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Economic Voting in Ghana. An in-depth study of the economic factor in African Elections

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Contents

Tables and Figures

INTRODUCTION

How powerful is the impact of the economy on election outcomes in Africa[1]? Do African electorates hold their governments accountable for the economic conditions they face? The classical concepts of the African voter suggest that they do not. In the past, voters south of the Sahara were often portrayed as primarily ethnic and clientelistic. Themes such as ethnic block voting and vote buying dominated the academic literature and led to a widespread image of Africans holding leaders accountable for everything but political performance. But the economic voting hypothesis has gained a lot of plausibility in recent decades. Ever more sophisticated research on voting behavior in Africa hints increasingly at a more governance-oriented voter. In the words of Lindberg and Morrison (2008), scholars observe a trend from “non-evaluative voting rationales” towards “evaluative voting rationales”. If such a trend exists, economic voting becomes likely. The topic is, however, largely unexplored for African democracies.

This thesis is thus dedicated to a close look at the economic factor in African elections. I present a case study of the West African nation Ghana, tracing the impact of the economy on three presidential elections between 2004 and 2012. The research design links survey data, objective macro-economic indicators and a detailed analysis of actual election outcomes to arrive at tangible conclusions about the influence of the economy on the elections under scrutiny. The results indicate that the state of the economy is a decisive variable in Ghana’s highly competitive democracy. For the elections of 2004 and 2012, I find a strong effect that is evident in the survey data, obvious in the election results and, moreover, absolute consistent with objective macro-economic developments. The observations in 2008 are more ambiguous but hold interesting insights regarding the attribution of political responsibility.

The idea that voters are sensitive to the economy and reward or punish governments at the ballot box according to the economic state of the nation is generally common. Corresponding models of voting behavior operate on the premise that voters are rational, i.e. cast a ballot after weighing available alternatives in the light of personal preferences. The economic voting theory adds the assumption that the economy weighs most in the calculation and derives the expectations that election results follow the macro-economic ups and downs of a country. The theory was mostly applied to Western industrial democracies but the story is generally equally plausible for the

[1] *Africa* in this thesis refers to African states south of the Sahara Desert usually summarized as “sub-Saharan Africa”

African context, maybe even a tad more plausible than in industrial nations because the relatively low national income of most African countries makes citizens extra-sensitive to economic changes. A hurdle, however, are weak informational structures. African education and media systems have limited capacities and cannot provide citizens with the same level of information as they do in industrial nations. The awareness of public affairs is in consequence low among Africans and economic voting needs to take place without detailed knowledge on economic policy making. This constitutes a certain challenge for the deduction of a causal link between the economy and the act of voting.

A first contribution of this thesis is thus the theoretical specification of a causal mechanism for economic voting in Africa. Based on a review of different conceptions from the literature, I argue that economic voting in sub-Saharan Africa is likely to take the shape of retrospective sanctioning based on egotropic economic perceptions. Retrospective sanctioning means that people observe how economic conditions develop over the term of a given government and finally either punish the incumbent at the ballot box for a negative trend or reward him for an economic uptrend. A retrospective monitoring of the economy does not necessarily demand much from citizens in terms of information. Economic perceptions can be formed in two ways, either by following macro-economic trends or by simply relying on personal daily experiences such as the price levels at markets. The literature describes the former types of perceptions as sociotropic and the latter as egotropic. Egotropic perceptions on particular come completely without informational preconditions and provides an explanation that expects even citizens who are largely cut off from informational streams to vote economically.

From a theoretical viewpoint, economic voting thus seems likely in sub-Saharan Africa. The empirical validation is naturally a lengthier endeavor. Very few studies have so far looked into economic voting in Africa. Those who have generally confirm the hypothesis but suffer from certain empirical shortcomings mostly owed to a limited availability of data for African countries. A first shortcoming is the reliance on surveys conducted at a considerable distance from actual election dates. Although such studies are able to demonstrate that vote intentions are influenced by the economy, they fail to convincingly link the economic factor to actual election outcomes. A second problem is the limited temporal scope of existing publications that without exception look at one single point in time and hence leave open questions regarding the robustness of the finding over time.

The present study is motivated by the aim to overcome these shortcomings. The close look at Ghana allows me to trace the economic vote over a longer period and to include different sources of data. I systematically link election outcomes, macroeconomic indicators and available surveys. The analysis makes use of electoral geography to dismantle election outcomes and statistical regression analysis to explore the economic factor in vote intentions of individuals. I find strong and plausible links between the individual and the aggregate level that illustratively reconstruct the impact of the economy on the election outcomes. Especially consistent is the picture for the elections of 2004 and 2012. In both cases a positive economic track record of the incumbent coincides with a country-wide positive trend in the election outcome. The regression analyses of surveys from 2002, 2005 and 2012 reveal, likewise, a strong influence of economic perceptions on the likelihood of a vote cast for the incumbent. Taken together, the different pieces of evidence provide a unique view of economic voting in an African democracy and strongly back the hypothesis. But I also find interesting variation. The 2008 election does not fit well into the economic voting pattern. The incumbent lost the election closely despite an overall positive economic record. Furthermore, economic perceptions play no important role for the vote intention in 2008, as evident in the regression model of a 2008 survey. A reason for the deviant character of the 2008 election seems to be that the incumbent president had reached a term limit and the new candidate of the party was not perceived as incumbent, which is an interesting finding in itself.

The thesis is made up of four chapters. The first chapter seeks to make readers familiar with the African voter by giving an overview of the knowledge we have after twenty years of research on elections in Africa. I discuss research on the topics of ethnicity, rural-urban divide, clientelism/vote buying and economic voting. The review focuses on empirical knowledge and the explanatory power for election outcomes of each approach and illustrates strengths and weaknesses. I conclude that ethnicity, rural-urban divides and vote buying have a limited scope in the dissecting of African election results, whereas the economic argument has the potential to become a general formula for elections in Africa. Ethnicity (in fact different kinds of strong regional party loyalties) is important but affects only a few regions of a country. The rest of the country remains invariably unexplained. Vote buying is a common phenomenon but research suggests that the African voter is quite resilient to such practices. The rural-urban divide also fails to show a consistent pattern in election results. The economic vote argument is supported by some promising results but too few to draw conclusions. More and deeper studies are needed to say with confidence that African elections are about the economy.

Chapter 2 addresses the question of how the causal linkage between the economy and the voting decision may work in Africa and derives a concrete theoretical model consistent with the African context. First, I introduce the idea of the rational voter and illustrate how the literature has deduced the economic voter. I proceed by discussing three theoretical debates on the mechanism behind the economic vote. The debates revolve around the questions of sanctioning vs. selection, egotropic vs. sociotropic voting, and the clarity of responsibility. Taken together, they span a broad conception of economic voting. In the second part of the chapter, I narrow down this broad conception to the African context. Most African countries have a very low national income and therefore deviate systematically from Western countries. This has repercussions for the economic vote. I highlight weak informational structures and explain the theoretical implications. In sum, I argue that the African economic vote is likely to manifest itself as retrospective sanctioning behavior driven by mostly egotropic economic perceptions and targeted at the most visible incumbent regardless of contextual variations in the clarity of responsibility.

The third chapter is dedicated to the research design and precisely spells out how I proceed to put the economic voting hypothesis to a test in an African democracy. I explain my twofold methodological approach, which rests upon individual-level and aggregate-level data. In the light of my research goals, I elucidate the advantages of a single-country study and illustrate the criteria leading to the choice of Ghana from the universe of cases. The section further gives a brief overview of the relevant characteristics of Ghana's political system. I then turn to the operationalization, describing the aggregate and the individual-level analysis seriatim. The aggregate-level analysis uses a process-tracing-inspired qualitative approach to determine whether the economy had an impact on election results. The data come from the World Bank and from Ghana's electoral commission. The individual-level analysis builds on survey data from the Afrobarometer and uses logit regression analysis to test the impact of the economy on voting decisions. The chapter gives detailed account of the choice of variables, the coding and the specification of the statistical model.

The fourth chapter examines the impact of the economy on three concrete Ghanaian elections. I look at each election individually starting with the aggregate-level results and moving on to the survey data. The mixed-method research design proofs useful, not only because of the chance to cross-validate both levels of analysis, but also for illustrative reasons. Both approaches converge into tangible stories of each election and thereby gain general credibility. Evidence in favor of the economic voting hypothesis comes especially from the elections in 2004 and 2012, whereas the analysis indicates a low economic influence for the 2008 election. The individual election analyses are followed by an overview of all individual-level numbers. The chapter finishes with a discussion on the theoretical implications of the findings.

At the end of the study I sum up the findings and conclude that the economy is a factor worth considering in any study on voting behavior in sub-Saharan Africa.

1 THE AFRICAN VOTER

The African continent has seen a surge of electoral institutions over recent decades. Especially the third wave of democracy had a tremendous impact on the continent and saw a majority of states undertaking major constitutional reforms towards pluralist democracy in the 1990s. The spread of electoral practices on the continent has not surprisingly caught scholarly attention and produced a sizeable body of literature on voting behavior in sub-Saharan Africa. The aim of this chapter is to describe the current state of knowledge on the African voter.

But does it actually make sense to conceive of the 48 states south of the Sahara as a certain common entity? Is there something like an African voter? There are good reasons to think so and it is not even necessary to point to the common but questionable accounts of an African culture (as described for instance by Etounga-Manuelle 2000). The main reason to analytically conceive of an African voter is the similar institutional history of most sub-Saharan states. Almost all societies in the region share a common political trajectory that led from mostly stateless societies into colonial states, then to independent post-colonial states, and finally in the 1990s to transitional democracies. This particular pattern has produced a multitude of common characteristics that pertain to political systems as well as political behavior (most comprehensively described by Hyden 2006). The continent is, moreover, united by the low-income status of most states, which is another catalyst of commonalities. Together, these factors produce a sufficient degree of cohesion to treat the 48 states south of the Sahara as a special entity in the building and testing of theories on voting behavior.

We can thus justifiably assume that there is something like a typical African voter. But what are the characterizing features? The academic literature naturally provides some different stories about voting behavior in sub-Saharan Africa. In order to distinguish the narratives it is useful to structure them along the lines of structural and rational-choice explanations. Structural approaches are inextricably linked with the works of Lipset and Rokkan (1967) who locate the roots of voting behavior in an individual's position in the social structure of a society. Accordingly, every society is composed of salient cleavages and voters vote for the party that represents the side of the cleavage they belong to, meaning workers vote for working class parties, rural dwellers for peasant parties etc.. By contrast, the rational approach (Downs 1957) sees voting as an act of individual choice, based on a weighing of alternatives in the light of personal preferences.

The African voter is generally assumed to be much more guided by structures than by rationality. Especially ethnic cleavages are regarded as important and elections are sometimes portrayed as an 'ethnic census'. Some scholars discuss, furthermore, a rural-urban cleavage as a structural explanation of election outcomes south of the Sahara. On the rational-choice side the research is dominated by concepts of clientelism and vote buying, i.e. voting in exchange for a personal material reward. Theories of economic voting play a subordinated role but some studies exist and are also discussed in the review. Following the discussions of the individual topics, I evaluate the overall explanatory power of the different theoretical stories about the African voter and explain why the economic voting hypothesis is the most promising topic to investigate for a better understanding.

1.1 STRUCTURAL EXPLANATIONS OF VOTING BEHAVIOR IN AFRICA

Ethnicity

Ethnicity is by far the most intensively discussed theme in research on voting behavior in sub-Saharan Africa. The division of national states into ethnic groups with highly salient identities is often seen as a guiding principle in the organization of African societies (Olorunsola 1972; Berman et al. 2004). Ethnicity is a fluid concept and scholars do not fully whether it is constructed, and a functional means to an end for individuals, or a characteristic of in fact distinct cultural groups, and an end in itself (cf. Hyden 2006: 183ff). Yet there is a lot of agreement about the crucial impact of ethnic identities on the political behavior of individuals in Africa.

With regard to voting behavior, it was Horowitz (1985) who made the most compelling theoretical argument for the importance of ethnicity. He states that the incentive for an individual to vote on the basis of an ethnic identity lies in the reaffirmation of a group identity. By ethnic bloc voting citizens can, accordingly, express mutual loyalty within a group, which creates a psychological incentive for the voter. Following this concept, scholars often refer to ethnic voting as expressive voting. From an empirical viewpoint, expressive voting also appears to be a more appropriate term. There is definitely a phenomenon of extremely strong regional party loyalties in Africa, with parties gaining up to 99 percent of the votes notwithstanding free and fair electoral competition. Several studies show, however, that the phenomenon is not necessarily founded on ethnicity.

In South Africa, for example, a racial cleavage by far outweighs ethnic-linguistic divisions in the fractionalization of the electorate. Ferree (2006: 803) investigates voting patterns in the self-described "rainbow nation" and notes, that race is an "overwhelming predictor of voting behavior." But she also calls into question the expressive voting interpretation, pointing to a surprisingly low actual salience of racial identities in her dataset.

In Malawi regional block voting also seems not to be based primarily on ethnicity. Ferree and Horowitz (2010) conducted extensive research to explain that election outcomes in Malawi resemble a regional census. Their investigation of public opinion data over a period of 9 years reveals that ethnic identities explain a considerably small number of partisan alignments, and suggests that the relationship between parties and regions is rather more grounded in the belief that certain parties favor certain regions. Block voting is accordingly not only expressive but rather more instrumental. Voters not only express their group identity, but also target goods and expect certain parties to be particularly likely to deliver these goods in a certain area. The patterns found in Malawi are, furthermore, less founded on ethnic, but rather more on regional, identities.

Most comprehensively discussed has been the influence of ethnic voting for the case of Ghana, with similar conclusions. Two particular groups in Ghana, the *Ewes* and the *Akans*, are associated with ethnic voting. Especially Nugent (2001; et al. 2010) has stressed this point, deeming ethnic block voting a "dangerous time bomb of unresolved conflict" (Nugent et al. 2010:95). Fridy (2006) has empirically investigated the claim and overall also confirms the prevalence of ethnic voting. His analyses of electoral maps and statistical data show a highly significant association between the proportion of Akan and Ewe speakers and the electoral success of associated parties. Yet the more recent literature has increasingly questioned the ethnic nature of this relationship. Whitfield (2008) argues that the extraordinary strength of certain parties among Akans and Ewes is more a consequence of ideological images and that at least one of the two patterns follows a more regional and less ethnic dynamic. Other authors follow this assessment and emphasize the importance of party traditions in the constitution of regional voting patterns (Hoffman/Long 2013; Osei 2013). Just as in the case of Malawi, the rationale seems, furthermore, to some extent instrumental. This point is illustrated by Ichino and Nathan (2013). Building on polling-station-level data they show that ethnic voting increases with higher ethnic homogeneity. They explain their finding by arguing that the ethnic composition affects prospective assessments of the probability of receiving goods from a certain party after the election and thereby make a strong point for an instrumental interpretation of ethnic voting in Ghana.

A cross-country empirical analysis of ethnic voting in Africa was conducted by Norris and Mattes (2012). Specifically, they look into the relationship between ethnicity and government support. Their results, first of all, back the claim that ethno-linguistic cleavages condition party identification in Africa. For eleven out of twelve countries they find ethnicity being a significant predictor of government support. At the same time, however, they downplay the role of ethnicity, stressing that it was neither the only nor the primary cleavage in most cases.

This somewhat ambiguous conclusion is a good summary of the general debate on ethnic voting in Africa. Indeed, we frequently find pockets of excessive regional block voting in Africa. However, the role of this phenomenon seems exaggerated in the literature. Firstly, it is less dominant than the notion of an ethnic or regional census suggests. Secondly, its foundation seems to be much more complex than the narrow ethnic view indicates and may be grounded in various attributes, among them ethnicity, but also regionalism, race or ideology. Finally, the practice of ethnic voting seems to be more instrumental than Horowitz's (1985) idea of expressive voting. This suggests that the stability of ethnic voting patterns is overstated because instrumental assessments can change faster than identity-based expressive considerations. Overall, though, ethnic (and regional) voting patterns remain crucial for an understanding of African elections; however, the image they draw of voting behavior on the continent seems by no means exhaustive.

The rural-urban Cleavage

A second common narrative in studies on electoral behavior south of the Sahara is the African version of the classical urban-rural cleavage. It was originally introduced by Lipset and Rokkan (1967), who observed party formation along the lines of urban and rural interests in the early phase of West European democracy.

With regard to contemporary Africa the existence of such a cleavage seems quite obvious. Most African states feature grave regional disparities in development, often referred to as the urban-rural gap (Sahn/Stifel 2003). At the extremes of the developmental continuum are on one pole metropolitan areas featuring a relatively broad middle class and an economy involved in the global exchange of goods. At the other pole are urban areas where the majority is without any education and the economy has a mainly local subsistence character. The different living conditions suggest that urban and rural dwellers systematically vary on a multitude of characteristics that are usually deemed important for voting behavior, including income, occupation, education, exposure to media and also value systems. In this light it seems likely that the urban-rural cleavage will also manifest itself in a corresponding political division.

Cross-national studies usually confirm this conjecture and find a rural-urban cleavage. Norris and Mattes (2012), for instance, in their aforementioned study on ethnic voting, report a strong influence of the rural-urban divide in their statistical models. The authors underline, however, that in fact only in three out of twelve countries political competition is unambiguously structured by rural and urban interests. In another cross-national investigation by Bratton et al. 2012, the rural variable is also significant. But the authors do not accord much attention to the finding since it is only a control variable, and accordingly we have no clear insight on what it means. Interesting is that both studies use government support or incumbent vote as dependent variable and always find a positive influence of rural dwelling. That suggests that voters from rural areas are simply more likely to support the incumbent and not aligned to specific parties.

