

THE ROLE OF INCUMBENCY FATIGUE IN THE NPP'S PARLIAMENTARY PERFORMANCE IN THE 2024 ELECTIONS

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Abstract: In competitive democracies, incumbency fatigue has emerged as an important factor influencing electoral outcomes. This paper examines the role of incumbency fatigue in the dismal performance of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) in the 2024 elections. It analyzes the impact of prolonged party and parliamentary incumbency on electoral results through a review of historical parliamentary seat data and a qualitative desk-based analysis of election reports and media coverage. The results indicate that the NPP's defeat was driven by several factors, including declining public trust and confidence, a strong desire for change and new leadership, protest voting arising from unmet expectations, perceptions of weak accountability, and voter exhaustion with long-serving incumbents. The opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC) also used effective mobilization strategies. The paper further develops the Seat-Level Mechanism of Incumbency Fatigue to explain how incumbency fatigue manifests in electoral outcomes.

Keywords: Ghana; incumbency fatigue; parliamentary elections; New Patriotic Party.

1. Introduction

Since the return to constitutional rule in 1992 and the beginning of Ghana's Fourth Republic, political power has alternated between the center-left National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the center-right New Patriotic Party (NPP). Ghanaians went to the polls for the ninth time on 7th December 2024 to elect a president and members of the 9th Parliament. The election resulted in another power alternation between the NDC and the NPP in both the parliamentary and presidential contests, signaling the strength and competitiveness of Ghana's democracy. Changes in the distribution of parliamentary seats reflect larger electoral patterns and voters' evaluations of the

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current government's performance. In this regard, parliamentary elections are often used to express voters' feelings about the government.

The outcome of the 2024 election indicates that incumbency fatigue primarily impacted the NPP's performance in the parliamentary election. Incumbency fatigue occurs when a governing party or its representatives become less popular over time, either because voters are unhappy, their expectations are not met, or they are of the view that the government is incompetent. In long-established democracies, voters tend to become more critical of incumbent parties when they perceive poor performance or ineffective governance.

The 2024 parliamentary election was remarkable because it presented a dramatic departure from the outcomes of previous trends, where the party that loses the presidency wins enough seats to prevent the other party from obtaining two-thirds of the seats. Ayee (2017) noted that the NPP won a commanding majority of 169 seats in 2016 (the first term of President Nana Akufo-Addo's government). By the 2024 elections, at the end of the NPP's second consecutive term, the party's parliamentary majority had evaporated; both the NPP and NDC won 137 seats each (with one independent), producing Ghana's first hung parliament (Gyampo & Graham, 2022). The 2024 elections completed this trajectory of decline for the NPP, whose parliamentary seats were reduced to just 88 after the opposition NDC had won 184 of the 276 seats, marking a historic erosion of the ruling party's parliamentary power. That the NDC succeeded in taking about two-thirds of the seats amply demonstrates the NPP's declining popularity and suggests that, after eight years in office, voters are generally tired of the incumbent party.

Extant literature exists on both presidential and parliamentary elections in Ghana and their outcomes (Brierley & Ofosu, 2014). Scholars such as Gyampo and Graham (2022) examined the dynamics of the 2020 elections, while Cheeseman, Lynch, and Willis (2017) also explored the 2016 elections by investigating the declining power of incumbency. Furthermore, Ayee (2017) conducted a post-mortem of the 2016 election, with Gyampo, Graham, and Yobo (2017) also investigating the factors that accounted for the monumental defeat of the ruling NDC in the 2016 election.

It is, however, noteworthy that despite the extensive scholarship on elections in Ghana, the impact of incumbency fatigue on the outcome of parliamentary elections in Ghana has received little attention. Furthermore, in the aftermath of the 2024 elections, there has been little scholarly engagement with the abysmal performance of the NPP in the parliamentary elections. This paper, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by examining the extent to which incumbency fatigue influenced the performance of the NPP in the parliamentary elections. The 2024 election holds historical

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significance because it marked the first time under Ghana's Fourth Republic in which an opposition party secured an absolute two-thirds majority in parliament. Following this introduction, the paper discusses incumbency fatigue in Ghanaian elections, after which the methodology employed in the study is outlined. It then examines historical trends in the performance of political parties in parliamentary elections, with particular attention to the role of incumbency fatigue in the parliamentary performance of the NPP in the 2024 elections. The paper concludes by highlighting key lessons arising from the analysis.

2. Literature review

2.1 Incumbency Fatigue in Ghanaian Elections

Elections in Ghana are held every four years, and since 1992, each of the two major parties (NDC and NPP) has governed for two consecutive terms before power alternated. A notable pattern in Ghana's Fourth Republic is that voter turnout often declines in the election following an incumbent party's completion of its two-term limit. For instance, after two terms of the NDC government, voter turnout dropped from 85.1% in 1996 to 61.7% in 2000. After two NDC terms ending in 2016, turnout fell from 80.2% in 2012 to 69.3% (Anaman & Bukari, 2021).

After two NPP terms, turnout in 2008 was 69.5% (down from 79.0% in 2004), and most recently, turnout in 2024 was just 60.9%, the lowest of any election in the Fourth Republic (Ghanaweb, 2024). These drops in participation show that voters lose interest at the end of long terms, which is an early sign of incumbency fatigue. The central question is, what drives this voter apathy and erosion of support for the ruling party after eight years in office. This study contends that incumbency fatigue is a major contributing factor to these trends.

