

COMPLEXITIES OF LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATION IN GHANA: DO LEGISLATORS REALLY REPRESENT THEIR CONSTITUENTS?

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(Received: March 2025; Accepted: April 2025; Published: May 2025)

Abstract: The question of whose interest legislators really represent is yet to be satisfactorily answered in the literature of legislative studies. The paper investigates whether Members of Parliament (MPs) in Ghana follow their constituents' preference, their own judgment, or their parties' interests. Qualitative data was collected through 25 in-depth interviews with MPs, senior parliamentary staff, Parliamentary press corps, and civil society groups. Using theoretical literature on ideal styles of representation—delegate, partisan, and trustee—the delegate role of MPs in relation to their constituents was largely overshadowed by the delivery of personalized and club goods as a way of representing their constituents. However, on a matter of policy, a partisan orientation strongly influences the legislative decision-making of MPs. This is due to the economic leverage that political parties have over their candidates' re-election bid and a whip system that can compel MPs to prioritize the party's interest over that of constituents and their own judgment. Informal factors, such as ethnicity, religion, schoolmates, family relations, and friendship, though they play a minor role in influencing their representational orientation, could potentially shape the secret dissenting views of MPs from their parties' positions. These findings highlight the need to enhance public education on the core responsibilities of MPs. This will foster an enduring trustee relationship, essential for reducing excessive pressure and demands on MPs, and undue partisanship in legislative policy-making.

Keywords: constituents; Ghana; legislators; Parliament; representation.

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1. Introduction

The question of legislative representation is particularly pertinent for a democracy to thrive. Amongst the three fundamental functions generally performed by Parliaments everywhere in the world, including legislation and oversight responsibility (Lindberg, 2010; Dauda et al., 2020), representation has been the most complex one (Mencarelli, 2022). The conventionally known view is that the actions of Members of Parliament (MPs) reflect the priorities of their constituents (Stapenhurst and Pelizzo, 2012; Suhuyini et al., 2023). Consistent with this view, the available evidence also suggests that voters prefer MPs to directly reflect their views, needs, and aspirations in the legislative process (Campbell et al., 2019; McKay, 2020). Yet, the literature suggests that there is a weak link between MPs and their constituents in Africa (Acheampong, 2021). Moreover, Lindberg (2010) also asserts that MPs in Africa face multiple accountability pressures on a daily basis, and it is crucial to understand the strategies they employ in muddling through such demands (Lindberg, 2010). In essence, strong parliamentary accountability plays a vital role in fostering trust in the legislative institution that represents the people. This is essential for advancing democratic consolidation in emerging democracies (Agomor, 2025).

The scholarship on legislative representation is embroiled in controversies with respect to whether elected representatives prioritize voters' preferences, party line, or trust in their own judgment (Østergaard-Nielsen and Camatarri, 2022; Trumm and Barclay, 2023). The literature suggests that MPs are expected to represent the views of their constituents and where they are entrusted with a development fund, they provide constituency service by way of offering club goods and sponsoring development projects in their respective constituencies (Lindberg, 2010). Some scholars have even contended that constituency service is the predominant priority among MPs to guarantee their re-election as well as boost their legislative careers (Suhuyini et al., 2023). In that regard, some commentators have argued that it is crucial for MPs to prioritize the preference of their constituent voters over their own views. However, MPs are also expected to be objective and independent-minded whose actions should be shaped by their best judgment rather than follow the dictates of others. The argument is that MPs should be allowed to bring their expertise to bear to help shape public policy in the process of legislation (Trumm and Barclay, 2023). Yet, Caplan et al. (2021) posit that trading off voters' preference for one's own invokes high electoral costs. Finally, MPs are socialized through party rules and norms, and so they are required to toe the party line by voting on motions that reflect their party's position (Stefan et al., 2012; Mai and Wenzelburger, 2023). But here too, the next questions are; why do some MPs vote against or dissent from their party's position? And does such a dissenting view allow MPs to exercise their own

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judgment? These complexities of representation raise a critical question with respect to whose interest MPs really represent. Scholars who attempt to analyze parliamentary representation tend to focus on categorizing different styles of representation. For instance, Cooper and Richardson (2006) emphasized the delegate-trustee dichotomy in representative democracy. The delegate approach indicates that elected legislators follow the opinions and wishes of their constituents in their legislative business, whereas the trustee approach drives legislators to make the best decisions possible based on objective criteria regardless of the immediate dissent of constituents. However, there is less evidence on how MPs navigate and adapt to these complex representational styles in practice.

