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Are African Voters Really Ethnic or Clientelistic?

Survey Evidence from Ghana

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Abstract

This article explores voting behavior in one of Africa's new democracies. Recognizing that much of the literature assumes African political behavior to be subsumed in ethnic ties and clientelism, we ask if individual voting behavior in Africa is driven by evaluative rationales based on retrospective or prospective judgments of the performance of parties or representatives, or by non-evaluative rationales characterized by clientelism and proxy voting. Based on a survey of voters in two recent elections in Ghana, one of the most surprising findings is that an overwhelming majority of the respondents do not vote based on clientelism, or due to ethnic or family ties but cast their ballots after evaluation of candidates and parties. Despite the significance of ethnicity among elites in Africa, voters are seemingly not influenced primarily by it. This leads us to hypothesize that citizens in "transitional democracies" often reason and behave as relatively "mature" democratic voters by consciously appraising the past performance of the promised policy programs of candidates and parties. We also found in the Ghanaian case that as expected clientelism is more likely where political competition is high. This seems to suggest a dilemma in newly democratizing poor countries: while high-level competition is generally thought to be a desirable characteristic of a democratic regime, competition may also work to raise the frequency of political corruption.

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The core institution of modern liberal democracy whereby the right of the people to self-government can be exercised is competitive and participatory elections. The extent to which elections fulfill that mission is to a significant extent dependent on citizens' rationale for how they behave at the polls. If voters' behavior is determined by non-evaluative rationales such as clientelism, then the purpose of self-rule by representative government is defeated. Despite the importance of this aspect of the function of elections as "instruments of democracy"¹, independent surveys of voters' behavior and rationale in multiparty elections in new and transitional democracies remain extremely scarce. While most analyses of Africa concentrate on transitions at the level of elites, state structures, and institutions², or on explaining political participation as such³ this study focuses on individual voting behavior. As such, this research represents one of the first exploratory steps along a new path in

* The authors wish to extend their sincere gratitude for excellent research assistance to Winifred Pankani, Andrew Wofesor, Victor Berdie, and Jae Woo Hong. This research was supported by the Crafoord Foundation and University of Missouri Research Council.

¹ Bingham G. Powell, *Elections as Instruments of Democracy* (London: Yale University Press, 2000).

² For example, Michael Bratton, "Second Elections in Africa," *Journal of Democracy* 9:3 (July 1998): 51-66; Matthijs Bogaards, "Electoral Choices for Divided Societies: Multi-Ethnic Parties and Constituency Polling in Africa," *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 41:3 (November 2004): 59-80; Staffan I. Lindberg, "It's Our Time to 'Chop': Does Elections in Africa Feed Neopatrimonialism Rather Than Counter-Act It?" *Democratization* 10:2 (April 2003): 121-40.

³ Michael Bratton, "Political Participation in a New Democracy: Institutional Considerations From Zambia." *Comparative Political Studies* 32:5 (June 1999): 549-88.

contemporary African politics at the same time as it engages a long-standing debate on patron-clientelism and ethnicity in democracies. We ask what makes voters in Ghana decide: political patronage, ethnic or family ties, or evaluative rationales such as characteristics and accomplishments of candidates, performance of government, and policy platforms of parties? Touching upon another classic distinction in studies of voting behavior: do voters vote retrospectively “throw the rascals out”, or do they rather vote prospectively based on promises? There has been virtually no long-term tracking of opinion about these fleeting matters⁴ and therefore our survey was dedicated to the collection of data about voting behavior and rationales that respondents gave for voting for one party or the other. The article develops a model of voting behavior for newly democratizing countries based broadly on research in established democracies. Based on responses in survey interviews with a broad sample of Ghanaian citizens, we conclude that only about one in ten voters are decisively influenced by either clientelism or ethnic and family ties in choosing political representatives while 85 to 90 percent behave as “mature” democratic citizens. Ethnicity is not a key factor in determining the vote in Ghana and clientelism when it appears, is furthered by intense

⁴ The Afro-Barometer is beginning to systematically put together some relevant data, but only began its collection in 1999. In the 1999 survey of attitudes in Ghana, the Center for Democratic Development (CDD) found a high level of partisan identification, and it was associated with two main parties, see Center for Democratic Development “Popular Attitudes to Democracy and Markets in Ghana.” (1999, Accra: CDD). In addition, the University of Ghana conducted a survey of 100 voters in 40 of the 200 constituencies in Ghana ahead of the 2000 elections. The data was collected in a non-random manner however, but has been reported in Kevin S. Fridy and Daniel A. Smith, “Elephants, Umbrellas, and Quarrelling Cocks: Disaggregating Party Identification in Ghana’s Fourth Republic,” *Western Political Science Association Conference*, (Portland, OR, March 11-13, 2004), and in two edited volumes: Joseph Aryee, ed., *The 1996 General Elections and Democratic Consolidation in Ghana*, (Legon: University of Ghana, 1998), and Joseph Aryee, ed., *Deepening Democracy in Ghana: Politics of the 2000 Elections*, Vol. Two, (Accra: Freedom Publications, 2001).

competition resulting in a dilemma for new democracies. Our analysis builds on a new data set on voting behavior and rationales generated from a survey of 690 voters in the two recent elections (1996 and 2000) in Ghana. This country is a good test case of voting behavior and the rationale of the African voter because the country recently emerged from long-term military rule to sustain a reasonably successful democratization. Three successive multiparty elections since 1992 constitutes the longest period in its history over which we can observe voting patterns within a single civilian regime.

The analysis is divided into five sections: The first is Ghanaian electoral history. The second is determinants of voting behavior based on comparative studies of established democracies and their implications for understanding voter alignments in African politics, together with and a theoretical model for analyzing voting behavior in newly democratizing countries. Third, the nature of the sample, sampling procedures, and processing are described, followed by the results of the empirical analysis. Finally, the findings are put into a comparative context with reference to voting and the significance of elections in African politics.

GHANAIAN ELECTORAL HISTORY

Elections and competitive partisan alignments in Ghana provide a rich history providing the context and a partial architecture for the present analysis. Ghana's independence came ahead of others in the region and its modern party tradition goes back at least to 1951. In its tutelary election that year, two factions vied against each other for leadership of the first titular post-colonial government.⁵ The alignments apparent already then, reflected clear interest blocs—the Danquah-Busia partisans who represented educated, indigenous traditional, and merchant elites, against the Nkrumahists who

⁵ Dennis Austin, *Politics in Ghana, 1946-1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964).

represented urban workers and rural peasants.⁶ In a second tutelary contest (1956) these blocs were sharper. Kwame Nkrumah held together his CPP coalition in the face of a more focused opposition in which the prominence of the Ashantis added an ethnic dimension.⁷

These patterns of competition gained a degree of predictability over the years, virtually replicating themselves in the alternations between military interventions and elected governments that preceded the 1992 democratization. In 1966, a military government that generally reflected the Danquah-Busiast bloc displaced the Nkrumah-led CPP government. A civilian government was elected in 1972 that brought Busia (and the Danquists) to power, whose short tenure was again interrupted by a military intervention. This military junta represented the populist elements associated with Nkrumah, and subsequently they were succeeded by an avowedly Nkrumahist civilian government in 1979. It too was short-lived, followed by another military junta that initially reflected a populist program.⁸

As such Ghanaians have considerable experience in negotiating their political interests, in spite of a turbulent history with cycles of civilian and military governments. At every election interval outcomes have revealed clarity of interest orientation, even when overlaid with local, sometimes apparent ethnic casts. To date, military intervention appears only to reinforce and not disrupt these orientations.

⁶ Minion K. C. Morrison, "Political Parties in Ghana through Four Republics: A Path to Democratic Consolidation," *Comparative Politics* 36:4 (July 2004): 422-24; John Wiseman, *Democracy in Black Africa: Survival and Renewal* (New York: Paragon, 1990), 119-120.

⁷ Minion K. C. Morrison, *Ethnicity and Political Integration: The Case of Ashanti, Ghana* (Syracuse: Africa Monograph Series, Syracuse University, 1982); Catherine Boone, *Political Topographies of the African State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁸ Naomi Chazan, *An Anatomy of Ghanaian Politics* (Boulder: Westview, 1983); Mike Oquaye, "The Ghanaian Elections of 1992: A Dissenting View," *African Affairs* 94 (April 1995): 259-75.

PERSPECTIVES ON VOTING BEHAVIOR AND ALIGNMENTS

The study of voting behavior and partisan alignments is one of the classical fields of political science inquiry.⁹ Yet it remains a notoriously under-researched area in African politics in part because so many of these post-independent states gravitated toward authoritarian regimes from the mid-1960s to the early 1990s. Much of what we know about African politics was produced during this period with the branding of mainstream concepts like “clientelism”¹⁰, “neo-patrimonialism”¹¹, “personalism”¹², “prebendalism”¹³, and “rentier state”¹⁴. Hence, many lessons on voters’ behavior and alignments were produced under conditions of limited competition in one-party systems.¹⁵

⁹ For example, Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper Collins, 1957); Seymour M. Lipset and Stein Rokkan, eds., *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross National Perspectives* (New York: Free Press, 1967); Anders Westholm, “Distance versus Direction: The Illusory Defeat of the Proximity Theory of Electoral Choice,” *American Political Science Review* 91:4 (November 1997): 865-83.

