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Some evidence on the demand side of private-public goods provision by MPs

Staffan I. Lindberg*

Understanding why politicians in Africa sometimes go against the dominant strategy of using clientelism, and instead produce more collective and public goods, still evades us. This paper seeks to illuminate the question, drawing on a pre-election survey carried out in ten strategically selected constituencies in Ghana in August 2008. The analysis shows that to the extent politicians engage in supplying significant levels of clientelistic goods, they are rational actors in the sense of selecting efficient means to achieve their end (re-election). At the same time, it suggests an antidote to the reproduction of clientelism. While clientelism in all likelihood will not disappear completely under any circumstances in Africa or elsewhere, the much higher electoral pay-offs of economic – even if local – development indicated by voters in Ghana suggests that politicians in the era of free and fair elections gain many more votes by seeking to further constituency development (a collective good) than they lose by disengaging from clientelism.

1 Introduction

A standard conception about the nuts and bolts of African politics is that African societies have little of the corporate and bureaucratic backbone that characterizes modern society. This fragmented and dispersed space provides the breeding ground for ‘Big Man’ politics which tend to be dominated by a single ‘patron’. In many different variants of this broad argument, patronage rather than policy is seen to drive choice and behavior (e.g. Bates 1981; Hyden 2006; Joseph 1987; Lemarchand 1972; van de Walle 2001). The consequence, most seem to agree, has been one or the other type of privatization of the state, its resources and implementation of policy. Students of elections in Africa, past and present, have struggled with these issues but studies that focus on the distribution of patronage in Africa approach the subject almost exclusively from the perspective of the patron. The focus is on how political and other leaders use neo-patrimonial or clientelist politics to stay in power (and often enrich themselves in the process) and how this in turn fosters a particular kind of governance. Voter identification and behavior has been inferred, rather than empirically mapped, from the strategic approach adopted by the political leaders. Mozzafar et al. (2003) argue that voter alignment follows from the politicization of ethnic cleavages, i.e. is a product of the choices that leaders make.¹ Others, e.g.

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¹ With regard to ethnicity, it has been argued that this occurs because voters have real incentives to do so along Young’s (1976) original argument: voters also receive ‘psychic benefits’ for supporting

Posner & Simon (2002) and Erdmann (2007), have questioned this, and some have tried to explore how far voters are 'ethnic' or 'rational' (Lindberg & Morrison 2008). As these and other studies, e.g. by Mattes & Piombo (2001) of voting in South Africa, also show, being rational does not necessarily mean voting based on specific policy preferences. Rationality tends to be contextualized and must be interpreted in its relevant individual or community perspectives.

What has been left out of the equation, however, is what the 'demand side' looks like (what citizens want and therefore push to get from political leaders); whether and how demand translates into real effects on political leaders' behavior; and what the consequences are for the provision of collective and private goods by the state. A few recent working papers and articles based on the Afrobarometer surveys seek to address this but since the AB does not ask questions about voting behavior directly, the basis for those analyses is far from satisfactory.² This paper takes one step forward. Based on survey evidence from Ghana ($N=1,600$), it ventures into the still relatively unknown area of citizens' expectations and demands of their political representatives and what shapes these expectations and demands.³

2 Existing knowledge on voters' demand for clientelism vs. collective goods

The literature on African politics is full of references to the important role that persons play in politics. These date back to the seminal piece by Lemarchand (1972) on clientelism and ethnicity as competing solidarities in national integration, and include contributions, among others, by Médard (1982), Reno (1998) and Chabal & Daloz (1999). This expresses itself also in the manifestation of informal institutions, i.e. the prevalence of face-to-face-based networks that support or undermine, complement or disregard formal institutions (Helmke & Levitsky 2006; Bratton 2007). The problem with the existing literature is that it looks at neo-patrimonialism and

candidates like themselves (Chandra 2004) and in lieu of clearly defined policy aims, use ethnicity as a cognitive shortcut to estimate similar electoral preferences (Ferree 2006). Responding to such incentives, citizens may be expected to vote along ethnic lines and thus elections in Africa's developing democracies can result in censuses of salient ethnic identities (Lijphart 1999; Synder 2000). Yet, these ethnic identities are multi-faceted and it has been demonstrated that their make-up and intensity can change over time (Posner 2005). At its core, ethnicity captures a multi-faceted identity defined as a shared myth of common ancestry, encompassing clan, language, religion, region, and even nation (Chandra 2004; Chazan 1983; Fearon & Laitin 2000; Horowitz 1985; Young 1976). At any one point, individuals can thus be expected to be more or less 'ethnic' in their perceived identity.

² See Gyimah-Boadi & Mensah (2003) for example. AB round 3 carried out in 2005 in most countries for the first time asked about voting behavior using the question: 'If (presidential) elections were held tomorrow, which party's candidate would you vote for?'. Based on voting behavior studies in the established democracies, we have very good reasons to assume that this hypothetical is a highly imperfect measure of actual voting behavior. The level of measurement error and systematic biases is also known to increase with the distance to the upcoming election. In AB's case, this becomes a huge problem since the distance to the next poll in many cases was over one year (e.g. Ghana and South Africa).

³ Richard Crook kindly reminded me that there is an earlier literature on Ghana that dwells on these issues and made insightful contributions, although not based systematic data. See, for example, Dunn & Robertson (1973), Dunn (1980), LeVine (1980), Austin & Luckham (1975). There is also the literature on the nature of elections in Africa during the one-party era, such Hayward (1987) and Hyden & Leys (1972). See further discussion below.

clientelism as elite strategies. It is interested in how leaders retain power and distribute patronage accordingly, but we do not know much of what happens at the other end. For instance, there is a tendency to assume that voters are caught between choosing one or the other, while in reality, as suggested above, it is equally realistic to hypothesize that they are able to be 'ethnic' and 'rational' in one and the same choice.

