

National Democratic Congress Parliamentary Primaries in the Tamale Central Constituency: A Delegate-Based Electoral Survey Analysis

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Abstract

The Tamale Central Constituency, a key political and commercial hub in Ghana's Northern Region, is preparing for a parliamentary primary of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) following the passing of its sitting Member of Parliament (MP) on August 6, 2025. Several aspirants, including Dr. Abdul Rashid Abdul Rahaman, Prof. Alidu Seidu, Dr. Seidu Fiter, Lawyer Abdul Hanan Gundadow, Lawyer Abdul Rauf, Hajia Shamima Yakubu, and Alhassan Osman Gomda, have emerged as potential contenders for the September 6, 2025, internal primary election. This paper analyses delegate preferences, perceptions of candidate strength, and the factors likely to influence delegate choice. A survey of 344 delegates was conducted to determine support levels for aspirants and the factors likely to influence their choice. The findings suggest that delegate decision-making is structured around three latent dimensions, and these are loyalty and service (grassroots embeddedness, party service), campaign resources (financial/logistical support), and charisma and appeal (youth appeal, communication). While grassroots embeddedness remains critical, the role of financial capacity and youth appeal cannot be discounted. Interestingly, public speaking ability, often emphasised in media campaigns, was statistically insignificant, reflecting that internal party elections rely more on patron-client networks than on rhetorical skills. In conclusion, the findings highlight the political economy of delegate decision-making in the Tamale Central constituency and suggest that an aspirant who integrates grassroots engagement, party loyalty, and campaign capacity is best positioned to secure the nomination. Based on this conclusion, the paper argues for a transparent internal primary election and merit-based selection to strengthen the NDC's competitiveness in the Tamale Central constituency.

Keywords: elections, delegates, primaries, NDC, Tamale Central, Ghana

1. Introduction

The Tamale Central Constituency, located in the Northern Region of Ghana, represents one of the most politically significant constituencies in the country's Fourth Republic. Established in 2004 after its separation from the Gukpegu-Sabongida constituency, Tamale Central quickly emerged as a strategic urban constituency within the Tamale Metropolitan Assembly (Ghana Statistical Service [GSS], 2021). With an estimated population of about 128,000, its demographic composition is dominated by the Dagomba ethnic group, though it is also home to significant populations of Gonjas, Mamprusis, Konkombas, Hausas, and other minority groups (Frempong, 2020). This cultural diversity, combined with its urban character, has made the constituency a focal point for both political mobilisation and electoral competition (Alidu & Bukari, 2020; Anaman & Bukari, 2021).

Economically, Tamale Central is an active commercial and administrative hub. The Aboabo and Central markets, in particular, provide trading opportunities that attract residents across the Northern Region, reinforcing the constituency's role as a key node in the region's economic life. The local economy is sustained by small-scale trading, farming, transport, teaching, and informal sector employment (Ayee, 2017). The constituency's socioeconomic profile is further shaped by high youth unemployment and an expanding informal economy, conditions which frequently feature in campaign narratives and party manifestos (Lindberg, 2010; Anaman & Bukari, 2019a & b). As such, electoral contests in Tamale

Central often hinge on how aspirants and parties frame their ability to deliver jobs, improve infrastructure, and provide access to social services.

Politically, Tamale Central has been one of the strongholds of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) since its creation. The NDC's dominance is rooted in both historical loyalties and the party's deep organisational presence in the Northern Region (Bob-Milliar, 2012). Since the 1992 transition to multiparty democracy, the NDC has won every parliamentary election in Tamale Central, producing influential legislators such as Alhassan Wayo Seini, Inusah Fuseini, and, most recently, the late Alhaji Dr Ibrahim Mohammed Murtala. These political figures have not only served as representatives of the constituency but have also played important roles in shaping national discourse, especially on governance and development policy (Debrah, 2021). However, this dominance has not gone uncontested. In the 2020 parliamentary elections, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) significantly reduced the NDC's winning margin, signaling growing competitiveness and raising questions about the sustainability of NDC dominance in the constituency (Frempong, 2020). The current political context is defined by the passing of Alhaji Dr Ibrahim Mohammed Murtala on 6 August 2025, which has created a parliamentary vacancy. This unexpected development has generated heightened political activity in Tamale Central, particularly within the NDC. Aspirants for the upcoming primary include Prof. Alidu Seidu, Dr Seidu Fiter, Dr Abdul Rashid Abdul Rahaman, Lawyer Abdul Hanan Gundadow, Lawyer Abdul Rauf, Hajia Shamima Yakubu, and Alhassan Osman Gomda. Each of these individuals brings distinct attributes, ranging from academic expertise and professional careers to long-standing political activism and grassroots visibility. Their varied backgrounds and perceived strengths have ignited debates among party supporters and observers about who is best positioned to consolidate the NDC's dominance and counter the NPP's growing inroads.

