

Institute for Peace and Development

Election Survey 2020

Election 2020: Matching Development Priorities, Voter Expectations, and Voting Choices in Northern Ghana

Summary of Survey Findings



Institute for Peace and Development

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Background to Survey

1. Peace and Development Outcomes of Historical Voting Patterns

The December 2020 general elections are the eighth since the first for the 4th republic in 1992. Democratic electoral systems presume the electorate would make decisions that serve their enlightened self-interests. Accordingly, elections are supposed to be marketplaces of ideas where the electorate shop for and make electoral choices between political parties, policy and program packages, and the candidates they believe are well-positioned to deliver the electoral promises that advance the best interests of the voters. However, voting patterns and behaviors in some parts of the country do not seem to correlate with evidence of received development interventions as a result of electoral choices the constituencies, districts, and regions have made. Instead, elections have been largely rooted in ethno-political and regional blocks that betray and dogmatic allegiance to political parties or specific personalities running as candidates. In particular, the five regions of the north, collectively the poorest part of the country, have maintained voting patterns that predominantly favor one political party. On average, the NDC has won more than 70% of the valid votes cast for Presidential elections since 1992 and more than 50% of all parliamentary seats available in the then Northern, Upper East, and Upper West Regions. It's lowest win rate for parliamentary seats was 58.1% of seats in the Northern Region and 54.5% for the Upper West in 2016. The Party's worst performance was 61.5% of parliamentary seats won in the Upper East Region in 2008¹.

2. Purpose of the Study

This survey is part of IPD's efforts to increase understanding of what influences the voting decisions of the electorate in northern Ghana. It aims to deepen the democratic culture for inclusive governance through support for policies and programs that promote active and informed citizens' engagement in elections and the promotion of good governance, peace, and development at the community, local government, regional, and national levels within the five (5) northern regions of Ghana. As a pilot, it carries out a preliminary survey of knowledge, perceptions, attitudes, behaviors, and practices of persons of voting age who are natives of the five regions of the north to ascertain what factors influence their choice of political parties and candidates for the Presidency and Parliament when they vote.

The findings will enable IPD to propose policy and program development guidance to help citizens of the north to recalibrate their voting practices to derive maximum development benefits from their electoral choices. The findings will enable political parties, community groups, civil society actors, among others to design and deliver civic, public, and voter education programs that promote informed citizen participation in elections in particular and, in general, development processes.

3. Research Questions

The core question that guided this research is: *What is that makes the majority of voters in northern Ghana remain fixed on voting for candidates of particular political parties, irrespective of the level of development interventions they receive from the alternating rules of their parties – NDC*

¹ Computed from Electoral results from the Electoral Commission of Ghana, 1992-2016 General elections.

and NPP? Alternately put, What would it take for voters in the north to shift from the party and personality-based voting patterns to interest-based ones?

The subsidiary questions that guided the survey include, but are not limited to the following:

- i. What attributes attract voters in the north to vote for candidates of political parties?
- ii. What performance capabilities and standards do voters use in judging the suitability of candidates for President and Parliament?
- iii. To what extent do the manifestoes of political parties affect the voting decisions of the electorate in northern Ghana?
- iv. What policies and programs are best placed to attract voters in the north to a particular candidate or political party?
- v. To what extent do chiefs in the north influence the voting decisions and behaviors of persons resident in their jurisdictions?
- vi. To what extent does vote buying through the use of money and other goods exist and influence voting decisions and behavior.

Survey Methodology

- Electronic Data Collection - 425/472 (90.1%)
- Paper based data collection - 47/472 (9.9%)
- Analysis using SPSS and Excel

Limitations

- Restrictions on recruitment of participants due to travel and contact limitations due to coronavirus pandemic mean:
 - Respondents are skewed towards highly educated urban-based individuals with internet access.
 - Views of rural residents not adequately represented.
 - North East and Savannah regions were not equitably represented.
 - Females were underrepresented.
- An expanded study is needed to validate findings.

