They offered invaluable insights on gender-related matters within the political space, pledges made, and policy development and advocacy data, all of which greatly contributed to the study. The election results for both party and general elections, along with the party manifestos, and party constitution have been uploaded online. For any data gaps identified online, I sought clarification from party executives, given that this information was archived within their respective parties.

In addition to the aforementioned resources, I acquired documents that detailed the history and founding fathers of the parties. These materials served as a substantial source of data for the study, particularly offering insights into the role of family social capital within the political sphere. These documents detailing the history and founding fathers of a political party offer valuable insights into the role of family social capital within the political sphere by revealing patterns of familial influence, inter-generational power dynamics, network formation, and access to resources and opportunities. I also closely examined the documented developmental projects initiated by these politicians and their contributions within their respective parties.

3.5. Data analysis

In this section, the approach and process of data analysis is outlined, and its significance highlighted. Data analysis is a critical component of the research methodology that transforms raw data into meaningful information and serves as the foundation for the research findings. To achieve a thorough understanding of the data, a combination of several qualitative sources was employed to categorize, interpret, and present the data in relation to the conceptual framework of social capital theory. This section provides an overview of the data analysis techniques used to interpret the data collected from interviews, non-participant observations and documents.

To achieve optimal results, it is fitting to employ qualitative data analysis techniques (Merriam 1998:160). The analysis of qualitative data involves delving into the data to extract profound meanings of behaviour, issues, experiences, phenomena, and the environment. I utilized thematic analysis to examine the data gathered from interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis. The thematic approach employed in this study combines both inductive and deductive methods for the analysis of qualitative data. Inductive analysis, also known as the bottom-up approach, begins with specific observations and progresses toward general conclusions

(Azungah 2018; Schwandt 2007). Conversely, deductive analysis starts with a broad hypothesis or theory, which is informed by the existing literature and predefined research questions. This method methodically moves toward specific conclusions that are derived from the data collected. This dual approach was specifically chosen to analyse the role of social capital in shaping the gender gap in politics. It enables a comprehensive examination of the issue, while also allowing the data itself to inform the findings.

Taking into account both theoretical perspectives and context is essential for interpreting the results of data analysis. This method helps to shed light on the intricate interaction between the data and the underlying social, cultural, and economic influences that shape the phenomenon being studied. By outlining the data analysis process and its relationship with the conceptual framework, this section establishes a basis for comprehending the research findings and their significance. This method of analysis facilitated a better understanding of the concept of social capital. Thematic analysis is critical in qualitative studies as it is an evolving process that directs and shapes the research. Thus, the study exercised thoroughness in the analysis process. While the study had a well-defined process, I was also prepared to make modifications in response to unforeseen challenges. This included strategies such as gathering additional data and posing follow-up questions as necessary.

The analysis of the primary data, which includes interviews and non-participant observations, began after several interviews had been transcribed and the observation notes systematically organized. Generally, data analysis started during my time in the field. The data transcription process started in November 2022, immediately after the first major interview during the second phase of fieldwork. I continued to transcribe after each interview because the first data collection stage highlighted that some responses required additional examination. Immediate transcription allowed for the quick clarification and in-depth probing of any emerging issues, thereby clearing any doubts or ambiguities.

Patton (2002:437) advises that participant cross-checking is the best approach when data calls for clarification, a strategy I employed with those participants accessible before leaving Ghana. Given the extensive nature of the data and the study's participants, it was optimal to aim for data saturation before leaving the field. This approach was advantageous because it was often challenging to arrange follow-up interviews with participants, although such follow-ups were necessary when new information emerged during the later stages of the analysis. The need to

recontact participants was not limited to the transcription phase but extended into the identifying themes phase whenever emergent issues and themes required further exploration or confirmation. As the majority of the analysis occurred after I return to Europe, follow-up interviews for clarification and validation were conducted using Skype, WhatsApp, and Clubhouse. Thankfully, these instances were minimal, making follow-ups relatively straightforward.

Given that the majority of interviews were conducted in English, with some participants interjecting short phrases and jargons in local Ghanaian languages like Twi, Ga, Ewe, Dagbani, and Hausa, I personally transcribed the sections in languages I comprehend (Twi, Ga, and Ewe), while recruiting a translator's (my assistant in the Northern region) help for unfamiliar phrases and jargons in Dagbani and Hausa. Ensuring precision, I also requested participants to clarify any unfamiliar words or phrases, cross-referencing these with my assistant. This thorough approach aimed to maintain verbatim transcription, recognizing that the unique Ghanaian English accent could risk data loss or misinterpretation if transcribed by a third party. Moreover, participants expressed discomfort with third-party access to recordings, underscoring the justification for my personal transcription endeavours. This not only upheld trust and confidentiality but also enabled me to deeply engage with the data, yielding fresh insights, as advocated by Patton (2002:441).

By transcribing the data directly myself, I ensured that sensitive information stays securely under my supervision, promoting accountability and confidentiality while minimizing the chance of unauthorized access. Additionally, through my personal transcription efforts, I cultivated a deeper bond with the data, enabling me to detect patterns, contradictions, or important nuances that might have otherwise escaped my notice. I also summarized the observation notes, creating a comprehensive description of each case into a diary. Furthermore, I documented my own thoughts and reactions about the case prior to the study to create reflexivity during the data collection phase. As I wrote the observation notes, I divided them into two sections: the first for what I directly observed in the field, and the second for my personal reflections, which occasionally displayed some biases. These biases were tied to my personal responses to specific observed incidents in the field.

After transcribing the raw observations and interviews and acknowledging any potential biases, I familiarised myself with the interview transcripts and observation notes with the participants. This was achieved through multiple readings of each transcript to gain a conceptual understanding of the overall themes and content of the interviews. I treated the interviews and

participant profiles as texts, attentively noting similarities and differences among cases in relation to their responses and observations.

3.5.1. Thematic analysis-data coding and emerging themes

This section provides the detailed explanation of the process of how themes emerged. After conducting an in-depth close reading of the interview transcripts and observation notes, meticulously marking and categorizing sentences and paragraphs relevant to the theoretical constructs of social capital as outlined by Bourdieu, Nahapiet, and Ghoshal, other social capital theorists particularly in relation to participants' access and use of social capital and how it influences their participation in politics.

Employing the six-stage process of thematic analysis, which involves becoming familiar with the data, coding, identifying themes, reviewing and refining them, and selecting representative quotes (Creswell and Poth 2016; Saldaña 2021), I conducted an analysis of the interview transcripts. Prior to initiating the analysis, I diligently transcribed the interviews word for word, safeguarding the anonymity of participants through the use of pseudonyms and the exclusion of any identifying details. This precautionary step guaranteed that no participant could be traced back to the data. These processes are detailed below.

Preparing and data reading: In this stage, I meticulously reviewed the 30 interview transcripts, documents and observation notes multiple times, enabling me to distinguish the conceptual foundations recurring across diverse data sources, thereby establishing a strong basis for triangulation. Employing manual coding, through this process, I systematically identified patterns, similarities, and concerns which emerged across various data types utilized in the study. Subsequently, I began pinpointing areas of interest and highlighted them with red text for clarity and differentiation from the surrounding text.

Creating codes and categorization: Drawing from insights gathered during the preliminary data examination, I formulated an initial set of codes. These codes were shaped by a blend of deductive methods, leveraging established theories and frameworks—including Bourdieu's social capital framework and Nahapiet and Ghoshal's three dimensions—while also embracing inductive approaches that enabled themes to organically arise from the data. I paid attention to how they entered politics, how they accessed social capital, challenges they faced, strategies they used, how they utilized it. This approach prevented the imposition of data into pre-

existing categories. As multiple themes began to surface, I documented new codes accordingly. Subsequently, I cross-referenced these emergent codes across various data sources to ensure their reliability and pertinence, thereby strengthening the validity of the themes derived from them.

Grouping and refinement of the themes: At this stage, the data had given me an extensive list of codes, I began a systematic process of refining and grouping them into broader, more encompassing themes. This phase involved combining overlapping codes and dividing broader ones into more specific sub-codes as necessary. The rationale behind this was the realization that certain codes conveyed similar ideas in different ways, all of which could be unified under one overarching theme. For example, I developed codes describing interactions such as discussing political aspirations during religious gatherings, meeting with religious leaders to discuss political ambitions, and participating in religious activities with individuals from different religious backgrounds. These were categorized as fostering relevant religious connections and religious influence, directly linking to our research questions on the role of religion in political networking. Throughout this process, I applied triangulation across the interviews, documents, and observations to ensure that the emerging themes were not only supported by multiple data points but also accurately reflected the complex dynamics of social capital within political contexts. This approach helped in identifying consistencies and discrepancies across data types, thus enhancing the reliability and depth of our findings

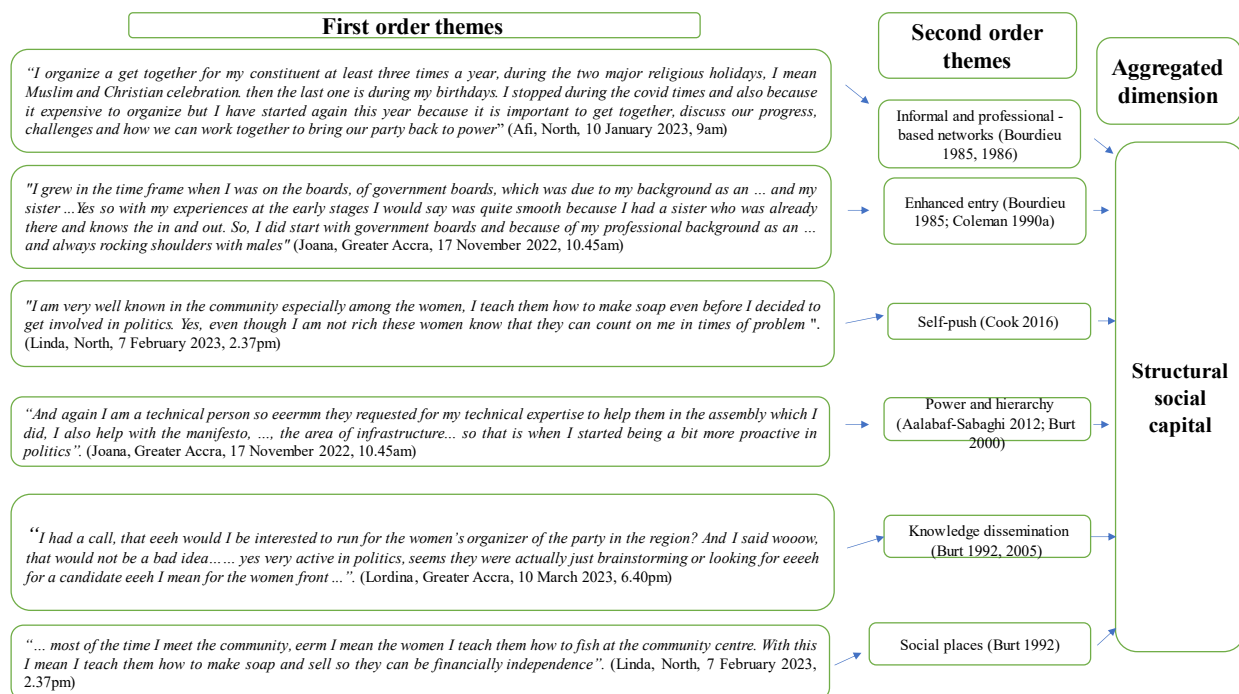
Analysis of data and integrating it with theory During this stage, I conducted a comprehensive analysis of the data within the framework of the established codes and themes. This process extended beyond surface-level interpretation, encompassing a deeper exploration of the implications of these findings in relation to the research questions (Merriam 1998:183–84). I evaluated the interplay between themes and their broader implications for enhancing our understanding of the role of social capital in female politicians' political participation.

Central to the analysis was the consistent reference to social capital theory (Bourdieu 1986; Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998). These conceptual frameworks served as invaluable tools for interpreting the data, offering a perspective through which to understand and contextualize the narratives derived from interviews, non-participant observations, and document analyses. For example, social capital theory facilitated an exploration of how networks and resources cultivated in various contexts, formal and informal, shape political influence and career advancement. Whenever patterns emerged that did not completely fit with existing theories, I revisited and, when

needed, adjusted the theoretical frameworks to incorporate new insights and ideas. This back-and-forth between theories and data ensured flexibility and responsiveness in the analysis, fostering a deeper and more holistic comprehension of the topics under study. After this stage I put together the analysis to create a clear story connecting the data and theory. This helped me see how each piece of data fits into the bigger picture of social capital theory and how it helps answer my research questions. This step was really important for making conclusions and showing how my research is useful in political science, sociology, and gender studies.

After I created thematic maps to illustrate my transition from description to analysis and then to data interpretation (fig. 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5). I used these maps for a comprehensive analysis of the qualitative data. They show the relationships between themes identified during the analysis, connecting and organizing different codes and themes hierarchically. In the thematic maps below, I visually represent how raw data, like interview quotes, are categorized into first-order themes, which are then grouped into second-order themes, and finally into broader, aggregate dimensions. Second-order themes are more abstract concepts that help categorize multiple first-order themes, providing a deeper understanding or broader perspective. The aggregate dimension is a broad construct that encapsulates the main focus of the analysis. This thematic map helps in understanding the structure and depth of the analysis.

Figure 3.1: Data analysis steps (Structural social capital)



Example in figure 3.1, for example, one of the first-order themes is *"I am very well known in the community especially among the women. I teach them how to make soap even before I decided to get involved in politics. Yes, even though I am not rich these women know that they can count on me in times of problem"* (Linda, North, 7 February 2023, 2.37pm). This theme highlights the individual's relationship with the community, her role in skill-sharing (a deliberate effort to expand her network with women in the community), and the trust and support she receive from the women.

The second-order theme for this first-order theme is "self-push" which refers to the individual's intrinsic motivation and proactive engagement in the community, reflecting personal initiative and self-driven action to access structural social capital. Structural social capital refers to social networks, identified by their size, quality, density, and connectivity patterns (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998). To access social capital, individuals must have relationships with others, as these relationships are the source of its value (Portes 1998). The second-order theme "self-push" encompasses first-order themes illustrating how self-initiatives and how politicians intentionally inform those around them about their activities significantly contribute to building networks in the political space. This supports literature that emphasizes how social networking is cultivated by individuals and used to further personal benefits (Adler and Kwon, 2002; Cook, 2016).

The aggregate dimension (structural social capital) which is an even higher level of abstraction, combining multiple second-order codes into a broad category that encapsulates related concepts. In the case of figure 3.1, "Structural social capital" refers to the networks, relationships, and social structures that facilitate cooperation and support within a community and political space. In summary the example illustrates how an individual's deliberate actions (teaching soap-making and being a reliable support) contribute to building structural social capital by fostering strong, trust-based relationships within the community. Their "self-push" or proactive engagement is a critical component in enhancing these social structures. A thematic map helped to provide clarity and helps to communicate the depth and breadth of the analysis, linking raw data to higher-level theoretical insights.

Figure 3.2: Data analysis steps (Cognitive Social Capital)

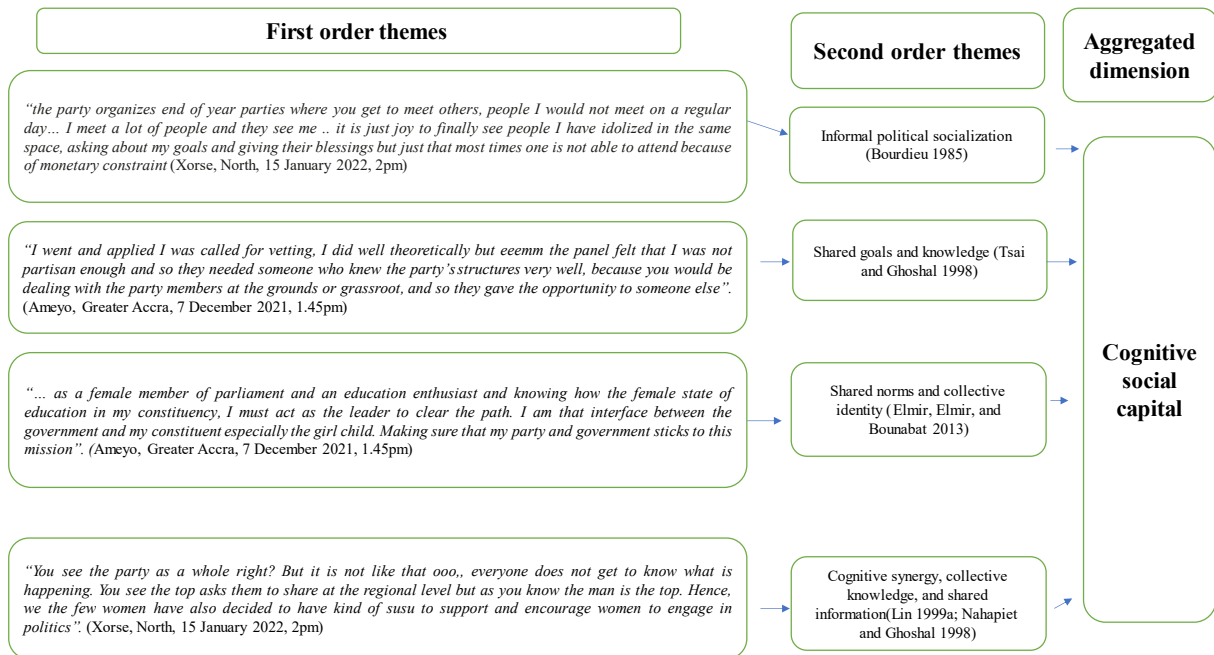


Figure 3.3: Data analysis steps (Relational Social Capital)

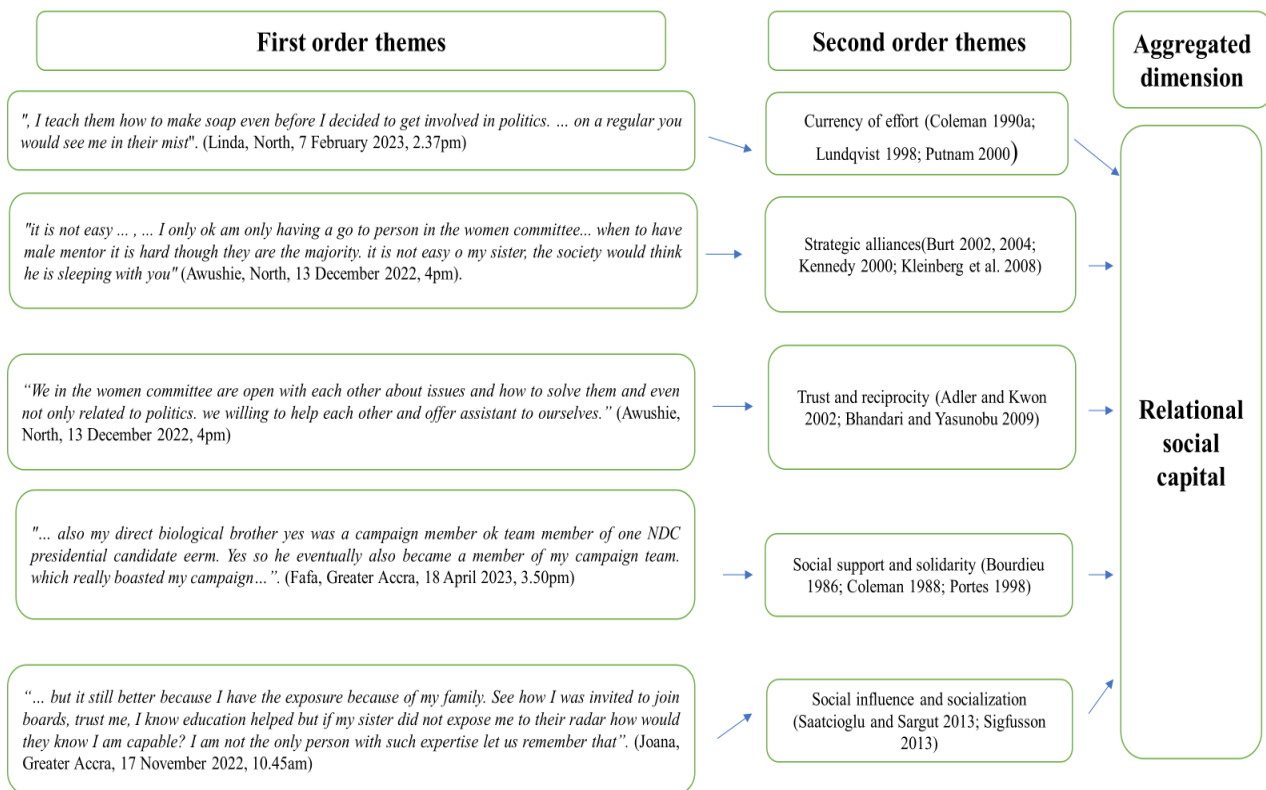


Figure 3.4: Data analysis steps (Socio-Political Contextual Dynamics)

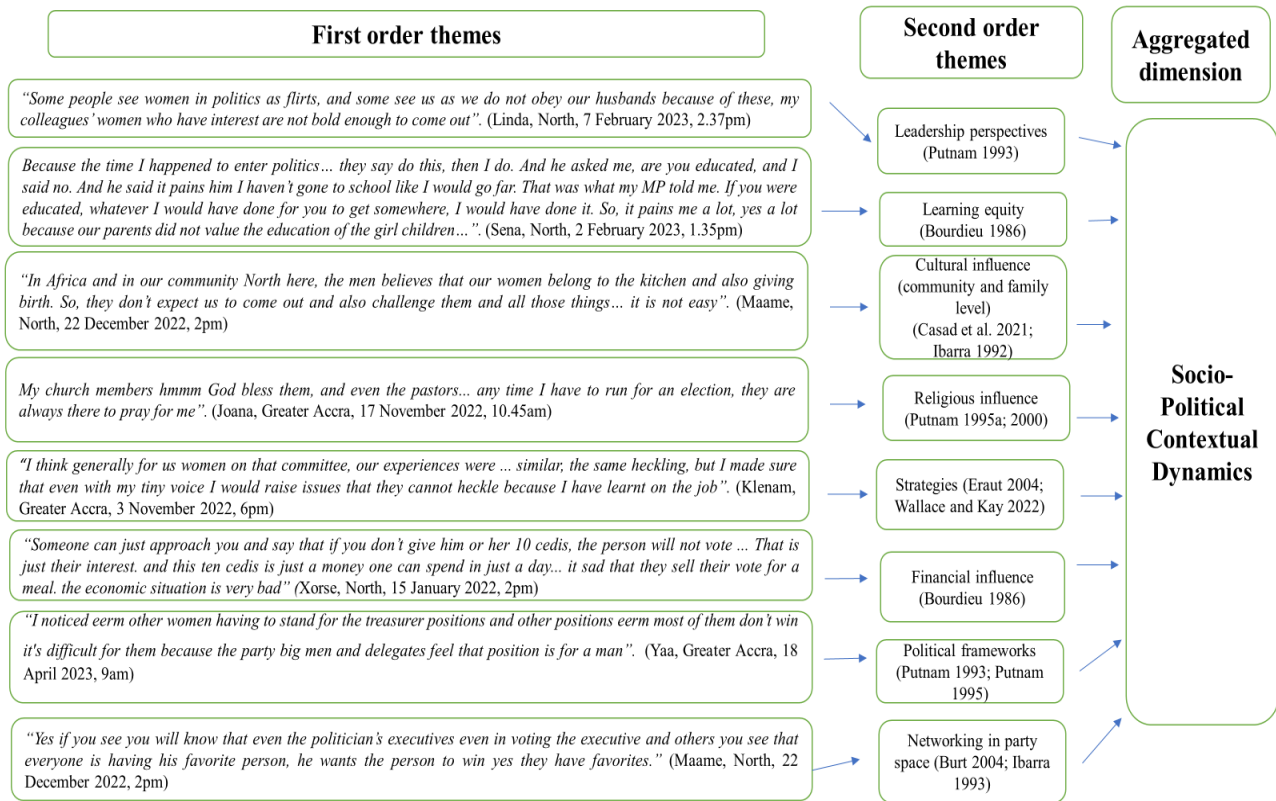
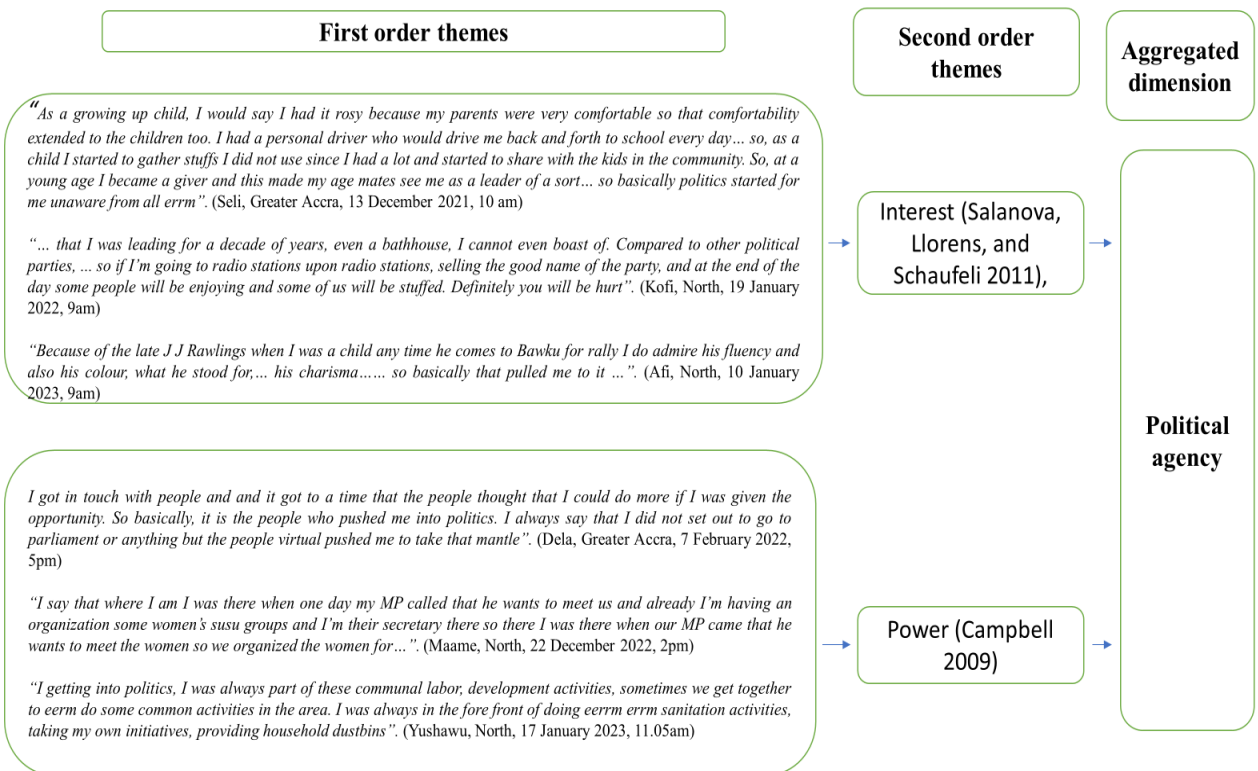


Figure 3.5: Data analysis steps (Political Agency)



Additionally, I made a list the of themes with explanations below.

Table 3.2: Data analysis: Themes with definitions

Aggregate dimensions	Themes	Meanings
Structural social capital	1. Informal and professional-based networks (Bourdieu 1985, 1986; Lin 2001b)	Accessing structural social capital through informal networks and interaction Accessing structural social capital based on their role or position in a group or community.
	2. Enhanced entry (Bourdieu 1985; Coleman 1990a)	Accessing structural social capital through the help of others
	3. Self-push (Cook 2016)	Accessing structural social capital through self-initiatives
	4. Power and hierarchy (Aalabaf-Sabaghi 2012; Burt 2000)	Power of the network they access
	5. Knowledge dissemination (Burt 1992, 2005)	Information sharing in the network
	6. Social places (Burt 1992)	Regular meeting places
Cognitive social capital	1. Informal political socialization (Bourdieu 1985; Lefebvre et al. 2016; Owen 2004)	Accessing cognitive social capital through participating in informal activities and networks
	2. Shared goals and knowledge (Cassel and Lo 1997; Lefebvre et al. 2016; Tsai and Ghoshal 1998)	Ways in which individuals use to acquaint themselves with the knowledge and goals of the field
	3. Shared norms and collective identity (Elmir, Elmir, and Bounabat 2013; Nohrstedt 2016)	Goals of the group and it influence on politicians
	4. Cognitive synergy, collective knowledge, and shared information (Lin 1999a; Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998)	Knowledge sharing in the network and decision making as a group
Relational social capital	1. Currency of effort (Coleman 1990a; Lundqvist 1998; Putnam 2000)	Accessing relational social capital by investing in networks
	2. Strategic alliances (Burt 2002, 2004; Kennedy 2000; Kleinberg et al. 2008)	Building alliance and collaboration
	3. Trust and reciprocity (Adler and Kwon 2002;	Counting on each other in the group and expecting similar help back

	Bhandari and Yasunobu 2009)	
	4. Social support and solidarity (Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1988; Portes 1998)	Practical and emotional assistance and a sense of unity.
	5. Social influence and socialization (Mu, Peng, and Love 2008; Saatcioglu and Sargut 2013)	How the groups affect the thoughts, feelings, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours of politicians
Socio-political contextual dynamics	1. Strategies (Eraut 2004; Wallace and Kay 2022)	Approaches in which individuals overcome challenges in accessing social capital in their regions
	2. Cultural influence (Community and family level) (Gidengil and O'Neill 2010; Ibarra 1992; Kiamba 2009; Lancee 2010; Leonard 2004; Nwabunkeonye 2014; Putnam 1993, 2000)	Ways in which shared beliefs, values, norms, traditions, and practices within a family unit, social context and community shape access to social capital
	3. Religious influence (Campbell, Green, and Layman 2010; Lim and Putnam 2010; Putnam 1995a, 2000)	Impact that religious beliefs, practices, institutions, and values have on politicians and their access to social capital
	4. Financial challenges (Bourdieu 1986; Epp 2018)	The power, control, or impact that financial resources have on access to social capital
	5. Learning equality (Adams and Agomor 2015; Bourdieu 1986)	The impact that equitable access to education and learning opportunities has on politicians' social capital access
	6. Political frameworks(Putnam 1993, 1995a)	The ways in which systems of governance, political ideologies, institutions, and policies shape social capital access
	7. Leadership perspectives and public image (Putnam 1993)	The ways in which perceptions, representations, and portrayals of leaders shape social capital access
	8. Networking in party space (Burt 2004; Ibarra 1993)	Establishing and nurturing mutually beneficial relationships with people in the political party space
Political agency	1. Interest (Salanova, Llorens, and Schaufeli 2011)	What motivate individuals to construct political agencies
	2. Power (Campbell 2009)	Efforts made by individuals to gain recognition, endorsement, and resources essential for their political participation.

I also made a table showing how the documents and observations were relevant to the study

Table 3.3: Contextual factors: Documents, quotes and observations

Themes	Code	Linkage explanation	Documents, quotes, and observations	Context influence
Parliamentary and party structure	Gender discrimination	Focuses on direct gender-based challenges encountered in parliamentary sessions.	<p>1. A person shall not be discriminated against on grounds of gender, race, colour, ethnic origin, religion, creed or social or economic status (Ghana constitution).</p> <p>2. Ensure the attainment of equality and fraternity of all men and women under the law without regard to ethnicity, race religious belief, ideology, culture, social or economic status (NDC constitution, Article 7)</p> <p>3. <i>“A bit of heckling, the difficulties, or challenges if you can say, was a bit of heckling from the other side (men) when you are asking questions ...”</i> - Joana, Greater Accra, 17 November 2022, 10.45am.</p> <p>3. <i>“Female politicians were mostly quite during meetings and parliamentary session”</i></p>	More pronounced in environments with deeply entrenched patriarchal values.
	Economic barriers	Discusses financial challenges specific to women in securing party	1. All member must be in good financial standing and be able to pay party dues	Economic status compounds gender disadvantages

		membership and candidacy	<p>(NDC constitution, Article 8)</p> <p>2. Pay dues as well as give donations for special programme and activities as may be decided from time to time by the Party.</p> <p>(NPP constitution, Article 3)</p> <p>3."My sister, it is not easy oo, they have reduced filling fees but I think is just a charade, because the things you would pay and do after that eeee is more than what they reduced. Politics is not for women especially when you are not rich. It is difficult that you are a woman but more difficult when you are a woman and poor." - Nuti, Greater Accra, 25 November 2022, 3.30pm.</p> <p>4. "more men than women are employed in both regions" (fig 1.7)</p>	in political involvement.
	Structural barriers	Addresses obstacles associated with party structures—such as hierarchy and power positions, officially recognized functions—that disproportionately impact women (official functions) - that	<p>1.Engendering parliaments entail raising awareness among all MPs, men and women, of the importance of taking gender into account - understanding how a society's concept of "man and "woman" leads to inequalities - in all actions, from policy-making to budget preparation through</p>	<p>Linked to cultural perceptions of gender roles and power. These structural issues are often reinforced by traditional power dynamics within parties.</p>

		disproportionately affect women.	<p>implementation and evaluation (Gender training manual for the parliament of Ghana)</p> <p>2. <i>"For our regional level, our regional chairman, those who are already in it, they have their favourite. And as sad as it may be it is difficult to be part of their favourites yes..."</i> - Sena, North, 2 February 2023, 1.35pm.</p> <p>3. <i>"Female were mostly seen with and relating with women especially in the North"</i></p> <p>4. <i>"Women were mostly seen at the grassroot mobilizing, during campaigns and also during the organization of the places for such meetings. But the men were mostly seen at the high tables"</i></p>	
	Inherited family social capital and socialization	Inherited family social capital and it influence on female politicians' social access and political participation	<p>1. There shall be three categories of membership: a) founding members; b) patrons; c) members; a) founding members are those persons who took part in bringing the party into being and paid the prescribed fee; b) patrons are members who undertake to contribute to the national fund of the party for the support</p>	Family social capital influence depends on geographical location dynamics, it is more impactful in the Greater Accra region

			<p>of the party's organization such extra levies as the party may impose from time to time, c) persons who are neither founding members nor patrons shall be described as members (NPP constitution, Article 3).</p> <p>2. <i>"I compare my struggle with ... whose dad was very influential and you would understand ... she I would say had it easy"</i> - Afi, North, 10 January 2023, 9am)</p> <p>3. <i>"Party members in the capital give respect to family members of founding fathers of the party during meetings"</i></p>	
Accessing resources	Favouritism	Analyses how internal preferences affect opportunities for leadership among women. And accessing opportunities	<p>1. To ensure that there are equal opportunities for all citizens without discrimination on any grounds whether of gender, age, position, politics, religion or status. (NPP constitution, Article 2)</p> <p>2. <i>"So that was what we faced when we were going to elect the constituency's executive...OK...There was a saying going round, MP was supporting this one, and MP was not supporting this one, and MP was</i></p>	Challenge of breaking into established networks within party leadership.

			<i>supporting this”</i> . - Sena, North, 2 February 2023, 1.35pm)	
	Expertise	Discuss how expertise, knowledge and training ensure access to resources in the political space	<p>1.To ensure that there are equal opportunities for all citizens without discrimination on any grounds whether of gender, age, position, politics, religion or status (NPP constitution, Article 2)</p> <p>2. <i>Because the time I happened to enter politics... they say do this, then I do. And he asked me, are you educated, and I said no. And he said it pains him I haven't gone to school like I would go far. That was what my MP told me. If you were educated, whatever I would have done for you to get somewhere, I would have done it. So, it pains me a lot, yes, a lot because our parents did not value the education of the girl children...”</i>. - Sena, North, 2 February 2023, 1.35pm)</p> <p>3. “Women in the North are less educated compared to women in the Greater Accra region (fig 1.8; table 1.2)</p>	Challenge of accessing resources due to lack of expertise, knowledge of political process within the political space.
	Partisan Gatekeeping	Looks at how partisan biases can limit women's	1.Political parties are to spread within their respective areas	Influence of party loyalty norms and

		access to information within the party.	<p>knowledge of the party's constitution, mission, standing orders, rules, principles, policies, projects and programmes (NDC constitution, Article 7)</p> <p>2.To participate in shaping the political will of the people by disseminating information on political ideas, social and economic programme of the Party. (NPP constitution, Article 2)</p> <p>3. <i>"I was called for vetting, I did well theoretically but the panel felt that I was not partisan enough and so they needed someone who knew the party's structures very well."</i> - Ameyo, Greater Accra, 7 December 2021, 1.45pm.</p>	informal power structures on information access.
	Exclusion from networks	Discusses the exclusion of women from informal networks that facilitate leadership ascent.	<p>1.To give equal opportunities to women and ensure that all forms of discrimination against women end, so that they can contribute more effectively to the development of the nation (NPP constitution, Article 2)</p> <p>2.To foster and actively promote unity among all the peoples of this</p>	Cultural and organizational practices that reinforce gender exclusivity in political influence and leadership opportunities

			<p>country regardless of ethnic origin, position, gender, occupation, status in society or political affiliation (NPP constitution, Article 2)</p> <p>3. Women shall be guaranteed equal rights to training and promotion without any impediments from any person (Ghana constitution).</p> <p>4. <i>"The real decisions are made in gatherings I'm seldom invited to; it's an uphill battle getting noticed for the right reasons."</i>— Sena, North, 2 February 2023, 1:35pm</p>	
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Source: NPP Constitution, NDC Constitution, NPP 2020 manifesto, NDC 2020 manifesto, Gender training manual for parliament of Ghana, Ghana constitution.

With these examples, I explained how observation notes, documents and themes are linked. The themes such “Parliamentary and party structure” and “Access to resources” were derived from an examination of recurring discussions within the data. “Parliament and party structure”: Initially, during the review of qualitative data, significant emphasis on gender discrimination and challenges within parliamentary and party structures was noted, particularly in procedural documents, observations and interviews. For instance, the gender training manual for the parliament of Ghana emphasizes the importance of incorporating a gender perspective in all parliamentary actions. Also, the NPP constitution asserts the need *"to give equal opportunities to women and ensure that all forms of discrimination against women end,"* highlighting a legislative commitment to gender equality. Similarly, it states the goal *"to foster and actively promote unity among all the peoples of this country regardless of ethnic origin, position, gender, occupation, status in society or political affiliation,"* which underscores a broader societal commitment to inclusivity. From these sources, initial codes such as "Gender discrimination", "Economic barriers", "Structural barriers", and

"Inherited family social capital and socialization" were established, reflecting the specific language and concerns of the participants, observations, and documents.

Similarly, the Ghana constitution, cited in the study, explicitly prohibits discrimination on various grounds including gender, while party constitutions promote values like participatory democracy and responsible government. The constitution reinforces these ideals by guaranteeing *"equal rights to training and promotion without any impediments from any person," and explicitly stating that "a person shall not be discriminated against on grounds of gender, race, colour, ethnic origin, religion, creed or social or economic status."*

As more data was coded, it became evident that these initial codes often intersected around broader concepts of structure and influence within parliaments and parties. For example, practical experiences mentioned by MPs, such as Joana from Greater Accra discussing the heckling faced from male colleagues, were also coded and contributed to this theme. These diverse data points were then grouped under the emergent theme "Parliament and party Structure," capturing how gender considerations and structural legal mandates influence parliamentary actions and party structure, gender equality, and social capital access. The theme "Parliament and party structure" thus captures both the formal legal commitments to gender equality and the personal experiences that illustrate the practical challenges to accessing social capital and realities faced by women in politics in the party and parliamentary structure.

"Access to resources" thus captures discussions about equal opportunities and political support, such as the narrative shared by Sena regarding the influence of MPs in local electoral processes, highlighted another critical aspect of political engagement. Codes such as "favouritism," "expertise," "partisan gatekeeping" and "exclusion from networks" were developed based on the observation's notes, interview quotes and documents. These codes were linked through their common focus on the access and distribution of resources among political participants, illustrating how political and institutional resources are accessed and distributed, which directly impacts political participation. The theme "Access to resources" was thus defined to encompass discussions around the accessibility and equitable distribution of political and institutional resources. This theme was significantly shaped by the coded data and observed patterns across different data sources, as seen in the constitutional and party constitution mandates for equality and the practical challenges cited by political actors.

These strong legal frameworks contributed to developing a robust theme around access to resources, with specific focus on legal and constitutional protections. Personal testimonies also played a critical role in shaping the theme. For example, Sena from North shares her experience, stating, *"Because the time I happened to enter politics... they say do this, then I do. And he asked me, are you educated, and I said no. And he said it pains him I haven't gone to school like I would go far. That was what my MP told me. If you were educated, whatever I would have done for you to get somewhere, I would have done it. So, it pains me a lot, yes, a lot because our parents did not value the education of the girl children..."* This personal narrative not only highlights the societal challenges women face due to historical undervaluing of girls' education but also emphasizes the personal and political impacts of these gendered societal norms on social capital access in the political space.

This detailed account provides a clear understanding of how the theme "Access to resources" was developed using specific data points from constitutions, laws, and personal narratives, emphasizing the analytical process that led from specific observations to broader thematic conclusions. Each theme was carefully reviewed to ensure it was supported by rich data and formed a coherent pattern, with a clear connection to the broader research questions about gender dynamics in accessing social capital. This rigorous process of coding, theme development, and integration demonstrates how initial observations, specific quotes and legal references informed the development of broader themes to capture the complex dynamics of social capital within the political context, aligning with the study's aim to explore gender dynamics and social capital access within the political landscape.

3.6. Researcher's positionality

This research emerged from a desire to support women in political leadership and improve the conditions they encounter. This was informed by my own encounters with gender-related challenges in leadership roles. My interest in gender-related issues in Ghana stems from my personal journey in seeking student leadership positions from primary school to university. These experiences have given me firsthand insight into the challenges women face in such campaigns. In 2018, my master's thesis delved into the identity formation of female parliamentarians in Ghana, revealing the necessity for women to conform to certain traits and behaviours to gain acceptance in politics. The research, highlighted the influence of social norms on women's political participation and identity formation in Ghana's political space. And how deep-rooted social norms

often hinder women's full participation in this space. Recognizing this, my focus shifted to identifying strategies to strengthen women's political participation.

Notably, this current study is exploring how both individuals and social networks could serve as catalysts for advancing women's political participation. This idea originated during my master's thesis research, where social networking proved instrumental in securing interviews with parliamentarians. Facilitated by my sister, an engineer who had connections within parliament in 2018, this networking prompted further investigation into its potential to increase female political participation. Beyond studying social connections, this study delved into the socio-cultural implications of accessing networks that generate social capital. This is partly because, I recognized harbouring certain preconceived notions about the Northern lifestyle. These biases sparked my interest in exploring whether such perceptions contribute to the lower representation of women in politics in the Northern region compared to Greater Accra. As a native of the Greater Accra region, I possess deep familiarity with its practices, values, norms, and beliefs, a perspective that Berger (2015) suggests can influence the study—this is known as reflexivity in qualitative research. I acknowledge that my life experiences have largely centred on the Greater Accra region, immersing me in its daily life more so than that of the Northern region.

In this research, I acknowledge that I am an “insider”, this position carries both advantages and disadvantages, as noted by Dwyer and Buckle (2009:60–61). Since I am a part of the Greater Accra culture, I inherently possesses an emic understanding of this culture. This internal perspective granted me privileged access to participant groups that may be inaccessible to external researchers. Nevertheless, I recognize that my insider position and reflexivity could potentially introduce biases that influence data collection and interpretation (Bryman 2012:149; Creswell and Poth 2018:24). Therefore, I exercised caution to maintain objectivity throughout the data collection and analysis stages. I was careful not to show any bias or favouritism towards female participants. Thus, when interacting with participants from the Greater Accra region, I intentionally positioned myself as an “outsider”. By me distancing myself from an insider's perspective, I was able to ask more probing questions without assuming or implying a full understanding of their culture and society. For participants from the Northern, I engaged a person (assistant) familiar with Northern region's culture to assist during the interviews. These measures allowed the study to navigate potential barriers to accessing participants and to keep my personal biases at bay. This provided the study with an unbiased perspective necessary for thorough, qualitative research.

Fully cognizant of politicians' reluctance to open up to individuals outside of their circle (such as strangers, researchers, and journalists) due to apprehensions about party bias, I deliberately refrained from declaring my party affiliations or asking sensitive questions about their party dynamics. Moreover, I omitted my surname and hometown when introducing myself to participants, as it is strongly associated with one of the two main political parties in Ghana. I portrayed myself as a neutral observer, someone who had not participated in the last two general elections due to studying abroad. Thereby avoiding potential tensions or conflicts

The widespread use of English as a common language or *lingua franca* further facilitated the interactions and nurtured trust between I and the participants. Consequently, the exchanges unfolded smoothly, thanks to the mutual language and shared cultural practices as Ghanaians. As posited by Williams and Heikes (1993:297), such commonalities can foster mutual understanding between researchers and participants. The participants may have perceived that I shared common ground with them, potentially explaining why the politicians, especially women, were willing to provide such comprehensive and insightful accounts of their experiences and knowledge.

3.7. Ethical considerations and trustworthiness of results

This thesis involves interviewing individuals in positions of high authority, which necessitates various ethical considerations before, during, and after the interview and observation process. The study prioritized the human rights of the participants. Hence, the participants were informed about the study's details and willingly provided consent to participate (Bryman 2012:138). The participants were acquainted with the study's purpose, subject matter, and the methodologies to be employed. Though it is standard procedure to ask participants to sign a consent form, in this case, considering the subjects were politicians, they opted for anonymity and hence declined to sign. The study respected this decision as it understood that signing the form could pose a threat to their anonymity. Consequently, after reviewing the consent form, the participants gave their verbal consent in lieu of a signature. Additionally, the participants were assured of their right to withdraw from the interview at any point if they felt uncomfortable. They were also provided with the option to request not to audio record specific parts of the conversation if they felt uneasy about being recorded.

During the stages of interviewing and transcription, anonymity was preserved by referring to participants by pseudonyms instead of their personal names (Bryman 2012:136). This was particularly important given the limited number of female politicians in Ghana; pseudonyms

identifiers mitigated the risk of inadvertent identification. The study further avoided any queries that could potentially single them out among their colleagues. All data collected during the interviews were meticulously transcribed in compliance with data protection regulations (Bryman 2012:137). Ethical considerations were also given to my positionality as a woman and a Southerner (a person from the Greater Accra region). To address this, I intentionally situated myself as an outsider and consciously distanced myself from pre-existing knowledge about the culture.

This study implemented several steps to enhance the rigor and credibility of the results, in response to criticisms often directed at qualitative research methods. Critics argue that such results lack reliability and are heavily influenced by the researcher's perspective. To counter these arguments and assure readers of the study's trustworthiness, I adopted several strategies. Firstly, I strived to represent the phenomenon authentically and engaged in methodologies that could validate the research outcomes (Schwandt 2007:309). I also utilized a triangulation of data collection methods, which allowed for a comprehensive examination of the issues from various perspectives and provided opportunities to cross-verify information (Merriam and Tisdell 2015:265). These strategies helped me ensure a balanced and thorough investigation, mitigating any potential biases arising from my insider position. Although it is recognized that no dataset can be completely flawless, this approach helped minimize a significant portion of potential biases in the collected data.

The next chapters present the findings of the thesis.

Chapter four

Unlocking opportunities: Female politicians' access to social capital

4.0. Chapter overview

In politics, the ability to access and utilize social capital is essential for achieving success and exerting influence (Krishna 2002; Lake and Huckfeldt 1998). In Ghanaian politics, the role of female politicians is undeniable, yet accessing social capital poses a significant challenge, especially in regions like Northern region. This chapter, drawing on Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998)'s seminal framework, explores how female politicians in Ghana effectively access social capital networks. Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998)'s model categorizes social capital into structural, relational, and cognitive dimensions, offering a comprehensive perspective to analyse the complex dynamics of connections, trust, and shared norms within social networks. This chapter utilizes this framework to address question one of this thesis: *How do individuals access social capitals through cognitive, structural, and relational dimensions?*

Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998:243) define social capital “*as the sum of actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit*”. This perspective aligns with other scholars, such as Bourdieu (1986), who note that social capital includes both the relationships an individual maintains and the resources accessible through those relationships. Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) analyse social capital across three dimensions: relational, cognitive, and structural. The relational dimension focuses on the quality of relationships, emphasizing trust, reciprocity, and mutual support as critical factors in accumulating social capital. The cognitive dimension pertains to the shared norms, values, and understandings that facilitate effective communication and collaboration within networks, thereby influencing individuals' capacity to access and utilize resources. The structural dimension addresses the patterns of connections among individuals and entities, encompassing the type and strength of relationships within a network. While Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) distinguish these three dimensions, they acknowledge their interrelation and interdependence, as supported by the findings of this study. The dimensions of social capital in this study are interconnected, leading to partial overlap in their analysis. This overlap is beneficial because it enables a more comprehensive understanding of how these dimensions interact and

influence each other, resulting in a more balanced and detailed analysis of social capital in the political space.

This chapter begins by investigating how female politicians access the structural dimension of social capital. The findings reveal that female politicians access structural social capital through informal and professional-based networks. Some are aided by others, while others take proactive steps independently. However, a notable revelation is that a majority of female politicians in the Northern region lack access to professional-based activities, in contrast to their counterparts in Greater Accra. This difference aligns with inequalities in literacy rates and workforce participation among women in the Northern region, as illustrated in table no. 1.2, figure 1.7 and figure 1.8, along with cultural barriers that hinder their access to formal employment opportunities. Additionally, the study reveals the significant role of family social capital in facilitating enhanced access for female politicians, particularly in the Northern and Greater Accra regions. Interestingly, it emerges that female politicians in Greater Accra benefit more from family social capital compared to their counterparts in the North, providing them with a diverse advantage in accessing social capital networks in the field.

4.1. Empowering networks: Female politicians and the dynamics of structural social capital

The structural dimension of social capital, as defined by Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), focuses on the patterns of connections and relationships, such as network ties within a social structure. These social interaction ties and structural patterns among individuals in a social network creates opportunities for accessing social capital. Structural dimension of social capital plays a pivotal role in shaping the nature and power of connections within a network, which influence resource access and knowledge sharing. In the structural dimension of social capital, the emphasis is on the individuals you connect with and the ways in which these connections are established (Burt 1992). This dimension is intrinsically linked to the cognitive and relational aspects of social capital, all of which interact to enhance the effectiveness of social capital in specific contexts (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998).

The section starts by examining how female politicians in Northern and Greater Accra access structural dimension social capital for political participation. The analysis is structured around several key themes: informal and professional-based networks, enhanced entry, and self-push (see table no 3.1). These themes serve as the analytical lenses through which the data are examined, guiding the exploration of how female politicians in Northern and Greater Accra access

the structural dimensions of social capital for political participation. Drawing on Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) concept of social capital, I examine how these themes are evidenced in the data collected from interviews, and additional form observations, and documents.

4.1.1. Informal and professional-based networks

In politics, knowing the right people and having their support is really important for politicians (Machiavelli 2020). Getting involved in politics means dealing with lots of different groups and connections. Essentially, possessing social capital requires individuals to cultivate relationships with others, as these connections constitute its fundamental value (Portes 1998). These relationships aid politicians to operate in the space. Some politicians revealed that they connect with people through professional-based networks and informal ties.

"then I started working with eerm the NGO sector so from the international NGO, then local NGO, so basically I became interested in you know things around women and leadership, politics and leadership, even though personally I did not want to do politics. so at one point I happened to be training a group of women, fishmongers in leadership, how they can play leadership roles at the community level because it is not a concept new to them, it something they do already at the local sorry within the family settings. Because most of the homes along the coast are headed by females so I was encouraging them to take up formal roles and then there was eerm an opportunity to contest for a position and that is eerrm what we would call the major or the chief executive, MCE, municipal chief executive position and they said to me that since I already have knowledge about leadership and I am now teaching them, they are now learning and so eerm because I already know it is important that I go and contest for the position errr so that they would know that the things am teaching them is practicable or are practicable and so I toke up the challenge and even though I was not known in terms of partisan politics, I went and applied I was called for vetting " (Ameyo, Greater Accra, 7 December 2021).

She reveals how her work with international and local NGOs, establishes connections and networks that offer access to resources, information, and opportunities. Through her involvement with grassroots communities, particularly women, by training fishmongers in leadership, she not only builds trust and support but also positions herself as an advocate for their interests. According to studies people are willing to collaborates with leaders that serve their interest (Putnam 1993, 1995a, 1995b). This demonstrates how her role as a trainer for these women widened her network for political participation. This aligns with studies suggesting that politicians can develop connections through their roles, allowing her to access bridging and bonding (Lin 2001a; Putnam 2000).

Some participants in the Greater Accra region also access structural social capital through informal ties. One participant from the Greater Accra region mentioned how she was able to access relationships and connections due to her membership with a club.

"I was a class representative, which we normally call a class rep and then I was also the vice president of the... student association of Ghana, and I was also the president of my local rotary club of So I think it was more to do with leadership and what you can offer as a leader. and you know how the members of the rotary club is, they are very supportive, the moment they heard of my candidature they came in their number to support". (Joana, Greater Accra, 17 November 2022, 10.45am)

She shows her active involvement in the Rotary club and also shows how the club provide a supportive environment where members readily assist each other, thus advancing her political aspirations (Coleman 1988, 1990a). The Rotary club serves as a nexus for cultivating social capital outside academia, granting her access to diverse individuals and resources (Burt 1992; Putnam 1995a; Tsai and Ghoshal 1998). Spark, Cox, and Corbett (2019) highlights the importance of translating symbolic capital into political capital, a feat achievable through institutional interventions in informal associations like the Rotary club.

Additionally, other female politicians in the Northern region highlighted how they accessed structural social capital through involvement in informal activities like religious activities. This form of access is categorized in the thesis as informal access. It is noted that female politicians predominantly rely on informal access to acquire structural capital, with these informal channels often being female-dominated, unlike in the Greater Accra region where access spans both genders.

"I organize a get together for my constituent at least three times a year, during the two major religious holidays, I mean Muslim and Christian celebration. then the last one is during my birthdays. I stopped during the covid times and also because it expensive to organize but I have started again this year because it is important to get together, discuss our progress, challenges and how we can work together to bring our party back to power". (Afi, North, 10 January 2023, 9am)

Employing a strategic approach, she arranges meetings with constituents in the community to establish connections and foster relationships. She purposefully invests in these informal gatherings to access their social capital (Lin 2001a; Tsai and Ghoshal 1998). She shows an adeptness in discerning what facilitates her access to relevant structural social capital, hence she strategically schedules these informal meetings and ensures they are inclusive, intimate, and adaptable, fostering strong bonds within the community, particularly across religious lines, which, as Narayan (1999) suggests, promotes social cohesion. Additionally, incorporating her own

birthday celebration into these events adds a personal touch, fostering a sense of closeness with attendees. As highlighted by Putnam (2000), individuals are inclined to associate with leaders who make them feel emotionally connected.

In the Northern region, I observed a trend where female politicians encounter difficulties in engaging both the community and political peers. They often resort to hosting informal gatherings, predominantly attended by women. During my observations, I attended three such informal gatherings where the female turnout exceeded that of males. In contrast, female politicians in the Greater Accra region join clubs and participate in weekend events to foster connections. There is a noticeable demographic attendee contrast between these regions, with more women than men attending gatherings in the North, whereas those in Greater Accra predominantly attract men attendees. This observation aligns with the findings from interviews, indicating that in the Northern region, female politicians mainly leverage structural social capital through informal networking activities like hosting parties with majority of the attendees been women. Conversely, participants in the Greater Accra region access it through professional-based network, educational engagements, and club meet-ups.

