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Chapter · October 2021

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# 6

## Media Representation of Women Parliamentary Candidates in Africa

### A Study of the *Daily Graphic* Newspaper and Ghana's 2016 Election

*Amanda Coffie and Peace A. Medie*

Women's movements, sometimes with the support of international organizations and aided by a favorable political opportunity structure, have placed women's political representation on the agenda in many African countries (Bauer 2014; Bauer et al. 2017; Kang 2015). This has resulted in countries' adoption of gender quotas and has also led to the implementation of programs aimed at encouraging women's political participation. In Ghana and elsewhere, some of these efforts to increase women's political representation have targeted the media; civil society organizations (CSOs) have trained the media on how to cover women candidates. As the Media Foundation for West Africa (2019: 11) writes, these efforts have occurred in Ghana where, "Undoubtedly several media houses and journalists have participated and received trainings by organization's such as UNESCO, CSOs and other development organizations on gender sensitive reportage." In turn, they have used "their platforms to increase women's voices and participation in governance." For example, "the *Daily Graphic*—has consistently provided a column in its newspaper to address gender and related issues while providing the platform for women's increased participation in governance processes." Given media's central role in elections (Temin and Smith 2002), such media training, including on how to cover women politicians, is essential.

Research conducted mostly in North America has found that media treat women politicians differently than men politicians: women politicians were referred to by their first name (Murray 2010; Uscinski and Goren 2011); women politicians were more likely to be associated with "women's" or "female" issues such as education, women's rights, and health (Alexander and Anderson 1993; Kittilson and Fridkin 2008); and women politicians traditionally received less coverage than men politicians (Kahn 1994). However, some studies suggest that the gender disparity in coverage has become less pronounced in some political races (Jalazai 2006; Kittilson and Fridkin 2008).

Studies on this topic in Africa show that gender biases also exist in media coverage of women politicians (Ette 2017; Mudavadi 2020; Osei-Appiah 2019). For example, Osei-Appiah (2019) in her comparative study of media coverage of politicians in Ghana and Nigeria in 2016 and 2015 respectively found that the media favored men.<sup>1</sup> However, a larger proportion of women politicians were covered than men politicians in some newspapers, with the *Daily Graphic* in Ghana covering the most women politicians in text. Furthermore, some of this research also suggests that gender biases are less salient in the coverage of women politicians in Africa than in the coverage of women politicians in other parts of the world (Adams 2016; Anderson et al. 2011; Mudavadi 2020). For example, in her study of media coverage of Liberia's 2011 presidential campaign, Adams (2016: 276) found that "Liberia does not conform to many of the gender stereotypes that appear in other world regions."

We build on this literature by studying the media's coverage of women parliamentary candidates in Ghana, one of Africa's most stable democracies. In addition to understanding how women politicians have been covered, we also probe the factors that have shaped this coverage. To do so, we utilize interviews with women parliamentarians and journalists and a content analysis of the *Daily Graphic*, Ghana's most widely circulated and read newspaper, to compare how women and men were covered in the run-up to the country's December 2016 general election. The data allow us to understand if, and how, the coverage differed for men and women candidates and which factors shaped the newspaper's coverage of women parliamentary candidates. In line with other research conducted in Africa, we find that a larger proportion of women parliamentary candidates received coverage than men parliamentary candidates. However, overall more men candidates received coverage in the *Daily Graphic*. We also find that news stories on women candidates did not focus on their appearance as expected from the literature based on American politics (see Hinojosa 2010).

Based on these findings, we conclude that gender bias was less common in the *Daily Graphic*'s coverage of women candidates than in major newspapers in most other countries outside Africa in which research has been conducted. This conclusion is line with Adams (2016) and Anderson et al. (2011), who find that gender stereotypes previously common in the media's representation of women political candidates were mostly absent during Liberia's 2005 presidential elections. Our findings also align with Osei-Appiah's (2019) findings on the *Daily Graphic*'s coverage of women politicians in Ghana.

We argue that both internal efforts within the organization and external efforts and pressures by civil society organizations, international organizations, and the state account for the larger proportion of women candidates covered by the

<sup>1</sup> In Ghana, the *Daily Graphic* was one of the newspapers analyzed. The other was the *Daily Guide*, a privately owned newspaper.

*Daily Graphic* and for the dearth of gender stereotypes in articles on women candidates. In particular, the journalists interviewed noted the positive impact of CSOs' efforts to train media personnel and advocate for better coverage of women politicians. This study, therefore, extends the literature on the media's coverage of women candidates in Africa, and globally, by demonstrating how the efforts of CSOs have impacted some media coverage of women politicians in Ghana.