It is known from both past and present election studies that 'treating' – the term that was used in the 1960s to describe attempts to provide tangible benefits to prospective voters during the campaigns – is quite common. In an electorate that is poor and may conceive of elections in instrumental and opportunistic ways, the temptation to give in to such offers cannot be underestimated. Vote-buying is more likely in poor areas/countries because the marginal utility of one vote is a constant in any given context while the cost varies: a more affluent citizen is less likely to sell his/her vote for a small inducement than a very poor person. Yet, the context varies in ways that can affect the utility of each extra vote for a party. In very competitive settings, the value of one extra vote can potentially make all the difference between winning and losing, especially so in majoritarian systems; hence, one would expect vote-buying activities and the like to be directed primarily towards independents, or swing voters. On the other hand, elections can also be won by 'getting the vote out' from core supporters and that suggests that candidates should direct their efforts more to their core constituents to ensure that they actually show up at the polls. We know virtually nothing about how these things play out in the African context today.

In one of the very few comparative studies of pre- and post-independence elections in Africa, Collier (1982) shows that the few elections held before 1945 were highly exclusive affairs among small elites in a few major cities. While the first elections to legislative councils in British colonies such as Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria (Price 1967; Jordan 1969) as well as Kenya and Zambia took place in the 1920s, it took until the 1950s for the same to happen in Malawi, Tanzania, and Uganda (Collier 1982). The situation was different in the French colonies, administered as a group, with the exception of Senegal (Morgenthau 1964). From 1946 Africans in the French colonies voted both in elections to assemblies in France (subject to eligibility criteria) and to local government councils. The French colonies actually experienced no less than seven territory-wide elections before the introduction of universal suffrage whereas most British colonies only had one or two (Collier 1982, 37, 44-45). These pre-independence attempts were carried out under the auspices of the colonial powers and from their perspective, it was a form of 'tutelary' democracy. In most cases, suffrage was universal and there were normally no restrictions on candidature and party (Cowen and Laakso 2002, 4). According to some early observers (e.g. MacKenzie & Robinson 1960), they did contribute to providing a new legitimacy acceptable to both the colonialists and the African nationalists.

This first wave of electoral democracy was short-lived, however. In countries such as Guinea, Mali, Ivory Coast and Rwanda regular one-party elections were held more or less as a result of de facto dominance (even if this dominance in several instances was shattered later). In other countries such as Benin, Gabon, Chad, Niger, Ghana and Congo one party-rule was created coercively and proved to be a lot less stable (Collier 1982, 104-109). More than 20 one-party regimes were rapidly formed across Africa, by election, merger, or coercion. Tanzania's president, Julius Nyerere, took the lead. A constitutional review committee was appointed in 1964 to make recommendations to parliament for legalizing a one-party system and to organize competitive elections under its auspices based on the single-member district formula a year

later. The first national election under this new formula in 1965 was generally met with much excitement and satisfaction (Cliffe 1967). Variations of this semi-competitive approach to legislative elections in which the voter could choose between several candidates approved by the ruling party, were later introduced in several other African countries (Nohlen et al. 1999, 6): Kenya (1969), Zambia (1973), Sudan (1974), Zaire (1977 and again in 1987), Malawi (1978), Mali (1979), Ivory Coast (1980), Sierra Leone (1982), Togo (1985), Ethiopia (1987), Central African Republic (1987), Comoros (1987), and Cameroon (1987). Only a few countries continued multiparty elections after independence: Botswana, Mauritius and Senegal. Academic observers like Hayward (1987), Collier (1982), and Bayart, Barkan & Okumu, and Martin (in Hermet *et al.* 1978), enthusiastically proclaimed this as steps towards 'political development'.

Hayward (1987, 16) for example showed how the semi-competitive nature of one-party elections in countries such as Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone led to many incumbent MPs being dislodged from their positions by disgruntled voters. According to Hayward, these elections offered people a choice of ruler. To Almond and Coleman (1960) one-party rule was a functional response to challenges of political development in the African context. The most positive interpretation came from Naomi Chazan (1979), who referred to this type of democratic elections as an 'African-derived formula for constructive popular representation'. Richard Sklar (1983) also espoused a similar optimism when he included the semi-competitive one-party elections as evidence that the continent was moving, albeit incrementally, toward more competitive political systems.

On the other side, authors as Ansprenger (1997) and Thibaut (1998) dismissed them because they never delivered the results their advocates promised. For instance, these elections never allowed voters a choice of who should rule or a chance to influence national policy directions. Most critical among the early observers was perhaps Zolberg (1966), who detailed governmental manipulation of electoral processes in West Africa. Nevertheless, as Hyden and Leys (1972) noted in a comparative study of such elections in Kenya and Tanzania, they gave the local electorate an opportunity to oust those leaders who breached their trust or failed to deliver 'pork barrel' to their constituents. In this specific respect, the formula worked to legitimize those in power, but equally importantly the system as a whole.

