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Member of the Parliament of Ghana: a hybrid institution with mixed effects

Staffan I. Lindberg*

Institutions matter because of the way they constrain actors' choices and thereby influence the attainment of preferred collective outcomes. This paper seeks to establish the composition of a key political institution in one African country, the office of Member of Parliament in Ghana. Consideration is given to both the formal rules and the informal norms which constitute the institution. An interview-based study carried out in 2008 is used to explore both the composition of the institution and its relationship to how actors behave, i.e. what the office holders provide in terms of public, collective, club, and private goods.

1 Introduction

The concept of political institutions has been the subject of considerable debate. Contemporary institutionalism in comparative politics, underpinned by a rational actor-perspective, can be traced back to a few seminal works. Arrow's (1951) and Downs' (1957) early studies contributed by explicating the assumption that structured individual choice can be thought of in terms of institutions, and by provoking a critique that spurred further work on the importance of the institutional context. Olsen's influential (1965) study on the problems of collective action in the face of a constant tendency for individuals to become free riders not only pointed to the need for institutions but also opened up the agenda of investigating their effects. With the right incentives, provided by rules and regulations shaping the expectations among individuals with regard to other's behavior, preferred collective outcomes can be achieved.

More recently, understanding the outcomes of games or processes, given a certain set of institutions, has been developed by scholars such as Neumann and Morgenstern (1994), North (1990) and March and Olsen (1989) (cf. Munck, 2001). From deductive models and games such as the famous 'Prisoner's Dilemma' (Axelrod, 1984), to empirical process tracing and historical analyses, it has been shown how institutions in important ways constrain actors' capabilities and choices (e.g. Bates, 1989; Moe, 1990). While actors can be thought of as self-reflexive individuals in a social context with abilities to discern and decide on their own preferred actions, choice is always conditioned. Institutional theory has therefore revolved around the ways and means by which a set of formal or informal rules structures such choices.

A crucial determinant of individual action within an institution is the nature of the constraints and conditions imposed by the composition of the rules and norms of the institution. The rules can be both formal and informal. This paper is concerned with a key institution in one African country, the office of Member of the Parliament of Ghana (hereafter MPG). While we know much about the formal rules of the office of the MPG, the present study seeks to establish the informal norms that also constitute the MPG as an institution. It was undertaken as a first study for an ongoing research stream on parliamentarians within the Africa Power and Politics Programme.

There is a long tradition in comparative politics of studying the origin and shape of institutions such as electoral systems, constitutional design, and agenda control. One strand has focused on the role of institutions in aggregating preferences. Another strategy has been

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to study the role of institutions in coordinating behavior that in turn generate patterns of political behavior that are self-reinforcing (Carey, 2000: 736-39). This structuring of choice is done both by defining actors (e.g. as elected members occupying the office of Member of the Parliament of Ghana) and providing incentives for some actions rather than others (e.g. to provide personalized patronage rather than high-quality legislative instruments); these form the constitutive and regulatory aspects of institutions. Cox's (1997) work on strategic electoral behavior and party system realignments as tipping equilibria; Ordershook's (1992) and Weingast's (1997) work on constitutions as expectations among political actors; and Vanberg's (1998) study of how constitutional courts constitute and coordinate citizens' beliefs, exemplify how institutions can be self-reinforcing while having multiple equilibria (Carey, 2000: 745-46). These and other studies in the genre also show how key political institutions contribute both to constituting actors and to structuring their incentives, beliefs, and expectations.

These are important references for a study of the MPG. We need to be concerned both with the way the institution contributes to shaping the actors (individuals elected as MPs) and with the way it conditions their preferences and actions. This is not to suggest a return to crude functionalism in the sense of Ridley's (1975) suggestion that designing a house is to determine who will inhabit that house and what they might do in there. But there is certainly a lot of suggestive evidence in the institutionalist literature that the initial conditions in terms of constitutive and regulative rules envisaged by institutions constrain and enable the choice of behavior among particular individuals.

This study seeks to establish the *de facto* composition of the institution of the MPG by assessing the various forms of accountability which parliamentarians face, and have to manage, when they inhabit the institution of MPG. On the one hand, holding this office is a position which comes with *formal* duties regarding legislation, executive oversight, and constituency representation and service. In theory, democratically elected office holders should be held accountable by voters for their performance of such formal democratic duties.

On the other hand there are *de facto informal* duties with which the MPG office is associated, as well as the *informal meanings* attached to the formal duties of the MPG. The descriptive aim of the present study is thus to explore the different forms of formal and informal accountability which have come to *constitute* the office of MPG, making it a hybrid institution. The analytic aim is to show how the pressures for these various forms of accountability affect the behavior of the person holding the office of MPG, and thus affect the variation in provision of public, 'semi-public' collective and club goods, as well as private goods (e.g. Kitschelt and Wilkinson, eds. 2007; Olsen, 1965).

To achieve this, the paper first briefly discusses the four main categories of duties that could be expected from an MPG office holder, before seeking to map out empirically the various formal and informal forms of accountability that Members of Parliament (MPs) face from constituents, their party, chiefs, business and civil society. It then asks, how do members act and prioritize the various forms of accountability and why? And finally, how does it affect their behavior in terms of their functioning as policy-makers, legislators, controllers of the executive, and providers of 'club' goods through constituency service?

2 Four categories of duties and accountability

In order to clarify the main assumptions on which the empirical analysis that follows is based, a few distinctions should be made. First, the main focus is on variations in the provision of public and semi-public collective and club goods, as against private goods, by holders of the elected office MPG. 'Pure' public goods are non-excludable, non-divisible goods that because of their nature can be expected to be undersupplied by private market forces. Public goods are

in modern societies typically valence issues, i.e. exhibit popular preference highly skewed toward the extreme, hence politicians do not compete over whether to provide them or not, but rather on making credible claims that they have the capacity to deliver such goods (Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007: 11). Collective goods are ‘impure’ public goods that are excludable in the sense that they can be directed towards a particular collective, but are non-divisible within that group.

