

MPs' ABSENTEEISM REPORT

First & Second Meetings of the
Seventh Parliament, 2017

18 December, 2017

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Introduction

The Parliament of Ghana from 1960 has had both failures and successes. The first three Parliaments (1960-1966; 1969-1970; 1979-1981) failed as a result of military takeovers. What remains the most successful of all parliamentary democracies in Ghana's history is the Fourth Republic (1993 – to date).

Though Ghana practices a multi-party democracy, what we have seen over the years is domination of the Executive and Legislative arms of government by the two main political parties – the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP). The NDC had majority seats in the first, second, fifth and sixth Parliaments whereas the NPP had/have the majority in the third, fourth and the current (seventh) Parliament. In the second Parliament (1997 – 2001), the NDC was able to have majority seats through a coalition with the Eagle party and the Democratic People's Party. The NPP fashioned a working majority in the fifth Parliament by co-opting independent MPs and those from the People's National Convention (PNC) and Convention People's Party (CPP).

Prior to the sixth and current Parliaments, Ghana lacked a rigorous, empowering, bipartisan, objective and citizen-responsive instrument to assess the performance of MPs and Parliament. Subsequent to our comprehensive report on the sixth Parliament of the Fourth Republic, this absenteeism report is one of many social accountability tools Odekro is using to make MPs accountable and ensure their steadfast devotion to the 1992 Constitution of Ghana and Standing Orders of Parliament.

Why is the absenteeism report important?

Regular attendance of MPs to parliament is critical to the functioning of government on at least two important counts. First, it is crucial for the effective representation of citizens during public debates and decision-making - a fundamental tenet of our democracy. Second, it ensures the efficiency of our governance processes. Before parliament can commence business, the 1992 Constitution requires that one third of MPs (92 of the 275) are present. Thus, the lack of quorum brings to a halt government business and may delay or [even rush](#) the consideration or passage of crucial bills. For instance, on Wednesday 25th November, 2015 Parliament was [forced to postpone its debate on the 2016 budget](#) because the quorum had not been reached.

Yet, MPs may be absent from parliamentary meetings for other reasons aside party primaries. For example, MPs may be absent when Parliament [sends them on an official mission](#). They may also be conducting other equally important duties as parliamentarians such as providing constituency service to their constituents. Lastly, MPs may be absent when they are sick or ill. However, MPs sometimes simply abandon their parliamentary duties to undertake personal business. The last point represents a leakage on the public purse.

MPs must seek permission from the Speaker in order to absent themselves from Parliament during any day of meeting (Article 97(1c)). The Parliamentary “Order Papers” and “Votes and Proceedings” record the attendance status of all Members of Parliament for each parliamentary , and meeting. For each meeting, an MP may be present, absent with permission or absent without permission.

Against this backdrop, chronic absenteeism affects quality of representation during debates and decision-making, and result in inefficiencies in the transaction of Parliamentary business. The most critical aspect of chronic absenteeism particularly without written permission of the Speaker is a violation of Article 97(1)(c) of the 1992 constitution of Ghana.

This short report examines the attendance records of MPs for the first (48) and second (37) meetings of the first session of the Seventh Parliament representing 85 sittings showing important trends in MPs' absenteeism in relation to variables (gender, age, ministerial status, party affiliation, term-in-office and electoral competition) that may influence attendance rate of MPs.

Analysis

Gender

It is common knowledge throughout the Fourth Republic that there has always been a disproportionate gender representation in parliament. Parliamentary records show that women have consistently remained comparatively very few. The record for the number of women elected in any single general election has been as low as 15 MPs out of 230 during the fifth parliament, to a record number of 37 MPs out of 275 under the current seventh parliament.