As important as these early studies were, it is unclear to what extent they are informative about the present situation. Multiparty elections, and in some cases democracy, have returned to the continent, and as a few decades have passed, new generations are on the scene who have grown up in an era of intensified information and communication, among other things. As Lindberg and Morrison (2005, 2008) argue, much of what passes as knowledge, especially about African voters is still assumed rather than empirically proven and, we should add here, derivative of studies of other political phenomena, notably political parties or electoral systems. Afrobarometer surveys provide some insights, but it would be premature to draw definite conclusions from an attitude survey that does not specifically target citizens at the time of elections. Thus, for instance, the conclusion by Bratton and Logan (2006) using Afrobarometer data that Africans are 'voters but not yet citizens' is an indication, not a conclusion about what happens when people go to the polls in African countries. Although largely ignored (outside of Ghana), the volumes edited by Ayele (1996, 2000) provide some insights based on systematically collected data, but they do little in terms of analysis employing multiple controls and, like Lindberg & Morrison's studies, must be seen as tentative.

How important is the act of voting? What motivates people to vote? What are the contextual factors that influence their choice? How do voter attitudes evolve and change over time? As research on voting behavior in the United States and Europe confirms, these and related questions are crucial to understanding in what way and to what extent democratic institutions and citizen-representative relationships make a difference to political outcomes. If the principal-agent relationship suffers from too severe moral hazard problems or information deficits such that the accountability function is undermined, it is less likely that representatives will behave in ways that reflect the principals' interests and, in the context of African states, produce more development efforts that are collective goods. On the other hand, even if the accountability relationship is strong, collective action problems among the principals are overcome and information deficits are solved with efficacious proxies, political outcomes may be less than optimal from the perspective of collective and club goods provision. Citizens may simply demand private goods rather than club or collective goods either because of poverty or as a result of path-dependent expectations, for example. In either case, we would expect politicians to seek to satisfy such demands in order to secure re-election. The problem is that we do not know much about the principals: citizens as voters.

Research on voting behavior is only beginning to emerge (Wantchekon 2003; Lindberg & Morrison 2005, 2008; Erdmann 2007; Fridy 2007). These initial steps are important but they are just a modest beginning. Compared to what we know about voting behavior and alignments in other regions of the world, the African voter remains, if not anonymous – which may be an overstatement – still only known in a diffuse manner. In the context of studying the extent to which democracy is being built in African countries, this may be, if not the last, nonetheless an additional significant frontier of research.

Not only are such studies scarce but they also fill a gap that has already been identified with the help of data from the Afrobarometer (AB) project. Although the AB provides valuable data from an increasing number of countries, the project does not focus on elections and voting behavior although voting is central to the democratic process. Valuable efforts have been made to try to infer conclusions about the African voter from AB data (e.g. Bratton & Kimenyi 2008; Cheesman & Ford 2007; Eifert et al. 2007; Logan 2008; Moehler & Lindberg 2009) but without questions specifically designed regarding voting behavior these conclusions are at best tentative. What is needed are complementary survey data that draw on the methodological experience with the Afrobarometer project but provide more specific data on voting behavior.

3 The 'demand side' of private and public goods in Ghana

Elections tend to take on a special political importance in poor countries such as most nations in Africa. This is particularly true in the rural areas where elections are viewed by at least some people as the best occasion for extracting benefits from government and political leaders. For instance, when a Southerner was elected President of Malawi in 1994 the electorate in that region immediately began to entertain the expectation that they would automatically receive preferential treatment or consideration in everything (Kamwambe 1994). Ikpe (2000: 148-50) in a survey of voter attitudes in the 1991 gubernatorial election in Akwa Ibom State in Nigeria, shows that a larger percentage of poor (65%) than well-off voters (39%) view elections as occasions to derive benefits from parties and candidates because they reason that once they are in office, they will forget the voters. Ikpe's study also shows that the choice of the poor is less

driven by community considerations than individual and more opportunistic choices to earn some benefits from the candidates and parties (2000: 152).

We can illustrate this with some recent survey data from Ghana, a presidential democracy with a single-member district, first-past-the-post system for elections to the legislature. The survey focused on elections of legislators (MPs) and was carried out in ten purposively selected constituencies, with a random selection of 160 respondents in each constituency. The aim was to get a representative sample of constituents in each district, rather than a nationally representative sample, yet, the purposive selection of districts makes for a relatively representative sample of the nation as a whole.⁴

We begin by reporting how respondents answered three different but related questions: What was the main reason you voted for ‘X’ in the legislative election in your constituency? What was the main thing you hoped or expected that the elected MP would do, when you voted in 2004? and What do you perceive to be the main issue that the candidates are campaigning on in the (then – August 2008) upcoming election campaign? The results presented in Table 1 illustrate several interesting issues.

Table 1: Voter choice, expectations, and perceptions of campaigns

| | Personal Support | Constituency Service | Lawmaking & Oversight | Other Issues | Total |
|--|------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|--------------|----------------|
| Main Rationale for Vote Choice in 2004 <i>N</i> | 3.9% 42 | 26.9% 290 | 30.0% 323 | 39.2% 422 | 100.0% 1077 |
| Main Expectation for Incoming MP <i>N</i> | 14.6% 170 | 68.8% 802 | 8.0% 93 | 8.6% 100 | 100.0% 1165 |
| Perception of Main Campaign Issue 2008 <i>N</i> | 13.3% 203 | 45.8% 702 | 5.1% 78 | 35.8% 549 | 100.0% 1532 |

Source: Lindberg’s survey, August 2008

First, when asked for their voting rationale, very few (less than 4%) acknowledge individual patronage as a reason for voting and relatively large shares (roughly 30% and 27% respectively) give politically correct answers regarding national lawmaking and executive oversight. Contrast this with what we interpret as the more genuine indicator – the answer to the question of what the respondent expect the candidate to do if and when elected. Now almost 15% indicate personal help, favors and jobs as the *primary and main* expectation and almost 70% respond that they most of all expect their MP to provide their community with development projects. In all, over 83.4% of the citizens in these constituencies expected legislators to mainly deliver personal or very narrow community, or ‘club’, goods. That these answers should be interpreted

