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Understanding Political Participation From the Margins: The Perspectives of Migrant Slum Dwellers in Agbogbloshie, Ghana

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Abstract

This paper explores politics and political participation from the voices and perspectives of migrant slum dwellers in Agbogbloshie, the most populous migrant slum in Accra. Using in-depth interviews, the paper found that residents' conception of politics is couched in a pejorative sense as they view politics as a "dirty and deceitful game." While most migrants see politics as contested elections in which political elites struggle for power, they participate in politics mainly by voting in periodic elections. The main driver of migrants' political participation is the need to vote for political parties and governments that protect them against forced eviction.

Keywords

Basic amenities, voting, elections, governmentality, politics, political participation, urban slums, Ghana

Introduction

Everyone experiences and is affected by political decisions (Yoldaş, 2015). The extent of exposure and impact of political decisions on one's life is most likely to influence how an individual and, in some cases, how a whole community views and perceives politics. Indeed, the perceptions individuals and communities hold about politics are most likely to influence the nature and type of their engagement in politics. This article examines the perceptions and voices of migrant slum dwellers on politics and political participation in Ghana. Having relocated from rural areas to the city of Accra with high hopes, migrants in Agbogbloshie face daily challenges of basic amenities and forced evictions by city authorities (Adamtey et al., 2015, 2021; Farouk and Owusu, 2012). For the past two decades, the settlement has witnessed pockets of evictions leading to massive protests and litigation in the Accra High Court (Afenah, 2021; Braimah, 2011; Morrison, 2017; Oppong et al., 2020; Oteng-Ababio and Grant, 2020). At the same time, governments in power and opposition political parties have sought to make political capital out of the situation by promising the residents' protection against evictions and amenities in exchange for votes (Cobbinah and Baidoo, 2021). While several studies exist on the community, they mainly focus on the causes of

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migrating from rural areas to the community, the characteristics of migrants, and the socioeconomic activities of the residents (Adamtey et al., 2015; Afriyie et al., 2015; Ahlvin, 2012; Awumbila, 2015; Awumbila and Torvikeh, 2018).

Besides, mainstream studies on politics and political participation from the Political Science discipline in Ghana focus mainly on factors accounting for electoral victories and defeats of political parties in presidential and parliamentary elections. The findings from the empirical studies suggest that most Ghanaians are rational and "matured" democratic citizens who vote based on general government performance and the state of the national economy (Alidu and Braimah, 2014; Anebo, 1997; Ayee, 1997, 2011, 2017; Debrah, 2016; Fobih, 2008; Gyimah-Boadi, 2009; Lindberg, 2013; Van Gyampo et al., 2017). Other findings are that political party manifestoes are important for electoral successes and failures (Ayee, 2011). Also, the role of ethnicity and religion in Ghana's electoral politics has been thoroughly examined (Arthur, 2009; Yobo and Van Gyampo, 2015). Despite the abundant scholarly discourse on politics and political participation in Ghana, the perspectives of migrant slum dwellers who experience politics and are affected by political decisions daily remain largely unaccounted for in the debate. Critical questions such as how migrant slum dwellers perceive politics and how the challenge of basic amenities and issues of evictions inform their views on politics and their participation in politics remain largely unaddressed in the literature. This paper fills this gap. The remainder of the article proceeds as follows. The concepts of politics and political participation are unpacked in the next section, followed by the theoretical framework. Discussed in this section also, is why migrants' perspectives matter. In "The study context", a brief background of Agbogbloshie is discussed, followed by the methodology in the section "Methods and procedures for data collection and analysis". The results are presented in the section "The findings", discussions in the section "Discussion of findings" and conclusion in the section "Concluding remarks".

Meaning of political participation and why it matters

There has been an unending debate on which human actions constitute political participation (Expósito, 2014; Heywood, 2013; Leftwich, 2004; Pham and Kaleja, 2021; Pickard, 2019). In the view of Sarah Pickard, definitions of political participation are both "periodic sensitive" and "beholder sensitive" (Pickard, 2019: 58). By periodic sensitivity, Sarah argues that what counts as an act of political participation depends on the time and age under review. Due to technology, some actions counted as political participation have become old-fashioned, while new forms of mobilization, including Internet-based participation, have emerged. Given this, Theocharis and Van Deth (2019) describe political participation as a moving target that is difficult to pin down. According to Verba and Nie (1972), political participation involves any activity that affects or has a chance of directly or indirectly affecting government action. Similarly, Rosenstone (2009) defines political participation as any action intended to influence the distribution of social goods and values. Furthermore, Leftwich (2004) approached the subject from two dimensions: first, political participation is people's involvement in solving collective problems through support for political parties, electoral participation, and participation in political activities of different kinds. Second, political participation is people's engagement in associational activities to solve communal problems.

