



Parliament of the Fourth Republic of Ghana – Views From the Grassroots

The 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana that came into effect in January 1993 provides the basic charter for the country's fourth attempt at republican democratic government since independence in 1957. It declares Ghana to be a unitary republic with sovereignty residing in the Ghanaian people. The constitution is the supreme law of the land and provides for the sharing of powers among a President, a Parliament, a Cabinet, a Council of State, and an independent judiciary.

Parliament, which shares legislative power with the Executive Branch, is one of the key institutions of governance in the new Republic. Notwithstanding the severe technical, material and legal limitations facing the institution, it has gained considerable prominence in the new democratic constitutional order.

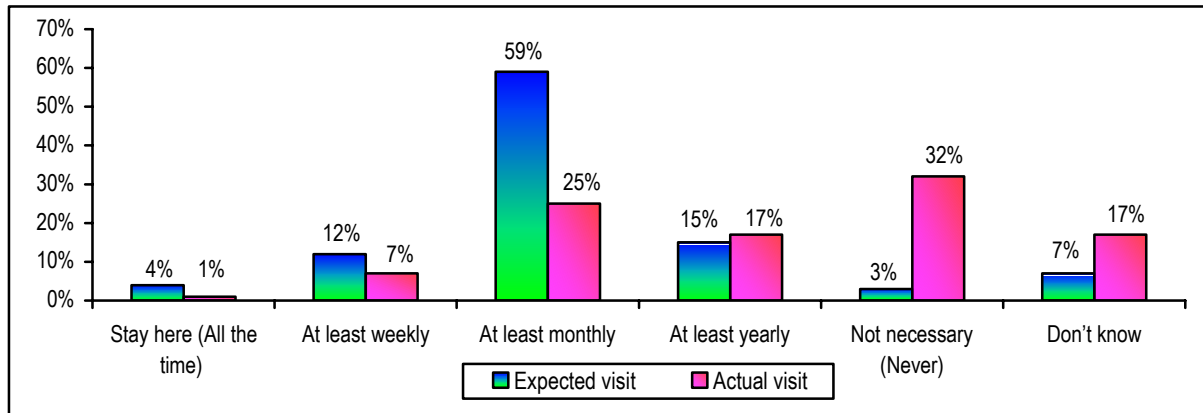
The Afrobarometer, a comparative survey research project, seeks to ascertain the views of Ghanaians on this important institution and its members. It begins with an assessment of popular expectations of the institution; continues with an appraisal of the performance of parliament and parliamentarians; and assesses implications for Ghanaian democratic development.

Popular Expectations

Ghanaians expect their views to form the basis of programmes initiated by their elected representatives: Almost nine out of every ten Ghanaians (88 percent) say elected representatives should listen to the views of their constituents and do what they demand. Less than a tenth (7 percent) thinks the elected leaders should follow their own ideas in deciding what is best for the country. The situation is hardly different from other Afrobarometer countries. Ninety one percent of respondents in Uganda, 85 percent in South Africa, 84 percent in Botswana, 79 percent in Benin and 68 percent in Cape Verde share similar sentiments.

Ghanaians expect more visits by their MPs than they are getting: Nearly 6 in every 10 Ghanaians think MPs should visit their constituencies on monthly basis. Less than a sixth (12 percent and 15 percent) expects weekly and yearly visits respectively. However, only a quarter of respondents (25 percent) say their MPs *actually* visit on monthly basis. Seventeen percent report receiving yearly visits; and a significant minority (32 percent) claims their MPs never visit.