⁴ This is following a procedure established by Lindberg and Morrison (2005, 2008). While this strategy would not be always be preferable to conducting a completely randomized, cross-national-wide sample, to our knowledge, only one such work has been successful in generating such a sample (Ferree, Gibson, Hoffman, and Long 2009). The strategic selection of constituencies was done in this project in order to get enough respondents from each constituency in order to make valid inferences possible about particular areas. With respect to demographic factors and regional distribution, the data collected in our survey roughly matches the more desirable sampling procedure; see Appendix 1.

as more ‘genuine’ indicators of voters’ rationales for choosing to vote for one or the other candidate is supported by the reported issues that candidates are campaigning on. Overall, these results reflect mostly the expectations voters have. In terms of substantive interpretation, this finding, of course, corroborates but also refines, the general understanding of elections in Africa found in the existing literature going all the way back to the early post-independence elections. Legislative elections are not about legislation, or executive oversight for that matter. They are about local development and personal benefits – clientelism. Yet, whereas much of the literature conflates the two and tends to focus on the personal bonds of a patron-client nature that come with personalized assistance, we find that a vast majority of voters put the main emphasis on a narrow form of what are nevertheless collective goods; that is, local development goods for the community.

In any case, either candidates are disconnected from their constituents’ expectations, which we find unlikely in this context where candidates are frequently interacting with their voters, or the answers given to the first question are politically correct and not reflecting true preferences. Table 2 gives further evidence of this.

Table 2: Relationship between reported rationale and expectations of MP

| Reported Voting Rationale (2004) | Personal Support | Main Expectation of Incoming MP (2004)? | | | Total |
|----------------------------------|------------------|---|----------------------|--------------|--------|
| | | Constituency Service | Lawmaking /Oversight | Other Issues | |
| Personal Support | 26.2% | 61.9% | 2.4% | 9.5% | 100.0% |
| <i>N</i> | 11 | 26 | 1 | 4 | 42 |
| Constituency Service | 12.2% | 73.4% | 8.4% | 5.9% | 100.0% |
| <i>N</i> | 35 | 210 | 24 | 17 | 286 |
| Lawmaking/Oversight | 18.6% | 63.8% | 10.4% | 7.2% | 100.0% |
| <i>N</i> | 59 | 203 | 33 | 23 | 318 |
| Other Issues | 13.2% | 71.6% | 4.6% | 10.6% | 100.0% |
| <i>N</i> | 55 | 298 | 19 | 44 | 416 |
| Total | 15.1% | 69.4% | 7.3% | 8.3% | 100.0% |
| <i>N</i> | 160 | 737 | 77 | 88 | 1062 |

Sign.: Chi2 26.539, df. 9, $p=$.002

Source: Lindberg’s survey, August 2008

The table shows that almost regardless of what voters say was their rationale for voting for a particular candidate, 80% to 90% of them prioritized that the incoming MP should see either to their personal needs, or to the needs of their local community. Asking people in Ghana what their reason was for voting a particular way is simply not a very good predictor of what they want their MP to do. This seems to indicate that in terms of the ‘demand side’ of the accountability relationship between citizens and representatives in these 10 Ghanaian constituencies, which we believe are broadly speaking representative of the country, there is a lot of ‘push’ for personalized clientelism and small-scale ‘club’ goods – the latter often regarded as a form of clientelism as well (e.g. Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007).

We also asked respondents how they saw the role of the MP using a series of statements they could either agree with or not. Table 3 presents the results for a few of these statements and the figures reaffirm the interpretation above. Close to 80% of respondents agree, or agree strongly, that the MP should be ‘like a mother or father of the constituency and take care of constituents

like his/her children'. Meanwhile, the corresponding share for statements that the MP should always support his/her ethnic group is much lower, at less than 50%, and with regard to responses to the question whether an MP should always or almost always support his or her own political party, the figures indicate that only 30% agree with this position.

Table 3: Role of the MP in Ghana

| | Disagree /Strongly | Neither | Agree /Strongly | Total |
|---|-----------------------|-------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Father/Mother that takes care of his/her children <i>N</i> | 21.7% 346 | 2.0% 32 | 76.3% 1216 | 100.0% 1594 |
| Always support his/her ethnic group <i>N</i> | 42.6% 673 | 8.0% 126 | 49.4% 780 | 100.0% 1579 |
| Always support his/her political party <i>N</i> | 63.3% 1000 | 6.8% 108 | 29.9% 472 | 100.0% 1580 |

Source: Lindberg's survey, August 2008

In order to better understand on what grounds Africans vote and how their attitudes and choices shape – maybe perpetuate – clientelism, it is necessary to focus more coherently on the voters themselves. They are faced with a ‘double-rationality’. It is rational for them to choose an elected representative from their own community because he (or she) is likely to best understand not only what people want but also how they should be treated. This probably applies to the majority of rural constituencies in Africa. Their need for making a choice, however, does not end there. They frequently also need to choose among their own ethnic compatriots since different political parties tend to nominate candidates that are from the same ethnic group in each constituency.