MAJOR FINDINGS FROM SURVEY

Profile of Respondents

- ✓ *Survey exceeds the minimum sample size required for a robust data for the analysis*
- ✓ *Majority of the respondents were within the economically active age range of 18-60 years*
- ✓ *Male respondents overshadowed female ones, despite special efforts made to reach female respondents.*
 - 472 valid participants are 22.91% more than the minimum $N= 384$, computed with Cochran's formula for unknown but large sample frame
 - 83.7% male (395/472)
 - 16.3% female (77/472)
 - 226/472 (47.8%) aged between 25-38.
 - 364/472 (77.1%) are University educated with at least a Bachelor's Degree.
 - 90.1% of the respondents (425/472) are natives of the 5 regions of the north.
 - 95.6%(451/472) registered to vote in 2020.
 - Only 20.8%(98/472) are registered members of any political party.
 - 76.9%(363/472) voted in election 2016.

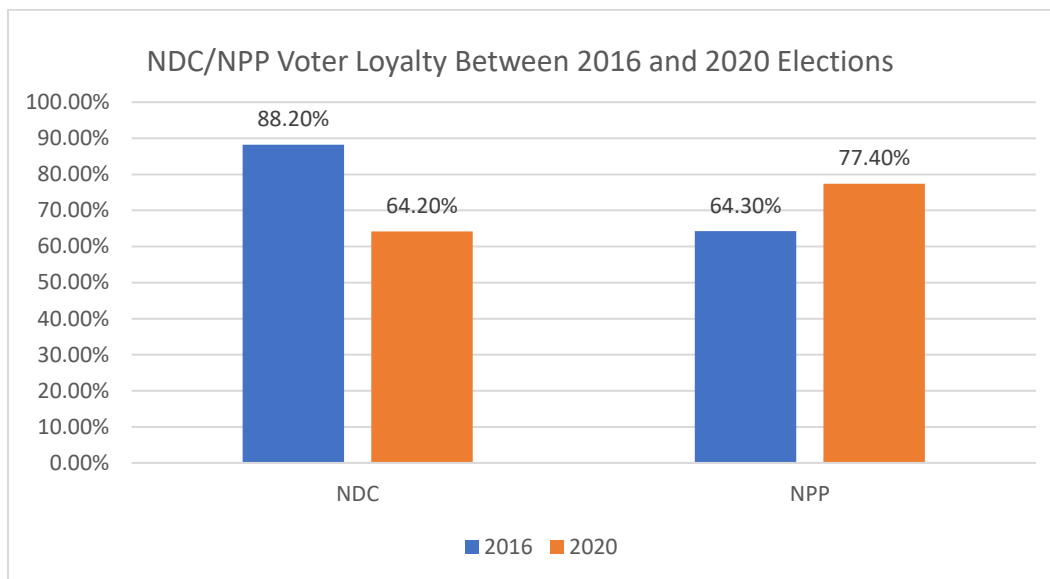
Voting Patterns:

Voter loyalty differs between the two major political parties in Ghana.

There are 165 respondents who said they voted for the NDC in 2016 and would do so again in 2020. While in 2016 this number represented 88.2% (165/187) of all respondents who voted for the NDC, the same number accounts for 64.5% of the total number of respondents who will be voting for the NDC in the 2020 elections,

The 165 respondents who said they voted for the NDC in 2016. However, in 2020, the same number of respondents who said they would vote again for the NDC will represent only 64.3% (165/257) of all respondents voting for the NDC. In contrast, of the 103 respondents who voted for the NPP in 2016 and also indicated their commitment to do the same in 2020 represented 64.3% of the NPP voters in 2016 (103/160) but 77.4% (103/133) in 2020.

In all, 22.5% (36/160) of respondents who voted for the NPP in 2016 have indicated their intent to switch their votes to the NDC in 2020, whereas only 3.2% (6/187) of respondents who voted for the NDC in 2016 were willing to switch their votes to the NPP in 2020. The above suggests that even though the NPP lost more people to the NDC than the latter did in reserve, the NPP proved more resilient in retaining its loyal voters than the NDC did. Also, while the NPP is likely to see a 13.1 percentage point increase in votes among respondents between the 2016 and 2020 elections, the NDC on the other hand is likely to experience a 22.0 percentage point loss in votes between the 2016 and 2020 elections among respondents.