¹⁰ Rene Lemarchand, “Political Clientelism and Ethnicity in Tropical Africa: Competing Solidarities in Nation-Building,” *American Political Science Review* 66:1 (February 1972): 68-90.

¹¹ Jean-Francois Medard, “The Underdeveloped State in Tropical Africa: Political Clientelism or Neo-Patrimonialism?” in Christopher Clapham, ed., *Private Patronage and Public Power: Political Clientelism in the Modern State* (London: Frances Pinter, 1982).

¹² Robert H. Jackson, and Carl G. Rosberg, *Personal Rule in Black Africa* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982).

¹³ Richard Joseph, *Prebendalism and Democracy in Nigeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

¹⁴ Robert H. Bates, *Markets and States in Tropical Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

¹⁵ For example, Franz Ansprenger, *Politische Geschichte Afrikas in 20. Jahrhundert* 2nd ed. (Munchen: Beck, 1997); Naomi Chazan, “A Re-Examination of the role of Elections in African Politics,” *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 14:2 (July 1979): 169-90; Fred Hayward, ed., *Elections in Independent Africa* (Boulder C.O.: Westview Press, 1987); Richard Sklar, “Democracy in Africa,” *African Studies Review* 26:3 (December 1983): 11-24.

These elections never allowed voters a choice of who should rule; nor did it give them a chance to influence policy directions. Yet, as Goran Hyden and Colin Leys noted in a comparative study, they gave the local electorate an opportunity to oust those leaders that had failed to deliver the goods to constituents.¹⁶ However, since the end of the Cold War in 1989 there have been nearly 15 years of elections featuring multiple parties in 44 out of the 48 African countries.¹⁷ This opens up new possibilities for research and analysis.

One early study of political participation in Zambia asked what makes voters go to the polls¹⁸, whereas the present focus is on why voters cast their ballots for a particular candidate or party. For this purpose we distinguish two categories of explanation for voting—evaluative and non-evaluative. In regard to the evaluative sphere we consider voter assessments of political parties versus representatives/candidates as one dimension and retrospective versus prospective judgments as another. In the non-evaluative sphere we consider assessments made on the basis of clientelism and of proxy voting. In addition, we frame the analysis in the context of electoral systems and the level of competitiveness of the race.

¹⁶ Goran Hyden and Colin Leys, "Elections and Politics in Single-Party Systems: The Case of Kenya and Tanzania," *British Journal of Political Science* 2:4 (October 1972): 389-420.

¹⁷ Staffan I. Lindberg, "The Democratic Quality of Multiparty Elections: Participation, Competition and Legitimacy in Africa," *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Studies* 42:1 (March 2004): 61-104; Staffan I. Lindberg, *Democracy and Elections in Africa* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

¹⁸ Michael Bratton, "Political Participation in a New Democracy."

Evaluative Voting Behavior

The extant explanations for voters' behavior include rational choice¹⁹, socio-psychological²⁰, and historical cleavages²¹. Meanwhile, the traditional spatial model of vote choice²² has been considered insufficient in research on voters in established democracies.²³ Perhaps the greatest improvement in voting analysis moving towards a parsimonious approach has been specifying voting rationale along two dimensions: the *orientation* of evaluation in terms of retrospective versus prospective voting and, the *object* of evaluation in terms of the individual representative or political party. It is these two latter measures that we have employed in this study because they facilitate operationalization of Ghanaian voting rationales beyond the mere conjecture of the past. This approach also implies a primacy of voters' own evaluation of their voting behavior rather than observers' ascription of induced reasons for voting one way or the other. Unless the survey interview revealed good reasons otherwise, we therefore view respondents as rational and responsible actors who are knowledgeable about the reasons for their voting behavior. And while there are most probably structural influences to voting behavior in Africa as in other parts of the world, in this article we are interested only in the reasoning

¹⁹ See Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*; and also Morris Fiorina, *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981).

²⁰ Agnus Campbell, P.E. Converse, W.E. Miller and D.E. Stokes, *The American Voter* (New York: Wiley, 1960).

²¹ For example, Lipset and Rokkan, *Party Systems*.

²² A voter's utility is defined as a function of the distance between her ideal point and the party's or candidate's stated or expected position, in which the loss of utility increases by the square of the distance, see Otto Davis, Melvin J. Hinich, and Peter Ordeshook, "An Expository Development of a Mathematical Model of the Electoral Process," *American Political Science Review* 64:2 (June 1970):426-48; and James M. Enelow and Melvin J. Hinich, *The Spatial Theory of Voting: An Introduction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

²³ Scott Morgenstern and Elizabeth Zechmeister.. "Better the Devil You Know than the Saint You Don't? Risk Propensity and Vote Choice in Mexico," *The Journal of Politics* 63:1 (February 2001): 93-119.

of citizens in a new democracy in Africa and the reasons they give for voting for one party or the other. Are they taking ‘primordial’ short-cuts such as ethnic or family ties to candidates, using patron-client relations to exchange their vote for individual favors, or using more evaluative reasoning in respect of programs and performance?

One of the most apparent political objects within the evaluative perspective is political party when voters develop a prospective evaluation based on what a political party may bring in the future. In this study we have treated this dimension as programmatic/party support. It has been extrapolated from replies from respondents that indicate that they voted for a particular party because they favor its policies, program, or ideals as expressed in writings/speeches; and/or because of what they wish to accomplish in the future, and the like. These replies are also easily distinguishable from voting behavior based on retrospective evaluation of government performance. For example, the ruling party typically represents what the government did in the past and becomes a target of punishment when the voters are dissatisfied. This classical “throw the rascals out” account of political competition is captured by voters who state that they want a change because the government has done bad things. Answers in this category included things like I wanted change, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) has been in power for 20 years, they [the government] has not done well, everything has become worse and we want to try something new, and so on. When voters want to reward the ruling party/government, their voting rationale is usually expressed in terms that reflect a prospective evaluation stating things such as it is the best, they are doing well, we need them to develop further, the opposition cannot govern well.

The second dimension regards the object of evaluation: the incumbent representative or one or more opposition candidate(s) for legislative office. Voters tend to evaluate the person if he/she is qualified as a representative of “our locality” (it is one of the features of single-member districts in particular) or of a need in national politics. Respondents in our survey expressing views such as

“(s)he knows our needs, is a reliable person to [represent] us, will work for our community,” were coded as providing this representative-centered type of rationale. Whereas this kind of evaluation is prospective, voters can also deploy the retrospective view in terms of personal performance that like regarding party concerns the incumbent only. This evaluation is sometimes hard to distinguish from clientelistic practices. In this instance our methodology was a great help. By doing oral interviews and coding on the spot, accompanied by qualitative notes recorded on each questionnaire, the precise meaning of each response could be clarified. When a respondent simply said that this candidate has done well we asked in what ways and only answers cast in terms of provision of public goods such as electricity for streets, a market place, public toilets, etc., were coded in this category whereas personal favors and gifts exchanged on individual basis were considered a clientelistic rationale. In the interview situation face to face with respondents it was relatively easy to determine what type of rationale was reported. Our concept of clientelism is thus different from Herbert Kitschelt’s, whose view is that programmatic linkages between citizens and politicians, i.e. voting rationales, only regards parties that pursue policy as a matter of “codified, universalistic public policy”.²⁴ In effect, only left-liberal and socialist parties are programmatic. Our view is that programmatic voting appears as voting for either evaluation of past performance of incumbents in terms of public decisions or for publicly declared intentions of policy if elected. Clientelistic voting, on the other hand, is dependent on non-public particularistic, often individualized, exchanges of private goods in exchange for political loyalty.

Non-Evaluative Voting Rationale

Whereas the evaluative voting rationale is based on voters’ judgment of the performance of parties or

²⁴ Herbert Kitschelt, “Linkages Between Citizens and Politicians in Democratic Polities,” *Comparative Political Studies* 33:6/7 (August/September 2000): 850.

representatives on policies or universalistic public goods, there are at least two possible additional voting behaviors that are not captured above in the four-field matrix. The first one is clientelistic voting based on personal affective ties of patronage, family, or service; and the second is proxy voting influenced and driven by ethnic, clan, or family ties.

Students of African politics have typically emphasized the presence of personal alignments and clientelistic politics continuing in the multiparty era²⁵ alongside ethnic, and family ties or geographic factors. Surprisingly, a recent set of studies aimed at explaining outcomes of electoral choice such as volatility, party fragmentation and party systems²⁶ do not even attempt to assess patron-clientelism alongside with ethnicity despite the long tradition of Africanists finding that it is a defining characteristic. In other recent studies²⁷ it has been readily analyzed. The neopatrimonial system often claimed to be a basic fact of African political systems including Ghana, is based on patron-clientelistic networks of patronage, personal loyalty, and coercion. In order to reproduce their leadership, “big men” must ensure regular flows of personal patronage to individual followers.²⁸ In

²⁵ For example, Michael Bratton and Nicholas van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in a Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

²⁶ For example, Shaheen Mozaffar, James R. Scarritt and Glen Galaich, “Electoral Institutions, Ethnopolitical Cleavages, and Party Systems in Africa’s Emerging Democracies,” *American Political Science Review* 97:3 (August 2003): 379-390; Shaheen Mozaffar, James R. Scarritt, “The Puzzle of African Party Systems,” *Party Politics* 11:4 (July 2005): 399-421.

