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RESEARCH ARTICLE



Good for Elections but not for Government: Zongos and the Politics of Exclusion in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Zongo communities – comprising migrants from the northern savannah of Ghana and neighbouring Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Northern Nigeria – are keenly involved in Ghanaian politics, especially leading up to national elections. Representing an important constituency, zongo residents expect their fair share of representation in government to compensate their diverse contributions to political activities. This article examines this expectation and how zongo residents perceive government policies and actions – including the creation of the Ministry of Inner Cities and Zongo Development – seeking to address their feelings of disengagement. Primary data were gathered during 2018 through a survey, focus group discussions and interviews and analysed from a social exclusion theory perspective. Most participants reported that there was no representation of the zongos at national or local government level. Further, the findings seemed to affirm that zongo residents are only politically important before and during elections. Participants in our study branded government interventions aimed at including zongo communities as merely cosmetic and tricking zongo residents into believing that government cares for them.

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Zongos are heterogeneous communities occupied mostly by settlers from the northern savannah of Ghana and neighbouring Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Northern Nigeria. Islam is the dominant religion and Hausa the dominant language in zongo communities. The term zongo can be traced back to the Hausa term *zango*, meaning ‘a settlement of Hausa and Hausa speaking traders’ (Casentini 2018).

Since the country gained its independence in 1957, zongo residents have played a major role in politics, especially during election season. Zongos are the hub of political mobilisation and organisation. Since the dawn of democracy in 1993, zongo residents have supported the two dominant political parties: the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP). Zongo residents are perceived as having strong and belligerent dispositions, and are for this reason sometimes used by political parties to spite their opponents during election campaigns (Amankwaah 2013). Political parties have also used zongos strategically. For example, in its 2008 election campaign, the NDC claimed that Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo (then presidential candidate of

the NPP) would deport zongo residents if he was elected president and his NPP controlled parliament, just as its predecessor, the Progress Party, did with the 1969 Ghana Aliens Compliance Order (Kobo 2010). Beyond the political capital, a high percentage of votes are often recorded in and around zongo communities during national and local elections. Recognising the political potential of zongos, political parties have sought woo these communities with political promises and claims. However, once elections are over, zongo communities are marginalised by politicians and generally underrepresented in government. Worse still, these communities are among the most underdeveloped in Ghana, characterised by slums and other features that typify the real essence of poverty. This has, among other things, led to perceptions of zongo residents as second-class citizens (Williamson 2014) and zongo residents falling victim to identity politics and the politics of exclusion.

Identity politics have contributed to the emergence of nation-states; incited numerous ethnic, national and global conflicts; and caused tremendous human rights violations and humanitarian crises (Cederman, Wimmer & Min 2010; Regan & Norton 2005). With its roots in colonialism, identity politics were already a concern in the run-up to Ghana's independence but became so pervasive immediately after independence that the independence government took steps to control identity-based politics by, among other things, outlawing political parties and other groups established along ethnic and regional lines (Agomor 2019). Yet Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah's independence administration is blamed for being exclusive and contributing to ethnicity-based politics. The 1958 *Balogun v Edusei* case involving deportation orders against four Ghanaians living in zongos, who were alleged to be Nigerians can be cited as an example. The *Re Akoto and 7 Others* case is another example – in this instance, the Preventive Detention Act of 1958 was used to detain and restrict people of specific ethnic extraction. By 1969, identity politics and ethnic exclusion had become even more noticeable, with Prime Minister Kofi Busia's administration deporting some three million 'foreigners', mostly of Nigeria heritage, under the new Aliens Compliance Order. Indeed, some have argued the Aliens Compliance Order was targeted at zongos (Kobo 2010). Given the widely held belief among Ghanaians that identity politics is unhelpful to national successive Ghanaian governments have instituted measures to increase the political participation of vulnerable groups in the country. Of the groups identified as vulnerable, zongos have received considerable/the most attention in Ghanaian politics.

Unlike previous studies, which mostly focused on the history of zongo communities (Williamson 2014), this article examines the participation of zongo residents in government. We expand and contribute to the existing literature by specifically examining the nature of political participation in zongo communities, how zongo residents are represented in government, and how political parties can develop and fully include zongos.

Methods

Studies on zongos should aim to integrate the perspectives of all stakeholders, and this article subsequently takes a transformative mixed-method approach that focuses on increasing social justice (Mertens 2009) in Ghana's culturally diverse society. Using purposive sampling, we selected constituencies in ten metropolitan, municipal and districts assemblies with politically active zongo communities: Ashaiman, Ayawaso North,

Ayawaso East, Madina, Tafo-Pankrono, Asawase, Sunyani East, Techiman South, Hohoe Central and Effiakuma. The study selected five electoral areas in each of the constituencies, and twenty respondents were randomly sampled from these zongo communities. This means that 100 respondents were selected from each constituency. A total of 1,000 respondents were selected for the survey. In addition, we spoke to leaders (religious, ethnic, youth and political party) face to face using structured as well as semi-structured interviews. In all, 15 participants were interviewed across all the constituencies and 10 focus group discussions conducted with the youth. The study also evaluated and analysed existing documents on zongos in Ghanaian communities.

