



GOOD GOVERNANCE AFRICA

The “falling of mighty oaks”: Examining the plausible implications of the loss of experienced parliamentarians on the work of Ghana’s 9th Parliament

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Introduction

Ghana’s democracy, hailed as a beacon for Africa, boasts eight successful multi-party elections since its return to constitutional rule in 1993 (Balley, 2020; Alidu, 2019). Over the past three decades, the country has made notable strides in institutionalising democracy and good governance. With a remarkable record of power alternation in 2001, 2009, and 2017, Ghana’s democracy continues to thrive albeit notable challenges.

The country functions as a unitary republic with a parliamentary democracy system. In this political framework, the President serves as both the head of state and head of government. The unicameral Parliament of Ghana consists of elected Members of Parliament (MPs) – elected from designated constituencies across the country. The country also employs the simple majority, or ‘First Past the Post’, voting system in its parliamentary elections. Since 2012, the nation has been subdivided into 275 single-member constituencies, with members elected to serve four-year terms.

Since Ghana’s return to constitutional rule, the persistent turnover of parliamentarians in the fourth republican parliament has raised concerns among Members of Parliament (MPs) themselves, parliamentary leadership, the academic community and the general public. This trend of losing experienced legislators significantly impacts the work of parliament (hampers the quality of legislative work) and that of the government of the day. The ongoing pattern is commonly linked to the growing monetisation of internal party elections, unfulfilled promises, and challenges with constituents and party activists.

Ayawaso Central MP, Henry Quartey has expressed concern over the departure of experienced MPs from the country’s legislative body. He highlighted the potential impact their exit could have on the parliamentary landscape, emphasising the significant role played by seasoned legislators (Jan. 2024)

What the issue is

Despite Ghana’s strong democratic reputation, its parliamentary system faces challenges and is often considered probably the weakest organ of government, marked by a high attrition rate of members. Key stakeholders, including parliamentary leaders, current and former MPs, academics, and researchers, have expressed concerns about this phenomenon and its detrimental impact on parliamentary performance. The issue is evident in the frequent turnover of MPs, with many not serving beyond one term.

Since the beginning of the fourth republican democratic dispensation on January 7, 1993, a substantial decrease in the number of surviving original members has been observed. For instance, out of the 189 National Democratic Congress (NDC) members who entered the first parliament, only Alban Kingsford Sumana Bagbin remains (currently serving as the Speaker of Parliament). Similarly, among the first batch of 61 New Patriotic Party (NPP) members who entered parliament in 1997, only Osei Kyei Mensah-Bonsu remains and will not be joining the ninth parliament in 2025 – voluntarily opting not to contest for re-election. Again, the 2016 general elections saw the NDC losing 80 seats – further reducing the number of more of the experienced and knowledgeable MPs.

The seventh parliament of the fourth republic, for instance, also saw a staggering total of 182 new members out of 275, with most of the continuing members relatively inexperienced.

The outcome of both the NDC internal primaries (May, 2023) and that of the governing NPP on the 27th of January, 2024 depicts a worrying situation with many seasoned legislators from both sides seek re-election or defeated in their respective parliamentary primaries. This trend is likely to have significant implications for the work of the ninth parliament. The quotes below speak to this:

“I am worried about the NPP, and I am worried about the Parliament of Ghana, and I am worried about our democracy. The longer a person stays in Parliament, the better the performance of that person. It is for him, it is for his party, it is for Parliament, and it is for our democracy”

– (Hon. Osei Kyei Mensah-Bonsu, Majority Leader of the 8th Parliament)

“It is a big blow to lose these numbers in parliament, but I am not surprised at the figures. One of the issues we have constantly discussed is the rate at which parliament loses experienced minds. Since the 4th republic, the strength of parliament keeps dwindling because of the high attrition rates”

– (Chief Director for the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs, Dr. Evans Aggrey Darko, 2021)

Source: <https://citinewsroom.com/2024/02/ind-c-npp-need-serious-introspection-on-exit-of-seasoned-mps-kyei-mensah-bonsu/>

Approach

This policy brief was developed using largely online sources (local news agency websites), where the majority of information and insights were gathered from digital platforms. In addition to online materials, limited data from the Electoral Commission of Ghana and a limited number of published articles were also incorporated. The decision to heavily utilise online sources stems from the difficulty in accessing data from the EC and also from political parties. This approach however, ensured a comprehensive exploration of relevant data and perspectives. Incorporating data from the Electoral Commission and a select few published articles also contributed to a well-rounded analysis, combining official statistics with scholarly insights for a nuanced understanding of the subject matter.