²⁷ Nicholas van de Walle “Presidentialism and clientelism in Africa’s emerging party systems.” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 41:2 (June 2003): 297-321.

²⁸ Christopher Clapham, “Democratization in Africa: Obstacles and Prospects,” *Third World Quarterly* 14:3 (September 1993): 423-38; Robert H. Jackson and Carl G. Rosberg, *Personal Rule in Black Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); Victor T. Le Vine, “African Patrimonial Regimes in Comparative Perspective,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 18:4 (December 1980): 657-73; Peter M. Lewis, “Economic Reform and Political Transition in Africa: The Quest for a Politics of Development,” *World Politics* 49:1 (October 1996): 92-129.

such patron-client relationships, vertical accountability modeled on the basis of “economies of affection”²⁹ means exchanging political support for *personalized* favors and benefits. These in turn reproduce pacts of mutual loyalty; voters choose representatives based on how good they are as patrons.³⁰ The few recent empirical studies that exist indicate that MPs in African multiparty systems do spend large shares of their campaign funds on personalized networks.³¹ The implications for voting behavior are distinct from voting based on performance and programmatic evaluation. Votes are exchanged based on the ability of the incumbent Member of Parliament (MP) or opposition candidate to “buy” votes and “take care of his people” providing gifts, paying for fees, finding jobs, and showing concerns on a *personalized* basis.³² A similar dilemma appears to be facing political entrepreneurs and parties across Africa, for example in Madagascar.³³ If this hypothesis is to be borne out in our analysis, we expect a large share of voters to account for their behavior by referring to or at least acknowledging receipt of gifts, jobs, and assistance from candidates or party activists. When respondents mentioned the promise or supply personal favors, patronage, service, or assistance to oneself or to close kin, these were considered as clientelistic. We concur that it is only when there is a promise or implicit agreement about *personal* favors or goods to be exchanged in return for political loyalty that a clientelistic relationship is established. Public goods such as schools, roads and electricity for the community can be discussed in terms of “bribes” in the sense of pork

²⁹ Goran Hyden, *No shortcuts to Progress* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

³⁰ Patrick Chabal, *Power in Africa* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1986).

³¹ Lindberg, “It’s Our Time to ‘Chop’”; Leonard Wantchekon, “Clientism and Voting Behavior: A Field Experiment in Benin,” *World Politics* 55:3 (April 2003): 399-422; Tom Wolf, “Money in the Mombasa 2002 General Election,” Research report prepared for Transparency International - Kenya. (Nairobi: ETD Consultants, 2002).

³² Lindberg, “It’s Our Time to ‘Chop’”, 124.

³³ Richard R. Marcus and Adrien R. Ratsimbaharison, “Political Parties in Madagascar: Neopatrimonial Tools or Democratic Instruments?” *Party Politics* 11:4 (July 2005): 399-421.

barrel politics perhaps but these are rightly referred to as public goods since they can be enjoyed by followers and opponents alike and can therefore not be used in enforcing individual patron-client relationships. Paying school fees every quarter for one person's children enables a personal bond of mutual dependence that can be and must be reproduced regularly. The MP that instead chooses to establish a trust fund that automatically pays the school fees for all children in his or her area would lose that leverage over individual voters. In addition, we also distinguish admiration for a leader that may be personalistic and perhaps parochial but is certainly not clientelistic. Voters may admire Jerry J. Rawlings in Ghana, George Bush in the U.S., or Jacques Chirac in France but that does not make their voting clientelistic when they do not receive personalized goods from these leaders.

Finally, voting by proxy in the context of uneducated and rural populations is typically thought to be channeled by family or ethnic ties: the voter following the lead of a close family or kin without further reflection. This category, like clientelism, has no necessary direct relationship to prospective or retrospective voting, and may reside in either or both dimensions. The issue of ethnic or tribal alignments being reproduced in politics of Africa is well known and there has recently been an upsurge in studies on its effects.³⁴ Yet, a correlation between voting patterns and ethnicity does not evidence causation, and even if ethnic issues play a role in national politics it does not necessarily translate into being important for individual voters at the polls. These are and should be treated as empirical questions. In fact, one recent study taking this empirical concern seriously also confirms our results that ethnicity is *not* defining for voters. The many predictions that ethnic identities would dominate the formation of new parties leading to fragmentation and ethnic implosion in South Africa (with the adopted proportional electoral system) were never borne out. Jessica Piombo has

³⁴ See Ted Robert Gurr, *Minorities at Risk. A Global View of Ethnopolitical Conflicts* (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 1998); Mozaffar, Scarritt and Galaich, "Electoral Institutions"; and Dan Posner, "Measuring Ethnic Fractionalization in Africa," *American Journal of Political Science* 48:4 (October 2004): 849-64.

shown that even as ethnic identity is important to most South Africans, this does not automatically translate into partisan divides but rather other social identities as well as institutional factors are as, if not more, important.³⁵ Therefore we gave the citizens themselves the option to indicate if ethnicity in terms of any kind of affiliation between themselves and the person they voted for, or the reverse for someone they did not vote for, had any bearing on their voting decision.

In the literature on voting rationales and behavior in established democracies, electoral system³⁶ is also thought to be an influential factor. The relevance of that theory to Africa's young electoral regimes is indicated in a few recent studies.³⁷ We cannot test for the influence of the

³⁵ Jessica Piombo, "Political Parties, Social Demographics and the Decline of Ethnic Mobilization in South Africa, 1994-99," *Party Politics* 11:4 (July 2005): 447-70.

³⁶ Giovanni Sartori, "The Party Effects of Electoral Systems," in Larry Diamond and Richard Günther, eds., *Political Parties and Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 99. What is usually referred to as electoral system regards both the voting method and the rules of translating votes into seats, and the extension of the law-like effects of electoral systems first advanced by Maurice Duverger, *Les Partis Politiques* (Paris: Colin, 1954), and Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, and corroborated by many scholars, for example Vernon Bogdanor and David Butler, eds., *Democracy and Elections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), Arend Lijphart, *Democracies: Patterns of Majoritarian and Consensus Government in Twenty-One Countries* (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 1984), Peter Mair, ed., *The West European Party System* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), Giovanni Sartori, "Political Development and Political Engineering," in J. D. Montgomery, and A. O. Hirschman, eds., *Public Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1968), Giovanni Sartori, "The Influence of Electoral Systems: Faulty Laws or Faulty Method?" in Bernard Grofman, and Arend Lijphart, eds., *Electoral Laws and Their Political Consequences* (New York: Agathon Press, 1986), and for Africa see, Dieter Nohlen, Michael Krennerich and Bernhard Thibaut, eds., *Elections in Africa: A Data Handbook* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

³⁷ For example, Matthijs Bogaards, "Electoral Choices for Divided Societies: Multi-Ethnic Parties and Constituency Polling in Africa," *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 41:3 (November 2004): 59-80, Staffan I. Lindberg, "Consequences of Electoral Systems in Africa: A Preliminary Inquiry," *Electoral Studies* 24:1 (January 2005): 41-64, and

electoral system in the Ghana survey but note that Ghana runs a plurality first-past-the post system (FPTP) in single-member constituencies. The relationship between constituents and representatives are typically close and in conjunction with its winner-take-all nature, it is generally thought to feed the “big man” syndrome of clientelistic politics. Thus, we expect that the Ghanaian electoral system may encourage evaluative voting rationale based on the qualities of the MP or candidate or on higher levels of clientelistic voting.

A Model of Voting Behavior

It should be recognized that identities in Africa are multilayered and are likely to interact such as for example an educated and urban female Ghanaian voter is also part of a family with rural and ethnic belonging in the North and grew up with an identity as a farmer. Her rational calculation may tell her to vote one way but her affective ties the other way. It might also be that her family, or parts of it take cues from her on voting. Similarly, the rural male and older voter may feel an inclination to vote for a male candidate for one party that stands for his views on tradition while his rational calculation tells him he would be better off voting for the female candidate of the other party who also is closer to him on policy issues. The empirical consequences of interactive effects of multi-layered background factors are very hard to assess with the limited N of this study. Nonetheless, this study reports on one of the first attempts to inquire into a fundamental issue in democratic politics: voting rationales. In doing so, it also addresses some central hypotheses about African politics: the salience of ethnicity and clientelism for political behavior.

Andrew Reynolds and Timothy D. Sisk, “Elections and Electoral Systems: Implications for Conflict Management.” in Andrew Reynolds and Timothy D. Sisk, eds., *Elections and Conflict Management in Africa* (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1990).

<Fig. 1 about here>

Figure 1 illustrates the dynamics of voting behavior particularly among voters in newly democratizing countries. It includes the aforementioned evaluative and non-evaluative voting rationales, and acknowledges that socio-economic conditions are likely to play a part in the background although this is not addressed here. Unlike much of the previous literature on African electoral politics, this scheme covers not only theoretical and universalistic accounts of representative democracy and its party/electoral dimensions, but also idiosyncratic features of fledging African democracies. It shows how voters can be aligned according to background cluster, as well as the voting rationales associated with their choices. A voter may be inclined to one of the voting rationales in casting his/her ballot, for any of a number of reasons illustrated in Figure 1 in the spaces where the spheres of causal factors overlap. The magnitude and direction of the effects of such voting rationales vary from one individual to another. In the following empirical analyses, however, we explore how Ghanaian voters behave in electoral politics and the reasons they themselves give for their behavior.