Club goods are a form of impure public goods in which shared goods are provided and used by a ‘club’ of some sort, whether functional such as unions or small and local such as a village community. They may come in many forms but are excludable and typically are also partially rivals in the sense of being subject to crowding – increased use by members of the club results in interference or signal delays. For example, if an MPG office-holder constructs a market space for a small community and everyone wants to use it to sell their goods on Saturdays, the space for each market woman may be so small that it defeats its purpose. Clubs can regulate such problems, however, by for example imposing a fee for market space and thus those with stronger preferences (or economic strength) for using the market can use it more frequently (e.g. Tiebout, 1956; Buchanan, 1965; Sandler, 2001: 65-67). Private goods are those goods that are excludable down to the level of the individual and, hence, divisible along the same lines.

With regard to elected representatives in a legislature, there is a potentially long list of activities that may be undertaken in pursuit of public or private goods. For representatives elected democratically in single-member districts, such as in Ghana, one can generally divide the range of possible duties into four categories:

1. *Legislation*: This area is typically assumed to be mainly concerned with providing relatively pure public goods (general laws). In practice, there is great variation if we look at the content of various bills enacted. However, the legislative activity as such is a pure public good. If it is carried out, every citizen ‘enjoys’ it and its ‘consumption’ by one individual diminishes neither the quantity nor the value of this good for another citizen. It is also a ‘lumpy’ public good: it is typically provided in big lumps (cf. Taylor and Ward, 1982) rather than in incremental portions. Activity on the floor of the house as well as in committees requires a minimum number of members present; before that is achieved no public good is provided but once the threshold is reached there can in principle be a full provision in terms of legislative activity.
2. *Executive oversight*: This is another area typically thought to provide a relatively pure public good by its very function as such, but as in the area of legislation, each activity carried out as oversight can be oriented towards more or less ‘impure’ goods. Oversight pertaining to particular constituents for a set of boreholes, a school building, and the like produces relatively small club goods. Yet, oversight can also be used to follow up on individual cases of constituents and these are more ambiguous. If based on a reasonable and legitimate assumption of wrong-doing on the part of a state institution (e.g. unlawful arrest), the outcome is still a public good in terms of making the state institution perform its function more appropriately and in accordance with the laws – even if it simultaneously produces a private good for the individual citizen. If, on the other hand, oversight rights conferred upon holders of the office of MPG are used to influence state institutions (police, courts, etc.) in illicit ways, it produces a private good and undermines the production of the public good and the functioning of the state.
3. *Constituency representation*: This is typically considered a legitimate ‘club good’ in terms of representing and voicing the concerns, problems and challenges of that particular area of the country and its people on the national political scene.

Ultimately, this function should inform and impact on legislation as well as oversight. Naturally, it can become a more impure, i.e. smaller, club good, if and when a member of the legislature performs this function only for a restricted group of constituents.

4. *Constituency service*: This can be either provision of public club goods that again vary with the nature of the service, or it can be concerned with purely private goods. When legislators are entrusted with some form of local development fund, as in for example Ghana and Kenya, this is typically not enough for any large scale community development projects. The public goods become small-scale, club goods such as roofing sheets for a school, a few scholarships which students can apply for, a few community toilets, a few electrical poles to facilitate electrification, and so on. When the MP is successful in lobbying the government to allocate resources for development projects in his or her particular constituency, the goods are typically the larger type of club goods such as roads or schools. But in many settings in the development world, MPs also produce a series of private goods: personal assistance and benefits for individual constituents, chiefs, and/or local party activists.

In short, the office holder (MP) may provide various types of goods – public, collective, club, and private – within four main categories of duty. We are interested here in exploring that variation because it tells us the *de facto* composition of the institution. We are particularly interested in the question of *which* of the various formal and informal duties of the MPG institution constituents and other actors hold office holders accountable for. By looking at the combination of formal and informal duties elected representatives are held accountable for, we can establish the ‘real’ hybridized nature of the MPG institution. The formal rules and duties are a natural part of the institution but it is also more than those only, and includes the regularized expectations that have become institutionalized as reoccurring patterns of accountability relationships expected by society from any holder of the MPG.

There are of course non-democratic, as well as democratic types and mechanisms of accountability (cf. Grant and Keohane, 2005). It is for this reason that the study asks not only about constituents but also about other actors’ possible abilities to exert influence over elected representatives and even shape the nature of the office of the MPG. At a general level, there seems to be widespread agreement on the four defining characteristics of all types of accountability.¹

1. An agent or institution who is to give an account (A for agent);
2. an area, responsibilities, or domain subject to accountability (D for domain);
3. an agent or institution to whom A is to give account (P for principal);
4. the right of P to require A to inform and explain/justify decisions with regard to D; and
5. the right of P to sanction A if A fails to inform and/or explain/justify decisions with regard to D.

These defining characteristics may be expressed in various ways,² but they seem to capture the core of the concept. It should be noted at the outset that none of these conditions specify that these relationships have to be formally codified, that the agents in question hold an official office or that the institutions involved are formal ones. Even if the individuals are indeed office holders such as MPs, their accountability relationship may be in part or wholly informal. Accountability relations can thus be fruitfully thought of as a principal-agent relationship. A principal (here citizens) transfers some authority to act and make decisions on its behalf, to an agent (here the office of MPG) occupied by a specific individual. According

¹ For an elaborate discussion of accountability, see Lindberg (2009a).

² For very similar reasoning, see Philip (2009).

to this approach, the individual MP can only act accordingly when empowered by virtue of being in that office. The authority conferred on the individual MP is in the legal sense owned by the office, not the individual, and the office holder can be sanctioned (e.g. in elections) and removed from the office. The principal has the legal and *de facto* power to judge the individual MPs' performance as office holder on whatever basis they find important, and ultimately remove the individual from the office.³ Making such judgments implies some way of benchmarking the MP against some set of standards, norms and rules.⁴

Such standards can be used as indicators of how the office of MPG is composed in terms of the formal and informal rules. The formal regulations of the office of MPG set standards of certain expected actions in terms of legislation and other business. But the principal (primarily constituents) may well use additional standards beyond the formal ones when making their judgments. These standards (or what holders of MPG are held accountable *for*) are exactly what interests us here: what are they, which ones are weighted more heavily in making the overall judgment, and has the situation changed significantly over the past few years? What are the effects of such standards on the behavior of the officeholder – the MP – in terms of provision of private, club, and public goods? In short, the principals may hold the individual MP accountable for some things more than others, and such accountability pressures in all likelihood have effects.

