

Factors influencing membership to a political party: A case of the Uganda national household governance survey

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Abstract

The study aimed at identifying factors influencing membership to a political party in Uganda clustering by region and residence. Assessment was done using a mixed effects logistic regression model and secondary data from the Uganda National Governance Baseline Survey (2013) consisting of 3750 households selected countrywide.

Ones' membership to a political party was significantly affected by age, sex, marital status, education level, work status, presence of a political party office in sub county, politicians responding to people's concerns, having political party structures and media freedom to air diverse political views.

The study recommended establishment of political party offices and structures from the grassroots to the national level. This can be ignited through increased media freedom and funding to support political party activities especially sensitization drives to enlighten the citizenry about the relevance and importance of political parties in fostering democracy, development and government accountability with regards to utilization of national resources.

Keywords: political parties, democracy, Uganda, membership

1. Introduction

According to ^[1], a political party is a political institution that has a number of identifiable characteristics and is established by like-minded individuals, with a common set of beliefs and agreeing on important matters of public policy. These individuals are, in a self-conscious manner, determined to gain and hold power on their own or in coalition with other political parties ^[17].

Political parties are an example of groups we have in today's modern society. Groups are critical to everyday existence since we are born into, learn and work in groups ^[4]. A true group has two or more individuals who mutually influence one another through social interaction ^[9]. Groups are characterized by; members interacting with each other; members influencing each other through social interactions; having a purpose or reason for existence; shared perceptions with regards to behaviour; members having particular roles to play in accomplishing group goals; having effective (emotional) ties to others in the group as well as interdependence on one another ^[4]. Motivations for people to join groups among others include; helping members meet a variety of needs whether biological, psychological or social and these cannot be separated from one another. Groups also satisfy a variety of social needs such as social support, comfort, advice, protection, dealing with stress and anxiety ^[4]. Political parties are saddled with the responsibility of recruiting competent individuals for political leadership through periodic elections, educating the electorate through political rallies and dissemination of information about

government policies as well as serving as a vehicle for the articulation and aggregation of the interests of people. Thus, they serve as the pivot upon which the entire political process revolves ^[2]. In other words, there can be no meaningful democracy without a properly functioning political party system. It is obvious therefore, that political parties constitute the heart of democracy. The more vigorous and healthy they are the better assured is the health of the democratic process ^[1]. It is therefore difficult to imagine any modern democracy without political parties as they are the connecting links between diverse groups of peoples and governments. The most common classification of political parties is that which emphasizes the degree of competitiveness in a political system. Hence, there can be one party, two party or multi-party political systems ^[14].

Independent Uganda was born in 1962 as a multi-party democracy, with three political parties represented in Parliament, the Democratic Party (DP), the Uganda People's Congress (UPC) and Kabaka Yekka (KY). Seven years later, the UPC government, led by Milton Obote, proscribed all rival parties, effectively turning Uganda into a one-party state. Following a coup in 1971, which toppled the Obote-led government and led to Idi Amin's military government, political parties went underground. They reappeared following the 1979 war which overthrew Idi Amin. Multi-party politics were re-introduced in the run-up to the 1980 general elections, which were controversially won by Milton Obote's UPC. Two new parties emerged during this time, the Conservative Party (CP) and the Uganda Patriotic Movement (UPM), the

predecessor of today’s ruling party, the National Resistance Movement (NRM). Today, years since the re-establishment of multi-party politics, political parties remain weak. In addition to a lack of internal organization, they have few committed members and perhaps most importantly, lack the resources needed to organize and (in many cases) the capacity to raise funds in the amounts required. The NRM has struggled to transition from an all-encompassing ‘Movement’ to a functioning political party, and its fusion with the state remains a key governance challenge as well as a major obstacle to the development of effective political parties in Uganda [2010].

1.1 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 shows that the socio-demographic factors are hypothesized to directly influence a person’s membership to a political party [6]. Similarly, political factors that focus on; an individual’s perception towards their leaders (rating of political leaders and their response to electorate concerns); the nature of political parties (political parties having offices, structures) and information factors on how government relates with opposition political parties and the media.