A perusal of the definitions shows that there is no problem with the concept of "participation," as it simply means to take part in an activity. However, the controversy arises when the "political" is attached to the "participation," as argued by Geraint Parry (1972). Early scholars such as David Easton defined politics as an authoritative allocation of values (cited in Bang, 2020; Gabriel, 2017). Also, Harrold Lasswell, in 1936, defined politics as "Who Gets What, When How?"(Cited in

Peters, 2004: 23). In classical Marxism, politics was simply a conflict between social classes (see Lasswell, 2018). Again, the rational Choice theorists likened politics to the market process where people pursue and make choices that maximize their gains (Leftwich, 2004). These classical definitions underscore politics as activities involving resource use and resolution of conflicts thereof. Recently, efforts have been made to broaden the scope of politics. For example, Leftwich (2004) argues that politics can no longer be confined to the activities of public institutions alone but can be found everywhere in societies where people attempt to take collective action. Politics, as used in this study, is in tandem with Leftwich's approach as people's involvement in solving collective problems through support for political parties, electoral participation, and participation in political activities of different kinds. Also, Leftwich sees political participation as peoples' engagement in associational activities to solve communal problems in what has become known as "Do-it-Ourselves (DIO)" Politics (Pickard, 2019).

Political participation remains significant, and at the heart of any functioning democracy is the element of active engagement by the citizenry (Birch et al., 2021; Dalton, 2008; Marsh et al., 2006; Parry et al., 1992). The quality of any democracy is determined by the kind of participatory channels available and engaged in by citizens. According to Parry and his colleagues, "any book about political participation must necessarily be about democracy" (Parry et al., 1992: 1). In his observation of the American democracy in the 19th century, Tocqueville argued that an important ingredient of the American society was the active participation of the citizens in the democratic process (Tocqueville et al., 2010). In a representative democracy, governments derive their authority to govern from the participation of citizens. Therefore, the non-participation of citizens in politics is detrimental to the social and political system (Mackerle-Bixa et al., 2009). The Gettysburg address of Abraham Lincoln in 1863 reechoed the need for citizens' participation in democracy as he described democracy as government of, by, and for the people (Conant, 2015; Jordan, 2016). Again, some scholars argue that political participation does not only improve the quality of democracy, but it allows individuals and societies to choose the best leaders to govern and hold them accountable (Johann, 2012; Klesner, 2009; Yoldaş, 2015).

Again, recent scholarship portrays political participation as a medium through which citizens can contribute to the development of their communities (Klesner, 2009; Yoldaş, 2015). Such participation involves voluntary associational activities to solve collective problems, what Sarah Pickard describes as DIO politics (Pickard, 2019), and in the view of Paul Bang, "everyday worker politics" or "project-driven politics" (Bang, 2010). In the next section, I examine the theoretical lens from which this study is embarked.

Determinants of political participation: a theoretical underpinning

Theorization of political participation stems from psephology, the study of elections. Therefore, early theories focused mainly on the determinants of electoral turnouts in advanced democracies. The rational choice theory by Anthony Downs is perhaps one of the earliest and most influential theories of voter turnout. Downs argued that voters are maximizing agents who calculate the cost and benefits of voting before casting a vote. A voter participates when "the returns outweigh the costs, and if not, they abstain" (Downs, 1957: 260). The benefits may include the value that citizens place on democracy which might not even be immediate, but to prevent system breakdown and, by so doing, serve as a form of insurance (Downs, 1957; Sigelman and Berry, 1982). The direct benefits or party differential returns are what competing political parties offer. The theory has received several criticisms, with many scholars arguing that rational actors will not participate in a collective action to achieve common goals because the products of such collective actions are public goods, and public goods have two properties: jointness and the impossibility of exclusion

(Olson, 1965, 2012; Whiteley, 2012; Whiteley and Seyd, 2002). In a related theory, Verba and Nie (1972) propounded the socioeconomic status model arguing that political participation is hinged on individuals' resources in terms of time, money, and civic skills. Time and money are understood without explanation, but civic skills refer to individuals' orientations and attitudes toward the political system. Other socioeconomic attributes influencing political participation in their view are one's education and social standing in society.

