

For Better for Worse Even After Death: Is ‘Widow Politics’ in Ghana’s Fourth Republic Becoming a Reliable Pathway for Women?

Journal of Asian and African Studies

1–18

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DOI: 10.1177/00219096221079321

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Department of Political Science, University of Ghana, Ghana

Emmanuel Yeboah-Assiamah 

Department of Political Science, University of Ghana, Ghana

Maame Adwoa Gyekye-Jandoh

Department of Political Science, University of Ghana, Ghana

Abstract

The quest to bridge the gender disparity in the politics of Ghana has seen little progress owing to the challenges associated with the passage of the Affirmative Action bill by the actors involved. However, the recent emergence and unconventional adoption of ‘widow succession’ politics in Ghana have sparked some public debates into the viability of the practice in the promotion of women in politics. This paper examined all five identified cases of widow politics in Ghana between 2000 and 2020 (Asutifi South, Shai Osudoku, Ayawaso West Wuogon, Mfantseman and Tempane constituencies) and draws on the widow effect and affirmative action concepts to propose lessons and the possible implication of the practice in Ghana.

Keywords

Widow politics, affirmative action, widow effect, parliament, sympathy vote

Introduction

Although the politics of Ghana has seen the active role of women, their numbers in terms of representation have not been encouraging (Ayentimi et al., 2020; Bauer, 2019). For instance, Ghana’s Eighth Parliament has seen some increase in the number of female Members of Parliament (MPs) from the previous 38 in the seventh parliament (Madsen et al., 2020) to 40/275 (representing 14.5% of the total membership) after the 2020 general elections, with both the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) caucuses having 20 women in parliament (Parliament of Ghana, 2021). Notwithstanding the nominal increase, Ghana is still halfway of the

Corresponding author:

Emmanuel Yeboah-Assiamah, Department of Political Science, University of Ghana, Box LG 64, Legon, Accra, Ghana.

Emails: eyeboah-assiamah@ug.edu.gh; yimmanuel@yahoo.com

required threshold to receive a bragging right because the ideal threshold for gender parity in political representation has been pegged at 30% by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) (2019). Classical democratic theorists have often argued that improved women representation in politics serves as the catalyst that inspires other women to come on board (Carroll, 1985). It has also been maintained that gender balance in representation at all levels in politics, especially, the legislature in itself legitimizes a political system and serves as the test point for representative assemblies (Darcy et al., 1987). Accordingly, some African countries like Uganda, South Africa and Rwanda have adopted various affirmative action policies, ranging from a voluntary party candidate quota, statutory quotas and quotas of reserve seats required by law to bridge the inequality gap in political representation in their respective countries (ABANTU, 2017; Madsen, 2019). It is against such backdrop and worldview that the relevant civil society organizations in Ghana launched the *Women's Manifesto for Ghana*, a political document drafted in 2004 to set out the critical issues of women and to advocate means of addressing them (Amoah-Boampong, 2018). It further outlines some key appeals that include, *inter alia*, promoting women representation and participation in decision-making at the top echelons of power in politics and addressing issues on access to resources, domestic violence against women and so on (Amoah-Boampong, 2018). Fortunately, crucial ones like the passage of legislation against domestic violence have been achieved. However, demands on the passage of affirmative action bill by the Parliament of Ghana keeps being prevaricated (Bauer, 2019).

Interestingly, a new phenomenon that has emerged in the Ghanaian body politic is the use of 'widow succession' politics by the major political parties; NPP and NDC. The concept of widow succession politics refers to the act of replacing a deceased congressman or congressional candidate with the widow ahead of a congressional or parliamentary elections (Gertzog, 1980; Kincaid, 1978). The practice first manifested in the run-up to the 2000 general elections, when the deceased Asutifi South NPP Parliamentary Candidate (PC) (Dr. Philip Kofi Adjabeng Amoah) was replaced with his widow (Cecilia Gyan Amoah) to contest the two-term NDC incumbent MP, Hon. Collins Dauda. Sixteen years later, the NDC also fielded Linda Obenewaa Akweley Ocloo (widow of the deceased PC, Desmond William Ocloo) for the Shai Osudoku seat in the 2016 parliamentary elections (Washington, 2016). Furthermore, the demise of the two-term NPP incumbent, Hon. Emmanuel Kyeremanteng Agyarko, obligated the NPP to sponsor the widow, Lydia Seyram Alhassan, ahead of the 2019 Ayawaso West Wougou parliamentary by-election. In the recent 2020 general elections, both the NPP and the NDC repeated the same political strategy by sponsoring two widows: ASP Ophelia Hayford (NPP) and Madam Lydia Akanvariba Lamisi for the Mfantseman and Tempene parliamentary seats, respectively (Amenuveve, 2020a). It is imperative to note that 'widow politics' is an old phenomenon that has received some scholarly attention (Bullock and Heys, 1972; Gertzog, 1980; Kincaid, 1978; Solowiej and Brunell, 2003, etc.). Its recent manifestation in Ghana can be linked to the innate cultural inheritance practice in most African societies. To wit, there is a high tendency for an individual to inherit both assets and liabilities of a deceased person (see Cooper, 2011).

The recent practice of widow politics has attracted public commentaries owing to its focus on promoting women representation. Critics have raised concerns on what happens when a female MP dies, does the widower also takes over? This article discusses the gendered implication of widow succession on politics in Ghana in three ways. First, it provides an overview of the level of progress on affirmative action in Africa and draws a specific inference from the Ghanaian case. Second, contextualizes the phenomenon of widow politics from the global perspective and narrows in on the specific cases in the Ghanaian context. Third, it discusses plausible implications of the phenomenon on representation and politics.

The paper heavily relied on secondary data; electoral results and media dossiers on gender and politics in Ghana and the practice of widow succession politics from the five identified

constituencies across four regions. These included Asutifi South (Ahafo region), Shai-Osudoku and Ayawaso West Wougon (Greater Accra region), Mfantseman (Central region) and Tempene (Upper East region).