A common view in legislative studies holds that if the executive arm is regularly responsible for dominating the business of parliament with numerous sectoral bills, the deliberation role of MPs may be weakened as the institution will only be responsible for voting on executive bills, rather than gathering its own information and reconciling gaps. On the contrary, other proponents argue that the legislative arm remains prominent in the affairs of deliberation to legislate decisions in the public interest (Pūraitė-Andrikiėnė and Valuta, 2024, p. 176). While Ghana's democracy has been the most celebrated in the West African sub-region (Driscoll, 2020; Abdulai and Sackeyfio, 2022), its institution of Parliament has equally received scholarly attention in recent times based on the above context and other varied reasons. For example, despite the dominance of incumbency advantage in Ghanaian politics, studies have also revealed the growing trend of incumbency disadvantages among Ghanaian legislators seeking reelection who often lose their seats due to varied reasons, including executive control of activities in parliament often through their members, the schemings of party primaries against incumbent legislators, the effect of opposition politics, and the impact of perceived bad executive governance on the ruling party in parliament (Agomor et al., 2023). In fact, some Africanist scholars have long concluded that Ghana's legislature is weakly institutionalized particularly with respect to its ability to represent the people and hold the executive accountable (Elischer, 2013; Draman, 2020; Agomor et al., 2023). Previous studies on legislative-constituents relations have found a strong presence of clientelistic networks that shape MPs' actions toward their constituents (Stapenhurst et al., 2012; Acheampong, 2021; Ibn Zackaria and Appiah-Marfo, 2022). However, we know a lot less about how commitment to one's own judgment and party's position shape MPs' views and actions on representation. While the evidence suggests that MPs in Africa and other low-income countries provide constituency services (Lindberg, 2010; Rahman, 2013), do MPs' policy preference such as voting on motions also reflects the views of their constituents, their own judgments or party line? How do MPs respond to these demands? In other words, do MPs follow their constituents' preference, own judgment, or party line particularly

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when the three are not aligned? This may have policy implications with respect to policy outcomes in parliamentary democracy. Moreover, Willumsen and Öhberg (2017) contend that every MP has three personal aims: to be re-elected, to influence policy outcomes, and to advance one's political career. In that regard, one key challenge of legislators is how to manage and carefully balance external demands, including those coming from political parties and other stakeholders in a manner that would enable the advancement of one's political career. As studies further show (Willumsen and Öhberg, 2017), the politics of managing legislative affairs often involve securing a solid majority to facilitate government business. In some contexts, legislators who dissent from their party's policy position due to ideological persuasions, or their delegate or trustee preferences, could still influence legislative policy outcomes. However, such dissent could also put their chances of reelection at risk and potentially hinder their political career within the party.

Against this background, this study has a core focus on examining the representative roles of MPs in Ghana in line with the factors of how and why MPs balance the interests of their constituency with party loyalty, including potential motivations behind dissenting from the party line in legislative decisions. For the same purpose, it will be imperative to examine how MPs in Ghana respond to three priorities for elected representatives, including voters' preference, own judgment and party line. The issue of interests can be deduced from the questions; whose interest do MPs in Ghana represent? What factors shape MPs's priorities in Ghana?

It should be emphasized that a deeper understanding of these issues can contribute to our broader understanding of MPs' policy preferences on the floor of the House of Parliament and improve the existing literature on representative styles of elected legislators. In other words, while the study helps bridge the knowledge gap on the various national and local political dilemmas that confront MPs, it also provides useful information for understanding other impending related issues, such as how MPs are expected to execute their duties in Parliament. By doing so, we advance the literature on how MPs approach the complexities of parliamentary representation. The article is organized as follows. In the next sections, the paper outlines the theoretical framework where delegates, trustees, and partisan models are discussed to properly foreground the objectives of the paper. This is followed by the research methods where an exploratory qualitative research design allowed the researchers to explore the subjective experiences of the participants on the subject under study. Finally, the themes generated based on the qualitative research design then formed the basis for data analysis, discussions, and policy implications.

2. Theoretical Review

This section reviews the existing theoretical literature on parliamentary representation, centering on two main areas relevant to the focus of the current study: the complexities of parliamentary representation and the factors shaping the representational orientation of MPs.

2.1 Complexities of Parliamentary Representation

In the academic literature, two main theoretical standpoints have shaped how legislators have fulfilled their representative roles: representative focus and representative styles (Wahlke, 1962; Andeweg and Thomassen, 2005). On one hand, representation focus denotes the actual entity or object being represented, including constituency voters, the entire country, or the party. On the other hand, the representative styles, describe the degree of autonomy that a legislator should enjoy when making political decisions (Østergaard-Nielsen and Camatarri, 2022, p. 198). With respect to styles, scholars delineated three ideal categories: delegates, trustees, and partisans or politico as priorities for elected representatives (Eulau et al., 1959; Andeweg, 2012; Sudulich et al., 2020; Caplan et al., 2021). First, the delegate model suggests that the elected representative should represent the will of the people and vote on issues must reflect the wishes of constituents. Within this framework, a delegate cannot express his/her own views on an issue instead votes under the dictates of the constituents. This part of the model contradicts the trustee model where MPs are expected to make decisions based on their personal evaluation and judgment instead of solely on the preferences or interests of their constituents or their political party. Put another way, the notion is that when MPs strictly adhere to the delegate style, they may be restricted in terms of their ability to prioritize the broader national interest by virtue of the primary demands of meeting the factional interests of their constituents. Second, with the trustee style, the representative aspires to follow their personal judgment during the decision-making process. The trustee always holds a fervent belief that the right thing to do is to make the "best decisions possible on some objective criteria, regardless of the constituents' opinions" (Cooper and Richardson, 2006, p. 175). Whenever the best course of policy action comes into conflict with the constituents' wishes or their political party, a trustee must treat constituents' or party's opinion as less important. They place much premium on their own expertise and prioritize their own judgments way above the preferences of their constituents as well as those of their party. Third, with respect to the partisan/politico model espoused by Converse and Pierce (1986), the central role of political parties comes into play. The partisans are those who vote on issues based on the position espoused by their parties. Some scholars describe the politico style as a mix of both delegate and trustee styles (Sudulich et al., 2020). Through party unity or party discipline, MPs are whipped to vote "unanimously or together on legislative motions" rather than on personal judgment or based on the view of their constituents