Interestingly, the rural-urban cleavage has not been much studied for specific countries. It is again the case of Ghana for which the purported relationship has been most extensively investigated. The prevalence of a political divide between urban and rural dwellers seemed to be quite clear in the first years after the democratic transition in 1992. Nugent (1999: 306) investigates this relationship for the elections of 1992 and 1996 and notes that the presidential candidate of the more urban-inclined party, though “comprehensively beaten overall, actually won a majority of constituencies in the principal cities and regional capitals.” Consistent with these findings is the observation that the campaign of one party targeted the “rural and urban poor,” whereas the other emphasized the interests of a “more radicalized urban middle-class” (Ayee 1997: 424). However, from the very beginning there were doubts on the existence of fixed alignments between rural/urban dwellers and specific parties in Ghana. Bawumia (1998) argued that the pattern was actually a result of an unequal distribution of state expenditures favoring rural environments. The elections after 2000 absolutely add to these doubts. The relationship becomes increasingly fuzzy. This is especially evident in Fridy's (2006) district-level analysis. In his statistical models, the proportion of rural dwellers shows no significance in predicting the vote share of parties on the district level in the 2000 and the 2004 election. The author furthermore observes that the urban-associated Party substantially loses ground in the metropolitan centers of the country. The rural-urban cleavage in Ghana thus seems to be an artifact of the transitional period, bearing no relevance anymore.

Apart from the studies on Ghana there is hardly research explicitly investigating concrete rural-urban voting patterns. To some extent the issue is an under-researched area; however, what we know suggests that the rural-urban cleavage is less significant than one might expect in light of the disparities in living conditions between both groups. Although rural and urban dwellers exhibit a deviant voting behavior in some studies there seems to be no systematic rule let alone stable alignments between one group and a certain party. The rural-urban cleavage has accordingly very limited power in explaining election outcomes in Africa.

1.2 RATIONAL-CHOICE EXPLANATIONS OF VOTING BEHAVIOR IN AFRICA

Clientelism/Vote buying

A prominent factor in rational accounts of voting behavior in Africa is clientelism or vote buying. Both terms are largely interchangeable and refer to a ballot cast on the basis of material rewards allocated by political actors, may it be a direct money transfer or some other material favor. Clientelism puts somewhat more emphasis on a stable personal relationship between a patron and a client, whereas vote buying just points to the actual act of a vote in exchange for a material reward. The decisive commonality is that the vote is essentially a result of a materially-grounded face-to-face relationship between a voter and a political actor. The evaluation of any governance action is, in turn, omitted from decision making.

A theoretical problem of vote buying is secret balloting. How can political actors ensure that voters comply and cast the right ballot after receiving a benefit? Stokes (2005) argues that regimes use considerable monitoring capacities over social networks to ensure compliance. The argument is indeed a solution to the commitment problem but one that demands relatively much from political actors in terms of organizational strength. Others suppose that actual monitoring is not necessary for effective vote buying. Nichter (2008) argued that parties can simply mobilize passive constituencies through the provision of material donations and thereby shape the election outcome in their favor.

Looking at Africa, several works have investigated related practices for different societies. Most confirmatory with regard to vote buying is a survey-based study on the effects of material benefits by political parties in Kenya by Kramon (2012). In accordance with Nichter's (2008) turnout argument he notes that "Kenyans who have been approached by a vote buyer are up to 14 percent more likely to vote" (Kramon 2012: 118). Yet, for other African countries there are contrary results. Conroy-Krutz and Logan (2012) look at the Ugandan election of 2011 and reject the common narrative that President Museveni secured his prime position in the Ugandan electoral autocracy through the distribution of material rewards. Similarly, Bratton (2012), in a study on electoral competition in Nigeria, downplays the influence of vote buying. Though calling vote buying an "epiphenomenal dimension" of electoral campaigns, he stresses that Nigerians are not inclined to comply because they generally condemn campaign manipulations. Instead of influencing the election, the generosity of Nigerian politicians seems to solely strengthen partisanship.

The reinforcement of partisan ties through material donations is a very interesting observation and points to an entirely different story of vote buying in Africa. A remarkable article in this regard comes from Lindberg (2003). Building on interviews with Members of Parliament in Ghana he investigates the dynamics behind clientelism in Africa. His research illustrates that African politicians face high pressures to attend to material demands from their constituents. Voters perceive the granting of personal favors as a primary function of politicians and a logical consequence of their vote. Lindberg (2003) also reports that the pressures are very high in safe haven constituencies where the most enthusiastic partisans express the highest demands. This suggests that material donations from the politician are not directly buying votes; they rather maintain a social network between a Patron and his partisan client.

Overall, it is thus questionable whether vote buying in Africa directly impacts on election outcomes. In most countries under investigation voters seem quite resistant to such campaign manipulations. The findings from Bratton and Lindberg suggest that another dynamic may be at work in which the material relations between voters and politicians, instead of directly shaping election outcomes, rather interact with the strong regional party alignments discussed above and establish social structures of partisanship that lead to long-term support for a certain party.

Economic Voting

Another potential explanation for electoral behavior in Africa is economic voting. The concept of economic voting portrays elections as referendums on the economy, in which voters punish or reward the government for its economic performance. Underlying this is the assumption that rational voters weigh the economy strongest in their voting decision because they expect high returns from a prospering societal economy (Lewis-Beck 1988; Duch/Stevenson 2008). To some extent economic voters thus resemble clientelistic voters. Both focus on material payoffs. The difference is that economic voters focus on returns that arise from economic governance whereas the clientelistic vote is completely detached of governance activities.

Interestingly, the idea receives surprisingly little attention from academics studying African voting behavior. Although countless qualitative works on African elections explicitly mention economic factors while explaining election outcomes[2], only a few studies try to empirically verify the claim. Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier (2008), in an extensive literature review on economic voting in transitional democracies, find only two studies of African countries and as of the date of this thesis there are apparently no further publications—at least none that would trace the economy-election nexus in a specific African country.

The low level of research activity is even more surprising in light of the encouraging results presented in the two studies available. One comes from Youde (2005), who investigates economic voting in Ghana. His study seeks to explain why the incumbent party lost the election in the year 2000 leading in effect to the first democratic turnover of Ghana's history. The author suggests that it was a poor economic performance that brought down the long-time ruling party, and tests his claim with the help of a representative survey. Specifically, he looks at the relationship between economic perceptions and government approval and his statistical models show that the popularity of the government in Ghana indeed partly hinges on perceived economic conditions. This may be deemed "a strong suggestion of economic voting in Ghana" (Youde 2005: 13). However, the study also suffers from serious limitations related to the dataset. The author himself discusses the temporal limitations: The survey was conducted 18 months

[2] e.g. Bratton 1994; Throup/Hornsby 1998; Bawumia 1998; Walraven 2002; Whitfield 2009; Gyimah-Boadi 2001, 2009

ahead of the election. An even more critical problem is the lack of an item on vote choice in the questionnaire. The study can only look at approval ratings and given the previously discussed ethnic/regional/clientelistic images of the African voter alignments, we cannot take it for granted that the approval rating and vote choice are connected. Youde's (2005) study is thus encouraging but by no means conclusive.

The other single-country study focuses on Zambia and presents some stronger pieces of evidence for economic voting. Posner and Simon (2002) are concerned with the question of to what extent the poor development of the Zambian economy in the early 1990s weakened electoral support for the incumbent president in the 1996 election. They start by testing the influence in a post-election survey and report quite compelling results that indicate that dissatisfaction with the economy kept people from casting a vote for the incumbent. The results are presented as predicted probabilities from a logit regression which raises some minor doubts because the effects are quite small and confidence intervals are not shown. But seemingly the authors found a highly significant relationship between economic satisfaction and vote choice in their individual-level data. In addition, they present a unique analysis of district-level aggregate data and regress the change in the president's vote share on changes in poverty levels across Zambia's 39 districts. The results show that increasing poverty leads to fewer votes for the president—at least in absolute numbers. The poverty variable becomes significant only if it is used to explain the vote share among all theoretically eligible voters. For changes in official vote shares the independent variables fail the significance tests. The finding suggests that Zambian voters withdraw from elections rather than vote for the opposition in the event of rising poverty, which seems pretty plausible given the low competitiveness of Zambian politics in 1996. Overall, Posner and Simon's (2002: 313) study provides a remarkable insight into economic voting in Africa and their conclusion that "African electorates are at least modestly responsive to economic trends" seems absolutely warranted in the light of their analysis.

The two single-country studies clearly hint at a potential influence of economic voting in Africa. However, they failed to fuel interest in economic voting among scholars of African politics and, despite a constantly improving availability of African survey data, remain the only points of reference for academics interested in empirical implications of the economy on concrete election outcomes on the continent.

Cross-country studies on economic voting have also largely excluded African data from their analysis and for a long time it was hard to find any African country in a paper on economic voting. The only early exception seems to be Wilkin et al. (1997) whose study encompassing 38 countries includes the Zambia. However, the article focuses on the overall picture and the Zambia receives no attention in the analysis. The country made it presumably in the Analysis because the authors needed a case with Z for an A to Z plum in the title.

It was only recently that the debate finally saw some movement, again, with encouraging results. Bratton et al (2012) put the topic of economic voting in sub-Saharan Africa back on the agenda. Their analysis of voting intentions in Africa is based on a pooled dataset of surveys from 16 African countries. The aim is to discriminate among ethnic, economic and partisan motives, and the authors apply logit regression to test the different theories. The dependent variable is vote choice, while perceived economic conditions, macroeconomic indicators and economic policy performance represent economic motives in the equation. The final results of the study render all three motives important. Not only ethnic and partisan identities but also economic variables show a significant effect on the dependent variables. The strongest finding with regard to the economy is that public perceptions of the economic policy performance show a strong influence on vote choice. To some extent, however, the role of economic motives remains ambiguous. Whereas prospective perceptions show a strong effect, retrospective ones fail the significance tests and partially point in the wrong direction. The macroeconomic indicators are also uniformly insignificant. The general conclusion that "Africans resemble the sociotropic voter so common in other parts of the world" and "think like future-oriented 'bankers'" (Bratton et al. 2012: 47) thus seems a tad premature. The work nevertheless represents a formidable comeback of the economic vote in African electoral studies.

More recently, another cross-country study by Gelineau (2013) managed to incorporate several African states. The study aims at testing the economic vote in developing countries and therefore compiles an impressive 290 surveys from all around the world involving 20 African countries. He uses a classical operationalization with economic perceptions as independent variables, while presidential approval and vote choice serve as dependent variables. Additionally, he adds some controls, including partisanship and membership in the majoritarian ethnic group. He then calculates logit models for each country and estimates the effect of economic perceptions on vote choice. With regard to Africa, he reports moderate effects for the majority of countries, attributing a loss between one and five percent in incumbent vote intentions to negative economic perceptions and accordingly finds a clear impact of economic voting in Africa. However, his extra-broad approach inevitably leads to a certain degree of imprecision in the operationalization. Many country-specific variables that may influence both vote choice and economic perceptions are omitted. The simple focus on the major ethnic group, for instance, means a disregard of minority ethnic group and regional affiliations. The most critical aspect is that Gelineau (2013) chooses a 'convenient' approach in the final choice of his independent variable. He tests prospective and retrospective economic perceptions for every survey and keeps only the more influential of both for the final model, justifying it by the fact that otherwise he would not have been able to reject the null-hypothesis for more than half of the models. The decision is understandable but leaves us with a lot of questions on the robustness of the findings and the concrete rationale behind the economic vote in Africa. Overall, the study can thus be characterized as another good suggestion of economic voting in Africa—no more, no less.

Considered altogether, the findings from the different studies clearly hint at an influence of economic voting in Africa but are at the same time inconclusive. There are too few observations that really trace back the economy to election outcomes. In fact, only Posner and Simon's (2002) study really links actual election outcomes and survey data. The remainder build on survey data that were gathered at a considerable temporal distance from election dates. The cross-country studies suffer, furthermore, from a general, and maybe for some contexts incomplete, operationalization. Nevertheless, the economic vote exhibits a huge potential in explaining election outcomes in sub-Saharan Africa.

1.3 WHAT WE KNOW AND WHY WE SHOULD FOCUS ON THE ECONOMY

So, how can we sum up the African voter? He is surely to some extent influenced by ethnicity. The related research was able to reveal different patterns of ethnic block voting across the continent. We can say with some certainty that ethnic identities matter and are a catalyst of vote choice in Africa. But we need to be cautious. Closer scrutiny of ethnic voting patterns has also revealed that they often follow regional rather than ethnic demarcations. In other words, it is not necessarily the ethnicity factor that brings about the regional pockets of excessive block voting so frequently observed in Africa. The issue remains important in research but it seems also sensible to shift the focus a little bit away from thinking in terms of ethnicity. The related voting patterns usually affect just a few areas of a country and can only explain a certain portion of the variance we find in election results. We definitely need additional knowledge to trace the story of an African election.

The rural-urban divide appears not to be a key in completing our image of the African voter. Although the sometimes grave disparities in living conditions between rural and urban Africans produce some significance in statistical models, the relationship is not especially stable. The findings are quite mixed. Sometimes rural dwelling indicators indeed show a strong influence, but in a considerable number of studies they are also completely negligible. For the case of Ghana it is moreover evident that the effect changed and vanished over time. Overall, there are apparently no systematic and predictable differences between rural and urban voting behavior, which renders the topic pretty unpromising for a deepening of theoretical knowledge on African voting behavior.

The vote buying topic is quite interesting. Personal material donations from politicians to voters seem to be a frequent phenomenon in Africa. The bought election hypothesis is, however, rejected for most cases under scrutiny. The African voter seems, overall, not especially inclined to comply with expectations bound to pre-electoral donations. Some readings point to complex patron-client relationships deeply embedded into social life and thereby suggest that the material relations do not reflect a simple pay-for-ballot exchange but rather represent a part of social life. This implies that the practice does not directly impact voting decisions and links it instead more to partisanship. In sum, the material exchanges between politicians and citizens are thus also not the decisive cornerstone to explain African election results.

At this point it is noteworthy that the three topics of ethnicity, rural-urban divides and clientelism, although representing the most common images of the African voter, project only a quite inconclusive picture. Ethnicity has only a spatially limited explanatory power. The other two show no consistent pattern of influence on the concrete act of balloting. In light of the restrictions, academics increasingly question the traditional concepts. Influential scholars call for a shift of the focus away from ‘non-evaluative voting rationales’ that leave out governance performance towards ‘evaluative voting rationales’ and emphasize that African voters are motivated by public goods (Lindberg/Morrison 2008; Weghorst/Lindberg 2013). Yet, so far there are few general concepts to analytically capture and predict ‘evaluative’ voting in Africa. A promising approach in this regard is the economic vote.

Research on economic voting in Africa has presented some results suggesting that it could be the decisive link to finally understand the African electorate. Virtually every study finds an effect of the economy on vote choice or related variables. Whereas the previously discussed themes fail to provide an explanation for variances in African election outcomes, the economic voting hypothesis does. It is generally applicable to the entire electorate and may drive voters regardless of ethnic identities or the existence of material exchange relations between politicians. However, any conclusion or generalization would be premature because the empirical and theoretical knowledge we have at the moment is simply too thin.

A first major shortcoming regards the quantity of empirical knowledge. We only have two observations in terms of detailed country-studies. One of them (Youde 2005) comes completely without temporal variation and analytical reference to vote choice. The other one (Posner/Simon 2002) has substantively broader data but leaves doubts regarding the robustness of its results and is also confined to a single election. The two cross-country studies that investigate African countries are both quite impressive but cannot link their survey evidence to concrete elections. One of them (Gelinieu 2010) is furthermore so broadly designed that tradeoffs with regard to a precise operationalization are inevitable—inferences with regard to the African voter are very critical on such a basis.

A second shortcoming is a lack of theoretical knowledge. Existing studies are primarily concerned with the empirical establishment of the relationship between economics and elections. Theoretical considerations are, in turn, largely left out. This constitutes a problem because knowing how the economy exactly informs the voting decision is crucial to get a sense of the scope of a theory. A special strength of the huge body of research on economic voting in Western countries is that it has yielded some concrete ideas specifying how the mechanism actually works. In consequence it is able to explain under which conditions voters vote economically and which factors may suppress the practice. With regard to Africa we lack such knowledge even though the special characteristics arising from the exceptional institutional history and the low-income status suggest that it may depart from what we know about Western countries.

In light of these shortcomings additional research on economic voting in Africa is urgently needed. Considering the potential of the economic vote and the comparatively low explanatory power of other approaches, it is, likewise, the prime issue to focus on for a more comprehensive understanding of the African voter. This work intends to be a first step in this endeavor by providing a theoretically-guided in-depth case study of economic voting in an African democracy.

2 CONCEPTUALIZING ECONOMIC VOTING IN AFRICA

The previous chapter has discussed different explanations for voting in sub-Saharan Africa and concluded that the idea of rational economic voting is the most promising concept to better understand the outcomes of elections on the continent. This chapter sets out to theoretically underpin this assessment by explaining in detail how the economy unfolds its influence on the voting decision of an individual. I build on the theoretical ideas from the classical economic voting literature and expand the argument to the special context of sub-Saharan Africa.

My point of departure in this chapter is the most general assumption behind economic voting, which I introduce in the first section. The basic idea underpinning all related concepts is that voters act rationally, meaning that they rationally assess the utility of every available option and vote for the party with the highest personal utility. Utility may bear a very different meaning to different people. Yet, in a decision pertaining to political leadership, it is a reasonable expectation that utility for most individuals centers on the economic development of the respective polity. This is the characterizing idea of the economic voting debate: Voters care first about the economy and consequently vote for candidates they regard good for the economy. The idea is straightforward and a common wisdom far beyond scientific research.

