

BRIEF REPORTS

Participation of Persons with Disabilities in Political Activities in Kumasi Metropolis, Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: *The opportunity to participate in political activities is at the heart of life in a just and democratic community. This paper attempts to assess the participation of persons with disabilities in political activities in Kumasi Metropolis, Ghana.*

Method: *A cross-sectional study design with a quantitative approach was followed. A multi-stage sampling technique was adopted to select three disability groups (physically impaired, visually impaired and hearing impaired) from the study area. Using a random sampling method, 415 participants were included in the study. Data was collected with the help of a structured questionnaire, and analysed using SPSS version 20.*

Results: *Most of the respondents did not participate in any political activities other than voting in elections. Other types of non-involvement included: Not contributing money to a political party or a candidate (75%); not having written or spoken to an elected representative/official (52%); not attending political meetings (51%); not writing letters to newspapers on a political issue (53%); not contributing money to an organisation trying to influence government policy/legislation (55%); and, not working with groups or on their own to change government laws or policies (51%).*

Conclusion: *Participation of persons with disabilities in various types of political activities was generally low, apart from voting. The government should actively promote an accessible environment in which persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in public affairs, without discrimination*

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and on an equal basis with others. This could encourage greater interest in political participation.

Key words: *persons with disabilities, political participation, Kumasi metropolis*

INTRODUCTION

Political participation plays an essential role in the eradication of political marginalisation, promotion of democratic governance, social inclusion, and advancement of all human rights with reference to persons with disabilities (Hall & Alvarez, 2012). Article 29 of the UN's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) guarantees political rights and the opportunity to enjoy those rights on an equal basis with others. The participation of persons with disabilities in politics could have a positive impact in shaping other areas where their interests are affected, such as their access to education, employment, livelihood, health and other social areas (Human Rights Commission, 2014).

In general, the level of participation of persons with disabilities in political activities has been low, with a range as low as 10-21% (Schriner et al, 1998); with participation of women with disabilities lower as compared to men with disabilities; with participation of the aged lower as compared to the youth; and also, lower participation of persons with severe disability (Guldvik et al, 2013).

In countries like the United States of America, the participation of this populace is very low as compared to persons without disabilities, despite the fact that they enjoyed independence earlier as compared to other countries (Schur et al, 2002). In Canada, their participation has also been low, especially in contesting as candidates in municipal, provincial and federal elections (Prince, 2007). Schur et al (2002) and Prince (2007) have attributed the under- representation of persons with disabilities in politics to negative public attitudes like stigmatisation and discrimination linked with disability. Studies done in African countries like Cameroon have also revealed that the involvement of persons with disabilities in politics is low (Opokua et al, 2016).

In a developing country like Ghana, the 1992 Constitution granted every citizen (including those with disabilities) the fundamental human right and freedom to participate in social activities (Aidoo, 2008). In addition, the Persons with Disability Act, 2006 (Act 715) was meant to protect and promote equal rights of participation among them. However, it appears that one area in which persons with disabilities in Ghana have not performed so well is their participation

in politics (Sackey, 2014). Another study done by Mensah et al (2008) found that the level of participation of persons with disabilities in politics is generally low, including low representation in terms of appointments to Parliamentary or Ministerial positions, and positions in Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs). Currently there is no representative of persons with disabilities on the Council of State to advise the President on the serious issues facing the country (Mensah et al, 2008). According to Mensah et al (2008), some of the reasons for low participation by persons with disabilities are the negative societal attitudes which come with discrimination and stigma, economic factors, the low level of education affecting their knowledge of politics, and inaccessibility.

Voting is one way in which individuals may voice their choice, but participation in electoral processes goes beyond voting, as it includes the ability to take part in the conduct of public affairs, the opportunity to register as a candidate, to campaign, to be voted and to hold office at all levels of government (Inclusion International, 2015a). A study done in Ghana by Jonah (2001) in Ahanta West and Shama constituencies found that voting in general elections had been high as compared to low levels of participation in other political activities like attending political gatherings, contributing money to political parties, party affiliation and standing for political office from political parties.