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(Mai and Wenzelburger, 2023). According to Sudulich et al. (2020), partisans are those who follow their party line and respect party discipline even if it means discarding the preferences of their voters and those of their own. While it is crucial to emphasize that delegates and partisans are elected representatives who decide to respond to an external influence or authority, trustees are independent-minded actors. Yet, legislators must make decisions on whether they prefer to be independent actors or be dictated to by external authority. These are difficult and complex decisions for MPs to take in the discharge of their duties on the floor of Parliament. Scholars have attempted to offer empirical evidence to unpack the complexities of legislative representation along delegate, trustee and partisan styles. For instance, in their research on US state legislators, Cooper and Richardson (2006) investigated the representation of MPs and found that they exhibit a trustee model of representation rather than a delegate or partisan model. While legislative institutions can shape the representative roles that legislators adopt, constituency demands also create a dilemma. Legislators must decide whether to prioritize their role as trustees by spending more time in parliament, potentially at the expense of adequate engagement with constituents. Andeweg and Thomassen (2005) also observed conflictual views between voters and their representatives in the Dutch Parliament, implying that MPs are more trustees and trust in their own judgment than those of their constituents. However, research has shown that voters prefer their representatives to focus on local-level issues and not national concerns (Campbell and Lovenduski, 2015). Consistent with this view, McKay (2020) posits that acting in the interests, priorities and preferences of constituents would engender higher levels of political trust. Drawing evidence from the UK, Trumm and Barclay (2023) have shown that citizens prefer MPs to prioritize their views. This implies that citizens of UK prefer their MPs to be trustees to be able to judge issues based on their independent views. The work by Østergaard-Nielsen and Camatarri (2022) focuses on emigrant candidates in the Italian Parliament. They showed that emigrant candidates view themselves as trustees compared to other home-based candidates. Thus, emigrant candidates perceive themselves as independent from political parties and voters.

2.2. Shapers of MPs' Representational Orientations

Studies have been conducted to understand the factors that shape legislators' attitudes toward representation. Both individual-level characteristics and institutional elements have received research attention. According to the evidence presented by Østergaard-Nielsen and Camatarri (2022), despite the fundamental characterization of immigrant candidates as trustees, their experience and longer stay trajectory in immigrant districts make them more likely to be delegates in those districts compared to in-country candidates. This implies that candidates may

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perceive their role as representing the interest of people as long as they have close ties with their constituents. Consistent with this view, Trumm and Barclay (2023) assert that MPs would show greater closeness to their constituents and represent their interests if they contest an election in the same community they live in. Drawing insights from Italian representatives, Russo (2021) observed that the more an MP is personally and politically rooted in his/her constituency, the more he/she will strive to raise the concerns of constituents through parliamentary questions. Therefore, MPs would act as delegates if they exhibit weaker ties with their political parties but have stronger ties with their communities. However, MPs who have been socialized through party structures, including the experience of working within a party office or holding political office tend to value party loyalty. As a result, such MPs are more inclined to be partisans rather than delegates or trustees. Caplan et al. (2021) have argued that political parties may institute strict party discipline for legislators to conform to the dictates of the party at the expense of the interest of the citizens they represent. The reason is that MPs tend to rely on their party for electoral success since parties control access to party tickets and ballot placement (André and Depauw, 2013). Similarly, Chiru and Enyedi (2015) posit that a constitutional provision of a country may mandate representatives to prioritize the interest of a particular geographical area in their policy preference.

For example, it is stipulated in the constitutions of Portuguese, Belgian, and France that parliamentarians should represent the interest of the nation and the entire population rather than a particular district (Brack et al., 2012). Given such constitutional provisions, representatives are likely to be trustees by exercising their judgment on policy issues. Nevertheless, Russo (2014) found in Italy that despite institutional constraints such as party discipline and constitutional provision, MPs still maintain a representational focus on constituents by raising local matters through parliamentary questions in the National Assembly. Tavits (2010) also found in Estonia that political representatives with strong local roots tend to support constituency interests despite the presence of strong party discipline. On the question of whether party ideology determines the representative role of MPs, Giebler and Weßels (2013) found that partisan style tends to dominate among leftist political parties. In other European jurisdictions, it is argued that parliament, being the institution with a democratic character, exerts additional control on the executive power through administrative autonomous institutions like the Ombudsman. For instance, by mandatory processes, annual reports from autonomous public authorities are scrutinized upon parliamentary request; standing parliamentary commissions can exert control through investigation of issues of public interest; parliamentary oversight also includes debates and deliberations during parliamentary plenary sessions; parliament also exercises financial control through budget approvals. This highlights the significance of the discourse on the trustee style of

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legislative representation, which could help mitigate the abuse of parliamentary control through excessive partisanship (Stoicu and Moroșteș, 2017). However, parliamentary processes are also complicated by inevitable partisan interests, as MPs require sufficient support from their colleagues to secure the approval of governmental or private members' bills, which are subjected to a process that could either be "admitted or rejected by voting" (Stoicu et al., 2018, p. 83).