Affirmative action in Africa: an overview

Owing to the numerous barriers to women's political representation in Africa, first-past-the-post electoral formulae, monetization of politics and stereotypical representations against women, some African countries have introduced several affirmative action plans, aimed at mitigating against these challenges. Madsen (2019) provides the various forms of affirmative action. For her, Affirmative action or gender quotas could take the form of:

a voluntary candidate quota adopted by individual parties: e.g., a 'zipper system', with women and men alternating (50:50) on the party list; a statutory candidate quota: e.g., a certain percentage of women among the candidates on the list (often 30 per cent linked to a critical mass); a quota of reserved seats mandated by law or the constitution. (Madsen, 2019: 5)

Data on the prospects of affirmative action plans in Africa indicate that countries that have instituted quota systems have made some significant strides in bridging the gender disparity in political representation. As of 2019, Rwanda topped the African affirmative action chart with about 61% of women representation in politics with Nigeria being the last with about 6% (Madsen, 2019). Rwanda's feat is largely attributed to the reserved (30%) threshold for women participation in local governance. Similarly in Tanzania, political parties are encouraged to appoint a number of women in proportion to votes received (ABANTU, 2017). Currently, the appointments of more women into sensitive ministerial portfolios by the current and first female president of Tanzania, Samia Suluhu Hassan, inspires hope for women who intend to venture into the arena of political leadership.

However, Ghana which has earned the enviable accolade of being the beacon of democracy in sub-Saharan Africa owing to the peaceful alternations in power lags behind other African countries in terms of women representation in politics. Although women representation in the Ghanaian legislature has seen some slight improvement, a cursory analysis of *women* representation between 1960 and 2020 (Figure 1) attests to the lack of political will to achieve the 30% recommended threshold by the IPU.

The major affront to Ghana's dwindled fortunes in this regard can be attributed to the incessant pussyfooting of the passage of the Affirmative Action bill which has been on the floor of parliament since 2017 (Madsen, 2019). Aside this, the NPP in 2015 introduced an initiative to reserve some seats that had incumbents as women. The only open challenge the party was going to consider was if another female was contesting these incumbent female MPs. However, this initiative was later shelved when it received a series of agitations and backlashes within the party (Madsen et al, 2020; Osei-Hwedie and Agomor, 2018). It is, however, interesting how the recent surge in widow succession politics among these major parties has not received similar backlashes. Are these parties just being rational? Owing to the fact that in all the cases, the parties involved have made political capital out of the widow effect.

Conceptual framework

To explain the gendered perspectives in Ghanaian politics and the recent surge in widow politics, the paper uses a combination of theoretical perspectives. Although the 1992 constitution of Ghana provides guarantees the rights and freedoms of all women and further abhor all forms of gender

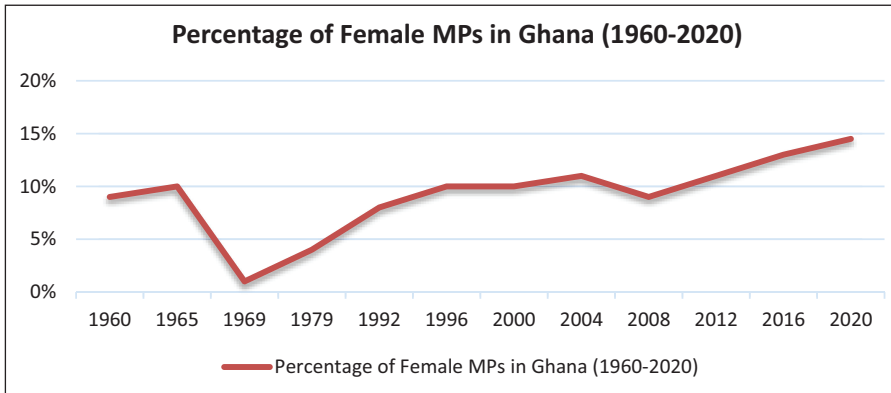


Figure 1. Women representation in the Ghanaian Parliament from 1960 to 2020.

Source: Compiled and updated from Madsen (2019). *Women's Political Representation and Affirmative Action in Ghana*, p. 3.

discrimination, women representation in public affairs has generally been low (Bauer, 2019; Osei-Hwedie and Agomor, 2018). In an attempt to explain this gender disparity, Osei-Hwedie and Agomor (2018) argued from the institutional perspective that the first-past-the-post electoral arrangement, among others, narrows women's chances of being elected due to difference in resources and support. Hence, necessitates the need for institutional reforms. The feminist institutionalists see institutions as gendered norms and analyses how they interact to shape the preferences and strategies of actors (Waylen, 2014). Madsen (2021) used the feminist institutionalism model to account for the low representation of women in politics and the delays in the introduction of the affirmative action bill in Ghana, citing the issues of inadequate financing and understaffing of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MOGCSP) (Madsen, 2021). To wit, 'the lack of strong feminist institutional spaces seems to be part of the reasons for the delaying of the affirmative action bill and its "shelving"' (Madsen, 2021: 233).