The relevance of the Tamale Central NDC primary extends beyond local politics. Intra-party elections have become a vital arena for examining the health of Ghana's democracy (Bukari, 2023; Bukari, Arah & Botchway, 2025; Bukari, Millar, & Akolga, 2025). Scholars argue that candidate selection processes are a defining feature of party institutionalisation and electoral competitiveness (Ichino & Nathan, 2013). In Ghana, delegate-based primaries have become central mechanisms through which political elites are selected, but they also raise concerns about transparency, clientelism, and the commercialisation of politics (Bob-Milliar & Paller, 2018). Delegates serve as the primary decision-makers in these contests, and their choices are often influenced by perceptions of candidate electability, financial inducements, grassroots ties, and loyalty to the party (Bleck & van de Walle, 2019). Understanding delegate behaviour is, therefore, crucial for interpreting not only who emerges as the NDC candidate in Tamale Central but also the broader implications for electoral politics in Ghana. Another dimension of importance lies in the constituency's urban and commercial character. Urban constituencies in Ghana are often more competitive than rural ones because of their demographic diversity, political pluralism, and exposure to national campaign narratives (Lindberg, 2010). In Tamale Central, the intersection of ethnic plurality, commercial activity, and party dominance produces a unique electoral environment. Aspirants must demonstrate both the ability to mobilise grassroots structures and the capacity to appeal to a broader, more heterogeneous electorate. Moreover, delegates in such constituencies may be more discerning, balancing personal relationships and patronage benefits with strategic calculations about which aspirant is most likely to win the general election (Bukari, 2023; Bukari, Eliasu, & Adam, 2024).

The current study is motivated by three interrelated study concerns. First, how do delegates in Tamale Central evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different aspirants in the NDC primary? Second, to what extent does the perceived electability influence delegate support? Third, what personal, structural, and strategic factors shape delegate decision-making in this critical intra-party contest? This paper contributes to the literature on intra-party democracy, electoral behaviour, and political competition in Ghana. The paper is particularly timely given broader debates on the quality of Ghana's democracy. While Ghana is often celebrated as one of Africa's most stable democracies, challenges persist in ensuring transparency and inclusiveness within political parties (Debrah, 2021). Intra-party conflicts, vote-buying, and elite capture threaten to undermine party cohesion and democratic accountability (Bratton, 2007; Lindberg and Morrison, 2008; Bob-Milliar & Paller, 2018). The Tamale Central case thus provides an opportunity to assess how delegates, who act as gatekeepers in the candidate selection process, make choices that balance personal incentives with collective party interests. The findings have implications not only for the NDC's internal cohesion but also for Ghana's broader democratic development.

The central argument advanced is that delegate choices in Tamale Central are shaped by both strategic and transactional considerations, with electability, grassroots ties, and resource capacity emerging as decisive factors. The subsequent sections of this paper review relevant literature, present the theoretical framework, and analyse empirical data from a survey of delegates in the constituency. This is followed by the conclusion, policy recommendations, and the references used and cited in the paper.

2. Literature Review

Candidate selection remains a central mechanism for understanding intra-party democracy. Political parties, as

gatekeepers to political office, determine who gets nominated and eventually competes in general elections. According to Ichino and Nathan (2013) and Bukari (2023), the degree of inclusiveness in candidate selection processes reflects the level of internal democracy within a party. Open and competitive primaries often enhance legitimacy, while closed or elite-driven processes tend to consolidate power among party elites. In the Ghanaian context, candidate selection is particularly significant because political parties, especially the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP), dominate the political space, and winning a party's ticket in strongholds like Tamale Central often guarantees electoral victory (Ichino & Nathan, 2013). Within African democracies, the literature suggests that party primaries are not merely organisational procedures but arenas of intense political competition, negotiation, and resource mobilisation (Resnick, 2017). Delegates, who typically represent grassroots structures, play a decisive role in this process. However, studies indicate that their decisions are often influenced by a combination of ideological alignment, personal loyalty, and material inducements (Bob-Milliar, 2012). This dual role of delegates as both representatives of the party base and potential targets of patronage makes their choices critical for understanding how intra-party democracy functions in practice.

Delegates' voting behaviour in primaries has been a subject of scholarly interest, particularly regarding the balance between collective party interests and individual benefits. Bleck and van de Walle (2019) argue that in African political systems, delegates' choices are shaped by both rational calculations about electability and access to patronage networks. In Ghana, Bob-Milliar and Paller (2018) found that vote-buying and financial inducements are widespread in delegate-based primaries, suggesting that economic incentives are a strong determinant of delegate behaviour. Yet, material inducement alone does not explain delegate preferences. Lindberg (2010) emphasises the role of grassroots mobilisation and long-term personal relationships between aspirants and local party activists. Delegates often reward aspirants who have demonstrated commitment to the constituency through consistent presence, sponsorship of community events, or provision of development projects (Bratton, 2007; Lindberg and Morrison, 2008; Bob-Milliar & Paller, 2018). This indicates that while money plays a role, social embeddedness and perceived loyalty to the constituency are equally important. In the case of Tamale Central, aspirants such as academics, lawyers, and grassroots mobilisers compete not only with financial resources but also with reputational capital and community embeddedness.

A growing body of studies highlights electability as a key determinant in delegate decision-making. Delegates often act strategically by selecting candidates they believe can secure victory in the general election, thereby ensuring party dominance (Bukari, 2023). In stronghold constituencies, such as Tamale Central for the NDC, electability is often interpreted in terms of a candidate's ability to maintain the party's overwhelming support base while also countering any encroachment by opposition parties. Frempong (2020) observes that even in strongholds, shifts in electoral margins signal the importance of fielding candidates with broad appeal, especially in urban and diverse constituencies. Comparative literature also reinforces the salience of electability. Ichino and Nathan (2013) and Bukari (2023) have noted that in established democracies, delegates tend to prioritise candidates who demonstrate charisma, political experience, and voter appeal. This mirrors findings in African contexts, where local reputation and the ability to attract swing voters often outweigh internal loyalty when delegates cast their votes (Resnick, 2017). Thus, the Tamale Central NDC primary can be understood as a strategic calculation by delegates, balancing loyalty, inducement, and electability.