In the next section, we review the literature on the media's coverage of women politicians and discuss how the amount and tone of coverage has changed over time. We then provide an overview of the media landscape in Ghana, as well as women's parliamentary representation and women politicians' experiences with the media in Ghana, noting that the number of women parliamentarians elected remains very small and has not changed significantly over the years. The lack of growth in women's representation underscores the need for increased and balanced reporting on women candidates. After this, we present the study's methodology and its findings and show that although there were fewer articles about women candidates than men candidates, a larger proportion of women candidates were covered, in comparison to men candidates. Furthermore, gender stereotypes were mostly absent from the *Daily Graphic's* reporting on women parliamentary candidates. Our conclusion underlines the critical role that CSOs can play in shaping the coverage of women candidates.

### Media Coverage of Women Candidates

In Africa and globally, the media play a very important role in elections. According to Ette (2017: 1481), "as powerful agents of social change, the news media exercise considerable influence in the construction of public understanding of political issues through their power to mediate societal discourses." Indeed, studies show that media coverage influences voters' decision-making, and negative coverage is correlated with poor electoral performance (Gidengil and Everitt 2000). Thus, efforts to increase the number of women in political office cannot be divorced from improving the media's coverage of women politicians.

There is a growing body of research, mainly but not exclusively conducted in North America and Europe, that examines media representation of women candidates for political office (Jenkins 1996; Kahn 1994; Kittilson and Fridkin 2008; Lachover 2017; Uscinski and Goren 2011). Much of the early literature revealed that women received less coverage than men and that the content of the coverage was impacted by gender bias. For example, in a study of newspaper coverage of senatorial campaigns in 47 US states between 1982 and 1988, Kahn (1994) found that, while more than 95 paragraphs about men senatorial candidates were published each week, fewer than 79 paragraphs on women senatorial candidates were

published each week. Furthermore, stories of women politicians were less likely to be placed on the front pages and were more likely to be found in the “ghetto” pages of newspapers (Jenkins 1996). In a study of men and women’s gubernatorial and senatorial races in the United States between 1992 and 2006, Jalazai (2006) found that coverage had become more balanced between men and women but that women received less substantive coverage and were more likely to be linked to traditional gender roles. Women candidates also appeared to be taken less seriously than men candidates. In the United States, women candidates were more likely to be referred to by their first name in articles, demonstrating familiarity, while titles were mostly used in addressing men candidates (Uscinski and Goren 2011). Research conducted in the United States and in Latin America has also shown that the media is more likely to focus on women’s appearance, including their clothing and hairstyle, than men’s (Hinojosa 2010; Piscopo 2010).

Despite these gendered patterns in media coverage, some studies suggest a move toward more balanced coverage for women candidates in the United States (Fridkin and Kittelson 2008; Jalazai 2006; Smith 1997). For example, both men and women have been associated with traditionally female issues (Fridkin and Kittelson 2008; Jalazai 2006). Indeed, studies show that the content of coverage has evolved over time and across contexts. For example, studies on whether women receive more horse race coverage (coverage that focuses on their viability in elections) have produced mixed results (Adams 2016: 277). That is, women sometimes receive more horse race coverage than men and vice versa.

Studies conducted in Africa have also found that some of the biases in quantity and quality of coverage are absent in the media. In her study of the candidacy of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Adams (2016) found that the media in Liberia did not show strong gender bias. President Johnson Sirleaf received more coverage than her male opponent, there was no coverage of her appearance and minimal discussion of her family roles, and she was identified with a broad range of issues as opposed to being associated only with women’s issues. Interestingly, while several international news articles discussed her clothing, Anderson et al. (2011) found that the domestic media did not discuss Sirleaf’s clothing. However, journalists reproduced one of the negative patterns noted above through the use of her first name.

Both studies show that these stereotypes were less salient in the Liberian media. Yet, studies also show that some bias in the coverage of women candidates exists. Mudavadi (2020: 112) in his study of how the Kenyan media (specifically two major newspapers) covered women politicians before and after the country’s 2017 general elections concluded that “gender frames still play a role in how women politicians are covered during elections.” For example, though it was the least common framing, 9.8 percent of women politicians were viewed as seductress or sex objects.