However, establishing the causal link between the economy and the vote requires a clear explanation of how voters evaluate the economy and how they translate this evaluation into preferences for particular candidates or parties. The second section of the chapter discusses three theoretical debates revolving around the mechanism behind the economic vote. The debates deal with the questions of sanctioning vs. selection, egotropic vs. sociotropic voting, and the clarity of responsibility. Together, they span a broad conception of economic voting involving different paths towards an economic vote. And—especially important for the application in Africa—they render information as the decisive aspect to delimit the different approaches.

The broad conception serves as a basis to deduce a plausible theoretical model of economic voting consistent with the sub-Saharan African environment. The most important contextual characteristic in this regard is a relatively weak supply of information in Africa. School and media systems are not well established and have limited capacities. This factor has certain implications for the theory of economic voting.

In light of the informational conditions, I suggest a retrospective sanctioning mechanism with an egotropic (i.e. personal and not national conditions oriented) emphasis that is largely unaffected by the clarity of responsibility. Sanctioning is preferable in the context because it is the best way for lowly informed voters to ensure economic progress. For an egotropic emphasis speaks a low awareness of the macro-economy in conjunction with a low sense of national unity. The alleged marginal role of the contextual factors obscuring the clarity of responsibility is justified by a low awareness of the aspects usually assumed to impede clarity.

2.1 The General Assumptions: Rationality and the Weight of the Economy

The most important concept underlying the idea of economic voting is the rational voter. Rational voting contrasts with structural approaches that see the voting decision as a consequence of social relations. Famous examples in this respect are Lipset and Rokkan (1967) who argued that party alignments are tied to social milieus and Campbell et al. (1960) whose influential socio-psychological model emphasizes lifelong-developed party identification. The rational voter, on the contrary, is not constrained by social influences and independently chooses the most preferred among available alternatives.

Rationality can be defined as the reasonable pursuit of conscious goals (cf. Downs 1957: 4). Rational individuals are aware of what they want and choose actions they think can facilitate these ends. In a decision situation a rational individual, according to the model, considers all its interests in a utility function to calculate and choose the one with the highest overall utility among available alternatives.

The foundation for the application of rational choice in political science was laid by Anthony Downs (1957). His ‘economic theory of democracy’ for the first time comprehensively builds on rational economic interest to explain the dynamics between citizens, political actors and institutions within democratic settings. With regard to voting, that means that a voter “casts his vote for the party he believes will provide him with more benefits than any other” (Downs 1957: 36).

But what does benefit mean here? To understand the concrete rationale, it firstly needs to be noted that elections are about choosing a government. Voters pick a party in order to bring it into power so that it can implement expected policies. The maximization of utility in the voting decision is consequently an assessment of benefits expected from future governance activities across parties. And a rational voter should always choose the party whose potential rule offers the highest personal utility income.

For a two-party system, this leads to a straightforward voting rationale as Downs (1957: 39) illustratively shows by the following subtraction:

$$E(U^{A}_{t+1}) - E(U^{B}_{t+1})$$

E is the expected Value. U is the utility income as projected by the voter. A and B are the two parties. t is the election period, and +1 indicates the upcoming period. The result of the subtraction is the 'expected party differential'. If we now assume that A is the incumbent and B is the opposition party, in election period t a rational voter will vote for the incumbent if the party differential is positive and for the opposition if it is negative. The formula becomes more complex for multiparty systems with less predictable coalition governments (cf. Downs 1957: 40f). But the two-party setting is a good model to exemplify the general concept of rational voting as a product of utility calculation.

The most crucial question for the application of rational choice regards the actual makeup of the 'U'. Which variables or issues enter a voter's utility calculation? Given the broad variety of governance activity and the distinct salience of issues across individuals, it is very difficult to give a theoretical answer to this question. Downs (1957), in his theory, overcomes this problem by assuming that political space is generally unidimensional and that all issues can be located on a left-right scale. Highest utility would then equal a party's closeness to a voter's ideal point on this left-right scale. However, the existence of one single policy-dimension is at least questionable (cf. Kriesi et al. 2006) and the assumption that the voting decision is simply about closeness is challenged by the directional character of most policies (Rabinowitz/MacDonald 1989). However, maybe utility is not as complex as Downs (1957) suggests.

Economic voting offers a contrasting and simplified theoretical answer to the question of how rational voters determine utility. The basic assumption is that the economic fate of a country is of such outstanding matter to the electorate that it generally outweighs other factors in the utility calculation. Utility would then largely be a deduction of the expected economic performance from a future government. The various remainders of government activities are in turn downplayed. The hypothesis reflects a common wisdom and is not only theoretically compelling but also readily empirically testable.

Among the pioneers to explicitly promote such an idea of economic voting was Kramer (1971). To theoretically justify the high weight of the economy in the utility function of voters, he pointed to the costs associated with the acquisition of information and argued that it is not necessarily practical or efficient for a rational voter to compare positions on 'subtle technical issues' across political platforms. Instead, Kramer (1971) suggested that voters look at the past (economic) performance of the incumbent party and base their voting decision on this 'readily available information'. Kramer (1971) tested his hypothesis on U.S. House of Representative elections and found the electoral fate of candidates from the incumbent party to be indeed substantially responsive to changes in economic conditions.

Kramer's (1971) work was the most explicit early statement of the hypothesis, and in conjunction with other concurrent publications containing similar ideas (Key 1964; Goodhart and Bhansali 1970) it had an enormous impact on the field of electoral studies. The subsequent years saw a surge of academic work promoting and testing the nexus between the economy and the vote (e.g. Stigler 1973; Tufte 1975, 1978; Fair 1978; Fiorina 1978; Lewis-Beck 1988; Powell and Whitten 1993).

Today, a general influence of economic conditions on election outcomes seems hardly deniable—at least from an empirical point of view. Two approaches testing the hypothesis can be distinguished. On the one hand, there are macro level studies. Following Kramer (1971), many authors related macroeconomic indicators to election outcomes in various western countries. The results are compelling—hardly any western society refuses to exhibit a certain degree of electoral responsiveness to the state of the economy (Nannestad/Paldam 1994; Lewis-Beck/Stegmaier 2000). A second type of study, fueled by the increasing availability of survey data, goes beyond the aggregates and asks whether vote intentions of individuals are actually contingent on economic perceptions. The findings largely confirm the macro-level analyses. As comparative cross-national studies suggest, individuals are indeed inclined to condition their support for incumbent parties on economic factors (van der Brug et al. 2007; Duch/Stevenson 2008; Nadeau et al. 2012).

The theoretical deduction of the economic vote is, however, a more difficult undertaking. The on first sight straightforward hypothesis—voters generally weigh economic issues more heavily than any others and hence vote economically—leaves many questions open regarding the actual mechanism of realization. How do citizens actually sense or observe the economy? And how do they relate this information to party politics and ultimately to their vote? In order to explain the realization of the economic vote, it is necessary to answer these questions.

2.2 The mechanism: Somewhat different Stories

The literature holds, unfortunately, no finite answers on how the economic vote unfolds at the individual level. Instead, there are quite different theoretical stories that lead to multiple coexisting conceptions of the process behind economic voting. However, these somewhat different stories do not stand in an empty space but are embedded in some lively academic debates. In order to capture and to structure the different concepts of economic voting, it is useful to stick to these debates. Below, I discuss three especially important controversies that deal with decisive questions regarding the concrete realization of economic voting. Together, they properly illustrate the different approaches and make it possible to derive theoretically driven expectations about the functioning of the economic vote in a given context.

Sanctioning vs. Selection

The first debate revolves around the question of how voters determine which party's policy offers promise the best economic prospects. Do they simply react to recent economic trends and punish leaders for poor economic performance, or do they systematically compare party manifestos and candidate competences to deliberately select the party with the most promising economic prospects? Downs' (1957) theoretical idea of a future oriented utility calculating voter seems to imply the latter. The prevailing theme in the literature is, however, a simple retrospective sanctioning mechanism.

Retrospective sanctioning focuses on recent economic performance as the key factor in a voter's utility function and expects that voters reelect incumbents if they are satisfied with the economic performance and try out opposition parties if they are not. Advocates assume that economic voting is about cutting decision-making costs and point to an overall low political sophistication of citizens. It is argued that a systematic comparison of complicated policy proposals is not realistic in this light and that voters thus rely exclusively on current economic trends to assess the economic benefits from different parties (Kramer 1971, Fiorina 1981).

Such a behavior seems to some extent in conflict with the idea of a future-oriented rational individual. However, some authors have shown that it can be thoroughly forward-looking. By punishing bad economic governance, voters signal that they are not tolerating a poor economy and, in turn, provide an incentive for politicians to target a positive economic development in the future (Barro 1973, Ferejohn 1986). Sanctioning models are furthermore very practical. They identify a single variable to enter into the utility calculation of voters and hence allow straightforward modeling. However, some authors doubt that the sole focus on recent economic performance adequately reflects a voter's calculation and address such concerns through the more complex selection models.

Selection models are characterized by a focus on the competence of candidates. Whereas *sanctioning* voters only look at and immediately react to economic conditions, *selecting* individuals assess the competency of candidates. Competence refers to the "administrative ability" of leaders to provide government service and to make the most of a country's resources (cf. Rogoff/Sibert 1988: 2). Conceiving of voting in terms of a competence assessment has implications for economic voting. The economic performance of the incumbent remains a dominant factor. Yet, voters in selection models do not simply react to macroeconomic changes. Rather more they interrogate economic conditions to extract a 'competency signal' that indicates the administrative skills of policy makers (Duch/Stevenson 2010).

The most striking advantage of selection models is that they can deal better with conceivable contextual factors that may shift the blame from incumbents. If the calculation is about competence, voters will weigh economic trends in their utility function dependent on the degree of responsibility they attribute to incumbents. With lower responsibility, the weight of economic development in the calculation decreases. A selection model can thereby explain why, in some cases, voters refuse to react to clear economic developments. Sanctioning models, on the contrary, generally assume a static punishment response to poor economic development and explain variance only by misperceptions or ambiguities with regard to the economic situation (Kramer 1983).

The only concern about selection models is that they demand relatively much from the average citizen. They imply that individuals actively assess how competent the country was managed by comparing potentials and actual economic outcomes.

Egotropic vs. Sociotropic Voting

A second important controversy regards the question of how egocentric the voters are in their assessment of the economy. Is their verdict based on their own economic situation, or do they rather more consider the development of the country as a whole? Straight rational choice theory would actually suggest that voters prioritize personal benefits, or technically spoken, vote egotropically. Macroeconomic developments are seldom immediately felt, and their assessment causes information costs. A reaction to personal changes or, respectively, a selection with emphasis on personally relevant campaign promises seems more obvious.

However, the paramount theme in the literature is a sociotropic view of economic voting. Most readings understand balloting as a mechanism to hold governments responsible for societal development and assume that voters understand the common good-oriented nature of political responsibility. The widespread reliance on macro-economic indicators as independent variables in the numerous aggregate-level studies is a clear pointer to this view. Citizens are expected to evaluate politicians according to their success in managing the overall economy. Personal well-being is, in contrast, seen as a matter of personal and not political responsibility (Feldman 1982).

Concrete empirical investigations on the issue back the claim. Kinder and Kiewet (1981) for instance conceptualize and test both approaches for the U.S. electorate and conclude that "American voters resemble the sociotropic ideal." Furthermore, Lewis-Beck and Paldam's (2000) aforementioned literature review finds a clear overweight of sociotropic vs. egotropic voting. Some authors have also investigated to what extent economic perceptions actually match the state of the macro-economy and shown that voters' perceptions accurately represent objective economic developments (Duch/Stevensen 2008; Lewis-Beck et al. 2013).

However, egotropic motives should not be disregarded, not only because some empirical studies indeed observe a considerable influence of egotropic voting, but also for theoretical reasons because sociotropic voting demands relatively much from the individual; it requires at least some valid information on and a basic understanding of the economy. Egotropic voting, in contrast, dramatically reduces information costs because the necessary information is directly felt in individuals' daily lives. As Kinder and Kiewet (1981: 130) note: "Knowing who the incumbents are, where the polling place is located, and a few other details are all that is needed." With a decreasing availability of information, the likelihood of a more egotropic economic vote thus increases, and it can become relevant.

Context and clarity of responsibility

A final crucial debate regards the influence of contextual factors and especially points to factors that affect the ‘clarity of responsibility’. The idea of economic voting implicitly assumes that voters link economic developments and leadership, and early works on the matter did not waste many words on questioning this seemingly obvious relationship. However, the expansion of empirical research to multiple societies, in conjunction with the discovery of empirical inconsistencies in the economic vote, raised the awareness that the attribution of responsibility to the incumbent is not self-evident and may vary across political systems.

The question is whether citizens actually hold the government responsible for economic developments. The straightforward assumption—the incumbent is rated according to economic performance—is challenged by structural features of polities that make it difficult to determine incumbency. Many democratic systems in the real world include checks and balances that may lead to configurations in which two or more political groups have concurrent substantive influence on the course of the nation.

The first systematic operationalization of such factors came from Powell and Whitten (1993), who included in their cross-national analysis of economic voting several institutional features that may obscure the responsibility of governments. The list encompasses a second legislative chamber governed by the opposition, coalition and minority governments, as well as legislative committee systems that facilitate opposition participation in policy making. Powell and Whitten (1993), moreover, emphasized party cohesion, arguing that in the case of more internally divided parties, voters are less likely to hold the entire group responsible.

The results reported by Powell and Whitten (1993) confirm the role of context and indicate that the clarity of responsibility is crucial for the strength and the stability of the economic vote in a given polity. The analysis was furthermore replicated and refined by several other scholars with findings pointing in the same direction (Whitten/Palmer 1999, Anderson 2000, Duch/Stevenson 2008). Duch and Stevenson (2008) furthermore add exogenous economic shocks to the list of potential contextual factors. An economic downturn rooted in an external crisis may harm the economy without impairing the competence of leaders in the eyes of the electorate.

Recently, another study (Parker-Stephen 2013) suggested that the clarity of responsibility may also work in the other direction because greater clarity can strengthen partisan bias in economic evaluations and thereby undermine the nexus between economic evaluations and voting.

However, the majority of studies finds clarity of responsibility positively associated with economic voting, and it can be concluded that the contextual clarity of responsibility matters and needs to be considered in studies on economic voting.

The three debates sketched above reveal a certain degree of ambiguity in the conceptualization of the economic vote. The literature has accumulated a bunch of different stories of how the nexus between the economy and election outcomes actually unfolds at the individual level, and in fact, there are multiple conceivable combinations of the three variables (although some characteristics—i.e. selective and sociotropic voting—go together more plausibly than others)

However, the point about the manifold conception of the economic vote is that the different concepts are by no means mutually exclusive and can obviously coexist in one society. The concrete realization of the economic vote depends first and foremost on individual characteristics. Information is especially of outstanding significance. Table I exemplifies two prototype conceptualizations characterized by low and high information levels. On the one hand, we can think of a very well informed individual with a high economic understanding and a high awareness for the distribution of responsibility. Such a person is likely to emphasize competence and to really understand the common-good character of political responsibility as well as the scope of influence of the government. The economic vote should thus be selective, sociotropic and aware of context, meaning only punish the government if responsibility is clear. Likewise, the opposing case is conceivable in the same society: An individual that has no idea of economics and politics, but equally engages in economic voting by punishing the most visible incumbent—regardless of his actual responsibility for a deterioration of personal, directly felt economic circumstances. In reality, though, many individuals may lie in between.

Table 2.1: Two prototype conceptions of the economic voter

Concept of the economic voter	Level of information	Mechanism	Orientation	Effect of 'clarity of responsibility'
Simple	Low	Sanctioning	Egotropic	Low
Advanced	High	Selection	Sociotropic	High

The quest in a concrete inquiry of economic voting is thus not to single out a certain conceptualization and define it as the only game in town. Instead, it is necessary to consider the different patterns in the analysis to determine which one is the most dominant theme. Furthermore, the different conceptualizations allow us to develop concrete expectations of the functioning of the economic vote in a given context based on our knowledge about this context. This is what shall be done with regard to sub-Saharan Africa in the following section of this chapter.

2.3 WHAT TO EXPECT IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Only a few publications on economic voting explicitly deal with or, in the case of comparative studies, include African countries. The long history of authoritative rule, in conjunction with dominant notions of ethnic and clientelistic voting behavior, lets the continent appear as a negligible object for economic voting research. However, I argue that this is too narrowly considered. In fact, sub-Saharan Africa provides an environment that is likely to produce economic voting. The general assumption of an overweight of the economy in a rational voter's utility function fares very well in the African low-income context. With regard to the mechanism, it is important to account for the comparatively weak informational structures on the continent. Against this background, we can make conceptual choices and narrow down the broad conception of economic voting introduced in the previous chapter. Below, I initially discuss the suitability of economic voting within the African context and then turn to the conceptual specification.

Why economic voting is likely to occur in the African context

The basic assumption of economic voting—individuals act rationally—is naturally without contextual reference. However, a necessary condition to expect Downs' (1957) version of rationality in the act of voting is a high quality of democratic elections. The long record of authoritative rule and deficient democracy in Africa thus calls the applicability of the economic vote into question. Yet, recent research shows a different trend. The region experienced a surge of democratic institutions over the last two decades, and a vast majority of countries now conducts regular multi-party elections with constantly rising democratic quality (Lindberg 2006, 2009). And even though democracy in Africa remains prone to breakdown, it is undeniable that a considerable number of African countries now provide decent levels of electoral accountability (Bogaards 2013; Lindberg 2013). With regard to the objective level of democracy, there is hence no reason to doubt the existence of economic voting.