The variation between the North and Greater Accra in terms of engagement strategies and gender dynamics at events may reflect underlying cultural and social norms that influence political behaviour. In the Northern region, the prevalence of informal gatherings predominantly attended by women might indicate a cultural norm where women feel more comfortable in segregated settings. This could be due to societal expectations or perceived roles of women in public life.

The distinction between formal and informal networking strategies highlights a significant social divide. In the Northern region, the reliance on informal gatherings among predominantly female attendees can be understood through Granovetter (1973) concept of the “strength of weak ties.” These informal networks, often regarded as less influential, can actually provide unique advantages in mobilizing resources and disseminating information within tight-knit communities. Conversely, the formal networking strategies employed by female politicians in Greater Accra—such as joining clubs and participating in professional events—tap into what Bourdieu might describe as institutionalized social capital. This form of capital is more publicly recognized and can translate into greater political and economic power, facilitating connections that span beyond immediate geographic or cultural boundaries.

At the micro-level, individual interactions within informal gatherings in the Northern region reflect localized social norms and cultural practices that dictate gender roles and the appropriateness of political engagement settings for women. These micro-level interactions, while seemingly insular, cumulatively build a network that can significantly influence local political landscapes. In contrast, the macro-level interactions observable in Greater Accra's professional networks align with Giddens (1984) theory of structuration, where broader societal structures both shape and are shaped by such interactions. Here, female politicians engage in settings that reflect and reinforce larger societal trends, including gender dynamics and political engagement norms across broader socio-political spectrums.

The concept of strong versus weak ties is also crucial in understanding these regional differences. In the Northern region, strong ties are formed through frequent, informal interactions that create dense networks of support among women. These strong ties are crucial for sustaining political engagement in environments that might be less receptive to female leadership. In Greater Accra, the strategic cultivation of weak ties through formal networks allows for bridging social capital, which is essential for accessing diverse resources and information critical for political success on a larger scale.

The methods of engagement might influence the political strategies employed by female politicians in each region. For instance, those in the North might focus more on grassroots mobilization and direct community engagement, which could be effective in influencing local-level decisions and policies. Conversely, in Greater Accra, engaging through professional networks could help in building influence and support within broader, possibly national-level political and economic arenas. Finally, the observed differences in event attendance suggest varying levels of political participation by gender across regions. This might impact how female politicians are perceived and the extent of their influence. In the Northern region, the strong turnout of women at events might enhance the female politicians' role as leaders for women's issues, whereas in Greater Accra, the mixed or male-dominated gatherings might require different approaches to address or advocate for gender-specific concerns.

Aside informal and professional-based networks building social capital, some politicians revealed how their access was enhanced by others. This will be examined in the next section.

4.1.2. Enhanced entry

Several female politicians emphasized the pivotal importance of external assistance in facilitating their access to structural social capital. This support encompasses diverse forms, including mentorship, networking opportunities, and informational guidance. Through these avenues of entry, these female politicians are able to access networks and connections that would otherwise be beyond their reach. However, it was revealed that their goals must align with these mentors, and opportunities in other for that alliance and recommendations to take place.

"I grew in the time frame when I was on the boards, of government boards, which was due to my background as an ... and my sister ... Yes so with my experiences at the early stages I would say was quite smooth because I had a sister who was already there and knows the in and out. So, I did start with government boards and because of my professional background as an ... and always rocking shoulders with males". (Joana, Greater Accra, 17 November 2022, 10.45am)

She reveals the intricate dynamics of personal relationships, professional acumen, and strategic networking, illustrating how familial ties played a pivotal role in her involvement in governmental boards. Emphasizing the significance of the mentorship of her sister who also served as a connector, providing invaluable insights, introductions to influential figures, and unwavering guidance through the complexities of politics. However, her access to social capital in the field journey is not solely driven by family connections but also by her educational and professional background. Her mention of operating in male-dominated circles hints at her adeptness honed in previous professional experiences, as noted by Eleje (2019). She skilfully leverages various forms of structural social capital—familial ties, professional competence, and strategic networking—to secure roles on government boards and operate through the political landscape.

Another participant also shared how her drive for excellence led to the attraction of a significant other who recognized her potential and supported her in accessing influential others, driven by their shared common goals.

"...would I say I am an activist just trying to see things done well, that is if they are to be done. And so, I remember very well, that was why I even stood as the GRASAG women commissioner, when I went unopposed. Eeeeh one of the presidential aspirants then, actually approached and then said Yaa, I see you to be someone who likes to get things done properly, why don't you form a camp with me so we we get to the hem of affairs, that was how I got to meet the big men " (Lordina, Greater Accra, 10 March 2023, 6.40pm).

She describes how her professional expertise and social connections enabled her access political activities and networks. This resonates with Lake and Huckfeldt (1998) and Foley and

Edwards (1999) assertion that social networks, particularly those rich in political expertise, play a crucial role in facilitating political engagement. Her professional expertise which was recognized by the presidential candidate enabled her access. This resonates with Lin (1999b) perspective linking social networks and status attainment, highlighting the structural aspects like network density, centrality, and diversity in shaping the distribution and accessibility of social capital. Her status and network density enabled her to attract social capital, further supporting the notion that her access to political engagement was facilitated by her social connections and professional background.

Some of the female politicians in the Northern region also had an enhanced entry accessing structural social capital.

"though I was having the interest to get into politics but I didn't know how to get into it so I had my mate Zagyuri Anglican who is Isaiah, he knew my interest and he was already involved in the party politics so as he invited me to come for this thing come and stand for mmm a general election no to eeei yes I was a poling agent for a start in 2012 so after 2016, 2016 again he invited me again to come and take part in the 2016 election, then I was, I became a committee member, so I got to know the do do dos and donts of the field." (Afi, North, 10 January 2023, 9am)

Her friend's support facilitated her entry, underscoring the importance of enduring relationships in providing valuable insights and opportunities. Recognizing her enthusiasm, her friend extended an invitation, illustrating the influence of social connections in accessing resources and avenues for engagement, as discussed by Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998). These connections enabled her to gather political information, overcoming personal resource limitations. Starting as a polling agent in the 2012 election, she gained invaluable firsthand experience in the political space. Advancing to a committee member in the 2016 election, she expanded her involvement and responsibilities, nurturing connections and collaborations with like-minded individuals. While politicians may have enhanced access to social networks in the field, others have demonstrated the ability to access structural social capital independently, even with minimal support.

The quoted narratives reveal the pivotal role of mentorship, familial connections, professional recognition, and strategic networking in building social capital in politics. The stories of Joana and Lordina illustrate the concept of social capital as defined by Bourdieu and Coleman. Joana's narrative underscores the importance of familial ties, with her sister's mentorship providing both guidance and entry into government boards. This support system represents a form of embedded social capital that is accessible through personal relationships. Lordina's experience,

on the other hand, demonstrates how recognition of one's professional capabilities by influential peers (in her case, a presidential aspirant) can facilitate access to political networks. This aligns with Lin's network theory of social capital (Lin 2002), where access to and use of social connections can lead to higher social and professional status.

The analysis of social capital often distinguishes between structural aspects (the impersonal configuration of linkages between actors or positions) and relational aspects (the personal relationships that individuals form with one another). Joana's access to government boards can be seen as leveraging relational mechanisms through familial ties, while Lordina's alignment with a presidential aspirant reflects strategic use of structural mechanisms, maximizing her visibility and influence within political networks.

4.1.3. Self-push

Taking the initiative to access structural social capital involves actively seeking and nurturing connections, networks, and relationships that offer access to resources, opportunities, and support within a specific social framework or community. Cook (2016) proposes strategies like creating fresh social networks and enhancing existing ones. Some participants adopted this approach, creating new social networks and integrating them with existing ones instead of solely depending on pre-established relationships or external facilitators, showcasing proactive efforts in building and leveraging social capital.

The research reveals that individuals can access structural social capital through self-initiative by identifying key stakeholders, influencers, and decision-makers within their desired domain or field of interest. This process involves conducting research, participating in relevant events, and engaging with authoritative or expert figures. Kirschling (2004) emphasizes that this demands a significant investment of time, energy, and perseverance to uphold the vision of eventual success. By demonstrating genuine interest and actively pursuing opportunities for connection, politicians can create new relationships and broaden their network.

Despite having connections in the field, some female politicians preferred not to rely solely on those connections but rather to build their own structural social capital within the political field.

"I had a few people approach me, approach me that they think I should go, but I was abit reluctant..... the what ifs were plenty. I did not want to assume because the people know my sister that means I would automatically win them over.... So, I started to create my own identity among the people.... So, during the parliamentary primaries, we were four two

women, two men, we all took part, we all took part in the election in the contest, I believe I won by I think about 73 percent the delegates at the time". (Joana, Greater Accra, 17 November 2022, 10.45am).

Acknowledging familial ties, she opted to carve out her own identity within the political sphere, as highlighted by Cook (2016). This reflects an awareness of the necessity to establish a separate presence and agenda to garner genuine support from constituents, rather than relying solely on inherited social capital. The substantial support she received during the parliamentary primaries underscores the tangible relationships and social networks contributing to the formation of social capital within politics (ibid). Thus, her experience in creating an individual identity and securing considerable support during the primaries resonates with how she self-facilitated her access of social capital. This involves tangible group memberships and networks, and constituent relationships vital for its development within the political space.

While she is not the only participant who access social capital through self-initiatives, it is evident that her familial connections allowed for prior insight into political affairs. This recognition extends to the Northern region participants as well.

.... I would say my senior brothers, were practically involved in everything that was going on with regards to aam , you know, rallies and mobilization of people, resources and all that. I would say, as a then, I wasn't up to the age of voting, so I did not partake in the voting as a then, but when I became of age, I joined them While we're moving about, traveling, crisscrossing the country, we're doing rallies... I gained some kind of popularity among the people and party". (Sena, North, 2 February 2023, 1.35pm)

Describing her involvement in activities such as rallies, mobilization, and building popularity among constituents and party members, illustrates her active engagement in various networks and group memberships, pivotal to social capital's structural dimension (Cook 2016). Despite her family's existing involvement, she chose to create her own new connections and integrate them with the familial ones. These actions underscore her participation in diverse networks and group affiliations, essential aspects of social capital's structure (Kirschling 2004).

Her proactive engagement in these political activities earns her popularity among both the populace and her party members. This growing popularity is attributed to her conspicuous presence at rallies, direct engagement with constituents, and steadfast adherence to her party's principles and vision. Through active involvement in party functions and direct interaction with voters, she strengthens her position within the party and the larger political sphere, consequently strengthening her structural social capital (Krishna 2002).

"I am very well known in the community especially among the women, I teach them how to make soap even before I decided to get involved in politics. Yes, even though I am not rich these women know that they can count on me in times of problem ". (Linda, North, 7 February 2023, 2.37pm)

Her recognition and teaching efforts reflect tangible relationships and support within the community, indicative of her self-facilitated structural social capital access. Through these women empowerment activities, she cultivates social connections and networks, reinforcing visibility and influence. Additionally, by offering practical aid and support, she fosters reciprocity and goodwill among community members, enhancing her social capital. Despite lacking financial power, community members trust her to aid them in times of need, underscoring the importance of personal integrity and reliability in nurturing social capital (Janssens 2010; Sabhlok 2011).

Female politicians, particularly in regions such as the Northern and Greater Accra, operate historically male-dominated political networks and institutions by accessing structural social capital (Spark et al. 2019). This entails leveraging familial ties, professional associations, and community networks, providing them with a foothold in spaces where they might otherwise face marginalization. This thesis reveals that while both regions female politicians employ strategies like enhanced access, self-push, and informal and professional-based networks. Northern women often rely on informal activities and networks due to challenges in accessing employment and education, while their counterparts in Greater Accra predominantly utilize professional-based network access. Consequently, these differences influence the types of social capital and networks accessed, with Northern women predominantly engaging with female-centric networks, while those in Greater Accra have a more balanced mix of genders.

The analysis of female politicians' experiences in accessing and leveraging structural social capital in the Northern and Greater Accra regions of Ghana provides a rich context for examining the strategies that facilitate or hinder political engagement. Their narratives revealed how personal initiative, familial relationships, professional networks, and community involvement played essential roles in the accumulation and utilization of social capital within distinct socio-political environments.

The accounts underscore the importance of personal initiative in accessing structural social capital. Politicians like Joana and Sena demonstrate that while familial and existing professional connections offer a foundational network, the proactive creation and integration of new networks are crucial for establishing a distinct political identity and broader influence. While social

inheritance plays a crucial role, it does not singularly dictate networking strategies. The detailed accounts underscore a sophisticated balance between leveraging inherited connections and proactively cultivating new ones. This dual strategy empowers individuals to significantly expand their influence and operational scope within political domains. As illustrated in Joana's account, she adeptly merges the mentorship 'inherited' from her sister with her independent initiatives to garner substantial support during the primaries. This approach not only enhances her political leverage but also demonstrates a dynamic integration of familial support with personal agency in political campaigning. Linda's example illustrates the power of visibility and direct community engagement in building trust and support. Her involvement in community activities not only bolsters her social capital but also establishes her as a reliable and approachable figure, which is crucial in politics.

The differences in networking strategies between the Northern and Greater Accra regions reflect broader gender-specific challenges and opportunities. While women in the North may rely more on informal networks due to limited access to formal employment and educational opportunities, those in Greater Accra utilize professional networks, suggesting varying strategies based on regional socio-economic contexts. This analysis aligns with Bourdieusian and Coleman's theories of social capital, emphasizing that social capital is not merely about who you know, but about how you engage with and mobilize these networks towards specific goals. The proactive creation of networks, as mentioned by Cook (2016), and the strategic utilization of existing ones demonstrate the instrumental and dynamic nature of social capital as conceptualized by Lin (2002).

The regional differences also hint at structural barriers that shape the networking strategies of female politicians. Such barriers may include socio-economic conditions, cultural norms, and historical legacies that dictate the accessibility of certain types of social capital. The strategies employed by these politicians reflect adaptive responses to these contextual factors. The narratives showcase a significant degree of agency among female politicians in navigating male-dominated political structures. This agency is crucial for understanding the intersections of gender, politics, and power, and how women in leadership positions can challenge and reshape these dynamics. In summary, this analysis not only highlights the strategies female politicians employ to access and mobilize social capital but also underscores the complex interplay between individual agency, social networks, and structural conditions in the political space.

4.2. Shared vision: Female politicians and the acquisition of cognitive social capital"

The cognitive dimension of social capital, as defined by Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), plays a pivotal role in understanding how social capital's function across diverse contexts. This dimension encompasses shared knowledge, goals and values embedded within social relationships. Cognitive dimension is important because it helps people in a group have common ways of understanding and interpreting things, which is necessary for working together and sharing knowledge effectively. Moreover, the cognitive dimension of social capital is crucial for facilitating knowledge exchange and combination, especially in participative governance contexts (Widén 2011).

Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) integrate cultural aspects into the analysis of organizational behaviour by focusing on shared goals and values. This approach helps in understanding how culture influences the development of cognitive social capital and organizational capabilities through interactions. Knowledge and culture are interlinked, making this approach suitable for explaining cognitive capital. In political social networks, particularly regarding the gender gap in accessing cognitive capital, combining cultural and knowledge analysis offers insights into how knowledge and shared goals is accessed. Cultural and organizational barriers also affect networking patterns, limiting women's access to informal knowledge exchanges and contributing to gender disparities in cognitive capital accumulation (Ibarra 1993). Inclusive networking opportunities are necessary to bridge this gap.

According to Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), the cognitive dimension of social capital is reflected in shared goals, values, culture, and knowledge, which collectively facilitate a common understanding for collective action. For example, politics has its own rules and norms, which are also grounded in cultural, societal, and organizational norms. Those without this understanding are not accepted in that space or find it difficult operating in the space. This current study indicates that politicians can gain this understanding and knowledge by attending informal meetings, where they can learn. Additionally, knowledge of political processes and practical political skills can provide access to shared knowledge and goals.

The analysis is structured around two themes: “informal political socialization”, and “shared goals and knowledge”, drawing from Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) framework of social capital (see table no 3.2).

4.2.1. Informal political socialization

Informal political socialization emphasizes how individuals acquire understanding of political systems and participation norms through informal events like hanging out with family, friends, and others in their community, instead of through formal lessons or rules. This informal political socialization according to this thesis happens in informal networks. Informal networks and events are crucial for accessing cognitive social capital, such as shared knowledge, information, opinions, beliefs, expertise, knowing each other well, and understanding within social networks (Huning, Bryant, and Holt 2015). Engaging with these informal networks and activities allows politicians to gain diverse perspectives, insights, and experiences, enriching their cognitive resources (Owen 2004). Trust, reciprocity, and shared values fostered within informal interactions are fundamental components of cognitive social capital (Lefebvre et al. 2016). Informal networks also create an environment conducive to learning, problem-solving, and innovation, enhancing individuals' cognitive capabilities and expanding their intellectual resources (Owen 2004). However, it is noteworthy that politically cognizant friends may exert a significant influence on opinion change (Parker, Parker, and McCann 2008).

“the party organizes end of year parties where you get to meet others, people I would not meet on a regular day... I meet a lot of people and they see me .. it is just joy to finally see people I have idolized in the same space, asking about my goals and giving their blessings but just that most times one is not able to attend because of monetary constraint ... is sure gatherings its is easy to freely learn without pressure”. (Xorse, North, 15 January 2022, 2pm)

Participating in informal events has broadened her social network, connecting her with politically influential and knowledgeable individuals she would not typically meet (Parker et al. 2008). These gatherings serve as valuable networking platforms, enabling her to engage with diverse individuals within the party, expanding her circle and garnering. Interacting with a variety of people provides access to new perspectives and information, enriching her cognitive social capital (ibid). However, she acknowledges financial constraints may hinder such opportunities. This is not quite different from those in the Greater Accra region

“Yes I know of ... ok I am , I am a member of pro forum that is professional forum . Which are a professional I mean group of professionals from my party who support their candidates I also belong to Grasia. We call it Grasia, also women's group, and we also support our members when they are standing for positions like that yes. we meet every other month to discuss how to push the women agenda and support ". (Lordina, Greater Accra, 10 March 2023, 6.40pm).

By actively participating in these forums, she gains access to a network of professionals with shared interests and goals, fostering knowledge exchange and skill development (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998). Through discussions and collaborative projects, members enhance their understanding of relevant issues and political trends, contributing to her professional growth. Participation in these groups facilitates knowledge sharing and collective action, bolstering the politician's cognitive abilities and effectiveness in both professional and political realms. The cognitive dimension of social capital reflects shared goals and values among individuals, aiding in information processing and decision-making (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998).

It is observed that female politicians from both regions benefit from cognitive social capital through engagement in informal networks, though financial constraints may limit access for some.

4.2.2. Shared goals and knowledge

Shared values, norms, and objectives are integral for accessing cognitive social capital among politicians, fostering unity and alignment towards collective goals (Lefebvre et al. 2016). However, Enemark (2012) suggests that the structure of political networks can influence strategic outcomes, with an overly connected network potentially inhibiting coordination. Shared vision promotes mutual understanding, trust, and reciprocity, essential for cognitive social capital (Lefebvre et al. 2016). By leveraging shared goals and knowledge, politicians enhance their cognitive capacities, promote learning, and make informed decisions (Witt 1998).

This theme is about how politicians in a group or community share the same understanding and agree on goals, values, and what they know. This thesis shows that "political literacy and competence" includes both understanding how politics works (like processes) and being skilled in political actions (like competence) are the ways politicians gain shared goals and knowledge about politics, whether through school, informal learning, or hands-on political involvement.

Knowledge of political processes and practical political skills are crucial in politics, aiding politicians in comprehending complex issues, engaging in informed debates, and making strategic decisions aligned with their goals and constituents' interests (Butler and Tavits 2021; Cassel and Lo 1997). This expertise fosters cooperation by recognizing shared interests, forming alliances, and working towards common objectives. Moreover, it enhances credibility and influence within political circles, facilitating effective communication and cooperation with colleagues and

stakeholders. Through such discourse, politicians bridge knowledge and experiences, effectively communicating ideas and engaging the public (Cassel and Lo 1997).

Knowledge of political processes is essential for politicians particularly for women who may encounter structural and cultural barriers (Agbalajobi 2010). This knowledge empowers female politicians to pursue shared goals within the political field, enabling them to navigate the system effectively and challenge it on equal footing with male counterparts. Having knowledge of how the political system works increases women's chances in power dynamics, making it a key resource for political career development and success (Shvedova 2005; Tadros 2014). Some participants mentioned how they accessed knowledge of the political process through formal education. This ensures they have shared goals and expertise in the field of politics.

"I have had one year training in politics at FES and I also had eerm I also had several training sessions or political trainings, actually. Because I always wanted to do politics and eerm doing politics as a woman is quite difficult in this part of the world eerm and you need certain trainings. You need to know what to do, how to present yourself as a woman. And eerm that is it". (Yaa, Greater Accra, 18 April 2023, 9am)

The politician's one-year training in politics at FES reflects a commitment to acquiring knowledge and skills in the field (Kinna 2015). This training emphasizes the importance of shared knowledge and vision in political engagement and empowerment. Additionally, it fosters the development of common understandings and collective ideologies necessary for addressing societal and political barriers. Formal training equips the politician with a foundational understanding of political processes, strategies, and communication techniques, enhancing her cognitive social capital (ibid). Some other participants especially from the North, mentioned how a lack of this made them miss opportunities in the field of politics.

"I lost a big opportunity in the party because I was not educated, as you know in the North, it is now that females are now been freed to go to school through the government initiative of free education, even as at that some still are denied so with me the party knew I was not educated but dedicated to their activities but in the end they told me that I can't go high because I am not educated and I would not understand certain things". (Sena, North, 2 February 2023, 1.35pm)

Her limited education, leading to a lack of knowledge of political processes, poses multiple obstacles to accessing cognitive social capital. It impedes their understanding of political intricacies, hampers their ability to articulate contributions, diminishes their influence on decision-making processes, and perpetuates inequalities within the political system. Consequently, these barriers restrict their chances for advancement within the party and undermine their capacity to

leverage cognitive social capital effectively. Despite the politician's commitment to party activities, her educational constraints may hinder their capacity to effectively communicate and showcase her contributions and ideas. Without the requisite political literacy, politicians may struggle to convey their value to party leadership and elucidate how their dedication has benefited the party. This difficulty in articulating contributions may diminish their perceived worth within the party, thereby curtailing their access to cognitive social capital.

Other participants said they had political education but lacked practical political skills;

“I went and applied I was called for vetting, I did well theoretically but eeemm the panel felt that I was not partisan enough and so they needed someone who knew the party’s structures very well, because you would be dealing with the party members at the grounds or grassroot, and so they gave the opportunity to someone else”. (Ameyo, Greater Accra, 7 December 2021, 1.45pm)

In her case though she had theoretical proficiency, she lacked the practical experience or deep knowledge of party structures, leading the vetting panel to favour a candidate with stronger partisan credentials. This situation underscores the importance of knowledge of political processes and practical political skills in political environments, where familiarity with party dynamics can significantly influence decision-making processes and opportunities for advancement. The situation extends beyond the Greater Accra region; it is also common in the North, where female politicians miss out on opportunities due to a lack of political and educational literacy, qualities deemed essential by hierarchies for understanding the objectives and goals of the political field.

However, according to the political party constitution

“Political parties are to spread within their respective areas knowledge of the party’s constitution, mission, standing orders, rules, principles, policies, projects and programmes”. (NDC constitution, Article 7)

The document reveals that the political party must spread knowledge about its constitution, goals, rules, and activities which would help the NDC members, supporters, and the public to make informed decisions and actively take part in party events. This openness would make the party more transparent, letting members hold leaders accountable to its principles, policies, and goals. This sharing of information acts as political education, giving people the know-how to discuss politics and contribute well to the party's growth. However, the narrations from the participants show a different experience where they are denied access to this knowledge hence are not able to participate in decision making process.

While formal education can provide participants with knowledge of political processes and help them access similar goals and values, knowledge of practical political skills is also essential (see eg. Lupia 2016). These skills enable individuals to navigate complex political landscapes effectively, collaborate with others, and achieve shared objectives. Practical political skills like communication, planning, and negotiation skills are essential for accessing shared goals in politics. They allow politicians especially females to form networks, build relationships, and acquire valuable resources and information, thereby boosting their influence and effectiveness in the political space (Ferris et al. 2007).

In order to access shared goals in the field some politicians utilized practical political skills.

“I try to control myself. No matter what they say. You know we human beings. So, in all, as a woman and as a leader as well, you have to be patient. This patient would help you get understanding of things you may not be preview to if you rush. So, it's just about patience, I learnt this from mother, ... though not a politician she does it at home anytime there is an issue to be solved with my dad and it works always, where my dad though very man I mean he is very patriarchal and does not want to share information with mum because she is a woman, she uses this approach” (Xorse, North, 15 January 2022, 2pm)

She acknowledges the challenge of controlling oneself despite the words or actions of others. This self-control is crucial in maintaining positive relationships and fostering trust within a social network, which is a fundamental aspect of cognitive social capital (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998). By exercising restraint and not reacting impulsively to potentially hurtful comments, she demonstrates emotional intelligence and resilience, both of which are valuable traits in building and accessing cognitive social capital (Ferris et al. 2007). This shows that through emotional regulation, patience, and effective communication, female politicians can cultivate and access cognitive social capital, thereby enhancing collaboration, trust, and collective problem-solving within their social networks. She acquired these practical skills through informal settings, where she observed this approach from her mother. Her narrative subtly reveals how gender dynamics influence access to information in the domestic sphere, a theme also observed in political contexts.

Some other politicians from the Greater Accra region also narrated how they access shared goals using practical political skills.

“I have developed a thick skin to face it ... Even now when I tell people I grew up been reserved it is difficult for them to identify me with it .. because the field would make you a communicator if you want to succeed, how would people know your visions and goals if you don't communicate it to them well, how would you also get to know their goals if you don't listen ... this I learnt from my mentor. it was difficult at first but gradually I became

one... So that gave me more zeal to contest the 2020 elections because now I had known how I appeal to the people, I had spoken to them, listened to them, preached to them and so forth. I came back stronger and well prepared for 2020 and I won hands down, generally I had much time to convince the people people to vote for me instead of my contender yes, that made me win, I won with a huge margin ... politics is the more you are known to the people that matter the better it is for you and the easier it is to win an election. It is all about numbers, money, and connections” (Ameyo, Greater Accra, 7 December 2021, 1.45pm)

She highlights how interpersonal skills like communication and listening skills play a crucial role in accessing cognitive social capital, particularly in political engagement which she acquired from her mentor. By engaging directly with voters, actively listening to their concerns, and effectively communicating their own vision, she established trust and rapport within the community (Ferris et al. 2007). This interaction facilitated shared goals, contributing to her success in the 2020 elections by connecting with voters and mobilizing support. Investing time and effort in building relationships with constituents gave her a competitive edge over their opponent, showcasing the significance of social connections in political campaigns. Ultimately, she underscores the importance of recognizing and utilizing cognitive social capital through personal development, communication abilities, and strategic engagement with constituents to navigate the complexities of contemporary politics and garner public support effectively.

Analysing shared goals and values through practical political skills provides a comprehensive understanding of social interactions within political organizations, emphasizing the role of cultural norms in information processing and decision-making. Culture also shapes cognitive frames, influencing how individuals perceive and use information (see eg. Quinn and Holland 1987). Gendered expectations in traditional culture often result in negative experiences for women, impacting their cognitive capital access.

Other participants mentioned that they achieve common goals by using practical political skills and the knowledge of political process they gained from official committees.

“... what helps you when you are in any committee of the party, most of the times it makes you get involved, you have a much better understanding of the politics of certain decision that you are wondering to take so even if you are are on a manifesto committee in a professional capacity, like you still have to be able to appreciate the political dimension to to things. and you should be able to discuss issues that are being discussed. I think the fact that we brainstorm a lot when we are doing these things, we brainstorm a lot and it is very good hhhhhhm excuse me to be able to bring out the best option for the party and country as a whole. And we always bear in mind that we are communicating with an ordinary person all the way to a high-level academic, so our interventions, our interventions must

be able to cut across and affect all and affect them positively.” (Joana, Greater Accra, 17 November 2022, 10.45am)

She explains how being part of party committees helps her understand political decisions better and access shared goals. This understanding of political decisions is important for making sure everyone in the party works towards the same goals (see eg. Tsai and Ghoshal 1998). Being active in discussions gives her insight into why decisions are made, which helps everyone agree on common goals. She also talks about the importance of understanding the politics behind committee discussions. This understanding helps her contribute effectively to discussions and decisions, making sure her ideas match with what the party believes. By sharing knowledge with others in the party, she can help create strategies and policies that everyone agrees with.

In the Northern region of Ghana, traditional gender roles and patriarchal norms pose barriers to women's involvement in politics and information processing. Conversely, the Greater Accra region, marked by urbanization and female migration, sees more opportunities for female engagement and information processing. Educational discrepancies between these regions affect the cognitive social capital of female politicians, with the North lagging behind. Shedding light on systemic barriers to education faced by women in the North. This underscores historical challenges and ongoing disparities in educational access, which in turn affect access to cognitive social capital. Interestingly, similar issues were noted among politicians in the Greater Accra region, indicating that political literacy is not solely dependent on formal education.

The differing access to cognitive social capital between the Northern and Greater Accra regions is attributed to variations in socio-cultural norms, political dynamics, and historical contexts. These narrations thus show that education is an important way for female politicians to gain valuable knowledge and understanding of how politics works. This knowledge helps them connect with others in their field who share similar beliefs and ideas.

4.3. Forging connections: Female politicians and the development of relational social capital

The relational dimension of social capital, as defined by Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), encompasses trust, obligation, expectation and identity. Cook (2005) and Lowndes (2004) expands on this notion by emphasizing the role of networks in fostering social exchange and cooperation, while acknowledging their potential negative ramifications in certain contexts. This dimension holds particular influence in party engagement, where participants are driven by expressive incentives and the enjoyment derived from involvement (Bäck, Teorell, and Westholm 2004).

The framework by Nahapiet and Ghoshal provides valuable insights into relational social capital, but a more critical focus on identity is needed for a clearer understanding of social networks. Differentiating identity from other relational aspects enhances the depth of social capital theory, aligning it with sociological analysis. Trust, obligation, and expectation are key components of social capital, influencing the quality of relationships. Trust is the confidence in others' intentions, obligation refers to duties driven by moral or social responsibility, and expectation involves anticipated behaviours. Identity, encompassing traits like race, ethnicity, gender, and culture, operates on a different layer and significantly shapes experiences and interactions. While Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) integrate identity into relational social capital, a critical assessment reveals that identity's complexity and foundational role might be better understood separately. This nuanced approach highlights identity's impact on trust, obligation, and expectation, offering a deeper understanding of social capital and its relation to identity. This perspective aligns with broader sociological discourses on the profound impact of identity (in this study gender) on social structures and relationships.

In examining how female politicians access relational social capital, this section will be guided by two themes conceptualized based on Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) relational dimension of social capital: currency of effort and strategic alliance (see table no 3.3).

4.3.1. Currency of effort

In politics, the ability to access and utilize relational social capital is crucial for success (Hall and Lamont 2013). The quality and strength of interpersonal relationships significantly aid in collaboration, garnering support, and navigating complex political landscapes (Lake and Huckfeldt 1998). Investing in networks is a strategic approach through which individuals, including politicians, can cultivate and leverage this form of social capital to achieve their objectives (Lundqvist 1998). The concept of “currency of effort” is instrumental in articulating how politicians invest various types of resources—including time, effort, and personal activities—to build and sustain relational social capital. This metaphorical expression clarifies that investments are not solely monetary but encompass a variety of contributions that foster strong, resilient social networks. This segment explores how politicians invest in their networks to access the relational dimension of social capital and which people they usually engage with.

For example, consider the activities of politicians in the North, who, despite recognizing the importance of network investment, face constraints due to insufficient financial resources. Xorse's comment highlights this challenge:

"Our responsibility as leaders isn't just to win votes but to earn the unwavering trust of those we serve. It's through consistent integrity, sincere dialogue, and meaningful actions that we bridge the gap and build a foundation of trust strong enough to weather any storm, but it is not easy to do this without money hahaha". (Xorse, North, 15 January 2022, 2pm)

She highlights the importance of building trust among those she serves through consistent honesty, genuine dialogue, and impactful deeds. This dedication to meaningful connections involves time, illustrates the development of social capital through trust establishment and positive relationship cultivation (Purdue 2001). Politicians who prioritize honesty, transparency, and authenticity foster credibility among constituents, enhancing their relational social capital (Valgarðsson et al. 2021). Her reference to the challenge of lacking financial resources underscores the value of non-monetary investments in politics. The "currency of effort" here involves emotional and ethical commitment, which fosters trust and credibility, crucial for sustaining long-term relationships with constituents.

The relational aspect's impact on trust levels within networks is crucial for understanding how social capital is developed and maintained (Downward, Pawlowski, and Rasciute 2011; Levin et al. 2016). Trust acts as a facilitator for social interactions and collaborations; however, the erosion of trust can lead to the weakening of social ties and a reduction in cooperative behaviour. Existing theories need to better address the conditions under which trust is built and eroded, particularly in diverse organizational and network contexts. Moreover, the impact of identity and cultural alignment on trust-building is an area that requires deeper exploration to understand how different identities influence expectations and obligations within networks.

These activities are particularly significant in contexts where financial resources are scarce, for women in regions with developmental and socio-cultural barriers to formal employment like the North., as highlighted by the politician Xorse's acknowledgment of the challenges posed by limited financial capacity. This shows the need for theories to more comprehensively consider how different forms of capital—social, cultural, and economic—interact and influence one another, especially in resource-constrained environments. Despite these obstacles, female politicians in both areas actively strive to build and invest in relationships.

Another participant from the North revealed how she regularly meets with women in the community.

"..., I teach them how to make soap even before I decided to get involved in politics. ... on a regular you would see me in their mist". (Linda, North, 7 February 2023, 2.37pm)

She maintains continuous contact with the women in her community, sharing knowledge and skills, demonstrating her ongoing commitment to these relationships. Her persistent presence among them indicates the substantial time invested. This sustained involvement underscores a deep connection and sense of belonging, crucial elements of social capital (Bourdieu 1986). By actively participating in community activities and physically being there, she strengthens social bonds and reinforces their network of relationships. However, it is noted that her engagement primarily focuses on a specific gender demographic.

It emerges that female politicians in both regions actively strive to establish and invest in relationships deliberately.

"I just got back from the market, yes I go there almost every other week especially market days, Its nice to let them know I understand their struggles and when I am voted I would do more...". (Yaa, Greater Accra, 18 April 2023, 9am)

She also stresses the importance of community engagement through regular visits to the market, aiming to understand their challenges and expressing a commitment to action if elected. Her dedication to engaging with the community, comprehending their hardships, and expressing a commitment to service illustrates the development of social capital, particularly through trust-building and positive relationship nurturing (Purdue 2001). Direct interaction enables her to forge personal connections, address constituents' concerns firsthand, and gain insights into their challenges.

In exceptional cases like the participant below she revealed how she has regular interactions with men and hence had information and encouragement from them.

"... the call came from males actually, yes males, asking me to contest the primaries... you know me from school days, that I always roll with the boys and that has not changed... I am typically identified as the king of queens...". (Fafa, Greater Accra, 18 April 2023, 3.50pm)

Despite the revealed similarities, female participants in both regions emphasize the importance of building relational social capital, particularly highlighting the significance of financial resources and time. However, women in the Greater Accra region distinguish themselves

by not only discussing but also taking concrete actions, giving them an advantage over their counterparts in the North and showcasing the region's advancement in addressing gender issues (refer to table no. 1.2). Additionally, exceptional cases were observed in the Greater Accra region where a few politicians maintained regular interactions with both genders.

Another participant also revealed how she strategically invested time to access relationships especially among men in the space.

“Sometimes if I’m passing and I see community members siting in groups, I don’t wait for invitation I do attend unless I have not seen if I if I see I’ll just pretend as if I’m coming there and I know of the meeting beforehand. if I see a group I’ll go and greet them sometimes if I see you sitting in your store I’ll go and greet you in your store and I will say oh I’m just passing and I just decided to check on you and how are you and those things, this is because eerm getting community members especially men for a meeting is difficult so unaware meetings is what I use” (Awushie, North, 13 December 2022, 4pm)

She deliberately builds relational social capital through informal interactions by joining community groups uninvited and engaging with people in their daily environments. This approach reduces interaction barriers, making community members more comfortable and open, which fosters genuine conversations. Regular, informal visits build trust over time, showing care and reliability, which is crucial for cooperation and mutual support (Purdue 2001). Her proactive method ensures inclusion, even for those not attending formal meetings, thus strengthening social bonds and distributing social capital more widely. To address the challenge of gathering men for formal meetings, she employs "unaware meetings" by integrating engagement into their routines, ensuring continuous interaction without the need for formal gatherings. These informal interactions create a network of social connections, enhancing community resilience and collective action. Her strategy of spontaneous engagement in familiar settings exemplifies how intentional time investment fosters trust, inclusion, and strong social networks, ultimately leading to greater social cohesion and well-being (see eg. Lundqvist 1998).

In conclusion, while financial resources are undoubtedly important, the broader spectrum of investments, including personal time, effort, and engagement, are equally critical in building and sustaining relational social capital. Theoretical frameworks must therefore expand to consider these varied forms of investment and their impacts on social capital formation. This nuanced understanding is essential for appreciating the full range of resources that politicians, particularly those operating in challenging environments, mobilize to navigate their political landscapes effectively. By addressing these theoretical gaps, scholars can offer more robust models that

account for the complexities of social interactions and their impacts on social capital within various contexts.

4.3.2. Strategic alliance

Building positive connections with colleagues and fellow political figures is crucial for politicians, as it enables them to build trust (Tsai and Ghoshal 1998). Through fostering trust, cooperation, and reciprocal assistance, politicians can utilize these connections to amplify their influence, forge partnerships, surmount obstacles, and promote their policy objectives (Kennedy 2000). Consequently, prioritizing constructive interpersonal bonds within political circles is indispensable for politicians aiming to faithfully represent their constituents and effect substantial change in the political landscape. This section would analyse the people these female politicians build connections with and if they are able to bridge connection gaps.

"I will say I have a good relationship with them. Just that there are quite a number of them Sincerely speaking, none of them is at a higher position. Because as a women organizer of the region, those that I happen to know I have personal relationships with, I have a relationship with are just in the constituency and region. I'm not aware of any one in the regional executives that are not in the women committee, not to talk about the national. Okay I will say I don't have personal relationship with them". (Sena, North, 2 February 2023, 1.35pm)

She maintains personal connections with numerous individuals within her constituency and region, indicating the existence of social ties. However, these individuals are primarily part of the women committee with whom she regularly interacts. By nurturing positive relationships with colleagues at the regional level, the politician gains access to relational social capital, facilitating effective collaboration, resource-sharing, and advocacy for shared objectives within their immediate sphere of influence. Despite her strong regional relationships, the politician acknowledges a lack of personal connections with individuals in higher positions, both within the regional executive and nationally. This deficiency implies a potential shortfall in the politician's relational social capital, particularly concerning access to influential networks and decision-making circles beyond their immediate sphere. She also reveals a lack of female mentors in that space.

Furthermore, others mention their limited interactions with members of other parties despite having relationships with individuals of both genders within their own party space.

"Yes yes yes but wait a min do you mean my political party or the other side? yes, I have friends, close ones. Just in case you want to ask about the other parties no I don't have.

various various, some are in the branch, constituencies, region and even national, national yes I have friends. ... both male and females, but prominently males hahaha I don't know why hahaha really, I don't know why. Now even thinking about it hahaha I don't know how it happened that way but majority of them are males rather than the female's yea" (Lordina, Greater Accra, 10 March 2023, 6.40pm).

The relational social capital is characterized by ties of social interaction and a shared vision, both of which significantly influence trust (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998; Ortiz, Donate, and Guadamillas 2016). Her alignment with political parties and the makeup of her social network, predominantly comprising males, exemplify the strategic alliances she has. Also, the presence of close acquaintances within the same political affiliations across various levels (branch, constituencies, region, and national) underscores the existence of social interaction ties and a shared vision, integral elements of the relational dimension of social capital. However, she highlights an absence of friends from opposing political parties which suggests a degree of exclusivity within her social network. This constraint hints at a potential gap in the politician's relational social capital concerning cross-party connections and alliances. The predominance of male friends within her social network indicates gender-specific pathways of social capital, demonstrating the interplay between gender dynamics and social capital (Bjarnegård 2009). This observation resonates with Bourdieu's proposition that the quantity and composition of capital are shaped by gender characteristics within each social group (Laberge 1995).

Female politicians from both regions face challenges in establishing connections either at higher levels, with male counterparts, or across party lines, leading to what is termed as structural holes—gaps within a social network where direct connections or relationships are lacking. However, it was observed that women in the Greater Accra region hold an advantage over their counterparts in the North, as they have access to influential figures at the top but encounter difficulties in establishing inter-party links. Conversely, women in the Northern region emphasized their lack of access to top officials, including women, due to the scarcity of female leaders in influential positions compared to the Greater Accra region, where such figures could serve as mentors (see table no 1.2). These structural holes emerge when there is limited or no communication, collaboration, or resource exchange between specific segments of a network (Burt 1992, 2000).

Structural holes present opportunities for individuals or organizations that can bridge the divide between disconnected groups or individuals (Kleinberg et al. 2008). These individuals, often termed brokers, possess access to varied information, resources, and perspectives from both

sides of the structural gap. By serving as intermediaries, brokers can facilitate the exchange of information, ideas, and resources, thereby gaining a strategic advantage within the network (ibid).

"It is not easy ..., ... I only ok am only having a go to person in the women committee... when to have male mentor it is hard though they are the majority. it is not easy o my sister; the society would think he is sleeping with you". (Awushie, North, 13 December 2022, 4pm).

Her situation resonates with other female politicians; her struggle to find a mentor due to societal assumptions about inappropriate relationships reflects the complex interplay between social interactions, trust, and norms of reciprocity (Tsai and Ghoshal 1998). With only one "go-to person" within the women's committee, this shows her limited network within her immediate political environment. This shows that she can hardly bridge gap, since her reliance on a single individual underscores a potential structural hole in her network, where opportunities for additional connections or diverse perspectives may be lacking.

One important revelation is the influence of external factors such as societal perception on social capital development. These societal perceptions and expectations impact their forming of relationships and accessing resources in social networks (Levine 2009). This aligns with the understanding that social capital is shaped not only by individual actions but also by broader social structures and cultural norms (Fukuyama 2000). These societal perceptions contribute to the existence of structural holes by discouraging female politicians from seeking relationships that could potentially bridge gaps in their social networks and provide valuable support and guidance.

"... see them as my friends and also colleagues because some are there, they are around the same age with me though I'm even the youngest among them all of them. they are this thing they are a lot of grown-ups within our... this thing party, and they know each other for long so this thing most people in the party they see you as eeee small girl and they don't come close so I only have friend who are my same age in the party and women because the men... they don't want to". (Yawa, North, 16 January 2022, 11.30am)

She reveals the challenges she faces in accessing relational social capital within her political party, particularly due to age and gender dynamics. The other group members are significantly older and have longstanding relationships with each other. This points to a potential structural hole in her network, as she lacks connections with older, more established members who could offer mentorship, guidance, and access to valuable resources and opportunities. Not only does she have challenges accessing relational social capital due to her age but she also faces gender challenges where the men are reluctant to form relationships with her or allow her enter their space.

This highlights the influence of power dynamics and gender roles on social capital development (Lowndes 2004). This aligns with the recognition that social capital is unequally distributed and can be affected by power differentials and social hierarchies (Asquith 2019; Lowndes 2004).

This situation is not unique to Northern politicians alone; some female politicians in the Greater Accra region also voiced similar sentiments about lacking cross-party connections and male connections. Despite these challenges faced by most of the females in both the Northern and Greater Accra region, some had unique experiences. According to this politician

“I am in two committees, two major committees, standing committee and select committee. One is the appointment committee, which is the committee that eerm vets and accesses the president’s nominees for ministerial positions and also the supreme court judges, so eerm the decision was taken by the party to take women from, representation from one from the north, one from the middle belt and one from the south, and one from the South. And so that was what was done. And so, I represented the south, when it comes to party space am a number of committees, the manifesto committee”. (Joana, Greater Accra, 17 November 2022, 10.45pm)

Her involvement in multiple committees showcases the politician's active engagement and influence within the party's organizational structure (Carpenter 2016). Through participation in various committees, she broadens her network of connections and relationships within the party, potentially bridging structural gaps and accessing diverse sources of support, information, and resources. By actively participating in decision-making processes, shaping party agendas, and promoting inclusivity, politicians can fortify their networks, bridge structural gaps, and enhance their influence and effectiveness within the political space (ibid).

In summary, it is observed that female politicians, especially those in the North, face challenges in leveraging structural gaps due to entrenched gender biases and stereotypes that hinder their participation and influence within political networks. Despite some female politicians in the Greater Accra region acknowledging access to male networks, they lack connections in other parties. Although these politicians often advocate for gender equality, they do not collaborate with female counterparts from other parties.

The study of strategic alliances in the context of social capital is particularly crucial for understanding structural mechanisms that influence the gender gap in politics. Social capital, fundamentally embedded in relationships and networks, significantly shapes opportunities and barriers within political systems, often manifesting in gendered patterns of inclusion and exclusion. Strategic alliances, as a form of mobilized social capital, are essential in examining how

collaborative networks can either perpetuate or challenge the existing gender disparities in political arenas. These alliances are often the foundation upon which political action is built, determining who gets to participate and who remains marginalized. In the context of gender, strategic alliances can either reinforce traditional power structures, where male-dominated networks prevail, or they can act as transformative coalitions that actively promote gender inclusivity.

Understanding the role of strategic alliances in politics through the lens of social capital offers insights into the structural mechanisms that create and sustain the gender gap. These alliances are not just about sharing resources but also about reshaping the discourse and practices within political spaces to ensure equal participation. Therefore, studying these dynamics is key to revealing how social capital, accessed and mobilized through strategic alliances, can be a critical factor in either maintaining the status quo or in driving change towards greater gender equality in politics.

Chapter conclusion

Female politicians in Ghana's Northern and Greater Accra regions employ diverse strategies to access political social capital, tailored to each region's socio-cultural dynamics. Utilizing cognitive, relational, and structural forms of capital, they navigate the political landscape to contribute meaningfully to governance. However, systemic barriers rooted in patriarchal norms persist, necessitating efforts to promote social capital access. Despite similarities in facing gender biases, differences emerge in access to informal networks and resources between regions. In the North, traditional gender roles hinder relational capital, exacerbated by structural limitations like inadequate infrastructure. In the Greater Accra region, while resources are comparatively better, entrenched biases within political institutions impede leveraging relational capital. Nonetheless, female politicians demonstrate resilience through grassroots mobilization and coalition-building, enhancing cognitive capital among women constituents. However, they are able to access political party cognitive social capital. Female politicians in the North have a lot of challenges leveraging structural holes unlike female politicians in the Greater Accra region. Addressing social capital disparities requires collaborative efforts from stakeholders to promote gender equality, education, and institutional reforms. By fostering inclusivity and valuing diversity, Ghana can empower female political leaders and advance towards a more equitable democracy.

Subsequently, chapter five will discuss the ways in which female politicians use social capital and how it affects their involvement in politics in both the Northern and Greater Accra regions.

Chapter five

Social networks and power plays: The impact of social capital on female politicians' political participation in Ghana

5.0. Chapter overview

The previous chapter examined the how female politicians access social capital through the framework of Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998). The findings highlight the varied and similar approaches by which female politicians access relational, cognitive, and structural social capital in these two regions. Having established the methods of accessing social capital among female politicians, influenced by factors that shape the development of social connections. This current chapter presents the findings to address question two: *In what ways do access to and utilization of social capital influence women's political participation?*

In this current chapter, the results of exploring the impact of social capital on female politicians' political participation in Ghana, as conceptualized by Nahapiet and Ghoshal in 1998, are presented. Nahapiet and Ghoshal's foundational theory identifies three components of social capital—structural, cognitive, and relational—that collectively determine an individual's ability to operate within a social structure. The literature suggests that the social groups and networks to which politicians belong to significantly shape their sense of self (Lim and Putnam 2010). This self-concept is influenced by emotional factors, as well as the physical and institutional realities of the political sphere, considering socio-cultural limitations (Parsons 2014). Consequently, this suggests that a politician's identity influences their actions, with their behaviour in politics reflecting their self-identity formed through their social connections.

This chapter uses a comprehensive approach to examine how the access to and utilization of social capital impact the political participation of female politicians. A particular emphasis is placed on the potential influences of social capital dynamics on women's political participation, including enhanced information access, increased political efficacy, empowerment, and greater influence in the socio-political sphere. The chapter starts by outlining and analysing the principal types and sources of social capital discovered in the data gathered. This exploration encompasses the roles and functions of networks female politicians join, community engagement, trust, norms, and shared values in a political setting. It concludes by examining the potential obstacles and opportunities derived from social capital that shape women's participation in politics, considering

societal and cultural norms, educational opportunities, resource access, and different types of capital such as economic, cultural, and symbolic.

Female politicians' political participation are significantly influenced by cognitive, relational, and structural social capital (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998). Cognitive social capital, which relates to their perceptions of social relationship quality, impacts their decision-making and activities (Adler and Kwon 2002). Relational social capital, encompassing their networks and connections, affects their interactions with key players, influencing their behaviour and policy decisions (Jovani and Roito 2021). Additionally, structural social capital, linked to their engagement in social networks, influences their behaviour and decision-making processes (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998).

The analysis shows that the interplay of cognitive, relational, and structural social capital is pivotal in influencing political participation and success of female politicians in Northern and Greater Accra regions. Although these social capital dimensions are different, they interdependent on each other (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998), influencing how female politicians participate in within the political sphere. The findings also highlight the multifaceted impact of social capital on female politicians, shaping their decision-making, interactions, and overall success in the political field. Understanding and leveraging these different forms of social capital can be crucial for female politicians in navigating their roles and achieving their objectives within the Ghanaian political landscape.

5.1. Networks and power: Structural social capital's impact on female political action

Structural social capital relates to the formation and interrelationships within a network, as analysed by Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998). Bourdieu (1986) highlights that the structural aspect of social capital is instrumental for network actors in leveraging social capital. This section aims to explore how the structural dimension of social capital impacts female politicians' actions, with a special focus on the strategies employed by female politicians in utilizing their network-based resources for information exchange, mobilizing resources, and gaining power and its limitations. Guiding the analysis are several themes: power and hierarchy, knowledge dissemination, and social places (see table no 3.1).

This analysis pays close attention to how politician's networks either facilitate or obstruct their access to opportunities and advancements, and the specific types of opportunities and

challenges these networks present. It examines how these networks influence politicians' accountability and responsiveness to their constituents. Additionally, it investigates whether their network ties help in building public trust, credibility, and public support. It explores whether their network connections help them bridge social gaps, engage with diverse community members, and address the needs and interests of various groups. Lastly, it considers how their social capital impacts their capacity to develop inclusive policies and initiatives.

5.1.1. Power and hierarchy

Hierarchical structure and the distribution of power within a network significantly affect how structural social capital influences politicians' political participation (Aalabaf-Sabaghi 2012; Burt 2000). The hierarchical nature of the networks with which politicians are associated contributes to the distribution of power and influence, both within and beyond these networks (Burt 2000). This reveals that the roles politicians hold in these networks are instrumental in accessing resources and extending their influence. As Bourdieu (1986) argued, the varied distribution of potential resources is linked to the concentration of individual positions within the social network, impacting how individuals' access and utilize social capital in these networks. Hence this section is dedicated to analysing the networks that female politicians are a part of in their work environments (such as parliament, political parties, and communities), focusing on the hierarchy and power they possess.

The data revealed that many networks, particularly those dominated by males, often restrict female members' freedom to explore, limiting their participation in the network and confining them to gender-specific activities. Female politicians expressed that their networks connect them to gender-specific opportunities, limiting their ability to connect with a broader range of opportunities and networks, and thereby hindering their ability to earn trust as effectively as their male counterparts. Due to men holding dominant positions, they often allocate roles to women that they deem suitable, rather than allowing women to occupy spaces where they can fully function (Bourdieu 1986).

The female politician below describes how this restricts her abilities in politics. Although she managed to gain some knowledge from the limited role or 'box' she was assigned to, this learning was influenced by gender biases.

"... ok so the last working committee that I was on we helped raise for the women wings activities, I was involved in basically everything, I am so passionate about it that I drafted

the letters myself, distributed them to the appropriate persons involved and then we were able to raise some funds for our activities”. (Lordina, Greater Accra, 10 March 2023, 6.40pm)

Her experience in the committee was pivotal in shaping her focus towards women's issues, leading her to actively seek funding for the women committee's objectives. Collaborating with other members, she followed a collective, gender-focused objective. Her involvement in the committee and her zeal for gender equality reflect her commitment to this collective effort, likely stemming from her alignment with the network's gender-focused agenda. This commitment showcases a shared identity and a determination to further the group's initiatives (Kramer 2006). This highlights the critical role of women's networks in achieving shared objectives and goals, as evidenced in this thesis through her ability to mobilize resources, advocate for rights, and tackle specific gender issues. Yet, it raises the question: do these efforts effectively tackle gender inequality in politics?

The influence of her networks was significant in directing her focus towards gender issues, driven by her realization of limited access to more powerful networks. This spurred her determination to drive change, highlighting the impact of the network's structural social capital on her political participation. Her active engagement in various network activities solidifies her role as an advocate for women's rights and empowerment, reflecting the network's primary goal. Her fervent participation in the network activities is not only a pursuit of women's empowerment but also a means of crafting her identity and narrative as a gender activist, in line with the network's ethos as revealed by (Polletta 1999). Nonetheless, it is revealed that this effort does not tackle gender inequality in politics in Ghana because their effort is limited to their space and not the whole political field.

Some participants from the Greater Accra region have managed to broaden their networks beyond predominantly female circles. This diversification was achievable due to their technical expertise. One female politician highlighted that her technical knowledge enabled her to establish connections with prominent male political figures, an opportunity she ascribes to her background in a professional domain that is predominantly male.

“And again I am a technical person so eerm they requested for my technical expertise to help them in the assembly which I did, I also help with the manifesto, ..., the area of infrastructure... so that is when I started being a bit more proactive in politics”. (Joana, Greater Accra, 17 November 2022, 10.45am)

Her technical abilities and expertise have established her as an invaluable asset in the political circles, leading to her participation in various crucial political activities and committees. Bourdieu (1986) indicates that individuals with specialized skills or knowledge typically hold a form of influence and power within their social networks, a fact that is exemplified by this politician. Her proficiency in technical matters has provided her with opportunities to engage in political activities and play a role in decision-making processes, thereby potentially enhancing her influence and efficiency in the political sector. This aligns with Eagly and Carli (2007a) findings that individuals with specific expertise can significantly impact policy formulation and decision-making, regardless of gender.

In this context, her technical expertise has positioned her as a key asset within her political party, facilitating access to influential networks. Her engagement in tasks such as contributing to the party's manifesto and infrastructure planning highlights her unique role in the political sphere especially her party space. This niche roles within the political party have endowed her with power and authority, thereby increasing her ability to influence and exert power, unaffected by gender. Her active participation in decision-making and providing technical assistance illustrates the significant influence she possesses due to her specialized knowledge. This demonstrates that her networks, as a member of the professional community and a political player, which are defined by her access to the political field and its potential resources, serve as a competitive advantage for her.