The Survey and Data

The survey was conducted over six weeks between June and July of 2003 using a particular strategy to render a sample that was as much as possible representative of voters in Ghana within the multi-faceted context of African societies. This survey was part of a pilot project with limited resources allowing us to sample a selection of almost 700 interviewees from six constituencies in four regions – Central, Ashanti, Volta and Greater Accra – out of the (then) 200 in Ghana. Since we could not

collect the numbers of respondents and constituencies necessary in order to guarantee that a computerized random selection would generate an unbiased sample, we used the alternative strategy of deliberate selection on key characteristics. To begin with the two party legacy in Ghana has resulted in safe havens for both the main two parties as well as hotly contested ones.³⁸ In a careful assessment of actual outcomes in the two elections, we selected a sample to reflect safe-havens (those where one of the major parties dominated); competitive districts (those where the major parties were almost at parity in their share of the vote); and, the capital districts (Greater Accra). We first chose one safe haven constituency from each of the regions where one of the two major parties were dominant: Ho West controlled by the NDC in its home base, the Volta Region; and Kwabre in the Ashanti Region controlled by the National Patriotic Party (NPP)³⁹. Besides being safe havens, each of these two constituencies also reflected a wide selection of citizens: urban towns, rural areas (with some trading markets, production sites and educational institutions), as well as poorer farming districts. Second, we selected two contested constituencies where competition between the parties had been fierce during Ghana's recent election history. We selected two constituencies in the same region (Central) that were as similar as possible to be able to hold a number of factors more or less constant: Effutu that has so far been won by NDC; and Cape Coast Central constituency where the NPP has prevailed the last two elections. They both stretch from the coastline to the inland with similar populations: fishing, farming, trading, merchandising, and small-scale industrial production

³⁸ Morrison, "Political Parties in Ghana".

³⁹ See also Morrison, "Political Parties in Ghana". However, there remains some competition within the overall Ashanti region, although the NPP captured 29 and 31 seats out of the regions 33 seats in the elections in 1996 and 2000 respectively and where minor parties have twice come within a percentage point of outpolling the otherwise major NPP. The one-party dominance was stronger in the Volta Region (dubbed the "World Bank" by its sympathizers) where the NDC collected all the 57 seats in 1996 and lost only two to independent candidates in 2000.

communities. Moreover, they are similar in ethnic variation and mixture of urban and rural settings. With regard to education Cape Coast is somewhat distinct, hosting one of the country's universities. Finally, the capital metropolitan area (Accra), which hosts around 2.5 million people, or about 13 percent of the population, was sampled. We selected two constituencies, again the most competitive in the area; and, another in which each of the two major parties have won the last two elections.

<Table 1 Sample Characteristics is about here>

Within each constituency, we selected six to sixteen town areas, villages, and communities to ensure a reasonable cross-section of the population in that constituency since we would collect only 100 to 130 respondents from each constituency and a random selection of areas would easily have generated a biased sample either leaving out key areas such as fishing villages or known concentrations of partisans in the main towns. Thus, rather than pretend that a computerized random selection of areas would lead to an unbiased sample, we consciously evaluated the options to guarantee an informed selection with regard to geographical spread, variation in employment (from fishing and farming to merchants, public servants and chiefs), education, urbanization, income, and political alignments. In this way our methodology for sampling areas is similar to the appropriate strategy when working with small-*N* studies selecting cases (be they interviewees or countries) seeking to generate as a representative coverage as possible when random sampling cannot guarantee that.⁴⁰ Our selection of interviewees at these locations was more random but still directed to ensure the same goal. At each selected area, we started in the Eastern end worked our way toward the West,

⁴⁰ Gerardo L. Munck, "Canons of Research Design in Qualitative Analysis," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 33:3 (Fall 1998): 18-45.

using standard household methodology approaching every fourth house or building if possible. This standard household survey methodology, however, risks introducing another set of biases in the sample. Women are less likely to be the respondents in a household (or absent due to trading); the (self-)employed tend to be at their offices or farms a good part of the day; and, younger people tend to congregate outside. Working in the late afternoons and evening in order to mitigate these problems not only severely limit the number of working hours for sampling but also violates a norm in many areas that one do not disturb cooking and eating meals with job-related issues at that time. In short, older people, men in particular, and uneducated or unemployed, risk being over sampled. Therefore, we also specifically targeted women at market places, young people at local meeting spots, and public and private employees at their workplaces in an effort to attain fair representation. We also adjusted our schedule to target villages on their non-farming days⁴¹ to connect with farmers. Our methodology makes it impossible to assess the statistical probability that each voter in Ghana had an equal chance to be selected for an interview. But we also concur that it is the most appropriate methodology and that a standard procedure may give the impression of a more rigorous research ensuring equal probabilities but because of the contextual limitations mentioned above, such a technique will nonetheless generate a less representative sample. Looking at our sample in that regard is also comforting.

As shown in table 2, the sample consists of a total of 690 respondents arrayed in a fairly good cross-section of Ghanaian constituents, excluding only the far northern regions of the country. This omission owed to resource and time limitations, as well as the relative inaccessibility of the region during the rainy season. The distribution of respondents between the constituencies averages from

⁴¹ Each locality tends to have a certain day of the week off from their farms, a day that varies according to convenience from place to place.

fifteen to twenty-two percent. Demographically, the sample is a good mix of urban, semi-urban, and rural citizens. Our calculations of these settings accorded 33 percent of the areas as urban, 16 percent as semi-urban, and slightly over 50% as rural⁴². This corresponds well with official estimates of the urban population constituting from 35 percent to 40 percent⁴³ of the total population in Ghana. The employment and educational indicators similarly correspond to the distribution in Ghana. Women are a little under-represented with 40 percent of our sample despite our extra efforts to reach them. In much of Africa, the population is a young one with current estimates that fully 40 percent of the Ghanaian population is below the age of fourteen, with much of the balance between fifteen and 64 years.

<Table 2 Political Representation of the sample 1996 & 2000 about here>

In terms of the dependent variable, the sample results show a very close fit between the reported behavior of respondents and the actual outcomes in national elections⁴⁴. In 1996, the NDC captured 58 percent of the parliamentary poll, compared to 40 percent for the NPP. Then in 2000

⁴² Republic of Ghana *The 2000 Population and Housing Census*, (Accra: Ghana Statistical Service, 2000). Highly urbanized Greater Accra is the most densely populated region, as one would expect, with 895.5 persons per square kilometer. This is followed by the Central Region, which at 162.2 persons per square kilometer, is the second most dense in the country; Volta Region (79.5) is seventh among the ten regions. Hence, some areas were slightly over-sampled although there is a rough correspondence to population density.

⁴³ United Nations, *United Nations Settlements Programme, 2003, Ghana*. Statistics available from the UNCHS Online: <http://www.unchs.org/habrdd/conditions/wafrica/ghana.html>.

⁴⁴ Only in Cape Coast was there a true deviation, likely an artifact of our sampling within an unusual large residential enclave of same-party associates. Otherwise we have no reason to doubt the actual election figures.

the fortunes of the parties were reversed, but the competition intensified—the NPP prevailed with 48 percent of the poll, while the NDC garnered 45 percent. These outcomes almost exactly mirrored those for our total sample⁴⁵ validating the soundness of the chosen sampling methodology regarding both selection of constituencies and respondents. Using oral interviews (in English or a local language) the researchers completed the survey questionnaires, soliciting answers to both pre-coded categorical variables and qualitative comments. All questions were posed as open-ended without providing any of the pre-coded answers as options to the respondents. Generally the interviewer would ask for clarifications in order to both make sure that the respondent was not “dressing up” and answer or were guessing what the expected answer was, thus to avoid introducing noise in the sample. In this way, we also collected qualitative information on the reasoning behind the replies proving a basis for valid interpretations of the collected data. Asking respondents about the thoughts for voting a particular way some years back was not a problem as far as we could discern from our own and our research assistants’ judgments. Most voters are still very much part of an oral culture where memorizing events and reasoning remains the singularly most important source of information. Before sampling, the research assistants were trained in the use of the survey instrument and each was supervised during their first day of work to ensure equivalence in the use of coding criteria. A data set was subsequently created by one of the researchers and all processing was done in SPSS 10.0.

⁴⁵ We also observe that memories have a greater propensity to fade when it comes to voting for fringe parties. For example, there is some disparity between the actual votes for minor parties in the safe havens (Volta and Ashanti) to the benefit of the dominant party in the region. The result was similar in a more rural constituency in Greater Accra where the NDC was dominant and also received the benefit of under-reported votes for minor parties.

VOTING RATIONALE IN GHANA

When the ruling Provincial National Defense Committee (PNDC) allowed a new constitution in Ghana sanctioning political parties in 1992, a military-*cum*-civilian government assumed a civilian posture (NDC) and successfully contested the presidency for the first time in the history of Ghana. The first poll was split between the NDC (58 percent), and the others (42 percent) out of which most went to the NPP. The major opposition party (NPP) refused to accept the outcome⁴⁶ and the severity of the dispute caused the opposition to withdraw from the subsequent parliamentary contest⁴⁷. But by 1996, the new democracy had gained sufficient strength to produce a widely

⁴⁶ Minion K. C. Morrison, "The Modulated Return of Ghana to Civilian Rule," in *Africa Contemporary Record* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1999): B44-59.