3 The institution and the provision of goods

The institution in focus in the present study is the office of MPG – not the individuals who happens to hold that office at a particular time *per se*. The political institution of the office of MPG, like all other institutions, can reasonably be assumed to have a formal and an informal side. We are thus interested in establishing the nature of the office of MPG; the informal and formal rules and norms in Ghana which constitute it; and how they constrain and/or enable the provision of various types of public, semi-public, and private goods by the individual holding the office.

We can observe parts of the institution of MPG (typically the formal side) independently of the individual office holders by analyzing the 1992 Constitution, Parliament of Ghana's Standing Orders, records of acts and presidential nominations passed or rejected, salary structures, and the like. Other areas, formal constituency service in various forms as well as informal norms, have to be observed through studying the behavior of individuals holding the office of MPG.⁵ Hence, while we are interested in the office, we need to make inferences from the study of office holders in order to capture a fuller picture of the hybrid of formal and informal rules and norms that constitute the MPG institution. Thus we are forced to 'read' the nature of the institution partly from the self-reported and observed behavior of the individual elected as an MP.

³ In theory, the principal can also change the formal nature of the office of MPG and even remove it as an institution by changing the constitution, but that need not concern us in this study.

⁴ One could argue that this seems to assume that MPs are only delegates of the constituency, and not as in parliamentary systems (e.g. Britain) a body of representatives embodying the nation (on Ghana, see e.g. Crook, 1987, and Rothchild, 1960). Yet, the only claim being made here is that in a single-member district system the MP is dependent on the voters in a particular constituency. The question of which norms about political goods are being used to evaluate the holder of an office is exactly what this paper seeks to explore empirically. It could be national sovereignty in the form of legislation and executive oversight, or it could be constituency representation in the form of collective or club goods.

⁵ While it would have been preferable to have been able to observe actual behavior of members, the limited scope of this pilot study necessitated using a more restricted but also less reliable empirical strategy: in-depth interviews. More is said on methodology below.

The implication is that we have to assume a very limited, if any, room for individual agency. If not, what we observe from the actions of an elected representative or their report on their own behavior could be seen just as expressions of their own individual and idiographic preferences. There is, of course, the possibility of reverse causation, where the individual office holder succeeds in changing the nature of the office. While it seems plausible to expect the room for maneuver to be limited for the individual office holders, a variation in the extent to which public goods are provided may in fact stem from such reverse causation. An individual MP who manages to educate his constituents about the role of the MP and thus reduce expectations for personal benefits and assistance, changes the informal norms of the institution (at least in that constituency) which in turn frees up time and money for production of more public goods.

4 The office of Member of Parliament in Ghana

The current (Fourth) Republic of Ghana was inaugurated on January 7, 1993. On the same day, the First Parliament of the Fourth Republic was opened by the then Rtd. Honorable Speaker of Parliament, Justice D. F. Annan. The Constitution (especially Chapter 10) and the Standing Orders of Parliament, regulate the formal side of the office of MPG. These regulations are fairly standard for legislators in a presidential system with legislative elections taking place in single-member districts, and specify the four formal areas of duty discussed above. There are two constitutional provisions, however, that merit some special mention. First, the president must appoint at least half of his ministers from within the legislature, thus undermining the separation of powers and providing the executive with a powerful instrument of cooptation, with implications that will be discussed below.

Second, the MPG comes with a small ‘slush fund’ for constituency service. Currently 7.5% of state revenues are distributed to the District Assemblies (local governments), and the MP for each constituency has spending authority over a share of that for community development purposes. Currently, MPs can use the equivalent of about \$34,000 annually from this source. In addition, when in the last few years Ghana became a Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC), the same formula was applied, generating about another \$9,000 per year. The annual salary including allowances (post-tax and deductions) for MPs is currently about \$24,000.⁶

Parliament currently holds three sittings every year and each sitting lasts nine to eleven weeks, with meetings Tuesday through Friday. In other words, members are supposed to spend a little more than half of the year in the capital and attending to the business of the House. There were 200 seats in the legislature from 1993 to 2004 when the number of constituencies was increased to 230. Table 1 displays the number of seats each party has held through the four parliaments in the Fourth Republic.

In brief, the first parliament was essentially a one-party affair after the main opposition party, NPP, boycotted the legislative elections. Nevertheless, the legislature did assert some independence and for example, rejected six of President Rawlings’ nominations for ministerial posts, as well as a number of bills. The second parliament saw an injection of substantial opposition, with the NPP capturing almost a third of the seats. This was by most accounts the most vigorous and diligent period seen so far in the Fourth Republic. After the NPP’s take-over in 2001 and during President Kufour’s Presidency (2001-8), the autonomy of the legislature as well as its effectiveness as an independent body of legislation, debate, and executive oversight was undermined significantly. This should serve as a background for the findings reported in the present study even if the autonomy and strength of the legislature are

⁶ The share of state revenues is about GHC9,000 per quarter, the HIPC share is about GHC10,000 per year, and the salary about GHC2,000 per month after taxes and deductions.

not the focus here (for details, see Lindberg, 2003, and forthcoming 2009b) but rather the composition of the institution of MPG nested within it.

Table 1: Number of seats and seat shares of parties in the legislatures

		1 st Parliament 1993-1996	2 nd Parliament 1997-2000	3 rd Parliament 2001-2004	4 th Parliament 2005-2008
NDC		94.5%	66.5%	46%	41%
	<i>N</i>	189	133	92	94
NPP		0	30.5%	50%	55.5%
	<i>N</i>	-	61	100	128
Other Parties and Independents		5.5%	3%	4%	3.5%
	<i>N</i>	11	6	8	8
Total		100%	100%	100%	100%
	<i>N</i>	200	200	200	230
Freedom House Political Rights, mean score		4.3	2.8	2.0	2.0

Source: Lindberg (forthcoming 2009b).