In a competitive setting – whether within a single or a multi-party system – voters thus have to make the next choice between competing candidates or parties. They are likely take into consideration how well an incumbent candidate has responded to constituent needs and promises he or she made at the previous election. They are also likely to consider not only promises but also more immediate tangible benefits that are distributed by incumbents and challengers alike during the actual campaign. Political parties may be associated with particular ethnic groups, but their success or failure is in the hands of individual leaders who are captives of expectations among their respective electorate. At the same time, as Posner (2005) has shown, the institutional setting influences which groups are large enough to be politically relevant, and hence along which lines coalitions and identities in politics are being formed and regrouped. As Bratton and Kimenyi (2008) have suggested in a paper analyzing voting in Kenya (prior to the disastrous December 2007 election), there is a need to probe much further in a comparative manner what influences voting and how voters in turn influence elite behavior. Citizens are not just at the receiving end of the electoral and political process. They are aware of the opportunities to act in their own interest that elections provide and how they reason, as well as how they participate in local discourses to make up their mind, are part of the challenges of understanding why politicians act the way they do.

4 Explaining the demand side

If voting in Africa is rational, what does self-identification with political parties mean in the African context? We have very little evidence to provide answers to questions like this one. One

problem is that in countries such as Ghana, like most if not all in Africa, where paid membership in a political party is rare, identification with a party does not have the same connotations as in countries where voluntary membership involving a regular fee on an annual basis is a tradition and people have enough money to afford paying these fees. Poverty is sufficiently widespread and deep in Africa that paying a membership fee to a political party borders on irrationality.⁵ Free-riding is rational in such a context especially since few parties either are unable, or are not sophisticated enough to provide what Olsen (1965) referred to as selective benefits to counter-act free-riding problems. The exception may be dominant parties in countries like Tanzania, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. As studies from Tanzania confirm (REDET 2004, 2005), where these movement parties continue to dominate, there is a tendency for voters to vote consistently for these parties in presidential, parliamentary and local government elections. Even in these places, however, the quality of the candidate matters. Moyo (1992: 120), reporting on a survey of the voters in the 1990 general elections in Zimbabwe, shows that one third were influenced by candidate qualities and attributes or a combination of party policies and candidate qualities.

In the survey conducted in Ghana August 2008, a few questions were asked that somewhat advance our knowledge in this regard. Instead of relying on questions like ‘are you a member of a political party?’ or ‘do you feel close to a particular political party?’ which are inherently problematic in any context, respondents were asked to tell us which party they had voted for over the last four elections in Ghana. We also asked if they had split their vote, and if so why. Based on the voting record, we identified core voters as those that had consistently voted for one and the same party, and swing voters as those who had at some point switched from one party to another.⁶ Thus, our classification is based on actual behavior (if self-reported) rather than more elusive notions of affiliation and identification.

Table 4 reports on the results of this analysis. The first striking thing is that almost 30% of respondents claim to be swing voters. This is significantly higher than in earlier surveys of Ghana (e.g. Lindberg & Morrison 2005, 2008), which indicated some 20% to be evident party hoppers. In itself, it suggests that ethnicity is not necessarily a solid predictor of voting behavior even in a country like Ghana where a close similitude of geographic-ethnic and party voting patterns has been evident throughout its post-independence period (Fridy 2007).

⁵ This was not the case during the era of nationalist post-independence movement parties, however. I thank Richard Crook for this point.

⁶ To clarify, all voters that had only voted once were coded as ‘missing’ but as long as a particular individual had voted in at least two elections, we decided we could classify them one way or the other. One exception was made. For those few voters (N=12) that had voted for party X in the 1996 elections, but then consistently voted for party Y in the two following elections (2000 and 2004) *and* reported that they would surely vote for party Y again in the upcoming 2008 elections, we judged them to have become core voters of party Y.

Table 4: Core and swing voters splitting their vote?

| | Split Vote in Last Election? | | Total | % of Total |
|-------------------|------------------------------|-------|--------|------------|
| | No | Yes | | |
| NDC Core Voters | 84.9% | 15.1% | 100.0% | 25.2% |
| <i>N</i> | 220 | 39 | 259 | |
| NPP Core Voters | 92.8% | 7.3% | 100.0% | 38.9% |
| <i>N</i> | 371 | 29 | 400 | |
| Other Core Voters | 55.6% | 44.4% | 100.0% | 7.0% |
| <i>N</i> | 40 | 32 | 72 | |
| Swing Voters | 60.4% | 39.6% | 100.0% | 28.9% |
| <i>N</i> | 180 | 118 | 298 | |
| Total | 78.8% | 21.2% | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| <i>N</i> | 811 | 218 | 1029 | 1029 |

Sign.: Split Vote: Chi2 136.175, df=3, p=.000

Source: Lindberg's Survey August 2008

Another interesting finding regards the split-ticket votes. Ghana has two major parties (NDC and NPP) which together typically capture over 90% of the votes in presidential elections. The results in Table 4 are based on citizens' voting in legislative elections. We note that while NDC core voters, vote for another party's presidential candidate more often (15.1%) than NPP core voters (7.3%), the real difference is with the smaller parties' core voters and swing voters. The latter two categories vote 'skirt and blouse', as they say in Ghana, i.e. for presidential and legislative candidates from different parties, in 44.4% and 39.6% of the cases. The reasons for doing so, however, vary. Small parties' supporters often have a relatively good shot at getting their local legislative representative elected in the context of geographically concentrated minorities. In our sample, many of these voters are found in Bolgatanga constituency, with a long tradition of voting for the PNC party which also currently holds the legislative seat. Meanwhile, these voters most likely realize that voting for the PNC presidential candidate means wasting your vote and thus go for their second order preference, choosing between the NDC and the NPP candidates. Swing voters, on the other hand, seems to switch party independently and also to a much higher degree act independently in their choice of presidential candidate.

