Manifestos and Voting Behavior in Third-Wave Democracies: Evidence from Ghana

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Abstract

Custom to pluralistic societies in emergent democracies, political mythology holds that since Ghana's Fourth Republic's inception, electoral outcomes have been fundamentally determined by ethno-political identification and other social cleavages to political parties. However, despite the potential influence of party manifesto contents in determining electoral outcomes, very little is known about the value of party manifestos in shaping voting behavior in the history of elections in the Fourth Republic. This is unfortunate because such knowledge can inform both the academic study of electoral politics and voting behavior. This article, rooted in the classical work on economic voting at both the individual and aggregate levels, presents original results from interviews with voters who participated in all the three recently held elections under study. Through interviews with 11,600 respondents from 116 constituencies and across all 16 regions, the study finds that the voting pattern in recent elections is not consistent with the popular ethno-social dynamics of Ghana's electoral politics. The results imply that party identification remains a significant determinant of voting decisions; nonetheless, the manifesto contents of political parties have become pivotal in shaping voting behavior rather than voting patterns based on socio-psychological notions and political party alignments. It concludes that voter inducement (kind or cash) in election periods is less relevant in structuring voting behavior. Further, it concludes that unless a major realignment occurs, electorates prefer a party with policies that maximize their utilities or will lead to the most considerable average benefit, as there is no reason to vote for a policy with idiosyncratic benefits or values. Thus, parties' policy blueprints or manifesto contents have become strong mobilizers and key determining factors for voters. As such, political parties need to invest in developing concrete policy programs that resonate with the citizenry to spur successful electoral outcomes.

Introduction

The political party manifesto is a formal document that pronounces the goals of the party's policy rooted in its underlying values and specifies policy proposals to achieve these goals (Budge *et al.*, 2001). In this respect, manifestos offer a clear window into the positions political actors across the ideational spectrum take on a given issue, presenting sets of beliefs and promises of action regarding the issue if elected. Therefore, political parties contesting elections put aggregate interests into programs and manifestos that offer a choice of values and direction.

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Elections are central components of multi-party democracy; as such, charting the electoral process in new and third-wave democracies provides a valuable way of illuminating democratic development since many features of the democratic process are either a requirement or a consequence of elections. As explained by Millard (2009), elections provide the means of determining who shall represent the people in the legislature (directly or indirectly), the nature of government, and opportunities for informing and mobilizing the population as well as legitimizing the political order and offer a routine and common mechanism of accountability.

Further, one of the primary connections between elections and representation is that, under democracy, governments are representatives because they are elected in a freely contested election, where participation is widespread and where citizens enjoy political liberties. Consequently, in their analysis of the relationship between elections and representation, Przeworski *et al.* (1999) intimated that elections and representation in competitive democratic systems can be anchored or viewed in two main perspectives. First is the "mandate" view - thus, elections serve to select good policies or policy-bearing politicians. In this case, parties and candidates make policy proposals during campaigns and explain how these policies affect the welfare of the citizenry. Citizens decide which of these proposals they want to be implemented, which politicians to charge with, and governments to implement them.

Thus, elections emulate the direct assembly, and the winning platform becomes the "mandate" that the government pursues. The second is the "accountability" view; in this case, elections hold governments responsible for the result of their past actions. In other words, the government, in exercising its mandate, also anticipates the judgment of voters. Therefore, they are induced to choose policies that, in their judgment, will be positively evaluated by citizens at the time of the next election. Thus, the stylized version of party democracy puts great emphasis on parties' policy programs as structuring the campaign, voters' choices, and government policy. Parties then fight elections rallying behind a manifesto, laying down policy priorities and positions, and the victorious party takes government office and implements its policy programs (Müller *et al.*, 2017).

Ghana's current democratic dispensation began with the 1992 elections. According to Ayee (1997), this election witnessed many controversies from the opposition political parties concerning its conduct and outcome because most voters did not trust the neutrality of the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC). The voters believed that the election management

body was manipulated and influenced by the military-led PNDC government. This apparent distrust of the INEC led to the main opposition party's boycott of the parliamentary elections. The events and aftermath of the 1992 elections led to major reforms in the management of elections in the country in terms of the integrity of the electoral process. Since then, every election has been an improvement over the previous one.

Indubitably, manifestos have been embedded as part of the electoral politics of Ghana even before independence. This is evidenced in the number of national and local elections, bye-elections, plebiscites, referendums, and the manifestos that had been formulated (Ayee, 2011). In 2020, Ghana held another successful general election, the eighth since 1992, which has seen political power swing between the two major political parties, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP). Thus, from the acrimonious founding election in 1992, Ghana has blossomed into a model of democratic progress for Africa; to its credit, eight successive electoral cycles and three alternations in power between the two dominant political parties. A significant mark in Ghana's democratic consolidation occurred in 2000. The year saw the alternation of political power from eleven years of undemocratic PNDC government and eight years of democratically led NDC government under the realms of Jerry John Rawlings to John Kufuor-led New Patriotic Party. Thus, the first time the country saw a civilian-to-civilian political turnover since independence.

While elections in the 4th Republic have essentially been institutionalized, the country still faces several democratic deficits - issues of winner-takes-all and politics of exclusion, abuse of incumbency, incipient ethnic tensions and intolerance, and a minimalist approach to democratic competition (Frempong, 2012). Studies on Ghana's electoral politics since the attainment of independence more than six decades ago exist (Austin,1965; Gyimah- Boadi, 1997; Ayee, 2002; Frempong, 2012). These studies have focused on either the outcomes and challenges of the elections, voter alignments, ethnicity, or legal and institutional frameworks. Others have tended to focus on campaign issues, party financing and abuse of incumbency, elite consensus, election management, managing conflicts, and the transition to and consolidation of democracy.

However, an aspect that has not received sufficient scholarly attention is the value of the manifesto contents of political parties in shaping voting behavior. Consequently, ahead of Ghana's eighth consecutive elections in 2020, this study sought to assess voters' expectations for

the election. In particular, the study sought to ascertain the issues that informed the voting preferences of electorates in the immediate past elections (2012 and 2016) and whether manifesto contents were a key determinant for the 2020 general elections party.

As averred by Gabel and Hix (2002), manifestos play a vital role relative to understanding the political space, the number of dimensions, the policy content of these dimensions, and the location of actors in the political competition and outcomes. However, as in the case of other third-wave democracies, scholars and democracy experts have adopted conflicting assumptions about the dimensionality, character, and determinants of electoral outcomes in one of Africa's stable democracies. Indeed, among the popular notions is that electoral outcomes since the inception of the 4th Republic are influenced predominantly by ethno-social cleavages and party alignment and less about party policies or manifestos. As a contribution to the resolution of this theoretical conflict, the paper assesses the relative value of manifesto contents of political parties in shaping voter behavior using the three recent elections as a case study.