The Evidence

Current composition and gender dynamics of the 8th Parliament

The current 8th parliament in Ghana presents a unique scenario with an unprecedented equal distribution of seats between the two major political parties. The data (Figure 1) indicates a balanced representation, with both

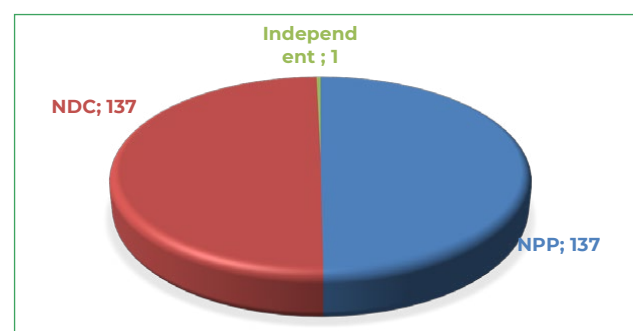


Figure 1: Composition of 8th parliament

Source: Electoral Commission of Ghana, 2020

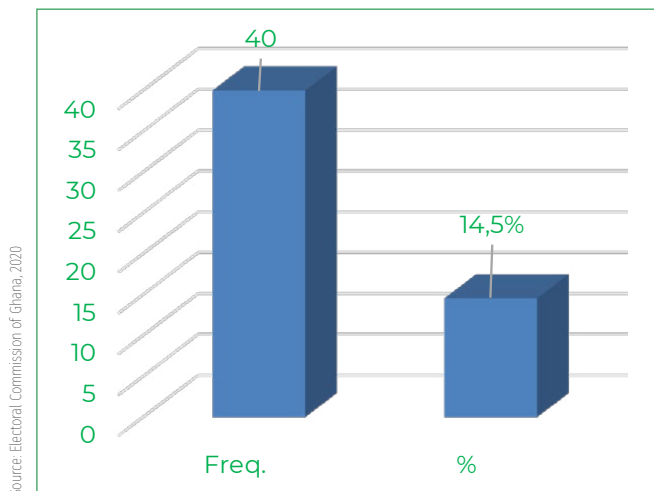


Figure 2: Gender distribution

the governing New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the largest opposition party, the National Democratic Congress (NDC), holding an equal number of seats, each occupying 137 out of the total 275. Adding a nuanced element, one Independent Candidate in the parliament has aligned with the NPP, providing them with a slight majority. The gender dynamics shows that out of the 275 parliamentary seats, only 40 (20-each for both NDC and NPP), representing 14.5% are occupied by women, highlighting a relatively low presence of female parliamentarians in the legislative body (Figure 2).

Evidence from the recent parliamentary elections

The outcome of the recently conducted parliamentary primaries of both the NPP and the NDC presents a scenario that could further compound the high parliamentary attrition rates. In all, 44 sitting Members of Parliament, comprising 28 from the NPP and 16 from the NDC, lost their bids to represent their respective parties in the 2024 general elections (Table 1). The Ashanti region recorded the highest percentage of incumbent losses for the NPP, while the Upper East region saw significant losses for the NDC. Notably, the Ashanti region, considered a stronghold for the NPP, saw 8 incumbent MPs losing their bids to represent the party in the 2024 elections. This result suggests a notable shift in voter sentiment in a region traditionally favourable to the party. The Greater Accra region, another crucial electoral battleground, witnessed 7 NPP and 2 NDC sitting MPs losing their bids. On the other side, the NDC also experienced setbacks, losing a total of 16 serving MPs at the party primaries with 4 MPs from the Upper East region losing their bid to represent the party in the upcoming national elections. The Volta region, historically a stronghold for the NDC, also witnessed the loss of 3 sitting MPs – further highlighting a complex interplay of factors influencing voter decisions.

The regional dynamics also showed interesting loss trends. In the Central region, 2 NPP and 1 NDC MPs lost their respective bids. The Western region, known for its competitive dynamics, saw both parties losing sitting MPs, with the NPP losing 2 and the NDC losing 1. The results reflect changing voter preferences, regional variations, and the complex interplay of factors shaping the political narrative in Ghana – with probable negative implications for the work of the 9th parliament.