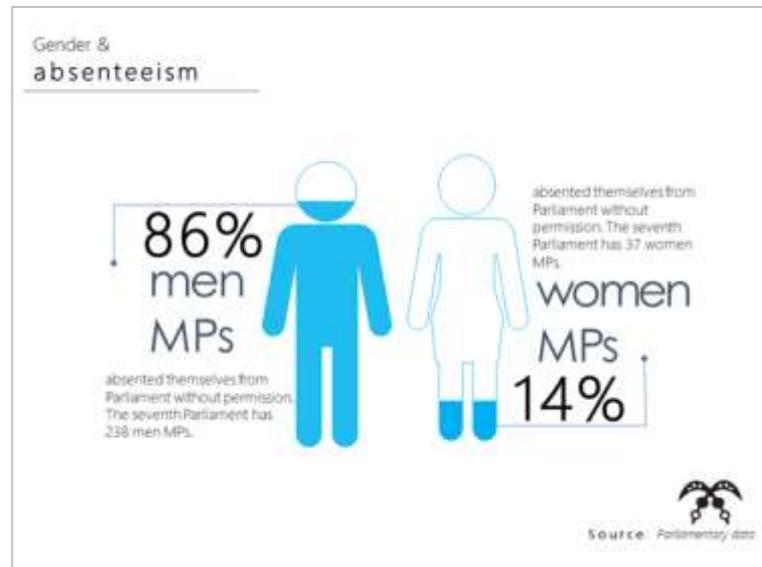


Figure 1 Gender distribution of absenteeism

Against the backdrop that women MPs are nearly one-eighth of the total number of MPs, relating the absenteeism data to the constitutional provision of Article 97(1)(c) shows that women are, on average, 14% likely to be absent from sitting without a written permission to the Speaker for 15 sittings and more, compared to men MPs who are six times (86%) more likely to be absent without a written permission for 15 sittings and more: (women = 11, men = 68). Figure 1 represents the distribution of absenteeism according to gender.

In an inter-party analysis, significant intra-gender differences show that women MPs belonging to the majority NPP have a 10% higher tendency to be absent without a written permission for 15 sittings and more than women MPs from the minority NDC (NPP = 8, that is, 33% ; NDC = 3, that is, 23%). Similarly, the men MPs belonging to the majority NPP are nearly twice more likely to be absent without a written permission for 15 sittings and more than men MPs from the minority NDC (NPP = 49, representing 34% ; NDC 19, representing 20%).

Age

The composition of the seventh parliament in terms of age shows that the majority are 36 - 50 years (n = 139, representing 50.55%). However, the analysis shows that MPs who are 51 - 65 years of age (n = 115; 41.82%) are the most likely to be absent without a written permission for 15 sittings and more (n = 45 or 56.9%). This figure outnumbers

MPs within the 36 - 50 age category (n = 30

or 37.9%). Only 2 which represents 2.6 percent of MPs who are either aged 24 - 35 years or aged 66 years and above were absent without a written permission for 15 sittings and more. The youngest MP is NPP newcomer Miss Francisca Oteng Mensah aged 24 years, while the oldest is NPP veteran MP Kwabena Appiah-Pinkrah aged 70 years. Both the NDC and the NPP elected the highest number of MPs in their 30s and 40s (n = 63 and 87 respectively).

The age group pattern by gender shows interesting variations. No woman MP in this current seventh parliament is aged 66 years, but nine (9) male MPs were 66 years or above.. The highest concentration of women MPs (n = 18) and men MPs (n =121) are within the 36 - 50 age category. Each gender within this category was more absent without a written permission for 15 sittings and more (women = 4 or 22 per cent: men = 26 or 21 per cent).

Ministerial Status

From a total of 110 Ministers and Deputy Ministers, President Nana Addo-Dankwa Akufo Addo appointed 71 from Parliament representing slightly more than a quarter (25%) of the entire membership of Parliament (n=275). In the first and second meetings of Parliament (January-August 2017; 85 sittings), 25 MP-Ministers absented themselves (without permission) from 27 sittings, representing an