While the rational choice and socioeconomic status models appear to offer insights into electoral turnouts and citizens' participation in advanced democracies, they fall short of explaining how migrant slum dwellers regarded as not part of the "city proper" understand and participate in politics. Against this backdrop, this paper uses the theory of governmentality by the French philosopher Michel Foucault, the right to the city by Henri Lefebvre, and Chatterjee's popular politics as the theoretical lenses from which this study is viewed. In a series of lectures in the late 1970s on political power, Foucault defined governmentality as an attempt to direct people's lives by placing them under the authority of a leader responsible for what they do and what happens to them (Foucault, 2007; Jessen and Von Eggers, 2020). Governmentality was understood "in the broad sense of techniques and procedures for directing human behavior" (Foucault, 2007). This paper argues that slum dwellers' motivations for participating in politics reflect how authorities at the local and national levels attempt to direct their lives.

Again, the political practices of urban slum dwellers reflect what Lefebvre termed as the right to the city, which is an expansion of the governmentality notion. In his formulation of the new politics of citizenship, Henri Lefebvre argued that the right to the city should not just be understood as a simple right to visit or return to traditional cities. He believed it is a renewed right to urban life that allows citizens to transform and co-create urban spaces (Oteng-Ababio and Grant, 2020). From this perspective, urban slum dwellers see political participation as an avenue to assert this citizenship. In his politics of the governed, Partha Chatterjee illustrates the struggles of the urban slum dwellers in popular politics. He demonstrates how the neglected populations' participation in politics is born out of government policies, further expanding the notion of governmentality (Chatterjee, 2004). This paper deploys the theory of governmentality to explore how urban slum dwellers in Ghana understand political participation and how such perceptions influence their o usage of the concept in their everyday struggles. The subsequent section offers insights into why migrant slum dwellers in Agbogbloshie political participation matters.

Why migrant slum dwellers' political participation matters

Since returning to a multiparty democratic system in 1992, eight general elections have been successfully organized in which power changed hands between two political parties: the National Democratic Congress and the New Patriotic Party (Fobih, 2008; Gyimah-Boadi, 2009; Mechkova and Lindberg, 2016; Van Gyampo et al., 2017). The electoral success has earned Ghana "a beacon of democracy" in a turbulent subregion. While the country is touted as an icon of democracy, what constitutes political participation from the perspectives of "migrants slum dwellers in Agbogbloshie who experience and are affected by political decisions at the local and national levels remains a critical gap.

Understanding migrants' perceptions about politics and how that influences their engagement in their voices is significant for two main reasons. First, there is growing evidence that urban slums in Ghana are becoming hotspots for local and national politics. The rapid urbanization caused by massive rural to urban migration has led to the growth of slums, high prices in the housing market, and contestations over urban spaces (Klopp and Paller, 2019; Paller, 2019; Paller, 2021). Authorities at the local and national levels face a new challenge of making hard decisions over how scarce

resources are to be allocated. The case of Agbogbloshie is particularly telling because the community is faced not only with basic amenities challenges but also an imminent threat of eviction. It is, therefore, appropriate to examine how such conditions influence residents' perceptions of politics and how that impacts their participation in politics.

Second, the governing New Patriotic Party, while in opposition in 2016, made several political promises to the community of Agbogbloshie, including protection against forceful eviction and provision of basic amenities (Cobbinah and Baidoo, 2021). At the time, there were heated confrontations between the residents of Agbogbloshie on the one hand and the Accra Metropolitan Assembly and the National Democratic Congress government over the fate of the community. Having won the elections and been in power for the past 5 years, it would be interesting to examine the migrants' experiences of such political decisions and how it informs their participation in politics.