Desirable Attributes of Preferred Presidential Candidates:

Personal attributes of candidates (trustworthiness, honesty, and leadership abilities) are more important determinants of voting choices than social characteristics such as ethnicity, gender, and religion. Trustworthiness, honesty, and leadership abilities as personal attributes of candidates are more important determinants of voting choices than the social characteristics of ethnicity, gender, and religion.

Top 3 Very Important Considerations (Percentage of respondents who said these are very important)

- Trustworthiness (89.8%)
- Honesty (88.9%)
- Demonstrated leadership abilities (85.8%)

Top 3 Unimportant Considerations (Percentage of respondents who said these are not important)

- Ethnic Background (60.8%)
- Religion (55.7%)
- Gender (38.3%)

Expectations of Performance Capabilities of the Presidential Candidates (Ranking for “Very Important”):

Fighting corruption and promoting education are higher priorities in respondents’ performance expectations for candidates than economic and infrastructure development. Fighting corruption and promoting education are higher voter priorities of the capabilities of presidential candidates than economic and infrastructure development

- will to fight corruption(87%),
- ability to promote education(86.9%),
- capacity to generate economic prosperity(84.8%)
- ability to deliver health care(84.4%)
- ability to deliver infrastructure(77.9%)
- Good Past Performance(65.7%)

Preferred Policies and Program Priorities of Candidates. (Ranking for “Very Important”):

Education, health care, and economic policies of political parties are very important determinants of respondents’ voting considerations.

- Education Policies(86.2%)
- Healthcare Policies(84.5%)
- Economic Policies(84.1%)

Respondents Expectation of Presidential Candidates (How will you rate candidates’ performance):

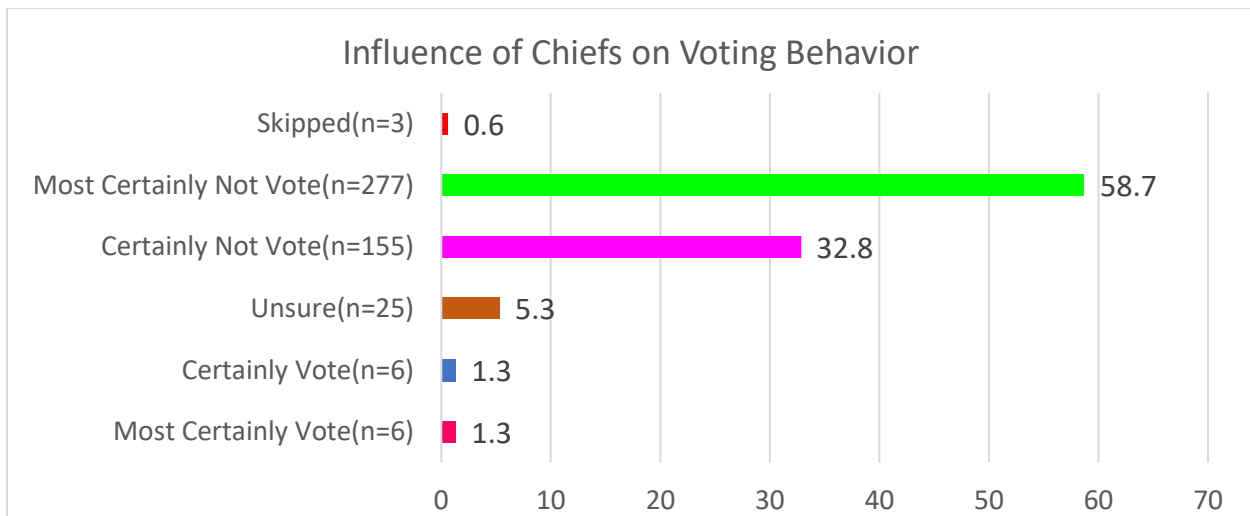
Ability to promote access to education is a top priority for respondents

Performance Criteria	“Very Important.”
Ability to promote education	86.2%
Ability to develop infrastructure - roads, healthcare facilities, schools etc	85.4%
Ability to provide good quality and affordable healthcare	85%
Ability to create jobs;	84.7%
Ability to develop agriculture	83.1%
Ability to create business opportunities	76.3%
Ability to reduce the cost of living	74.8%
Ability provide access to affordable credit for businesses	65.5%

The Influence of Chiefs on Voting Behaviors of Respondents.

