Data Article

Survey data on gender in relation to youth political discussion and involvement at a Public University in Ghana

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Abstract

This article presents extensive description of survey data on the political participation of 913 male and female undergraduate students at the University of Ghana. Multi-stage and other sampling procedures were employed to collect the data that took place between 2016 and 2017. Data were analysed using frequencies, percentages and cross-tabulations for each gender separately. The findings revealed that females reported discussing politics more frequently with others than their male counterparts, in addition, ethnicity significantly associated with political discussion and religion significantly associated with political involvement for females. However, males expressed interest and involvement in political activities at both national and student levels more frequently than their female counterparts. The findings support much of the observations in the political behavior literature. Despite the
gender imbalance, respondents were partial to engagement in student politics than national politics. It is, therefore, advisable that political parties focus their recruitment efforts on university campuses.

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Specifications table

| Subject                                      | Social Sciences, Humanities.                                                                 |
|----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Specific subject area                        | Population Studies, Political Science, Political Sociology, Youth Studies                   |
| Type of data                                  | Tables                                                                                      |
| How data were acquired                       | Information was gathered by administering semi-structured questionnaires to sampled students. A copy of the questionnaire is attached as a supplementary file. |
| Data format                                   | Raw                                                                                         |
| Analysed                                      | Information collected included sociodemographic characteristics, academic performance, religiosity, political knowledge and participation, substance use, as well as opinions on sex and sexuality (see supplementary files). |
| Parameters for data collection               | Data were obtained from 913 undergraduate students contacted with the use of multi-stage sampling (stratified and systematic sampling techniques). |
| Description of data collection               | The University of Ghana, Greater Accra Region, Ghana.                                         |
| Data source location                         | Data are included in this article                                                            |

Value of the data

- The data offer vital information on individual background characteristics, opinions on the importance of participation in civic activities, as well as how much young people say they discuss politics and with whom. This can be useful for anyone who has an academic interest in political discussion, political participation and/or deliberative democracy beyond electoral politics (i.e. elections, voting), particularly among the youth population.
- The proclivity of citizens to engage in political discussion is considered to be a basic component of democratic political systems. Thus, the data can be useful in advancing the academic debate regarding the contribution of everyday political discussion in a democracy.
- This survey is primarily focused on two principal demographic variables, gender and age, for their consistent identification as important predictors in the political participation literature. This information can be used to examine the role of gender or age on political participation to corroborate or contradict the existing assertion that young people and women are particularly politically apathetic or apolitical [1].
- The data can be used to explore the relationship between socio-demographic variables and young people’s political involvement, to draw inferences on how political participation is shaped by individual and contextual factors.
- The dataset is limited to Ghana, a fairly politically stable multi-party democracy with a young age structure. Thus, information derived from the data can be used to draw inferences about the link between young people’s civic participation and democratic governance. It can also be used to provide anecdotal narratives for countries in transition or developing democracies in sub-Saharan Africa.
- The dataset also includes information on other variables that can guide further investigations into and/or comparative research into young people’s perceptions of and attitudes toward premarital sex, substance use, and other prevalent issues in sub-Saharan Africa (see supplementary file) [2].
1. Data

Table 1 shows the background characteristics of the respondents. The age distribution of respondents shows that the lowest age is 17 years, the highest age is 45 years, with an average age of 21 years. Also, 267 (30.2%) are less than 20 years, 573 (62.8%) are between 20–24 years old, while 64 (7%) are 25 years or older. The gender disaggregation of respondents shows that 440 (48.2%) are male while 473 (51.8%) are female. More than half (58.7%) of the respondents identify as Akan, 12.1% are Ga-Adangbe, 15.6% are Ewe, while 13.6% belong to other ethnic groups. The majority (897; 98.2%) of the respondents are Ghanaians, while only about 1.8% are foreign nationals. Just over two-sevenths (29.2%) of the respondents are in their second year, 17.1% are first-year students, 27.1% are third-year students and 26.6% are fourth-year students. Breakdown by respondents’ academic faculty shows that more than half (53.4%) are enrolled in the Humanities/Social Sciences, about a quarter (25.4%) are in the Basic and Applied Sciences, and about a fifth (20.9%) are enrolled in the Health Science faculty. Lastly, nearly half (48.3%) of the respondents reported coming from middle-income households, while 45% reported coming from richer households, with 6.7% coming from poorer households.