The literature on the representative styles shows the complexities MPs face in executing their duties in a representative democracy. The empirical evidence shows that individual-level, institutional and contextual factors shape the extent to which MPs represent their constituents, themselves, and their political party. This paper is the first of the kind that seeks to investigate these complexities of parliamentary representation by drawing evidence from the Parliament of Ghana, which has a legislative foundational mandate enshrined in the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana to enact laws necessary for good governance (Ansong and Agomor, 2024). Specifically, the paper seeks to understand the representative orientation of Ghanaian MPs, the factors that shape such orientations, and their implications on the performance of MPs.

3. Research methodology

The paper employed a qualitative approach (Creswell et al., 2006) to understand the experiences of legislators with respect to their representative styles in the Ghanaian Parliament. Specifically, a qualitative approach allowed MPs to share their experiences on whether their daily actions in Parliament are motivated by their desire to serve the interests of their constituents, their conviction or those of their political party. Previous studies on Ghana's Parliament have justified a qualitative research approach as the most suitable for analyzing the lived experiences of MPs in Ghana (Sakyi, 2010; Suhuyini et al., 2023). In fact, Yin (1994) argued that a qualitative approach allows for complex issues to be examined when the participants can share their own experiences without obstruction. Instead of employing statistical techniques as is the case in the quantitative approach, a qualitative study focuses on insider perspectives, context, meaning, and textual interpretation for a complete understanding of the phenomenon (Braun and Clarke, 2019). Semi-structured interviews were used to collect relevant primary data. With the aid of semi-structured interviews, follow-up questions were used to clarify and validate some claims made by informants (Marshall et al., 2013).

In-depth semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to "enter into the other person's perspectives" (Patton, 2002, p. 341) to generate a meaningful contextual understanding of what MPs perceive their representative roles to be. In that regard, purposive sampling guided the selection of potential informants for the study.

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Therefore, attempts were made to recruit participants whose knowledge and experiences were considered to be crucial for understanding MPs' representation as "information-rich informants" (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2007, p. 34). In all, 25 interviews were conducted: seventeen (17) interviews were conducted with MPs (both majority and minority MPs), three (3) interviews with senior parliamentary staff, three (3) interviews with journalists from Parliamentary press corps, and two (2) interviews with civil society groups. Elected MPs were key to the primary data collection because they offered first-hand information on the complexities of their representative roles. While Ghana remains a defacto two-party state, the party affiliation of the MPs was excluded in the study because the research focus was on a broader understanding of representation beyond the specific political party that the majority and minority MPs represented in parliament. Similarly, while a direct interview of constituency members or local party supporters would have provided additional information to the study, these informants were excluded. The focus of the study was rather on interpreting the extent to which MPs navigate their representative roles in the context of bridging the gaps between legislative roles and constituency engagements. The rationale for interviewing top parliamentary staff was because they are involved in the day-to-day administration of Parliament. They are also involved in filing questions and scheduling agendas for MPs and can share vital information with respect to MPs' voting patterns and priorities. Moreover, the journalists attached to Parliament work closely with parliamentarians and are required to engage in evidence-based reporting on parliamentary activities. This is essential for shaping public opinion and influencing legislative decision-making (Agomor, 2025). Therefore, they provided relevant information on MPs' priorities. Also, civil society groups work in the governance space by supporting democratic governance through research, advocacy, capacity building and technical support. Their work in parliament provided useful information on the behavior of MPs and their representative roles in Ghana's Parliament. It should be noted that the sample size of 25 provides a strong basis for deeper qualitative analysis. Indeed, Guest et al. (2006) have argued that the point of data saturation can be reached within the first 12 interviews. The key informant interviews were conducted, each lasting between 35 minutes to 50 minutes. The views of the informants were audio-recorded and transcribed.

Thematic data analysis approach (Miles and Huberman, 1984) was employed where common themes were identified and verified by reflection on the data and field notes. Themes were generated based on commonly recurring themes, and used a "combination of analyst narratives and illustrative data extracts" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 24). Clarke and Braun (2013) further suggest seven steps: transcription, reading and familiarisation, coding, producing themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and completing the analysis. These steps guided data

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preparation and analysis. It should be noted that these steps are not rigid. As Clarke and Braun (2013, p. 592) argue, the "thematic approach is fluid and recursive rather than rigid and structured". Specifically, the views of elite informants that point to MPs' priorities as representing their constituents, themselves, or their respective political parties as well as the factors that determine MPs' representative styles were used as themes, which formed the basis for analyses, discussions, and conclusions. For instance, by relying on an inductive approach, the thematic analysis was done through an inductive coding of the primary data to ascertain different patterns that explain the general representative roles of MPs under relevant themes (key among them included interests, loyalty, and dissent). To strengthen the internal validity of the study as well as ensure a fair representation of the 25 elite informants, the study included multiple interviewed sources relevant to the focus. This approach in addition to the data saturation technique was essential to validate the elite interviews at a point where adequate information was gathered to replicate the study.