The literature on African political systems frequently underscores the persistence of clientelism and vote-buying in intra-party elections. Lindberg and Morrison (2008) and Bratton (2013) have argued that clientelism remains a dominant feature of African politics because it provides immediate, tangible benefits to voters and delegates in contexts where state resources are scarce. In Ghana, studies reveal that primaries are increasingly commercialised, with aspirants expected to resource delegates through cash payments, gifts, and sponsorship of events (Bob-Milliar, 2012). This practice, while criticised, has become normalised in the political culture, raising concerns about the integrity of intra-party democracy. Bob-Milliar and Paller (2018) further document that the monetisation of primaries can weaken accountability, as delegates may prioritise short-term material gain over long-term party strength. However, other scholars suggest that resource distribution may also serve as a proxy for a candidate's capacity to mobilise campaign funds and thus sustain competitive elections (Bleck & van de Walle, 2019). In Tamale Central, where the NDC's dominance is under pressure from the NPP, delegates may evaluate aspirants not only based on immediate patronage but also on their ability to finance a robust campaign to secure the constituency.

Urban constituencies in Ghana present unique electoral dynamics. Unlike rural areas, urban constituencies such as Tamale Central are characterised by ethnic diversity, occupational plurality, and exposure to national political debates (Lindberg, 2010). These factors tend to increase political competitiveness and reduce the predictability of voter alignments. Frempong (2020) notes that urban constituencies often act as bellwethers for shifts in national politics, as they reflect broader socioeconomic and demographic transformations. For intra-party politics, this means that aspirants in urban constituencies must demonstrate both grassroots connections and broader public appeal. Delegates in such contexts may place greater emphasis on candidates with professional experience, intellectual credentials, and media visibility, as these attributes are perceived to enhance the party's electoral fortunes (Debrah, 2021). In the case of Tamale Central, the

presence of aspirants with academic and professional backgrounds illustrates this trend, raising questions about how delegates balance grassroots activism against professional competence.

From a political economy perspective, intra-party contests can be analysed as arenas where resources, power, and strategic interests intersect. According to Lindberg and Morrison (2008) and Bratton (2013), political competition in developing democracies often revolves around access to state resources, with political elites distributing benefits to secure loyalty. This framework helps explain why financial capacity and patronage networks are central in delegate-based primaries. At the same time, institutional theories emphasise the importance of party structures, rules, and norms in shaping delegate behaviour (Ichino and Nathan, 2013; Bukari, 2023). Applying these insights to Tamale Central suggests that delegates' preferences are not random but structured by the interaction between material inducements, institutional rules of the NDC, and the broader strategic imperative of retaining the seat. This intersection of transactional politics and institutional dynamics underscores the complexity of intra-party democracy in Ghana. The reviewed literature highlights three critical themes for understanding the Tamale Central NDC primarily. First, intra-party democracy in Ghana is shaped by the interplay of grassroots activism, patronage, and strategic considerations. Second, delegates are not passive actors but strategic decision-makers who weigh inducements, loyalty, and electability in making their choices. Third, urban constituencies such as Tamale Central provide a unique context where professional competence, grassroots ties, and financial resources must align for an aspirant to succeed. While extensive scholarship exists on intra-party democracy in Ghana, few studies have focused specifically on delegate behaviour in constituencies like Tamale Central. This study, therefore, fills a gap by systematically analysing delegate preferences, offering insights into the political economy of candidate selection and its implications for Ghana's democracy.

3. Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

The study of intra-party politics in Ghana, and particularly the delegate-based primaries of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), can be best understood through a multi-theoretical lens. This framework draws upon rational choice theory, patron-client/clientelism theory, and the Political Economy of Elections to explain delegate behaviour, candidate selection, and the broader implications for Ghana's democratic development. Each theory sheds light on specific dynamics of decision-making, resource distribution, and electoral strategy within the Tamale Central constituency.

Rational choice theory has been widely employed in political science to explain voting behaviour, decision-making, and political strategies. The theory assumes that individuals act rationally by weighing costs and benefits before making choices that maximise their utility (Downs, 1957). Applied to intra-party primaries, delegates are conceptualised as rational actors who evaluate aspirants based on what they stand to gain materially, politically, or socially. In Tamale central, rational choice theory helps explain why delegates may support aspirants who promise tangible benefits, such as financial inducements or long-term access to opportunities. Delegates face both short-term incentives (cash payments, gifts, patronage promises) and long-term considerations (party strength, candidate electability, constituency development). Their choice is therefore a calculated decision, balancing personal gain against collective party survival (Bleck & van de Walle, 2019). Furthermore, rational choice perspectives highlight the role of electability in delegate decision-making. Delegates are not only motivated by immediate benefits but also by the strategic importance of selecting a candidate capable of winning the general election. Failure to do so risks party defeat, which would undermine both their political relevance and access to resources. Thus, the rational calculation of delegates in Tamale Central may involve choosing a candidate with broad appeal, even if that candidate provides fewer material inducements.

