

Research Article

Pathways of Electoral Clientelism in University Student Elections in Ghana: An Exploratory Study

Kwaku Abrefa Busiaⁱ, Alice Amegahⁱⁱ & Francis Arthur-Holmesⁱⁱⁱ

Abstract

Recent studies on student politics and governance have shown that electoral clientelism (EC) in university student elections is often facilitated by clientelist relations between student leaders and political parties. However, there is a dearth of empirical research investigating the various forms of electoral clientelism, as manifested through vote-buying practices in campus electoral politics in African universities. This article, therefore, investigates the multifaceted and changing dynamics of vote-buying in student electoral processes in Ghanaian universities. The study adopted a qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews with 15 student leaders, 4 university staff working with student leadership, and 4 focus group interviews involving students at the University of Ghana and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. From our finding, we argue that electoral clientelism takes place in five crucial ways in university student elections in Ghana. These include the provision of direct cash payments, exchanging electoral support for student government positions and appointments, provision of food and beverage consumables, award of student-related business contracts, and provision of educational materials and souvenirs.

Keywords

Electoral clientelism, student politics, vote-buying, campus elections, Ghanaian universities

i **Kwaku Abrefa Busia** (corresponding author), ORCID: 0000-0003-2667-7338, PhD researcher at the Department of Sociology and Social Policy at Lingnan University, Hong Kong, busiaabrefa@gmail.com

ii **Alice Amegah**, ORCID: 0000-0002-9025-4041, PhD researcher, Department of Education, University of Cambridge, UK, aliceamegah@gmail.com

iii **Francis Arthur-Holmes**, ORCID: 0000-0002-5099-4555, MPhil Graduate, Department of International Development, University of Oxford, UK, frarthur88@gmail.com

Introduction

Since the 2000s, a growing number of studies have pointed to the clientelist relationships between student leaders and political parties in higher education institutions (HEIs) in Africa (Abrefa Busia, 2019; Luescher-Mamashela & Mugume, 2014; Mugume, 2015). This strand of literature on student politics has highlighted the increasing political influences and vote-buying in university student electoral politics that consequently feed into national politics. Student elections have gradually been infiltrated by national political parties, especially at the levels of students' guild and student representative council (SRC) elections across many African universities (Mugume, 2015; Oanda, 2016a; Oanda & Omanga, 2018).

Similar to national elections, periodic student elections take place each academic year for electing student representatives at various levels, ranging from departmental through to faculties and colleges to halls of residence. Thus, student electoral politics provides insight into mainstream national politics, due to the latent function of university campuses as 'political communities' beyond academic enterprise. The centrality of elections and democratic politics in student affairs and governance processes has, therefore, become crucial for understanding the linkages between campus and national politics (Mugume, 2015; Weinberg & Walker, 1969). As Paolo and Van Gyampo (2019) emphasise, the literature on electoral clientelism in Africa fails to engage with the growing contemporary phenomena regarding the dynamics of campus-based student politics and its relationship with national party politics.

At the university student political front, existing empirical studies on electoral clientelism in Africa have primarily studied the clientelist linkages between student leaders and political parties (Abrefa Busia, 2019; Luescher-Mamashela & Mugume, 2014; Mugume, 2015; Mugume & Luescher, 2017a, 2017b). These studies focused exclusively on how political parties influence student leaders through resource exchanges for their external gains, subsequently infiltrating student politics. Other studies have also investigated student participation in university governance through campus elections and its association with patronage politics and vote-buying practices (Oanda, 2016b; Sarpong, 2018). However, very little is known in the scholarly literature on how vote-buying takes place in university student electoral processes in Africa. For example, Oanda's (2016b) study on the evolving nature of student participation in university governance only discussed manifestations of electoral clientelism as part of the historicity, broader trends, and emerging issues in student politics in Africa, notably Ghana, Uganda, and Kenya. As such, most of what is known about the methods of electoral clientelism in university elections primarily comes from media discourses rather than from academia. For instance, in their review of the complex vote-buying linkages between student politics, intra-party politics, and national politics in Ghana, Paolo and Van Gyampo (2019) relied on secondary sources such as print and electronic media discourses, existing literature, as well as personal observations.

In light of this knowledge gap, this article primarily investigated the multifaceted pathways

of electoral clientelism in university student elections in Ghana. It examines the various forms of vote-buying that occur before and during elections on the campuses of Ghanaian public universities. To the best of our knowledge, there has not been any detailed empirical research investigating how electoral clientelism takes place in university student elections in the Ghanaian context. While some methods of vote-buying such as direct cash payments by candidates to students seem commonplace, questions of when, where, and how such payments are made are not adequately discussed in the literature. Besides, other forms of electoral clientelism outside political party influences such as how some ordinary students fund student candidates' election campaigns in exchange for some material benefits is grossly understudied. Such methods of vote-buying in student elections may not necessarily be associated with political party influences but rather intra-campus dynamics, which offer mutual benefits between candidates and ordinary students. There is, therefore, the need to consider both the intra-campus and external party clientelist influences in student electoral politics. As emphasised by Paalo and Van Gyampo (2019), scholars and policymakers need to conduct further empirical studies to thoroughly investigate the reinforcing role of electoral clientelism in student politics, and how this bears semblance with intra-party and national elections. The rest of this article is structured in six sections. First, we provide a theoretical framework on EC. The second section discusses the phenomena of EC in student elections in Africa. This section shows how vote-buying in university student elections has become the new dimension of electoral clientelism in Africa. The third section details the methodology of the study, including the research design used and instruments of data collection. The fourth section presents the findings of the study, followed by the fifth section, which focuses on the discussions of the findings presented. The final section provides concluding remarks on the key findings of the study, as well as policy and practical implications for addressing EC in student democratic politics.