In this article, I define incumbency fatigue as the slow loss of public trust and support for a ruling party or long-serving officeholder because they have been in power for a long time. With the passage of time, a government that stays in power for a long time can make voters unhappy, whether it is because they do not keep their promises, they perceive that things are not getting better, or they just want something new. In parliamentary terms, incumbency fatigue can show up as people not being as interested in or supportive of MPs or parties that have held a certain constituency for a long time. This disconnection may hinder an incumbent MP's capacity to adequately represent constituents or maintain enthusiasm, consequently compromising the party's overall efficacy in Parliament.

It is important to state that incumbency fatigue does not just affect individual politicians; it can also affect a whole political party in a constituency where that party has been in power for many election cycles, even if its candidates have changed over

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time. The idea includes many different economic, social, and political factors that build up over time and affect how people vote in different situations.

Incumbency fatigue is akin to the phenomenon characterized by Cheeseman, Lynch, and Willis (2017) as the "ebbing power of incumbency" during Ghana's 2016 elections, where the typical benefits associated with incumbency diminish following prolonged tenure. In a broader sense, this idea fits with ideas about democratic accountability, which argues that voters become more critical and demanding of their leaders over time (Norris, 2011; Stoker, 2006). As governments stay in power for a long time, voters may blame the current leaders for ongoing problems in the country, which could make them want new leaders (Henn & Foard, 2014).

In Ghana, both major parties have eventually faced this weariness among the electorate. The alternation of power every eight years reflects an informal two-term political cycle, encapsulated in the popular political mantra "Break the 8," a slogan the NPP itself adopted in its bid to secure a third consecutive term in 2024. The literature on African elections has noted similar patterns of regime alternation and fatigue, though Ghana's case is distinctive for its regularity and the relative peacefulness of turnovers (Gyimah-Boadi, 2009). What has been missing, and which this study provides, is a focused analysis of how incumbency fatigue specifically influences parliamentary election outcomes in Ghana.

2.2 Historical Trends in Parliamentary Performance

To put the outcome of the 2024 elections in a proper perspective, it is important to review the historical distribution of parliamentary seats between the NDC and NPP since the inception of the Fourth Republic. Table 1 below shows the number of seats won by each party (1992-2024), along with the seats won by the minor parties or independent candidates. This historical overview shows an alternation of power (control of parliament) and the growth of parliamentary representation over time (the number of seats increased from 200 to 230 in 2004 and to 275 by 2012, with a further addition to 276 constituencies by 2024).

Table 1. Parliamentary Election Results in Ghana's Fourth Republic (1992–2024)

Year	NDC Seats	NPP Seats	Others (Independents & small parties)	Total Seats
1992	189	0 (<i>boycott</i>)	11	200
1996	133	61	6	200
2000	92	100	8	200
2004	98	128	4	230
2008	116	107	7	230
2012	148	123	4	275

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2016	106	169	0	275
2020	137	137	1	275
2024	185	87	4	276

Sources: Compiled from the Electoral Commission of Ghana's official results.

Several observations emerge from Table 1. First, Ghana's first parliamentary election in 1992 was boycotted by the NPP (which disputed the presidential election results), resulting in an overwhelmingly NDC-dominated Parliament with no opposition representation. In the 1996 election, the NPP, which served as the main opposition party outside parliament, participated and won 61 seats, and this reduced the NDC's majority. The 2000 election was significant because it was the first time a president had served the two constitutionally mandated terms and was ineligible to contest the election under the Fourth Republic.

The NPP won both the presidency and a narrow parliamentary majority (100 NPP seats to NDC's 92). This demonstrated that an incumbent party (the NDC in this case) could be unseated after its two-term limit, an early indication of voter desire for change at the turn of the millennium (Gyimah-Boadi, 2001).

The 2004 election, in which the ruling NPP sought re-election, held significance as the number of seats in parliament was increased from 200 to 230. The NPP managed to increase its tally to 128 seats (+28), maintaining a majority, while the NDC also won 98 seats, resulting in +8. However, after eight years of NPP rule, the pattern of alternation reasserted itself in the 2008 elections. With President J.A. Kufuor stepping down after two terms, voters swung back to the opposition NDC. The NDC won 116 seats (+18), formed the majority in parliament, and won the presidency. However, the number of seats for the NPP decreased from 128 in 2004 to 107. This result means that the number of seats of the NPP was reduced by 21 within four years. The NPP's loss of 21 parliamentary seats compared to what it won in 2004 can be partly attributed to what Gyampo et al. (2017) describe as regime fatigue; essentially, Ghanaians grew tired of the NPP and yearned for a change after eight years. This mirrored the 2000 turnover and solidified a possible eight-year electoral cycle.

The NDC won a second term in office and a large majority in parliament in the 2012 election (148 NDC seats to 123 NPP seats). People were starting to wonder if the NDC could break the cycle and win a third straight term in the 2016 elections. It came as a surprise to many when the opposition NPP won a landslide victory in 2016, obtaining 169 seats, the most seats by any party since 1992. The NDC, on the other hand, lost 106 seats (Frempong, 2017). This result led to a third straight change of power, this time after the ruling party had been in power for two terms, which fits

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the pattern of incumbency fatigue. Many people viewed the NDC's loss as an indication that people were unhappy with how the economy was run and how corrupt the NDC government was (Aye, 2017; Cheeseman, Lynch & Willis, 2017). In 2016, the NPP's supermajority allowed one party to control Parliament. These developments raised concerns about fewer checks and balances.