Additionally, she mentioned that

“What helps you when you are in any committee of the party, most of the times it makes you get involved, you have a much better understanding of the politics of certain decision that you are wondering to take.... I can say that I learnt a lot from my colleagues....., even though most of the time I was the only woman”. (Joana, Greater Accra, 17 November 2022, 10.45am)

Her active involvement offers her the chance to build social capital, create connections, and gain insights into political processes and decisions. This highlights the significance of active participation in committees rather than mere membership. Lin (2001) have shown that active engagement in social networks like committees results in acquiring knowledge and insights regarding political processes, decision-making, and policy issues. She played a crucial role in the party's infrastructure and manifesto committee, which shaped her identity. Such empirical evidence supports the idea that participation in committees create political education by developing social

capital, thereby influencing identity formation and behaviour. Studies, including those by Verba et al. (1995), have shown that active participation in political committees enhances understanding of politics and leverages social capital in political fields. This evidence reinforces the view that involvement in committees enhances comprehension of political decision-making and influences the utilization of social capital in politics.

Nevertheless, gender dynamics within political settings cannot be overlooked. Often the only woman in various committees, her experiences emphasize potential gender imbalances. Her expertise allowed her involvement, yet it also underscored the challenges in distributing social capital, with women commonly encountering obstacles to accessing networks and resources. Her unique position as the sole woman brings to light gender disparities in the structural social capital within party contexts, showing how women generally have fewer chances to build networks and access resources compared to men, as noted by Verba et al. (1995). This shows that committee membership allows members to gain a deeper understanding of political processes, decision-making frameworks, and policy issues, though this varies depending on the committee's nature.

Her experiences also highlight the underrepresentation of women in political committees and the resulting power dynamics. The data of this thesis indicates that women typically face challenges in reaching decision-making roles and influential networks, leading to a diminished political presence and influence. Leading most women to focus on women empowerment issues which is often rejected by the dominate male networks in the political space. The pattern of women having limited access to varied networks is predominantly seen in the North.

Some participants from the North noted the gendered nature of their network which exclude them from significant decision-making activities. This affects their participation in the field.

“I am not in any committee expect the women committee, yes because I am this thing the women organizer. I was first in the polling this thing but after 2016 I stopped. They go for meeting they do not this thing call you but when is work then they ask you to work, join to work. Even the women committee in the North... is this thing they have some party meeting, and they make decisions and this thing they do not consult me, is bad”. (Afi, North, 10 January 2023, 9am)

She shared her experience of being relegated to work duties while being excluded from decision-making processes, shedding light on the social dynamics in her workplace, presumably rooted in traditional norms. Research shows that in the Northern region, women are often sidelined in both domestic and professional decision-making, with men typically assuming leadership roles

(Ardayfio-Schandorf 2005; Bawa and Sanyare 2013; Sossou 2011). This exclusion extends to her professional environment, where she is limited in accessing resources and networks, consequently diminishing her political influence and participation opportunities. This also points to her reduced power within the women's committee, despite her full membership of the political party.

The female politician's limited opportunity to join key party committees, especially those focused on decision-making, reflects gender-based stereotypes and biases that relegate women to more laborious tasks. It also highlights the gender-related imbalances in gaining social capital within her political party. This exclusion led to her feeling of frustration and dissatisfaction with her party's treatment, underscoring her group's minimal influence and peripheral status within the party hierarchy. She experienced feelings of being undervalued and overlooked in crucial decision-making processes, a pattern prevalent in the party space and society. This is why she joined forces with women's groups to collectively oppose this exclusion.

These findings reinforce what Eagly and Karau (2002) identified: women commonly face barriers in achieving roles in decision-making and in accessing influential networks within organizations. Her exclusion from various committees exemplifies the frequent disconnection of women from powerful networks, which are essential for their effective performance and integration with other influential groups. Individuals connected to diverse and strong networks are more inclined to engage in decision-making and hold influence within organizations (Burt 2004).

The emphasis on the Northern region and the role of societal norms in the marginalization of women, deeply rooted in political practices, highlights that the participant faces barriers not just due to her gender but also because of her regional context, which significantly affects her structural social capital access and utilization. This context is crucial in shaping gender dynamics and influencing women's opportunities in political participation. Viewing her situation through an intersectionality lens reveals how gender dynamics interplay with other societal aspects like region or ethnicity, influencing experiences, opportunities, and the utilization of structural social capital (Fleming, Neville, and Muirhead 2022; McCall 2005). This situation limited the female politician's ability to create connections in and out of the political sphere. This aligns with existing literature indicating that politicians build goodwill and networks through their roles, involving colleagues, party officials, and peers (Müller 2007). These networks are vital for politicians to gain essential resources, information, and opportunities.

Besides the network's ability to connect its members to opportunities and other influential networks, structural social capital also encompasses the network's role in facilitating information flow among members and their access to information.

5.1.2. Knowledge dissemination

Social networks give people access to information, which constitutes structural social capital. This access largely centres on the nature of the relationships within the network, as noted by Burt (1992, 2005). Networks like party committees are sources of social capital, generated collectively, and shared among members. Understanding the varied connections and relationships these politicians maintain across different social, cultural, or organizational lines can shed light on how their social capital impacts their political participation. The data reveals that female politicians often form gender-specific networks, limiting their access to diverse, weak, and influential ties, which in turn restricts their information flow and narrows their sources of information and knowledge.

The data also indicates variability in how female politicians acquire information, with some relying on close ties and others on weak ties. Those connected through weak ties often receive recommendations based on their engagement in issues of mutual interest, benefiting from the expansive reach of these ties. Politicians with a diverse network of weak ties encompassing different genders, executives, and community leaders commonly seen in the Greater Accra region tend to be more successful than those limited to close or gender-specific weaker ties commonly observed in the Northern region. This is because a varied network of information and recommendations can more effectively guide their decision-making and the utilization of social resources in the political field.

One female politician described the process of her recruitment through information she received from her network.

“I had a call, that eeeh would I be interested to run for the women’s organizer of the party in the region? And I said wooow, that would not be a bad idea..... yes very active in politics, seems they were actually just brainstorming or looking for eeeeh for a candidate eeeh I mean for the women front ...”. (Lordina, Greater Accra, 10 March 2023, 6.40pm)

This indicates that the female politician's involvement and networking in politics, reflecting her structural social capital, resulted in her recognition and recommendation for opportunities within this sphere. Her consideration as a candidate is linked to her active political engagement

and relationships with key individuals, highlighting how structural social capital aids in identifying and recruiting for specific roles in political organizations. This is further emphasized by the crucial role that party leaders and influential figures play in spotting, informing, and recruiting suitable candidates for diverse positions.

It is noteworthy, however, that the opportunities presented were specifically gendered, not aligned with the generally male-dominated roles. Political parties and organizations, in their search for suitable candidates, prioritize those who resonate with their principles and ideologies. In this instance, the politician's consideration for the women's organizer role by the party reflects targeted recruitment. This strategy, involving high-ranking party members, shapes her career towards a gendered leadership role, underlining the impact of recruitment practices and information exchange in influencing the diversity and structure of political leadership and careers, in line with Gatto and Wylie (2021)'s findings.

Though the gender training manual for the parliament of Ghana against this act of limiting politicians due to gender.

“Engendering” parliaments entail raising awareness among all MPs, men and women, of the importance of taking gender into account - understanding how a society’s concept of “man and “woman” leads to inequalities - in all actions, from policy-making to budget preparation through implementation and evaluation”. (Gender training manual for the parliament of Ghana).

Her recruitment process, though facilitates women empowerment as stated by the parliamentary constitution, it also confined her participation leading to gender inequality. The female politician's situation also sheds light on how performance influences knowledge dissemination. The data collected for this thesis indicates that individuals known for their competence, skills, and previous achievements are more likely to gain attention and be considered for leadership roles due to the trust they have built with recommenders and constituents. Alvarez and Brehm (2002) highlight that voters place high importance on past performance and qualifications when choosing candidates. Thus, the female politician's earlier contributions and accomplishments in her community and political party likely influenced others' trust and recognition, making her a potential candidate.

As per Goffman (1956) and Schafer and Keith (1985), individuals' agency evolves from their interpretations of others' assessments and reactions to their actions. The female politician's agency, developed from such perceptions, helped her establish trust. This trust led executives to

share critical information with her, supporting her candidacy. This support, rooted in her established trust from past performances, extended beyond information sharing to include strategic assistance for her success in the role.

The experience of receiving information and support is not unique to female politicians from either the Northern or Greater Accra regions. Some acquire information through personal connections, while others leverage community and weaker ties. A recurring theme in these experiences is the gendered nature of the information, though there are a few cases of non-gendered information from the data gathered for this thesis. In these instances, as observed and mentioned by some female politicians, they received information from individuals of both genders, mainly men, which facilitated access to non-gender-specific insights. These connections with men were often formed through school networks, as elaborated in the interview below. In her specific case, the information was of a general nature, reflecting her entrance into the field as a polling agent, a role that is not gender-specific, unlike the position of a women's organizer.

"I had my mate from Zagyuri Anglican who is Isaiah, he knew my interest and he was already involved in the party politics so as he invited me to come for this thing... polling agent... I became a committee member, so I got to know the dos and donts of the field... now a party executive". (Afi, North, 10 January 2023, 9am)

This female politician, hailing from the Northern region, established social ties with a colleague in the political field, albeit less influential. This relationship served as her gateway into politics, providing her with essential knowledge, opportunities, and norms of the field, thereby enhancing her knowledge and participation in party politics. Research reveals that exposure to political discussions and association with politically literate colleagues can motivate one's active participation in politics (Parker et al. 2008). Her experience as a polling agent, a role pivotal in enriching her understanding of the electoral process and protecting party votes, informed her about the workings of the field. This experience, in turn, led to her becoming a committee member and later a party executive. Her experiences and insights were not gender-specific, allowing her to engage with a diverse demographic, thus broadening her knowledge of the party and its electoral procedures.

Despite this she mentioned in the previous section that she was not receiving the recognition she needed, which led her to become a women's organizer. Since the network did not reciprocate or share information after she joined, she had to carve out a niche for herself. This shaped her political involvement towards women's issues, as she believed this focus would provide

her with the recognition she sought. The data gathered also shows that the locations politicians frequent, and their social circles significantly influence the networks they form, the information they receive, and their interactions, thereby shaping and influencing their political pursuits. Therefore, analysing these common meeting places provides insight into their primary social interactions and the factors influencing their political initiatives.

5.1.3. Social places

This research defines ‘social places’ as the various locations where politicians meet, both within their communities and beyond, including religious venues, offices, and during their daily activities. These locations act as physical settings that facilitate gatherings, interactions, and the formation of connections, playing a crucial role in granting access to and utilization of structural social capital due to their function as community interaction centres. This understanding allows me to explore how the physical and social attributes of a location contribute to the creation, sustenance, and use of social networks. The findings of this research indicate that community hubs and homes are the most common meeting spots for participants, particularly those in the Northern region.

“... most of the time I meet the community, eerm I mean the women I teach them how to fish at the community centre. With this I mean I teach them how to make soap and sell so they can be financially independence”. (Linda, North, 7 February 2023, 2.37pm)

This highlights that the female politician engages predominantly with a gender-specific segment of the community in soap-making and selling activities. This is a core aspect of structural social capital. Through acquiring these skills, women are empowered not only with a trade but also with the means for greater self-reliance and financial independence. The initiative to teach women soap-making is poised to create new networks and relationships within the community, offering support, resources, and collaborative prospects, thereby increasing the community's overall social capital. However, this support is notably gender specific.

Moreover, this initiative reflects a deliberate move towards gender equality, potentially reinforcing the community's social fabric and fostering collective efforts towards common objectives, central to structural social capital. Initially focusing on strengthening internal group bonds, this effort might also generate 'bridging' social capital, connecting women to a wider spectrum of individuals and groups beyond their immediate circles. However, this expanded social capital remains gender-biased. According to the data for my thesis, these gatherings are exclusively

for women, indicating a gap in male participation. The activities in these spaces are mostly tailored to appeal to women.

In the Greater Accra region, I observed a distinct approach among female politicians in connecting with the community, primarily through rallies, social gatherings, and religious centres. The gender demographic here differs notably from those in the North, where interaction patterns vary. Specifically, in the Greater Accra region, politicians create close ties with constituents by visiting them at their workplaces, reciprocated by constituents visiting them. This phenomenon, akin to what Burt (1992) terms "network closure," holds significance in resource allocation dynamics. Notably, I observed a marked absence of gender bias within these tight-knit networks of politicians in Greater Accra, in contrast to the North. Also, these meeting places in the Greater Accra region are not gender specific but non-gendered.

In conclusion, the data highlights how information flow, power structures, and network connections are pivotal in shaping female politicians' political participation, emphasizing the structural aspects of social capital that dictate the distribution of resources and opportunities in political networks. These factors impact how politicians utilize their social capital and perform their roles, including the nature of their connections. Female politicians often engage with constituents in social settings, with the frequency of these meetings building trust and facilitating information exchange. But this is mostly gendered in the North as compared to the Greater Accra region.

The findings of this current research suggest that female politicians often lack the resources needed to form powerful, strategic networks (elaborated on in chapter 4). As a result, they struggle to utilize strategic alliances for resource sharing effectively. Moreover, the networks they typically join tend to restrict their active involvement in the field. The data gathered also highlights how influential individuals who recruit female politicians in the both regions not only impact their entry into the field but also shape their political participation by assigning them to gender-specific roles. These roles have mixed effects on the politicians' participation. Positively, they offer easier access to the field, resource acquisition, opportunities for learning, and skill development. However, negatively, the gendered nature of these advantages can limit their broader field access.

The research also points to an unequal distribution of power in the field, with some female politicians being recruited only for gender-specific roles, leading to limited access to more general

positions and power. This limitation is partly due to entrenched socio-cultural norms within the political sphere. Additionally, while some participants struggle to overcome these inequalities in accessing networks and resources, a few have managed to do so through connections with male-dominated networks established before their political careers. These networks facilitated their interaction with other influential political figures. This ensured general knowledge sharing and information exchange, and eased their integration into the political landscape by establishing a notable presence in networks and committees.

The data for this thesis consequently demonstrates that female politicians operate within varied structural and interactive frameworks that collectively impact their political participation. These elements also shape their access to resources and networks, either directly or indirectly, throughout their political careers. Structural social capital highlights the significance of network connections. However, there is debate over whether objectives are met through far-reaching ties via pivotal "brokers" as suggested by Burt (1992, 1998), who bridge various networks (Granovetter 1973; Putnam 2000), or through strong bonds within close networks. I found that female politicians require both strong and weak ties for success in politics, alongside influence and power to achieve their goals. Additionally, the result of this thesis indicates that not all politicians wield equal power, impacting their resource distribution, a concept supported by Bourdieu (1985). Significantly, female politicians can transcend structural power barriers by forming networks in male-dominated spheres outside work, which can be advantageous in politics. However, one important aspect revealed about these networks is that they do not give female politicians the recognition they need, even if they are allowed into their space, especially in the Northern region.

The analysis also moves beyond structural explanations to examine other factors influencing female politicians' participation. While structural social capital is a foundational element for building and utilizing social capital, merely being part of various networks does not guarantee high-quality relationships or political success. Extensive networks and associations might be present, but they only facilitate social capital when they function alongside relational and cognitive social capital. Burt (1992) notes that a thorough analysis of social capital's impact on political participation involves more than just structural aspects and dimensions. Thus, the next section delves into cognitive social capital and its effect on female politicians' political participation.

5.2. The influence of cognitive dynamics on female political engagement

Cognitive social capital focuses on the intellectual and cognitive elements of social ties (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998). This section thus concentrates on examining the influence of shared knowledge, objectives, values, culture, and expertise within the networks of female politicians, and how it contributes to a shared understanding of collective actions and political participation within their social framework.

Culture shapes how people think and understand things (see eg. Quinn and Holland 1987). In many traditional cultures, expectations about gender can limit women's opportunities (Shiraz 2015; Shvedova 2005). For instance, these cultures often see women as unfit for leadership roles. This belief can create obstacles that stop women from taking action and becoming leaders. It can also make women strategize to use the knowledge they acquire to empower themselves.

In politics, the way female politicians utilize cognitive social capital—specifically through "Shared norms and collective identity" and "Cognitive synergy, collective knowledge, and shared information" (refer to table no. 3.2)—is crucial for assessing the gender gap in the political field.

5.2.1. Shared norms and collective identity

Previous research has shown that individuals within networks with common objectives and values are significantly influenced in their collaborative efforts (Elmir et al. 2013; Nohrstedt 2016). The presence of a collective goal and culture is reflected in resource utilization and decision-making processes in politics. The network's shared norms and objectives include common expectations and guiding principles for its members. These shared values and norms foster trust, reciprocity, and a sense of collective identity within the social network. Furthermore, common norms, goals, and visions not only encourage collective efforts but also facilitate collaborative projects (Berger and Luckmann 1967). They additionally contribute to the increased efficiency and effectiveness of politicians' actions (Monterde et al. 2015).

The data gathered indicates that shared goals and understanding contribute to building trust and reciprocity. This is particularly noticeable when politicians view their network members as reliable and well-informed, leading to better alignment of actions, synchronized efforts, and more effective collaboration. It is also observed that trust, typically developed over time through shared experiences and the perceived integrity of community members, fosters reciprocity. This is the

practice of mutually beneficial exchanges that strengthen cooperative behaviours and trust (Bhandari and Yasunobu 2009).

This section focuses on adherence to norms, cooperative decision-making, collective intelligence, and the maintenance of legitimacy and reputations within female politician's networks. Discussions included how female politicians developed social capital influenced by their environment, family connections, and ambition for change, impacting their engagement in social networks. The variables in this section are different to those that define structural social capital but some are overlapping, this shows how these dimensions of social capital are interconnected and rely on each other in the space of politics. Restrictions due to socio-cultural norms or feelings of non-acceptance prevented some politicians from participating in certain networks. Others were excluded for not meeting specific criteria. Despite these challenges, female politicians formed or joined new networks, striving to be effective within them. They shaped their identities around shared norms, although some still faced difficulties in integrating into these networks.

According to this female politician

"... as a female member of parliament and an education enthusiast and knowing how the female state of education in my constituency, I must act as the leader to clear the path. I am that interface between the government and my constituent especially the girl child. Making sure that my party and government sticks to this mission". (Ameyo, Greater Accra, 7 December 2021, 1.45pm)

She fully embraces her dual role as a policymaker and a representative for her constituents, placing a strong emphasis on the advancement of female education. Her dedication to female education signifies a deep-rooted commitment to promoting gender equality and empowering education in her community. Through her advocacy for these values, she plays a pivotal role in cultivating a collective understanding of the critical importance of educating women. In doing so, she strategically positions herself as a reliable intermediary between the government and her constituents, with a special focus on young girls. This trust is instrumental in creating effective communication and collaboration between the government and the community, a key factor in the successful implementation of educational policies.

Her approach also highlights how she leverages her social capital; her active promotion and embodiment of gender equality values typically lead to greater adoption and effectiveness of related policies. As a leader and a bridge between different groups, she aids in creating social cohesion. She is deliberately working towards building a more inclusive and cohesive community,

one that addresses the needs of marginalized groups, particularly girls which aligns with the findings of Jovani and Roito (2021). This reflects the shared values within her network, her intentional adherence to them, and the trust her community and network places in her to achieve their collective goals. Additionally, this strategy addresses the broader societal issue of women being excluded from decision-making processes. Her network has entrusted her with the task of reversing this trend, with education of young girls as the starting point. Her methods are a prime example of how cognitive social capital can be harnessed to drive positive change, especially in areas of gender equality and education.

This dynamic of the political sphere carving out distinct spaces for women to establish their own shared norms, as existing norms do not provide them with equitable opportunities for trust and participation, is not unique to the Greater Accra region. Similar views were expressed by participants from the Northern region as well. Observations show that women, using their own expertise, collaborate with other women to advocate for gender empowerment, in response to limitations placed on their roles by the hierarchy. As one female politician expressed, she exerted every effort to empower women, a strategy that ultimately contributed to her election.

“We are dedicated to bringing empowerment to the average woman in North, we do all within our power, I personally draft letters to NGOs to seek their support, even to my party and the government. I dedicate time to these activities; this is why I was elected”. (Xorse, North, 15 January 2022, 2pm)

Her actions demonstrate a deep commitment to empowering Northern women, highlighting her hands-on role and active pursuit of support from NGOs, political parties, and the government. This emphasizes her dedication to collective empowerment and collaboration. As Putnam (2000) highlights, cognitive social capital is vital for mutual understanding and cooperation, key in collective initiatives like women's empowerment. Her proactive role in writing letters and rallying support is a conscious effort to uphold these common norms and values. Engaging with NGOs, political parties, and the government is a strategic move to cultivate a women trust-based, collaborative network, compensating for what the political space lacks. Coleman (1988) asserts that such networks are essential in gaining access to resources and information, crucial in areas like women's empowerment where cross-sector and societal collaboration is needed.

Her field activities aiding women exemplify cognitive social capital in action. (Bourdieu (1986) notes that leaders can greatly influence social capital's distribution and mobilization. By investing time and resources in these empowerment activities, she fosters a supportive

environment for women's empowerment. Her focus on the average woman in her area reflects an understanding of the significance of context in social capital's growth and application. Woolcock (1998) contends that social capital is context-specific, necessitating tailored strategies for its development and application according to the distinct social and cultural environments.

It has become evident from the data that the context and common goals significantly shape female politicians' political participation in the political field. These interactions of female politicians likely help to build trust, establish shared norms, and create social networks, potentially leading to positive community outcomes such as enhanced economic activities, improved social welfare, and better crisis management as revealed by Coleman (1988) and Putnam (2000).

5.2.2. Cognitive synergy, collective knowledge, and shared information

According to existing research, cognitive social capital refers to the collective knowledge and insights present within social networks, as identified by Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998). This form of social capital highlights the cognitive aspects of learning, innovation, and problem-solving in these networks. It is about the intellectual assets and skills accessible and utilizable through social connections, including collaborative capabilities, idea exchange, and productive dialogue (Lin 1999a; Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998). Stjernqvist et al. (2018) highlighted how this sense of connection can strongly encourage community engagement and mutual support.

When we look more closely at the utilization of cognitive capital in politics, particularly how it can influence political participation, and potentially narrow the gender gap, we must look beyond the knowledge itself and focus also on how they use that knowledge, their skills, and networks. This holistic approach is crucial for understanding the complex reality of the politics, where knowledge acts as a lever of power and influence. This section of the thesis focused on the collective intelligence and innovative problem-solving approaches within the social networks of female politicians. These approaches foster a shared comprehension and the exchange of political-specific knowledge.

Female politicians indicated that dominant male political networks often impede their access to beneficial knowledge, leading them to establish their own networks. They highlighted their efforts in addressing challenges and the collective strategies they employ in the field. Predominantly in the Northern region, female politicians often unite with other women to empower each other in combating male dominance, focusing on achieving financial independence as a key

strategy. This strategy takes cues from the Greater Accra region, where women's financial autonomy has been linked to increased influence in household affairs, making the transition of this empowerment into public spheres more seamless.

“You see the party as a whole right? But it is not like that ooo,, everyone does not get to know what is happening. You see the top asks them to share at the regional level but as you know the man is the top. Hence, we the few women have also decided to have kind of susu to support and encourage women to engage in politics”. (Xorse, North, 15 January 2022, 2pm)

This female politician reveals a stark contrast between the perceived efforts of a political party to reduce gender inequality and the actual prevalence of such inequality within its top ranks. The unequal gender dynamics within the party, particularly regarding the allocation of information and resources, are quite apparent. This situation reflects a typical pattern in political organizations, where those at the apex control decision-making and information flow, often sidelining those outside the inner circle. Such structures disproportionately disadvantage groups like women, who already encounter systemic hurdles in political engagement (Akita 2010; Asekere 2020; Nwabunkeonye 2014).

To address this, female politicians in the party have innovated an informal support network using traditional communal savings methods, specifically "susu," a practice prevalent in Ghana. This initiative reflects the women's intelligent and creative approach to problem-solving within the party. The "Susu" system not only aids in financial pooling but also fosters a sense of unity and mutual support, recognizing the distinct obstacles they face in a male-dominated setting. By forming this strategy, these women have established alternative support mechanisms, crucial for groups traditionally underrepresented, like women, to strengthen their position. This leads to enhanced inclusivity and more effective collective action among the women. Countering the limitations of the party's formal structures that may not fully represent or support women's interests.

Female politicians within her party have established their own informal support systems to compensate for the lack of institutional support. This strategy is designed to improve mutual understanding, distribute critical information, and cultivate community among the women members. This empowers women to take an active role in a political landscape that tends to marginalize them. Similar issues are observed in the Greater Accra region, where despite more

liberal gender norms, the division of gender in politics still significantly influences the sharing of information and resources.

“It is not easy, some people when those who you know better than especially the males do not want to share what they know. They feel they are in competition with you. One colleague said you think your professional field is same as politics, politics is not a game for ladies, if you think is book sense then know it is a lie, I worked hard to get here, it did not come easy for me to give it to you easily... yes so I also use my professional knowledge”. (Joana, Greater Accra, 17 November 2022, 10.45am)

The female politician's grievances indicate a belief among some male colleagues that women are ill-suited for political and professional environments. This stance embodies deep-rooted gender stereotypes, suggesting certain careers are more fitting for one gender than another. Such biases hinder the access to cognitive social capital by reinforcing gender norms. This perception of women as unsuitable for certain roles or sectors impedes the development of inclusive norms and values, diminishing the overall cognitive social capital in these areas.

Moreover, the hesitation to share knowledge, as mentioned, highlights a competitive nature common in professional environments. This competitive edge becomes more pronounced in sectors where women are a minority, possibly because men feel their position is jeopardized by women joining their field. This reluctance to disseminate information highlights a preference for competition over cooperation. Seen as a zero-sum game, where one person's gain is perceived as another's loss, this mindset is counterproductive to creating strong cognitive social capital (Meegan 2010). Hogg and Terry (2014) observed that when individuals feel their group status is endangered, they might engage in actions to maintain their position. They use strategies like not sharing beneficial information or support, indicative of a low level of cognitive social capital in the workplace.

In environments rich in cognitive social capital, there is a higher tendency for individuals to share knowledge and work collaboratively, buoyed by a collective belief in the mutual benefits of such interactions (Lin 1999b; Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998). However, the male colleagues' competitive view towards the participant implies a deficit of trust and supportive norms for knowledge sharing. Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) have found that high cognitive social capital, characterized by shared language and mutual understanding, fosters more knowledge sharing, innovation, and performance.

This mutual understanding is absent in the participant's case, lessening the likelihood of knowledge exchange. This issue is compounded by the men's perception that women are entering the political field due to gender quotas, not merit, a belief evident in statements like *"I worked hard to get here, it did not come easy for me to give it to you easily."* This viewpoint mistakenly equates diversity and inclusion efforts with providing unearned advantages to underrepresented groups, overlooking systemic challenges and barriers these female politicians might face. This highlights the difficulties in knowledge sharing, the impact of gender norms, and the tension between competition and collaboration in these settings. This leads to the establishment of women's movements and groups within the sector.

"We have women movement and wings, at first, I did not appreciate them but with the help and support they have given me, I reverse my initially thought of them being a white elephant. They way the push the women agenda and try to offer help to we the new folks is amazing. I only wish it could go beyond party boundaries because now when they see us, they see the party before the women agenda". (Sena, North, 2 February 2023, 1.35pm)

This highlights the initial shortfall in knowledge exchange, common norms, values, and understanding that is crucial for fostering collaboration within or between groups in the political sphere. Such a gap led to the creation of women's wings and movements. The female politician initially perceived these groups as 'white elephants', signifying their perceived lack of value and relevance. This perception reflected the inadequate level of resource and knowledge sharing in these women's groups, possibly due to the male-dominated nature of the field and a scarcity of necessary resources for these women's groups.

The female politician's view shifted after experiencing the support and unity within these women's groups. Networks can reshape politicians' perceptions and norms, fostering community and shared goals (Chow and Chan 2008). Consequently, the support from the women's wings altered the participant's view of their ability to support her activities. Her subsequent appreciation for these wings signifies the development of shared values and beliefs, essential to cognitive social capital. These groups champion a united front for women's empowerment, fostering an understanding that surpasses individual differences. Despite transcending personal differences, the participant's change in perspective did not extend beyond political party lines, leading to the domination of political affiliations over the broader women's agenda.

External identities like party affiliations can influence a group's internal focus, possibly causing fragmentation or diluting the primary agenda. The female politician's wish for these

movements to cross party boundaries underlines the need for more inclusivity and a cohesive group identity. Such inclusivity would enrich the cognitive social capital of the women's wing by incorporating diverse experiences and viewpoints, thereby enhancing collective knowledge, and understanding. Ultimately, the female politician's experience reflects the transformative impact of shared norms, values, and understanding within the women's movement network, reshaping her view of their activities.

This research findings indicates that female politicians, especially in the Northern region and Greater Accra regions, struggle to establish cognitive social capital with male colleagues. In contrast, female politicians effectively use informal networks to establish trust and shared values among women. The central role of shared goals and culture in developing and utilizing cognitive social capital is evident. This is exemplified in how female politicians apply their social capital, focusing on women's empowerment and skill sharing, especially in Northern Ghana. A common goal facilitates a unified understanding, encouraging politicians to transcend party, regional, cultural, and gender divides to contribute knowledge and expertise for the electorate's wellbeing.

Despite these efforts from these female politicians, the data gathered reveals a disconnect between national party leaders, who often aim to empower women, and regional executives, whose goals differ due to local social norms, leading to a lack of collaboration and information sharing. Additionally, within the higher ranks of the party, there is a reluctance to share information and skills, particularly with women, due to a belief that women are not meritorious politicians. This leads to a network predominantly among similar male politicians, limiting the advancement and collaboration opportunities for women. Consequently, female politicians form their own alliances, but these too are hindered by party loyalties, translating into less effective groupings.

The data gathered also reveals that while structural and cognitive social capital are important, they are enhanced by relational social capital. To comprehensively understand how these aspects of social capital influence female politicians' political participation, the subsequent section of the study will focus on the relational dimension of social capital.

5.3. Dynamics of relationships and trust in women's political networks

Relational social capital focuses on the quality and nature of social connections, interactions, and trust within a community or among individuals, which shapes their behaviour and assists in achieving their goals, as described by (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998). Relational social

capital acknowledges that the value of social networks and connections lies not just in the quantity of contacts or network size, but in the strength and quality of those relationships and their capacity to promote trust, cooperation, reciprocity, and mutual commitments among group members. Key behavioural aspects of relational social capital in the political sphere, including trust and reciprocity, social support, and solidarity, as well as social influence and socialization, (Adler and Kwon 2002) are crucial in shaping politician's political participation and resource use. These aspects and their implications will be discussed in detail in the subsequent section.

5.3.1 Trust and reciprocity

Research shows that high trust levels encourage individuals to collaborate, share information, and engage in beneficial connections (Adler and Kwon 2002). Notably, relational social capital is formed by shared norms and values, also known as cognitive social capital (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998). Developing trust fosters reciprocity, involving the exchange of favours, support, and resources among network members, fostering a sense of mutual obligation and benefit. Trust-based relationships lead to effective resource management, enabling politicians to confidently depend on others to meet their duties.

Strong connections with influential people or groups grant politicians access to critical resources, such as financial means, expertise, information, and support. These network ties significantly impact politicians' use of government resources, as they use these relationships to secure necessary resources for governance. I observed that politicians, particularly those with long-standing family connections in the field, often build trust through these enduring relationships. This trust, developed over time and often inherited through family ties, grants them access to resources that might otherwise be unattainable. This phenomenon is identified as the benefit of inherited family social capital. Such trust within their network allows members to exchange favours with the expectation of reciprocity, reducing the individual pressure to succeed.

One female politician shared how her sister played a crucial role in helping her establish trust with influential figures, thereby aiding her political growth. This trust she accessed was due to her sister's long-lasting relationship in the party space.

"I would say I kind of tagged along my elder sister because she was a very influential in government. she was there before so it was just in helping her for whatever work she has assigned me to do I would do that, but I was more like in the background helping... as you know politics is give and take hence, I gave my expertise and earned their support". (Joana, Greater Accra, 17 November 2022, 10.45am)

She credits her political engagement to family connections, notably with her elder sister, a former minister of state, whose influence opened doors to significant political networks and connections. This familial bond underlines the importance of informal relationships in political involvement and shaped her behaviour and roles in governance tasks. It also shows the impact of familial socialization and role modelling on her career choices. Research highlights the importance of family and socialization in shaping an individual's attitudes, behaviours, and aspirations (Hoskins and Barker 2016; Özmete 2011).

Literature, including Coleman (1988), points out that group involvement and active participation in group activities are key to developing trust among members. Her time spent assisting her sister and engaging in various tasks helped her build important network connections. These connections, initiated by her sister, impacted her political participation and involvement in political activities, reflecting the transmission of political values within the family. Although her sister's network provided initial access, her own efforts in party activities-built trust with party officials. This trust led to her involvement in sensitive roles, like working on the manifesto committee and later appointments, like being on the board. Her participation in collective decision-making, coupled with access to shared knowledge and resources, was facilitated by the trust she built over time in the party space. Her activities demonstrate the influence of social norms and collective action in her party, enhancing personal relationships. Also, she was recognized hence her making the statement of politics being “give and take”.

This is quite different in the North, where participants mentioned how it was difficult for them to build trust among the male colleagues even when they had inherited social capital and long-time relationships in the party and community space. This has positioned them to women-oriented roles in the space because they feel more welcomed in that space.

“We in the women committee are open with each other about issues and how to solve them and even not only related to politics. we willing to help each other and offer assistance to ourselves.” (Awushie, North, 13 December 2022, 4pm)

Her statement revealed that the women's committee has strong shared values, trust, and support for each other. The members openly discuss different issues and solutions, not just political ones, and are willing to help one another. This openness and readiness to assist strengthen their effectiveness as a group and build a cooperative and supportive atmosphere. The findings hence revealed that actively engaging with networks is crucial for maintaining trust within these

networks. This becomes challenging as the political sphere often does not accommodate the unique demands of female politicians, who juggle their professional responsibilities with societal expectations and personal professional commitments. Therefore, when politicians manage to form networks that facilitate association, the constraints of their busy schedules and societal norms often impede their ability to invest adequate time and effort. Many women in politics have expressed concerns about their limited time and resources, which hinder their efforts to build trust within these networks. It is vital to recognize that while shared values contribute to trust-building, developing this trust is a gradual process that is essential for unlocking the full potential of a network.

“It is not easy, you see how you met them at my office, that is how it is every day, they form a long queue to see me, yes I also go to them during market days to see how they are doing in the market as well, ... they are my pillar”. (Joana, Greater Accra, 17 November 2022, 10.45am)

Her intentional efforts to regularly engage with constituents at her office and during market days indicate a long-standing connection with the community. This habitual engagement implies shared values and substantial trust between her and the people (Coleman 1988). This engagement values mutual trust and understanding for effective cooperation and community support. Furthermore, the trust she has developed over time has created a robust sense of community identity and interdependence, as illustrated by her reference to them as "her pillar." Such strong community ties and mutual dependence are critical to cognitive social capital, promoting social cohesion. Her frequent interactions in both professional and market settings reveal the nature of her community relationships.

It was revealed that female politicians in both regions struggle to establish trust in the field. Therefore, tend to seek it through their women's programs, shaping their participation according to the group's expertise. Additionally, inherited social capital helps build trust for female politicians in male-dominated networks, but this is more common in the Greater Accra region. Northern female participants mentioned they are unable to benefit from this because, even if their family's inherited social capital is relevant, their party space relies on social norms and does not offer them reciprocity.

The examination of relational social capital within the political context of Ghana reveals regional differences between the North and Greater Accra, particularly in how female politicians build and utilize their networks. These differences show the contrasting challenges and

opportunities that women face in these regions, shaped by different norms, cultural patterns, and political structures.

In Greater Accra, the case of Joana illustrates the significant role familial connections play in establishing trust and advancing political careers. Her relationship with her influential sister, a former government official, provided her with unparalleled access to powerful political networks. This inherited social capital offers critical resources and opportunities often inaccessible through other means. Such connections are not only beneficial but may be essential for developing career. Conversely, in the North, female politicians often report difficulties in building trust with male colleagues, which restricts their access to influential networks and confines them to roles within women-specific circles. The women's committees, highlighted by Awushie's experiences, serve as crucial support systems. However, these are primarily confined to dealing with women-specific issues and lack the broader political influence that their counterparts in Greater Accra might wield through more diverse networks. The solidarity among female politicians in the North, while robust within their specific groups, does not translate into broader political influence. These women often find themselves marginalized from the main political discourse, which is predominantly controlled by male-dominated networks. The support they provide each other is vital for personal and group resilience but does not necessarily empower them to break into more influential political circles.

In Greater Accra, female politicians like Joana can use both formal and informal networks to gain political traction. The support she receives from her familial connections not only enhances her political capabilities but also positions her within key decision-making processes, such as working on party manifestos and participating in crucial committees. Joana's regular interactions with her constituents exemplify how trust, built through consistent community engagement, can solidify a politician's standing within their community. This ongoing engagement helps establish a reciprocal relationship where the community supports the politician's initiatives, knowing their needs and concerns are genuinely represented.

In contrast, although female politicians in the North engage with their communities, the scope and impact of these engagements are often limited by the restricted roles they are accorded within the political party structures. The trust they build is more localized and does not necessarily translate into broader political influence or resource access. This analysis emphasises a significant regional disparity in how relational social capital is developed and utilized by female politicians in Ghana. While women in Greater Accra use a mix of family, formal and social networks to gain

greater access to resources and political influence, those in the North struggle with gender-based political structures and the concentration of political power in male hands, which limits their participation to more limited roles. This regional comparison not only highlights the different challenges faced by female politicians but also points to the need for strategies that address these regional disparities, ensuring more equitable access to political capital and influence across Ghana.

5.3.2. Social support and solidarity

Relational social capital, as outlined by Lin (1999b), is key in providing social support and aiding in the mobilization of resources. According to Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), and Lin (2001), strong relationships and networks are crucial for accessing various resources, including knowledge, skills, financial capital, and social connections. Individuals with a solid base in relational social capital are able to use these resources effectively to tackle challenges, capitalize on opportunities, and achieve their objectives (Portes 1998). Social support in these networks means offering assistance, guidance, and resources when facing difficulties or challenges. For politicians, strong ties and connections with influential people or groups can open doors to essential resources like financial capital, expertise, information, and support (Jack 2005). These connections can have a significant impact on how politicians manage government resources, leveraging their relationships to secure the necessary resources for their administrative tasks. Solidarity within these networks is defined by a sense of unity, common purpose, and collective action, fostered by shared identities and norms (Wallaschek 2019).

The data gathered for this thesis revealed varied experiences among participants regarding support systems. While some female politicians benefited from substantial family support, others faced significant challenges due to the lack of support, leading to tension in the political field and influencing their perceptions of the political environment.

"... also my direct biological brother yes was a campaign member ok team member of one NDC presidential candidate eerm. Yes so he eventually also became a member of my campaign team. which really boasted my campaign...". (Fafa, Greater Accra, 18 April 2023, 3.50pm)

Her brother's assistance was a key factor in her success in the field. His longstanding political ties and campaign experience, both within the same party as hers, provided a network that she could tap into for her own field advantage. His pre-existing connections with party officials, combined with his role in her team, brought valuable expertise and expanded the reach of her political agenda within the NDC party, potentially drawing in his own network to support her

cause. Family often plays a crucial role in campaigns, offering dependable support that forms a solid, faithful foundation, characterized by trust and reciprocity (Muraoka 2017; Stoker and Jennings 1995, 2016). This instance illustrates the significant role of relational social capital in her campaign, raising curiosity about the genesis of this collaboration.

She clarified that neither she influenced her family's political affiliations, nor did they impact her decision to join the party. However, they all ended up in the same political party. Nonetheless, given that her brother was a member of the party well before she joined, it can be inferred that family socialization and robust familial connections played a role in her decision to become part of the NDC. Collaborating with her brother during her campaign signified a shared ideology and values within their family, enhancing her campaign's appeal and bringing in additional support. The strong bond with her brother enabled her to access tailored resources and support aligned with the party's agenda, further solidifying her commitment to the party due to his influential status within it.

The research indicates that social support and solidarity, as vital facets of relational social capital, significantly shape the behaviour and achievement of female politicians (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998). These factors are especially critical in a space frequently marked by gender disparities and distinct challenges facing women like the political field. Social support empowers female politicians, offering emotional support, practical help, and the sharing of crucial information and resources, as exemplified by the assistance provided by the politician's brother. Such support, whether it comes from family, colleagues, mentors, or broader networks, enables women in politics to manage the complexity of their roles more effectively, boosting their confidence and decision-making skills. It also acts as a protective barrier against the various challenges and stressors inherent in political life, particularly those exacerbated by gender issues. However, the data also shows that most female politicians in the Northern region do not receive this level of support in their party or community settings, even if they do have it within their family.

Moreover, social support and solidarity are directly impactful on policy formulation and representation. Women with the backing of strong, collaborative networks are often more inclined to propose and uphold policies that cater to a variety of needs and viewpoints, not just those related to gender. This is largely because their networks also endorse and support these broader perspectives.

5.3.3. Social influence and socialization

Political participation is shaped by relational social capital through social influence and the process of socialization. The beliefs, attitudes, and actions of network members significantly impact individuals, as observed by Saatcioglu and Sargut (2013). According to Mu et al. (2008), the development of values, attitudes, and behaviours in individuals is heavily influenced by robust relationships and networks, resulting in the assimilation of uniform norms and behaviours within these networks. Politicians are more inclined to adjust their behaviours to reflect societal norms that emphasize collective efforts, collaboration, and general welfare. Such norms inspire politicians to collectively work, share resources, and make joint decisions for the efficient and fair allocation of government resources. However, it has been identified that these social norms often overlook collective gender action, thereby restricting the operational freedom of female politicians in these environments. Consequently, female politicians have been compelled to establish their norms within their groups for resource pooling.

Additionally, the socialization of some female politicians into traditional gender roles means that, despite their need to actively campaign, they must also consider these gender roles, which in turn influences how they manage their resources in the field. Such socialization affects their candidacy and aligns their behaviour with these societal expectations.

“... very difficult to be a home manager, trust me you hahaha and apart from that I have a special needs child as well yes...When it got to politics during the campaign, I had to arrange someone to take care of the kids because they are still young, the youngest is 5 years ye so I had to get someone to take care of them and I had to be visiting them at least once every two weeks when I was campaigning. my husband is very cooperative”. (Lordina, Greater Accra, 10 March 2023, 6.40pm)

She emphasizes the difficulties she encountered in balancing her domestic roles, notably as a home manager and caregiver for a child with special needs, while also participating in a political campaign. She further notes the necessity of arranging childcare during the campaign and acknowledges the assistance from her supportive husband. This reflects the supportive elements inherent in her family and social networks.

The concept of relational social capital, as explained by Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), focuses on the benefits derived from social interactions and relationships. In her situation, the support she receives from her husband is considered a form of relational social capital. His cooperative approach and his role as a community leader provide her with diverse forms of support,

resources, and network connections, emphasizing the importance of familial and social support in situations where individuals need assistance to manage various roles and responsibilities.

Research, has revealed that robust social support networks, like those from spouses or partners, can mitigate the difficulties individuals face in balancing their personal and professional lives (Markwei et al. 2019; Wani 2022). Such support can manifest in emotional backing, practical help, and shared responsibilities. In this instance, the husband's cooperative nature indicates the presence of supportive relational social capital, aiding in reducing the burden of managing household chores and caring for a child with special needs.

Furthermore, data for this thesis indicates that social networks and support systems are essential for those engaged in political campaigns. Having a strong support network can assist individuals in handling the demands of campaigning while upholding their personal responsibilities. Her efforts in organizing childcare and maintaining regular visits with her children during the campaign illustrate her dedication to balancing her roles as a parent and a politician. The findings also show the lasting influence of socialization on her behaviour, indicating that despite her professional commitments, she still feels the need to be actively present at home, a sentiment that differs from the experiences of men in similar positions.

The female politician emphasized the significant presence of relational social capital within her family environment, a stark contrast to its absence in her professional sphere, specifically in the political party space. This highlights how the impact of relational social capital can fluctuate depending on the unique situations, resources, and support within an individual's social network. The lack of her family support extending into the political sphere posed challenges for her in connecting within that space. Conversely, another female politician shared how her family support carried over from the home environment to the political space, thereby facilitating her integration and access to influential social connections and interactions in that space.

“... but it still better because I have the exposure because of my family. See how I was invited to join boards, trust me, I know education helped but if my sister did not expose me to their radar how would they know I am capable? I am not the only person with such expertise let us remember that”. (Joana, Greater Accra, 17 November 2022, 10.45am)

She disclosed that although her strong family connections in politics provided some advantages, the political field was still challenging, albeit less so than for those without such connections. This indicates that family ties do not uniformly impact individuals within the same

political party. Her family's close and longstanding relationship with the party enabled her to gain significant exposure. The relationship between her family and the party developed over time, enhancing familiarity and interpersonal trust, from which she has benefited.

This long-term familial connection helped the party to recognize her skills and expertise, enhancing her ability to make effective decisions in her role. The trust established through her family's historical bond with the party transcended gender barriers, leading to opportunities and support for her. While acknowledging the importance of education (human capital), she noted the crucial role of her sister's influence (social capital) in elevating her skills and knowledge. This exemplifies the interplay between human and social capital, as others with comparable or superior skills may not have the same opportunities due to their lack of social connections. This is different in the North where female politicians struggle to get the acceptance even from home hence tend to prioritize domestic activities over political activities which in the end affects their political participation.

In conclusion, relational social capital plays a significant role in a politician's career. Female politicians often build this capital with women colleagues, family, and a few outside their immediate professional circle. However, many do not develop such connections with broader networks due to socialization, family priorities, and societal norms. Even those aware of the importance of these networks, particularly in northern regions, find access limited. Those with access to male-dominated networks struggle to utilize them fully, often prioritizing family obligations. As a result, they miss out on potential benefits like access to information and collective decision-making, which stem from relational social capital built on mutual trust within social networks. Unlike their male counterparts, they are unable to exploit structural holes, thereby limiting their acquisition of various advantages.

Trust is a key element in strong relationships, especially over time, and this is evident in politics, a field traditionally dominated by men. This male dominance has made it difficult for women to gain the same level of trust, crucial for fostering reciprocal, collaborative behaviours, and teamwork. As noted by Coleman (1988), politicians build consensus within their networks through interactions with each other and with voters. However, women's restricted access to these networks prevents them from engaging in and shaping the norms typical of the political landscape.

I noticed that women with established family connections in politics, particularly those with longstanding party affiliations, especially in the Greater Accra region, are better equipped to navigate these gender-specific challenges. This is due to the tendency of political leaders to form alliances with individuals they trust and can rely upon, often those with strong connections within the party. Conversely, women who are newcomers to the political field often find it challenging to establish such strong relationships, as the existing networks, with their deep-rooted history and reciprocity norms, tend to exclude them, thereby limiting their access to the resources and benefits these networks provide.

Chapter conclusion

The analysis of social capital's dimensions in this thesis overlaps because they are interconnected. This overlap is advantageous, allowing for a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how these dimensions interact and influence each other, resulting in a more balanced and detailed analysis of social capital in the Ghanaian political landscape.

This chapter underscores the critical role that social networks play for female politicians in Ghana, significantly influencing how they leverage social capital and engage in political activities. These networks are essential for gathering information, mobilizing resources, engaging voters, and connecting with key political figures. However, female politicians often face barriers when trying to integrate into established, powerful male networks due to gender biases and societal norms. As a result, they create their own predominantly female networks, which, while empowering, generally lack the influence of male-dominated networks.

The chapter highlights that female politicians operate within various structural and interactional frameworks that shape their political participation and effectiveness. These frameworks also determine the type of resources and networks accessible to them throughout their careers. Structural social capital, defined by network connections, is vital for their success, necessitating both close and distant connections.

The study reveals that influential men in politics often form networks with women mainly to advance their own interests rather than to support the women. This dynamic adds a layer of complexity to political networking for female politicians. Additionally, in the Northern region of Ghana, female politicians struggle to develop cognitive social capital with their male counterparts within political parties and social environments. Cognitive social capital, which is based on shared

goals and cultural values, unites female politicians around the common aim of empowering women. This solidarity is expressed through the exchange of knowledge and skills, particularly within informal and formal networks, to promote shared objectives. However, this mutual understanding does not typically extend across political party lines. Participants noted that a common goal fosters mutual understanding, encouraging collaboration across parties and genders for the electorate's benefit. Nevertheless, conflicts of interest often arise between regional and national executives due to differing goals, influenced by regional social norms.

Relational social capital, which includes relationships with colleagues, family, and immediate professional circles, is crucial for female politicians. Those who might access influential networks through family ties, education, or professional backgrounds are often constrained by family duties and time, limiting their ability to fully benefit from these networks. The research highlights the importance of investing time in networks to exploit structural holes, an opportunity less accessible to female politicians.

The chapter concludes that Ghana's political sphere is predominantly controlled by elite men in high offices who form networks based on long-standing relationships, using trust, norms, and reciprocity to maintain power. Factors such as religion, education, and cultural norms support this hierarchical structure. Female politicians, through both informal and formal networks, strive to convert resources and ideas into tangible outcomes using cognitive social capital, addressing the challenges they face in the political space.

Chapter six

Barriers and bridges: The impact of culture, religion, education, and socio-economic factors on female politicians' access to social capital in Northern and Greater Accra regions

6.0. Chapter overview

In this current chapter, the outcomes of question three is showcased, delving into *What sociocultural factors and regional differences hinder female political actors' access to social capital in the Northern and Greater Accra regions of Ghana*. This thesis focused on comparing the Northern and Greater Accra regions of Ghana because of their historical, religious, traditional, and developmental differences which is a major determinate of gender inequality and social capital (Adumpong 2020:5). Additionally, the substantial inequality in female political participation between the Northern and Greater Accra regions is a contributing factor.

The objective of this chapter is to comprehend the interplay between location and associated elements like culture, religion, socio-economic factors, and politics in potentially moulding the foundational aspects of social capital for female politicians in these two regions. As a reminder, social capital, as defined here, includes social networks, trust, reciprocity, and social norms, which form the foundation of societal interactions and empower individuals, especially female politicians in these regions to participate in politics. This definition establishes a foundation for examining how these elements serve as indicators of social capital across various geopolitical contexts.

This chapter methodically unravels the intricate relationship between diverse geographical structures, socio-cultural factors and their influence on the social capital female politicians' access, enhancing our comprehension of women's political engagement in Ghana. The insights offered here add to the expansive conversation surrounding gender, geography, and politics, forming a foundation for policy proposals suggestions that can strengthen women's active participation in Ghana's political landscape.

Research highlights that socio-cultural, educational, and financial barriers significantly shape political participation among women, with geographical disparities potentially playing a role in their influence (Boakye, Yeboah-Assiamah, and Gyekye-Jandoh 2022; Sossou 2011). Geographical structures also play a significant role in determining individuals' access to social

capital (Chumnangoon, Chiralaksanakul, and Chintakananda 2021; Murayama, Fujiwara, and Kawachi 2012; Suryani and Azmy 2023). Factors such as closeness to hubs of authority and key power nodes and intersections with aspects like gender norms and expectation, collectively shape the challenges and prospects individuals encounter when building and leveraging their social networks.

This research highlights how the North-South divide in Ghana presents a fascinating lens through which to examine socio-cultural factors and regional differences that hinder female politician's access to political social capital. The developmental gap between the Northern and Greater Accra regions tends to affect employment, which in turn influences the socio-cultural norms of the people in these areas (see table no 1.2; figure 1.7.). The findings reveal that in the Greater Accra region, with its progressive urban features, industrial hub, cultural diversity, established networks, and resource availability, enables female politicians easily access social capital. Conversely, the Northern region, primarily characterized by its preserved cultural heritage, and less industrial nature has geographical and socio-cultural nuances that shape the way social capital is accessed. The scarcity of formal networks and resources, intertwined with entrenched traditional social norms and a vibrant cultural heritage, makes female politicians in the Northern region to have a comparatively more challenging time accessing social capital.

In the Greater Accra region, the density of political and social undertakings makes it straightforward to engage with networks, gather information, and capitalize on opportunities, thus fostering an enhanced engagement with social capital. The region's geographical makeup has a bearing on community interactions, which subsequently determines how female politicians access social capital. The Greater Accra region typically displays pronounced diversity, a welcoming attitude towards contemporary thoughts, and expansive societal connections. These dynamics foster a broader engagement with social capital, as women politicians can tap into varied viewpoints, resources, and opportunities in their communities. This allows them to build larger networks, establish ties with key figures, and procure the necessary resources and information to strengthen their political involvement. Yet, it is worth noting that the influential personalities and resources they access are predominantly gender-influenced.

The socio-cultural landscape and cultural preserved character of the Northern region are found to pose significant challenges for female politicians in terms of establishing networks, acquiring resources, and enhancing visibility, ultimately restricting their access to social capital.

The North's adherence to traditional social frameworks and its more homogenously formed communities contribute to this outcome (Łukasiewicz et al. 2019). Such characteristics often reduce the variety of social networks and resources that female politicians can leverage, leading to restricted access to social capital.

The findings emphasized the significant influence of gender and societal norms on the ways female politicians in both regions access social capital across both regions. In the Greater Accra region, even though there remain gender disparities, there is a more forward-thinking societal perspective on women's political roles. This results in female politicians encountering fewer overt obstacles, and a more accommodating social environment, facilitating their ability to establish and utilize social capital. Conversely, in the Northern region, prevailing patriarchal views and established power hierarchies restrict female politician's social capital access and impede their political participation.

One of the most significant findings of this research is how social factors intertwined with cultural norms shape social networks and consequently form the accessibility of social capital for women in politics. The study further found that these dynamics in accessing social capital directly shape the strategies and methodologies employed by female politicians across the two regions (elaborated in chapter 7). In the Greater Accra region, where there is a broader access to social capital, female politicians predominantly engage in forging strategic partnerships, broadening their connections, and tapping into established channels to progress politically. Conversely, in the Northern region, due to the limited availability of social capital, women more frequently resort to grassroots mobilization, community-centred programs and capitalizing on pre-existing social relationships to attain political leverage. Although both strategies have gendered underpinnings, female politicians in the Greater Accra region are beginning to deviate from traditionally gender-centric network affiliations, unlike in the Northern region where they are primarily limited to women-centric networks. This pivotal insight underscores the profound impact of regional social capital dynamics on the political strategies and successes of female politicians.

This thesis highlighted the significant influence of gender and societal norms on the ways female politicians in both regions access social capital across both regions. As defined by Coffé and Bolzendahl (2010), gender disparities imply the differential treatment, opportunities, and resources provided to individuals based on their gender. Such disparities are evident in numerous

ways, including restricted access to financial means, underrepresentation in leadership roles, and prevailing prejudices that impede the progression of women's political participation.

In the Greater Accra region, despite the presence of gender disparities, the study noted a more progressive societal environment in Greater Accra than in the Northern region, as data from the national census show (see table no.1.2). Women in Greater Accra benefit from enhanced educational prospects, broader exposure to contemporary beliefs, and supportive communities. Nevertheless, they still confront hurdles like gender prejudice and exclusionary actions that impact their social capital access. On the other hand, the Northern region shows pronounced gender inequalities. Established power dynamics, cultural customs, and restricted educational avenues for women lead to a marked power and influence disparity, limiting women's political involvement in this area.