⁴⁷ There has been some debate about the actual level of fraud in the 1992-elections but current evidence seems to suggest that the irregularities could not have altered the outcome. For further details on these two elections, and the last one in 2000, see Adu Boahen, "A Note on the Ghanaian Elections," *African Affairs* 94 (April 1995): 277-80; Daniel Green, "Ghana: Structural Adjustment and State (Re)Formation," in Leonardo A. Villalón and Philip A. Huxtable, eds., *The African State at a Critical Juncture* (Boulder, C.O.: Lynne Rienner, 1998): 185-211; Emmanuel Gyimah-Boadi, ed., *Six Years of Constitutional Rule in Ghana* (Accra: Friedrich Ebert Foundation and Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1998); Emmanuel Gyimah-Boadi, "Ghana: The Challenges of Consolidating Democracy," in Richard Joseph, ed., *State, Conflict and Democracy in Africa* (Boulder, CO.: Lynne Rienner, 1999): 409-427; Emmanuel Gyimah-Boadi, "A Peaceful Turnover in Ghana," *Journal of Democracy* 12:1 (January 2001): 103-104; Richard Jeffries, "The Ghanaian Elections of 1996: Towards the Consolidation of Democracy?" *African Affairs* 97 (April 1998): 189-208; Terrence Lyon, "A Major Step Forward." *Journal of Democracy* 8:2 (April 1997): 65-77; Kwame A. Ninsin, "Elections, Democracy and Elite Consensus," in Kwame A. Ninsin, ed., *Ghana: Transition to Democracy* (Dakar: CODRESIA, 1998): 211-230; Paul Nugent, "Winners, Losers and also Rans: Money, Moral Authority and Voting Patterns in the Ghana 2000 Election," *African Affairs* 100 (July 2001): 405-428; Richard Sandbrook and Jay Oelbaum, *Reforming the Political Kingdom: Governance and Development in Ghana's Fourth Republic* (Accra: Center for Democracy and Development, Ghana, 1999); and Mike Oquaye, "The Ghanaian Elections of 1992: A Dissenting View," *African Affairs* 94 (April 1995): 259-275.

accepted competitive result, which again returned the incumbent NDC to power (with nearly 58 percent of the votes). In 2000, when the ruling NDC president and old authoritarian ruler Rawlings was unable to succeed himself, the opposition NPP won power in an even more tightly fought contest. The party took 48 percent of the vote, against 44.5 percent for the NDC in the first round improving its share to 57 percent against 43 in the second round. The Ghana elections in 1996 and 2000 were widely regarded as the two most satisfactory in the country's history until that point. They were seen as "free and fair" by both partisan competitors and by an array of international observers. While there were routine charges about the "incumbency" advantage enjoyed by the ruling NDC government, there were no disputes of such severity that the contesting parties challenged the outcomes.

What do voters in new democracies such as Ghanaians fend for when they vote for political representatives? What were the most important reasons to why they picked one party or the other at the polls? We posed this question to our sample by asking respondents to provide explanations for their votes for local parliamentarians in the 1996 and 2000 elections. Looking at the total sample as in tables 3 and 4, we find revealing results.

<Tables 3 and 4: Evaluative and Non-evaluative Voting>

Given the conventional wisdom, one of the most surprising findings is the relative strength of evaluative voting rationales among these respondents. Invoking local affinities of family or ethnic considerations as proxies or voting based on patron-client relationships were far behind broader and more democratic sources such as candidate performance and party platforms. In the survey only about 10 percent of 1996 voters reported clientelistic or proxy voting while the corresponding figure

for the latest election in 2000 was slightly higher at close to 14 percent. Though the increasing share of these rationales tends to suggest a negative trend, overall these findings contradict much of the conventional wisdom about African politics. The constant presence and importance of ethnicity in Ghanaian politics is beyond doubt to anyone familiar with the country⁴⁸ visible for example in that presidential running mates are selected strategically to spread tribal reach, Ashanti dominance has always been feared, and stereotypes of different groups' political behavior prevail in newspapers, parliamentary debates and so on. But recognizing the significance of ethnicity in politics does not allow us simply to assume it matters also for voters at the polls. To the contrary, our evidence indicates that playing the ethnic card in Ghanaian politics is greatly overrated as very few voters actually seems to think in terms of tribal loyalties when they go to cast their vote. Our figures do not stand completely alone in this regard either, tallying with a local survey of the Agona West and Effutu constituencies in 1996 indicating that five to eleven percent of voters voted by proxy of this kind.⁴⁹ Sentiments of a familial or ethnic nature that we labeled proxy voting was more prominent showing some variation from 2.3 to 13.2 percent in our survey but seemed to operate by no particular pattern. A study of the significance of ethnicity and tribal politics in the 2000 elections in Ghana also suggests that while election results confirm the historical Ashanti-Ewe cleavage, it cannot explain voting behavior and the outcome of the elections in general.⁵⁰ It is also corroborated by the fact that the flag bearer of the alleged Ewe-party NDC in 2000 professor John A. Mills, is an ethnic

⁴⁸ One of the authors' worked as an advisor to Parliament of Ghana for two years.

⁴⁹ Gilbert K. Bluwey, "Determinants of Political Choice in Agona West and Effutu Constituencies in the Central Region of Ghana," in Joseph Aryee, ed., *The 1996 General Elections and Democratic Consolidation in Ghana* (Legon: University of Ghana, 1998).

⁵⁰ A. Kaakyrie Duku Frempong, "Ghana's Election 2000: The Ethnic Under Current" in Joseph Aryee, ed., *Deepening Democracy in Ghana: Politics of the 2000 Elections* Volume One. (Accra: Freedom Publications, 2001).

Fanti which is a tribe among the Akan peoples dominated by the Ashantis but the Ewes still voted as heavily as before for the NDC. Finally, in a survey of over three thousand voters after the 2000 elections none (!) said they voted for the winning President John A. Kufour because he was Ashanti.⁵¹

While it might have been expected that the one-party and single ethnic group dominate safe havens of Kwabre and Ho-West would share more of ethnic sentiments, only the latter really is on the high end. But interestingly, it is not the highest among the constituencies in 2000 — both contested Effutu and modestly contested Kpone are higher. Yet, it is well known that the Ashantis vote overwhelmingly for the NPP while the Dagombas and Ewes typically support the NDC. Why does this not show in how voters respond? There is certainly the possibility of unconscious processes at work and also the possibility that political correctness triggers other responses than ethnic ties as rationale for voting a particular way. Yet, this rarely can explain why voters in the Ashanti region for example vote for the NPP since also the NDC candidates tend to be from the Ashanti ethnic group. If ethnicity were the only factor at work, both NPP and NDC candidates would be equally viable as prospective MPs. It seems more likely to us that these safe havens reflect legacies resulting in a political socialization that voters are using in forming their opinion about candidates' pros and cons. A study carried out in Techiman south constituency after the 1996 election also indicates that socialization through the family and peers play a crucial role in reproducing voter alignments⁵² but does not indicate an ethnic component to this. In addition, the socialist orientation of the old CPP and NDCs direct predecessor PNDC was never favored by the traditionally liberal and market-

⁵¹ Dan McKwartin, "Institutions, Electoral Process, Value Preferences and Democratic Practice in Ghana," in Joseph Aryee, ed., *Deepening Democracy in Ghana: Politics of the 2000 Elections* Volume One. (Accra: Freedom Publications, 2001).

⁵² Martin Verlet, "Political Attitudes and the 1996 National Elections: Market and Politics in Techiman South," in Joseph Aryee, ed., *The 1996 General Elections and Democratic Consolidation in Ghana* (Legon: University of Ghana, 1998).

oriented Ashanti peoples. To an Ashanti voter it is likely that a candidate represents the NPP provides a proxy for that kind of evaluation whereas an NDC candidate raises a red flag signifying repression during the 1980s and unwanted socialistic ideals. This is no different from similar proxies used by voters in the established democracies and does not make them parochial or ethnic. We concur that we must believe the voters when they give us their reasons for voting this way or that, until there is convincing empirical data to suggest otherwise. Our data and interpretation are also compatible with the few similar evaluations that exist in other African countries. For example, a recent study from South Africa⁵³ – one of the most deeply divided societies in terms of ethnicity in Africa where observers like Donald Horowitz and Arendt Lijphart predicted sharp ethnic conflicts⁵⁴ – point out that social identities also in Africa are multilayered and that several institutions and other factors contribute in determining which will be activated into partisan cleavages. Piombo's empirical analysis also evidences what we find support to hypothesize for Ghana; although salient in the structure of society and one key feature of identity, ethnicity is not necessarily defining for voting behavior in present day multiparty elections.

The overwhelming majority of the respondents were focused on issues of incumbent performance or the general stance of the candidate/party on future policy. In the 1996 election almost 90 percent of all voters chose their candidate in the parliamentary election according to one of the four "legitimate" democratic rationales as outlined by our theory. The level was only slightly

⁵³ Jessica Piombo, "Political Parties, Social Demographics."