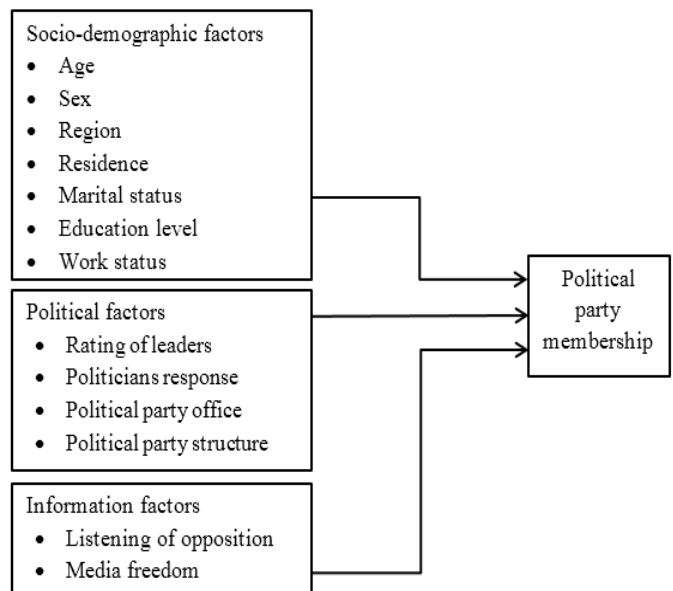


Fig 1: Conceptual framework for determinants of membership to a political party

Table 1: Description of model variables

Variable	Description	Data Type
Sex	Sex of respondent	Binary
Age	Age in complete years	Ordinal
Education level	Highest level of education completed	Ordinal
Marital status	Marital status of respondent	Nominal
Region	Region where respondent is located	Nominal
Residence	Type of residence where respondent is located	Binary
Work status	Have a job or are employed	Binary
Rating of leaders	Rating of performance of leaders	Ordinal
Politicians response	Politicians respond to the your concerns	Ordinal
Political party office	Have any political party office in your sub county	Binary
Political party structure	Political parties have structures in which they operate	Binary
Listening to opposition	Government takes the voice of opposition into account	Ordinal
Media freedom	Media outlets free to air diverse political views	Nominal
Political party membership	Belong to any political party	Binary

2. Materials and methods

2.1 Data source

The data used in this study was obtained from the Uganda National Governance Baseline Survey (2014) conducted by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics in collaboration with Makerere University, School of Statistics and Planning. A national sample of 3750 households was selected countrywide using a three stage stratified cluster sampling design where 75 enumeration areas were first selected from each stratum using Probability Proportional to Size, then 10 households were selected from each enumeration area using systematic sampling and finally two adults were selected from each household.

2.2 Data analysis

Analysis was done in STATA Version 13.0 [16] using Pearson’s chi-square to test for association between membership to a political party and plausible independent variables. The mixed effects logistic regression model was used to identify significant determinants of membership to a political party as shown below adapted from [16];

$$\Pr(y_{ij} = 1|x_{ij}, u_j) = H(x_{ij}\beta + z_{ij}u_j) \tag{1}$$

for $j = 1, \dots, M$ clusters, with cluster j consisting of $i = 1, \dots, n_j$ observations. The responses are binary-valued y_{ij} , with $y_{ij} = 1$ if $depvar_{ij} \neq 0$ and treating $y_{ij} = 0$ otherwise. The $1 \times p$ row vector x_{ij} are the covariates for the fixed effects with regression coefficients (fixed effects) β . The $1 \times q$, vector z_{ij} are the covariates corresponding to the random effects and can be used to represent random intercepts. The random effects u_j are M realizations from a multivariate normal distribution with mean, 0 and $q \times q$ variance matrix Σ . $H(\cdot)$ is the logistic cumulative distribution function, which maps the linear predictor to the probability of a success ($y_{ij} = 1$) with $H(v) = \exp(v) / \{1 + \exp(v)\}$.

3. Results

A summarized description of the variables used for the study is provided in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Characteristics of the Respondents

Variables		Frequency	Percentage
Age	18 to 30	1,976	41.37
	31 to 59	2,302	48.2
	60 plus	498	10.43
Sex	Male	2,193	45.92
	Female	2,583	54.08
Region	Kampala	819	17.15
	Central	927	19.41
	Eastern	1,053	22.05
	Northern	1,001	20.96
	Western	976	20.44
	Urban	1,290	27.01
Residence	Rural	3,486	72.99
	Never married	574	12.02
Marital status	Married	3,531	73.93
	Divorced	320	6.70
	Widowed	351	7.35
	None	964	20.18
Education level	Primary	2,423	50.73
	Secondary	966	20.23
	Diploma/certificate	245	5.13
	Degree & above	178	3.73
	No	1,441	30.17
Work status	Yes	3,335	69.83
	Poor	755	15.81
Rating of leaders	Fair	1,789	37.46
	Good	1,885	39.47
	Very good	347	7.27
	Not at all	1,898	39.74
Politicians response	Slightly	1,617	33.86
	Somewhat	903	18.91
	Completely	358	7.50
	Yes	1,649	34.53
Political party office	No	2,216	46.40
	Don't know	911	19.07
	No	889	18.61
Political party structure	Yes	1,599	33.48
	Yes some	2,020	42.29
	Don't know	268	5.61
	Not at all	1,984	41.54
Listening to opposition	Slightly	1,514	31.70
	Somewhat	749	15.68
	Completely	529	11.08
	No	1,431	29.96
Media freedom	Yes	2,337	48.93
	Don't know	1,008	21.11
	No	1,712	35.85
Political party membership	Yes	3,064	64.15