Framework

Social exclusion theory

Social exclusion theory can be traced to the early writings of Aristotle (Sen 2000). The theory may differ according to national context and sociological paradigms in a particular society or a country. Social exclusion happens when a section of a population is unable to exercise their social rights as citizens, including the right to a decent standard of living (Silver 1994). For Katherine Duffy (1995, 33), social exclusion is a:

broader concept than poverty, encompassing not only low material means but the inability to participate effectively in economic, social, political and cultural life and in some characterizations alienation and distance from mainstream society.

The theory conveys a phenomenon where individuals, social groups or geographical areas experience political, economic and social disadvantages – resulting from a combination of interrelated problems, such as religious intolerance, regional disparities, unemployment, poor professional or social skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime and violence as well as underdevelopment (Nayar 2007; Panda 2016) – leading to a lack of confidence, a sense of powerlessness or a degree of social alienation. Social exclusion encompasses an inability to access public services, take part in community life and function in society with a sense of personal dignity. It also connotes the lack of participation or inadequate representation of a section of a society in government.

Amartya Sen (2000) has offered a different perspective by noting that besides total segregation, social exclusion could also mean inclusion, but under unfavourable conditions. Sen describes these two conditions as unfavourable exclusion and unfavourable inclusion. In his view, being included with unequal treatment carries the same adverse effects as being excluded.

Based on the above, it is contended that social exclusion may exist at two levels: societal and individual. At the societal level, it comprises insufficient social cohesion and integration in a state. At the individual level, it connotes the inability to participate in social, political, cultural and economic activities.

Three theoretical propositions

Social exclusion theory has three fundamental propositions (Leary 1990, 222). The first is that ‘individuals in a community (as socio-political animals) possess an innate and a necessary reason to escape exclusion from social and political groupings and activities’. People and societies should be included in the affairs of the state for their protection

and so that they can benefit from the wealth of social, political, physical and psychological benefits that the state (or the society) has to offer (Barash 1977). Zongo residents continuously play an active role in politics because they want to escape exclusion. The second proposition is that the 'political and social behavior of a society or individuals in a society are mere reflections of their attempt to improve their inclusionary status' (Leary 1990, 223). Thus, the activities of an entire society or individuals in a society are nothing but attempts to seek inclusion and avoid exclusion (Leary 1990). Even though there might be other motives and goals for community or individual behaviour, these are generally pursued in ways that do not endanger inclusion. Lastly, the theory contends that 'the perception that one's (societal or individual) inclusionary status is less than desired often results in negative consequences' (Leary 1990, 223). The negative effects of exclusion are felt both by individuals and society as a whole.

Individual exclusion works on a psychological level, often results in feelings like anxiety, jealousy, loneliness, depression and low self-esteem (Leary 1990). Communities that are excluded or marginalised are often characterised by violent crime, unemployment and under-development (Beall, Crankshaw & Parnell 2014). Social exclusion also breaks social bonds (Silver 1994). Notwithstanding its negative effects, social exclusion is one of the major agents for political and economic restructuring and transformation (Nayar 2007).

Some have argued that social exclusion theory is narrow and archaic, and that it has not generated satisfactory clarity (Nayar 2007). Countries such as the United Kingdom and France have a national definition of the concept of social exclusion that denies it from universal application. Notwithstanding the critique of the theory, it is still useful in explaining exclusion of zongos. It also helps us understand the rationale of zongo residents' continuous political involvement despite their limited representation in government.

Contextualising social exclusion theory in Ghana

To ensure stability, modern democracies should accept and encourage participation from every part of their societies, regardless of whether they be minority or majority groups (Kaldur, Fangen & Sarin 2011). The inclusion of all residents in all political processes can help ensure the survival of the political system and the socio-political integration of the country (Kaldur et al. 2011). Despite the importance of inclusion, political exclusion still characterises most African democracies. Some African countries have implemented official policies excluding certain groups from national life (Chauveau & Bobo 2005; Ogwang 2011).

There is no official policy in Ghana excluding zongo residents. In fact, the country's 1992 Constitution proscribes any such discriminatory practice. For instance, Article 17 (1) states that 'all persons shall be equal before the law' and Article 17(2) provides that 'a person shall not be discriminated against on grounds of gender, race, colour, ethnic origin, religion, creed or social or economic status'. Furthermore, Article 17(3) provides an explanation of discrimination.