Electoral studies are multifaceted, including approaches based on normative (democratic) theory, rational choice and game theory, institutionalism, path dependence, political culture, and discourse analysis. There are also single-country and comparative studies of electoral inputs and outputs. Elements on the "input side" include institutional settings, the nature of the rules and administrative processes governing elections, voting technology, candidate recruitment and selection, the nature of political party development, election turnout, voting behavior, the influence of the media, and the role of the election campaign. On the other hand, elements on the "output side" include the electoral system's consequences, representation patterns, parliamentary behavior, legitimacy, and accountability (Millard, 2009).

Accordingly, the goal is not to do a comparative study or analyze the whole broad spectrum of an electoral system but rather to disaggregate and narrow down on voting behavior, an "input side" element. Consequently, the study achieved the following general objectives: First, it examined the extent to which manifesto contents of political parties shape voting behavior in new and unconsolidated democracies. Second, it assessed the relative influence of ethnopolitical dynamics on voting decisions in pluralistic societies. The specific objectives the study achieved are as follows: i) it assessed the value of party manifesto contents on voting decisions in 2012, 2016 & 2020 general elections; ii) it ascertained the distributional level of voters' alignment between the two dominant political parties in the country.

Significance of the Study

As Dalton (2016) observed, assessing voting behavior is crucial as it provides cues for judging the political candidates and issues, political participation, and stability in electoral systems. From this point of view, this study did not discount the role of cultural identities and socio-political milieus in shaping voting behavior in pluralistic societies. Instead, it argues that party manifestos have become strong mobilizers and critical determinants of voting decisions not only in established democracies but also in third-wave democracies. The very reason is that the voting behavior has drifted more toward the Downsian economic model on political competition and rational choice decision-making. Consequently, this paper is a greenfield empirical study on the confluence of party manifesto contents and voting decisions in an emergent democracy. Thus, it provides the empirical basis for parties and political actors to invest in developing concrete policy programs that resonate with the aspirations of citizens to spur successful electoral outcomes.

Scope, Limitations, and Delimitations

This study is against conflicting conclusions within the scholarly communities that are often intertwined with popular notions that electoral outcomes since the inception of the 4th Republic are influenced principally by party alignment or ethno-social cleavages. Against the notion, this study sought to achieve the following: To understand voting patterns and determinant factors for voters in recent elections and to precisely ascertain the relevance of party manifesto contents in voting decisions in the elections. Consequently, a comparative analysis of the manifesto contents of the parties that participated in the elections under review was outside the scope of the study, and neither was it within its scope to assess the role of party manifestos in all elections post-independent Ghana. The study sample covered 116 (42%) out of 275 constituencies in the country and is less than half of the total, which may be one of the possible constraints in the sampling. So, the main delimitation of the study was that the number of constituencies selected for the survey was disproportionate and lacked regional balance since the focus was more on swing constituencies and regions. However, respondents with formal education were more willing to participate in the survey than those without formal education.

Theory and Arguments

One of the defining features of democracy is the periodic holding of elections (Dahl, 1971). Elections are, therefore, among the most ubiquitous contemporary political institutions, and voting is the single act of political participation undertaken by a majority of adults in a majority of the nations in the world today (Rose & Mossawir, 1967). Multi-party elections have become a global norm as they provide legitimacy for the governing and give voice to citizens as opposed to narrow political or sectional elites (Kerr & Luhrmann, 2017). A critical aspect of elections and the democratization process is how political parties formulate manifestos as policy blueprints to influence voter behavior in a competitive multi-party democracy. As such, parties consciously try to shape their images in the form of policy statements prior to an election campaign for the voters to see what the parties seek to execute should they win power. Thus, parties occasionally alter their manifestos between elections to shape a new party identity based on lessons from past electoral defeats (Janda *et al.*, 1995).

Manifestos are vital in enhancing responsive governance since elections are contested freely and won based on substantial ideas. Thus, citizens enjoy political liberties since governments will act in the people's best interest (Przeworski *et al.*, 2012). On the other hand, others have argued that manifestos are without political significance. For instance, Dunn has stated that "policy programs or manifestos and ideologies have played a strikingly insignificant role in shaping voters' choice" (Dunn, 1975, p. 191). In a similar tone, Chazan opined that "once issues were set, politicization during elections tended to occur around social groups, local interest, and personalities and not around contents" (Chazan, 1983, p. 67).

Further, elections can be grouped into two main types: Thus, presidential and parliamentary elections. According to classical theory, these two are known as the 'first-order' elections, while municipal or local elections are considered 'second-order' elections (Reif & Schmitt, 1980). The stakes in elections can therefore be evaluated based on whether they are national in character or are municipal or local elections. The stakes can further be assessed based on the country or continent context. For Example, Reif and Schmitt consider European and regional elections to be 'second-order' elections because there is fewer stakes in the eyes of voters. As a result, many people feel less obliged to vote in those elections.

However, in the context of presidential and parliamentary elections, thus 'first order' elections often assume a national character, and where the stakes are high political parties that adopt all legitimate means, including well thought out policies, to win the mandate of the people. As strategic agents, they (parties) are aware of the trade-offs between policy aims, how to be re-elected, and winning votes. For instance, incumbents seeking re-election, while conveying an attractive vision, must also communicate about the policies enacted during their time in power. Although this creates incentives for implementing partisan policies, it pushes the incumbent to fulfill a fair proportion of all the campaign promises made.

Thus, incumbents often have little room to maneuver; consequently, they sometimes focus on areas that they expect the greatest electoral fortunes. In this case, the promised policy might be implemented at whatever point in the cycle considered most favorable (Brouard *et al.*, 2018). Thus, following elections, governing parties have an incentive to demonstrate their ability to deliver the policies promised during the campaign, and the same applies to the other end of the electoral cycle when the imminence of the next election may push them toward re-election-oriented policymaking (Tufte, 1978; Alesina & Rosenthal, 1995). In essence, the existence of electoral cycles in economic policies and outcomes supports the idea that the distance to/from the next/last election affects how political parties react (Franzese, 2002).

However, some obstacles deprive some voters of participating in the electoral process, and these obstacles emanate from two main perspectives. First, in the case of advanced democracies where electoral registration is usually automatic, limiting eligibility and access to citizenship is the main barrier to participation (Lewis-Beck *et al.*, 2016). Second, a lack of political resources such as local political knowledge, civic skills to participate, and political mobilization from the political parties is similarly found to constitute a barrier to electoral participation (Sobolewska *et al.*, 2013).

The preceding shows the dynamic and complex nature of electoral studies as a field, encompassing many approaches and all aspects of the electoral process. The focus of this article is on the model concerning voter turnout and voting decisions based on individual interests and social incentives, as studies on voting behavior in Africa's young multi-party regimes is an almost completely ignored research topic, although this is a classical field of political science (Erdmann, 2007a).