⁵⁴ Donald Horowitz, *A Democratic South Africa? Constitutional Engineering in a Divided Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 85; Arendt Lijphart, "Democracies: Forms, Performance and Constitutional Engineering," *European Journal of Political Research* 25:1 (January 1994): 1-17; Arendt Lijphart, *Power Sharing in South Africa*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 122.

lower at 86 percent for the 2000 election⁵⁵. The distribution of responses within these categories is also telling. Indeed, it seems that Ghanaian voters just as voters in other parts of the world divide in their rationales defying a unified theoretical explanation; only a theory that includes the possibility of many rationales can capture the empirical landscape.

The two standard types of voting, prospective and retrospective, are almost equally common rationales for Ghanaian voters although it varies over time. Nearly one third of the electorate voted to punish the incumbent government and sitting MPs in 1996. In 2000 this share increased to 45 percent signifying how voters in Ghana are using the past performance of incumbents as a basis for future voting in a way that is similar to many established democracies. It is hard to assess how much of this is due to the incentives for retrospective voting and throwing the rascals out enshrined in the FPTP system; and how much it is due to the fact that the PNDC/NDC had ruled Ghana for almost two decades; or, how much to other factors. But the empirical evidence as it stands does lend support to the effect of electoral systems with regards to retrospective voting in majoritarian systems.⁵⁶ The main campaign slogan “Vote for Change” of the (then) opposition party NPP is also likely to have increased the number of these responses. Even so, this shows the willingness and readiness of Ghanaian voters to use elections to punish what they perceive to be a less than sufficient performance of the incumbent government. That kind of retrospective accountability is a hallmark of representative liberal democracy and its relative prominence and consistency in Ghana suggests a move toward relative maturity in the Ghanaian electorate.

⁵⁵ Moreover, these same explanations were far ahead of all others when respondents gave their second most important reason for voter choice. In this instance performance and party/policy preference increase in strength, while there is a significant drop in strength of critical assessment of a sitting government.

⁵⁶ Lindberg, “Consequences of Electoral Systems.”

We also note that when Ghanaian voters are concerned with past performance, it is primarily regarding the national executive and less often the local MP. Although both anecdotal evidence and the small amount of systematic evidence available on voting rationales seems to suggest the importance voters place on the “pork” their local MP can bring to the constituency⁵⁷, it is less influential in voters’ rationales than expected. As shown in Table 3 and 4, only around 15 percent of the respondents indicate that the past performance of their MP (good or bad) was of primary importance to their decision. This might reflect at least one of two things. Either the Ghanaian voter is on average far more “mature” as a democratic citizen than expected from the relative short period of democratic rule so as to look to national and general policy concerns rather than idiosyncratic traits of individual MPs. Or, the executive dominance in the eyes of the public is so strong as to overshadow the meaningfulness of local parliamentary representatives. We actually tend to believe it is a combination of both. The 690 survey interviews that we personally administered, along with our two research assistants, provided numerous occasions to assess the reasoning of voters behind these figures. This qualitative information was noted on the survey instrument furthering a more qualified discussion on these matters. This data suggests that while the MP is well-known and viewed as an important actor, a large majority of voters find the policies and programs implemented or suggested by the political parties carries more weight for their own decision. The MP is an authority in the local communities and a source of intense discussions, requests and various activities but we cannot move from that to the conclusion that their behavior is also decisive for how people vote as an untested assumption.

⁵⁷ See Joel D. Barkan, “Elections in Agrarian Societies,” *Journal of Democracy* 6:4 (October 1995): 106-16; Joel D. Barkan, “Protracted Transitions Among Africa’s New Democracies,” *Democratization* 7:3 (June 2000): 227-43; Hyden and Leys, “Elections and Politics in Single-Party Systems.”

But we also found that rationales are partly grounded in the structural imbalance between the executive and the legislature in Ghana. The Office of the President is a very strong executive by way of the 1992 constitution, undercutting the separation of powers by conscripting at least half of the ministers from among the MPs. Parliament's capacity is also limited by lack of resources to carry out its constitutionally defined countervailing and pro-active powers and working within the Parliament of Ghana for two years, one of the authors knows all too well the constant lack of staff, material and research resources that are necessary for a well-functioning parliament. For example, lack of staff office space, shortage of telephone lines, and transportation restrictions all reduce the quality of preparatory work for parliamentary committees. The financial and technical resources needed to pursue investigations of the actions of the executive and for research of proposed legislation are severely constrained. In addition, internal management problems—skill level, bureaucratic formality, and inertia lead to staff under-utilization. In sum, multiple factors contribute to a weak legislature, where individual MPs have limited powers to affect policy but giving those MPs recruited to be ministers or deputies a position to deliver a share of extra governmental efforts in their own constituency.

<Tables 5: Voting Rationale for Different Party Supporters, 2000>

It is also interesting to note that the share of voters casting their vote based on promises for the future have decreased as the frequency of recurrent democratic elections has increased. At the same time it is particularly voters concerned with party politics (rather than MPs) who have shifted towards retrospective evaluation. While this in part is explained by the use of campaign slogans as discussed above, another thought comes to mind as a result of this—a margin of shifting voter

alignments. In Table 5, the results have been disaggregated on party support in the 2000 election. Given the large share (53.2 percent) of NPP voters that primarily cited regime change as their rationale for voting choice, a majority may easily shift in the future. While some amount of these are obviously NPP respondents who are staunch partisan identifiers, it is equally reasonable to assume that there is a substantial amount of swing-votes in the system that may go anywhere at the next polls.⁵⁸ We may therefore expect to see renewed alterations in power in this young democracy although at the time of writing, indications are that NPP will win the 2004 elections.

In sum, Ghanaian voters based their decision on both prospective and retrospective considerations but are more than twice as likely to cast their vote in the parliamentary election on the basis of their assessment of party characteristics rather than qualities of the individual MP, *despite the FPTP system*. One might say that we found the political culture a lot less parochial than expected where even rural voters generally do not form their decision about how to vote based on personal characteristics or performance of the MP, patron-client exchanges, or how family and friends vote. While our figures tally well with a local study in one constituency (Akropong) in 1996 suggesting between 22 and 36 percent of voters base their vote on the party rather than the candidate's personal characteristics⁵⁹, it is a somewhat surprising finding not the least given the general picture of clientelism and ethnic salience painted in the literature on African democratization. We find this a very interesting and surprising finding—like most Africanists, we did not expect the median Ghanaian voter's rationale to be a principle policy/party mandate.

⁵⁸ Morrison, "Political Parties in Ghana."

⁵⁹ Kumi Ansah-Koi, "Ghana's 1996 Elections: A Study of the Akropong Constituency" in Joseph Aryee, ed., *The 1996 General Elections and Democratic Consolidation in Ghana* (Legon: University of Ghana, 1998).

Competitiveness Feeds Clientelism

In the literature on African politics, clientelism, neopatrimonialism, and political corruption are generally thought to be central components to understanding political behavior on both elite and mass levels. Among Ghanaian voters such factors were nonetheless the least important in forming their decision on how to vote. This would lead one to conclude that the common assumption that African parochial sentiments play a determining role in contemporary affairs may be over wrought.⁶⁰ For the 2000 election, only five percent of respondents suggested that personal gifts, assistance, or promises thereof, from candidates determined their voting action; and, only eight percent made references to familial or ethnic bases. A natural objection is that respondents are likely to underreport on clientelistic voting because of the derogatory connotations of selling ones vote. There are two things to be said about this. Our findings generally correspond with the inclinations the Afrobarometer has reported on Ghana.⁶¹ This diminishes the prospect that our results are the mere product of bias. Secondly, our experience in the field, our qualitative notes, and discussions about this with experienced Ghanaian research assistants suggests that the number of more or less dishonest respondents under-reporting clientelism and ethnic voting was low, perhaps in the range of five to ten percent. We were thus surprised on both accounts. We had expected a much higher prevalence of ethnic and clientelistic voting and also a higher degree of obviously questionable replies, denials and outright lies. If there is any bias as a result of our data collection thus should be a dent towards too high, rather than too low figures. Given our experience in the field that differed much from what we had expected, we are convinced our figures are not that far off from the truth.

⁶⁰ For example, Kitschelt, "Linkages Between Citizens.;" and Crawford Young, "Africa: An Interim Balance Sheet," in Peter Lewis, ed., *Africa: Dilemmas of Development and Change* (Boulder: Westview, 1998): 341-57.

⁶¹ Afrobarometer, Paper No. 11, available through Afrobarometer <http://www.afrobarometer.org/surveys.html>

Even so, clientelistic voting remains a recognizable share of voters that act to undermine the democratic electoral process in Ghana. Patron-clientelism can affect democracy negatively in several ways. Such practices include not only attending individuals' schools fees, electricity and water bills, funeral and wedding expenses, distributing cutlasses and other tools for agriculture, as well as 'chop' in the form of small sums of money but also personal assistance in dealing with the authorities whether it is the police, courts, headmasters, local government officials, or ministries. Patron-client acts such as these reproduce pacts of mutual loyalty in exchange votes in democratic elections. In this instance, there is little left of the idea of democratic accountability in a liberal democracy. Elected officials are not held accountable for their actions, or inaction, with regard to public matters and their political agendas but rather based on provision socio-economic benefits in personalized networks indirectly affecting horizontal accountability in two ways. First, the involvement of MPs on behalf of their constituents as and when they are experiencing difficulties with other parts of the state apparatus lead to mutual favors between elected officials and/or between elected officials and administrative staff. "You help my people and I'll help yours", as one respondent in Staffan I. Lindberg's survey put it.⁶² Second, MPs preoccupied with these extremely time consuming tasks to reproduce their personal clientelistic networks may not be allocating sufficient amount of time holding other elected officials and state agencies accountable. Thus, horizontal accountability is be weakened. There is therefore a need to understand what actually feeds political clientelism in elections? We measured the level of competition primarily by selecting contested versus safe haven constituencies to draw our sample from. The two hotly contested constituencies, Cape Coast and Effutu, are located in close proximity to each other in the Central Region holding a number of factors constant. Similarly, two constituencies from the Accra capital area have also been contested in

⁶² Lindberg, "It's Our Time to 'Chop'."

the last two elections though to a lesser degree. It should be noted that one of these, the Kpone constituency, is primarily rural despite being close to the capital. Finally, the two safe havens are located in two different regions that are by and large controlled separately by one of the two main parties.

