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## WHAT DO VOTERS WANT FROM THEIR LEGISLATORS? EVIDENCE FROM GHANA

GEORGE KWAKU OFOSU \*

### Abstract

Legislators make trade-offs when allocating their time and resources to their multiple tasks of representation, legislation, executive oversight, and constituency service. Furthermore, they must decide how much effort to exert or the balance to strike when undertaking a specific function. Existing research provides limited insights into citizens' preferences over these officeholder multifaceted decisions in sub-Saharan Africa. I offer novel insights into citizens' preferences using a conjoint survey experiment of Ghanaians to address this knowledge gap. My findings are threefold. First, I find that citizens put more 'weight' on constituency-related activities than parliamentary work. Second, in the constituency, citizens value political representation activities more than constituency services. Third, they weigh public-good-oriented constituency services higher than private ones. The research contributes to our understanding of citizen-legislator accountability relationships in sub-Saharan Africa.

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LEGISLATORS ARE MULTITASKING AGENTS OF CITIZENS WITH LIMITED RESOURCES. They must make trade-offs allocating their time, effort, and constituency funds to their multiple—and competing—tasks of representation, legislation, executive oversight, and constituency service.<sup>1</sup> How politicians make these decisions may be influenced by their beliefs about what citizens want, which they can misjudge.<sup>2</sup>

\*George Kwaku Ofosu ([g.ofosu@lse.ac.uk](mailto:g.ofosu@lse.ac.uk)) is Assistant Professor based at the London School of Economics, London, UK. I thank Laurits Florang Aarslew, Sarah Brierley, Mathias Krönke, Robert Mattes, Carl Muller-Crepon, Daniel Posner, Joan Ricart-Huguet, Merete Bech Seeborg, Michael Wahman, three anonymous reviewers, and the editors of *African Affairs* for their helpful comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this article. The Washington University in St. Louis (WUSTL) Institutional Review Board approved the study with ID number 201806174 on 26 July 2018. WUSTL's Weidenbaum Center on the Economy, Government, and Public Policy provided financial support.

1. Joel D. Barkan, 'Legislatures on the rise?', *Journal of Democracy* 19, 2 (2008), pp. 124–37.
2. Miguel M. Pereira, 'Understanding and reducing biases in elite beliefs about the electorate', *American Political Science Review* 115, 4 (2021), pp. 1308–1324.

Misperceptions about voters' priorities can lead to the misallocation of state resources to undesired policies<sup>3</sup> and voter dissatisfaction with representatives or the political system more broadly.<sup>4</sup>

Yet, we know little about voters' preferences on these legislator trade-off decisions in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Existing work shows what 'shares' of citizens value the various legislator roles by asking voters 'the important reasons why they [you] voted [for] a political representative'<sup>5</sup> or 'the most important responsibilities of a Member of Parliament'<sup>6</sup> or 'the main thing they [you] hope or expect that the candidate elected as MP in this election will do'.<sup>7</sup> Researchers have also asked citizens to choose from a close-ended list 'the most important responsibility of their [your] representative to the National Assembly?'<sup>8</sup> or what role(s) they want legislators to perform.<sup>9,10</sup>

These studies have generated mixed results. For example, researchers find that a majority of citizens mention or choose constituency-related work (i.e. representation and constituency service) as more important than parliamentary work (i.e. executive oversight and legislation).<sup>11</sup> However, Staffan Lindberg<sup>12</sup> also finds that while a majority of voters say they want constituency service (i.e. supply of private or small-scale club goods), they vote on national policy outcomes, which suggests that voters may prefer legislation and oversight. Dennis Rhee finds that citizens want an equal split of attention between constituency and parliamentary work.<sup>13</sup> Within the constituency, it is also unclear whether citizens want politicians to focus on

3. Joel D. Barkan and Robert Mattes, 'Why CDFs in Africa?', in Mark Baskin and Michael L. Mezey (eds), *Distributive politics in developing countries: Almost pork* (Lexington Books, Lanham, MD, USA, 2014), pp. 27–47.

4. Shaun Bowler and Jeffrey A. Karp, 'Politicians, scandals, and trust in government', *Political Behavior* 26, 3 (2004), pp. 271–87.

5. Staffan I. Lindberg and Minion K. C. Morrison, 'Are African voters really ethnic or clientelistic? Survey evidence from Ghana', *Political Science Quarterly* 123, 1 (2008), pp. 95–122.

6. Robert Mattes and Shaheen Mozaffar, 'Legislatures and democratic development in Africa', *African Studies Review* 59, 3 (2016), pp. 201–15.

7. See Afrobarometer (AB) Round 2 (2004); Staffan I. Lindberg, 'Have the cake and eat it: The rational voter in Africa', *Party Politics* 19, 6 (2013), pp. 945–61.

8. Joel D. Barkan, Robert Mattes, Shaheen Mozaffar, and Kimberly Smiddy, 'The African legislatures project: First findings' (Working Paper, 2010); AB R4 (2008).

9. Joel D. Barkan and John J. Okumu, 'Political linkage in Kenya: Citizens, local elites, and legislators', Comparative Legislative Research Center, University of Iowa, 1974.

10. Alternatively, scholars have asked politicians to rank which of their functions or duties citizens hold them mostly to account to infer what voters want. See, for example, Abraham Ibn Zackaria and Yaw Appiah-Marfo, 'Implications of political clientelism on the effectiveness of legislators in Ghana', *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 28, 1 (2022): 26–46; Staffan I. Lindberg, 'What accountability pressures do MPs in Africa face and how do they respond? Evidence from Ghana', *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 48, 1 (2010), pp. 117–42.

11. Barkan et al., 'African legislatures project'; Lindberg, 'Have the cake and eat it'; Mattes and Mozaffar, 'Legislatures'.

12. Lindberg, 'Have the cake and eat it'.

13. Dennis Rhee, *Between constituents and the capital: Understanding African legislators* (University of California, San Diego, unpublished PhD dissertation, 2019).

political representation activities<sup>14</sup> or constituency service.<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, it is hard to infer voters' priorities from these studies.

Moreover, an extensive literature on citizen–legislature linkages indicates that voters may not care about these legislator duties. Instead, citizens deem as more important a politician's partisanship or ethnicity,<sup>16</sup> electoral hand-outs,<sup>17</sup> or symbolic responsiveness.<sup>18</sup> Scholars are yet to establish whether in the presence of these factors, voters value legislator performance of their roles.

Importantly, these studies say little about the 'balance' voters want their representatives to strike within and across their competing functions. Legislators make 'implicit' trade-offs when deciding which of their competing tasks to focus on. In turn, they make more 'explicit' decisions about how much effort to dedicate to each function. Scholars have noted these trade-offs that politicians must make and examined factors that can shape officeholders' decisions.<sup>19</sup> I focus on and theorize how citizens want politicians to make these trade-offs.

Across functions, I argue that citizens will likely prefer legislators to dedicate more time, effort, and resources to aspects of their jobs that improve constituent welfare and which citizens can easily observe. Accordingly, voters will value constituency-related work of representation and constituency service more than parliamentary work of legislation and executive oversight. Citizens will likely assess that legislators' political representation activities will help representatives to learn and advance constituents' interests in legislative debates. Thus, attentiveness to such constituency activity can boost a legislator's parliamentary work. Therefore, in contrast to some

14. Barkan and Mattes, 'Why CDFs in Africa?'; Nikolaos Frantzeskakis, *Speaking of home: Local representation and reelection in Africa* (Michigan State University, unpublished PhD dissertation, 2023).

15. Joel D. Barkan, 'Bringing home the pork: Legislator behavior, rural development, and political change in East Africa', in Joel Smith and Lloyd D. Musolf (eds), *Legislatures in development* (Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 1979), pp. 265–88; Zackaria and Appiah-Marfo, 'Implications of political clientelism on the effectiveness of legislators in Ghana'; Eric Kramon, 'Electoral handouts as information: Explaining unmonitored vote buying', *World Politics* 68, 3 (2016), pp. 454–98; Lindberg, 'What accountability pressures?'; Mattes and Mozaffar, 'Legislatures'.

16. Noah L. Nathan, *Electoral politics and Africa's urban transition: Class and ethnicity in Ghana* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2019).

17. Dominika Koter, 'Costly electoral campaigns and the changing composition and quality of parliament: Evidence from Benin', *African Affairs* 116, 465 (2017), pp. 573–96; Staffan I. Lindberg, "'It's our time to chop": Do elections in Africa feed neo-patrimonialism rather than counteract it?', *Democratization* 10, 2 (2003), pp. 121–40; Lindberg, 'What accountability pressures?'; Kwame A. Ninsin, 'Elections and representation in Ghana's democracy', in Kwame A. Ninsin (ed.), *Issues in Ghana's electoral politics* (CODESRIA, Dakar, 2016), pp. 115–34.