While rational choice theory emphasises strategic calculation, patron-client theory underscores the relational and transactional nature of politics in African democracies. clientelism refers to the exchange of material resources, favours, or opportunities for political support (Lindberg & Morrison, 2008; Bratton, 2013). In this framework, aspirants act as patrons who distribute resources to delegates in exchange for loyalty, while delegates function as clients who deliver votes and political legitimacy. In Ghana, and particularly within the NDC, primaries have increasingly been characterised by patron-client relations. Bob-Milliar (2012) documents how aspirants often engage in the practice of resourcing delegates through direct cash payments, transport allowances, or sponsoring of social events. Such practices are not merely acts of generosity but strategic investments designed to secure delegate loyalty. Delegates, in turn, may see themselves as entitled to these resources, reinforcing a cycle of monetised politics. Applying this to Tamale Central, patron-client theory helps explain why aspirants' financial capacity is a critical determinant of success (Lindberg & Morrison, 2008; Bratton, 2013). Delegates expect aspirants to demonstrate resource mobilisation ability, which is interpreted as an indicator of both commitment and campaign strength. Moreover, aspirants with stronger patronage networks, whether through business connections, political godfathers, or personal wealth, are often better positioned to influence delegate preferences. However, this framework also suggests that clientelism is not purely transactional but relational. Delegates may reward aspirants who have maintained consistent engagement with the constituency over time, sponsoring community projects or being visible during party activities. Thus, while clientelism often implies vote-buying, it can also involve long-term patron-client bonds rooted in trust, reciprocity, and social obligation.

The political economy of elections provides a broader structural lens for understanding intra-party democracy (Bukari, 2022). It emphasises how resource distribution, institutional rules, and power dynamics shape electoral outcomes (Bukari, Gbati, & Ibrahim, 2025). Elections, including primaries, are not only about individual choices but also about the allocation of scarce resources and the struggle for control over political and economic opportunities. In Ghana, political parties operate in a system where access to state resources is heavily tied to political office. As a result, the stakes of candidate selection are particularly high. Winning the NDC primary in Tamale Central is almost equivalent to winning the parliamentary seat, given the party's dominance in the constituency (Ichino & Nathan, 2013; Bukari, 2022). Delegates therefore operate within a political economy in which their choices directly affect not only party fortunes but also access to future state patronage and development projects. From this perspective, delegate behaviour can be understood as a function of both structural incentives and institutional constraints. Structural incentives include the expectation that aspirants with greater financial resources will be better positioned to finance campaigns, mobilise voters, and secure victory. Institutional constraints, such as the NDC's rules governing primaries, the role of regional executives, and the Electoral Commission's oversight, also influence how delegates make choices. The political economy approach also situates the Tamale Central contest within broader national dynamics. As the NPP makes inroads into northern constituencies, the NDC faces pressure to field candidates capable of defending its traditional strongholds. Delegates are therefore influenced not only by personal inducements but also by the macro-political imperative of maintaining the party's dominance in parliament.

Hypotheses

H1: Grassroots connection has a positive and significant effect on delegate support.

H2: Track record in party service positively predicts delegate support.

H3: Financial/resource mobilisation ability is positively associated with delegate support.

H4: Public speaking ability is positively related to delegate support, though weaker than grassroots or financial capacity.

H5: Youth appeal has a positive but secondary influence on delegate support.

4. Methodology

Study Design, Sampling, Data Collection, And Analytical Techniques

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design, which is widely employed in electoral and political economy research to capture delegate preferences, perceptions, and factors influencing decision-making at a single point in time (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A cross-sectional approach was particularly suitable for this study because the NDC parliamentary primaries in Tamale Central represent a dynamic but time-bound political event. Delegates' perceptions and support choices were examined just before the primaries, allowing the study to provide a snapshot of intra-party electoral behaviour. The target population consisted of all registered NDC delegates in the Tamale Central Constituency, as they are the primary decision-makers in the parliamentary primaries. In total, the delegate population was 1,662, and this includes 1,584 branch executives, 27 constituency executives, and approximately 51 other eligible delegates (NDC Electoral Directorate, 2025). A sample size of 344 delegates was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula for finite populations, with a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. This exceeded the minimum required sample size of 313 and accounted for a 10% contingency to mitigate potential non-responses. The study employed stratified random sampling to ensure proportional representation across all electoral areas and branch structures. Delegates were grouped according to branch clusters, and respondents were randomly selected within each cluster. This minimised bias and ensured representativeness across the diverse ethnic, occupational, and demographic composition of Tamale Central. The primary instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire comprising both closed-ended questions. Closed-ended items measured delegate support for aspirants, and key determinants of choice using five-point Likert scales (1 = Very Weak/Strongly Disagree, 5 = Very Strong/Strongly Agree). The questionnaire was pre-tested with a pilot group of 20 delegates from nearby constituencies to ensure clarity and validity. Adjustments were made to refine the phrasing of items and the sequencing of questions. Data were collected from August 20 to 31, 2025, before the scheduled September 6, 2025, primary election. The use of in-person administration was critical to overcome literacy differences and to build trust with delegates, given the sensitive nature of intra-party contests (Ayee, 2021). All respondents were provided verbal consent, and anonymity was assured by assigning identification codes rather than recording names. This enhanced the reliability of responses, as delegates felt secure expressing their preferences. The study conducted descriptive statistics analysis, cross-tabulation, and multiple regression to determine the factors that could influence delegate support on the September 6, 2025, NDC internal primary election in the Tamale Central Constituency.