Ghana's 2020 elections were some of the most competitive and important in the country's history. The NPP government had to deal with the unexpected problem of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. It made campaigning harder and hurt the economy. The election led to a hung parliament, with the NPP and NDC each winning 137 seats and an independent winning the last seat (CDD-Ghana, 2021). This 8th Parliament (2021–2024) was different from the others because it required the two main parties to work together and come to an agreement, since neither had a clear majority.

The 2020 results followed the "eight-year itch" pattern once more; even though the NPP kept the presidency (with President Akufo-Addo winning re-election), the dramatic loss of parliamentary seats (from 169 in 2016 to 137 in 2020) showed that many voters were unhappy with the ruling party. Some were of the view that the NPP's first term did not live up to their hopes, so the voters gave the opposition more power (Graphic, 2023). Many people saw the hung parliament as a sign that the ruling party was losing support and that competition was getting stronger in Ghana's democracy.

3. Methodology and empirical data

This study employs a qualitative research design, focusing on a desk review of pertinent documents and reports. The main sources of information for the paper were the Electoral Commission's website, official election results from 2024, records of parliamentary seats, and news articles about the 2024 election. The primary research methodology employed in the study is the thematic content analysis of materials, wherein persistent themes related to the effects of incumbency fatigue were identified. There were no interviews or surveys; instead, the study focuses on analyzing existing data to identify patterns consistent with incumbency fatigue. This method is appropriate because the research is retrospective and explanatory, and there is a substantial body of information available on the election.

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4. Empirical results

4.1 The 2024 Election Outcome

Both parties saw the 2024 elections as a major battle against this historical background. The NPP wanted to "break the 8," which meant it wanted to stay in power for more than the usual two terms. The party stated that it needed more time to finish its development agenda. The NDC, on the other hand, vigorously pushed a narrative that the election was effectively a referendum on the NPP's governance. NDC leaders characterized the contest as being between the NPP and Ghana, urging all Ghanaians to unite to vote out the NPP to rescue the country from mismanagement. This strong message from the opposition tapped into many people's anger after almost eight years of NPP rule.

Events that occurred during the second term of the then Government, especially between 2023 and 2024, indicated that most Ghanaians were perhaps dissatisfied with the country's governance. For example, there were many protests and high-profile strikes by different labor unions (Ghanaweb, 2024b; Myjoyonline, 2024). In 2024, a group of unions, including the University Teachers Association of Ghana (UTAG), the Technical University Teachers Association of Ghana (TUTAG), the College Teachers Association of Ghana (CETAG), the Civil Servants Association (CLOGSAG), embarked on strike to protest low pay, poor working conditions, and a lack of government accountability (Myjoyonline, 2024).

The youth-led #FixTheCountry movement showed how impatient young people in the country had become with regard to bad governance. Young voters, who comprised approximately 55% of the over 18 million registered voters in 2024 (Dubawa, 2024), were especially vocal, using social media and street protests to demand solutions to unemployment, economic hardship, and corruption. These developments set the stage for an electorate highly receptive to change.

The official results of the 2024 parliamentary elections shocked many observers in their magnitude, if not their direction. The opposition NDC won 185 out of 276 contested seats, while the NPP managed to win only 87, with the remaining four seats taken by independent candidates. This means the NDC exceeded the two-thirds majority threshold (185 seats in a 276-member house) for the first time in Ghana's competitive electoral history. For the NPP, the outcome was an unprecedented defeat, as its parliamentary representation was reduced by nearly half compared to the previous term. The result also marked the fourth turnover of political power (counting from 2000) and cemented the pattern that no party has yet been allowed by Ghanaian voters to govern beyond eight years consecutively.

The major swing against the NPP showed that many people were unhappy with the party's performance during its second term (2017–2024). In 2022 and 2023, Ghana's

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economy was very unstable. The currency lost value, inflation rose quickly, and the cost of living and fuel rose sharply (Atuahen, Agyei, & Frimpong, 2024). Several Ghanaians blamed the NPP government for these issues. Martin Kpebu, a well-known legal analyst, summed up how people felt in April 2024 when he stated that "the NPP lost the 2024 elections in 2022". This meant that the ruling party's fate was sealed long before the campaign began (ModernGhana, 2024). Many people felt the same way, which shows that by the time Ghanaians went to the polls, a number of them wanted to punish the then leaders for the bad economic situation.

The NPP's problems got worse because of fights within the party. One big problem was that President Akufo-Addo refused to move or fire his Finance Minister, Ken Ofori-Atta, even though people and even NPP parliamentarians kept asking him to do so. A group of the NPP's own MPs publicly called for Ofori-Atta to step down in late 2022, blaming him for bad economic management. People were frustrated that the then-president, Mr. Akufo-Addo, did not do anything about these calls. Eugene Boakye Antwi, a former NPP Deputy Minister, later said of the election loss: "Keeping Ken Ofori-Atta in office until February 2024 meant that we weren't listening to the people who voted for us, so we didn't deserve their votes" (Ghanaweb, 2024). This honest admission from someone in the NPP shows how the party's leaders seemed to ignore both public and internal concerns, which gave people the impression that they were arrogant and out of touch.

In short, the results of the 2024 parliamentary election can be considered the end of a trend of people becoming increasingly unhappy with the NPP government. This is a clear case of incumbency fatigue. The combination of the NPP's tenure in power, economic challenges, unresolved grievances, and the passage of time created a favorable environment that the opposition NDC successfully exploited. The subsequent section of this paper goes into more detail about how incumbency fatigue showed up in 2024 by examining the factors that led to the NPP's big drop in parliamentary support.