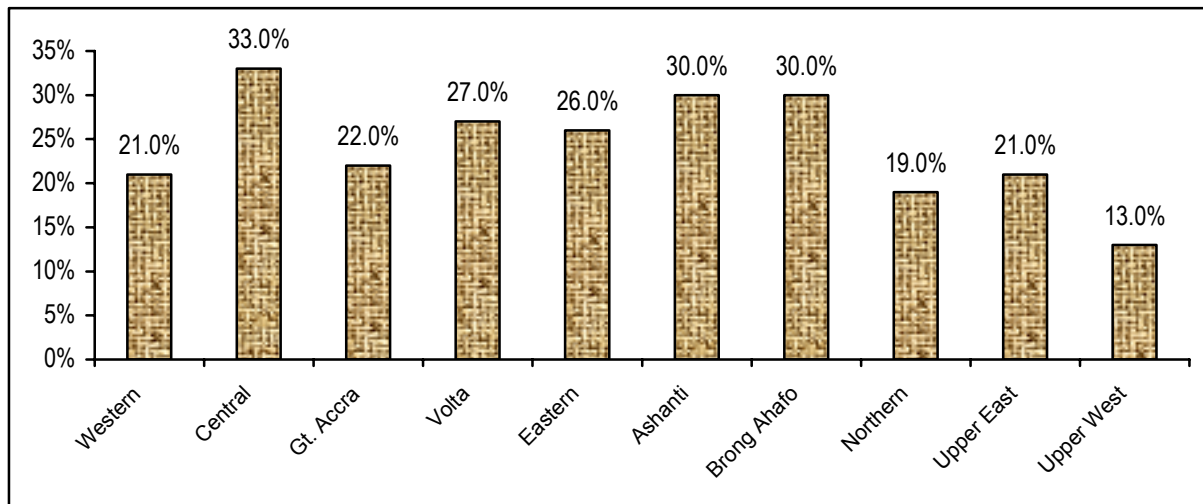
Figure 1: Expected and actual MP constituency visits



NB: "All the time" and "Never" responses relate to actual visit

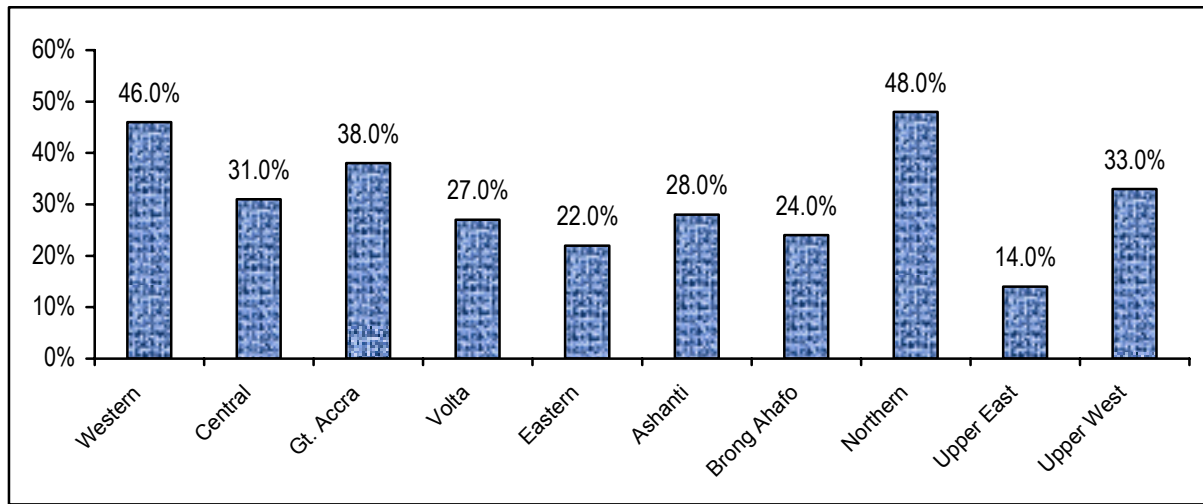
As shown in the chart below (Figure 2), a comparatively greater percentage of respondents in the Central region say their MPs visit them at least once a month. Constituents in the Upper West region receive the least number of monthly visits.