18. Kathleen Klaus, Jeffrey W. Paller, and Martha Wilfahrt, 'Demanding recognition: A new framework for the study of political clientelism', *African Affairs* 122, 487 (2023), pp. 185–203.

19. For example, Barkan, 'Legislatures on the rise?'; Scott Ashworth and Ethan Bueno de Mesquita, 'Delivering the goods: Legislative particularism in different electoral and institutional settings', *The Journal of Politics* 68, 1 (2006), pp. 168–79.

existing research, I do not imply citizens do not care about parliamentary work, only that they put less weight on it than constituency work when citizens vote. Concerning constituency service, I suggest it also directly serves to address the community or personal needs of a legislator's constituents. Finally, because these efforts (i.e. representation and constituency service) occur mainly in the constituency, voters can easily observe them.

With specific tasks (explicit effort or trade-offs), voters will likely prefer politicians who put in more effort than less when performing each role. Furthermore, I distinguish constituency services into providing (local) public goods and private benefits (financial and casework)<sup>20</sup> and argue that citizens will likely prefer the former. In a context where voters believe politicians distribute personal support using a partisan or clientelistic logic, citizens will conclude that they are more likely to benefit from public, which is nonexcludable, than from private goods.

To examine these claims, I adopt a conjoint survey experiment, which is particularly well suited for understanding how study subjects make 'implicit' trade-offs when deciding on products (politicians) with multiple features.<sup>21</sup> The survey respondents ( $n = 2,020$ ) were randomly selected from a stratified sample of 12 constituencies in Ghana.<sup>22</sup> I asked respondents to choose between hypothetical candidates who varied on several attributes including 'promised' time allocations between the capital (doing parliamentary work) and home (conducting constituency-related activities) as well as pledged levels of efforts to engage in political representation, and constituency services.<sup>23</sup> I define 'representation' as meeting with constituents to listen to their views to 'represent' them in parliament.<sup>24</sup> I consider two key constituency services: (i) spending state funds to improve constituents' welfare

20. Brian F. Crisp and William M. Simoneau, 'Electoral systems and constituency service' in Erik S. Herron, Robert J. Pekkanen, and Matthew S. Shugart (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Electoral Systems* (Oxford University Press, New York, NY, 2018), pp. 346–65.

21. Kirk Bansak, Jens Hainmueller, Daniel J. Hopkins, Teppei Yamamoto, James N. Druckman, and Donald P. Green, 'Conjoint survey experiments', in James N. Druckman and Donald P. Green (eds), *Advances in Experimental Political Science* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2021), pp. 19–41.

22. I stratified districts by electoral competition and urbanization, which allows me to determine whether voter preferences vary across district types (see, e.g., Nathan, *Electoral politics and Africa's urban transition*); Michael Wahman and Catherine Boone, 'Captured countryside? Stability and change in sub-national support for African incumbent parties', *Comparative Politics* 50, 2 (2018), pp. 189–216. I also assess variations in individual characteristics that may be relevant to preferences. [Supplementary Appendix E](#) shows these analyses.

23. My design is similar to that of Yusaku Horiuchi, Daniel M. Smith, and Teppei Yamamoto, 'Identifying voter preferences for politicians' personal attributes: A conjoint experiment in Japan', *Political Science Research and Methods* 8, 1 (2020), pp. 75–91 and Nick Vivyan and Markus Wagner, 'What do voters want from their local MP?' *The Political Quarterly* 86, 1 (2015), pp. 33–40, who employ conjoint survey experiments to estimate how candidates' characteristics and MPs' constituency service promises affect voter preferences in Japan and the UK, respectively.

24. Barkan et al., 'African legislatures project'.

(and how citizens would like politicians to allocate these funds to public works versus private benefits) and (ii) casework.<sup>25</sup>

My findings are threefold. First, I find that citizens put significantly more weight on legislators' constituency-related activities of representation and constituency service than on parliamentary work. Specifically, I find that political representation and constituency service (effort at spending constituency funds) were 22 and 17 percentage points more important to citizens than legislator decisions concerning how much time to dedicate to parliamentary work. Thus, in line with my argument, implicitly, citizens tilt the balance towards legislators' constituency-related functions. Second, within the electoral district, voters want politicians to dedicate more effort to political representation than constituency services. Finally, between public and private constituency services, citizens want politicians to dedicate more effort and resources to collective (i.e. use constituency funds to address their community infrastructure needs) than personal benefits (financial or casework).

In Ghana, citizens elect their representatives under plurality rule in single-member districts. The study's results can be generalized to cover other SSA countries with similar electoral systems—about a third of African countries.<sup>26</sup> Also, Ghanaians have been shown to hold similar views to other African voters concerning what they expect from their legislators.<sup>27</sup> In a 2008–2009 survey of African voters' views of what legislators should do in 17 countries, about 45 percent of respondents in the sample ( $n = 20,339$ ) said the most important responsibility of their representative is representation; 31 percent said constituency service; 15 percent responded law-making; and 6 percent named oversight.<sup>28</sup> The corresponding figures for Ghana were 45 percent (representation), 40 percent (constituency service), 8 percent (law-making), and 2 percent (oversight). Accordingly, I believe my findings will apply more broadly.

This study makes three significant contributions to the literature on legislator–citizen relationships. First, it is the first to consider the trade-offs citizens want legislators to strike 'across' and 'within' their traditional or legal roles in SSA. It advances existing work by considering how each legislator's role weighs in voters' decisions by considering the implicit and explicit trade-offs voters must make in choosing representatives.<sup>29</sup>

25. See Crisp and Simoneau, 'Electoral systems and constituency service'; George Kwaku Ofosu, 'Do fairer elections increase the responsiveness of politicians?', *American Political Science Review* 113, 4 (2019), pp. 963–79.

26. International IDEA, <<https://www.idea.int/data-tools/question-view/130355>> (22 March 2023).

27. Mattes and Mozaffar, 'Legislatures'.

28. *Ibid.*

29. Barkan et al., 'African legislatures project'; Barkan and Okumu, 'Political linkage in Kenya'; Matthias Werner Krönke, *Conveyor belts of information: The role of political parties in*

Second, it contributes to research on voting behaviour in SSA's legislative elections. The results align with emerging scholarship that suggests citizens care more about public than private benefits from legislators, providing an estimate of the trade-off preferred by voters.<sup>30</sup> Third, it provides novel insights into how citizens want legislators to distribute instituted legislator funds for constituency service (Constituency Development Funds (CDFs)). Prior research investigates why legislators establish these funds<sup>31</sup> and considers how they spend these resources.<sup>32</sup>

*How do citizens want Members of Parliaments to allocate their time and resources?*

Legislators perform four primary functions: representation, law-making, executive oversight, and constituency service.<sup>33</sup> Joel Barkan defines representation as advancing the views and interests of constituents in national legislative debates.<sup>34</sup> While this role takes place in the legislature or parliament, it first involves getting to know what people want through organizing events such as town halls or providing channels to collect constituents' views.<sup>35</sup> Thus, in this study, I define political representation as regularly meeting constituents to listen to their concerns and debriefing them about parliamentary debates. Legislation involves helping to make or craft public policies and pass them into law. Executive oversight is ensuring that the executive branch implements these policies and laws as parliament agrees. Constituency service involves addressing constituents' personal or

*basic service delivery in Africa* (University of Cape Town, unpublished PhD dissertation, 2023); Lindberg, 'Have the cake and eat it'; Lindberg and Morrison, 'Are African voters really ethnic or clientelistic?'

30. Michael Bratton, Ravi Bhavnani, and Tse-Hsin Chen, 'Voting intentions in Africa: Ethnic, economic or partisan?', *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 50, 1 (2012), pp. 27–52; Robin Harding, 'Attribution and accountability: Voting for roads in Ghana', *World Politics* 67, 04 (2015), pp. 656–89; Mattes and Mozaffar, 'Legislatures'; Franklin Oduro and Regina Oforiwa Amanfo-Tetteh, 'A study of voter expectations of MPs in Ghana constituencies with high incidence of poverty' (Policy Brief, NOPOOR, 2016).

31. Barkan and Mattes, 'Why CDFs in Africa?'; Kennedy Ochieng Opalo, 'Formalizing clientelism in Kenya: From Harambee to the Constituency Development Fund', *World Development* 152 (2022), p. 05794.

32. Ofosu, 'Do fairer elections increase?'; Andrew J. Harris and Daniel N. Posner, '(Under what conditions) do politicians reward their supporters? Evidence from Kenya's Constituency Development Fund', *American Political Science Review* 113, 1 (2019), pp. 123–139.