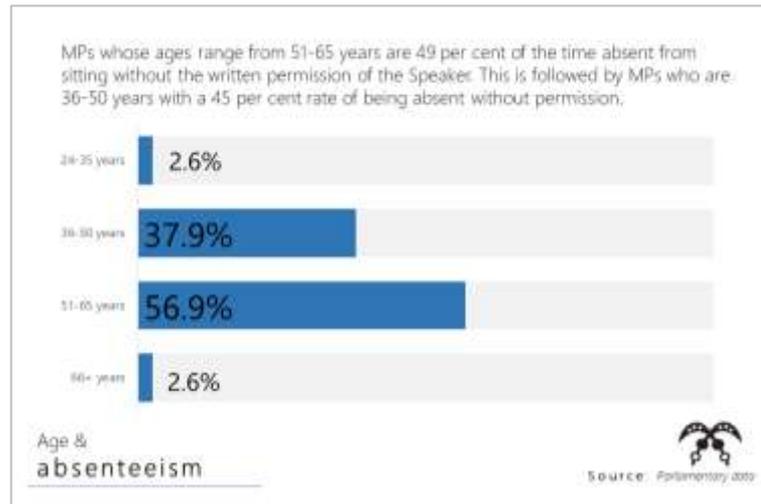


Figure 2 Age distribution of absenteeism



Figure 3 Ministerial Status & absenteeism

average of 65%, nearly twice more than their deputies (35%; n=46). Eighteen (18) out of the 25 MP-Ministers and 21 out of the 46 MP-Deputy Ministers absented themselves from more than 15 sittings representing 72% and 46% respectively.

Yet no significant difference was observed between MP-Ministers and MP-Deputy Ministers in absenteeism with permission (former, 2.7%; latter, 2.2%).

Thirty-nine (39) MPs comprising 18 Ministers and 21 Deputy Ministers violated article 97 (1) (c), that is, they absented themselves from 15 sittings and over without permission of the Speaker of Parliament.

Article 97(c) Violators; MP-Ministers and Deputy Ministers who absented themselves from 15 sittings and over without permission of the Speaker

MP-Minister	Constituency	Sector/Region
Awuah, Ignatius Baffour	Sunyani West	Employment and Social Welfare
Afeku, Catherine Abelema	Evaluate Ajomoro Gwira	Tourism, Culture and Creative Arts
Afriyie, Kwaku	Sefwi-Wiawso	Western Region
Agyeman-Manu, Kwaku	Dormaa Central	Health
Botchwey, Shirley Ayorkor (Ms)	Anyaa/Sowutuom	Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration
Darfour, Eric Kwakye	Nkawkaw	Eastern Region
Prempeh, Matthew Opoku (Dr)	Manhyia South	Education
Owusu-Ekuful, Ursula G (Mrs)	Ablekuma West	Communications
Quaye, Elizabeth Afoley	Krowor	Fisheries & Aquaculture
Akyea, Samuel Atta	Abuakwa South	Works & Housing
Botwe, Daniel	Okere	Regional Reorganization and Development
Ghartey, Joe	Esikado/Tekan	Railways Development
Gyan-Baffuor, George Yaw (Prof)	Wenchi	Planning
Prempeh, Freda Akosua (Ms)	Tano North	Works and Housing (DM)
Ntim, Augustine Collins	Offinso North	Local Government and Rural Development (DM)
Oteng-Gyasi, Barbara	Prestea/Huni-Valley	Lands and Natural Resources (DM)
Aboagye-Gyedu, Kingsley	Bibiani-Anhwiaso-Bekwai	Health (DM)

Mohammad Habibu Tijani	Yendi	Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration (DM)
Kwarteng Kwaku Agyeman	Obuasi West	Finance (DM)
Cudjoe Joseph	Effia	Energy (DM)
Oduro George Boahen	New Edubiase	Agriculture (DM)
Quaitoo William Agyapong	Akim Oda	Agriculture (DM)
Darko-Mensah Kwabena Okyere	Takoradi	Aviation (DM)
Paul Essien	Jomoro	Chieftaincy & Religious Affairs (DM)
Joseph Tetteh	Upper Manya Krobo	Eastern region (DM)
William Aidoo Owuraku	Afigya Kwabre South	Energy (DM)
Francis Kingsley Ato Codjoe	Ekumfi	Fisheries and Aquaculture (DM)
Gifty Twum-Ampofo	Abuakwa North	Gender, Children and Social Protection (DM)
Kingsley Aboagye-Gyedu	Bibiani-Anhwiaso-Bekwai	Health (DM)
Tina Gifty Naa Ayeley Mensah	Weija Gbawe	Health (DM)
Benito Owusu-Bio	Atwima-Nwabiagya North	Lands and Natural Resources (DM)
William Kwasi Sabi	Dormaa East	Monitoring and Evaluation (DM)
Solomon Namliit Boar	Bunkpurugu	Northern region (DM)
Kwaku Agyenim-Boateng	Berekum West	Railways Development (DM)
Kingsley Carlos Ahenkorah	Tema West	Trade and Industry (DM)
Dominic Bingab Aduna Nitiwul	Bimbilla	Defense
Dery Ambrose	Nandom	Interior
Amoako-Attah Kwasi	Atiwa West	Roads and Highways
Joseph Kofi Adda	Navrongo Central	Water Resources and Sanitation

