This policy brief examines expectations, preferences and behaviour of Ghanaian voters towards their Members of Parliament (MPs) during elections. Informed by a study conducted in constituencies with high incidence of poverty, ahead of the 7th December, 2012 elections, the study revealed that Ghanaian voters (44%) are very much interested in public affairs. Further, the study showed that Ghanaians (59%) actively participate in community meetings. In spite of the active nature of adult Ghanaians, in terms of interest and participation in public affairs, Ghanaians appear to have very limited knowledge and understanding of the core functions and responsibilities of MPs. For instance, majority of respondents considered the ability of their MPs to draw attention to the developmental needs of the constituents, provision socio-economic development of constituents, and lobbying of developmental projects as the core functions and responsibilities as against the constitutional assigned functions, which are lawmaking, representation and oversight of the executive. Another significant revelation from the study, which is a determinant of voting decisions, is that 84% of respondents indicated that they are ‘to a large extent’ influenced by the extent to which a candidate can directly provide personal resource, provision of development projects in the constituencies and the ability of the candidate to help many people. These findings show that voters’ voting intent is not based on the competence of the candidates to perform their core mandate of MPs, but the ability of MPs to provide developmental projects to the constituents. We recommend in this study the need for intense and continuous civic and voter education by Ghana’s constitutional body, the National Commission for Civic Education (NNCE), and other Civil Society Organizations for citizens to appreciate the role of MPs, issues on elections and accountability, and above all, on the civic and political rights of citizens.

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Ghana’s Fourth Republic is often touted as one of Africa’s most promising nascent democracies, primarily due to the legitimacy of its electoral processes. This is partly reflected in the fact that winners of each of Ghana’s Presidential and Parliamentary elections have been recognised by their opponents and have been allowed a conducive political space to successfully begin and end their tenure of office. It is worth mentioning that in more cases than one, the strength of legitimacy and credibility of elections have been tested to the limit by very close results but in all cases the system did not implode. Hence the quest to improve the lot of Ghanaians has not been interrupted by political dislocations. This is what has boosted Ghana’s image as a stable fledgling democracy and a good example worthy of emulation by other struggling African democracies.

Even though the process of democracy started off on a shaky note, it began with systematic national efforts aimed at confronting the challenge of widespread poverty. It started with the 1995 Coordinated Programme of Economic and Social Development with the theme ‘Ghana Vision 2020’ and evolved into the ‘Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda (2010-2013)’. These initiatives created the policy space for targeted initiatives such as the establishment of the Savannah Accelerated Development Authority (SADA), the National Youth Employment Programme and the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP), among others. All these indicate there has been political consistency in the pursuit of poverty reduction strategies since the inception of Ghana’s Fourth Republic.

However, for democratic processes (which in Ghana, and elsewhere, is linked with the material wellbeing of the people) to endure a lot depends on the fortification of democratic values. This calls for an enhanced and mutually empowering relationships based on trust between the citizenry and their public office holders, and not the kind of a relationship based on clientelism. It is very critical that we have a clear understanding as to whether and in what ways Ghana has moved away from the clientelist politics. Irrespective of the direction of its movement, clientelism impacts policy choices, the level of corruption or the extent of fulfilment or non-fulfilment of election promises. This in the end will also determine the chances whether candidates are punished or not at the polls by the electorate. All in all, it is about the electorate holding the elected to public account.

Our pre-election survey, conducted in ten selected constituencies in all the ten regions of Ghana, ahead of the 2012 presidential and parliamentary elections, helps us to reveal the extent to which elections in Ghana reflect democratic instruments of accountability.

**EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS**

**Interest in Public Affairs**
Around 44% of those Ghanaians interviewed claimed to be “very interested” in public affairs, while another 29% were “somewhat interested” and only 8% of Ghanaians, on the other hand, claimed...
to be “not at all interested” in public affairs. This is particularly significant to the study because of how it relates to the attributes of citizens awareness, participation and degree to which they can engage elected representatives and demand accountability. This interest in public affairs is expressed through a variety of activities (See Figure 1 below).

First, many respondents indicate that they receive news from a formal source (51% get news from the radio every day, and 27% a few times in a week). This points out to the fact that radio audiences avail themselves to reliable information being generated in the public realm. However, the popularity of radio comes at the expense of other news media platforms. Large portions of the population say they never track news from television (43%), newspapers (75%) or the internet (86%). Other respondents also significantly rely on secondary sources such as friends and relatives (34% do so every day and 29% a few times a week) for information on developments in national affairs.