33. Barkan, 'Legislatures on the rise?'

34. *Ibid.*

35. Barkan and Mattes, 'Why CDFs in Africa?'; Guy Grossman and Kristin Michelitch, 'Information dissemination, competitive pressure, and politician performance between elections: A field experiment in Uganda', *American Political Science Review* 112, 2 (2018), pp. 280–301; Ransford E. Gyampo, 'Assessing the quality of parliamentary representation in Ghana', *The African Review: A Journal of African Politics, Development and International Affairs* (2017), pp. 68–82.

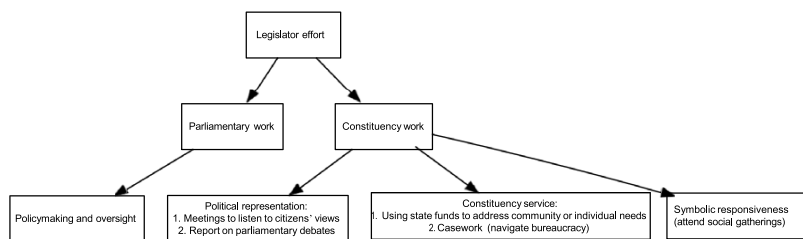


Figure 1 Tasks legislators perform on citizens' behalf.

community non-policy concerns.<sup>36</sup> Besides these traditional roles, politicians often report that constituents expect them to be symbolically responsive, which involves being attentive or participating in citizens' social and religious events.<sup>37</sup> Figure 1 shows these tasks.

There is an inherent tension across the multiple tasks legislators perform on citizens' behalf, which compels them to make trade-offs.<sup>38</sup> Limited time and resources are the primary cause of this tension. The more time and resources they dedicate to policy-making, the less will be available for executive oversight, representation, and constituency service. In performing constituency service, the more time and resources legislators spend on individual needs (or requests), the less they can devote to community development projects. Another source of tension across legislator roles emanates simply from geography. They must be present in the capital for policy-making and executive oversight but in their electoral district for constituency-related tasks. Politicians must decide where to spend more of their time. Accordingly, these legislator trade-offs across and within their multiple tasks have welfare implications for citizens.

I theorize that voters will likely prefer that their representatives put more time, effort, and resources into aspects of their jobs that citizens believe will directly improve their welfare. In line with much of the existing work, citizens will put more weight on representation and constituency service than on parliamentary work of legislation and executive oversight. In a context with a great need for local development (including schools, clinics, bridges, and roads) and limited access to the state, citizens are likely to expect their politicians to focus on learning about these local problems to advance them

36. Bruce E. Cain, John A. Ferejohn, and Morris P. Fiorina, 'The constituency service basis of the personal vote for US representatives and British Members of Parliament', *American Political Science Review* 78, 1 (1984), pp. 110–25; Crisp and Simoneau, 'Electoral systems and constituency service'; Richard F. Fenno, *Home style: House members in their districts* (Harper Collins, New York, NY, USA, 1978).

37. Heinz Eulau and Paul D. Karpis, 'The puzzle of representation: Specifying components of responsiveness', *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 2, 3 (1977), pp. 233–54.

38. Barkan, 'Legislatures on the rise?'; Mattes and Mozaffar, 'Legislatures'.



within the legislature or help to solve them.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, these local efforts are observable and benefit a legislator's constituents more than work in the legislature.<sup>40</sup> Accordingly, voters will likely prefer to tilt the balance in favour of political representation and constituency service.

However, in contrast with existing work, I do not suggest that citizens discount parliamentary work, only that it receives less weight in voting decisions. Voters recognize the link between constituency-related activities and work in parliament.<sup>41</sup> However, the latter is tricky to observe. Moreover, legislative output is difficult to attribute to an individual legislator.<sup>42</sup> Accordingly, while voters will credit legislators for putting effort into parliamentary work, they will put more weight on how much time, effort, and resources they dedicate to constituency-related work.

While this proposition addresses voter preference over the trade-offs legislators make across multiple tasks, it does not consider those within specific decisions. Using the above theoretical framework, I hypothesize about specific decisions that entail making explicit trade-offs.

### *Being in parliament versus in the constituency*

One of the explicit trade-offs legislators must make is how much time to spend in the capital versus the constituency. Assuming that legislators mainly do parliamentary work in the capital and constituency-related activities in the electoral district, then citizens' views about how politicians balance their time between the capital and the constituency map onto the weight they place on each.<sup>43</sup> In line with my argument, citizens will likely prefer more legislator time in the constituency than in the capital. Alternatively, if voters want politicians to dedicate equal attention to parliamentary and constituency-related work, they will choose candidates committed to splitting their time.

### *Constituency work*

#### **Constituency services and political representation**

Legislators can prioritize constituency services or activities related to political representation when in their constituencies. Much research argues that

39. Barkan, 'Bringing home the pork'; Jennifer Bussell, *Clients and constituents: Political responsiveness in patronage democracies* (Oxford University Press, New York, NY, USA, 2019); Goran Hyden, 'Political accountability in Africa: Is the glass half-full or half-empty?' (Working Paper, Africa Power and Politics Programme Series 6, 2010); Lindberg, 'What accountability pressures?'

40. Harding, 'Attribution and accountability'.

41. Barkan, 'Bringing home the pork'; Rhee, *Between constituents and the capital*.

42. Ashworth and Bueno de Mesquita, 'Delivering the goods'.

43. Rhee, *Between constituents and the capital*.



where access to public infrastructure and services is limited, and the government bureaucracy is very inefficient, citizens prefer legislators to focus on constituency services.<sup>44</sup> Specifically, voters want legislators—their only ‘political broker’ with legal status in the central government—to help provide or improve access to public services in their communities or help with bureaucratic bottlenecks.<sup>45</sup> Accordingly, citizens will likely prefer politicians to devote more time and effort to constituency services. They will pay less attention to legislator efforts at representation when citizens decide for whom to vote.

However, voters may want their legislators to focus on political representation—listening and ‘representing’ constituents’ concerns in the legislature. In support of such a possibility, Joel Barkan and Robert Mattes note that while the introduction of CDFs allows Members of Parliament (MPs) to provide valued local public goods (constituency services), these have not boosted incumbent re-election rates in SSA.<sup>46</sup> With findings from Afrobarometer surveys that suggest most citizens want representatives to organize meetings to listen to their concerns, Barkan and Mattes argue that voters want legislators to express their concerns at the heart of government rather than to solve them directly.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, voters will be influenced by legislators’ efforts at representation (organizing meetings to listen to constituents’ demands and briefing them on parliamentary meetings); constituency services, which include spending state funds or conducting casework, will not affect vote choice.

However, in line with my theory, voters are likely to value equally constituency service and representation because both benefit constituents directly and can be easily observed. Moreover, while these functions are distinct, they may be linked in constituents’ minds. Community meetings or town halls can be used to solicit residents’ views about national issues and local needs.

### **Constituency service: community projects versus personal benefits**

Constituency service is another dimension of legislator decision that involves striking a balance, especially when distributing funds. Brain Crisp and William Simoneau provide a review of the literature on constituency

44. Kate Baldwin, *The paradox of traditional chiefs in democratic Africa* (Cambridge University Press, New York, NY, USA, 2016).

45. Barkan, ‘Bringing home the Pork’; Bussell, ‘Clients and constituents’.

46. Barkan and Mattes, ‘Why CDFs in Africa?’.

47. *Ibid.* However, Jeremy Bowles and Benjamin Marx find a positive relationship between CDF spending and legislators (successfully) seeking re-election (Jeremy Bowles and Benjamin Marx, ‘Turnover and accountability in Africa’s parliaments’ (Working Paper, available at SSRN 4642554, 2022).

services in developing and developed democracies.<sup>48</sup> They note that constituency service involves two main activities: (i) helping citizens navigate bureaucratic bottlenecks (casework) and (ii) spending allocated state funds to provide community public goods or personal financial support.

In developing countries, legislators are often given funds to commission community projects and provide individual financial support through CDFs (or their equivalent).<sup>49</sup> Legislators can allocate these funds to support (i) local public goods to communities or (ii) individual financial needs. These funds remain controversial because scholars and policymakers argue they breach the separation of powers or that they can exacerbate clientelism.<sup>50</sup>

However, because legislators control these funds and must exert effort to spend them, scholars consider their use as constituency services.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, while distributing these funds to individuals and communities can be clientelistic or partisan, they need not be.<sup>52</sup> For example, Joseph Asunka finds Ghanaian legislators in competitive districts often adopt non-discretionary methods to distribute these funds.<sup>53</sup> Politicians can set up scholarship schemes for needy constituents or set and publicize criteria for supporting individual financial requests. Andrew Harris and Daniel Posner find that the spatial distribution of partisans in a constituency shapes politicians' abilities to favour supporters.<sup>54</sup>

I classify constituency services as public or private. Local public goods target entire communities or constituents. These include providing community infrastructure such as roads, clinics, schools, marketplaces, electricity, and toilets.<sup>55</sup> Private services focus on individuals and include (i) providing personal financial support from statutory funds through, for example, scholarship schemes and (ii) casework. Thus, concerning personal financial support, my focus is on providing assistance from state funds that legislators control rather than from those funds that politicians hand out from their campaigns or personal funds during elections.<sup>56</sup>

48. Crisp and Simoneau, 'Electoral systems and constituency service'.

49. Barkan and Mattes, 'Why CDFs in Africa?'; Michael L. Mezey, 'Constituency Development Funds and the role of the representative', in Baskin and Mezey (eds), *Distributive Politics in Developing Countries*, pp. 199–212; Opalo, 'Formalizing Clientelism in Kenya'.

