

# Parliamentary Turnover in Ghana's Fourth Republic: Perspectives of Members of Parliament

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**Abstract:** Since the return to constitutional rule in Ghana in January 1993, the high turnover of parliamentarians in Ghana's fourth republican parliament has been a source of concern to not only Members of Parliament (MPs) and the leadership of parliament, but to the academia as well. The minority and majority leaders in the seventh parliament of the fourth republic of Ghana have bemoaned this practice where most MPs do not go past one term of parliament. The aim of this study was to examine members of parliament perceptions about impact and implications of the high attrition rate of MPs on the members and parliament as an institution. Data for the study was collected in 2019 through semi-structured interviews conducted with forty-five purposively selected minority and majority MPs of the fourth republic. The findings revealed that the high attrition rate of MPs affects the work of parliament and parliamentarians significantly. Parliamentarians reported that the loss of experience MPs to fresh one affects the quality of work done by the legislative arm of government. They revealed further that the outrageously high attrition rate cannot facilitate the growth of parliament; neither can it grow our parties. They identified: (i) increasing monetization of internal party elections (ii) unfulfilled promises of MPs (iii) pettiness on the part of constituents and party activists as some of the causes of the high attrition rate of parliamentarians in Ghana's parliament. Given the diversity of opinions on the phenomenon, parliamentarians suggested that the public affairs department should intensive its education on the workings of parliament and its engagement with the general public.

**Keywords:** Ghana, Attrition Rate, Members of Parliament, Parliament, Constitution, Turnover.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Ghana's democracy is acclaimed to be a beacon of hope for the African continent (Gyimah-Boadi 2013, Alidu 2019) with an enviable record of seven successful successive multi-party elections since the country returned to democratic, constitutional rule in 1993. Significant gains have been made in institutionalizing democracy and good governance in the last two and half decades since Ghana came to join other African countries in political liberalization in the early 1990s. Ghana's success story includes power alternation on three consecutive occasions with the ruling party losing power and handing over to the opposition party. This occurred in 2001, 2009 and 2017. The media in Ghana is a vibrant one with several newspapers, radio and television stations spread across the length and breadth of the country. The independence of the media as guaranteed by the constitution enabled the media to strongly discuss policy issues and politicians, calling on them to be transparent and accountable to the citizens.

Despite Ghana's widely respected democratic credentials, one of its key stakeholders, parliament does not seem to flourish and is not only considered as the weakest among the three organs of the state, but also has a high attrition rate of its members, thereby affecting the performance of the institution. Concerns have been raised by few stakeholders in the leadership of parliament and individual MPs (both present and past), academics and researchers about the high attrition rate of MPs in the fourth republican parliaments and how it is contributing to the poor performance of parliament. They bemoaned the practice of where most MPs do not go past four years (one term) and are replaced with fresh ones. For example, the seventh parliament of the fourth republic has 182 new entrants (first timers) in a 275 member-chamber and of the 93 continuing members, not many can be described as "old hands" because they are just serving their second term. What are the factors contributing to this high attrition rate of MPs in Ghana's parliament, and how can this phenomenon be controlled? Because of the consensus built around the negative impact of this phenomenon in our democratic dispensation, there is the need to examine the causes of this canker and consider recommendations to curtail it. This can only happen when empirical evidence has been established. Quite a number of studies have been undertaken by scholars and organizations on various aspects of parliamentary development in Ghana (Centre for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), Institute for Democratic Governance (IDEG), and Institute for Economic Affairs (IEA). Despite the insights and outcome of these studies, very little has been done about the high attrition rate of members of parliament and how it is affecting the performance of parliament in Ghana. This paper examines the perception of members of parliament in the fourth republic of Ghana about the high attrition rate of MPs since the inauguration of parliament on 7<sup>th</sup> January, 1993.

The objectives of the study are to:

Examine parliamentarians perception about the high attrition rate of MPs affects the work of parliament

Examine perceptions about how the exit of experienced MPs with in-depth knowledge about parliament has affected the institutional memory of parliament

The paper is divided into four major sections, the first section looks at the overview of high attrition rate of parliamentarians in Ghana's fourth republic. The second section discusses the theoretical perspective of attrition in parliament of the fourth

republic. Section three describes the methods and data collection techniques. The fourth and final section discusses MPs perceptions about the high attrition rate in Ghana's fourth republican parliament.