To place the practice of widow politics in a proper context, the paper further adopts the 'Widow effect'. The concept was originally coined by Lisa Solowiej and Thomas L. Brunell in their work, *The Entrance of Women to the U.S. Congress: The Widow Effect* to explain the significance of widows who had replaced their deceased husbands in the United States Congress (Solowiej and Brunell, 2003). To them, political parties heavily relied on the widows of deceased congressmen in the United States to replace their deceased spouses for two main reasons. First as the short-term measure for political parties to hold on to a seat until a more 'suitable' candidate was found for future elections. Second, a means to capitalize on the goodwill of the deceased MP/PCs' family in terms of resources to execute the elections (Solowiej and Brunell, 2003). Baker and Palmieri (2020) adopted a similar concept to explain women's pathways to political leadership in the Pacific. They argued:

A sympathy vote may be given out of respect for the husband's leadership; he may have been a particularly popular leader in the community, and his wife or widow could be a secondary beneficiary of that respect. (Baker and Palmieri, 2020: 1)

Similarly, Diamond (2020) re-echoed Baker and Palmieri's arguments by maintaining that political leaders recruit widows to make political capital out of public sympathy and to retain or win a seat for the interim. For her, the practice was widely used in the United States to avoid unwarranted intra-party feuds over possible replacements. The political behaviour in the instances

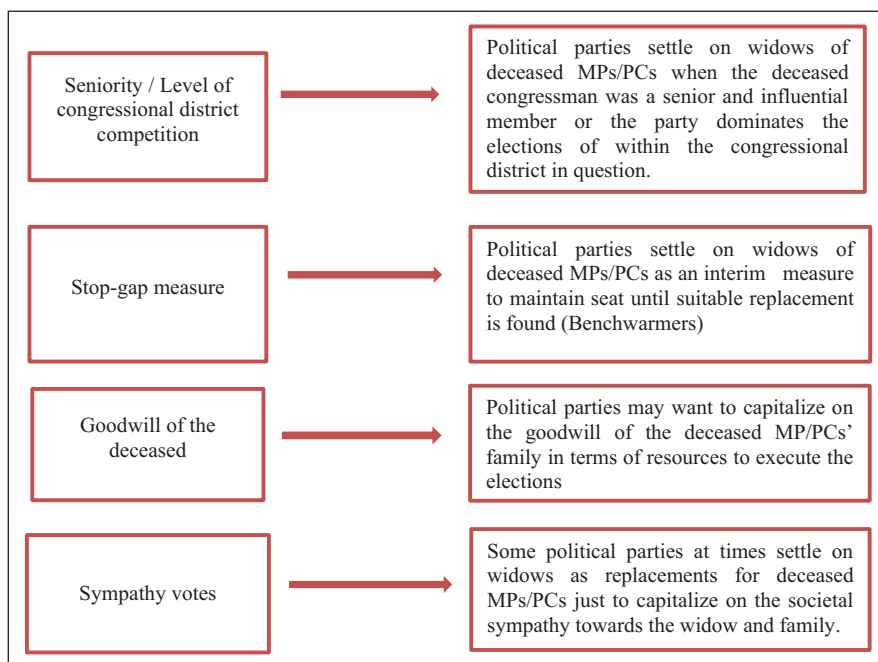


Figure 2. Rationale for widow politics summarized.

Source: Baker and Palmieri (2020), Gertzog (1980), Solowiej and Brunell (2003).

given is highly grounded in Downs' (1957) conceptions of rationality. Some rational theorists like Strom (1990) upheld that political parties constitute like-minded individuals who act collectively not to only seek votes but also to maximize their votes using all possible means, conventional or unconventional. In his seminal work, Irwin Gertzog argued that political parties in America often adopted widow succession politics for two main reasons. First, the parties consider the degree of seniority of the deceased congressman. Second, when the congressional district or seat in question is considered a safe seat for a political party (Gertzog, 1980).

The abovementioned propositions are subsequently tested in each of the five identified cases of widow succession politics in Ghana to ascertain their validity.

Evidence of widow politics: general context

The 19th Amendments that legalized female suffrage stirred the political interest of women in the United States (Gertzog, 1980). Interestingly, 14-year statistics from the History, Arts and Archives section of the US House of Representatives indicated that about 34 of 95 women served in the US Congress between 1917 and 1976 were widows (HAAUSHR, 2007). Similarly, a recent report by the Centre for American Women and Politics (CAWP) has shown that more than 47 widows have either been elected or nominated to fill vacant congressional slots created as a result of the death of their spouses between 1923 and 2005 (Centre for American Women and Politics, 2017). Of the 47 who replaced their dead husbands, 8 occupied the seats in the US Senate, whereas the remaining 39 joined the US House of representatives. Widow succession politics emerged first in the United States when the Republican-sponsored widow Mae Ella Nolan won a seat in the US House of Representatives (CAWP, 2017; Gertzog, 1980). Between 1929 and 1933, the Democrats also

Period	The Senate	
1931-45	Hattie Wyatt Caraway (D)- AZ	
1936-37	Rose McConnel Long (D)- LA	
1948	Vera Cahalan Bushfield (R)- SD	
1960-67	Maurine Brown Neuberger (D)- OR	
1978-79	Maryon Pittman Allen (D)- AL	
1978-79	Muriel Buck Humphrey (D)- MN	
1992	Jocelyn Birch Burdick (D)- ND	
2001-02	Jean Carnahan (D)- MO	
	House of Representatives	
1923-25	Mae Ella Nolan (R)- CA	1957-63 Kathryn Elizabeth Granahan (D)-PA
1925-37	Florence Prag Kahn (R)- CA	1958-61 Edna Oakes Simpson (R) -IL
1925-60	Edith Nourse Rogers (R)- MA	1961-63 Catherine Dorris Norrell (D)- AR
1929-31	Pearl Peden Oldfield (D)- AR	1961-63 Louise Goff Reece (R) -TN
1930-33	Effiegene Locke Wingo (D) AR	1962-63 Corinne Boyd Riley (D) -SC
1932-33	Willa McCord Blake Eslick (D)- TN	1964-65 Irene Bailey Baker (R) -TN
1934-35	Marian Williams Clarke (R)- NY	1966-67 Lera Millard Thomas (D) -TX
1938	Elizabeth Hawley Gasque (D)-SC	1972-73 Elizabeth B. Andrews (D) -AL
1940-69	Frances Bolton (R) -OH	1973-91 Corinne "Lindy" Boggs (D) -LA
1940-49	Margaret Chase Smith (R) -ME	1973-97 Cardiss Collins (D) -IL
1940-41	Florence Reville Gibbs (Democrat)-GA	1975-79 Shirley N. Pettis (R) -CA
1940-41	Clara Gooding McMillan (Democrat)-SC	1979-93 Beverly Barton Butcher Byron (D) -MD
1941-43	Katharine Edgar Byron (D) -MD	1982-83 Jean Ashbrook (R) -OH
1942-43	Veronica Grace Boland (D) -PA	1983-87 Sala Burton (D) -CA
1944-45	Willa Lybrand Fulmer (D) -SC	1985-87 Catherine S. Long (D) -LA
1951-55	Vera Daerr Buchanan (D) -PA	1996-2013 Jo Ann Emerson (R) -MO
1951-63	Marguerite Stitt Church (R) -IL	1998-2013 Mary Bono (R) -CA
1951-65	Maude Elizabeth Kee (D) -WV	1998-2017 Lois Capps (D) -CA
1952-75	Leonor K. Sullivan (D)-MO	2005-present Doris Matsui (D) -CA
1954-57	Mary Elizabeth Pruett Farrington (R) -HI	2021-present Julia Letlow (R) - LA