Objective

Previous studies done in Ghana on participation of persons with disabilities in politics focused largely on their participation in voting. Very few studies looked at their participation in other political activities. In order to unearth or add new knowledge to the few studies on the subject, this study attempts to assess the participation of persons with disabilities, in Kumasi Metropolis, in political activities other than voting; activities such as contributing money to a political party or candidate, writing or speaking to elected representatives/officials, attending political meetings, writing letters to newspapers on political issues, contributing money to an organisation trying to influence government policy/legislation, and working with groups or on their own to change government laws or policies.

METHOD

Study Design

A descriptive cross-sectional study design was adopted, with a quantitative approach.

Study Site

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%) in the city of Kumasi have some form of disability, 2.5 % of whom are females with disabilities and 2.3% are males (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014). The distribution by type of disability in the Metropolis is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Population by Type of Disability and Gender

Disability Type	Both Sexes		Male		Female	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Total	1,730,249	100.0	826,479	100.0	903,770	100.0
No disability	1,688,189	97.6	807,422	97.7	880,767	97.5
With disability	42,060	2.4	19,057	2.3	23,003	2.5
Sight	17,984	42.8	7,704	40.4	10,280	44.7
Hearing	5,014	11.9	2,170	11.4	2,844	12.4
Speech	5,423	12.9	2,971	15.6	2,452	10.7
Physical	9,465	22.5	4,303	22.6	5,162	22.4
Intellectual	6,054	14.4	2,962	0.4	3,092	0.3
Emotional	7,613	18.1	3,486	18.3	4,127	17.9
Other	4,860	11.6	2,106	11.1	2,754	12.0

Source: Ghana Statistical Service, 2010 Population and Housing Census

Study Sample

The sample size for this study was calculated by using the total number of the population in Kumasi Metropolis who had various forms of disabilities. Hence, the 2010 population census District Analytical Report estimation gives the figure of 42,060 (see Table 1) as the total for Kumasi metropolis population with disabilities (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014).

A simple random sampling technique, using Yamane (1967) simplified formula, was adopted to select 415 respondents.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where n = sample size, N = population size, and e = level of precision.

The formula was applied to the aforementioned sample:

$$N = 42,060$$

$$e = .05$$

$$1 + N(e)^2 = 1 + 42060(.05)^2$$

$$n = \frac{42060}{1 + 42060(.05)^2}$$

$$n = 396$$

A 5% non-respondent rate was assumed. The number 19 was randomly obtained from a tally sheet after calculating 5% of 396 which is 19.8, and 19 was added to 396 to give a sample size of 415. To achieve a representative number of respondents from three categories of persons with disabilities (physically impaired, visually impaired and hearing impaired), the sample size was proportionally distributed by probability proportional to size method as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Sample Size Distribution for Three Disability Groups

Disability Type	Population per Disability Type	Sample Size per Disability Type	Total
Physically Impaired	9,465	$(9,465/32,463)*415$	121
Visually Impaired	17,984	$(17,984/32,463)*415$	230
Hearing Impaired	5,014	$(5,014/32,463)*415$	64
Total	32,463		n=415

Sampling Technique

A multi-stage sampling technique was adopted where 3 disability groups (physically impaired, visually impaired and hearing impaired) were conveniently selected because they were within the study area and could be reached easily through their respective Associations at their monthly meetings. After that, a simple random sampling technique was used to select respondents from each of the 3 disability groups.

Respondents were selected by balloting. The words, either 'Yes' or 'No', were written on pieces of papers and those who picked 'Yes' were selected for the study. The sample size of 415 respondents consisted of 121 persons from the physically impaired group, 230 from the visually impaired group, and 64 from the hearing impaired group. This distribution was done as per the calculations made in Table 2.

Inclusion Criteria

Respondents were selected on the basis of the following criteria:

- Males and females from three categories of persons with disabilities, namely the physically impaired, visually impaired and hearing impaired;
- Those who were 18 years of age and older;
- Those who were registered members of the Ghana Disabled People's Organisations (DPO's); and,
- Those who consented to be part of the study.