## II. OVERVIEW OF HIGH ATTRITION RATE IN GHANA

A disturbing aspect of the Fourth Republican Parliament is the high record of mobility of its Members of Parliament. This high turnover was set in motion as a result of the boycott of the 1992 parliamentary elections by the opposition parties. When the fourth republican democratic dispensation started on 7<sup>th</sup> January, 1993, out of the 189 members of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) who entered parliament, only one in the name of Alban Kingsford Sumana Bagbin has survived till date and unfortunately, is not coming back to the eighth parliament. On the side of the New Patriotic Party (NPP), the first batch of 61 members who entered parliament in 1997, there is only one left in the seventh parliament and he is in the person of Osei Kyei Mensah-Bonsu. In the 2016 general elections, the NDC as the ruling party for instance lost 80 seats which involved MPs with experience and in-depth knowledge in parliamentary issues. Again only sixty-nine of the 200 MPs in the first parliament returned to the second parliament in 1997 and one hundred and twelve were retained from the second to the Third parliament following the 2000 general elections. This situation has adversely affected the development and performance of parliament as valuable institutional memory and experience has been quickly lost. The following factors also contributed to an even greater turnover. First, there was the increase in the number of constituencies to 230. In most of the new constituencies, fresh candidates contested for all parties. Second, several of the NDC MPs who had had a third term mostly parliamentary committee ranking members stepped aside. They include I.K. Adjei Mensah, deputy minority leader, Steve Akorlie (Finance), Kofi Attor (Foreign Affairs), Kosi Kedem (Education) and Joseph Ackah (Defence & Interior); a few lost party primaries and some lost the actual election. Seven Members who returned to the fourth parliament after their defeat in previous elections were Cletus Avoka (Zebilla) Dr. Alfred Tia (Nalerigu-Gambaga), Dominic B. A. Nitiwul (Bimbilla), Mike Hammah (Effutu), Ernest Attuquaye Armah (Trobu-Amasaman), Dominic Azumah (Garu-Tempene) and Collins Dauda (Asutifi South).

MPs who discharge their national legislative or oversight duties diligently, yet fall short in the area of local development project provisioning risk losing their seat, either in the ensuing party primaries or in the general election. In fact, the results of recent Parliamentary elections bear this out. MPs that were known for contributing to legislative issues but failed to meet the expectations of constituents have lost their seats. In 2008 for example, 20 MPs who are well regarded nationally, in part for their high profile legislative roles, nonetheless lost their seats presumably for failing to meet the local development expectations of their constituents. Among them were notable MPs like Christine Churcher (NPP-Cape

Coast), Dr. Benjamin Kunbuor (NPP-Nandom), Mahama Ayariga (NDC-Bawku Central), Freddie Blay (CPP-Ellembelle) and Dr. Paa Kwesi Nduom (CPP-Komenda Edina Eguafo Ebeam). The 2012 Parliamentary elections also saw 15 of such MPs rejected. Among them were Samia Nkrumah (CPP-Jomoro), Michael Teye-Nyaunu (NDC-Lower Manya Krobo), John Tia Akologo (NDC-Talensi), Moses Asaga (NDC-Nabdam), Mr. Ambrose Dery (NPP-Lawra (Nandom), Dr. Kofi Asare (NPP-Akwatia) and Madam Catherine Afeku (NPP-Evuale Gwira). In short, MPs must strive to simultaneously balance their responsibilities to the nation (Parliament) and to their constituencies.

## III. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Parliamentary turnover is an important question in political science due to its link to salient topics like the roles and movement of MPs, relationship between the legislature and the executive and the quality of the processes leading to how decisions are taken.

According to Lindberg (2004), parliamentary turnover is defined in terms of the electoral turnover of the chief political executive in presidential elections and a changed majority in parliamentary elections. He indicated that this represents one of the core indicators of electoral competitiveness and an important democratic quality of elections that turnover has been linked to its legitimacy. This he further explains to mean that legitimacy of an election can be determined by the extent at which political stakeholders' particularly political parties and candidates accept the outcome of elections in a peaceful and open manner. He posits that in order to measure electoral legitimacy, some indicators such as loser's acceptance of election results, peacefulness of the elections at all stages – before, during and after needs to be identified. He further noted that legitimacy of elections can also be measured by the peacefulness of the elections, defined in terms of whether violence occurred at any stages of the elections, which is a symptom of failed institutionalization.