The deficiencies in the coverage of women politicians extend beyond framing. In her study of four high-profile women politicians during Nigeria's 2015 electoral cycle, Ette (2017: 1489) found that the women did not "attract media coverage." The author explained that the journalists often treated the women as their "mates":

For example, Professor Sonaiya was often addressed as Remi, an affectionate and familiar variant of Oluremi (her first name). However, Dr Goodluck Jonathan, the presidential candidate of the PDP, for example, was never addressed as 'Lucky', the affectionate diminutive of his name neither was the APC candidate General Muhammadu Buhari called 'Moh'. (Ette 2017: 1492)

In her comparative study of Ghana and Nigeria, Osei-Appiah (2019) found that men received more verbal (text) coverage but women were disproportionately covered, with the *Daily Graphic* covering the highest number of women politicians. The author concluded that state-owned media provided more verbal coverage than private media in both countries. The author also analyzed visual prominence (image) across four newspapers in both countries. According to her:

Results show differentiated prominence between the countries. Compared to the men, Ghanaian women politicians were less visible in the smaller articles and more visible in articles that were a half page or more long. This made the women more prominent in the articles than their male counterparts. In contrast, Nigerian women politicians dominated the smaller articles as well as being less prominent in, the bigger articles... The results suggest that in terms of prominence in article size, only women politicians in Ghana seem to have an advantage over their male counterparts. This means that once Ghanaian women politicians overcome challenges with gaining media visibility, they are more likely to be usually represented prominently in articles than male politicians.

(Osei-Appiah 2019: 165–166)

However, Osei-Appiah (2019: 233) concluded from her analyses of the quality of content that "women politicians' coverage is deeply refracted through the prism of gender norms and expectations embedded in the Ghanaian and Nigerian society." Overall, the literature on media coverage of women candidates in Africa suggests that gender bias is more prominent in some countries and some media outlets than others.

We add to this literature by studying media coverage of women parliamentary candidates during Ghana's 2016 general elections, including the amount of coverage they have received and the gender bias in this coverage. Additionally, we investigate how CSOs have shaped this media coverage. This inquiry is necessary not only for advancing the literature but also for understanding how to further

improve media coverage and women representation. In the next two sections, we briefly discuss the media in Ghana as a beneficiary of Ghana's transition to democracy and its general role in consolidating democracy. We then consider how the media has covered women candidates, noting the severe challenges women generally face in securing elected office in Ghana and asking whether the media's coverage of women candidates is helping or hindering their progress in this regard. Finally, we compare the *Daily Graphic's* coverage of women candidates during the 2016 elections with research findings to determine the variations and the factors that account for the differences.

### The Media Context in Ghana

Despite a turbulent post-independence political history characterized by several military coups, Ghana has since 1993 been among Africa's most stable, democratic countries. In 1992, Ghana conducted the first elections under the Fourth Republican Constitution. In 2016, it held the most recent of seven successive elections, the first time in the country's political history it has sustained elections for so long. The media not only benefited from Ghana's democratic transition but has played a significant role in consolidating it.

Ghana's most extended military rule from 1981 to 1992 promoted a "culture of silence" which negatively affected the media (Ankomah 1987; Hasty 2001). During that period, the state-owned media and the few privately owned media were not independent, and criticism of the government was absent. The state-owned media which included the *Daily Graphic*, the *Ghanaian Times*, and the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation TV and Radio, the only electronic media at the time, were an extension of the government and "organ of state propaganda" (Ankomah 1987: 18). Owners, editors, and journalists of private media, which was mostly print, did not have the freedom to criticize the government. Government abuses toward private newspaper editors and journalists included arrest and imprisonment without trial, murder, and vandalizing of properties. Yet, media personnel did not report threats to their lives, either in the newspapers or to the police (Ankomah 1987: 18).

Additionally, President Rawlings's public verbal abuse of the press for not serving the interest of government led many of his critics to flee into exile or forced them into silence (Ankomah 1987: 18–19). Eventually, the regime's imposition of the Newspaper Licensing Decree—PNDC Law 211—in 1989, which demanded that private newspapers register with the government for permission to operate, led to the disappearance of the few existing private media outlets (Gyimah-Boadi 1994).

The 1992 Constitution, which ushered in Ghana's Fourth Republic in 1993, began the process of removing the strictures of government control over the media. The 1992 Constitution set the framework for a return to democracy and instituted freedom of expression as the basis for liberalizing the media and reintroducing independent media in Ghana. Chapter 12 of Ghana's 1992 Constitution guarantees freedom and independence of the media. Article 162 (3) of the Constitution states: "There shall be no impediments to the establishment of private press or media; and in particular, there shall be no law requiring any person to obtain a license as a prerequisite to the establishment or operation of a newspaper, journal or other mass communication or information" (Republic of Ghana 1992). Furthermore, Act 449 of the new Constitution instituted the National Media Commission as the regulator of the media and ensured its independence from the government. Subsequently in 2001, parliament unanimously repealed libel laws that criminalized and stifled free press and had been used to prosecute journalists.