Consequently, as the paper seeks to assess the influence of party manifesto contents in shaping voting behavior, it employs the Downsian theoretical framework on electoral participation.[†] Downs (1957) seminal and pioneering work, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, applies economic techniques and logic modeling to electoral politics. According to the approach, as parties and candidates aim to be elected, there is a need to construct policy platforms that correspond to voters' preferences. Thus, the model provides the precise conditions under which economic theory could be applied to non-market political decision-making and a framework to analyze some interesting tendencies in political competition.

However, Downs' framework on two-party competition is assumed to be based on the axiom of self-interest; thus, victory-oriented political parties and candidates are applicable only within a certain political context. In addition to the fundamental assumption that the context relates to democratic politics, the model outlines nine other conditions: (i) there are only two political parties; (ii) Elections take place within a single constituency; (iii) there is a single election to choose a single candidate, and a plurality vote decides the election; (iv) policies can be located along a single (left-right) dimension; (v) candidates' policy positions are well defined; (vi) each voter estimates the candidates' policy dimensions for the next election and votes for the candidate or party that can be expected to enact policies closest to the voter's own position; (vii) parties and candidates care only about winning, so they formulate policies to win elections, not for other reasons; (viii) each candidate is part of a unified party team; (ix) eligible voters go to the polls if the expected benefits of their votes' contribution to the election of their preferred candidate exceed the "cost" of voting.

In other words, this ideal model works in a political system embedded with the above attributes and essentially gives rise to predictions that candidates' policies will converge to the preferences of the median voter and that elections can be expected to be decided by relatively narrow margins. It is because candidates are nearly identical in their only relevant attributes and policy preferences (Grofman *et al.*, 2008).

[†]Anthony Downs's theory of party systems and voting was adapted to the idea that voters in the 1950s were behaving like consumers when voting, rather than being tied to a party by social bonds and traditional loyalties - An Economic Theory of Democracy.

Accordingly, the approach posits that the following beliefs fundamentally influence voting behavior under non-market political decision-making.

1. Modeling voting decisions on rational choice terms: The ideas about rational ignorance and the rationality of not voting. That is, individuals who vote for the party they expect will yield the highest utility for them if they get into the office (in terms of policies).

2. The ethical behavior of voters: The notion of ideology as a shorthand way of summarizing policy views, party labels as voting cues. This has two implications - on the one hand, voters prefer parties that are closer to their ideal positions/interests in the left-right space. On the other hand, voters prefer parties whose policies benefit the larger society or have altruistic effects.

3. The implications of information cost and uncertainty on electoral choices: The idea that voters use parties' position on the left-right dimension as a heuristic in deciding which parties will yield them the highest utility. These models are elaborated further below.

The Rational Choice Model

One of the models that explains voting decisions is the rational choice paradigm. It asserts that an action has value only if it affects outcomes. Thus, modeling voting behavior under the domain of rational choice implies that individuals who vote for a party they expect will yield the highest utility if they get into the office (in terms of policies). Stated differently, the 'expected utility model of a voter turnout states that a voter, in deciding whether to vote or abstain, calculates the expected utility of either action or votes if benefits exceed costs (Downs, 1957). This classical model, developed from a combination of theories of social action and economic theories of rationality, essentially ascribes the motivations of individuals on whether to vote and how to vote to a calculation of the likely benefit to be derived from the preferred decision.

Expanding on Downs' claims on rationality and voting, Ledyard (1984) introduced a game theory rather than a decision theory that focuses on the problem by endogenously deriving the p (probability that the voter will be decisive). The probability is based on the rationality that each voter is acting in consequence of his or her anticipations of the actions of other voters. Similarly, Palfrey and Rosenthal (1985) show that in any symmetric equilibrium to the game of incomplete information, voters with significantly positive costs will abstain in very large electorates, while some voters with significantly positive costs will indeed vote in relatively small electorates.

Thus, the underlying view is that in large electorates, participation will result only if individuals have negative net costs of voting.

Since Downs' modeling of political participation on rational choice calculations, other theorists have appreciated the "paradox of not voting", which states that if each person only votes for the purpose of influencing the election outcome, then even a small cost to vote like a minor schedule conflict or mildly bad weather should dissuade anyone from voting (Feddersen, 2004). Consequently, voting is seen as a rational act in which voters decide their party preference based on personal interest. The relevance of the model lies in the fact that it stresses the importance of policy or issue-based voting since parties can be influenced to reshape policies encapsulated in their manifestos to meet the aspirations of voters. Nonetheless, a weakness of the model is that it abstracts the individual voter from his or her social and cultural context (Gyampo & Debrah, 2013).

The Ethical Voting Model

The second model that explains voting behavior is the 'ethical voter' approach which has two main dimensions. First, it explains the notion of ideology as a shorthand way of summarizing policy views, party labels as voting cues, and voters prefer parties closer to their ideological positions/interests in the left-right space. On the other hand, voters prefer parties whose policies benefit the larger society or have altruistic effects. That is, the pursuit of egocentric behavior ought to be matched with society's interest.

This is in sharp contrast to the rational choice paradigm - in that voters, according to this theory, have two sets of preferences, the first being a set of selfish preferences, which have to do with only that individual's own utility. The second set of ethical or altruistic preferences contains the individual's perception of the utilities of others. According to Goodin and Roberts (1975), ethical behavior occurs when the stakes are low and when any individual has little effect on the outcome (low efficacy); as such, ethical preferences are likely to dominate the individual's voting decision. In other words, the model suggests that voters think in terms of group and national benefits. Therefore, the motivation to vote makes sense for many people as it is viewed as a contribution to collective interests. This explains why the rhetoric of politics tends to be phrased as benefits to society generally or too large deserving groups, rather than open appeals to self-interest (Edlin *et al.*, 2007).

Furthermore, it assumes that each voter acts independently based on his or her own assessment of what constitutes ethical action; accordingly, agents maximize their individual utility under a moral constraint given by a universalization principle. Contrary to the rule-utilitarian framework, this model predicts higher turnout rates among voters with higher intensity of support, thus linking ethical motivation to the spatial theory of voting (Coate & Conlin, 2004). The significant part of this model is that it provides the basis for understanding why people would vote in a certain way, especially if it would benefit the broader social group as against self and egoistic interest.

The Information-Based Model

The information model elucidates the importance of issue-knowledge in shaping voting behavior. The model stresses the implications of information cost and uncertainty on electoral choices and asserts that voters use the position of parties on the left-right dimension as a heuristic in making voting decisions. In their work on information and elections and the relative role of issues in presidential elections, Campbell *et al.* (1960) averred that issue voting must embed the following three necessary conditions. First, the voter must be aware of the issue and have an opinion concerning it. Second, the issue must arouse a minimal intensity of feeling for the voter. Third, the issue must be accompanied by a perception that one party or candidate represents the person's own position better than the other party or candidate (Alvarez, 1998). According to the model, voters are constrained both by a lack of knowledge regarding the different consequences of their decisions and by the limited intellectual capacity to analyze all available options. Thus, when the information level of the population is much less or incomplete, it can affect turnout and voting decisions.