<Table 4. Rationale in Contested Constituencies vs. Safe Havens

Overall, this analysis of constituency based decisions illustrate that the only systematic difference between the constituencies is that instances of political clientelism are fewer in safe havens than in contested constituencies. We measured personal clientelism as highest ranked reason to vote for a particular candidate or party but we also asked for the second-rank reason of their vote and those results (although not reported here) does not change this picture. The presence of gift giving by candidates and the party are lowest within the safe-havens (0-2.8 percent). It reaches near eight percent in Cape Coast and above twelve percent in Kpone—two contested areas. The effect seems to be non-linear but clearly affect voting when levels of competition rise from low to moderate or high while the differences between high and moderate levels of competition are not systematic and the difference between the levels of clientelistic responses in contested vs. safe havens is statistically significant (Spearman $.688$, $p=.013$) despite the low number of cases ($N[\text{constituencies}]=12$; $N[\text{responses}]=60$). This has important implications for what we should expect from democratization in African countries. We certainly would expect personalized clientelism to be higher in contested areas; why should an essentially uncontested MP in a safe haven waste resources on personalized assistance when it is not necessary to get reelected? Thus, in the context of poverty, high unemployment and a culture of gift giving (personal material provisions by the “big man” or “big

woman” for h/her people), clientelism is more likely when political competition is high. When a small number of swing voters can shift the plurality one way or the other, the value of each potential swing voter increases, thus creating incentives for candidates to use all available means in their campaigns. This way our results saying the number of voters being influenced by personalized patronage is low, can be reconciled with the reports from Ghana that MPs typically spend one quarter to one half of their total campaign funds on such political clientelism.⁶³ In a competitive system the marginal value of each voter is high enough to make MPs behavior rational despite the picture we get from our survey of voters.

Yet, the implication for new democracies can be troubling. Flip a coin and the voters are likely both to know that their value is higher when the competition is high, and to be encouraged by street talk of money and other handouts from candidates or their aides (the “boys” that typically accompany contestants to campaign and provide security). The result is easily turned into a vicious circle of increasing demands and patronage that in extension can undermine the legitimacy of democratic elections. At the same time it can scare away potential and/or experienced leaders who do not have the funds to sustain such campaigns, or who find the practices inconsistent with good democratic practice. While the results from the two Ghanaian elections do not warrant conclusions about pervasive electoral clientelism or drastically escalating vote buying, there is a source of measured discomfort in these figures. The more contested constituencies show higher levels of political clientelism during election campaigns, and these levels are increasing across the board albeit slowly.

⁶³ Lindberg, “It’s Our Time to ‘Chop’.”

CONCLUSION

The question of what makes the African voter decide at the polls feeds into several fields of inquiry, only a few of which we have been able to touch upon. We have for example, ignored issues of structural factors affecting voting rationale and behavior such as class, gender, age, social status, employment status and ideological orientation, in favor of a detailed examination of the reasons for voting behavior ascribed by the voters themselves. In this sense, our findings presented here could be viewed as hypotheses or tentative conclusions. Fundamentally, the finding that evaluative voting behavior is the by far the most common stance in Ghana challenges the mainstream literature and assumptions on African politics. While comparative data definitely is needed before we can generalize across countries, the Ghanaian example illustrates what *could* be a commonality: a majority of citizens in “transitional democracies” reason and behave as relatively “mature” democratic voters by consciously evaluating the past performance or the promised policy programs of candidates and parties. While it may be objected that these voters cannot reasonably be evaluative in their voting behavior given that so little information is available to them on the policies and platforms of various parties and candidates, we contest that view believing that limited information does not make it impossible for voters to act on whatever information they actually have. Voters all over the world have limited information and also make choices of how important it is to them to acquire more information from various sources and we have no reasons to assume that Ghanaian voters are different in this regard. In sum, we find it most reasonable to interpret answers pointing to a rational evaluation of parties and candidates as being indeed just that, and not made up replies or unviable.

The low prevalence of family and ethnically predisposed voting according to our survey is likely to raise questions among some observers familiar with Africa in general and Ghana in particular. While available election data on some twenty elections in Ghana since independence give the appearance of an ethnic factor where voters within some regions often divide along some of the

major ethnic groups, we must be careful not to commit an ecological fallacy. There is always a danger inherent in making inferences about individual-level rational decision-making processes from aggregate-level statistics. Our survey results suggest that voting behavior is not so much ethnic in essence as it is a rational response to the classic information problem for the voter using the parties' historical affiliations as a key source of evaluation. While the limited number of constituencies and the relative variation of ethnic choices among candidates from different parties constrain our possibilities to make stronger conclusions in this regard, our results point strongly toward ethnicity being less important to voters in Ghana than previously assumed. That voting is also "parochial" in that successful candidates in Ghana overall almost exclusively were born and grew up in the constituency they represent is also such a proxy. A person who comes from your area is more likely to know your concerns and the priorities important to people there than an outsider, hence, this is also a rational response to the information problem. It is not necessarily ethnic nor can it explain voting in the safe havens since opposition candidates are also local individuals.

Based on this we conclude that clientelistic and ethnic predisposed voting are minor features of the Ghanaian electorate, and that when present they seem to be nurtured by intense partisan competition. This makes for a dilemma in newly democratizing poor countries. High-level competition is generally thought to be a desirable characteristic of a democratic regime, and alternations in power a healthy exercise. But if competition also works to raise the frequency of political corruption in the form of vote buying and clientelistic practices, we must ask ourselves if this will undermine democracy. There are two mutually contradictory hypotheses in the literature about the impact of democracy on corruption. The optimistic one states that democratization will reduce if not eradicate corruption. It is assumed that this occurs as a consequence of increased transparency, horizontal checks and balances; the presence of independent media and civil society organizations; and, an executive that is constrained by vertical accountability (voters will not return

corrupt leaders to office). The negative hypothesis says that political corruption will undermine and possibly pervert democracy. As long as candidates can increase the likelihood of winning by providing illicit incentives to voters, especially in a context of poverty and deprivation, such corruption is likely to spread. Increased competition is then likely to spur the use of political patronage, but then to significantly raise the stakes requiring other resources, hence, feeding into other forms of corruption. While large-*N* data on corruption⁶⁴ consistently show an inverse relationship to democracy⁶⁵ that tends to be interpreted in favor of the optimistic hypothesis, longitudinal case studies such as this one seem to suggest that perhaps the more negative expectation is closer to reality.⁶⁶ At the same time, these studies including the present one are limited in time and we have not witnessed any “final” outcome yet. It is quite possible, and indeed there are many signs of this happening in Ghana that local think tanks, civil society organizations, the mushrooming media, and individuals in concert with supportive international actors are mobilizing forces to fight what they perceive of as immoral and parasitical behavior threatening their hopes for a better future. As such, it might be too early to pass any judgment on these hypotheses but the data presented here do give reasons for concern.

⁶⁴ The World Bank’s Governance Indicators or Transparency International’s Corruption Perception’s Index.

⁶⁵ Most commonly measured with the Freedom House index of political rights and civil liberties but other measures typically produces a very similar outcome.

⁶⁶ See also Lindberg, “It’s Our Time to ‘Chop’.”; Wantchekon “Clientism and Voting Behavior.”; and Wolf “Money in the Mombasa 2002 General Election.”