The liberalization of the media has led to an increase in private ownership and operation, creating opportunities for more accountability and independent reportage on the dealings of government. According to the Media Foundation for West Africa, as of 2016, the National Media Commission (NMC) had a record of 135 print media in circulation. They include eight daily and bi-weekly newspapers from the two state-owned print media, Graphic Communications Group and the New Times Corporation, while the remaining are privately owned.<sup>2</sup> In addition to print media, the most recent data from the government regulator for electronic media indicate that at the end of 2018, there were 34 authorized television operators across the country (NCA n.d.). The data exclude numerous social media and other online news sources which are not regulated by the NMC.

As the Fourth Estate, the Ghanaian media has contributed to democratic consolidation and is central to ensuring transparent and accountable government. Accordingly, Temin and Smith (2002) note that any legitimate explanation for Ghana's successful transition and electoral success must pay close attention to the Ghanaian media. "[It] is no coincidence that one of Africa's most democratic countries is also home to some of the most vibrant and outspoken media outlets on the continent" (Temin and Smith 2002: 586).

In its role as society's watchdog, the media monitors government officials, duty-bearers, and the powerful in society to forestall the abuse of power and curtail corruption. Journalists like Raymond Archer, Anas Aremeyaw Anas, and Manasseh Azure have conducted undercover investigations to reveal corruption

<sup>2</sup> The NMC notes that there are over 100 registered privately owned print media. Also, the Media Ownership Monitor Ghana, a CSO, has listed these media sources and their ownership, as well as their share of the media market. This list is available at <http://ghana.mom-rsf.org/en/> (accessed August 31, 2020).

in the judiciary, police, health service, immigration service, and the seat of government (Odartey-Wellington et al. 2017). In one example from 2001, Gadzekpo (2008) notes that media investigations and reportage led to the NPP government's decision to abandon its quest to raise a one billion US dollar loan from the International Finance Consortium, a company with dubious credentials—journalists traced the consortium's contact information to a hairdresser's salon in London.

The media also disseminate information that is fundamental to a functioning democracy. Media outlets organize debates and use their platforms to interrogate the manifestos of the various political parties. And they provide political and civic education, educating the electorate on the need to contribute to free, fair, and peaceful elections (Gyimah-Boadi 2001). To ensure election transparency, media further serve as an independent observer at the various polling stations, monitor the election personnel, and broadcast journalist-compiled results from across the country (Arthur 2010; Temin and Smith 2002). In addition, media plurality has ensured that contending political parties have the opportunity to secure political advertising during election campaigns.

There is little doubt that the Ghanaian media has played a significant role in the country's elections and its performance has improved with every election cycle during the Fourth Republic (Arthur 2010; Gyimah-Boadi 2001; Temin and Smith 2002). However, it is important to examine how media outlets have performed when it comes to covering women in Ghana, especially women in parliament where they remain underrepresented. While the media has provided fairer coverage of political parties, we ask if media representation of women parliamentary candidates has been equally balanced.

### **Women's Representation in Ghanaian Politics**

During Ghana's most extended military rule from 1981 to 1992, women's political participation was low but witnessed some appreciable changes. Unlike other military regimes, the PNDC appointed some women into government and also established organizations specifically for women's socioeconomic and political empowerment. As succinctly noted by Allah-Mensah (2005: 16), coups d'état are a significant cause of the low representation of women in Ghanaian politics since the overthrow of legitimately elected government "pulled down with it, the rare opportunity for women to participate in political and public office." The PNDC, however, is noted as the only military regime in Ghanaian history to have appointed women into their government (Allah-Mensah 2005: 16).

At the beginning of the PNDC regime, two major groups were formed to help promote equal rights and opportunities for woman. These were the Federation of

Ghanaian Women (FEGAWO) and the 31st December Women's Movement (31st DWM). These groups notably, the 31st DWM chaired by the First Lady, Mrs Nana Konadu Agyeman-Rawlings, played significant roles since the 1980s to empower Ghanaian women to gain economic and political independence (Torto 2013). The 31st DWM engaged in economic activities and mobilization efforts that gave some women respite from economic challenges by creating the enabling environment for them to engage in certain economic activities. These mobilization activities are credited with providing women with some political experiences which became resources for their participation in elections. Indeed, the majority of the women contestants in the First District assembly elections held in 1988 and the national elections in 1992 were connected to the 31st DWM (Allah-Mensah 2005: 17).