Theoretical Framework on Electoral Clientelism

The concept of electoral clientelism (EC) falls under the umbrella of clientelism and refers to the provision of goods or cash around Election Day or during electoral campaigns (Gadjanova, 2017; Kramon, 2016). EC, also known as vote-buying, is viewed as a transaction between candidates and voters, such that once citizens receive cash or private goods in exchange for political support, they have to comply and vote for the buyer (Gallego & Wantchekon, 2017). Generally, vote-buying involves a typical scenario where candidates, usually through intermediaries, intend to buy votes during election campaigns, compared to what happens over a longer period (Schaffe, 2007). EC has been highlighted as a pervasive feature of distributive politics in most developing countries around the world (Gallego & Wantchekon, 2017; Kramon, 2018; Schaffe, 2007).

As most studies on EC tend to focus on national-level politics relative to student politics,

a number of explanations have been put forth by various scholars. According to Kramon (2016), vote-buying during elections serves to signal the commitment to future redistribution by candidates, especially where there are uncertainty and lack of trust. As such, Kramon's informational theory of EC argues that by providing handouts to voters, politicians are signalling voters about their capacities to deliver developmental goods after elections. As such, EC in Africa occurs as a means of building reputation through the delivery of particularistic goods, primarily given out to enhance performance, reputations, and credibility rather than a clientelist exchange for votes (Kramon, 2016, 2018; Nathan, 2016). This is especially the case among voters with no clear long-term expectations of better service delivery from one party or the other, which makes short-term spending on particularistic goods appealing to them (Nathan, 2016). Also, EC is seen as an affirmation of status by political candidates through public displays of wealth. As Gadjanova (2017) argues, where elections are competitive, and voters expect gifts; one of the strategies used by candidates is the public distribution of cash and other inducements to affirm their own status.

Furthermore, other scholars also argue that EC, even if ineffective, is the result of political equilibrium, in which candidates cannot deviate because other parties are following similar strategies, thereby making the costs of defecting higher than the benefits (Chauchard, 2016; Gadjanova, 2017). As Gadjanova (2017) further argues, the provision of material rewards by politicians during competitive elections is made to undermine an opponent's rewards by matching inducements or encouraging voters to break reciprocity norms. Under such circumstances, EC ensures that neither parties nor politicians' gifts are sufficient for a win, consequently forcing them to pursue different linkage mechanisms to voters (Gadjanova, 2017; Gallego & Wantchekon, 2017). Over time, providing material inducements in what Gadjanova (2017) calls 'patronage democracies' has become a normalised strategy for securing votes and mobilising the masses, especially in Africa. As Bratton (2008) emphasises, (African) electoral campaigns provide moments for politicians to engage in mass mobilisation and electoral manipulations through vote-buying rather than providing an opportunity for public deliberation.

Concerning the explanations for EC, a wide range of electoral handouts has been identified in the literature. EC has been noted to occur in various forms such as cash payments, food, and the award of contracts, employment offers, alcohol, medicine, clothing, and other gifts to voters (Gallego & Wantchekon, 2017; Lindberg, 2003; Wantchekon, 2003). These pathways of electoral clientelism have been given considerable attention to ascertain how vote-buying manifests before and during elections. For instance, direct cash payments to voters have been highlighted as a pervasive method of vote-buying across various developing countries, often distributed through party intermediaries and brokers (Gadjanova, 2017; Kramon, 2018; Schaffé, 2007). The provision of cash payments during election campaigns is usually attributed to the widespread poverty in most of the developing world, which makes it easier to manipulate most

voters with handouts in return for votes (Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007). Notwithstanding what is known concerning EC in national politics, not much has been researched concerning the strategies of vote-buying in university student politics. The next section provides an overview of EC in African student elections and its association with national politics.

Campus Electoral Clientelism in Africa and its Linkages with National Politics

The broader discourse of EC in mainstream politics in Africa emphasises the prevalent and persistent vote-buying practices during elections (Bratton, 2008; Lindberg, 2003; Wantchekon, 2003). Considerable studies have investigated the reasons for EC as a form of clientelism in African elections, mainly from the perspective of comparative politics between democratisation in both the developed and developing democracies (Medina & Stokes, 2002). Clientelism broadly refers to transactions between politicians and citizens, whereby material favours are given in exchange for political support (Wantchekon, 2003). What distinguishes EC as a type of clientelism is that it occurs before and during elections with the main motive of buying votes and ensuring higher voter turnout (Nichter, 2008; Schaffe, 2007) compared to other forms like patronage and prebendalism, which tend to consolidate as political systems, for instance through deeper distortions in public service delivery (Gallego & Wantchekon, 2017). As Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007) assert, patronage involves the allocation of public resources like jobs in return for political support which may create distortions in the economy. Thus, patronage differs from EC in that it takes a longer period, is not limited to the election campaigns, and offers more attractive resources for clients beyond the short-run (Gallego & Wantchekon, 2017). Prebendalism exists as an extreme form of patronage, where clients only extract public resources for their own benefit without any control of the patron (Gallego & Wantchekon, 2017; Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007).