4.2 Manifestation of incumbency fatigue in the 2024 election

This section of the paper explains incumbency fatigue manifested in the 2024 elections and how it negatively affected the NPP's share of seats in parliament. The paper found that there is a connection between (a) long seat-holding, (b) national performance punishment, and (c) turnout-based protest. The 2024 election was interpreted as a national referendum on the performance of the ruling NPP. This interpretation is consistent with Ghana's "eight-year power alternation."

Regarding "Safe seats", incumbency fatigue does not necessarily occur because a party's supporters defected to the opposition. It occurs due to demobilization

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(apathy), intra-party dissatisfaction, and a reduced tolerance for complacency. This pattern is exactly what happened in the six regions (Greater Accra, Ashanti, Eastern, Western, Bono, and Central) that depressed the NPP's base turnout.

Table 2. List of Traditional NPP Seats Held for more than three Consecutive Terms by Region and lost in the 2024 election

Region	Constituency	Term	No. of Years
Ahafo	Asunafo North	2000-2024	24 years
	Asutifi North	2000-2024	24 years
Ashanti	Adansi Asokwa	2000-2024	24 years
	Ahafo Ano South East	2012-2024	12 years
	Akrofoam	2004-2024	20 years
	Asante Akim North	2012-2024	12 years
Bono	Berekum East	2000-2024	24 years
	Berekum West	2012-2024	12 years
	Dormaa Central	2000-2024	24 years
	Dormaa East	2000-2024	24 years
	Sunyani East	1996-2024	28 years
	Sunyani West	1996-2024	28 years
Central	Assin Central	2012-2024	12 years
	Awutu Senya East	2012-2024	12 years
	Upper West Denkyira East	2004-2024	20 years
Eastern	Akuapim South	2012-2024	12 years
	Lower West Akim	2000-2024	24 years
Greater Accra	Ablekuma North	1996-2024	28 years
	Ablekuma West	2012-2024	12 years
	Ayawaso Central	1996-2024	28 years
	Ayawaso West Wougou	2000-2024	20 years
	Dome/Kwabanya	2000-2024	20 years
	Okaikwei South	1996-2024	28 years
	Tema West	1996-2024	28 years
Western	Essikado-Ketan	2000-2024	20 years
	Kwesimintsim	2012-2024	12 years
	Mpohor	2012-2024	12 years
	Sekondi	1996-2024	28 years
	Tarkwa Nsuame	2000-2024	20 years
Western North	Biabiani-Anhwiaso Bekwai	2000-2024	20 years

Source: Author's own compilation based on election data.

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4.3 Conceptual framework

In this section, I developed the Ijon Seat-Level Mechanism of Incumbency Fatigue to explain how incumbency fatigue occurs. The paper explains incumbency fatigue as the connection between (a) long seat-holding, (b) national performance punishment, and (c) turnout-based protest. The 2024 election was interpreted as a national referendum on the ruling NPP's performance. This interpretation is consistent with Ghana's "eight-year power alternation."

Nationally, the 2024 election has been interpreted as a referendum on incumbent performance, consistent with Ghana's broader "eight-year alternation" trend, in which, after two terms, voters reassess incumbents on economic and governance outcomes. Within this context, incumbency fatigue in parliamentary "safe" seats often manifests less as mass defection to the opposition and more as demobilization (apathy), intra-party dissatisfaction, and reduced tolerance for complacency. This pattern is explicitly linked to the outcomes in six regions (Greater Accra, Ashanti, Eastern, Western, Bono, and Central) that depressed the NPP's base turnout.

Ijon Seat-Level Mechanism of Incumbency Fatigue (Figure)

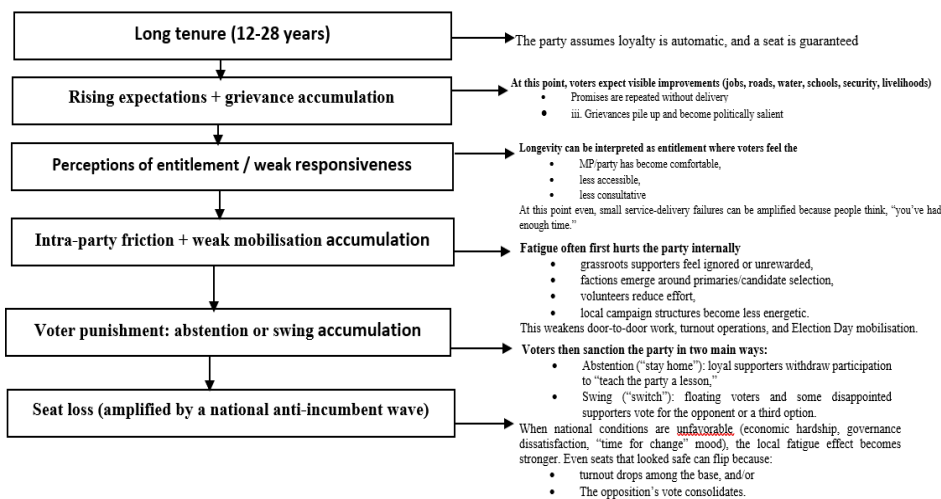


Figure 1. Ijon Seat – level mechanism of incumbency fatigue

Source: Own processing.

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Using the "No. of Years" column on Table 2 above, the long-held seats can be grouped into four vulnerability tiers. The typologies of seat tenure have also been developed to reinforce the seat-level mechanism above. The typologies explain the levels of vulnerability that a party/candidate faces as they hold a seat for more than three terms. These tiers explain the level of vulnerability and how it affects the chances of a party retaining its seats. The vulnerability tiers simply argue that the longer a party/candidate holds onto a seat, the more vulnerable the seat becomes as a result of incumbency fatigue.