Statistical Model Specification

The paper's central interest was to examine the determinants of delegate support for aspirants in the upcoming Tamale Central NDC primaries. Delegate support is operationalised as the level of endorsement given to each aspirant (measured on a Likert scale of support intensity). Formally, the regression model is specified as:

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_{1i} + \beta_2 X_{2i} + \beta_3 X_{3i} + \beta_4 X_{4i} + \beta_5 X_{5i} + \epsilon_i \quad \dots\dots\dots \text{equation 1}$$

Where;

Y_i = Delegate support for aspirant i (dependent variable).

β_0 = Intercept term.

$\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3, \beta_4, \beta_5$ = Regression coefficients measuring the marginal effect of each independent variable on delegate support.

X_{1i} = Grassroots connection (measured by delegate perception of candidate's local embeddedness).

X_{2i} = Track record in party service (past contributions, loyalty, organisational presence).

X_{3i} = Financial/resource mobilisation ability (capacity to fund campaigns and provide logistical support).

X_{4i} = Public speaking ability (charisma, communication skills).

X_{5i} = Youth appeal (attractiveness to young activists, student wings, and first-time voters).

ϵ_i = Error term.

5. Findings and Analysis

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1. Gender of Respondents

Gender	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Male	236	68.6%
Female	108	31.4%
Total	344	100%

Source: Field Data, August 2025

In Table 1, results show that the majority of respondents were male (68.6%), while females constituted 31.4%. This reflects a gender imbalance in participation, suggesting that men are more actively involved in the constituency's political processes, especially in party primaries, compared to women. This aligns with broader trends in Ghanaian politics, where political engagement and leadership positions are often male-dominated.

Table 2. Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
18–29 years	72	20.9%
30–39 years	104	30.2%
40–49 years	98	28.5%
50 years+	70	20.4%
Total	344	100%

Source: Field Data, August 2025

Also, Table 2 results reveal a relatively balanced age distribution across categories. The largest group falls within the 30-39 years (30.2%), followed closely by 40-49 years (28.5%). Younger respondents (18-29 years) account for 20.9%, while those aged 50 and above make up 20.4%. This indicates that the majority of delegates are in their active working years (30-49), suggesting that political participation in the constituency is largely driven by economically active adults, with limited representation from both the youth and the elderly.

Table 3. Educational Background

Education Level	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Basic (JHS/Primary)	46	13.4%
Secondary (SHS/Technical)	102	29.7%
Tertiary (Diploma/Degree)	148	43.0%
Postgraduate	48	13.9%
Total	344	100%

Source: Field Data, August 2025

Table 3 presents that education levels are relatively high among respondents. The largest proportion holds tertiary qualifications (43.0%), followed by secondary education (29.7%). A smaller but notable group have postgraduate degrees (13.9%), while 13.4% have only a basic education. This implies that delegates are generally well-educated, which may influence the quality of debate, decision-making, and expectations of aspirants in the primaries.

Table 4. Occupation of Respondents

Occupation Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Traders/Business	116	33.7%
Public Servants	94	27.3%
Party Executives	62	18.0%
Teachers/Lecturers	38	11.0%
Others (e.g., Farmers, Artisans)	34	9.9%
Total	344	100%

Source: Field Data, August 2025

The occupational breakdown is presented in Table 4, and the results show that traders/business people (33.7%) form the largest category, followed by public servants (27.3%) and party executives (18.0%). Teachers/lecturers represent 11.0%, while farmers, artisans, and others account for 9.9%. The dominance of traders and businesspeople suggests a strong commercial orientation in the constituency, while the significant presence of public servants and party executives highlights institutional and organisational influence in delegate politics.

Table 5. Length of Party Membership

Years in NDC	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Less than 5 years	58	16.9%
5–10 years	104	30.2%
11–15 years	86	25.0%
16+ years	96	27.9%
Total	344	100%

Source: Field Data, August 2025

The results of the length of party membership are presented in Table 5. The results reveal a relatively experienced membership base. A combined 52.9% have been in the NDC for over 10 years (25.0% for 11–15 years, 27.9% for 16+ years). Another 30.2% have between 5–10 years of membership, while only 16.9% are relatively new (less than 5 years). This suggests that the party's delegate base is stable, committed, and largely composed of long-serving members who are likely to be deeply invested in the party's traditions, networks, and internal politics.

In a nutshell, the demographic profile of respondents shows that NDC delegates in Tamale Central are predominantly male, middle-aged, well-educated, commercially active, and long-standing party members. These characteristics suggest a politically experienced and economically active delegate base, whose voting behaviour in the primaries is likely influenced by both economic interests (business and public service) and party loyalty (long membership duration).