What makes voters switch parties, then, in a country like Ghana? Who are the swing voters compared to core supporters of the different parties? Is it the lure of personalized clientelistic goods like a job or a small cash handout ('small chop' in Ghanaian parlance), community oriented 'club' goods, or rather general public goods like lawmaking and effective oversight, that make voters switch from one party's candidate to another in legislative elections? What is the 'market' so to speak for various offers that politicians can exploit in their relationship to constituents? We probed this issue in several ways in the survey but have found surprisingly little substantive evidence. Table 5 exemplifies this by looking at some of the results of how respondents answered a series of questions about what, if anything would make them consider voting for another party's candidate. We thus asked for example, if they would consider voting for another party if that party's candidate offered to get them or someone in their family a job, if the candidate gave them some sort of personal help or cash handout, if he/she could bring

development projects to their community, or if the person running for office was one that could provide effective oversight over how the president and his ministers spent national budgetary allocations.

Table 5: Core and swing voters: switching vote for what?

| | Would (% Saying Maybe/Yes) Switch Vote If Candidate Offered: | | | |
|-------------------|--|------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| | Job | Small Chop | Community Dev. Proj. | Effective Oversight |
| NDC Core Voters | 19.2% | 8.4% | 30.1% | 20.8% |
| <i>N</i> | 46 | 20 | 72 | 49 |
| NPP Core Voters | 21.3% | 4.7% | 27.6% | 18.9% |
| <i>N</i> | 78 | 17 | 101 | 68 |
| Other Core Voters | 20.4% | 6.1% | 30.6% | 8.5% |
| <i>N</i> | 10 | 3 | 15 | 4 |
| Swing Voters | 23.6% | 9.4% | 33.7% | 20.6% |
| <i>N</i> | 58 | 23 | 83 | 50 |
| Total | 21.3% | 7.0% | 30.1% | 19.3% |
| <i>N</i> | 192 | 63 | 271 | 171 |
| <i>Total N</i> | 900 | 898 | 900 | 886 |

Sign.:

Job Offer: Chi2 1.383, df=3, p=.709

Small Chop: Chi2 5.955, df=3, p=.114

Dev. Proj.: Chi2 2.646, df=3, p=.450

Oversight: Chi2 4.130, df=3, p=.248

Source: Lindberg's survey, August 2008

According to this survey, swing voters do not differ in any statistically significant way from the various parties' core voters on any of these indicators. Core voters are operationalized here as individuals who have voted for the same party over the past three elections.⁷ We use this as a reasonable proxy for not being 'persuadable', which is the essential characteristic of the swing voter.⁸ The literature on neopatrimonialism and patron-client relations would have predicted that by offering personal favors or community programs, rival political patrons would lure voters to swing from one candidate and party to another. The results from Ghana call such an interpretation into question. Nor do they support the more optimistic thesis that, in accordance with modernization theory, voters are influenced by the position take on specific policy issues.⁹ The alternative explanation referred to above, that voters in Africa make their choice based on ethnicity (whether because of primordial or socially constructed identities, or because ethnicity provides a cognitive shortcut in a situation of a severe information deficit), only gets limited support from the survey.

⁷ If an individual had only voted in two elections, we used that voting history as evidence of the same phenomenon but coded individuals with only one past electoral experience as missing. That decision excludes especially the younger, possibly more swing-prone, voters who have only voted in the last election because of their young age.

⁸ For a good discussion of alternative approaches and some findings using data on American elections, see Mayer ed. (2007).

⁹ Although not reported here, we checked for various characteristics. For example, neither level of education nor relative size of household income distinguishes swing from core voters. There is one exception to this. The core voters of 'other parties', significantly the CPP and PNC, are less well educated and poorer than the core voters of the NDC and the NPP.

Table 6: Core-swing voters and ethnicity

| Ethnicity | NDC Core | NPP Core | Other Core | Swing | Total |
|---------------|----------|----------|------------|-------|--------|
| Ashanti/Akyem | 7,7% | 69,9% | ,5% | 21,9% | 100,0% |
| <i>N</i> | 28 | 255 | 2 | 80 | 365 |
| Ewe/Anlo | 61,0% | 13,0% | 1,3% | 24,7% | 100,0% |
| <i>N</i> | 94 | 20 | 2 | 38 | 154 |
| Ga/Adangbe | 36,0% | 36,0% | 4,5% | 23,4% | 100,0% |
| <i>N</i> | 40 | 40 | 5 | 26 | 111 |
| Dagomba | 39,2% | 31,4% | 2,0% | 27,5% | 100,0% |
| <i>N</i> | 40 | 32 | 2 | 28 | 102 |
| Fante | 30,0% | 30,0% | 3,8% | 36,2% | 100,0% |
| <i>N</i> | 39 | 39 | 5 | 47 | 130 |
| Frafra/Nzema | 11,6% | 12,2% | 33,3% | 42,9% | 100,0% |
| <i>N</i> | 22 | 23 | 63 | 81 | 189 |
| Others | 34,4% | 23,0% | 3,3% | 39,3% | 100,0% |
| <i>N</i> | 21 | 14 | 2 | 24 | 61 |
| Total | 25,5% | 38,0% | 7,3% | 29,1% | 100,0% |
| <i>N</i> | 284 | 423 | 81 | 324 | 1112 |

Sign.: Chi2 554.564, df=18, $p=.000$

Source: Lindberg's survey, August 2008

In Table 6, the voting behavior is tabulated with self-reported data on ethnicity, or tribe. The two main parties in Ghana have an historical association with two ethnic groups: the NDC with the Ewe group (which constitutes about 15% of the total population) and the NPP with in particular the Ashantis and Akyem¹⁰ (about 25% of the population). This political alignment is indeed reflected in the data in Table 6. Yet, significant proportions of both these groups also vote for other parties or are swing voters (have a propensity to switch their vote if the right goods are offered) so there is obviously no inevitability in the relationship between ethnicity and voting behavior even in these two groups. In the other ethnic groups represented in the survey, the relationship between vote choice and ethnicity disappears completely. The Dagombas, Fantes and a host of smaller groups distribute almost evenly between the two main parties and swing voters, and among Frafra and Nzema peoples¹¹ swing voters actually make up the plurality. So while ethnicity may be a powerful predictor for vote choice in some ethnic groups, it is not so in many others (differences simultaneously within and between groups: $\text{Chi}^2=554.564$, $\text{df}=18$, $p=.000$).