Data Collection

Data collection took up to 3 months, to allow time to reach all respondents.

The researchers developed an instrument (see Appendix) for measuring the level of participation of persons with disabilities in other types of political activities apart from voting. It was measured with an index of 6 questions each on a 4-point Scale, with responses ranging from 'Frequently', to 'A few times', 'Only once/twice', and 'Not at all'. Those who responded with 'Frequently' were classified as 'High Participation', 'A few times' and 'Only once/twice' were 'Average', and 'Not at all' was 'Low Participation'.

The questionnaire was explained to the respondents and those who could not read were taken through it by the researchers. Provision was also made for the hearing impaired group, by assigning them a sign language interpreter.

Data Analysis

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), software version 20, was used to analyse the data. The results were presented using simple descriptive statistics of percentages and frequencies in graphs such as pie charts.

Ethics Approval

Before the data was collected, ethical clearance was obtained from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, School of Medical Sciences, the Committee for Human Research and Publication and Ethics, KNUST, Department of Social Welfare, and from Disabled Peoples' Organisations (DPOs) in Kumasi Metropolis. A written informed consent form was translated and explained to prospective study respondents in a language they could understand well, before their enrolment in the study. The respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Codes were assigned in place of their formal names in the data and their information was not passed on to anyone.

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 3 shows that among the participants, 55.4% were visually impaired, 29.2% were physically impaired, and 15.4% were hearing impaired. There were more male participants (62%) than female (38%). The mean age of respondents was 31.2 years. About 42% of the respondents were married, while 30% were single, 24% widowed and 4% divorced. As for level of education, 21% had no formal education, while 79% had completed at least primary education. In relation to employment, 10% of those surveyed were employed in the formal sector, 30% were artisans, 13% were traders, and the remaining 47% were unemployed.

Table 3: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Disability Type		
Physically Impaired	121	29.2
Visually Impaired	230	55.4
Hearing Impaired	64	15.4
Gender		
Male	257	62
Female	158	38
Age		
18 - 25 years	54	13
26-35 years	109	26
36-45 years	129	31
46-55 years	113	27
56 years and above	10	3
Mean	31.2	
Marital Status		
Married	176	42
Single	124	30
Widowed	98	24
Divorced	17	4
Ethnicity		
Ashanti	220	53
Fanti	110	27
Ga	43	10
Ewe	27	7
Gonja	10	2
Others	5	1
Education		
No formal education	87	21
Primary	86	21
JHS/ Middle	111	27
SHS/A level	99	24
Tertiary	32	7
Occupation		

Unemployed	194	47
Formal	40	10
Artisan	126	30
Trader	55	13

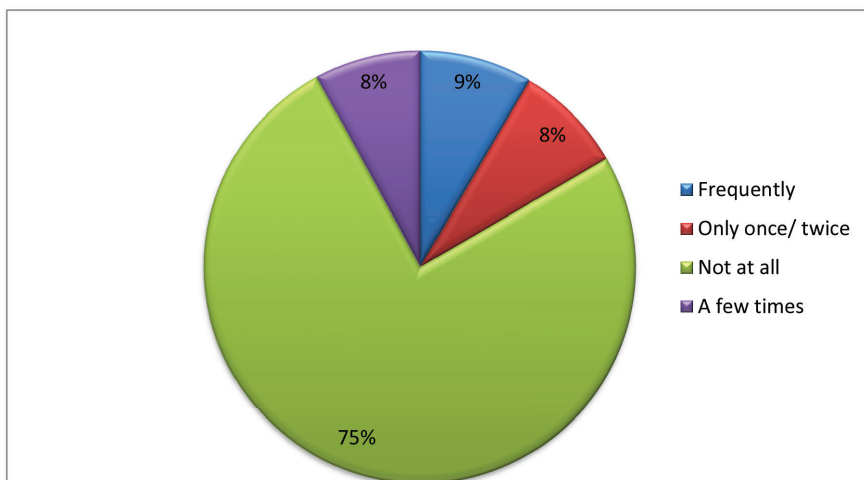
(Source: Field work, 2018)

Level of Participation of Persons with Disabilities in Political Activities other than Voting

a) Contributing money to a political party or a candidate

Figure 1 shows that majority (75%) of the respondents indicated that they had never, in any way, contributed money to a political party or a candidate before, while 8% said they had contributed money to a political party a few times and only once/twice to a candidate. However, only 9% of the respondents indicated that they frequently contribute money to a political party or a candidate.