Exclusion can be either active or indirect. Those actively excluded are denied the opportunity to participate in civic life but also often fall victim to crime encouraged and rewarded by the state (Gamson 1995). Indirect and 'often unintentional' exclusion

pertains to 'social invisibility' that is 'implicit in cultural and institutional practices' (Gamson 1995, 1). The zongo residents in Ghana could be said to often experience Gamson's indirect political exclusion.

In keeping with the first proposition of social exclusion theory, Zongo communities instinctively avoid exclusion from national life and political activities. Their rationale for being included in the affairs of the state is not only to feel a sense of belonging but also to seek protection as well as benefit from the wealth of social, political and physical benefits the state machinery provides.

The second proposition of social exclusion theory helps us understand that zongo communities behave like they do to advance their inclusionary status in Ghanaian political life. Essentially, zongo communities and zongo residents do whatever they do in search of inclusion. Even if they are motivated by something else than inclusion, zongo residents will not behave in ways that imperil their opportunity to be included in political and social life.

The third proposition offered by social exclusion theory validates the negative feelings experienced by both individuals and zongo communities in general, including anxiety, jealousy, loneliness, depression and low self-esteem (as detailed by Leary 1990). Also, zongo communities often display characteristics typical of politically excluded groups: crime, unemployment and under-development.

Political participation

There has been renewed academic interest in political participation in Ghana in recent times (Sackey 2015; Sossou 2011), possibly due to growing concerns about dwindling voter turnout, political party membership and political apathy (Marsh, O'Toole & Jones 2006). Citizen participation in governance is seen as a *sine qua non* in democracy, with some arguing that it is the essence of democracy itself (Inglehart & Welzel 2005; Pontes, Henn & Griffiths 2018).

In Ghana, participation in election campaigns is impressive. However, beyond the campaign trail, there is less involvement as some groups are directly or indirectly denied the opportunity to hold political positions. For instance, women, who constitute the majority of citizens, only occupied 38 out of 275 seats in Ghana's seventh parliament. In 1995, out of a total of 200 parliamentary seats, only sixteen were occupied by women (Sossou 2011, 6). In 2004, out of a total of 230 seats, women occupied only 25 seats. There have been one or two politicians living with disability – former Minister for Chieftaincy and Traditional Affairs Henry Siedu Daanaa being one of the most prominent – but general political participation among this constituency is generally very low in Ghana, possibly because of negative cultural practices and perceptions (Sackey 2015).

The 1992 Constitution provides citizens of Ghana an array of rights that were not available under military rule, including freedom of movement and the opportunity to take part in public gatherings, and freedom of speech. Citizens can also be actively involved in the administration of the state (Nekola 2006). These opportunities led to the emergence of political parties and social movements, the re-emergence of civil society organisations, and the reopening of the public space for citizen participation in the governance of the country.

Political participation is 'a way through which the citizens of a country take part in the electoral as well as in policy making process of the country' (Shamatha 2014, 196). For Petrosyan Astghik (2016, 206), political participation comprises the:

involvement of citizens (in the broader sense including public subjects like organizations, groups, etc.) in political processes, decision making ceremonies, as well as [their] influence on the formation of political systems and institutions, their operation, drafting political decision.

Political participation is described as 'activities of citizens that attempt to influence the structure of government, the selection of government, or the policies of government' (Conway 2001, 231). All these definitions help explain actions that citizens take to influence government.

The common thread running through all the conceptualisations of the phrase 'political participation' is the ability to take part in the electoral process and influence government decisions and policies, structure and the appointment of officials. Political participation may be at the individual or collective level; it may be peaceful or violent, sporadic or sustained, organised or spontaneous, legal or illegal (Huntington & Nelson 1976). There are several forms of political participation, including voting, forming a political party and taking part in legal or illegal demonstrations (Weitz-Shapiro & Winters 2008). Citizens participate in these activities with the aim of influencing government politics.

Sidney Verba, Norman Nie and Jae-on Kim (1987) also identify four participation locations: in election campaign activities, elections themselves, communal activities and through contacting public officials. Jan Teorell, Mariano Torcal and José Montero (2007), building on the typologies of Verba et al. (1987), present a broader typology that includes electoral, consumer and party-based participation, and protest and contact activities. These typologies have been criticised for being limited and failing to consider other forms of participation (Ekman & Amnå 2012). Martyn Barrett and Bruna Zani (2014) also contend that these typologies fail to include citizen participation in governance.

Levels of political participation differ from individual to individual and group to group. D.A. Falade (2014) identifies six types of political participation: inactive (no involvement), voting specialisation (only during elections), parochial (occasional involvement, only where it affects the individual or community), communalist (active involvement in community affairs and elections but not individually in political campaigns), campaigners (involvement in politics, both nationally and locally, but not in community activities) and complete activist (involvement in all facets of politics, even those that have no direct bearing on the self).