¹⁰ Ashantis and Akyems are part of the larger group of Akans denoting a set of tribes with very similar languages and to some extent customary traditions concentrated in the middle regions of the country. Of the Akans, Ashantis constitute approximately 42% and some of the other major groups are Akyem, Ahanta, Evalue, Akuapem, and Brong (Ghana Statistical Service, 2009). Fantes are usually also included in among the Akans as a linguistic group but they have in recent political history been less aligned with the Ashantis and the rest of the Akan tribes; hence it makes sense to treat them separately in the following analysis.

¹¹ Frafras and Nzemas are distinct and are geographically concentrated in different parts of the country (Frafras in the Upper West region and Nzemas in Western Region) but are put together in the table since their figures are very similar and we wanted to simplify the presentation.

A final alternative explanation is the ‘pocket voting’ thesis with roots back in Downs’ (1957) classic rational choice approach to the behavior of citizens. One typical argument is that voters are likely (or even supposed) to punish incumbent governments if and when the economy turns down, and/or that voters who perceive their economic situation or the economic situation of the country as becoming worse would vote for the opposition.

Table 7: Perceptions of economy and vote choice

| Economy at present compared to 1 year ago? | Reported Vote Choice in Upcoming Election 2008? | | | | | | Total |
|--|---|------------------|------------------------|------------|--------------|--------|-------|
| | NDC (Opposition) | NPP (Government) | Other (Not Government) | Don't Know | Will Abstain | | |
| Much worse/worse | 69.9% | 40.3% | 59.3% | 50.3% | 59.0% | 53.4% | |
| <i>N</i> | 281 | 226 | 70 | 77 | 46 | 700 | |
| About the same | 11.4% | 18.7% | 20.3% | 18.3% | 21.8% | 16.8% | |
| <i>N</i> | 46 | 105 | 24 | 28 | 17 | 220 | |
| Better/Much better | 18.7% | 41.0% | 20.3% | 31.4% | 19.2% | 29.9% | |
| <i>N</i> | 75 | 230 | 24 | 48 | 15 | 392 | |
| Total | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | |
| <i>N</i> | 402 | 561 | 118 | 153 | 78 | 1312 | |

Sign.: Chi2 97.284, df=8, $p=.000$

Source: Lindberg's survey, August 2008

In Table 7 we can get a sense of the extent to which this kind of reasoning could be useful in order to understand voters in Africa. Here we tabulate voters’ assessment of the present state of the economy in Ghana compared to one year ago, with their self-reported projected vote choice for the upcoming elections on December 7, 2008. Citizens who think that the economy over the last year has become ‘worse’ or ‘much worse’ are much more likely to say they will vote for the main opposition party, or any of the smaller non-Government parties, while citizens with a positive evaluation of the economy are more than twice as likely to vote for the incumbent NPP than other voters. The results are essentially the same if we substitute the evaluation of the economy with individuals’ evaluation of their own personal financial situation, and all these differences are highly statistically significant. In short, the economic voting thesis in this broad sense seems to have something to say about voting also in Africa. Now, we should admit that there is a catch here. We also ran an analysis of the parties’ core voters’ evaluation of the state of the economy and the results show that opposition core voters are much more likely to have a negative evaluation of the economy compared to NPP core voters. We are thus left with a situation where the evaluation of the economy may be endogenous to party affiliation, rather than affecting voting behavior since our operationalization of core voter builds on actual behavior taking place long before the evaluation of the economy over the last year.¹²

The closest empirical verification of voter preference for patronage rather than policy comes from a unique randomized field experiment in Benin (Wantchekon 2003) in which villages were subjected to different campaigns, one focusing on a clientelistic, the other on a public policy

¹² But to sort these things out (and more generally arrive at a multivariate explanation of voting behavior in Ghana) we need to use more sophisticated statistical analysis. This is a matter for another paper.

message.¹³ The former assumes a promise of the delivery of a private benefit in the village, while the latter assumes the promise of a more generic reform of the education or health care systems. The study shows that there are some significant differences. For example, women tend to be more favorably inclined toward public policy than men – the most likely beneficiaries of patronage. Regional candidates are more wedded to a clientelistic approach than those that run as national candidates. These differences notwithstanding, however, the main conclusion is that clientelism works for all candidates, especially incumbents and regional candidates.

5 Conclusions

Much has been written about the nature of politics in Africa and its detrimental consequences for alleviation of poverty, creation of sustainable economic growth, and production of public goods. Understanding why politicians in Africa act as they do, and how their behavior sometimes can become more productive in terms of producing more collective and public goods, still evades us. The question of what politicians' landscape of incentives looks like is crucial to finding the answers. What citizens hold their political representatives accountable for, in the era of democratic elections, constitutes one important set of incentives.