Traditional rulers have very little influence on the voting behaviors of respondents than ordinarily presumed. At least 91.5% of respondents said they will not follow the instructions of chiefs to vote as they instrument them to.

To the question “If the chief of the community or traditional area where you lived asked you to vote for his preferred candidate, how likely are you to vote for that candidate” the chart below suggests that for respondents in this survey, chiefs have very limited influence on their voting behaviors.



The Influence of Money and Other Gifts on Voting Behaviour.

More than 80% of respondents believe vote buying is rampant as money and other goodies are used to influence the voting choices of the electorate.

“to what extent do you believe people vote for candidates who offer them money and other gifts instantly than those who promise to deliver development services?”

- 80.9% of respondents believed to different degrees that candidates used money and gifts to buy votes.
 - Very Strongly Believe (38.3%)
 - Strongly Believe (23.3%)
 - Believe (19.3%)

Respondents' Perception of the Next Government's Ability to Meet their Needs.

Majority of respondents are optimistic that the next government in 2021 will meet their development priorities.

- at least 58.9% of respondents have some hope that the next government will meet their priorities.
- Respondents who said they will vote for the NPP's presidential candidate had more confidence that the next government will meet their development priorities.
 - 72.2% of respondents who said they will vote for the NPP's presidential candidate also said they believed to a very high extent or high extent that the next NPP government will meet their development priorities.
 - 67.3% of respondents who said they will vote for the NDC in 2020 also said they believed the next NDC government will meet their development priorities to a very high extent or high extent.

Respondents Expectations of Positive Change from the Next Government.

Majority of respondents are optimistic that they will see positive changes in their personal and family lives from the next coming in 2021

- 58.8% of respondents had very high (19.7%) or high (38.8%) expectations of positive change in their personal and family lives as a result of the policies and programs from the next government.
 - men were three times more optimistic (22%) of seeing **very high** positive change than women were (7.8%)
 - Respondents aged 39-45 were the most optimistic for positive change. (67.4% - $n=86$)
 - 70.70% of respondents who said they will vote for NPP had very high to high expectations of positive change.
 - 64.20% of respondents who said they will vote for NDC had very high to high expectations of positive change.

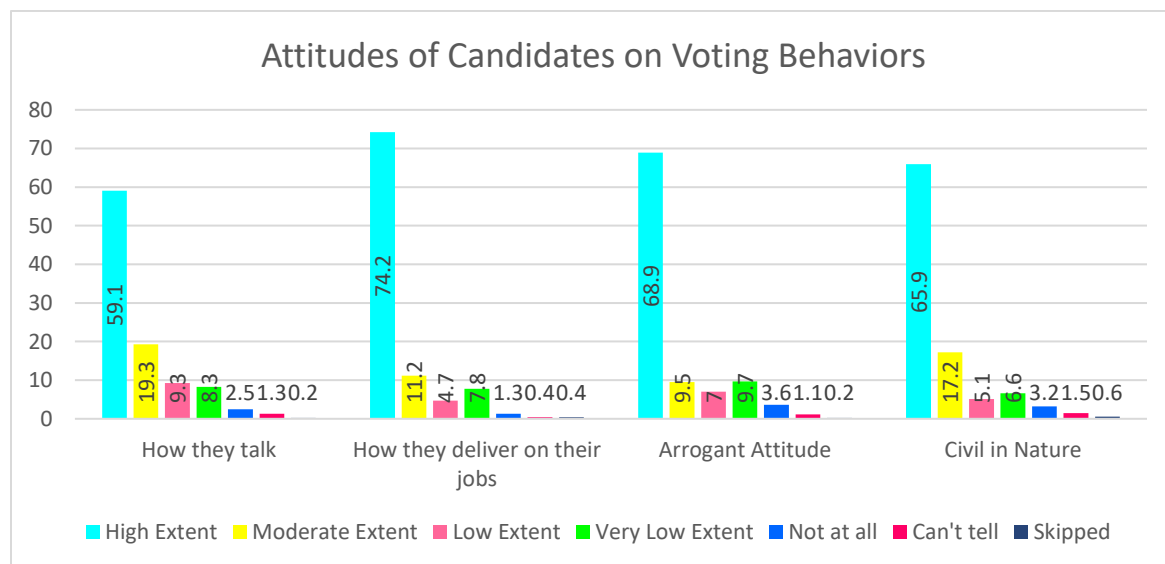
The Influence of Manifestoes in Voter Decision Making:

Most respondents take the manifestoes of political parties into account in their voting decisions.

Influence of Manifestoes	Very High/High Extent Ratings
consider party manifestoes before voting	66.1%
Issues covered in the manifesto	(50.8%)
Manner in which it is communicated	37.7%
Messages of the manifesto reflect my present needs.	58.5%

Effects of Attitudes and Behaviors of Government Appointees on Voting Behaviors.

Performance results of government appointees are more relevant to voters than the personal attributes of the officeholders.



Will you vote for your current MP in the 2020 elections?

- ✓ *Respondents were divided on whether they would vote for their sitting MP in the 2020 elections*
- ✓ *Card bearing members of political parties were more sure to vote to retain their current MPs than non-card bearing members*
- 49.8% said they were most likely or likely going to vote for their current member of parliament.
- 42.6% said they were either most unlikely, unlikely, or not sure they would vote for their current member of parliament.

How likely are you to vote for your current Member of Parliament?

Vote for your current Member of Parliament.	Frequency	Valid Percent
Most Likely	185	39.2
Likely	50	10.6
Unlikely	69	14.6
Most Unlikely	82	17.4
Not sure	50	10.6
Prefer not to tell	36	7.6
Total	472	100.0

- Of the 98 respondents who said they were card bearing members of various political parties
 - 58.2% were sure to vote for their current member of parliament.
 - 29.6% were either most unlikely or unlikely to vote for their current member of parliament.
- Of the 364 non-card bearing respondents
 - 47.6% were most likely or likely to vote for their current MP.
 - 33.4% said they were either most unlikely or unlikely to vote for their current member of parliament.
- The rest of the respondents were either unsure or preferred to keep their vote confidential.

Conclusion

The study confirms that positional voting remains a strong factor in how people in the north vote in general elections.

Party affiliations are ensuring and most respondents are likely to stick to the same political parties and candidates they voted for in 2016 in the 2020 elections. Respondents also said the trustworthiness, honesty, and leadership abilities of the candidates are more important determinants of voting choices than social characteristics such as ethnicity, gender, and religion. They also put a high premium on the ability of the candidates or parties to fight corruption, promote education, generate economic prosperity, deliver health care and infrastructure. In particular, respondents had very high-performance expectations of presidential candidates' ability to provide access to quality educational services.

On factors that influence their voting choices, it is evident that traditional leaders do not have as much influence on the voting behaviors of respondents as political leaders have seemed to imply in their competition to court the endorsement of chiefs during electoral campaigns. On the contrary, respondents believed money and other goodies that politicians dish out have a greater influence on the voting behaviors of the electorate. Even though most respondents said they took the manifestos of political parties into account in their voting choices, the extent to which the content of manifestoes actually influenced their choice is not clear, given the rather small margin of respondents likely to switch their voting choices for presidential and parliamentary candidates.

With respect to future outlooks from the election, at least 58.8% of respondents were positive that they will see positive changes in their personal and family lives from the government that takes office in 2021. However, more male respondents had a more positive expectation than women; middle-aged respondents (39-45 years) were also more positive than other age categories, and more respondents (70.70%) who said they will vote for NPP in 2020 had very high to high expectations of positive change than those who said they will vote for NDC (64.20%).