NO	REGION	NPP		NDC	
		FREQUENCY	%	FREQUENCY	%
1.	Ahafo	1	3.6	-	-
2.	Ashanti	8	28.6	1	6.3
3.	Greater Accra	7	25.0	2	12.5
4.	Central	2	7.1	1	6.3
5.	Western	2	7.1	1	6.3
6.	Western North	-	-	1	6.3
7.	Eastern	5	17.9	-	-
8.	North East	1	3.6	-	-
9.	Northern	1	3.6	1	6.3
10.	Savannah	1	3.6	-	-
11.	Upper East	-	-	4	25.0
12.	Oti	-	-	1	6.3
13.	Volta	-	-	3	18.8
14.	Bono East	-	-	1	6.3
TOTAL		28	100.0	16	100.0
Grand total of MPs who lost their bid				44	

Table 1: Regional distribution of incumbent MPs who lost their party primaries

Gender distribution of MPs who lost the parliamentary primaries

Among the 40 women currently in parliament, a total of 10 (25%) lost their bid to represent their parties in the 2024 elections (Figure 3). This breakdown includes 7 from the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and 3 from the National Democratic Congress (NDC), reflecting the gender distribution among MPs who were unsuccessful in retaining their seats.

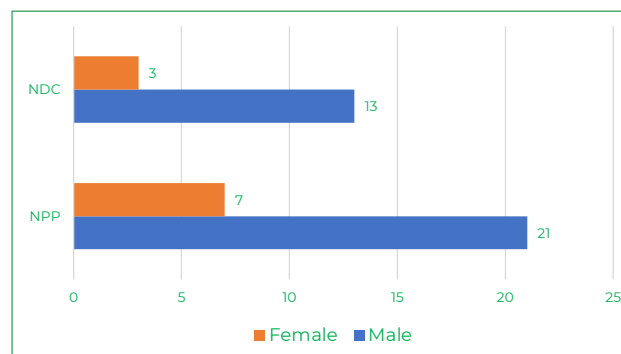


Figure 3: Gender distribution of sitting MPs who lost primaries

MPs who voluntarily did not seek re-election

In all, a total of 22 Members of Parliament voluntarily opted not to contest the internal primaries of their respective parties. Out of these, 19 are from the NPP, and 3 are from the NDC. Consequently, they will not be representing their respective parties in the upcoming 2024 general elections.

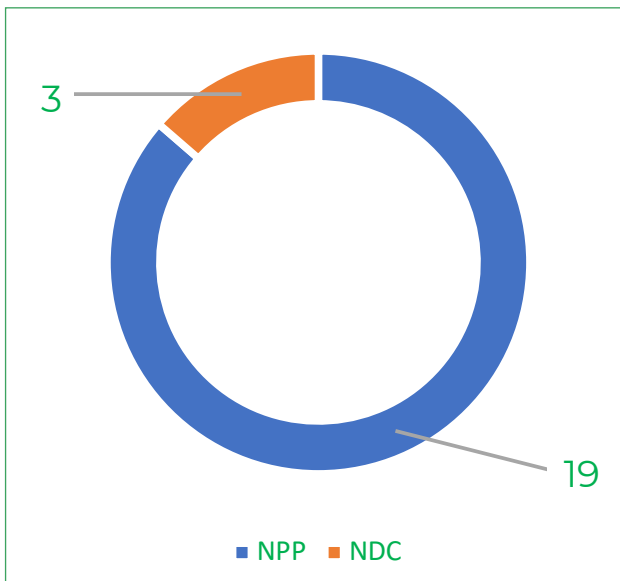


Figure 4: MPs who voluntarily opted not to contest party elections

Overall number of sitting MPs who will not be contesting the 2024 elections

The evidence from Figure 5 shows that a total of 66 Members of Parliament (about 24% of the 275 MPs) will not be contesting the 2024 general elections in Ghana. This comprises 47 from the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and 19 from the National Democratic Congress (NDC). This data indicates a significant number of incumbents across both major political parties who will not be contesting the upcoming electoral cycle. This figure indicates that 1 out of every 5 of the current group of MPs will not be returning to parliament. This will definitely have serious repercussions for the work of the 9th parliament.