Figure 3. Widows who succeeded their deceased husbands in the US Congress.

Source: CAWP (2017).

nominated three widows who managed to retain their deceased husbands' seats in Arizona and Tennessee. The subsequent years saw the increased number of widows in the US Congress with the most recent one being the Republican-sponsored widow, Julia Letlow, who was elected to replace the deceased husband on the Los Angeles ticket for the US House of Representatives (Figure 3).

Kincaid (1978) established the nexus between death and the political careers of most women in the US Congress. It was revealed that most women who had served in the US Congress in the

1970s benefitted from ‘widow’s succession’. Although the phenomenon was widespread, it was more prevalent in some states than others. Kincaid (1978) maintained:

While twelve states have never been represented by any woman in Congress, for another eight states (Arkansas, Florida, Maine, Missouri, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, South Carolina and Tennessee) widowhood has been a virtual sine qua non for membership, i.e., no women except widows have ever been elected. (p. 96)

As a buildup on Kincaid’s work, Gertzog (1980) also explored the rationale behind the nomination of widows into the US Congress. Conclusively, two major striking observations were made. It was detected that not all widows were automatically nominated by parties to replace their deceased husbands because there was a selection criterion. First, the level of seniority and influence of the deceased spouses while in Congress. From a rational perspective, parties made such nominations in anticipation for these widows to tap into the formidable reputes and support base of their deceased husbands (Gertzog, 1980). This gave most of these nominated widows some political edge over their competitors in some congressional districts in the United States. Second, the degree of competition within a congressional district. Gertzog (1980) argued that ‘party leaders are more likely to support congressional widows when their party dominates elections within the district’ (p. 822). By inference, political parties considered widow succession in instances where the electoral districts involved were considered as safe seats.

Jalalzai and Hankinson (2008) also broadened the scope to cover the actions of these widows in Congress. The main objective was to ascertain whether there exists some similarities or differences in political philosophies between these widows and their late husbands. The authors concluded that most widows shared similar ideologies with their deceased husbands on issues in Congress. However, most were more critical with issues and bills related to women. As illustrated earlier, Baker and Palmieri (2020) also highlighted the evidence of a similar phenomenon in the politics of Pacific areas like Tonga and Solomon Islands, citing sympathy votes and maintenance of power within an elite family. But raised concerns on its reliability for women who intend to venture into politics.

Electoral politics and cases of widow politics in Ghana

Since Ghana’s inception into the Fourth Republic, it has witnessed eight consecutive general elections that have produced noticeable trends and generally been described as free, fair and transparent. These elections have either induced power alternations or retentions by incumbents (Agbele and Saibu, 2021; Frempong, 2017). A cursory analysis of electoral results in Ghana somewhat confirms an institutionalized political duopoly by the NPP and NDC, which have won elections alternately and relegated other existing political parties to the fringes (Daddieh and Bob-Milliar, 2014). In terms of electoral gains, the NDC has gained absolute control of the Volta and demonstrated greater strength in the Northern Regions of Ghana, whereas the NPP has the Ashanti and Eastern regions as their ‘world banks’ (Sefa-Nyarko, 2021). In line with Gertzog’s safe congressional seat argument raised earlier and others, this section of the study chronicles cases (Figure 4) and outcomes of the widow politics model for fielding candidates in Parliamentary elections in Ghana.

Asutifi South Constituency. The Asutifi South Constituency was formerly of the Brong Ahafo region but is now located in the Ahafo region after the 2019 regional re-organization in Ghana. Clearly, the constituency has been the most supportive of the NDC in the region (Table 1). The NPP has

Election Year	Constituency	Party	Deceased MPs/PCs	Widow & Replacement	Election outcome
2000	Asutifi South	NPP	Dr. Philip Kofi Adjabeng Amoah	Cecilia Gyan Amoah	victory
2016/2020	Shai Osudoku	NDC	Desmond William Ocloo	Linda Obenewaa Akweley Ocloo	Victory
2019/2020	Ayawaso West Wougon	NPP	Emmanuel Kyeremanteng Agyarko	Lydia Seyram Alhassan	Victory
2020	Tempane	NDC	David Adakudugu	Lydia Akanvariba Lamisi	Victory
2020	Mfantseman	NPP	Ekow Quansah Hayford	Ophelia Hayford	Victory

Figure 4. Evidence of widow politics in Ghana.

Source: Authors' compilation, 2021.

Table 1. NPP and NDC Parliamentary Votes in Asutifi South (1992–2020).

Party	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016	2020
NPP	–	37.8%	51.6%	46.9%	49.8%	44.2%	43.0%	46.5%
NDC	Unopposed	61.6%	48.1%	51.7%	49.9%	55.4%	56.7%	53.4%

Source: Electoral Commission of Ghana, 2021.

NPP: New Patriotic Party; NDC: National Democratic Congress. The significance of the bold values are indicate the party that won in each case or year.

won the parliamentary seat only once (2000), while the NDC has held it seven times through the same candidate Collins Dauda.