Further, it asserts that people have a natural predisposition to vote and that the probability of turning out increases with the individual's information level. The reason is that the value of changing the election outcome is higher when the voter is more confident that he or she is voting for the right candidate (Matsusaka, 1995). The ideological preference of the voter further influences the decision to acquire information and thereby increases the likelihood of voting (Larcinese, 2009). As in the case of the ethical voter model, this framework also stresses the importance of political ideology. Consequently, if voters' attitudes conform to the tenets of a dominant ideology, parties develop their policies in line with that ideology and devise strategies

to disseminate knowledge and or information relative to the party's ideology to voters. The weakness in this model is that it suffers setbacks in emergent democracies where political resources such as local political knowledge and civic skills are lacking. These are required for effective political participation in understanding political parties' ideologies and manifesto contents for informed voting decisions.

Material and Methods

Study Design and Sampling

This pre-election survey was a nationwide exercise, and respondents were drawn from the sixteen administrative regions of Ghana and 116 selected constituencies across the country. For a breakdown of the regional representation of the constituencies sampled, see table 1. In all, one hundred voters were interviewed in each of the selected constituencies, totaling 11,600 respondents. The study adopted purposive sampling methods and semi-structured interviews for data collection. This explains why the number of constituencies selected for the survey varies across the regions.

In other words, the main criterion used in the sampling was population size, swing regions, and new regions. In this regard, purposive sampling methods were chosen as they helped select respondents most likely to yield appropriate and useful information (Kelly, 2010). For example, Volta had just one constituency because the region has always voted one way. The region has given at least 80% of popular votes to the NDC since the return to multi-party democracy in 1992. On the other hand, Ashanti had the highest number of fifteen constituencies sampled because it is the region with the highest number of forty-seven constituencies in the country.

The last factor was the creation of new administrative regions prior to the election. We sought to determine if the creation of the six additional regions could alter voting patterns in these new regions. Consequently, among the reasons for adopting the purposive strategy is based on the assumption that, given the aims and objectives of the study, specific kinds of people may hold different and vital views about the ideas and issues in question and therefore need to be included in the sample (Robinson, 2014). As shown in Table 1 below, it can be observed that new regions,

including Western North, Bono, Bono East, and Oti had more constituencies sampled than some of the traditional regions.[‡]

	Table 1: **Regional Distribution of Constituencies**	
S. No.	**Name of Region**	**Number of Constituencies**
1.	Western	8
2.	Central	14
3.	Greater Accra	15
4.	Volta	1
5.	Eastern	10
6.	Ashanti	15
7.	Western North	6
8.	Ahafo	3
9.	Bono	7
10.	Bono East	8
11.	Oti	6
12.	Northern	8
13.	Savanna	2
14.	North-East	3
15.	Upper East	5
16.	Upper West	5
	Total	**116**

Source: Authors (2022)

[‡] The government created six new regions (Western North, Bono, Bono East, Ahafo, Oti & North East) barely a year into the 2020 general elections. Thus, increasing the number of regions from ten to sixteen. The last time a similar event occurred was in 1983 when the Upper West region was created from the then Upper region.

Table 2: **Summary of Demographics**

Source: Authors (2022)

Data Analysis

Data collection instruments were systematically structured into thematic areas to ensure comprehensive coverage of specific issues and facilitate efficient, effective, and structured data capture, analysis, and presentation. The results obtained were processed into a form appropriate for analysis after editing, coding, and entering into the SPSS software. Quantitative data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to generate tables and charts,

Gender	Age	Religion	Education	Income (Gh)	Employment	Employment Type
-Male: 50.6% -Female: 49.4%	-Below 40: 64.1% -Above 40: 35.9%	-Christians: 73.0% -Muslims: 21.2% -Traditional: 3.0% -No-Religion: 2.4% -Others 0.4%	-None: 22.15% -Primary: 16.08% -JHS: 28.34% -SHS: 19.31% -Post-Secondary: 8.22% -Bachelor: 5.58% -Master/PhD: 0.32%	-Below 500: 61.3% -Between: 501-1000: 25.53% -Between: 1001-2000: 9.71% -Between: 2001-3000: 3.28% -Above 4000: 0.18%	-Self-employment: 61.7% -Formal sector: 14.9% -Unemployed: 20.6% -Retired/ Undisclosed 2.8%	-Farmers: 37.4% -Traders: 25.2% -Health & Education: 17.2% -Service: 7.5% -Mining: 1.2% -Others: 11.5%

whereas interviews were analyzed with a thematic focus (thematic approach). The themes from the interview relating to the subject under investigation were used to support the quantitative data. Quantitative analysis methods were employed using descriptive statistical tools such as percentages and frequency using tables and charts. The output of this process resulted in a data set that responded to the objectives of the study as input into the drafting of the findings and drawing of conclusions of the study.

Findings

Table 3: **Have you voted in the following elections?**				
		2012 (%)	2016 (%)	
	Yes	73.9	81.5	
	No	26.1	18.5	
	Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Authors (2022)

From table 3, it can be observed that most of the respondents had voted in the previous two elections. Again, from the table, one can see that in the 2012 general elections, 73.9% of the respondents voted in that year's election. In the case of the 2016 general elections, 81.59% of the respondents voted in that year's election. Thus, the number of respondents who voted in 2012 was less than those who voted in the 2016 general elections. Thus, an increase of 7.69% in 2016 than in the 2012 general elections.
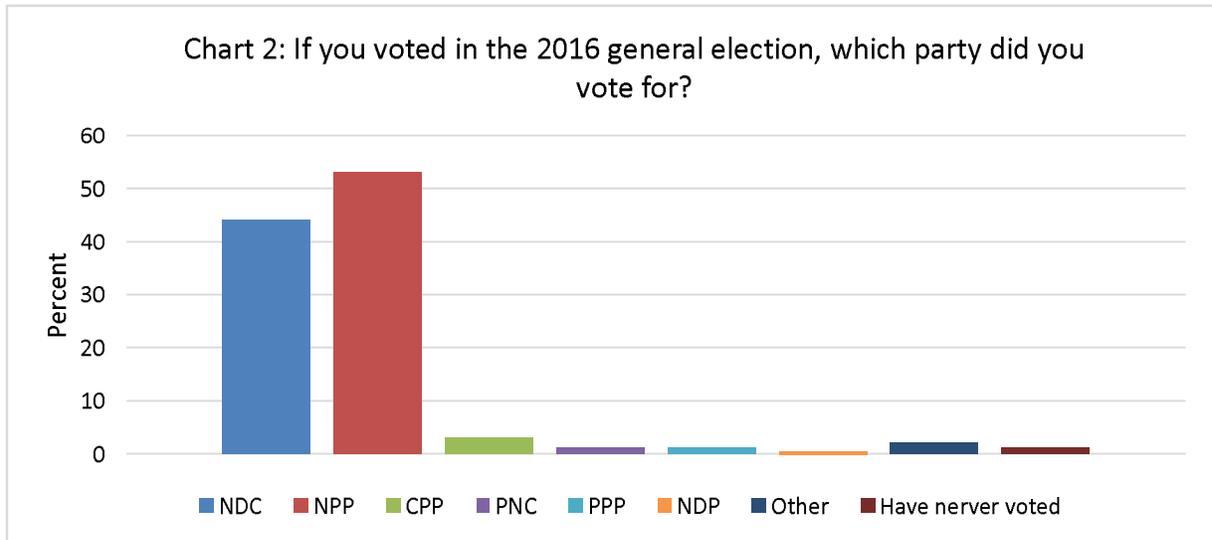
Outcome of 2012 Elections