Shenton's (2004) suggestions were used to achieve credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of our findings. For credibility, the semi-structured interview guide allowed for the questions to be modified to suit the abilities of the informants in the study. Transferability was ensured by quoting verbatim the views of the interviewees. Also, background information of the participants and a detailed description of the study were provided for the purposes of transferability. We also audio-recorded the interviews and documented the data collection procedures, which ensured the dependability of the findings. Finally, confirmability was ensured by justifying the choice of research methods, tools, and procedures.

4. Findings and discussion

The issue of whether MPs prioritize the views of their constituents, their judgment, or the preference of their political parties continues to be of current interest among scholars and practitioners. Using the qualitative research strategy outlined above, the empirical results are presented in two key areas. First, the paper examines whether MPs in Ghana prioritize the preference of their constituents, their judgment, or the views of their political parties when making decisions. Second, the paper discusses the findings on the factors that shape the representative priorities of MPs in Ghana.

4.1 Whose interest does MPS serve?

The notion of representative democracy suggests that MPs should prioritize the views and needs of their constituents. However, the issue of whose interest MPs in Ghana serve in their representative roles was found in two ways: service to constituents and service to the party.

4.1.1 Prioritizing the interest of the constituents

The data shows that the only time MPs prioritize the preferences of their constituents is through the provision of constituency service in the form of offering personalized goods such as donations toward social programs (funerals, wedding ceremonies, religious gatherings, etc), payment of school fees, hospital bills, electricity bills, and facilitating the delivery of developmental projects. Some informants shared their experiences that:

I represent my people. I cannot just be sitting in Accra here and leave my people down there. Every Saturday morning, I leave for my constituency to attend weddings, funerals, and other social programs (MP 1, 2024).

Another informant corroborates that:

It is important for me to visit my constituents. I am here because of them and I have to attend to their needs. I pay school fees, hospital bills, and even electricity bills. These are the visible things they can see and relate to (MP 5, 2024).

This was what another MP had to say:

I don't need to always be in Accra. I usually visit the constituency to hold meetings with party executives, inspect ongoing community projects, attend to individual casework, hold meetings with chiefs and opinion leaders, and interact with community members (MP 15, 2024).

It is evident that MPs' representational role towards their constituents is seen in how they pay attention to the delivery of private and club goods. However, we observe that there is a discrepancy with respect to how constituency service is delivered. Thus, while some of the constituency service provided by MPs are constituency-wide in nature, a majority of the informants reveal that a major part of their constituency service is restricted to party delegates and loyal party members. With respect to the constituency-wide service, a majority of MPs disclose that they hold 'office hours' to openly interact with the geographic constituency and collate their views. They also intervene in some cases to carry out repair works or renovate some community services that need urgent attention. One of the informants explain that:

It is about how I utilized the little resources at my disposal to benefit the people. For example, toward social programs (funerals, wedding ceremonies, religious gatherings, etc), payment of school fees, hospital bills, electricity bills, and facilitating the delivery of developmental projects.

Borehole drilling gives them cement which becomes self-helped projects. So, we handle projects like self-help. If they would build something they need cement and if they would roof buildings, they need a roof. If they have broken down boreholes we would go and repair them. The most likely event

is that we can even reshape some of their roads. If the Assembly has a grader and yours is to buy fuel, we can do that to support them (MP 7, 2024).

However, all MPs did indicate that they devote a greater part of their constituency service to serving their loyal party members. An interviewee narrated that:

Yes, I often join party officials in carrying out most of the constituency service I do. Party executives know our party members who are in need. We only hold office hours to engage the general public (MP 10, 2024).

Another interviewee intimated that:

The issue is that the constituency executives decide whether you can go back to parliament or not. So, I don't take them for granted. I go with them to do constituency services like attending funerals, weddings, and other social gatherings. They know our party members (MP, 18, 2024).

The findings reveal generally that MPs prosecute their representative roles by prioritizing the needs of their constituents. Thus, the needs of the constituents are prioritized only through the offering of club goods. It also came up strongly that apart from office hours that are open for constituency-wide service, a large part of the constituency service, including attendance at functions, meetings, and case works is restricted to local party officials and loyal party members. This implies that when MPs claim to represent their constituents, they don't represent the entire constituency but rather individuals and loyal groups within the geographic constituency. Nonetheless, broader discussions with interviewees reveal that the reason why MPs prioritize constituency service as their representative role is not limited to just meeting constituency demand. In this context, MPs often grapple with the challenge of balancing their personal preference for the job, the potential political gains they can secure, and the partisan pressures exerted at the local level. While the provision of personalized goods fairly aligns with the delegate style of representation, this scenario does not lead to a definitive conclusion that MPs are fully adopting the delegate role. The findings were rather nuanced which suggested that a broader quest by MPs to strengthen their political capital in the constituency, including reelection prospects subtly influences their priorities. As a priority that is partisan in style, the result was found to be less on constituency-wide service and more on delivering personalized goods to party officials and loyal party members in the constituency. In other words, MPs are concerned about their electoral survival and since local party officials and party loyalists are those who select candidates during internal party primaries for the general elections, they become the main priority of MPs' constituency service delivery. Some informants disclose that:

My survival as an MP depends on delegates who are party members. You ignore them at your peril. They decide you're going to Parliament and your exit. So, I have a responsibility to meet their needs (MP 3, 2024).