Matland and Studlar (2004:92) defines parliamentary turnover as the proportion of membership that changes from one election to the next. Squire 1998 also defines parliamentary turnover as the level of renewal or continuity of elites and membership stability within an institution. Manow defines it as the share of those who either do not return to the subsequent parliament or are not re-elected (Manow 2007:196). This leads to a broad and narrow definition of parliamentary turnover. It is either defined broadly as comprising all who have been members of parliament but are no longer members of parliament (turnover rate  $\frac{1}{4}$  return rate), or it is defined more narrowly as comprising all who have been elected to parliament but failed to be re-elected to parliament (turnover rate  $\frac{1}{4}$  re-election rate) (Manow 2007:197). The above definitions of parliamentary turnover can be categorized into two groups. The first group which is known as the micro-level approach looks at individual motivations for exiting parliament and the second group also

known as the macro-level approach consider the institutional factors of parliament.

However, Francois and Grossman (2015) have suggested three levels for studying parliamentary turnover. They are the legislature (macro-level), the parliamentary party (meso-level) and the individual level (micro-level). They indicated that the macro and micro levels of approach is not sufficient for the studying of parliamentary turnover and concluded that a concomitant consideration of both parliamentary and party factors seems to be the most fruitful approach.

The two perspectives of the definition of parliamentary turnover have straight forward counting rules: the return rate can be calculated by counting the number of MPs sitting in parliament on the last day of the previous parliament and the first day of the next parliament, with the total number of seats in the previous parliament as the divisor. The re-election rate reports the percentage of incumbents who have been elected at one general elections and are re-elected at the next general elections i.e. who were members of parliament on the first day of the previous and on the first day of the next parliament.

In the case of Ghana's parliament, legislative turnover refers to the number of members of parliament who failed to win both at the intra and inter party elections irrespective of the fact that they were members of the outgoing parliament. For example, the seventh parliament of the fourth republic recorded a high number of MPs who could not retain their seat or lost the party primaries.

#### IV. METHOD AND TECHNIQUES OF DATA COLLECTION

A qualitative technique was used in collecting data for the study. Qualitative research method was used for the purposes of adopting and interpretive approach for the analysis and understanding of the experience of the Members of Parliament, which is aimed at providing a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of the attrition of MPs in parliament. This method was used because it is flexible especially when it bothers on answering questions about experience, meaning and perspective, most often from the standpoint of the participant.

About Forty-five (45) key informants were purposively selected and used for the data collection on the high attrition rate of MPs in Ghana's fourth republican parliament. The semi-structured interviews conducted with the key informants were issue-driven from the minority and majority side of parliament.

The selection of the key informants was influenced by the researcher's personal judgement and the research objectives taking into consideration past and present majority and majority MPs in the fourth republican parliament. The interviews were conducted with past and present MPs from the NPP, NDC, CPP, PNC and independent MPs. The interview composed of 32 males and 13 females. Generally, the interview sought information about the high record of

mobility of members of parliament in the fourth republic, factors contributing to this high turnover, concerns of constituents and the processes of electing the MPs by their political parties.

#### 4.1 Methodological Limitation of the Study

Forty-five respondents which constitute about 16.4% of the 275 member-chamber cannot be said to be scientifically representative cross-section of the parliament. It was an attempt to get opinion of MPs from the various parties in parliament and it is not devoid of the biases especially with the determinants of the sample size of participants. Therefore, the findings of this study should be interpreted with caution, because, probably it may over-estimate MPs opinion about the high attrition rate of MPs in the fourth republic and its implications on the performance of parliament.

### V. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

This section summaries MPs opinions about the high attrition rate of MPs in the fourth Republic of Ghana's Parliament.

#### 5.1 Background information on interviewees

Background Information on Interviewees	Number of MPs included in sample
Party Affiliation	
National Democratic Congress (NDC)	22
New Patriotic Party (NPP)	17
Convention Peoples Party (CPP)	2
Peoples National Convention (PNC)	2
Independent Members of Parliament	2
Gender	
Male	32
Female	13

#### 5.2 High Attrition Rate of MPs

A disturbing aspect of the fourth republican parliament is the high record of mobility of MPs. In this regards, interviewees were asked to give their opinions about the degree of attrition of MPs. Answers to this question were overwhelming. All the forty-five interviewees representing 100% were of the opinion that there is high turnover of MPs in the fourth republican parliament. Their justification for this view point was premised on the fact that one MP each from the first and second parliament are currently in the seventh parliament of the fourth republic and the high rate of new entrants (first timers).