5 Some methodological clarifications

During a little over two weeks in May 2008, interviews were carried out with 18 Members of Parliament (MPs) from four different parties. Qualitative semi-structured interviews guided by a tentative formula were developed in advance and guarantees of relative anonymity were given.⁷ The key focus was the various forms of accountability pressures they as MPs face and how they respond to them, prioritize, and view their impact on the functions they as MPs are supposed to fulfill. MPs were also asked to specify as much as possible the kinds of private and public goods they have provided to various constituents and others holding them to account. Most interviews also included a discussion of whether there is anything ‘traditional’ about the accountability pressures they face. It should be noted that the word ‘traditional’ in this context in Ghana is non-controversial and comfortably used by both MPs and other citizens, and as far as it could be determined, provided a contextually appropriate entry point for this part of the data collection. The word ‘traditional’ is typically used by interviewees to denote something that is currently perceived to be a natural part of Ghanaian socio-cultural norms and practices with historical roots.

The selection of interviewees was done in part with a view to talking to more experienced members who may reasonably be assumed to be more knowledgeable about the issues of concern to this study than those more recently elected. Another reason for this non-random selection was in order to focus on MPs who could provide a perspective on how things have changed over the years. In part, however, the selection was by chance and determined by availability⁸. Yet, the sample has representation of all four legislative parties with roughly

⁷ Relative anonymity means that their names are listed at the end of this document but at no point in the text are specific utterances or pieces of information referenced to a particular individual.

⁸ Parliament had closed early when I arrived, so many members were in their constituencies. Many phone calls and a good deal of driving around – as well as spending many hours in Parliament waiting for them to come in for another errand – made it possible to get a decent sample from all four parties. Since this was a pilot study aimed at developing hypotheses rather than testing, the sampling is less of a methodological issue than in might be.

proportional distribution, covers most of the ten regions in Ghana, as well as differences with regard to gender, religion, rural and urban constituencies, and MPs who are ministers and those who are not.

The interviews with politicians were supplemented with 15 interviews with other persons who could shed further light on these questions and provide other perspectives – members of the Electoral Commission and the Supreme Court, leading party members, senior clerks and staff of Parliament, a couple of local chiefs, and donor/diplomatic officers among others. As far as possible, the information gathered from MPs was cross-checked for general validity and possible political reasons behind the various statements describing their own role and behavior. For the most part, what the MPs said was confirmed by the supplementary interviews.⁹ In addition, two meetings were held at the Center for Democratic Development-Ghana, with the Director and several of the staff who are implementing programs with Parliament. Preliminary findings from this study were presented, and alternative interpretations discussed and evaluated, which has also informed some of the interpretations that follow in the analysis. Prior knowledge by the author of the constitution and the Standing Orders, and much of other relevant regulations as well as the work in the legislature, relieved much of the need for background research.¹⁰ The interviews conducted and data collected specifically for this paper have also been analyzed in conjunction with the author's earlier work on the legislature, the MPs and their constituents (e.g. Lindberg 2003, forthcoming 2009b, Lindberg and Morrison 2005, 2008), as well as in the light of the author working as an officer the Ghanaian legislature from 1999 to 2001.

6 Accountability pressures on individuals holding the office of MPG

So what are the accountability pressures holders of the MPG office face? We use the answers to that question to make inferences about the nature of the office. First of all, the MPs were asked about whether, and if so how, the following eight groups held them accountable: 1) citizens in their constituencies, 2) the local party, 3) the national party, 4) the extended family, 5) chiefs, 6) religious leaders, 7) civil society organizations, and 8) businesses. These questions were semi-structured and open-ended in the sense that the nature of the accountability relationship with each group was discussed first separately, and only after that part had been concluded, did I engage in a dialogue with them about whether it was possible to say that some groups and type of goods were more dominant in their daily work than others.

That dialogue then led to a phase of the interviews where the MP was asked to rank goods and groups in terms of how much of their time and money they spend on them, and how much they as office holders felt 'held accountable' by various groups. It is worth noting that *civil*

⁹ The interviews have also validated the general approach and confirmed the possibility of working out 1) a more structured interview instruments making it possible to collect both quantifiable and purely qualitative data that can be used for a structured comparison within and across countries; 2) a survey instrument that can be used to supplement the information gathered by interviews to get a more solid basis for generalizations; and 3) a ranking instrument whereby assistant clerks attached to committees can be asked to (anonymously) rank their MPs in terms of performance on a few indicators. The results can be used as a proxy for performance in the role as A) representatives of their constituency, B) legislators and C) providers of oversight. With such an instrument, one could then select to for interview some of the highest, middle, and lowest ranked MPs to ensure an appropriate variation on the dependent variable. This would also make it possible to make a systematic comparison of the relationship between accountability pressures and the provision of public *versus* private goods by MPs.

¹⁰ The author was effectively a staff member of Parliament 1999-2001 as a long-term consultant labeled 'Parliamentary Fellow' employed by Parliamentarians for Global Action under the West African program and has since been back for extended periods in 2003 and 2005 doing further research on the legislature, its relationship to the executive, and the functioning of the MPs.

society organizations and *religious leaders* were unanimously perceived as *not* holding them accountable to any great extent. Religious leaders ask MPs to attend some functions and perhaps give a small donation but that seems to be all they ask for. Civil society organizations 'are critical voices' but again little is felt in terms of holding MPs accountable.

To some extent this also applies to *businesses*. The increasing role of money in politics is generally acknowledged, and the fact is that some candidates' campaigns are sponsored by businesses (expecting something in return) although this is more relevant to ministers and presidential candidates than to ordinary MPs. Among the remaining five groups the things they hold MPs accountable for are the following, in rank order:

6.1 *Personal benefits*

The two general areas always mentioned as what *citizens in their constituencies* hold them most of all accountable for, are personal assistance and community development projects. This is also the only form of accountability mentioned with regard to *members of the extended family*. Personal benefits come in many forms. Most common now is to ask directly for money either as just pocket money, or to buy food items, pay bills or school fees (very common), or as contributions to funerals and weddings, or to start a small trading-business or farm, and so on. Less common but important are demands for jobs, but when they come it is typically requests for low skilled jobs in the army, police, or immigration.