At present, the literature on EC in Africa shows various ways through which candidates engage in vote-buying before and during elections. Across various African countries, the persistence of vote-buying has been attributed to weak political economy (Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007), clientelist political culture revealing the patrimonialism (Chabal & Daloz, 1999), weak political institutions and party structures (van de Walle, 2007), strategy for mass mobilisation (Chauchard, 2016), low educational levels and civic awareness (Nathan, 2016), as well as building reputation and affirming status (Gadjanova, 2017; Kramon, 2018). Consequently, various methods of EC in Africa, and Ghana in particular, include monetary payments to voters, (public) donations of items (such as food, household electronic appliances), employment offers, and awarding of contracts (Lindberg, 2003; Nathan, 2016; van de Walle, 2007).

Despite the contributions of the existing literature, it tends to focus on national-level electoral politics, including intra-political party elections. As such, newer forms of EC in

student politics which is becoming a growing practice across various university campuses in Africa have received far less attention. As argued by Paolo and Van Gyampo (2019), current scholarly discussions on EC fail to engage some growing contemporary trends that contribute significantly to sustaining the culture of vote-buying. Research on EC in university student elections exists in a few universities in Africa. For instance, since 2015, a growing literature has studied the associations between campus-based student politics and national political parties through the influence of student leadership by parties (Abrefa Busia, 2019; Luescher-Mamashela & Mugume, 2014; Mugume, 2015). For example, existing empirical studies have investigated the clientelist association between student leaders and political parties, notably in Uganda (Mugume, 2015; Mugume & Luescher, 2017b) and Kenya (Oanda, 2016b). Thus, there is a need for more empirical research on campus-based vote-buying practices in other African countries to facilitate broader discussions of the phenomena on EC.

EC at the student politics level is therefore an emerging strand in the clientelism literature in Africa. As argued by Luescher-Mamashela and Mugume (2014), electoral clientelism in student elections is associated with multiparty democracy in Africa. A few scholars have highlighted the clientelist relationships between student leaders and political parties in student electoral politics in various African HEIs (Abrefa Busia, 2019; Mugume, 2015; Mugume & Luescher, 2017b). For instance, Oanda (2016b) argues that the partisan influences by politicians have contributed to the competitive nature of student political activities and the 'massive monetisation' of student elections across various HEI campuses in Africa. As Oanda and Omanga (2018) emphasise, university student elections have been associated with patron-client politics and political influences. Thus, national politics has been implicated in campus politics as politicians seek to build political clients in African universities using students (Oanda, 2016b; Oanda & Omanga, 2018; Paolo & Van Gyampo, 2019) who have historically been the 'mouthpiece' of the youth and society in general (Van Gyampo, 2013). These dynamics capture the new forms of politicisation and campus-partisan linkages in student politics in Africa, notably Uganda, Kenya, and Ghana (Mugume & Luescher; Oanda, 2016a; Paolo & Van Gyampo, 2019).

In the literature, the most crucial factor for the involvement of political parties in student politics is the recruitment of student cadres, while student leaders in turn gain goods and services such as providing funds for their campaigns (Abrefa Busia, 2019; Mugume, 2015; Mugume & Luescher, 2017b; Weinberg & Walker, 1969). Building on the existing works on student politics, Abrefa Busia (2019) explains that the cause of electoral clientelism in student elections is a result of the failures of elected student leaders to fulfil their campaign policies over time. Precedents of past student leaders who fail to address the academic and socio-economic concerns of students, and the desire to amass wealth using their positions in student government, had culminated in a campus culture of clientelism and patronage. Thus, most student voters demand direct material benefits and in some cases, post-electoral appointments before giving candidates their votes and other electoral support (Abrefa Busia, 2019). Again,

the student-voter apathy resulting from unfulfilled promises and corrupt practices by student leaders also makes electoral clientelism a means of popular mobilising in campus elections (Abrefa Busia, 2019; Nyarko, 2016).

Concerning the forms of EC in student electoral politics, the literature on vote-buying shows that student political candidates provide direct cash payments to voters in the build-up to and during elections (Nyarko, 2016; Oanda, 2016b). These monetary payments have often occurred as a result of partisan interests in campus politics in many African universities. For instance, in Kenyan universities, student election campaigns are usually funded by national political parties with interests that sometimes have negative ethnic and tribal agendas (Oanda, 2016b). This ultimately affects student leadership and representation. Similarly, student campaigns for guild elections in Ugandan universities, notably Makerere University, have political party undertones which tend to control campus politics (Natamba, 2012 cited in Oanda, 2016b: 78). As Sarpong (2018) asserts, some student politicians have often been endorsed and funded by Ghana's two main political parties, National Democratic Congress (NDC) and New Patriotic Party (NPP), through their active campus networks. Thus, across many African universities, partisan influences have heavily monetised student elections with student political candidates distributing direct cash to students and influential student groups to ensure electoral success (Mugume, 2015; Oanda, 2016b). In Ghana, for instance, Nyarko (2016) reports how an SRC presidential candidate gave money up to GH¢ 5000 to students in various halls of residence to share before an election.