The results discussed in this chapter indicate that the geography of a region plays a pivotal role in shaping the accessibility of social capital, which in turn, affects the political participation of female politicians in both the Northern and Greater Accra regions. In the Greater Accra region, there is a more adaptable access to social capital, benefiting women's political pursuits by offering them tailored resources, assistance, and avenues for partnership in political circles. Conversely, in the Northern region, the inherent geographical challenges curtail the availability of social capital. Here, women encounter heightened obstacles in building networks, securing resources, and challenging age-old power hierarchies, leading to diminished political engagement. The cumulative outcomes on women's participation in politics, evidenced by a smaller number of women from the Northern region in politics and parliament (see table no 1.2), further underscore these findings.

The chapter starts by examining the socio-cultural and regional intricacies of accessing social capital in Northern and Greater Accra region and its potential effect on female politicians' accessing political social capital. Since culture encompasses a wide variety of phenomena, I will focus on three areas that I consider key to shaping the social roles of women and influencing their access to social capital, namely, religion and the family model, more specifically, the patriarchal family model, patriarchal societal norms. This approach will allow me to analyse the impact of culture on the formation of women's political careers and access to social capital, concentrating on how these specific cultural domains regulate and reinforce dominant social structures.

Guiding the analysis are several themes: cultural influence on political dynamics (community and family level), religious influence, financial influence, and educational influence (fig 3.4). Drawing on Bourdieu (1986) concept of social capital, I analyse how these themes manifest in the data collected from the interviews, observations and documents. These themes lay the groundwork for a comprehensive comparative study on how socio-cultural factors and regional differences hinders political social capital access of female politicians across these two regions of Ghana.

6.1. Cultural influence on political dynamics (community level): The impact of cultural norms on female politicians' social capital access in Northern and Greater Accra regions

Ghana, with its vast cultural tapestry, historical depth, and traditions, highlights the dynamic interrelation of cultural and social practices across its varied regions. The literature reviewed the contrasting socio-cultural and geographical characteristics of the Northern and Greater Accra regions, shaped over time by elements such as ethno-linguistic identities, colonial legacies, religious beliefs, and economic determinants (see chapter 1). Though these norms are integral to daily existence, they extend their influence into the spheres of politics and governance. Especially for women entering the political domain, these standards can act both as opportunities and barriers, directly affecting how female politicians' access social capital.

By probing deeply into these regional differences, the collected data from the interviews, observations and documents highlight the nuanced interplay between social roles, gender norms and the goals of women in politics, revealing a thorough understanding of how they can hinder accessing of social capital by these female politicians. Upon analysing the data, I discovered that these socio-cultural obstacles are interconnected with the geographical layouts of the two regions.

Some of the participants from the Northern region highlight that the age-old patriarchal view from the region significantly impacts contemporary evaluations of women aspiring for, or already in, political roles, hindering their connection to community social networks and resources.

“In Africa and in our community North here, the men believes that our women belong to the kitchen and also giving birth. So, they don't expect us to come out and also challenge them and all those things... it is not easy”. (Maame, North, 22 December 2022, 2pm)

The female politician sheds light on the entrenched patriarchal views and gender standards in the Northern region. She uncovers the deep-seated gender roles and societal norms that the Northern populace adheres to. This suggests that there are specific behaviours that are culturally

accepted and expected for both men and women. It reveals how these gender-specific roles often restrict women to household tasks, a notion supported by Duflo's (2012) study. The men predominantly possess power and dominate in areas like political leadership, moral guidance, and societal privilege. This gives them a distinct edge in tapping into valuable social networks. And the believe that women are meant for the kitchen restrict them of economic power hence are not able to access powerful networks that require members to have economic power before acceptance. This fact is highlighted in the 2021 statistical report for Ghana, which indicates that only 37% of working-age females are employed in the Northern region (refer to table no. 1.2; fig 1.7).

As noted by Katungi, Edmeades, and Smale (2008), men typically possess greater access to information compared to women, leading to imbalanced power relations, and hindering women's opportunities to question prevailing gender conventions. This perspective aligns with the participants' claim that in the Northern communities, men are not prepared for women to contest their stance and share in their social capital. In the North, it is observed that social capital often serves to strengthen conventional gender roles, thereby restricting women's influence and their potential for political participation. This aligns with Kabeer's (1999) findings, suggesting that accessing resources like information can either uplift or restrict women based on the gender expectations and dominant power relations within a community.

She is not the only female from the North who had issues with patriarchal norms in the community.

"You know, what our old men used to say is that "who is a woman" That woman is nobody. And some people are convinced that when you give a chance to a woman, she will override you.... if we gather the men to talk to them seeing them is difficult...they will tell you that you are a woman you don't have to talk to them". (Linda, North, 7 February 2023, 2.37pm)

This underscores the perpetuation of patriarchal values across generations in Northern Ghana, leading to sustained gender inequality and relegating women to a subordinate status in power dynamics. As the female politician pointed out, community elders not only use language to perpetuate bias against women but are also apprehensive about sharing authority with them or allowing them in their network. They view the involvement of women in politics as a challenge to the established male dominance. As a result, there is a concerted effort to condition women to be sceptical of female leaders and to reject the idea of women in leadership roles. Elevating women to positions of authority could potentially challenge established traditional gender norms and shake

up the existing order. This kind of socialization fosters the belief that women are subordinate to men and are not fit for leadership roles (Gerardi 2019; Sapiro 1981).

The data also sheds light on the prevailing gender dynamics within her community, where men are traditionally seen as the primary decision-makers, relegating women to subordinate roles, often perceived as "secondary humans". As will be discussed in chapter eight, societal perceptions play a significant role in shaping the political agency of these female politicians and determining the alliances and connections they form. She further explained how these patriarchal socialization in the community influences their stand in decision-making

"Like we Northerners, women voice are not heard. I do not know whether it is morality, or it is a tradition. And also, they think that women are not valid. All things are to be done by men. They think that our views are not important within our living space... they would even discourage you from getting education, which they say you would only sit at home afterwards". (Linda, North, 7 February 2023, 2.37pm)

This undervaluing of women's viewpoints in her society often results in women internalizing a sense of unimportance and sidelining women's roles, views, and efforts. This sentiment aligns with Mead's (1934) symbolic interactionist theory, suggesting that people form their identity through social engagements and interactions. This emphasizes the pivotal role of social engagements in shaping interpretations within societal relationships. The diminished value of women's opinions not only alters their self-image but can also impede or limit their direct engagement in community governance, politics, and other areas of public engagement, as well as their access to education which can give them knowledge (cognitive social capital) to utilize in the political field. This hence maintains the existing power imbalances, ensuring men continue to be the primary beneficiaries of social capital. Also socializing them to reinforce illiteracy is just a way to stop them from accessing political literacy, opportunities, and knowledge transfer.

These politicians experience is reflective of many women in the Northern region who routinely encounter difficulties when engaging in community discussions, expressing viewpoints in public spaces, or influencing decision-making. According to Duflo (2005), women participating in local councils in India frequently found themselves unheard and interrupted, showcasing underlying societal gender biases. This situation bears similarities with women in Northern Ghana, where cultural norms and stereotypes significantly influence behaviour and attitudes directed at women in political environments and settings.

As per another female politician from the Northern region

"The men sometimes see us as though we do not belong here. I remember when I was campaigning my co-contender had to confront me and say that if it is left for him, he does not support women going into politics. I asked him why and he said, what time have I finished serving my husband and my children and what time would I get to do politics, let with him, politics is only reserve for men". (Xorse, North, 15 January 2022, 2pm)

This gender-biased categorization and undervaluing of tasks in the political space resonate with wider societal beliefs in the society. In the Northern region and globally, politics is traditionally viewed as a male sphere, aligning with Sylvia Walby's (1990, 1997) description of patriarchy, wherein men exert dominance over women. Globally, this perspective varies in intensity, with some cultures severely limiting women's leadership, even within familial contexts. These prevailing beliefs, coupled with doubts about women's leadership abilities, act as roadblocks to their access to networks and social capital. This limited access hinders their political participation and ability to foster alliances. Community networks, which could otherwise support these women, often withhold support based on these entrenched views. The origins of such views can be traced back to the historical sidelining of women from public domains and decision-making roles, resulting in long-lasting implications on their opportunities in political networks and social capital acquisition (Tadros 2014).

The Northern region's community perspective on female leadership is deeply rooted in its patriarchal traditions. These patriarchal systems have consistently pushed women to the margins in political spheres, reducing their ability to amass social capital and be politically effective. Remarks from her fellow participants about her political candidacy reflect the societal environment where women often contend to build supportive and beneficial networks due to existing prejudices and exclusionary mindsets. This manifestation of patriarchal views within the political space impedes women's potential to make influential connections and take on leadership roles.

Another participant also mentioned

"You know that discrimination cannot stop, especially in this communities' communities. Okay. No, I'm a woman, that's where they think women are not fit to be leaders. But women can also take other positions like the chairperson, treasure, security, or any other positions in their political arena. They think we the women cannot do the work, or they say we cannot lead the men, they think we only good for women organizer". (Afi, North, 10 January 2023, 9am)

I observed most community's biases and stereotypes towards women in politics. Many women, despite their drive to enter politics and awareness of societal perceptions, find themselves cornered into gender-specific roles. As affirmed by this participant, they accept roles like 'women

organizer' even when they possess the competence for more authoritative positions like 'chairperson' or 'president,' roles traditionally seen as reserved for men. These gendered roles are often of lesser importance, limiting their influence in decision-making.

The data highlights that these discriminatory practices and biased perceptions create significant obstacles for women struggling to access networks in the field. I observed that these societal biases not only restrain opportunities for women but also shape the very structures of political networks, putting them at a disadvantage. This is because discrimination and stereotypes have created a culture where women are often seen as less capable leaders compared to men (Eagly and Karau 2002; Heilman 2001). This often leads to women being left out of crucial conversations, passed over for leadership positions, or not taken seriously when they try to influence decisions. As a result, women in the Northern region find it much harder to connect with networks that could offer them valuable connections, guidance, and opportunities for political growth. This situation is connected to gender stratification theory, which suggests that gender disparities are more prevalent in developing countries (Treas and Tai 2016). Men predominantly occupy positions of greater power and esteem (Kiamba 2009). The biases against women pursuing political careers are reflective of a larger societal issue: a deeply rooted socialization process that reinforces traditional gender roles. The thesis underscores the intensified gender-based challenges women from the Northern region of Ghana encounter, largely stemming from their cultural norms and socializations.

While the participant acknowledges the societal constraints placed upon her, there appears to be a passive acceptance rather than active resistance. This complacency further entrenches her in the restraining societal mould, hindering her political progress and aspirations. Societal socialization often conditions women to view gender discrimination and stereotyping as customary, leading many to avoid challenging such norms, as emphasized by Liu (2019:13). As a result, any woman who takes a stand against these biases risks being labelled a rebel, facing opposition not only from the broader society but also from her fellow women.

Although women confront patriarchal societal obstacles when entering and throughout their political careers which led to challenges in access social networks, it was noted that such challenges are more prevalent among female politicians from the Northern region. In contrast, those from the Greater Accra region did not emphasize these societal norms as significant barriers. As shared by a female politician from the Greater Accra region:

"My area is a cosmopolitan area made up of a about 10 or more satellite paramount, and such as a native your people see you as a messenger and that they would have a voice if you should go higher ookk and so they hold you in some high esteem. They see you as a public figure already though it does not matter whether you have won or not, when you lose, they tell you do not give up. That is the kind of encouragement I get from them always". (Lordina, Greater Accra, 10 March 2023, 6.40pm)

This participant experience shows a distinct contrast between the treatment of female candidates from cultural liberal regions and those from cultural preserved regions. The Greater Accra region, being more cosmopolitan, seems less bound by traditional norms and customs. As the female politician notes, her community values a leader's ability to connect with them and foster a collective identity based on shared symbols and meanings (Paul 1996). For this community, the politician was not just seen as a woman in politics but as a "public figure" The community had an established notion of politicians as representatives, which she embodied, leading to her widespread acceptance irrespective of gender. This acceptance is not just passive; it actively positioned her as a respected representative, providing her with invaluable informational support (a form of social capital).

Being in a diverse community, with a myriad of socio-cultural backgrounds, means that this information about community expectations becomes a crucial asset for any political candidate to serve effectively. The community's endorsement of her candidacy provided a form of social capital, as they wholeheartedly supported her election aspirations. More than just verbal support, the community also give her emotional support.

From the data, it revealed that how the community saw her as their leader irrespective of her gender makes it easy for her to access community networks. They trusted her leadership abilities. According to Fukuyama (1995) and Putnam (1993) if people acknowledge or have confidence in your leadership skills, they are likely to include you in their networks and provide help and connections. This trust in leaders can helps them become part of their social circles, as people are more inclined to interact with and support leaders they trust. Hence, the participant drawing support from these networks can significantly assist in dealing the complexities and stresses inherent in the political field (Torney-Purta 2017). Individuals fortunate enough to garner such backing often find it easier to progress towards their political professional goals. This foundational support allowed the candidate to adeptly strategize and operate effectively within the political environment.

Other female politicians also highlighted the support they received from their communities in accessing social capitals. However, it was evident that much of this assistance was directed towards roles traditionally associated with their gender. However, a few mentioned how they were able to access community social capital that is not gendered.

“... most of them were of the view that no woman had ever done that. So even those from the other side of the political divide, were actually proud of me. They encouraged me. This is the kind of women we want, women who can who can speak up for us. Women who can help other young women. Women who the other young men look up to. Everyone wants to eerm associate with me. Everyone wants their daughters to associate with me, even if we are not from the same political side, yea. My society, my side is not really strong on the men men thing, It's just the fear. The women are just, I mean they must just go strong to contest positions...as a woman you would be applauded by some even men, they see you as an iron lady in coat hahaha because few women stand up for elections even beyond the constituency and so for me to always be getting closer to the region, I mean they see me as a very strong woman”. (Yaa, Greater Accra, 18 April 2023, 9am)

From her account, it is evident that the community both praised and acknowledged her boldness in pursuing a political position, a move that was unconventional for women in her area. This suggests that her community is gradually becoming more receptive to female political figures, compared to other communities that might retain patriarchal views. Her audacity not only disrupts these established norms but also inspires other women. She is respected as a role model within her community significantly enhance ease in accessing community networks that can potentially advancing her political career. When individuals are regarded as positive influencers or community leaders, they tend to earn the trust and admiration of their neighbours (Putnam 2000). Consequently, this recognition present opportunities for networking with influential figures, rallying support for causes or campaigns, and creating alliances crucial for navigating the intricacies of politics (Bourdieu 1985; Coleman 1990b).

However, a notable observation is that her success led her to primarily associate with women and men. As Tajfel and Turner (1986; 2004) point out, individuals often derive their sense of self from the groups they belong to and the associated social identities. Her accomplishments in the political space were particularly celebrated by women, who hoped she would serve as a role model for their daughters. Interestingly, men in her community did not only support her ambitions, there was a palpable willingness to share real power or fully integrate her into the political machinery.

She also noted that even members of opposition parties held her in high regard, highlighting her ability to create connections across party lines. Yet, it is worth noting that these connections were often gendered, reinforcing the idea that political allegiances can be superseded by social identities, as Greene (2004) suggests. Nonetheless, such cross-party affiliations, while seemingly beneficial, appeared more constraining than empowering for her. Her aspirations drew certain social connections that, while offering support, also inadvertently limited her progression in the political landscape. This, in turn, presented a unique set of challenges for her continued growth.

In the Greater Accra region, I observed that some female politicians have started to counteract the traditional views which assign them caregiver roles and men leadership roles, a contrast from the Northern region. I observed how these female politicians, return to their offices after lengthy days at the parliamentary complex to engage with constituents, often working late into the night. Their dedication, evident in their extended hours and commitment to serving their constituents, earns them admiration from the community, who hail their tireless efforts. The sight of both male and female constituents seeking their guidance showcases their effectiveness and respect within political circles (Rhode 2017).

When stereotypes are defied, women are often perceived as outliers, as noted by Eagly and Karau (2002). But in the Greater Accra region, the participant was rather applauded for it. Consequently, when a woman is named an *"iron lady"* by her contemporaries in the political domain, including men, it signifies her amassed trust and influence. This accolade stems from her political contributions, which have earned respect from society and men, enhancing her stature, and expanding her reach. This suggests that her actions and contributions have not gone unnoticed by the community. Her skill in engaging with constituents of both genders has further established her as a resilient leader, a testament to the social capital she has amassed in her political career. The acknowledgement of this woman as a potent leader can be directly associated with heightened trust from her constituents, and a stronger presence in political parties or alliances, as supported by Beaman et al. (2012).

The politician's consistent involvement in elections, along with her expanding influence at the regional level, also exemplifies her civic commitment, building trust and mutual understanding among her constituents and fellow colleagues. In contrast, politicians from the Northern region faced barriers to such civic participation in their communities due to specific social norms. As highlighted by Putnam (2000), the strength and involvement in community participation, civic

activities, and the robustness of civic institutions represent social capital. This suggests that the Greater Accra region is more open to women benefiting from community trust, influence and information through unrestricted access to these community structures and networks.

In many communities, women are culturally conditioned to prioritize domestic roles (Adongo, Dapaah, and Azumah 2023; Nwabunkeonye 2014). When juggling career and family becomes overly demanding, many women opt to step back from their professional pursuits to cater to their families. This societal stance is driven by the prevailing view that deems a woman successful primarily by her competence in homemaking (Nwabunkeonye 2014). Which tends to poses a challenge or an ease in their accessing of social capital outside the home space.

Some male politicians also echoed the challenges females face in accessing social capital

“Because in our northern contest, I am speaking about our northern contest, we as northerners by the virtue of our culture and religious orientations we believe that women do not take up leadership positions and as you might also know taking up a political position is like taking a leadership position to lead some people. So so the least number of people women who get into politics are either hindered by this kind of ideological position or even have their homes to take care of which like maybe their husbands might even not be happy to see them get involved and even if they do get themselves involved the youth and the people and electorate would not give them the mandate for the common ideological position that we have as a people”. (Yushawu, North, 17 January 2023, 11.05am)

This analysis highlights the distinct challenges faced by female politicians in different regions. In the Northern region, the social norms significantly hinder women's access to community information, support, and trust, as the community itself is reluctant to provide them with opportunities. This echoes the concerns raised by female politicians in the area, who emphasize the systemic barriers they encounter. Conversely, in the Greater Accra region, the dynamics are different. According to one male participant, the challenges women face in gaining community support stem from interpersonal conflicts among women themselves, rather than a lack of willingness from the community. He suggests that female candidates need to adopt a humble demeanour to earn the trust they seek. This perspective highlights a different set of social dynamics where the opportunity to gain trust exists, but internal community relations complicate the process.

The cosmopolitan nature of the Greater Accra region, with its mix of diverse cultural backgrounds, is fast eroding these traditional norms that once relegated women to subordinate roles. This shift has enabled women to effectively operate in the political space and garner support from the community. This stands in contrast to monocultural areas, where a singular tradition or

norm might predominantly influence behaviour. Often, such cosmopolitan environment paves the way for more progressive views, especially concerning gender roles (Inglehart and Norris 2003), setting it apart from the Northern region.

The varied traditions in the Greater Accra region offer women the opportunity to network, participate in community activities, and position themselves in different roles, which is regarded as a demonstration of decreased patriarchy when compared to the conditions in the Northern region. This is essential in leveraging the social capital of the entire community, not just a part of it (Putnam 2000). Her geographical location allowed her to tap into entire community social capital, which is often inaccessible to female politicians in the Northern region. These community connections promote interactions among diverse groups. These findings align with research by Gidengil and O'Neill (2010) and Lancee (2010), suggesting that cosmopolitan urban environments are conducive to the growth of both bridging and bonding social capital.

The analysis reveals that the Greater Accra region presents female politicians the opportunity to interact with those from varied backgrounds, thereby fostering bridging social capital. Concurrently, it offers avenues women the chance to solidify relationships within their own social circles, cultivating bonding social capital. As Putnam (2000) argues that both bonding and bridging social capital are important. Thus, is it not surprising that women in Greater Accra region do interact frequently with a broad range of populations while maintaining tight-knit ties within their own communities. Their active participation in community groups and diverse social networks amplifies their robust social capital.

In summary, female politicians in the Greater Accra region benefit from a unique form of social capital from the entire community that those in the Northern region do not. This is attributed to the Greater Accra region's unique geographical and cosmopolitan characteristics. The blending of multiple traditions in the Greater Accra region offers a versatility absent in the more homogeneous culturally preserved Northern region. The societal norms, stereotypes and community perception of women in politics present challenges for women's access to social capital in the Northern region. This hinders their ability to access the community's social capital, unlike in the Greater Accra region where access to information, emotional support, and encouragement is easier. The subsequent section will explore the challenges arising from family norms rooted in societal expectations in accessing social capital.

6.2. Cultural influence on political dynamics (family level): The impact of cultural norms and societal expectations on female politicians' social capital access in Northern and Greater Accra regions

The expectations around gender roles at work and within families, along with societal norms about how men and women should behave, make it harder for women to benefit from mentoring and social connections (Seraj, Tsouroufli, and Branine 2015). These norms, encompassing traditional gender roles, expectations, and familial obligations, can either facilitate or impede women's participation in political spheres (ibid). Traditional gender roles and familial obligations may serve as barriers to political engagement and social capital access, supportive family networks and resources can also facilitate women's success in accessing social capital.

Although it is clear that patriarchal norms in the community can hinder women access to social capital, research also shows that individuals from politically active families are more inclined to accessing political networks (Cross and Young 2008). This underscores the idea that family dynamics and inherited family social capital can either facilitate or hinder a politician's access to political network relevant for political career advancement. According to one participant:

"I grew in the time frame when I was on the boards, of government boards, which was due to my background as an.... and my sister level in the party, , I was still doing some party works here and there. Like I said anything that I am assigned to I do. I decided that I might go and contest for the party primaries for that seat. Yes so with my experiences at the early stages I would say was quite smooth because I had a sister who was already there and knows the in and out". (Joana, Greater Accra, 17 November 2022, 10.45am)

The female politician's trajectory underscores the pivotal roles her family's history and her educational background played in paving pathways to social networks and political prospects (Cross and Young 2008; Lowndes 2004). With an active involvement in party activities, she found doors opening to political boards and even the opportunity to run in the party primaries. This access can be viewed, from a sociological lens, as her amassed social capital. The familial connections and the resulting socialization equipped her to adeptly navigate the political domain and access opportunities. This happened because her family had established trust through their longstanding connections with political party networks. This trust allowed her to access valuable information, making it easier for her to integrate and gain acceptance within these networks. Additionally, her experience in her professional field outside politics provided insights and strategies for operating similar environments. Leveraging her professional background knowledge, she gained access to male-dominated political networks and successfully established herself within them.

According to Putnam (1993, 2000), engagement in social networks demands investment of time and resources, creates trust amongst participants, and in turn, driving political participation. Her family's history with the political networks coupled with her regular interaction in the political space, she was able to build relationships within the networks. Which enabled her to understand the values and norms of the space. This familiarity and continuity in interactions contribute to the cultivation of trust, which forms the foundation for cooperation and collective action. This shows that while gaining access to social network is vital, its sustainable access is equally crucial (Lin 1999a; Putnam 1993, 1995a). The female politician, after benefiting from her family's social capital, took proactive measures to immerse herself in the socialization process and regular interactions in the political field. This proactive engagement not only deepened her understanding of the political field but also equipped her with the necessary technical expertise and knowledge. According to Putnam (1993), as individuals invest time and effort into networks, they do not only gain trust from others but also extend trust to fellow members. This reciprocal trust facilitates collaboration, information-sharing, and mutual support, leading to various benefits for individuals and the network as a whole. Drawing from her experiences and Bourdieu's insights, it becomes evident that while social capital can open doors for many, its absence can also hinder others from accessing political networks. Such disparities can culminate in uneven political participation and representation opportunities (Bourdieu 1986).

In politics and social capital access, family is significance even if the family lacks political prominence. As emphasized by the female politician below, her family's emotional backing was instrumental in helping her manage the stresses and demands characteristic of the political space.

"Yes, so my family was or is still a great support system for me. The encouragement, you can do, is go for it. Errrm there were days like I said it wasn't easy. There were days I broke down. There were days I had to, like I was, I was totally broken. My family will come in. eeerm and then when I had to go for my campaign rounds, my mom was always going to support me...she takes care of my child". (Yaa, Greater Accra, 18 April 2023, 9am)

This highlights the crucial role her immediate family played in supporting her career aspirations, aligning with research suggesting the significance of family backing in realizing personal and professional objectives (Torney-Purta 2017). This familial encouragement can be categorized as the social capital derived from close-knit bonding ties (Leonard 2004). These ties, deeply personal to the candidate, offer support that can alleviate the stresses and challenges prevalent to their chosen field. Such social capital manifests as encouragement, emotional sustenance, and informational guidance.

Emotional support from family members offered her a comforting sense of belonging and security during challenging moments as a politician, which significantly contributes to their overall well-being and resilience, helping cope stress and adversity of the field more effectively. By accessing emotional support from their family, she leverage this social capital reinforce social connections with other networks outside her home which is very important in the field of politics (Granovetter 1973). This also support enables her to strike a balance between work and personal life, a task made easier by the unwavering support of her mother. As a result, she has more time to maintain regular connections with weaker ties without neglecting her home life. While the backing from her entire family was crucial, she distinctly underscored the pivotal role her mother played. This not only signifies the high esteem in which the family held her mother's decisions but also provides a glimpse into the family's progressive stance on gender roles and respect for women.

She is not the only participant acknowledging family support in accessing social capital; others shared how they received support from their husbands.

"My husband is the educated man that does not leave every household duty on his wife but also helps to take care of things at home. It is not easy yes, but my husband and children understand my busy schedules. I do not forget forget yes that am a mother and a wife, and I guess this is why my husband is always supportive of every move of mine because he always say if you can manage your home you can manage the country". (Ameyo, Greater Accra, 7 December 2021, 1.45pm)

She sheds light on the familial and household dynamics in her home. She mentions that her husband and children actively contribute to household chores, significantly alleviating her stress. This participation also reflects the supportive environment she experiences at home and social capital access. Historically, duties such as childcare and domestic chores have been viewed as traditional gender roles primarily designated for women (Adongo et al. 2023). Gender roles are shaped by societal and cultural expectations that define appropriate behaviours and responsibilities for men and women across various life domains (Blackstone 2003).

The division of labour within households pertains to how tasks and responsibilities are distributed between partners, encompassing household chores, child-rearing, and paid employment. Typically, men are brought up with an emphasis on career aspirations, whereas women are oriented towards domestic responsibilities (Adongo et al. 2023). Interestingly, in the case of this woman, she believes her husband's educational background plays a pivotal role in their household dynamics. This also delves into the complexities of balancing work and family,

especially for women juggling political roles with familial duties. Women, more than their male counterparts, encounter challenges in reconciling work and family roles, largely due to societal norms and gendered expectations (Adongo et al. 2023; Nwabunkeonye 2014:286–88). Societal pressures frequently compel women to elevate familial duties above career aspirations, often leading to criticism or even repercussions for those who choose otherwise.

As noted by Adongo et al. (2023), gender dynamics and the distribution of household duties can profoundly influence women's political involvement and success. Studies suggest that women with supportive partners, who actively partake in household responsibilities, tend to engage more in political activities (Nwabunkeonye 2014). In a similar vein, research indicates that women's political success is often tied to a strong social support system, encompassing emotional and tangible assistance from family and wider social circles (Nwabunkeonye 2014:288).

The family support she accessed, particularly in sharing household chores, plays a pivotal role in empowering her to access social networks and opportunities outside the home, thereby facilitating her political career advancement. Her family reducing the time and stress associated with domestic tasks, she is able to focus more effectively on their political endeavours, thereby enhancing her prospects for career advancement. Knowing she has the support of her family. This also enables her to step outside her domestic roles and seek opportunities for political engagement and political networking which require a lot of time investment (Putnam 1993).

Additionally, it is worth noting that other female politicians acknowledged receiving not just emotional, but also financial support from their families.

“Well, I had support, I had support in terms of eerm my posters and banners and even cash support yes and recommendations, yes it did not end there, I was ok they were campaigning for me here and there, all round....my direct biological brother yes is a member of my campaign team”. (Lordina, Greater Accra, 10 March 2023, 6.40pm)

This underscores the significance of social networks, especially within the political campaign framework. It reveals into the twin concepts of bonding and bridging social capital. Her brother helped her financially and also enabled her to access bridging social capital. These represent the benefits derived from tight-knit, exclusive networks, and more expansive, inclusive connections respectively, assisting individuals in achieving their objectives (Putnam 2000:22). Social capital is not restricted to just tangible assets like monetary or material support; it also encompasses intangibles such as trust, reciprocal norms, and informational access.

Moreover, the politician emphasizes the pivotal role of family backing and the weight of kinship bonds in political and societal spheres. Previous studies reveal that these familial connections serve as significant sources of social capital, providing emotional sustenance, resource access, and a platform for political leverage (Leonard 2004). In situations where individuals struggle with societal or economic hurdles, including marginalized groups like women, ethnic minorities, or those from less privileged origins, the role of family in providing unwavering support and resources becomes even more salient (ibid).

Although the data highlighted instances where family support smoothed the path for women entering politics and accessing social capital, it also highlighted contrasting narratives. Particularly, women from the Northern region narrated how family dynamics and inherited family social capital acted as impediments to their political aspirations and accomplishments.

"Me my husband helped but some people their husband would not allow them ... so maybe if your husband doesn't have understanding he can give you a. this thing pressure that maybe if you want your marriage choose your marriage and if you want your politics, you can choose your politics... so most of us because of our background, we do not get the support and encouragement". (Linda, North, 7 February 2023, 2.37pm)

The female politician highlighted that some women are deterred from engaging in politics because their husbands discourage or forbid them. This is due to societal pressures that demand they prioritize their marital roles over political aspirations. Research indicates that women with supportive spouses tend to be more active and successful in the political space (Kiamba 2009:96). Often, these women face a difficult choice: conforming to societal expectations by prioritizing their marriage or pursuing their political ambitions. Opting for politics can lead to perceptions of failing in their core traditional role as homemakers, especially if they end up divorced. Given these pressures, many women, weighing the pros and cons, ultimately lean towards traditional roles as it becomes overwhelmingly challenging to balance both roles (ibid). This situation underscores the societal power imbalances and inherent gender biases.

These challenges documented in this thesis which stem from spousal opposition and societal pressures underscore the intricate relationship between gender dynamics, familial expectations, and women's access to social networks. They reveal how husbands and society can make it hard for them to get involved in politics. When women have less control over their decisions about politics because of their husbands or what society expects of them, they have a harder time making connections and being part of political groups. This also cultivates a fear of

being judged or left out if they do not follow traditional roles, which makes it even harder for them to join networks that can help them in politics.

Unlike their female counterparts, men in the political sphere rarely struggle with such career-versus-family dilemmas, highlighting the gendered biases prevalent in society (Kiamba 2009). The challenges women face, particularly the absence of spousal support and the pressure to prioritize marriage above politics, can be attributed to the power disparities and gender inequities within marital setups, where husbands often wield more influence over their wives' choices. Female politicians from the Northern region underscored the difficulties they encountered in combining work-life challenges in the field, securing their husbands' acceptance, and managing time between work and home. Interestingly, these concerns were not voiced by female politicians from the Greater Accra region.

"My husband was not in support because he was scared of the society and its norms. They, for them women are not fit to be leaders or let me say can't be leaders..... My dad was also not in support also because he was scared, I may not be able to marry since men do not want women who are always in the public. They are seen as prostitute and cannot keep a home". (Xorse, North, 15 January 2022, 2pm)

The politician emphasizes the entrenched gender roles and power dynamics between men and women in her community. Within this setting, women often need the endorsement of the male members for decisions, including those concerning their careers. This role demarcation within families is sustained by societal frameworks and cultural traditions, potentially fostering gender disparities (Feinstein, Feinstein, and Sabrow 2010). Intriguingly, these domestic dynamics reflect the broader community, where women are conditioned to place domestic roles and familial duties first, often necessitating male approval when pursuing their career ambitions. This also sheds light on the societal norms of her community which have been rooted in the family settings, which are often unfavourable towards women aspiring to leadership roles.

Given this context, it is understandable that the community equates a woman's success with her marital status. This leads to concerns, like those expressed by her father, that aspiring for leadership might compromise her chances of marriage. Such familial socialization fosters a "glass ceiling" effect, constraining women's progress in the workplace and leadership roles, as noted by Crampton and Mishra (1999:101). These societal norms encourage women to value roles as wives and mothers over professional pursuits. In contrast, men are groomed to prioritize formal careers. As women are not typically prepared to balance both family and career, they often feel compelled

to relinquish one, which is frequently the professional aspect. This dilemma represents a significant challenge for women in politics and accessing social capital, particularly in the Northern region of Ghana.

In the Northern region, a significant barrier is the need for approval from husbands, who frequently resist sharing authority with their wives. Without spousal approval, it is highly likely that the community will restrict access to trust and support, due to the deeply patriarchal foundations of their society, especially within familial dynamics as emphasised by the participant. Additionally, some participants in the North mentioned that while their families supported their political aspirations by connecting them with political networks in the community, they were not fully accepted due to sociocultural norms that limited the support they expected. They noted that this was evident from the lack of reciprocity they received from these groups. Conversely, women from the Greater Accra region expressed gratitude for the consistent support they receive from their families in their political endeavours. Research suggests that family backing plays a pivotal role in propelling individuals to advanced stages in their careers (Nwabunkeonye 2014:289). Such support offers invaluable social capital, such as emotional sustenance, which can alleviate stress. Furthermore, familial ties can pave the way to a broader spectrum of social networks. In politics, expansive networking can significantly increase a candidate's outreach to potential voters.

The data gathered reveals that the necessity for women to obtain approval from their spouses and families prior to entering politics presents a significant challenge to their engagement with essential social networks crucial for political progress. When women cannot make decisions on their own and have to rely on their families, it is tough for them to get involved in politics and establish vital connections (Kabeer 1999). This lack of independence also makes it harder for them to speak up and make a name for themselves in the political field, which can hold them back in their political careers. I observed that this lack of independence prevents women from attending networking gatherings or engaging in political endeavours to avoid problems in their homes.

In summary, the findings emphasize that in Northern region female politicians encounter more societal and familiar challenges in accessing social capitals in the political sphere compared to their Greater Accra region counterparts. This disparity is largely attributed to the societal norms and development differences between the Northern and the Greater Accra region. And also, the patriarchal family model, where men hold primary authority and decision-making power within the family unit. The Greater Accra region, being a bustling cosmopolitan trade center, attracts

diverse populations from across the country seeking better economic opportunities. Conversely, though the Northern region boasts cultural diversity, many of these cultural groups share similar patriarchal ideologies. This commonality suggests that establishing a gender-equitable environment in the Northern region might be challenging, given its deeply rooted patriarchal history. In contrast, the Greater Accra region's status as a national commercial hub means that more women participate in formal and informal sectors, often gaining financial stability (see table no. 1.2.; fig 1.7). This economic empowerment tends to amplify their voices, providing them with an edge to access networks and engage in them. Given them an advantage over their Northern counterparts who often have restricted access to financial opportunities and networks.³²

Though female politicians in the Greater Accra region benefit from community support and encounter fewer obstacles in accessing community assistance and family support, it is notable that this support is often gender specific. Such support appears aimed at promoting women's leadership over other women, rather than elevating them as leaders within the broader community. However, the thesis found a few exceptional ungendered supports in the Greater Accra region. This thesis highlights the need for societal change that extends beyond just the female candidates. It is crucial to educate and socialize the wider female community to rally behind and believe in female leaders. In the Northern, a prevailing sentiment emerged: many women view their fellow women as skilled homemakers rather than potential leaders. This perception stems from deep-rooted societal conditioning, causing many to view ambitious women as deviating from traditional norms.

However, it is essential to highlight that when addressing socio-cultural factors, religious influences are crucial, given that both cultural and religious beliefs profoundly shape societal values and influence access to social capital (Lim and Putnam 2010).

6.3. Faith-based standards: The impact of religious disparities on female politicians' social capital access in Northern and Greater Accra regions

Religious individuals and groups, deeply engaged in religious practices, naturally foster strong community bonds (Putnam 1995a, 2000). Thus, membership in such groups enhances social capital by embedding individuals in networks and granting access to resources unique to these communities. They serve as vital community centres that foster social connections and capital.

³² <https://census2021.statsghana.gov.gh/gssmain/fileUpload/reportthelist/Volume%203%20Highlights.pdf>

Additionally, religious groups actively participate in political campaigns, providing organizational support to parliamentary candidates. They also possess resources like financial backing and employ political marketing within religious contexts. Voting patterns and behaviours can also shaped by religious ties, with several studies indicating that endorsements by religious leaders can notably influence electoral results (Arli et al. 2022; Yirenkyi 2000).

In Ghana, churches, temples, and mosques play key roles in building social capital for women in politics, providing support networks and resources (Yirenkyi 2000). Religious establishments offer tangible and intangible resources, including financial aid and moral guidance, enhancing women's involvement in politics. These religious places also have lots of things that can help women in politics, like money, places to hold events, and ways to communicate with others. They also give women guidance and strength based on their religious beliefs.

This section delves into the profound impact of religion on societal interactions, focusing particularly on how religious tenets shape female politicians' social capital access within different regions. In Ghana, many traditional customs and norms are deeply rooted in religious practices (Brion and Ampah-Mensah 2021). Historically, since colonial times, there has been a distinct religious divide between the North and the South of Ghana. As previously noted, the Northern region is predominantly Muslim, interspersed with a minority of Christians, whereas the Greater Accra region is primarily Christian, with a smaller Muslim populace (see table no.1.2; fig 1.10).

In the Northern religion, the complex interconnections between diverse groups are marked by a rigid adherence to religious norms and trust, particularly concerning religious identity and gender politics. These religious norms often obstruct women's active participation in politics within their religious communities, with transgressions leading to either informal or formal repercussions. Consequently, women face considerable barriers in forming inclusive relationships across diverse groups, which significantly diminishes their access to bridging social capital. Moreover, their opportunities for developing bonding social capital are curtailed, as intimate relationships tied to political ambitions are typically proscribed within these religious contexts. In stark contrast, the religious environment in the Greater Accra region appears to be more conducive to female political engagement. Female politicians from this region report greater success in creating connections and establishing social networks within their religious spheres.

Participants in the study provided insights into how the religious affiliations prevalent in their respective regions influence their access to social capital. Religion often exerts a significant

influence on societal norms and values (Ahmed 1992). Some interpretations of Islam set distinct roles for women, impacting the perception of women in political circles (ibid). Consequently, this contributes to the limited representation of female politicians in the Northern region. Female politicians from the Northern region assert that within their religious communities, there are no social connections or networks that pertain to political activities. This suggests a delineation between religious affiliations and political networking within these areas.

“How you are supposed to relate with your colleague Muslim, or the Iman... yes, you can’t even do politics in there especially as a woman yes”. (Xorse, North, 15 January 2022, 2pm)

The politician highlighted the challenges encountered in forming connections with other Muslims within her religious settings, especially as a woman. This situation underscores the complex obstacles faced by women due to the multifaceted nature of their identities in the political sphere, which often conflict with their religious identities. These challenges are emblematic of the broader difficulties in navigating diverse environments where religious and political roles intersect. This concept aligns with the theory of 'intersectionality', introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989). Intersectionality provides a framework for analysing how various social identities, such as gender, race, and religion, interact within overlapping systems of disadvantage or discrimination. This is quite different in the Greater Accra region

Some female parliamentarians from Greater Accra recounts,

“My church members hmmm God bless them, and even the pastors... any time I have to run for an election, they are always there to pray for me”. (Joana, Greater Accra, 17 November 2022, 10.45am)

“eerm I don’t go to the church to campaign but I know the church members who I would align with for my benefit yes . I consulted my priest for prayers hahahaha before embarking on the campaign aaaah and so eer it it rather builds you up spiritually when you have to get your priest to pray for you. They would never reject you, they encourage you they pray for you, wish you well eeer I do my part as a catholic to go before God before embarking yes... and also because you a member they would choose you ahead of others who are not part”. (Lordina, Greater Accra, 10 March 2023, 6.40pm)

In the case of these female politicians, that they have access to church members network and also the spiritual leader. They have the support and encouragement provided by churchgoers and religious leaders to politicians during electoral campaigns. Their religious affiliations create a cohesive platform of trust, identity, and collective goals, which members like her can utilize for support during critical life events, such as political elections (Bourdieu 1986; Putnam 2000).

Furthermore, their religious spaces also provide emotional support through prayers and positive affirmations, acting as a form of social capital that mitigates the anxieties associated with election dynamics, as noted by Auguste (2022).

Her religious networks support extends beyond just emotional and spiritual realms, can also manifesting as tangible assets like vote mobilization, fundraising, and campaign volunteering, as highlighted by Bourdieu (1986) and Putnam (2000). The encouragement from religious congregants and spiritual leaders epitomizes 'bonding' social capital, characterized by close communities rallying in support of their members. An endorsement from a religious authority often implies divine approval of a candidate's nomination, representing a potent form of social capital potentially boosting the chances of female politicians winning votes from both their church members and those who respect the spiritual leader, even if they are not part of the congregation (Arli et al. 2022).

The lack of such religious network-driven social capital in the Northern region is revealed to be a huge challenge for women that hinders their political career progression. This is not different from what I observed in the religious spaces: female politicians freely socialized with both men and women in church settings after the service in the Greater Accra region, whereas such interaction was rarely seen in mosques in the Northern region. When female politicians visit, they tend to prioritize engaging with women.

The data gathered from interviews authenticate the role of religion as a significant repository of social capital, emphasizing how networks within religious groups serve as pivotal sources of social capital. These networks are instrumental in either facilitating or constraining the political careers of women, illustrating the dual potential of religious affiliations to support or hinder professional advancement within the political sphere and social capital access. In the Greater Accra region, female politicians emphasize the value of this religiously derived social capital, noting its significant influence on their political trajectories. These politicians mentioned how they often benefit from the supportive networks within their religious communities, which provide crucial backing during electoral campaigns. They articulate a distinct advantage in comparison to their counterparts from the Northern region, attributing this to the robust support system available within their religious settings. This difference underscores the potential of networks within religious groups as forms of social capital that can be leveraged for political advancement, highlighting the disparities in access and utilization of these resources between

different regions. Insights from these shared experiences suggest that female politicians in the Northern region encounter numerous challenges related to their religious affiliations and how it hinders their access to opportunities.

According to a female participant from the Greater Accra region, the impact of Islam on women's leadership and access to social capital varies. She explained that this variation and its intensity depend on sociocultural norms and regional differences.

"Take the Muslims for instance, I can boast of one of their regional caucus coordinators who is female, only one coming from the Volta region and none from the northern region... eeeh so religion is a factor for the northerners, they don't encourage their women to be in leadership positions". (Yaa, Greater Accra, 18 April 2023, 9am)

Although she is not from the Northern region, her connection with politicians from that region provided her with insights into the experiences of Northern women. Putnam (2000) points out that networks enhance the exchange of information and resources among members. Thus, it is no surprise that she spoke about the Northern situation with fervour, as if she were a native. She highlighted the distinct cultures, practices, and social values between regions, using the Volta region and the North as examples. This means that while accessing political roles and social capital is challenging for Muslim women, it is even more so for those in the Northern region. This difference becomes clearer when considering the unique practices and beliefs of Muslims in the Northern and Greater Accra region.

Takyiwa Manuh's (2012) research offers a deep understanding of how societal and cultural aspects influence gender roles and one's entry into social networks. In Northern region, these dynamics hinder women's access to social capital and entry into social networks, even within their religious spaces. While Islam is not fundamentally against female leadership, prevailing local traditions and interpretations can curtail their public involvement (Koburtay, Abuhussein, and Sidani 2022). Therefore, it is essential to distinguish between cultural habits and religious doctrines when assessing women's leadership potential.

The female politicians from the Northern region expressed reluctance to have their discussions regarding the impact of religion on their access to social capital recorded on tape. This reluctance underscores the apprehension they harbour concerning the repercussions of openly discussing the constraints imposed by their religious affiliations. It highlights the societal pressure exerted on them to adhere strictly to the rules and norms of their religion. Additionally, they noted

the prohibition against engaging in political discourse within their religious settings, indicating the strict boundaries delineating the spheres of religion and politics within their communities.

However, this issue is not exclusive to female Muslims. Male Muslim politicians also mentioned that their religion does not allow them to build religious networks for political purposes.

“Ok I am a proud Muslim and I pray five times a day. I visit the mosques on Fridays. Yes, but I mean mosque activities is not something we connect to politics because even as child. You only pray and you do mosque activities in the mosque. ...they are business committees I mean if I must say. For example, haji committee you talked about are business committees they help people to go to haji but I mean we don't consider those ones I mean as social intervention committees because they have something they are going to benefit after everything but talking about Islamic activities before politics. Islamic activities we do it not because we want to use it for our political benefits, but we do it because it is something we are oriented to do yeah” (Yushawu, North, 17 January 2023, 11.05am)

From the data, it is evident that religious principles and doctrines are often conveyed in ways that limit women's public roles, especially in leadership, due to male-skewed leadership perceptions in the Northern region and also from forming social networks in the religious space. When society assesses women for leadership roles, their leadership potentials often conflict with traditional and religious leadership concepts. Which limits their access to networks in the space. This inequality can intensify in environments where religious and cultural values promote conventional gender roles (Eagly and Karau 2002).

In tight-knit Muslim societies, I observed that bonding social capital promotes powerful connections and common values. However, these values often descend towards established and traditional gender roles, limiting women's opportunities for leadership and accessing social networks, a notion supported by Koenig et al. (2011). The collective beliefs and customs of such communities unconsciously hinder women's involvement in politics and access to social networks. This perspective resonates with the findings of Awumbila and Ardayfio-Schandorf (2009), indicating that the Northern region, marked by a strong Muslim presence, carry traditional customs that, intertwined with religious convictions, dictate women's roles both politically and socially. Religious networks and religion can thus serve as platforms for bonding and unity within a community, but they can also pose barriers or constraints on politicians.

In essence, the data revealed that factors such as religious beliefs and cultural norms, particularly in these regions, influence networking in the religious space, access to information, access to emotional support and guidance. Although Islam and Christianity offer varied views and

practices related to women's roles, regional differences, local traditions, and societal values significantly determine the social capital access of women in politics. These variations among Muslim women in different regions arise from the interplay of religious beliefs, economic conditions, and cultural norms. Furthermore, religious entities such as churches, temples, and mosques are crucial in developing social capital for women in politics. This emphasizes that spiritual places of worship not only enrich spiritual values and nurture spiritual well-being but also promote robust community bonds, active community participation, and joint initiatives, as highlighted by Coleman (1988).

6.4 Coins and connections: The intersection of financial challenges and female politicians' social capital acquisition in the Northern and Greater Accra regions

The differences in geographical landscapes and its impact on female politicians' access to social capital cannot be fully understood without considering the economic disparities between the regions. The Greater Accra and Northern regions of Ghana highlight the country's diverse economic paths (Aryeetey and Kanbur 2011). Greater Accra, as Ghana's economic and administrative hub, showcases a superior economic performance, urban amenities, and increased resource availability. In contrast, the Northern region is largely defined by its farming-based economy, elevated levels of poverty, and comparatively limited infrastructure (Honyenuga and Wutoh 2019).³³ These economic differences significantly shape the political domain, especially network access for women in politics.

There is an intricate relationship between economic conditions and social capital in politics (Lin 2000a). Economic disparities affect various aspects, including education, access to networks, and beliefs, ultimately impacting political engagement (Epp 2018). Wealthier individuals have advantages in education and connections, shaping their political awareness and access to resources (ibid). Economic status influences beliefs and values towards politics, intersecting with other social identities. Addressing economic inequalities is crucial for promoting equitable distribution of social capital and fostering democratic governance.

Female politicians who adeptly handle gender dynamics in their communities often contend with the added challenges of regional economic disparities influencing their access to social capital (Kilimo 2022). Understanding the effects of these disparities on their networking,

³³ <https://census2021.statsghana.gov.gh/gssmain/fileUpload/reportthemelist/Volume%203%20Highlights.pdf>

resource availability, and political influence in these areas demands a detailed examination. The data of this study indicates that accumulating social capital by female politicians is notably difficult in the Northern region. This stems from the area's underdevelopment (see table no.1.2.), leading electorates to expect politicians to demonstrate financial success, often by seeking financial incentives in return for votes, information, and campaign support.

The poverty and underdevelopment of the Northern region has acted as a catalyst for reinforcing patriarchal norms and stereotypes that tend serve as a hinderance for social capital access in the region. This is different from the Greater Accra region (see table no. 1.2). Historically, the Northern Region of Ghana has stood out as one of the most impoverished and least developed areas in Ghana (Dery 2019).³⁴ This economic position has further entrenched patriarchal norms and gender disparities. Thus, it is not unexpected for participants to bring up these issues of financial challenges and how it influences their social capital access. Research has also shown that in Ghana, particularly in the Northern region, women are often financially marginalized (Aryeetey and Kanbur 2011; Awumbila and Ardayfio-Schandorf 2009).³⁵ Thus, when access to certain fields and networks is associated with financial strength, women find themselves at a disadvantage.

“Someone can just approach you and say that if you don’t give him or her 10 cedis, the person will not vote ... That is just their interest. and this ten cedis is just a money one can spend in just a day... it sad that they sell their vote for a meal. the economic situation is very bad”. (Xorse, North,15 January 2022, 2pm)

In country wide, it is hypothesized that voters may prioritize immediate benefits and make decisions based on the concept of utility maximization. If a voter perceives an immediate ten cedis benefit to outweigh a potential future gain from a political aspirant, they may be tempted to trade their vote. This hypothesis suggests that such judgment may be distorted when constituents face severe economic challenges, as commonly observed in underdeveloped regions. In these areas, voters may lack awareness about candidates' policy stances or the lasting consequences of their choices.

I observed constituents visiting these aspiring female politicians, who have not yet held parliamentary positions, seeking assistance with their everyday challenges. However, given the financial circumstances of these candidates, I have serious doubts about their capacity to provide aid. When I asked about these frequent visits, the candidates explained that their inability to

³⁴ See table No. 1.2

³⁵ <https://census2021.statsghana.gov.gh/gssmain/fileUpload/reportthelist/Volume%203%20Highlights.pdf>

address constituents' needs causes people to turn to other candidates, often male, whom they perceive as more capable. This leads to a loss of support from constituents who view them as ineffective leaders. This shows how financial challenges and economic difficulties intensify the occurrence of vote buying, disproportionately affecting female candidates due to their often-limited financial means (Kilimo 2022; Vicente 2014).

Financial struggles and economic difficulties may increase the occurrence of vote buying, potentially affecting female candidates more due to their often-limited financial means (Vicente 2014). Particularly in the Northern region, where many struggle to meet fundamental necessities and poverty rates are high, voters and their affiliations may prioritize candidates offering short-term solutions over those advocating for policies that would benefit the entire community in the long run. The heightened levels of poverty disproportionately impact women in the Northern region, where many individuals struggle with financial hardships, thereby limiting their access to communal resources and social capital. Economic challenges exacerbate this limitation, as constituents often prioritize immediate personal gains over the long-term welfare of the community, leading to practices such as vote-selling (Vicente 2014). Moreover, this economic context influences the type of information and support extended to political candidates. Consequently, financially disadvantaged candidates, particularly women, frequently face reluctance from the community to provide essential social support and resources, reflecting the economic constraints prevalent within the community (see table no. 1.2).

This behaviour of the Northern population towards political activities demonstrates their limited social capital (Nakhaie 2006). They often lack adequate knowledge on political subjects and seldom question their elected leaders. This dearth in social capital exposes them to vote-buying temptations and reduces their chances of voting with insight and autonomy. This situation particularly impacts women in the Northern region, many of whom highlight their financial challenges, resulting in the community limiting their access to communal resources and community networks. This environment also dictates the information and support constituents offer to political candidates. Thus, financially disadvantaged candidates, predominantly women, often find the community withholding essential social support and resources.

Communities enriched with bridging social capital are often more resilient, unified, and effective in collective endeavours. Norris (2002) posits that such capital enables people from varied social backgrounds to unite and collaboratively act, thus promoting democratic engagement.

This infers that with more bridging capital, the enticement of vote buying might diminish, as communities could appreciate the shared advantages of true electoral involvement. Northern women face challenges accessing this bridging social capital in wider circles. As a result, their political prospects are bleak, particularly given that bridging social capital often requires significant financial resources, which many Northern women lack. This highlights a dominant reliance on bonding social capital, missing the extensive insights bridging capital offers.

These findings not only illustrate how economic downturns in the Northern region affect its female politicians but also points to a decline in social capital and its effect on collective action participation. It is evident that community members prioritize financial benefits over voting, and this sentiment transcends gender boundaries. It indicates that even women may not be wholly committed to collective efforts aimed at women's empowerment. This resonates with Putnam's (1995) findings, which suggest that a decline in social capital correlates with waning belief in the broader societal value of individual participation. The participant further emphasized on the financial situations she faces as a politician in the North which tend to affect their social capital access.

"Sometimes you will be in your house. Somebody will come and tell you, she wants school fees for the child. ...Sometimes a rent for her accommodation. Okay. Sometimes a sheep for a naming ceremony... do this for him or her. So if you don't do it or show a concern, when you come out to call them for a meeting, they will not come out and they won't vote for you". (Xorse, North, 15 January 2022, 2pm)

Her society perceives her to be rich and hence her engagement in politics. The community asks material and financial assistance from her, and, as the politician shared. Any failure to provide such support can erode trust, diminishes the candidate's capacity to rally the community towards shared objectives. This dynamic suggests that the relationship between voters and politicians is transactional, reflecting the principles of exchange theory (Blau 1964, 2017). Here, reciprocity and interdependence arise from the combined efforts of both voters and candidates. Voters decide their support based on a candidate's responsiveness to their material and financial requirements. As the female politician highlighted, a candidate unable to meet these expectations is often perceived as unfit to lead.

This issue is not unique to only female in the Northern and Greater Accra regions. Male politicians also mentioned this situation of the Ghanaian political space been money intensive such

that when you do not have the necessary financial independence it is difficult in accessing social capitals.

“I would say money, who you know or better still who knows you, yes because African politics or let me say Ghanaian politics involves money, giving and spreading it on every step of the way. People think automatically politicians are rich so they bring all their money related issues and lay them before them. And if no one knows you trust me it is difficult in the world of politics yes so I would say it again being a good leader does not mean you the choice of the people. There are a lot of manipulations from the top to the down with money involved. Yes so you need to be known and it is not easy to be known if you don't have eeverm the connections and money”. (Nana, Greater Accra, 16 March 2023, 12pm)

Financial constraints faced by these politicians present significant challenges to accessing social capitals (Kilimo 2022). Without the necessary resources, I observed how they struggle to engage in networking events, host gatherings, meet the daily needs of constituents, access influential circles, and conduct outreach activities in their community. According to Coleman (1990a), building and benefiting from a social network demands time investment and regular meetings with members to foster trust. However, financial constraints of these politicians hinder their participation in crucial networking opportunities such as events, conferences, and gatherings where connections are created and relationships built.