Chart 1: If you voted in the 2012 general elections, which party did you vote for?
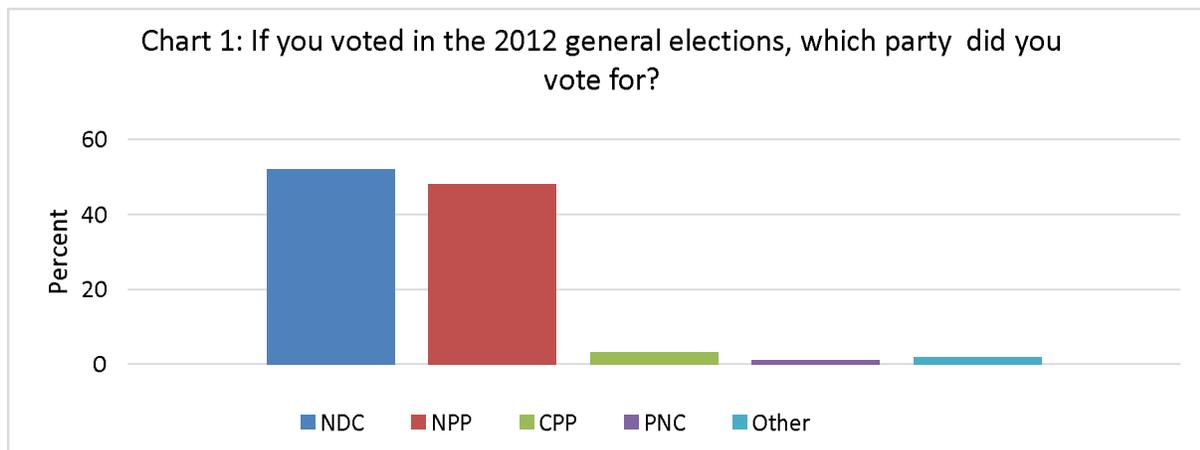
Source: Authors (2022)

One of the first questions respondents had to respond to was whether they had voted in previous elections, emphasis was on the 2012 and 2016 general elections and which political party they

voted for in those elections. In the case of the 2012 elections, the voter turnout was 73.9%. Out of that, 51.4% indicated that they voted for the NDC while 47.0% revealed that they voted for the NPP, with a minority of 1.6% indicating that they voted for the other political parties. For summaries of the percentage of votes garnered by the major political parties, thus the NDC and NPP, and the percentage of votes obtained by the other political parties that participated in the 2012 general elections, see chart 1 above.

Source: Authors (2022)

Outcome of 2016 Elections

On the other hand, in the case of the 2016 elections, the voter turnout was 81.59%. Out of this, 54.2% of the respondents indicated that they voted for the NPP, while 43.9% of the respondents said they voted for the NDC. A cumulative percentage of 1.9% of the respondents indicated that they voted for the other political parties participating in the 2016 general elections. Chart 2 above summarizes the percentage of votes garnered by the two major political parties, thus the NDC and NPP, and the percentage of votes obtained by the other political parties in the 2016 general elections.

Table 4: **Reasons for Voting for a Party**	
Variables	**Percentage**
Admired the presidential candidate	17.8
Liked the party program/manifesto	65.8

|	
I received financial inducement	1.4
I just voted	4.3
It is the party of my tribesmen/women	8.3
Others	2.4
Total	**100.0**

Source: Authors (2022)

Having established that the respondents had previously voted in the immediate past two elections, the survey further inquired about respondents' motives for voting for a particular political party. Out of the six variables, a political party manifesto emerged as the most important factor that influenced their voting decisions. Indeed, over two-thirds (65.8%) of the respondents mentioned that they voted for a political party based on its manifesto contents. In other words, the political party with the most convincing manifesto earned the most votes in the 2012 and 2016 elections.

The second most important consideration that influenced respondents' voting choices in the two elections was the likeability of a party's presidential candidate. In this regard, about 18% of respondents voted for a party because they admired the presidential candidate. The third important deciding factor had to do with ethnic considerations. As such, about 8% of respondents admitted that they voted for a particular political party or candidate based on ethnic accounts or links. However, financial inducement was the least factor that determined respondents' choice of a political party or candidate.

Thus, people voted in those two elections based on other factors, and that financial inducement did not influence in any way the kind of party candidate that got their votes. Table 4 above summarizes the determinants of respondents' votes in the 2012 and 2016 elections.

Regrets Voting for NPP

Chart 3: If you voted for the NPP, have you had any regrets?
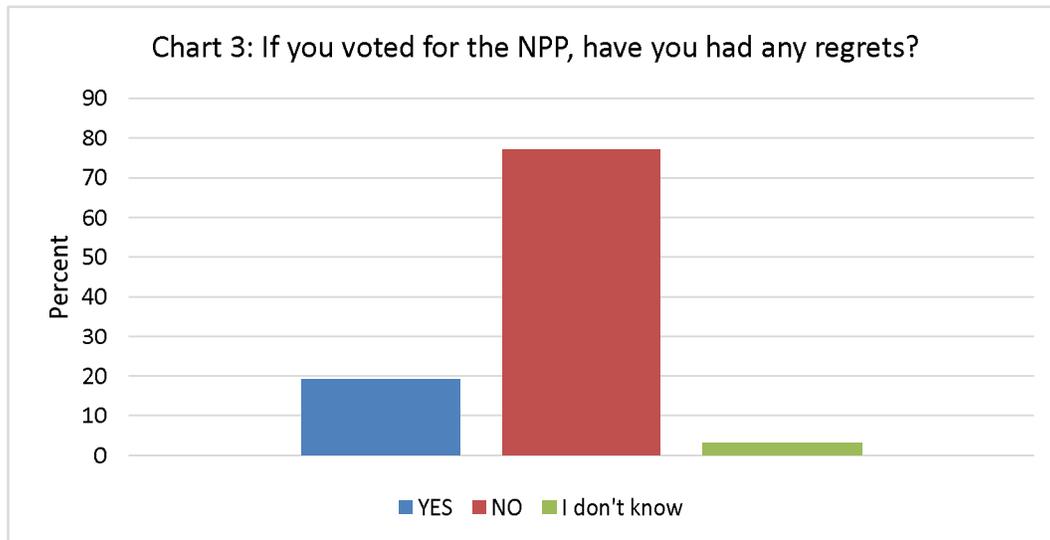
Source: Authors (2022)

The 2016 general election and its outcome was peculiar in many respects: The incumbent candidate who won the 2012 general elections following the death of the sitting president prior to the elections meant that the governing party had served a cumulative period of eight years by the end of 2016. Thus, three and half years of John Atta Mills led NDC government plus four and half years of John Mahama led NDC government. In other words, another victory for the party in 2016 would have meant a consecutive twelve years of NDC-led administration, which would have been the first of its kind under the current Republic.