Somewhat more difficult is the question whether individuals subjectively trust in democratic institutions. This is an important aspect for rational voting models in new democracies because people may have experienced self-interested governance in the past, and trust cannot be taken for granted. As Duch (2001) asserts, citizens who distrust institutions are likely to expect 'rent seeking and shirking' from both opposition and government groups. And in the light of such expectations they have no reason to believe their vote can foster economic success. The rationality of economic voting, thereby, becomes obsolete. Trust might be a big issue in Africa given the perceived corruption levels reported by all common corruption indices. For the purpose of this theoretical chapter it makes, however, sense to assume that the necessary level of trust is given. Since several states in Africa have increasingly proved their ability to provide electoral accountability it seems likely that also institutional trust is growing. The aspect of subjective supply of democracy is thus important but does not rule out the existence of rational voting

When the democratic requirements are met, there are good reasons to believe that especially economic voting, as a special form of rational voting behavior, plays a crucial role. The second basic assumption behind economic voting—the economy outweighs other motives in a voter's utility function—fits quite well into the African context and seems even more credible than in Western countries.

This is, first of all, due to the fact that most countries south of the Sahara are characterized by a low per capita income. The World Bank counts 27 low-income, 14 lower-middle-income and only 7 middle-income countries[3]. Under low-income conditions, economic considerations are almost inherently more salient. One reason is that changes are more immediately felt and affect more essential human needs. A rising inflation, for instance, leads inevitably to declining food security because expenditures for food make up such a high share of overall spending among the poor that rising prices can hardly be compensated. Likewise, a weak development of GDP can quickly jeopardize basic governmental services, leading for instance to the suspension of school teacher payment (Lambert 2004). A further argument supporting the belief that the salience of the economy is especially high under low-income conditions is the existence of systematic differences in value systems between low- and high-income societies. The comparative research on values is surely controversial, but a clear finding is that in low-income societies the emphasis on material needs is markedly strong. Political demands are dominated by the aspiration for material security, whereas non-material demands such as environmental protection play a

[3] Classification available at: http://data.worldbank.org/about/country-classifications/country-and-lending-groups

subordinated role (Inglehart/Welzel 2006). These findings comport perfectly with the claim of an overweight of economic considerations in the utility function of voters.

Another good point in favor of the economic weight argument can be made with regard to political competition. Political competition in Africa is less directional and polarized compared to Western democracies. For Western party systems, it is usually possible to find a certain degree of programmatic polarization. Parties have ideological traditions and systematically oppose on certain issues along these lines. Such a directional character of political competition means a challenge to the economic voting hypothesis because it highlights the potential relevance of issues beyond macro-economic questions. In Africa, by contrast, we find a constellation theoretically more conducive to the economic vote. Political competition has a much less directional structure. Most of the parties are rooted in independence movements, and from the very beginning they were intended to represent the country as a whole. They are less bound to certain social groups or ideologies and hence do not oppose each other along clear lines (see Hyden 2006: 25ff). Policy agendas are instead essentially shaped by the development ideal as it is proposed (some argue imposed (Escobar 1995)) by developmental organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Related issues, for instance education, health and business growth, are valence issues, i.e. issues where everybody agrees about the direction. Empirical research backs the claim by showing that the majority of parties offer quite similar left-wing policies in their manifestos (Elischer 2012). A uni-directional political competition in African countries perfectly comports with the assumption that the economy outweighs other factors in a voter's utility function. The political arena simply provides no other controversial issues for a rational voter to include in his utility calculation.

We can thus conclude that the African context is actually favorable to the economic voting hypothesis. Given the low-income status of most countries, in conjunction with the inherently less directional political competition, the economy appears as the logical prime issue for rational voters. A precondition is, however, a certain degree of objective democratic quality and subjective institutional trust that cannot be taken for granted in the mostly transitional regimes in Africa.

The Mechanism in Africa: Economic voting in the light of low information

The previous section of this chapter has introduced a broad conception of economic voting involving different stories of the concrete mechanism. The distinct conceptions are in many ways a consequence of different assumptions regarding the amount and the quality of information entering a voter's utility calculation. For Western democracies, the trend goes towards increasingly complex models with higher expectations regarding the informational sophistication of voters. However, compared to the most studied Western nations, the information structures south of the Sahara are quite weak. The lack of information affects all three conceptual debates discussed above and needs to be considered for the specification of the most suitable concept of economic voting.

The informational disparity between industrial Western democracies and the low-income countries in Africa is owed to two specific factors. The first one pertains to education. Education is important in shaping political and economic sophistication and is a crucial resource to evaluate concrete policies. School systems in Africa have, however, very limited capacities, leaving many people with few or no years of formal schooling (see World Bank 2013). In the case of Ghana—actually one of the more developed low-middle-income countries on the continent—this means concretely that about one quarter of citizens aged fifteen years and older never attended school (Ghana Statistical Service 2010), while only eleven percent in this group experienced secondary education. Such numbers mean a huge educational gap in comparison with Western countries, where almost everybody has primary and at least some secondary education. The second factor undermining the flow of political information is a relatively low circulation of mass media. The numbers from the 2008 Afrobarometer carried out in 20 countries[4] are indicative in this respect. Less than 40 percent in the sample reported to regularly (at least 'few times a week') watch news on TV. Regular newspaper consumption plays an even smaller role (about 20 percent). Internet usage was not queried in 2008, but the numbers from Ghana in 2012 indicate a marginal significance with 84 percent saying they never use the internet. The only common source of information is the radio with a rate of about 75 percent of regular listeners across countries. However, most radio stations are local community radios providing programming in indigenous languages, and in the light of the general low level of education it is doubtful whether these radio stations can provide people with comprehensive and independent information on political processes (cf. Ogola 2011).

[4] Afrobarometer Round 4 2008: Codebook and merged dataset available at: www.afrobarometer.org

The actual degree of information naturally varies within populations, but the crucial point is that the weak structures mean high costs for information. Lower education and exposure to mass media increase the costs to keep up-to-date with public affairs. The likelihood that citizens in Africa are well aware of public affairs is consequently low. Findings from Bratton et al. (2005: 203ff) on the awareness of economic policies confirm this assessment and show a relatively low rate of well-informed citizens. Their analysis of survey data from twelve African countries specifically indicates that three-quarters of African citizens are not aware of Structural Adjustment Programs—a strong hint that people are not familiar with concrete questions on economic policies[5].

Looking at information we thus find conditions quite different from the Western environment. This is theoretically meaningful with regard to the three conceptual debates introduced in the previous section. In the light of the insights on information, we can make conceptual choices here and identify the most appropriate concept.

The first debate was on selection vs. sanctioning. Here, the weak informational background strongly favors a sanctioning perspective. Selection models assume that voters maximize utility by choosing the most competent economic manager among available candidates. This involves a systematic comparison of the economic competence of candidates. Yet, given the low awareness of public affairs it does not seem plausible that many voters within the African context have the opportunity to make such an assessment. There is simply too little information on actions and standpoints by different candidates to juxtapose them and derive a competency signal. It is thus more likely that Africans operate as described by the proponents of sanctioning mechanism, i.e. they infer future expectations from current trends and hold leaders accountable for economic policies by punishing weak performance and rewarding a positive economic development.

With regard to the second controversy on sociotropic vs. egotropic voting, several reasons suggest a more egotropic approach for an analysis in sub-Saran Africa. A first reason is, again, the low availability of information. An assessment of the societal economic environment would require some valid knowledge on macro-economic indicators, such as GDP, inflation or unemployment, or at least an idea of the overall macro-economic situation. The low exposure to

[5] The Structural Adjustment Program was by that time the main development strategy proposed by International Organizations, and it guided discussions on domestic economic policies across the African continent (Mkandawire 1999).

mass media, however, entails that many people may not be aware of such trends. Moreover, the on-average few years of schooling indicate that numerous people might lack the understanding to make sense of macro-economic numbers. An egotropic model, on the other hand, is less demanding in terms of information. Voters here simply enter their personal economic experiences into the utility function. The usage of this readily available information requires neither data on concrete economic policy proposals nor technical knowledge on macro-economic processes and is thus more consistent with the reality of life in Africa. Furthermore, the common claim that Africans are deficient in national unity suggests a more egotropic shape of the economic vote on the continent. Several readings (e.g. Easterly/Levine 1997; Azam 2001) on different topics in social science suggest that due to the arbitrary boundaries drawn by alien colonial powers, national identities are not especially strong and compete with precolonial ethnic group identities. A lower salience of the national identity implies that people care less about the national economy and thus supports the egotropic model.

Finally, we have to assess the impact of the contextual clarity of responsibility. Recent research on Western democracies has suggested that a lower clarity decreases the likelihood of an economic vote, be it due to constitutional power balancing (Powell/Whitten 1993) or a result of exogenous shocks to the economy (Duch/Stevenson 2008). This should generally hold for African countries. However, it is likely that the effect is weaker here. Especially with regard to external factors that may shift away the blame from the incumbent: Recalling the fact that by the year 2000 about two-thirds of Africans were not aware of Structural Adjustment (Bratton et al. 2005), we can infer that most people are not familiar with global economic developments. Devoid of such knowledge, voters will punish or reward the government regardless of external factors beyond its control. Similarly, the responsibility obscuring role of constitutional power sharing may be weakened as a result of the low awareness of public affairs. If people cannot follow daily politics in the media, they cannot witness the political influence wielded by opposing groups that control power sources apart from the main source (usually head of state). As a result, the economic vote may be somewhat less sensitive to such constitutional balancing. Instead of distinguishing responsibility between different power holders, people may punish and reward the most visible incumbent regardless of potential balancing powers. Yet, we have to be careful with conclusive statements here. The arguments above only indicate that the influence of contextual clarity of responsibility may be lower. That does not mean it is muted—clarity of responsibility remains an important aspect.

The discussion of the three debates in light of the weak informational structures south of the Sahara leads to a clearer conceptual base for economic voting on the continent. For Africa, as for any other context, holds: Levels of information and the exact causal link of economic voting may vary across individuals. However, along the conceptual choices specified above, we can formulate a most-likely mechanism to guide our empirical analysis. Put briefly, we arrive at a retrospective sanctioning mechanism based on egotropic perceptions and largely unaffected by contextual variations in the clarity of responsibility. Table II sums up the argument. A low awareness of economic policies makes people likely to rely on recent trends and to sanction or reward the government accordingly. To determine economic trends, African voters seem more likely to look at (egotropic) personal conditions. The reason are high thresholds to take a macro-economic perspective and the commonly assumed low sense of national unity. Finally, the contextual factors can be expected to be less influential, since exogenous shocks and constitutional power balancing are less visible.

Table 3.2: Conceptual expectations regarding the mechanism of economic voting in Africa

	Mechanism	Orientation	Contextual variables
Expectation	Retrospective sanctioning	Egotropic > Sociotropic	Lower sensitivity
Justification	Low awareness of public affairs. Recent economic trends as shortcuts to infer economic performance	Low awareness of macroeconomic situation. Low sense of national unity	Exogenous shocks and constitutional power balancing less visible.

2.4 SUMMARY

This chapter has introduced the theoretical assumptions underlying the economic vote and developed a conceptual definition of economic voting consistent with the African environment. With regard to the basic assumptions—rational voting behavior and a supremacy of the economy over other issues in a voter's utility function—I have pointed out that the economic voting hypothesis lends itself very well to the structures found south of the Sahara. Factors related to the low income status of most countries, in conjunction with a tendency toward low polarization of political competition in Africa, are supportive to the argument.

Modeling and empirical testing of the economic vote requires, moreover, a conceptual definition of the exact mechanism at the individual level. The discussion of theoretical arguments in the literature has highlighted the existence of somewhat different stories on how economic voting actually works. The exact realization primarily depends on an individual's level of information. The different mechanisms discussed are thus likely to coexist in a given society. Yet, on the basis of a society's overall informational infrastructure, we can specify a most-likely mechanism to guide the empirical analysis.

The trend in the literature goes clearly towards more advanced concepts of economic voting involving higher requirements regarding the informational and political sophistication of individuals. However, a characterizing feature of sub-Saharan Africa are relatively weak media and school systems, leading to a low supply of information. Economic voting thus needs to take place without detailed knowledge on economic policy making. Thus, a retrospective sanctioning mechanism, as proposed by early readings, seems most likely. Retrospective sanctioning provides a way consistent with such constraints. People simply infer the economic prospects from recent trends and reward or punish the incumbent accordingly to ensure good economic policies. Furthermore, the weak informational infrastructure makes it difficult for voters to take a macro-economic perspective. We can thus expect to find egotropic voting to be stronger than sociotropic voting. Finally, it seems likely that African voters will punish and reward the government regardless of ambiguities regarding political responsibility. Such ambiguity is induced by constitutional power sharing and exogenous shocks to the economy. The informational hurdles indicate that people are less aware of both and hence the effect is weaker compared to other countries.

Based on these expectations the following chapter will develop a research design to empirically test the occurrence and influence of economic voting in Ghana. The theoretical discussion in this chapter will not only help to specify the concrete variables but also guide the interpretation of the findings and embed them into the broad canon of theory on economic voting.

However, even without empirical testing, a first finding from the theory chapter is that there is no reason to disregard the economic vote in research on voting behavior in Africa. The strong focus on ethnic and clientelistic voting in African electoral studies may be justified by the positive findings that the related literature has produced. Yet, these approaches cannot satisfactorily explain the shift of votes, let alone turnovers of government. The economic voting hypothesis appears as an important complement and may be a cornerstone to better understand the overall dynamics of voting in Africa.

3 TESTING THE ECONOMIC VOTE IN GHANA

The previous chapter has introduced the theoretical rationale leading scientists to believe that the economy may indeed guide the political behavior of voters. The present chapter outlines a research design to empirically test this claim for an African democracy.

The aim is to systematically track the influence of the economy in a case study of the West African state of Ghana. The twelve-year observation period encompasses three elections. As a case study the analysis is committed to an in-depth perspective and seeks to arrive at a comprehensive assessment regarding the extent of leverage imposed by the economy on election results in Ghana.

Therefore, I build on a twofold methodological approach. On the one hand, I compare macroeconomic indicators and election results to see whether the actual vote share of incumbents follows the economy as predicted by the economic voting hypothesis. Furthermore, I analyze individual level surveys to test whether vote intentions or government approval ratings depend on changes in economic conditions.

Taken together, both approaches provide a unique basis to draw valid conclusions about the impact of economic voting. We can link actual election outcomes to vote intentions measured by surveys and validate them against each other. A problem of studies in emerging democracies is the reliance on survey data gathered in a certain temporal distance to the election date. The findings of such research are to some extend inconclusive—It remains uncertain to what extent the statements in the surveys really represent the behavior at the actual voting day. By linking objective macro-data and survey research in a case study of an African democracy it is possible to overcome this problem. We can simply cross-validate our findings. The better the match, the greater our confidence in the hypothesis.

The first section of this chapter explains the selection of Ghana as a case to test the theory. In the second section, I introduce the data for the individual-level analysis and derive a statistical model to single out the influence of the economy, with due regard to competing explanations of voting behavior in Ghana. The third section presents the aggregate-level data and a strategy to qualitatively trace the economic voting hypothesis by this data.

3.1 A CASE STUDY OF GHANA

Using single-case studies to test a theory is a disputed tactic because the validation of a general theoretical claim on the basis of a single observation is inherently problematic (King et al. 1994: 208-13). However, in order to enhance the current scientific knowledge on economic voting in African democracies it appears to be an appropriate approach.

Two reasons speak for a single-case design. First of all, the case study can be embedded into a broader research program. The hypothesis of the economic vote has been extensively studied for Western countries. Some recent cross-national studies (Gelineau 2013; Bratton et al. 2012) have furthermore investigated the developing world, including Africa. The single-case study can thus be seen to belong to a group of observations against which it can be compared to assess the general validity of the purported link (cf. King et al. 1994: 20). Secondly, a single case study allows us to trace a social science relationship with particular detail.

One can argue that the latter is exactly what is needed in the research on economic voting in Africa. The findings from the cross-country survey studies surely hint at a significant impact of economic voting in the region. However, due to the multitude of cases, the findings cannot be tied back to concrete election outcomes. Moreover, they must rely on a general operationalization prone to overlook or inaccurately measure country-specific variables. The findings thus remain to a certain degree inconclusive and advocates of competing hypotheses may doubt that the economy finally manifests itself in concrete election outcomes.

A single-country study can clear up such doubts. It can carefully operationalize all relevant factors for voting behavior in a specific society. The focus on a single country offers, furthermore, the chance to go beyond the mere statistical analysis of survey data and take into account concrete election outcomes as well as objective macro-economic indicators to arrive at a comprehensive assessment of the influence of the economy on election outcomes. Finally, a case study has advantages in learning about the concrete mechanism. Empirically, there is not much known about the specific realization of the economic vote in Africa. The large cross-country studies have just too many observations involving a multitude of deviant settings to clearly observe a mechanism. A single-country study, contrastingly, can closely look at the unfolding of the economic vote and juxtapose competing explanations against the background of a single setting. In the light of the conceptual questions revolving around the economic vote, such insights are highly desirable because they allow validation of the theoretical expectations stated in the previous chapter towards a consistent theory of economic voting in sub-Saharan Africa.

A crucial question for a single-case design is case selection. Scholars of political methodology have suggested various strategies to pick a case, among them the theoretically-driven most-likely case selection (Lijphart 1971; Rohlfing 2012: 84ff). A most-likely case is a case with a relatively high probability of fulfilling the theoretical conjecture. Choosing such an environment is in line with the testing and refinement of theory as it is intended by this thesis. I seek to confirm the existence of economic voting in Africa against competing explanations and to improve our understanding of the mechanism. Such insights occur especially if we can indeed observe the economic vote. It is hence reasonable to choose a case likely to exhibit the practice.

Which characteristics qualify a most-likely case? I suggest that quality of democracy is the crucial dimension. In the previous chapter, I have only briefly discussed the role of democracy for economic voting. Democracy is not in itself part of the play; it is neither the independent nor the dependent variable. But it is still crucially important and can be seen as the stage for economic voting; the only condition that allows actors to behave as expected by the hypothesis. Nearly any conceivable improvement of democratic quality—may it be fairness in elections, competitiveness, or decreasing corruption—seems favorable to the economic vote. A choice along the lines of democratic quality is thus the best way to specify a most-likely case.

