

LETTER TO EDITOR

Dear Editor,

Assessing the Knowledge of Persons with Disabilities on Politics, in the Kumasi Metropolis of Ghana

Kumasi Metropolis is the capital city of the Ashanti Region of Ghana, and is the country's second largest city after Accra. According to the 2010 Population and Housing census, it is estimated that 42,060 persons (2.4%) have some form of disability in the city, 2.5 % of whom are females with disabilities and 2.3% are males (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014).

Data from the American National Election Study (ANES) (2012), showed that persons without disabilities had better knowledge about politics than persons with disabilities, and there were 10% more persons without disabilities in politics than persons with disabilities (Powell, 2015). Therefore, it could be said that persons with disabilities who lack knowledge or information on politics might face problems in participation (Khasnabis et al, 2010).

Citizens, including persons with disabilities, ought to acquire a minimum level of knowledge about the political system wherein they show preferences as well as elect representatives (Niemi & Junn, 1998). Several studies have been done on the participation of persons with disabilities in politics in Ghana. They have revealed however, that persons with disabilities have not performed too well. Since there have been no previous studies on the political knowledge levels of persons with disabilities in Ghana, this assessment focused on 415 persons with disabilities in Kumasi Metropolis. The surveyed group consisted of 121 persons with physical impairments, 230 with visual impairments, and 64 with hearing impairments. Most of them (62%) were males. While 79% had completed at least primary education, 21% had no formal education.

To measure the levels of their political knowledge, this group of persons with disabilities was given an index of 9 multiple choice questions regarding political leaders. Those who gave 70 – 100% correct answers were classified as 'High knowledge', those with 50 – 69% correct answers were classified as 'Average knowledge', and those with below 49% correct answers were classified as 'Low knowledge'.

Half of the 415 persons with disabilities had high knowledge about politics. This indicates that a sizeable number of persons with disabilities are knowledgeable

about politics (political actors), and this might have an effect on their participation in politics or otherwise. The survey found that certain disability groups had high levels of political knowledge in comparison to the average knowledge level of other groups. The physically impaired and the visually impaired groups of persons had considerably higher levels of knowledge than the hearing-impaired group. The highest level of political knowledge was seen among the physically impaired persons. This could influence their participation in politics.

Since knowledge plays a key role in political participation among persons with disabilities, it is argued that the influence of factual information on political activity is of considerable importance. Consequently, several measures need to be put in place to reach the vast majority of persons with disabilities. Political information needs to be delivered in an accessible manner, to allow persons with disabilities to deliberate and appreciate the issues being discussed. It is recommended that politicians and political parties should provide reports and other vital information about on-going political developments in accessible formats, both offline and online, to improve the knowledge levels of persons with disabilities.

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