It is imperative to note that the phenomenon practice of widow politics first manifested in Ghana within this constituency in the run-up to the 2000 general elections. The demise of the NPP PC for the Constituency, Prof. Phillip Kofi Adjabeng Amoah, necessitated a more formidable and possible replacement against the NDC incumbent, Collins Dauda. The NPP, as a rational entity, capitalized on anticipated sympathy votes and elected the deceased PC's widow, Madam Cecilia Gyan Amoah, as the party's new parliamentary candidate for the 2000 elections. The widow, prior to her nomination, was a professional teacher and a career diplomat. She was later appointed as Ghana's High Commissioner to Cuba and Barbados in the second term of the erstwhile President Kufour's regime when she lost her party's parliamentary primaries in 2004 to a new NPP candidate, Thomas Yaw Broni.

What was fascinating in this case study was its novelty in Ghanaian politics and the widow's ability to unseat the two-term incumbent NDC MP in the elections. A cursory analysis of parliamentary outcomes within the constituency indicates that out of the eight organized successful parliamentary elections between 1992 and 2020, the NPP has occupied the seat once and that was only possible when the party fielded a widow (Figure 4). The new NPP candidate could not retain the seat but lost to Collins Dauda again in 2004 (Frempong, 2017). What then was the widow's magic wand? Owing to this scenario, it is highly possible that the NPP and the widow largely benefitted from sympathy votes because it was a ticket split outcome where the NPP won the

Table 2. NPP and NDC Parliamentary Votes in Shai Osudoku (1992–2020).

Party	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016	2020
NPP	–	12.7%	21.3%	34.7%	24.8%	22.8%	21.7%	32.8%
NDC	Unopposed	81.2%	50.6%	63.4%	65.6%	59.0%	67.1%	67.2%

Source: Electoral Commission of Ghana, 2021.

NPP: New Patriotic Party; NDC: National Democratic Congress. The significance of the bold values are indicate the party that won in each case or year.

parliamentary but lost the closely contested presidential in the first round. However, the NPP's after securing the parliamentary seat managed to win the presidential run-off (Frempong, 2017). Aside from the evidence of widow politics at play, Frempong (2017) has generally indicated the general yearning for change among Ghanaians to explain NPP's ability to snatch NDC seats like the Asutifi South constituency in the 2000 elections.

The case of the widow losing her re-election bid in the party's primaries to some extent fits the 'benchwarmer' argument where widows are brought in as an interim measure until a suitable candidate is settled on in the future (Solowiej and Brunell, 2003).

Shai Osudoku Constituency. The Shai Osudoku Constituency in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana reignited the practice of widow succession politics ahead of the 2016 general elections. After the demise of the then NDC PC, Desmond William Ocloo, the party settled on his widow, Madam Linda Obenewaa Akweley Ocloo, as the new PC. A cursory analysis of electoral results as shown in Table 2 reveals that the constituency remains a safe seat for the NDC.

Madam Ocloo, prior to her entry into politics was an Economist, Banker and Insurer.¹ Although she also contested the party's primaries after being convinced by some party bigshots, she triumphed over all other candidates and proceeded to retain the seat for the NDC. Unlike the case of the Asutifi South widow, Madam Linda Ocloo was successful on her second bid in the 2020 parliamentary elections. As noted earlier, the Shai Osudoku constituency remains a safe seat for the NDC because the NPP has never won it due to persistent abysmal performance. The NPP's best was the (32.8%) garnered in the 2020 elections (Table 2). The safe nature of the seat for the NDC's somewhat accounts for their actions to sponsor the widow. This reverberates Irwin Gertzog's conceptions that 'party leaders are more likely to support congressional widows when their party dominates elections within the district' (Gertzog, 1980: 822). The strides made by the widow in consolidating her grounds suggest she could maintain the seat for a long time. A cursory analysis of the NDC's winning percentages in the constituency from 2000 to 2020 indicates a steadily appreciation in winning percentages since the widow was brought in 2016 (Table 2).

Ayawaso-West Wuogon Constituency. The sudden demise of the incumbent NPP MP for the constituency, Emmanuel Kyeremanteng Agyarko, in November 2018 compelled the party to settle on his widow, Lydia Seyram Alhassan, after a successful parliamentary primary bid. The widow, prior to her nomination for the 2019 by-elections, was into the importation of pharmaceuticals.² Just like the previous cases, the widow, in this case, was largely successful in retaining the seat for two reasons. First, the fortunes can be explained in connection to the safe seat analogy as espoused by Gertzog (1980). A cursory analysis of parliamentary outcomes in the constituency presupposes that it is now a safe seat for the NPP (Table 3). Out of the 8 successful elections, the NDC has held the seat only twice (1992 and 1996).

Second, the widow among other factors enjoyed some form of sympathy votes as earlier held by Solowiej and Brunell (2003). Further analysis of the victory margins indicates that the highest

Table 3. NPP and NDC Parliamentary Votes in Ayawaso West Wuogon (1992–2020).

Party	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016	2019 by-election	2020
NPP	–	45.2%	56.2%	52.1%	48.2%	50.3%	57.3%	68.8%	51.4%
NDC	64.1%	46.1%	36.5%	37.9%	42.3%	47.6%	39.6%	30.5%	48.3%

Source: Electoral Commission of Ghana, 2021.

NPP: New Patriotic Party; NDC: National Democratic Congress. The significance of the bold values are indicate the party that won in each case or year.

Table 4. NPP and NDC Parliamentary Votes in Tempene (2012–2020).

Party	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016	2020
NPP	–	–	–	–	–	36.6%	45.4%	44.0%
NDC	–	–	–	–	–	52.3%	36.4%	56.0%

Source: Electoral Commission of Ghana, 2021.