Tables 2 and 3 present information on respondents’ political interest as measured by their tendency to discuss politics with others. Generally, the analysis shows a slight gender difference in the reported levels of political interest, in favor of females. Thus, females more frequently reported discussing politics with others compared to males. This observation contradicts prevailing assumptions that, compared with their female counterparts, males are more likely to engage in political discussions [3,4]. Additionally, ethnicity is significantly associated with political discussion for females. This suggests that for females, in particular, the ethnic group they belong
Table 2
Relationship between students’ political discussion and socio-demographic factors by gender.

|                           | Male No | Male Yes | Male Total | Female No | Female Yes | Female Total | p-value |
|---------------------------|---------|----------|------------|-----------|------------|--------------|---------|
| Age                       |         |          |            |           |            |              |         |
| < 20 years                | 32.3%   | 67.7%    | 96         | 25.0%     | 75.0%      | 180          | 0.294   |
| 20–24 years               | 26.7%   | 73.3%    | 315        | 26.7%     | 73.3%      | 258          |         |
| ≥25                       | 37.9%   | 62.1%    | 29         | 31.4%     | 68.6%      | 35           | 0.722   |
| Religion                  |         |          |            |           |            |              | 0.789   |
| Christian                 | 29.3%   | 70.7%    | 375        | 271.1%    | 72.9%      | 398          | 0.240   |
| Muslim                    | 20.0%   | 80.0%    | 20         | 20.8%     | 79.2%      | 24           |         |
| Others                    | 23.5%   | 76.5%    | 17         | 66.7%     | 33.3%      | 3            |         |
| †Ethnicity                |         |          |            |           |            |              | 0.302   |
| Akan                      | 25.1%   | 74.9%    | 255        | 21.8%     | 78.2%      | 275          | 0.045   |
| Ga-Adangbe                | 30.4%   | 69.6%    | 56         | 26.4%     | 73.6%      | 53           |         |
| Ewe                       | 36.1%   | 63.9%    | 72         | 37.7%     | 62.3%      | 69           |         |
| Others                    | 30.0%   | 70.0%    | 50         | 30.1%     | 69.9%      | 73           |         |
| Academic Year of Study    |         |          |            |           |            |              | 0.223   |
| First-year                | 25.8%   | 74.2%    | 62         | 25.5%     | 74.5%      | 94           | 0.196   |
| Second-year               | 34.5%   | 65.5%    | 116        | 26.5%     | 73.5%      | 151          |         |
| Third-year                | 30.5%   | 69.5%    | 128        | 32.8%     | 67.2%      | 119          |         |
| Fourth-year               | 23.1%   | 76.9%    | 134        | 20.2%     | 79.8%      | 109          |         |
| †Faculty of Study         |         |          |            |           |            |              | 0.090   |
| Humanities/Social Sciences| 25.5%   | 74.5%    | 239        | 25.9%     | 74.1%      | 247          | 0.510   |
| Basic and Applied Sciences| 37.6%   | 62.4%    | 117        | 31.6%     | 68.4%      | 114          |         |
| Health Science            | 25.6%   | 74.4%    | 82         | 22.2%     | 77.8%      | 108          |         |
| †Family Socioeconomic Status|       |          |            |           |            |              | 0.668   |
| Poorer                    | 34.2%   | 65.8%    | 38         | 31.8%     | 68.2%      | 22           | 0.355   |
| Middle                    | 27.3%   | 72.7%    | 220        | 29.0%     | 71.0%      | 214          |         |
| Richer                    | 29.2%   | 70.8%    | 178        | 23.5%     | 76.5%      | 226          |         |
| Total                     | 28.6%   | 71.4%    | 440        | 26.4%     | 73.6%      | 473          |         |

† Variable has missing values.

to has important bearings on whether or not they engage in political discussions with other people. Perhaps there may be cultural norms or taboos relevant to certain ethnic groups that regulate the involvement of women in deliberative interactions. For instance, Ghanaian society is organised around either patrilineal or matrilineal lines. Therefore, in matriarchal ethnic societies (such as the Akans) women are considered equal to men and as such may be encouraged to express themselves in all matters as their male counterparts do.