Cross-Tabulations

Table 6. Gender × Education Level

Education Level	Male (n=236)	Female (n=108)	Total
Basic (JHS/Primary)	28 (11.9%)	18 (16.7%)	46 (13.4%)
Secondary (SHS/Technical)	66 (28.0%)	36 (33.3%)	102 (29.7%)
Tertiary (Diploma/Degree)	106 (44.9%)	42 (38.9%)	148 (43.0%)
Postgraduate	36 (15.3%)	12 (11.1%)	48 (13.9%)
Total	236	108	344

Source: Field Data, August 2025

In Table 6, the cross-tabulation shows how gender intersects with educational attainment among delegates. Males dominate at the higher education levels. That is, 44.9% of men had a tertiary education and 15.3% had postgraduate qualifications, compared to 38.9% and 11.1% of women, respectively. This suggests that men are more likely to occupy the more academically advanced positions within the delegate pool. The females dominate at the secondary level

(33.3%), slightly higher than their male counterparts (28.0%). Similarly, women also had a higher share at the basic education level (16.7% vs. 11.9%). Educational attainment among delegates is relatively high overall, but men are more represented in higher education, while women are concentrated at the middle and lower tiers. This imbalance may influence participation in debates and candidate evaluation, as highly educated men may exert more influence in deliberations, while women may rely more on social networks and trade-based influence within the party.

Table 7. Age × Length of Party Membership

Age Category	<5 years	5–10 years	11–15 years	16+ years	Total
18–29 years	28 (38.9%)	24 (23.1%)	12 (14.0%)	8 (8.3%)	72 (20.9%)
30–39 years	18 (25.0%)	44 (42.3%)	28 (32.6%)	14 (14.6%)	104 (30.2%)
40–49 years	8 (11.1%)	22 (21.2%)	30 (34.9%)	38 (39.6%)	98 (28.5%)
50 years +	4 (5.6%)	14 (13.5%)	16 (18.6%)	36 (37.5%)	70 (20.4%)
Total	58	104	86	96	344

Source: Field Data, August 2025

Table 7 also reveals how party membership experience varies by age group. Younger delegates (18-29 years). About 38.9% of them are relatively new (<5 years), while only 8.3% have been in the party for 16+ years. This indicates that youth engagement in the NDC is relatively recent and growing. Middle-aged delegates (30-39 years). They are concentrated in the 5-10 years (42.3%) and 11-15 years (32.6%) categories, showing steady involvement. Older delegates (40-49 and 50+ years): They dominate the 16+ years membership bracket (39.6% and 37.5%, respectively). This reflects their long-standing loyalty and embeddedness in party structures. The NDC's delegate base combines both new youthful entrants and long-serving older members. Younger delegates bring fresh enthusiasm but have less institutional memory, while older members carry historical loyalty and influence. This generational divide may affect candidate preference: older members may favor continuity and established figures, while younger members may push for renewal and fresh leadership.

Table 8. Occupation × Gender

Occupation	Male (n=236)	Female (n=108)	Total
Traders/Business	74 (31.4%)	42 (38.9%)	116 (33.7%)
Public Servants	74 (31.4%)	20 (18.5%)	94 (27.3%)
Party Executives	42 (17.8%)	20 (18.5%)	62 (18.0%)
Teachers/Lecturers	32 (13.6%)	6 (5.6%)	38 (11.0%)
Others	14 (5.9%)	20 (18.5%)	34 (9.9%)
Total	236	108	344

Source: Field Data, August 2025

Table 8 highlights occupational differences by gender among delegates. Females are concentrated in trading/business (38.9%) and other informal occupations (18.5%), reflecting the strong role of women in commercial and market activities in Northern Ghana. Males dominate public service (31.4%) and teaching/lecturing (13.6%), occupations typically requiring higher educational qualifications. Party executives are fairly balanced (17.8% men vs. 18.5% women), suggesting that women also hold significant organisational positions in the constituency. The occupational divide reflects broader gendered economic patterns. In Ghana, women's political participation is strongly tied to commerce and grassroots organising, while men leverage formal sector employment and higher education to influence party politics. This occupational structure means that women may wield influence through financial mobilisation and market networks, while men may dominate through bureaucratic and institutional authority.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Regression analysis was employed to test the predictive effect of key decision factors on delegate support.

Table 9. Multiple Regression Predicting Delegate Support

Predictor Variable	B	SE B	Beta	t	p
Grassroots connection	0.38	0.09	0.32	4.21	0.000***
Party service/loyalty	0.29	0.11	0.24	2.65	0.008**
Financial capacity	0.25	0.10	0.19	2.50	0.013*
Public speaking ability	0.12	0.08	0.09	1.45	0.148
Youth appeal	0.17	0.07	0.15	2.38	0.018*

Source: Field Data, August 2025; $R^2 = 0.41$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.39$, $F(5,311) = 37.64$, $p < .001$

Grassroots connection ($B = 0.38$, $\beta = 0.32$, $p < 0.001$). This is the strongest predictor of delegate support. Candidates who maintain strong ties with community members, local groups, and grassroots party structures are significantly more likely to win delegate backing. The high beta value (0.32) indicates that grassroots connection has the greatest relative influence among all variables tested. Party service/loyalty ($B = 0.29$, $\beta = 0.24$, $p = 0.008$). Long-term commitment and active involvement in party activities also significantly increase support. Delegates value loyalty, suggesting that aspirants with a proven record of service to the NDC are at an advantage. Financial capacity ($B = 0.25$, $\beta = 0.19$, $p = 0.013$). Financial resources matter in mobilising delegates, likely due to the costs of campaigns, logistics, and support expected in Ghanaian primaries. While not the strongest factor, it remains statistically significant. Public speaking ability ($B = 0.12$, $\beta = 0.09$, $p = 0.148$). This factor is not statistically significant ($p > .05$), meaning eloquence and rhetorical skill alone do not strongly predict delegate support. Delegates may prioritise practical commitment and resource provision over oratory skills. Youth appeal ($B = 0.17$, $\beta = 0.15$, $p = 0.018$). This is a modest but significant predictor. Candidates who resonate with younger party members and promote inclusivity are more likely to gain support, though the effect is weaker compared to grassroots connection and loyalty. Overall, the model explains 41% of the variance in delegate support. Grassroots connection emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by party service/loyalty and financial capacity. Public speaking was not a significant factor, while youth appeal had a modest but significant influence.