Zongo residents are politically active; they engage in political activities at ward, constituency, regional and national levels. They contest for party positions at all these levels, and campaign for their political parties before and during elections. They participate in all the forms of political activities (Teorell et al. 2007; Verba et al. 1987; Weitz-Shapiro & Winters 2008).

In most African democracies, voting has become the key indicator of political participation and inclusion in politics (Dalton 2004; Norris 2005). While zongo residents have been very active before and during elections, beyond that they are not offered the same opportunities as non-zongo residents to actively participate in government.

Historical perspective of zongos

As they have survived the context given by contemporary perspectives, the transmission and interpretative views expressed in historical narratives on zongos have been a subject of public interest. There is a dearth of studies on zongo communities, which has made the conceptualisation of zongos challenging. 'Zongo' has been defined as a 'travelers camp' (Williamson 2014, 3) and 'stopover' (Newman & Newman 2007, 230), the latter being its literal meaning in Hausa. Zongo communities are seen to be almost homogeneously Muslim. Roy Abraham (1962, 967) notes that zongo is a Hausa term meaning the 'camping place of a caravan or the section of town where Muslim traders lived'. Zongos are also sometimes referred to as Muslim settlements. Giulia Casentini (2018) describes zongos as areas of contemporary West African towns established as a result of trading activities. He observes that the term 'zongo' was derived from the Hausa term 'zango', which means 'temporary settlement'. These settlements still exist in most West African countries and continue to be viewed as places where strangers live, with Islam being the dominant religion. According to Ahmed Yusuf (1974, 213):

Zango is a [Hausa] term for a caravan resting place just outside a walled city. In Daura and other Hausa northern towns, a Zango settlement traditionally contained Kanuri and Arab merchants. Hausa migrants were the primary dwellers of Zango urban units in some parts of Niger, Ghana, Dahomey.

Some of the first documented zongos date back to 1874; they were erected following the defeat of the Ashanti people by the British imperial power in the Kumasi area in the south of Ghana. The movement of strangers was controlled by the centralised powers of the Ashanti Empire (Wilks 1963). Strict immigration policies controlled the movement of non-Ashanti and prevented direct links between the northerners and traders in the south of the country, particularly along the coast. *Kwansrafo* (road wardens) collected toll fees, thus preventing the export of arms to the north, controlled the movement of traders, and informed the government of the movement of strangers within the kingdom. Similarly, various taxes were collected from traders within and outside of the Ashanti metropolis. By 1896, Kumasi was opened for business to all, and there was an influx of northerners who moved into zongos to benefit from the destruction of the Ashanti hegemon.

Whereas in the late 1800s the term zongo merely referred to a geographical area, it later came to encompass a conceptual identity (Schildkrout 1976). Enid Schildkrout documents how, for Ashanti and Europeans alike, zongo communities included recent migrants from the northern parts of Ghana and strangers to the Ashanti. Southern migrants, Asante Nkramo (Muslim Ashanti) and slaves of northern extraction were excluded from zongo membership, which was situationally defined to meet a particular need. All northern migrants (strangers) were regarded by the Europeans and southern Ghanaians to be zongo community members. From this perspective, orthodox Muslim migrants and non-Muslim northerners may have been strangers to Kumasi but were not seen as members of the zongo. The two qualifying characteristics for zongo community membership were the ability to speak Hausa and being Muslim. Migration continued to various other parts of southern Ghana; migrants were accepted into the indigenous communities in places such as Accra, Cape Coast, Takoradi and Obuasi. As the northern

parts of Ghana were ethnically diverse, the migrants hailing from the north were too, including Hausa, Yoruba, Mossi, Songhai (Gao) and Wangara residents from neighbouring West African countries. These migrants were predominantly traders and unskilled labourers.

Contemporary zongo communities date back to the colonial era where predominantly Muslim visitors temporarily occupied areas to do trade with citizens. Encouraging the settlement of strangers, the British colonial office facilitated the development of zongos (Schildkrout 1976). This development ought to be appreciated within the broader context – the external system that influences the fundamentals of the zongo communities. The politicisation of ethnicity occurred because of events and policies beyond the frontiers of the zongos, specifically community members' particular vulnerability as strangers. The political systems of the zongos were modelled on Hausa emirates systems from Nigeria (Ratray 1930).

Zongo communities can be described as segmentary lineage societies, where political authority is regulated in a diffused political power structure. Each segmentary lineage organises its membership according to unilineal descent or fiction thereof. Life is organised according to and revolves around ethnic association, with each ethnic group possessing an opportunity to enskin a chief more powerful than the 'central' zongo chief. In Africa, these political systems are often delineated into centralised and acephalous groups (Fortes & Evans-Pritchard 1940). From an anthropological perspective, local groups are formed around unilineal descent or fiction of such descent, their bonds sealed by being in segmentary opposition to other ethnic groups in close proximity. The zongos in Ghana are a microcosm of northern Ghana and the Sahel region of West Africa – featuring a mix of languages, cultures and symbols of ethnic groups such as the Hausa, Fulani, Dagomba, Yoruba, Gurune and many others.