The study context

The study was conducted in Agbogbloshie, also known as Old Fadama in Accra, the capital of Ghana. As shown in Figure 1, Agbogbloshie community lies in the center of Accra, along the old Timber Market Road, stretching along the Odaw River. The authorities regard the community as a squatter settlement since the residents have no legal titles to the land they occupy (Grant, 2006). The community's estimated population is pegged at 80,000, but they could be more due to the fluidity of urban slums as people go and come in at will (Afenah, 2021; Housing the Masses, 2010; Tutu et al., 2019).

The origin of the community is not readily known, but most scholars trace the community's growth to the Non-aligned Movement Conference of 1991. As part of preparing for the conference, many hawkers were temporarily relocated to the Agbogbloshie site adjacent to the Abossey-Okai. However, after the event, the traders were not moved. The growth of the settlement into a mega slum began in the early 1990s as rural migrants fleeing from inter-ethnic conflicts in northern Ghana joined the traders. The migrants created a yam market, and stalls were built to trade. Subsequently, more migrants joined them through networks. With time, what was supposed to be a market became a home (Morrison, 2017; Oppong et al., 2020; Tutu et al., 2019). Residential housing in the community is made of wooden shacks and self-built concrete (Adamtey et al., 2021).

Agbogbloshie was chosen for the survey because of the representativeness of the community in being a home to most migrants from rural communities, particularly from the northern part of Ghana. Many of the migrants move in search of better conditions. Although the community lies in the heart of Accra, it is characterized by precarity without basic amenities. Moreso, the space the migrants occupy, is under the radar of city authority for eviction, making it an ideal community to investigate the perception of politics and how conditions of precarity coupled with uncertainties in the community influence migrants' perceptions and engagement in politics.

Methods and procedures for data collection and analysis

The study adopted an exploratory qualitative methodology which allows for investigating a problem not clearly defined (Stebbins, 2001; Swedberg, 2020). As a design, an exploratory approach offers researchers the opportunity to appreciate better how a phenomenon manifests and uncover the nature of unclear phenomena (Agyabeng et al., 2022; Polit and Beck, 2010). The choice of this design is to gain deeper insights and meanings rather than quantify and generalize results (Creswell et al., 2007; Creswell and Poth, 2016). Twelve migrant slum dwellers were purposively selected. The choice of the purposive sampling technique was to get respondents who have lived in the
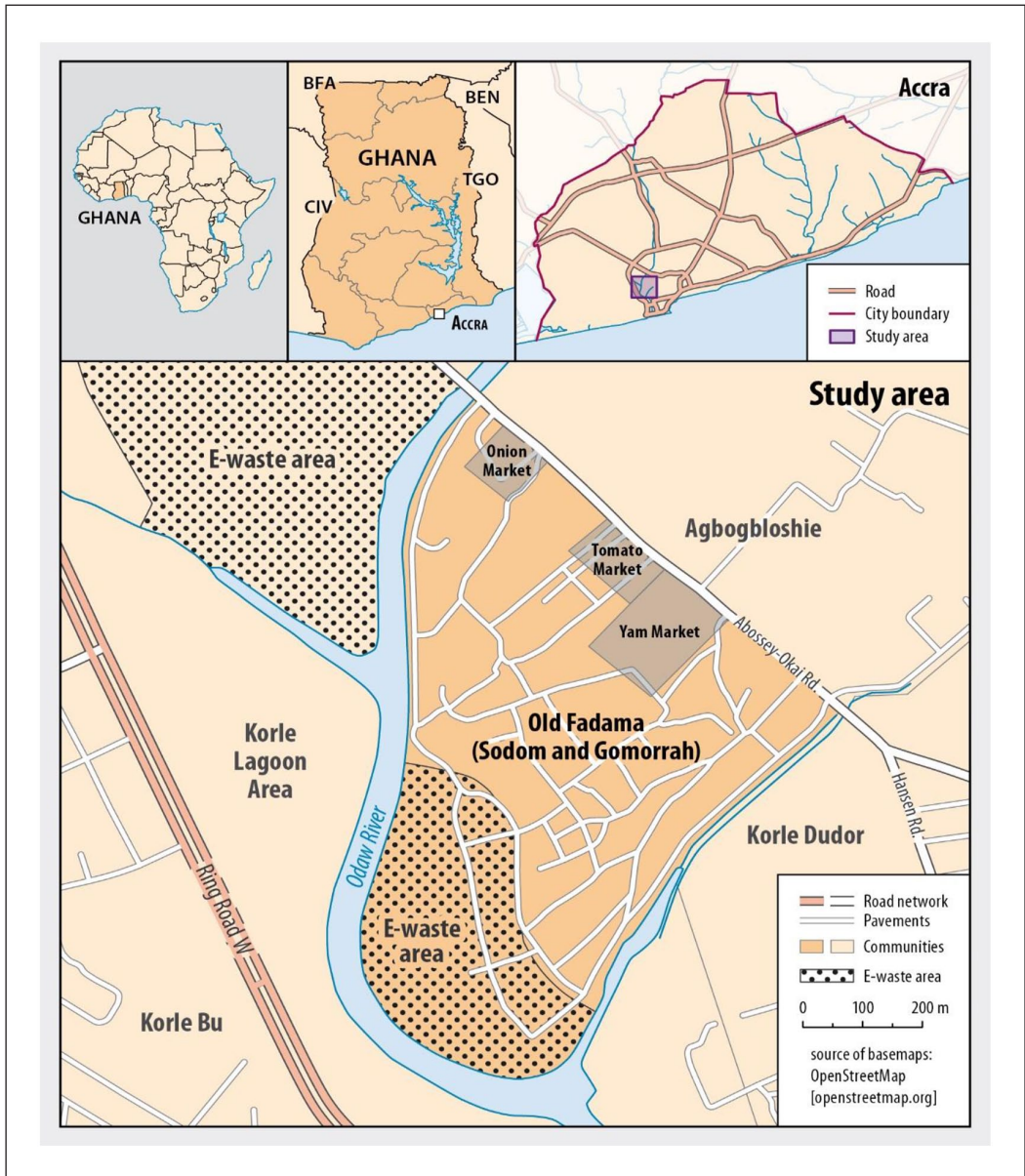
Figure 1. Map of Ghana showing Accra and Agbogbloshie, the study area.
Source: Blauhut (2022).