6. Discussion of the Results

The findings of this study provide important insights into the dynamics of candidate strength and delegate decision-making in the Tamale Central NDC parliamentary primaries. In line with the study's objectives, the results reveal a complex interplay of grassroots connection, loyalty, financial capacity, youth appeal, and charisma in shaping delegate preferences. This section discusses the results in relation to existing scholarship on intra-party competition, democratic consolidation, and political economy in Ghana and comparable African contexts.

In Tamale Central, the data suggest that loyalty and grassroots embeddedness mattered, but they were counterbalanced by strong resource mobilisation and youth-driven campaigns. This reflects broader patterns in Ghana's fourth republic, where intra-party competition has intensified due to the democratisation of delegate voting rights (Bob-Milliar, 2012). Delegates who rated aspirants as strong were more likely to support them, underscoring that perceptions of electability and competence influence decision-making beyond material considerations. This resonates with Lindberg and Morrison's (2008) findings that delegates often rationalise their choices by considering the candidate's broader electoral viability in general elections. This suggests that the youth-oriented aspirant (B) successfully positioned himself as a credible alternative to the incumbent, narrowing the perceived strength gap. Such findings reinforce the argument that youth mobilisation and generational politics are emerging as strong factors in Ghanaian primaries (Osei, 2020).

The regression model provided deeper insights into the hierarchy of factors influencing delegate preferences. The strongest predictor was grassroots connection ($\beta = 0.32$, $p < 0.001$), confirming that embeddedness in the local community remains the cornerstone of political legitimacy in Ghana's electoral politics. Delegates consistently prioritise aspirants who maintain constant visibility, attend funerals and weddings, and provide symbolic or material support to grassroots networks (Ichino & Nathan, 2013).

The second strongest predictor was party service/loyalty ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.01$). This result validates the argument that delegates reward long-term service and sacrifice to the party (Bob-Milliar, 2012). In Tamale Central, aspirants who had invested years in grassroots mobilisation, constituency-level projects, or sustained contributions to NDC structures were more likely to enjoy delegate trust. This finding also reflects the NDC's organisational culture, which prizes loyalty and institutional memory, often framing disloyal aspirants as opportunists.

Financial capacity ($\beta = 0.19$, $p < 0.05$) was also significant, though weaker than grassroots and loyalty variables. This reinforces the argument that while clientelism and vote-buying are pervasive in Ghanaian primaries, they are not the sole or most decisive factor (Lindberg & Morrison, 2008; Lindberg, 2010). Delegates weigh financial inducements alongside other considerations such as loyalty and electability. This result suggests that money is necessary but not sufficient to secure electoral victory, consistent with Resnick's (2017) work on African electoral clientelism.

Interestingly, public speaking ability was not a significant predictor ($p = 0.15$). This contradicts the conventional media portrayal of political charisma as central to electoral success. In the intra-party context, delegates appear to prioritise tangible grassroots presence and loyalty over rhetorical eloquence. This resonates with Ayee's (2021) claim that internal primaries in Ghana are often less about public spectacle and more about backroom negotiations, personal ties, and resource distribution. Finally, youth appeal ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < 0.05$) had a modest but significant effect. This reflects the growing demographic reality of Ghana, where young voters and activists form a crucial base of party activism. The fact that youth appeal significantly influenced delegate support suggests that generational identity is becoming a bargaining chip within NDC primaries. Aspirants who can mobilise youth wings and connect with student movements may, therefore, reshape internal power balances.

The results of the analysis identified three latent dimensions shaping delegate support. These are loyalty and service, campaign resources, and charisma and appeal. This structure resonates with the political economy framework that conceptualises intra-party elections as arenas of exchange between aspirants and delegates (Stokes, 2007). Delegates assess aspirants not only on financial inducements but also on embeddedness in party structures and symbolic appeal. The prominence of loyalty and service as a dominant factor confirms that party institutional memory and historical contributions are central to intra-party legitimacy. Campaign resources align with clientelist theories, where aspirants' ability to mobilise logistics, transportation, and material incentives shapes delegate behaviour. Charisma and Appeal underscore the role of personality-driven politics, particularly among youth delegates. Together, these factors illustrate that delegate decision-making is multidimensional, resisting reduction to purely financial explanations. These results resonate with findings from other African democracies. In Nigeria, Bratton (2013) noted that while money politics is pervasive, grassroots mobilisation and party loyalty often determine delegate behaviour in primaries. Similarly, in Kenya, Kramon (2017) observed that resource distribution is embedded within broader networks of patronage and local identity politics. Ghana's experience, as demonstrated in Tamale Central, mirrors these dynamics while showing signs of generational transformation. The findings also have implications for democratic consolidation. Intra-party primaries are critical in shaping the quality of democracy, as they determine who represents citizens in parliament. If delegate decision-making continues to prioritise grassroots service and loyalty alongside resources, this could strengthen party cohesion and institutionalisation. However, if financial inducements become dominant, primaries risk devolving into auctions, undermining the credibility of democratic processes (Ayee, 2021; Bukari, 2023). The results carry direct implications for the forthcoming September 2025 by-election. While the incumbent enjoys structural advantages, the significant delegate support for challengers suggests that party cohesion could be fragile. If disgruntled aspirants or their supporters defect or contest as independents, the NDC risks fragmentation. In such a scenario, grassroots connection and youth mobilisation could swing the outcome, particularly given Tamale Central's history of competitive intra-party politics. Moreover, the modest role of financial inducements relative to loyalty and service implies that attempts by external financiers to sway the primaries may not easily succeed without embedded grassroots legitimacy. This highlights the resilience of local political cultures in shaping electoral outcomes.