On the other hand, the NPP party and its candidate made several mouthwatering promises in the 2016 elections, which partly culminated in its margin of victory of nearly 54%. This was also the first time in the history of Ghana's electoral politics that a sitting president lost an election to an opposition candidate. Consequently, the survey aimed to establish whether voters who voted so massively for the NPP in 2016 had any regrets after four years. While most respondents (78%) had no regrets about voting for the NPP in that election, those who regretted voting for the NPP were still significant; thus, about 19% of voters, as seen in the above chart 3.
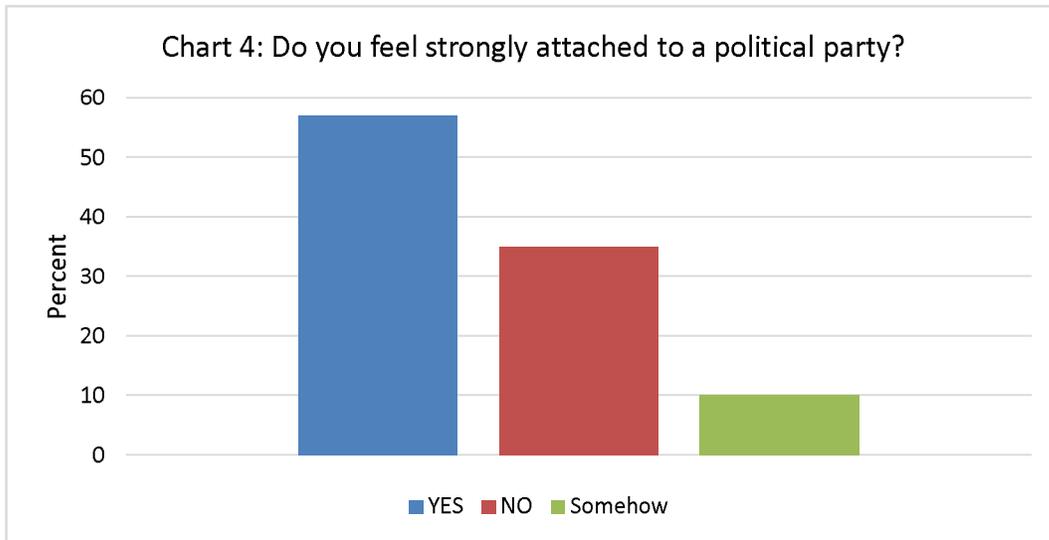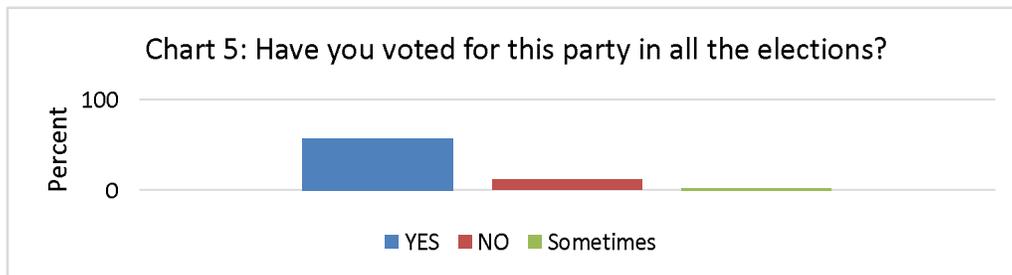
Source: Authors (2022)

Political Party Affiliation

Concerning whether respondents were strongly attached to any political party, 56% indicated that they were strongly aligned to a specific political party. In comparison, 34% believed they had no particular political affiliation. Those with slight leanings to a political party constituted only 10%. The above Chart 4 provides a breakdown of voters' affiliation or otherwise to political parties in the country.

Previous Voting Patterns

Source: Authors (2022)

Regarding whether respondents had been voting for the political party that they claimed to have strong affiliations, most respondents admitted that they have always voted for the political party with which they have some form of affiliation. Indeed, the survey results show that 86.2% of electorates leaning toward a political party have always voted for that party, with only 13.8%

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changing their voting patterns. The above Chart 5 summarizes the pattern of voting in the 2012 and 2016 elections.

Future Voting Patterns

Chart 6: Will you continue to vote for this party?
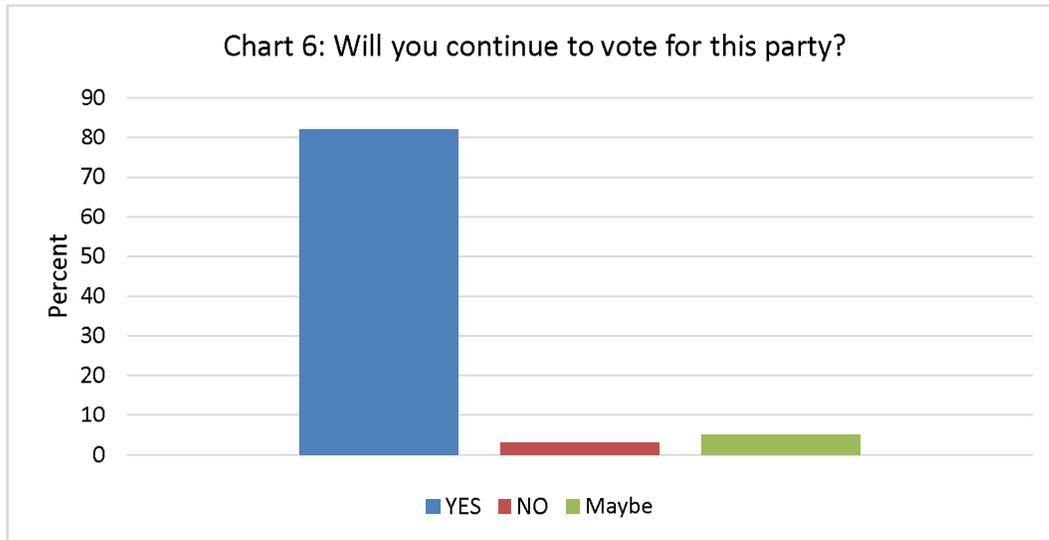
Source: Authors (2022)

As to whether they would vote for the political parties that they admitted having strong affiliations within the 2020 general elections, 89.7% of respondents revealed that they would vote for the party they had voted for in the previous two elections. The implication is that more than 56% of the voters are strongly attached to a specific political party. What it also means is that the NPP is slightly ahead of the NDC when it comes to a political party with a core party membership. It is also revealed that in all previous elections, this group of voters had always voted for the political party they were strongly affiliated with. Indeed, the survey results show that 86.2% of electorates with a leaning toward a political party have always voted for that party, with only 13.8% ever-changing their voting patterns. Respondents also knew that this exact scenario would play out in the 2020 elections. Thus 89.7% of respondents indicated that they would vote for the party they had voted for in previous elections. For a summary of the findings on whether electorates would continue to vote for the party they are aligned with in future elections, see chart 6 above.