community of Agbogbloshie for at least 8 years, have some lived experience in the community, and be above the age of 18. Also, since the study is about migrant slum dwellers, the technique was appropriate in getting migrants willing to share their experiences on the concept. The disadvantage of this procedure is that it cannot be considered a statistical representation of the target population (Saunders et al., 2018). Therefore, the results of this study do not represent urban slum dwellers in Ghana, and the results are not intended to be generalized. The composition of the interviewees is

Table 1. Background of sampled interviewees.

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percent
Region of migrants	Northern region	3	25.00
	Upper East region	2	16.67
	Upper West region	3	25.00
	North-East region	2	16.66
	Savannah region	2	16.66
	Total	**12**	**100.00**
Sex of migrants	Male	6	50.00
	Female	6	50.00
	Total	12	100.00
Marital status of migrants	Single	2	16.67
	Married	4	33.33
	Engaged/co-habitation	6	50.00
	Total	**12**	**100.00**
Religious affiliations of migrants	Christianity	6	50.00
	Islam	5	41.67
	African traditional religion	1	8.33
	Total	**12**	**100.00**
Educational level of migrants	No formal education	3	27.40
	Primary education	2	41.67
	Middle/JHS and senior high	5	18.36
	Tertiary	2	20.52
	Total	**12**	**100.00**

Author's field survey.

in Table 1. Although a sample of 12 appears relatively small, data saturation was reached by the eighth participant following the recommendation of Guest et al. (2006). They define data saturation as the stage of data collecting and analysis when additional data have little to no impact on the data already collected. To accurately assess the theme, exhaustion of variability and heterogeneity of sampled respondents was the defining feature of reaching data saturation.