NPP: New Patriotic Party; NDC: National Democratic Congress. The significance of the bold values are indicate the party that won in each case or year.

the party has ever garnered was when the widow was brought in to contest the 2019 by-election (68.8%) (Table 3). What is striking and perhaps different from the earlier cases was when the NPP unanimously re-nominated her unopposed to re-contest the seat in the 2020 general elections. This decision according to the party's National Organizer, Sammy Awuku was contingent on the party's conventions to allow any MP who came to power through a by-election and holds office for 2 or fewer years to re-contest unopposed (Muhayu-Deen, 2020).

Tempene Constituency. In the Tempene case, Madam Lydia Lamisi Akanvariba was elected by the NDC to replace her deceased husband, David Adakudugu (a one-term MP), who lost the seat in 2016 to the debutant NPP candidate, Joseph Kpemkpa (Amenuveve, 2020b). Madam Lydia Akanvariba, prior to her entrance into active partisan politics, was a nursing professional.³ The Tempene constituency, being one of the recently created seats in 2012 from its mother constituency, Garu Tempene, was one of the keenly contested seats that had both the NDC and the NPP holding it once in 2012 and 2016, respectively (Table 4). The widow's successful bid in the parliamentary primaries was the game changer for the NDC because she managed to wrestle the seat from the NPP incumbent and her margin of victory was the NDC's best since the creation of the constituency (Table 4).

Clearly, the Tempene case also fits the sympathy vote model. This is largely because the NDC's nomination and support for the widow was the game changer. Madam Akanvariba managed to recapture the seat for the deceased husband and the NDC.

Mfantseman Constituency. Just like the Tempene case, the murder of the incumbent MP and PC of the Mfantseman constituency necessitated the use of widow succession by the NPP to sustain their electoral fortunes (Boakye, 2020; Frimpong, 2020a). Looking at the exigencies of the time and closeness of the MP's demise to the 2020 elections, the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the NPP unanimously settled on the widow, Madam Ophelia Hayford without any parliamentary primaries. The widow, before she was brought into the picture, was an Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) of the Ghana Police Service.⁴ Consequently, she had to resign from the police Service

Table 5. NPP and NDC Parliamentary Vote in Mfantseman (1992-2020).

Party	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016	2020
NPP	–	–	34.8%	56.6%	45.6%	47.2%	46.8%	51.9%
NDC	71.3%	87.5%	40.0%	41.4%	52.1%	51.0%	45.6%	46.8%

Source: Electoral Commission of Ghana, 2021.

NPP: New Patriotic Party; NDC: National Democratic Congress. The significance of the bold values are indicate the party that won in each case or year.

before filing to contest the 2020 elections. Politics within the Mfantseman Constituency between the two major political parties remains very keen. However, a swift analysis of electoral trends in the constituency shows that the NDC had an edge over the NPP until the 2016 (close contest) and the 2020 elections (Table 5). From the outcome of the 2020 parliamentary elections in the constituency, it can be inferred that the NPP benefitted from some sympathy votes because the party's voter percentage appreciated by more than 5% (Table 5).

The contest between the two parties remains keen so that the NPP's decision to bring in the widow was a political gamble that will require time to ascertain its worthiness. Although the widow increased the NPP's parliamentary fortunes from the previously 46.8% in 2016 to 51.9%, the widow's political strength would be tested in 2024 should the NPP support her second term bid.

Widow politics in Ghana: party support and campaign messages

Undoubtedly, the major political parties in Ghana have embraced widow politics and in all the cases illustrated above supported the widows involved in diverse ways. For instance, the general secretary of the NPP justified the use of widow politics in the case of the Mfantseman constituency in a radio interview. He averred:

I have been to the constituency several times and the whole constituency leadership and party members, the Regional [Executive] setup and the National [Executive] set up deem it fit that his wife [Ophelia] is the backbone of the husband . . . She knows the constituency very well and considering the large support that the husband had and the kind of difficulties that the constituency is going through, a lot more of the constituents think that we should let the wife continue . . . there was massive consensus with no dissent at all at all levels of the consideration of the widow as the replacement. (Frimpong, 2020b: paras. 1–3)

Similarly, the NPP held a mammoth rally, dubbed 'perfect replacement rally' to support Madam Lydia Alhassan ahead of the 2019 Ayawaso West Wuogon by-elections which were graced and had the support of the incumbent President Nana Akufo-Addo, his Vice, Dr. Mahamadu Bawumia, and other party bigshots (Acheampomaa, 2019). From the party supports and the strategies adopted in the campaigns, it can be inferred that the political parties involved acted rationally, to appeal to sympathy votes or capitalist on the existing local support for the deceased MPs. In the case of the Tempane constituency, it was revealed that among the potential replacements,

The delegates saw the widow of the late David Adakudugu as the most suitable to 'fight' the New Patriotic Party's (NPP) Parliamentary Candidate, Joseph Dindio Kpemka for the seat . . . Some others believe the presence of Ms. Lamisi in the race might win some sympathy votes for the party because of the demise of her husband. (Amenueve, 2020a)

As part of the campaign strategies, most of these widows were either clad in black or had their deceased husbands attached to theirs on the campaign posters (Shai Osudoku, Ayawaso West



Figure 5. Samples of campaign posters for widow succession politics in Ghana.
Source: Authors' compilation, 2021.

Wuogon, Mfantseman and Tempene) to appeal to the emotions of the constituents for support (Figure 5).