Source: Parliamentary Data for first and second meetings

Party Affiliation

Ghana practices a multi-party system. This system permits all twenty-four registered political parties across the political spectrum in the country to take part in every general election. However, the data shows that compared to any of the previous Parliaments under the Fourth Republic of Ghana, only the two dominant political parties, the ruling New Patriotic Party and the largest opposition, the National Democratic Congress, are represented in the Seventh Parliament. The NPP elected 168 MPs which represents 61% while the NDC elected 107 MPs which represents 39 per cent.

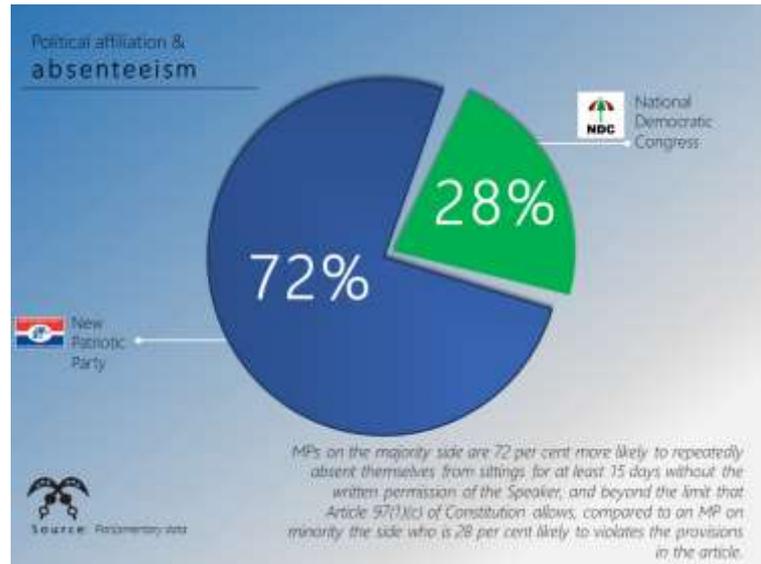


Figure 4 Political party distribution of absenteeism

The analysis of data between MPs per party and parliamentary attendance shows that 28 NDC MPs (28%) were absent from sitting for at least 15 days without a written permission to the Speaker, beyond the limit that Article 97(1)(c) of Constitution allows. NPP MPs were nearly three times absent without a written permission for 15 sittings and more (n = 57 or 72%).

The party absenteeism pattern by age shows that NPP MPs aged 51 - 65 years were the most absent without a written permission for 15 sittings and more (n = 34 or 43 per cent), three times more than the NDC MPs (n = 11 or 14 per cent). This pattern slightly changes over the 24 - 35 age category (NDC = 25 per cent; NPP = 12.5 per cent) who were most absent without a written permission for 15 sittings and more.

Term in Office

The Seventh Parliament had a near balance between the number of MPs serving multiple terms (n=139) and new MPs (n=136).

MPs serving multiple terms absented themselves from 15 sittings, representing 63% without permission of the Speaker, almost nearly crossing the constitutional threshold but numerically above their new counterparts (9 sittings; 37%).