Particularly, two factors of democratic quality matter. The most important is surely democratic competitiveness. The more voters perceive elections as a choice between government and opposition, the more likely they are to vote economically. A second point is institutional trust. As Duch (2001) asserted, voters need some confidence in political institutions to believe that their vote may drive economic success. Based on these indicators, we can easily select a case.

Competitiveness can be straightforwardly measured by the number of government turnovers[6]. With regard to institutional trust, I follow Duch (2001) and use the CPI[7].

Table 3.1 lists the most eligible candidates south of the Sahara. The six countries in consideration represent the highest ranked African countries in the CPI and, not by chance, are except for Rwanda, all associated with liberal democracy in Africa. Botswana is by far the highest ranked African country in the corruption index. However, the fact that the ruling party has never changed disqualifies it for our investigation. For the same reason Rwanda, Namibia and South Africa can be ruled out. Solely Ghana and Senegal have experienced two turnovers each. Since Ghana ranks higher in the corruption index, it is the most-likely case and becomes the analytical unit for the analysis.

Table 3.1: Potential Cases

Country	CPI Rank	Turnovers since 1990
Botswana	30	0
Rwanda	52	0
Namibia	57	0
Ghana	63	2
South Africa	72	0
Senegal	77	2

Ghana, located on Africa's western coastline, presents an excellent case to investigate voting behavior. Demographically, the country, with its 25 million inhabitants involving huge Muslim and Christian populations as well as about 40 ethnic groups, can be seen as a typical case of an African country without extremes. Politically, Ghana is stable and highly competitive. Six elections have been carried out since the democratic transition in 1992. The first two elections were, however, not fully democratic (Lindberg 2006). Yet, the 2000 election was a game changer with regard to democratic quality and saw the opposition taking over leadership after a highly competitive electoral race. Ever since, electoral races have been highly competitive, including a second turnover in 2008.

Another positive aspect about the case of Ghana is that the country's electoral system corresponds well to the abstract assumptions of economic voting theory. Electoral institutions in Ghana are thoroughly majoritarian. In both parliamentary and presidential elections the first passes the post which implies that usually only two candidates have an actual chance of claiming

[6] Turnover refers to 'leadership turnover' (See Horowitz et al. 2009).
[7] CPI 2013: Corruption Perceptions Index: Available online at: http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2013/results/

office. The consequence is a stable *de facto* two-party system with two political camps competing for power—parliamentary contenders in by now 275 constituencies, presidential candidates in one single national constituency. Presidential candidates, furthermore, compete in a second-round run-off if no candidate achieves an absolute majority in the first round. Voters face a clear choice between government and opposition under such conditions, perfectly resembling the decision situation assumed by the basic economic voting literature.

The relevant parties in Ghana are the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP). All presidential candidates with any chance for power as well as the overwhelming majority of members of parliament since 1992 were affiliated with one of these groups. Stereotypically, the NDC is associated with the interests of poor and rural citizens and leftist policies, whereas the NPP is associated with the urban business elites and right-wing policies. However, an empirical analysis of manifestos from both camps by Elischer (2012) based on the MRG/CMP[8] coding scheme shows that this classification is by no means carved in stone. In fact, both parties are inclined to offer primarily leftist policies to mobilize the vast majority of rather poor people in Ghana. In this analysis, I will thus not accord much attention to the ideological background of the parties and, in line with the theory of economic voting, conceive of both groups primarily as incumbent and opposition. The importance of party alignments emphasized by many authors shall, however, be controlled for in the models by measures related to partisanship.

As operational period I specifically analyze the period between 2004 and 2012. During this time Ghana has conducted three elections and seen one turnover. We thus have a good deal of variance in election outcomes to determine the influence of the economy. An expansion of the observation period would be preferable. Yet, for analytical reasons that regard new demarcations after 2000 and democratic deficits in the 1992 and 1996 elections, I decided to confine the investigation to the eight years between 2004 and 2012.

Furthermore, the analysis centers on the presidential vote, leaving out parliamentary elections. This decision conforms to the constitutional division of power in Ghana, in which the presidency is the decisive power source to steer the country, with almost unrestricted control over the executive branch. The presidency is, correspondingly, “the overwhelmingly dominant objective

[8] Manifesto Research Group/Comparative Manifesto Project: The research group has conducted quantitative content analyses of parties’ election programs from more than 50 countries. Coding scheme available at: https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu/

of multiparty political competition in Ghana" (Gyimah-Boadi 2009: 146). If we are interested in the link between the national economy and voting behavior, the presidential election is thus clearly the poll to look at. Parliamentary elections are, in return, rather more local races, holding candidates not primarily accountable for the national development of the country (see Lindberg 2003). Finally and for practical reasons, I only look at first-round elections. The observation period includes only one run-off and the results cannot be meaningfully compared to a second observation.

In sum, we arrive at a clear analytical setting to explore economic voting in sub-Saharan Africa. The case of Ghana, with its typical-for-Africa demographic composition and its exceptional electoral competitiveness, is likely to make voters sensitive to the economy and thus presents us with an excellent opportunity to get a sense of how the economic vote impacts on African elections. The observation period ranging from 2004 to 2012 and the focus on the presidential elections render, furthermore, a clear analytical frame for the operationalization of this empirical endeavor.

3.2 OPERATIONALIZATION

The concrete analysis of this work involves two related but methodologically distinct approaches. On the one hand, I investigate survey data. Representative surveys offer the opportunity to investigate the link between economics and elections at the individual level and to determine the driving forces behind vote intentions at the individual level. However, a drawback of such data is that—at least in the case of Ghana—available scientific datasets are not directly linked to elections. Therefore, I also include aggregate-level economic and election data.

Both approaches are supposed to work together in informing our assessment of the influence of the economy on elections. However, with regard to the operationalization it is important to treat the aggregate and the individual level separately. Below, I thus start by spelling out the operationalization of the aggregate-level data and afterwards turn to the individual.

3.2.1 Aggregate-Level Analysis

Studies of economic voting on the macro-level usually rest upon the statistical analysis of time-series data. Macroeconomic indicators serve as independent variables and are linked to election outcomes and regular public opinion polls, respectively (mirroring the dependent variables vote choice and government approval in surveys). However, in the case of Ghana we have only a small number of democratic elections to investigate, and regular opinion polls are hardly available. Accordingly, there is only a very small number of aggregate observations—too few to make a statistical inquiry. The data at our disposal—outcomes of three elections and annual macroeconomic indicators—may nevertheless contain valuable information, yet we have to rely more on a systematic qualitative interpretation to infer insights about the impact of our economic indicators on the election results.

This shall, firstly, be done through a close look at the election results. I look not only at the mere aggregates but also present electoral maps[9] that illustratively show the detailed distribution of an incumbent's gains and losses through gradual color shades. The maps are based on a dataset that combines results from the 2004, 2008 and 2012 elections at the level of Ghana's 170 administrative districts[10]. The data come from the Electoral Commission of Ghana and are available online[11]. A shortcoming is that district-level election results for the year 2000 are not available. As a result, I cannot calculate the changes in the incumbent's vote share for the 2004 election. The electoral map for the 2004 election is thus only on the level of Ghana's 10 administrative regions.

Economic time-series data on the district level is unfortunately not available. To get a sense of objective changes in economic conditions the analysis is confined to macroeconomic indicators. Two indicators are taken into account: GDP growth and inflation rate. GDP growth refers to the annual percentage growth rate of GDP per capita. The inflation rate reflects the annual percentage change in the costs to the average consumer of acquiring a basket of goods and services. Both indicators are compiled by the World Bank and available at the country data homepage for Ghana[12]. The unemployment rate, included by most related studies, is not applicable in the case of Ghana. The informal sector is too big, and reliable numbers that would indicate how many Ghanaians receive a regular income are nonexistent.

How can this data be used for a meaningful assessment of economic voting? As argued above, we are confined to a qualitative interpretation because of the small number of observations. However, by using systematic criteria we can still produce some valid insights. Specifically, I

9 The maps have been created using ArcGIS. Data on administrative boundaries: http://www.gadm.org

10 Ghana's electoral map 2012 includes 275 constituencies. Demarcations were rearranged in 2012. To calculate percent point differences, the results are extrapolated to the district level. This is an unproblematic procedure since "No electoral district should fall in more than one administrative district" (Electoral Commission 2013)

11 http://www.ec.gov.gh/

12 http://data.worldbank.org/country/ghana - The specific indicator codes are 'NY.GDP.PCAP.KD.ZG' (GDP) and 'FP.CPI.TOTL.ZG' (Inflation)

follow a two-step procedure to evaluate the impact of the economy on election results at the aggregate level for each election. In the first step I ask: Is there a plausible relationship between the economy and the election result? I juxtapose the macro-economic indicators and the election results at the country-level and look for a link between changes in an incumbent's vote share and changes in economic conditions. The existence of such a link is a first piece of evidence for economic voting. It is admittedly a weak piece but in the second step, taking into account the detailed electoral maps, it can become stronger. The idea behind the use of these maps is to disentangle the election results and to distinguish regional and overall trends. Trends are crucial because our indicators, by definition, affect the entire country. Especially the inflation rate should usually reach all citizens irrespective of their place of residence. By distinguishing trends we can thus assess whether or not it is justified to attribute changes in the incumbent's vote share to the economy. If we observe a strong nationwide trend, this is supportive of our hypothesis that the macro-economy is the driving force behind the election outcome. An ambiguous trend with strong regional effects in turn weakens our hypothesis because it suggests other regional sources of electoral change. A plausible economic explanation for an unequal distribution would, in turn, again strengthen our hypothesis.

The conclusiveness of this part of the analysis is, admittedly, relatively low. If we conceive of the qualitative interpretation as a form of process tracing (see Bennett 2010), our evidence does not go beyond the status of a 'straw in the wind'. Even in the best case scenario, where economic trends and elections results go hand in hand and we furthermore observe an overall trend, we cannot single out the economy as a necessary and/or sufficient condition. However, a 'straw in the wind' is still a good piece of evidence "providing useful information that may favor or call into question a given hypothesis" (Bennett 2010:211). Especially since we have the opportunity to verify the aggregate observations with individual-level data.

3.2.2 Individual-Level Analysis

The individual-level analysis is based on the Afrobarometer; according to its homepage "an independent, nonpartisan research project that measures the social, political, and economic atmosphere in Africa." Since 1999 the research group has carried out five waves of representative surveys in altogether 35 countries. Ghana was included in each with interviews conducted in 1999, 2002, 2005, 2008 and 2012. Through a random sampling procedure, the Afrobarometer ensures to capture a representative cross-section of each society. As the short self-description cited above with its explicit reference to the political and economic atmosphere already suggests, it contains items for all factors of interest in an analysis of economic voting behavior. The aim now is to build a statistical model to estimate the impact of the economy on election outcomes while taking into account all potentially relevant other factors. The following factors are important in this regard.

Dependent Variables: Vote Intention and Presidential Approval

The most important dependent variable to capture the influence of the economy on election outcomes is naturally the vote choice. The Afrobarometer explicitly asks respondents which party's presidential candidate they would vote for, if elections were held tomorrow. Since the economic voting hypothesis focuses primarily on the effects for the incumbent, I choose a binary coding where the 1-category includes all voters saying they would vote for the incumbent, and the 0-category includes voters favoring a different party and also nonvoters. Only people who refuse to answer or say they do not know are decoded as missing values.

However, a problem with the vote intention is that in surveys detached from concrete elections it is not absolutely clear whether the reported vote intention represents the actual vote intention. Voters may be less influenced by partisan motives compared to the situation in the voting booth or they may feel inclined to present a coherent political mindset and accordingly simply state that they would vote for the same party as in the previous election (also enquired by the previous item in the questionnaire).

In this light it seems sensible to add a second dependent variable that more directly measures the current satisfaction with the incumbent president. If we find satisfaction related to the economy, this is at the minimum a strong hint at economic voting. Given the temporal shortcomings of the question on vote intentions, the inclusion of such a variable can thus help us to gain confidence in our hypothesis. A suitable item in the questionnaire is provided by a question asking whether people approve or disapprove of the way the current president has performed his job over the past twelve months. The question can be answered on a 4-point scale ranging from 'strongly disapprove' to 'strongly approve'. Since the distance between strong and non-strong (dis)approval is by definition much lower than between disapproval and approval, I reduce this information also to a binary variable coded 1 for general approval and 0 for disapproval. Respondents who say they do not know or have not heard enough are again coded as missing values.

Independent Variable: Economic perceptions

The general independent variable of the economic voting hypothesis is the macro-economic development of a country. However, surveys naturally do not measure the objective economy. Moreover, the idea of a rational voter who calculates his personal utility implies that the perceived economy matters more than the objective economy. In order to measure the independent variable, I thus use questions that enquire about perceived economic condition.

The theory chapter of this work has argued that the informational structure in Africa strongly suggests a retrospective sanctioning mechanism with an emphasis on personal (egotropic) conditions. The Afrobarometer offers an item perfectly in line with this proposition. Respondents are asked to rate their personal living conditions compared to twelve months ago on a five-point scale ranging from "much worse" to "much better".

In order to distinguish and juxtapose the different conceptual images of economic voting it is, however, recommendable to also include sociotropic and prospective assessments. The Afrobarometer offers the same five-point-scale with regard to a country's economy as a whole and also prospectively (expectations 12 months ahead). In sum, we have four different independent variables to enter in the model: Retrospective/prospective living conditions and retrospective/prospective economic conditions.

Yet an issue may be collinearity. Table 3.2 displays the correlations[13] among the four variables from three Afrobarometer surveys carried out in Ghana. In the top row we find the correlations between retrospective and prospective evaluations. The correlates are low ranging from r=0.25 to r=0.38. Accordingly, people clearly distinguish between future expectations and past evaluations. The bottom row, however, shows a different picture. Here we find the correlations between sociotropic and egotropic evaluations. Both are very highly correlated, with coefficients ranging from 0.71 to 0.91. The strong relationship indicates that people do not distinguish between personal living conditions and the economy as a whole. This is a problem for regression models, which usually assume that the independent variables are unrelated to each other. It is, moreover, theoretically meaningless to include egotropic and sociotropic evaluations in the same model, since they obviously measure the same dimension.

[13] Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Measures linear relationships between two variables and takes values between -1 and 1. A value of 0 indicates no correlation, whereas values of -1 or 1 indicate perfect linear negative or positive relationships.

In order to mitigate this problem in the analysis, I shall use only retrospective and prospective evaluations together in one model and, in turn, calculate individual models for living conditions and economic conditions, respectively.

Table 3.2: Correlations between independent variables

Correlation between	Variables	2005	2008	2012
Retrospective and Prospective perceptions	Eco 12m ago/Eco 12m ahead Liv 12m ago/Liv 12m ahead	**0.38** **0.36**	**0.29** **0.25**	**0.31** **0.26**
Sociotropic and Egotropic perceptions	Eco 12m ago/Liv 12m ago Eco 12m ahead/Liv 12m ahead	**0.83** **0.91**	**0.71** **0.82**	**0.75** **0.87**

Controls

To get a valid picture of the influence of the economy on voting in Ghana, it is important to carefully operationalize competing explanations. Previous research on voting behavior in Ghana has highlighted several demographic and structural factors assumed to influence the vote choices of Ghanaians. Incorporating these factors into the model is crucially important because a voter who is demographically or structurally aligned to a certain party may be biased in his judgment of the economy. We thus have to control for different sources of party alignment to distinguish partisanship and actual economic evaluations.

The first and surely most brightly-lit demographic factor is ethnicity. The results here are unambiguous. Two particular groups, the *Ewes* and the *Akans* show a clear inclination to vote for a certain Party (Ewes for the NDC; Akans for the NPP). As a first control variable, I thus include an ethnic dummy for Akans based on the self-reported ethnicity item in the Afrobarometer. In the case of the Ewe-NDC linkage the operationalization is not that straightforward. Some authors have argued that this relationship is actually regionally and not ethnicity based. Most Ewes live in Ghana's *Volta* Region, making it difficult to distinguish regional and ethnic voting here. However, cross-tabs from different Afrobarometer-waves indicate that the share of NDC voters is substantially higher among residents from the Volta than among all Ewes. This strongly supports the regional view. I thus include a regional dummy for the Volta region instead of an ethnic dummy into the model.

Apart from ethnicity, there are two other demographic factors frequently assumed to guide voters at the polls. The first one is an alleged cleavage between urban and rural dwellers. Especially in the first elections there was a very obvious gap between the city and the countryside, with rural dwellers overwhelmingly voting for NDC. Later this strong relationship disappeared and the

NPP proved its ability to also mobilize rural dwellers. However, at least urban dwellers are still assumed to lean towards the NPP. Based on the classification by the interviewer, I thus include an urban dummy into the model.

Furthermore, education is deemed influential. The NPP is often portrayed as a party of the elites and it is accordingly assumed that people with higher education are more inclined to vote for the NPP. The Afrobarometer provides a nine-point scale on education to capture the huge variety of educational backgrounds. Despite the numerous categories the scale is clearly ordinal. I also tested a reduced scale only distinguishing between primary, secondary and higher education, without any change in results. I thus use the complete scale in the final model.

A final important factor is surely partisanship. Several authors highlight strong ideological linkages, with many citizens in Ghana aligning with a certain party just on the basis of ideological images. In this light, it is important to control partisanship. Most Afrobarometer waves measure partisanship in two steps. First there is a general question whether respondents feel close to any party followed by a second question asking about the strength of this relationship. However, since the exact formulation of the latter varies across the different waves, I only use the first question and consider every respondent indicating to feel close to a party a partisan.

