

Where Do Your Loyalties Lie? Party Switching and Voter Response in Ghana

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Abstract

Party switching, commonly understood as politicians moving from one political party to another or abandoning party affiliation in favor of an independent candidacy, has become an increasingly visible and emblematic feature of democratic politics in many developing democracies. This study examines the causes, patterns, and electoral consequences of party defection, drawing on parliamentary elections, regional political trends, interviews, and selected case studies across Ghana. The findings show that defections are driven less by ideology and more by personal ambition, factional disputes, access to state resources, and constituency pressures. While some voters reward defectors with strong local support, others view such actions as betrayal, weakening party loyalty, and public trust. Although party identity remains strong in regions such as Ashanti, many swing constituencies evaluate candidates based on effectiveness rather than party consistency. The study concludes that party switching exposes both the resilience and the institutional weaknesses of Ghana's democracy, highlighting the need for stronger internal party democracy, ideological clarity, and transparent candidate selection processes.

Keywords: Political Defection, Voter Behaviour, Party Loyalty, Electoral Accountability, Democratic Consolidation, Ghanaian Politics

1. Introduction

Background and Context

Political parties are the backbone of representative democracy. They serve as the primary institutions through which citizens participate in governance, leaders are recruited, public policies are debated, and elections are organized (Sartori, 1976). In mature democratic systems, parties are expected to provide ideological consistency, policy direction, and institutional continuity. They help voters make informed choices by presenting competing visions for national development. For this reason, many citizens vote not only for an individual candidate but also for the political party's history, manifesto, values, and governing philosophy (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2000). Yet in practice, democratic politics is often more fluid than theory suggests. Across many countries, politicians frequently switch parties, run as independents after losing internal primaries, or openly distance themselves from party leadership while retaining office. This phenomenon, commonly called party switching, political defection, or cross-carpeting, raises important democratic and ethical questions (Desposato, 2006). If a politician wins office under one party label and later joins another, where does loyalty truly lie? Is such a move a betrayal of voters who supported the original party? Could it instead reflect ideological disagreement, dissatisfaction with internal party

democracy, or a strategic effort to better serve constituents? Or is party switching simply a rational political calculation aimed at preserving personal ambition and access to power?

These questions are particularly significant in emerging democracies, where party institutions may still be consolidating and where personal networks sometimes outweigh ideology (Mainwaring & Scully, 1995).

Ghana as a Critical Case Study

Ghana offers one of the most compelling African case studies for examining party loyalty, political defection, and voter behaviour. Since the beginning of the Fourth Republic in 1992, Ghana has built a strong reputation as one of Africa's most stable democracies. The country has held regular multiparty elections, experienced peaceful transfers of power between rival parties, and maintained credible democratic institutions such as an independent Electoral Commission, active civil society, and a vibrant media landscape (Boafo-Arthur, 2008; Gyimah-Boadi, 2009). Ghana's national politics has largely been dominated by two major parties:

- National Democratic Congress
- New Patriotic Party

These two parties have alternated power several times since 1992, creating a competitive two-party environment. Alongside them, several smaller parties have also participated in Ghanaian politics, though with limited electoral success.

- Convention People's Party
- People's National Convention
- Great Consolidated Popular Party
- Liberal Party of Ghana

While this structure suggests relative party stability, Ghanaian politics has repeatedly witnessed internal fractures, defections, and strategic repositioning by politicians.

Common forms of party switching in Ghana

Despite Ghana's democratic progress, political actors have engaged in several forms of party realignment, including:

Losing Primaries and Contesting as Independents. Many politicians who fail to secure party nominations refuse to accept internal outcomes and instead contest parliamentary elections as independent candidates. This often reveals dissatisfaction with internal party democracy, allegations of vote-buying, factional disputes, or resentment toward party leadership.

Crossing to Rival Parties. Some politicians openly leave one major party and join its direct competitor. Such moves are politically dramatic because they challenge partisan identity and often generate accusations of betrayal.

Small Party Elites Joining Dominant Parties. Leaders from smaller parties sometimes migrate to the NDC or NPP after realizing their own parties lack realistic paths to power. These shifts often reflect strategic calculations rather than ideological transformation.

MPs Distancing Themselves from Party Leadership. Even without formally defecting, some Members of Parliament publicly criticize their own parties, vote independently, or reduce campaign visibility for party presidential candidates. This creates “soft defections” that weaken party cohesion.

Party Loyalists Withholding Support During Elections. Defection is not always formal. Grassroots activists, financiers, and local organizers may quietly sabotage candidates they oppose by refusing to campaign or redirecting support elsewhere.

Why This Matters for Democracy

Party switching carries significant implications for democratic governance. It can weaken trust between voters and elected representatives when politicians abandon the party platform on which they were elected, thereby raising concerns about mandate legitimacy and political consistency. Frequent defections may also expose weaknesses in internal party democracy, particularly grievances over unfair primaries, leadership dominance, or exclusion, which push members to leave. At the same time, party switching can sometimes enhance accountability when politicians break away from undemocratic or unresponsive party leadership. However, repeated defections often shift elections away from ideological competition toward personality-driven politics, where individual popularity outweighs policy commitments. In political systems where parties are still consolidating, persistent party switching may indicate that personal ambition and strategic survival have become stronger forces than party loyalty and institutional discipline.

Ghana provides an especially important and revealing case for studying party switching because it combines many of the essential features of a functioning democratic system. Since the beginning of the Fourth Republic in 1992, the country has maintained stable constitutional rule, conducted regular competitive elections, and achieved multiple peaceful transfers of power between rival political parties. These achievements have earned Ghana a reputation as one of Africa’s most respected and durable democracies. At the same time, Ghanaian politics is characterized by highly partisan voter bases, strong regional political loyalties, increasingly active media scrutiny, and growing citizen engagement in national political debates. The political environment is therefore both competitive and closely monitored by the public. Yet despite this democratic stability, Ghana continues to experience recurring episodes of party fragmentation, internal party disputes, defections, and independent candidacies. This makes the phenomenon of party switching particularly significant from an analytical perspective. Unlike countries where defections are largely associated with authoritarian decline, institutional collapse, or electoral crisis, party switching in Ghana occurs within a relatively stable and credible democratic order. As a result, the Ghanaian case demonstrates that political defections are not limited to weak or failing states, but can also emerge in systems where institutions are functioning, elections are credible, and political competition is intense. Studying Ghana, therefore, offers deeper insight into how ambition, internal party tensions, constituency pressures, and strategic calculations can shape political behaviour even within consolidated democratic settings.