Also, the PNDC government ensured and increased women participation in the consultative meetings and drafting of the 1992 Constitution. For example, the 31st DWM played a leading role in organizing women across the country to share their views during the consultative meetings organized by the National Commission for Democracy (NCD). Later the 31st DWM and the National Council for Women and Development were allocated ten seats on the Consultative Assembly that collated information and drafted the 1992 Constitution. Also, representatives from professional groups created by the PNDC regime such as hairdressers, dressmakers, and chop bar operators associations subsequently helped increase the numbers of women participants in the drafting of the Constitution. According to Allah-Mensah (2005: 22), the high number of women involved in drafting the Constitution was an important landmark for women in Ghanaian politics, especially under a military regime.

The draft Constitution was accepted by the people in a referendum and the first presidential and parliamentary election under the Fourth Republic was held in 1992. However, since the shift to democracy under the Fourth Republic, Ghana's relative success in adopting competitive elections and a free press has not been paired with equal success in achieving gender parity in elected office. Data from the Research, Monitoring, and Evaluation Department of the Electoral Commission of Ghana shows a slow increase in the number of women candidates under the Fourth Republic (1992–present), the focus of this chapter. As Table 6.1 shows, in 1992, although the opposition party boycotted the parliamentary elections, 23 women (5 percent of candidates) contested and 16 won their constituencies. In 1996, with opposition parties joining the elections, the number of women candidates more than doubled to 57 (7 percent of candidates), and 18 women were elected. This slow increase continued in 2000 with 95 women candidates, of whom 19 won their seats in that parliament. In 2004, the number of women candidates jumped to 104 and 25 won. However, in 2008, while the number of women candidates was 101, the number elected dropped to 20. Thus, there were five fewer

**Table 6.1** Women candidates and percentage of elected women in parliament, 1992–2016

Year	Parliamentarians	Women candidates	Elected women parliamentarians	Women parliamentarians (%)
1992	200	23	16	8
1996	200	57	18	9
2000	200	95	19	9.5
2004	230	104	25	10.9
2008	230	101	20	8.7
2012	275	133	29	10.5
2016	275	137	37	13.5

*Source:* Computed from data obtained from the Research Monitoring and Evaluation Department of the Electoral Commission of Ghana.

women parliamentarians in 2008 than there had been previously. Fortunately, 2012 witnessed both an increase in women candidates from 101 to 133 and the elected number from 20 to 29. This increasing trend continued in 2016 when 137 women and 1,158 men contested, and 37 women were elected to parliament—the highest number in the history of Ghana and the Fourth Republic. Nonetheless, even with the increase in the number of women elected, women still fill only 13.5 percent of the 275 seats, well below the UN recommended 30 percent minimum for women's representation in the legislature.

Academic studies and other reports have noted several reasons for Ghana's unimpressive progress toward increasing the number of women parliamentarians. For example, Darkwa (2015: 251) attributed the low supply of women candidates to structural factors rather than the simplistic notion that Ghanaian women are uninterested in politics. These factors include stereotyping of elections and governance as male fields and a lack of support from political parties, which fail to initiate strategies to promote women's participation (Darkwa 2015). An earlier study by Women in Law and Development in Africa (WiLDAF), a women-centered nongovernmental organization (NGO), which sampled women, parliamentary candidates, representatives of organizations working on women political participation, parliamentarians, political parties' executives, and traditional leaders, noted a confluence of barriers against women's political participation in Ghana. WiLDAF's 2009 study, which included a perception survey and in-depth interviews, analyzed voters' perceptions of having a women parliamentarian or president and concluded cultural and traditional barriers to women's election have been overemphasized, while legal, political, and economic barriers to women's active participation in politics have been under-interrogated. According to some of the respondents, a major barrier to women's participation in public life is their limited access to financial support. Moreover, since women constitute the majority of low-income earners, they are less likely to have disposable income to use for political campaigning (WiLDAF 2009). Other women respondents cited the violence that has characterized Ghanaian politics, rather than cultural or traditional barriers, as the source of their lack of interest in participating in elections as candidates (WiLDAF 2009).