The list of specific Ghanaian factors is complete at this point. Other variables generally deemed relevant for voting were also tested. However, age, gender, religion, and cash income were neither significant nor did they improve the model fit. It was thus decided to exclude them from the analysis to keep the models parsimonious and focus on relevant factors. Table 3.3 gives an overview of the final list of variables and the corresponding coding.

The preferable model for the estimation is a logit regression. Logit models estimate the probability that a certain outcome occurs and hence are the first choice for binary dependent variables such as incumbent vote and presidential approval (Long 1997: 34ff). On the basis of a logit estimation we can determine whether or not perceived economic conditions (or any other variable) increase the probability that a respondent votes for or approves of the incumbent, respectively. Specifically, I calculate four models for each wave of the Afrobarometer included in the analysis. One using perceived living conditions (egotropic) as an independent variable and another one using perceived economic conditions (sociotropic) as an independent variable. Both are calculated for each of the two dependent variables which leads to the final number of four models per wave. The equation—for illustrative purposes presented outside the actual logit formula—is as follows:

Probability (Incumbent vote=1|Incumbent approval=1) = $\alpha + \beta_1$ (Retrospective economic|living condition) + β_2 (Prospective economic|living conditions) + β_2 (Akan) + β_3 (Volta Resident) + β_4 (Urban Resident) + β_5 (Level of Education) + β_6 (Close to NPP) + β_7 (Close to NDC) + ε

Table 3.3: List of Variables

Variable	Coding
Dependent Variables	
Incumbent vote	Binary: 1=Vote for incumbent
Incumbent approval	Binary: 1=Respondents approves of President's work
Independent Variables	
Retrospective economic/living conditions	Five-Point-Scale: 1=Much Worse; 5=Much Better
Prospective economic/living conditions	
Control Variables	
Akan	Binary: 1=Akan (self-description)
Volta	Binary: 1=Volta resident
Urban	Binary: 1=Urban Dweller
Education	Nine-Point-Scale: Higher value=Higher Education
Partisanship NPP	Binary: 1=Respondent feels close to NPP
Partisanship NDC	Binary: 1= Respondent feels close to NDC

4 ECONOMIC VOTING IN THREE GHANAIAN ELECTIONS

The preceding chapter has introduced a research design to test the economic voting hypothesis in Africa through a case study of Ghana. In this chapter I present and discuss the results. The core finding is that economic voting indeed conditions election outcomes in Ghana. For two out of three elections, I find strong evidence for an impact of the economy on the election outcome. The two-fold methodological approach that links aggregate data to opinion polls also proves very useful. Taken together, both perspectives not only cross-validate the impact of the economy on the elections in 2004 and 2012, they also provide an explanation for the failure of the hypothesis in the election of 2008.

The chapter starts with individual analyses of each election. Following that, I also present an overview of all statistical models to assess the general impact of the economy on election results. Finally, I discuss the theoretical implications of the results.

4.1 THE 2004 ELECTION

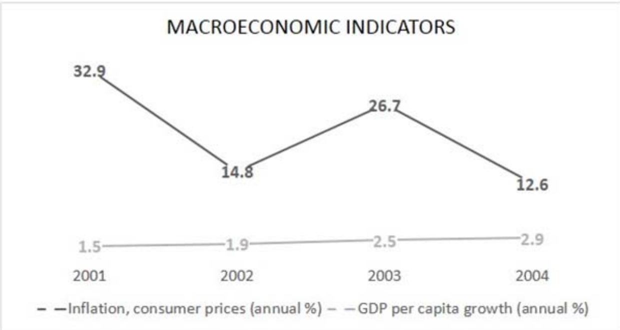
The 2004 election was carried out on the 8th of December and the results represented a triumph for the incumbent New Patriotic Party, with President John Kufuor taking 52.45 percent of the votes which meant a gain of 4.28% compared to the previous election. Kufuor had only taken over the presidency in 2000 from former military dictator and NDC-founder Jerry John Rawlings who stepped down after 18 years in power. Technically, he was the first democratically elected president of Ghana. Given the tight electoral race in 2000 and the fact that he had to overcome potentially hostile administrative structures established by 18 years of military rule, it is quite remarkable that he was able to settle the subsequent 2004 electoral race that clearly.

What role did the economy play in this victory? Figure 4.1 gives an overview of the aggregate-level data. Our first points of interest are the economic indicators represented by the two charts at the bottom-left corner of the figure. Do the numbers back the hypothesis that the electorate rewarded Kufuor for a good economic record? On first sight, the numbers do not seem especially positive. Per capita growth (light grey), though constantly rising, remained at a low level, below three percent. The inflation rate (dark grey) was quite high during the first and the third year of the term. Even the relatively low 12.62 percent inflation in the election year practically means an increase in consumer prices at a somewhat considerable rate. However, we have to put these

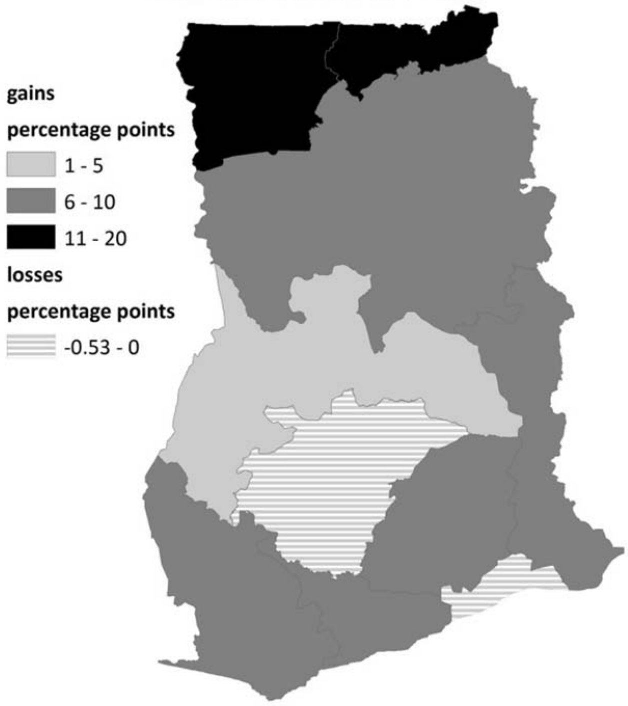
Figure 4.1: Election Overview 2004

Incumbent Party: NPP
Vote share: 52.45 %
Overall difference to 2000: 4.28 %
Regions with losses/gains: 2/8

Percent point difference by region: Sum stats				
Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
10	6.04	5.2	-0.53	16.72



Gains and Losses: NPP 2004



numbers in perspective. Ghana is generally used to high inflation rates and low or even negative growth rates.

In fact, the numbers represent a tremendous success. Even recent years had seen much higher price increases than the 32.9 percent in 2001. The inflation rate of 12.62 percent in the election year is the second lowest since Ghana's democratic transition in 1992. Similarly, the second indicator, per capita GDP growth, is in a positive sense historical. The growth rate of 2.89 percent just ahead of the election represents the strongest growth since 1984. And whereas 1984 was preceded by five years with negative growth, the rate under the Kufuor administration was positive for all four years of the term. Considering Ghana's economic history, the Kufuor years represent a remarkably positive period. The fact that especially the election year is historically successful further fuels the hypothesis that the incumbent's electoral success was driven by his economic record.

Does a close look at the election result support this proposition? Do we see a clear general trend as we would expect in an economy-driven election outcome? Indeed, there is such a trend. The map on the right-hand side of figure 4.1 displays gains and losses. Filled fields represent regions with gains; dashed fields indicate losses. The first fact hinting at a general trend is that the incumbent gained votes in a vast majority of the regions (8 out of 10). The losses are, moreover, marginal and do not exceed 0.51 percent, whereas the gains reach up to 16.7 percent as indicated by the summary statistics in the table left of the map. Notable is the fact that the gains cut across all potential cleavages. The NPP records gains in the rural north just as in the generally more urban south, among ethnic *Akans* in the south-western regions of the country as well as among *Ewes* in the Volta-Region stretching over the south-eastern border.

Interestingly, the only two regions with losses are natural strongholds of the NPP. One is the Ashanti region (dashed field in the middle of the map) with an overwhelming majority of ethnic Akans; the other is Greater Accra (dashed at the bottom) with a thoroughly urban population structure. Akans as well as urban residents are stereotypical NPP voters. The losses are, however, largely negligible. Both regions are still won by the NPP and, given the tiny margin of losses, results here are rather more a defense of the party's strong position than an actual decline.

Taken together, our aggregate data seem pretty supportive to the economic voting argument. We see a nation-wide political trend in favor of the incumbent in line with a clearly positive development of the macro-economy.

Can we confirm this assessment by individual-level data? Do we find vote intentions driven by the economy in the period under investigation? Two surveys for scrutiny are available around the election date. The 2002 Afrobarometer carried out in the middle of President Kufuor's term, and, the 2005 version with interviews conducted three month after the election. I believe that both models together provide a good snapshot of voters' motivations on the intervening voting day.

Table 4.1 displays the results. The left side of the table shows the results for model 1 with presidential approval as a dependent variable. The right side presents model 2 results on the probability of a vote cast for the incumbent (available only for 2005).

In the top four rows we find the economic indicators, and the majority of them are clearly significant. The retrospective items are especially pronounced. People who think that the economy has improved over the last 12 months are not only more likely to approve of the incumbent, they also express the intention to vote for him. Not surprisingly, the finding is true for both egotropic and sociotropic evaluations—both measures are highly correlated. But interestingly, sociotropic evaluations seem to be a little bit stronger in the equation for the vote intention.

Table 4.1: 2004 election analysis: Logit models based on Afrobarometer surveys

	Model 1 Presidential approval				Model 2 Incumbent vote (NPP)	
	2002		2005			
Retro economy	0.37		0.31		0.33	
	(0.09)***		(0.09)***		(0.10)***	
Prosp economy	0.13		0.24		0.12	
	(0.09)		(0.08)***		(0.09)	
Retro living cond		0.27		0.29		0.24
		(0.09)***		(0.09)***		(0.09)**
Prosp living cond		0.08		0.21		0.15
		(0.09)		(0.08)***		(0.09)*
Akan	1.07	1.18	0.48	0.60	0.47	0.44
	(0.19)***	(0.18)***	(0.19)**	(0.19)***	(0.20)**	(0.20)**
Volta resident	-0.58	-0.55	-1.03	-1.08	-0.47	-0.53
	(0.29)**	(0.27)**	(0.28)***	(0.28)***	(0.39)	(0.38)
Urban resident	-0.09	-0.14	0.14	0.19	0.47	0.48
	(0.19)	(0.18)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.21)**	(0.20)**
Level of education	0.04	0.02	0.11	0.12	-0.01	0.02
	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.05)**	(0.04)***	(0.05)	(0.05)
Close to NPP	1.32	1.24	0.90	0.95	3.17	3.17
	(0.22)***	(0.21)***	(0.22)***	(0.22)***	(0.22)***	(0.22)***
Close to NDC	-0.70	-0.74	-1.06	-1.02	-1.66	-1.72
	(0.22)***	(0.21)***	(0.21)***	(0.21)***	(0.30)***	(0.30)***
Intercept	-1.02	-0.48	-0.89	-0.98	-2.92	-2.88
	(0.51)**	(0.50)	(0.48)*	(0.47)**	(0.54)***	(0.53)***
Pseudo R2	0.22	0.20	0.20	0.20	0.45	0.46
N	970	1,012	951	985	951	984

* *p*<0.1; ** *p*<0.05; *** *p*<0.01, In Parentheses: Standard Errors

The numbers for the prospective items are more ambiguous. For 2002, both prospective indicators are insignificant and accordingly do not influence approval of the president. In 2005, by contrast, prospective evaluations show a strong influence on presidential approval ratings but show hardly any effect on the vote intention. Accordingly, prospective assessments do not shape voting decisions. Our primary finding is thus a strong retrospective effect which is consistent with the theoretical assumption of a retrospective sanctioning mechanism. Overall, the models strongly suggest that the gains of the NPP were indeed a result of the positive past economic record by the ruling party.

Apart from our main variables of interest we find first of all partisanship highly significant. People who feel close to the incumbent's party are much more likely to approve of and to vote for the president in office. Conversely, people close to the opposition party are less likely to do so. The ethnic variables are also mostly significant. Members of the Akan group rate the NPP president better and are inclined to vote for the NPP. Likewise, Volta residents, are more likely to disapprove of the president. The latter fails, however, to reach significance for the voting decision, which can be explained by the fact that that the group of Volta residents intending to vote for the NPP is only a tiny fraction in the sample. Finally, urban residents are more likely to vote for the NPP supporting the image of a party of the urban middle class. But, contrastingly, a higher education is not associated with vote choice and only partly with approval ratings. Only one coefficient of both items is significant at the 99 percent level. The two socioeconomic factors seem thus not overwhelmingly important.

Our review of the 2004 election leads to a clear result. We can say with some confidence that the economy was a decisive factor for the electoral success of the NPP. In the aggregate data, we observe a country-wide political trend following recent positive developments in the macro-economy. At the same time, we were able to show that voters are substantively driven by economic evaluations in their vote intention. Together, both observations draw a consistent picture of an African election shaped by the economic vote.

4.2 THE 2008 ELECTION

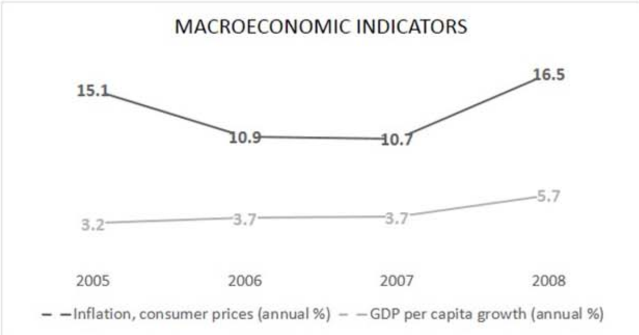
After the election of 2004 had been a relatively clear affair, the subsequent poll in December 2008 turned into the closest race of Ghana's short democratic history. In the first round, the incumbent NPP lost 3.32 percent compared to 2004 and thereby narrowly missed an absolute majority with a total vote share of 49.13 percent. The incumbent party was still 1 percent up compared to the competing NDC but, due to the losses, forced into a run-off. The second round led quite unexpectedly to a defeat of the ruling NPP and saw John Atta Mills, candidate of the NDC, winning the presidency by an incredibly close margin of 0.46 percent, or in absolute numbers 40,000 votes. To what extent can this defeat of the NPP be seen as a consequence of a poor economic performance? Figure 4.2 gives the overview of relevant aggregate data to answer this question.

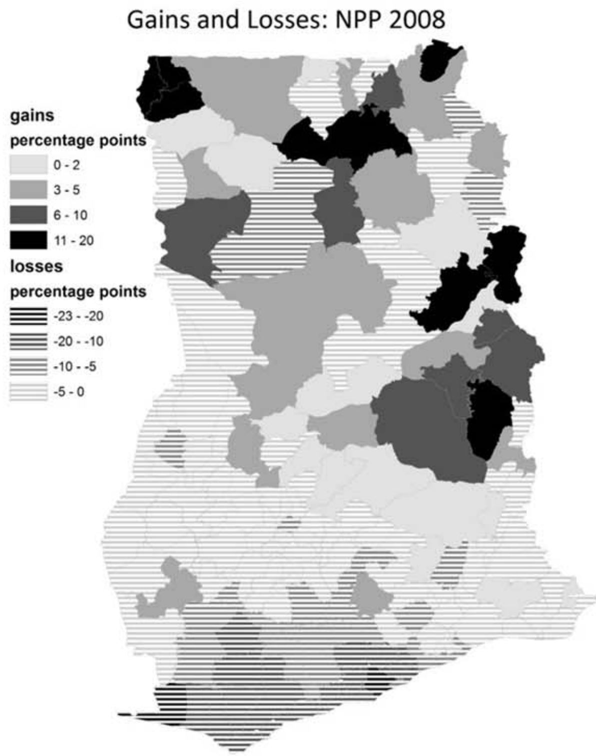
Interestingly the macro-economic indicators displayed by the charts at the bottom left of the figure, do not immediately hint at a political change. Again, we need to interpret the data against Ghana's economic history. Factually, the second term of NPP's John Kufuor represents the most stable economic period since independence. The inflation rate, although still double-digit, remained below 20 percent throughout the term. Ghana had not seen four years in a row without inflation rising above 20 percent since the early 1970s. At the same time, per capita growth was constantly above 3 percent, peaking at 5.7 percent in the final year of the term. Such a stable and relatively high growth was unprecedented in Ghana's modern history. According to the

Figure 4.2: Election Overview 2008

Incumbent Party: NPP
Overall difference to 2004: -3.32%
Districts with losses: 119
Districts with gains: 51

Percent point difference by district: Sum stats				
Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
170	-2.58	6.71	-22.97	18.92





economic voting hypothesis, we would thus actually expect the electorate to reward the incumbent. The only factor to explain the actual defeat is the rise of inflation in the election year, yet the level is still low for Ghana and coincides with a record high in GDP per capita growth. However, the NPP was apparently not able to win over voters on the basis of its economic record. The electoral map on the right side of Figure 4.2 shows gains and losses by district. The large dashed areas reveal that the ruling party lost votes in a majority of districts, specifically in 119 out of 170, representing 70 percent. Yet, there is no nationwide trend. Instead, we find regional patterns. Especially in the south, the NPP did poorly. Particularly painful are the losses along the densely populated western coastline. The dark shades of grey indicate that the party lost more than 10 percent in numerous districts here. This is a surprising fall from grace in an area with a majority of ethnic Akans who are usually associated with ethnic voting in favor of the ruling party. Furthermore, the NPP lost votes in almost all districts of the Ashanti region represented by the huge dashed light grey field in the south-west of the map. The Ashanti region is the ethnically quite homogeneous heartland of the Akans and thus adds to the impression of a decreasing popularity of the party among Akans. On the other hand, we find a mixed trend in the three northern regions involving both high gains and high losses. Overall, the NPP gained votes here. We can thus speak of a bi-directional trend with the south punishing the NPP and a mixed

Table 4.2: 2008 election analysis: Logit models based on 2008 Afrobarometer

	Model 1 Presidential approval		Model 2 Incumbent vote (NPP)	
	2008			
Retro economy	0.12		0.13	
	(0.09)		(0.11)	
Prosp economy	0.24		0.11	
	(0.08)***		(0.12)	
Retro living cond		0.08		0.18
		(0.09)		(0.11)
Prosp living cond		0.25		0.17
		(0.09)***		(0.12)
Akan	0.62	0.59	1.11	1.13
	(0.21)***	(0.20)***	(0.24)***	(0.24)***
Volta Resident	-0.89	-0.91	-0.30	-0.25
	(0.28)***	(0.28)***	(0.42)	(0.42)
Urban Resident	-0.33	-0.27	0.42	0.37
	(0.20)*	(0.20)	(0.25)*	(0.25)
Education	0.00	0.00	-0.06	-0.07
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Close to NPP	2.12	2.12	3.05	3.08
	(0.32)***	(0.32)***	(0.29)***	(0.29)***
Close to NDC	-0.79	-0.88	-3.01	-3.01
	(0.20)***	(0.20)***	(0.44)***	(0.44)***
Intercept	0.25	0.22	-1.90	-2.25
	(0.55)	(0.56)	(0.76)**	(0.76)***
Pseudo R2	0.22	0.22	0.52	0.52
N	961	974	770	781

* $p<0.1$; ** $p<0.05$; *** $p<0.01$, In Parentheses: Standard errors

record in the north including some strong gains for the ruling party. The contrary trends is also evident in the summary statistics found in the table at the right of Figure 4.2. Especially the high range with losses of up to (–)22.47 percent and gains peaking at 18.92 percent is noteworthy in this regard.