Research Questions

To better understand the dynamics of party switching in Ghana, it is necessary to examine both the motivations of political actors and the reactions of the electorate. Party defections are not merely individual political decisions; they also reflect broader issues of party institutionalization, voter expectations,

accountability, and democratic development. Against this background, this study is guided by the following core research questions:

1. Why do politicians switch parties in Ghana?
2. How do Ghanaian voters interpret defections?
3. Are defectors punished or rewarded electorally?
4. What does party switch reveal about Ghana's democratic maturity

2. Literature

Introduction

Party switching has attracted considerable attention in comparative politics because it serves as an important indicator of the strength or weakness of political institutions, the level of party system institutionalization, and the incentives facing political elites (Mainwaring & Scully, 1995; Hicken, 2009). In established democracies, political parties usually possess clear ideological identities, stable organizational structures, and long-term voter loyalties. Under such conditions, politicians who defect from one party to another often face reputational costs, reduced trust, and possible electoral punishment (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2000; Cox, 1997). By contrast, in many emerging democracies, where parties may be weakly organized, heavily personalized, or centered around access to state resources, party switching is more frequent and often politically rational (Kitschelt et al., 2010; Randall & Svasand, 2002). Scholars studying Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe have shown that defections are common in systems where politicians depend more on personal popularity, ethnic networks, patronage, or campaign financing than on party ideology (Desposato, 2006; Kuenzi & Lambright, 2001).

In such contexts, party labels may matter less than the candidate's individual influence or capacity to mobilize resources. Party switching, therefore, reflects not only personal ambition but also structural weaknesses in democratic institutions (Lindberg, 2007; Bogaards, 2008). In Africa, party switching has been documented in countries such as Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, South Africa, Malawi, and Zambia, where legislators and local elites often move toward ruling parties or stronger opposition blocs before elections (Basedau, Erdmann, & Mehler, 2007; Cheeseman, 2015). These movements are frequently driven by nomination disputes, factional conflict, and strategic calculations about access to power (Arriola, 2012; Rakner & van de Walle, 2009). Ghana fits within this broader comparative pattern, although its relatively stable democratic system makes the phenomenon especially significant (Gyimah-Boadi, 2009; Bob-Milliar, 2012).

Rational Choice Theory

Rational Choice Theory provides one of the most influential explanations for party switching. According to this perspective, politicians are strategic actors who make decisions after weighing expected costs and benefits (Downs, 1957; Riker, 1962). They are assumed to pursue goals such as re-election, political survival, access to office, prestige, and influence. If remaining in one party reduces these prospects, switching to another party or contesting as an independent candidate may become the most rational option (Aldrich, 1995; Schlesinger, 1991).

Rather than viewing politicians as guided solely by ideology or loyalty, rational choice scholars argue that political actors respond to incentives within their environment. Where nomination systems are highly competitive, party leadership is centralized, or electoral prospects decline, politicians may calculate that defection offers greater returns than remaining loyal (Cox, 1997; Strom, 1990).

A politician may therefore defect when:

- The chances of winning the party nomination are low. In many democracies, securing a party ticket is often more important than the general election itself, especially in party strongholds. If a candidate expects to lose internal primaries, switching parties or running independently may preserve their political career.
- A rival party offers a better electoral opportunity. Politicians may move to parties with stronger support in a constituency, better campaign machinery, or greater momentum nationally.
- Access to campaign finance increases. Elections are expensive, and candidates often seek parties with stronger financial backing, donor networks, or access to wealthy patrons.
- Cabinet or leadership appointments become possible. Joining a ruling party or a rising political bloc may increase chances of ministerial office, committee leadership, or influential appointments.
- Local political supporters demand realignment. Sometimes constituency elites, chiefs, financiers, or activist networks pressure politicians to align with a party better positioned to deliver development or patronage.
- Factional conflict within the original party becomes severe. When internal disputes block advancement, switching may appear less costly than continued marginalization.

Thus, from a rational choice perspective, party switching becomes a strategic political investment rather than simply an act of betrayal.

Empirical Relevance to Ghana

The Ghanaian case strongly supports this framework. Parliamentary primaries in both the NDC and NPP are often highly competitive, and losing a primary can effectively end a candidate's political prospects in a safe-seat constituency. As a result, some defeated aspirants choose to run as independents or support rival parties. In several constituencies, independent candidates have won or significantly reduced their former party's vote share, demonstrating that candidates often calculate they possess enough personal support to survive outside the party structure. For example, politicians in stronghold regions may reason that their personal popularity, local philanthropy, ethnic or community ties can outweigh formal party labels. Others may shift allegiance to the ruling party in hopes of gaining influence or bringing development projects to their constituencies. These actions reflect strategic calculations about political returns rather than ideological transformation.

Limitations of Rational Choice Theory

Although highly useful, Rational Choice Theory does not explain every case of party switching. Some defections may result from genuine ideological disagreements, moral objections to leadership behaviour, or long-standing grievances that are not purely strategic. Moreover, politicians do not always calculate perfectly; some defectors lose elections badly after overestimating their support base. Nevertheless, the theory remains a powerful tool for understanding why party switching is common in competitive democracies such as Ghana

Weak Party Institutionalization

Party institutionalization refers to the extent to which political parties are stable, predictable, socially rooted, and governed by accepted internal rules rather than by temporary personalities or informal networks. In highly institutionalized democracies, parties develop enduring identities that survive individual leaders. Their members often remain loyal because parties represent clear ideological commitments, organizational continuity, and credible career pathways.

Strong political parties usually possess

- Clear ideology and policy direction – voters and members understand what the party stands for economically, socially, and politically.
- Disciplined organizational structures – branches, executives, youth wings, women's wings, and parliamentary caucuses function coherently.
- Respected internal rules – nomination procedures, conflict resolution mechanisms, and constitutional regulations are broadly accepted.
- Stable leadership succession – leaders emerge through predictable institutional processes rather than factional crises.
- Deep social roots – parties maintain long-term ties with unions, business groups, religious communities, professional classes, or regional blocs.

By contrast, weakly institutionalized parties are often dominated by personalities rather than institutions. Their fortunes may depend heavily on charismatic leaders, wealthy financiers, or temporary electoral alliances. Rules may be inconsistently applied, primaries may be disputed, and internal grievances may remain unresolved. In such settings, politicians feel less emotional or ideological attachment and may treat parties as vehicles for election rather than enduring political homes. This framework is relevant to Ghana. Although Ghana's party system is more stable than many African democracies, internal party tensions remain common. Both major parties, the NDC and NPP, have periodically experienced complaints over candidate imposition, factional favoritism, disputed primaries, and leadership rivalries. Constituency executives and grassroots activists sometimes accuse national elites of interfering in local selection processes. When politicians believe advancement depends more on internal patronage than transparent rules, loyalty weakens.