Majority of the respondents were below 60 years with the highest proportion aged 31 to 59 (48.2%) then 18 to 30 (41.37%) and lastly 60 plus (10.43%). Majority of the respondents were females (54.08%) compared to males (45.92%). The Eastern (22.05%), Northern (20.96%) and Western regions (20.44%) had the highest proportion of respondents with majority residing in rural areas (72.99%). 69.83% of respondents were engaged in some form of gainful employment and had not attained education beyond primary level (50.73%). As regards respondents' rating of their leaders, the highest proportion rated them good (39.47%) and fair (37.46%). Pertaining to politicians responding to the concerns of the respondents, highest proportion reported political leaders doing so, slightly (33.86%) or not at all

(39.74%). Regarding political parties and organizations represented in parliament have structures (rules, objectives, finances, membership) in which they operate, 42.29% of the respondents agreed that some do have and they were the highest followed by those who responded with yes (33.48%). As for the degree to which respondents thought government takes the voice of opposition parties into account in planning and service deliver, the highest proportion reported not at all (41.54%) although with regards media outlets being free to air diverse political views, the highest proportion of responded with yes (48.93%). Finally, majority of the respondents reported belonging to a political party (64.15%).

Table 3 below provides a summary of the association between political party membership and plausible independent

variables. Apart from the variable pertaining to whether government takes the voice of the opposition parties into account in planning and service delivery, the rest of the

variables were significantly ($p < 0.05$) associated with membership to a political party.

Table 3: Factors associated with membership to a political party

Variables		Political party membership	
		No	Yes
Age	18 to 30	42.16	57.84
	31 to 59	30.10	69.90
	60 plus	37.35	62.65
		chi2(2)=67.701 p=0.000	
Sex	Male	30.37	69.63
	Female	40.50	59.50
		chi2(1)=52.884 p=0.000	
Region	Kampala	47.01	52.99
	Central	40.02	59.98
	Eastern	37.23	62.77
	Northern	37.16	62.84
	Western	19.67	80.33
		chi2(4) =164.055 p=0.000	
Residence	Urban	45.12	54.88
	Rural	32.42	67.58
		chi2(1)=66.048 p=0.000	
Marital status	Never married	47.74	52.26
	Married	33.25	66.75
	Divorced	38.13	61.88
	Widowed	40.46	59.54
		chi2(3)=49.609 p=0.000	
Education level	None	36.41	63.59
	Primary	34.05	65.95
	Secondary	36.44	63.56
	Diploma/certificate	41.22	58.78
	Degree & above	46.63	53.37
		chi2(4)=15.767 p=0.003	
Work status	No	42.68	57.32
	Yes	32.89	67.11
		chi2(1)=41.895 p=0.000	
Rating of leaders	Poor	39.87	60.13
	Fair	37.40	62.60
	Good	34.69	65.31
	Very good	25.36	74.64
		chi2(3)=24.854 p=0.000	
Politicians response	Not at all	39.62	60.38
	Slightly	33.58	66.42
	Somewhat	33.78	66.22
	Completely	31.28	68.72
		chi2(3)=20.288 p=0.000	
Political party office	Yes	24.14	75.86
	No	39.67	60.33
	Don't know	47.75	52.25
		chi2(2)=168.525 p=0.000	
Political party structure	No	51.97	48.03
	Yes	30.14	69.86
	Yes some	32.97	67.03
	Don't know	38.06	61.94
		chi2(3)=130.929 p=0.000	
Listening to opposition	Not at all	36.54	63.46
	Slightly	35.14	64.86
	Somewhat	36.45	63.55
	Completely	34.40	65.60
		chi2(3)=1.344 p=0.719	
Media freedom	No	33.89	66.11
	Yes	32.43	67.57
	Don't know	46.53	53.47
		chi2(2)=64.2136 p=0.000	