50. Mezey, 'Constituency Development Funds and the role of the representative'; Opalo, 'Formalizing clientelism in Kenya'.

51. Philip Keefer and Stuti Khemani, 'When do legislators pass on pork? The role of political parties in determining legislator effort', *American Political Science Review* 103, 1 (2009), pp. 99–112; Ofosu, 'Do fairer elections increase'.

52. Asunka, 'Non-discretionary resource allocation as political investment'; Harris and Posner, '(Under what conditions) do politicians reward their supporters?'.

53. *Ibid.*

54. *Ibid.*

55. Lindberg, 'What accountability pressures'. Lindberg regards these goods as 'club' to distinguish them from the 'purely' public goods provided by legislators in the form of national legislation and executive oversight.

56. For example, Lindberg, 'It's our time to chop'.

When gauging the balance legislators should strike in providing public versus private goods, individuals are likely to assess the probability that they will personally benefit from a particular service. Public goods are nonexcludable and nonrivalrous,<sup>57</sup> while private benefits can be bestowed on favourites or those with access to politicians.<sup>58</sup> A growing number of studies show that access to personal support or casework from politicians often depends on shared partisanship or ethnicity/race with the legislator<sup>59</sup> or the ability to participate in local elections.<sup>60</sup> They may also be focused on local party workers or executives.<sup>61</sup> Thus, citizens will likely prefer public over private constituency services because they are more likely to benefit.

### *Symbolic responsiveness*

The last constituency-related activity I consider is ‘symbolic responsiveness’, which Heinz Eulau and Paul Karps define as ‘public gestures of a sort that create a sense of trust and support in the relationship between representative and represented’.<sup>62</sup> It involves attending social events such as funerals, weddings, naming ceremonies, traditional festivals, and religious services to share in constituents’ joys and grief or supporting disaster-stricken communities. Attending these social events often requires legislators to make ‘small’ contributions or ‘gifts’ to relevant constituents<sup>63</sup> that can in turn sustain clientelistic relationships.<sup>64</sup> However, interviews with citizens also suggest that they see these gestures as an expression of ‘gratitude and respect for support and hard work’ by representatives to their constituents in their time of need.<sup>65</sup>

57. Mancur Olson, *The logic of collective action: Public goods and the theory of groups* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, USA, 1971).

58. Guy Grossman, Macartan Humphreys, and Gabriella Sacramone-Lutz, “‘I wld like u WMP to extend electricity 2 our village’”: On information technology and interest articulation’, *American Political Science Review* 108, 3 (2014), pp. 688–705.

59. Daniel M. Butler and David E. Broockman, ‘Do politicians racially discriminate against constituents? A field experiment on state legislators’, *American Journal of Political Science* 55, 3 (2011), pp. 463–77; Peter Thisted Dinesen, Malte Dahl, and Mikkel Schiøler, ‘When are legislators responsive to ethnic minorities? Testing the role of electoral incentives and candidate selection for mitigating ethnocentric responsiveness’, *American Political Science Review* 115, 2 (2021), pp. 450–66; Gwyneth H. McClendon, ‘Race and responsiveness: An experiment with South African politicians’, *Journal of Experimental Political Science* 3, 1 (2016), pp. 60–74.

60. Nikhar Gaikwad and Gareth Nellis, ‘Do politicians discriminate against internal migrants? Evidence from nationwide field experiments in India’, *American Journal of Political Science* 65, 4 (2021), pp. 790–806.

61. Martin Acheampong, ‘Legislators’ pathway to power in Ghana: Intra-party competition, clientelism and legislator–constituents’ relationship’, *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 27, 2 (2021), pp. 300–16.

62. Eulau and Karps, ‘The puzzle of representation’, p. 241.

63. Gyampo, ‘Assessing’; Lindberg, ‘What accountability pressures’.

64. Klaus, Paller, and Wilfahrt, ‘Demanding recognition’.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 195.

Although largely overlooked in the literature, nearly 8 in 10 Ghanaian MPs report that attending social events (funerals, traditional festivals, and church services) is one of the top three activities they participate in when visiting their constituency.<sup>66</sup> Goran Hyden argues that such participation indicates that Ghanaian legislators are ‘socially embedded’.<sup>67</sup> Politicians believe that missing such community events would prevent them from getting re-elected but also put a major burden on their health and personal funds. It is therefore important to assess how citizens weigh such efforts relative to other legislator roles.

I hypothesize that citizens will likely want politicians who attend more social events. However, in terms of balance with other legislator activities, it is likely that voters will put less weight compared to representation and public goods-oriented constituency service. Similar to private financial transfers and casework, voters may fear favouritism.

### *Research design*

To examine how citizens want legislators to juggle their competing tasks, I conducted a conjoint survey experiment in Ghana. Ghanaian MPs are elected for 4-year terms using plurality rule in single-member districts. Survey participants were given descriptions of three pairs of hypothetical candidates running for parliament in their constituency. These candidates were characterized by nine attributes (or features) (Table 1).

The first five attributes concerned a set of pledged time allocations to activities in the capital versus at home, and the level of effort they would commit to political representation, constituency services, and symbolic responsiveness: (i) allocation of ‘time between the constituency versus the capital (Accra)’ (three levels); (ii) ‘organizing constituency meetings to listen to constituents’ views’; (iii) ‘use of MP’s Common Fund (CDF)’ (four levels) to provide public goods or private benefits; (iv) ‘personal assistance’ (casework) (three levels) to constituents to navigate the state bureaucracy; and (v) attending ‘social events’ (three levels).

The remaining attributes were personal characteristics of the hypothetical candidate: (vi) ‘party affiliation’ (three levels); (vii) ‘hometown/residency status’ (three levels); (viii) ‘profession’ (six levels); and (ix) ‘gender’ (two levels).<sup>68</sup> I randomized the values of each attribute, which helps

66. George Kwaku Oforu, *Election integrity and political responsiveness in developing democracies: Evidence from Ghana* (University of California, Los Angeles, unpublished PhD dissertation, 2017).

67. Hyden, ‘Political accountability in Africa’.

68. I used data from the profiles of all candidates who contested the country’s 2016 general election from the website of the Electoral Commission to determine realistic attribute levels regarding a candidate’s party, gender, profession, and place of birth, which increases the external validity of the survey design. I also piloted the survey in three constituencies (Awutu

*Table 1* Values of candidates' promises and characteristics in the conjoint survey.

<i>Candidate attribute</i>	<i>Attribute levels</i>	<i>Probabilities</i>
<i>Parliament versus constituency</i>		
(i) <i>Time in constituency versus capital (Accra)</i>	Constituency (C): [25, 50, 75 ] percent; Accra (A): [25, 50, 75] percent [Use levels] ( $T_{C,A}$ ): $T_{25,75}^{[1]}$ $T_{50,50}^{[2]}$ $T_{75,25}^{[3]}$	1/3 1/3 1/3
<i>Political representation</i>		
(ii) <i>Community meetings to listen to constituents' views and debrief them on parliamentary debates</i>	Never [1] Monthly [2] Every 3 months [3] Every 6 months [4] Yearly [5]	1/5 1/5 1/5 1/5 1/5
<i>Constituency services</i>		
(iii) <i>Use of MP's Common Fund (CDF)</i>	[Levels: (i) 10 percent; (ii) 50 percent; (iii) 90 percent] of CDF to support the construction or renovation of community school and clinics, repairs of roads and bridges, and other community self-help projects [Levels: (i) 10 percent; (ii) 50 percent; (iii) 90 percent] of MPCF to pay school fees, medical bills, and apprenticeship fee for some individual members of this constituency [use levels]: $P_{10,10}^{[1]}$ $P_{50,50}^{[2]}$ $P_{10,90}^{[3]}$ $P_{90,10}^{[4]}$	1/4 1/4 1/4 1/4
(iv) <i>Personal assistance (case-work)</i>	[Levels: hardly (1/10) [1], sometimes (5/10) [2], always (10/10) [3]] support constituents who need help to obtain government services such as business licences, passports, and birth certificates, and facilitate government loans or jobs: Hardly (1/10) [1] Sometimes (5/10) [2] Always (10/10) [3]	1/3 1/3 1/3
<i>Symbolic responsiveness</i>		
(v) <i>Social events</i>	[Levels: hardly (1/10) [1], sometimes (5/10) [2], always (10/10) [3]]: attend or contribute to social events such as funerals, church/mosque activities, and traditional festivals: Hardly (1/10) [1] Sometimes (5/10) [2] Always (10/10) [3]	1/3 1/3 1/3