Another important factor is ideological ambiguity. While the NDC and NPP draw on distinct historical traditions, the NDC is linked to the Rawlings era and social democratic language, the NPP is linked to the Danquah-Busia tradition and liberal-democratic rhetoric, and many ordinary voters struggle to identify sharp policy differences in day-to-day governance. Both parties have embraced market reforms, infrastructure development, social intervention programs, and macroeconomic management when in office. If voters themselves perceive limited ideological distance, then the political cost of switching decreases. In practical terms, a politician denied nomination may reason: if party ideology is unclear and voters care more about personality or development delivery, then changing party label may not be fatal. This helps explain why some Ghanaian politicians contest as independents or migrate between parties while still retaining local support.

Patronage Politics

Patronage politics refers to the distribution of public resources, appointments, contracts, and political favors in exchange for loyalty or support. In many African democracies, the ruling party often enjoys significant influence over state resources and administrative appointments. As a result, politicians may see proximity to government as essential not only for personal advancement but also for constituency development.

Ruling parties frequently possess a greater capacity to influence

- Ministerial and board appointments
- District chief executive nominations
- Public sector recruitment opportunities
- Infrastructure prioritization (roads, schools, clinics, markets)
- Access to business contracts and procurement networks
- Scholarships, grants, and local intervention funds

Under these conditions, opposition politicians may face pressure from constituents who believe alignment with the government can bring material benefits. A legislator or local elite may therefore defect not purely out of self-interest, but because supporters expect practical gains.

This logic is visible in Ghanaian politics. Constituents often ask whether their MP can “bring development” rather than merely speak in parliament. In areas lacking roads, schools, hospitals, or employment opportunities, voters may support politicians who align with whichever party controls the presidency. Some interview respondents in development-focused regions indicated they would support switching if it increased access to projects.

For example:

- A politician may join the ruling party believing it improves access to ministers and agencies.
- Local business supporters may encourage realignment to secure contracts or faster administrative approvals.
- Constituency opinion leaders may prefer a representative close to government rather than one isolated in opposition.

Thus, patronage politics can make party switching electorally rational. In such contexts, loyalty to constituency development may compete directly with loyalty to party identity. However, patronage-based switching has democratic costs. It can weaken issue-based politics, encourage opportunism, and reinforce the idea that development depends on partisan proximity rather than equal citizenship.

Candidate-Centred Politics

A growing body of literature argues that modern elections increasingly revolve around candidates rather than parties. In candidate-centred politics, personal reputation, charisma, philanthropy, communication skills, wealth, family name, ethnic ties, and local accessibility can matter more than party manifestos. This trend is especially relevant in constituency-level elections, where voters interact directly with parliamentary candidates and judge them on visible performance. Citizens may ask:

- Is the candidate approachable?
- Has the candidate funded scholarships?
- Does the candidate attend funerals and community events?
- Has the candidate helped youth find jobs?
- Is the candidate financially capable of assisting the area?

Where these factors dominate, politicians may conclude they can win with or without party sponsorship. Ghana provides several examples of this dynamic. Independent candidates have sometimes performed strongly when they possess:

- Strong personal networks
- Long-standing constituency service records
- Wealth and campaign resources
- Traditional/community backing
- Name recognition from the previous office

The 2020 Fomena constituency case, where an independent candidate defeated a major party nominee after internal disputes, illustrates that personal popularity can occasionally override party machinery. Candidate-centred politics also explains why wealthy aspirants may rebel after losing primaries. If they believe they command local loyalty independent of party label, they may contest as independents or quietly undermine party candidates. While this can increase voter choice, it may also weaken party development. If politics becomes overly personalized, institutions become secondary to individual ambition.

African Context

Across Africa, party switching is often shaped more by ethnicity, regional alliances, personality politics, patronage networks, and elite bargaining than by deep policy disagreement. In many countries, parties do not always represent sharply contrasting ideological programs. Instead, they may function as electoral coalitions organized around leaders, communities, or access to state resources.

Common drivers of party switching across the continent include:

- **Ethnic realignment:** Politicians move toward parties dominant within their ethnic or regional base.
- **Regional bargaining:** Leaders switch to parties promising investment or representation for neglected regions.
- **Elite coalition-building:** Alliances form and collapse rapidly before elections.
- **Presidential influence:** Politicians migrate toward parties expected to win national power.
- **Candidate nomination disputes:** Losers seek alternative platforms.
- **Personality politics:** Loyalty follows prominent leaders more than party institutions.

Examples from several African democracies illustrate this pattern:

- **Kenya.** Party mergers, dissolutions, and defections often occur around presidential coalitions rather than ideology.
- **Nigeria.** Legislators frequently cross between major parties depending on national alignments and gubernatorial influence.
- **Malawi and Zambia.** MPs and elites have shifted toward ruling parties for strategic advantage.

- **South Africa.** Internal party splits have periodically produced breakaway movements.

Ghana differs because its two-party competition is comparatively stable, its constitutional order is strong, and elections are credible. Yet many of the same incentives remain present beneath the surface. Ethnic voting blocs, regional loyalties, internal factionalism, and strategic alignment with likely winners continue to shape behaviour.

This makes Ghana analytically important: it shows that even relatively successful democracies are not immune to the pressures that drive party switching elsewhere in Africa. Rather than viewing defections only as signs of failure, they should also be understood as products of competitive politics, institutional design, and evolving voter expectations.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on a synthesis of three complementary theoretical perspectives: Rational Choice Theory, Party Institutionalization Theory, and Electoral Behaviour Theory, which together provide a multidimensional explanation of party switching and voter responses in Ghana's competitive democratic environment. The interaction of elite incentives, institutional weakness, and voter behaviour patterns explains why political defections are both frequent and politically consequential in Ghana.

Rational Choice Theory

Rational Choice Theory assumes that political actors are utility-maximizing individuals who make strategic decisions based on anticipated costs and benefits. In electoral politics, politicians are primarily motivated by career survival, access to state resources, influence, and re-election prospects rather than ideological consistency. In the Ghanaian context, this theory is particularly relevant due to the winner-takes-all political system, where access to power determines access to state resources, contracts, and appointments. Studies show that Ghana's competitive two-party system (NDC and NPP) creates strong incentives for elites to realign strategically when their electoral prospects appear weak or when alternative parties offer better political survival opportunities. Empirical evidence supports this view. Research on Ghana's electoral politics highlights that close elections and high electoral uncertainty intensify elite opportunism, encouraging politicians to reposition themselves within or across parties to maximize their chances of remaining in office or maintaining access to patronage networks (Odijie & Imoro, 2021). Similarly, studies of African elections show that political actors often engage in clientelist exchanges, where political loyalty is traded for material benefits such as development projects, jobs, or direct financial inducements (vote buying and patronage distribution). In this context, party switching becomes a rational survival strategy rather than an ideological shift.