### Media Coverage of Women in Ghanaian Politics

Specifically, regarding the media, the WiLDAF study reported that the women surveyed were disappointed in media coverage of politics because it favored men, even though they said the media was professional in some respects (WiLDAF 2009). The media bias reported in the WiLDAF study is echoed in the literature that focuses on women candidates in previous Ghanaian elections and more recently. For example, Benneh (2005) revealed that women candidates felt

that they received unprecedentedly low levels of attention from the media, although most of the coverage was positive. A year later, Dzeble (2006) conducted a study of the 2004 elections and revealed that the press gave disproportionately more coverage to men politicians in the country than their women counterparts. The study concluded that the media provided less coverage, representation, and voice for women seeking office than for men.

Additionally, the National Media Commission (NMC), which is the statutory body mandated by the 1992 Constitution to regulate the activities of the media in Ghana, concluded at the end of the most recent election of 2016 that media reporting on women was low (Esson 2017). The Executive Secretary of the NMC noted that “there was more concentration on the men than women and this undermines efforts of the women who are capable and are hidden somewhere in the dark who need the media to expose their potential to the world” (Esson 2017). Finally, Osei-Appiah’s 2019 study, which focused on the media coverage of men and women politicians (including those in elected office, candidates, and political appointees) during the 2016 elections, observed a trend similar to that found during previous elections. She notes that men politicians were comparatively more visible than women and that the media “depict[ed] them [women politicians] as ancillary political actors” (Osei-Appiah 2019: 315).

These scholarly and commissioned studies, which deploy a variety of research methods, suggest that, generally, media coverage of women candidates in Ghana has been lower than that of men. However, more research on how women parliamentary candidates were covered in the most recent elections is needed. The existing studies on the 2016 elections covered all women politicians and did not focus exclusively on candidates. For example, Osei-Appiah’s work, which is the most recent study of media coverage, included a broad range of politicians, including appointed government officials like the Electoral Commissioner of the 2016 elections and ministers of state, as well as political party executives who were not contesting the elections. In focusing specifically on women parliamentary candidates during the 2016 elections, our study more explicitly addresses the media’s role in Ghana’s quest to achieve the recommended threshold of 30 percent women members of parliament.

### Data Sources and Measurement

This study is based on a content analysis of the *Daily Graphic’s* candidate coverage in the build-up to the 2016 elections. Research assistants at the University of Ghana reviewed print copies of the newspaper published during the four most intense months (September, October, November, and December) of the 2016 election cycle. The research assistants recorded all news stories that featured parliamentary candidates in the designated timeframe. The second author then coded

the news stories to assess the amount of coverage for women and men candidates and the presence of gender bias in the coverage. Each news story was coded for whether candidates' clothing was mentioned, whether candidates were associated with women and children's issues, and whether candidates' titles were used.

To situate the findings from the content analysis, the first author also interviewed two women parliamentary candidates, two women journalists at the *Daily Graphic* (one of whom was assigned to the Gender pages), and a woman member of the *Daily Graphic* editorial team, who sometimes had oversight responsibilities for the Gender pages. She also interviewed a woman journalist who was actively engaged in organizing conferences and seminars for the empowerment of women journalists and on issues of women's representation in the media. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants via phone. The objective of these interviews was to understand the factors that have shaped the *Daily Graphic's* coverage of women politicians, including the decision to publish profiles of women candidates.

Within the broader media environment in Ghana, the *Daily Graphic* occupies a unique space as one of the oldest newspapers and a publicly owned media company. The newspaper was first published on October 2, 1950, in the then Gold Coast by the British newspaper *Daily Mirror*. In 1962, the government of Ghana acquired the company by an Act of Parliament and turned it into a statutory corporation. In 1999, Graphic Corporation changed from a subverted public corporation to an autonomous public limited liability company, the Graphic Communications Group Ltd. (GCGL) and became a publicly owned media outlet. The *Daily Graphic* is perceived as the most reliable newspaper in Ghana, although at various points in time it has been accused of being a government mouthpiece. For example, in a study of the *Daily Graphic's* reports on government and opposition parties (1992–2016), Amissah (2017) identifies a bias toward ruling political parties. Amissah (2017: 2) concludes that generally the “*Daily Graphic's* reports are biased, skewed in favor of the ruling political parties, even when opposition parties are given coverage, they are not provided with the same speaking space.” Putting this potential political bias aside, this chapter's focus is the potential gender bias in the *Daily Graphic's* coverage of women parliamentary candidates.

### **Findings: Coverage of Women Parliamentary Candidates in the *Daily Graphic***

In this section, we present our findings on the *Daily Graphic's* coverage of women parliamentary candidates during the 2016 general elections. Specifically, we compare the amount of coverage received by men and women candidates, the extent to which women candidates were associated with “women's” issues, the presence

of negative coverage, and the discussion of women's physical appearance in news stories.