Another interviewee corroborated that:

I take care of party members before the wider constituency members. First of all, it is the delegates and other party loyal members who determine my stay in parliament. This is politics and you need to satisfy your support base first before you think of outsiders (MP 9, 2024).

It can be gleaned from the evidence presented above that MPs see their representative role as offering constituency service to their party loyalists. This feeds into one commonly held proposition: the political career of MPs depends much more on party delegates rather than the entire voters in the constituency. Therefore, the constituency service offered by MPs as their representative role to their constituents reflects patronage and clientelistic politics of the Ghanaian political system where public goods are exchanged for political loyalty and continued electoral support. In fact, one important route for MPs to easily ascend to power is their capacity to win intra-party competition through clientelistic networks. Therefore, the main preoccupation of MPs is how to cater to the delegate network and not the entire constituency.

4.1.2 Prioritizing party's interest

It emerged strongly from the findings that MPs tend to prioritize the interest of their political parties when it comes to making crucial decisions on policy issues on the floor of the house. The MPs express the view that Parliament is made up of the majority and minority causes, and so debates and decision-making on policy issues are shaped by partisan considerations. Thus, since most of the business of the house emanates from the executive, MPs from the ruling government will always support those policies whether they resonate with the people or not, which may be opposed by the opposition party and its MPs. All interviewees expressed the view that the preference of political parties shapes the behavior of MPs on the floor of the house more than that of their constituents or their judgment. An informant shared his experience when he once resisted to toe the position of the party:

I once resisted toeing the party line on a particular issue. But I was called to the party headquarters. I was asked if I have my interest then I can withdraw on our party ticket. I was told the party could not support me. We can withdraw our support. They said I have to go on my own as an independent candidate. So, once you are in the parliament on the ticket in the name of a party, definitely you would be whipped by the party and you must obey if you want to be in parliament. So, if you want to exercise your independent mind then you must come in as an independent candidate (MP 3, 2024).

This was what another interviewee had to say:

As for what happens in parliament all is about our party's interest. Our debate on the floor of the house, decision-making, and voting, it is about the

position of our party. On every issue, the party has its position and we all follow that regardless of the opinions of our constituents (MP 16, 2024).

Another MP corroborated that:

Oh! We don't have our minds in Parliament. It is about what the party wants. Every decision we take as individuals and as a Caucus is about the interest of the party and not about our constituents or our judgment. In most cases, we don't even consult our constituents before making decisions in Parliament (MP 2, 2024).

The above views were discussed during interviews with non-MPs.

MPs toe the line of their parties. The majority will always support the position of the ruling government and the opposition will support the position of their party. It has always been like that in this 4th Republic (Senior Parliamentary Staff 2, 2024).

Another interviewee corroborated that:

They always debate and vote based on party lines. They don't consider the constituents' views or their own opinions (CSO 3, 2024).

It is evident that while MPs represent their constituents by offering personalized goods, the opinions of the constituents are not given the same priority when it comes to making decisions on the floor of the house. Rather, MPs' actions in Parliament reflect the interests of their parties. The reason why the party officials exert enormous influence over the MPs is the fact that their filing fees with the Electoral Commission (EC) are paid for by their parties. Moreover, the parties also use the Whip system to ensure that MPs comply with the dictates of their parties. One of the informants stated that:

It is so because when we are filing at the EC, the party pays the filing fee at the EC. This is why we have allegiance to the party. They make sure that they pay that money to also have control over you (MP 5, 2024).

Another informant intimated that:

They make sure your filing fees are paid for so they can have control over you. They also use the whip system to whip MPs in line (MP 14, 2024).

This assertion was corroborated by findings from parliamentary staff

Political parties have too much control over MPs. They use the whip system to ensure that MPs stay within the interest of the Party (Parliamentary Senior Staff 1, 2024).

The findings presented above are further reinforced by the outcomes of various legislative policy debates in Parliament, including the approval of ministerial appointments, national budget deliberations, legislative proposals, the passage of contentious bills, and censure motions that were impacted by party interests. For example, a 2017 report from the Appointments Committee revealed that not all

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ministerial nominees received unanimous approval. In one instance, the committee recommended the approval of Otiko Afisah Djaba as Minister for Gender, Children, and Social Protection through a majority decision instead of a consensus decision. Opposition members of the committee, adhering to their party's stance, opposed her nomination, citing her alleged unsavory comment about a prominent member of the opposition party and her unsatisfactory response on not completing mandatory national service (Parliament of Ghana, 2017). During the laying of the 2022 Budget Statement and Economic Policy, MPs reportedly voted strictly along party lines on the controversial Electronic Transactions Levy, which was introduced by the ruling party. The budget initially faced rejection, led by the opposition Speaker of Parliament. However, this decision was later overturned by a Deputy Speaker from the ruling party, highlighting the deep partisan divisions surrounding the policy (Republic of Ghana, 2021). While the policy dimensions of the discussion emphasize the significance of passing bills into law and the president's ultimate assent, the contentious nature of legislation is not always beneficial. Other perspectives underscore that Ghana's Parliament is a sine qua non institution for validating legislative and constitutional instruments essential to the functioning of other governmental bodies. Consequently, the importance of consensus-building in parliamentary decision-making cannot be overstated (Agomor, 2024).