Another very important request, especially in rural areas, is for different forms of advice relating to conflict resolution. Families with relational problems, conflicts between villages or tribes, questions about which educational path children should take, and many other such problems, are put on the knee of the office holder. This also applies to some requests that could lead to interference with other state bodies, especially the police. All the respondents claim that they do not interfere with the judicial system except when it involves individuals who have been wrongfully arrested. In that case, of course, they are providing a constituency service that is fully legitimate and even the availability of such help is a constituency club good (to the extent it is available to all and not just a select group – something I could not verify). But there is a risk of illicit involvement undermining the rule of law.

There is a very clear sense among all interviewees (not only the MPs themselves) that this form of pressure for personalized benefits has increased dramatically since the first and second parliaments, but most dramatically so over the past four years. Various illustrations can be given of this. Campaign spending by incumbents typically increased between two and threefold from 1996 to 2000 (Lindberg 2003), and the indications are that this has further quadrupled in the last election cycle. Cash handouts to buy votes in urban areas that tended to be the equivalent of 50 cents to individual voters in 2000, now are up to \$5 or more which is a significant increase even taking inflation into account. Most MPs did not print T-shirts in 1992, and in 1996 most gave out only a small number, mainly to campaign workers. In 2000 and especially 2004 most reported that they had printed many hundreds and in several cases thousands of T-shirts, and this year constituents do not even accept the T-shirts unless they carry a brand name like 'Lacoste'.

The personal assistance/benefits type of accountability relationship is the most common in MPs' relationship to their constituents and the one that puts the most pressure on MPs (according to their own rank orderings) along with the pressure for community development (discussed below). In my count, half ($N=9$) of the interviewees ranked personal assistance/benefits as 'the thing ordinary constituents hold them accountable for the most'. *Chiefs* much more rarely demand personal favors and about half of the MPs report that their chiefs almost exclusively hold MPs accountable for delivery of relevant development projects (more on the latter below).

With regard to what *local party activists and executives* hold them accountable for, all MPs put personal benefits at the top. In fact, most of the interviewees adamantly complain how instrumental local party executives at all levels (ward, village and constituency) have become in demanding personal favors (mostly money) in return for their continued support. To exemplify this increase in demand, one MP's story is relevant: in 1992 they were given spare parts for bicycles, by 2000 they all requested new bicycles and whereas some started to demand motorbikes in 2004, by now (2008) no one asks for bicycles any more – it is all a question of motorbikes or cars. When they ask for money, party executives and activists demand the equivalent of \$100-\$500 on a regular basis. Other frequent demands even by the young 'boys' who help them campaign include mobile phones, motorbikes, jobs, and setting up of small businesses.

At no point is the accountability relationship between the incumbent MPs and their local party executives and organizers perceived to be a question of policy or ideology. The exclusive focus on personal benefits in the accountability relationship between the office holder and their local party organization is perhaps the most worrying trend. The norm is that they made it possible for the MP to come into office, so they should now be rewarded with their share; otherwise they will support someone else next time. There is little, if anything, left of party allegiance and programmatic support in this relationship; it has become an instrumentalization of party organization for personal benefit. This is particularly so in 'safe havens' where there is no doubt that whoever runs on the ticket of the dominant party will win. Since both main parties nowadays have primaries (in which only party executives are enfranchised), this gives enormous leverage to local party bosses to extract as much as possible from candidates long before the national campaigns start. By contrast with the demands for personal benefits by ordinary citizens, where at least many of the MPs can find some positive impacts on their duties as office holders, in the sphere of their accountability relationships with local party workers not one could point to beneficial effects.

Where does this pressure for personal assistance come from? There are the expected claims from both sides of the aisle that the other party has created the situation by starting and then relying on increasing payments to individual citizens to garner votes. But many also refer to the idea that it has a history in Ghana dating from the first republic (Nkrumah's time) when MPs were the *de facto* extension of the state and provider of development projects in the rural areas. The claim is that this set up a path dependency that has been hard to break.

This is plausible to some extent. But interestingly it is also almost unanimously agreed that it intersects with the tendency to regard the office of MPG as infused with a traditional role as 'father' or 'mother' meaning taking care of dependents, filling such a role for the constituency. The MP has a responsibility to take care of, support, and help when necessary his/her 'children'. In some ethnic groups, tradition holds that the oldest son has the responsibility to take care of younger siblings, as well as the parents when they grow old. In other groups, the same function is expected to be filled by an uncle. Ultimately, there is always some uncle or elder somewhere in the family that can be called upon in need. If parts of the family are in need, a better off (or less poor) relative is expected to assume this 'father' role for the extended family. This person can also be a 'mother' in most tribes where women can assume leadership roles also as chiefs (and the queen-mother can be more powerful than the chief). The moral obligation of this person to listen to the concerns of members of the family or group, and help in ways he or she can, is very strong. These are the standards according to which such family leaders are judged and sanctions for defection are potentially very damaging. The leader's entire family can be ostracized and this can significantly affect even children and grand-children in terms of how they are treated. Leaders who do not fulfill at least some minimum expectations also face the threat of members of the family/group simply deserting them, leaving them without a leadership role and supporters, echoing Hyden's (1983, 2006) statement of the logic and impact of the 'economy of affection'.

In short, the traditional notion of a ‘father’ and ‘mother’ has been transposed and grafted upon the formal institution of the MPG. This makes it a case of a hybrid institution which combines the formal democratic dispensation and the informal (and as they say in Ghana ‘traditional’) institution of an extended family that spans the entire constituency. The informal institution is embodied in the well-off father figure who has a moral obligation to solve problems, often monetary, for members in need. It is not attached to the person in question, as evidenced by the fact that my interviewees almost uniformly testify that it comes with the office. This is further confirmed by examples of current office holders who have been living abroad for some time before becoming MPs and during that time did not fill any such functions for a larger group and were in fact surprised to find themselves cast as ‘fathers/mothers’ for the constituency.