Based on a pre-election survey carried out in ten strategically selected constituencies in Ghana in August 2008, we find that to the extent politicians in this country engage in supplying significant levels of clientelistic goods (as indicated by Lindberg 2010b), they seem to be acting as rational actors in the sense of selecting efficient means to achieve their end (re-election). The vast majority or some 70% of citizens in general, and not just swing voters, primarily expect their legislators to supply small-scale 'club' goods to communities. Any politician who does not want to be unemployed after the next election, would be foolish not to provide some level of collective, if small-scale goods. The role of the MP as being a 'parent' of the constituency as reported previously based on interviews with MPs (Lindberg 2010a), finds support also based on survey data from the side of citizens.

Yet, at the same time, the analysis presented here suggests an antidote to the reproduction of clientelism. The most favored act of legislators is when they manage to bring small-scale community development projects to the areas in their constituencies. At the same time, citizens seem to be placing a significant premium on economic development more generally. These two things ultimately go together. A growing economy will not only lead to more citizens being touched by economic development in many localities. A stronger national economy also means that the state's income increases and it can afford to invest in more community development projects. While clientelism will in all likelihood not disappear completely under any circumstances in Africa or elsewhere, the much higher electoral pay-offs of economic – even if local – development indicated by voters in Ghana suggests that rational politicians in an era of free and fair elections gain many more votes seeking to further constituency development (a collective good) than they lose by disengaging from clientelism.

¹³ Wantchekon hired groups of assistants posing as activists working for a particular party candidate. In the clientelist villages, the message was that the candidate would deliver by building schools, health clinics and roads. In the public policy locations, they emphasized that the candidate would reform the education and health care system with emphasis on building new schools, new hospitals, and vaccination campaigns (2003: 410-11).

Interview data from summer 2009 (Lindberg 2009 *forthcoming*) clearly supports the interpretation that provision of collective goods is actually preferable to clientelism as an electoral strategy, and therefore repetition of elections can facilitate the transformation of the behavior of MPs in Ghana. A significant number of MPs, especially the more educated and politically more sophisticated ones, are increasingly turning away from provision of private, clientelistic goods in favor of providing more collective goods. Paying fewer school fees, they set up scholarship schemes; paying fewer hospital bills, they pay for registration in the national health insurance scheme; giving less cash handouts to unemployed, they work to ensure that a local development bank provides reasonable micro-finance loans to many; and so on. Clientelism is not gone, and MPs are spending more than ever on their election campaigns, but the forces are there and in action that can turn the tide in favor of, at least, small-scale collective goods.

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Appendix 1: Sampling procedure

The sampling procedure involved first stratifying constituencies in the 2008 elections by Ghana's ten regions. Then, since a computer generated, random selection procedure could lead to selection of extreme outliers, one constituency was strategically selected from each of the ten regions by weighting a number of both quantitative and qualitative indicators in order to ensure a representative selection of constituencies as far as possible. Within each constituency, we used polling stations as sampling frame, and 16 of them were selected at random by a computer. The latter selection process was guided by a distance-rule in order to ensure geographic coverage of the constituency. Within these identified enumeration areas, survey administrators select random walking paths from the designated sampling starting point. The final stages of sampling were guided by Afrobarometer protocol where surveyors identify an interval of households to survey (survey every *n*th household determined by the day of the month) and within the household, random selection of respondent from a assembled list of members in the household above the age of 18 (cf. Afrobarometer Survey Methods 2009).

Three constituencies reflecting safe-havens for the two dominant parties in their geographical strongholds Ashanti region for the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and Volta region for the National Democratic Congress (NDC) respectively were chosen. Ho West in the Volta Region, a stronghold of the NDC, was split in two for the 2004 election so in the second round, both these constituencies were sampled to ensure consistency over time. Kwabre, in the heartland of the Ashanti region, on the other hand, is considered a National Patriotic Party (NPP) stronghold. Akim Swedru in the Eastern region is another safe haven chosen to capture that region but also to reflect the fact that the NPP have almost double the number of safe havens compared to the NDC. Besides being safe havens, each of these constituencies has a diverse population of urban and rural residents engaged in trading, farming and education. These three were selected because they were very representative of the regions (cf. Lindberg and Morrison 2005). Next, three competitive districts, in which the two dominant parties were equally competitive, as neither had a clear majority or power had alternated between them, were also selected. The Central region and the Greater Accra region have been contested regions for both parties in several elections. Both Cape Coast and Ablekumah South had been NPP constituencies over the last three election cycles but with radically decreasing margins and both were eventually lost to the NDC in 2008. Both have a combination of fishing, farming, trading, and small-scale cottage industry communities, and a mixture of urban and rural communities. Ablekumah South is also one of the most populous constituencies in the country and provides a fairly good cross-section of residents in the capital. The last competitive area was Bolgatanga in the far north of the country. In addition to contributing to geographical representation of the country and inclusion of some minority ethnic groups from the North, it is a constituency where one of the small parties has won a seat in the past. During the time of the survey, the PNC was holding the seat although it was lost to the NDC in the 2008 election. In addition to the six

constituencies above, four semi-competitive constituencies were selected. Kpone-Katamanso, which lies on the outskirts of the Accra/Tema metropolitan area with a mixed population of various occupations ranging from farmers to traders and citizens who work in the city but live outside, is a more rural community than Ablekumah South constituency. Evalue-Gwira is located in the Western region and a traditional stronghold of the CPP, which is the party with the strongest historical link to the country's founding father Kwame Nkrumah, but has become increasingly competitive over the years. Jaman South is located in Brong-Afaho region and while somewhat competitive, is still relatively safe for the NPP. Tamale Central constituency in the Northern region is also relatively competitive but has been comfortably won by the NDC.