(continued)

Table 1 (Continued)

<i>Candidate attribute</i>	<i>Attribute levels</i>	<i>Probabilities</i>
<i>Personal attributes</i>		
<i>(vi) Political party</i>	<i>Independent (IND) [1]</i>	<i>1/3</i>
	<i>New Patriotic Party (NPP) [2]</i>	<i>1/3</i>
	<i>National Democratic Congress (NDC) [3]</i>	<i>1/3</i>
<i>(vii) Hometown/residency status</i>	<i>Hails from and resides in constituency [1]</i>	<i>1/3</i>
	<i>Does not hail but resident in constituency [2]</i>	<i>1/3</i>
	<i>Hails from but not resident [3]</i>	<i>1/3</i>
<i>(viii) Profession</i>	<i>Farmer/agriculturalist (1)</i>	<i>1/6</i>
	<i>Lawyer (2)</i>	<i>1/6</i>
	<i>Educationist/teacher (3)</i>	<i>1/6</i>
	<i>Business person (4)</i>	<i>1/6</i>
	<i>Accountant (5)</i>	<i>1/6</i>
	<i>Architect (6)</i>	<i>1/6</i>
<i>(ix) Gender</i>	<i>Female [0]</i>	<i>1/5</i>
	<i>Male [1]</i>	<i>4/5</i>

simultaneously estimate the average marginal component effects (AMCEs) of each attribute relative to a chosen baseline on candidate choice.<sup>69</sup>

## Measurements

I examine how citizens would like their representatives to divide their time (T) between their constituency (C) and the capital, Accra (A),  $T_{(C,A)}$  (time in constituency versus capital (Accra)). Respondents were told how hypothetical candidates plan to divide their time between the capital, doing parliamentary work of legislation and oversight, and the district, undertaking constituency-related work. They considered three potential trade-offs: more time in the constituency and little in the capital ( $T_{(75\text{ percent}, 25\text{ percent})}$ ); more in the capital and less in the constituency ( $T_{(25\text{ percent}, 75\text{ percent})}$ ); and an equal split between the constituency and the capital ( $T_{(50\text{ percent}, 50\text{ percent})}$ ).

Several scholars use the frequency of legislators' visits to their constituency (and thus the time spent) to indicate their attentiveness to or knowledge of constituents' concerns.<sup>70</sup> Accordingly, how citizens want

Senya West, Sege, and Krowor) in August 2018 to ensure that participants would understand the questionnaire.

69. Jens Hainmueller, Daniel J. Hopkins, and Teppei Yamamoto, 'Causal inference in conjoint analysis: Understanding multidimensional choices via stated preference experiments', *Political Analysis* 22, 1 (2013), pp. 1–30.

70. For example, Fenno, 'Home style'; Rachael E. Ingall and Brian F. Crisp, 'Determinants of home style: The many incentives for going home in Colombia', *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 26, 3 (2001), pp. 487–512; Michael Bratton, 'Where do elections lead in Africa', in Michael Bratton (ed.), *Voting and democratic citizenship in Africa* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, CO, USA, 2013), pp. 17–38; Barkan and Mattes, 'Why CDFs in Africa?'

their legislators to divide their time between the constituency and the capital likely reveals how they prioritize constituency service versus parliamentary work.

However, simply focusing on the frequency or amount of time citizens want their MPs to spend in the constituency says little about what they would like them to do when they visit.<sup>71</sup> Voters may want their representatives to focus on either political representational activities (i.e. listening to and debriefing constituents) or constituency services. They may also simply want them to engage in social events. My research design allows me to examine the weights citizens place on specific activities when their representative visits.

Concerning political representation, the survey asked respondents to consider how frequently a hypothetical candidate promises to organize community meetings to listen to constituents' concerns and brief them about government policies discussed in parliament (community meetings). Hypothetical candidates promised never to organize such meetings or to do so monthly, every 3 months, every 6 months, or yearly. A demand for frequent meetings indicates that citizens place a high value on representation.

The conjoint survey uses two key features to examine how citizens prioritize constituency services. First, Ghana provides MPs with equal amounts in CDFs, and they have discretion over their use. Using these funds takes time and effort to deal with the local bureaucracy. Accordingly, voters may want their representatives to focus on effectively spending these funds rather than engaging in other constituency work. I take the impact of any form of spending on vote choice to indicate the degree to which voters value this type of constituency service (use of MP's Common Fund (CDF)). I also examine citizens' preferences regarding four possible CDF spending (trade-offs):

$P_{(\text{public}(\% \text{ CDF}), \text{private}(\% \text{ CDF}))}$ . At the extreme end, a voter may prefer politicians to use almost all their funds to provide public infrastructure ( $P_{(90 \text{ percent}, 10 \text{ percent})}$ ) or to focus mainly on providing individual benefits ( $P_{(10 \text{ percent}, 90 \text{ percent})}$ ). Alternatively, voters may want legislators to divide the CDF equally between each ( $P_{(50 \text{ percent}, 50 \text{ percent})}$ ). I use minimal spending on each type,  $P_{(10 \text{ percent}, 10 \text{ percent})}$ , as the baseline category (indicating that the MP does not spend all of their allocated funds).<sup>72</sup>

71. Regular visits to one's constituency may be used for other constituency service purposes, such as to visit loved ones or family, work on their businesses located in the constituency, raise campaign funds, or give policy speeches on behalf of the president (Crisp and Simoneau, 'Electoral systems and constituency service').

72. Ideally, one would use no spending as the baseline. However, because voters may not consider CDF spending in their choice of MPs in the first place, choosing a 0 percent use of CDF could simply prime respondents rather than elicit a genuine response.



Second, I asked respondents to weigh how a hypothetical candidate promises to provide personal support to individuals who need help obtaining government services such as business licences, passports, and birth certificates, or support to apply for government loans or jobs (personal assistance (casework)).<sup>73</sup> To aid comprehension, such assistance was also stated as the proportion of individual requests the candidate would support. The research assistants told the respondents that the hypothetical candidate promised that during her term in office, for, say, every 10 residents who come to request casework, she would hardly (1/10), sometimes (5/10), or always (10/10) help with their requests.

To systematically test the impact of symbolic responsiveness on vote choice, I asked respondents to consider the extent (also expressed out of 10) to which a hypothetical candidate promises to participate (or donate) to social events in their community: hardly (1/10), sometimes (5/10), or always (10/10). I included donation in the description because my scoping suggested many expect MPs to donate funds at such events even if they are unable to attend (e.g. donate to bereaved families and religious festivals, or buy food and drinks for a traditional festival). Accordingly, I am unable to distinguish the effect of merely attending versus just donating to these events. However, note that such donations are often not deemed as a substitute for attendance and hence MPs report regular attendance to events such as funerals.<sup>74</sup> The study provides initial causal evidence concerning whether politicians' symbolic responsiveness is important to African voters.

### **Personal attributes of hypothetical candidates**

Voters may not consider candidate promises about effort or the decisions they will make in office when deciding how to vote; they may focus instead on aspirants' personal traits. These characteristics may serve as heuristics to determine which politician will better serve them. Therefore, in addition to promised efforts, I also consider four factors that my field interviews (and the literature) indicate may be more important in citizens' vote choices in parliamentary elections in Ghana—candidates' party affiliation, hometown and residence status, profession, and gender.

#### *Party affiliation*

Two major parties, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC), have dominated Ghana's parliamentary

73. While MPs do not directly control these jobs, citizens often call on them to provide information about available jobs, intercede, or help them submit applications (Klaus, Paller, and Wilfahrt, 'Demanding recognition'; Lindberg, 'What accountability pressures do MPs in Africa face').

74. Klaus, Paller, and Wilfahrt, 'Demanding recognition'.

(and presidential) elections since the country's return to multiparty elections in 1992.<sup>75</sup> Accordingly, I use these two parties and independent as the possible values of party affiliation. To facilitate substantive interpretation of the effect of party affiliation, I recoded each profile as a copartisan, non-copartisan, or independent pair conditional on the match between the partisanship of the respondent and the hypothetical candidate (see Sampling respondents).