Table 3. Seat-Tenure Typology: Vulnerability Tiers (12 / 20 / 24 / 28 Years)

Tier	Years held	Approx. terms	Label	What it implies for vulnerability (summary)
Type 1	12 years	≈3 terms	Recent entrenchment, early fatigue	Vulnerable when national conditions turn sharply negative; mobilisation can collapse quickly, especially if local performance signals are mixed.
Type 2	20 years	≈5 terms	Entrenched, higher complacency risk	Long exposure to one party's brand increases accumulated grievances; stronger "time for change" sentiment under national stress.
Type 3	24 years	≈6 terms	Deep entrenchment, grievance saturation	Structurally vulnerable once turnout dips; even modest abstention among loyalists can flip outcomes in competitive parliamentary contests.
Type 4	28 years	≈7 terms	Foundational strongholds, high expectations	Symbolic party ownership; when these seats fall, it often signals severe legitimacy loss or urban/swing realignment beyond candidate factors.

Note: The tiers are derived from the "No. of Years" column and describe increasing vulnerability risks associated with prolonged seat-holding.

4.4 Regional discussion (only constituencies in the table)

Ahafo

Asunafo North and Asutifi North (both 24 years) show "deep entrenchment" exposure. After six terms, voters in these constituencies are more likely to view unfulfilled promises and unmet local expectations as neglect. Fatigue can lead to abstention or a change in voting if this feeling, in addition to a national anti-incumbent climate, is present.

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Ashanti

The Ashanti Region is the traditional stronghold of the NPP, and the majority of the seats the party holds are from there. The region witnessed a drop in voter turnout and demobilization, which has been viewed as a contributory factor to the NPP's defeat. From Table 2 above, Adansi Asokwa (24), Ahafo Ano South East (12), Akrofoom (20), and Asante Akim North (12) seats were all lost, which many attributed to the perception held by some constituents that they had been "taken for granted." When there is the feeling of being "taken for granted", even "recent entrenchment" (12-year) seats can be lost because incumbency fatigue works through base abstention, and not necessarily mass switching.

Bono

Berekum East (24), Berekum West (12), Dormaa Central (24), Dormaa East (24), Sunyani East (28), and Sunyani West (28) have served as traditional seats for the NPP, which have been held for long terms. Bono is one of the six regions where the NPP and its leaders argued that voter apathy was very high and contributed to its abysmal performance. When a party holds seats for a long time (28 years), fatigue is made worse by high expectations and "it's time" stories that become believable when people are unhappy with the government and the state of the economy.

Central

The region where Assin Central (12), Awutu Senya East (12), and Upper West Denkyira East (20) are located is expected to swing comfortably against the incumbent in 2024. In swing regions, incumbency fatigue is especially strong because party identity is weaker and local dissatisfaction is more likely to turn into opposition votes. This means that seats that have been held for a long time (20 years) are even more vulnerable.

Eastern

In the eastern part of the country, Akuapim South (12) and Lower West Akim (24) show both "early fatigue" and "deep entrenchment" in a stronghold area that still saw lower mobilization and weaker margins. When turnout drops, 24-year seats become less safe because incumbency fatigue makes it easier to withhold support as a punishment.

Greater Accra

In Greater Accra, the table shows Ablekuma North (28), Ablekuma West (12), Ayawaso Central (28), Ayawaso West Wuogon (20), Dome/Kwabanya (20), Okaikwei South (28), and Tema West (28). Greater Accra is said to be swinging decisively because of the high cost of living in cities, high youth unemployment, and complaints about local services. This makes incumbency fatigue worse, especially

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in seats that have been held for a long time (28 years), and where the party brand is directly blamed for the frustrations that have built up.

Western and Western North

Essikado-Ketan (20), Kwesimintsim (12), Mpohor (12), Sekondi (28), and Tarkwa Nsuame (20) show how fatigue works in a region where people are expected to vote comfortably against the incumbent in 2024. In these situations, 12-year seats can change hands because national factors are more important. On the other hand, 20-28-year-olds have to deal with the extra burden of being accountable for "long stewardship" for local economic stressors and perceived underperformance. Biabiani-Anhwiaso Bekwai (20) is the "entrenched" tier in Western North. After five terms, incumbency fatigue can show up as less enthusiasm from the grassroots and more willingness to punish the ruling party, especially when nearby regions (like Western) swing strongly, and national stories of change are important.

4.5 Incumbency Fatigue and how it contributed to the defeat of the NPP in 2024

The idea of incumbency fatigue helps us understand why the NPP lost the 2024 elections by showing how several related factors worked together. The NPP's long time in power (2017–2024) caused a complicated mix of feelings among voters and strategic responses from both the public and the opposition. This discussion breaks down the signs of incumbency fatigue into five main areas: (1) loss of public trust and confidence; (2) demand for change and new leadership; (3) perceived lack of accountability and too much exposure among incumbents; (4) protest voting; and (5) opposition mobilization. All these factors made the NPP less appealing and helped the NDC win.

4.5.1 Loss of Public Confidence and Trust

A major cause of incumbency fatigue in Ghana's 2024 elections was the loss of faith and trust in the ruling party's representatives. By the end of the NPP's second term, many Ghanaians were unhappy with what they saw as broken promises, inefficiency, and cases of corruption or mismanagement by government officials. People's trust in MPs, which has always been low, seemed to reach new lows in areas where the NPP had been in power for decades. This lack of trust was not just about individual MPs; it was also about a general lack of faith in the NPP's leadership. Ojebode, Onyishi, and Aremu (2017) contend that an increasing disparity between constituents' expectations and their leaders' performance can undermine the democratic mandate.