The findings also generally show that MPs tend to prioritize the interest of their parties as far as voting on policy issues on the floor of Parliament is concerned. Two key issues are worthy of note. First, when it comes to parliamentary work such as debating and voting to take decisions on policy issues, MPs overwhelmingly prioritize the interest of their parties over the views of their constituents. Two factors reinforce political parties' control over MPs: the fees MPs pay at the point of filing their nominations with the EC are paid for by their parties and the use of the whip system compels MPs to prioritize the party's interest over that of constituents and their judgment. These two factors have induced party-complaint voting behavior of MPs. Second, another issue is a dilemma that lies in the fact that while MPs represent the interest of their parties in national legislative politics, they also have to be highly concerned with the politics of managing the local electoral machinery of the party rooted in the constituency. This buttresses the earlier explanation of why constituency party executives and other loyal local party members are prioritized in the form of a narrower constituency service delivery.

4.1.3 Why do some MPs dissent from the party line?

Overall, if party loyalty, party discipline, and the whip system are meant to ensure that MPs overwhelmingly vote on the party line or represent the interest of their parties, why do some MPs dissent or deviate from voting on the party line? And where these MPs dissent, do they vote to represent the interest of their constituents or their judgment? The results show that the dissenting MPs neither opt to represent

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their view judgment nor the views of their constituents. Rather, informants were unanimous on the views that as MPs, they share close ties based on religion, family, ethnicity, regional relations, extended family, friends, schoolmates, and other informal relations. Therefore, it is difficult to make decisions against their colleagues on the other side of the political divide despite the position of their parties. One of the interviewees explain that:

The last ministerial vetting we had. The position of our party was that some ministers should be rejected. But they went through because some MPs from our caucus voted to approve against the group and the party's position. The reality is that they are our friends in the House of Parliament. We have relations as schoolmates, church, family, and others. You don't expect me to go for the party's position in situations like that (MP 2, 2024).

Another MP added that:

Do you remember how the current Speaker was approved? Some bad nuts from our caucus voted for the opposition person to become the speaker. We are friends and church members, we have chiefs who come to talk to us. So, we can dissent from the party's position (MP 8, 2024).

Another interviewee corroborated that:

This is because MPs use a voice vote. If they use secret balloting to approve policies, most of the MPs won't toe their party positions. But because of victimization, they decide to conform. Upon all that, we see them dissenting during secret voting where they think that their identity won't be known (CSO 3, 2024).

Although MPs rarely dissent from party lines in Ghana's hybrid presidential system—where the majority of ministers are appointed from Parliament, existing studies affirm that such dissent is possible. A significant example emerged following the 2020 elections, which resulted in an evenly split Parliament, with both the ruling and opposition parties securing 137 seats each, alongside one independent MP. For the first time in that legislative chamber, the Speaker of Parliament was elected from the opposition. While both parties fielded candidates for the Speaker position, it is assumed that the opposition candidate's victory was facilitated by a dissenting vote from a member of the ruling party. This was also possible due to the adoption of a secret ballot system instead of a public voice vote. (Asekere, 2021). The opposition Speaker also brought significant credibility to his portfolio during the parliamentary vote, being the longest-serving MP since the inception of Ghana's Fourth Republic in 1993. From the foregone, it can be gleaned that because of strong party discipline, MPs tend to vote overwhelmingly based on their parties' position. However, the evidence presented here also suggests that MPs may dissent from their parties' position if decision-making is based on secret balloting where the identity of an MP

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cannot be easily known. With respect to the approval of nominees by the ruling government, some opposition MPs dissented from the parties' position due to personal relations they share with the nominees. This implies that MPs' representational style is not only shaped by tripartite interests (constituents, personal judgement, and party) but also informal relations. These informal relationships manifest in the form of extended family, religion, classmates, regional relations, ethnicity, and other political considerations. Therefore, where a decision is to be taken based on party positions, these informal relations are key determinants of MPs' representational roles. Once an MP is elected, it is expected that he/she owns allegiance to constituents' deliberative and representational duties by standing in for them in the House. Nevertheless, this is far from the case as MPs face complex accountability demands with the party's interest becoming the key undercurrent.

4.2. Discussion

The paper examines whether MPs in Ghana prioritize the preference of their constituents, their judgment, or the views of their political parties when making decisions on the floor of Parliament. The paper observes a discrepancy in how MPs exercise their representative roles. First, the evidence reveals that MPs' representative role towards their constituents is seen in how they provide constituency service in the form of personalized goods and facilitate the delivery of development projects in their respective constituencies. These personalized goods manifest in the form of MPs' donations at funerals, wedding ceremonies, religious gatherings, and payment of school fees, and hospital and utility bills. Moreover, the delivery of constituency service is seen in MPs' involvement in the work of local development. However, it should be noted that MPs are not development agents and are not required to engage in the provision of visible projects. Yet, they are faced with mounting pressure from their constituents to provide public goods (Lindberg, 2010). Therefore, the creation of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) is supposed to enable MPs to directly address certain developmental challenges in their districts and constituencies (Suhuyini et al., 2023). As the evidence shows, MPs occasionally intervene to assist in providing social services such as borehole drilling, assisting with cement and roofing sheets to facilitate community-led self-help projects, engaging in repair works for some broken down community services, and lobbying the sector ministers for development projects. Therefore, the results with respect to MPs' provision of constituency service as a way of representing the interest of their constituents are consistent with the existing scholarship on legislative studies (Jahan, 2015; Dockendorff, 2020; Parker, 2021). Yet, there is a dissimilar pattern of how the constituency services are delivered by MPs: the services provided are not all-inclusive but skewed towards party delegates and loyal party members. This is consistent with the finding observed by Acheampong (2021). The paper further observes that with respect to how decisions are made in the House of