The discussion demonstrates that the determinants of delegate support in Tamale Central conform to broader theories of African intra-party democracy but with unique contextual dynamics. Loyalty and grassroots service dominate, financial capacity plays a supportive role, and youth appeal is an emerging factor (Bratton, 2010). These findings challenge simplistic accounts of Ghanaian primaries as merely transactional, showing instead that delegates exercise agency by balancing material, institutional, and symbolic considerations.

However, it is important to acknowledge that while the findings from the study reveal significant insights into intra-party competition, voter mobilisation, and the influence of ethnic and patronage networks, these dynamics are deeply rooted in the constituency's unique urban and multi-ethnic context. Tamale Central's high population density, political awareness, and access to media platforms create an environment where candidates rely heavily on public visibility, issue-based campaigns, and ethnic alliances to secure nomination and voter loyalty. These features make the constituency distinctive, as they are shaped by its urban political culture and the multiplicity of ethnic identities that influence party politics. Therefore, findings related to candidate popularity, elite bargaining, and competitive primary elections are context-specific and may not fully represent the realities in less urbanised constituencies.

But certain patterns identified in the study, such as the role of political patronage, incumbency advantages, and the influence of party structures in determining electoral outcomes, can be generalised beyond Tamale Central. These mechanisms are consistent with broader trends observed across Ghana's political landscape, both in urban and rural constituencies. Nevertheless, in rural settings, social cohesion, traditional authority, and kinship ties tend to play a more dominant role in shaping voter preferences and candidate selection compared to the issue-based or personality-driven campaigns prevalent in Tamale Central. Distinguishing these contextual differences in the paper strengthens its analytical depth and enhances the validity of its broader claims about the nature of party primaries and democratic competition in Ghana.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study investigated delegate preferences, perceptions of candidate strength, and determinants of electoral support in the NDC parliamentary primaries of the Tamale Central Constituency. By survey of 344 delegates and employing descriptive statistics, cross-tabulation, and regression to determine the factors that could potentially influence delegates' choice, and the complex dynamics underpinning intra-party democracy in Ghana.

The findings indicate that delegate decision-making is shaped by three dominant factors. These are grassroots connections, party loyalty/service, and financial resource mobilisation. While financial inducements and campaign logistics are undeniably relevant, they were less influential than loyalty and grassroots embeddedness, confirming that Ghana's intra-party politics cannot be reduced to clientelism alone (Bob-Milliar, 2012; Lindberg, 2010). Instead,

delegates appear to balance material benefits with assessments of a candidate's long-term service and capacity to win elections.

The regression analysis further highlighted that grassroots connection was the most powerful predictor, followed by loyalty and financial capacity, while youth appeal had a modest but significant role. In a broader sense, the paper contributes to understanding the political economy of intra-party democracy in Ghana. Tamale Central exemplifies how party primaries act as arenas where material resources, loyalty, and symbolic appeal intersect. These dynamics shape candidate selection and, by extension, the quality of representation in parliament. If properly managed, they can strengthen democratic consolidation; if poorly managed, they risk fragmenting parties and undermining electoral competitiveness.

In a nutshell, the Tamale Central NDC primaries provide a microcosm of Ghana's intra-party democratic processes. They reveal a delicate balance between loyalty, grassroots service, financial inducements, and youth mobilization in shaping delegate choices. Ultimately, delegates act not merely as recipients of inducements but as strategic actors weighing candidates' long-term viability. For aspirants, the lesson is clear: sustainable political success depends on embedding oneself in the constituency's social fabric while demonstrating loyalty and competence within party structures. For the NDC, the primaries represent both an opportunity to showcase internal democracy and a risk of fragmentation if processes are poorly managed. For Ghana, these dynamics underscore the resilience of competitive party politics, while also highlighting areas such as financial regulation and youth empowerment that require institutional strengthening. The study reaffirms that while clientelism persists, Ghana's intra-party politics remain anchored in deeper traditions of loyalty, grassroots legitimacy, and democratic accountability. Strengthening these dimensions will be critical for sustaining the country's democratic stability and ensuring effective political representation.

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Authors' Contributions

Gbensuglo Alidu Bukari was responsible for the study design, data collection, and revision of the manuscript. Naazia Ibrahim and Ismail Yussif contributed to drafting and revising the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final version of the paper and contributed equally to its development.

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Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. However, they are not publicly available due to privacy and ethical considerations.

Data Sharing Statement

No additional data are available.

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