

**POLITICS,  
PARLIAMENTARIANS & THE  
PUBLIC:**

**THE POLITICS OF PARLIAMENTS &  
CONSTITUENCY RELATIONS**

**BY**

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# BRIEF BACKGROUND

- Parliamentary democracy is not a new phenomenon in Ghana's political history. Perhaps we can consider 1951 as a rough cut off period for the emergence and development of Parliamentary democracy.

# Background Cont.

- Since 1951, we have experienced this form of democracy in 1954, 1957, 1960 (to a limited extent), 1969, 1979 and 1993 to date. It is worth adding at this point that in 1964 an Article was added to the 1960 Constitution, which declared Ghana a One Party State. It therefore becomes difficult to include or exclude this period from Ghana's experience in parliamentary democracy

# Background Cont'd

- An important feature of parliamentary democracy in Ghana is that it has often been disrupted in political convulsions involving the military, police as well as civilian actors. The importance of this footnote is to underscore the point that parliamentary democracy in Ghana has not been a linear or straightforward development. It has suffered a number of setbacks in the political twists and turns Ghana has experienced.

# Constitution Electoral System & Political Parties

- Ghana's 1992 Constitution provide for the existence of political parties to which all citizens of Ghana of voting age (18 yrs) can freely belong. The essential requirements for the existence of a political party in Ghana are briefly as follows:
- The right to form political parties is guaranteed.
- Subject to the provisions of Article 55, a political party is free to participate in shaping the political will of the people, to disseminate information and political ideas, social and economic programmes of a national character.
- Every political party shall have a national character.
- The internal organization of a political party shall conform to democratic principles and its actions and purposes shall not contravene or be inconsistent with the Constitution or any other law.
- The state shall provide fair opportunity to all political parties to present their programmes to the public by ensuring equal access to the state-owned media.
- Only a citizen of Ghana can make a contribution or donation to a political party registered in Ghana.

# Electoral System

- Ghana is divided into 230 Constituencies from which MPs are elected
- MPs and the President are elected every 4 years
- A Member is elected by a Simple Majority of eligible voters resident in the Constituency, while the President is elected by more than 51% of all registered voters
- Currently the majority in Parliament passed the Controversial ROPAA to extend the franchise to all Ghanaian citizens living abroad

# Political Parties

- There are two dominant Political Parties in Ghana, the NPP (liberal democratic) with 120 seats and the NDC (Social democratic) with 94 Seats
- There are three splinter Parties of the Nkrumahist tradition (CPP with 2 seats, PNC with 3 seats & GCPG), there is 1 Independent MP
- In addition, two new political parties have sprung up since the 2004 elections (DFP & GRP)
- The majority party in Ghana is not only a majority of only NPP parliamentarians but also include the PNC, CPP and the Independent Parliamentarian who by their individual and collective actions have indicated they want to be identified or associated with the NPP on issues before the House
- Yet Article 97 Clauses (g) and (f) require a member of parliament to vacate his seat if he leaves the party on whose ticket he was elected to join another party or he was elected as an Independent candidate and joins a political party (prohibition of carpet crossing).

# MPs and Citizen (Voters)

- MPs in Ghana have come to be associated with their Constituents in terms of the use of the MPs share of the Common Fund
- Ghana's 1992 Constitution provides in Article 252 that a percentage of total revenue collected annually be distributed among and transferred to all district assemblies in the country.
- This constitutional provision was intended to provide a constitutional basis for fiscal decentralization in the country. The formula to be used in the distribution is to be made by the Administrator of the District Assemblies' Common Fund (ADACF) and laid before Parliament for approval. This is what has come to known and referred to in common parlance as the *common fund*.

# MPs Voters (Cont'd)

- When the first Parliament of the Fourth Republic sat in 1993 to consider the formula for distributing the fund, the idea was mooted that a share of the Fund for each DA be given to the Member (s) of Parliament within the district to enable him/her undertake development activities.
- A number of explanations have been offered over the years as justification for this Share of the Fund going to MPs.
- However, these explanations revolve around two concerns.
- First, that it is an increasing realization that, notwithstanding constitutional provisions on the role (s) of the MP, she or he is expected to provide public goods and services to Constituents. And that such an expectation could not be met without a budget line for the MP.
- Second, that a close reading of the 1992 Constitution, particularly those on the Directive Principles of State Policy, suggests the MP has to be involved in the development processes of their districts.
- Unfortunately, development over the years in local communities has come to be equated with the provision physical infrastructure. Therefore for the MP to be seen manifestly involved in development at the local level she or he has to be seen as providing or attempting to provide physical goods such as KVIP toilets, renovating schools, supplying dual desks etc.

# MPs Voters (Cont'd)

- MPs are seen more often lobbying Ministers to get one Dev't project or another to their communities
- The Success or otherwise of an MP in Ghana is not based on how well core functions such as law making, oversight and debates are performed but rather provision of public goods and services
- Increasingly, Constituents assess MPs by the amount of projects they have provided over a 4 year period

# Challenges

- The Voter in Ghana is unable or unwilling to see that the Executive Arm of Gov't and not MPs should address issues of provision of public goods and services
- MPs are closer to the electorate and are more politically vulnerable in terms of demands for goods and services
- The Dev't Role of MPs is ridden with conflicts between Ministers and MPs, MPs and DCEs and between the Gov't side and the Opposition
- Very uncomfortable patronage networks are developing in the political system
- The quest of MPs to be seen as providing “development” goods and services has weakened Parliamentary Oversight
- MPs tend to avoid Constituents until election time

# MPs and the External Environment

- Ghana's Economy like most emerging ones is donor driven
- A lot of bilateral and multilateral financial decisions which affect the electorate are taken in Parliament
- Very little attention is given in such agreements to oversight by National Parliaments. MPs over the years have not engaged themselves seriously in these areas