Apart from direct monetary payments, student leaders have also been noted for distributing consumables such as food, beverages, and branded souvenirs. Based on Nyarko's (2016) journalistic report, student politicians in Ghanaian universities distribute branded T-shirts, sponsor birthday parties and entertainment programmes and also provide porridge breakfast to student voters in the build-up to elections. Such forms of vote-buying have continued in contemporary student politics and are often fuelled by political parties that provide clientelist goods to their favourite candidates for onward distribution to student voters (Paalo & Van Gyampo, 2019). In Uganda, for example, student guild candidates at Makerere University are expected to provide music at campus events and also beverages and alcohol to their supporters, usually through the financial support of some politicians (Mugume, 2015; Oanda, 2016b). As some scholars emphasise, the primary 'non-partisan' responsibility of student leaders to promote the welfare of students has become heavily 'politicised' by partisan politics across various universities in Africa (Abrefa Busia, 2019; Van Gyampo, 2013). This situation however, affects student governance as students with good leadership potential but lacking party affiliation refrain from student electoral politics because of the increasing monetisation of university student elections in Africa (Oanda, 2016b).

Methodology

This research forms part of a broader study on “Student Politics and Clientelism in West African Universities: A Case Study of Ghana” conducted in April 2019. A qualitative research methodology with an interpretive approach was employed for this study. The interpretive approach recognises the complexity of social life and seeks to provide a better understanding of people’s experiences within a complex social context (Krauss, 2005). Moreover, the interpretive paradigm optimises focus group discussions (FGDs) and personal interviews (Yin, 2003) to explore phenomena as a means of understanding the multiple realities of social life and the deeper meanings of the phenomena. The qualitative approach was therefore more applicable as interviews, and FGDs allowed students and student leaders to ‘voice out’ their experiences and perspectives on clientelism in a university setting.

The research design for this study was an exploratory multiple case study that helped to explore the socio-political context of electoral clientelism in Ghanaian universities. As Bleijenberg (2010) points out, explorative case studies focus on explaining social phenomena within a particular social context. Case studies are also useful for including different approaches and methods to the phenomena being studied (Yin, 2003, p.8). As such, the University of Ghana (UG) and the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) were selected, given their historical association with active student politics in Ghana and its relation to national politics (Van Gyampo, 2013). The two universities stand out as Ghana’s flagship and oldest universities with the largest student populations that have a growing feature of electoral clientelism in Ghana. This informed the selection of the two universities as cases for the study out of ten public universities, six technical universities, and five chartered private universities based on the Ghana National Accreditation Board data as of June 2018.

The study adopted purposive, snowballing, and convenience sampling techniques to elicit in-depth data from students and student leaders. The first author hired two research assistants who helped him to recruit undergraduate and postgraduate students to participate in the study. Both the undergraduate and postgraduate students were conveniently selected based on their availability and rich experiences and knowledge of vote-buying in student elections. Subsequently, 27 students at both UG and KNUST were sampled and clustered into four groups for the FGDs. Thus, 3 of the groups had seven members and the other one had six members. Also, past and current student leadership candidates were purposively selected and made referrals of other student leaders who were subsequently contacted and recruited for the study. Student leaders were drawn from the faculty and students representative council (SRC) levels where electoral clientelism is pervasive. Altogether, 15 past and current student leaders of UG and KNUST, comprising nine males and six females, agreed to participate in the study. Furthermore, 4 university staff members (2 each from UG and KNUST) who work with student leaders were also recruited for their views on vote-buying in student elections on campus.

The study employed semi-structured interviews and FGDs with student leaders and students to collect empirical data on the pathways of electoral clientelism in university student elections in Ghana. The data collection lasted for three weeks, from 4 to 19 April 2019. Interviews with student leaders took place at centrally agreed locations in Accra, Kumasi, and Tarkwa. Interview guides were used to obtain relevant data from student leaders. Permission was obtained from interviewees before taking field notes and tape-recording the interviews. Moreover, FGDs were also conducted on the campuses of UG in Accra and KNUST in Kumasi. As Denscombe (2007) argues, FGDs have the advantage of capturing the dimensions and nuances of a topic which may be limited by personal interviews. At KNUST, FGDs were done in the discussion area of the main library. At the UG, the TV Room space at the Mensah Sarbah Hall hosted the discussions. On average, FGDs took 30–50 minutes. Members of each FGD comprised males and females with an age cohort of 20–27 years. This research was approved in March 2019 by the Graduate Education Committee of the Department of Politics and International Studies at the University of Cambridge, UK. As part of this research, ethical considerations including oral consent and written informed consent forms were sought from participants before interviews and FGDs. The purpose of the study was also explained to participants, and they were assured of confidentiality and their anonymity for the information provided.

Finally, data analysis for the study was concurrently done throughout the data collection process through an inductive data analysis strategy. Qualitative data were coded with the aid of the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti. to generate descriptive codes and later analytical codes. The data were then analysed thematically and cross-checked with responses from participants to bring out emerging themes and patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Findings

At the student politics level, very little is known about how clientelism occurs and the forms it takes. Based on field interviews and FGDs, participants indicated five main ways through which electoral clientelism is evident in campus electoral politics. These pathways include the provision of direct cash payments, provision of food and beverage consumables, provision of educational materials and souvenirs, exchanging electoral support for student government positions and appointments, and award of student-related business contracts.