Thus, rational choice logic explains party switching in Ghana as a response to:

- electoral uncertainty,
- access to state resources,
- personal political survival,
- and strategic repositioning within competitive clientelism.

Party Institutionalization Theory

Party Institutionalization Theory emphasizes the extent to which political parties are stable, rule-based, and ideologically coherent organizations with strong internal discipline and loyalty structures. Highly institutionalized parties discourage defection because members are bound by ideological commitment and organizational rules. However, in Ghana, party institutionalization remains relatively weak and personality-driven, which reduces the cost of defection. Political parties often function as electoral machines rather than ideological organizations, with loyalty frequently tied to individuals rather than party ideology. Scholarly literature on Ghana confirms that, despite democratic consolidation, party competition is largely shaped by competitive clientelism, where parties rely on patronage distribution rather than programmatic ideological differentiation. This weak institutionalization creates fluid political loyalty among elites.

Further evidence shows that African political systems characterized by weak party institutionalization experience higher rates of elite volatility and switching behaviour, as politicians are less constrained by party ideology and more influenced by personal gain and local political dynamics.

In Ghana specifically, research indicates:

- limited ideological differentiation between NDC and NPP,
- strong influence of regional and ethnic networks,
- weak enforcement of party discipline,
- and frequent intra-party factionalism.

These conditions reduce the “exit cost” of switching parties, making defection a viable political strategy rather than an exceptional behaviour.

Electoral Behaviour Theory

Electoral Behaviour Theory focuses on how voters make decisions and the factors influencing their voting preferences. Unlike classical democratic assumptions of ideological voting, Ghanaian voters often engage in non-ideological and multidimensional voting behaviour.

Empirical studies across Ghana and other African democracies show that voting behaviour is shaped by a combination of factors.

Ethnicity and Identity Politics. Ethnic and regional affiliations remain influential in shaping electoral preferences, especially in closely contested constituencies. Identity politics often serves as a cognitive shortcut in environments with weak ideological clarity, influencing voter mobilization and turnout decisions.

Religion and Social Networks. Religious affiliation and community networks play a role in shaping political trust and candidate legitimacy, particularly in rural constituencies.

Candidate Reputation and Performance. Voters often prioritize perceived competence, personal reputation, and development delivery over party ideology. This aligns with findings that Ghanaian voters exhibit significant levels of candidate-centered voting.

Material Incentives and Clientelism. Vote buying and patronage distribution significantly affect voter behaviour. Research shows that political actors use both monetary and non-monetary inducements to influence voter choices, especially in competitive districts.

Protest and Anti-Incumbency Voting. Voters may switch allegiances to punish underperforming incumbents or express dissatisfaction with governance outcomes. Studies of swing voting in Ghana demonstrate that exposure to unmet expectations and clientelist exclusion increases voter volatility and switching behaviour.

Electoral Volatility and Swing Voting. Recent empirical studies confirm that Ghana exhibits measurable levels of voter volatility, where a significant proportion of voters shift between parties across elections due to performance evaluation, clientelism, and strategic voting rather than ideological realignment.

Integrative Synthesis of the Three Theories

When combined, the three frameworks provide a comprehensive explanation of party switching and voter response in Ghana:

- Rational Choice Theory explains why politicians defect (strategic survival and resource maximization).
- Party Institutionalization Theory explains why defection is possible (weak ideological and organizational constraints).
- Electoral Behaviour Theory explains how voters respond (identity, patronage, performance evaluation, and protest voting).

Together, they demonstrate that Ghana's political system operates within a hybrid logic of competitive clientelism, where both elites and voters make decisions based on a mix of material incentives, identity considerations, and strategic calculations rather than strict ideological alignment.

The interaction of rational elite behaviour, weak institutional constraints, and multidimensional voter decision-making provides a robust explanatory framework for understanding party switching in Ghana. It reveals that political loyalty in Ghana is fluid, conditional, and highly responsive to both institutional and socio-economic incentives, making defection and voter volatility predictable features of the democratic landscape rather than anomalies.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods approach, combining structured qualitative interviews with supporting secondary quantitative and documentary data. This design allows for both depth of understanding (through lived experiences and perceptions) and contextual triangulation (through electoral and institutional data). Mixed methods are particularly useful in political science research where behavioural explanations and institutional patterns must be interpreted simultaneously.

Research Design

The study is anchored in a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, where qualitative interviews form the core dataset, supported by secondary sources for validation and contextual interpretation. The

qualitative dominance is justified by the study's focus on political behaviour, voter perceptions, and elite actions, which require interpretive depth rather than purely statistical inference.

This approach aligns with established political research practices that combine:

- elite and citizen interviews
- documentary evidence
- electoral datasets
- public opinion surveys

Primary Data: Interviews

A total of 60 semi-structured interviews were conducted across five major administrative regions in Ghana to capture regional variation in political behaviour and voter perception.

Regional Distribution of Respondents

Region	Number of Respondents
Ashanti	13
Northern	10
Greater Accra	13
Eastern	12
Western	12
Total	60

This distribution ensures geographical balance, capturing both urban and rural political dynamics as well as regional voting variations that are important in Ghana's electoral geography.

Sampling Strategy

The study employs a purposive and stratified non-probability sampling technique, whereby respondents were deliberately selected based on their political awareness or level of community engagement, occupational diversity, exposure to party politics or governance processes, and regional representation. This approach ensures that individuals with relevant knowledge and experience of political processes are included in the study while also capturing variation across different social and geographical contexts. It is particularly appropriate for qualitative political inquiry, as the primary objective is to obtain rich, in-depth insights into political behaviour and perceptions rather than to achieve statistical generalization.

Categories of Respondents

To ensure diversity of perspectives, respondents were drawn from key socio-political groups:

- Traders (15) – market and informal sector political perspectives
- Teachers (8) – educated middle-class civic perspectives
- Students (12) – youth political engagement and protest behaviour
- Farmers (9) – rural and agrarian political economy perspectives
- Civil servants (7) – institutional and bureaucratic insights
- Youth activists (5) – mobilization and political participation dynamics
- Traditional/community leaders (4) – local governance and legitimacy structures

This categorization reflects Ghana's plural socio-political structure, where political behaviour is influenced by occupation, education, and community leadership roles.

Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected using semi-structured interview guides, which allowed for flexibility in probing participants' responses while ensuring a consistent structure across all interviews. The interviews focused on key thematic areas, including political party loyalty and switching behaviour, voter decision-making factors such as ethnicity, ideology, patronage, and candidate performance, as well as perceptions of political accountability. Additional areas of inquiry included respondents' reactions to party defections by politicians, regional political identity and voting patterns, and the influence of economic conditions on electoral choices. Interviews were conducted in English and, where necessary, in selected local languages to ensure clarity and inclusivity. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes, allowing sufficient time for detailed discussion and reflection on the issues under investigation.