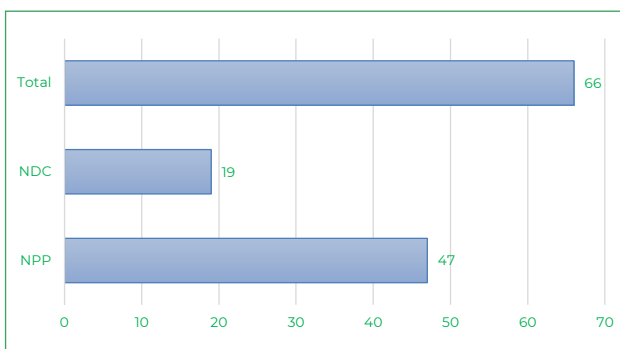


Figure 5: Overall number of MPs who will not be contesting election 2024

Implications of the high attrition

The potential exit of several experienced members of parliament in Ghana’s 9th Parliament could have various implications. These comprise the risk of losing a significant number of female representatives from the already low number, reduced institutional knowledge, a potential impact on legislative effectiveness/efficacy, diminished leadership and mentorship, challenges in committee work, a heightened potential for increased partisanship, and impact on public confidence. Specifically, the anticipated implications stem from the high attrition rate in the parliamentary primaries of the two main political parties in Ghana.

- Possibility of losing several female representatives** – based on the analysis, 10 out of the 40 women in the 8th parliament will not be contesting the 2024 elections. Subsequently, the number of women who have won their respective primaries to contest the 2024 elections is lower than in previous elections. This scenario presents a looming prospect of losing more female MPs in Ghana’s 9th Parliament. This could significantly affect the strides made in fostering gender diversity and representation in the parliament. The departure of seasoned women parliamentarians might impede the momentum towards achieving greater gender balance and diminish the diversity of perspectives in legislative debates and decision-making processes. Such a loss could potentially undermine the progress towards creating a more inclusive and equitable parliamentary environment in Ghana.
- Challenges in committee work** – parliamentary work is largely done at the committee level and the work is intricately woven with the wealth of expertise and experience that its members bring to the table. The potential departure of seasoned Members of Parliament introduces a concerning dynamic, particularly in the functioning of committees. These committees play a pivotal role in legislative scrutiny, where the collective knowledge and insights of experienced MPs contribute significantly to the thorough examination of proposed legislation. The departure of these seasoned individuals could disrupt the committees’ ability to conduct comprehensive reviews, potentially leading to a shortfall in valuable insights and a potential gap in the thorough examination of legislative matters. This situation underscores the critical role that experienced MPs play in upholding the efficacy and quality of parliamentary proceedings.