Findings and discussion

Data gathered were analysed according to themes that are discussed in this section.

Political participation

Political participation and democracy are bedfellows, hence inseparable (Van Deth 2001). Some similarly argue that there cannot be any meaningful discussion of democracy without participation (Parry, Moyser & Day 1992). Our goal was to investigate the nature of political participation among zongo residents. To answer the research question, we examined whether zongo residents are given equal opportunities during election campaigns in Ghana. Participants in all 30 focus group discussions (FGDs) noted that they were given a lot of space during election campaigns to mobilise voters for the various political parties. This observation is in line with the claim that in Africa the kind of participation many citizens are offered is engagement in campaign activities and voting during elections (Falade 2014). FGD participants said they participated in programmes organised by political parties and house-to-house election campaigns. These participants also organised rallies during the campaign period.

However, after the elections were over, participation abated. *'We are used to doing all the dirty work during elections and being abandoned after the elections'*, a participant stated

during a FGD in the Madina constituency. Another participant, in the Yapei Kusowo constituency, said, *'In the lead-up to the 2016 elections, as a communication team member of the NDC, I helped [parliamentary candidate] John Jinapor campaign and canvass for votes, but he neglected me after the election'*.

Zongo residents are given space to participate in party activities during election campaigns. This is the most common form of participation in Africa (Dalton 2008; Zukin, Keeter, Andolina et al. 2006), but political elites typically use electioneering for their own benefit instead of serving the interests of zongo communities. Although the zongo communities are not the only ones abandoned following the elections, they tend to suffer more from this abandonment than others. A participant in a FGD in Ayawaso North asserted that, *'Our recognition ends on the voting day, and our role in Ghanaian politics also ends the day the winner is declared'*. It is clear from these observations that political elites in Ghana use zongo residents in their campaigns and abandon them when the voting ends. One of the underlying reasons for this abandonment is that political elites view zongo residents as vote-canvassing machines rather than as people who can take part in the governance process. This article therefore argues that political participation in zongo communities is mostly limited to election campaigns; only a few people from the zongos are considered for government positions. The youth and most of the adults who engage in political activities actively do that before and during elections and their involvement ends after elections. [Table 1](#)

Representation in government

Following the democratisation of Africa in the 1990s, citizen participation and representation in government and governance have gained prominence. Citizen representation in governance is essential for promoting public confidence in state institutions and ensuring policies are made in accordance with the needs of citizens (Haque 2003). In a democracy, all citizens – irrespective of sex, colour or race – should have equal opportunity in government. Government representation means being appointed to a government position. Even though every Ghanaian citizen can actively participate in politics and hold a government position, a section of the population still feels alienated in the distribution of state resources and government appointments. [Figure 1](#) shows participants' perception of how zongo residents are represented in government.

As shown in [Figure 1](#), only two in five (43 per cent) respondents knew of a zongo resident holding or who had held a local government position. Also, only three in ten

Table 1. Voter turnout in the 2020 elections: Zongo vs non-zongo constituencies

Constituency	Turnout (per cent)
Asawase	76.6
Suame	73
Ashaiman	83.4
Ledzekuku	77.4
Ayawaso North	78.3
Okaikoi Central	67.2
Madina	87.8
Ablekuma North	68.3

Source: Electoral Commission of Ghana.

Note: Zongo constituencies are rendered in bold type.