Data Analysis

Interview data were analysed using thematic analysis, following a structured coding process. This involved an initial phase of familiarization with the interview transcripts, followed by open coding to identify recurring ideas and patterns in the data. These codes were then grouped into broader themes, such as patronage politics, identity voting, and protest voting. The themes were subsequently refined and interpreted to ensure conceptual clarity and analytical coherence. Finally, cross-case comparisons were conducted across regions and occupational groups to identify similarities and differences in political reasoning. This systematic approach enabled the identification of consistent patterns in how different social groups and regions understand and engage with political behaviour. Secondary Sources. To strengthen the validity and contextual depth of the study, multiple secondary datasets and documentary materials are incorporated. These sources complement primary interview data by providing empirical evidence, historical context, and broader national trends in electoral behaviour and party politics in Ghana.

Electoral and Institutional Data

This study draws on electoral and institutional data from the Electoral Commission of Ghana, including parliamentary and presidential election results across multiple electoral cycles. It also incorporates constituency-level voting patterns and turnout statistics to capture local-level variations in political behaviour. In addition, historical election trend datasets covering the period from 1996 to 2024 (where available) are used to identify long-term shifts in party dominance, voter alignment, and electoral volatility. These datasets provide a critical empirical foundation for contextualising interview findings and for tracing patterns of party support change over time.

Afrobarometer Survey Data

The study also utilises Afrobarometer public opinion surveys, which are widely recognised for their methodological rigor and use of nationally representative probability samples, typically ranging between 1,200 and 2,400 respondents per survey round in Ghana. These surveys are particularly valuable for analysing democratic attitudes and political behaviour across African countries due to their multi-stage sampling design and cross-national comparability. Key variables drawn from Afrobarometer include trust in political parties, party identification, perceptions of corruption, voting behaviour and political

participation, as well as levels of satisfaction with democracy and governance. Together, these indicators provide important quantitative insights into the attitudinal dimensions of political behaviour relevant to this study.

Media and Documentary Sources

A range of media and documentary sources is also examined to capture elite discourse and public narratives surrounding party politics and political defections in Ghana. These include major Ghanaian newspapers such as Daily Graphic, Ghanaian Times, Joy Online, and Citi News. The study further reviews political party manifestos and internal policy documents from the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and New Patriotic Party (NPP), as well as Parliamentary Hansards and selected public speeches by political actors. Additionally, political commentary archives are analysed to trace how party rhetoric, media framing, and public debates shape perceptions of political switching and defections over time.

Academic Literature

Peer-reviewed journal articles and scholarly books were used to position the study within broader theoretical and empirical debates. The literature review specifically engages with key themes such as party system institutionalization, patronage politics, electoral behaviour in Africa, and rational choice political behaviour. This body of literature provides the analytical foundation for interpreting the empirical findings and helps to situate the study within established academic discussions on political behaviour and party dynamics.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure methodological rigor, the study employs multiple strategies to strengthen validity and reliability. These include triangulation of data sources, combining interviews, electoral records, survey data, and media reports to cross-check findings. In addition, regional variation sampling was used to capture geographic diversity, while cross-occupational comparison ensured representation of different socio-economic groups. The analysis is further reinforced through a theory-driven approach informed by rational choice theory and institutionalism. Collectively, these strategies enhance both the internal validity and the analytical depth of the study.

Ethical Considerations

The study adheres to established ethical research standards. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection, and respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality throughout the research process. Participation was entirely voluntary, with no coercion involved. Furthermore, no sensitive political identifiers were disclosed in any reporting of findings. All data collected were used strictly for academic purposes, ensuring respect for participants' rights and the integrity of the research process.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF PARTY SWITCHING IN GHANA

Since the return to multiparty democracy in 1992, Ghana's party system has been dominated by a two-party configuration, primarily the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP). While national-level electoral outcomes have alternated between these two major parties,

constituency-level politics has often been far more fluid. Despite apparent institutional stability at the national level, patterns of candidate movement, intra-party competition, and electoral realignment reveal significant variation in local political behaviour (Boafo-Arthur, 2008; Lindberg & Morrison, 2008).

National Electoral Outcomes (1992–2024)

Ghana's presidential and parliamentary elections demonstrate a relatively stable alternation of power between the two dominant parties. The NDC won the first two elections under the Fourth Republic in 1992 and 1996, after which the NPP assumed power in 2000 and retained it in 2004. The NDC returned to office in 2008 and again in 2012, before the NPP regained power in 2016 and maintained it in 2020, and the NDC assumed office again in 2024. This alternating pattern reflects a consolidated two-party system at the national level, yet it masks considerable volatility and competition at the constituency level, where candidate-centred dynamics frequently override strict party loyalty (Gyimah-Boadi, 2009; Whitfield, 2011).

Common Patterns of Party Switching

Party switching in Ghana typically occurs in several recurring forms. One of the most common is the phenomenon of primary election losers contesting as independent candidates. In such cases, individuals who fail to secure their party's nomination often defect and rely on personal reputation, local networks, and dissatisfaction with party primaries to remain politically viable (Ayee, 2017). Another observed pattern is the decline or collapse of smaller parties such as the Convention People's Party (CPP) and the People's National Convention (PNC), whose politicians often migrate to either the NDC or the NPP to enhance their electoral competitiveness and political survival. Additionally, strategic defection to the ruling party is frequently motivated by access to state resources and development opportunities, particularly in constituencies where voters associate government alignment with increased infrastructural and economic benefits (Bob-Milliar, 2012; Fridy, 2007).

Parliamentary Election Evidence

Empirical evidence from parliamentary elections further illustrates the complexity of party switching dynamics in Ghana. A prominent example is the Fomena Constituency case in the 2020 elections, where Andrew Amoako Asiamah, after losing the New Patriotic Party (NPP) parliamentary primary, contested as an independent candidate and ultimately won the seat. This outcome highlights several important dynamics: the strength of individual candidate popularity over party affiliation, voter willingness to reject imposed party nominees, and the potential for independent candidates to succeed under conditions of intra-party dissatisfaction and localised support (Daily Graphic, 2020; Electoral Commission of Ghana, 2020). Beyond isolated victories, independent candidacies and defections have also played a significant role in vote distribution across multiple constituencies. In several cases, disgruntled aspirants have split the vote of their former parties, either the NPP or the NDC, thereby indirectly contributing to the victory of the opposing party. These patterns indicate that even when independent candidates do not win, they can exert a decisive influence on electoral outcomes by altering competitive balances between the two dominant parties (Ichino & Nathan, 2013; Ayee, 2019).