Provision of direct cash payments to students

The provision of direct monetary payments is the most common form of electoral clientelism in university student elections. During electioneering campaigns, findings showed that some students usually demanded money from student candidates in exchange for giving their electoral support. This situation occurred as a result of the disappointment of student leaders in

fulfilling students' interests over time. Thus, some students felt better off getting 'direct benefits from candidates before voting in elections, due to past precedents of candidates neglecting their needs and failing to negotiate with university management and national educational agencies on issues affecting university students. Similarly, student leaders provided cash payments to electorates to persuade student voters and to convince them to vote massively for them due to general apathy in campus elections. As explained by a past SRC candidate of KNUST:

On elections days, in particular, you need people to pull students to vote due to voter apathy. Some people will genuinely do that for you, but others put a price tag on it. Give me this amount of money, and I will 'sweep' [mobilise] people for you. In some instances, students will come and tell you, give me this amount of money as lunch or transportation fare to campus before I vote for you. Afterwards, I will take a picture for you to see. That is direct vote-buying right there.

Candidates also offered monetary payments to influential student groups as a precondition for canvassing votes from students on their behalf, and sometimes as an appreciation for campaigning for them during elections. As emphasised by a current student leader at UG:

There are student groups that act as political entrepreneurs. They only look at the financial opportunities provided by the politics of the day. They are all about, how can I benefit from what is happening? They come with the idea that if you need me to convince people to massively vote for you, they tie it to an economic benefit. They can charge, say GH¢ 500 and then go with candidates for campaigns.

Direct cash payments through campus representatives during national students' union elections were also mentioned by study participants. At the National Union of Ghana Students' (NUGS) congress, student government representatives from various universities usually received financial inducements from NUGS candidates in the form of transportation and payment of capitation fees. For instance, the capitation fee, which catered for student delegate accommodation, food, transport, and other expenses at the congress to elect national student leaders, was reported to be sometimes funded by some candidates. As such, financing congress-related expenses and the annual NUGS dues, which were to be settled by local university representatives, was paid by some NUGS candidates. Such payments were noted by participants as a common practice by candidates with partisan associations, in exchange for votes. According to a local campus representative:

Sometimes, candidates could pay the capitation fee of about ₵300 per delegate at NUGS congress. Most tertiary institutions have about 20-30 delegates. For some schools, they only vote for [national] candidates because they have paid for their delegates' capitation fee.

Provision of food and beverage consumables

From the interviews and FGDs, the provision of food and beverage consumables by candidates to students for electoral support was another form of clientelism at UG and KNUST. This form of vote-buying comprised the distribution of soft drinks, and the provision of lunch for voters in the form of food packs with snacks. Candidates sometimes did this with the hope of capturing swing voters, undecided in the election week to pull last-minute votes. As these discussants mentioned:

On election days at Legon [UG], some candidates have cars parked at vantage points on campus distributing food packs and soft drinks to influence people to vote. I don't know how it works, but that is what it is.

In typical male halls like Unity Hall, you will have candidates who before or during the election day, provide breakfast like porridge and snacks for students. Some students based on that to vote and decide not to vote for others because they did not provide such food items.

From these statements by some students in FGDs, the provision of food items before and during elections was a primary strategy used by candidates in exchange for electoral support. These were provided to 'ordinary' students and also to various influential student groups as a mobilisation strategy. Candidates relied on food and beverage distribution because they felt students are not interested in policies, thereby using material inducements to beat competition from other candidates.

Provision of educational materials and souvenirs

The study found that candidates also provided educational material and branded election products to students for electoral support. Such educational material included academic handouts, branded exercise books, pens and past examination questions, while election souvenirs provided to students included stickers, wristbands, and calendars. These items were usually provided by candidates to advertise their campaigns and make their political intentions known to electorates. However, this approach enhanced a candidate's popularity and electoral visibility on campus, which could translate to getting more votes over their opponents. A past faculty president at KNUST admitted that:

Vote-buying takes the form of souvenirs like branded wristbands and giving out branded exercise books. I did that during my campaigns. For exercise books, are useful for advertising a candidate and also for students' academic work. So, that is more like a dual exchange that benefits both parties.

Concerning the provision of candidate branded products to students during elections; a university staff member involved in student leadership at KNUST explained that:

During campaign periods on campus, it is not very hard to see some candidates giving out various items such as stationery to students. Our universities seem to have left the student politics space unregulated, hence lacking any stringent framework guiding elections. The idea is that it is students' matters; let us leave it for them. Moving forward, there should be explicit rules on the conduct of campus elections.

Exchanging electoral support for student government positions and appointments

Another form of clientelism the study found was the exchange of electoral support for post-electoral student government positions and appointments. The study identified patronage politics implicit with the giving of positions and appointments by candidates to their political supporters and cronies from their high schools, religious groups, halls of residences, and faculties. Besides, some students, as a result of previous cases of candidates neglecting their needs after elections and financial embezzlement of student funds by successful candidates, 'out rightly' demand positions before giving their electoral support. As indicated by a postgraduate student at UG:

In 2014/15, I was on the same floor with a candidate popularly called Palenxy. During his campaign for JCR president, most of his high school friends supported him. Eventually, he won massively and put most of his colleagues on hall committees. Besides, he appointed some of them as floor representatives and then gave them 'inner rooms' with extra privacy, which are a 'hot cake' on campus.