### Amount of Coverage

As noted earlier, existing research from around the world shows that the amount of coverage received by women candidates has historically been lower than that received by men, although more recent studies show that gap closing in some races (Jalazai 2006; Kittilson and Fridkin 2008). Osei-Appiah's (2019) analysis of the *Daily Graphic's* coverage of women politicians in the 2016 elections revealed that while more men politicians were covered in the newspaper's pages, a higher proportion of women politicians were covered. Our findings were similar. Our analysis of the 2016 electoral coverage in the *Daily Graphic* found 25 news stories that mentioned 33 (out of 136) women parliamentary candidates, and 39 stories which mentioned 88 (out of 1,158) men candidates. Thus, 24 percent of women candidates received coverage in comparison to 7.5 percent of men candidates. Furthermore, news stories that included women candidates averaged 16.8 paragraphs while those that included men candidates averaged 15.8 paragraphs. This contrasts with research by Kahn (1994), whose study of newspaper coverage of senatorial campaigns in 47 US states between 1982 and 1988 showed that more paragraphs were devoted to men senatorial candidates than women. In other words, our findings demonstrate that even though the majority of women candidates did not receive coverage, women candidates were more likely to receive coverage than men candidates and that the related articles were somewhat more in-depth than those written on men.

### Negative Coverage

Another trend noted in the literature is negative coverage of women candidates (Mudavadi 2020); however, our content analysis did not reveal this pattern. Stories focused on women's policy platforms, their past work experience, their party affiliation, and the content of their campaign messages. Personal attacks and other controversies were omitted from news reports, even when such information was being discussed by the public and on social media. For example, Ms. Hannah Tetteh, NDC Member of Parliament for Awutu Senya and Minister of Foreign Affairs (2012–2016) explained that her male opponent attacked her marital status during the campaign and his attack was extensively covered by radio programs and on social media but not in the newspapers.<sup>3</sup> We argue that the

<sup>3</sup> Author interview with Hannah Tetteh, Accra, Ghana, June 14, 2017.

decision not to highlight such a controversy reflects the *Daily Graphic's* decision to stay above the fray, as well as an awareness of gender stereotyping, an issue raised by women's organizations and other civil society actors in Ghana.

### Women Candidates' Appearance

News stories have traditionally discussed women candidates' physical appearance. Adams (2016) found that this was not the case in Liberia, where President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's physical appearance was not commented on by newspapers. Anderson et al. (2011) found that while international newspapers focused on President Johnson Sirleaf's clothing, Liberian newspapers did not. Similarly, we found that the discussion of women candidates' appearance—specifically their clothing—was absent from the *Daily Graphic's* coverage. News stories published around the election did not highlight women's clothing or other aspects of their physical appearance. As expected, men candidates' appearance was also not discussed in news stories.

Together, our findings do not show gender bias against women parliamentary candidates in the *Daily Graphic's* coverage of the 2016 elections. To explain this surprising finding, we argue in the next section that the newspaper's balanced coverage can be attributed to the efforts of women journalists, the advocacy of women's organizations, the actions of government agencies such as the National Council for Women and Development, and the specialized training provided to journalists, some of which has been supported by international organizations like UNESCO.

### Efforts to Improve Coverage of Women in the *Daily Graphic*

Given the media's importance in Ghana's democracy and the persistently low levels of women in elected office, there is a clear need for gender parity and unbiased coverage of women candidates. The *Daily Graphic* has engaged in several efforts that have helped produce the relatively positive results presented in the previous section.

In 2004, the newspaper created a "gender page" dedicated to reporting on "women's issues." According to Rebecca Quaicoe, the gender reporter at the *Daily Graphic*, the decision to create this page followed advocacy by women's organizations seeking an increase in women's representation.<sup>4</sup> Hadiza Quansah, a member of the editorial team of *Daily Graphic*, noted that a combination of factors

<sup>4</sup> Author interview with Rebecca Quaicoe, Accra, Ghana, July 20, 2017.

internal to the organization and external factors and actors influenced the *Daily Graphic*'s official launch of the gender pages.<sup>5</sup> She stated that some women journalists had always maintained a focus on women and served as internal checks on reporters, emphasizing the need to be sensitive to women's rights and related issues. With respect to external factors, she pointed to international events, such as the Beijing Conference, and the subsequent increase in activities by state institutions, such as the National Council for Women and Development and the 31st December Women's Movement, which sought to increase coverage of women. Combined, these factors resulted in the publication of more news items on women and piqued readers' interest. The *Daily Graphic* responded to this demand by creating specific pages dedicated to women's issues and labeling them the gender pages. Also, she noted that these pages serve as extra pages for focusing extensively on women candidates during election periods.