Figure 2: MP monthly visits, by region



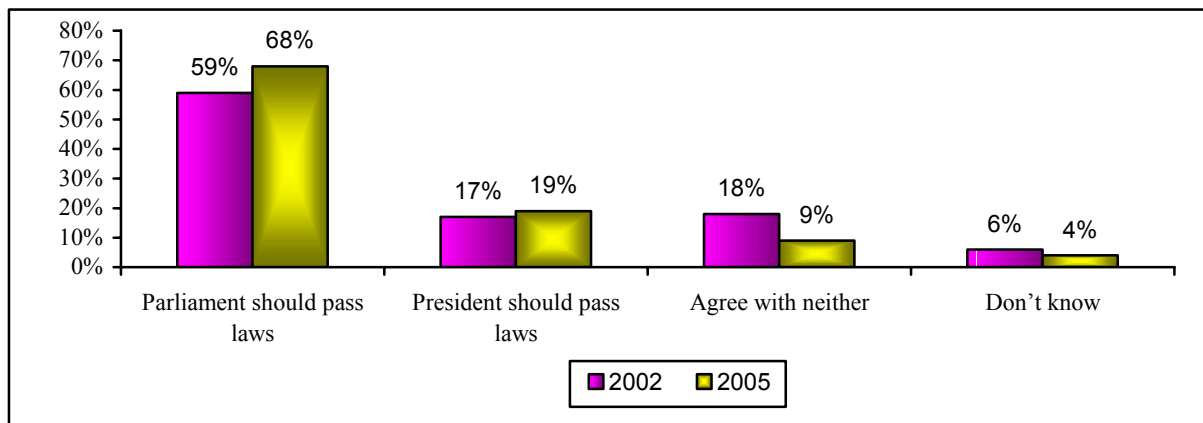
On the other hand, a majority of the 32 percent respondents who claim their MPs never visit them are located in the Northern region (48 percent); followed by the Western region (46 percent). The Upper East region recorded the best performance in MP monthly visitation with only 14 percent of respondents saying their MPs never visit them (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: MPs never visit, by region



Ghanaians expect Parliament to take centre stage in legislative matters: As in other new African democracies, executive/presidential dominance is a fact of life, and parliament enjoys a fledging existence at best. However, Ghanaians expect parliament to take the center stage in legislative matters. Close to seven out of every ten Ghanaians (68 percent) contend that since members of Parliament represent the people, they should make laws for the country even if the President disagrees. But nearly a fifth (19 percent) thinks the President represents all Ghanaians and should be able to override Parliament in legislative matters.

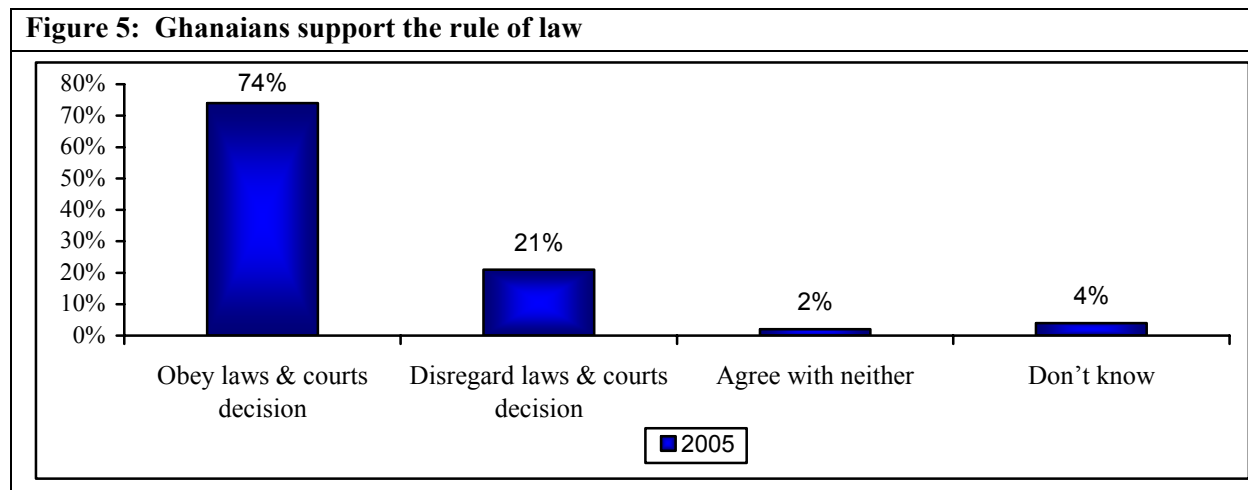
Figure 4: Parliament to take centre stage in legislative matters



Popular support for the idea of parliament taking centre stage in legislative matters in Ghana is only lower than Benin (74 percent) and Uganda (80 percent), but much higher than Cape Verde (47 percent), Botswana (53 percent) and South Africa (59 percent).