#### *Hometown/residence status*

I consider all the legal residential requirements for MP candidates.

The law permits those who hail from but are not resident in the constituency as well as those who do not hail from but are resident in the constituency to stand for election.<sup>76</sup> I also asked respondents to consider a hypothetical candidate who hails from and is resident in the constituency. These options allow me to tease out whether simply hailing from or being resident is more important to voters (or whether they prefer both). In addition, whether a candidate is originally from a particular constituency may signal whether he or she belongs to a local ethnic group. However, holding a residential status can signal shared preferences for similar local public infrastructure or common challenges with local government bureaucracies.

#### *Profession*

I gleaned data from the profiles of candidates who competed in the country's 2016 parliamentary elections.

#### *Gender*

Candidates' gender was either female or male.

### **Sampling respondents**

Respondents were selected from a stratified sample of 12 constituencies. I stratified the country's 275 constituencies by the level of electoral competition, classifying those who won by a margin of 10 percent or less in the 2012 and 2016 parliamentary elections as competitive. Half of the sampled constituencies are competitive according to this definition, which generates a large enough subsample of respondents to test my hypotheses about how

75. Kevin Fridy, 'The elephant, umbrella, and quarrelling cocks: Disaggregating partisanship in Ghana's Fourth Republic', *African Affairs* 106, 423 (2007), pp. 281–305; Emmanuel Gyimah-Boadi, 'Another step forward for Ghana', *Journal of Democracy* 20, 2 (2009), pp. 138–52.

76. The law requires candidates to be a permanent resident or to have lived in the constituency they seek to represent for five of the 10 years preceding the election (Public Election Regulations, 1996 (CI 15)).

Table 2 Descriptive statistics of respondents.

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>
<i>Demographics</i>		
<i>Age</i>	38.937	14.730
<i>Female</i>	0.496	0.500
<i>No formal education</i>	0.299	0.458
<i>Poverty index (0–6)</i>	1.928	1.538
<i>Political participation</i>		
<i>Voted in prior election (2016)</i>	0.863	0.344
<i>Feel close to a party</i>	0.740	0.439
<i>Party close to incumbent party (NPP)</i>	0.555	0.497
<i>Political knowledge</i>		
<i>Claim to know MP's name</i>	0.750	0.433
<i>Of those who claim to know MP's name, correctly names</i>	0.957	0.203

electoral competition shapes citizens' priorities. Five of these constituencies are urban.<sup>77</sup>

I randomly selected 10 polling stations from each constituency. Enumerators then followed a random walk sampling procedure to select approximately 17 respondents living within the catchment of each voting center.<sup>78</sup> Thus, we interviewed about 170 constituents in each constituency.

Table 2 shows the summary statistics of the participants ( $n = 2,022$ ). Respondents were 39 years old, on average, and half were female. Approximately 30 percent said they had no formal education in my sample.

To measure respondents' wealth, I sum six indicators of lived poverty to generate a poverty index scored from 0 to 6: going several times or more without food, water, medicine, fuel for cooking, cash income, and living in a hut or shack housing. Those scoring between 0 and 3 are classified as high income (rich), and those from 4 to 6 as low income (poor).<sup>79</sup> Respondents averaged 1.928 on the poverty index, where higher values indicate higher

77. I classify constituencies as urban or rural based on the mean of the proportion of sampled communities in a constituency with access to electricity, pipe water, sewage, mobile phone services, post office, schools, police station, clinic, market, bank, and daily transport. This measure correlates with the proportion of rural residents according to Ghana's 2010 census.

78. Supplementary Appendix Tables A.1 and A.3 report the summary statistics of the characteristics of the sampled respondents and polling station (recorded by enumerators), respectively. Supplementary Appendix Tables A.2 also shows that the characteristics of my sample are similar across multiple dimensions to a nationally representative sample of Ghanaians in Afrobarometer Round 7, which was taken close to my research. However, respondents are significantly likely to have no formal education (14 percent difference) and have fewer assets than the AB sample. However, note that my findings do not vary significantly with these individual-level attributes (see Supplementary Appendix E.2).

79. Dividing participants into three income groups (0 or 1 as high (rich), 2 or 3 as medium (middle), and 4 to 6 as low (poor)) does not change the substantive results. High- and middle-income participants had similar demands and preferences.

levels of lived poverty. Over three-fourths (86 percent) said they voted in the most recent elections in 2016, and 74 percent reported being close to a political party. Of those close to a party, 56 percent said it was the incumbent party (NPP). An impressive 75 percent said they knew the name of their MP, of which 96 percent could correctly name the representative.

To code respondents' partisanship, I use the questions about whether they feel close to a party and which one it was. To simplify the presentation, education level is classified as either none or primary education/above; participants with primary and secondary education had similar demands.

### **Interviewing respondents, balance statistics, and profile order effect**

[Supplementary Appendix B](#) details the interview procedure and the narrative presented to respondents. [Supplementary Appendix Figure B.1](#) shows an example of a conjoint choice presented to a respondent.<sup>80</sup> The profiles were presented side by side, each pair on a separate screen. Respondents chose which candidate from each pair they would vote for in a hypothetical election.

[Supplementary Appendix Table C.2](#) illustrates that the order in which the profile appeared did not affect the results. The attributes were presented in a randomized order that was fixed across the three pairings for each study participant to ease the cognitive burden for respondents and to minimize primacy and recency effects. [Supplementary Appendix Table C.1](#) demonstrates that the randomization was successful. Controlling for multiple variables that were not balanced across treatments, as expected by chance, does not change the results.

### **Estimation strategy**

To assess the relative importance of the various legislator tasks to citizens, I estimate how each promised effort allocation on an activity (relative to its baseline) affects vote choice using ordinary least squares. In all cases, I use the minimal provision of a task as the baseline and estimate how promised increases change the probability of choosing a candidate's profile. The unit of analysis is a rated profile; the dependent variable is coded 1 for the candidate profiles respondents preferred within a pair, and 0 for those they did not. The independent variables are all dummy variables for each attribute level in the conjoint survey. Because respondents were presented with three

80. I used SurveyCTO software installed on smartphones to conduct the interviews to ease data entry, minimize enumerator errors, and facilitate the randomization of treatments in the conjoint survey.

candidate pairs and appeared in the dataset multiple times, I cluster standard errors at the respondent level to account for the non-independence of responses. Also, to ensure that I am comparing individuals within the same electoral district, I include constituency fixed effects. Moreover, respondents' experiences within their constituency are likely to shape how they perceive the profiles of hypothetical candidates. For example, if a profile indicates that candidate A does not hail from the constituency but is a resident, they might think about their own MP who is also not from the area, which may influence how they focus on the other attributes that are provided for that hypothetical candidate. Including constituency fixed effects helps account for such idiosyncrasies.

Importantly, because respondents were forced to choose between a candidate pair in a hypothetical contest, this approach helps measure which legislator tasks they prioritize (trade-offs).<sup>81</sup> Moreover, estimating the causal effect of different legislator activities on the same outcome—vote choice—permits a comparison of causal effects.

To evaluate subgroup differences in preferences regarding legislator tasks, I compare (sub-group) marginal means of selecting profiles with different levels of promised legislator activity, as suggested by Thomas Leeper, Sara Hobolt, and James Tilley.<sup>82</sup> I then assess whether a regression model accounting for these subgroup differences is statistically significantly different from those assuming no such distinctions. Finally, if different, I consider which preferences over legislator activities differ across these subgroups.

## Results

### How citizens want legislators to allocate their time, effort, and constituency funds

Figure 2 shows the main results of the causal effects (i.e. AMCEs) of time allocation between the capital and the constituency, political representation, the various constituency services, symbolic responsiveness, and candidates' attributes on vote choice. It displays the AMCEs (points) and 95 percent confidence intervals (bars).<sup>83</sup> These results show how citizens want politicians to make specific decisions and trade-offs.<sup>84</sup> Substantively,

81. Bansak et al., 'Conjoint survey experiments'.

82. Thomas J. Leeper, Sara B. Hobolt, and James Tilley, 'Measuring subgroup preferences in conjoint experiments', *Political Analysis* 28, 2 (2020), pp. 207–21.

83. Supplementary Appendix Table D.1 reports the full regression results.

84. In Supplementary Appendix E, I examine the potential heterogeneity of these effects by constituency- and individual-level attributes. I focus on two constituencies (urbanization and electoral competition) and four personal characteristics (partisanship, gender, wealth, and education). There are differences in a few specific functions, but these differences are often not statistically or substantively different. Therefore, it is hard to draw any firm conclusions.

