

Party Campaign Strategies: Rallies, Canvassing and Handouts in Ghana*

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Abstract

We investigate the campaign strategies — rallies, canvassing, and electoral handouts — of Ghana’s two major political parties during the 2012 election. We argue that incumbent and opposition parties pursue divergent strategies. Because of the incumbent party’s resource advantage and ability to favor the party’s core areas with state resources *before* the election begins, they are likely to mount a broader campaign and invest more heavily in resource-intensive methods. Consistent with this argument we show that the ruling party campaign most intensely in swing and opposition districts, while the challenger invests most heavily in their stronghold. The incumbent also distributes twice as many handouts. These findings contribute to a more holistic understanding of campaigns in new democracies. They imply that instead of adopting universal core and swing strategies, ruling parties do both; focusing on their core supporters while in office and targeting more electorally diverse constituencies during the campaign.

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What campaign strategies do political parties use in Africa’s new democracies? A deeper analysis of how parties mobilize support is important for our understanding of multi-party elections. If parties rely predominantly on handouts or voter intimidation to sway voters, elections may fail to produce accountable government. Furthermore, if incumbency advantages are significant or opposition parties are confined to campaign only in certain locations in a country, elections may be unsuccessful in generating robust political competition and public trust in democratic institutions. In short, *how* and *where* political parties campaign has critical implications for the long-term viability and consolidation of third-wave democracies.

Existing literature tends to focus on only a subset of the common campaign strategies that parties use in new democracies. Indeed, much of the literature on election campaigns pays attention to parties’ use of methods such as vote buying,¹ electoral violence,² and fraud.³ However, other strategies, such as campaign rallies and door-to-door canvassing, also appear to be widespread across Africa (Conroy-Krutz, 2016; Horowitz, 2016; Nathan, 2018; Paget, 2018). While these strategies may involve elements of the former – parties may intimidate voters when they canvass, or distribute handouts during rallies – these types of campaign contact may also be quite different. In particular, canvassing and rallies provide candidates or party activists with an opportunity to discuss government performance, as well as national or local policies. Further, much research focuses on specific campaign strategies in isolation. We thus lack a holistic picture of how parties allocate resources to different campaign methods — their “portfolio” — and how these portfolios vary by party type and across local political contexts.

In this article, we explore how parties allocate resources across different types of campaign strategies, and how they target these strategies to different types of electoral constituencies. We do so by studying the campaigns of Ghana’s two major political parties during the country’s 2012 election. Our focus is not only on how and where parties campaign, but how this varies between incumbent and opposition parties. We argue that incumbent parties are likely to mount a more national campaign than the opposition. This difference is driven by two advantages that ruling parties enjoy. First, since control of state resources is concentrated in the executive branch, incumbent parties can target public resources

¹See Bratton (2008); Nugent (2007); Kramon (2018); Wantchekon (2003).

²See Collier and Vicente (2014); Robinson and Torvik (2009); Straus and Taylor (2012).

³See Asunka et al. (2017); Collier and Vicente (2012).

to favor certain constituencies before the election campaign begins. In particular, incumbents can shore up the support of their core districts by favoring them during their term in office, which frees them to campaign more aggressively in swing and opposition-dominant districts during the campaign. Second, the incumbent party usually has an overall resource advantage (Arriola, 2012; Rakner and Van de Walle, 2009; Levitsky and Way, 2010). Because campaign strategies are labor intensive (Bob-Milliar, 2012), the incumbent has the advantage of being able to recruit non-ideologically committed party activists. This allows the incumbent to campaign more intensely in electorally competitive areas and opposition strongholds, where the pool of ideologically-committed activists – who may work for the party for free – is smaller than in their own core districts.

Using original survey data collected immediately following Ghana’s 2012 presidential and parliamentary elections, we examine how parties allocated the three most prevalent campaign strategies in the country: campaign rallies, house-to-house canvassing (henceforth “canvassing”), and vote buying (“electoral handouts”). The survey questions distinguished between the incumbent and opposition party, which allows us to assess how incumbency shapes campaign strategies. Perhaps surprisingly, our survey on campaign contact is among the first to make this distinction between different parties.⁴ We sampled constituencies to produce variation in the degree of local electoral competition, which we leverage to examine how parties target campaign resources to their core districts, swing districts, and their opponent’s core districts. We complement our analysis with qualitative evidence from other elections in Ghana to further investigate the strategies of Ghana’s two main parties over time. These accounts support the argument that incumbent parties adopt a more nationwide campaign strategy and use more resource-intensive campaign methods.