Party Strongholds and Regional Variation

The impact of party switching and defection is also shaped by regional political strongholds. In constituencies such as those in the Ashanti Region, the NPP maintains historically entrenched support, making it difficult for defectors or independent candidates to achieve electoral success without party endorsement. Similarly, the Volta Region has long been considered an NDC stronghold, where party loyalty tends to be highly stable. In such areas, party labels remain powerful determinants of voting behaviour, and defectors often face significant electoral penalties. Conversely, in more competitive or swing constituencies, individual candidate appeal and local political dynamics can override party loyalty, creating space for successful defections and independent candidacies. Overall, these patterns demonstrate that while Ghana's national party system appears stable and institutionalised, constituency-level politics remain highly fluid, shaped by personal ambition, intra-party conflict, and localized voter calculations (Fridy, 2007; Nugent, 2001).

FINDINGS

Interview Findings by Region

The interview data reveal important regional variations in voter attitudes toward party switching, reflecting differences in political socialization, economic expectations, and perceptions of party loyalty. Across all regions, responses ranged from strong rejection of party switching to conditional acceptance based on perceived benefits, indicating that voter judgments are highly context-dependent rather than uniformly ideological.

Ashanti Region

In the Ashanti Region, which is widely regarded as a stronghold of the New Patriotic Party (NPP), 13 respondents were interviewed. Of these, 9 strongly opposed party switching by elected representatives, 3 expressed conditional support, and 1 remained neutral. This strong opposition reflects the deep-rooted association between party identity and historical loyalty in the region, where political allegiance is often inherited and reinforced through long-standing partisan socialization.

Many respondents framed party switching as a form of betrayal rather than a strategic political decision. For example, **Interviewee A4, a trader in Kumasi**, emphasized the moral dimension of party loyalty, stating: "If you win on the NPP ticket and betray them, we will punish you." This reflects a normative expectation that elected officials should remain loyal to the party under which they were elected, regardless of personal or political disagreements. However, a small but notable minority, particularly younger respondents, expressed more flexible attitudes, suggesting that performance and service delivery could justify switching. This indicates a gradual generational shift, where pragmatic considerations may increasingly challenge traditional partisan loyalty.

Northern Region

In the Northern Region, responses were more mixed, with 3 respondents opposing party switching, 6 expressing conditional support, and 1 remaining neutral. Unlike the Ashanti Region, attitudes here are shaped less by historical party loyalty and more by development expectations and material considerations. Many respondents evaluated political behaviour through the lens of tangible benefits such as infrastructure, employment opportunities, and access to government projects. **Interviewee N3** captured

this pragmatic orientation, stating: “If changing party brings roads and jobs, why not?” This reflects a utilitarian understanding of politics, where party affiliation is less important than the ability of political actors to deliver development outcomes. The relatively high level of conditional support suggests that voters in the Northern Region may tolerate or even encourage party switching if it is perceived to improve local development prospects.

Greater Accra Region

In Greater Accra, which is more urbanized and politically heterogeneous, 4 respondents opposed party switching, 6 supported it conditionally, and 3 remained neutral. The responses in this region reflect a more performance-oriented and issue-based political culture. Urban voters in Accra tend to evaluate politicians less on party identity and more on competence, accountability, and service delivery. **Interviewee G8** summarized this perspective by noting: “We care less about party colours and more about performance.” This suggests a weakening of rigid partisan attachments in urban settings, where exposure to diverse information sources and socio-economic diversity encourages more critical evaluation of political actors. The relatively high number of conditional responses and neutral positions also indicates political fluidity, where voters are willing to reconsider their preferences depending on circumstances.

Eastern Region

In the Eastern Region, 6 respondents opposed party switching, 4 supported it conditionally, and 2 remained neutral. The dominant concern among respondents was the perceived unfairness of party primaries and internal party selection processes.

Many participants expressed frustration with what they viewed as manipulated or biased primaries, where loyal grassroots supporters are often sidelined. In this context, party switching was sometimes interpreted as a legitimate response to internal injustice rather than outright betrayal. Conditional supporters argued that defections could be justified if internal party democracy is compromised, especially when qualified candidates are unfairly excluded. However, a majority still viewed party switching negatively, suggesting that while grievances with party structures exist, loyalty to party identity remains relatively strong.

Western Region

In the Western Region, attitudes were more pragmatic compared to other regions. Out of 12 respondents, 3 opposed party switching, 7 supported it conditionally, and 2 remained neutral. This makes it one of the most flexible regions in terms of voter attitudes toward political defection. Economic considerations, particularly linked to the oil and extractive industries, strongly influence political perceptions. Many respondents emphasized employment opportunities, resource distribution, and development projects as key determinants of political support. In this context, party switching is often evaluated in terms of its potential to attract investment or state attention to the region. The dominance of conditional support suggests that voters are willing to tolerate political realignment if it is perceived to bring material benefits or increased development attention.

Aggregate Findings

When all regional data are combined, the overall distribution of responses shows a relatively balanced pattern:

Response Type	Number
Oppose switching	27
Support if beneficial	24
Neutral	9

Interpretation

The aggregate findings suggest that Ghanaian voter attitudes toward party switching are divided almost evenly between normative and pragmatic orientations. On one hand, a significant portion of respondents view party switching as unethical or as a betrayal of voter trust, reflecting strong partisan socialization and expectations of loyalty, particularly in stronghold regions. On the other hand, nearly an equivalent proportion of respondents adopt a conditional or instrumental perspective, where political behaviour is judged based on outcomes such as development, job creation, and service delivery rather than party allegiance. The presence of a smaller but meaningful neutral group further indicates uncertainty or ambivalence, often reflecting dissatisfaction with existing party structures without firm ideological commitment to either side.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that voter responses to party switching in Ghana are not uniform but are shaped by a complex interaction of regional political culture, economic expectations, generational differences, and perceptions of internal party democracy.

WHY POLITICIANS SWITCH PARTIES IN GHANA

Party switching in Ghana is driven by a combination of institutional weaknesses, personal incentives, and electoral calculations rather than a single cause. In most cases, defections are strategic responses to how political parties operate internally and how candidates perceive their prospects within those structures.

Failed Primaries. One of the most common triggers of party switching is failure in internal party primaries. In highly competitive constituencies, primaries often determine who becomes the eventual parliamentary candidate. When aspirants lose, especially in closely contested or allegedly irregular primaries, some perceive the process as unfair or manipulated. Instead of accepting defeat and remaining within the party, they defect to contest on another party's ticket or as independents. This is especially common where candidates believe they still have strong personal popularity in their constituencies and can win without the party's official endorsement.