Figure 1: Contributing Money to a Political Party or Candidate



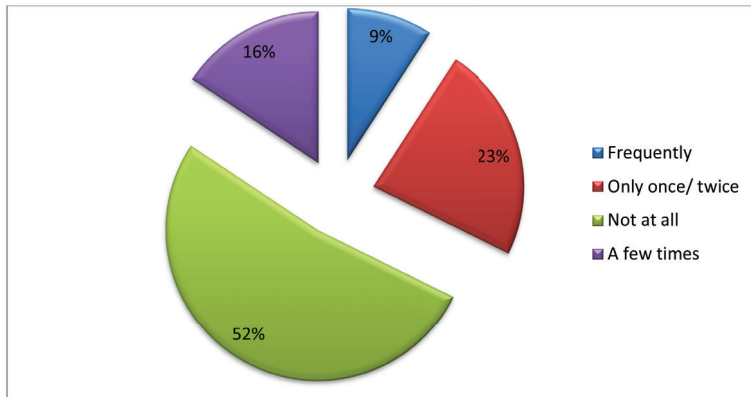
(Source: Field work, 2018)

b) Writing or speaking to an elected representative/official

Figure 2 shows that 52% of the respondents surveyed said they had not written or spoken to any elected representatives or officials. While 23% said they had written or spoken to elected representatives or officials only once/twice, about

16% of the respondents said they had written or spoken to elected representatives or officials a few times. However, only 9% claimed that they frequently write or speak to elected representatives or officials.

Figure 2: Writing or Speaking to an Elected Representative/Official

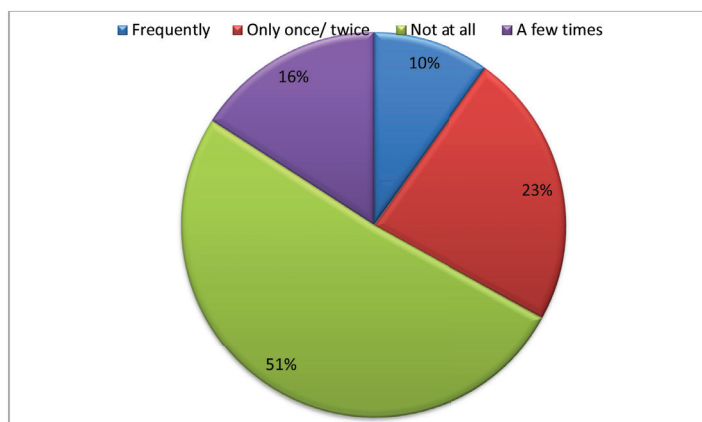


(Source: Field work, 2018)

c) Attending political meetings

Figure 3 reveals that 51% of the respondents had never attended a political meeting. While 23% said they had attended political meetings only once/twice, 16% said that they had attended political meetings a few times. However, only 10% of the respondents confirmed that they frequently attend political meetings.