Ghanaians also strongly disapprove of a President putting himself/herself above the laws of the country: Nearly three-quarters (74 percent) say the President must always obey the laws and the courts

even if he/she thinks they are wrong. Only twenty-one percent think that the elected President should not be bound by laws of the country or court decisions that he/she thinks are wrong.



Popular Appraisal of Parliament

Ghanaians know their national representatives (MP and Vice President) by name: Sixty seven percent of Ghanaians could correctly name their MP. Name identification of MPs is much higher in Ghana than South Africa, Cape Verde and Benin - where only less than a third of the respondents could identify their MPs by name; it is lower than Botswana (77 percent). Nearly seventy percent of Ghanaians correctly named the Vice President. However, Vice Presidents are comparatively more popularly known in Botswana (86 percent) and South Africa (73 percent) but less popularly known in Uganda (51 percent), Cape Verde (25 percent) and Benin (3 percent).

Contact is relatively infrequent between Ghanaians and elected leaders or government officials: Less than a sixth (16 percent) of respondents reported having ever contacted a Parliamentarian, a District Chief Executive (13 percent) and an official of a government ministry (12 percent). Ghanaians are more likely to contact their informal and community leaders (religious - 48 percent, and traditional leaders – 30 percent, as well as “influential persons”- 27 percent, and political party officials – 21 percent) than elected or appointed public officials.

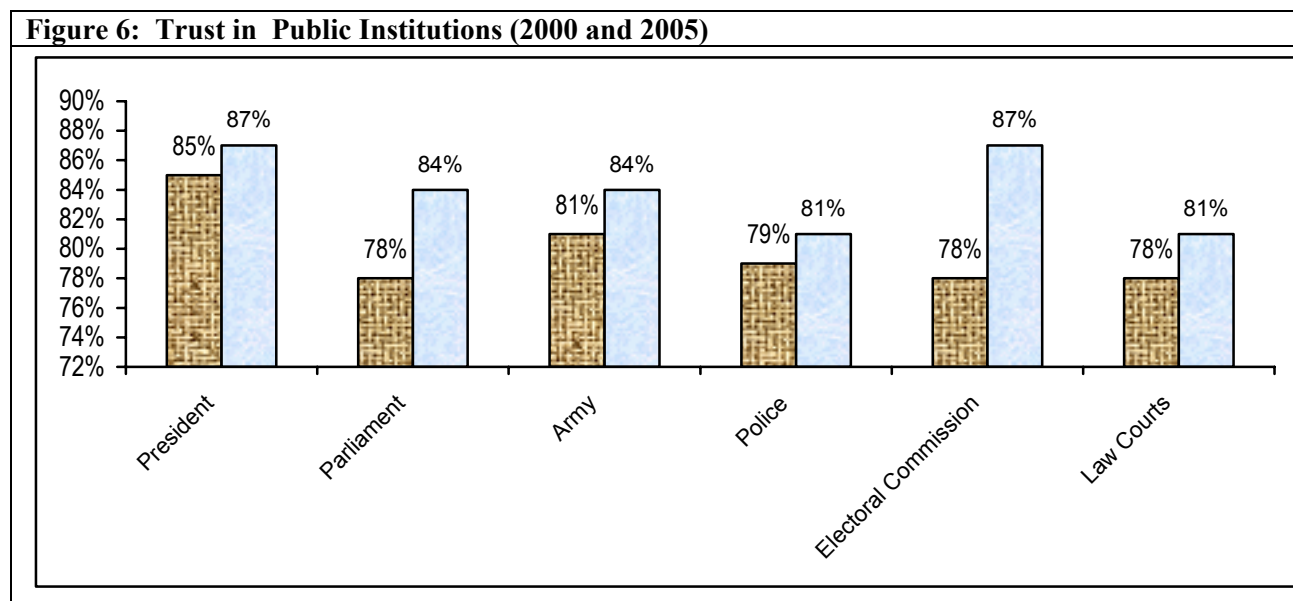
And when they contact their representatives, they tend to discuss personal problems: Of those who indicated that they had contacted a leader in the past year to discuss issues or present their views, majority (31 percent) said they talked about their personal problems. A little over a quarter (27 percent) said they talked about a community problem. Discussing political issues with local leaders is almost nonexistent. Only 2 percent indicated that they discussed a political issue when they met and interacted with a local leader.