We find that door-to-door canvassing and campaign rallies are widespread during campaigns in Ghana. Over 40 percent of respondents reported seeing a politician at a rally or campaign meeting, and about 30 percent were canvassed at their home during the election. In comparison, 17 percent of respondents report gifts being distributed in their community. Second, we find evidence of divergence in the behavior of parties both in terms of which strategies they use and where they campaign. Regarding the former, the incumbent party distributes 62 percent more gifts than the opposition. Regarding the

⁴Some rounds of the Afrobarometer survey ask citizens whether parties contacted them during the campaign, but do not ask which party.

latter, the incumbent canvasses and distributes handouts the most in constituencies outside their core constituencies of support: that is, they target swing and opposition constituencies. The opposition party does the opposite: they canvass and distribute handouts most in their stronghold districts. Both parties hold the most rallies in their stronghold districts, a result that we suggest is driven by the actions of incumbent Members of Parliament.

These findings make four contributions. By examining multiple campaign strategies in a single election, our paper is among the first to present a more holistic picture of the campaign environment in a new democracy. Although canvassing and rallies can be venues for clientelism, we present evidence that when party activists canvass they disseminate information on the policies of their party. Thus, the results add nuance to existing debates about whether elections in Africa are clientelistic *or* programmatic (Resnick, 2012; Taylor, 2017). Our results suggest parties engage in a mix of clientelistic and more programmatic (policy-based) forms of campaigning, which demonstrates that these strategies are not mutually exclusive.

Second, our results suggest that parties do not adopt a universal “core” or “swing” targeting strategy. Instead, we argue that ruling parties target their core districts during their term in office, which allows them to focus on swing and opposition districts during the campaign period. These findings advance the distributive politics literature that has focused on the question of whether parties target core or swing areas, often with mixed results (Franck and Rainer, 2012; Golden and Min, 2013; Kasara, 2007; Kramon and Posner, 2013). Our analysis suggests that parties target different types of districts at different times in the electoral cycle. Thus, the questions of when and with which strategies parties target core versus swing districts should receive more attention.

Third, our analysis contributes by highlighting the benefits of analyzing multiple campaign strategies — the portfolio — in the context of the same study. Had we only focused on rallies, we would have concluded that the incumbent targets its core areas, while had we focused only on canvassing, we would have concluded that the incumbent targets swing and opposition areas. Instead, we conclude that the incumbent targets different areas with different strategies, which deepens our understanding of the strategic logic of campaigns. We suggest that this is driven by the decisions of actors at different levels of the party hierarchy (national level versus constituency level) and by the potential electoral returns of these differ-

ent strategies in different types of constituencies: specifically, rallies are a cost effective strategy for mobilizing core supporters to turn out to vote (Paget, 2018), while more personalized strategies, such as canvassing and handouts, are more likely to be effective outside of core areas.

Finally, our results deepen our understanding of the advantages of incumbency in new democracies. While previous work has highlighted that opposition parties struggle for resources (Arriola, 2013; Rakner and Van de Walle, 2009), our results document how these resource imbalances translate into differences in the campaigns that incumbents and challengers are able to conduct. Although it is not surprising that the ruling party has an incumbency advantage in Ghana, our contribution is to show one important, and under-studied, channel through which this advantage manifests itself.

1 Incumbency and party campaign strategies in Ghana

Ghana has held multi-party elections every four years since its return to democratic rule in 1992. Along with a growing number of African countries, it has experienced three successful democratic transitions of power, in 2000, 2008 and 2016. Two parties dominate the electoral arena, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP). We focus on Ghana's December 2012 election, during which the NDC was the incumbent party and the NPP was the main challenger. Presidential elections are concurrent with parliamentary elections. The NDC won the 2012 election, securing both the presidency and a majority of the seats in the parliament.

Presidential candidates need an absolute majority to win the election which, combined with Ghana's history of highly competitive races, incentivizes parties to seek votes from across the country (Whitfield, 2009). Accordingly, both major parties have a national character, and draw support from "all geographic constituencies, encapsulating different groups, socio-economic backgrounds and perspectives" (Gyimah-Boadi and Debrah, 2008, 147). Yet both main parties have areas of historic electoral dominance that coincide with ethnic alliances (Fridy, 2007). While ex-President J. J. Rawlings popularly referred to the Volta region as the electoral "World Bank" of the NDC, the constituencies in the populous Ashanti region are stronghold areas for the NPP.