However, the campaign messages of the non-debutant widows (Shai Osudoku and Ayawaso West Wuogon constituencies) differed from the new entrants (Mfantseman and Tempene constituencies) ahead of the recent 2020 general elections. The campaign message was re-directed tout their achievements for their first term, with both citing the achievements in education, health and so on. Madam Lydia Alhassan, after her successful second parliamentary bid in the Ayawaso West Wugon constituency, indicated in an interview:

They [constituents of Ayawaso West Wuogon] are appreciative of the work that we have done, and for me, I have been an MP for less than two years and they have seen my good works. My signature is all over the place and so for them, they are renewing my mandate and that of President Akufo-Addo. (Darko, 2020: paras. 12, 13)

Similarly, Madam Linda Ocloo, as part of her campaigning indicated

An incumbent MP and the Parliamentary Candidate, people on the ground have seen my works and I believe they will give me another chance to continue the good works. I am going to parliament again based on my achievement, and I believe within four years in opposition I've done so well and I deserve the second term. (Mensah, 2020: paras. 3, 5)

Discussion and possible implications of widow politics in Ghana

Despite the seeming prospects of the practice, it is associated with some challenges. In this section, the paper highlights some of the challenges with the practice.

First, the practice of widow politics somewhat serves as an entry-level qualification amid the difficulty in rolling out mainstream affirmative action plans. Previous studies have shown the strong correlation between widow politics and the entrance of women into the legislature across some advanced democracies like the United States and other areas in the Pacific (Gertzog, 1980; Solowiej and Brunell, 2003). Evidence from the Ghanaian cases somewhat confirms the use of the widow card to gain some competitive edge over political opponents. The five cases presented synchronizes with the election of widows as a stop-gap measure to maintain the party's fortunes or capitalize on sympathy votes. This is because such women in a normal intra-party politics may not have been considered. In effect, the demise of their spouses becomes the visa and gives these widows some form of political advantage over other contenders.

Second, the practice of widow politics has the tendency to undermine quality representation of the people. Consistent with this observation, Ransford Gyampo⁵ contends:

. . . the practice of asking widows to replace their dead husbands in parliament, may be dangerous and soon undermine quality representation, particularly, if the only driving force to push a certain segment of the citizenry to parliament is the loss of their spouse. (Gyampo, 2020)

Although most wives of politicians have some interest in the political careers of their husbands, most of these women appear more as 'trophy' wives rather than 'trailblazers' because they exert little or no influence political careers of their spouses. Generally, most women in Ghana have less interest in partisan politics and the few that defy the odds and venture into it have over the years settled for the lower political positions and gender identity-based ones like the positions of women organizers (Sossou, 2011). These political predispositions of most Ghanaian women are largely influenced by cultural, educational and financial barriers (Sossou, 2011). So, the persistent use of 'widow succession' in Ghanaian politics has the tendency to culminate in the election of inexperienced or disinterested leaders who may have no incentive to serve other than the circumstances under which they were elected. Due to the exigencies of the timing and the tendency to capitalize on the fortunes of the deceased MPs, most parties tend to overlook the competence of these widows and overly bang their hopes on sympathy votes. Hence, some of these women may lack the temerity to run for office. The practice in times of vacancy has always been for parties to prospective candidates to have an open contest to select a candidate for the party. However, the Mfantseman case presents a clear case of candidate imposition by the top echelons of the NPP, unlike the others who were made to compete. This to a larger extent, denied potential suitors the chance to compete for the slot.

Contrary to the claims on poor representation, most of these widows have been very active in parliamentary duties and promoting the well-being of their constituents. For instance, MP for Ayawaso West Wougon, Lydia Alhassan, was trending in the Ghanaian media when she opted to sacrifice 3 months of her salary as part of mitigating the effects of the Covid-19 on the vulnerable in her constituency. The NPP to some extent has recognized her active role in the party and nominated her as the party's deputy whip in the parliament of Ghana. Among the identified widows, she is currently the most engaged in parliamentary duties (Table 6). The Shai Osudoku MP and the newly elected widow from the Mfantseman constituencies serve on the Government Assurance and Defense and Interior committees, respectively, in higher capacities (Sossou, 2011).

Third, the phenomenon of widow succession politics has the tendency to trigger contract killings. In congruence to this, Ransford Gyampo (2020) bemoaned:

We must also be careful not to perpetuate this precedence [Widow politics]. Else, very soon, some unscrupulous people who have marital issues with their spouse, may be plotting murder as a mean of getting selected to parliament.

Table 6. Impacts of widowed MPs in Ghana's Eighth Parliament.

Constituency	Widow/MP	Parliamentary Committee and Rank
Ayawaso West Wuogon	Lydia Seyram Alhassan	First Deputy Majority Whip Business – Member Selection – Member Health – Member Mines and Energy – Member
Shai Osudoku	Linda Ocloo	Government Assurance – Deputy Ranking Member Food, Agriculture and Cocoa Affairs Committee – Member
Mfantseman	Ophelia Hayford	Defence and Interior – Vice Chairperson House – Member
Tempane	Lydia Lamisi Akanvariba	Communications – Member

Source: Authors' compilation from Parliament of Ghana website, 2021.

From these assertions, it could be deduced that the continued practice of widow politics by political parties has the propensity to breed bad precedence by encouraging spouses of congressmen who have ill motives and future political ambitions to consider exterminating their spouses for political gains.

Fourth, the practice of widow succession politics has the tendency to undermine socio-cultural norms. One key socio-cultural norm within most African societies is the practice of widowhood rites which offer widows some privacy to mourn their deceased spouse (Ramphele, 1996). In the Ghanaian Akan setting, widows are required to be excused from activities that require a lot of public visibility (Korang-Okrah and Haight, 2015). Contrastingly, the practice of widow politics also requires widows to be at the forefront to champion the unfinished political legacies of their husbands. In essence, most of these widows are mostly deprived of the privacy to mourn their deceased husbands solemnly. For instance, the exigencies and the proximity of the elections normally compel political parties to overlook these socio-cultural norms and breach the privacy of the mourning family by making demands to possibly get the widow to replace the deceased husband in the impending elections (Dzeble, 2020). The woes of these widows are mostly exacerbated by the politics of insults, ridicules and rumours against women who venture into politics in Ghana (Madsen, 2021). Women who are outspoken and show equal strength as their male colleagues in the Ghanaian political space are either labelled as 'Yaa Asantewaa' or 'Iron Ladies' (Madsen, 2021). A classical instance of public ridicule of a widow was when Madam Lydia Seyram Alhassan of the Ayawaso West Wuogon was tag as 'a bloody widow' by the opposition NDC MPs (including women), due to the skirmishes that characterized the 2019 Ayawaso by-elections. (Boamah, 2019).