In other instances, successful candidates returned electoral support with appointments such as senator (speaker of student parliament), judicial chair, and electoral commissioner.

Award of student-related business contracts

The award of student-related business contracts was also found to be another pathway of electoral clientelism. From our findings there is a prevalent exchange where some students negotiated with candidates to fund their campaigns, and also to help mobilise students to win campus elections. In return, successful candidates who won student elections were expected to provide assurances of business contracts related to student events and souvenirs to such 'student political financiers'. While some student leaders mentioned that they did not succumb to such proposals, they emphasised that such clientelist practices were common in student elections.

According to a former student-faculty president at KNUST:

There are instances where students who have business exchange their support and sometimes monetary support for a candidate in exchange for business contracts. When I was vying for faculty president, a student approached me for a brief meeting. At the meeting, he proposed helping my campaign finance and in return wanted all student-related printing used for the Faculty Week Celebration to be given to him, since he owned a printing press.

Similarly, a past student leader at UG noted that:

The deal in UG now is that it is either you give me a position or a contract, providing souvenirs are fading in recent times. Some students will tell you that when you win, every single exercise book produced for freshers, approximately 38000 copies, should be awarded to them. Hence, when the standard price is GH¢1.50, such student financiers awarded such contracts negotiate with printing presses and get them subsidised at 70 pesewas because of bulk printing. That is how those who sponsor candidates get their money back after elections.

Discussion

Our study has shown that the pathways of EC in campus elections in Ghana are multifaceted and interconnected. Candidates often used different strategies to directly influence votes before and during elections. These involve direct cash payments by candidates and sometimes through influential intermediaries to student-voters, distribution of stationery and branded souvenirs, and provision of food items. These methods of vote-buying were usually found to be important for pulling voters to campus on election days at both UG and KNUST, and to also rival opponents' provision of material incentives in the build-up to elections. Concerning using EC to enhance voter turnout, the strategy to use material inducements like food items and cash payments was a result of student-voter apathy following years of unfulfilled promises by candidates. As such, unlike the dominant narrative of candidates providing handouts to influence votes, most student-voters (especially those in their later years) instead demanded 'direct benefits from candidates before voting. Records of successful student leaders failing to address students' welfare have created a political culture of vote-buying in university student elections (Abrefa Busia, 2019).

Consequently, the competitive nature of campus elections to engage influential student groups to 'sweep' voters, especially on election days, has made most candidates (notably at the SRC and faculty levels) resort to vote-buying. This practice resonates with vote-buying at the national level, where politicians undermine opponents' material rewards by matching such inducements or breaking reciprocity norms to ensure political equilibrium (Chauchard, 2016;

Gadjanova, 2017). Though some candidates did not engage in vote-buying, they admitted that EC was a common practice on campus at both KNUST and UG. For such candidates and former student leaders, their reasons included not wanting to be controlled by political parties who usually funded SRC candidates, financial constraints, and also based on their past service which endeared them to fellow students, in previous leadership roles such as hall presidents, class representatives, and departmental executives.

Furthermore, it also became clear that vote-buying strategies such as the provision of student government positions and appointments, as well as business contracts are mainly reserved for influential agents who canvassed votes for candidates, primarily through door-to-door campaigns in student hostels and halls of residences. More importantly, while these two methods relate more to patronage in the mainstream literature, we argue that under student electoral politics, the award of contracts and provision of positions by successful candidates are backed into EC due to the relatively short period (typically 7-11 months) of student leadership office per academic year. Thus, even though patronage politics at the national level takes a longer time compared to vote-buying, which tend to be around elections (Gallego & Wantchekon, 2017), the award of student positions takes a shorter time, sometimes taking effect the moment candidates win elections. These appointments are usually decided among candidates and influential student groups or 'brokers' as a guarantee before even offering their electoral support. In UG, for instance, this was made evident, as the award of business contracts and appointments was preferred by most students involved in campus elections compared to cash payments, electoral souvenirs, and food items.

Moreover, our findings point to some remarkable differences between UG and KNUST regarding EC. At UG, the scale of vote-buying was more pronounced due to the intense political party influences in student elections, especially at the SRC level. Hence, most SRC candidates were usually endorsed and funded by campus party branches, often with the direct backing of party official who by the proximity of the campus, came around during elections. This situation stems from the fact that the UG campus is strategically located in the Ayawaso West Wuogon Constituency where university students of UG constitute an overwhelming voter population, which of itself can secure a member of parliament (MPs) outright victory in national elections. Besides, as Ghana's premier university based in the national capital, UG is close to important government office and political party official who turn to campuses to recruit and mentor their next crop of party leadership and mobilise grassroots support during national elections. As highlighted by Oanda and Omanga (2018), African politicians still see universities as critical bases for building political clients; rendering more student activities along political party lines. Consequently, this has made student elections in UG more politicised and highly monetised compared to KNUST. At KNUST, though politicisation of student elections exists, it was uncommon to witness party youth organisers or other official coming to campus during elections as was the case with UG. Instead, the campus branches of Ghana's two main

parties, New Patriotic Party (NPP) and National Democratic Congress (NDC), were much more involved than party officials themselves.