This study aimed to establish to what extent respondents matched their development priorities to the voting choices they make during general elections. Although no strong associations have been established in this study due to the sample constraints, the perceptible tendency of the majority of respondents to stick to previous political choices suggest party and personality loyalties may hold stronger sway than respondents' development priorities and performance outcomes of the candidates in determining voting choices. The seeming reliance on attachment to ethnicity, party, and personalities in making electoral choices do not only reinforce positional voting behaviors but also severely subdue interest-based rational choices at the ballot. As a result, votes, which should be the currency with which the electorate buy the best policy options from parties and candidates to advance their interests, often become wasted currency and opportunities, as elections after another fail to transform the lives of those who vote.

Besides, the use of (ethnic, regional, and party) feelings and perceptions rather than verifiable interest-based facts in political debates at all levels tend to raise the political temperature in all electoral seasons. This is because the strong feelings usually associated with positional rather than rational voting patterns often become building blocks for the use of violence as a means of persuading opposing sides. Increasing interest-based voting behaviors would not only reduce the tendency to use violence as a political instrument, it actually holds the promise of creating political permutations, interest-based alliances, and collaborative initiatives that bring people of different identity groups (ethnic, religious, age, gender, profession, etc) to pursue common or different but mutually reinforcing interests. It is the sure way to build/strengthen the missing middle between the political elite and the dispersed electorate to create the organizational interfaces that hold political leaders to account for their stewardship of common resources.

Recommendation

- 1. NGOs and CSOs must refocus their governance interventions to prioritize interest-based voter education:*** NGOs and civil society groups that are interested in promoting genuine citizen participation in governance need to invest more into working with communities to generate their own manifestos (i.e. sets of development priorities and accountability standards) that they can use to engage political parties and candidate during and after elections. Clearly articulated community and district development plans and performance standards are what will make citizens lead, rather than merely follow political discourses on development issues that affect them directly.

2. ***Political parties need to recalibrate their manifesto priorities and campaign messages to reflect the needs of voters:*** The results of this study show that respondents consider the character and values of candidates to the presidency and parliament more important than their ability to deliver development services. Hence, the competition between political parties on who has delivered more infrastructure than the other during their term in office may be mismatched to the interests and priorities of respondents. While further studies are needed to establish the depth and spread of this dissonance between politicians and the electorate, the extent to which it influences the willingness of the electorate to accept money and goods in exchange for their votes also needs to be investigated.
3. ***Deepen understanding of the role of chiefs in the political space:*** Political parties and candidates to political offices compete assiduously for endorsements of chiefs, and sitting governments are known to show gifts on prominent chiefs in order to enlist their endorsements during election years. However, respondents in this survey have demonstrated that chiefs have virtually no influence on their voting choices. The extent to which traditional leaders play relevant roles as credible and legitimate gatekeepers to political and development processes in their communities or territorial spheres of influence requires further interrogation and retooling. Otherwise, the visible pull of chiefs into political activities does not only pose a risk of violating the injunctions of Article 276 of the 1992 Constitution that bars chiefs from engagement in politics, but the practice also risks intensifying the politicization, protraction, and instrumentalization of conflicts associated with the chieftaincy institution, as already evident in most parts of the north.
4. ***Expand and deepen the study to include the voices and views of more rural people:*** Northern Ghana cannot be an effective contributor to shaping Ghana's development policies, priorities, and programming agendas unless it can articulate and project its own asks into the national policy discourse through informed decision making that includes electoral decision making. A voting block taken for granted will remain the recipient of policy and program flow-overs, rather than being at the center and the subject of interest in such policy and program decision-making processes. Change is only possible with an informed electorate capable of making interest-based rather than allegiance-based voting choices.

A deepening of this study is required to i) understand the depth and spread of this phenomenon and ii) if indeed, party allegiances trump the development needs of the electorate in northern in their voting behaviors, and iii) what would it take for the electorate in the north to shift from affiliation based to interest based voting patterns in order to have stronger bargaining power with political office seekers that come to them. An expanded study that brings on board the views of more rural and less educated respondents and also ensures more equitable representation of all five regions of the north will create the depth of insights necessary to offer policy and program recommendations that create more informed electorates.

A deeper and expanded study is also strongly recommended in order to ensure equitable representation of the voices and views of women on the issues under study.