Nonetheless, Ghanaians are increasingly satisfied with the performance of their elected representatives: A majority of Ghanaians (65 percent) approve of the performance of Members of Parliament. This is slightly better than the level observed in 2002 when approval of MPs performance was close to 60 percent and a marked improvement over the situation in 1999 when 57 percent of Ghanaians were *dissatisfied* with the performance of their MPs.

The approval rate of the performance of parliament in Ghana is comparable to that in Botswana (68 percent), Uganda (63 percent) and South Africa (58 percent) but significantly higher than in Benin (49 percent) and Cape Verde (41 percent).

Ghanaians continue to hold the view that their political representatives are responsive to their demands: A majority of Ghanaians feel they are able to command the attention of their elected national and local representatives. Those who expressed this view with regards to their local representatives (assembly members) are comparatively higher (63 percent) than the proportion sharing similar opinion about national representatives (MPs), 55 percent. This is similar to the situation in 2000 when exactly 63 percent said they are able to make their elected representatives listen to them. It is worth noting that only 49 percent of Ghanaians held this view in 1999.

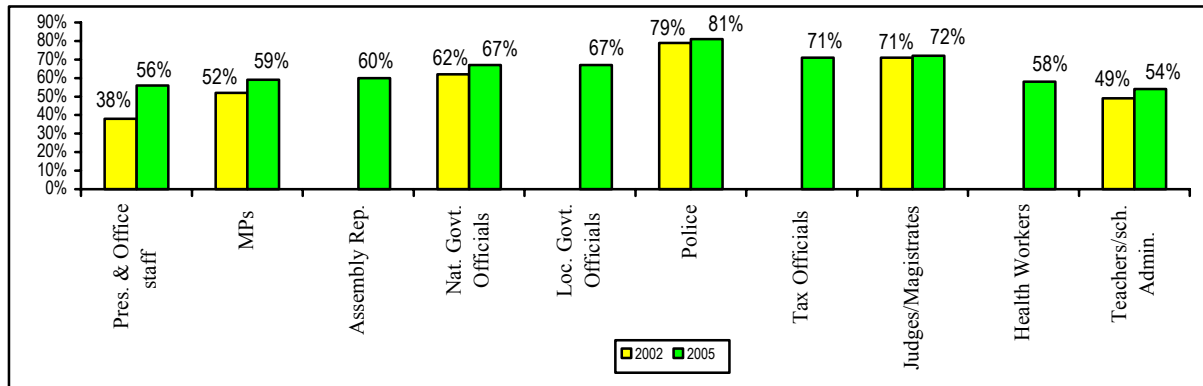
Moreover, trust in Parliament appears to be growing: More than four in five Ghanaians (84 percent) express trust in Parliament (compared to a little over three quarters in 2002). It is worth mentioning that Parliament and the Army have the same trust rating and are ranked the second most trusted public institutions in Ghana, coming after the President and the Electoral Commission which enjoy the same overall trust rating (87 percent). The figure below shows the trust rating for some public institutions for Afrobarometer round 2 (2002) and round 3 (2005).



Trust ratings for public institutions have generally increased over the 2000 levels with the Electoral Commission and Parliament recording the highest increases.