Table 2 – Perception about the High Turnover of MPs

Responses	No	Percentage (%)
Yes	45	100
No	0	0

Source: Field Data (2019)

5.3 Increasing Monetization of Internal Party Elections

The trend where experienced MPs are voted against by their delegates in the party’s internal elections thereby allowing novices to enter parliament is affecting the quality of debates on the floor of the House. The study in this connection further explored perceptions about the effect of monetization of the running of parliamentary campaigns on the work of parliament and parliamentarians. Table 3 summarised the responses on this question. An overwhelming majority of respondents (89%) are strongly of the opinion that monetization of the parliamentary primaries contribute to the high attrition rate of MPs in the fourth republican parliament. 5 respondents out of the 45 representing 11% disagree that monetization is also a contributing factor to this phenomenon.

Table 3 – Increasing Monetization of Internal Party Elections

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	40	89
NO	5	11

Source: Field Data (2019)

5.4 Effect of Unfulfilled Promises of MPs

Many of the respondents, when running their campaigns deliberately make many unrealistic promises to woo unsuspecting voters and when such promises were not met in the four year term, constituents become angry and vote against them in the subsequent pols. The study asked participants whether they agree or disagree with this assertion. Forty-two (42) out of the forty-five (45) respondents (93%) said that an unfulfilled promise made by MPs is a contributing factor to the high turnover of MPs. Thus majority of the respondents agreed on this.

But it is fascinating to note that an overwhelming majority of 100% of the interviewees said that the provision of these facilities was not a core function of the MP and for that matter should be discouraged.

5.5 Pettiness on the Part of Constituents and Party Activists

Constituents knowing the living standard of some professionals from low paying career, and seeing them drive 4x4 vehicles and getting huge allowances and other benefits become envious of the MPs and for that matter are not read to vote for them in the next election. Some constituents’ especially party activists will not vote for their MPs at the next election because the MP’s vehicle drove past them and did not stop to wave or offer them a ride. Viewpoints on this matter showed that all the respondents agreed that it is a major factor since few individuals who also are nursing the ambition of becoming MPs incite their colleagues not to vote for the MPs at their delegate conferences. Respondents also reported that the practice where the part allows its leaders in parliament to be challenged is undemocratic and that they are demanding that the leadership of their political parties to put in place a policy that will prevent a party member from challenging a

minority or a majority leader in the party primaries. When perceptions about the work of parliament and party caucus is examined along partisan line, the findings reveals that all the political party interviewees supported the assertion that the political parties should be looking at wisdom and who is better positioned to perform the functions of an MP, than allowing everybody to contest. They contend that a lot of investment is made on MPs and there is the need to make an amendment to the rues in order to achieve value for money, and they expect the political parties should be able to make rules to that effect.

VI. LESSONS LEARNED

The following lessons emerged from the study. The first lesson was that, with the entrance of the new MPs who are mostly novice as to the parliamentary procedures and practice, the quality of debate on the floor of the House is affected. Debates in the House have been left on the shoulders of a few MPs due to the inability of the other MPs to make contributions on the floor of parliament. This occurrence cannot facilitate the growth of parliament which needs experienced legislators, and parliamentary skills for smooth representational, oversight and law-making roes.

The second lesson is that, running a parliamentary campaign right from the party’s primary to that of the general elections have shown that it cost one a fortune to get elected into parliament. To run for the parliamentary primary alone cost about eighty six thousand dollars (WFD 2019). Some of the MPs in their quest to become MPs go to the extent of selling their properties and as well as going for huge bank loans to finance their campaigns. Some of them-mostly the first timers, run into huge debts during which they are often not able to finish paying before the next elections where majority of them loose their seats.

Thirdly, the study confirmed that, the high attrition rate has affected the workings of parliament in many ways that, for instance, currently, there are second term MPs who are occupying some high positions which obviously should have been occupied by at least a third term or a fourth term members.

VII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This rapid parliamentary turnover has depleted Parliament of its experienced members thus partly contributing to the weakened capacity of Parliament to deliver on its responsibilities. However, on the positive side, each new Parliament in the Fourth Republic has come with diverse and improved backgrounds to help move the work of Parliament forward. Among the new members on both sides are people who had held various positions in politics previously – ambassadors, ministers, teachers, special assistants/staffers, District Chief Executives, etc.

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on the floor of the House. Debates in Parliament have been left on the shoulders of a few MPs due to the inability of the other MPs to make contributions on the floor.

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