In the general perception of ordinary Ghanaians, holders of the MPG office are relatively wealthy, if not very wealthy. A more wealthy ‘family’ head is expected to ‘drop something’ for everyone who comes near, and give more substantive contributions when there are special needs.¹¹ Citizens feel they have a moral right to come and see the office holder/father/mother, especially in rural areas. They have a moral right to be listened to and assisted when in need or just because they are less well off. In urban areas, where populations are larger and more diverse and the spatial distance between office holder and ordinary citizens is wider, there are often mediators between office holders and citizens weakening this accountability relationship to the effect that it looks more like an instrumental vote-buying relationship. Complicating it further, it is therefore in the short-term interest of office holders (and candidates for office), to display wealth. Since it is better from the perspective of followers to have a wealthy ‘father’ or ‘mother’ than a poor one, showing outward signs of resource-wealth is an important campaign tool inducing more people to be followers. But it should be noted that a disproportionate share of the disbursement of personal benefits (in terms of value) seems to go to their own family and to party executives – who in spatial terms are considered ‘closer family’ than ordinary citizens. Pressures from constituents but in particular from extended family members¹² and local party executives/activists for private goods (personal benefits/gifts/money) have by all indications increased exponentially over the past four years. The more experienced MPs unanimously agree about this change in the landscape.

But there is also some important variation. The data suggests a clear division between the rural and urban constituencies. Whereas most MPs say they can not deny any but the most outrageous requests from constituents in rural areas, in the urban areas most of the interviewees report that they typically refuse to respond to demands 15 or more times out of 20. This pattern tallies with findings from surveys of voters (e.g. Lindberg and Morrison, 2005, 2008) indicating that younger and more urban residents instrumentally seek personal benefits from all candidates but such gifts do not impact much on their choice at the polls. MPs in urban areas know this and that makes it easier for them to reject more of the requests, whereas in rural constituencies the necessity of giving at least something is still felt in a very imposing way. In rural areas the traditional role of the father/mother is stronger and the moral obligations thus more present.

¹¹ It should be noted that this is distinct from the norms of chieftancy however. While chiefs are often expected to help ‘take care’ of their people, the institution typically comes with a power to extract resources from their people and to enforce norms of voluntary contribution to the ‘stool’ or ‘skin’, whereas the norms surrounding the notion of ‘fathers’ and ‘mothers’ do not come with extractive powers or expectations.

¹² It could be argued that family obligations are not public obligations that should be discussed under the constitution of the MPG office. I argue, however, that the composition of the formal rules and informal norms constituting the contemporary MPG office includes the norm of providing the extended family (that can be as large as 2,000 individuals) with special benefits from office. It has become an institutionalized informal norm, and is therefore *de facto* part of the MPG.

6.2 Constituency service – community development

This is the second most common and most emphasized area of performance that holders of MPG feel they are held accountable for. Constituency service is part of both the formal rules of the MPG, and the informal norms. About half of the respondents perceive this to be what *ordinary constituents* put most emphasis on, and a vast majority feel that this area is what *chiefs* hold them accountable for. Perhaps surprisingly, office holders do not perceive *civil society organizations* holding them accountable for this (or anything else). One would have expected, perhaps, that local organizations would hold the MPs accountable for local community development.

The most common public goods vary somewhat according to constituency geography and socio-economic profile. In coastal areas, it can be making sure the coastal border control keep large international fishing boats out of the waters the local fishermen use; in dry areas in the North and infested river-areas in the East water boreholes is a main consideration; in more remote areas electrification is highly desired; and in many areas key demands include roads, schools, health clinics, toilets, and drainage. Some but far from all, MPs find that the pressures from the ‘father/mother’ dimension of the MPG hybrid institution has created incentives for them to produce more of such small and not so small club goods (restricted public goods). The ‘largest’ example is the new National Health Insurance Scheme, which in principle covers all citizens for a small premium. Some (but far from all) MPs claim that the sustained and overwhelming pressures to pay for hospital bills faced by all MPs over the years contributed significantly to the decision to create this insurance scheme.

More common is the MPs’ perception that the close relationship between them and their constituents and their role as father/mother puts enormous pressures on them to pay for and by other means bring about community development. MPs have some public resources (the Common Fund, HIPC funds) which they often use for school buildings, toilets, roofing sheets, scholarships, and boreholes – depending on the needs in the area. But the funds to which they have direct access are limited and do not reach far. Therefore MPs also use a lot of time lobbying ministers and top-level bureaucrats to bring development projects. This is not unique to Ghana or any other African country but part of the system of ‘pork-barrel’ politics that tends to be more prominent in single-member district systems.

Similarly, pressures from *chiefs* are overwhelmingly holding office holders accountable for community development and it seems that especially in rural areas the chiefs are primarily oriented towards community development. Constituents in the more rural areas often channel their demands through the chiefs when they put pressure on the MP to bring development projects. Where Queen Mothers are strong, similar things seems to happen. Several MPs describe how chiefs then represent their community in holding them to account for delivery on promises, sending delegations to the MP to inquire if promised development projects do not materialize soon enough. Sanctions are evident to office holders representing rural areas where chiefs still have significant leverage over voting behavior, whereas office holders in urban areas tend to perceive chiefs as powerless in terms of influencing voting behavior and are therefore less amenable to their pressures. Particularly in rural areas, and where MPs have invested in educating the citizens about the role of the MPG, the grafting of the traditional father/mother institution onto the office of the MPG has induced strong pressures to provide at least a significant measure of ‘impure’ public club goods. Office holders, in short, go out of their way and use every possible means to provide community development benefits to their constituents.

6.3 *Constituency representation*

Relatively common is the claim that the ‘traditional’ role of the MP as father/mother makes him/her aware of the problems in the constituency, and thus enables them to better represent their *constituents* on the floor of the house. The ‘traditional’ role also comes with relatively strong pressures from constituents for the MP to be seen on the floor of the House, as well as in the media. Even rural dwellers seem to follow this and regard it as important. Critical in this process is the role of the media and access to information. Almost all MPs agree that the more the constituents know about what they do in Parliament and in their Committees, the more pressure they put on these aspects of MPs’ performance.