Figure 3: Attending Political Meetings

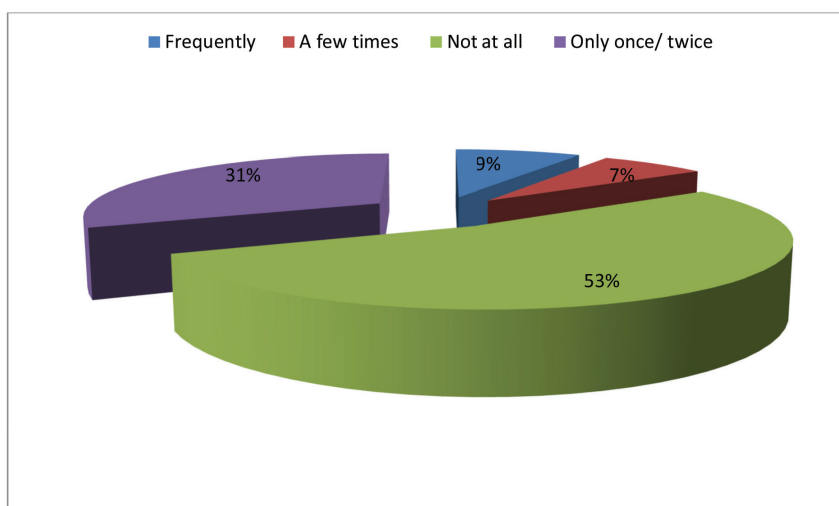


(Source: Field work, 2018)

d) Writing letters to newspapers on a political issue

Figure 4 shows that more than half or 53% of the respondents stated that they had never written letters to newspapers on any political issue. While 31% said they had written letters to newspapers only once/twice, 7% claimed that they had written letters to newspapers a few times. However, only 9% of the respondents indicated that they were frequently engaged in writing letters to newspapers on political issues.

Figure 4: Writing Letters to Newspapers on a Political Issue

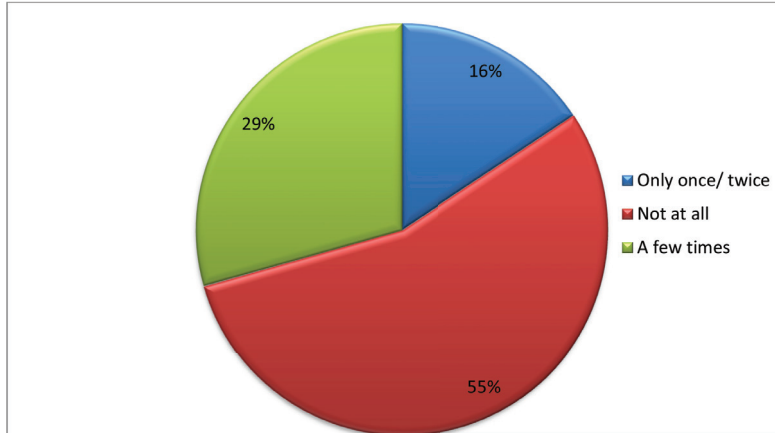


(Source: Field work, 2018)

d) Contributing money to an organisation trying to influence government policy/legislation

Figure 5 reveals that more than half or 55% of the respondents had never contributed money to an organisation trying to influence government policy or legislation. While 29% confirmed that they had contributed a few times, 16% said they had contributed money only once/twice to an organisation trying to influence government policy or legislation. However, none of the respondents claimed that they did so frequently.

Figure 5: Contributing Money to an Organisation trying to Influence Government Policy/Legislation

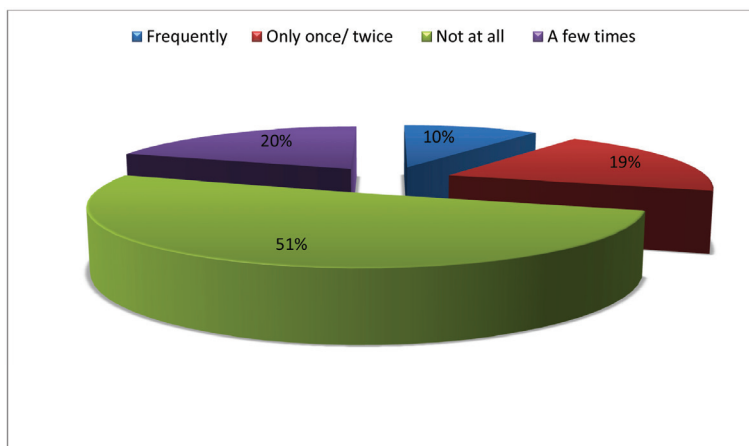


(Source: Field work, 2018)

e) Working with groups or on one's own to change government laws or policies

Figure 6 shows that while 51% of the respondents had not worked with groups or on their own to change government laws or policies, only 10% confirmed that they frequently did such work. About 20% responded that they had worked with groups or on their own a few times to change government laws or policies, and 19% said they had done such work only once/twice.