In fact, in many places where the NPP had been in charge since 1996, voters stated that they felt taken for granted. Many of the current NPP MPs in these areas had become too comfortable, thinking their seats were "safe." Over time, these MPs often stopped being involved with their constituents, and people saw them as distant or

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self-serving. This dynamic corresponds with Stoker's (2006) assertion that when politicians seem indifferent to citizen needs, citizens start to doubt the significance of politics altogether. The NPP, the ruling party at the time, might have suffered more than the NDC in 2024 due to public anger.

People's scrutiny of their MPs grew as social media became more popular and people had easier access to information (Flinders, 2012). During the NPP's time in power, social media in Ghana was full of remarks about MPs' work, spending, and alleged wrongdoing. Incumbents who were struggling or were caught in scandals had a harder time avoiding criticism because they were always in the public eye. Warren (2004) states that corruption, or even the idea of it, can weaken the legitimacy of democracy.

By 2024, many Ghanaians thought that their MPs and government officials were no longer responsible to the people. They pointed to problems like the government's handling of COVID-19 funds, accusations of bribery in public contracts, and the fact that some constituencies had not seen any visible development, even though money had been set aside for it. Instead of being rewarded for their experience, many long-serving NPP MPs were met with voter doubt or even anger. People who did not trust the NPP's parliamentary candidates voted against them, which contributed to the party losing the election.

4.5.2 Demand for Change and Fresh Leadership

After eight years with the same party in power, many voters desire a change, go in a new direction, and see new leaders. In 2024, Ghanaian voters showed a strong desire for change and new leadership, which was a sign of incumbency fatigue. Younger voters and people in cities wanted change the most. The NPP's message of continuity ("four more years" to solidify its achievements) did not work in these areas. Instead, it seemed that people thought that their lives would only become better if the government changed.

This circumstance is similar to what happens in other democracies, where voters often want to change things up after two terms to "refresh" the political scene (Henn & Foard, 2014). Research on political representation (e.g., Pitkin, 1967; Fox & Lawless, 2014) indicates that voters often perceive younger or novice candidates as embodying innovation and heightened responsiveness, in contrast to seasoned politicians who are regarded as integral to the established order. The NDC in Ghana was able to use this feeling to its advantage by running many new candidates for parliament and talking about a generational renewal. People in constituencies who were tired of their long-term NPP MPs were in favor of new leaders. It is well known that many sitting MPs in Ghana's Parliament lose their party primaries or general

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elections every cycle. This data shows that voters are willing to replace their representatives often, and the elections in 2024 were no different.

The NPP faced not only opposition from NDC challengers but also, in some cases, from independent candidates or internal splits, where its members ran against official nominees. Voters in some traditional NPP areas who might normally never vote for the NDC chose to either stay home (further lowering turnout) or even vote for an independent/third-party candidate as a form of protest, effectively ousting the NPP incumbent. This underscores how the demand for change can even override partisan loyalty.

The "fresh faces" narrative was also amplified by the NDC's campaign. They made a point to inject new energy into governance and frequently reminded voters of the NPP government's failures, arguing that nothing would change unless leadership changed. As a result, constituencies that had been reliably NPP for decades, such as Ablekuma North and West, Adansi-Asokwa, Ayawaso Central, Berekum East and West, Dormaa Central, Okaikoi South, and Sunyani East and West, elected NDC MPs for the first time in the Fourth Republic, largely because the electorate wanted new representation after long periods of NPP dominance. While new leadership does not guarantee better performance, Fenno (1977) cautions against romanticizing newcomers, who may lack experience. The 2024 voters were willing to take that chance, having grown impatient with the status quo.

4.5.3 Accountability Fatigue and Overexposure of Incumbents

A further aspect of incumbency fatigue evident in 2024 was what might be termed accountability fatigue, which refers to the perception that long-serving officials had become insufficiently accountable to the people, coupled with the overexposure of the incumbent party's politicians. When the same party holds power in a constituency (or nationally) for an extended time, its leaders undergo far more public scrutiny and accumulate a record that can be used against them. Many Ghanaians believed that some NPP MPs and ministers, having served multiple terms, were no longer responsive to their constituents' needs by 2024. There was a feeling that these politicians had had "enough time to change our fortunes but failed to deliver," as was a common refrain in local radio discussions.

Voters finally turned against the NPP in places like Assin Central and Sunyani West, which the party had held since the 1990s. Interviews with voters in the media showed that many people were of the opinion that the NPP had had enough time to improve the living standards of the people, but had not done so. The situation is in line with Diamond's (2008) observation that when leaders hold on to power, they often put their own political survival ahead of serving the public, which makes voters less likely to believe any new promises. By the third or fourth election of seeing the same

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party's campaign messages, many Ghanaian voters became inured to the NPP's rhetoric. Overexposure of the NPP's top figures, President Akufo-Addo, Vice-President Bawumia (who was the NPP's 2024 presidential candidate), and other prominent ministers, meant that their public image suffered from every policy failure and scandal during the eight years. In contrast, the opposition's figures, having been out of power, lacked such baggage and were able to present themselves as a fresh start.