Voting in the 2020 Elections

Table 5: **Which choice best describes your likelihood to vote in the 2020 elections?**

Variable	Percent
Definitely voting	81.6
Probably voting	14.0
Probably Not Voting	2.2
Definitely Not Voting	1.5
Don't Know/Refused	.7
Total	**100.0**

Source: Authors (2022)

Further, the survey wanted to gauge respondents' likelihood and eagerness to vote in the upcoming 2020 general elections. Multiple-choice answers were provided to guide respondents in measuring their state of likelihood to vote in the upcoming elections. The results of the survey indicate that the majority of the electorates were eager to vote in the 2020 elections. Indeed, an overwhelming majority of about 82% of respondents indicated that they would definitely vote in the 2020 general election. However, 14% revealed they were likely to vote, and only 1.5% confirmed that they would definitely not vote in that year's general elections.

Meanwhile, 2.2% of the respondents said they might not vote in the elections. An insignificant percentage of 0.7% confirmed that they were unsure whether they would vote in the upcoming elections or refused to respond to the question. For a summary of responses on the issue of the likelihood of voting in the 2020 general elections, see table 5 above.

Discussion

Manifestos and Voting Decisions

Rose and Mossawir (1967), in their analysis of the role of elections in a democracy, remarked that elections are among the most ubiquitous of contemporary political institutions, and voting is the single act of political participation undertaken by a majority of adults in a majority of the nations in the world today. Thus, past and present discussions on democracy cannot discount the important role elections play in sustaining democratic structures. However, a significant element

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in the democratization process and electoral politics is party policy programs and their influence on voting behavior in established and emerging democracies. Lamare & Budd (2022) explain that political party manifestos present a portfolio of policy proposals packaged together to fulfill explicit values and ideals. Modeling their article in the context of the rational choice paradigm, they underscored the importance of ideas and political manifestos in competitive multi-party democracy. They provided three main channels through which ideas enter political party manifestos, including a reflection of entrenched values, new thinking, and reactive mirroring.

Downs' application of economic ideas to the analysis of the political competition and voting behavior, on the one hand, enables political parties desirous of successful electoral outcomes to design policy programs that mirror the interests of the larger society. On the other hand, it allows voters to assess which party policy programs maximize their interests, whether egoistic or altruistic.

Ghana held its seventh successful general election in 2016 since the return to multi-party democracy in 1992. Ahead of its eighth general elections in 2020, the study sought to ascertain the relevant issues that determined voters' decisions in the previous 2012 and 2016 elections and the determining factors for the 2020 elections. In particular, our variable of interest was whether a party's manifesto content was an important criterion in voting decisions. The findings show that out of about six variables, a political party manifesto emerged as the most significant factor that influenced or determined the outcomes of the previous two elections. In other words, the political party with the most convincing manifesto earned the most votes in the 2012 and 2016 elections. Indeed, over two-thirds (65.8%) of the respondents mentioned that they voted for a political party based on the content of the party's manifesto. Most of the voters who voted in the 2012 elections also voted in the 2016 elections.

These findings imply that voters voted in these elections because of rational choice calculations. Thus, voters assessed the relative contents of the parties' manifestos and decided on the one that best served their interests. Accordingly, in his arguments on rational choice models, Aldrich (1993) observes that rational choice theories are about how the (expected) utility associated with outcomes generates or induces preferences for the actions at hand. Thus, the underlying assumption is that it is fundamental that the individual prefers outcomes with a higher utility to those with lower utility. Further, individual chooses actions to receive more highly valued

outcomes as actions are the means to obtain desired ends and have value only as far as they affect outcomes.

However, Kaplan *et al.* (2007) opined that rational choice calculations are not always about utility maximization for an individual. In this context, there is a difference between rational choice as a theory of individual choice and as a theory of collective choice. On the one hand, one considers the effect of assuming rationality on individual voting behavior (micro level). On the other hand, one considers the effect of rational voting behavior on aggregate choice (macro level). Therefore, the assumptions of rational behavior on individual choice, while not completely uncontroversial, are rather mundane since the action undertaken by the individual is based on altruistic motives or actions that seek to benefit the larger society and not private utility maximization.

This perspective presents two implications for the findings based on the results, which show that party manifesto contents were the most significant determinant for voters in these elections. The first implication is that the NDC and NPP won the last elections based on calculations by the average voter relative to the party that offered policy programs that satisfied the most needs (utility maximization). As intimated by Evans (2004), parties offer policies, and voters at those policies, decide which maximize their utilities and vote accordingly.

The second implication is that voters voted for the winning party in these elections based on the party's policy programs that electorates believed served the interest of the larger society (altruism). In this respect, McGann (2016) asserts that this line of voting is consistent with the way citizens perceive voting and participation - not simply as a (possibly) enjoyable act or as a discrete duty, but as a potential contribution to the general good. The assumption is that the larger the jurisdiction in which the election applies, the more significant the potential effect of the election outcome on the general welfare. In other words, people vote for the policy that they think will lead to the largest average benefit and that there is no reason to vote for a policy that has idiosyncratic benefits to an individual because the individual utility benefit is essentially irrelevant for large electorates.

Essentially, the study's findings confirm earlier studies on elections or political competition and the value of party manifesto contents in shaping voting behavior. For example, Dalton (2000)

intimated that how people vote is decreasingly determined by their location in the political structure, such as their social class or religious membership, or by a long-term sense of loyalty. Similarly, Franklin (2010) observed that in the 1960s, social cleavages accounted for 60% of the variance in electoral choices; this value declined to 10% in the mid-1980s. Correspondingly, party programs, the economy, and evaluations of leaders have become more important factors for voters than social ties and other factors (Kiewiet & Rivers, 1984; Lewis-Beck & Paldam, 2000).