Out of the five pathways emphasised through our findings the most effective were cash payments to ordinary students and influential student groups to influence votes together with the award of contracts after winning elections. Due to the situation of student-voter apathy resulting from unfulfilled campaign promises and policies of candidates over time, monetary incentives has become an effective strategy to get students to vote on election days or paying influential agents to campaign massively for candidates in the build-up to elections. This is especially so for off-campus students who, if not for lectures on election day, see no reason to come to campus for the sake of voting, given the common shared experiences that candidates fail to address their needs when voted into power (Abrefa Busia, 2019). For such students, offering cash payments during elections provides an intrinsic motivation to vote for a candidate. While cash payment is well emphasised in the dominant EC literature, its practice during student elections is not well articulated, especially given the fact that unlike national elections, student elections are not 'primarily' organised along with political party representation, despite instances of partisanship. Thus, though cash payments are involved in EC at both levels, the reasons and motivations may be different, as our finding suggests. Also, the award of contracts provides an effective method of EC in student elections. This is because for students with businesses or links with some enterprises, voting for a candidate, campaigning, and sponsoring them, came with a surety that upon winning the election, they were awarded contracts to supply student-related products such as stationery and T-shirts. This way, these students were also able to recoup their sponsorship monies through such contracts and where possible, make profits due to the discounted prices from bulk purchases. In such instances, such 'student political entrepreneurs' do not necessarily have any political party ties, but only decide to sponsor candidates because of the personal benefits. Thus, EC in student elections does not only speak to political party associations, but also intra-campus dynamics outside partisan influences. Besides, because some candidates have been noted to disappoint students concerning positions and appointments after winning elections, most students preferred getting contracts or direct cash payments, especially at UG.

As earlier indicated, despite the promise of student government positions being an effective method of EC, previous instances of successful candidates not granting student such appointments made it less effective for candidates compared to cash payments and award of contracts. Student positions were, however, more effective among some students compared to the distribution of food items, as such positions could be used on their curriculum vitae to demonstrate their leadership and extra-curricular abilities. Again, we argue that the distribution of branded products like exercise books during elections are basic educational needs of students, which candidates capitalise on to influence votes just as most students require them for their studies. However, since this was one of the most used strategies by candidates

during elections on campus, it is least effective as a principal means of vote-buying in Ghanaian public universities. The distribution of food and beverage consumables is the least effective of the pathways of EC, as it was the most typical method used by candidates. These were usually provided on election days and also during the week of elections at both UG and KNUST. This tie in with existing media reports and studies, which show that the practice of student leaders sponsoring morning porridge breakfast and other food items during elections is pervasive in Ghanaian universities (Nyarko, 2016; Sarpong, 2018). Also, our study finds similar observations in other African universities, particularly in Uganda and Kenya, where student guild candidates engage in vote-buying practices such as providing beverages and alcohol to students during campaigns, often sponsored by leading political parties (Mugume, 2015; Oanda, 2016b).

The pathways of EC in university student elections identified in this study are consistent with the general political culture in Ghana, where national elections have been associated with widespread vote-buying (Paalo & Van Gyampo, 2019). Though different reasons account for the practice at both the student politics and national politics levels as earlier discussed, the strategies appeared similar, particularly due to the infiltration of political party influences in student elections. Consequently, the competitive nature of Ghana's two-party (NPP and NDC) dominated political landscape is becoming implicated in the 'non-partisan' responsibility of student leadership primarily responsible for addressing the welfare needs of students. Under such circumstances, as noted in our findings student leadership and governance is compromised, as the loyalty of successful candidates lies with their 'political godfathers' who fund their elections at the expense of student welfare. For instance, at the national students union elections, cash payments, which were heavily monetised by political parties, have resulted in the polarisation of the NUGS with ruling governments preferring a NUGS president in their political camp. This has led to the division of the NUGS into two factions with political loyalties to both the NPP and NDC. Ultimately, the pathways of EC in student elections, partly fuelled by political party influences and intra-campus dynamics, point to the enduring practice of vote-buying in Ghana's electoral democracy which is 'nurtured from below'. This is worth mentioning, given that most politicians in Ghana have been through the ranks of university student leadership.

Conclusion

Our research explored an understudied phenomenon in student electoral politics in Africa, by investigating how electoral clientelism takes place in student elections in Ghana. We have shown that vote-buying in Ghanaian university student elections occur in five crucial ways. These included providing cash payments, giving student government positions to supporters, distributing food and beverages, awarding student-related business contracts to student electoral financiers by elected leaders, and providing educational materials and souvenirs to student-voters. The significant contribution of the study is that it provides rich empirical data on the

complex forms of electoral clientelism in student elections in relation to national elections in Ghana. This is mainly due to the infiltration of political party influences in university student politics. We, therefore, recommend that universities must develop a coherent, participatory framework and stringent regulations to guide campus electoral politics, particularly concerning student political financing partisan influences from political parties, student electoral campaigning, and ethical considerations in conducting campus elections.