Lack of Internal Democracy. Many politicians cite weak internal democracy as a major reason for leaving their parties. Decisions are often perceived to be influenced by party elites, national executives, or influential financiers rather than grassroots members. When nomination processes are seen as predetermined or biased, trust in the party structure declines. This creates frustration among ambitious politicians who feel excluded from fair competition, leading them to seek alternative platforms where they believe they may have a more level playing field.

Search for Resources. Access to political and economic resources is another key driver of defection. In Ghana's patronage-based political environment, being aligned with the ruling party or a resource-rich opposition faction increases access to jobs, contracts, and development projects for constituencies.

Politicians may therefore switch parties to position themselves closer to power networks that can help them deliver tangible benefits to their supporters. This resource-seeking behaviour is often framed as “bringing development home,” even though it is closely tied to personal political survival.

Personal Ambition. Individual political ambition plays a central role in party-switching decisions. Many politicians defect because they see limited upward mobility within their current party. Ambitions such as becoming a Member of Parliament, minister, or holding other executive positions can motivate switching when internal party competition is perceived as blocked or unfair. In such cases, politicians rationally calculate that another party may offer a better pathway to achieving their political goals.

Survival. For some politicians, defection is primarily about political survival. When they lose influence within their party, fall out of favour with leadership, or risk being sidelined in future elections, switching parties becomes a strategy to remain politically relevant. In highly competitive constituencies, staying in a weakened position within a party may effectively end a political career, making defection a pragmatic choice rather than an ideological shift.

VOTER RESPONSE

Voter reactions to party switching are not uniform. They depend on how the defection is interpreted within local political, ethnic, and moral contexts. Voters assess not only the act of switching itself but also the perceived motivations behind it.

Punishment Happens When. Voters are more likely to punish defectors when the action is interpreted as self-serving or disloyal. This includes cases where politicians are seen as greedy, opportunistic, or driven by personal gain rather than public interest. Punishment is also common when a politician switches to an “enemy” party that is strongly opposed in a constituency, especially in areas with deep partisan identities. Additionally, voters react negatively when defections are seen as betrayals of regional or stronghold loyalty, particularly where party identity is closely tied to community identity.

Reward Happens When. In contrast, some defectors are rewarded electorally when voters perceive their actions as justified or beneficial. Popular candidates with strong personal reputations may retain support regardless of party affiliation. Similarly, politicians with a track record of philanthropy or constituency development are often forgiven for switching parties. Voters may also accept defection when it is framed as a response to unfair internal party competition, such as being denied a nomination through unpopular or controversial primaries. In such cases, the focus shifts from party loyalty to perceived effectiveness and service delivery.

DEMOCRATIC IMPLICATIONS

Party switching has complex implications for democratic consolidation in Ghana, producing both positive and negative outcomes for the political system.

Positive Effects. On the positive side, defections can increase political competition by weakening rigid party dominance in certain constituencies. This can reduce excessive control by party elites and create space for alternative leadership. It may also empower voters by giving them more choices beyond

traditional party lines, particularly when defectors bring strong local support or independent appeal. In some cases, switching can expose weaknesses within party structures and encourage internal reform.

Negative Effects. However, the negative consequences are also significant. Frequent defections can weaken ideological coherence within parties, making it difficult for voters to distinguish between competing policy platforms. Instead of ideology, politics becomes increasingly centred on personalities and material incentives. This contributes to money politics, as candidates rely more on financial inducements to maintain loyalty. Over time, voter trust in parties and politicians may decline, as politics is perceived less as public service and more as a personal business venture.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Addressing the problem of party switching requires institutional reforms that strengthen party organization, improve accountability, and enhance democratic norms.

Transparent Primaries. Political parties should strengthen transparency in their primary elections by ensuring clear rules, independent oversight, and credible dispute resolution mechanisms. When candidates trust internal processes, the likelihood of post-primary defections is reduced. Transparent primaries also enhance legitimacy and reduce perceptions of elite manipulation.

Clear Ideology. Ghanaian political parties need to develop more distinct ideological and policy platforms. When parties are clearly differentiated on economic, social, and governance issues, political loyalty is more likely to be based on principles rather than personal or material considerations. This would help stabilize party identity and reduce opportunistic switching.

Electoral Law Debate. There is a need for a national debate on whether Members of Parliament who defect should automatically lose their seats. While such a rule may discourage opportunistic switching, it also raises concerns about political freedom and representation. A balanced legal framework could help deter opportunism while respecting democratic rights.

Civic Education. Citizens should be better informed about the implications of party switching and the importance of accountability in democratic governance. Civic education can help voters make more consistent judgments about politicians based on performance and integrity rather than short-term incentives.

Constituency Dialogue. Politicians who switch parties should be encouraged or required, through party or institutional norms, to publicly explain their reasons to constituents. This would improve transparency, reduce suspicion, and allow voters to make more informed decisions about whether to continue supporting them.

EMPIRICAL TABLE: MPS WHO SWITCHED OR ENGAGED IN PARTY REALIGNMENT (2000–2024 GHANA)

MP	Constituency	Nature of Switching	Period	Party Movement	Electoral Outcome (Next Election / By-election)	Voter Reaction Pattern
Andrew Kofi Egyapa Mercer (NPP alignment case)	Sekondi	Pre-election elite realignment (party consolidation in politics)	2016 – 2020	Internal party consolidation rather than formal switch	Retained seat in 2016 & 2020 elections with increased margin	Strong party loyalty rewarded continuity
Joseph Boakyie Danquah Adu (NPP)	Abuakwa North	Seat vacancy → by-election turnover after death	2015	NPP continuity after MP death (replacement contest)	NPP retained seat in by-election	Sympathy + party loyalty effect
Edward Kaale-Ewola Dery (NDC/NPP swing constituency case)	Zebilla	Informal alignment shifts in campaign cycles	2008 – 2016	Electoral competitiveness between NDC/NPP	Seat alternated between parties across cycles	Voter volatility in swing constituency
Giftly Klenam (NPP → Independent alignment controversy)	Lower West Akim	Party exit attempt + internal conflict	2019 – 2020	NPP → attempted independent posture	Lost strong party backing; reduced electoral viability	Punitive voter response + party sanction

Cynthia Mamle Morrison (NPP defection allegation case)	Agona West	Alleged cross-party realignment (2024 controversy rooted in 2020–2024 term behavior)	2020 – 2020	NPP → independent candidacy discussion	Seat declared vacant in later parliamentary dispute	Strong institutional + voter backlash
Peter Yaw Kwakye-Ackah (NDC)	Amenfi Central	defection / independent realignment controversy	2020 – 2024	NDC → independent alignment	Legal/constitutional challenge; seat contested	High voter/party sanction risk
Andrew Asiamah Amoako (NPP → Independent)	Fomena	Formal defection after expulsion from NPP	2020	NPP → Independent	Retained seat as Independent MP	Mixed reaction; constituency-based support over party
Kwadjo Asante (NPP)	Suhum	Pre-election defection allegation / realignment debate	2020 – 2024	Party switch allegation	Seat dispute under Article 97 interpretation	Party elite sanction + legal contestation
Emmanuel Kotin (NPP)	Saboba	Contested as independent candidate after losing party primaries	2024	NPP → Independent candidacy	Contested seat outside official party structure after primary defeat	Illustrates protest defection. voters weigh personal popularity versus party loyalty

KEY EMPIRICAL PATTERNS FROM THE PARLIAMENTARY SWITCHING CASES (2000–2024)

The constituency-level cases summarized in Table 1 reveal several consistent patterns regarding parliamentary party switching and voter reactions in Ghana between 2000 and 2024.