But there is also a very clear differentiation between office holders who have been merely reactive to existing rules and norms, and others who have invested heavily in educating constituents about the role of the MPG, the nature and importance of legislative and oversight activities, and national politics. One would have expected a rural-urban divide in this respect but as far as is possible to determine, it does not exist. MPs for three of the most rural and poor areas in the sample, reported the strongest pressures from constituents on legislative business whereas several of the office holders from the most urban areas feel little or no pressure in this regard. When it comes to the MPs’ influence, the personality of the office holder, and his/her inclination to raise the political awareness of citizens living in the constituency, seems the most important factor. This variable cuts across the urban-rural divide, with a clear correlation between the efforts by the MPG office holders to change the nature of accountability relationships in favor of a focus on public, national-level goods and the goods they are actually held accountable for.

That is to say, the ‘good’ MPs who have invested in this kind of citizen-education and increased the amount of information available to constituents, feel that it has paid off and increased the importance of their legislative activities in the eyes of their constituents. Rural folks have access to radio and in some areas even television these days and there is some significant coverage of parliamentary business. More politically aware constituents can therefore follow these stories closely. A few MPs even report that ordinary constituents now call them on their cell phones to give their opinion on matters before the house and give feedback on what they heard their MP saying on the floor of the house. The MPs who have not engaged in strategic civic education, on the other hand, report that money and personal benefits play a greater and greater part in accountability relationships, while their ‘real’ activities as MPs in the form of representation and legislation have diminished.

None of the office holders, however, find these pressures to be of major significance to getting re-elected and the magnitude of this dimension in terms of affecting their behavior is therefore not all that large. But it has nevertheless increased in areas where there is more information and education available and here the close relationship between office holders and citizens plays a positive role. Being the ‘father/mother’ implies a strong pressure for being available to listen to the concerns and views of ‘their people’. While not widespread (yet?), two of the interviewed MPs nevertheless reported that they personally knew a handful of previous MPs who had lost their seats in the previous two elections due to low performance as representatives of their areas in voicing constituency concerns on the national scene. About a third of those interviewed ($N=6$) also report that they hold regular (3-5 per year) community meetings to explain legislative business and policy in their areas, and often face questions about new laws and demands to speak up on their behalf on the floor of the house. These are the office holders who have been somewhat successful in turning the informal ‘father/mother’ institution of the MPG into a pressure for the production of purer public goods.

At the same time, the problem of clientelistic provision of private goods is a collective action problem of the prisoner’s dilemma type. Everyone has an interest in the production of public

goods but each individual is always better off taking private benefits when they can, hence the incentives are stacked in favor of defection rather than cooperation. The MPs who have made inroads into increasing awareness of the costs of failure to provide public goods are also changing the incentives in favor of collaboration. When more actors are sensitized to the costs associated with defection it becomes possible to engineer social norms imposing costs on those who defect, thus changing the equation. While the significance of this success in these cases should not be overstated, it nevertheless points to the possibility of harnessing traditional institutions grafted onto a modern democratic dispensation, in ways that can effect the production of more public goods and solutions to collective action problems.

6.4 Legislation

None of the holders of MPG offices report any significant pressures from *constituents, chiefs, the local party, civil society, or religious and other community leaders* for particular legislation. Legislation is an activity where the accountability relationships are primarily to *the executive* and to some extent to *business* and international financial institutions and donors (on loan programs and related legislation). NPP MPs (before the change of government in January 2009), were under severe and constant pressure from the executive to toe *the national party* line (defined by the president and his cabinet) and deviations were explicitly sanctioned: little or no constituency development programs, no seats on lucrative tender boards and boards of state owned enterprises, which in turn means losing out on extra resources crucial for attending to personal constituents' requests. The executive was also using 'brown envelopes' to reward loyal MPs in general, and specifically used inducements of \$500-\$2,000 per legislator, to ensure the smooth passage of bills, loan agreements, and presidential nominations. Accountability was about being loyal to the president and sanctions were concrete material rewards and punishments with serious implications for incumbents' ability to live up to the informal norms of 'father/mother' and thus by extension to stay in post.

Occupants of the MPG office are in dire need of resources for both constituency development and for provision of personal benefits; the executive branch is very aware of this and uses it to maximum advantage. The effect, however, is that provision of public goods in terms of due diligence in scrutiny of loan agreements, appropriate revision of bills before they are enacted, and active public debate on policy options can be compromised.

6.5 Executive oversight

This is the least significant area of accountability in practice. Even if pressed, only a few of the interviewees could find instances of how MPs are held accountable for oversight. There is a small element of this in the representational function when MPs inquire on the floor of the house about the progress of constituency-specific projects such as roads and bridges. But these are generally 'friendly fire', meant if possible to speed up implementation if not merely to assure *constituents* that the MP is keeping his/her eyes on the project. Oversight in general is very weak in Ghana and the legislature's role has if anything diminished over the last two terms of the NPP regime.

This was further undermined by the use by President Kufuor of the constitutional provision requiring the president to pick half of his ministers from among the MPs. The former president not only appointed a vast number of ministers and deputies (at present 88) but also went far beyond the 50 percent requirement in terms of recruiting MPs to these posts. According to Lindberg (forthcoming 2009b) 63 percent of all NPP ministers were MPs compared with exactly 50 percent during the previous NDC government, and 74 percent of cabinet ministers were MPs compared with 24 percent during the First Parliament. In total, 43 percent of the NPP majority MPs were ministers or deputies. (During President Rawlings' time, less than 30 percent of the (then) majority party's MPs were made ministers or

deputies). Added to this were, amongst other things, 147 lucrative seats on procurement and tender boards in the gift of the President, awarded to MPs mainly on basis of loyalty to him.

In view of the perks and increased potential for constituency service that came with these positions, the remaining MPs were in effect waiting in line to be appointed at a later stage. In order to be considered, one had to be loyal to *the national party* line in terms of legislation and not make too much noise when it comes to executive oversight. In sum, the public good of executive oversight is severely under-produced, in part as an effect of weak accountability pressures from constituents and other groups in this area, and partly as a consequence of very strong accountability pressures from the executive in the area of legislation.