Party Alignment

Although the objective of the paper and the variable of interest for the study is the influence of party manifesto contents on voting decisions, understanding voters' alignment through ethno-political identification and other social networks to the two dominant parties in the country was also assessed. As underscored by Roth (1998), partisanship and voting behavior is a complex phenomenon that cannot be explained exhaustively by a single model. According to Dalton (2016), party alignment is an early socialized, enduring, affective psychological identification with a specific political party. Stated differently, studies on voting behavior in plural societies, particularly in African countries, are related predominantly to factors such as ethnicity, personal ties, and clientelism (Van de Walle, 2003; Posner, 2005). In this regard, in their analysis of social incentives and informal networks on turnout and voting behavior, Soskice *et* al. (2011) hypothesized that a significant proportion of turnout and voting decisions is a consequence of voters conforming to the expectations of the informal social networks (ISNs) - of family, friends, work colleagues and perhaps neighbors, of which they are part. The incentives arise from the importance most people attach to their acceptance by those they are close to and the desire to avoid their disapproval. Therefore, voting takes place in those networks where politics is treated as important, especially around elections.

Since Ghana returned to multi-party democracy in 1992, political power has alternated between two parties only, thus the NDC and NPP, making the two the main dominant parties in the 4th Republic. With its social democratic ideological orientation and center-left political philosophy, the NDC gets its main support and votes from rural and peri-urban settings and those within low-income brackets. The NPP, which is center-right with its liberal political philosophy and free-market orientation, on the other hand, gets its main support from the middle class and in the urban communities. Furthermore, as a result of ethno-historical progenitors, the NDC gets a minimum of 80% of popular votes in the presidential result from the Volta region and has always

won all parliamentary seats in the region except few instances where the party lost one or two seats, only to win them back in the subsequent election that followed. Conversely, the NPP obtains at least 75% of popular votes in the presidential result in Ashanti, the country's second most populous region. The party also wins all the parliamentary seats in the region except two or three constituencies, dominated mainly by settlers with different ethnic backgrounds.

The aforesaid therefore lends credence to conclusions from previous electoral political studies that ethnicity is a major factor in voting decisions, especially in pluralistic societies, and is most evidenced in the election results. In other words, citizens of specific districts or regions populated (predominantly) by a particular ethnic group vote for one party one election after the other. Back on this background and in the context of Dalton's assertion that party alignment is a socio-psychological product of family and social group ties, the aim was to examine whether these social and informal networks had significant influences on voting decisions in the elections under study. The results show that 56% of voters were strongly attached to a specific political party, while 34% did not have any political affiliation. Those with slight leanings to a political party constituted only 10%. To ascertain further, the survey sought to understand which of the political parties most respondents had strong leanings toward; 52% of the respondents were affiliated to the NPP, whereas 46.8% were strongly attached to the NDC, and only 1.2% claimed to be traditionally attached to the other political parties. Thus, party alignment (links to a candidate through ethnic or party affiliation) was the second most important criterion for voters in the elections under study.

The findings bring into sharp focus the link between ethnopolitical (ethnic voting) and rational choice models in voting behavior. Consequently, in his work on ethnicity and voter alignment, Erdmann (2007b) concluded that ethno-political voting has a rational dimension in that, during periods of electoral political uncertainty, it is rational to rely on things one knows, including the extended family, personal friends, neighbors, community members, those from the next community or district, from the same ethnic group, and among others. He averred that although family or village ties are not always friendly, in case of an unknown 'challenge' posed from outside, the alliance and reliance on the next comes down to a decision to 'rely on the devil we know - as villagers often explain why they are voting in favor of a particular party or candidate. The electoral decision in favor of a candidate from the same village or the same ethno-political

group becomes even more rational if the prevailing perception is that members of the other group will vote for a member of their group. The implicit assumption is that the elected person will, in the first instance, take care of his or her own kin before any other.

Consequently, it can be explained therefore that the two dominant parties, which are aligned to the two regions and major ethnic groups in the country, are underpinned by the assumption that the voters feel their interests are best served by the party or people with whom they have an ethno-political association since it is only rational to rely on things one knows and the elected in turn takes care of his own 'people' before any other group of people.

In sum, Downs' application of economic ideas to the analysis of political competition is a distinctive creative synthesis that helps to understand voting behavior. Notwithstanding, the approach suffers some criticisms. For example, the model suggests that voters only have vague preferences on issues and are attracted by politicians who clearly and powerfully put forward policies on the same side of the issue. However, surveys show that candidates tend to take more extreme positions on issues when the theory would suggest that they should converge toward a centrist consensus (Rabinowitz & Macdonald, 1989; Iversen, 1994).

Conclusion

Studies on elections in Ghana are numerous, especially since the return to multi-party democracy in 1992. These studies revolve around politics of winner-takes-all, incumbency abuse, minimalist approach to the democratic competition, the independence of the Electoral Commission, and other issues relative to democratic consolidation in emergent democracies. However, despite the potential influence of party manifesto contents in shaping voting behavior, it has not received the needed scholarly attention. Consequently, this study, employing the Downsian model, which highlights the problem of free-riding relative to political competition and rational choice considerations, has brought to the fore the key determinants of voting behavior in Ghana's recent electoral history. Specifically, it has brought to the limelight the relevance or value of party manifesto contents in shaping voting decisions. Downs' approach avers that it is rational for an individual voter not to vote given the costs associated with voting and the infinitesimal chance of influencing the electoral outcome. In other words, the model underpins democratic functionality in achieving governance ends that meets citizens' expectations and aspirations.

Accordingly, the study sought to understand the main determining factors for voters, focusing on the impact party manifesto contents have on voting decisions. Of the six variables, a party manifesto or policy program emerged as the most significant factor that determined voting behavior in the elections under study. The political party with a manifesto content that maximized both individual and group utilities earned the most votes in these elections.

Indeed, over two-thirds (65.8%) of respondents mentioned in the survey that they voted for a political party based on the party's manifesto contents. The second most important factor determining voting decisions was the candidates' personality. In this regard, about 18% of respondents voted for a party because they admired the candidate. In comparison, the third most significant factor was ethnic factors, as 8% of voters claimed they voted for a particular party or candidate on account of ethnic considerations. Generally, the most negligible factor that determined respondents' choice of a political party or candidate was financial inducement, as a minuscule minority of 1.4% claimed to have made their electoral choices based on inducements by political parties or candidates. Thus, people voted in the elections under study primarily based on the manifesto contents of the parties and to some extent as a result of ethnopolitical inclinations and that financial inducement, whether in kind or cash, did not influence in any way voting decisions of the electorates in the study area.

The findings imply that party alignment remains a significant determinant of voting decisions; nonetheless, the role of party manifesto contents in shaping voting behavior triumphs over voting patterns based on socio-psychological notions and cleavages to political parties. It further shows that voter inducement in whatever form during elections is less relevant in structuring voting behavior. The findings imply, therefore, that political parties need to adapt to the changing voting dynamics and fashion out policy programs that maximize the aspirations of citizens to spur successful electoral outcomes.

Finally, in terms of originality and contribution to the field, the paper counts as greenfield empirical research on the influence of party manifesto contents on voting behavior in ethno-pluralistic emergent democracies.

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