![Figure 1: Source and Frequency of access to news on Public Affairs (%)](image)

Source: CDD-Ghana Pre-election Survey findings(2012)

Second, a decent proportion of Ghanaians directly engage in informal political discussions; 32% claim that they frequently discuss political issues with friends or family and another 48% do so occasionally. In terms of taking part in political congregations, even more Ghanaians (59%) have been involved in a community meeting and some (47%) have proactively done so at least once to raise pertinent issues (See Figure 2 below). While there is clearly a significant level of engagement between peers on political issues this is not reflected in the amount of direct contact made with elected representatives. Regarding levels at which citizens interact with their MPs, 26% of respondents claimed they would never contact their MP, while a further 51% said they will if they get the chance (See Figure 2 below). This response patterns may be attributed to two reasons: either Ghanaians are not aware of the channels of interaction with their MPs open to them or the channels do not exist.
Either way, this does not bode well for the nurturing of compelling accountability and a vibrant transparent public space. This latter contention is buttressed by the fact that Ghanaians very much prefer to contact their MPs personally and informally or through an intermediary. Only a small percentage of respondents (7%) will choose formal modes of interactions (such as writing letters or presenting petitions) with their MPs (See Figure 3 below).

Public expectations of MPs

In Ghana’s Fourth Republican Constitution of 1992, legislative power is invested in MPs\(^4\). Further, in accordance with the principle of separation of powers and checks and balances, MPs are to serve as sources of countervailing power of the executive branch of government\(^5\). Since the inception of the Fourth Republic, certain conventions, such as MPs monitoring development programmes and intervening directly to solve development problems, have developed alongside the main functions of MPs. Even though the conventional functions are low in order of priority


relative to the constitutionally mandated functions of MPs, the conventions seem to have registered in the minds of respondents as the main functions of MPs.

When asked what citizens thought the three core responsibilities of MPs were, only 19% said law making. Representation of constituents needs was recognised as a key responsibility by virtually all respondents, with particular focus on lobbying for constituency development projects (See Figure 4 below). What is alarming is that 28% of respondents think that their MPs have a responsibility to directly support individuals monetarily (in making donations in support of paying loans, fees and given gifts). This suggests that in the constituencies surveyed, a large portion of constituents are already primed to engage their MP in clientelistic relations. An MP is deemed to be doing a good job and thus worthy of votes if they personally provide individuals or sponsor community projects. This group of respondents are more numerous than those who know the law making and oversight responsibilities of MPs. Clientelistic relationships involve individuals making personal demands on their benefactors.

**Figure 4: Core Functions/Responsibilities of MP**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Percentages who mentioned function</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Draw attention to the development needs of the constituency</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For the provisioning of socio-economic development of the constituency</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lobby for development projects for the constituency</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support people (e.g. giving gifts, loans, paying school fees)</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make good laws for the country</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ghana Pre-election Survey findings (2012)

Even though we are not certain as to whether the dependent clientelistic mentality of voters was nurtured by MPs or not, it appears they have clearly read the dependent clientelistic mentality of voters and are satisfying the expectations of voters accordingly. When asked to mention three things that they think MPs actually do (as depicted in Figure 5 below), the responses were largely the same; 15% believed they make law, 6% oversight of the executive and a majority of 53% believe that they directly resource people and the community (30% said in support for paying fees, providing loans and gifts; and 23% said they draw attention to the development needs of the constituency. These findings indicate that MPs and voters are in accord that dependent clientelism ought to be the de facto basis of a social contract in which that election results are a record and scorecard of those who excel at it and are capable of sustaining it (and are thus rewarded) and those who do not (and hence are punished with electoral loss). All in all, both the supply of and demand for MPs services are distorted, diminishing the accountability of MPs to their constituents in terms of living up to their true constitutional mandate and in the end undermining the development of a high sense of local resource mobilization for poverty reduction.
Voter decision-making

From the study, 77% of respondents claim to be highly influenced by the extent to which a candidate can directly provide development projects and 62% are highly influenced by whether a person has helped many people or not. Nonetheless, a significant proportion of respondents are persuaded by functions relevant to the constitutional mandate of MPs or impressive personal attributes. Considerable numbers of respondents deem it important that the candidate have a good academic qualification (44%), and have the ability to check government abuse of power (58%), be vocal in speaking for the constituency in Parliament (65%), and be good at law making (53%).

Up to 50% of individuals could not recall any specific issues in the previous MP election campaigns. Thus, the degree that respondents were aware of campaign promises was limited thus undermining their ability to hold their representatives accountable. It is, however, promising that 43% of people think that campaign issues are very likely to influence election outcomes and another 18% said that they are somewhat likely to have influence. As such, it is clear that large
portions of the population are willing to review their opinion of a representative based on their actions and promises (rather than being, for example, uncompromisingly ethnic or partisan).

**POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

First, while Ghanaians exhibit strong interest in public affairs and follow the campaign promises of their Parliamentary candidates, Ghanaian voters perceive their MPs as being primarily responsible for their direct personal needs as well as community development projects. Voters do not place a high priority on the constitutional mandate of their elected representatives - law making, representation and executive oversight. The ability of MPs to carry out these apparent personal/community responsibilities, their track record for doing so and their promises to do so in the future are all significant in influencing the voting preferences of individuals.

Second, the study reveals that there is still a low level of participation in formal methods of ensuring accountability. Not only is there a low level of interest in formal engagements to hold representatives to account but a majority of Ghanaians do not know that there are routes available to them to do so.

Third, and finally, the study shows that a large portion of Ghanaians would want to contact their MPs if they could. This is a very positive observation and should be considered in designing appropriate accountability interventions. It is instructive to note that while respondents in the study constituencies prefer a dependent clientelistic relationship with their political representatives, it appears that there is a latent desire to hold representatives to account over issues of concern to the local community.

Following from the above, we contend that fundamental features of policy issue-based criticism and thus democratic accountability are already in place in Ghana. And that good democratic practices can foster public official accountability that can impact positively on poverty alleviation. Given that citizens are interested in public affairs, we can contend that the context exists in Ghana in which democratic accountability is practically feasible.

We recommend that Ghana’s constitutionally created bodies, such as the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE)\(^6\) and other non-governmental groups, step up their civic/voter education during elections and beyond on how citizens can engage their elected representatives in a democracy. The NCCE, which is a constitutional body established to, among others, create and sustain within society the awareness of the principles and objectives of the Constitution as the fundamental law of Ghana and to educate and encourage the public to defend the Constitution at all times, against all forms of abuse and violation, must be resourced and strengthened to play its role as the guardians of the democratic integrity of the state.

We also recommend the need to address the inappropriateness of a patron-client style relationship. Ghanaian civil society organizations should design and engage in creative ways and methods to strengthen MPs accountability. Developing and nurturing appropriate political relationship between citizens and MPs will compliment local efforts at resource mobilization to fight poverty in a holistic manner. We view the Public Affairs unit of Parliament of Ghana as playing a key role in developing strategies to strengthen MPs and citizens interaction thereby educating the people on the role of MPs and promoting parliament as the democratic ‘Light House’ of Ghanaians.

An original survey was carried out to seek the following objectives:

- the voter’s thinking about candidates aspiring to be Members of Parliament;
- the issues at the core of candidates’ campaign messages and whether they influence voter preferences; and
- the extent to which an election is an instrument of accountability.

The questions asked provided indications of the extent to which Ghanaian voters demand accountability from their elected representatives, particularly from members of parliament (MPs). The survey involved measuring the views of respondents on:

- interest in politics and political participation
- their preferred method for contacting MPs
- what they believe MPs should do (expectations)
- what they believe MPs actually do (perceptions)
- the factors that influence candidate preferences
- what they believe are the most pressing problems in their community

Methodology

The constituencies that were targeted for data collection have high incidence of poverty. This is a deliberate effort to capture the extent to which the poor are influenced by clientelistic relationships with their MPs. The study involved the sampling of a target 1,200 respondents (aged 18 years and above) in ten constituencies from the ten administrative regions of Ghana.
**PROJECT NAME**
NOPOOR – Enhancing Knowledge for Renewed Policies against Poverty

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CDE Centre for Development Economics – Delhi, India  
CNRS-CSH Centre National de Recherche Scientifique (India unit), Centre de Sciences Humaines / Institut Français de Pondichéry – Pondichéry, India  
CRES Consortium pour la recherche économique et sociale – Dakar, Senegal  
GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies – Hamburg, Germany  
GRADE Grupo de Analisis para el Desarrollo – Lima, Peru  
IIW Kiel Institute for the World Economy – Kiel, Germany  
IRD Institut de Recherche pour le Développement – Paris, France  
ITESM Instituto Tecnologico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey – Monterrey, Mexico  
LISER Luxemburg Institute for Socio-Economic Research – Esch-sur-Alzette, Luxemburg  
Oikodrom The Vienna Institute for Urban Sustainability – Vienna, Austria  
UA-CEE Université d’Antananarivo – Antananarivo, Madagascar  
UAM Universidad Autonoma de Madrid – Madrid, Spain  
UCHILE Universidad de Chile – Santiago de Chile, Chile  
UCT – SALDRU University of Cape Town – Cape Town, South Africa  
UFRJ Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro – Rio de Janeiro, Brazil  
UNAMUR Facultés Universitaires Notre-Dame de la Paix – Namur, Belgium  
UOXF-CSAE University of Oxford, Centre for the Study of African Economies – Oxford, United Kingdom  
UPD Université Paris Dauphine – Paris, France  
VASS Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences – Hanoi, Vietnam

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