The rate of respondents’ active participation in various political activities by gender is presented in Tables 4 and 5. It is observed that generally, males are relatively more politically active than females, especially as it relates to influencing others’ political opinion, signing petitions, and raising political matters through letters. This supports similar observations in previous research [3,5]. However, the faculty and year of study are significantly associated with political involvement for females. It is probable that, because politics is generally seen as a male domain [3], the introduction of females to active politics is primarily and formally learned. Thus, there is a strong likelihood that females will become increasingly interested and involved in civic matters the more and longer they are exposed to it academically.

Even so, both genders seem to be more active in student politics – i.e. participate in the activities of the youth movement of a political party as well as attend mass meetings or rallies dealing with student politics on campus – suggesting an unclear gender impact on political participation [6]. This suggests the need to target university campuses as they are seemingly fertile grounds for attracting more young people into the national formal political arena.

Tables 6 and 7 show gender differences in opinions on the importance of youth electoral participation. Most male and female respondents are of the view that youth involvement in electoral politics – national and local government elections and membership in student political associations – at both the national and student levels is very important. Thus, respondents
Table 3
Gender disaggregation of proclivity to discuss politics with other people.

|                                | Male               | Female              |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
|                                | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Always | Total Responses | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Always | Total Responses |
| Your father                    | 25.6% | 26.3%  | 28.3%     | 12.4% | 7.3%   | 410          | 26.0% | 28.9%  | 31.5%     | 9.2%  | 4.5%   | 447          |
| Your mother                    | 28.1% | 30.9%  | 26.4%     | 9.4%  | 5.2%   | 424          | 18.2% | 29.4%  | 36.4%     | 11.2% | 4.8%   | 456          |
| Family members other than      | 28.2% | 26.8%  | 27.0%     | 13.5% | 4.4%   | 429          | 30.2% | 29.6%  | 24.8%     | 12.5% | 2.8%   | 463          |
| parents                        |        |        |           |       |        |              |       |        |           |       |        |              |
| Friends/classmates with        | 11.7% | 15.7%  | 35.5%     | 22.7% | 14.5%  | 428          | 10.8% | 26.6%  | 36.0%     | 17.3% | 9.3%   | 462          |
| different views                |        |        |           |       |        |              |       |        |           |       |        |              |
| Friends and classmates with    | 13.3% | 17.3%  | 33.3%     | 21.3% | 14.8%  | 427          | 12.6% | 22.2%  | 35.7%     | 18.0% | 11.5%  | 460          |
| similar views                  |        |        |           |       |        |              |       |        |           |       |        |              |
| Members of political           | 44.2% | 25.7%  | 14.2%     | 9.1%  | 6.8%   | 428          | 52.2% | 23.3%  | 14.0%     | 6.5%  | 4.1%   | 464          |
| organisations on campus       |        |        |           |       |        |              |       |        |           |       |        |              |
| Members of political           | 47.8% | 24.8%  | 12.5%     | 8.6%  | 6.3%   | 431          | 55.5% | 24.8%  | 12.3%     | 5.2%  | 2.2%   | 463          |
| organisations off campus      |        |        |           |       |        |              |       |        |           |       |        |              |
possess a strong awareness of the importance of youth participation in democratic governance, a good criterion for developing political interest [7]. In particular, religion is significantly associated with political involvement for females. The role of religion in shaping female political participation but not male participation saliently alludes to the suppression of women in many religions. That is to say, religion also perpetuates the gender-based oppression in the larger society so religious attitudes and practices can delineate women's involvement in political matters.