The instrument for the primary data collection was a structured interview guide. The instrument was administered through face-to-face interviews, allowing participants to air their candid opinions and political experiences. Interviews are particularly helpful for a meaningful appreciation of the issues from respondents' voices (Saunders et al., 2018). The respondents drew upon their personal and community experiences to give insights on the subject. The interviews were conducted in English Language, Likpakpaaln, Twi, and Dagbani, in which the respondents freely expressed themselves. The interview sessions were recorded with the consent of the participants. The respondents also signed consent forms agreeing that their views could be quoted publicly. The recordings were later transcribed into text in Microsoft Word for analysis. The participants' direct quotes and excerpts transcribed into texts were critically analyzed and discussed in the findings stage. Also, observations in the community were made to confirm some respondents' views. Finally, corroboration was made from secondary materials, including newspapers and journal articles. A challenge encountered in the field worth reporting was translating the concept of politics and political participation for those who could not speak and understand English well. However, this challenge was addressed by seeking assistance from language scholars who assisted with vernacular terms that matched the concepts in the local languages.

The findings

Politics as "deceitful and a dirty game": voices of migrant slum dwellers

The data show that most migrants in Agbogbloshie perceived politics mainly as a "deceitful and dirty game." The participants' voices and perceptions are presented below:

> When I hear the word politics, what comes to mind immediately is the image of party campaigns, sometimes involving insults. I do not know how good an answer I can give you on politics, but as I know and have seen, politics here has to do with lying to win power. You know, politics is a dirty game, full of lies and deceit. It is a game of deceit and lies because look at what is happening, all the promises made to us by this government during the electioneering times. Yet, not a single promise has been fulfilled. Politicians just say and make promises to convince people to vote for them; that is politics for me. (Interviewee A, June 2020)

> There is not much to say on this because I'm not a fan of politics, but in my experience, politicians' unfulfilled promises come to mind when I hear the word politics, hahaha (laughter). On a serious note, politics is about choosing people to lead the country through political parties. I see political parties' campaigns on the streets every four years promising heaven on earth, yet nothing happens after winning the elections. I believe that is politics. (Interviewee B, June 2020)

> Eeeish, politics, politics. . . hmmmm (sighing). When I hear the word politics, what usually comes to mind is the party campaign and a long list of politicians' promises; that is my answer. (Interviewee L, June 2020)

A careful analysis of the participants' views shows that politics invokes images of deceit and unfulfilled campaigned promises, as articulated by Interviewee A. While such perceptions of politics were incredibly limited, the views reflected the participants' personal and community experiences. The participants argued that Ghanaian politicians had no credibility, and no one took their words seriously since they have consistently failed to deliver their promises (Interviewee B).

Politics as contested elections, conflicts, and holding leaders accountable

Another vital revelation that surveyed participants intimated was that politics is contested electoral activities involving conflicts among and between political parties and holding leaders accountable. The voices of the migrants are presented as follows:

> What immediately comes to mind when I hear of politics is voting. But since you want to know what politics is, I think politics is about holding leaders accountable for their promises. The way to do that is to reward them with votes if they honor their commitments and vote them out if they do not. (Interviewee J, June 2020)

> Many things come to mind when I hear of politics, but I believe politics is about peaceful co-existence. Why do I say that? I am saying this because we have to elect leaders who will lead the country to ensure peace and development. I think that is how I can answer the question. (Interviewee F, June 2020)

> Hmmm, when I hear politics, it is all about conflict and fighting over who will win the subsequent elections. Party campaigns by politicians are all part of it. (Interviewee K, June 2020)

> Politics, for me, does not mean much. Usually, I only hear the word politics during elections or when we have problems in this community. Since you want to know my opinion on politics, I will say it is about NDC and NPP. These are the party people who talk a lot about politics. (Interviewee L, June 2020)

It would have been good if you asked the politicians. For me, politics does not mean anything other than campaign and voting. Every four years, we have to choose new leaders. There are large political rallies with promises, and that is politics. (Interviewee G, 2020)

The above responses show that migrants perceived politics as electoral activities. The respondents who held this view argued that politics was mainly about electing leaders to govern. For the migrants, elections offered the perfect opportunity to hold leaders accountable. The participants believed politicians who did not fulfill their campaign promises should be voted out, as indicated by Interviewee J.