In addition to the existence of a section that is dedicated to positively representing women and coordinated by a journalist who has received specialized training in how to report on women, the journalists at the *Daily Graphic* benefited from specialized training to ensure fair coverage of women in the newspaper, including women candidates. According to the journalists interviewed, gender advocates, CSOs, and media colleagues with support from international organizations such as UNESCO, have been instrumental in providing these specialized trainings. The training sessions generally focus on sensitizing journalists to the benefits of focusing on women and giving equal coverage to both sexes. These trainings were necessary because, as Quaicoe noted, the training received in journalism schools did not equip her with the necessary tools to be an effective gender reporter.<sup>6</sup>

This claim was also highlighted by another journalist who organizes and conducts trainings for colleague journalists on gender empowerment and the representation of women in the media, Georgina Ankumah.<sup>7</sup> Narrating her experience, Ankumah notes that, during a meeting for West African journalists in Dakar in 2015, organized by the International Federation of Journalism, she realized most of her women colleagues in Ghana were excluded and faced stigmatization in their work. Consequently, Ghanaian media had few women in senior and leadership positions. Moreover, since women journalists were more likely to be subjected to violence, they avoided covering stories related to politics, including elections and campaigns. She added, "I think the experiences of reporters are sometimes reflected in their writings and the choices of cases they set up for themselves. Therefore, if women journalists are missing or are not involved in the

<sup>5</sup> Author interview with Hadiza Quansah, Accra, Ghana, September 20, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Author interview with Rebecca Quaicoe, Accra, Ghana, July 20, 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Author interview with Georgina Ankumah, Accra, Ghana, August 21, 2018.

coverage of politics and elections campaigns, the women candidates are less likely to be featured in the media reports.” To remedy this problem, she has organized three seminars for women journalists across the country with funding from UNESCO to provide specialized training for women journalists.

The interviews, therefore, show that the *Daily Graphic*’s coverage of women parliamentary candidates can be explained by a combination of factors: the efforts of women journalists, advocacy by women’s organizations, the actions of government agencies such as the National Council for Women and Development, and specialized training provided to journalists, sometimes with international support.

## Conclusion

Overall, our findings suggest that the *Daily Graphic*, Ghana’s most widely circulated newspaper, does not reproduce the gender stereotypes that have been noted in most countries studied. Women parliamentary candidates received proportionally more coverage than men candidates in the run-up to Ghana’s 2016 elections, and negative coverage of women and discussions of their appearance were absent from the *Daily Graphic*. These findings echo those of Adams’s (2016) study of Liberia’s presidential elections. We did find that women were slightly more likely to be associated with women’s issues in the paper’s coverage; however, we argue that a comparison of women’s platform with their coverage is necessary to understand if the association comes from journalists or from the candidates themselves. Furthermore, as with men candidates, the majority of women candidates did not receive coverage. Nonetheless, the comparison shows that women are well represented in the *Daily Graphic* in comparison to men and gender stereotypes are not salient in the reporting.

We argue that in Ghana, this is partly due to activism by women’s NGOs and other CSOs as well as efforts by international organizations and the state to improve the representation of women politicians. This activism has included training for journalists to increase the coverage of women and to reduce gender stereotyping of women candidates. This advocacy and training by CSOs has erased most stereotypes from the coverage of women in the *Daily Graphic*. This demonstrates the important role that CSOs play in shaping media coverage but also in influencing women’s representation in politics. This study has only focused on one newspaper in Ghana. Therefore, there is a need to study other newspapers and media outlets to assess their coverage of women. Interviews suggest that stereotypes are more likely to be trafficked on radio programs and in internet forums. This underscores the need to study these forums for a more complete picture of how women are represented in the media in Ghana, and in Africa more broadly.

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## Interviews

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- Obuobia Darko-Opoku, Former Parliamentary Candidate (July 17, 2017)
- Rebecca Quaiocoe, Female Reporter on the Gender Desk, *Daily Graphic* (July 20, 2017)
- Hadiza N. B. Quansah, Female Journalist and Member of the Editorial Team, *Daily Graphic* and *Weekend Mirror* (September 20, 2018)
- Della Russell, Female Reporter, *Daily Graphic* (August 27, 2018)
- Hannah Tetteh, Former Parliamentary Candidate and Minister of Foreign Affairs (June 14, 2017)