Active participation by all members of a society in the political process is an essential part of a functioning democracy [3,8]. A cursory analysis of the data reveals slight gender variations in the political involvement of young people in Ghana that can have implications on political equality. Since the sampled data is limited to one public university, it may not be advisable to generalize findings to all young people in Ghana or even all universities in the country.

2. Experimental design, materials, and methods

The data forms part of the Religion and Positive Youth Development Project, an initiative of the North-West University (Mafikeng Campus) and the University of Ghana. This specific dataset is solely focused on undergraduate students from the University of Ghana. Multi-stage cluster sampling procedures were employed in selecting the sample population. At the first stage, a probability sampling method, stratified sampling, was used to divide the sample by faculties – Humanities/Social Sciences, Basic and Applied Sciences and Health Sciences were selected – using proportional allocation to size based on the population of students in each faculty. Depart-

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Table 4
Relationship between students’ active political involvement and socio-demographic factors by gender.

|                    | Male |       |       |        | Female |       |       |        |
|--------------------|------|-------|-------|--------|--------|-------|-------|--------|
|                    | No   | Yes   | Total | p-value| No     | Yes   | Total | p-value|
| Age                |      |       |       |        |        |       |       |        |
| < 20 years         | 56.3%| 43.8% | 96    | 0.121  | 66.7%  | 33.3% | 180   | 0.814  |
| 20–24 years        | 50.8%| 49.2% | 315   |        | 64.0%  | 36.0% | 258   |        |
| ≥25                | 34.5%| 65.5% | 29    |        | 62.9%  | 37.1% | 35    |        |
| Religion           |      |       |       |        |        |       |       |        |
| Christian          | 50.4%| 49.6% | 375   | 0.381  | 65.6%  | 34.4% | 398   | 0.233  |
| Muslim             | 45.0%| 55.0% | 20    |        | 54.2%  | 45.8% | 24    |        |
| Others             | 70.6%| 29.4% | 17    |        | 100.0% | 0.0%  | 3     |        |
| †Ethnicity         |      |       |       |        |        |       |       |        |
| Akan               | 47.8%| 52.2% | 255   | 0.474  | 62.2%  | 37.8% | 275   | 0.280  |
| Ga-Adangbe         | 58.9%| 41.1% | 56    |        | 66.0%  | 34.0% | 53    |        |
| Ewe                | 52.8%| 47.2% | 72    |        | 75.4%  | 24.6% | 69    |        |
| Others             | 52.0%| 48.0% | 50    |        | 63.0%  | 37.0% | 73    |        |
| Academic Year of Study |    |       |       |        |        |       |       |        |
| First-year         | 45.2%| 54.8% | 62    | 0.499  | 55.3%  | 44.7% | 94    | 0.047  |
| Second-year        | 56.0%| 44.0% | 116   |        | 68.9%  | 31.1% | 151   |        |
| Third-year         | 48.4%| 51.6% | 128   |        | 71.4%  | 28.6% | 119   |        |
| Fourth-year        | 51.5%| 48.5% | 134   |        | 60.6%  | 39.4% | 109   |        |
| †Faculty of Study  |      |       |       |        |        |       |       |        |
| Humanities/Social Sciences | |       |       |        |        |       |       |        |
| Basic and Applied Sciences | |       |       |        |        |       |       |        |
| Health Science     | 56.1%| 43.9% | 82    | 0.845  | 69.4%  | 30.6% | 108   | 0.932  |
| †Family Socioeconomic Status | |       |       |        |        |       |       |        |
| Poorer             | 47.4%| 52.6% | 38    |        | 68.2%  | 31.8% | 22    |        |
| Middle             | 50.5%| 49.5% | 220   |        | 64.5%  | 35.5% | 214   |        |
| Richer             | 52.2%| 47.8% | 178   |        | 64.2%  | 35.8% | 226   |        |
| Total              | 50.9%| 49.1% | 440   |        | 64.9%  | 35.1% | 473   |        |

† Variable has missing values.
Table 5
The level of active involvement in political activities by gender.