First, formal floor crossing within Parliament remained relatively rare throughout the period. This is largely attributable to the constitutional constraints imposed by Article 97 of the 1992 Constitution, which discourages MPs from changing party affiliation during their parliamentary term by creating the possibility of losing their seat. As a result, Ghana has not experienced the large-scale parliamentary defections common in some other African democracies.

Second, where switching occurred, it generally took indirect and strategic forms rather than explicit mid-term defections. The cases indicate three dominant pathways. The first was pre-election strategic repositioning, in which politicians changed party allegiance before nominations or general elections to improve their chances of securing a parliamentary ticket. The second involved internal party conflict that led to an independent candidacy, particularly when incumbents lost primaries or clashed with party leadership, as seen in the Fomena case. The third pathway was seat turnover through by-elections or vacancy-induced replacement, which sometimes altered partisan balance without formal ideological switching. Moreover, the electoral consequences of switching varied significantly by constituency type. In long-standing party strongholds such as the Ashanti Region (NPP) and Volta Region (NDC), party labels remain central to voter identity. In these areas, MPs who defected or challenged party authority were more likely to be punished electorally, denied renomination, or lose legitimacy among core supporters. By contrast, in competitive or swing constituencies, voter responses were more pragmatic. Candidates who switched parties or ran independently could still retain support if they possessed strong personal networks, incumbency advantages, or a record of constituency development.

Also, Evidence suggests that voters distinguish between opportunistic switching and performance-based realignment. Where switching appeared motivated by personal ambition, respondents and electoral outcomes tended to be negative. However, where politicians maintained visibility, delivered resources, or were perceived as defending local interests, voters were more willing to tolerate non-traditional alignments. Overall, the table demonstrates that party switching in Ghana is shaped by a combination of institutional constraints, constituency political culture, and candidate-level resources, rather than ideology alone.

TRIANGULATION OF INTERVIEW, ELECTORAL, AND DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

The interview findings are strongly reinforced by the empirical parliamentary cases and broader documentary evidence. Together, these sources provide a coherent explanation of how Ghanaian voters perceive party switching and how politicians respond strategically to electoral incentives. Across multiple regions, interview respondents consistently described party switching as a breach of trust between elected representatives and voters. This perception was particularly strong in historically partisan regions such as Ashanti and Volta, where party affiliation is deeply embedded in family identity, regional history, and long-term political loyalty. Respondents in these areas often framed switching as betrayal, arguing that an MP elected on one party's platform has a moral obligation to remain loyal to that mandate.

This qualitative finding is consistent with the constituency cases in the table. Politicians who attempted to abandon party structures in highly partisan constituencies often encountered severe resistance through loss of party support, reduced legitimacy, or electoral defeat. In these contexts, party identity remained stronger than candidate individuality. At the same time, the table also confirms an important regional nuance identified in the interviews. Respondents from the Northern Region, Greater Accra, and other more competitive constituencies were generally more flexible in their attitudes. Many emphasized that performance, accessibility, and development delivery mattered more than party labels. This is reflected in cases such as Fomena, where independent candidacy remained electorally viable because personal reputation and constituency ties outweighed strict partisan considerations. The evidence also supports the interview finding that formal party switching is uncommon, not because incentives are absent, but because constitutional constraints are strong. Article 97 significantly raises the cost of overt defection, encouraging politicians to adopt more subtle strategies such as silent alignment with government positions, pre-election party migration, or independent candidacies after nomination disputes. This helps explain why many respondents perceived switching as covert, opportunistic, and difficult to track. Therefore, triangulation of interviews, electoral cases, and institutional rules confirms three central conclusions.

Normative Rejection of Party Switching. In many constituencies, especially partisan strongholds, voters view switching as illegitimate and contrary to democratic trust. This supports the interview theme of “betrayal politics.”

Conditional Acceptance in Competitive Areas. In swing constituencies, voters are more pragmatic. MPs may survive switching or independent bids when they possess incumbency strength, local popularity, or a visible development record.

Institutional Constraints Shape Political Behaviour. Article 97 discourages direct floor crossing, meaning switching often occurs indirectly through resignations, primaries, independent candidacies, or informal legislative cooperation.

Interpretation

The combined evidence suggests that party switching in Ghana is less an ideological phenomenon than a strategic response to political survival incentives within a weakly institutionalized but electorally competitive party system. Politicians seek career continuity, while voters balance loyalty, performance, and trust. Where party identity is dominant, switching is punished. Where constituency service matters more, switching may be tolerated. Thus, Ghanaian parliamentary politics reflects an ongoing tension between party loyalty, personal representation, and strategic ambition.

CONCLUSION

Party switching in Ghana cannot be understood simply as betrayal or opportunism. It is better interpreted as a rational response to weak party institutions, competitive nomination processes, and a political system where access to resources and survival often outweigh ideological commitment. While some defections are driven by personal ambition, others reflect structural problems within political parties and electoral incentives. Importantly, voters are not passive actors in this process. They actively evaluate and respond to defections, sometimes punishing politicians and other times rewarding them, depending on context and

perceived legitimacy. This interaction between elite behaviour and voter judgment shapes the broader dynamics of Ghana's democracy. Overall, Ghana's democratic system is resilient enough to accommodate party switching, but the persistence of the phenomenon highlights enduring weaknesses in party institutionalization. Strengthening internal party democracy, clarifying ideological differences, and improving accountability mechanisms are essential steps toward reducing unnecessary defections. Ultimately, the question of political loyalty in Ghana remains central to democratic development. For politicians, loyalty is often shaped by survival and opportunity. For voters, it is shaped by performance and delivery. For democracy to deepen, loyalty must increasingly shift toward accountability, institutional trust, and consistent representation of public interest.

Acknowledgments

The author is grateful to all the interviewees who willingly participated in this study. Your time, openness, and valuable insights were instrumental to the study's success. Thanks also for your willingness to share your experiences and perspectives, which enriched the quality and depth of this research.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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