<Figure 1 Model of Voting Behavior>

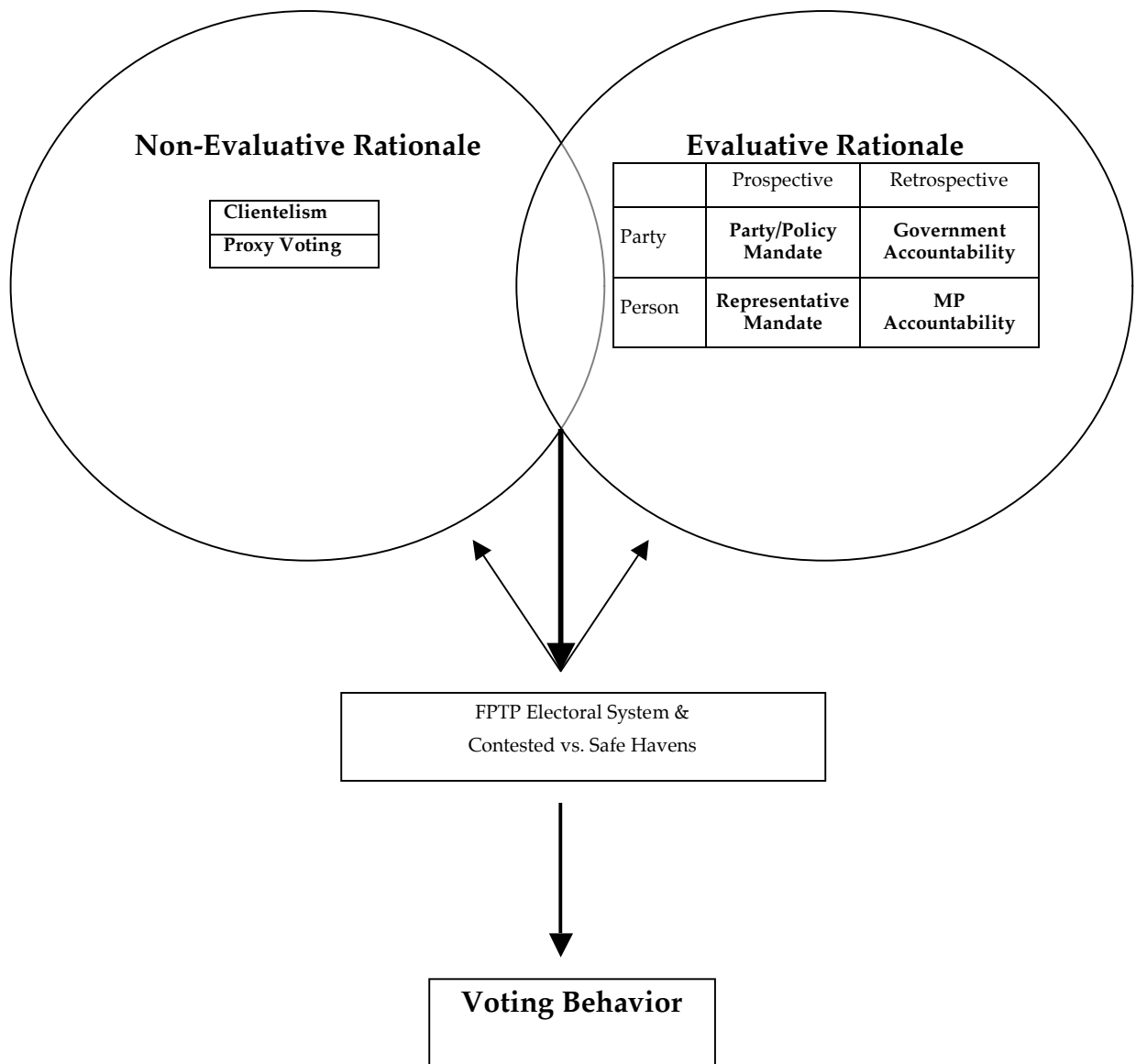


TABLE 1.

Sample Characteristics

Region	Central	Ashanti	Volta	Accra	Total N		
	38.6%	15.8%	14.9%	30.7%	100%		
	266	109	103	212	690		
Constituency	Cape Coast	Effutu	Kwabre	Ho West	Ablekuma S	Kpone	Total N
	21.7%	16.8%	15.8%	14.9%	14.9%	15.8%	100%
	150	116	109	103	103	109	690
Location	Urban	Semi-Urban	Rural				Total N
	33.3%	16.4%	50.3%				100%
	230	113	347				690
Sex	Male	Female					Total N
	59.9%	40%					99.9%
	413	276					689
Age	18-25yrs	25-34yrs	35-44yrs	45-54yrs	55+ yrs		
	12.3%	31.0%	26.8%	16.4%	13.2%	99.7%	
	83	214	185	113	91	688	
Education	None	Primary	Secondary	Diploma	University		
	13.9%	37.4%	31.4%	11.3%	4.3%	98.4%	
	96	258	217	78	30	679	
Job Status	Public	Private	Student	Retired	Unemployed		
	16.8%	66.5%	3.5%	1.3%	11.2%	99.3%	
	116	459	24	9	77	685	

TABLE 2.
Political Representativity of the Sample

Party	1996			2000		
	<i>N</i>	%	Official Vote %	<i>N</i>	%	Official Vote %
NDC	353	58.0	57.5	295	44.5	44.5
NPP	241	39.6	39.5	347	52.3	48.2
Others	15	2.5	3.0	21	3.2	7.2
Missing	81	-	-	27	-	-
Total	690	100.1	100.0	690	100.0	100.0

TABLE 3:
Evaluative and Non-Evaluative Voting 1996.

<u>Evaluative:</u>	<u>Prospective</u>	<u>Retrospective</u>	Total
<u>Party</u>	Party/Policy Mandate	Government Accountability	
	46.9%	15.7%	62.6%
<i>N</i>	266	89	355
<u>Person</u>	Personal Mandate	MP Accountability	
	11.5%	15.5%	27.0%
<i>N</i>	65	88	153
Total	58.4%	31.2%	89.6%
<i>N</i>	331	177	508
Non-Evaluative:			<u>Clientelism</u>
			4.2%
			24
			<u>Proxy Voting</u>
			6.2%
			35
Total			100.0%
<i>N</i>			576
<i>Missing</i>			114

Note, χ^2 146.074, $p=0.000$,

TABLE 4:
Evaluative and Non-Evaluative Voting 2000.

<u>Evaluative:</u>	<u>Prospective</u>	<u>Retrospective</u>	Total
<u>Party</u>	Party/Policy Mandate	Government Accountability	
	29.1%	28.8%	57.9%
<i>N</i>	189	187	376
<u>Person</u>	Personal Mandate	MP Accountability	
	11.7%	16.5%	28.2%
<i>N</i>	76	107	183
Total	40.8%	45.3%	86.1%
<i>N</i>	265	294	559
Non-Evaluative:			<u>Clientelism</u>
			5.5%
			36
			<u>Proxy Voting</u>
			8.3%
			54
Total			99.9%
<i>N</i>			649
<i>Missing</i>			41

Note: χ^2 234.806, $p=.000$,

TABLE 5:
Voting Rationale for Different Party Supporters, 2000.

		<u>NDC</u>	<u>NPP</u>	<u>Other</u>	Total
Party Mandate		38.5%	21.3%	28.6%	29.1%
	<i>N</i>	110	73	6	189
Gov. Accountability		.7%	53.2%	14.3%	28.8%
	<i>N</i>	2	182	3	187
Personal. Mandate		16.4%	6.1%	38.1%	11.7%
	<i>N</i>	47	21	8	76
MP Accountability		26.2%	9.1%	4.8%	16.5%
	<i>N</i>	75	31	1	107
Clientelism		5.6%	5.3%	9.5%	5.5%
	<i>N</i>	16	18	2	36
Proxy		12.6%	5.0%	4.8%	8.3%
	<i>N</i>	36	17	1	54
Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	<i>N</i>	286	342	21	649

Note: Significance when only the two major parties are included: χ^2 215.421, p =.000, df =5.

TABLE 6.
Rationale in Contested vs. Safe Haven Constituencies

	Parliamentary Election 1996							Parliamentary Election 2000						
	Contested Constituencies		Capital (Contested)			Safe Havens		Contested Constituencies		Capital (Contested)			Safe Havens	
	Cape Coast	Effutu	Kpone	Ablekuma South	Kwabre	Ho West	Total	Cape Coast	Effutu	Kpone	Ablekuma South	Kwabre	Ho West	Total
Party Mandate	54.6%	51.1%	24.0%	75.9%	50.5%	26.4%	46.8%	30.3%	27.1%	20.4%	49.4%	29.2%	21.2%	29.1%
N	65	45	23	63	46	24	266	44	29	22	43	31	21	190
Gov. Account.	29.4%	17.0%	11.5%	10.8%	18.7%	2.2%	15.7%	41.4%	30.8%	24.1%	32.2%	34.0%	5.1%	28.8%
N	35	15	11	9	17	2	89	60	33	26	28	36	5	188
Rep. Mandate	2.5%	13.6%	16.7%	2.4%	6.6%	29.7%	11.6%	9.7%	10.3%	11.1%	4.6%	6.6%	29.3%	11.8%
N	3	12	16	2	6	27	66	14	11	12	4	7	29	77
MP Account	5.0%	10.2%	27.1%	4.8%	18.7%	28.6%	15.5%	2.8%	14.0%	25.0%	5.7%	22.6%	32.3%	16.4%
N	6	9	26	4	17	26	88	4	15	27	5	24	32	107
Clientelism	4.2%	4.5%	12.5%	3.6%			4.2%	7.6%	4.7%	9.3%	5.7%	2.8%	2.0%	5.5%
N	5	4	12	3			24	11	5	10	5	3	2	36
Proxy	4.2%	3.4%	8.3%	2.4%	5.5%	13.2%	6.2%	8.3%	13.1%	10.2%	2.3%	4.7%	10.1%	8.3%
N	5	3	8	2	5	12	35	12	14	11	2	5	10	54
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
N	119	88	96	83	91	91	568	145	107	108	87	106	99	652

Note: Significance: 1996 Election: Chi-square =178.463 (p=0.000) df=25/ 2000 Election: Chi-square = 142.178 (p=0.000) df=25.

Correlation Contested constituency (dummy) – Number of responses with clientelism as first rank rationale for vote: Spearman .688, p=.013