However, Ghanaians perceive corruption among public officials, including MPs: Ghanaians perceive varying levels of corruption in public agencies and among public officials. Close to six in ten (59 percent) perceive corruption among parliamentarians. This perception is lower than for the police (8 in 10 respondents), as well as for judges and tax officials (over 7 in 10). But it is worth noting that perceived corruption among MPs increased from 52 percent in 2002 to 59 percent in 2005 representing a nearly fourteen percent increase. This jump in perception of corruption was second only to that for the Presidency, which recorded a little over forty seven percent increase over the 2002 level.

Figure 6: Perceived corruption among public officials



Perceived corruption among MPs is persistent across other Afrobarometer countries with 72 percent each of respondents in South Africa and Uganda, 68 percent in Botswana and 63 percent in Benin holding this view.

Implications and Conclusions

Afrobarometer Round 3 findings provide evidence of the factors that influence popular appraisal of the performance of parliament and the fulfilment of the representative function. They show that infrequent MP constituency visits have a negative impact on popular appraisal of Parliament:

- 45 percent of respondents who say their MPs never visit them disapprove of the performance of Parliament; by contrast only 19 percent of those who receive monthly visits and 17 percent of those who receive weekly visits hold such a negative view.
- Moreover, 15 percent of respondents who say their MPs never visit them do not trust parliament *at all* while only 9 percent of those who receive annual visits and 8 percent of those who receive monthly visits hold a similar view.
- Knowledge of the identity of a MP is also influenced by MP visits to the constituency. Some 27 percent of respondents who say their MPs never visit do not know the names of their MPs. On the other hand, only 17 percent of those who receive annual visits and 16 percent of those who receive monthly visits also were ignorant of MP names.
- Almost all Ghanaians (88 percent) say elected representatives should listen to the views of their constituents. However, infrequent or the lack of MP visits make constituents feel MPs never listen to them. Well over half (56 percent) of respondents who say their MPs never visit also indicate that their MPs never listen.
- In general, political party affiliation does not appear to colour the approval of the performance of Parliament: Close to half (49 percent) of NDC affiliates and exactly half (50 percent) of NPP affiliates approve of the performance of parliament. However, popular perception of corruption among MPs is relatively higher among NDC supporters (67 percent) than NPP supporters (58 percent).

It follows from the analysis above that infrequent MP visits to their constituencies tends to raise negative perceptions about parliament as an institution and parliamentarians themselves. It also

Despite these shortcomings, Ghanaians have a generally positive image of the institution which presents an opportunity for growth and development. Members of Parliament should be encouraged by these positive appraisals and also make the effort to sustain this goodwill by making frequent constituency visits and improving public perception of corruption among MPs.

Three rounds of Afrobarometer surveys have been conducted in Ghana since August 1999. Rounds 2 and 3 took place in September 1992 and March 2005 respectively. Each Afrobarometer survey selects a nationally representative, randomly stratified, probability sample of citizens of voting age (18 years and above) and administers face-to-face interviews. The Afrobarometer instrument asks a standard set of questions from one round to another so that trends in public opinion can be tracked over time. Samples consisted of 1,200 respondents in each survey (1,199 in Round 3).

Round 3 interviews were conducted in all ten regions of the country and in both urban (47 percent) and rural (53 percent) areas. Respondents could choose to answer in any of the six predominant languages spoken in the country - Akan, Ewe, Ga/Adangbe, Dagbani, Hausa and English. Using the Ghana 2000 census data in March 2005, enumeration areas were randomly selected with the probability proportionate to its size in the overall population. Random procedures were also used to select households and respondents, though a gender quota was introduced at the last stage of sampling to ensure an equal representation of men and women. Every eligible adult in Ghana thus had an equal and know chance of being selected. As such, results can be generalized to the voting-age population of Ghana with a margin of error of plus or minus 2.5 percent at a confidence level of 95 percent.

The Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from 18 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (Idasa), the Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) and Michigan State University. Several donors support the Afrobarometer's research, capacity-building and outreach activities, including the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Department of International Development (UK). For more information: www.afrobarometer.org