Citizens can join both parties and serve them in official roles at the local, regional and national

levels. The entry point for grassroots members is polling-station executive positions.⁵ Both parties also organize local primaries to select presidential and parliamentary candidates, which gives party members a direct influence on the composition of national party elites (Ichino and Nathan, 2013). During the campaign period, the mass party network comes to life. National and then regional and constituency party offices dispatch resources to polling stations, where party activists draw up local campaign plans.

1.1 Campaign strategies: canvassing, handouts and rallies

We focus on the three most prevalent party campaign strategies in Ghana: door-to-door canvassing, campaign rallies, and electoral handouts. As regards to door-to-door canvassing, it is very typical for political party activists to visit potential voters at home to try to win their support (Nathan, 2016). A country-specific question on the Afrobarometer (round 5) illustrates what happens when political party activists canvass potential voters. The survey asked respondents an open-ended question on what they thought grassroots activists did during election campaigns.⁶ The most frequent response was that they explain the party's plans and policies (22 percent). The next most frequent response was that activists mobilize people to support the party (12 percent). In comparison, only a small share of people said that foot soldiers distribute gifts to voters (7 percent) or intimidate or attempt to ignite violence (2 percent).

The idea that party activists use their interactions with citizens to explain the plans and policies of their preferred party is also suggested by the handbooks that parties give to activists in Ghana. For example, the NPP's Polling Station Manual declares that "It is deemed very necessary for Polling Station Executives [party activists] to update themselves on the policies and programmes of the NPP government so as to be able to proactively defend the Party at all times and at whichever level" (New Patriotic Party, 2006). Thus, while party activists may also distribute small gifts while canvassing, for the most part they also appear to discuss policy proposals.

For example, during the election that we study, one of the major policies that both parties discussed was the challenger's (NPP's) commitment to making senior high school (SHS) free (Brierley and

⁵The NDC has party positions in each electoral ward, while the NPP has positions for each polling station.

⁶Verbatim responses were coded into pre-defined categories. The exact wording was: *In your opinion, which three main activities would you say grassroots political party activists (or foot soldiers) primarily engage themselves in during election campaigns and elections?*

Ofosu, 2014).⁷ NPP billboards displayed the slogan “Free SHS Now! Not in 20 years. Your vote can make it happen.” Taylor (2017) argues that the NPP have used universal policy platforms to attract voters from non-core ethnic groups. By committing to universal policies — such as free SHS and a national health insurance program — the party is able to build support from outside its core Akan base.⁸

In addition to trying to win support on the basis of their proposed policies, it is common for parties to distribute electoral handouts to voters (Lindberg, 2003; Nugent, 2007). Many voters expect to receive gifts from candidates (Ghana Center for Democratic Development, 2016), and pressure them to distribute private benefits during the campaign (Lindberg, 2013). According to Afrobarometer data, about 12 percent of Ghanaians were offered a handout during the 2004 elections, and about 7 percent in 2012. Much vote buying in Ghana, and elsewhere in Africa, occurs in public spaces such as campaign rallies and campaign meetings (Kramon, 2016).

Finally, regarding rallies, as in other countries in Africa (Horowitz, 2016; Paget, 2018) and elsewhere (Szwarcberg, 2012; Langston and Rosas, 2018), presidential and parliamentary candidates regularly hold campaign rallies. These events typically involve both the presidential candidate and the party’s MPs from nearby constituencies. Ordinary voters and local notables, including traditional chiefs, attend these events, at which politicians take to the stage to discuss their campaign promises and disparage the opposition. At rallies, voters are also given t-shirts, handheld fans and other branded paraphernalia. Rallies are expensive to organize: stages and PA systems are erected, and large screens may be mounted. Parties also pay activists to bring citizens to rallies, and often provide nourishment to attendees.

1.2 Incumbency and campaign strategies

How and where do parties invest in these different campaign strategies? We argue that incumbency partly shapes the answer to this question. We emphasize two incumbency advantages that we expect to determine incumbent versus opposition campaign strategies.

First, incumbent parties are at a significant resource advantage because they have access to state funds. In Ghana, the national incumbent is in a particularly strong position because they control each

⁷Primary and junior high school are already free in Ghana.

⁸The Akan are the largest ethnic group in Ghana.

of the country's 216 local governments.⁹ This ensures that both the national and local bureaucracy — traditional sources of party finance — are in the hands of the ruling party. Recent academic research, and multiple corruption scandals, demonstrate that ruling parties in Ghana finance their campaigns by corrupting public procurement processes and awarding state contracts to party financiers (Brierley, 2017; Luna, 2015; Sigman, 2017).¹⁰ In contrast, opposition parties can only offer firms prospective promises of state contracts. While the NPP is likely to have been better resourced than other opposition parties in Africa, opposition parties in Ghana still struggle to compete with the incumbent party's resources (Arriola, 2012, 2013).