7 Conclusions

Democracy has come a long way in Ghana since the inauguration of the Fourth Republic in 1993. In the process, the office of MPG has developed a distinctly hybrid character, consisting of a combination of the fairly standard formal expectations of constituency representation, community service, legislation and executive oversight, and the informal norms of being a ‘father/mother’ of the constituency with expectations about attending to the individual personal needs and concerns of constituents and party workers in particular.

In comparative terms, many of the features described above are, of course, not peculiar to Ghana, or perhaps even to Africa or poor nations. The stronger emphasis on constituency-based accountability relationships is typical for many democracies where pork-barrel politics is equally or even more important in getting reelected. But in this working paper the aim has been primarily to provide an empirical analysis of the Ghanaian institution, rather than assess the generality or peculiarity of its various characteristics.

This hybridization of the MPG office has a series of direct and indirect consequences, a tentative summary of which is made below. This is not an exclusive list, nor are there any implications of mono-causality and linear relationships. For the sake of clarity, the presentation is simplified to distill some essential components. The list below is also disproportionate in highlighting the positive effects of the hybrid MPG institution while being less detailed on what is more well-known: the negative effects on the provision of public goods and the powerful incentives driving the provision of personal, or private goods.

The hybrid configuration of the MPG office puts enormous pressures on office holders to be responsive to constituents’ needs and priorities. The grafting of the ‘father/mother’ institution onto the MPG role has also brought in an extra dimension for sanction. While the primary tool of sanction in the formal sense is through the ballot box every four years, the informal institution provides traditional tools of shame, collective punishment of the family, and loss of prestige and status. In this sense, the accountability relationship between representative (agent) and citizens (principal) is much stronger than might appear and has a great potential for making the agent act in accordance with the interests of the principal.

There are already some manifest positive effects of this strong and close accountability relationship. Office holders feel pressured to speak on the floor of the House as much as they can and to bring to bear knowledge of their constituency and the people’s needs on the issues for debate. The norms of responsibility force MPs to learn details of issues before the house so that they can speak on the floor and say something meaningful, contribute to the debate, and in doing so address concerns that pertain to their constituency. Constituency representation is thus positively affected even if at this early stage in Ghana’s democracy people are often less concerned with what is being said as long as they and their area are actively represented in the public sphere. With increased information and civic education, this

could become a strong tool of effecting democratic responsiveness and make policy better adapted to the needs of constituents.

Most MPs feels that the pressures for personal assistance significantly enhance their knowledge of the problems and challenges facing their constituency, which in turn improves their competence as law makers although it rarely informs executive oversight.

The informal institution of being a 'father/mother' of the constituency plays an enhancing role in making it a primary concern of MPs to bring local development projects to their communities. Here it should also be noted that it seems that the traditional chieftancy institution also plays a largely positive role in this respect, at least in rural areas. The traditional duties of the chiefs to represent and look out for their communities, rather than for certain individuals, can play a positive role in promoting the provision of club, and collective rather than private, personal goods.

Even the intense pressures for accountability for private needs can have some positive effects when leading to a situation where office holders feel forced to seek collective solutions to problems faced by many citizens. When MPs seek general policy, or at least community development solutions, as a means of alleviating some of the pressures for personal benefits arising from the clientelistic behavior of citizens towards the 'father/mother' of the constituency, this may have some positive developmental effects.

Beyond these positive effects, there are many ways in which the various pressures for accountability facing holders of the MPG office affect the provision of public goods and solutions to collective action problems negatively. To mention but a few, the local party organization members' holding MPs accountable for increasingly expensive individual benefits; the executive demanding more or less absolute loyalty; and constituents' accountability pressures taking away from their time and energy, all act in ways to undermine positive outcomes.

In the case of Ghana, part of the problem is constitutional, as discussed in the introduction. Another contributing fact is the use of primaries in the two major parties and the way these are structured to allow only party executives to participate. But part of the problem is also lack of civic education and access to information which, in combination with poverty, makes clientelism a less expensive means of getting loyal followers than it is in a more affluent society.

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Interviewees

Members of Parliament

Hon. Akua S. Dansua, (NDC) MP 2001-present for North Dayi, 2nd Deputy Minority Whip.

Hon. Albin S. K. Bagbin, (NDC) MP 1993-present for Nadowli West, Minority Leader

Hon. Alhaji Seidu Amadu, (NDC) MP 1993-present for Yapei/Kusawgu, former Minister of State.

Hon. Alice Teni Boon, (NDC) MP 1999-present for Lambussie.

Hon. Cecilia A. Dapaah, (NPP) MP 2005-present for Bantama, former Minister of State.

Hon. David Apasera, (PNC) MP 2001-present for Bolgatanga.

Hon. Ester Obeng, (NPP) MP 2001-2008, former Minister of Lands, Forestry and Mines.

Hon. Gershon K. B. Gbediame, (NDC) MP 1997-2008 for Nkwanta South,

Hon. Kenneth Dzirasah, (NDC) MP 1993-2008 for South Tongo, former First Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Kojo Armah, (CPP) MP 1997-present for Evalue-Gira.

Hon. Kosi Kedem, (NDC) MP 1993-2004 for Hohoe South, West Africa Representative for Association of West-European Parliamentarians for Africa (AWEPA).

Hon. Kwabena Bartels, (NPP) MP 1997-present for Ablekumah North, former Minister of Private Sector Development, Minister of the Interior.

Hon. Nana Akuffo-Addo, (NPP) MP 1997-2008 for Abuakwa South, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, presidential candidate for NPP in the 2008 elections.

Hon. Nana Asante-Frempong, (NPP) MP 1997-2004 for Kwabre East, Regional Chairman of Ghana Business Association.

Hon. Paul Appiah-Ofori, (NPP) MP 2001-present for Asikuma/Odoben/Brakwa.

Hon. Stephen Balado Manu, (NPP) MP 1997-present for Ahafo Ano South, former Deputy Majority Leader.

Hon. Steve Akorli, (NDC) MP 1993-2004 for Ho East, former Minister of State.

Hon. Theresa Tagoe, (NPP) MP 1997-2008 for Ablekumah South, former Deputy Minister of House and Workings, former Deputy Minister for Greater Accra.

Other Interviewees

[names left out purposely]