

Focus on: Ghana

REFLECTIONS ON THE ELECTION SUPER CYCLE FROM A GENDER LENS

A series of write up from experts in the field reflecting on the role of women in last elections.

— 2024
— 2020
— 2017
— 1996



About the Author

REFLECTIONS ON THE ELECTION SUPER CYCLE GRETCHEN BAUER

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Where are the women in Ghana's new cabinet?

In September 2024 a long anticipated Affirmative Action Bill (AA Bill) was [signed into law in Ghana](#). But you would hardly know it in early 2025 following parliamentary and presidential elections and the appointment of new cabinet ministers. Granted, the AA Bill is mostly 'aspirational.' For example, it suggests that: "14. (1) The Government shall ensure progressive gender balance in public office, governance and decision-making positions," including in ministries and a host of other public offices. The Bill does not indicate, however, how gender balance is to be achieved, nor what the consequences are if gender balance is not achieved. According to the schedules at the end of the Bill [the goal for the 2024-2026 period is 30 percent women](#) in public office, among other positions.

The law was passed too late in 2024 to affect the December parliamentary elections in Ghana and, indeed, the [outcome of those elections was very disappointing for women's representation](#). There was no increase in the number of women in parliament in Ghana from the eighth to the ninth parliaments, and [Ghana remains ranked at an embarrassingly low 15 percent women](#) in parliament.

But Ghanaians might have expected the newly elected president to take at least the spirit of the AA Bill into account when making his cabinet appointments. Sadly, that has not been the case, as the [Affirmative Action Coalition and others have observed](#).

Table 1. (Initial) Appointments of Women to Cabinet, Ghana, 1993–2025

Election year	Party/president	Women/total ministers	Women ministers %
1992	NDC/Rawlings	2/19	10.5%
1996	NDC/Rawlings	3/19	16.0
2000	NPP/Kufuor	2/19	10.5
2004	NPP/Kufuor	2/19	10.5
2008	NDC/Mills	4/19	21
2012	NDC/Mahama	6/19	32
2016	NPP/Akufo-Addo	4/19	21
2020	NPP/Akufo-Addo	3/19	16
2024	NDC/Mahama	2/19	10.5

Source: [Bauer and Darkwah 2024, p. 284](#);

<https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Mahama-s-Cabinet-The-2-women-and-17-men-who-will-be-running-Ghana-for-the-next-4-years-1972451>

[Ghana's 1992 constitution](#) stipulates that there will be up to 19 ministers in cabinet. In late February [President Mahama announced the final make up of his 19 member cabinet](#) – which includes 17 men and only two women – Honorable Elizabeth Ofosu-Adjare as Minister of Trade, Agribusiness, and Industry and Dr Agnes Naa Momo Lartey as Minister of Gender, Children, and Social Protection. In so doing, President Mahama restored the

Minister of Gender, Children, and Social Protection to cabinet (removed by President Akufo-Addo), but 10.5 percent women in cabinet is very [far from meeting the 30 percent goal stated in the Affirmative Action Bill for 2024-2026](#). While President Mahama has appointed women to other positions in government, cabinet is where the most important and influential ministries are found. And cabinet appointments are the ones that will be used to include Ghana in [global rankings](#).

What difference do more women cabinet ministers – or even gender parity (equal numbers of men and women ministers) make? Around the world about [15 countries had gender parity cabinets in late 2024](#) – 10 in Europe, three in Latin America and two in Africa. Scholarly research suggests that women’s interests will be substantively and symbolically better represented when there are more women in cabinet. In Europe, [countries with more women in cabinet were found to spend more on public health](#) than those with fewer women ministers. In North America [governments with more women in cabinet were found to better keep their policy pledges](#) than those with fewer women ministers. In Nigeria and South Africa, women cabinet ministers have been found to [enhance women’s interests in ‘non-legislative ways’](#) through creating programs that directly affect women’s lives, such as initiatives around domestic violence, economic empowerment, and the provision of fuel and potable water. Around the world, [women cabinet ministers are found to have significant role model impacts](#), for example, in encouraging other women’s political participation.

What are the challenges to appointing more women to cabinet in Ghana? [In previous research on the cabinet appointment process in Ghana](#), we uncovered some of the challenges to the appointment of more women. These include the directive in the constitution that half of cabinet ministers must be drawn from parliament; but when there are only few women in parliament, there may be fewer women available to be cabinet ministers. The constitution also refers to achieving a regional and gender balance in cabinet appointments, but our research found that while regional balance was always met, gender balance was not. At the same time, we also learned that cabinet appointments are very much the ‘president’s prerogative.’ Thus, an empowered president, like President Mahama, could appoint a gender parity cabinet if he chose to do so, as other leaders around the world, [including in Africa](#), have done. Given President Mahama’s previous high representation of women in cabinet and the newly adopted Affirmative Action Bill, many had assumed that he would take the opportunity of a new cabinet to propel Ghana into a leadership position in this realm, though that has not been the case.

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