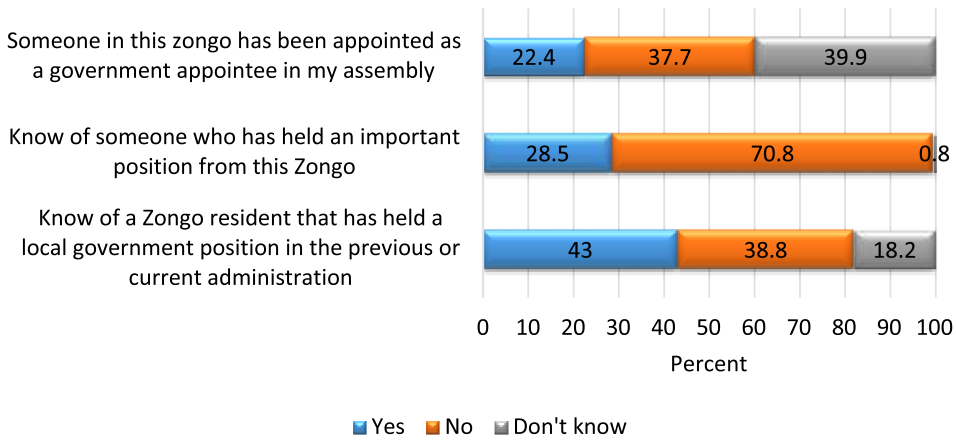


Figure 1. Representation of zongo residents in government. Source: Fieldwork

(28.5 per cent) respondents knew of a resident of their zongo holding an important position. Furthermore, only one in five (22.4 per cent) respondents knew someone from their zongo who had been appointed to a government position. This statistic shows that even after actively participating in election activities, zongo residents are not considered for government appointments, be it at the local level or national level. This finding was further confirmed by a participant from the Asawase constituency: *'Politicians only know us during elections, but after elections we become enemies to them'*. Some of the participants also felt that zongo residents are not fairly represented in government. Politicians seem to see zongo residents as useful only for canvassing votes. They are also not considered for government positions because most of those who are active in campaigning are seen as weak in terms of literacy and numeracy or do not have the minimum qualifications required. A FGD respondent in Ashaiman commented that zongo residents:

are perceived as criminal and violent people [...] So they neglect us in everything unlike the other people who are seen as angels. Zongo people are not criminals as they think [...] We are very clever and knowledgeable, but we don't get the opportunities to express it.

A respondent in Techiman lamented that zongo residents are not given enough space when it comes to government appointments. According to him, the overall effect is the absence of representation in government, culminating in zongo residents being left out when it comes to *'who gets what, when and why'*.

This sentiment was also shared by an imam from Mamobi in the Ayawaso East constituency, who stated that:

We are the last in the pecking order when politicians are considering people for positions. They seem to be doing us a favour in their appointments, and that is the exclusion we are praying to overcome. We are all citizens and campaign for political parties just as any other citizen out there, but why are we excluded from government appointments?

Similarly, an imam from Hohoe stated that:

Since 1993, I have not seen or heard of any appointment of a zongo person from Hohoe. All the governments focus on the other people here and leave us out of appointments. It is for this reason that we have always said they view us as foreigners.

This view is also shared by other respondents. Of the respondents, 22.4 per cent said someone from their zongo had been appointed to government, 37.7 per cent said their zongo was not represented in government, and 39.9 per cent said they did not know.

Exclusion of zongo residents from political appointments: The role of political parties

As indicated by Raul Cordenillo and Sam van Der Staak (2014), political parties are key democratic institutions that offer citizens the opportunity to participate in politics and be represented in governments. Thus, political parties must always allow all citizens to be represented in governments through political appointments. For a political party to survive in a changing political landscape, it must always strive to including and representing all citizens in government, especially those belonging to minority groups (IDEA 2017). Some of the measures that can be introduced by political parties to increase representation of minorities include affirmative action (Heyer & Jayal 2009; Tsikata 2009) and reserving positions to be occupied by vulnerable groups.

Successive governments in Ghana have rolled out policies and programmes to mitigate the challenges zongo residents face. For instance, under the presidency of John Mahama, the National Council of Zongo Chiefs was established to link the zongos and the government and integrate all the zongos in the affairs of the state. Under the leadership of President Nana Akufo-Addo, the Ministry of Inner Cities and Zongo Development was also established to be more inclusive of zongos and promote their development. The establishment of the National Council of Zongo Chiefs and the Ministry of Inner Cities and Zongo Development demonstrates government commitments to the zongos.

To assess how governments and political parties seek to include zongo residents, we explored the participant perception of various government policies (see Figure 2).

Respondents were asked to rate government policies towards zongo communities on a scale of 1 (excellent) to 5 (very bad). The results are presented in Figure 2. Of the four

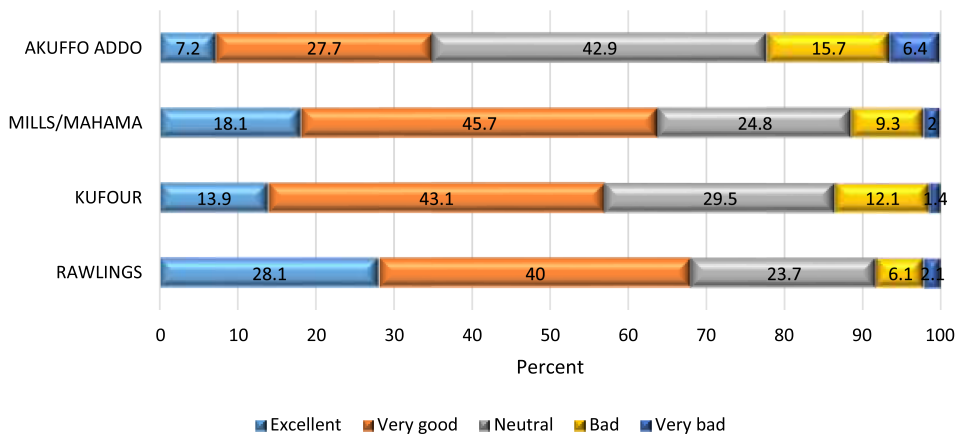


Figure 2. Government policies on zongo communities. Source: Fieldwork

administrations under Ghana's so-called Fourth Republic, the Rawlings (NDC) regime was said to have had the most favourable zongo policies, closely followed by the Mills/Mahama (NDC), Kufuor (NPP) and Akuffo Addo (NPP) administrations. This is an indication that the NDC is a social democratic party although it provides limited social intervention compared to the NPP, which is a centre right party that has introduced various social safety net policies such as National Health Insurance Scheme and the social protection intervention Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty.