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Parliament, MPs tend to prioritize the interest of their political parties over that of their constituents and their judgment. One important point that is worthy of note is that on a matter of policy, which includes how MPs debate and vote on policy issues, MPs overwhelmingly prioritize their parties' interests over the views of constituents and their judgment. Generally, the finding holds two theoretical implications. First, the behavior of Ghanaian MPs illustrates the delegate model of representation as seen in how they prioritize constituents' interests by offering constituency service. Second, the partisan or politico model of representation is exemplified in how MPs vote overwhelmingly on party positions on policy issues. These results are contrary to the existing empirical studies, which found that legislators are trustees rather than delegates or partisans. It also reinforces the practical notion that MPs could balance between the delegate and trustee style of representation by acting based on several influences; personal judgments, party interests, and constituency needs (Andeweg and Thomassen, 2005; Cooper and Richardson, 2006; Campbell and Lovenduski, 2015; McKay, 2020; Østergaard-Nielsen and Camatarri, 2022; Trumm and Barclay, 2023). The delegate and partisan disposition of MPs is symptomatic of Ghana's competitive political environment where politicians resort to patronage and clientelism to maintain electoral support (Berenschot, 2018). This reflects the broader political discourse on party unity, where the ideals of uniformity are upheld in the voting behavior of MPs from the same party. The argument further stems from the standpoint of ideological cohesion, where colleague MPs in parliament naturally tend to vote based on party discipline rather than their principled orientation (Brabec, 2021). The net effect is that it undermines serious legislative activity and oversight functions of legislators. Two key factors shape MPs' overwhelming prioritization of their parties' interests over anything else. First, MPs are socialized through party structures, which enable political parties to pay their filing fees in order to have control over MPs while they perform their duties in Parliament. Second, political parties tend to use the whip system to ensure that MPs toe the party lines. Indeed, extant literature has demonstrated that strict party discipline measures are often employed by political parties to induce party-complaint voting behavior of MPs (Caplan et al., 2021). It is worthy of note that apart from offering constituency service as a way of maintaining electoral support, MPs exhibit stronger ties with their parties compared to their constituents. Also, MPs have no choice but to toe the party line because political parties determine MPs' political careers as they control access to party tickets and ballot placement (André and Depauw, 2013). At this stage, a critical question emerged if MPs vote overwhelmingly in the interest of their political parties, why do some MPs dissent from the position of their caucus and their political parties particularly when there is secret voting in Parliament? The evidence suggests that informal relations, including ethnicity, regionality, religion, classmates, and

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family are crucial in determining MPs' priorities. Therefore, it can be concluded that limiting MPs' representational roles to only delegates, trustees, and partisans' orientations blurs a comprehensive understanding of parliamentary representation, particularly in developing countries when these informal relations are ignored.

5. Conclusions and policy recommendation

Legislators' role orientation and representational styles continue to gain research attention among scholars in the literature on legislative behavior and representation. The paper investigates whether MPs in Ghana follow their constituents' preference, their own judgment, or their parties' interests. The paper finds that MPs tend to prioritize the delivery of personalized and club goods as a way of representing their constituents. But on a matter of policy including how MPs deliberate and make decisions in the House, the findings show that they vote overwhelmingly on their parties' positions, implying that MPs are more partisans than delegates and trustees. Two key factors reinforce political parties' control over MPs: the fees MPs pay at the point of filing their nominations with the EC are paid for by their parties and the use of the whip system compels MPs to prioritize the party's interest over that of constituents and their judgment. The paper also observes that ethnicity, religion, classmates, family relations, friendship, and other informal relations are some of the reasons why some MPs dissent from their parties' positions. The article recommends that citizens should be educated to understand the core mandate of MPs. This will allay unnecessary pressures and demands on MPs in a manner that will curtail patronage and clientelism. This is important because the delivery of constituency service is patronage that may undermine the performance of MPs. These findings broaden our understanding with respect to how MPs approach their parliamentary duties vis-à-vis following the interests of their parties, alongside constituency needs. Moreover, the Standing Orders of Parliament should be crafted in a way that will make MPs independent of their political parties. The article concludes that delegate, trustee, and partisan are not the only models but also informal relations are crucial in understanding MPs' role orientation in Ghana and other nascent democracies. Therefore, future researchers should explore in detail the dynamics of such informal relations and the extent to which they shape MPs' representation.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank the anonymous reviewers and editors for their valuable contributions.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Author Contributions

The entire article was written by Kingsley S. Agomor and Ebenezer Ahumah Djietror.

Disclosure Statement

The authors have not got any competing financial, professional, or personal interests from other parties.

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