As highlighted by this participant

“Sometimes this meeting are held in other regions and it expensive to get there, book a hotel and other expenses, my small salary cannot finance that hence I always have to fall on my husband for help”. (Linda, North, 7 February 2023, 2.37pm)

In addition to the challenge of accessing community networks for information and support, politicians also encounter the challenge of accessing influential networks within the political space. These social networks frequently consist of influential individuals or groups capable of offering support, guidance, and collaboration opportunities. However, politicians lacking financial resources struggle to gain entry into these influential circles, as membership or participation often demands financial contributions or investments (Bourdieu 1985, 1986). In her case she is not financially capable of attending some meetings without the help of her husband.

According to literature, many women, particularly in the Northern region, tend to be financially reliant on their husbands and male counterparts (Adongo et al. 2023). This reliance can be attributed to traditional norms that often deny women inheritance rights, as confirmed by Adongo et al. (2023). Within her constituency, the poor economic conditions and low living

standards make the populace more inclined to support candidates who can readily meet their essential needs. Research emphasizes the pivotal role of financial independence in political engagement (Bawa and Sanyare 2013; Shiraz 2015; Shojaei, Samsu, and Asayesh 2010:45; Sossou 2011). This independence also impacts access to specific social networks in the field (Bourdieu 1986).

Socio-economic standing remains a pivotal factor in political representation and accessing social networks. Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality theory underscores how multiple identities (such as gender and class) can intersect, exacerbating disadvantages (Crenshaw 1989). Candidates with ample financial resources tend to hold an edge in elections, given their capacity to fund campaigns, secure media exposure, and build relationships within influential circles (Kilimo 2022). Consequently, women with limited economic means contend with a compounded challenge (ibid). This is crucial to note, as many candidates do not have access to wealthy social networks that can financially support their campaigns. In contrast, the situation in the Greater Accra region presents a different scenario. While the region boasts greater development, affording women a certain level of financial independence, it remains unequal compared to men (see table no 1.2; fig 1.7). Despite this, women in Greater Accra own decision-making capabilities and the capacity to advocate for their rights. This newfound freedom has enabled their integration into specific social circles and groups. However, they still grapple with financial limitations, particularly evident in their efforts to engage with voters and expand their social networks.

As previously noted, vote-buying is prevalent in developing nations (Vicente 2014). However, with a more educated and financial independent electorate, there is a tendency to prioritize long-term policies over immediate gains. This dynamic has assisted Greater Accra region women in expanding their social capital in the field and access diverse networks.

“As I said initially, I was working with women entrepreneurs in the informal sector, they are my main backbone yea, they help finance my campaign. Yes if anyone tells you that the market women in the capital you see are not rich it is a lie, you just have to be true yes they support the agenda”. (Ameyo, Greater Accra, 7 December 2021, 1.45pm)

This highlights the Greater Accra region's economic vitality, which has enabled women to attain financial independence and support candidates championing a collective agenda. The quote underscores the pivotal role of women entrepreneurs in the informal sector within the Greater Accra region, portraying them as a cornerstone of support for political campaigns. The politician acknowledges their significant contribution in financing her campaign, shedding light on the

economic vibrancy of the region. Furthermore, the assertion that market women in the capital are financially affluent challenges common misconceptions, emphasizing the economic empowerment of these women. This not only reflects the region's economic vitality but also signals a broader trend of women attaining financial independence and actively engaging in political processes. It highlights how economic factors, such as the prosperity of the informal sector, can shape political dynamics and foster collective agendas championed by female parliamentarians. Labelling women entrepreneurs in the informal sector as the "*main backbone*" emphasizes their economic prowess. Even though the informal sector might not always be reflected accurately in official figures, its crucial role in the economy, especially in developing nations, was pointed out by Keith Hart (1973). These women entrepreneurs frequently accumulate considerable economic influence, even if formal institutions do not always acknowledge them.

She emphasised the pivotal roles market women have had in shaping her career, challenging conventional narratives where women, especially those in informal sectors, are perceived as passive or sidelined. Sylvia Chant (1997) elucidated the roles of women in developing economies and their influence in redefining gender standards. Chant (1997) theorises that women leading households frequently juggle multiple responsibilities, from income generation and caregiving to decision-making. Through their actions in the Greater Accra region, they contest traditional gender norms, driving a shift in gender dynamics. This reflects observations in the Greater Accra region, where, as income generators, women exert control over some decision-making processes, contrasting with their Northern counterparts. This also shows how their informal networks and bonding social capitals are very strong financially.

Williams and Gurtoo (2011) assert that the choice to become an entrepreneur in the informal sector is shaped by societal norms and collective logical decisions. Women in the informal sector in the Greater Accra region play a proactive role in endorsing various agendas, including political campaigns, which can influence gender norms and legislative policies. This sheds light on an insightful revelation: political campaigns can be financed not just by the elite but also by grassroots backers from informal sectors especially women. Drawing parallels with Mark Granovetter's (1985) "embeddedness" concept, it is evident that economic endeavours are intricately tied to social networks, trust, and social structures.

The economic prowess of these local market women in Greater Accra region also disrupts preconceived notions about wealth, gender, and profession. This resonates with Pierre Bourdieu's

(1986) theories on various forms of capital. Although these women might lack the "*symbolic capital*" of societal prestige, their economic capital is evident in the Greater Accra region. This perspective not only challenges traditional views of the informal sector but also aligns with Gustafson, Berger, and Luckmann's (1968) observations regarding the social construction of reality within this sector. They contend that societal constructs might skew perceptions of poverty in the informal sector, not truly representing the economic realities of market women.

The relationship between the market women and the politician suggests a kind of social contract or reciprocal bond. This bond facilitates collective actions among these women, aiming to challenge gender stereotypes and secure their representation in parliament. The politician acknowledges the economic prowess of these women. In response, they are financially backing the politician's campaign. This represents a united endeavour for female representation, a collaboration between grassroots women in the informal sector and the female candidate. Such an alliance is lacking in the Northern sector, mainly because grassroots women there lack financial autonomy and a voice.

In essence, the data for this thesis highlights the complex interplay of gender, economics, and politics, especially within informal sectors in networking and accessing social capital. It unveils intricate social relationships and power dynamics, largely attributed to the Greater Accra region's cosmopolitan atmosphere that empowers women financially. However, these efforts often consume a significant amount of the politician's time.

"I am always on the grounds mmm see my people almost every day hmm it is difficult because because of the time, now my colleagues who are in the north, they may not go to their constituency as frequently as I do, meaning they see me on a regular and we interact more often". (Ameyo, Greater Accra, 7 December 2021, 1.45pm)

Her consistent presence among the market women signifies a more involved, possibly hands-on, form of representation, differing from representatives in the Northern region who may be more removed from their constituents. This underlines the critical role of social engagement and interaction in determining how individuals perceive and interpret the world. Considering this, the frequent interactions between the politician and her constituents enhance her prominence in their community's social landscape. As revealed by Coleman (1990b) trust is developed through repeated interactions and the establishment of norms of reciprocity and mutual benefit. As the politician and the market women engage in constant interactions and observe each other's

behaviour over time, they build trust based on their assessments of others' reliability, integrity, and willingness to cooperate.

Also, these women are not only financial supporters but also voters, hence her consistent engagement with them, turns the political space into a more collaborative and interactive domain. As Lefebvre (1991) points out, spatial practices significantly influence social ties and power structures. She consistently shared experiences with her constituents in a specific area. Lefebvre (1991) describes such experiences as "lived space", which not only fosters new social connections but also reshapes existing ones. These regular interactions go beyond mere representation; they establish mutual understanding, and social capital with the constituency. This sheds light on the intricate relationship among space, society, and power in the Greater Accra region. Such regular engagements act as a means of networking and establishing social ties, enhancing politician's prominence and influence within the community.

This also introduces the idea of sociological consciousness as outlined by Kyler and Taff (2020). This consciousness pertains to the perspective through which one comprehends societal interactions and relationships. In the Greater Accra region, consistent engagement with voters showcases a pronounced sociological awareness, characterized by a keen interest in understanding and addressing the community's needs and issues. This strategic understanding aids in election victories, an insight seemingly absent in the Northern region, leading to potential obstacles. Such differences in regional engagement and network access indicates differences in sociopolitical trends, infrastructure, cultural norms, or other locale-specific elements. This resonates ideas from studies, who believed that geographical context significantly influences social interactions (Sharmeen, Arentze, and Timmermans 2014; Soja 1989).

However, significant time commitment is required to sustain such relationships. This stems from the understanding that nurturing relationships is essential for fostering valuable social capital (Yung-Chul 2009). For the politician to establish both strong and weak ties within the community (Granovetter 1973), and to make specific investments in these relationships, the time she finds consuming ultimately aids in cultivating trust, dedication, and resource accessibility — all of which are paramount in politics. In essence, the data of this thesis highlights the importance of being physically present, engaging relationally, and understanding the sociocultural nuances of time and space within political representation. This immersive approach stands in contrast to what

might be perceived as more remote styles of representation, shedding light on the varied ways in which representatives connect or network with their constituencies.

To conclude, the economic contrasts between the Northern and Greater Accra regions are instrumental in determining the access female politicians have to social capital. With Greater Accra standing as an example of economic progressive and urbanized region, women often find enhanced avenues for visibility, outreach, and financial self-reliance. Such economic vitality strengthens their capacities to access networks, garner support, and enter influential domains, reinforcing their social capital. Conversely, the Northern region, with its economic constraints, poses its own set of challenges and prospects. Female politicians here contend with age-old hierarchies, limited fiscal autonomy, and a more rural setting. It is pivotal to note that economic growth does not singularly define access to political social capital. Cultural, historical, and political elements blend with economic considerations in determining the terrain female politician's tread and how they access social capital. Given the evident challenge of vote-buying that politicians confront in Ghana, enhancing educational and professional opportunities in a region can deter such practices and improve political social capital access. Thus, the following section explores in-depth the education and professional growth in both regions and how it influences social capital access.

6.5. Learning equity: The unequal path of education, political literacy, and its influence on female politicians' social capital access in Northern and Greater Accra regions

Education and professional growth in the field of politics emerges as two crucial aspects of accessing political networks and social capital. Education plays a pivotal role in shaping the social capital of female politicians, serving as a catalyst for their engagement and influence within political spheres. Beyond imparting knowledge and skills, education empowers women with the tools to navigate complex social networks and establish meaningful connections. Furthermore, access to quality education equips female politicians with the confidence and credibility needed to effectively advocate for their constituents' interests. In essence, education serves as a cornerstone for women in politics, enabling them to build robust social capital essential for their success and impact in the public arena.

Examining the nuanced interplay between education and professional growth within specific regional contexts unveils insights into the impact on female politicians' acquisition of social capital. The regional educational and professional milieu exerts a profound influence not only on the socio-economic fabric but also on the intricate political dynamics therein (Burt 1992;

Lin 2001b). Advanced educational attainment often aligns with heightened political involvement, while strong professional ties can serve as channels for political support, fundraising, and collaborative policymaking (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 2012). As politicians immerse themselves in such environments, their ability to harness relationships, gain trust, and bond with their electorates is enhanced.

Nevertheless, comprehending the impact of education and professional advancement on the acquisition of social capital access transcends mere simplistic correlations. The distinctive attributes of a region's culture, economy, history, and demographics intersect with these factors. For instance, in locales where formal education is highly valued, politicians possessing advanced qualifications often encounter facilitation in fostering trust and asserting authority (Stoker and Jennings 2016). In areas where professional affiliations and formal education is respected, politicians with extensive professional histories might find their social capital enhanced. The 2021 census data (see table no.1.2; figure 1.8; figure 1.9) presented an unequal education access and higher illiteracy rates in the North. This converges with the findings from interviews, revealing significant challenges in accessing education for women in this region. However, despite these barriers, the public, voters, and political parties in Ghana highly value educated politicians, attributing to them heightened trust and authority (Adams and Agomor 2015).

Moreover, in regions like the Northern region where I observed that leadership demands formal education and societal norms hinder certain genders (females) from accessing education, these tends to restrict their access to leadership. In the North, women expressed difficulties accessing education, rooted in the belief that their role is in the household, not the classroom. This mindset, suggesting that investing in a woman's education is a waste of money, is consistent with Casad et al. (2021) findings. This consequently denies women without access to education equal opportunities in the field of politics.

“Because the time I happened to enter politics... they say do this, then I do. And he asked me, are you educated, and I said no. And he said it pains him I haven’t gone to school like I would go far. That was what my MP told me. If you were educated, whatever I would have done for you to get somewhere, I would have done it. So, it pains me a lot, yes a lot because our parents did not value the education of the girl children...”. (Sena, North, 2 February 2023, 1.35pm)

In Ghana's history, many communities, and societies especially in the Northern region have undervalued girls' education, rooted in the notion that they are primarily suited for domestic roles

(Alhassan and Odame 2015). The politician's lack of education has significantly impacted her pursuit of a political career and access to social capital from the member of parliament. Despite her connections to a prominent political figure who could have provided support, the community's emphasis on academic qualifications for politicians prevented her from receiving such help. This was evident when the MP expressed his willingness to assist but pointed out her educational shortcomings, which reflect broader societal views in her region. This underscores that having influential connections is not enough; one must also possess the qualifications required of the network to benefit from them.

This dynamic consequently perpetuates a cycle of inequality, denying women without access to education equal opportunities and social capital within the political sphere. As exemplified by the statement of the women organizer from the North, the lack of formal education serves as a barrier to political advancement, with individuals expressing regret and lamentation over missed opportunities due to their educational status. This sentiment underscores the broader systemic challenges faced by women in accessing education and accruing social capital within the political arena, perpetuating disparities and hindering inclusive representation.

Educational qualification of an individual has the power to open doors to opportunities and increase the individual's standing in the society. Bourdieu (1986) posited that education serves as a type of cultural capital, enabling individuals to climb the societal hierarchy. Research consistently shows a strong association between higher educational attainment and increased political participation, from voting to campaigning and even vying for public office. Furthermore, those with advanced education often have an expanded social network. Education nurtures these networks by fostering relationships with classmates, educators, and mentors. As noted by Bradley and Corwyn (2002), such relationships can be instrumental in offering crucial information, guidance, and links that pave the way for job opportunities, professional growth, and various social, political, and economic benefits.

The politician's anguish over missing out on education can be understood through the prism of symbolic interactionism. This sorrow stems from the societal value placed on education—not merely as a pathway for individual growth, but as an example of respect, dignity, and opportunity. Consequently, her educational deficit is an obstacle to harnessing essential opportunities in the field of politics. In the Northern region, entrenched cultural norms concerning gender intersect

with the nuanced interplay of politics and patronage. These norms, recognizing the transformative power of education, often deliberately withhold this privilege from women.

According to the political party's constitution

"... give equal opportunities to women and ensure that all forms of discrimination against women end, so that they can contribute more effectively to the development of the nation" (NPP constitution, Article 2)

This indicates that despite political parties explicitly stating in their constitutions that they do not discriminate against women, the political space and its networks have certain implicit requirements for acceptance. Consequently, if a woman lacks these qualifications, she may experience involuntary discrimination.

According to another female politician

"I was having the interest to get into politics, but I did not know how to get into, and you know that anyway you don't know I am only a JSS girl ... I found myself in there by popular request from the women". (Linda, North, 7 February 2023, 9am)

She reinforces an earlier sentiment, emphasizing that a notable challenge for female politicians accessing social capital is their limited technical and political expertise. This female politician had not immersed herself in understanding the cultural and organizational norms, values, and practices that define the political landscape. While her passion was evident, she lacked the foundational experience or socialization within the political space. This might suggest that she was not oriented towards recognizing politics as a feasible career option, potentially hindering her from accessing vital resources and networks. An absence of such socialization, coupled with the lack of appropriate connections and capital, can be considerable impediments in politics (Lin 2000b). This perspective is in line with Pateman's (1970:105) assertion: *"we learn to participate by participating."* Her unfamiliarity with the political environment amplified her challenges, especially in accessing social networks. As articulated by Putnam (1995b:666), *"people who join are people who trust... and the trust predominantly emerges from the act of joining."*

According to Newton (1997), socialization and association processes are pivotal for participants to access social networks that align with specific organizational values and practices. For many women, tapping into these congruent organizational networks is challenging, leading them to miss out on associated benefits because they are not political literate. Existing literature underscores that social capital encompasses the assets derived from an individual's or group's

social networks and affiliations (Putnam 1995a). In the political field, those equipped with robust social ties are often better positioned to harness resources such as financial backing, endorsements, and broad support (Bourdieu 1986:249; Coleman 1988; Lowndes 2004). As inferred from her statement, she was influenced by women who, themselves, likely lacked the necessary socialization, education, and affiliations, making it even more challenging for her to find her footing in the political field. This is also because she did not share the same values, knowledge and norms with the main political networks (mostly male of hierarchy in the political space) which can create cohesion and address problems effectively.

The findings indicate that education is very important in accessing cognitive social capital. Also, the way a politician develops their political agency can either hinder or boost their access to political network. The challenges often stem from the specific political agency they build before entering the political field, which in turn can dictate the nature of their social connections. While it is clear that associations and a deep understanding of party structures and values can influence candidate selection. Conversely, in the Greater Accra region, female politicians have noted that they had received education. However, some struggled due to a lack of technical knowledge in the field, which hindered their effectiveness.

“... I have had one year training in eerm politics at FES and I also had eermm I also had several training sessions on political trainings, ... I always wanted to do politics and eermm doing politics as a woman is quite difficult in this part of the world eermm and you need certain trainings. You need to know what to do, how to present yourself as a woman”. (Yaa, Greater Accra, 18 April 2023, 9am)

She asserts her professional identity by presenting herself as someone with a specialized knowledge or background in politics, indicating her educational and professional growth. This idea is consistent with theories of identity formation through discourse as discussed by Bucholtz and Hall (2005). Yet, even with her educational credentials, she highlights the gender biases present in the political sphere. As Connell (1987) points out, deep-seated patriarchal norms often relegate women to the sidelines, diminishing their presence and perceived credibility in political domains. Beyond presenting herself as well-educated, she also identifies as a female in the sector. This reflects Butler's idea of performativity, emphasized by Lloyd (2015), suggesting that gender is not just a biological feature but also a dynamic expression. In the male-dominated political landscape, women continually face societal norms, urging them to display their gender roles in particular, frequently constrained, manners.

Her exposure to "specific trainings" and understanding of "what to do" enabled her to acquire crucial knowledge and skills essential for navigating the political landscape. This emphasizes the pivotal role of education and training in equipping individuals (females) to tackle challenges in their political profession through the formal networks they join. Her educational advancement, particularly in the political space, gives her a different edge compared to many from the Northern region. This can be attributed to her community's forward-thinking gender norms and economic status where educational pursuits are not limited by gender.

Her educational growth not only deepened her insight into politics but also linked her to influential circles and networks vital to her political profession. As a result, potential challenges are lessened as these connections provide support and guidance. This is revealed in my analysis as an important social capital, Ibarra's research (1993) underscores the importance of mentorship in accessing professional networks and resources, particularly for women navigating the political landscape. Such significant networking and opportunities seem lacking for those from the Northern region, largely because of societal constraints on education. This advantage further arises from the Greater Accra region's embrace of women's empowerment and informal business initiatives.

"I happened to be training a group of women, fishmongers in leadership, how they can play leadership roles at the community level because it is not a concept new to them, it something they do already at the local sorry within the family settings. Because most of the homes along the coast are headed by females so I was encouraging them to take up formal roles". (Ameyo, Greater Accra, 7 December 2021, 1.45pm)

In the Greater Accra region, access to education is not just confined to formal schooling; it extends to entrepreneurial training, empowering women towards financial autonomy. Historically, leadership qualities have been linked to male attributes. Yet, the politician's insights unveil how women in the Greater Accra region, strengthened by their financial independence, exert influence within their households. This resonates with gender studies and feminist theory suggesting that leadership is not innately gender-specific, and both genders have the potential for effective leadership (Eagly and Carli 2007a). Such financial and decision-making power grants women access to considerable social capital and access to social networks. Research suggests that this social capital can be instrumental in accessing leadership roles and corporate boards (Górska et al. 2021).

The reference to leadership "*at the community level*" as opposed to "*within family settings*" hints at the age-old divide between public and private domains. Traditionally, in the Greater Accra

region, the private or domestic sphere is women's territory, while the public space, encompassing politics, community leadership, and business, is male-centric. In contrast, in the Northern region, men dominate both public and private domains.

Encouraging Greater Accra region female fish mongers to take on official roles showcases avenues of empowerment and signals a gentle transition from household leadership roles to more expansive public domains. These inherent leadership and training initiatives have been associated with a rise in social capital over time (Strömgren et al. 2017). This can enhance their professional connections and can set the stage for them to take on prominent leadership roles in the public space and access some social networks. This underscores the complex relationship between informal leadership experience, formal leadership roles, education, and access to politics for women. In the Greater Accra region, empowerment and education are about recognizing and strengthening the existing strengths of its women rather than introducing them to unfamiliar leadership ideas, a practice more common in the North. This stems from the fact that women in the Greater Accra region often assume leadership roles within their households, unlike women in the Northern region. It highlights the importance of recognizing and leveraging existing social capital among women while also promoting formal leadership training and education to enhance their participation and influence within political spheres.

In the context of the swift advancement of women's participation in the labour market and their improved access to education in Greater Accra region. It is essential to consider the colonial history, which instigated significant transformations in the access to education for females. Other female politicians also pointed out their lack of practical experience and technical expertise in politics, caused a challenge in accessing opportunities.

As one female politician noted,

“I went and applied I was called for vetting, I did well theoretically but eerrmm the panel felt that I was not partisan enough and so they needed someone who knew the party’s structures very well, because you would be dealing with the party members at the grounds or grassroot, and so they gave the opportunity to someone else”. (Ameyo, Greater Accra, 7 December 2021, 1.45pm)

While her passion for politics was clear, she was missing some key elements, highlighting her unpreparedness. As literature indicates, candidates linked with the two major political parties in Ghana have a better chance of securing an election win than those running as independent candidates (Daddieh and Bob-Milliar 2012:208). She was not allowed entry into the political

network not because of her gender but because she did not have the right information, knowledge, or shared ideas to communicate with the electorates that vote. This mean that she did not understand the rules, norms and values of the network she wanted to be part of.

“Political parties are to spread within their respective areas knowledge of the party’s constitution, mission, standing orders, rules, principles, policies, projects and programmes”. (NDC constitution, Article 7)

This sheds light on the pivotal aspects political parties considers when selecting candidates. In her instance, a deep understanding of the party's framework and its members was vital. This significance is drawn from the belief that elected officials significantly influence the party's image and actions (Daddieh and Bob-Milliar 2012:211; Hazan and Rahat 2010:6). For political parties, this understanding is crucial for ensuring effective representation and creating strong ties with grassroots followers.

Studies emphasize the importance of trust among members for the effectiveness of social networks (Coleman 1990b; Putnam 1993, 1995b). Her case reveals a failure to build trust due to a disparity in shared language and knowledge with the network, hindering collective efficacy and resulting in her denied access (Granovetter 1973; Tsai and Ghoshal 1998). When individuals in a network share a common understanding of terminology, concepts, and goals, it fosters cohesion, facilitating smoother communication, collaboration, and reducing misunderstandings or conflicts (Bourdieu 1985; Lyons 2005).

Furthermore, shared knowledge within a social network significantly contributes to collective efficacy—the group's belief in its ability to achieve common goals and address collective problems effectively (ibid). This shared knowledge not only empowers individual members but also enhances the overall resilience and adaptability of the network (Bourdieu 1985; Lyons 2005). Trust within a social network is founded on members' ability to communicate effectively through shared language and leverage collective knowledge to achieve shared objectives. This makes everyone feel like they belong and can work together better. Her case thus highlights a significant challenge most female participants often face in accessing social networks in the field of politics—a lack of specialized knowledge.

Some male politicians also agreed with this assertion that education and lack of political expertise is one of the main challenges female politicians in accessing social capital in the field of politics

“I would say it is education because it has all to do with education. Yes because this thing called politics involves a lot of mind work, it is a lot of exhibits of eerm knowledge and understanding of society and most of the women who want to lead and are living in the rural areas do not have that educational that should take them there, so even if she is able to get there, something pulls them back because on the floor of parliament she gets lost”.
(Nana, Greater Accra, 16 March 2023, 12pm)

This male participant emphasized the importance of education for accessing social capital in the field. He also highlighted the challenges faced by female politicians, particularly those in rural areas, who, despite their passion, cannot access networks due to a lack of technical knowledge.

Chapter conclusion

This chapter delves into the complex interplay of location and its intersection with cultural, religious, socio-economic, educational and political literacy, revealing how they collectively shape the social capital available to female politicians in Northern and Greater Accra regions of Ghana. Central to social capital—social networks, trust, reciprocity, and norms—are not stand-alone entities but are intricately tied to the regions' socio-cultural landscape. The chapter revealed that education, political literacy, and regional development are pivotal in determining the access women politicians in both Northern and Greater Accra region have to political social capital. However, the effects of these factors are deeply intertwined with regional characteristics and socio-cultural factors. Historically, Northern Ghana, trailing the Greater Accra region in educational and socio-economic progress, brings a complex set of challenges for its female politicians. The region's longstanding patriarchal norms and cultural traditions have limited women's participation in politics, hindered their educational ambitions, and constrained their leadership roles and engagement in social networks and accessing social capital.

In contrast, the more urbanized Greater Accra region, display a notable advancement in education and development. This environment tends to be more conducive to the rise of female politicians and their ability to harness social capital. Influenced by global trends, a diverse economy, and a strong civil society, the Greater Accra region provides women with better opportunities to build and utilize their social capital. Empowerment programs are documented as beginning to play a crucial role in developing women's leadership in the Northern region and improving their access to social capital. Yet, the pace of change in the Northern region remains slower than in the Greater Accra region. This suggests that while the Greater Accra region

showcases evident progress, the deep-rooted cultural practices in the North call for parallel shifts to fully empower female politicians.

In the Greater Accra region, female politicians often benefit from inherited social capital within their families, facilitating easier access to broader social networks. In contrast, in the North, community and societal norms create barriers to such access. Additionally, religious institutions play a significant role, with mosques in the North presenting challenges for female politicians in accessing social capital, unlike in the Greater Accra region where they may even receive endorsements from spiritual leaders.

The following chapter explores the intricacies of party politics in both regions and their impact on accessing social capital, self-perception and leadership, and also strategies female utilizes in the field.

Chapter seven

Female politicians in Northern and Greater Accra regions and social capital access: Party structures, leadership perspectives, and strategies

7.0. Chapter overview

In political science and sociology, social capital has attracted considerable interest due to its influence on political processes, power structures, and decision-making (Jackman and Miller 1998). Social capital, defined as the resources embedded within social networks, plays a crucial role in facilitating collective action, mobilizing support, and accessing opportunities within political spheres (Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1988; Putnam 1993, 2000).

Historically, women's participation in politics has faced systemic challenges, patriarchal structures, and cultural norms prioritizing male leadership (Shvedova 2005). As a result, female politicians often encounter different pathways to access social capital compared to their male counterparts (Eagly and Carli 2018), which can result in women facing unique challenges and employing distinct strategies. A critical part in examining how female politicians access social capitals is recognizing the challenges they encounter in forming and sustaining networks that can contribute to their political success (Sapiro 2013). These barriers are complex and often intertwined, reaching beyond just politics into Ghana's societal and cultural core. These challenges can be broadly classified into two intertwined categories: the structural challenges presented by the political sphere, and the socio-cultural barriers anchored in deep-seated patriarchal traditions (elaborated in chapter 6).

The data gathered for this thesis shows that structural challenges, such as underrepresentation in political bodies, gender bias, and disparities in resource availability, hinder women's inclusion in established spheres of power and influence. Additionally, cultural norms and societal expectations can impose further limitations on female politicians, shaping the dynamics of their relationships and the breadth of their social capital access. The data also demonstrates how factors such as trust in leadership skills, societal norms, and urbanization contribute to women's ability to access networks that build social capital.

This chapter examines the influence of party structures, leadership perspectives, and networking within the political space of the Northern and Greater Accra regions on the social capital access of female politicians (fig 3.4). Additionally, it delves into the various strategies

employed by female politicians to overcome challenges in accessing social capital in the Northern and Greater Accra regions. The data gathered for this thesis revealed that female politicians employ diverse strategies including forming alliances with similar-minded individuals and interest groups, utilizing personal and community networks, actively seeking mentorship and support from established political figures, and engaging in education to understand the dynamics of the political landscape.

7.1. Political framework: Party structures in Northern and Greater Accra regions and their influence on female politicians' social capital access

Political party framework covers both internal structures and the external environment that influences the party. Regional structures within a political party play a vital role in shaping women's access to social capital (Celis et al. 2019; Rashkova and Zankina 2017). Inclusive practices, transparency, and engagement opportunities provided by these structures enhance women's ability to build and leverage social capital. They facilitate networking through events and gatherings, enabling women to establish connections and access resources within the party. By prioritizing initiatives promoting inclusivity, party regional structures can ensure resources are directed towards enhancing women's access to social capital. Moreover, they organize training programs empowering women to engage effectively within the party. However, exclusionary practices and lack of transparency can hinder women's access to social capital by creating barriers to participation and opportunities for engagement. Such practices marginalize certain groups and limit their ability to build connections and contribute to the party's success.

In the diverse political environment of Ghana, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP) have asserted themselves as dominant political parties since the nation's return to democracy in 1992. Beyond shaping national priorities and governance, their influence is particularly evident in regional dynamics, especially in the Northern and Greater Accra regions. A pivotal yet occasionally overlooked aspect of their influence is their role in shaping the opportunities available to female politicians building political social capital in these regions. In an environment characterized by patriarchal values, this vital resource gains even more significance for female politicians in projecting their political trajectory and accomplishments.

The mission for meaningful representation and leadership for women often involves overcoming numerous challenges. Examining the role of regional political structures in facilitating or hindering this pursuit in relation to how they access social capital is of paramount importance

in this thesis. While the Northern region is celebrated for its age-old monarchies and traditions, the Greater Accra region is distinguished by its vibrant urban life and maritime heritage. Each region offers a unique political environment. These varying contexts influence everything from party dynamics and voting processes to the core civic engagement of their populations. At the heart of this discourse is the path of female politicians, whose political journeys are closely linked with their ability to harness and utilize political social capital within political party boundaries. In observation, it is evident that political parties often seek to categorize women within predefined roles rather than affording them the opportunity to freely contest any position

“I met I met some top officials of the ... party, they told me the big opportunities I could get if I join them ... it is still not easy but I had this man in the party who kept encouraging me anytime I lose to not give up”. (Ameyo, Greater Accra, 7 December 2021, 1.45pm)

Political parties are instrumental in identifying and developing potential leaders. The selection process is shaped by a lot of determining factors, such as gender, socio-economic background, regional ties, and individual networks (Norris and Lovenduski 1995). In numerous environments, patriarchal norms within party structures pose unique challenges for women aiming to venture into politics. This also has repercussions on their ability to access social capital within the political sphere (Celis et al. 2019). Reflecting on the experience of the participant in discussion, her engagement with political party representatives regarding *"noteworthy opportunities"* points towards a deliberate move by the party leadership to encourage female participation. This aligns with global practices where political groups are focusing on diversifying their core by inviting more women and other marginalized groups. Such interactions often serve as gateways to influential circles teeming with social capital. It creates an avenue for these politicians to gain pertinent insights and prospects by leveraging such networks.

The data of this thesis emphasized how political parties often act as central points of political social capital, granting members the ability to network, access resources, knowledge, skill, and explore opportunities. However, for the politician, while these networks hold significant power, navigating and extracting benefits from them may pose challenges, with gender, socio-economic considerations, and other elements occasionally becoming obstacles (Lin 2002). Even with the opportunities provided by the political party, her journey was far from straightforward. This reflects wider observations suggesting that, even with organizational backing and formal party networks, women often encounter numerous obstacles in the political domain, particularly when seeking the right social capital.

She hails from the Greater Accra region, an area typically considered progressive on gender matters, yet she still struggled with integrating into the party framework and securing valuable social connections. Her experience implies that even after being introduced to prospective networks within the political party, hurdles persist in fully accessing and utilizing the available political social capital in the party structures in the Greater Accra region. Such experiences align with broader studies showing that women, even if integrated into networks, may confront specific challenges stemming from deep-seated socio-cultural and organizational standards.

One notable feature was the impactful role of mentors during her political journey. Mentorship emerges as a crucial aspect of political networking, with experienced politicians providing guidance and support to newer entrants. She highlighted the presence of a male figure within the party who consistently motivated her through challenges, embodying the role of a mentor. This mentor was instrumental in enhancing her access to social capital by acting as a bridge, offering guidance, connecting her to essential individuals, and providing emotional backup, assisting her entry into the party domain (Burt 1992). Such interactions emphasize the value of social capital in offering emotional sustenance and inspiration for individuals (Kriesi et al. 2006). It highlights the importance of mentorship in the political field. However, it is worth noting that such mentor-mentee dynamics sometimes lead to opportunities that may inadvertently restrict access to top-tier positions in the political field.

“I noticed eerm other women having to stand for the treasurer positions and other positions eerm most of them don’t win it’s difficult for them because the party big men and delegates feel that position is for a man”. (Nutti, Greater Accra, 25 November 2022, 3.30pm)

The quote suggests that certain leadership positions, such as treasurer, are perceived as traditionally male-dominated roles within the party. This reflects entrenched gender norms and expectations that dictate which roles are deemed suitable for men and women. The quote indicates that despite efforts by women to stand for positions like treasurer, they often face significant obstacles and are unsuccessful in winning these roles. This suggests the presence of structural barriers, such as biases, stereotypes, and power dynamics within the party hierarchy, which hinder women's access to leadership positions and social capital.

The mention of *"party big men and delegates"* implies the presence of influential male members who hold sway over decision-making processes within the party. This underscores the unequal distribution of power and resources, where male power brokers reinforce traditional gender roles and expectations, further marginalizing women in their pursuit of leadership positions

and social capital. The quote suggests that certain leadership positions, such as treasurer, are perceived as traditionally male-dominated roles within the party. This reflects entrenched gender norms and expectations that dictate which roles are deemed suitable for men and women.

Stereotypes and traditional gender roles have persistently shaped views on what individuals, based on their gender, can or should do in various fields, politics included. Over time, women have been typecast into roles deemed suitable for '*feminine*' qualities, such as caregiving. Similarly, leadership and high-stake roles and positions have mostly been reserved for men, rooted in deep-seated patriarchal norms (Eagly and Karau 2002). This dynamic is evident in the roles political parties often assign to women in the Greater Accra region. The recurring situation where women vie for treasurer positions and other roles typically reserved for men, but often fall short, hints at underlying biases against them, secured in gendered perceptions within party structures. Such barriers limit their reach to influential party networks and their ability to effectively utilize social capital like information.

Research indicates that women's political journeys are frequently separated with challenges, primarily stemming from doubts about their appropriateness for specific roles (Dolan 2014). Political parties in the Greater Accra region and Ghana as a whole are not impartial bodies. They harbour power hierarchies, with some individuals or factions, termed as gatekeepers, wielding more influence than others. These gatekeepers, driven by their biases and interests, significantly dictate candidate opportunities and their eventual success, including for women (Krook and Norris 2014).

The politician's mention of "*party big men and delegates*" highlights the crucial gatekeeper role these individuals hold in mediating access to social resources within party structure in the Greater Accra region. Such influential figures in the party critically shape who can tap into the party's social capital and the extent of its availability, as noted by Krook and Norris (2014). Their perception that certain roles are reserved for men, especially in the Greater Accra region of Ghana, reflects larger empirical patterns where leadership structures dominated by men perpetuate gender biases. These biases influence the pathways and aspirations of female candidates, often limiting their entry into essential networks and access to opportunities (Lin 2001b). This situation provides a tangible illustration of the hurdles women encounter due to gender prejudices within political parties in the Greater Accra region.

Some female politicians in the Greater Accra region, however faced different conditions in the party space. Example is the participant below who shared how she experienced equitable treatment by party members and executives.

“And I see ... the men pushing the women to take up roles. eerrmm in the past, I did not see that you would attest to the fact that most women eerrmm would rather stay back. But now I see like the men pushing the women to take up roles, the men supporting the women, eerrmm and I don't see that eerrmm friction between the men and women so much like it used to be. I think it is better the relationship has got better”. (Yaa, Greater Accra, 18 April 2023, 9am)

She has observed a notable shift in gender dynamics, with men now more supportive of women assuming leadership roles. While women might have previously been reticent about taking on such responsibilities, there is a marked increase in men's advocacy for female leadership. Additionally, she points out that interactions between the genders in the party space seem to be more amicable, showing a decrease in past tensions. This can build trust and ensure regular meeting because they all understand each other and willing to work together (Bourdieu 1985; Tsai and Ghoshal 1998).

The findings underscore that societal perceptions of gender roles and relationships are not static; they can and do evolve, as detailed by Eagly and Wood (2012). The female politician's observation of changing dynamics within the party space—where men now encourage women to assume roles—reflects this shift towards gender equality and the empowerment of women. The observations also accentuate the relatively progressive gender norms in the Greater Accra region of Ghana, as evidenced by studies from Orkoh, Claassen, and Blaauw (2022) and Senadza (2012). This trend suggests a move towards more inclusive gender attitudes in the Greater Accra region, marked by men's recognition and active support of women's involvement in areas previously dominated by men, such as political leadership roles.

Furthermore, studies emphasize the pivotal role of male allies in elevating women's leadership, reinforcing the idea that gender equality is a collective endeavour, not confined solely to women (Subašić et al. 2018). These findings shed light on the evolving nature of gender dynamics and societal perceptions towards gender roles which has led to women accessing social networks. These shifts are steered by a myriad of elements, encompassing cultural, educational, social, and economic influences, as well as targeted advocacy and policy adaptations.

The dynamics of gendered opportunities and the access to such gender-biased social resources within political parties in the Greater Accra region is not quite different from those in the Northern region.

"We can also do the work. So, they should try and vote us. Or put us into higher positions to be able to help them take care of the country. So as the party too should also some kind of, because if a man and a woman stood for a position, is like their eyes are always on the men than the women. So, it should not be so. A man can stand as giant as he is, and a woman is small, but the work a woman can do is more than what the man can do". (Afi, North, 10 January 2023, 9am)

The accounts from the participants contradict the principles outlined in the political party constitutions regarding fair treatment of female candidates.

"All elected members in parliament must be given fair opportunity to participate in the running of the government". (Party constitution)

This illustrates that political parties heavily rely on the gender roles, sociocultural norms and customs of the communities they represent. In numerous cultures, established gender roles have often provided men with greater chances to amass and leverage social capital, notably in political and leadership arenas, including party systems (Connell 1988). The observation that women, regardless of their competencies and talents, are often bypassed for senior roles resonates with the '*glass ceiling*' notion. This term describes an unseen obstacle that hinders women and other marginalized groups from attaining top-tier roles in organizations and politics, no matter their credentials and expertise (Eagly and Carli 2007a). This underscores the profound influence of societal norms and prejudices in shaping and restricting opportunities for diverse groups, especially in political party contexts in the North.

In the Northern region, women's leadership abilities are often underestimated, not due to their actual skills but because of entrenched societal norms, particularly evident in political circles (Wood and Eagly 2002). In the North, there exist entrenched beliefs about the typical roles and attributes associated with each gender. When women pursue leadership positions, often considered "*masculine*" within political realms, they encounter biases stemming from the perceived mismatch between traditional female roles and leadership responsibilities. Fiske et al. (2002) posit that stereotypes encompass two main façades: warmth and competence.

In the North, women frequently face the stereotype of being high in warmth but lacking in competence. This stereotype adversely impacts leadership situations where competence is

paramount. Such viewpoints hinder women's access to social resources in political spheres. Interestingly, in many instances in the Northern region, women contribute more than their male counterparts in the party space, but their efforts remain unrecognized due to prevailing views that favour men as natural leaders.

“Because women, though I said we can do all things, but if they are scheduling activities, most of, look at, most of the meetings at night is not good for us. Most of the meetings. So even if it is done at night, but it should be earlier and then you close what? early”. (Xorse, North, 15 January 2022, 2pm)

Typically, conventional gender roles assign women the primary tasks of caregiving and managing domestic duties (Eagly and Karau 2002). In many cultures, women return home earlier than men to attend to familial obligations. Consequently, late evening engagements can be particularly challenging for women, intensifying the conflict between professional and personal roles. After their formal jobs, women often shoulder unpaid domestic tasks. They strive to maintain a balance between professional duties and personal commitments to avoid conflict in both spheres. Yet, in traditionally oriented societies, like the Northern region, evening hours are largely dedicated to family. This leaves little room for nurturing social ties crucial for accruing meaningful opportunities and knowledge about political participation (Yung-Chul 2009). This limited engagement affects their ability to connect, collaborate, and influence decisions in the party space.

The data of this thesis shows how the Northern region's political party space is designed around typical male timetables without considering caregiving and other women duties. This impedes women's involvement and impact in political domains in the Northern region. This could diminish the variety in decision-making and collaborative thinking (Carli and Eagly 2007). Given the demanding nature of politics and the need for time investment to amass social capital, the gendered complexities of harmonizing career and home life present significant challenges, particularly for women in the Northern region.

Bourdieu (1986) theoretical framework emphasizes the significance of relationship networks in the accumulation of social capital. According to Bourdieu, an individual's social capital is contingent upon the extent of their social connections and the aggregate capital—whether economic, cultural, or symbolic—possessed by individuals within these networks (Bourdieu 1986). Consequently, the scheduling of late-night meetings within political contexts assumes

paramount importance, serving as critical forums for campaign strategizing and deliberation on substantive matters.

However, the exclusionary impact of inconvenient meeting timings on women cannot be overstated. Women's inability to attend such meetings deprives them of valuable opportunities to cultivate and leverage their social capital within political spheres. Moreover, this disparity in access to social capital is exacerbated in the Northern region's political landscape, where meetings and events are often scheduled at times that are unfavourable for women. This systemic marginalization further impedes women's capacity to access and mobilize social capital, consequently constraining their prospects and agency within the political domain.

Within the political party landscape, candidates lacking connections to certain social networks often face biases. This phenomenon can be better understood through the lens of elite theory, which posits that societal decision-making processes are largely dominated by a select few, including politicians and executives (López 2013). These influential figures tend to endorse candidates who resonate with their own agendas or can bolster their position of power. Notably, many of these elite political circles restrict women's access, hampering their upward mobility (Carli and Eagly 2007). Gender disparities does not only limit participation in meetings and acceptance into certain networks but also affect the equitable distribution of benefits within the party structures. According to this female politician

"They do not even call me for meetings, if it is women mobilizing meetings, they will call me but for any other meetings we are not included and any other benefits you are not ...They go for meeting they don't this thing call you but when is work then they ask you to work, join to work". (Linda, North, 7 February 2023, 2.37pm)

This female politician highlighted that despite the party presenting itself as a unified entity working towards a shared goal, there exists an unequal distribution of resources and imbalances in meeting participation. Women, in particular, face distinct disparities within this environment. The party's influential figures primarily view women as tools to gather female support. Yet, these women are frequently sidelined from benefiting from the party's resources or being included in significant meetings. Being a woman from the North underscores the possibility that such gender-based disparities in participation are rooted in entrenched societal norms. These norms often restrict women's involvement and visibility in certain spheres, thus perpetuating gender inequalities. As Adongo et al. (2023) and Shiraz (2015) notes, women in Northern Ghana typically confront greater obstacles in accessing decision-making roles, leadership positions, and

professional networks across various organizational settings, leading to uneven opportunities and advantages.

This goes against what the gender training manual for the parliament of Ghana states

“Engendering” parliaments entail raising awareness among all MPs, men and women, of the importance of taking gender into account - understanding how a society’s concept of “man and “woman” leads to inequalities - in all actions...”. (Gender training manual for the parliament of Ghana)

She is not the only female politician from the Northern region who believes that the treatment they receive from the political party stems from the socio-cultural norms of their community which serves as a challenge in accessing social networks.

“Truth... the committees that are not associated with females it difficult to enter. Because the north is mostly like that. that is why I said I am working hard to be recognized to be chosen to join other committees in the party”. (Afi, North, 10 January 2023, 9am)

She underscores the significant influence of cultural and societal norms when trying to access particular networks within the party framework. The politician's perspective aligns with that of the previous respondent, highlighting gender disparities in party environments and the profound effects of cultural norms on opportunity access. When viewed through the prism of gendered organizational theory, the difficulties the participant encounters in accessing particular committees can be attributed to the gendered norms and expectations prevalent within the community.

Political parties exhibit gendered hierarchies and labour divisions, with certain committees or roles traditionally aligned with a specific gender, predominantly male, due to the male-dominated nature of the field (Acker 1992:421–27). This paradigm can pose challenges, especially for women who deviate from these gendered standards, resulting in exclusion from certain prospects or committees. These deep-rooted gendered norms and expectations in organizational cultures, influenced by societal standards, demand proactive measures to question and transform them.

The findings highlight the politician's deep desire for recognition. She perceives her current affiliation (with women) as inadequate, driving her to strive for acceptance into male-dominated committees. Her persistent efforts to secure a spot in these committees reflect her ambition to amass cultural capital, like recognition, reputation, and credentials. This is to access the opportunities often reserved for male counterparts (Bourdieu 1986). This showcases the female

participant's commitment and the time she is willing to invest to secure acceptance (ibid). Given the male-centric nature of the field, combined with predominantly masculine organizational norms, individuals without the necessary cultural capital might find it challenging to join these committees. Existing committee members typically possess a common set of cultural and social assets that determine their opportunities. Thus, to be included, one usually needs to align with these shared characteristics to gain entry and enjoy the associated benefits.

7.2. Networking in the party space

The section investigates the processes by which female politicians in both regions establish alliances, cultivate mentorships, and engage in collaborations. It elucidates the significance of networking and relationship-building as pivotal components of the political landscape for these women. This underscores their acute awareness of the impact of such connections on their career trajectories, motivating them to actively pursue and maintain relationships

Beyond examining the influence of political party processes in both regions, this study also delves into how female politicians access networks and relationships in both regions. Ghana's political terrain, enriched by its unique cultural, historical, and regional facets, offers a deep understanding of the relational networks' politicians can cultivate. Especially for female politicians, the nature and depth of these connections can shape their political paths. The findings highlight the role of regional differences in determining the networking prospects for these women. It examines how they create alliances, how their mentorships develop, and how collaborations differ across these two regions. The data of this thesis revealed how important networking and having relationships was paramount to these female politicians. This shows they understand the effects on their career hence they do all it takes to form relationships, just as this participant mentioned

"I have friends..., some are in the branch, constituencies, region and even national, national yes I have friends. but prominently males, yes, I am always in their mist to learn".
(Lordina, Greater Accra, 10 March 2023, 6.40pm)

She was well-acquainted with a tiered networking structure in political party, characterized by terms like "branch", "constituencies", and "national". Recognizing the importance of networking, she strategically built relationships with male figures across various levels. Her primary aim was to gain knowledge, illustrating her understanding that men in the party are invaluable resources to advance her political ambitions. Gender dynamics significantly influence

networking behaviours and access to vital social capital. Aware of the potential benefits, she engaged with these men to secure resources, insights, and opportunities, marking a deliberate strategy to establish her presence in the political field. She pursued mentorships from influential men to overcome hurdles and harness resources. Mentorship is important in accessing professional networks and resources, particularly for women in the political space (Ibarra 1993).

However, it is evident she had limited networking opportunities with women compared to men, pointing to a gender disparity in the field. This possibly prompted her to form more relationships across genders. Given the male predominance in the field, even if equal same-gender networking existed, aligning with male-centric networks would be most advantageous, as they predominantly control resource access. This not only highlights the field's openness to her making connections at varying hierarchies but also her discernment of their importance. Such dynamics might hint at the prevailing roles of men in key or controlling positions, as reflected in Bourdieu (1986) work.

Research by Burt (2004) and (Ibarra 1993) indicates that having varied networks, encompassing both hierarchy and gender, provide a more comprehensive access to information. Yet, it is observed that female politicians contend with acquiring social capital of the same depth or breadth as their male colleagues. However, some women who do succeed in forming ties with powerful male personas often reap substantial rewards in knowledge and opportunities. In the cultural liberal Greater Accra region, while building relationships can grant women access to resources, knowledge, or opportunities, it can also be a double-edged sword, potentially reinforcing established power dynamics. The female politicians in the Greater Accra region often access connections with influential men, which inadvertently reinforced gender hierarchies.

Those in the Northern region highlighted the overwhelming favouritism that hindered networking, regardless of one's familial social standing (inherited family social capital).

"For our regional level, our regional chairman, those who are already in it, they have their favourite. and as sad as it maybe it difficult to be part of their favourite yes...". (Sena, North, 2 February 2023, 1.35pm)

She insinuates bias within the party's regional setup, where current leaders or members show preferences for specific individuals. Such bias greatly affects newcomers or outsiders trying to access resources, opportunities, or support in the party space. Those connected with powerful figures often benefit to the detriment of those lacking such ties. The presence or absence of social

capital frequently creates distinct insider-outsider distinctions. Insiders benefit from various advantages like resources, knowledge, and opportunities. In contrast, those outside the inner circle find it difficult to tap into or benefit from this network (Granovetter 1973). These insiders not only share these benefits amongst themselves but often monopolize access to crucial resources or opportunities. They can act as gatekeepers, deciding who gets in and who remains out (Burt 1992).

Such dynamics present formidable challenges for those not part of the favoured group (women), with issues going beyond mere exclusion feelings). It illustrates how individuals without inherent social capital or connections within the party space in the Northern region often confront obstacles when trying to create their networks, access opportunities, or climb the organizational ladder. Established biases can critically obstruct their attempts to amass and use social capital (Coleman 1988). Indeed, these biases and challenges accessing the party's hierarchy have been significant obstacles for many female politicians in the North. This reflects the underlying divisions within the party. Despite public perception of unity and a common goal among party members, interviews reveal that this unity is more perceived than real.

Other female politicians also expressed the same sentiments about favouritism in the party space. It was revealed that participants (mostly females and males who are not financially independent) outside the exclusive inner circle may not reap the benefits of this concentrated political social capital due to favouritism.

“So that was what we faced when we were going to elect the constituency’s executive...OK...There was a saying going round, MP was supporting this one, and MP was not supporting this one, and MP was supporting this”. (Bee, North, 12 December 2022, 9.am)

The female politician offers insight into the inner workings of the party, highlighting the significant roles played by those in authoritative positions. Accessing social capital within the party, particularly connecting with influential figures, emerges as a key strategy for ensuring success in this domain. These dynamic underscores the themes of favouritism and the distribution of power during political recruitment. The female politician emphasizes the pivotal role a member of parliament plays in endorsing constituency executives, showcasing the considerable impact politicians have on intra-party decisions (Norris and Lovenduski 1995). As a result, members of parliament can wield their influence, often channelling authority toward their preferred candidates. A nod of approval from an MP or the broader party apparatus can endow candidates with an

enhanced profile, greater resources, and a stronger claim to legitimacy as discussed in (Matland 2005; Norris and Lovenduski 1995), factors that could influence voter sentiments and decisions.

Though the party constitution and gender training manual for the parliament of Ghana is totally against this act

“All member of the ruling party sitting as elected members in parliament must be given fair opportunity to participate in the running of the government” (Gender training manual for the parliament of Ghana).

The experience described by this female politician aligns with what is commonly known as "political endorsement." In this context, influential figures harness their authority to back specific candidates during elections, as revealed by Matland (2005:98). Such endorsements are not necessarily tied to gender, but rather to one's affiliations with certain social groups, the nature of those memberships, and their performance and reputation within the party and constituency. Evidently, members of parliament exert significant influence over party nominations and the election process, highlighting the intricate power dynamics within the political party. The favouritism in the party space highlights her lack of access to crucial networks and resources within the party, which could also provide recommendations for her. This forms a closed circle, posing challenges for outsiders to gain access (Granovetter 1985).

Notably, this perspective was shared by more than just a single female politician.

“Yes, if you see you will know that even the politician’s executives even in voting the executive and others you see that everyone is having his favourite person, he wants the person to win yes they have favourites.” (Maame, North, 22 December 2022, 2pm)

The party dynamics underscore a prevalent inclination towards personal biases and favouritism. This trend is rooted in individuals' propensity to align with groups reflecting their own ideologies, a concept elucidated by the social identity theory (Greene 2004). Invariably, there is a bias favouring their immediate group (in-group) over external ones (out-group). This aligns with discussions from chapter four, which highlight the role of political agency in unlocking particular social networks pivotal for political progression. Lapinski and Rimal (2005) emphasize how group norms and affiliations meld individual behaviours and attitudes. This drive stems from a desire for inclusion and a fear of sanctions. Drawing from the participant's account, influential figures within the party often rally behind candidates who align with their ideologies or those they perceive as part of their social circle. This bias manifests as favouritism, often framed in terms of social connectivity – the rewards or privileges extended to their preferred candidates.

This demonstrates that within the realm of political parties, networks and affiliations play a significant role. The particular network an individual aligns with can profoundly influence their political trajectory (Norris 1997). Group dynamics within these party spaces are pivotal. While members may adhere to the norms of their individual social networks, they also rally behind the group's preferred candidate (Matland 2005). Such allegiance arises from a sense of belonging within the group, Creating loyalty and unity. This collective solidarity often results in the endorsement of their favoured candidate, reflecting the influence of social capital and its potential to benefit one group over another (Bourdieu 1986).

Beyond the issues of favouritism and difficulty accessing the party hierarchy, women encounter double standards from those at the top of affairs. Men are often perceived as innate leaders, while women are stereotypically relegated to supporting or caregiving roles. Thus, merely having ties to influential networks is not sufficient for effective networking. Gender biases and societal norms greatly influence this dynamic. Such gender-based expectations limit women's aspirations and undermine their perceived credibility in accessing networks in the Northern region especially.

However, both Northern and Greater Accra region participants acknowledged the significance of networking in their field, as one politician noted.

"Currently, am the only women treasurer for my region. And that is where I am now. But I am hoping that by God's grace and by my hard working, I will be chosen to join other male committees because they judge you not by your works but your gender". (Maame, North, 22 December 2022, 2pm)

The quote emphasizes the significance of networking in the political field, particularly for women striving to advance in leadership positions. Despite holding a notable role as a regional treasurer, the participant acknowledges the gender biases that could impede further progression and networking opportunities. Her ambition to join predominantly male committees underscores the existing gender imbalance in representation and highlights the importance of networking in accessing influential circles. This reveals the gendered nature of networking within the political sphere, wherein women often face barriers and biases that limit their access to influential networks and positions. Despite holding leadership roles such as regional treasurer, the participant experiences challenges in networking with predominantly male committees, indicating a disparity in networking privileges between male and female politicians. Furthermore, the quote highlights the lack of mentorship and supportive networks for female politicians, particularly those in

pioneering positions. The participant's limited access to mentors and supportive networks due to the scarcity of female leaders and potential prejudices hinders her political advancement, underscoring the importance of mentorship and supportive networks in facilitating women's progression in politics.

Despite securing a notable role as a regional treasurer, she remains cognizant of the gender biases that could impede further progression and networking opportunities. Her ambition to connect with predominantly male committees underscores the existing gender imbalance in representation. Even as a treasurer, a role predominantly held by men, her drive to engage with these male-dominated committees reveals that she does not enjoy the same networking privileges as her male peers. This highlights how ingrained cultural and structural obstacles can restrict women's entry into influential networks and powerful positions. Even as she garners opportunities in certain areas, accessing elite and influential circles remains influenced by gender (Lin 2001b).