Second, the incumbent party can direct public resources to fulfill its political goals *before* the election campaign begins. There is evidence that presidents in some African countries channel public goods and resources to areas where their ethnic and partisan supporters live in high concentrations (Franck and Rainer, 2012). Briggs (2012) finds that incumbents in Ghana have disproportionately delivered electrification to their stronghold districts. Similarly, Nathan (2018) argues that parties in urban Ghana distribute club goods and private benefits to core voters after elections, and deliver private benefits to both core and non-core voters during the campaign period. Only the ruling party can target its core supporters during its term in office, which allows it to invest in voters outside its core during election campaigns.¹¹

These resource advantages shape campaign strategies in two important ways. First, the incumbent party should be able to invest in more resource-intensive campaign strategies such as canvassing and electoral handouts. Second, these advantages should allow the incumbent to pursue a more national campaign strategy for two reasons. First, since each of the main campaign strategies is labor intensive, each party must deploy a vast network of activists to engage in campaign-related work. As in other contexts, party activists play a central role in mobilizing voters to attend campaign rallies (Szwarcberg, 2012), door-to-door canvassing (Horowitz, 2016), and distributing electoral handouts (Kramon, 2016;

⁹Ghana's constitution (Article 243) requires the president to appoint the head of each local government.

¹⁰See "How to Unmask Corruption in Ghana" <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/25/opinion/how-to-unmask-corruption-in-ghana.html> and "Review procurement process to fight corruption – IMANI to Gov't" <http://citifmonline.com/2016/01/23/183892/>.

¹¹The NDC president, John Evans Atta Mills, passed away while in office in July of the election year. As required by the constitution, the NDC smoothly passed power to his vice president, John Mahama, a very well known and popular NDC politician. Mahama then contested the election in December 2012. Thus, while the specific presidential candidate of the NDC changed in 2012, the party still benefited from its strategic distribution of resources before the campaign period.

Lindberg, 2003; Stokes et al., 2013).

Party activists are often motivated to work on campaigns in return for immediate payments or promises of future benefits, such as public sector jobs or government contracts and loans (Bob-Milliar, 2012; Driscoll, 2017). Incumbent parties can more easily attract activists who are motivated by private benefits. Incumbent parties can offer greater upfront benefits to these activists and their promises of post-election benefits may appear more credible (Wantchekon, 2003). Thus, in addition to having more money to spend on campaigns, the incumbent has a comparative advantage in the recruitment of non-ideologically committed party mobilizers.

This advantage is important because each party's pool of ideologically committed activists is concentrated in its strongholds. Thus, while both parties should be able to campaign intensely in their own strongholds, the opposition is less able to work outside its strongholds. This implies that the incumbent will be able to invest more effort in campaigning in competitive and opposition electoral districts. In comparison, the opposition is less likely to have the resources to recruit and motivate large numbers of activists in non-core communities.

A second reason that the incumbent should be able to pursue a more national campaign strategy is that they can allocate state resources towards fulfilling the party's electoral goals well before the electoral period. Discretion over state resources allows the incumbent to solidify electoral support in stronghold areas through targeted redistribution of state resources. We expect that this frees up the incumbent to campaign more intensely in competitive and opposition-stronghold areas during the campaign.

2 Data and measurement

2.1 Post-election survey

We conducted a large-scale citizen survey during the two days that followed Ghana's 2012 general elections. Citizens from four of Ghana's ten regions — Ashanti, Central, Volta, and Western — are in the sample.¹² The timing of the survey facilitates reliable reporting on campaign activities. We selected the study regions because of the variation they offer in their levels of electoral competition. The Ashanti and Volta regions are not electorally competitive. In contrast, the Central and Western regions are home

¹²About half of Ghana's population lives in these regions.

to some of Ghana's most competitive constituencies: these districts contain many voters who are "up for grabs" in each election (Fridy, 2007). We leverage this variation across constituencies to investigate party campaign strategies across different electoral environments.

We construct a random, representative sample of nearly 6,000 citizens who reside in 60 constituencies.¹³ To ensure variation across electoral environments, we first classified constituencies as being either electorally competitive or party strongholds. We then randomly sampled constituencies from these blocks. To select respondents we followed the Afrobarometer, and used a random-walk technique starting from a pre-specified starting point.¹⁴ The surveys were conducted in English (the country's national language), as well as Akan and Ewe, the two main local languages in the study regions.