Finally, the practice has the tendency to summarily truncate the professional careers of widows. The exigencies of the time normally compel the widows to abandon their personal careers to pursue the political legacies of their deceased husbands. Accordingly, some end up quitting their jobs in exchange for political nominations. This remains risky and somewhat a political gamble, especially when the seat in question is no safe seat. Unlike individuals who own their private businesses, widows who work in the public sector may encounter some challenges. For instance, the laws guiding public service recruitment in Ghana highly frown on staff engagements in active partisan politics. Hence, the Mfantseman widow was actively serving in Ghana as a Police Officer and was compelled by law to resign before filing to contest the seat in 2020. Although she was successful in her bid, there have been general concerns as to what her fate would be should she lose out on her second term bid like the Asutifi South widow. For instance, some have bemoaned:

The widow, is being made to sacrifice her job as Police Officer, for a non-Ketu-South-like seat [competitive], that she can easily win in 2020 because of sympathy, but cannot be guaranteed victory beyond the victory. Will the party take care of her and the children, when she loses her seat and no longer has a job with the Police Service? (Gyampo, 2020: para. 12)

Conclusions and policy implications

This paper examined the practice of widow politics as a possible means of promoting women's participation and representation amid the challenges associated with the passage of the affirmative action bill in Ghana. On the whole, the paper discussed the gendered implications of the practice. Findings from the studies revealed that though the practice is not legally recognized, it has largely worked for parties that have utilized it so far (see Asutifi South, Shai Osudoku, Ayawaso West Wuogon, Mfantseman and Tempene cases). However, owing to the challenges associated with it, it cannot be a reliable pathway for women representation in Ghana. What is striking in all this is the lackadaisical way the Affirmative action bill has been handled by the actors as opposed to the holistic unconventional adoption of widow succession politics by the major parties.

Statistics on the adoption Affirmative Action policies have projected it as a more reliable and convenient pathway to promote women representation in politics (Madsen, 2019, 2021). However, Ghana still lags behind countries like South Africa, Rwanda and Uganda in terms of the adoption of Affirmative Action plans. Accordingly, some measures ought to be instituted to bridge the gap in gender disparities in Ghanaian politics. First, the Parliament of Ghana ought to expedite the legislation on the Affirmative Action Bill which has over the years has not received the needed prioritization from successive governments. There should be strategic co-operation between Women's organizations, female MPs and formal government institutions like the MOGCSP to push for the passage of the affirmative action bill (Madsen, 2019). Second, political parties are encouraged to roll out gender quotas to stir up the interest of women in politics. Accordingly, women could be granted some form of rebates on the cost of running for political offices to induce broader participation (see Bauer and Darkwah, 2019). Third, the idea of reservation of safe seats for women as was indicated in Gertzog's (1980) conceptions could prove useful in this context if the major parties, NPP and NDC, reserve certain seats in their strongholds, Ashanti and Volta regions, respectively, for only women to contest. Fourth, the first-past-the-post electoral formula in Ghana ought to be re-looked at to employ a more proportional representation (PR) formula that can accommodate special representation for women. Finally, owing to the disparity and unequal access to resources, this paper agrees with Madsen's position that donor agencies earmark some funds to support female candidates as was done ahead of the 2009 Malawian elections.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Emmanuel Yeboah-Assiamah  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9906-1302>

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5. Political Scientist and Associate Professor at the University of Ghana.

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Author biographies

Baffour Agyeman Prempeh Boakye is a Graduate Teaching and Research Assistant at the University of Ghana and doubles as a Research Associate at the Elections Research and Resource Centre (ERRC-Ghana). He is a Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) scholar and holds both Bachelor of Arts and Master of Philosophy Degrees in Political Science from the University of Ghana. His research and publications focus on Electoral politics in Africa, Political parties, Governance and Development in Africa. Baffour can be reached via bapboakye@st.ug.edu.gh.

Emmanuel Yeboah-Assiamah (PhD) is currently a lecturer at the Department of Political Science in the University of Ghana and possesses a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Political Science, a Master of Philosophy (MPhil) Degree in Public Administration both from the University of Ghana and a PhD in Public & Development Management from the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa. He has had a post-doctoral training from the Global Development Institute, University of Manchester where he served as a GCRF Fellow and has published in the areas of *governance and leadership; politics, public policy and public administration; environmental governance; PPP and urban service delivery*. His papers have appeared inter alia, in the *International Journal of Public Administration*, *Public Organization Review*; *Public Money & Management*; *Journal of Public Affairs*; *Society & Natural Resources* and serves as a verified reviewer for many reputable journals. Email: eyeboah-assiamah@ug.edu.gh or yimmanuel@yahoo.com.

Maame Adwoa Gyekye-Jandoh (PhD) is a Senior Lecturer and Head of the University of Ghana's Political Science Department and possesses a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science (Honors) with Sociology from the University of Ghana, and M.A (Comparative Politics and American Politics) and Ph.D. degrees in Political Science (Comparative Politics) from Temple University in Philadelphia, PA, U.S.A. She was a Post-Doctoral Fellow at the Amsterdam School for Social Science Research from January 2009 to December 2012 and an APSA-Africa Workshop Fellow from June to July 2009, under the theme: *Electoral Systems, Political Behavior, and Democracy*, at the University of Ghana. She has published in scholarly journals such as the *Contemporary Journal of African Studies*, the *Ghana Social Science Journal*, *Legon Journal of the Humanities*, *Springer Nature*, and the *African Journal of Democracy and Governance*, as well as chapters in edited books published by Palgrave Macmillan, Springer, and CODESRIA. Email: MGyekye-Jandoh@ug.edu.gh.