- Reduced institutional knowledge** – the potential departure of experienced MPs brings with it the risk of a significant loss of institutional memory and historical context within the parliamentary setting. These seasoned individuals often possess a deep understanding of the legislative history, past policy debates, and the evolution of parliamentary procedures. As they exit, their institutional knowledge, garnered over years of service, departs with them. This loss can hinder effective decision-making processes, as current and future MPs may lack crucial insights into the context and rationale behind previous legislative decisions. The absence of this historical perspective can impede legislative continuity, making it challenging for the parliament to build upon past achievements, learn from previous mistakes, and maintain a coherent and informed approach to governance.
- Impact on legislative effectiveness** – experienced parliamentarians are integral to the legislative process, actively contributing to the shaping and implementation of effective laws and policies. These seasoned individuals possess a nuanced understanding of parliamentary procedures, intricate knowledge of legal frameworks, and insights gained from years of navigating the complexities of governance. Their absence due to departure or attrition is likely to pose a significant risk to the legislative processes - may lead to a slowdown in legislative proceedings, as newer members may need time to familiarise themselves with the intricacies of the legislative landscape. Moreover, the departure of seasoned parliamentarians may result in less well-informed and thorough policy outcomes. Experienced lawmakers often bring historical context, lessons learned from past legislative endeavours, and a deep understanding of the potential implications of proposed policies. Without their input, the legislative body may face challenges in achieving the same level of depth and expertise in crafting and scrutinising laws. Consequently, the absence of seasoned parliamentarians can have far-reaching effects, potentially affecting the quality and effectiveness of the legislation that emerges from the parliamentary process.
- Diminished leadership and mentorship** – seasoned MPs often assume leadership roles beyond their legislative duties, playing vital roles as mentors and guides within parliamentary system. Their extensive experience positions them as leaders who provide valuable insights, institutional knowledge, and guidance to newer members, contributing to the development of a collaborative and cohesive working environment. This mentorship dynamic is crucial in helping incoming representatives navigate the complexities of parliamentary procedures, understand the nuances of policymaking, and foster effective working relationships. The potential departure of seasoned MPs introduces the risk of a leadership vacuum within parliamentary chambers. The absence of these experienced figures including Osei Kyei-Mensah Bonsu, Cletus Avoka, Klutse Avedzi and others may result in a void of leadership that could impact the overall functioning of the legislative body. Furthermore, the potential of having limited mentorship for incoming representatives may impede their integration into the parliamentary process, potentially delaying their ability to contribute effectively. The context here emphasises the multifaceted role that seasoned MPs play in not only shaping legislation but also in fostering a culture of mentorship and collaboration within the parliamentary setting.
- Potential for increased partisanship** – the potential influx of inexperienced MPs may heighten susceptibility to party pressures within the legislative landscape. Unlike their more seasoned counterparts, newer MPs might face challenges in navigating the intricate dynamics of parliamentary politics. Inexperienced lawmakers may find themselves more inclined to align with party positions, especially under the influence of party leadership, as they may lack the depth of experience to confidently assert their own perspectives. This increased susceptibility to party pressures has the potential to foster a more partisan atmosphere within parliamentary debates. MPs may feel compelled to adhere strictly to party lines, limiting the diversity of opinions and reducing the willingness to engage in constructive debates or compromise for the greater national interest. The absence of a robust exchange of ideas and a tendency towards increased partisanship could hinder the parliament’s ability to arrive at well-informed and balanced policy decisions. Thus, the context underscores the significance of having a mix of experienced and inexperienced MPs to maintain a healthy balance in parliamentary discourse and decision-making.
- Impact on public confidence** – the departure of experienced parliamentarians has the potential to undermine public confidence in the legislative process. Experienced representatives are often viewed by citizens as pillars of expertise, stability, and

institutional knowledge within the parliamentary system. Their prolonged service and in-depth understanding of legislative intricacies contribute to a sense of reliability and competence. As these seasoned figures exit, there is a risk that citizens may perceive a loss of stability and efficiency within the legislative body. Public confidence in the effectiveness of the legislative process is closely tied to the perceived competence and experience of the representatives. The absence of experienced parliamentarians may lead to concerns about a potential erosion of institutional memory, a decrease in the ability to navigate complex policy issues, and a perceived lack of continuity in governance. Such perceptions could, in turn, diminish public trust in the legislative branch, as citizens may question the efficacy and reliability of the decision-making processes in the absence of seasoned representatives. This context highlights the importance of maintaining a balance of experience within the parliamentary ranks to uphold public confidence in the legislative system.

- **Transition challenges** – integrating new members into the parliamentary system is a nuanced process that involves familiarizing them with the intricacies of legislative procedures, committee work, and the overall dynamics of governance. The potential loss of experienced MPs introduces a challenging period of adjustment for both the new members and the parliamentary system as a whole. Seasoned lawmakers, through their wealth of experience, often serve as mentors and guides for newcomers, aiding in their smooth integration into the legislative framework. The departure of experienced MPs may lead to a transitional phase where incoming members need time to adapt to their roles and responsibilities. This period of adjustment could potentially impact the overall productivity of the parliament, as new members navigate the learning curve associated with parliamentary procedures and decision-making processes. During this transitional phase, there may be delays in committee work, legislative debates, and policy formulation, highlighting the importance of maintaining a balance between experienced and new members to ensure the continuous and effective functioning of the parliamentary system.
- **Potential for policy gaps** – experienced MPs play a crucial role in identifying and addressing critical issues within the legislative agenda. Their prolonged exposure to parliamentary proceedings and comprehensive understanding of policy areas

enable them to pinpoint pressing national concerns and advocate for effective solutions. The potential departure of these experienced MPs raises concerns about potential oversight in key policy areas, creating gaps in the legislative agenda. These seasoned lawmakers often serve as the vanguards in recognizing emerging challenges, advocating for necessary reforms, and ensuring that the legislative agenda remains aligned with the evolving needs of the nation. Their absence may result in delays in responding to urgent national concerns, as newer members may take time to familiarize themselves with the intricacies of complex policy issues. This context underscores the vital role that experienced MPs play in steering the legislative agenda, ensuring a timely and effective response to critical issues that impact the welfare of the nation.