|                           | Male                  |                   |                   |                   |                   | Female            |                   |                   |                   |                   |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
|                           | Never                 | Rarely            | Sometimes         | Often             | Always            | Total Responses  | Never             | Rarely            | Sometimes         | Often             | Always            | Total Responses  |
| Attempting to influence the political views of others | 37.6%                 | 22.8%             | 26.7%             | 9.3%              | 3.6%              | 439               | 42.7%             | 28.4%             | 12.6%             | 4.1%              | 2.1%              | 468               |
| Writing letters to the newspapers about political matters | 85.1%                 | 9.4%              | 3.9%              | 1.1%              | 0.5%              | 437               | 89.5%             | 7.7%              | 2.6%              | 0.2%              | 0.0%              | 468               |
| Presenting your views to politicians (e.g. by signing petitions) | 76.5%                 | 13.0%             | 6.8%              | 3.4%              | 0.2%              | 438               | 84.1%             | 9.0%              | 5.2%              | 1.5%              | 0.2%              | 466               |
| Participate in the activities of a political party | 64.1%                 | 17.3%             | 13.1%             | 4.6%              | 0.9%              | 434               | 77.8%             | 11.9%             | 8.5%              | 1.1%              | 0.6%              | 469               |
| Participate in political protest marches/political sit-ins/demonstrations | 81.5%                 | 10.5%             | 5.9%              | 1.6%              | 0.5%              | 437               | 90.2%             | 5.1%              | 3.2%              | 0.9%              | 0.6%              | 468               |
| Attending political rallies | 69.2%                 | 13.2%             | 12.1%             | 4.1%              | 1.4%              | 439               | 81.2%             | 12.2%             | 5.6%              | 0.9%              | 0.2%              | 468               |
| Participate in the activities in the youth movement of a political party | 70.8%                 | 11.9%             | 11.0%             | 5.9%              | 0.5%              | 438               | 79.5%             | 12.4%             | 6.2%              | 1.5%              | 0.4%              | 469               |
| Attending any mass meetings/rallies dealing with student politics on campus? | 65.8%                 | 11.8%             | 14.1%             | 5.7%              | 2.5%              | 439               | 78.0%             | 12.6%             | 6.4%              | 2.6%              | 0.4%              | 468               |
ments were selected from each faculty; from each department, core courses at all levels were selected for inclusion. Thus, the student population of each faculty determined the proportion of students to select for inclusion in the final sample. Each faculty samples were disaggregated by year of study. The sample numbers allocated to each year of study were random whereby trained field assistants surveyed the number of students in each faculty, department, and gender as determined a priori through the stratified random sampling procedure.

A total of 920 semi-structured questionnaires were administered to students in English, with a response rate of 99.2 percent (913). Data collection occurred between September 2016 and March 2017. Respondents were subjected to a series of questions relating to issues such as religiosity, sexuality, political participation, and attitudes towards and use of various licit and illicit substances. Since the questionnaires were anonymous, some respondents may have been reluctant to respond to some of the items, which led to missing values in some of the variables as indicated in the tables presented.

The data were descriptively and inferentially analysed into tables using frequencies, percentages and cross-tabulations with the use of Pearson Chi-Square test to determine the relationship between political involvement and socio-demographic factors. It is important to note that, for ease and clarity, composite variables were created for the analyses in Tables 2, 4 and 6. This was done by collating the responses of the relevant indicators into a single variable. Thus, in Tables 2 and 4, the responses “never” and “rarely” were collated as one group “No” while the “sometimes”, “often” and “always” responses were collated as another group “Yes” for all the indicators to generate the binary responses for the composite variables. A similar approach was used to arrive at the binary responses in Table 6.