Socio-demographic factors and political party membership

All socio-demographic factors had a significant ($p < 0.05$) association with political party membership. Majority across all age groups belonged to a political party though the highest proportion was among those aged 31 to 59 years (69.9%). Similarly, regarding the sex of the respondent, majority belonged to a political party among both males (69.63%) and females (59.5%). Regarding the regions where respondents were located, Western region (80.33%) had the highest proportion of respondents with political party membership followed distantly by the Northern (62.84%) and Eastern (62.77%) regions though Kampala (47.01%) had the lowest proportion of respondents belong to a political party. As for residence, majority of both rural (67.58%) and urban (54.88%) residents had political party membership. Pertaining to marital status, the married (66.75%) and divorced (61.88%) had the highest proportion with political party membership with those never married (47.74%) having the highest proportion not belonging to a political party. As for education level, political party membership was highest among respondents who had attained at most the primary level (65.95%) followed by those with no education (63.59%) and secondary level (63.56%). Majority of the respondents who were employed (67.11%) belonged to a political party.

Political factors and political party membership

Regarding rating of political leaders, political party membership increased with rating of political leaders with respondents who rated their leaders as very good (74.64%) having the majority. As regards to politicians responding to the concerns of respondents, majority of the respondents across all groups had political party membership with the highest among those who thought political leaders responded completely (68.72%) to their concerns and needs. As for regards the awareness of political party offices in their sub-county, the proportion of persons who responded with yes (75.86%) had the highest proportion with political party membership compared to those who responded with no (60.33%) and those who didn't know (52.25%). Pertaining to political parties having structures in which they operate, majority of the respondents who replied with yes (69.86%) had political party membership whereas majority who responded with no (51.97%) were no political party members.

Information factors and political party membership

As for government taking the voice of opposition into account, majority of the respondents with political party membership with the highest proportion being among those who thought government completely (65.6%) listens to the opposition political parties. Pertaining to media outlets freely airing diverse political views, majority of respondents who thought there was no (66.11%) media freedom belonged to political parties though the proportion was highest among those who thought there was media freedom (67.57%), Table 4 provides a summary of the determinants of membership to a political party estimated using a multilevel mixed effects logistic regression with nesting at both region and residence levels.

Table 4: Determinants of membership to a political party

Variables		Odds Ratio	Z	P> z	[95% C. I]	
Age	18 to 30	1.00				
	31 to 59	1.44	4.87	0.00	1.24	1.67
	60 plus	1.21	1.46	0.15	0.94	1.56
Sex	Male	1.00				
	Female	0.72	-4.59	0.00	0.63	0.83
Marital status	Never married	1.00				
	Married	1.47	3.60	0.00	1.19	1.81
	Divorced	1.29	1.54	0.13	0.93	1.77
	Widowed	1.27	1.37	0.17	0.90	1.79
Education level	None	1.00				
	Primary	0.92	-0.96	0.34	0.77	1.09
	Secondary	0.95	-0.46	0.65	0.76	1.19
	Diploma/certificate	0.66	-2.50	0.01	0.47	0.91
	Degree & above	0.65	-2.24	0.03	0.45	0.95
Work status	No	1.00				
	Yes	1.17	2.07	0.04	1.01	1.35
Rating of leaders	Poor	1.00				
	Fair	0.98	-0.21	0.83	0.81	1.19
	Good	1.02	0.24	0.81	0.84	1.24
	Very good	1.33	1.80	0.07	0.98	1.82
Politicians response	Not at all	1.00				
	Slightly	1.32	3.50	0.00	1.13	1.54
	Somewhat	1.24	2.31	0.02	1.03	1.50
	Completely	1.27	1.69	0.09	0.96	1.67
Political party office	Yes	1.00				
	No	0.45	-10.11	0.00	0.38	0.52
	Don't know	0.38	-9.64	0.00	0.32	0.47
Political party structure	No	1.00				
	Yes	2.60	10.03	0.00	2.16	3.13
	Yes some	2.33	9.38	0.00	1.96	2.79
	Don't know	1.87	3.73	0.00	1.34	2.59
Media freedom	No	1.00				
	Yes	0.93	-0.92	0.36	0.80	1.09
	Don't know	0.59	-5.25	0.00	0.49	0.72
	Constant	0.67	-1.49	0.14	0.40	1.13
Region						
	Var (residence)	0.06			0.01	0.29
	Var(cons)	0.08			0.00	1.63

LR test vs. Logistic regression: $\chi^2(2) = 173.09$ Prob> $\chi^2 = 0.0000$

For respondents aged 31 to 59, the odds of being a member of a political party were 1.44 times higher than the odds for one aged 18 to 30. The decline in party membership among the youth is consistent with studies by ^[19] as well as ^[20]. This may be attributed to decreased preference of institutional forms of political participation such as voting and in favor of extra-institutional forms of activism such as protests ^[8, 12].