Nature and motives behind migrant slum dwellers' participation in politics

The nature of migrants' political participation and the motivation behind participation or non-participation is as follows:

Usually, I vote and, occasionally, join political party rallies. I am not a member of a political party, but I have voted twice since coming of age. I will vote in the upcoming election. I vote because I feel like, it is a duty, but we had to team up to vote in the last election against the NDC government and Vanderpuije, the former mayor of Accra, for trying to evict us. (Interviewee A, June 2020)

Yeah, I know what I said about politics; I said it is a dirty game, and that is why I'm not active in it, but I usually vote during general elections. I will vote in the upcoming elections for a candidate who promises to create jobs for the youth of this community. (Interviewee K, June 2020)

My friends persuaded me to vote in the 2016 general elections. We voted at the time against the NDC government because they had threatened to evict us. Even they made us call the house in the north to vote against them. Today, I do not see the difference between the parties. The current government had promised to build hostels for us if we voted for them, but since winning the election, nothing has been done. The Ghanaian politicians are unreliable, and I am not sure I would ever vote again. (Interviewee C, June 2020)

I have voted in both general and district assembly elections twice, just that the politicians do not fulfill their promises. When it reaches elections, the politicians will entice you with lofty promises, but after voting, you never see them until four years again. I keep participating because it is my duty to do, but sometimes political parties will come and convince me to vote. (Interviewee D, June 2020)

I have never voted and have no interest in voting. All Ghanaian politicians are the same and care about themselves and their families. Due to this, I do not waste my time registering or even cast a vote. (Interviewee G, June 2020)

When it comes to political activities, I always vote. Sometimes when you do not want to vote, the politicians will come around enticing you with promises and sometimes gifts to vote for them. I have voted in the last general and District Assembly elections. (Interviewee L, June 2020)

Usually, I wouldn't say I like participating in politics and political conversations. Over here, if you are very loud in politics and your party is voted out of office, staying here will be hell for you. I only vote on election day and go back to my work. The main reason for being here is to work and not engage in politics. (Interviewee A, June 2020)

I have participated in political rallies before. In the 2016 general elections, there was a street campaign by the current NPP government in which many of us in this community joined. Apart from that, I also voted

for the current government and will vote in the upcoming elections. I voted for the party because they promised to protect our stay in the community here. (Interviewee E, June 2020)

Yeah, my view of politics, particularly Ghanaian politics, is not positive, and I still stand by it. But I have voted before and will vote any day. I get involved when it comes to voting because it is always better to choose someone you think might be better than allow other people to choose for you. The politicians come, especially in an election year, with gifts and promises. I always listen to the most reasonable messages and vote on them. (Interviewee H, June 2020)

Migrants' political participation was consistent with their conception of politics, as revealed in their voices above. It is observed that most participants voted in previous elections and engaged in electoral and partisan activities. Also, some participants indicated their intention to participate in future elections. The nature of migrants' political engagement can be described as mainly conventional: engaging in electoral and partisan political activities.

On the motives, several underlying reasons account for why migrants choose to vote, participate in rallies, or abstain. The results indicate that most migrants participated in the previous elections to express their displeasure against the National Democratic Congress government, the previous administration under which portions of their community were demolished (Interviewee A). For the migrants who held this view, elections serve as a tool; they can use against any political party or government whose policies threatened the survival of their community, as articulated by respondent E.

Also, some surveyed participants did not readily have reasons for participating in politics and indicated that their colleagues convinced them to do so. Such respondents were mobilized to vote out the previous administration, whose leadership had threatened to evict them forcefully in Agbogbloshie, as they indicated in their narratives. In fact, the decision to vote against the government was extended to the family in areas of origin, a point articulated by Interviewee C.

Another important driver of political participation from migrants' point of view is political promises ranging from job creation for migrants' communities to providing basic amenities. As revealed by Interviewees K and C, political promises from party politicians play a vital role in people deciding to participate in elections. Again, others participate because they are offered gifts, as Interviewee L indicated. Similarly, participants believe that participating in politics in Agbogbloshie comes at a cost, particularly when one political party loses an election. Further probes revealed that political leadership and access to certain basic amenities in some parts of the Agbogbloshie neighborhood are tied to political parties in power. Still, the responses revealed that others participate out of patriotism, as indicated by Interviewee A. While most of the interviewees participated in politics by voting, one respondent never voted and had no intention of voting despite being of age. The reason for non-participation was that "all Ghanaian politicians are the same" and cared for only themselves (Interviewee G). The respondent argued that she would not waste her time voting for people who do not care about the community's plight.