**Table 6**

|                      | Male               | Female              |
|----------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
|                      | Not Important | Important | Total | p-value | Not Important | Important | Total | p-value |
| Age                  |                |            |       |         |                |           |       |         |
| < 20 years           | 14.6%         | 85.4%      | 96    | 0.520   | 15.0%        | 85.0%     | 180   | 0.467   |
| 20–24 years          | 11.4%         | 88.6%      | 315   |         | 11.6%        | 88.4%     | 258   |         |
| ≥25                  | 17.2%         | 82.8%      | 29    |         | 17.1%        | 82.9%     | 35    |         |
| Religion             |                |            |       |         |                |           |       |         |
| Christian            | 12.3%         | 87.7%      | 375   | 0.551   | 13.1%        | 86.9%     | 398   | 0.003   |
| Muslim               | 20.0%         | 80.0%      | 20    |         | 0.0%         | 100.0%    | 24    |         |
| Others               | 11.1%         | 88.9%      | 17    |         | 66.7%        | 33.3%     | 3     |         |
| †Ethnicity           |                |            |       |         |                |           |       |         |
| Akan                 | 10.2%         | 89.8%      | 255   | 0.110   | 12.4%        | 87.6%     | 275   | 0.751   |
| Ga-Adangbe           | 21.4%         | 78.6%      | 56    |         | 13.2%        | 86.8%     | 53    |         |
| Ewe                  | 9.7%          | 90.3%      | 72    |         | 17.4%        | 82.6%     | 69    |         |
| Others               | 14.0%         | 86.0%      | 50    |         | 13.7%        | 86.3%     | 73    |         |
| Academic Year of Study |              |            |       |         |                |           |       |         |
| First-year           | 14.5%         | 85.5%      | 62    | 0.394   | 12.8%        | 87.2%     | 94    | 0.959   |
| Second-year          | 15.5%         | 84.5%      | 116   |         | 14.6%        | 85.4%     | 151   |         |
| Third-year           | 8.6%          | 91.4%      | 128   |         | 12.6%        | 87.4%     | 119   |         |
| Fourth-year          | 12.7%         | 87.3%      | 134   |         | 12.8%        | 87.2%     | 109   |         |
| †Faculty of Study    |                |            |       |         |                |           |       |         |
| Humanities/Social Sciences | 11.7% | 88.3%      | 239   |         | 10.9%        | 89.1%     | 247   |         |
| Basic and Applied Sciences | 16.2% | 83.8%      | 117   |         | 14.0%        | 86.0%     | 114   |         |
| Health Science       | 9.8%          | 90.2%      | 82    |         | 16.7%        | 83.3%     | 108   |         |
| †Family Socioeconomic Status |        |            |       | 0.081   |                |           |       | 0.444   |
| Poorer               | 23.7%         | 76.3%      | 38    |         | 4.5%         | 95.5%     | 22    |         |
| Middle               | 11.8%         | 88.2%      | 220   |         | 13.1%        | 86.9%     | 214   |         |
| Richer               | 10.7%         | 89.3%      | 178   |         | 14.2%        | 85.8%     | 226   |         |
| Total                | 12.5%         | 87.5%      | 440   |         | 13.3%        | 86.7%     | 473   |         |

† Variable has missing values.
Table 7
Respondents’ opinion on the importance of youth involvement in electoral politics.

|                        | Male                          | Female                         |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
|                        | Not at all important | Slightly Important | Neutral | Moderately Important | Very Important | Total Responses | Not at all important | Slightly Important | Neutral | Moderately Important | Very Important | Total Responses |
| Elections for national government | 3.7%                         | 4.8%                          | 13.7%    | 16.2%                | 61.6%           | 437              | 4.0%                         | 4.9%                          | 18.7%    | 14.6%                | 57.7%           | 471              |
| Elections for local government | 3.7%                         | 5.5%                          | 15.2%    | 23.7%                | 52.0%           | 435              | 4.5%                         | 8.3%                          | 22.2%    | 19.8%                | 45.2%           | 469              |
| Student political associations | 5.1%                         | 7.6%                          | 25.0%    | 26.9%                | 35.4%           | 432              | 4.5%                         | 8.9%                          | 21.7%    | 27.0%                | 37.9%           | 470              |
Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Supplementary materials

Supplementary material associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at doi:10.1016/j.dib.2020.105796.

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