As for females, the odds of being a member of a political party were 0.72 times lower than the odds for males. The poor performance of females can be attributed to a political culture that is embedded in the ideology of patriarchy ^[10]. This has made political parties male dominated especially regarding leadership roles.

Regarding marital status, for married respondents, the odds of being a member of a political party were 1.47 times higher than the odds for those who have never married. This was consistent with findings by ^[18].

Pertaining to education level, for respondents with a diploma/certificate, the odds of being a member of a political

party were 0.66 times lower than the odds for one with no education. Similarly, for respondents with a university degree and above, the odds of being a member of a political party were 0.65 times lower than the odds for one with no education.

As for work status, for respondents who are employed, the odds of being a member of a political party were 1.17 times higher than the odds for the unemployed. This can be attributed to the fact that most of the political parties have requirements that members should fulfill with the most common being payment of membership fees to cater for party expenses^[3, 13] and this can easily be met by employed persons since they have a source of income.

As to whether politicians responding to people's concerns, for respondents who thought they did slightly, the odds of being a member of a political party were 1.32 times higher than the odds for persons who thought not at all. Similarly, for respondents who thought they did somewhat, the odds of being a member of a political party were 1.24 times higher than the odds for persons who thought not at all.

Pertaining to the presence of a political party office in ones' sub county, for those who said no, the odds of being a member of a political party were 0.45 times lower than the odds for those who said yes. Similarly for those who didn't know, the odds of being a member of a political party were 0.38 times lower than the odds for those who said yes. This was significant due to the importance of party offices at national and regional or provincial levels to ensure rapid and efficient conduct of party affairs^[15] including the recruitment of new members.

With regards to having political party structures, for persons who responded with yes, the odds of being a member of a political party were 2.60 times higher than the odds for persons who responded with no. As for persons who responded with yes, some do have, the odds of being a member of a political party were 2.22 times higher than the odds for persons who responded with no. Similarly, for persons who didn't know, the odds of being a member of a political party were 1.87 times higher than the odds for persons who responded with no. The significance of party structures which are simply ways in which a political party relates to the citizenry and its supporters can be attributed to their importance in informing the relationship between party leaders and supporters at all levels hence are pivotal players in the electoral process and how relations are managed^[15].

Concerning and media freedom to air diverse political views, for respondents who didn't know whether it existed, the odds of being a member of a political party were 0.59 times lower than the odds for those who responded with no.

Finally, a likelihood ratio test ($\chi^2=173.09$, $p=0.000$) comparing findings from the Multilevel mixed effects logistic regression model and the ordinary logistic regression model indicated a significant improvement in favor of the mixed effects approach confirming the existence of heterogeneity between the different clusters or groups. This can be attributed to the nature of the survey whereby the sample was obtained through nested sampling in heterogeneous subgroups^[7] as well as the inherent differences among the population across different geographical areas.

4. Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, political party membership was expected to be high among respondents who are; aged 31 to 59, of the male sex, married, diploma/ certificate or university degree and above holders, employed, in disagreement or don't know of a political party office in their sub county, slightly or somewhat in agreement that politicians respond to people's concerns, in agreement or don't know of political party structures and unaware of whether media freedom to air diverse political views exists. The insignificance of the effect of the variable regarding whether government takes the voice of the opposition parties into account in planning and service delivery indicates the weakness of opposition parties in the country. Opposition political parties have not been able to establish themselves or expand in terms of their operation, their quest for democracy in order to capture the hearts of the rural populace where the majority of the electorate resides^[5].

The study recommended establishment of political party offices and structures from the grassroots to the national level. This can be ignited through increased media freedom and funding to support political party activities especially sensitization drives to enlighten the citizenry about the relevance and importance of political parties in fostering democracy, development and government accountability with regards to utilization of national resources. Increasing in funding for political parties calls for innovativeness of leaders in regards to identifying additional funding avenues including donations, membership fees, public funding, trust funds and many more.

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