This situation reveals that despite a consistent rise in female participation in politics, they are still not adequately represented in top-tier leadership and networks. These imbalances, particularly in the North, are often rooted in gender prejudices and barriers, which inhibit women's progression, as highlighted by Carli and Eagly (2007). Advancing in typically male-centric sectors like politics often centres on solid networking and mentorship, which she lacks, being among the pioneering women in her position. Due to the scarcity of female leaders and potential prejudices, her access to mentors and supportive networks is limited, which crucial for her political advancement.

Some male politicians mentioned how gender treatment is based on area and its factors.

“Well, I would say that theoretically, I would say the party is gender neutral, they trying to help females in the party but when we talk of the reality on the grounds, I would say it can be anyway depending on the area and the prevailing factors. So, I would say some areas gender is manipulated yes and sometimes too who knows you plays a role and other times yes eerrmm for instance there are instances where you would see eerrmm a female daughter, or a female friend or a female niece of eerrmm an older politician. I mean an influential politician trying to bulldoze her way through and then others support it because her father or relative had ever been a high ranking member and so they would have to help her to win so sometimes you can tell that eerrmm you can tell that the so called candidate is not up to the task but eerrmm well the party would help depending on the contributions her family has put into the party and so it does happen and well not just on the female side even on the male side. That is why I say who knows you syndrome in general it can favour anyone.”
(Nana, Greater Accra, 16 March 2023, 12pm)

The male politician reveals that even though the party claims to treat everyone equally, gender can still be used unfairly. This means that women might face bias because of their gender, and those who are related to powerful male politicians might get special treatment, even if they are not the best for the job. This keeps a system where family connections matter more than skills. This shows a conflict between choosing based on merit and showing favouritism to friends and family. A politician's chances in the party might depend on her family's past support (Coleman 1988). This means that women from less wealthy or connected families might struggle to get ahead. Overall, the politician points out that favouritism and nepotism are common in the party, not just based on gender. This means that knowing the right people matters a lot, which can make it harder for women and men who do not have those connections (Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1988; Lin 2001b).

Both regions primarily revolve around navigating gendered networks, yet with distinct characteristics. But one common challenge faced by these female politicians in two these regions is the practice of restricting women's access to specific committees. This exacerbated by challenges rooted in socio-cultural contexts, is notably prevalent in the party landscape of the Northern region. Even though it has been revealed that the party space and its structures in both regions do not give women access to their social capital due to the hierarchy and gatekeepers, and inaccessible formal meeting times, the Greater Accra region have been more open to various interest groups and mentors which favour female politicians though it is mostly gendered. The Northern region's female politicians are revealed to be working their way without mentorship unlike the female politicians in the Greater Accra region. This is because political parties' representatives in the Northern region often reflect the traditional patriarchal systems. This means that access to leadership positions and formal networking for women might be limited, which in turn could restrict their access to social capital.

This shows that though political party structures are somewhat consistent nationally, they exhibit unique characteristics across different regions. Both regions demonstrate how party structures can curtail women's access to social capital due to entrenched social norms and hierarchies. Party dynamics inherently reflect these regional differences. For female politicians, these disparities offer different challenges and advantages in accessing resources, skills, knowledge and acceptance in the field.

A significant dimension these findings touch upon is the proactive stance of men in endorsing women for leadership positions in the party space. The thesis poses a thought-provoking question: In the context of the Greater Accra region of Ghana, are the roles that men are championing for women truly empowering, or do they subtly perpetuate existing imbalances and hierarchies? The data revealed that these roles assigned to females perpetuate existing inequalities.

“You would see from the actions of some party strong weights that they only wanted to use me as a sacrificial lamb ... generally 3 months is too small a time to contest a general election especially for a new aspirant when your opponent has been around for long campaigning. So for the party to come to me for help to stand at that short period then later when I had a chance to have more time to campaign, some wanted to contest my candidature I felt they knew the party would lose during the 2016 since the shift was quick and they just needed anyone to represent and yes me Naa was chosen to be the sacrifice since I had no experience in general elections if I lose it would really not affect them in a way. You get what I mean, yes that’s it”. (Ameyo, Greater Accra, 7 December 2021, 1.45pm)

The female politician believed she was positioned by the party as a “sacrificial lamb” in the 2016 election. Existing research suggests that political parties sometimes promote women to advance the narrative of gender equality. However, this is not always in the genuine interest of women's empowerment but rather to further the party's political agenda or other strategic gains (Madsen 2019a, 2019b; Osei-Hwedie and Agomor 2018). In this female politician's situation, the party nominated her as a candidate for the 2016 elections with a constrained campaigning timeline because the initial primary winner was unavailable. With her opponent having a substantial campaigning advantage, her chances of victory were slim. From previous conversations, the participant acknowledged her limited background in partisan politics. Seizing this, the party presented her with what appeared to be a golden chance, but with the undertones of a setup. The party, reluctant to field a veteran candidate whose defeat might tarnish their record, leveraged her inexperience, deeming it a minimal risk. This situation underscores the complex power interplay within political entities and its sway on candidate selection (Osei-Hwedie and Agomor 2018).

Research indicates that political parties often choose candidates based on a range of factors, including their perceived electability, popularity, and allegiance to the party (Matland 2005). In the highlighted scenario, the female politician was chosen more out of convenience than conviction, filling a role where success seemed improbable. This decision was likely made to shield veteran or high-profile party members from a potential electoral defeat. Such strategies underscore the interplay of power dynamics and tactical decision-making in political groups

(Norris and Lovenduski 1995). Moreover, her nomination appears to have been a token gesture to meet certain formalities, rather than a genuine endorsement or investment in her campaign. Such symbolic gestures can often impact individual political participation and relationships in political space, often presenting obstacles or challenges.

While there has been a noticeable shift in societal and organizational norms in the political landscape towards equality, a significant challenge persists. Many men appear not to be genuinely pursuing equality through power-sharing with women. Instead, they seem more comfortable relegating women to traditional roles within the political domain even though they have allowed them to access their networks. Consequently, when women aspire to transcend these set roles and seek shared authority, they are often perceived by some men as threats to the longstanding male dominance. This suggest that one can access social networks and not have access to the advantages like information, recommendation, trust in that space (Bourdieu 1986).

“Yes, some may see you as threat, unfortunately even from within, they see you as a threat, say eerrmm she is raising fast oo, I mean she is moving too high and they want to discourage you that are are you, you haven’t even been to the branch, you haven’t been to the constituency and you want to get to region hahaha that was when I contested for the vice chairperson position”. (Lordina, Greater Accra, 10 March 2023, 6.40pm)

The female politician described encountering resistance from party members when she aspired to rise within the political party's ranks, particularly when vying for the position of vice chairperson. Many attempted to dissuade her, suggesting that such a position was traditionally reserved for male candidates. This pushback can be interpreted as stemming from conflicts related to competition for authoritative roles within the political party. As she aimed for higher positions, her ambitions challenged the established power dynamics and potentially threatened the vested interests of other members. Consequently, they tried to steer her towards lower-ranking positions rather than the vice chairperson position.

In traditionally male-dominated spheres, like political parties, women often grapple with gendered discrimination, biases, and stereotypes when they defy conventional gender norms and expectations. The politician's experience, where she was subtly discouraged, insinuating she was advancing "too swiftly" or aiming "too high," underscores the entrenched societal belief that women ought to occupy subordinate roles, refraining from vying for top leadership positions. Not only do female politicians encounter challenges in receiving full support within political parties, but they also face obstacles when serving on specific party and governmental committees.

“A bit of heckling, the difficulties, or challenges if you can say, was a bit of heckling from the other side when you are asking questions but with time you get over it. Yes, we were first timers I would say, like I mentioned we have few women in this committees so even if we heckle it would be low compared to a lot of men doing the heckling”. (Joana, Greater Accra, 17 November 2022, 10.45am)

Her statement underscores the difficulties women encounter when voicing opinions or engaging in committee discussions, especially as newcomers. In contrast, male novices in these committees face less heckling. This disparity is likely due to the male-majority composition of these committees. Such situations exemplify the discrimination women experience in predominantly male environments, which is a consequence of entrenched gender and power dynamics within the party and parliament. In these settings, gender plays a significant role in determining power dynamics and authority. The heckling women face while raising questions is indicative of these gender-based power imbalances, where female voices are often marginalized or belittled (Beard 2017). Men might resort to heckling to reinforce their dominance or to perpetuate existing power structures (ibid). Consequently, female politicians often grapple with added challenges, from gender prejudices to stereotyping and overt discrimination, making their active participation in committees even more strenuous (Beard 2017).

Shvedova (2005) posit those factors like gender, status, and communication styles impact women's participation in committees. Building on these insights, this thesis also highlights the challenges stemming from the limited number of women in these committees, leading to heightened discrimination. These female politicians find themselves in a double bind: they face frequent interruptions, heckling, and their ideas are often sidelined. Additionally, when they assert themselves or voice their opinions, they risk backlash (Kubu 2018). Such obstacles can hinder women's active participation and contribution in committee discussions, perpetuating gender inequality (ibid).

The politician's experience of male candidates facing less heckling in male-dominated committee aligns with established research on gendered communication dynamics (Merchant 2012). Studies indicate that men often adopt assertive, dominant, and competitive communication styles, whereas women typically lean towards cooperative, collaborative, and inclusive methods (Merchant 2012:17–21). These patterns influence how each gender articulates opinions, poses questions, and contributes to discussions in committee settings. While men's assertive behaviour, including heckling, might be more pronounced, societal norms might restrain women, making

them less inclined to engage in such behaviours. In many cultures, there's an unspoken rule where women should remain quiet when men speak.

Despite these challenges, the politician emphasized her eventual ability to navigate this dynamic, demonstrating her resilience and determination. From the documents analysed it is revealed that both the parliamentary and party constitutions are against these acts happening in these committees. Unfortunately, these challenges may deter some women, as some studies suggest that a significant number of female candidates retreat in the face of such difficulties, further explaining their underrepresentation in politics (Odame 2010).

7.3. Leadership perspectives and public image in Northern and Greater Accra: The ripple effect on female politicians' social capital access

In Ghana's intricate socio-political landscape, disparities emerge in the perceptions of female leadership between the Northern and Greater Accra regions. These perspectives, deeply rooted in cultural, historical, and socio-economic contexts, exert profound influence on the trajectories and social capital acquisition of female politicians. The Northern region, characterized by its rich tapestry of traditions, often associates leadership with cultural norms, thereby constraining or shaping the accepted manifestations of female leadership. In contrast, the Greater Accra region, particularly the cosmopolitan urban centre, reflects a confluence of local and global influences, fostering a more diverse outlook on female leadership. Nonetheless, even in this dynamic setting, a fusion of traditional and contemporary ideologies gives rise to a nuanced perspective. For women engaged in politics, these prevailing perceptions significantly impact their capacity to accrue social capital, an indispensable resource for achieving political efficacy. In examining the disparities in accessing political social capital across the two regions, regional perceptions of leadership attributes emerge as a crucial factor that impact how women access social capital. The research thus delved into the leadership perceptions held by the constituents in both regions and how these views influence female politicians' access to social capital.

A female politician highlighted that the Northern region's communities' view of women in politics and their presumed leadership inadequacies is not the sole perspective on female leadership.

“Some people see women in politics as flirts, and some see us as we do not obey our husbands because of these, my colleagues’ women who have interest are not bold enough to come out”. (Linda, North, 7 February 2023, 2.37pm)

In her community, there exist entrenched stereotypes and misconceptions about women in politics. Many perceive female politicians as either "flirtatious" or defiant towards their husbands, deterring other women from venturing into the political space. These biased views obstruct these women from tapping into certain political networks. Such prejudices curtail their ability to access vital resources, support, and opportunities essential for political power. Within this male-dominated framework, societal expectations press women to conform, notably being subservient to their spouses, amplifying gender disparities. These deeply rooted prejudices maintain male-dominated systems, striving to anchor women to traditional confines, thus eroding their independence and influence. Labelling women in politics as "flirtatious" or "rebellious" towards their husbands is a manifestation of the ongoing creation and reinforcement of harmful labels against women defying conventional norms (Childs and Krook 2009). The collective beliefs and standards of a society act as unspoken checks. Consequently, when women are stigmatized and labelled in such derogatory ways, they face societal backlashes which can jeopardize their standing, interpersonal ties, and access to resources, thus curbing their pursuit of political connections. In an environment devoid of support and burdened with biased standards, their enthusiasm and drive in politics diminish.

Other Female politicians also shared the same sentiments. She highlighted that when they engage in politics, they are often unfairly labelled as "loose" and accused of being promiscuous.

"Our husbands, some of our husbands think that if you become a politician ... it is like they always believe that the men are sleeping with you, ... our husbands apart from that they always think that if you reach that place, you will not lower yourself to them, there is a say that you will not be having time to take care of the home". (Yawa, North, 16 January 2022, 11.30am)

The female politician emphasizes the troubling perception of women in politics: rather than being evaluated based on their qualifications and competencies, they are often objectified. Men, conventionally viewed as the primary bearers of power, might find it challenging to support women in their lives who pursue political ambitions. This resistance may stem from fears of appearing weak or being perceived as unable to "control" their wives. Deep-rooted stereotypes suggest that women in politics are prone to extramarital affairs or may disrespect their spouses upon acquiring power. Such perceptions often deter husbands from supporting their wives' political ambitions (Nwabunkeonye 2014). This societal perspective poses a significant barrier for many female politicians, with challenges being more pronounced in Northern Ghana.

When female politicians face such unfair labels, it hampers their ability to access community networks crucial for their political advancement (Sossou 2011). The stigma attached to female leaders can result in social exclusion, marginalization, and a lack of trust among community members (Williams 2000). As a result, female politicians labelled as “loose” encounter difficulties in establishing and maintaining connections within their communities. Potential supporters, allies, or mentors may hesitate to engage with them due to concerns about damaging their own reputations. This limitation restricts their ability to network effectively, gather support for their political activities, or access resources essential for their careers. This negative lens on the political field and its female actors can be traced back to entrenched gender disparities and patriarchal values that curtail women's prospects in political participation and leadership (Shvedova 2005). These biases have their foundations in sociological elements like power structures, gender biases, and societal interactions (ibid).

Significantly, these views are also prevalent in the Greater Accra region, where female politicians similarly encounter negative stereotypes of female politicians being seen as flirtatious. Yet, one participant noted that beyond this label, her community regards her as a representative.

“Our people see you as a messenger that they would have a voice if you should go higher ok and so they hold you in some high esteem. They see you as a public figure already”.
(Joana, Greater Accra, 17 November 2022, 10.45am)

In her community, politicians serve as the embodiment of the public's hopes and expectations, acting as both representatives and messengers. She stands as the community's voice, particularly within upper levels of governance, which significantly influences the trust and support she receives. Viewed as both a public figure and messenger, she embodies symbolic meanings bestowed upon her by constituents. Drawing from the symbolic interactionism theory (Blumer 1986; Carter and Fuller 2015), individuals derive meaning from these symbolic representations, moulding their behaviours and expectations accordingly. This holds politicians in great reverence due to the pivotal roles they assume.

This admiration signifies deep respect for politicians, positioning them as central connectors within a broader political framework. They act as bridges, linking their community to the expansive political space. Such a perception cements the politician's status within the community's in-group, moulding them as the bearers of the community's aspirations and identity. The respect shown to politicians, regardless of gender, reflects their perceived authority and reach

within societal networks. This esteem, a form of symbolic capital, can be harnessed to obtain resources, create ties, and adeptly navigate the political terrain. This esteemed stature provides them with an expanded access to a range of social networks and resources, enhancing their advocacy on behalf of their constituents.

Interestingly, it is noted that gender does not influence this perception. She is recognized for her leadership, rather than her gender. Additionally, there is a shared sentiment, both in the Northern and the Greater Accra region, that the community holds greater expectations of politicians, particularly in addressing their fundamental needs.

“... she thinks MPship is charity so even food items we would eat in the house she would take and give it out because you know she wants you to succeed, she wants you to be a mother to the people and all that yeah”. (Ameyo, Greater Accra, 7 December 2021, 1.45pm)

The community, as well as her family, expects that politicians must assume a role of charity and nurture, implying that they must extend their personal assets to constituents in a show of unity and shared responsibility. This perception exposes the multifaceted responsibilities politicians must undertake, going beyond mere legislative actions. A parliamentarian must harmoniously merge personal aspirations with community service. Doing so she is able to access informal networks in the space.

The societal perspective that being an MP encompasses charitable and caregiving duties underscores the broader expectation for MPs to serve as guardians and benefactors for their community, not just as policy makers. This fosters a two-way relationship between constituents and politicians, rooted in mutual advantages. Here, generosity is not solely a selfless act; it is also a strategy to reinforce the bond between the MP and their community, possibly ensuring sustained backing and political triumph. Such charitable endeavours by the MP can be seen as building social bonds with hopes of a return, potentially in the form of allegiance, loyalty, or votes. It further implies that the community views leadership roles as fitting for both genders. Her charity actions hence cultivate a feeling of unity and community among voters, creating deeper connections and mutual trust between the public and her. This enhances the collective identity and solidarity of the community, fostering a feeling of unity and collective mission. Research indicates that politicians viewed as charitable and engaged with their communities often enjoy a higher likelihood of winning elections (Fowler and Hall 2017). Community involvement and charitable endeavours can shape public sentiment and voting patterns positively.

While she actively strives to create connections through her charity work, it is evident that the community allows her this connection because they view women as equally competent leaders as men. In Ghana, the notion of female politicians being charitable and community-oriented is a consistent theme, shaping their accumulation of social capital. Charitable actions and community involvement are seen as hallmarks of effective leadership, producing trust and mutual respect between politicians and their electorates. By resonating with these perceptions, female politicians can bolster their social capital, solidifying their roles as credible and efficient representatives. Nevertheless, societal norms play a pivotal role in this perception. For instance, in the Northern region, I observed that while politicians are generally viewed as affluent individuals capable of addressing daily needs, women are not necessarily seen as leaders. Therefore, despite a woman's extensive charitable efforts, she might be perceived merely as a philanthropist rather than a leader. This contrasts with the Greater Accra region, where leadership is attributed to the individual, regardless of gender.

The data for this thesis reveals that in the Northern and Greater Accra regions of Ghana, contrasting yet interlinked perceptions of leadership significantly influence female politicians' access to social capital. This access is shaped by a web of traditional norms, community values, and forward-thinking principles, forming a detailed medium of expectations and opportunities for women in politics. Female politicians' success centres on their capability to adeptly traverse this complex terrain, aligning with dominant leadership views while also building community ties. Their ability to do this is key to effectively harnessing social capital and ensuring lasting political influence.

The interconnectedness of cultural settings, societal viewpoints, and political activity emphasizes the layered characteristics of female political leadership across Ghana's varied landscapes. As per Brion and Ampah-Mensah (2021), both cultural norms and educational backgrounds shape the way women leaders are perceived. This indicates that reshaping these norms via education could change views about female politicians which would have an influence on how they access social capital. To conclude, how leadership is perceived critically affects the availability of political social capital for female politicians in the Northern and Greater Accra regions. This availability is influenced by aspects such as cultural traditions, education, and regional specifics. Understanding these nuances is key to mitigating gender inequalities and championing a rise in women's political leadership.

The situation in the Greater Accra region align closely with the research by Bass and Riggio (2006), which posits that leadership competencies nurtured within familial contexts can transition to communal or institutional roles. This suggests that capabilities developed in one sphere can seamlessly translate to another, especially in the realms of organization and leadership. Duflo (2012) emphasizes that training and empowerment initiatives lead to notable improvements in women's engagement in community leadership, economic ventures, and political platforms. Such impacts are clearly observable among women in the Greater Accra region.

Societal norms and adverse perceptions do not only question women's capability in leadership roles which poses a challenge to access political and community networks. But also, often lead them to experience identity conflicts. Women venturing into male dominated fields like politics grapple with a "double bind." They are simultaneously expected to exhibit traditionally feminine qualities like warmth and empathy, and traditionally masculine attributes such as assertiveness and confidence. This poses a delicate balance for women; emphasizing warmth and empathy might label them as "soft" or "weak," while leaning into assertiveness and confidence could paint them as "aggressive" or "abrasive." This is because society often associates leadership with inherent masculine traits (Alexander and Andersen 1993; Kiamba 2009:90; Sapiro 1981).

I observed that female politicians facing identity conflict and the double bind find it difficult to cultivate trust with others, especially when their identity is negatively perceived within a specific community or social group. When women exhibit leadership traits like assertiveness, outspokenness, and courage, they often face unjust labels of disrespectfulness and arrogance. This lack of trust complicates the establishment of meaningful relationships and hampers their access to the social capital present within networks.

"But then the perceptions and the thoughts about eerm, women who try to do politics. ok so if you are doing politics eerm you are outspoken. they feel that you are a feminist. You are a radical feminist to be doing politics, they feel you are a disrespectful woman. They feel you actually sleep around with men; they tag you eerrmm it was it is not easy but hmmm yea". (Yaa, Greater Accra, 18 April 2023, 9am)

She recounted being labelled as a radical feminist, disrespectful, and promiscuous simply for being outspoken. This observation aligns with the symbolic interactionist theoretical perspective, which posits that individuals shape meaning and social reality through continuous interactions with others (Blumer 1986; Mead 1934). Based on this, the study suggests that the negative stereotypes and stigmas associated with women's involvement in politics stem from

consistent social interactions with individuals harbouring traditional views on gender roles. Such individuals perceive women in politics as challenges to these entrenched norms. Society may evaluate political candidates through a lens of bias, leading to divergent perceptions of the political competence of men and women (Sapiro 1981). Given these restrictive gender norms, it is imperative for women to receive adequate support to effectively engage in politics. They are not able to access social network because of the stigma which limits networking opportunities, impairing trust-building efforts, and hindering effective communication and social skills development.

"In my community the women, is like we the women are not voting at all for women.... but every year when it is election time you see that they'll be pushing women to go and at the end of the day no improvement... They only push women to go and vote for men, but the don't push women to stand to be voted". (Xorse, North, 15 January 2022, 2pm)

This societal socialization not only influences a candidate's political agency but also affects the perspectives of other women in her community (Liu 2019:13). Surprisingly, according to participants some women constituents uphold the belief that their gender is not capable for leadership, maintaining that men are inherently more competent and effective leaders. As a result, they consistently vote for male candidates year after year, even if these elected officials fail to address their concerns. Such perceptions are deeply entrenched in their everyday lives and expressions. As one female politician noted, patriarchal norms are disseminated among community members through proverbial language. This underscores how various societal facets – from culture and religion to politics – consistently privilege men over women (Adongo et al. 2023).

The data highlights how stereotypes and biases against women's leadership abilities can lead female candidates to hesitate in actively pursuing opportunities to participate in networks or engage in networking activities. This self-doubt can diminish their confidence in networking scenarios, posing challenges in forming connections and accessing valuable opportunities within networks. Additionally, my observations, particularly in the Northern region where there is a higher female population yet female candidates struggle to win elections, reveal a lack of solidarity within the female community. This is notably different from trends observed in the Greater Accra region. The reluctance of women to support fellow female candidates contributes to fewer networking connections and opportunities, as female candidates find it difficult to gather support from their own gender. This is attributed to the beliefs and biases against women in leadership positions (Krook 2010b). These stereotypes might make it even harder for women to get into male-

dominated networks because they face more doubt and resistance in networks where men hold most of the power.

7.4. Shattering the glass ceiling: The resilience of female politicians in the political battlefield

This section highlights the subtle, yet impactful, strategies female politicians employ to overcome these challenges in accessing social capital. Some female politicians pointed to effective communication and consistency as their methods of choice, while others highlighted the supportive role of their husbands in sharing household responsibilities. Additionally, a few sought external helps, hiring assistants to manage their domestic affairs. Others spoke of their resilience in confronting gender bias in both party and government committees, attributing their fortitude to determination and unwavering consistency.

“When it got to politics during the campaign, I had to arrange someone to take care of the kids because they are still young, the youngest is 5 years ye so I had to get someone to take care of them and I had to be visiting them at least once every two weeks when I was campaigning. So, I come over weekends maybe Friday, get back on Monday campaign though out till Friday pass by and then get back to the region hahaha so it has been so The kids miss me more hahaha so I actually do more on the phone with them when I am not”.
(Lordina, Greater Accra, 10 March 2023, 6.40pm)

The excerpts reveal the nature of the society in which the participant resides, highlighting her innovative approaches to maintaining a presence in her family's daily lives. The family's embrace of technology underscores their progressive stance in redefining the conventional roles of wives. In addition, she benefits from tangible support in the form of domestic assistance to ensure her children's well-being in her absence. Despite her frequent absence, she emphasizes the societal expectation that deems a woman successful only if her family thrives. This contrasts sharply with the often-observed male pattern of prioritizing career over domestic responsibilities, except for financial provisions (Nwabunkeonye 2014). While the politician was not always physically present, she faced challenges in balancing her career and family life. Her struggle originates from time-based conflicts, where her professional and personal roles intersected. As she navigated this intricate balance during her campaign, she relied on both technology and household help to ensure both domains received attention.

Her narration also highlights the challenge of childcare and emphasizes the significance of support structures and system for women involved in politics to reach outside opportunities. Research underscores that, owing to conventional gender roles and societal expectations, women often struggle with striking a balance between professional commitments and family obligations

(Nwabunkeonye 2014). There is a prevailing expectation for women to give precedence to family over their political pursuits, and this often coincides with challenges in finding adequate childcare and accessing supportive services. Data from this research, suggests that female politicians, in comparison to their male counterparts, are more often in marital bonds with children and predominantly bear the childcare responsibilities.

Consequently, her strength lay in her ability to devise methods and enlist assistance that enabled her to maintain a presence at home while fulfilling her official political responsibilities and accessing social networks. This ensured that no one felt neglected, be it in her traditional or official role. Her success in striking this balance can be credited to the progressive norms of her society. It has been argued that the Greater Accra region has made notable strides in addressing gender equality issues. This strategy of having help she helped her balance housework and campaign duties enabled her to spend regular time in her outside networks. Which is very beneficial to social capital access and building (Burt 2002).

Another female politician strategically employed the approach of showing respect to men and acknowledging their traditional roles. This tactic helped her gain her husband's support, even in a community where women sharing power with men was met with resistance.

"See that if you want to be a leader and you are a woman is is about the way you will behave the way you will treat your husband that will make him convince if I put my wife at this position, will she still be my wife she will still respect me no matter where or no matter what the condition that we are all together I know who you are you do not respect". (Maame, North, 22 December 2022, 2pm)

In her experience, she recognized the importance of her husband's support and was acutely aware of the societal norms governing her community. To secure his support, she approached the matter with understanding and respect. She emphasized in her statements that, in her society, showing respect towards male figures is pivotal. For women to be acknowledged as leaders and gain acceptance, they need to steer their actions in ways that uphold the respect of their husbands and other men in the community. This would enable an access to community social capital. She implies that women who defy traditional gender roles could be perceived as challenging male authority, which might result in resistance. While she acknowledges the prevalent gender biases, she tactically adheres to certain traditional roles within her family to gain her husband's trust and support, which proves invaluable in her professional endeavours.

In light of societal restrictions and the challenges these politicians face in accessing social capital as female politician within their communities, one politician relied on consistent communication and organizing social gatherings as strategies, and she recognized their success.

"I try to mingle with the people. OK once in a while I do organize a small party for my community ...but it is money oo my sister I used to do it three times in a year but now I do it ones... initially the party was mostly women, but currently we have some few men joining which is a good sign". (Afi, North, 10 January 2023, 9am)

This highlights the importance of communication in a politician's daily activities, while emphasizing the significance of financial independence in political engagement. The events she organized required funding, and these gatherings provided her with a platform to further connect with the community and her constituents. As Bourdieu (1986) pointed out, financial constraints can limit access to certain community networks. Her persistence in organizing these events is showing returns, as she noted an increase in male attendance, a demographic that was initially absent. This trend aligns with the exchange theory, indicating that her constituents extend their support based on the events she facilitates (Blau 1964, 2017).

From her experience, it is evident that she aimed to resonate with the entire community, transcending gender boundaries, leading her to actively engage with constituents through social events. The strong bonds and relationships she cultivated likely enticed a diverse crowd to attend, including men, fostering a more inclusive environment as argued by Leonard (2004). By successfully integrating men into these events, she not only challenged traditional gender norms but also advanced the cause of gender equality within the community.

Her actions showcase a proactive approach to harnessing social capital and fostering community ties through the organization of social events. Such gatherings can catalyse various forms of social capital, including economic opportunities and enhanced community cohesion. This is because these events pave the way for attendees to forge connections and establish relationships, potentially bolstering representation, and empowerment for female candidates (Colletta and Cullen 2002; Putnam 1993). Her dedication to organizing these social events offers insights into how social networks and relationships can influence opportunities and results for underrepresented groups.

Other female politicians also intentionally worked on building social connections within the community, which assisted her in overcoming obstacles in the field.

"There is one man he is like an elder everyone is talking about him the man doesn't want to even if I call for program, he will not come ... all the time before I will come and open the store sometimes, I will just enter his place and greet him and say oh I just come to say hello to you how are you how is this. if I am going out and the grandchildren are there sometimes, I'll just give them something and say oh just collect and do this this so now the man even if he does not see me, he does call me". (Maame, North, 22 December 2022, 2pm)

In the case of this politician, she deliberately made an effort make and build connections with influential people. This aligns with research underscoring the importance of time and consistency in nurturing social relationships (Putnam 1995b, 2000). Her experience sheds light on a societal context where time, financial means, and interpersonal connections are instrumental in accessing social capital. Recognizing the potential impact of aligning with influential figures, she proactively sought and fostered a relationship with a prominent individual who could elevate her political aspirations. Research indicates that those who cultivate solid connections with community stalwarts stand to access critical resources (Bourdieu 1986). The benefits reaped from such calculated relationships encompass insights, endorsement, and potential opportunities. Moreover, the esteemed status of the elder within the community indicates his own considerable social capital, making his association immensely beneficial for her.

Another female politician emphasized the crucial role of bonding and bridging ties in engaging with community networks. Her drive to form bridging ties was influenced by her political agency and was further strengthened by her well-informed politically astute bonding ties.

"I would safely say that it was not a difficult decision to make because there was a family legacy in my constituency, my late father was very influential in the developmental trajectory if I would say of our constituency ... so they accepted my candidature quite easily". (Seli, Greater Accra, 13 December 2021, 10.am)

The depth of her bonding social ties and inherited family social capital played a pivotal role in her success within the field, notably aiding in garnering support from the constituency. As Uphoff (2000) postulated, the essence of social capital is rooted in history and the duration of engagement. The longstanding involvement of her family in the community bolstered her credibility, with the community being familiar with the value and contributions her family could offer in return for their support. This family legacy within the constituency granted her a gateway to vital social networks and connections, equipping her with essential social capital in the form of political opportunities and backing (Putnam 1993). For this politician, the storied presence of her

family in the community offered a distinct edge over other prospective candidates, underscoring the inherent disparities associated with social capital (Bourdieu 1986).

The situation also highlights the financial strength of her family, which empowered them to engage in the community's developmental pursuits. Research has illustrated that holding economic power can grant access to specific social networks (Uphoff 2000). Furthermore, the information indicates the value of the cultural capital held by her family in relation to her candidacy. As posited by Bourdieu (1986), cultural assets like knowledge can equip individuals with distinct advantages across different aspects of their lives, encompassing their professional paths. The depth of understanding and adept communication abilities her family demonstrated in addressing developmental matters and rallying community endorsement provided her with a unique leverage in her political endeavours. This demonstrates that her gender had minimal influence on her ability to access community's social networks, largely due to her family's established legacy. This might also stem from the community's progressive stance, wherein they form their perceptions of politicians without being bound by gender biases or patriarchal norms. As noted by Bridges et al. (2022) and Lin (2002), women equipped with social and cultural capital stand a better chance of thriving in various domains, including politics. Such capital not only facilitates the success of women but also bestows cultural legitimacy (Bridges et al. 2022). Putnam (1993) asserts that social networks and connections can be instrumental for political mobilization and electoral victories. Furthermore, social capital plays a pivotal role in fostering trust and legitimacy among voters (Atkinson and Fowler 2014).

In Ghana, apart from community norms and practices that often deter women from venturing into politics and accessing social capital, lack of political expertise can also cause a challenge. Research indicates that political parties give preference to candidates who demonstrate unwavering allegiance to the party's principles and ethos (Hazan and Rahat 2010:6). This suggests that parties value members with a proven track record of dedication to their frameworks and who resonate with their core values. Thus, if an individual is internally driven to venture into politics but fails to cultivate relationships with central party figures well-acquainted with its operations, establishing trust and securing an endorsement becomes challenging.

Political parties are primarily driven by the ambition to win; therefore, cohesion and trust within their ranks are paramount. As Simmel (1950:326) articulated, trust is “one of the most important synthetic forces within society.” Consequently, candidates perceived as lacking

sufficient dedication to the party might be viewed as inconsistent or untrustworthy, potentially jeopardizing the party's chances in elections. Also, candidates who do not have history with the political party. This perception transcends gender boundaries. A candidate's personal attributes often resonate more with the party's identity than the party's manifesto itself (Hazan and Rahat 2010:6). This highlights the importance of being well-versed with the party's core values and connecting with its pivotal figures. It underscores the notion that, beyond mere enthusiasm for politics, one must grasp its intricacies and align with influential allies to gain endorsement from a political party.

Understanding the history of the party, including its founding, significant milestones, and key figures, helps members appreciate the evolution of its principles and values. Familiarity with the party's core ideologies and policies ensures members are aligned with its vision and objectives, fostering the necessary trust (Hazan and Rahat 2010). This can be classified as a lack of technical expertise. This can lead to their inability to succeed and access social capital. Their failures were often attributed to not grasping the intricacies of the domain, but rather relying solely on hearsay or surface knowledge. For this particular politician, even though she had familial connections and social capital in the field, which helped her to cultivate trust with other politicians. She emphasized the importance of acquainting herself with the political field and party nuances before deciding to run for office. The lack of comprehensive understanding about the political landscape has caused numerous electoral setbacks for women. This could be interpreted as some women not prioritizing politics as a significant career path. And also knowing the value of technical expertise in accessing social capital (Bourdieu 1986).

“Really because as I mentioned early my family has a strong background in the field hence it kind of paved a certain path for me to walk in. so I would say I just had to do a little research and I was good to go. Yes...”. (Joana, Greater Accra, 17 November 2022, 10.45am)

The politician's advantage, stemming from their family's notable background in the field, facilitated both their entry and advancement. This can be analogized to the notion of "social capital," which delineates the advantages derived from one's familial associations, social connections, and group affiliations. Being part of a family with a legacy or proficiency in a specific sector can equip an individual with invaluable knowledge, networking opportunities, and avenues that may remain closed off to those without such ties (Bourdieu 1986). Studies underscore that such familial bonds in professional arenas can markedly shape an individual's career path. These

advantages can range from acquiring internships to securing roles in esteemed organizations (Burt 1992).

Though the politician benefited significantly from her familial advantages, she recognized the importance of conducting her own preliminary research before delving deep into the field. This aligns with the notion of "tacit knowledge." Tacit knowledge embodies the insights that are not easily conveyed through written or spoken means. Being nurtured in a family with a distinguished legacy in a specific domain likely familiarized her with this intrinsic form of knowledge, simplifying her initial preparations (Polanyi 1966). However, her proactive approach to further research beyond her familial sphere furnished her with an additional advantage.

Regarding the access to social capital within the party context, which many participants identified as a challenge, she managed to overcome this hurdle due to the substantial family social capital they held and technical expertise. This family-backed social capital positioned them more favourably for accessing social resources within the party space.

“Yes, so with my experiences at the early stages I would say was quite smooth because I had a sister who was already there and knows the in and out. So, I did start with government boards and because of my professional background as an... and always rocking shoulders with males. I was not something new to me, I always made sure my views were heard and if necessary, implemented”. (Joana, Greater Accra, 17 November 2022, 10.45am)

The politician's initial experience was eased by the presence of her sister, who was familiar with the political landscape. This underscores the invaluable mentorship she received from her sister. Such mentorship offered guidance, paved the way for new opportunities, and ensured a seamless transition into the political arena. Additionally, it empowered her to navigate and overcome challenges tied to accessing social capital within the party, a hurdle that many face. Research indicates that mentorship, particularly at the outset of one's career, can significantly influence professional development, job contentment, and overall career achievement (Allen et al. 2004). Moreover, research suggests that women in professions predominantly occupied by men often adopt tactics to validate their expertise, build alliances, and contest traditional norms to ensure their viewpoints are respected (Wallace and Kay 2022).

Besides receiving mentorship from her sister, the participant successfully addressed the challenge of muted female representation in committees. She was determined to be assertive, ensuring her voice was heard even in environments that seemed intimidating due to gender biases. As highlighted by Ames and Flynn (2007), assertiveness is paramount, especially in settings where

one's opinions might be overshadowed. The participant made it a priority to effectively convey her viewpoints on various issues, regardless of any attempts to sideline her due to her gender. Stavrova (2019) affirms that for individuals from minority or underrepresented demographics, assertiveness combined with effective communication is vital for guaranteeing equal participation and influence.

In addition to confronting the issue of subdued female voices in committees, some participants also grappled with heckling in male-dominated party and government committees. One politician, in particular, shared her tactics for addressing these challenges. Although she identified this as a gender-specific problem, she adeptly navigated and overcame it.

"I think generally for us women on that committee, our experiences were ... similar, the same heckling, but I made sure that even with my tiny voice I would raise issues that they cannot heckle because I have learnt on the job". (Klenam, Greater Accra, 3 November 2022, 6pm)

The gender dynamics present in her professional and committee settings have played a role in the challenges she experienced in accessing social capital. When the heckling is happening, she is stopped from making her point hence she is not able to communicate her expertise which can make her known and expand her network. These committees often reflect traditional patriarchal values that tend to marginalize or sideline women, making it challenging for them to express their viewpoints without encountering resistance. Consistently, women in male-dominated settings are found to experience interruptions or heckling more frequently than their male peers. These encounters can impede active engagement and fair representation.

However, the politician noted that even with a "soft voice," she made her points so compelling that they could not be easily overlooked. This approach aligns with Jürgen Habermas's "communicative action" theory, which underscores the potency of logical discourse and arguments anchored in evidence and rationale (Chang and Jacobson 2010). In navigating her challenges, the individual seemed to harness the essence of this concept by presenting topics that were challenging to dismiss or contest.

Research in organizational behaviour indicates that when individuals, particularly those from underrepresented groups, support their arguments with indisputable evidence or logic, they can minimize interruptions or dismissals. Equipped with robust, thoroughly researched points, the participant managed to counter biases and earn respect during discussions. The individual highlighted "learning on the job," implying that experience was instrumental in refining this

communication approach. Drawing from Kolb's "experiential learning" theory, it is posited that knowledge stems from experiences, especially when individuals reflect on these experiences and subsequently apply the lessons in new contexts (Kolb 1984). The politician's approach to overcoming challenges, rooted in on-the-job and experiential learning, demonstrates the power of these methods in professional advancement. It is well-documented that professionals who consciously reflect on their experiences, glean lessons from challenges, and adjust their approaches are more adept at navigating intricate work settings (Eraut 2004). The politician's strategy not only underscores her educational background but also signifies her commitment to her chosen career path.

However, I found something interesting where some male politicians revealed that women are not able to access even women networks and mentors. This is because they are in disagreement hence women must work with each other and build trust before they can come to fight male dominance.

“No no I mean capital NO, they don't yes, they don't, compared to the males. Because males no matter how do a lot of support for other, I mean colleagues males than women would do for their colleague women. Yes, it is my opinion that is what I see standing from where I sit. Yes, that is what I personally see”. (Nana, Greater Accra, 16 March 2023, 12 pm)

He compared the support among male and female politicians, noting that male politicians are more likely to help each other than female politicians. He suggests that male politicians have a stronger sense of teamwork and are more willing to support their male colleagues. This teamwork gives men better access to resources, advice, and opportunities, boosting their success. He believes women in politics face difficulties in building strong support networks, which are important for their success. This is not just because the field is dominated by men or because of gender biases and traditional roles, but also because women struggle to create solidarity among themselves. The data from the observations, documents and perceptive from the female politicians however suggest that the small number of women in politics limits the impact of any solidarity they do manage to build.

In Ghana, apart from community norms and practices that often deter women from venturing into politics and accessing social capital, the political space is rife with instances of abuse and derogatory remarks. As documented by Asamoah et al. (2014) and Darkwah (2014), some female politicians opt to overlook such behaviours, while others reciprocate in kind. Both

responses are seen as coping strategies within this challenging environment. Choosing to sidestep these verbal affronts can be a viable strategy for navigating and enduring the rough terrains of political discourse. These can also lead one to connect with affluent members of the space. However, many women tend to recoil in the face of such insults, as participating in this trend of exchanging insults could imply, they are directly contesting patriarchal norms (Darkwah 2014: 294-295). Such involvement can label them as disrespectful or even arrogant.

Nevertheless, some female politicians highlighted how these negative stereotypes and perceptions associated with female politicians can be countered through strong social networks. Some mentioned how members within their social networks vouch for their character and accomplishments, thus dispelling prevalent misconceptions. This underscores the critical importance of building and accessing social networks in the political sphere, as well as the need for aspirants to be well-informed about the intricacies of the field prior to making an entrance.

Chapter conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter sheds light on the multifaceted challenges women encounters accessing social capital, predominantly stemming from regional political party dynamics, leadership perceptive and networking in the party space. Regional party frameworks which are built on societal norms often constrain women, inhibiting their active participation and access to specific social groups in the party space. Notably, female politicians in the Northern region party space struggle with societal barriers deeply embedded in their socio-religious fabric, more so than their Greater Accra region counterparts.

Within the political space, Northern female politicians frequently face barriers to entering specific groups, largely due to societal norms and expectations. In contrast, female politicians in the Greater Accra region experience a slightly more welcoming environment, with greater encouragement to participate in politics. However, this encouragement does not necessarily grant them unfettered access to all political networks. The thesis underscores a progressive shift in the Greater Accra region, evident in the rising number of female candidates. This change may be attributed to an increase in educated women in the Greater Accra region compared to the Northern region, signalling a wave of socio-cultural evolution.

The thesis recognizes the profound influence of gender dynamics on female politicians' social capital access in the political space. This chapter delved into the nuanced and frequently

unspoken strategies these women harness to operate and overcome these obstacles, managing to achieve noteworthy advancements in their political careers in the face of challenges. The narratives of female politicians from both the Northern and Greater Accra regions of Ghana, though diverse, collectively highlight resilience as a shared trait. Harnessing the power of social capital, these women are not only navigating through the intricate political terrain but actively transforming it. Balancing between tradition and contemporary approaches, their efforts exemplify the dynamic evolution of Ghanaian politics and the unyielding spirit of its women leaders.

The subsequent chapter, delves deeper into how politicians develop political agency through development of political interest and resource acquisition.

Chapter eight

Political agency through development of political interest and resource acquisition

8.0. Chapter overview

The current chapter addresses the fourth research question: How do politicians develop their political agency and extend it to access social capital and engage in politics? Answering this question requires an understanding of how individuals construct their interest in engaging in politics and the resources or power they need to navigate the political landscape. Depending on the sociocultural and political context, individuals may have different reasons for engaging in mainstream politics and may need various forms of capital or resources to do so. Therefore, to understand political participation, it is crucial to recognize the distinct sociocultural contexts in which individuals navigate their way into mainstream politics. In this chapter, I explore the diverse sociocultural factors and individual subjectivities that push people toward political engagement, specifically in the Northern and Greater Accra regions of Ghana. Through these regions, I examine how distinct sociocultural realities shape individuals' inclination toward political participation and the resources they can access to achieve their objective of engaging in politics.

In this chapter, I explore the intersections of sociocultural factors, the construction of political interest, and the acquisition of essential resources for political participation. I utilize the sociological concept of "Agency" to analyse how individuals construct their political agencies. Agency is a multifaceted concept that can be used to address different realities, including social structures. In sociology, agency is defined as the ability of individuals to act independently and make decisions that shape their lives and society, including political realities (Dunn 2018). From the sociological perspective of agency, individuals are seen as social actors who engage in social actions through "choices or interest" and "ability." To fully understand agency, it is crucial to examine how individuals construct their interests and the resources they mobilize, including both symbolic and material forms (Bourdieu 1987). In this chapter, using the concept of agency, I delve into political participation in the Northern and Greater Accra regions of Ghana, focusing on how individuals construct their political interests and the resources their political interests lead them access to achieve political participation. Throughout this chapter, I sometimes use terms such as "political interest" and "power" to describe, respectively, the interests or motivations that

individuals construct for political participation and the resources these interests enable them to access.

The findings presented in this chapter are based on interviews and observations of politicians from the Northern and Greater Accra regions of Ghana. The data collected from these politicians indicate that they construct their political interests based on personal values, beliefs, and a sense of purpose, all of which stem from socialization, personal experiences, and sociocultural dynamics. Once political interests are formed, politicians tend to engage in activities that align with these interests, such as volunteerism, public engagement, and building supportive social networks. The significance of engaging in activities based on political interests lies in the acquisition of resources and power, which enable further involvement in politics. Such power or resources may include gaining approval and endorsement from others, thus reinforcing their political interests. This interaction underscores the nature of political interest, which is shaped by personal values and sociocultural experiences.

The discussion in this chapter also reveals that politicians often align themselves with social networks and activities that reflect their political interests. As such, external rewards, which can serve as catalysts for the construction of political interest, are linked to social identity and belonging. This indicates that a politician's identity within a group influences their experiences and actions. Consequently, political interest and the pursuit of power affect a politician's access to social networks and social capital. The current study introduces the terms "empowerment objective," "development objective," and "emdevelopment objective" to describe the factors that underlie the construction of political interest. These factors are utilized by politicians in Ghana to navigate their political careers.

Empowerment objective refers to factors that motivate individuals to engage in politics with the aim of empowering women and women's groups to address inequalities across political, financial, educational, and other spheres that marginalize women. This political interest predominantly arises among women, although there are instances where men also adopt such perspectives within the political sphere. The focus on empowerment tends to attract similar social networks and consolidate power around these issues.

Female politicians often embrace empowerment as a response to being excluded from development-oriented social networks, even when they may possess a development-focused

political interest centred on community and constituency improvement rather than solely on women's empowerment issues. Development push factors, characterized by a political interest in contributing to overall community and constituency development, are more commonly observed among men, with fewer women exhibiting this perspective. However, data suggest that female politicians, particularly in the Northern region, face challenges in accessing similar social networks due to discrepancies between these development networks and prevailing societal gender norms. Furthermore, some politicians exhibit a hybrid form of political interest termed "emdevelopment objective," which combines a desire to develop their constituency with efforts to empower women. This dual perspective is predominantly adopted by female politicians in the Greater Accra region, as well as by a minority of male politicians in both the Northern and Greater Accra regions.

In the sections that follow, I detail the concept of political agency and its relationship with political interest and power acquisition, focusing on how the construction of interest and acquisition of power are significant determinants of political agency or participation. This discussion is followed by an empirical examination of how various sociocultural, personal, and political factors shape individuals' construction of political interest. Subsequently, I explore how political actors, based on their political interests, access resources or power that enable them to navigate their political participation. In the latter part of the chapter, I discuss how differing sociocultural and gender dynamics shape the nexus between individuals' political interest and power acquisition.

8.1. Political agency as power and interest

Fundamentally, the concept of agency argues that individuals are active actors in society with the ability to make independent choices. Conceptually, agency embodies power or ability to undertake social action and such power may be drive from the economic, psychological, and political resources that individuals possess (Campbell 2009). For instance, as social capital scholars clarify, power or the ability to exercise individual's agencies encompasses the possession of a range of resources—both tangible and intangible. Therefore, individuals' agencies are contingent to their ability to acquire the necessary capitals, such as economic, political, cultural, and social capitals. Another fundamentally aspect of understanding the exercise of agency is the intrinsic and extrinsic desires or interest that individuals construct towards certain goals. Without such objectives, the idea of agency becomes incomprehensible. Therefore, motivation becomes significant aspect of understanding the conceptual framing of agency. Motivation refers to the

psychological driving forces that influence individuals to pursue social actions or exercise their agency. These psychological drives may be influenced by external factors such as sociocultural, economic, and political realities.

Therefore, the relationship between agency, power or capital accumulation, and construction of interest can be explored in various ways to understand individuals' decisions to engage in social actions, including political engagement. However, the attention given to this relationship may vary across disciplines such as psychology and sociology. For instance, psychology scholars may be interested in how motivation may be viewed as a driving force shaping individuals' agency (Salanova et al. 2011), whereas sociological scholars may focus on how power dynamics shape individuals' agency (Campbell 2009). While distinctive concepts, agency, power, and motivations are intertwined with complex and reversible relationship, where each has the tendency to shape the others.

In this study, I focus on understanding construction of political interest and capital accumulation or power acquisition as fundamental elements shaping individuals' agency, particularly within the context of political participation. I argue that individuals' political agency is influenced by both social capital dynamics and personal motivations, which are further shaped by various sociocultural, economic, and political factors. Here, political agency refers to individuals' capacity and desire to engage in political activities. Throughout this chapter, I explore how sociocultural, economic, and political factors impact individuals' inclination for political participation. Additionally, I examine the gender dynamics of political agency, elucidating how gender intersects with individuals' power dynamics and inclination for political engagement. Studies have shown that factors such as gender equality, empowerment, public service, and development motivation may contribute to individuals' construction of political agency (Aker 2019; Fox and Lawless 2010; Lopian et al. 2022). Using the case of Ghanaian politics, I consider the gender dynamic of power acquisition or resources acquisition to examine how gender interacts with construction of political agency.

While gender may be significant in understanding political agencies, these gender trajectories may be understood through differing sociocultural, economic, and political contexts as these contexts define the relationship between gender, power, and motivation. The various sociocultural and economic contexts do not only have the tendencies to shape individuals' access to power for political participation but also influence their desire to participate politically. For

instance, research suggests that political agency stems from various sources, including a commitment to advancing public policy, advocating for social justice, or pursuing personal economic development (Bari 2005:3–5; Han 2009). Therefore, in this study, I also focus on comprehending political decision-making or participation by examining the complex interplay of these sociocultural and economic dynamics and individual agency in political engagement.

At one hand, when exploring power as a component of political agency, I examine social capital, social norms, and beliefs, as not only source of power through which individuals can acquire both intangible and tangible assets but also sources of individuals political interest or interest or political participation. These assets provide them with the capacity to engage in political activities. Through this approach, the gender dynamics of political participation and agency can be examined. As previously mentioned, sociocultural and economic structures shape access to social capital. This implies that imbalances in access to social capital can lead to disparities in the power to exercise political agency (Coffé and Bolzendahl 2010; Fox and Lawless 2004; Norris 1991). At another hand, I examine the sociocultural, economic, and political factors that motivate individuals to construct political agencies. As scholars have noted, the formulation of interest and desire to engage in social action, including participating in politics, is influenced by individuals' beliefs, values, and assumptions (Larson and Rusk 2011). It is derived from internal factors such as personal interests, experiences, economic interests, ideological interests, values, or beliefs, targeting personally satisfying goals (Deci and Ryan 2000:55).

8.2. Developing interest for political agency

Construction of political agency is characterized as fundamental for engaging in political activity. This may be shaped by either individuals' subjective socioeconomic and political views or structural conditions such as sociocultural narratives. At one hand, construction of interest for political participation may emanates from things like intrinsic personal aspiration, societal norms, personal economic and ideological interests, as well as individual values or beliefs. This may also stem from an ardent passion for specific issues, personal experiences, an altruistic desire to support the underprivileged, personal economic gains, or the quest for power. Constructing political agencies may also be triggered by the sociocultural context and the issues related to it, coupled with the desire to effect changes in these situations. Desire to participate in politics is an individual-driven phenomenon that requires little to no external validation to reinforce the intention.

The findings in this study suggests that most politicians in Northern and Greater Accra region construct their political interests through observation of social inequality and their desire to bring about social change. In other words, engaging with politicians in the Greater Accra and Northern region of Ghana, the findings reveal that individuals may construct political agency through their internal drive to assist marginalized groups in their respective communities. For some politicians, political engagement was a concept that emerged from listening to other politicians via traditional rallies who significantly contributed to the country's development. The findings suggest to exercise one's political agency, individuals may construct their interest through delving into the viewpoint of others who they may see as role models or sharing similar world views. Others were motivated internally by the experiences they encountered in their societies. For example, in an interview with a female politician from Greater Accra region of Ghana, she articulated how her political interest was sparked by witnessing the precarious conditions of her neighbours.

“As a growing up child, I would say I had it rosy because my parents were very comfortable so that comfortability extended to the children too. I had a personal driver who would drive me back and forth to school every day... so, as a child I started to gather stuffs I did not use since I had a lot and started to share with the kids in the community. So, at a young age I became a giver and this made my age mates see me as a leader of a sort... so basically politics started for me unaware from all errm”. (Seli, Greater Accra, 13 December 2021, 10 am)

The excerpt emphasizes how political agency hinges on an individual's passion to assist others. And how a family's socioeconomic status can influence this inherent drive to offer social support. The politician hails from a family with high socioeconomic status. This instilled in her a desire to support others, ultimately shaping her leadership values and aspirations. As suggested, she cultivated her political agency from childhood, fuelled by observing her surroundings filled with less privileged individuals. Her lived experiences emphasize the socioeconomic diversity in Ghana and how privilege informs political agency through empathetic observation.

Raised in a family with higher social standing than her neighbours, the politician was driven by a genuine desire to improve her community members' lives. Her case suggests a positive link between socioeconomic status and prosocial behaviour (Korndörfer, Egloff, and Schmukle 2015). According to Kraus et al. (2012), socioeconomic status reflects an individual's position in the social hierarchy. As a member of a higher-status family, she devoted a significant portion of her time and resources to philanthropy and charitable giving.

The excerpt also underlines the exchange of social capital between the precarious and privileged in Ghanaian societies. Individuals exhibiting prosocial behaviour tend to be more approachable in daily interactions and more trustworthy with strangers (Korndörfer et al. 2015). This behaviour significantly contributes to building social networks within the community (Helliwell et al. 2017:22–25). Her openness with strangers expanded her social network, contradicting studies suggesting that men are more likely to establish wider social networks than women (Lamba and Krahn 2003:339). The data indicate that the breadth of social network ties relates more to socioeconomic status and prosocial behaviour than gender (Putnam 2000:191).

However, the politician's desire to help the less fortunate was not solely due to her family's socioeconomic status; it was also inspired by her parents. Drawing from psychological theories of social learning, children learn by observing others, influencing their attitudes and behaviours (Bandura 1971; Bandura and Walters 1977). The interviewee experiences illustrate how her father's attitude towards sharing with the community's less privileged individuals inspired her to do the same. Which aided her to develop her prosocial values and behaviours. This aligns with Bandura and Walters (1977), who assert that behavioural patterns can be acquired through observation and direct experience.

“So, I see most of these church members always come to my father for help, mostly financial help to help them sometimes have one square meal a day. My father, in other to help them take some of them and train them to be self-sufficient however some of these people who he trained do not get the opportunity of been employed by the public sector and even the private sector. Since there are no jobs in the system, they end up coming to seek for financial help once again... So, you know he helps already and me too... so I felt I could do more if I have the power”. (Seli, Greater Accra, 13 December 2021, 10 am)

It is observed that she wanted to do more for her people because the community assistance program led by her father, though individual-based, was not effective enough to address the wide-ranging issues she observed within her community. Seeing first-hand the limitations of such an approach. She realized that a broader and a more comprehensive strategy was needed to tackle the prevalent unemployment and poverty issues in her community. This led her to enter politics, not just out of personal ambition, but primarily to help alleviate social unrest in her community (Gustafson 2020:1139–40). Research supports the idea that political representation can stimulate infrastructure investment, creating jobs and significantly reducing poverty (Gadjanova 2017). While her intent to aid her community was genuine, it also served as a platform for her own political career.