References

- Abrefa Busia, K. (2019). *Student Politics and Clientelism in West African Universities. A Case Study of Ghana*. University of Cambridge.
- Bleijenberg, I. (2010). Case selection. In A. J. Mills, G. Durepos, & E. Wiebe (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of case study research* (pp. 62–64). Sage. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412957397.n26>
- Bratton, M. (2008). Vote buying and violence in Nigerian election campaigns. *Electoral Studies*, 27(4), 621–632. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2008.04.013>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. DOI:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
- Chabal, P., & Daloz, J.-P. (1999). *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument*. James Currey.
- Chauchard, S. (2016). *Why Provide Electoral Handouts? Theory and Micro-Level Evidence from Mumbai*. Dartmouth.
- Denscombe, M. (2007). *The Good Research Guide: for small-scale social research projects* (3rd ed.). Open University Press.
- Gadjanova, E. (2017). Electoral clientelism as status affirmation in Africa: Evidence from Ghana. *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 55(4), 593–621. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X17000416>
- Gallego, J., & Wantchekon, L. (2017). *Clientelism: Concepts, Agents, and Solutions* (Faculty of Economics Working Papers, No. 207).
- Kitschelt, H., & Wilkinson, S. (2007). *Patrons, Clients, and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kramon, E. (2016). Electoral Handouts as Information: Explained Unmonitored Vote Buying. *World Politics*, 68(3), 454–498. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887115000453>
- Kramon, E. (2018). *Money for Votes: The Causes and Consequences of Electoral Clientelism in Africa*. Cambridge University Press.
- Krauss, S. E. (2005). Research Paradigms and Meaning Making: A Primer. *The Qualitative Report*, 10(4), 758–770. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2005.1831>
- Lindberg, S. (2003). ‘It’s Our Time to “Chop”’: Do Elections in Africa Feed Neo-Patrimonialism

- rather than Counter-Act It? *Democratisation*, 10(2), 121–140.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/714000118>
- Luescher-Mamashela, T. M., & Mugume, T. (2014). Studies in Higher Education Student representation and multiparty politics in African higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 39(3), 500–515. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2014.896183>
- Medina, L. F., & Stokes, S. C. (2002). *Clientelism as Political Monopoly* (No. 25). <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.467.3741&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- Mugume, T. (2015). *Student Politics and Multiparty Politics in Uganda: A Case Study of Makerere University*. University of the Western Cape. <http://hdl.handle.net/11394/4726>
- Mugume, T., & Luescher, T. (2017a). Student Politics at Makerere University in the Lens of Schmitter and Streeck's Framework: Student Leaders and Political Parties. *Makerere Journal of Higher Education*, 9(1), 133–160. <https://doi.org/10.4314/majohe.v9i1.1>.
- Mugume, T., & Luescher, T. (2017b). Student Representation and the Relationship between Student Leaders and Political Parties: The Case of Makerere University. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 31(3), 154–171. <https://doi.org/10.20853/31-3-639>
- Nathan, N. (2016). *Electoral Politics Amid Africa's Urban Transition: A Study of Urban Ghana*. Harvard University.
- Nichter, S. (2008). Vote Buying or Turnout Buying? Machine Politics and the Secret Ballot. *American Political Science Review*, 102(1), 19–31. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055408080106>
- Nyarko, R. K. (2016). SRC elections: How Ghana breeds corrupt political leaders. <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/SRC-elections-How-Ghana-breeds-corrupt-political-leaders-429230>
- Oanda, I. (2016a). How political interference keeps hurting Africa's universities. <http://theconversation.com/how-political-interference-keeps-hurting-africas-universities-58387>
- Oanda, I. (2016b). The evolving nature of student participation in university governance in Africa: An overview of policies, trends and emerging issues. In T. M. Luescher, M. Klemenčič, & J. O. Jowi (Eds.), *Student Politics in Africa: Representation and Activism* (Vol. 2, pp. 61–84). African Minds.
- Oanda, I., & Omanga, D. (2018, June 16). African universities bogged down by politics of patronage. *The Standard*. <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001284322/african-universities-bogged-down-by-politics-of-patronage>
- Paalo, S. A., & Van Gyampo, R. E. (2019). Campus Politics and Intra-Party Vote Buying in Ghana: How Political Mentorship Could Destruct. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 7(2), 123–141. <https://doi.org/10.24085/jsaa.v7i2.3829>
- Sarpong, G. (2018). *The Ballot Bag: Navigating the Myrrh and Mud of World of Student Politics*. LiteMedya.
- Schaffe, F. C. (2007). *Elections for Sale. The Causes and Consequences of Vote Buying*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Van de Walle, N. (2007). Meet the new boss, same as the old boss? The evolution of political

- clientelism in Africa. In *Patrons, Clients, and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition*. (pp. 50–67). Cambridge University Press.
- Van Gyampo, R. E. (2013). Student activism and democratic quality in Ghana's Fourth Republic. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 1, 49–66. <https://doi.org/10.14426/jsaa.v1i1-2.24>
- Wantchekon, L. (2003). Clientelism and Voting Behavior. Evidence from a Field Experiment in Benin. *World Politics*, 55, 399–422.
- Weinberg, I., & Walker, K. N. (1969). Student Politics and Political Systems: Toward a Typology. *American Journal of Sociology*, 75(1), 77–96. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2775614>
- Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: design and methods*. (3rd ed.). Sage.