In total, the aggregate-level data suggests a rejection of the economic voting hypothesis for the 2008 election. Even though the macro-economy did comparatively well, the incumbent party lost votes in the majority of districts. The strong regional effects, furthermore, add to the idea that factors other than the economy drove voters.

How does the individual-level analysis pertain to this impression? Table 4.2 presents the results from the logit regression based on the 2008 Afrobarometer with interviews conducted in March 2008, barely eight month ahead of the poll. The numbers fuel the impression that the 2008 election was everything but a referendum on the economic performance of the incumbent. Model 2 shows the results using voting decision as independent variable. All four coefficients of economic perceptions fail to reach statistical significance. In other words, a positive economic evaluation did not increase the probability that an individual voted for the incumbent in 2008. On the contrary, presidential approval, the dependent variable of model 1, seems indeed dependent on economic evaluation with both coefficients for prospective evaluations being highly significant. This is a remarkable finding, providing a potential explanation for the lack of economic voting in 2008.

Ghana's constitution involves a term limit for presidents. As a consequence, President Kufuor could not run again in 2008. His designated successor and new flag-bearer of the NPP, Nana Akufo-Addo, was apparently not able to benefit from the recent economic success of his predecessor. Akufo-Addo had been foreign minister, a post not especially public in Ghana. As the difference between model 1 and model 2 suggests, the electorate attributed the economic success to the person of John Kufuor but not to the entire New Patriotic Party. It was accordingly the end of Kufuor's second term that paved the way for the open and incredibly tight electoral race of 2008 and kept voters from rewarding the government for a positive economic record.

Apart from our main variables, the individual-level results hold no surprises and largely resemble the pattern of 2004. Ethnicity and partisanship exhibit high significance, whereas education and urban dwelling show hardly any influence on the dependent variables.

All things considered, we have to reject the economic voting hypothesis for 2008. At the aggregate level a positive macro-economic trend fails to manifest itself in a country-wide political trend in favor of the incumbent party. At the individual level a positive economic evaluation does not induce voters to cast a ballot for the incumbent. A reason seems to be that the responsibility for the economic uptrend was solely attributed to the person of John Kufuor and not to the incumbent party as a whole. The introduction of a new flag-bearer due to a constitutional term limit thereby undermined the expectable reward.

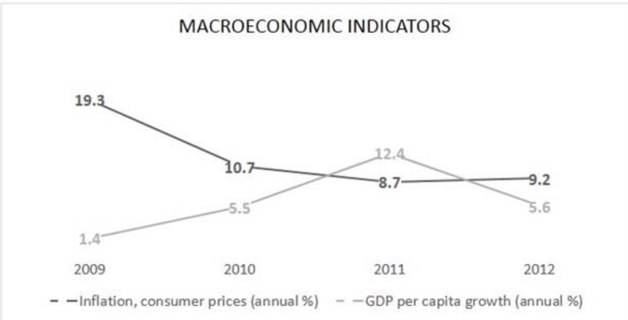
4.3 The 2012 Election

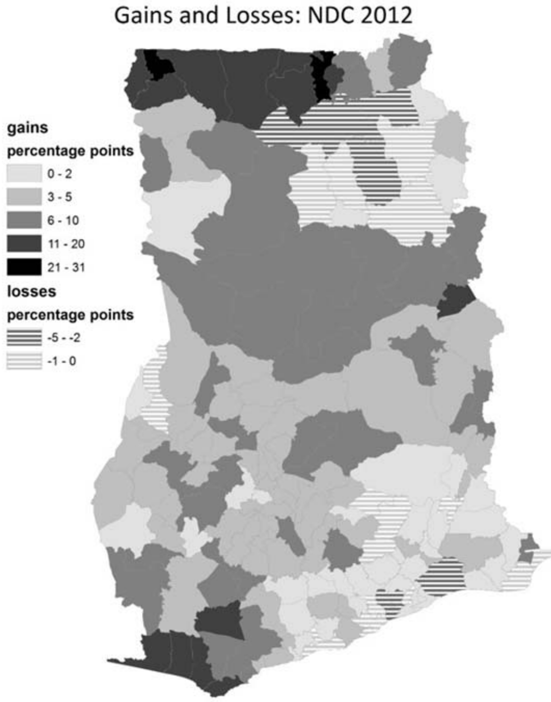
The 2012 election saw the incumbent NDC defending the presidential office in the first round. The party's incumbent candidate, John Mahama, was able to secure 50.7 percent of the votes, which represents a gain of 2.8 percent, sparing the party another thrilling run-off. A peculiarity was the sudden death of incumbent President John Atta Mills five months before the election date. The president's demise led to a wave of mourning in Ghana. Politically, however, it did not change too much. Vice president John Mahama was sworn in as the new president a few days after the incident. Mahama had already a high profile. The vice president's office is generally a very public in Ghana and serves always as the primary running mate in campaign days. The

Figure 4.3: Election Overview 2012

Incumbent Party: NDC
Overall difference to 2008: 2.61%
Districts with losses: 23
Districts with gains: 147

Percent point difference by district: Sum stats				
Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
170	4.45	4.9	-4.7	30.1





change in the presidential office did thus not mark a breaking point in the country's leadership but was rather a sign of continuity under extraordinary circumstances.

The final results are an important victory for the NDC. The overall gain of 2.8% may not seem especially impressive. However, it represents by far the best first-round result for the party since former military ruler John Rawlings stepped down in 2000. In Ghana's highly competitive democracy, a gain of almost 3 percent is, furthermore, a big deal. The question is again: To what extent was the 2012 success of the incumbent NDC a consequence of a good economic development under the administration?

Figure 4.3 presents the overview of the aggregate data. The charts of macro-economic indicators in the bottom left of the figure generally support the idea of an incumbent's success on their behalf. The figures show a strong economic uptrend. Although the first year of the term was rather a turn for the worse with the inflation rate reaching almost 20 percent, for the rest of the time the charts reveal unprecedentedly positive numbers for both inflation and growth rate. The annual increase of consumer prices was brought down to 10 percent in the second year and dropped even below 10 percent in the third and in the election year—something that had not happened since 1971. GDP per capita growth reached a record peak with 12.4 percent in 2011, which is by far the highest rate since the World Bank started to compile the statistic in 1960. The record year is furthermore framed by unusually high growth in both the preceding year and the subsequent election year. Such a high and constant growth of GDP per capita rate is likely to be felt by citizens. If the Ghanaian electorate is indeed inclined to vote economically, we should definitely be able to observe a significant effect in favor of the incumbent in 2012.

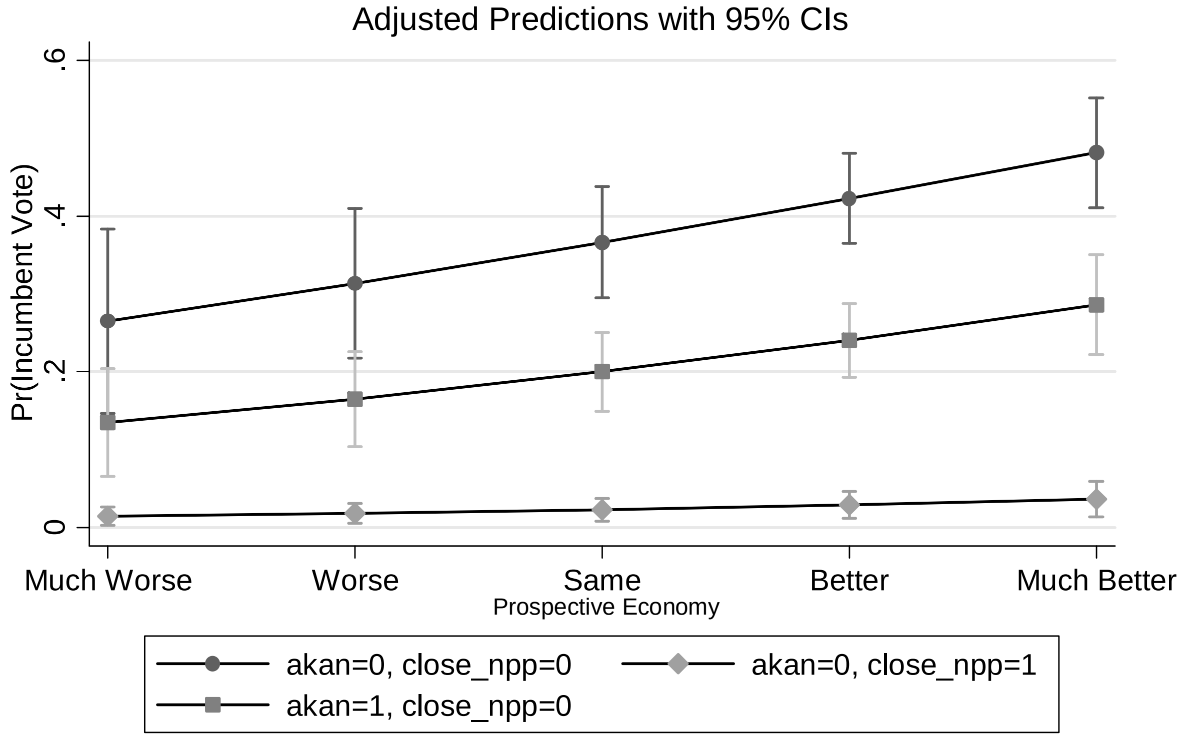
So how does the election result fit into the economic voting hypothesis? Actually quite well: The success of the NDC in 2012 is the result of a countrywide trend. This is already evident in the summary statistics on the left side of the figure. The NDC gained votes in 147 out of 170 districts, or 87 percent of the districts. Furthermore, losses are quite small and reached at maximum -4.7 percentage points, as opposed to gains of up to 30.1 points. The map on the right side of Figure 4.3 shows that most losses did not exceed 1 percent as indicated by the dashed fields in light grey. By contrast, only 5 of the 23 dashed districts have a darker color shade indicating losses of 2-5 percentage points. Some of the losses can, furthermore, be attributed to a regional special effect. In the northwest we find a considerably large connected dashed area, which represents territory of two ethnic minorities in a long-standing conflict over chieftancy with each other. The issue is very salient in the area (Lund 2003; Kelly 2005). The ruling NDC failed to live up to promises to solve the conflict and was thus punished here. The remainder of the losses falls largely into the urban areas at the coastline. Yet, there is no clear pattern. In the metropolitan Greater Accra region, located at the coastline roughly in the middle between the western and the eastern border, we find a quite equal distribution of districts with losses and districts with gains. Overall, we thus find a clear nation-wide trend in favor of the incumbent party affecting all regions – an observation supportive to the economic voting argument. Notable in this respect is the fact that the NDC Party managed to gain votes throughout the Akan regions in the southwestern quarter of the country. The presumable economic trend is accordingly unaffected by ethnicity.

Does the individual-level analysis back the economic interpretation of the election results? Table 4.3 displays logit models based on the 2012 Afrobarometer. The interviews were conducted in May 2012, six months ahead of the election. The numbers indicate a strong influence of economic perceptions on presidential approval and vote choice. Overall, 6 out of 8 economic indicators are statistically significant. Respondents who perceived an economic uptrend are accordingly generally more likely to approve of and to vote for the incumbent.

However, unlike in 2004, and against out theoretical expectations, the prospective assessments seem to outweigh retrospective evaluations. The coefficients for retrospective living conditions are not statistically significant. Likewise, the judgments on the past development of the economy at-large exhibit lower significance levels than the prospective economic evaluations. Accordingly, the expectation that the economy will improve in the future appears to be more favorable to the incumbent than a perceived positive development in the past. However, a definite overweight of prospective over retrospective evaluations cannot be inferred. After all, the retrospective sociotropic coefficients are still significant. I tested, moreover, the exclusion of the prospective evaluations from the model, which led to a 99 percent significance for all four retrospective coefficients. This suggests that the prospective expectations are at least partly a function of retrospective perceptions, which would be in line with our theoretical claim that the informational void in Africa induces people to infer future expectations from recent economic trends. Notwithstanding this discussion, we can definitely note a clear influence of economic perceptions in general on vote intentions some six months ahead of the election.

Table 4.3: 2012 election analysis: Logit models based on 2012 Afrobarometer

Figure 4.4: Predicted Probabilities for Incumbent Vote 2012



With regard to the control variables, the picture resembles the previous analyses. The ethnic and partisanship variables are highly significant, whereas education and an urban living area barely show any effect. An aspect worth highlighting here is the voting behavior of ethnic Akans. The group is usually associated with ethnic voting for the opposition NPP. On the electoral map, we saw, however, that the trend in favor of the incumbent NDC was nation-wide and included the Akan regions. At the individual level, we can now show that Akans are, just like other groups, more likely to vote for the NDC if they perceive the economy positively.

For this purpose, Figure 4.4 graphs the predicted probabilities as calculated by the sociotropic version of model 2. The plot shows the probability of a vote for the incumbent (y-axis) for different levels of prospective economic perceptions (x-axis). Overall, we find three horizontal lines representing three different types of individuals. The first one, marked by circles, stands for individuals who are neither partisans nor Akans nor Volta inhabitants, i.e. completely devoid of known demographic influences on voting behavior in Ghana (remaining variables at mean). According to the model, the probability for such a person to vote for the incumbent ranges from 0.3 if they expect the economy to worsen to 0.48 if they think the economy is getting much better. This is pretty much what we would expect of such a person. More interesting is the line with the squares showing probabilities for a member of the Akan-group. Here we see that Akans, notwithstanding their general leaning towards the NPP, may cast a ballot for the incumbent in the light of a positive economic development. An Akan saying the economy is worsening has a quite low likelihood of 0.16 to vote for the NDC. But if respective individuals expect a positive future development the likelihood increases to 0.28. We need to be cautious with specific numbers here, since the confidence intervals represented by the vertical lines are quite broad. However, the intervals from the lowest and the highest economic rating do not overlap, meaning we can say with 95 percent confidence that Akans, regardless of their ethnic background, are more likely to vote for the NDC if they express satisfaction with the economy. NPP partisans, i.e. people feeling close to the NPP seem in contrast by no means responsive to the economy, as suggested by the almost even line at the bottom of the plot.

Overall, we arrive at a consistent picture of an economically grounded 2012 presidential election in Ghana. The individual-level analysis perfectly comports with the observations at the aggregate level. The nationwide trend on the electoral map is not only associated with a positive development of macroeconomic indicators but also with individual vote intentions that are significantly driven by the economy. The individual-level analysis, furthermore, confirms the assessment that the political uptrend of the NDC affects all demographic groups including the Akans, who are often assumed to stubbornly refuse to vote for the NDC. Only partisanship seems to be an obstacle to an economic vote. In sum, we can say with high confidence that the triumph of the incumbent NDC in 2012 was largely a consequence of the positive economic development over the previous term.

4.4 Overall Picture

The previous investigation of three elections has found strong evidence for economic voting with regard to two out of the three elections under scrutiny. As a completion of the analysis and to get a better sense of the general impact of economic considerations on the Ghanaian electorate, it is now insightful to juxtapose the individual-level results of the entire period. Table 4.4 displays the figures from all logit models calculated on the basis of four waves of Afrobarometer surveys between 2002 and 2012.

The economic measures representing the independent variable of the present analysis are to be found in the top four rows. The core result is a general sensitivity of Ghanaian voters to perceived economic conditions. Overall, 17 out of 28 economic coefficients are significant. All coefficients are, furthermore, positive and thus—in line with the economic voting hypotheses—predict a positive influence of economic perceptions on the probability of approval of or a vote for the incumbent, respectively.