Participants in our study further stated that the establishment of the Ministry of Zongo Development was a positive step towards developing the zongos and promoting inclusiveness. An NDC-constituency secretary in Tamale Central argued that the NPP government's establishment of the Zongo Development Fund is another milestone in the development of the zongos. In his view, the fund will help develop skills and infrastructure, which will enable zongo residents to be included in the governance process. Admitting that government tends to ignore zongo residents after elections, he was careful of faulting government because *'most of us [zongo residents] engaged in politics do not have the requisite qualification for a political appointment'*. Similarly, a coordinator of Nasara, the Zongo wing of the NPP, in the Hohoe constituency stated that the NPP's commitment to zongos in politics is evident in the establishment of his own position. He further observed that the coordinator position ensured there was always a zongo resident among NPP executives on all levels, from national to local. Thus, zongo residents are often included in the party's executive positions but not considered at the government level. However, an NDC member from the Ashaiman constituency reasoned that the Ministry is mere lip service: *'What the NPP promised and what the ministry claims it does are two different things. After almost two years, we have not seen any change in the zongos'*.

A participant from the NDC stated that his party believes in grassroots participation and, as such, all its policies are targeted at the development of local areas, including zongos. Despite admitting that the party did not have a blueprint for the zongos, NDG FGD participants boasted about their contribution to zongo development, particularly referring to projects undertaken during the administration of President Jerry Rawlings' administration – more than 20 years ago.

Some of the participants indicated that political parties could perhaps promote inclusiveness through affirmative action policies; they could reserve positions for zongo residents, for example. According to some participants, affirmative action would improve the number of zongo residents who are currently included in the decision-making processes to an appreciable number.

Ministry of Inner Cities and Zongo Development: A step towards inclusivity?

Respondents applauded the government for this bold initiative in Ghanaian politics. However, participants were concerned about the inactiveness of this Ministry since its establishment. The Ministry is yet to initiate policies to uplift the zongos. In this regard, a FGD participant from Kwesimentsim zongo noted that the Ministry:

is a laudable idea, and we have taken part in discussions to make it a reality. But we cannot be certain that our views will be considered. We hope that the Ministry will fulfil its promises to the zongo communities, which have been marginalised for many years.

Similarly, another respondent from Tafo-Pankrono constituency stated that:

We consider the Ministry [...] as one of the innovative ways to assist the zongo communities. The Ministry will re-channel funds into zongo development. It will serve as a link between zongo and the government.

Another interviewee from the Ashaiman constituency remarked that:

The Ministry [...] should form a zongo research team that can dialogue with educated zongo youth instead of relying on zongo chiefs, who have neglected the development of their communities. In this regard, we can benefit from the Ministry. Otherwise, the ministry will not contribute in any meaningful way to the zongos.

Some respondents held the view that the Ministry's success depended on the zongo residents' involvement with it. As a result, some of the respondents claimed that zongo residents should be involved in Ministry activities, especially with planning. Some opinion leaders did not support the establishment of the Ministry.

The study also sought to establish if the Minister of Inner Cities and Zongo Development had consulted zongo residents on the activities, programmes and projects planned for them. While some of the opinion leaders had been consulted on critical development issues, others complained that there had been a lack of Ministry consultation. Those who were not consulted stated that they heard the Minister visited some imams. According to them, the Imams are only one part of the zongo leadership, thus consulting them alone to take decisions on the entire zongo is unfair and unacceptable.

An opinion leader in Hohoe zongo stated that:

The Minister has been here and the [imams] told him what we want – the establishment of an Islamic secondary school. I participated in a stakeholder meeting on zongo development in Hohoe zongo.

Many of the participants suggested that the Minister only consulted imams and other leaders who were not known NDC members. In Ayawaso East, Ashaiman, Sunyani East and Effiakuma, respondents/opinion leaders expressed similar views, implying that the Ministry had to consult more broadly with all the relevant stakeholders in order to be completely inclusive of zongo communities. Despite all its prospects, the Progressive People's Party (PPP) said the Zongo Development Ministry might not have been necessary, as its responsibilities could have been incorporated under some of the other ministries. The constituency secretary of the PPP in Sunyani East remarked that:

the PPP see [the Ministry of Zongo Development] as a duplication of responsibilities with accompanying financial burden on the State. With the necessary financial backing from the State, the Ministry of Local Government could have executed these plans. If it has to do with health issues, we already have a health ministry, which should be well resourced to be able to tackle every health problem. We do not see the need for [...] a separate Ministry for inner cities and zongos.