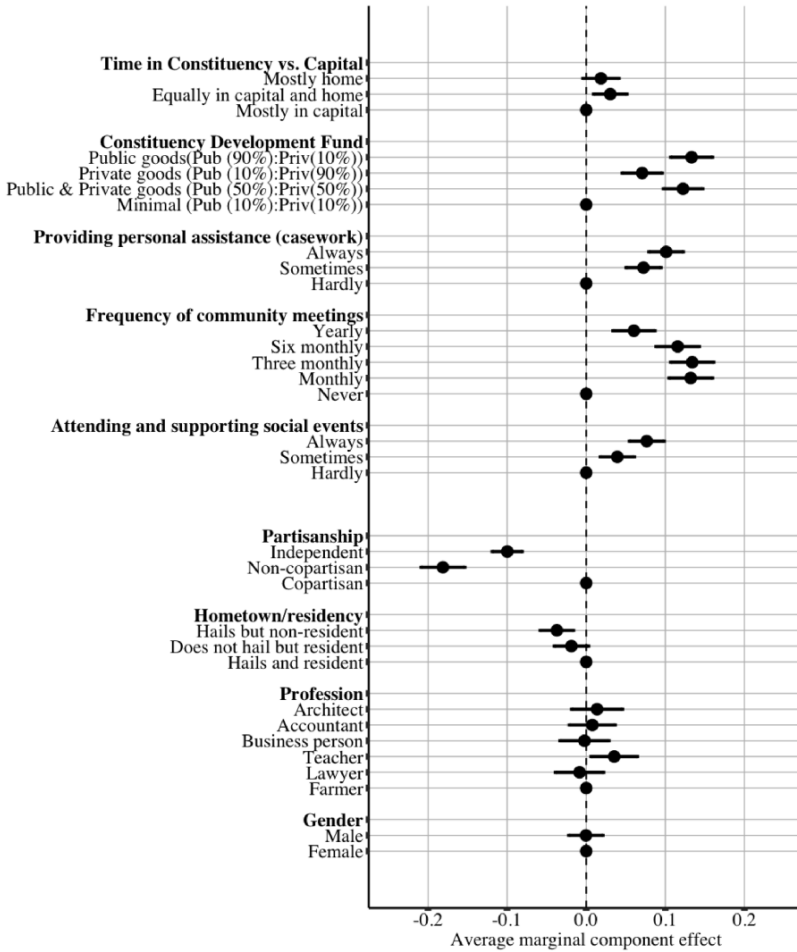


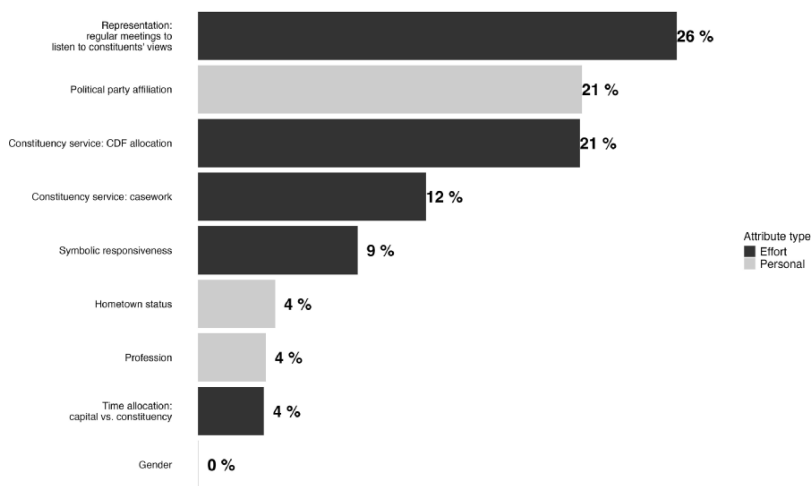
Figure 2 AMCE of candidate attributes on being preferred as an MP.

these causal estimates indicate how much candidates can increase their vote shares relative to the baseline category, other things being equal.<sup>85</sup> In Figure 3, I show the relative importance of each attribute on voter decisions, demonstrating the implicit trade-offs across legislator activity.

**Time in the constituency versus the capital (legislature)**

Respondents were 3 percentage points (ppts, significant at  $p \leq 0.01$ ) more likely to pick a candidate who promised to split their time equally between

85. Bansak et al., ‘Conjoint survey experiments’.



*Figure 3* Relative importance of candidate attributes in determining respondents' vote choices in conjoint survey (trade-offs across attributes).

the constituency and the capital compared to those who pledged to spend about three-quarters of their time in the capital. They were also slightly more likely (1.9 ppts) to prefer candidates who pledged to spend three-quarters of their time in the constituency than those who committed to staying more in the capital. However, the effect is only significant at  $p \leq 0.114$ , which suggests we cannot distinguish the impact of a legislator spending the most time in the capital. These results imply that citizens want their legislators to divide their time equally between national issues and constituency-focused activities, contrasting with conventional wisdom (also see Rhee who found similar results in Kenya).<sup>86</sup>

Yet, these effects are substantively minor. Considering that scholars consider competitive constituency won by 10 percent or less,<sup>87</sup> a legislator's decision to shift from spending most of their time in the capital to an equal split may not change the outcome of most close races. Moreover, relative to political representation and constituency services, how a candidate promises to divide their time weighs minimally on vote choice (Figure 3).

86. Rhee, *Between constituents and the capital*.

87. Joseph Asunka, Sarah Brierley, Miriam Golden, Eric Kramon, and George Ofose, 'Electoral fraud or violence: The effect of observers on party manipulation strategies', *British Journal of Political Science* 49, 1 (2019), pp.129–51; Nahomi Ichino and Matthias Schündeln, 'Deterring or displacing electoral irregularities? Spillover effects of observers in a randomized field experiment in Ghana', *The Journal of Politics* 74, 01 (2012), pp. 292–307.



### Constituency services: public works versus private benefits

First, considering how citizens want legislators to divide their CDF between public infrastructure and individual financial support, the results suggest they would prefer a politician who will dedicate at least half of their funds to public works. Respondents were 12.2 ppts and 13.3 ppts more likely to prefer a candidate who promised to spend half ( $P_{[\text{pub}(50 \text{ percent}), \text{priv}(50 \text{ percent})]}$ ) or almost all ( $P_{[\text{pub}(90 \text{ percent}), \text{priv}(10 \text{ percent})]}$ ) of their CDF to provide public infrastructure, respectively, compared to those who promised to use only a small amount on private and public goods ( $P_{[\text{pub}(10 \text{ percent}), \text{priv}(10 \text{ percent})]}$ ). These estimates are statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.01$  and substantively large. By contrast, the promise to use almost all the funds ( $P_{[\text{pub}(10 \text{ percent}), \text{priv}(90 \text{ percent})]}$ ) to provide private benefits to constituents increases the probability of choosing a candidate by only 7.1 ppts ( $p \leq 0.01$ ) relative to the baseline ( $P_{[\text{pub}(10 \text{ percent}), \text{priv}(10 \text{ percent})]}$ ).

Accordingly, consistent with my expectation, citizens prefer candidates who promise to put effort into spending their constituency funds to provide more, rather than less, private and public goods. As I argued, spending these funds requires working with the local bureaucracy. Considering the trade-off legislators must make, these results indicate that respondents prefer politicians who will allocate more of these funds to local public goods than individual transfers.

I argued that this is because citizens are more likely to benefit from public than from private services. However, an alternative explanation is that when the survey respondents assessed a hypothetical candidate, they could not gauge their odds of benefiting personally. If they were evaluating a real candidate, they could more accurately determine this likelihood. This could make study participants less likely to believe candidate promises to provide personal benefits. To check this possibility, I examine whether these patterns change when I account for partisanship. For example, we should expect that when comparing copartisan candidates, citizens will select those who promise more private benefits. Beyond the copartisan advantages enjoyed by hypothetical aspirants discussed in Effects of candidates' personal attributes, [Supplementary Appendix Figures D.1 and D.2](#) show that respondents' partisanship does not change their preference for more public than private benefits from the MP's CDF.<sup>88</sup>

Second, I find that the provision of personal assistance (casework) to help constituents navigate the government bureaucracy or find state employment, another form of private benefit, is salient to voters when selecting parliamentarians. Candidates who promise to sometimes (half of the time)

88. It is also possible that citizens may have a preference towards private benefits when politicians distribute their personal funds compared to the public resources I consider. However, my study was not designed to test this possibility.

or always help constituents in this way are 7.2 and 10.1 ppts more likely to be preferred, respectively, compared to those who promise to help little. Both estimates are significant at  $p \leq 0.01$ .

Overall, these results suggest that with these specific decisions, voters favour more effort than less in providing constituency services, and when distributing funds, they want legislators to tilt the balance in favour of public infrastructure compared to private transfers.