Figure 6: Working with Groups or on One's Own to change Government Laws or Policies



(Source: Field work, 2018)

DISCUSSION

The study revealed that, apart from voting in elections, persons with physical, visual and hearing impairment have not been participating in other types of political activities. Most of the respondents had never, in any way, contributed money to a political party or candidate, written or spoken to any elected representatives or officials, attended a political meeting, written letters to newspapers on any political issue, contributed money to an organisation trying to influence government policy or legislation, nor worked with groups or on their own to change government laws or policies. The study finding of low participation in political activities is similar to the findings of Jonah (2001) that voting in general elections had been high as compared to low levels of participation in other political activities. It is also supported by the study of Sackey (2014) that persons with disabilities have not performed so well when it comes to participation in politics.

In this study, the low political participation of respondents could be attributed to economic problems, due to which they probably do not have the financial means to engage in political activities. They may also be faced with problems of accessibility caused by inaccessible roads, the difficult nature of transportation, and unsuitable infrastructure in buildings, that hinder their free movement and equal participation with others. Lack of reasonable accommodation for people with visual and hearing impairment could also be a challenge, as they may not be getting information in accessible formats from political parties and politicians or may not be able to communicate with others. Also, low participation could be attributed to their lack of interest in various types of political activities, apart from voting.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that apart from voting in elections, the level of participation of persons with disabilities was very low in other types of political activities, such as attending political meetings, contributing money to political parties or candidates, and contacting elected representatives or officials, among others. The proposed recommendations could make a difference to them and consequently benefit the country.

Limitations

The major limitation of the study was the non-inclusion of other disability groups. As mentioned under Sampling Technique, the study focused only on physically

impaired, visually impaired and hearing impaired persons for data collection. It was further limited to only persons with disabilities in the Kumasi Metropolis. These limitations might reduce the validity, reliability and generalisation of the study findings. Also, the study did not look into the reasons for non-involvement in political activities as it was not part of the study objectives.

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APPENDIX

KWAME NKRUMAH UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

SCHOOL OF MEDICAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY HEALTH

CENTRE FOR DISABILITY AND REHABILITATION STUDIES

QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is aimed at collecting data for a study on:

“PARTICIPATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN POLITICAL ACTIVITIES IN KUMASI METROPOLIS” .

This data is purely for academic purpose and your responses will remain confidential and will not be shared with anyone. Thank you for participating.

Section A: Socio-Demographic Characteristics

1. Type of disability?

(Tick the nature of your disability)

a. Physically impaired

b. Visually impaired

c. Hearing impaired

d. Other, (Specify).....

2. Sex: Male Female

3. Age

a. 18 – 25

b. 26-35

c. 36 - 45

d. 46 - 55

e. 56 and Above

4. Marital Status:

- a. Married b. Single c. Divorced d. Widowed

5. Ethnicity:

- a. Ashanti
b. Fanti
c. Ga
d. Ewe
e. Gonja
f. Other, (Specify).....

6. Level of education:

- a. No Formal
b. Primary
c. JHS/Middle
d. SHS/ O Level/ A Level/ Tech/Voc.
e. Tertiary (Univ. / Poly. / Post-Sec.)
f. Other, (Specify).....

7. Occupational Status:

- a. Unemployed
b. Formal
c. Artisan
d. Trader

Section B: The level of participation in other types of political activities besides voting

(Tick as appropriate)

8. Here is a list of political activities people sometimes participate in besides voting. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these before?

a. Contributed money to a political party or candidate?

Frequently A few times Only once Not at all

b. Written or spoken to elected representative/official?

Frequently A few times Only once Not at all

c. Attended a political meeting?

Frequently A few times Only once Not at all

d. Written letters to newspaper on a political issue?

Frequently A few times Only once Not at all

e. Contributed money to an organisation trying to influence government policy/legislation?

Frequently A few times Only once Not at all

f. Worked with groups or on your own to change government laws/policies?

Frequently A few times Only once Not at all