Discussion of the findings

The first point worth discussing is migrants' conception of politics. Politics has been narrowly conceived as electoral activities in which political parties compete for state power. In that regard, slum dwellers' understanding of politics is in line with the classical notion of politics which limits politics to the institutional practices of power struggle. In their experience, politics was about elections and rallies, although a few believed politics entailed conflict resolution and peaceful co-existence. The electoral processes and unfulfilled campaign promises to the community of

Agbogbloshie have led to migrants describing politics as a "deceitful and dirty game." Most scholars today see politics beyond the institutional practices of electioneering and partisan politics. As Leftwich (2004) argued, politics exist in communities where people solve problems of a public character, what some scholars refer to as "Do-it-Ourselves" Politics (Bang, 2020; Pickard, 2019). It is possible that migrants engaged in these non-conventional forms of politics but are unaware that such practices constitute politics.

Regarding participation in politics, migrants' engagement was consistent with their perception and understanding of politics. Most participated in politics by casting a vote in previous elections. Eleven of the 12 interviewees voted in previous elections and expressed a strong desire to vote in subsequent elections. A few others participated in political rallies. Apart from one respondent who expressed disdain for politics and refused to vote, the remaining 11 participants engaged in some form of conventional politics. The main repertoire of political participation arising from the participants' views is voting in periodic elections and campaign rallies which is consistent with participants' notion of politics.

On the motives for engaging in politics, the survey found that most participants were influenced by the need to use politics as a tool against the political class. The participants revealed that they voted against the previous government for threatening to evict them in 2015. The Accra Metropolitan Assembly had carried out pockets of evictions, which triggered mass discontent for the then National Democratic Congress (NDC) Party government. Most migrants in Agbogbloshie voted and mobilized their colleagues and relatives in areas of origin to vote against the NDC government in the 2016 elections because of the eviction exercise. Although there were a couple of other reasons for engaging in politics, including political promises of basic amenities, the principal incentive for engaging in politics was a reaction to the governmental policy of forceful eviction articulated by the migrants. In this regard, participants' political participation is consistent with the Foucauldian theory of governmentality and what Partha Chatterjee refers to as popular politics, in which slum dwellers' participation in politics is seen as a reaction to governmental attempt to direct and control the slum population (Chatterjee, 2004; Foucault, 2007; Jessen and Von Eggers, 2020).

The findings here contradict the growing notion that the Ghanaian voter evaluates the national economic performance of the government before exercising their franchise (Alidu and Braimah, 2014; Ayee, 1997, 2011, 2017; Debrah, 2016; Fobih, 2008; Gyimah-Boadi, 2009; Lindberg, 2013; Van Gyampo et al., 2017). For the migrants, it did not matter how well a government had performed on the economic scale. What mattered to them was their community interest, and they will vote against any party and government that threatened to evict them.

Concluding remarks

The paper set out to explore two key issues: how migrant slum dwellers in Agbogbloshie perceive politics. Second, examine the nature of political participation and the motives behind participation. Based on the evidence, the following conclusions are drawn. First, politics is perceived by migrant slum dwellers in a pejorative and narrow spectrum. The participants' believed politics is "a dirty game" and a "game of deceit" engaged in by selfish and deceitful elites who cared for nothing but themselves. The negative conception of politics is born out of the residents' everyday experiences of unfulfilled campaign promises and the insensitivity of the ruling class to the daily needs of the migrants in Agbogbloshie.

Second, the paper concludes that migrants' participation in politics is conventional. From the voices of the migrants, voting and other electoral activities constituted the major ways they participated in politics. Again, engagement in politics is tied to community needs and reaction to governmental policies. The findings demonstrate that local context matters in driving political participation.

There was evidence suggesting that migrants use political participation as a tool against the political class to overcome the critical challenge of forceful eviction, as many of the respondents voted against the previous government under whose regime their community witnessed pockets of evictions.

The paper has contributed to our understanding of how migrant slum dwellers in Agbogbloshie perceive politics. While residents perceive politics as a "deceitful and dirty game" in which political parties struggle for power, they see elections as a tool to hold leaders accountable. They do this by voting against those who fail to honor their campaign promises and advance their community's interests. In particular, migrants are more likely to vote for political parties that promise protection against forceful evictions and vote against those who threaten them with evictions.

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