### **Political representation**

I find that respondents prefer candidates who promise to regularly organize community meetings to listen to their concerns (to convey them to parliament) and brief them about parliamentary debates. Compared to a candidate who does not promise to organize community meetings, citizens are 13.2 (monthly), 13.4 (every 3 months), and 11.6 (every 6 months) ppts more likely to prefer MPs who will organize regular community meetings. These estimates are substantively large and significant at  $p \leq 0.01$ . The probability of selecting a candidate who promises only yearly meetings decreases to about 6 ppts ( $p \leq 0.01$ ). These results show that citizens want politicians to organize more meetings to learn their views to represent them in parliament.

### **Symbolic responsiveness**

Finally, citizens like politicians who promise to be more symbolically responsive, attending or financially supporting constituents with social events such as funerals, religious services, traditional festivals, and naming ceremonies. Compared to candidates who pledged to hardly attend such events, those who offered to participate half of the time or always were 3.9 ppts and 7.6 ppts more likely to be preferred, respectively. These estimates are significant at  $p \leq 0.01$ . This novel finding suggests Ghanaians care about symbolic responsiveness. I acknowledge that traditional conceptions of symbolic responsiveness do not involve 'financial support' but simply being present to celebrate or sympathize with constituents. However, in the Ghanaian context, such donations or gifts are expected as noted in section Symbolic responsiveness. Moreover, my research design does not allow me to separate the effects of simply attending or donating or both. A future study can investigate these possibilities.

#### *Effects of candidates' personal attributes*

Before discussing the relative importance of these legislator effort on vote choice, I first present the results concerning candidates' personal attributes. The analysis yields three main results regarding the effects of candidates'

personal attributes. First, participants were significantly less likely to select a non-copartisan (18.1 ppts) or independent (10 ppts) aspirant than they were to choose a copartisan politician. This result suggests a strong partisan bias in selecting legislative aspirants and accords with existing research.

Second, I find evidence to suggest that residency in the constituency is important to voters, which complements my finding that citizens want more political representation. Compared to candidates who are from and live in the constituency (my baseline category), indigenous politicians who do not reside in the constituency were the least favoured (about 3.7 ppts less likely to be selected,  $p \leq 0.01$ ). Aspirants who do not come from but reside in the constituency were approximately 1.9 ppts less likely to be preferred as an MP (significant at the 10 percent level).

Third, I observe that citizens place less emphasis on the candidate's profession (although educationists or teachers are 3.5 ppts more favoured than farmers, significant at  $p \leq 0.05$ ) and gender.

These results suggest that citizens also consider aspirants' partisanship and residence status when selecting legislators.

### Relative importance of legislator functions on vote choice

Consistent with my argument, my results on the various legislator functions demonstrate two things. First, with each function, citizens favour politicians who will exert more effort than less. Second, they also consider the trade-offs inherent in specific decisions. In particular, respondents were more supportive of an equal split of legislator time between parliamentary work and constituency-related activities. In distributing constituency funds, they wanted politicians who will tilt the balance more towards collective than private financial transfer.

However, these results say little about how respondents make trade-offs across the various legislator functions (and personal attributes) in the conjoint survey.

To examine these trade-offs, I estimate the relative importance of each of the attributes on voters' decisions.<sup>89</sup> Figure 3 shows the results. To help contrast the importance of legislator efforts/functions (black bars) with that of personal attributes (grey bars) on vote choice, I present both. Regarding legislator efforts, the results show that political representation contributed the most in voters' decisions (26 percent). Interestingly,

89. The relative importance of each attribute shows how the range of the causal impacts of its levels on vote choice compares to that of other features. Specifically, we first calculate the range (i.e. max–min) of the effects of each attribute's levels (i.e. marginal component effects as estimated in Figure 2). The ratio of each attribute's range to the sum of all attributes' ranges provides its relative importance. Thus, they sum up to unity. See Vithala R. Rao, 'Conjoint analysis', in Jagdish N. Sheth and Naresh Malhotra (eds), *Wiley International Encyclopedia of Marketing* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, Chichester, England, UK, 2010).

respondents were willing to trade off a bit of party affiliation for political presentation. This is followed by constituency services: CDF allocation (21 percent) and casework (12 percent). Together with their individual effects, the results on constituency services suggest that effort in public-oriented constituency service weighed more for constituents. Respondents then considered promised symbolic responsiveness (9 percent) and then the decision concerning time allocation (4 percent).

These results show that voters want more attention to constituency-related activities relative to committed time towards parliamentary (compared to constituency) work. Also, consistent with my hypothesis, respondents put similar weights on political representation and constituency service that are public goods oriented, with a slight tilt towards representation.

### *Conclusion*

Using a conjoint survey experiment, I investigate how citizens would like legislators to allocate their time, efforts, and constituency funds to their competing tasks in Ghana. Legislators are multi-tasking agents of citizens. With limited time and resources and the inherent tension built into their roles of representation, legislation, executive oversight, and constituency service, they must strike trade-offs. How much such balancing aligns with citizens' preferences is important for assessing the quality of democracy. My empirical approach allows for two primary analyses, contributing novel insights to existing research. First, it helps to estimate the causal effects of legislator effort or decision-making regarding each task on vote choice, indicating how effort or decision-making with each influences vote shares.<sup>90</sup> Second, it allows us to investigate what kinds of trade-offs voters are willing to make when they consider the range of competing roles that representatives have (as well as their personal attributes).

My main findings are that citizens are willing to trade off less parliamentary work in their voting decisions for constituency-related activities of political representation and constituency service. Within the constituency, citizens weigh political representation activities (i.e. community meetings to listen to constituents' views and debrief them on parliamentary proceedings) more than constituency services. I theorize that citizens' beliefs that political representation and constituency services directly benefit a politician's constituents and can be observed in the electoral district encourage voters to weigh these constituency-related tasks more than parliamentary work in the capital. However, while voters may give less weight in their voting decision to how much time legislators would dedicate to parliamentary

90. Bansak et al., 'Conjoint survey experiments'.

work (relative to constituency service), they favour an equal split in time between the two. Concerning constituency service, citizens want parliamentarians to tilt the balance more towards public-oriented services than private transfers (financial) or benefits (casework). This may be due to their fear of being excluded from personal benefits compared to collective goods. Finally, it is important to recognize that for each type of legislator activity, citizens demand officeholders to exert more effort than less. Accordingly, promises of more effort in each legislator's role increase the candidates' vote shares. Thus, it is possible to discover associations or effects when considering individual roles in a particular study. Yet, my findings suggest that we can tell the trade-offs voters are willing to make when citizens are asked to consider these legislator tasks together.

While I believe I have advanced existing research on citizen–legislator relationships, my research design has a few limitations. I take time allocation between the capital and the electoral district as my measure of the importance citizens put on parliamentary work. However, this is only indirect. My measure does not disaggregate legislators' two parliamentary duties of legislation and executive oversight, which makes it impossible to tell how voters might weigh the two. Including these efforts more explicitly would significantly increase the cognitive overload for respondents. Nevertheless, future studies can focus directly on these different aspects.

Finally, because my study is set in Ghana, four necessary scope conditions apply. First, citizens elect their representatives under plurality rule in single-member districts. This electoral system incentivizes constituency service over parliamentary work and representation, which may explain why citizens want representatives to pay some attention to the latter. It remains to be seen if similar results would be found in countries using proportional representation. Second, Ghana has a mix of competitive and non-competitive electoral constituencies. Although the two major parties (NPP and NDC) dominate some constituencies, the overall competitiveness of parliamentary races has increased over time. After winning their party primaries, about a quarter of MPs seeking re-election lose.<sup>91</sup> Accordingly, certain aspects of the findings shaped by electoral competition (i.e. how MPs allocated their funds to public and private goods) may not apply to countries with a dominant party system. Third, and related to the allocation of funds, I consider how citizens want their legislators to use their state-allocated funds in the form of CDFs. While multiple countries have adopted these measures, they are not universal. My results are therefore

91. Ofori, 'Do fairer elections increase?'; Between 2000 and 2012, the overall turnover rate for the Ghanaian Parliament was 45.38 percent (i.e. either retiring or losing through party primaries or general elections), and the percentage of seats changing between parties averaged 22.45 percent.

most pertinent to countries with CDFs in which legislators have substantial discretion over how they are spent. Finally, Ghana's legislature remains weak relative to the executive branch with limited ability to raise private member bills with cost implications for the state,<sup>92</sup> which can encourage citizens to focus on representation and constituency service. Thus, my findings may only apply in contexts with weak legislatures relative to the executive.

*Supplementary material*

[Supplementary data](#) is available online at *African Affairs*.

92. Lindberg and Zhou, 'The rise and decline of parliament in Ghana'; Ken Ochieng' Opalo, *Legislative development in Africa: Politics and postcolonial legacies* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2019).