Another dimension of accountability relates to local governance. MPs in Ghana are often expected to bring tangible development (such as projects and jobs) to their constituencies. Long-serving NPP MPs faced heightened expectations in this regard. By 2024, if certain communities still lacked basic infrastructure or opportunities, constituents were less forgiving of an MP who had been in office for, say, 12 or 16 years. The "diminishing returns" on electoral promises (Lindberg, 2003) set in for the NPP. Voters no longer found new promises credible when past ones remained unfulfilled. Anecdotal reports in several constituencies indicate that constituents either sparsely attended campaign events for incumbent MPs or confronted them with hostile questions about unfulfilled commitments.

On the national stage, controversies such as perceived corruption in pandemic relief funds and the failure to curb illegal mining ("galamsey") despite promises eroded the NPP's moral authority. The cumulative effect was that by election day, a large portion of the electorate felt the NPP had run out of excuses and did not deserve yet another mandate. This punitive attitude is a classic symptom of incumbency fatigue: the longer a party stays, the more blame it accumulates for any problems, until even its loyal supporters may decide it is time to let the other side try.

4.5.4. Protest Voting and Electoral Backlash

When voters are dissatisfied with an incumbent party but have few institutional means to voice their grievances in between elections, they may resort to the ballot as a tool of protest. The 2024 election can be interpreted as a giant wave of protest voting against the NPP. People vote for the opposition not to elect them, but to punish the ruling party for poor performance or broken trust (Norris, 2004). In Ghana's 2024 case, many things made people angry enough to protest: the economy was bad (high unemployment, high inflation, and a falling currency), the government was corrupt (scandals, abuse of power, and human rights violations like the violent suppression of some protests), and policies were disappointing (for example, stalled infrastructure projects and unpopular tax measures like the e-levy on digital transactions). Each of these problems may have turned off different groups of voters,

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but together they made a large group of unhappy people. Protest voting had an effect in both traditional swing constituencies and the NPP's own strongholds.

In swing regions (areas that switch between NDC and NPP now and then), voters strongly supported the NDC in 2024, giving them seats that the NPP held onto in 2020 by large margins. This suggests that centrist or undecided voters used their vote to express disapproval of the incumbent's record. Even more striking was the incidence of protest voting in the NPP's strongholds, such as the Ashanti Region. Although the NPP still won the majority of seats in Ashanti (its stronghold), the NDC managed to pick up a few constituencies there that had been considered almost unwinnable for any party but the NPP. For example, the Adansi Asokwa and Akrofuom constituencies, nestled in the NPP's base, fell to the NDC in 2024.

Local studies indicate that these losses occurred because core NPP voters either stayed home or voted for someone else because they were unhappy with the manner in which the central government was running the country. When long-time supporters in a party's base area are so unhappy that they either do not vote or vote for the other party, it is a clear sign that incumbency fatigue has reached its peak. The ballot served as a means for people to express their disapproval of the NPP. In the end, the large number of protest votes in many constituencies led to the immense number of seat losses shown in Table 1. This occurrence corroborates Fridy's (2007) conclusions that Ghanaian partisanship, despite its robustness, can be "disaggregated" during adverse national circumstances, indicating that voters may not remain loyal to their party when experiencing profound dissatisfaction. Instead, they will defect in significant numbers to "quarrel" with their traditional choice, as happened in 2024.

4.4.5 Opposition Mobilization and Strategic Exploitation

Incumbency fatigue not only weakens the ruling party from the inside but also provides the opposition a chance to take advantage of it. In 2024, the NDC employed strategic methods to encourage voter turnout by capitalizing on the public's fatigue with the NPP. The opposition's campaign was all about change. It kept bringing up the NPP era's failures and scandals, which kept voters angry.

The NDC's presidential candidate and parliamentary hopefuls framed themselves as the answer to the NPP's shortcomings, promising relief from economic pain, restoration of accountability, and a "reset" for the country. The NDC deliberately targeted voters' weariness with this message. Essentially, the party positioned itself as the vehicle for the protest and desire for change discussed above. By doing so, the NDC transformed incumbency fatigue from a passive sentiment into an active voting choice for many Ghanaians.

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One notable aspect of the NDC's mobilization was its success in energizing its base while also reaching disillusioned NPP supporters. Reportedly, the NDC initiated unity efforts to reintegrate members who had become estranged or inactive. Meanwhile, the NPP was struggling with internal unity; some NPP grassroots members were demotivated by the government's performance and the party's candidate selection processes, leading to apathy or even covert support for opposition candidates in a few cases. The NDC used every weakness of the NPP to its advantage. For example, in areas where the NPP incumbent was considered unpopular or arrogant, the NDC campaigned hard at the community level, presenting themselves as humble and attentive alternatives.

The NDC also made strategic gains among young people and first-time voters by using the energy of social movements like #FixTheCountry and making its platform match the needs of these groups (jobs, anti-corruption measures, social justice). This is similar to what happened in the regional head elections in Indonesia, where parties and candidates used social media to target the youth who are key to determining who wins an election (Mulyadi et. al., 2025). The NDC had a ready-made campaign story because the NPP's economic problems made things worse. They argued that the election was a chance to save Ghana's economy from the NPP's shoddy management. This narrative resonated strongly amid high inflation and unemployment. In effect, incumbency fatigue gave the opposition both a potent message (It's time for a change) and a motivated audience (voters hungry to hear that message).

The results from 2024 show that the NDC was able to turn this feeling into votes, even in places where it usually could not. The fact that the opposition was able to win over constituencies in the NPP's traditional strongholds, which has never happened before in an election, shows that a well-organized opposition can use public fatigue to make significant gains. This trend is in line with what has been seen in other elections: when incumbents fail, opposition parties can become more enthusiastic and united, seeing the election as theirs to win (or the incumbents to lose). In 2024, incumbency fatigue both harmed the NPP and benefited the NDC, illustrating the dual nature of this phenomenon.