Notwithstanding that 40 per cent of the respondents considered it impossible for the Ministry to close the gap between the zongos and other communities, many respondents were optimistic the Ministry could do so and also include zongo residents in the governance process.

Main challenges faced by zongo residents

The main/key challenge zongo residents face is sanitation. More than half of respondents (51.1 per cent) reported that sanitation is their biggest problem. Other problems include security (18.6 per cent), lack of infrastructure (13 per cent), poor access to education (6.6 per cent) and poor access to healthcare (4.6 per cent). [Figure 3](#)

Public policy and political participation of zongo communities

Public policy plays a significant role in citizens' experiences and political participation. Public policy frequently mirrors the reasoning of deep social structures and also explains the insistent gaps in political participation between groups (Hern 2015). In the context of zongo communities, public policies significantly impact political participation, both in the positive and negative sense. In the positive sense, when the policies are in line with the demands of the people, these people are influenced to actively participate in politics. However, when the policies do not address their needs, they negatively affect participation – some of them may not participate in politics. This is because exclusionary policies prevent full political participation. For instance, participants in the study revealed that the NPP government's resolve during the 2016 elections to create the Ministry of Zongo Development influenced the behaviour of most of the zongo residents at the time. This is consistent with existing arguments that public policy can affect the political behaviour of target populations (Mettler & Soss 2004).

Political participation is not limited to voting (Dambo, Ersoy, Eluwole & Arikewuyo 2022). It also includes participation in governance, advocacy and civil protest. But the political participation of the residents of Ghana's zongos is limited to voting as these residents are marginalised in terms of political appointments; just a few zongo residents are included in government. In order to ensure parity in political participation, government must consciously introduce policies that will reverse marginalisation of zongo

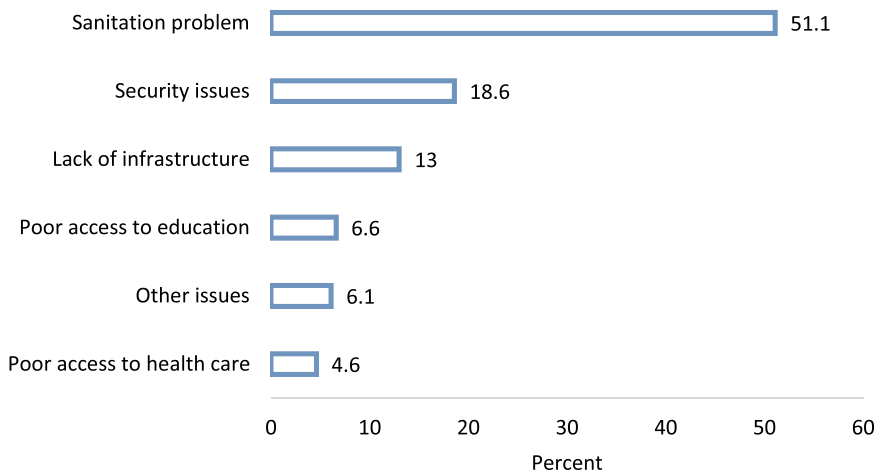


Figure 3. Zongo residents: Main challenges. Source: Fieldwork

residents. For example, the Ministry of Inner Cities and Zongo Development – which seeks to build infrastructure and facilitate social and economic development of inner-city and zongo communities within inclusive, resilient, safe human settlements and sustainable urban development – is significant in reversing marginalisation.

Conclusion

The objective of this article has been to examine the participation of zongo residents in government in Ghana. While zongo communities are very active during elections, they have by and large not been considered for political appointments after casting their votes. Zongo residents' political participation is limited to election activities and political campaigns. With the establishment of the Ministry of Inner Cities and Zongo Development, the Council of Zongo Chiefs and the Zongo Development Fund, the Ghanaian government has made some progress to include zongo residents in the body politic. These measures are, however, not enough. More needs to be done to ensure the full inclusion of zongos and their communities. To fully embrace zongo communities, the government as well as political parties can play an important role. They can promote inclusivity by introducing affirmative action. Also, besides ensuring that its policies and programmes have a real impact on the lives of zongo residents, the Ministry of Inner Cities and Zongo Development ought to include zongo residents in Ghanaian politics. Other tribes should approach zongo residents as equally capable as any other citizen. The government also needs to focus on developing zongos to ensure their fitting status in Ghana's socio-political life.

Disclosure statement

No conflict of interest has been reported by the authors.

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