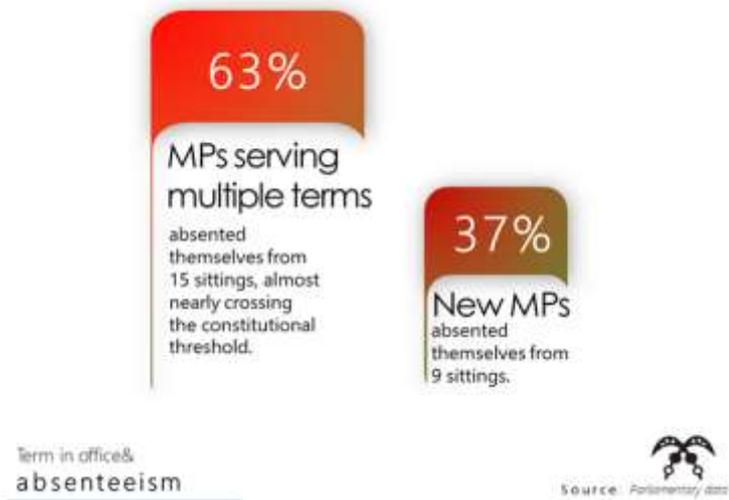


Figure 5 Term in office and absenteeism

Electoral Competition

We explored the likelihood of MPs who contested in highly competitive constituencies and thus with low margins of victory, absenting themselves more so as to engage in constituency work for reelection. However, we did not observe any significant difference between high and low margins of victory. MPs from constituencies with low margins (<50%) were absent without permission about 49% of the time, three percent higher than those with high margins of victory (>50% but <80%).

Margin of victory (%)	Absenteeism rate (%)
<10	12.03
<20	12.9
<30	15.2
<40	9
<50	13
<60	14.5
<70	8.5
<80	9.8

Source: Parliamentary data

Conclusion & Recommendations

There has never been an occasion where MPs in breach of Article 97(1)(c) have been summoned before the Privileges Committee of Parliament to explain their chronic absenteeism without written permission of the Speaker and asked to vacate their seats upon failure to provide plausible reasons. Perhaps this lack of precedence has encouraged impunity among some MPs.

The high rate of absenteeism particularly among MPs who double as substantive Ministers of State is a major concern. Earlier this year, the Selection Committee of Parliament had to recompose the leadership of committees on the basis that “the situation where sector Ministers superintend their oversight committees of the House (Parliament) is at variance with best practice and indeed the conventions of the House.” This suggested a complete disregard of institutional effectiveness of Parliament in the executive’s decision to appoint Ministers. Also, in our press release of 16 July 2017 captioned “**The fallout from Nana Addo’s appointment of 110 Ministers continues to undermine Parliament**”, Odekro indicated that the Selection Committee cherry picked problems and only ‘plucked the low hanging fruit’ in terms of reconfiguring committee leadership, but failed to consider the equally important subject of chronic absenteeism. Besides, the separating line between the executive and legislative arms of government is blurred as the President is empowered to appoint majority of Ministers from Parliament as enshrined Article 78 (1) of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana, which states “*Ministers of State shall be appointed by the President with the prior approval of Parliament from among members of Parliament or persons qualified to be elected as members of Parliament, except that the majority of Ministers of State shall be appointed from among members of Parliament*”.

In light of these observations, going forward, Odekro will like to recommend the following:

Punitive measures

1. The Honorable Speaker of Parliament Professor Mike Oquaye should task the Privileges Committee of Parliament to summon MPs who have been absent from 15 parliament sittings and beyond without written permission of the Speaker, to inquire into reasons for their absenteeism in line with Article 97(1)(c) of the 1992

Constitution of Ghana. This committee inquiry should be open to the general public by default.

2. MPs found to have no reasonable excuse to be absent without written permission from 15 sittings and beyond should be asked to vacate their seats in line with Article 97(1)(c) of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana.

Reformative measures

1. Automation of the process of requesting for permission to be absent. The current process whereby MPs have to manually fill out the “Leave of Absence” can be ineffective in some respects. There are occasional urgent emergencies MPs have to respond to in their respective constituencies which might make it impossible for an MP to come to Parliament and file an official request to be absent. This will broaden avenues of seeking the explicit permission of the Speaker in writing to be absent.
2. MPs who have sought permission in writing of the Speaker should have duplicate copies of approved “Leaves of absence”. This is to draw a distinction between approved and unapproved leaves of absence.
3. The threshold of absenteeism (15 sittings) upon which Statutory implications might arise as preserved in the Constitution is too high. For a serious institution like Parliament, the second arm of government, absence from seven (7) sittings of a meeting without written permission of the Speaker should attract sanctions.
4. Finally, we have to reexamine the impact of Article 78(1) on the effectiveness of Parliament’s oversight of the executive arm of government.

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