5. Discussions and Recommendations

The paper examines why the NPP's parliamentary fortunes collapsed so sharply in the 2024 elections and argues that incumbency fatigue provides a persuasive explanation, particularly because the outcome represented an unusually large anti-incumbent swing, including losses in constituencies the party had held for multiple

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terms. The findings show that the 2024 contest was widely interpreted as a referendum on incumbent performance, and that this "performance punishment" interacted with voter apathy and protest behaviour to weaken the NPP's parliamentary base.

A central insight is that incumbency fatigue in parliamentary "safe seats" did not always operate through mass defection to the opposition. Rather, it often manifested through demobilization, intra-party dissatisfaction, and a sharp decline in tolerance for complacency, especially in regions where the NPP's base turnout fell. This is consistent with democratic accountability arguments that voters become more demanding over time and punish incumbents when expectations are not met, but the paper adds an important Ghana-specific seat-level pathway: loyalists can "punish" the party simply by withholding enthusiasm and staying home, which can be decisive in parliamentary contests.

The paper's Seat-Level Mechanism of Incumbency Fatigue helps connect national performance evaluations to constituency outcomes by linking (a) long seat-holding, (b) national performance punishment, and (c) turnout-based protest. In this framing, long tenure raises expectations and accumulates grievances; when national conditions deteriorate (economy, governance controversies, elite responsiveness), fatigue deepens; and the electoral expression of fatigue frequently becomes lower turnout or protest voting rather than straightforward partisan switching.

A further contribution is the seat-tenure vulnerability typology (12/20/24/28 years), which clarifies why some "traditional" seats became structurally exposed once turnout dipped. Seats held for 24–28 years are treated as "deep entrenchment/foundational strongholds," where losses signal not only candidate problems but broader legitimacy erosion and urban/swing realignment pressures. The empirical narrative aligns this with observed losses across multiple regions and highlights that even "recent entrenchment" seats (12 years) can flip quickly under severe national stress.

Finally, the analysis shows that incumbency fatigue was multi-causal and cumulative. The paper identifies five reinforcing channels - loss of trust, demand for change, perceived accountability deficits, incumbent overexposure, protest voting, and effective opposition mobilization. These channels were amplified by contextual pressures noted in the results section (e.g., labour unrest, youth pressure, and governance dissatisfaction, and visible elite disagreements and responsiveness concerns), creating a political environment in which the opposition could convert anti-incumbent sentiment into parliamentary gains.

The paper recommends that incumbent parties and long-serving MPs institutionalise early-warning systems for detecting incumbency fatigue by tracking constituency

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turnout trends, narrowing victory margins, escalating primary competition, and signs of protest or apathy in traditional strongholds. Because fatigue often manifests through demobilisation rather than direct partisan switching, relying on election-day results alone is an inefficient and costly approach to identifying vulnerability. The paper further argues that incumbents should adopt measurable standards of constituency engagement, including regular town halls, constituency service charters, structured issue-tracking, and publicly reported follow-up on local concerns. Where prolonged tenure elevates citizens' expectations, representation must be continually demonstrated through visible responsiveness rather than assumed based on historical party loyalty.

In addition, when public perceptions shift toward complacency or non-responsiveness, parties should strengthen internal accountability through timely sanctions, performance-based leadership adjustments, and clearly communicated corrective policy actions, since "not listening" can become electorally decisive under fatigue conditions. For opposition parties, the paper recommends converting "change" messaging into credible governing alternatives by presenting coherent policy programmes, competent and locally credible candidates, and a disciplined accountability posture after victory. Finally, opposition mobilisation should be ethical and inclusive, prioritising issue-based outreach, youth engagement, and sustained community organising that expands participation rather than amplifying polarisation.

6. Conclusions

Ghana's 2024 parliamentary elections offer a clear case study of how incumbency fatigue can reshape parliamentary outcomes after prolonged rule. After eight years in office, the NPP and many long-serving MPs faced declining support amid economic hardship, governance concerns, and impatience with extended incumbency. Fatigue expressed itself through eroding trust, louder demands for change, apathy, and protest in former strongholds, and an opposition able to convert governing failures into mobilisation, producing a heavy NPP defeat.

These findings underscore two lessons. First, Ghanaian voters retain real sanctioning power: they can withdraw a mandate through constitutional means when responsiveness falters, reinforcing electoral accountability. Second, parties that seek durability must renew leadership, policy agendas, and constituency engagement, and act on early warning signals with credible accountability and timely reforms rather than late, symbolic adjustments. The NPP's corrections came late and failed to convince voters that hardship and impunity would be addressed.

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The main contribution of the paper is to operationalise incumbency fatigue at the seat level, combining a mechanism-based explanation with a tenure-vulnerability typology for research and early warning. It advances theory-building by specifying a Seat-Level Mechanism of Incumbency Fatigue linking long tenure, national punishment, and turnout-based protest to explain vulnerability through demobilisation rather than simple partisan switching. The Ghana case applies to other competitive, multi-party democracies with stronghold politics and term-limited executives, where "safe" seats can also become fragile via demobilisation and protest. Methodologically, the study is constrained by reliance on electoral returns and qualitative interpretation, which limits causal claims and the separation of national shocks from constituency dynamics. For the law community, the analysis shows how electoral accountability interacts with constitutional governance, informing debates on representation, political rights, and integrity-enhancing reforms.

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