The interest to support her community hence emerged at a young age. Thus, she began addressing the problem in modest ways before eventually running for office. Her community involvement allowed her to form connections within social networks comprised predominantly of middle and low-income individuals. She felt a strong sense of community, knowing their struggles and being eager to participate in collective action for social change (Tajfel and Turner 1986; Wright and Tropp 2002). This research implies that investment in such networks and collaborative action towards common goals are key to network development, offering long-term benefits for the politician. This aligns with Bourdieu's (1985) assertion that networks are the outcome of strategic investments.

Significantly, the data revealed that some politicians construct political agencies, not solely from personal interest, but also from social encouragement from friends and close family members (close ties). These further unravel the relationship between social relationships and development of political agencies or interest for political participation. This aligns with previous studies that suggest that political figures and elites within an individual's family or social network significantly shape their agencies for political participation (Jennings and Niemi 2014; Kurtz 1989). In an interview with one such politician, she recounted how her drive for political involvement was nurtured through her interactions with her father's politically active friends.

“... going out with my father and meeting his political affluent friends also influenced my passion for politics. Though my father is a pastor..., he had a large army of political friends especially from...party”. (Klenam, Greater Accra, 3 November 2022, 6 pm)

This highlights how children's early experiences with politics can shape their decision to become politicians (Jennings and Niemi 2014). According to Putnam (2000), early exposure to politics often cultivates a deep-rooted motivation to engage politically later in life. In her case, interacting with political elites from a young age contributes to the development of agencies for political participation. This exposure broadened her understanding of political issues. Thus, her interest was not solely self-awareness and value, but also social, developed through interactions with these influential politicians. So, she did not just want to be a politician, she also wanted to make a difference because of her relationship with these important politicians. As a result, she gained access to both electorates and political parties, forming a wide range of connections. These networks were also gender neutral because the people she had early contact with before entering the field were influential male networks.

According to Putnam (2000), those who encounter diverse views through their social networks are likely to be more tolerant and politically active. Her initiative in accessing the electorate's networks (both male and female) significantly aided in building community connections. With this access, she did not entirely depend on others to establish and grow her community networks. Her proactive approach and helping attitude fostered trust and increased her connection base over time. These efforts align with Coleman's statement (1990:312) that social capital is “*a by-product of activities engaged in for other purposes*”. The networks she built ultimately translated into social capital and support.

Also, her support for the community highlighted her skills and areas of interest to her constituents. This demonstrates her ability to identify and express her interests and purpose, engaging in activities aligning with these values. Even without explicitly announcing her intention to run for parliament, her public engagement widened her social network and earned her a level of social capitals or power. Focusing on her beliefs, values, and goals provided opportunities for her personal growth and strengthened her drive towards political fulfilment.

The excerpt further suggests that constructing political agency may push individuals to engage in power acquisition process such as social capitals. As shown in the excerpt, to demonstrate her political agency she builds networks within the entire community and motivated to enhance the development of the whole constituency, a concept this study refers to as “development objective”. This demonstrates the gender-neutral nature of association norms in her region. And reflects her socioeconomic standing in the community.

This shows the importance family background plays in the type of social networks politicians are able to access and how it helps to build their political interest and power. The researcher observed the crucial role of family background and social networks in motivation development. The next politician's experience, influenced by her family's political involvement, supports this assertion.

“My elder sister ... Is an influential member of government... I grew in the time frame when I was on the boards, of government boards, which was due to my background as an ... and my sister... I would safely say that it was not a difficult decision to make because there was a family legacy in my constituency, my late father was very influential in the developmental trajectory if I would say of our constituency... That is how politics, what made me want to follow... ”. (Joana, Greater Accra, 17 November, 2022, 10.45am)

The study inferred from this specific quote that the participant had close associates and a significant portion of her family entrenched in politics and public service. Her family's involvement in this sector granted her opportunities for political progression (Jennings and Niemi 2014; Kurtz 1989). Not only did she have familial connections in the political space, but she also had access to community ties. Therefore, it was relatively straightforward in her case to explore both political and social networks.

Regarding her desire and power to engaged political, it was observed that it was not entirely based personal interest that informed her political agency but it was partly due to the significant influence of her family background on her development (Putnam 2000). And partly because her father was already deeply engaged in community development, which paved a path she subsequently followed. This politician, similar to the one mentioned in the first quote, had connections to both weak ties (community) and strong ties (family), which significantly shaped her progression in the political field. However, the study revealed that the formation of bonded social capital Putnam (2000:22–23) and involvement in a tight-knit network Coleman (1988) can make accessing distant connections more challenging.

The findings align with the social network theory, asserting that individuals embedded within social networks, granting access to political social capital, are likely to succeed in the field (Granovetter 1973). However, these individuals must establish both close and distant relationships to ensure access to expansive and intimate networks (ibid). In her situation, she leveraged the social capital from her family to reinforce her power to engaged in politics, enabling her to tap into other networks pertinent to her political career. This effectively illustrates how the development of both power and interest for political participation.

While her family facilitated her entry into relevant networks, she played a crucial role in maintaining the trust and ties within these networks. Putnam (2000) suggests that simply accessing the networks is not sufficient to secure the social capital within them; active involvement is key. This is evidenced by how she immersed herself in leadership roles and took on responsibilities on government boards. In essence, she mastered her job, and then convinced others in the network of the legitimacy of her performance. This implies that while family social capital was vital for gaining access to party executives and the community, it was also necessary for her to validate her capabilities to the people and to actively participate.

Apart from growing up in a family environment that was politically engaged, it is observed that personal experiences of lacking certain privileges can also stimulate the development of political agencies. The interest and power necessary for political agency often correlates with socio-cultural norms, religious standards, and developmental disparities (Akter 2019; Fox and Lawless 2010; Lapian et al. 2022). The data disclosed that some politicians did not experience any political engagement during their childhood that fostered their motivation to get involved in politics. However, certain rights that they feel they were deprived of kindled their political interest. This basic right, include right to education, right to financial freedom among others.

Certain politicians highlighted that their experiences with patriarchal structures and gender discrimination while growing up kindled their interest for political participation, thereby unravelling the relationship between sociocultural structures, gender, and political agency. It indicates that gender norms, societal norms, and socialization can shape political agency. This was particularly pronounced among participants in the Northern region. This aligns with the studies of Bari (2005:3–5) and Attri (2021), asserting that sociocultural norms contribute to shaping interest for political participation.

Some politicians stated that their political agency was ignited by their admiration for prominent political leaders and their leadership styles, which is another form of building interest and motivation for politics. The following quotes show how transformational leadership qualities and personal admiration of a leader can inspire an individual to participate in politics. This type of interest can shape political behaviour by influencing an individual's perspectives on political issues and their willingness to participate in political activities.

“Because of the late J J Rawlings when I was a child any time, he comes to Bawku for rally I do admire his fluency and also his colour; what he stood for... his charisma..... so basically that pulled me to it ... ”. (Afi, North, 10 January 2023, 9am)

This politician’s narration showed how a leader's style can influence a person's internal desire to get involved in politics. The captivating leadership style of Rawlings motivated her to enter politics. Her narration highlights how different political leadership styles can shape people's attitudes towards politics. Research has shown that compelling leadership can significantly increase voter turnout and political participation in Africa (Aden 2015).

The politician was not just inspired by Rawlings's leadership style. She also greatly admired him as a person. In Ghana, people often vote or join political parties because they admire

certain traits of a political leader (Antwi 2018; Boakye 2018). These traits can include skin colour, proficiency in English, physical appearance, and charisma. Even though English is not the main language spoken in Ghanaian communities, being fluent in it is highly valued for politicians in Ghana. Rawlings was light-skinned, which also highlights that looks play a role in building a strong political base. This shows what kind of qualities they associate with good leadership. There is a common belief that a good leader should be light skinned, which suggests some lingering colonial influences.

Her admiration for him likely influenced her decision to join his political party. This suggests that political agency may be constructed through admiration of a leader's style and persona. This may manifest through social imitation and collaboration where like-minded individuals sharing the same values, beliefs, and aspirations, are willing to collaborate towards a common objective. However, these are not the only methods politicians employ to develop their agency for political participation. One politician noted that beyond being inspired to join politics due to the charismatic leadership style and admiration of the leader's persona, individuals' agency can also revolve around developmental issues.

“Yes. Sincerely speaking aahh. In the environment in which I live, ... Naturally when you look at our country, the southern part is already more developed than north.,... but from my own understanding of things, I realize that we truly have one or two politicians who do not want the growth of others in their communities... They feel that it is better to always catch the fish and give to you instead of teaching you how to go catching the fish yourself. We have very most of those politicians found here in the Northern region”. (Malike, North, 18 January 2023, 3.25pm)

The politician revealed that a developmental deficiency in the Northern region sparked his interest in political participation. His interest did not stem solely from the lack of development, but more significantly, from the behaviour of politicians who preferred to keep their communities reliant on them rather than fostering self-sufficiency. He shed light on how community leaders were reluctant to share power, leading to a dependency on their benevolence. This situation I observed in the Northern region, where high level politicians tend to subject the constituent to their benevolence instead of developing the region so that people in the North would be able to cater for their everyday expensive and daily needs.

In countries like Ghana, it is often the case that a few powerful people control most of the resources (Crawford 2009). This can slow down economic growth and progress in communities. This is often because of corruption and politicians favouring their friends and supporters. So, the

participant constructed agency for political participation because he saw corrupt leadership in his community. He wanted to change the way things were done to bring better opportunities to his region and lessen the development gap between the Northern and Greater Accra regions of Ghana.

Other politicians did not say outright that they got into politics for money, but it became clear from observing and talking to them. Being motivated by money means being influenced by things like personal financial gain. This can affect how a person feels about political issues.

“... that I was leading for a decade of years, even a bathhouse, I cannot even boast of. Compared to other political parties, ... so if I’m going to radio stations upon radio stations, selling the good name of the party, and at the end of the day some people will be enjoying and some of us will be stuffed. Definitely you will be hurt” (Kofi, North, 19 January 2022, 9am).

Although he did not explicitly discuss economic benefit as inherent to his political agency, the excerpt indicates that he viewed politics as a vehicle for personal financial enrichment. I observed that most people politicians want to engage in politics to enrich themselves instead of helping the constituency. That is why when they go to the community for endorsement, the constituents also want to gain something from them before giving them their support. Consequently, when his aspirations were unfulfilled despite significant effort, he voiced his discontent. This situation also throws light on the power structure within the political party. Which illustrates how power is disseminated among members, even as they share common objectives and agendas. It exposes the varying tiers and affiliations within the party, potentially attributable to internal party dynamics, external political forces, or personal constraints. Significantly, the data revealed that male politicians seldom faced any structural barriers or socio-norms influencing their interest for political engagement. Instead, their agency was generally fostered through early political engagement, recognition of developmental disparities, desire to combat corruption, or the need to address developmental issues later in life.

In summary, the interview data and the observation notes indicate that developmental issues, gender concerns, personal finance enrichment and socio-cultural norms contribute to the construction of political agencies including interest and power or resources. These agencies, in turn, push individual to build associations with those who share similar goals. It also promotes a better understanding of their own social identities and perceptions by others in social networks. However, access to these networks is impacted by various factors, including socioeconomic status, geographical location, social norms, and technological infrastructure. Even with interest for

political engagement, access to social capitals or networks is not guaranteed. If a community's social norms conflict with a candidate's agency, building or accessing networks may prove challenging. This could explain why some female politicians focus primarily on gender empowerment issues.

8.3. Power acquisition as constituent for political agency

This study characterizes power acquisition as the efforts made by individuals to gain recognition, endorsement, and resources essential for their political participation. As previously argued, political agency includes an individual's ability to acquire the necessary sources of power that enable them to engage in politics. Power may be in the form of tangible capitals such as financial resources, or intangible such as endorsement and psychological support. This attempts from external elements such as expectations, endorsements, and political incentives. It also includes being nominated by constituents to run in an election. These factors can also result from a complex mesh of influences that reflect interest as well as wider societal, cultural, and political environments. Essentially, power acquisition attempts are primarily fuelled by politicians' interest for political participation and their interaction with the broader social, cultural, and political realities.

The previous section detailed how the development of interest for political agency is intertwined with societal and community engagement. These engagements can foster the development of resources and power necessary for political engagement. The data revealed that power acquisition can emerge from others with whom the politician may not have direct interaction but who are familiar with the politician's goals, experience, qualifications, and ideologies (linking ties). This shows that power or resources to engage in politics may stem from bonding and bridging ties.

After developing interest and desire as part of their political agency, the data indicates that politicians are likely to participate in activities related to their interest. These activities serve as platforms to promote personal interests, attracting like-minded individuals to support these interests (Scrivens and Smith 2013:30–32). This behaviour facilitates the building of social networks, as individuals with common goals unite for collective action. As these networks are constructed around individual personal goals, power for political agency is developed (Scrivens and Smith 2013:32). The members of these networks can then motivate the individual to participate in politics. This congregation of like-minded individuals with shared goals supporting politicians

can be viewed as self-initiated access to social capital. Essentially, through these networks' individual acquire psychological and symbolic resources, serving as a source of power to engage in politics. Here, the individual purposefully establishes networks around their political agencies, leading to the development of power and resources. This aligns with prior literature affirming the relationship between motivation and power acquisition (Deci and Ryan 2012).

In delving in-depth into the data, the study findings suggest that politicians' interest for political participation enables them to tap into social networks sharing their ideologies and objectives. These networks consequently become sources of power for these politicians. Further analysis suggests that power manifests through endorsements and political recruitment. Various factors play significant roles in political recruitment and endorsement (Norris and Lovenduski 1995), including personal connections (bonding ties): individuals familiar with the politician's areas of interest who recommend the individual based on this knowledge to run in elections. This was observed in the case of the politician whose quote is attracted below

“... so, I remember very well, that was why I even stood as the GRASAG women commissioner... Watching GTV govern and then I had a call, that eerm would I be interested to run for the women's organizer of the party in the region? ... seems they were actually just brainstorming or looking for eerm for a candidate eerm I mean for the women front... And so that was the beginning of my career officially... oh ok so the discussion was between two males, one family and one friend”. (Lordina, Greater Accra, 10 March 2023, 6.40pm)

The quote shows how her interest as political agency led to soliciting social networks that are crucial for acquiring significant power for political participation. Developing interest for political engagement helped her carve out a place for herself in society and the community. She did this by sharing her skills and goals with her close connections and others around her. This also allowed her to build a social network with people who shared her vision. These actions helped her find some outside motivation or psychological affirmation related to her interests. She had already shown leadership by running for women-related positions in school. So, when a slot for a women's organizer opened in her party, she was recommended. This recommendation came from the social networks, thereby suggesting the relationship between development of power for political agency and social capitals.

Her previous work and interests made her stand out from other candidates. So, those who recommended her, who were part of her close network, knew her interest for politics. So, it made it easier for her to officially join the political field. They did not recommend her for any other

position, but for what they knew she was passionate about. This shows the important role of showcasing political interest in attracting necessary endorsement and power. It also highlights how individuals' interest for politics influences the type of social networks and social resources they access.

The data also suggests that her power as a constituent for her political agency results from personal relationships and being part of social networks. This agrees with research on how social networks shape political participation. Putnam (2000) says that people with strong ties to a political organization are more likely to be politically active. The data also emphasizes the role of informal recruitment in Ghana's political field. During the fieldwork, I observed that this could lead to an imbalance of power and favouritism, where unsuitable individuals are recruited simply because they have connections to those in power. This is in line with Lin (2017:787) who says that social resources only benefit a small group of people in powerful networks. Those who are not lucky enough to be part of these networks tend to miss out on these benefits.

The politician's power and resources came from her involvement with social networks and political recruitment practices. This shows how strong her social network is in attracting power and resources (political recruitment) based on her self-awareness. However, the data also shows that close connections and strong ties are not the only factors that lead to power acquisition. Other things like qualifications and experience play a role too. Power can come from the community, organizations, and political parties who recommend individuals based on their experiences, skills, and passion needed for success in politics (bridging and linking social capital) (Lim 2008; Norris and Lovenduski 1995). This power and capitals mostly come from weak ties who are aware of the politician's work or see the value of their skills in the field. These recommendations may also come from weak ties that have access to the strong social networks and connections of the politician. However, it is observed that for these weak ties to enhance social capitals and power of these politicians, some use the strategy of intentional creating networks with these weak ties and then market their political interest to them. This strategy targets specific networks the politician wants to align with. It is observed that this strategy works well with male politician's because they do not have social, cultural, and religious restricts that tend to restrict their associations.

"I got in touch with people and and it got to a time that the people thought that I could do more if I was given the opportunity. So basically, it is the people who pushed me into politics. I always say that I did not set out to go to parliament or anything but the people virtual pushed me to take that mantle". (Dela, Greater Accra, 7 February 2022, 5pm)

Just like this politician was driven by the problems in his community, so he decided to work more closely with the people to make things better. Through his work with the people, they asked him to represent them in the government. The people believed that he could do more because he had the same goals as them. This was because they knew his goals and interest, which he showed through his work with the people. This finding shows the role of social groups and engagement in promoting his interest and goals. These social groups gave him social resources, which can be seen in community mobilization and social support to run for a government seat.

Also, the data shows how a strong sense of social identity and belonging played a key role in the development of his power or resources. People who strongly identify with a specific social group are more likely to act for the group. Because he identified the needs of the people, there was a group action by the people to give him social support and approval to run for the seat. Social support does not only come from the community, but it can also come in the form of political recruitment from individuals in the community or party officials.

The data further revealed many factors that lead to power or social capital acquisition and suggestion from the masses: making a special place for oneself in the political field and society with one's inner drive largely influencing the type of political hiring one gets. This eventually shows how the social group they joined through their interest leads to the type of social groups they can join in the political field. This politician had already made social connections among the community folks; so, the suggestion helped him to expand these group connections beyond community ties.

The findings suggest that, the form of social capitals and power individuals acquire for their political agency is related to the type of social relationships and social group that they joined in politics. As the politician develops his interest or political agency, he is likely to work with others with similar interests and they may be introduced to new platforms and invited to join groups through their connections. This social connection may help them to join exclusive professional and powerful groups. This supports Scrivens and Smith (2013) study that intrinsic motivation are likely to attract a certain social group access based on shared values and interest. Example:

"...or have interest in politics is honourable Hawa Yakubu though I'm not in her party but the way she was fighting for women, her strength, fighting against all these women belong... belongs to kitchen and all this she makes me develop interest in politics".
(Maame, North, 22 December 2022, 2pm)

The quote emphasizes how her political agency grew out of her admiration for her political role model's stance on promoting women's rights and equality. Interestingly, even though her role model was from a different party, they both shared the common goal of advocating for women. This shows that shared objectives can transcend party lines. The fact that her role model was a woman underscores the significant role female mentors play in fostering motivation in the largely male-dominated field of politics. Research by Lawless and Fox (2010) indicates that women who have exposure to female political leaders are more likely to consider running for political office.

The narration also sheds light on collective social perception on gender role and political agency. These stereotypes and perceptions can hinder women's political agency. Inspired by her political role model, she made efforts to challenge these gender biases and stereotypes in her community, mainly by promoting financial independence among women. Her active involvement and associations within her social network caught the attention of her member of parliament. This led to her being recruited into the main political party and allowed her to connect with and broaden her social network based on her personal reflections and goals.

"I say that where I am I was there when one day my MP called that he wants to meet us and already I'm having an organization some women's susu groups and I'm their secretary there so there I was there when our MP came that he wants to meet the women so we organized the women for..." (Maame, North, 22 December 2022, 2pm)

Her experiences suggests that her focus on women-related issues might limit her connections to only those social networks interested in empowering women. To encapsulate this accurately, I employ the term "empowerment social networks" (Lin 2000a). These are networks formed mostly to empower women and these networks are mostly occupied by women. These networks are typically less influential in the political field (ibid). Although a male member of parliament recommended her, it is likely that he did it as part of a broader strategy to recruit people with skills and experiences that can help the political party succeed (Fox and Lawless 2004; Norris and Lovenduski 1995). He may not have intended to connect her with other political networks that could provide mentoring, financial, or logistical support for her candidacy.

While the recommendation from the member of parliament boosted her visibility and influence in politics, her influence was confined to her own personal reflections and goals. This is unlike politicians who enter politics due to a "development objective," a term this study uses to describe those who join politics to enhance people's living standards and address broader

development issues, regardless of gender. These individuals often can expand their networks and social connections regardless of gender.

The data emphasize the significant role political parties and leaders in Ghana play in shaping politicians' interests, which are based on their personal reflections and how these align with the party's goals and values. The data also show how women's groups and organizations significantly contribute to promoting women's political participation and representation (Tripp 2016). These groups offer women a platform to gather and mobilize around specific political issues and advocate for their rights and interests (Ferree and Mueller 2004).

Previous research indicates that women's social networks are not as powerful as men's social networks (Lin 2000a). This leads to questions about how a political agency support shape individuals' access to appropriate social networks. While one may construct their interest for politics around general community issues, factors such as social norms, socioeconomic status, and location can hinder the development of these exercise of these agencies and the attraction of its associated power or resources. Some politicians have community access, making it easier to develop their agencies that encompass the whole community, regardless of gender. In the excerpt below, the individual discusses how he conveyed his interest to the community by participating in communal labour and development activities. According to Scrivens and Smith (2013), community involvement and volunteering can lead to increased social capital and social network building.

"I getting into politics, I was always part of these communal labour, development activities, sometimes we get together to eerm do some common activities in the area. I was always in the fore front of doing eerrm sanitation activities, taking my own initiatives, providing household dustbins". (Yushawu, North, 17 January 2023, 11.05am)

Though enhancement of social capital can positively influence one's political career (Putnam 2000). Our data indicated that the politician's interest played a crucial role in cultivating social capital within the community. Nonetheless, the impact of social norms and socioeconomic status cannot be disregarded. In line with the social capital theory, it is posited that social networks, coupled with norms of reciprocity and trust, stimulate collective action and cooperation (Putnam 2000:19, 2004).

The politician's engagement in communal labour, an active interaction with the community, fostered a level of trust among community members. His ability to procure resources and provide

household dustbins exhibited his leadership skills and highlighted his socioeconomic standing, catering to a shared community need. Individuals actively participating in community organizations and voluntary associations are more prone to political activity (Verba et al. 1995). Such engagements also contribute to enhancing their social capital (Putnam 1993:161).

The politician's visibility within the community and his interest garnered the attention of opinion leaders, leading to further encouragement for his involvement. These encouraging factors can be perceived as a form of power or resources, stemming from his interest and political agency. This suggested alignment of his values, norms, and objectives with those of the opinion leaders. Furthermore, these interactions also connected him to political networks sharing similar aspirations and principles, which showcases a positive effect of social capital earned from community engagement. This is not different in the case of the participants below.

“The opinion leaders involve those old people in my community who were seen as NDC members who were loyal members and they are willing to die for the party. I mean they are even the reason why I became very strong NDC because it all started by paying my respect to them and telling them my intentions and my activeness and they connected me to other members of the NDC”. (Malike, North, 18 January 2023, 3.25pm)

Community opinion leaders significantly influenced the politician's behaviour. As highlighted in the excerpt, these leaders hold substantial authority in party politics, prompting the participant to willingly forge an association with them, marked by respect. This suggests that in Ghanaian societies, acceptance into certain social networks requires demonstration of worthiness, a strong sense of social identity and belonging (Bawa 2016). And, crucially, the network's willingness to welcome new members (ibid).

The politician, in this instance, made himself amenable to the perspectives and behaviours of the opinion leaders, facilitating access to their social capital. He cultivated a strong identity within the group and participated in behaviours deemed valuable by them. This process of alignment with the opinion leaders' beliefs and values, referred to as conformity, is a key aspect of social influence theory. Furthermore, the politician's actions were also shaped by compliance and obedience.

Overall, the data elucidates how political interest can empower potential political candidates, enabling them to tap into political opportunities. Also form social networks with like-minded politicians. While these opportunities can foster accumulation of capitals for political participation, it is essential to note that individual differences in political interest significantly influence the type

of capitals or resources they access. The data also sheds light on how the development of motivation can be a potential barrier to accessing weaker connections and powerful networks. And how it may limit social capital access in the field. It highlights the role of social norms, geographic location, and socioeconomic status as possible constraints in motivation development. This, in turn, may contribute to the underrepresentation of women in the political space in Ghana.

8.4. Socio-gender context of political agency development

As discussed earlier, the development of political agencies is contingent upon specific sociocultural, economic, and political regimes that shape individuals' capacity for political participation, including the development of interest and acquisition of power. This section delves into the contrasting development political agency in Northern and Greater Accra regions of Ghana and how gender factor into this framework. It examines the complex relationship between varying socio-cultural norms, socialization processes, gender and their impact on the cultivation of interest and power, as well as their subsequent role in social network and social capital access. These two regions offer significant grounds for exploring the differing sociocultural and economic contexts that may shape individuals' political agency, given the sharp contrasts in economic development, sociocultural norms, and religious beliefs in these two regions (see table no. 1.2). In attempt to understand these sociocultural nuances of political agency, participants from both regions were interviewed and observed. For instance, during an interview, a participant from the Northern region underscored how he developed his political agency. To him and other participants from the region argue that their political agency emanated from the need to change the narratives in terms of community development. The excerpt below shows an example of such perspective.

“So, I must say I was fed with politics at an early age. But as I I I said what inspired me to enter politics was not because of them I mean my uncles and grandfather rather it was how to bring change and do things differently.... Yes, because I would say I was privileged than other children my age so the whole issue was how I could make my people enjoy some of the privileges I enjoyed due to the fact that I come from a sort of rich family. Yes yes so for me making good out of politics inspired me yes I believed I made good out of it and still making good”. (Yushawu, North, 17 January 2023, 11.05am)

He emphasizes the prevalent poverty in the Northern region of Ghana and how the politicians view politics as a conduit for enhancing the society's economic state. It sheds light on the economic and developmental disparities in the region, contributing to significant youth migration to the South (Adaawen and Owusu 2013). The quote illustrates how the politician is not

merely a passive recipient of social norms and expectations. Instead, he actively shapes his identity and sense of purpose through interactions with others and his environment.

His interest for political participation was built around the desire to effect change in society by bettering their economic conditions. This political interest was influenced by the system failures in the Northern region and empathetic social observations. This system failure can be attributed to leadership attitudes, mismanagement of resources, or the minority in power monopolizing the nation's wealth. Bourdieu (1991) further attests that social capital can often serve to enhance the rich's wealth while impoverishing the poor. Which confirms the system failures in his community in relation to the corrupt leadership attitudes.

The excerpt highlights his unique advantage over the typical child in Northern region of Ghana, given his upbringing in a wealthy, politically grounded family. It further underscores the harsh living conditions experienced by locals and the inherent difficulties of succeeding without access to quality education, clean water, and basic amenities. Drawing upon Verba, Scholzman and Brady's research (1995), the data implies that politics can serve as a tool for societal betterment. The individuals' actions within a political system can be instrumental in achieving shared goals. In the North, the primary motivational force appears to be communal development, rather than personal gain. Nevertheless, the data reveals that previous parliamentary members from the region primarily pursued their own interests, a trend that contributed to increased unemployment and poverty in the region.

In the Greater Accra region, which is more developed than the Northern region in terms of socioeconomic standards, the politician also constructed his interest around developmental issues. This was similar to other politicians in the Greater Accra region who also perceived a lack of good water, roads, job opportunities, quality education, and other essential amenities. This suggests that, while Northerners may perceive Greater Accra region as developed, its residents believe there is still room for improvement. According to this male politician:

“Yes, I am very much interested eerrm when the community is developing and everyone is happy, everyone has potable water, good education yea... Politics is the way”. (Lemuel, Greater Accra, 15 March 2023, 10.25am)

His political agency was deeply rooted in addressing developmental issues. This suggests that the community was deprived of certain amenities essential for a comfortable life, driving him to focus on resolving these problems. The quote further underscores the significance of basic

necessities like clean water and quality education for community progress. This is in line with the concept of human development that advocates for enhancing individual welfare through access to education, healthcare, and other basic needs (United Nations Development Programme 2015).³⁶ Empirical research also corroborates the beneficial impact of investments in human development, showcasing improved outcomes in areas such as economic growth and poverty alleviation (World Bank 2019).

In terms of regional contexts, male politicians from both the Northern and Greater Accra regions commonly build similar interest for political engagement. Referred to in this study as “development objective”. Some female politicians in the North, however, shape their political agency based on their socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. While most male politicians in both regions revolve around development, some Northern male politicians focus on improving their economic standing. This discrepancy is likely due to the economic development gap between the Northern and Greater Accra regions, with the latter being more privileged. In the face of economic and political struggles, individuals often shape their political interests as a means to transform their economic situation, irrespective of gender (Kassa 2015). Thus, by focusing their political participation on improving their economic status, Northern male politicians align with the economic conflict theoretical perspective (Jauch and Watzka 2016).

The data reveal that the difference in constructing political agency between female politicians in both regions stems from socio-cultural norms and development gaps. Social norms significantly shape the political agency of politicians. Norms surrounding gender, ethnicity, and religion can influence political engagement, particularly in areas where traditional values are entrenched and preserved. Unsurprisingly, women in the Northern region often centre their political interest on issues of women's empowerment.

The data suggest that interest and power for political agency are built on the identification with specific social values and the ambition to alter these norms and values. Perceived as underdeveloped and lacking gender-friendly norms (Odame 2014), the Northern region stimulates female participants to develop interest around these issues and the drive to change such narratives. Given community expectations regarding female behaviour, politicians who have experienced

³⁶ <https://hdr.undp.org/content/human-development-report-2015>

gender inequality in such societies develop interest that prioritize gender equality and empowerment.

According to Lin (2000), politicians who emphasize women's empowerment are more likely to engage with societal groups and networks that share the same goals, facilitating power acquisition. Social norms and developmental gaps can also shape the type of power and capitals that politicians' access. In the case of politicians prioritizing women's empowerment, they tend to attract and build social networks around this cause in society. Based on the work of Lilleker and Koc-Michalska (2017), politicians may cultivate agencies based on the rewards valued within their social group or political culture. The data suggest that politicians construct their agencies around perceived societal deficits. The type of interest developed by politicians can profoundly impact their behaviour and the social groups they choose to join.

Research indicates that the political atmosphere and economic status in various regions can influence the external rewards, or social connections, that politicians can access (Eley 1990). This, in turn, can affect their social network and the social capital they can access. In regions with stringent norms against women's rights, politicians may focus on rewards such as women's empowerment and economic independence. Meanwhile, in areas with liberal norms towards women, politicians may focus more on broader development. According to Abdulai and Hulme (2015), Northern region politicians are more likely to seek rewards like resource access and patronage networks. Conversely, those from the Greater Accra region often prioritize public service and cooperation. These differing political agencies are largely due to the distinct historical, cultural, economic, and political factors that have shaped each region's conditions (Abdulai and Hulme 2015).

Furthermore, research shows that the political field is largely male dominated (Ballington 2008). This is due to issues like work-life balance, sociocultural norms, financial hurdles, and negative public views on women in politics, particularly in elected roles (ibid). Conversely, women face fewer challenges when they assist political parties without vying for positions or contest for women-specific roles within the party (Lyons 2005). So, if we disregard stereotypes of women choosing gender-related or general political positions, what motivates a greater number of women and men to pursue a political career?

The data suggests that female politicians often build an “empowerment objective” as their political agency, leading to increased acquisition of power and network growth. However, studies indicate that women's networks are often less powerful and limited in scope (Lin 2000b), generating social capital insufficient to boost female political engagement (ibid). Conversely, male politicians tend to cultivate “development objective” toward their political agencies and participation. This aligns with Lawless and Fox's findings (2010) that men are commonly driven by “development objective”, while women may be more inspired by “empowerment objective”. The following excerpt provides insight into how female politicians form their political interest, which is rooted in empowerment objective as a political agency.

“My interest in politics I don't know it was my, this thing even though I was having the interest to get into politics but I didn't know how to get into it ... My main reason is like we Northerners' women's this thing woman's voice are not heard I don't know whether it is morality or or that's how or is it is a tradition, even in the family ...”. (Linda, North, 7 February 2023, 2.37pm)

Her interest for political participation was based on gender-appropriate behaviour, a concept stemming from societal definitions of gender roles (Akita 2010; Bawa and Sanyare 2013; Kacmar et al. 2011). Her views highlight a perceived bias in societal structures that enforce such behaviour. She was heavily influenced by societal and familial norms. These align with the social role theory, which suggests that gender roles and expectations are based on sex differences within a society (Eagly and Wood 2012). Such norms significantly shape political interest and social capital acquisition.

Her statement also exposes a desire to use politics to challenge gender inequality, especially in the Northern region. It underscores the political knowledge these women possess and their eagerness to contest gender disparities in their society and political institutions. Moreover, it highlights the considerable regional variations in female political representation in Ghana. Women from the Northern region is particularly underrepresented. This disparity may stem from their unique agencies, differing from their Southern counterparts. As one politician from the Greater Accra region shared,

“I started working with the NGO sector... so basically, I became interested in you know things around women and leadership, politics, and leadership, even though personally I did not want to do politics. So, at one point I happened to be training a group of women, fishmongers in leadership, how they can play leadership roles at the community level because it is not a concept new to them, it something they do already at the local sorry within the family settings. Because most of the homes along the coast are headed by females

so I was encouraging them to take up formal roles and then there was eerrm an opportunity to contest for a position ... so who best to contest than the teacher”. (Ameyo, Greater Accra, 7 December 2021, 1.45pm)

Her interest for politics, also centred on women's empowerment, albeit differently from the politician from the Northern region. She narrates her journey to becoming interested in women's leadership and politics, a path she was not initially drawn to. Her association with an NGO, which aimed to uplift women in the community, played a role in shaping her political agency. The data suggests that gender-appropriate behaviour is somewhat more liberal in the Greater Accra region. She explained that women in the Greater Accra region often head families, unlike in the Northern region, where women reported having limited voice even within family contexts. Therefore, while both participants focused on women's empowerment, the extent varied. The Northern female politician spoke of empowerment starting from the family, extending to society and governance. The female politician from the Greater Accra region concentrated on societal and formal empowerment.

In contrast, another politician from the Greater Accra region found her political interest in addressing developmental issues.

“Ok hmm ok it started more of interest in leadership not necessarily in politics.... When I went to the university, I was a class representative, which we normally call a class rep and then I was also the vice president of then ... student association of Ghana, and I was also the president of my local rotary club of university. So, I think it was more to do with leadership and what you can offer as a leader ..., I got appointed to the board of the ... I also was helping with the manifesto, the ... party manifesto, the area of infrastructure, ...”. (Joana, Greater Accra, 17 November 2022, 10.45am)

First, the female politician pointed out that her leadership interest started outside of the political field. This emphasizes the point that leadership traits are not limited to politics but can be developed in various situations. This aligns with the trait theory of leadership, suggesting that certain natural characteristics, like intelligence, charisma, and honesty, can help people be effective leaders (Sethuraman and Suresh 2014; Verawati and Hartono 2020).

Her interest for political participation evolved through experiences of educational leadership. She had led student groups since her school years and held various leadership roles not solely related to women's issues. The politician also noted her political involvement through appointments to government boards and her contributions to a party manifesto. This indicates she had substantial connections within the party that enabled her access to such roles and boards. The

social identity theory theorizes that people may feel a stronger connection to groups they see as similar to themselves, contributing to gender-based differences in political representation (Tajfel and Turner 2004). She found that they shared similar identities, which made her comfortable associating with them. Additionally, her relevant experiences made her an accepted member of their network.

However, male politicians seem to have a different approach to developing their political interest, as the following quote suggests.

“... so, politics has always been in my family but you know but I got inspired because of my sense of community because I believe we can use politics for a greater good to make progressive changes in the livelihood of the people”. (Malike, North, 18 January 2023, 3.25pm)

The politician's interest was based on civic engagement, which this study terms as "development objective". He aimed to take part in activities that enhance his community's social, economic, and political wellbeing. He viewed politics as a benefit for everyone, not as a means for selfish gains. As per Putnam (2000), civic engagement is crucial for building social capital and fostering social unity. From his viewpoint, this study suggests that he is driven to address unequal opportunity distribution among community members. He aspired to resolve economic inequality, discrimination, and community marginalization, attracting similar social connections.

The data highlighted an intriguing aspect about the development of political interest among female politicians, even those who harboured "development objective". Despite their involvement in activities that typically characterize politicians, they did not want to be labelled as politicians.

“.... I would not say I had an interest in politics right from the beginning, I was not too much interested into politics, especially political leadership but growing up I had to take up roles and responsibilities in the church and then to the community and then I started working with eerrm the NGO sector so from the international NGO, then local NGO, so basically, I became interested in you know things around women and leadership, politics and leadership ...”. (Ameyo, Greater Accra, 7 December 2021, 1.45pm)

Female politicians often seek external validation, displaying less confidence in their pursuits. Consequently, when they receive external affirmation, they may be unprepared, having not anticipated this extrinsic encouragement and social capitals. In contrast, men engaging in activities driven by intrinsic motivation often have a strategic plan for their chosen field. They intentionally work towards external validation, which act as a source of psychological power or resource for their political agencies. This aligns with Fox and Lawless's findings (2005; 2010),

who discovered that women are less likely to vie for political office due to their comparatively lower nascent political ambitions.

In Ghana's Northern region, female politicians encounter more obstacles than their male counterparts. They often have lower education levels and face social pressure to choose or prioritize domestic duties over political engagement (Odame 2014). These challenges, further explored in previous chapters, were found to impact the construction of political interest and soliciting social capitals these female politicians prioritized. Making them focus on women's empowerment and poverty reduction. Conversely, research discovered that female politicians in the Greater Accra region of Ghana leaned towards education and human rights issues (Odame 2010). This could be due to the region's higher economic growth, allowing them to focus on wider issues. This suggests how gender norms affects political interest and ability or power for political participation (Akita 2010; Bawa and Sanyare 2013; Shiraz 2015). Due to gender bias, women often face issues related to their societal roles, impacting their motivation and social connections.

Essentially, significant differences exist in the development of male and female politicians' political interest. Which is attributed to societal norms, historical contexts, socialization, political party dynamics, gender norms, and individual qualifications and experiences. Male politicians are likely to build a "development objective", while female politicians tend to cultivate an "empowerment objective". Some manage to blend both empowerment and development objectives, thus creating what the study refers to as "emdevelopment objective".

The research reveals that Ghanaian women encounter numerous obstacles in gaining political power due to cultural and social norms, discrimination, and resource shortages. These challenges may affect female politicians' political interest and resource capacity. To conclude, the motivation behind the development of male and female politicians in Ghana is complex and multi-layered, shaped by various factors that mirror the region's cultural, historical, and political terrain.

In conclusion, noticeable regional differences exist in construction of political agencies Northern and Greater Accra region of Ghana. These disparities are largely attributed to differences in cultural, economic, and political environments. Social norms and developmental gaps significantly affect how politicians in different Ghanaian regions develop motivations and access social networks. Therefore, understanding local political culture and economic situations is vital when studying politicians' access to social capital and how it can influence success. Secondly, the

findings show that interest as a constituent of political agency may be shaped by individuals' gender where women and men construct different goals and agencies towards political participation.

Chapter conclusion

Through the sociological concept of agency, the chapter explored the construction of political interest how the interest leads to acquisition of resources towards political participation. It demonstrated that the construction of political interest and power among Ghanaian politicians is a complex process. This process is influenced by economic status, developmental disparities, sociocultural norms, and personal experiences. This chapter offers a new perspective on the gender gap in accessing social capital in politics by studying differences in political interest.

Differences in political interest were identified as key factors influencing social network access and social capital access. The chapter showed how different objectives shape individuals' political interest such as "empowerment", "development", and "emdevelopment". Empowerment objective, largely centred around women-related issues, leads to the creation of women-centric social networks. Although these networks are perceived as less powerful, they are not exclusive to women. Men who build empowerment interest often combine it with other types, thereby accessing diverse networks. This, the study terms as politicians with "emdevelopment". This group, termed "emdevelopment", also includes female politicians in the Greater Accra region with more than one political objective, one of which is focused on women's issues – and the other on development related issues.

The data revealed that female politicians, particularly those from the North, often focus their political interest on women-centred issues. This is largely due to sociocultural norms and socioeconomic factors that tend to limit women. Which in turn, inspire these women to challenge their circumstances, influencing their political interest and power acquisition. On the other hand, male politicians predominantly build their political interest around development issues, gaining access to related, typically more powerful, networks. The chapter underscored the intricate relationship between political interest, social norms, developmental gaps, social network and capital access. Capitalizing on this knowledge, the next chapter explores the challenges female politicians face in accessing social capitals in the Northern and Greater Accra region of Ghana.

The next chapter will present the conclusion of the thesis.

Chapter nine

Discussion and Conclusion

9.0. Introduction

This chapter synthesizes research findings within the framework of the initial research questions and relevant theoretical perspectives, specifically focusing on the concept of social capital as conceptualized by Bourdieu (1986) and Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998). It explores how these concepts apply to the underrepresentation of women in politics in the Northern and Greater Accra regions of Ghana. The study employs sociological insights to understand how access and utilization of social capital influence female political participation. By leveraging the social capital theories of Bourdieu (1986) and Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), the research examines how enhancing social capital could potentially address the issue of women's underrepresentation in Ghanaian politics.

This study emphasizes the necessity of adopting an agency-focused perspective to comprehend the role of social capital in political engagement, particularly for female politicians in Ghana. It underscores the significance of qualitative research methods, in exploring the development of social capital among politicians. By delving into the challenges faced by female politicians in accessing social capital and incorporating personal experiences, non-participant observations, and document analysis, this study contributes to the discourse on social capitals and their influence on political participation. This study also showcases how political agency facilitates access to social capital while considering the influence of social norms, economic factors, and regional disparities. Furthermore, this research extends the scope of social capital theory by examining its manifestation in the sociocultural landscapes of Ghana's Northern and Greater Accra regions, focusing on the structural, cognitive, and relational aspects of social capital.

The findings of this thesis underscore the importance of power dynamics, political agency, gender, and regional disparities in accessing social capital and networks. While theoretical frameworks such as those of Nahapiet and Ghoshal and Bourdieu, along with other political studies, provide valuable insights, they do not fully capture the nuanced dynamics of power and political agency across diverse sociocultural contexts. Unlike much existing research that predominantly emphasizes the positive aspects of political social capital. This study uses a different approach, examining how political agency and geographical factors influence politicians'

access to social networks, networking capabilities and overall political involvement. The research reveals that social capital can both positively and negatively impact politicians' professional conduct. Additionally, it identifies specific areas within the professional lives of female politicians in Ghana that require improvement to enhance their political engagement. The subsequent sections delve into the detailed findings from the thesis.

9.1. Accessing social capital

The study explores how female politicians in the Northern and Greater Accra regions of Ghana cultivate relational, cognitive, and structural social capital within party spaces, parliament, and the community. Drawing on Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), who identified three types of social capital—structural, cognitive, and relational—the research sheds light on how these forms of capital shape women's political engagement. Specifically, structural social capital, defined by Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) consists of tangible resources within social networks, accessible to individuals or groups, encompassing realized and potential benefits from relationship structures, aiding resource access. This encompasses organizational affiliations, trust-based ties, and shared values, which facilitate adaptation to various social contexts and provide crucial support and resources for individuals' success (Ali-Hassan 2009).

The study revealed that female politicians in the Northern and Greater Accra regions access structural social capital through both informal and professional networks, enhanced entry, and self-initiative. The findings indicate that female politicians in the Northern region often encounter challenges in engaging both the community and their political colleagues. To address these challenges, they rely on informal gatherings, predominantly attended by women, which foster strong ties among attendees. In contrast, those in the Greater Accra region prefer joining clubs and participating in weekend events to cultivate connections, attracting more male attendees. Interviews reveal that in the Northern region, female politicians primarily leverage structural social capital through informal networking activities like hosting parties. Meanwhile, in the Greater Accra region, structural social capital is accessed through professional networks, educational engagements, and club meet-ups. These insights underscore the nuanced ways in which female politicians in different regions of Ghana navigate and utilize social capital in their political activities.

The study highlights how female politicians, in both regions, navigate historically male-dominated political networks by accessing structural social capital. This involves leveraging familial ties, professional associations, and community networks to establish themselves in spaces where they might otherwise be marginalized. While female politicians in both regions employ strategies such as enhanced access and self-promotion, there are nuances in their approaches. Northern women often rely on informal activities and networks due to challenges in accessing education and employment. According to (Bourdieu 1986), an educational background acts as a conduit to cultural capital, serving to strengthen network strategies and facilitate access to connections spanning various networks (Granovetter 1973; Putnam 2000). In contrast, women in Greater Accra predominantly utilize professional-based networks. These differences influence the types of social capital and networks accessed, with Northern women engaging more with female-centric networks while those in Greater Accra have a more balanced mix of genders. Additionally, some politicians disclosed how their access to social capital was enhanced by others, and familial connections were found to play a role in uncovering and enhancing the skills of female participants, though this varies based on social norms and culture. This illustrates the potential for achieving goals through distant ties with the assistance of key individuals (Bourdieu 1986; Burt 1992, 1998; Granovetter 1973; Putnam 2000).

Some female politicians in both regions also proactively seek to access social capital themselves. This involves actively nurturing connections, networks, and relationships to gain access to resources, opportunities, and support within a specific social context. Cook (2016) proposes strategies such as creating new social networks and enhancing existing ones. Some politicians have embraced this approach, integrating new networks with established ones rather than solely relying on pre-existing relationships or external facilitators, demonstrating proactive efforts in building and leveraging social capital.

The cognitive dimension of social capital, defined by the shared visions and objectives within an organization, is crucial. As outlined by Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998:251), shared knowledge is central to this dimension. The thesis explores how female politicians access social capital, focusing on informal political socialization and shared knowledge. Female politicians in both regions recognize the necessity of understanding the political landscape to gain favour with top hierarchies. However, traditional gender roles and patriarchal norms in the Northern region of Ghana, as well as educational disparities in the Greater Accra region, present barriers to accessing

shared knowledge. Leveraging their expertise and education is one strategy employed by many women in the Greater Accra region to overcome these obstacles. The Greater Accra region, characterized by urbanization, offers more opportunities for female engagement, impacting cognitive social capital. Educational differences (see fig 1.8, 1.9) exacerbate this gap, with fewer role models and support networks available in the North. Additionally, power structures vary between regions, with the North relying more on traditional authorities and the Greater Accra region providing diverse community engagement avenues.

Informal meetings facilitate knowledge sharing, but some politicians face barriers such as exclusion or financial constraints. This highlights the interrelation between cognitive and relational social capital, both of which rely on trust. Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998:244), define relational social capital as the network of personal connections that politicians develop with constituents, colleagues, party leaders, and other key figures through continuous interaction. This type of social capital involves obtaining resources, benefits, and advantages from one's social networks and relationships, a notion introduced by Bourdieu (1985). Relational social capital plays a crucial role in cultivating trust and cooperation within social networks, based on the perception of others' dependability, honesty, and kindness (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998). This type of social capital is characterized by shared norms and values, also known as cognitive social capital (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998). This section was categorized under two themes: currency of effort and strategic alliance.

The findings indicates that the "currency of effort," represented by time invested in networking activities, is crucial for garnering future support among politicians (Adler and Kwon 2002). This aligns with (Putnam 1995b) idea that present efforts yield future returns, fostering strong bonds between politicians, constituents, and other political figures (Lin 2002). Some female politicians believe that diverse connections can bridge structural gaps (Granovetter 1973), but are hindered from nurturing relationships due to financial constraints. Female politicians, especially in the Greater Accra region, stress the importance of building relational social capital, prioritizing financial resources and time. Notably, women in this region actively translate discussions into action, giving them an edge over counterparts in the North and highlighting regional advancements in addressing gender concerns. Furthermore, select politicians in Greater Accra maintain regular interactions with both genders, demonstrating strategic alliances that vary in nature and stakeholder involvement.

Female politicians in the North struggle to establish strategic alliances compared to their counterparts in the Greater Accra region. Structural holes in access exist in both regions, with few instances of female politicians acting as brokers, primarily due to family inherited social capital fostering long-term trust (Adler and Kwon 2002). However, female politicians in the North face challenges in benefiting from such relationships, contrary to Bourdieu (1985) suggestion that enduring connections promote reciprocity. Gender and geographical location significantly affect the dynamics of family inherited social capital. In contrast, female politicians in the Greater Accra region leverage interactions with diverse groups to enhance bridging social capital, while also strengthening bonds within their own networks, fostering bonding social capital. This aligns with Gidengil and O'Neill (2010) and Lancee (2010), who argue that cosmopolitan urban settings facilitate the development of both forms of social capital. Actively participating in community groups and diverse social networks significantly enriches their social capital.

In the Northern region, female politicians voice concerns about limited access to strong male social networks, attributing it to gender-biased social norms confining women to domestic roles, hindering networking opportunities outside the home. This highlights a disparity: female politicians in the Greater Accra region benefit from a distinct social capital type, not shared by those in the North, due to the Greater Accra region's geographical and cosmopolitan features fostering gender equality. The study also reveals that relationship building in both regions primarily revolves around gender-specific networks, with differences noted: Northern participants emphasize community gender bonds, while Greater Accra participants enjoy access to a broader range of connections, owing to the region's liberal socio-cultural environment (see table no.1.2.). Notably, influential gender-centric networks accessible to politicians differ between regions, with Greater Accra offering more diverse connections, although women remain prevalent. This emphasizes the importance of leveraging geographical characteristics in shaping the political trajectories of female politicians, whether through close-knit Northern communities or extensive Greater Accra networks.

9.2. Social capital utilization and its influence on female political participation

The research examines how female politicians in the Northern and Greater Accra regions utilize relational, cognitive, and structural social capital within party spaces, parliament, and communities, drawing on Nahapiet and Ghoshal's (1998). Social networks, as emphasized by (Burt 1992, 2005), provide access to information, a crucial aspect of structural social capital, influenced

by the quality of relationships within these networks. Party committees serve as sources of social capital, collectively created, and shared among members. Analysis of female politicians' diverse connections and interactions across social, cultural, and organizational contexts sheds light on social capital's impact on political participation. The data reveals diverse information-gathering approaches among female participants, ranging from reliance on close ties to weaker ties (Granovetter 1973).

While experiences of receiving information and support are not region-specific, a commonality is the gendered nature of information, with few instances of non-gendered content. Those connected by weaker ties or what Granovetter (1973) refers as “strength of weak ties”, benefit from advice stemming from active involvement in shared interests, accessing a broad array of connections. Female politicians with expansive networks of weak ties across genders, executives, and community leaders tend to be more successful due to the breadth of information and advice they receive. This diverse input aids in decision-making and the effective utilization of social resources in politics.

Political parties rely on information to select candidates, prioritizing individuals who align with their principles and ideologies, even in gender-specific roles. Some participants noted strategic selection by senior party members based on relayed information, shaping their careers towards gender-focused leadership roles. This underscores the influence of recruitment practices and information sharing on political leadership diversity, echoing the findings of Gatto and Wylie (2021). Politicians disseminate information across various venues they frequent, termed 'social places,' including religious venues, offices, and other daily visitations. These places serve as hubs for social gatherings, fostering networks and facilitating access to structural social capital. Engaging with constituents in such settings is crucial for building trust and exchanging information. Interestingly, female politicians in both the Northern and Greater Accra regions predominantly interact with women. In the Northern region, interactions, albeit less frequent, focus on acquiring trades for financial independence without male involvement, while regular meetings in Greater Accra markets reflect women's financial autonomy there.

Bourdieu (1986:249) highlights the role of daily interactions in accruing social capital, linking it to network size and accumulated social capital. This perspective explains why female politicians in the Greater Accra region prioritize development issues, contrasting with their Northern counterparts' emphasis on gender equality. The parliament's location in Greater Accra

affords these female politicians' better access to constituents, fostering stronger relationships. In contrast, Northern female politicians face hurdles in maintaining regular communication due to financial constraints and geographical distance. Greater Accra region female politicians engage with constituents daily, strengthening trust-building efforts. This underscores the significance of informal communication in strengthening ties and sharing knowledge and resources. However, female politicians encounter challenges in balancing professional duties and family responsibilities, particularly pronounced in the Northern region due to the gender-specific nature of social meeting places, unlike the more inclusive environments in Greater Accra.

The findings reveal power and access imbalances within the political sector, noting that female politicians are often confined to gender-defined roles, limiting their capacity to attain broader positions and influence. This issue is rooted in entrenched socio-cultural norms prevalent in politics, echoing Bourdieu's perspective that social networks' position clustering often shapes reward distribution and network structure (Bourdieu 1984, 1989). While navigating these inequities poses challenges, some female politicians have successfully leveraged pre-existing connections within traditionally male-dominated networks, facilitating interactions with influential figures and smoothing their integration into politics. This aligns with Bourdieu's insights into power dynamics within social networks.

Furthermore, power distribution among politicians varies, impacting resource allocation, contrary to Coleman (1988) notion of social capital as a public good. Some Greater Accra region female politicians overcome structural power obstacles by forming networks in male-dominated fields outside their professional realm, aiding their political endeavours. However, forming such networks is notably difficult for female politicians in the Northern region, particularly outside the political sphere. The study underscores the pivotal role of information flow, power structures, and networking in shaping the political participation of female politicians, emphasizing the structural aspects of social capital that influence resource and opportunity distribution within political networks. These elements significantly impact how female politicians utilize their social capital and execute their roles, including the types of connections they maintain.

However, beyond structural considerations, the thesis explores other factors influencing the political participation of female politicians. While structural social capital is crucial for cultivating and leveraging social capital, mere membership in various networks does not guarantee meaningful relationships or political success. Extensive networks contribute to social capital

effectively only when paired with relational and cognitive social capital, as noted by Burt (1992). The cognitive dimension of social capital, described by Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998:251), involves shared knowledge, objectives, values, culture, and expertise within networks. Studies have shown that networks sharing mutual goals and values enhance collaborative work significantly (Elmir et al. 2013; Nohrstedt 2016). In politics, a unified objective and culture manifest in the management of resources and decision-making processes. Networks characterized by shared norms and objectives cultivate trust, mutual support, and a shared identity. Aligned values and norms not only boost group endeavours but also make collaborative initiatives more achievable (Berger and Luckmann 1967).

The findings reveal a recurring pattern in the political landscape, where women carve out unique norms and spaces due to the inadequacy of existing norms in providing fair opportunities for trust and involvement. This phenomenon is evident not only in the Greater Accra region but also in the Northern region. Women, leveraging their insights, collaborate with fellow women to advocate for gender empowerment, challenging institutional constraints on their roles. The specific context and shared goals profoundly shape the political participation of female politicians in the political sphere. Regular engagement with voters and network members is crucial for maintaining trust within these networks. However, this is challenging, as the political environment often overlooks the distinct needs of female politicians, who must balance professional roles with societal and personal obligations.

Cognitive social capital, defined as shared knowledge and insights within social networks by Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), plays a crucial role in fostering learning, innovation, and problem-solving within these networks. This concept emphasizes intellectual assets and skills exchanged through social interactions, including collaborative abilities and productive discussions (Lin 1999a; Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998). Such connections significantly facilitate community involvement and reciprocal support, as observed by Stjernqvist et al. (2018).