Addressing these implications requires a concerted effort from all key stakeholders – political parties, existing parliamentarians, the government of the day, working through the along with support mechanisms to ensure a smooth transition and the continued effectiveness of Ghana’s 9th Parliament.

Proposed recommendations

Addressing the potential high parliamentary attrition and the potential loss of experienced members requires a strategic approach. Here are some recommendations:

- **Succession planning and mentorship programmes:** Implement structured succession planning and mentorship programs to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and skills from experienced parliamentarians to newer members. This can help bridge the gap created by the departure of seasoned MPs. The recommendation stems from the recognition of the invaluable knowledge and skills possessed by experienced parliamentarians and the potential challenges associated with their departure. In parliamentary settings, the departure of seasoned MPs can create a void in institutional memory and expertise. To address this, a well-designed succession planning initiative can ensure a seamless transition by systematically identifying and preparing potential successors among newer members.
- **Quota systems and affirmative action** – to enhance women’s representation in parliament, a multifaceted approach is recommended. This involves implementing quota systems or affirmative action policies, conducting public awareness campaigns challenging gender stereotypes, securing commitments from political

parties to support women candidates, establishing supportive legal frameworks, offering tailored capacity-building programs and networking opportunities, advocating for flexible work arrangements, encouraging women’s participation in local politics, ensuring fair media coverage, and recognizing the achievements of women leaders. By combining these strategies, a comprehensive effort can be made to address barriers, promote gender equality, and create a more inclusive and diverse parliamentary environment.

- **Establish cross-party collaboration initiatives** to collectively address and mitigate the attrition of experienced MPs. Through joint efforts, political parties can implement mentorship programs, facilitate knowledge-sharing platforms, and advocate for supportive policies to retain and leverage the valuable expertise of seasoned parliamentarians, fostering a collaborative and stable legislative environment.
- **Training and capacity building:** there is the need for continuous investment in training and capacity-building programmes for both new and existing parliamentarians. This should focus on enhancing legislative skills, policy analysis, and other competencies crucial for effective parliamentary performance.
- **Transparent selection processes:** Ensure transparent and merit-based selection processes for parliamentary leadership roles. The recommendation to ensure transparent and merit-based selection processes for parliamentary leadership roles underscores the importance of promoting competence and effectiveness in legislative leadership. In many parliamentary systems, leadership positions are traditionally held by experienced individuals. However, relying solely on tenure may not always align with the need for dynamic and forward-thinking leadership. By advocating for transparent and merit-based selection processes, parliamentary systems can prioritise the identification and promotion of capable individuals based on their skills, qualifications, and track record rather than purely on financial acumen. This approach not only encourages a more diverse and skilled leadership but also cultivates a culture that values competency and performance, ultimately contributing to more effective and adaptive parliamentary governance.

- **Engage CSOs and other stakeholders** – involve civil society organizations and key stakeholders in advocating for the importance of experienced leadership in parliament. Building awareness of the potential consequences of high attrition can garner support for measures aimed at retaining seasoned MPs at the local/constituency level.
- **Establish a parliamentary knowledge repository:** since the exit of experienced parliamentarians from parliament is largely inevitable, it is important to continuously strengthen and upgrade/develop a centralised repository of parliamentary knowledge, including documentation of legislative processes, historical contexts, and best practices. This resource can serve as a reference for both new and existing members, mitigating the loss of institutional knowledge.
- **Public awareness campaigns:** Conduct public awareness campaigns highlighting the value of experienced parliamentarians and the potential consequences of high attrition. Generating public support for retaining seasoned representatives can exert pressure on policymakers to implement measures addressing this issue.

By adopting a comprehensive and proactive approach that combines these recommendations, Ghana can work towards mitigating the negative impacts of high parliamentary attrition and ensuring the continued effectiveness of its legislative body.

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Contact us
Tel: 011 268 0479
Email: info@gga.org

Web: www.gga.org