Table 4.4: Overview of Logit-Results: Afrobarometer 2002-2012

Afrobarometer Year	2002		2005				2008				2012			
Dependent Variable	Model 1 Approval		Model 1 Approval		Model 2 Vote for NPP		Model 1 Approval		Model 2 Vote for NPP		Model 1 Approval		Model2 Vote for NDC	
Retro economy	0.37		0.31		0.33		0.12		0.13		0.12		0.17	
	(0.09)***		(0.09)***		(0.10)***		(0.09)		(0.11)		(0.05)**		(0.08)**	
Prosp economy	0.13		0.24		0.12		0.24		0.11		0.36		0.24	
	(0.09)		(0.08)***		0.09)		(0.08)***		(0.12)		(0.06)***		(0.09)***	
Retro living cond		0.27		0.29		0.24		0.08		0.18		0.08		0.12
		(0.09)***		(0.09)***		(0.09)**		(0.09)		(0.11)		(0.05)		(0.08)
Prosp living cond		0.08		0.21		0.15		0.25		0.17		0.31		0.21
		(0.09)		(0.08)***		(0.09)*		(0.09)***		(0.12)		(0.06)***		(0.10)**
Akan	1.07	1.18	0.48	0.60	0.47	0.44	0.62	0.59	1.11	1.13	-0.87	-0.89	-0.84	-0.89
	(0.19)***	(0.18)***	(0.19)**	(0.19)***	(0.20)**	(0.20)**	(0.21)***	(0.20)***	(0.24)***	(0.24)***	(0.11)***	(0.11)***	(0.16)***	(0.16)***
Volta Resident	-0.58	-0.55	-1.03	-1.08	-0.47	-0.53	-0.89	-0.91	-0.30	-0.25	0.78	0.82	1.89	1.78
	(0.29)**	(0.27)**	(0.28)***	(0.28)***	(0.39)	(0.38)	(0.28)***	(0.28)***	(0.42)	(0.42)	(0.22)***	(0.22)***	(0.31)***	(0.30)***
Urban Resident	-0.09	-0.14	0.14	0.19	0.47	0.48	-0.33	-0.27	0.42	0.37	0.07	0.11	0.18	0.21
	(0.19)	(0.18)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.21)**	(0.20)**	(0.20)*	(0.20)	(0.25)*	(0.25)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.17)	(0.17)
Education	0.04	0.02	0.11	0.12	-0.01	0.02	0.00	0.00	-0.06	-0.07	0.01	0.00	-0.08	-0.08
	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.05)**	(0.04)***	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.04)*	(0.04)**
Close to NPP	1.32	1.24	0.90	0.95	3.17	3.17	2.12	2.12	3.05	3.08	-1.03	-1.03	-3.21	-3.20
	(0.22)***	(0.21)***	(0.22)***	(0.22)***	(0.22)***	(0.22)***	(0.32)***	(0.32)***	(0.29)***	(0.29)***	(0.12)***	(0.11)***	(0.32)***	(0.32)***
Close to NDC	-0.70	-0.74	-1.06	-1.02	-1.66	-1.72	-0.79	-0.88	-3.01	-3.01	1.27	1.29	2.95	2.92
	(0.22)***	(0.21)***	(0.21)***	(0.21)***	(0.30)***	(0.30)***	(0.20)***	(0.20)***	(0.44)***	(0.44)***	(0.16)***	(0.15)***	(0.20)***	(0.19)***
Intercept	-1.02	-0.48	-0.89	-0.98	-2.92	-2.88	0.25	0.22	-1.90	-2.25	-0.95	-0.74	-1.84	-1.62
	(0.51)**	(0.50)	(0.48)*	(0.47)**	(0.54)***	(0.53)***	(0.55)	(0.56)	(0.76)**	(0.76)***	(0.32)***	(0.33)**	(0.51)***	(0.54)***
Pseudo R2	0.22	0.20	0.20	0.20	0.45	0.46	0.22	0.22	0.52	0.52	0.21	0.20	0.54	0.54
N	970	1,012	951	985	951	984	961	974	770	781	2,175	2,216	1,684	1,708

*** p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01, In Parentheses: Standard Errors**

However, in 11 out of the 28 cases the measures of economic perceptions also fail to show an influence and it is not absolutely clear, where this variation is coming from. Obvious is only the dynamic of 2008, where especially the coefficients of model 2 calculating the probability of an incumbent vote fail the significance test. As discussed above, the disappearance of an economic voting effect here is a consequence of the term limit reached by the incumbent. The remaining variation, however, seems not to follow a meaningful pattern. In the first two waves of 2002 and 2005, retrospective economic perceptions are more influential than prospective ones. But the picture changes with the latter two surveys of 2008 and 2012, where the significance of future-oriented items noticeably outweighs the influence of backward-looking assessments. One may conclude that prospective perceptions gain importance over time. However, the development is more a tendency and by far not sufficiently unambiguous to infer a general increase of the importance of retrospective assessments over time.

Likewise, we cannot really discriminate between living conditions and economic conditions, i.e. sociotropic and egotropic evaluations from the numbers. I calculated distinct models for each because of a high correlation between both. The correlation suggests that both measures target the same dimension. Yet interestingly, the results between a model calculated with sociotropic perceptions often deviate from those of the same model with egotropic independent variables. This is a certain weakness of the results that cannot be plausibly explained at this point but calls for a deeper look into the nature of economic perceptions in Africa.

With regard to the controls, the overall picture does not really add to what we saw in the individual election analysis. Ethnicity and partisanship matter, whereas education and urban living barely impact on approval ratings and voting decisions.

Another positive aspect worth mentioning is the good fit of the models. The values for Pseudo R2 ranging from 0.2 to 0.54 indicate that we can explain up to 54 percent of the deviance of our dependent variables. A clear difference in this regard exists between model 1 and model 2 estimations. The former, focusing on presidential approval, show a substantively lower fit than the latter with vote intention as dependent variable. This is probably a result of the partisanship variable. About 60 percent of each sample feel close to a party (with an oddly unstable distribution on different parties over time) and people who identify themselves as partisans almost always say they want to vote for the respective party, which leads to the general good fit of model 2 calculations. Given the significance of our economic variables, we can, however, also assume that our economic indicators substantially contribute to the fit. I also investigated residuals to evaluate the validity of the models. I plotted the standardized residuals for each model and calculated the Cook's distance to see to what extent the results are driven by especially influential observations (cf. Long/Freese 2006: 147). For all models, I found the residuals quite evenly distributed over the observations and only very few outliers, usually less than ten observations.

4.5 Theoretical Discussion

The core finding of this study is that economic perceptions can drive election outcomes in Ghana. The work was able to highlight a direct link between opinion polls and concrete elections, and in two of the three elections under scrutiny the effect was quite clear.

With regard to general debates on the African voter, the results strengthen the notion of evaluative voting. African voters seem to care about governance performance and hold leaders accountable for the economic conditions they face. Furthermore, I found hints that even members of ethnic groups associated with block voting are at least modestly responsive to the economy. The results, therefore, contribute to the rising image of a rational governance-oriented African voter.

But to what extent are the findings consistent with the theoretical conceptualization of economic voting developed in the theory chapter of this thesis? I argued that the economic vote is likely to occur in Africa but that the mechanism may deviate from that of Western environments, especially because of weaker informational structures. A plausible causal link for economic voting under such conditions is a retrospective sanctioning mechanism with an emphasis on egotropic economic perceptions and largely unaffected by the clarity of responsibility. What insights can we draw from the analysis regarding the validity of this particular theoretical conception of economic voting in sub-Saharan Africa?

The assumption of straightforward retrospective sanctioning is to some extent challenged by the empirical findings. The idea implies that individuals take the recent development of the economy and pretty much immediately derive the voting decision. The vote intention should thus be primarily a function of retrospective economic perceptions. Yet, according to the models, prospective and retrospective assessments seem at least equally important. Accordingly, at least some citizens in Ghana vote on the basis of expectations that they form without reference to the past. This interesting finding contradicts the idea of retrospective sanctioning and is further fueled by other studies on African countries that also find prospective assessments highly important for vote choices or government approval, respectively. Bratton et al. (2012), in their study of the complete Afrobarometer 2008 dataset, find exclusively prospective perceptions being significant. Youde's (2005) analysis of the first Afrobarometer in Ghana is, not surprisingly, consistent with the findings here, detecting an influence of both prospective and retrospective assessments.

The recurring impact of prospective evaluations raises questions regarding the nature of economic perceptions. How are the seemingly important prospective evaluations formed? What is their basis? Arguments that people make themselves familiar with economic affairs, as put forth for instance by Duch/Stevensen (2008), are not readily applicable to the African environment. The information sources at hand are not comparable to Western countries. Understanding the formation of economic perceptions thus remains an outstanding quest in research on economic voting behavior in Africa.

With regard to the question of egotropic vs. sociotropic economic perceptions, the analysis presents itself more in line with the theoretical expectation of a vote primarily driven by personal living conditions. This can be inferred already from the high correlations between both items, suggesting that people do not readily distinguish between their own conditions and the situation of the macro-economy. It is, however, interesting that in the models presented above egotropic and sociotropic evaluations are not completely interchangeable. Sometimes egotropic perceptions fail the significance test where sociotropic perceptions pass it and vice versa. Overall, the estimates for the economy at large produce a tad more significance. In the models presented by Bratton et al. (2012) it is, furthermore, only the (prospective) sociotropic coefficient that reaches statistical significance. This is a peculiarity that should be further scrutinized in future studies. However, given the high correlates and the problem of acquiring information about the macro-economy, we can for the moment maintain the assumption that personal living conditions are more important than the economy as a whole and also shape the perceptions of the economy-at-large.

Finally, the question of clarity of responsibility was discussed in the theory chapter. I have argued that voters in Africa are less aware of constitutional and exogenous constraints that may undermine the attribution of responsibility to the incumbent. I expected voters, accordingly, to always punish or reward the most visible incumbent regardless of limitations to his ability to steer the economy. Based on a single case in a system with an exceptionally high clarity, this study is not able to evaluate the impact of different levels of clarity on African voters.

A highly interesting finding with regard to the attribution of responsibility is, however, that person may matter more than party. The analysis of the 2008 election strongly suggested that the new presidential candidate of the incumbent party was not able to mobilize voters around the positive economic record of his predecessor, who had reached the term limit and was thus not eligible to run for the presidency again. The incumbent party finally lost the election despite an extraordinary positive recent economic trend, and economic voting was not measureable both either the aggregate or the individual level. The finding to some extent confirms the focus of voters on the 'most visible incumbent', which is undoubtedly the person of the president in Ghana, but at the same time it rejects the claim that context does not matter. A new candidate seems to be a sufficient condition to undermine the attribution of economic responsibility to the incumbent party. On the basis of one observation it is difficult to say how general the 'term-limit effect' is but it is an interesting factor, definitely worth further investigation.

Generally, the results can be seen as representative for the entire region south of the Sahara. Ghana is undoubtedly a pioneer of democracy on the continent but many scholars suggest that other states are on the same path. Apart from its positive democratic record, the country is a quite typical case of an African society and the conventional variables, especially ethnic and partisan loyalties, continue to condition political behavior in Ghana as well as elsewhere. While controlling these factors, the analysis has demonstrated economic voting in Ghana. It seems likely that the same effect will also occur in other states of the region following rising levels of democracy.

Conclusion

This thesis has presented an in-depth study of the West African country Ghana to trace the economic factor in sub-Saharan African elections. Motivated by some promising but inconclusive pioneering research on the influence of the economic situation on voting decisions of African citizens, the aspiration was to provide the most comprehensive look into economic voting in an African democracy yet available. The study has systematically analyzed the role of the economy in three Ghanaian presidential elections over a twelve-year period and taken into account survey data, objective macroeconomic indicators and election outcomes.

The core finding is that the economy is a crucial variable to explain election outcomes in Ghana's highly competitive democracy. For two out of three elections, I observe strong evidence for an impact of the economy on the election outcome. Confirming the economic voting hypothesis are the elections of 2004 and 2012. In both cases vote gains in favor of the incumbent can be clearly attributed to an economic uptrend. The two-fold methodological approach linking aggregate data and opinion polls proves useful here. In 2004 and 2012 there is an uptrend in the macroeconomic indicators that coincides with a consistent country-wide political trend. The survey data proves, moreover, that economic considerations drove vote intentions in 2004 and 2012. Taken together, the two levels of analysis not only cross-validate the findings; they also create a credible and complete picture of the sizeable influence of the economy on the election outcomes of 2004 and 2012.

Interestingly, I also find a deviant case. The 2008 election does not fit well into the economic voting pattern. Although the economy had thoroughly improved over the term, the incumbent party lost votes in 2008. The distribution of vote changes across the country seems random and a clear political trend is not detectable. Economic perceptions measured at the individual level, moreover, fail to show an influence on the vote intentions in 2008. Taken together, these observations suggest that the economy was disregarded by voters in 2008. The analysis reveals, however, an interesting reason for the non-economic character of the 2008 election. The incumbent president had reached a term limit in 2008 and the incumbent party had to present a new presidential candidate for the election. The individual-level analysis suggests that this factor undermined economic voting by revealing a discrepancy between the influence of economic perceptions on presidential approval (high) and the influence of economic perceptions on the vote intention (insignificant).

Besides empirical testing, the thesis also aspired to develop and evaluate a causal model of economic voting in Africa. I have highlighted a weak supply of information in Africa and argued that in light of the informational conditions a retrospective sanctioning mechanism based on egotropic economic perceptions is the most plausible mechanism to in a conception of economic voting in Africa. In addition, I stated that Africans will generally hold the most visible incumbent accountable regardless of the actual contextual clarity of responsibility.

The latter point is confirmed and rejected at the same time by the observations for the 2008 election. The apparent focus on the person of the president is confirmatory with regard to the notion of a focus on the most visible incumbent. However, my evaluation that variations in the contextual clarity of political responsibility hardly matter is obsolete. Obviously, term limits are an important factor and may mute economic voting in Africa, which is a highly interesting individual finding from this study.

Even more challenged by the findings is the assumption of a straightforward retrospective mechanism. Retrospective voting implies that voters derive their voting decision mainly from past economic developments. However, the individual-level analysis renders prospective and retrospective economic perceptions at least equally important. The data also indicate that both clearly measure different dimensions. This raises the question of how future-oriented prospective perceptions are formed. If they are not a function of past economic trends, what are they based on? Given the strong influence of prospective assessments found here as well as in other studies (esp. Bratton et al. 2012), it is important to answer this question. Further research is needed to get a sense of the nature of economic perceptions among African citizens.

More warranted in light of the analysis seems the assumption that economic perceptions in Africa are primarily egotropic. Egotropic refers to perceptions formed on the basis of personal economic experiences (as opposed to sociotropic ones formed with reference to the macro economy). I argued that due to informational hurdles Africans are more likely to rely on egotropic perceptions. The study has found that both perceptions measure the same dimension among Africans, which supports the egotropic view.

Overall, the study represents an unprecedented piece of evidence for the prevalence of economic voting in Africa and thereby also contributes to higher-level debate on the African voter. The academic literature traditionally emphasized non-evaluative voting rationales in Africa such as expressive ethnic voting or vote buying. In more recent years, however, scholars increasingly have found evidence for a more evaluative (governance oriented) voting behavior. The present study supports the latter position. At least the Ghanaian electorate is responsive to the economic situation and accordingly holds leaders accountable for their performance in public offices.

Given the congruent institutional history of most states south of the Sahara, it is reasonable to assume that the results also apply to other African electorates. The economy is thus a factor worth considering in any study on voting behavior in sub-Saharan Africa, yet additional research is still important, not only to further confirm the universality of the economic voting hypothesis for Africa (and beyond), but also to clarify the specific conditions that determine the occurrence and the strength of economic voting in Africa. Interesting potential research questions highlighted by this study include the role of term limits in comparative perspective, and the source of prospective economic perceptions.

APPENDIX

Appendix I

Survey files used in the Analysis

Afrobarometer 2002: Merged Round 2 Data (16 Countries) (2004)

Afrobarometer 2005: Merged Round 3 Data (18 Countries) (2005)

Afrobarometer 2008: Merged Round 4 Data (20 Countries) (2008)

Afrobarometer 2012: Ghana Round 5 Data

Appendix II

Survey questions used in the Analysis

Incumbent vote: If a presidential election were held tomorrow, which party's candidate would you vote for?

Coded "0" (Vote for any opposition party & Would not vote) Coded "1" (Vote for Incumbent)

Incumbent approval: Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the following people have performed their jobs over the past twelve months, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? President […]

Coded "0" (Strongly Disapprove & Disapprove) Coded "1" (Approve & Strongly Approve)

Prospective Economic/Living conditions: Looking ahead, do you expect the following to be better or worse? a) Economic conditions in this country in twelve months time b) Your living conditions in twelve months time

Ordinal scale "1" to "5" (Much Worse/Worse/Same/Better/Much Better)

Retrospective Economic/Living conditions: Looking back, how do you rate the following compared to twelve months ago? a) Economic conditions in this country b) Your living conditions

Ordinal scale "1" to "5" (Much Worse/Worse/Same/Better/Much Better)

Akan: What is your ethnic community, cultural group or tribe?

Coded “1” (Akan) “0“ (Other groups/Ghanaian/Refused to answer/Do not know)
Volta: Filled by interviewer: Region/Province

Coded “1” (Volta) “0” (any other region)

Urban: Filled by interviewer: Enumeration area

Coded “1” (Urban) “0” (Rural)

Education: What is the highest level of education you have completed?

Ordinal scale “1” to “9” (No formal schooling/Informal schooling only (including Koranic schooling)/ Some primary schooling/Primary school completed/Some secondary school or high school/Secondary school or high school completed/Post-secondary qualifications, other than university e.g. a diploma or degree from a polytechnic or college/Some university/University completed/Post-graduate)

Partisanship NDC|NPP: a) Do you feel close to any particular political party? b) Which party is that?

Coded “1” (NDC|NPP) Coded “0” (No/Any other party)

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Hiermit erkläre ich, dass ich die Arbeit selbstständig und ohne Benutzung anderer als der angegebenen Quellen und Hilfsmittel angefertigt habe.

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