In the Northern region, female politicians collaborate with other women to challenge male dominance by promoting financial independence, a strategy empowering women in both the Greater Accra and Northern regions to exert influence in the public sphere. This trend arises from the difficulties female politicians, particularly in the North, encounter in building cognitive social capital with male colleagues. To address this, they leverage informal networks to cultivate trust and establish shared values among women, emphasizing the importance of aligned goals and

cultural insights in fostering cognitive social capital within politics. These efforts foster a collective mindset, encouraging politicians to bridge gaps across party lines, regional divides, cultural differences, and gender barriers, pooling knowledge and expertise for the electorate's benefit.

However, the thesis highlights a disconnect between national party leaders, who generally support women's empowerment, and regional executives, whose aims vary due to local cultural norms. This disparity leads to reduced cooperation and knowledge exchange. Additionally, there is a reluctance at senior party levels to share information and skills with women, driven by a perception of women's inferiority as politicians. This attitude fosters networks predominantly among like-minded male politicians, limiting opportunities for women's advancement and collaboration. Consequently, female politicians form their own networks, but these are often hindered by party loyalties, resulting in less effective associations.

Furthermore, the research reveals that social capital encompasses formal and informal social interactions, as well as culturally and politically integrated networks. Nahapiet and Ghoshal categorize this as structural social capital, facilitating information sharing within and among political networks. Female politicians in the Ghana recognize the benefits of connections to male-dominated networks, as these hold hierarchical power, promoting group cohesion and advancing gender equality goals within parliament. It is observed that politicians foster consensus within their networks through interactions with colleagues and constituents. However, restricted access for women in these networks hampers their ability to engage in and shape prevailing political norms. Political leaders often prefer to connect with trusted individuals, typically those with strong party affiliations. As a result, female politicians with established political family ties, especially in the Greater Accra region with longstanding party connections, excel in navigating these gender-specific challenges, underscoring the interplay of human and social capital in politics.

New female entrants in politics often struggle to forge strong relationships due to the long histories and reciprocity norms of existing networks, which tend to marginalize them and limit their access to resources and benefits. Consequently, female politicians typically build social capital with other women, family members, and a few individuals outside their professional sphere. However, many fail to expand their network connections due to socialization, familial duties, and societal expectations. Even those who recognize the importance of wider networks, particularly in the Northern region, face limited access. Women who manage to infiltrate male-dominated networks often underutilize them, prioritizing family over potential benefits like information

sharing and collective decision-making, outcomes of relational social capital based on mutual trust in social networks. Unlike men, these women struggle to exploit structural gaps, thereby restricting their access to various potential advantages (Burt 1992).

Trust plays a crucial role in the networks of female politicians in these regions, enabling access to resources, information, and support essential for success. In regions facing gender-based challenges, like the Northern region, trust is fundamental for establishing legitimacy and influence. Female politicians rely on trusted relationships for mentorship and access to influential networks, crucial for navigating institutional obstacles and advancing their political agendas through reciprocal relationships, thereby improving their political position.

Relational social capital, as defined by Lin (1999a), is essential for providing social support and mobilizing resources. The works of Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), and Lin (2001) emphasize the importance of strong relationships and networks in accessing various resources such as knowledge, financial capital, and social connections. Individuals with substantial relational social capital can utilize these resources to tackle challenges, capitalize on opportunities, and achieve their objectives, as highlighted by Portes (1998). However, female politicians in the Northern region indicate that their tendency to form groups with other women limits their access to the dominant group and diverse resources. This contrasts with female politicians in the Greater Accra region, who leverage technical skills and educational backgrounds to access the dominant group, aligning with Nahapiet and Ghoshal's argument that leaders in organizations foster interpersonal relations through interactions and recognition of employees' skills and abilities (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998:254–56).

The findings highlight the role of prolonged familial connections in uncovering and enhancing the skills and expertise of female politicians, thus improving their decision-making capabilities, although this varies significantly based on geographic location. Trust, stemming from longstanding family ties with political parties, can overcome gender barriers and create opportunities for female candidates, albeit influenced by geographical factors. Trust is paramount in enduring political relationships, yet geographical settings can hinder women from gaining the necessary trust for fostering reciprocal, collaborative behaviours and teamwork.

Within the context of political networking, a politician's interactions span various individuals, considering gender dynamics, network structures, and ties to fellow politicians,

interest groups, constituents, and prominent party leaders. The thesis delves into the structural aspects of social capital and its impact on female politicians' political participation, particularly highlighting their strategies for utilizing network-based resources to exchange information, mobilize resources, and amplify their influence. Female politicians interact with a diverse individual significantly shaping their political trajectory, contributing various levels of social capital that enable them to utilize both horizontal and vertical forms of social capital. However, in the Northern region, female politicians often engage primarily with other women to pursue independence from men, forming exclusive female groups that displace men and exacerbate power dynamics. Consequently, the social capital accessed by these female groups is gender-specific, limiting broader social capital access. This finding aligns with the notion that the efficacy of a social network in generating social capital depends on the strength or weakness of connections and the willingness to share resources among members (Burt 1992; Granovetter 1973).

Some female politicians especially in the Northern region express feeling marginalized within their parties, unable to access resources because they are not part of the inner circles that cultivate social capital. Their networks primarily consist of colleagues, friends, and family, providing critical support in politics, known as horizontal social capital, yet proving insufficient. Access to vertical social capital, involving engagement with high-ranking political figures, remains a challenge for them, resulting in missed benefits from influential connections. However, a few female politicians from the Greater Accra region succeed due to their inherited social capital, educational backgrounds, and geographic diversity.

Difficulties in accessing vertical and horizontal social capital within their own parties lead some female politicians to form cross-party networks. These gender-neutral networks connect them with similarly ranked colleagues but lack significant influence. This aligns with Aalabaf-Sabaghi (2012) and Granovetter's (1973) findings that diverse networks, including those across political parties, correlate with active political engagement and broader societal influence, transcending party or gender limitations. However, the effectiveness and influence of these bipartisan networks on political integrity are critical factors. These networks are typically horizontal, consisting of colleagues of similar or lower status, offering insights, perspectives, and opportunities for collaboration and negotiation. Yet, the lack of vertical ties, particularly outside one's own political party, might restrict their overall impact. This resonates with the views of Burt

(2000) and Lin (2001), noting that merely being part of a social network does not guarantee valuable social capital or influence through association.

Furthermore, networks, especially male-dominated ones in the political field, often constrain the freedom of female members to explore, steering them towards gender-specific roles. Female politicians in these networks typically hold inconsequential roles, limiting their access to resources and reducing their ability to extend influence. This situation arises because men, who often control these networks, assign women to roles they deem suitable, rather than allowing them to operate in roles where they could be more effective. This restricts their functionality in their roles and impedes their ability to build trust as effectively as male counterparts. Efforts to address gender inequality in Ghana's political landscape raise questions about their adequacy. While some participants' networks focus attention on gender issues due to limited access to influential networks, these efforts fall short in tackling gender inequality comprehensively. Female politicians' exclusion from various committees highlights their frequent separation from vital networks essential for effective performance and integration into influential groups. Particularly in the Northern region, female politicians often lack access to diverse networks, contrasting with some participants from the Greater Accra region who broaden their networks beyond female-dominated ones, facilitated by their technical skills. Smith and Jones (2015) suggest that societal roles often align with individual skills and expertise, with better-educated individuals more likely to assume influential roles in their networks. Thus, a female politician's technical expertise can position her as a pivotal figure in her political party, granting access to influential networks.

The focus on the Northern region highlights the impact of societal norms on women's marginalization ingrained in political practices, indicating challenges not solely based on gender but also regional context, significantly affecting structural social capital. This context shapes gender dynamics and impacts women's political participation opportunities. An intersectional perspective reveals how gender dynamics intersect with other societal factors like region or ethnicity, influencing experiences, opportunities, and impacts on structural social capital (Fleming et al. 2022; McCall 2005). This situation limits participants' abilities to develop connections within and outside the political realm, aligning with literature suggesting politicians build networks and goodwill through their roles, involving colleagues, party officials, and peers (Müller 2007). Such networks, a form of social capital, are vital for politicians to acquire necessary resources, information, and opportunities.

9.3. Socio-political contextual dynamics and strategies

Geographic structures significantly influence individuals' access to social capital, as evidenced in studies by Chumnangoon et al. (2021); Murayama et al. (2012) and Suryani and Azmy (2023). Comparing the Northern and Greater Accra regions reveals disparities in developmental stages, educational opportunities, economic progress, networking, and political party dynamics, shaped by differing socio-economic values and norms. These differences significantly impact female politicians' ability to access social capital.

Drawing on Bourdieu (1986) concept of social capital, the study explores cultural, familial, religious, financial, educational, and political party influences on female politicians' access to social capital. Societal and family norms frequently limit women's active involvement and access to specific social circles, particularly evident in the Northern region due to entrenched patriarchal values within family structures. Religious beliefs and cultural norms play pivotal roles in shaping access to social capital, with Islam predominant in the Northern region and Christianity in the Greater Accra region. In Islamic communities in the Northern region, women's roles, regional variations, and local traditions significantly influence access to social capital, often suppressing and marginalizing women. Conversely, in the Greater Accra region, female politicians receive significant support from religious organizations, particularly churches, facilitating access to social capital within Christian worship spaces. This highlights the role of places of worship in building strong community ties and encouraging active participation (Coleman 1988), contrasting with restricted political networking within religious spaces like mosques. Muslim politicians, both male and female, mentioned that there was no avenue for political networking in their religious space. In contrast, Christian politicians noted that they were able to network and access useful resources within their religious communities, aiding their participation in politics.

Research indicates a significant developmental divide between Ghana's Northern and Greater Accra regions, persisting for over a century due to the colonial period's focus on developing the resource-rich South (Aboagye 2021). This divide has left the less developed North facing a scarcity of opportunities, with men dominating limited resources, restricting women's access to financial independence. Economic independence is crucial for women's empowerment in politics; however, the economic challenges in the Northern region deprive women of this, diminishing their political influence. Northern female participants report struggling against longstanding societal hierarchies and limited financial independence environments. In contrast,

the Greater Accra region's economic growth provides female politicians with better opportunities for visibility, outreach, and financial independence, enhancing their ability to build networks and penetrate influential circles, thereby strengthening their social capital.

The study reveals a striking disparity between the importance of family connections in politics in the Greater Accra region and the constraints imposed by social norms on women's political influence in the Northern region, despite familial support. Female participants from the Northern region noted that inherited social capital does not offer crucial network access as in the Greater Accra region, attributed to societal norms. It underscores how cultural, religious, socio-economic, and political factors shape distinct social capital landscapes for women politicians in different regions of Ghana. This demonstrates the intricate and adaptable nature of social capital, influenced by regional specifics and individual perseverance, crucial for understanding and fostering a more equitable political future in Ghana.

Social capital in the Ghanaian political space is rooted in community engagement, trust, and mutual exchange. Most Northern female politicians struggle to access social capital due to a lack of financial independence resulting from the region's underdevelopment, hindering their access to resources typically dispensed in return for financial aid. Brion and Ampah-Mensah (2021) argue that cultural norms and educational backgrounds play a pivotal role in shaping perceptions of women leaders. The data indicates a greater openness in the South towards empowering and educating women, suggesting that changing these norms through education can shift perspectives on female politicians and their access to social capital. The perception of leadership among the populace significantly affects the availability of social capital for female politicians in the Northern and Greater Accra region, influenced by factors such as cultural traditions, education, the roots of social capital, and regional differences. Understanding these nuances is crucial for addressing gender disparities and promoting an increase in women's political leadership. Additionally, the study delves into how these women politicians acquire resources in both regions, which are instrumental in building networks, advocating for causes, and fostering change.

In addition to advanced educational opportunities in the Greater Accra region, participants noted access to empowerment programs crucial for fostering women's leadership. Efforts to extend these benefits to Northern counterparts aim to strengthen their leadership skills and improve their access to social capital. However, the pace of change in the Northern region is slower due to limited

availability of such programs, indicating that entrenched cultural practices require significant changes to fully empower female politicians there. These education and empowerment trainings in the South helped these women become well-versed in the political landscape, enabling them to engage effectively and access similar networks. The thesis underscores that in the party space, social capital formation occurs through professional connections, links to civil society, and academic achievements, aligning with the insights of Lin (2001) and Putnam (1993).

A comparison of networks accessible to female politicians in both the Northern and Greater Accra regions highlights the significant role of geographical settings in networking in the party, impacting the acquisition of social capital. In Ghana, especially in the Northern region, female politicians often struggle to access networks that are not female-dominated, unlike in the Greater Accra region. Some male politicians believe that women struggle to build solidarity and are not willing to help each other, viewing this as a major issue that women face independently of gender bias. However, data from observations, documents, and interviews with female politicians tells a different story. It shows that women struggle to build solidarity, support each other, and access resources because their numbers are few. They lack sufficient resources to support themselves, let alone help other women, unlike their male counterparts in the political space.

Contrasting views on leadership in Ghana's Northern and Greater Accra regions significantly impact women politicians' access to social capital, influenced by traditional norms, community values, and progressive ideas, as discussed by Nannicini et al. (2013). Female politicians' success relies on navigating this multifaceted environment, aligning with prevalent leadership perceptions, and cultivating community relationships. In the Northern region, societal views often question women's leadership capabilities, emphasizing domestic management skills and husband's support for gaining acceptance and enhancing social capital. This contrasts with perceptions in the Greater Accra region, where communities recognize women as leaders regardless of gender. This dichotomy highlights the interplay between cultural settings, societal attitudes, and political engagement in shaping female political leadership across Ghana. This resonates with studies by Fox and Lawless (2005) and Krook (2010).

Female politicians in both Northern Ghana and the Greater Accra region face significant challenges due to gendered hierarchies and labour divisions within their political parties. These hierarchies often align certain roles and committees with men, leading to the exclusion of women who deviate from these gendered standards (Acker 1992:421–27). Such entrenched norms and

expectations, influenced by societal standards, require proactive measures for change. Despite the appearance of unity in political parties, there is an unequal distribution of resources and disparities in meeting participation, with influential figures primarily viewing women as tools to garner female support rather than including them in significant decisions. Women in Northern Ghana particularly struggle with accessing decision-making roles and leadership positions, facing greater obstacles compared to those in Greater Accra, where opportunities are also gendered (Adongo et al. 2023). Only a few women in Greater Accra overcome these barriers due to their expertise and technical knowledge.

Despite growing calls for gender equality and support from some organizations and male advocates for women's political involvement in Ghana, female politicians are often seen as threats to established male dominance, particularly when challenging existing power structures or defying traditional gender roles, consistent with the findings of Phillips (1995). Female politicians in the Northern and Greater Accra regions frequently encounter resistance, backlash, or efforts to undermine their authority and influence as they rise in politics. This aligns with studies indicating that women seeking leadership positions in politics face obstacles including gender bias, stereotypes, and overt discrimination (Childs and Krook 2008; Lawless and Fox 2010; Norris and Lovenduski 1995). This thus created barriers for women in accessing certain networks and cultivating trust within the community and party space.

Moreover, the study transcends merely identifying challenges by exploring the resilience, strategies, and innovative approaches adopted by these women to convert obstacles into opportunities. This perspective sheds light on their capacity to attain political objectives, often overlooked in discussions surrounding women's political participation. Female politicians employ various strategies to navigate challenges and access social capital. For instance, some prioritize maintaining respectful relationships with their husbands to garner their support, which facilitates access to social capital. In contrast, others, particularly in regions like Greater Accra, focus on empowering themselves through education and expertise. This enables them to acquire shared knowledge of the political landscape, enhancing their effectiveness in political engagement. Additionally, some female politicians enlist help with household duties, allowing them to allocate more time to invest in building social networks outside the home environment. These strategies contribute to their ability to leverage social capital for their advancement in politics.

9.4. Political agency

The study explores how individuals construct their political agency and the sources of their ability to exercise it. Individuals may participate in politics based on their interests and capacity to act on these interests. Therefore, understanding the sources of political actors' interests and power is crucial for establishing and understanding political agency. This study examined the sociocultural, political, and economic factors that shape political interest among politicians in Ghana and how these interests are gendered. Additionally, the study investigated the resources that serve as means of power or "ability" to engage in politics and how politicians' gender influences their ability to acquire such resources. Using data from various political actors in Northern Ghana and the Greater Accra region, the study suggests that not only does gender determine political interests and resource acquisition for political participation, but sociocultural and geographical dynamics also play significant roles in shaping political agency.

The findings suggest that political actors in Ghana, particularly in the Northern region and Greater Accra region, construct their political interests around three broader sociocultural, political, and economic dynamics: “empowerment,” “development,” and “emdevelopment” political interests. Individuals are driven by empowerment when social inequality motivates them to consider mainstream politics. While social inequality encompasses various issues such as economic inequality and gender inequality, empowerment political interests in Ghana focus on addressing gender inequality in economic activities, educational opportunities, and political advantages. Individuals engage in mainstream politics to help alter these areas of gender inequality.

Notably, while both women and men may construct empowerment political interests, these interests are more commonly found among female politicians, especially those in the northern part of Ghana who referred to sociocultural practices that undermine women competitive values in the socioeconomic and political ventures. These findings can be contextualized within the broader global discourse on gender inequality, where international organizations, government institutions, and individuals strive for equality. However, it should be noted that while gender constructs may be diverse in the global north and western countries, including LGBTQ+ communities (Dembroff 2020). The gender inequality framework in Ghana and most African countries, as well as the global south, is limited to a binary system of gender. Consequently, empowerment political interests among female political actors in Ghana are constructed within a binary and biologically deterministic framework.

In the current study, "development" political interests were coined to describe the community development objectives that motivate individuals to participate in mainstream politics in Ghana. The findings suggest that while development political interest has significant gender perspectives, its geographical perspective is more nuanced than distinct. Community and constituency development drives many politicians to enter active politics with the aim of effecting change in their communities. Regarding its gender narrative, the study showed that nearly all male politicians who participated constructed their political interest around the need to effect development in their communities and constituencies, with only a few women mentioning development as their political interest. The socioeconomic and infrastructural disparities between the northern region and the southern part of the country, especially the Greater Accra region, serve as reference points for male politicians in the Northern region when constructing their development political interests. Similarly, male politicians in Greater Accra also feel their communities need further development and believe that engaging in politics provides the opportunity to achieve such progress.

Politicians construct "development" political interests when their decision to engage in mainstream politics is driven by a desire to both effect community development and reduce gender inequality, as previously discussed. This interest is predominantly seen among female politicians in the Greater Accra region and some male politicians in both regions. The findings suggest that while community development is central to political interests in both the Northern and Greater Accra regions, women in the North are less concerned with community development. This may be associated with the pervasive sociocultural gender dynamics in the north, which shape women's understanding of gender roles. Women in the Northern region often perceive community development as a masculine domain and focus more on empowerment political interests, driven by their economic conditions and the need to challenge gender roles. Consequently, women in the Northern region concentrate more on empowerment political interests than on other sociocultural and political realities.

In exercising political agency, political actors require capital or resources that give them power. The current study examines how political actors in Ghana negotiate access to this power, leveraging Bourdieu's (1986) notion of social capital. According to Bourdieu, individuals may acquire certain capital within their social networks, which in turn gives them the ability to exercise their agency. Following Bourdieu's perspective, the study examines the various forms of capital

that political actor's access through their social networks, including symbolic and material capital, and how sociocultural and gender dynamics shapes this network access. Symbolic capital encompasses social capital that is symbolic in nature, such as emotional and psychological support and information, while material capital includes social capital that is tangible in nature, such as economic capital.

The results suggest that political actors leverage different forms of social networks, such as political party groups, community groups, family, and friendship networks. Through these various networks, political actors acquire economic support, recommendations, and referrals of other political actors. Most significantly, gender mediates individuals' ability to access these various forms of capital, with women being subject to sociocultural and political limitations. In accessing social networks for political power, sociocultural norms, especially in the northern part of Ghana, limit women from accessing community groups and even family support, as many families in the region do not support women's participation in politics. While women in the Greater Accra region face similar challenges, the situation for women in the northern region is more pervasive. These challenges often compel women, especially in the north, to resort to women's groups where they predominantly access their political power or social capital. The results suggest that gender and sociocultural context play crucial roles in understanding individuals' tendency to access social capital, particularly within the political atmosphere.

9.5. Theoretical and practical implications

This research contributes to social capital studies by exploring how female politicians in diverse socio-cultural environments access and utilize social capital, and how this influences their political participation. Additionally, it investigates the role of networks in political agency, considering geographical contexts and gender disparities in Ghana's Northern and Greater Accra regions. The thesis provides a comparative analysis that illustrates how the relational, cognitive, and structural dimensions of social capital collaboratively influence the utilization of social capital by female politicians. This is demonstrated by their varied access to these interrelated social capital dimensions, differing by geography. The study incorporates Nahapiet and Ghoshal's (1998) perspective, extending social capital's concept in the individual level. This approach highlights the significance of trust, cooperation, and shared language and codes, offering deeper insights. It particularly aids in understanding how organizational structures in different geographical political space affect the way Ghanaian female politicians' access and use social capital.

In Ghana's political groups, women often experience marginalization in network connections, primarily accessing horizontal social capital, which relies on trust and reciprocity among equals in hierarchy (Framke et al. 2019:889). This restriction to horizontal ties affects their ideologies, leading them to accept subordinate roles, as Granovetter (1973) suggests that specific associations can shape one's identity and focus on related issues and policies. This difficulty in accessing vertical social capital in the workplace aligns with Bruegel's (2005:11) findings that building bridging social capital is challenging for women, as it often involves including those in power.

Despite challenges being general in the political space, there are regional disparities. In the Greater Accra region, female politicians have mentors with extensive experience, providing specific guidance and support. This mentorship has significantly shaped their political values. Conversely, in the Northern region, female politicians predominantly have male mentors, who reinforce traditional subordinate roles for women, due to a lack of understanding of gender-specific challenges and a desire to preserve their dominant positions. This results in women being included in groups for grassroots building but excluded from accessing vital resources and information. This practice, where dominant groups form exclusive inner circles that withhold resources from women, aligns with Bourdieu's (1986) view of social capital as a tool for perpetuating social inequality.

The thesis reveals that although female politicians in the Greater Accra region encounter difficulties in accessing vertical networks, they manage to connect with a limited number that resonate with their ideologies, aided by the limited presence of female mentors. This highlights the importance of having a mentor whose ideologies align with one's own for success in this field. Consequently, the thesis posits that structural social capital is shaped by the availability of suitable influential mentors and members who share similar ideologies. In contrast, the Northern region has very few, if any, high-ranking female politicians, making it challenging to find mentors who understand their specific circumstances. This mismatch between ideologies and mentors, along with increasing male dominance, hinders the effective transfer of social capital. This aligns with Burt (1992) and Putnam (1993:167), who argue that social capital is a product of social structures that benefit its members. Women in the Greater Accra region gain from this arrangement, as they access networks where power and hierarchy align with their ideologies.

Including a comparative analysis, the thesis reveals that a gender disparity in access to politically advantageous information, with men generally having greater access than women. In

Ghanaian political circles, women often feel excluded from key information-sharing discussions, prompting them to establish their own groups for political empowerment. This gap in information access is especially stark in Northern Ghana, where sociocultural and religious norms, education levels, and financial independence limit women's political participation. Burt (1992) suggests that the ability to obtain structural capital is reliant on the characteristics of individuals within a network. He notes that access to capital in a network can be inclusive for some and exclusive for others. This is influenced by the nature of connections and the readiness to share resources within the network (Burt 1992; Granovetter 1973). The thesis proves this in the political sphere, showing that despite the existence of mixed-gender political networks, men have superior access to information, highlighting the impact of gender on network dynamics and structural social capital.

Additionally, the study indicates that female politicians in the Greater Accra region, though facing similar information access challenges, have better opportunities than their counterparts in the Northern region. This highlights the significance of gender and geographical factors in understanding the complexities of structural capitals. Thus, the thesis argues that structural social capital is influenced by individual demographic characteristics like gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, which differ according to the context in which this capital is accessed. The study suggests that in accessing structural capital, which involves building networks and connections that facilitate progress, female politicians in the Northern region face greater challenges compared to their Greater Accra region counterparts. This disparity is attributed to factors such as underdeveloped political infrastructure, limited networking opportunities, or socio-cultural barriers, all of which impede their ability to secure essential support and resources for political success.

The thesis also conducts a comparative analysis indicating that political parties and the political space, in terms of gender, have established norms and a collective identity that marginalize women. This situation has led to female politicians in both the Northern and Greater Accra region creating their own networks that are more inclusive and cohesive, addressing the needs of marginalized groups, especially women. This finding aligns with Jovani and Roito's (2021) research. The resilience shown by these women demonstrates their substantial human capital and their intense efforts to achieve success in politics, traditionally seen as a domain for the elite and men. Despite the educational progress and liberal cultural setting, particularly in the Greater Accra region, women still encounter barriers in political parties, where a few dominate decision-making,

excluding women from their networks despite their evident qualifications. This supports Bourdieu's (1986:248–49) view that social capital perpetuates social inequality.

Furthermore, the thesis reveals that in the political context, cognitive concepts involving shared representations, interpretations, and meaning systems among parties are crucial for building social capital. However, women struggle to integrate into dominant groups, challenging the formation of such capital. The disparity in educational and economic backgrounds between women in the Northern and Greater Accra regions leads to different approaches in accessing and using social capital. The study shows that societal and political perceptions of women's roles vary between these regions. In the Northern region, where traditional gender roles are more prevalent, women encounter greater obstacles in aligning their political goals with societal expectations, thus affecting their ability to effectively utilize cognitive social capital. The thesis also notes that prominent figures in political parties' form alliances with women not to share resources but to limit their influence in the field. This finding contributes to social capital theory by showing that power dynamics are determined in relation to other actors, and that social capital serves as a resource of power. In this dynamic, individuals strive to acquire and subsequently monopolize these positions for their benefit (Bourdieu 1986:248).

The thesis also uncovered that, in contrast to the rural Northern region, the cultural liberal Greater Accra region, exhibits higher levels of access to cognitive and structural social capital. Female politicians Greater Accra region benefit from increased access to education and professional networks, bolstering their cognitive social capital and subsequently enhancing their political engagement opportunities and resources. Cognitive social capital, involving shared information, demonstrates the interconnection with the structural social capital dimension.

The thesis found that the marginalization of women occurs because the dominant group fails to establish norms that facilitate their inclusion, leading to their exclusion from information and collective knowledge. This situation exposes divisions within the party space and a monopolization of power. A few dominant men use this power to oppress women, fearing that granting them access would be detrimental to their status and disrupt the pre-established societal roles of women. This observation aligns with Bourdieu's (1986:248) view of social capital as a scarce resource perpetuating class divisions through structured inequality, thus maintaining the current social order. This challenges Coleman's (1988) view of social capital as a public good. He argues that although social capital has public good characteristics, the expansion and

diversification of networks are leading to fewer in-group social groups. The thesis reveals a prevalence of in-group social groups in the field and party space that monopolize information and power, thereby restricting women's access.

It highlights that in Ghana, women in politics often face marginalization due to perceptions of untrustworthiness and inability to foster trust in political relationships. This marginalization stems from not sharing the established norms and values of social and political groups, which are often formed to exclude women. Additionally, as women actively strive for their place in politics, they encounter resistance from long-standing groups with established, resilient networks resistant to change, to maintain their dominance.

Granovetter's (1973:1361) research reveals a link between longstanding relationships and trust, yet the thesis also suggests that mere longevity in a network does not automatically confer trustworthiness; rather, one's position in the social structure is crucial. Evidence indicates that female politicians, especially in the Northern region, spend time in dominant groups like political parties without gaining trust or reciprocal benefits. Within the context of the thesis, these women are not acknowledged as influential in networks with similar ties, leading to a lack of reciprocity for their contributions. The thesis observes that these political groups, especially in the Northern region, function to further suppress women, using their established positions in social networks as a legalized structure for distributing rewards and shaping perceptions of the social network, as discussed by Bourdieu (1984, 1989).

Additionally, the thesis highlights how these networks impose traditional norms and expectations, potentially impeding women's political participation and progression. It reveals that cultural and societal differences between the Northern and Greater Accra region affect female politicians' ability to build and sustain key relationships. Female politicians in the Northern region encounter unique hurdles in developing robust, supportive networks due to socio-cultural and educational barriers, making the relational dynamics in the Northern region less conducive to fostering strong, politically advantageous relationships. Influenced by factors such as traditional gender roles, lower trust in women's leadership, and patriarchal systems, these dynamics restrict Northern female politicians' ability to maximize their social capital.

The dynamics in the Greater Accra region are somewhat distinct, demonstrated by how female politicians there successfully cultivate politically advantageous relationships. This success

is often linked to the Greater Accra region's cultural liberal nature, which affords them unique privileges. Furthermore, their familial social capital plays a key role in gaining trust within political networks and accessing resources, a situation not mirrored in the Northern region, where social norms impede the formation of such trusting bonds. This disparity is also highlighted in the mismatch between community perceptions of suitable leadership and the aspirations of women to lead, indicating the complex relationship between social norms, perceptions, inherited social capital, and trust in politics.

Beyond the advantages of inherited social capital for female politicians in the Greater Accra region, the study also shows the importance of their educational and technical qualifications. These assets are amplified by the trust derived from their social capital, facilitating reciprocity, a dynamic less prevalent in the Northern region. This observation aligns with Nahapiet and Ghoshal's (1998:254–56) research, which suggests that leaders develop interpersonal relationships by engaging with and understanding the skills of others. The thesis therefore suggests that in politics, inherited social capital must be complemented by human capital. Without the resources and opportunities provided by social capital, progress in politics is limited, as human capital alone is insufficient, as argued by Timberlake (2005:39, 43).

The thesis offers a comparative analysis which reveals that female politicians in the Greater Accra region enjoy better access to both strong and weak ties within their communities and political spheres, aiding their political development more so than female politicians in the Northern region. Jack (2005) emphasizes the importance of such connections for politicians, noting they provide access to crucial resources like financial capital, expertise, information, and support. In stark contrast, female politicians in the Northern region face difficulties in obtaining family support, particularly from husbands, and even when they do, they often not accepted within community spaces due to prevailing social norms that deem women unsuitable for leadership roles - a situation that is notably different in the Greater Accra region. The critical role of family in the political space especially during political campaigns, providing reliable and trusted support, is highlighted by Muraoka (2017) and Stoker and Jennings (1995).

Furthermore, the thesis indicates that despite female politicians in the Northern region recognizing the importance of social capital in politics and the ways to build it, such as community interaction and campaigning as described by Bourdieu (1986), they are constrained by traditional gender roles, which affects their management of resources in the political field. This is influenced

by social norms and the socialization process, evident in the disproportionate time dedicated to family duties over political activities. The study also highlights the significance of the size and composition of one's network. Although both regions grapple with gender inequality, female politicians in the Greater Accra region benefit from inherited social capital and the ability to access resources from both genders, unlike their Northern counterparts, who predominantly interact within female networks. As Burton and Vu (2021) indicate, these limited networks provide a foundation for change but are inward-looking and conservative, hindering female politicians in the Northern region's access to 'bridging' social capital and their subsequent political progress. This supports Bruegel's (2005) view on the difficulties of developing bridging social capital due to its association with power dynamics.

The thesis thus indicates that the relational, cognitive, and structural dimensions of social capital (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998), although appearing distinct, are in fact interconnected and mutually dependent. This interdependence is evident in their access and use, particularly in the political sphere. The study highlights how differences in regional access and application of social capital significantly impact women's representation in politics. In the Northern region, where relational social capital is prevalent but potentially limiting, female politicians encounter more obstacles in the political sphere. Conversely, in the Greater Accra region, female politicians have better opportunities in politics due to easier access to cognitive and structural social capital. In Ghana, female politicians, especially in the Northern region, face obstacles in accessing the relational dimension of social capital due to gender biases and stereotypes, while the cognitive dimension, encompassing shared narratives and language, presents challenges in aligning with predominantly male political discourse.

The study also employs an analytical framework to examine the impact of these geographical contexts on social capital access and political agency, with a particular focus on gender disparities in these regions. Drawing on Bourdieu's social capital concept, the research explores political agency, trends, and patterns in political networks. It reveals that men tend to translate political agency into significant power and influence for political participation more effectively than women, particularly in Ghana's Northern region, where women face greater marginalization. The study also highlights how sociocultural, religious, and geographic factors influence female politicians' political agency and their ability to access social capital.

These findings both align with and elaborate on Bourdieu's (1986) theory of social capital, which he views as a scarce resource that fosters class distinctions through structured inequality, perpetuating the existing social hierarchy. The study suggests that some female politicians, despite their personal drive toward diverse community objectives, have their goals influenced by their geographic perceptions, including social norms, development, education, and religious beliefs. These factors also affect the kind of social capital they can access. This is compounded by the lack of equal support from the predominantly male senior political figures, a situation that underscores the power and privilege imbalance identified by Bourdieu (1986). Consequently, these female politicians often channel their political agency towards gender-specific issues, partly due to the limited power and influence available, which could otherwise facilitate their entry into social networks aimed at countering male dominance in their societies.

This research sheds light on the structural inequalities perpetuated by existing power dynamics, emphasizing the need for addressing gender-specific issues in political participation. The effectiveness of social networks in Ghana's political landscape is hindered by financial constraints, emphasizing the importance of financial capital in accessing influential circles. Particularly in the Northern region, men leverage their extensive networks and financial resources to maintain dominance over women, who lack the means to penetrate these networks. This dynamic aligns with findings by (Pena-López et al. 2021:678, 689), suggesting that social capital accumulation may not benefit all groups equally.

Marginalized social norms in the Northern region evidenced by women's societal positioning restrict women's participation in politics, reflecting unequal power distribution as described by Bourdieu (1986) concept of social capital. Despite their desire to engage in politics, Ghanaian women face societal barriers, limiting their roles and networking opportunities. Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) focus on social capital as an investment in relationship networks, but do not delve deeply into gender dynamics. However, Bourdieu's analysis highlights how social capital contributes to unequal power accumulation, emphasizing the gendered nature of political agency dynamics (Bourdieu 1977, 1986).

The research highlights the disparities faced by female politicians in different regions of Ghana, particularly contrasting the experiences of those in the Greater Accra region with those in the Northern region. It emphasizes the role of sociocultural and geographical factors in shaping political agency and accessing social capital in politics. The study suggests that political agency is

influenced by individual demographic factors like gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, which vary based on the context of social capital access. A comparative analysis reveals that female politicians in Greater Accra have better access to politically influential social capital compared to those in the Northern region, challenging previous sociological notions about rural areas being richer in social capital (Hofferth and Iceland 1998:574).

The disparity in social capital access in the North is attributed to geographical factors that hinder women's political involvement and reflect broader marginalization issues such as limited access to education and formal employment (see table no 1.2; figure 1.7; figure 1.8). These findings align with Bourdieu's discussion on social capital, which emphasizes the role of reciprocal benefits in social networks and the perpetuation of social inequality through exclusive networks and dominant groups (Bourdieu 1986:248). This thesis reveals a prevailing social order in their geographical setting, where the dominant group seeks to maintain its norms, particularly in politics, thereby negatively impacting women's participation. These dominant groups form exclusive networks, sharing resources and setting rules, supporting Bourdieu's view of social capital as a mechanism for perpetuating social inequality (1986:248–49).

The thesis thus highlights those Greater Accra region female politicians, despite grappling with challenges like men due to a large population, enjoy more opportunities compared to their Northern counterparts. This advantage stems from the Greater Accra region's cosmopolitan nature, facilitating the formation of both bonding and bridging social capital in the political space. This aligns with Sørensen's (2016:395, 408) findings that urban areas exhibit slightly higher bridging social capital, aiding individual advancement. Conversely, female politicians in the Northern region predominantly develop bonding social capital, creating networks to counter external threats and power struggles. However, their lack of bridging social capital, as noted by Sørensen (2016), hinders their progress. This limitation is evident in their restricted access to wider community networks, adversely affecting their active participation and ability to garner social capital necessary for combating gender inequality. The widening gap between women striving for equality and men perpetuating existing social norms exacerbates women's disempowerment, leading to increased marginalization in the region.

In the Greater Accra region, despite a more promising situation than in the North, challenges persist in building vertical social capital within political party workplaces. This issue, not exclusive to the Greater Accra region, has prompted some female politicians to establish cross-

party networks, facilitating access to horizontal social capital. As defined by Framke et al. (2019:889), horizontal social capital relies on trust and reciprocity among colleagues at the same hierarchical level, while vertical social capital involves interactions between different hierarchical levels, incorporating formal or institutional power dynamics. However, this thesis reveals that horizontal social capital alone is insufficient for women's success in politics, as it often relegates them to subordinate roles. This observation supports Putnam's (2000) theory that excessive horizontal social capital can lead to negative social outcomes. Contrary to the assumption that formal employment spaces, including political parties, are becoming gender-neutral, this thesis indicates a deep-rooted gender bias in these areas, often shaped by male-oriented social constructs, as also discussed by Timberlake (2005:41).

In political circles, female politicians in the Greater Accra region typically encounter less difficult situations than those in the Northern region. This disparity is particularly evident in Muslim communities in Northern Ghana, where sociocultural and religious norms hinder women's involvement in politics (Shiraz 2015). Northern patriarchal norms create obstacles for women, evidenced by a disconnect between gender empowerment and social norms. This disconnect is characterized by the societal expectation for women to prioritize domestic roles over education and formal employment, and not to assert their rights. Religion further entrenches this socialization, adversely impacting women's empowerment in both the private and political field. This thesis emphasizes the negative impact of the disconnection between political norms and gender socio-cultural norms on effective political participation, extending to challenges in accessing social capital. The difficulty in accessing social capital is notable in both Northern and Greater Accra regions, though it varies regionally. In the Northern region, challenges are exacerbated by more entrenched patriarchal norms, whereas in the South, the barriers, though less severe, still significantly hinder women's political progress. This regional variation in accessing and utilizing social capital for female politicians, compared to their male counterparts, plays a crucial role in their reduced success and visibility in politics.

The study reveals that in the Northern region, the marginalization of women's rights and access to basic privileges, such as participating in household discussions or having rights to financial capital and education, detrimentally impacts their political participation and ability to access social capital, as discussed by Bourdieu (1986). Bourdieu noted that social networks are based on mutual benefits, implying the need for reciprocity in such networks. Women, due to their

sociocultural standing, often fail to meet the standards of political groups characterized by highly educated and affluent members, thus limiting their access. This highlights the importance of a certain level of prominence for acceptance into specific groups. Conversely, when women who do not meet these standards are included, they are often guided into gendered roles, reflecting Bourdieu (1986) view of social capital as a scarce resource fostering class division, perpetuated by structured inequality. The dominant group offers women positions and resources that limit their advocacy for gender equality, aligning with Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992:119) notion that social capital stems from social structures, with the dominant group maintaining control over resources.

The thesis indicates that female politicians, despite qualifying for certain networks, often face rules within these networks that conflict with their gender roles and societal norms, leading to a loss of social capital. An example is the scheduling of meetings at night, which they cannot attend, causing them to miss vital information and resources. This phenomenon aligns with Bourdieu's (1984, 1989) idea that social networks often act as structured environments for distributing rewards and shaping perceptions within these networks. The reluctance of these networks to share power with women, despite a facade of gender equality presented to international organizations, is a result of social norms that favour male dominance. This situation allows men to establish standards that assess women against masculine norms and values, as discussed by Glapka and Braid (2018:53). However, in the Greater Accra region, a cultural liberal setting provides female politicians better access to social networks and more regular interaction with their electorates compared to the Northern region.

This indicates that the complex challenges female politicians in Ghana face, encompassing socio-cultural, economic, and political factors. In the Northern region, where patriarchal norms are more ingrained, women encounter greater obstacles in societal acceptance and support, exacerbated by economic limitations and restricted access to educational and networking opportunities crucial in politics. Conversely, in the Greater Accra region, women, despite a more liberal social environment, still confront similar systemic gender biases and institutional hurdles that impede their access to social capital and political participation. They also face issues like vote-buying during elections and a minority of female party delegates, perpetuating the existing social order. The existing voting systems in political parties, dominated by men, especially in the Northern region, determine leadership, placing minority women in a disadvantaged position for gaining support. This supports Webb et al. (2002) perspective that acquiring social capital in

politics involves a network of norms, rules, and relationships. This is because dominant groups within parties, particularly in the North, form an exclusive circle, controlling resources and rulemaking, echoing Bourdieu's view of social capital as a means to sustain social inequality (1986:248–49).

The thesis additionally demonstrates that social capital, contrary to Coleman's (1988) argument, does not resemble a public good. Coleman posited that even though social capital shares some qualities with public goods, the expansion and diversification of networks lead to fewer in-group social groups. Within the scope of this thesis, it is observed that the increasing gender gap between male and female delegates in political parties contributes to more in-group social groups. This situation makes it challenging for female candidates to access vital information and resources, as these groups often favour established candidates, placing female delegates at a competitive disadvantage. Consequently, fewer women succeed in party primaries, reflecting Bourdieu's (1986)' perspective that social capital can contribute to persistent social inequality.

Considering the influence of geographical context on politicians' political agency, the study sheds light on how social capital can elucidate the dynamics of power and interests within political networks. The findings in Ghana reveal that politicians' networks, and their longevity, are deeply influenced by the motivations of powerful actors, which stem from material, cultural, and symbolic exchanges. This explains the dominance of male networks in politics, enabling them to consolidate and enhance their status, thereby excluding women, even those whose interest align with the network's ideologies. This reinforces the notion that social capital is not so much a public good, but rather a means of perpetuating social inequality, as identified in Bourdieu (1986).

The research further explores the role of social capital as a power resource in various contexts. Particularly in Northern region, men use social relationships to maintain their societal status and wield power, a dynamic not fully explored in the Bourdieu's framework. It is observed that social networks often provide men with access to community information and resources. Particularly in northern communities, where traditional councils and leadership roles are predominantly male, a growing divide is observed between the empowerment of women and traditional norms. This discrepancy is also evident in political parties and networks. Women in Ghana, especially in the Northern region, report difficulties in accessing resources within their communities and political parties. This aligns with Duverger's (1954) view that political parties are hierarchical social organizations, where those in authority dictate the norms followed by the

party. Thus, when community norms in regions like the Northern region restrict women's leadership, political parties often adhere to these norms, limiting women's involvement and influence. This observation is consistent with Katz and Mair's (1995) assertion that, despite a party's collective goals, a small group of leaders often controls access to power within the party structure.

By integrating insights from Bourdieu, Nahapiet, and Ghoshal, the thesis reveals that the difficulties faced by Ghanaian female politicians in accessing social capital are deeply rooted in the societal and cultural context of Ghana. These challenges influence not only their opportunities but also the strategies they need to utilize in the political landscape. These difficulties do more than just hinder their network-building; they also impact the quality of these networks and their overall effectiveness in politics. These challenges highlight the necessity for a more refined comprehension of political empowerment and participation in Ghana. It also shows that the accomplishments of female politicians are not solely due to their personal skills or ambitions but are significantly influenced by the broader socio-political environment they operate within. For example, the success of female politicians in the Northern goes beyond election victories or office holding; it encompasses altering prevailing norms and attitudes, fostering supportive networks, and shaping more inclusive and equitable political institutions and processes.

Consequently, this thesis's theoretical implications highlight a complex set of obstacles facing female politicians in the Northern and Greater Accra region. A combination of structural, relational, and cognitive hurdles contributes to their underrepresentation in parliament and the political sphere. Addressing these barriers demands a holistic strategy that enhances networking while simultaneously challenging societal and cultural norms that limit women's political involvement. Such initiatives are vital for establishing a more equitable and representative political environment in Ghana.

These theoretical insights reveal a sophisticated interaction of social, cultural, and economic factors affecting women's participation in politics, offering valuable perspectives for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners striving to improve female political involvement and representation. Recognizing these dynamics is essential for devising specific interventions to enhance women's representation in Ghana's parliament. This knowledge also underscores the need for a nuanced approach to support female politicians, considering the distinct challenges and opportunities presented by their geographic and cultural contexts. The findings indicate that

examining the challenges faced by female politicians in the Northern and Greater Accra region, and how these challenges impact their political success, requires acknowledging various intersecting factors that shape their experiences and outcomes. Future research and policy initiatives should concentrate on strengthening the networks of female politicians, overcoming socio-cultural barriers, and promoting environments that encourage women's political engagement across all regions of Ghana.

This theoretical analysis not only enriches academic discussions but also has practical implications for policymaking and advocacy. It suggests that interventions and support aimed at enhancing female political participation and promoting gender equality should be customized to the specific motivations and social capital prevalent in different areas. Such an approach is more likely to effectively address the unique challenges faced by Ghanaian female politicians, thereby advancing the international goal of gender parity in political representation.

9.6. Further research

The thesis employs a sociological perspective to offer a comprehensive explanation of gender inequality within Ghana's political landscape. It explores how access to and utilization of social capital, motivation, and prevailing gender norms impact the political participation of female politicians in politics, specifically focusing on the Northern and Greater Accra regions of Ghana. Rather than simply identifying challenges, the thesis investigates how female politicians navigate these obstacles. The thesis's scope and findings suggest that further research is necessary to gain a more comprehensive understanding of gender inequality in Ghana's political sphere, which is essential for developing effective strategies, particularly in other regions of the country.

While there is considerable research globally on gender inequality in politics, which primarily focuses on the challenges faced by female politicians, this study follows a similar trend. In chapters 6 and 7, it is revealed that geographical location and its features significantly influence the challenges faced by female politicians in accessing social capital. Although the findings of this study are critical for understanding and addressing gender inequality in the political sphere of the Northern and Greater Accra regions, further research is needed to explore regional variations within Ghana and compare them with other African countries. Future studies should expand their scope to include additional regions within Ghana or other countries with similar political and socio-cultural landscapes. This could elucidate specific local dynamics or broader patterns across

the continent. This comparative analysis could shed light on how regional disparities in social capital, motivation, and gender norms affect women's political engagement.

This current thesis employed qualitative methods, providing participants with the opportunity to express how they access and utilize social capital in-depth. However, it was noted that findings cannot be generalized, suggesting that future studies should employ a mixed-methods approach. This would involve combining qualitative interviews and observations with quantitative data analysis across different regions or countries, thereby increasing the participant pool and alleviating concerns about generalization. Additionally, the current study overlooked the influence of transnational feminist networks and movements on gender norms and women's political participation in Ghana. Addressing this gap could provide valuable insights for interventions aimed at reducing gender inequality in Ghana and Africa as a whole.

9.7. Conclusion

The thesis explores the inquiry: "How do access to and utilization of social capital, impact the political participation of female politicians in the Northern and Greater Accra region?". The thesis's distinctive scope, methodology, and theoretical framework distinguish it in sociopolitical research discourse, both domestically in Ghana and globally. Employing a multimethod approach, the study collects data from diverse sources and political actors, enabling a thorough exploration of the phenomena under study, notably uncovering the sociological intricacies of gender inequality in politics through data triangulation.

Primarily utilizing social capital theory, supplemented by insights from sociological theories, the thesis sheds light on the underexplored aspects of social capital development and accessibility for politicians, particularly regarding gender dynamics. The blending of perspectives is crucial given the nature of gender disparity in politics and the chosen methodological approach, necessitating a fusion of psychological and sociological viewpoints. Focusing on diverse regions of Ghana, notably the Northern and Greater Accra regions, the thesis examines the interplay among regional dynamics, and the socio-cultural environments of politicians, and their collective impact on social capital access and utilization and political participation. It reveals the intricate realities faced by women in politics, elucidating how gender, culture, and political dynamics intertwine to shape their access to social capital in complex and nuanced ways. These factors also affect their participation in politics and widen the gender gap, especially in the Northern region.

The research findings suggest that the evolution of political agency among Ghanaian politicians is a complex interplay of economic status, developmental disparities, socio-cultural norms, and personal experiences, significantly affecting their access to social capital. The study illustrates the crucial role of specific political agency in shaping politicians' access to social capital, highlighting the diverse career trajectories influenced by individual motivation and their impact on leveraging social capital. This comprehensive study emphasizes the intricate dynamics of female political engagement in Ghana, underscoring the necessity for multifaceted approaches that consider both sociocultural and geographical factors to effectively address gender inequality in politics.

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Appendices

Table A: Participants

	Region	Participant code name	Gender	Party	Date and time of interview
1	Greater Accra	Ameyo	Female	NDC	7 December 2021, 1.45pm
2	Greater Accra	Seli	Female	NPP	13 December 2021, 10am
3	Northern	Xorse	Female	NDC	15 January 2022, 2pm
4	Northern	Yawa	Female	NPP	16 January 2022, 11.30 am
5	Northern	Yaw	Male	NDC	18 January 2022, 4 pm
6	Northern	Kofi	Male	NPP	19 January 2022, 9 am
7	Greater Accra	Dela	Male	NDC	7 February 2022, 5 pm
8	Greater Accra	Emma	Male	NDC	10 February 2022, 10.30 am
9	Greater Accra	Klenam	Female	NDC	3 November 2022, 6.pm
10	Greater Accra	Joana	Female	NDC	17 November 2022, 10 .45 am
11	Greater Accra	Nuti	Female	NPP	25 November 2022, 3.30 pm
12	Northern	Bee	Female	NDC	12 December 2022, 9.30 am
13	Northern	Awushie	Female	NDC	13 December 2022, 4.pm
14	Northern	Kwame	Male	NPP	20 December 2022, 1.25 pm
15	Northern	Maame	Female	NPP	22 December 2022, 2 pm
16	Northern	Afi	Female	NDC	10 January 2023, 9.am
17	Northern	Yushawu	Male	NPP	17 January 2023, 11.05 am
18	Northern	Malike	Male	NDC	18 January 2023, 3.25 pm
19	Northern	Sey	Male	NDC	20 January 2023, 4.10 pm
20	Northern	Sena	Female	NDC	2 February 2023, 1.35 pm
21	Northern	Linda	Female	NPP	7 February 2023, 2.37pm
22	Northern	Kafui	Male	NDC	7 February 2023, 9.am
23	Greater Accra	Paa	Male	NPP	10 February 2023, 3.43 pm
24	Greater Accra	Lordina	Female	NDC	10 March 2023, 6.40 pm
25	Greater Accra	Lemuel	Male	NPP	15 March 2023, 10.25 am
26	Greater Accra	Nana	Male	NPP	16 March 2023, 12 pm
27	Greater Accra	Osei	Male	NPP	22 March 2023, 10.12 am
28	Greater Accra	Edudzi	Male	NDC	5 April 2023, 2.00 pm
29	Greater Accra	Yaa	Female	NPP	18 April 2023, 9. Am
30	Greater Accra	Fafa	Female	NDC	18 April 2023, 3.50 pm

Technical description of gender indices

Explanation and calculation of gender representation indices

To analyse the trends and disparities in gender representation in Ghanaian parliamentary elections, data adjustments and index calculations are performed as follows:

Data Adjustment:

To ensure a fair comparison over time and account for changes in the number of parliamentary seats, we normalize the number of male and female candidates and elected officials by the total number of elected positions (parliament seats) each year. This normalization helps in reflecting the proportionate representation based on available opportunities rather than absolute numbers. Here is how the data is adjusted

- **Adjusted Male Candidates** (`Adj_M_Candidates`):

$$\text{Adj_M_Candidates} = \frac{\text{M_Candidates}}{\text{Total_Elected}}$$

- **Adjusted Female Candidates** (`Adj_F_Candidates`):

$$\text{Adj_F_Candidates} = \frac{\text{F_Candidates}}{\text{Total_Elected}}$$

- **Adjusted Male Elected** (`Adj_M_Elected`):

$$\text{Adj_M_Elected} = \frac{\text{M_Elected}}{\text{Total_Elected}}$$

- **Adjusted Female Elected** (`Adj_F_Elected`):

$$\text{Adj_F_Elected} = \frac{\text{F_Elected}}{\text{Total_Elected}}$$

Index Calculations:

Using the adjusted data, I compute the following indices to analyze the extent of gender parity, gaps, and potential glass ceilings in political representation:

1. **Gender Parity Index (GPI):** Indicates the ratio of female to total representation, computed separately for candidates and elected officials.

- **GPI for Candidates** (‘GPI_Candidates’):

$$GPI_{Candidates} = \frac{Adj_F_Candidates}{Adj_F_Candidates + Adj_M_Candidates}$$

- **GPI for Elected Officials** (‘GPI_Elected’):

$$GPI_{Elected} = \frac{Adj_F_Elected}{Adj_F_Elected + Adj_M_Elected}$$

2. **Gender Gap Index (GGI):** Measures the ratio of female to male representation, highlighting disparities, computed separately for candidates and elected officials.

- **GGI for Candidates** (‘GGI_Candidates’):

$$GGI_{Candidates} = \frac{Adj_F_Candidates}{Adj_M_Candidates}$$

- **GGI for Elected Officials** (‘GGI_Elected’):

$$GGI_{Elected} = \frac{Adj_F_Elected}{Adj_M_Elected}$$

3. **Glass Ceiling Index (GCI):** Compares the GPI of elected officials to the GPI of candidates to evaluate if women face additional barriers from being candidates to getting elected.

$$GCI = \frac{GPI_{Elected}}{GPI_{Candidates}}$$

Gender Parity Index (GPI)

The Gender Parity Index (GPI) measures the ratio of females to the total (females + males) in a given category. It is used to assess gender representation in contexts like education, employment, and as I have used in the data, political candidacy and elected positions.

- GPI = 0, minimum: indicates there are no females in the category, demonstrating a total lack of female representation.
- GPI = 0.5: This value shows that the category is composed equally of males and females, reflecting perfect gender parity.
- GPI = 1, implies 100% females, no males present in the category.

Gender Gap Index (GGI)

The Gender Gap Index (GGI) compares female metrics directly to male metrics in specific categories, such as candidates or elected officials.

- $GGI = 0$, (minimum): Indicates a complete absence of females in the category being considered, highlighting extreme gender disparity. Maximum (infinity): This would occur theoretically if there are no males in the metric being considered (all-female candidates or elected officials), though in practical terms, this would be capped by the total number of positions or candidates.

- $GGI = 0.5$: Suggests that the number of females in the category is half that of males, indicating significant underrepresentation.

- $GGI = 1$: Signifies equality between males and females in the category, indicating no gender gap in that particular metric.

Glass Ceiling Index (GCI)

- $GCI = 1$: This indicates perfect congruence between the proportion of female candidates and the proportion of female elected officials. A value of 1 suggests that females are elected at the same rate as their candidacy implies.

- $GCI > 1$: A GCI greater than 1 implies that females are being elected at a higher rate than their representation among candidates would suggest. This might indicate a favourability towards female candidates in elections.

- $GCI < 1$: Conversely, a GCI less than 1 indicates that females are being elected at a lower rate than their representation among candidates. This could suggest a barrier to the election of female candidates despite their participation in candidacy.

A GCI greater than 1, such as 1.5, indicates that women are being elected at a rate 1.5 times greater than their representation among candidates would suggest. This could be seen as a positive bias towards female candidates or a very effective mobilization and support for female candidates within the electorate. If 20% of candidates are female but they make up 30% of the elected officials, the GCI would be 1.5. This might suggest targeted support or a favourable view of female candidates among voters, possibly driven by specific campaigns or societal shifts favouring greater gender diversity.

These indices provide a nuanced view of the gender dynamics in Ghana's parliamentary elections, helping to identify trends, disparities, and barriers in female political representation over

time. The use of normalized data ensures that these insights are consistent across different electoral periods, allowing for meaningful comparisons and analysis.

All charts and graphs included in this thesis were generated using the Python programming language. Python's data visualization libraries, such as Matplotlib, Seaborn, and Pandas, were employed to create these visual representations.