2.2 Dependent variables

We asked respondents a battery of questions on their contact with parties prior to the election. To analyze variation in strategies between different types of parties, we asked these questions separately for each of the two major parties. This approach makes our data unusually rich and distinguishes it from many prior surveys on campaign contact, which often ask voters about their experiences with different campaign strategies without asking them which parties targeted them.

We construct three dependent variables. We use our first two outcome measures — on canvassing and handouts — to provide insights into the operation of the national party's campaign strategy. Our third outcome focuses exclusively on the activities of parliamentary aspirants. To measure rates of canvassing, we asked respondents whether they were canvassed at home by party agents.¹⁵ The outcome is a dummy variable that takes a value of 1 if the party canvassed the respondent, and 0 otherwise. Our second outcome assesses the frequency of handouts. We asked whether voters witnessed any of the parties distributing items in their communities during the campaign. Although we ideally wanted to know which

¹³The survey involved roughly 300 survey enumerators. These enumerators were recruited as part of a larger project that analyzed the impact on election observers of election-day fraud and violence. We present those results elsewhere. We trained groups of enumerators in each of the four regions in our sample. Because of challenges in data collection in the days after the election, we were able to collect survey data from 56 of the sampled constituencies.

¹⁴More details on the sampling procedure can be found in Appendix A.

¹⁵The exact wording of the questions of the three outcome variables was: (1) *Did any political party agents come to your place of residence to encourage you to vote for their party?* (2) *Did you witness any of these parties distributing items such as money, food, fertilizer, or cell phones to voters in your area during the election?* (3) *Have you seen the candidate for MP of this constituency from the following parties at a rally or any other event during the current elections?*

individuals received gifts from parties, we framed this question with reference to the respondent's local area in order to guard against response bias. Previous research shows that vote buying is a sensitive topic and that citizens under-report this practice when asked directly if they received gifts (Gonzalez-Ocantos et al., 2012). To minimize bias, we therefore follow previous researchers and asked voters whether they had observed vote buying in their area (e.g. Stokes, 2005). Finally, we asked voters whether they had seen the candidate for MP at a rally or campaign event. Again, we coded responses separately for each party to construct two dummy variables, with positive responses taking a value of 1.

2.3 Control variables

In regression analyses, we control for constituency- and individual- level factors that may predict campaign contact. At the individual level, electoral handouts tend to be targeted toward poorer voters (Bratton, 2008; Jensen and Justesen, 2014). We therefore created a poverty index as a composite indicator of respondents' approximate wealth by summing responses to a set of questions about how often they go without cash income, food, medicine and electricity. We also control for age and gender.

At the constituency level, since campaign strategies may vary across urban and rural areas, we control for whether citizens live in predominantly rural constituencies using data from Ghana's 2010 census. We also use the census data to control for the share of houses with electricity, which we use as a proxy for the accessibility of a constituency. Finally, we control for overall constituency-level wealth using the share of houses made of natural materials (as opposed to concrete).

3 Results

3.1 How do parties campaign?

We first present descriptive information on the prevalence of each of the three campaign methods. Figure 1 displays mean levels of canvassing, handouts and rallies for each party. Regarding canvassing, both the incumbent and opposition parties canvassed about one in every three (30 percent) citizens in our sample. Many voters (23 percent) interacted with party activists from both parties. These high rates of canvassing

do not appear to be unique to Ghana: in Uganda and Kenya, 60 percent and 40 percent of the population, respectively, reported being canvassed (Conroy-Krutz, 2016; Horowitz, 2016).

Both parties also distribute handouts, although the incumbent party has a clear advantage. Overall, about 13 percent of respondents indicated that the incumbent party distributed handouts to people in their community, compared to 8 percent for the opposition party. This difference is equivalent to a 62 percent increase in gifts distributed by the incumbent relative to the opposition. It is also consistent with our argument that differential access to financial resources shapes how parties mobilize support. It is also clear that the prevalence of handouts is significantly lower than rates of canvassing.

Finally, we turn to rallies. As we note above, this question explicitly taps into the behavior of parliamentary aspirants. Figure 1 shows that 45 percent of respondents report seeing the parliamentary aspirant at a rally or event during the campaign. A large number of respondents report seeing candidates from both of the major parties (35 percent). Campaigns thus reach large numbers of voters with rallies, a pattern that is consistent with research from other African countries. In Tanzania, about three-quarters of the population attended a rally during the 2015 election campaign (Paget, 2017). In Uganda, over 60 percent of the population attended at least one party rally during the 2011 election (Conroy-Krutz, 2016). Likewise, Horowitz (2016) found that Kenyan President Kibaki held at least one rally in every two constituencies in 2007.

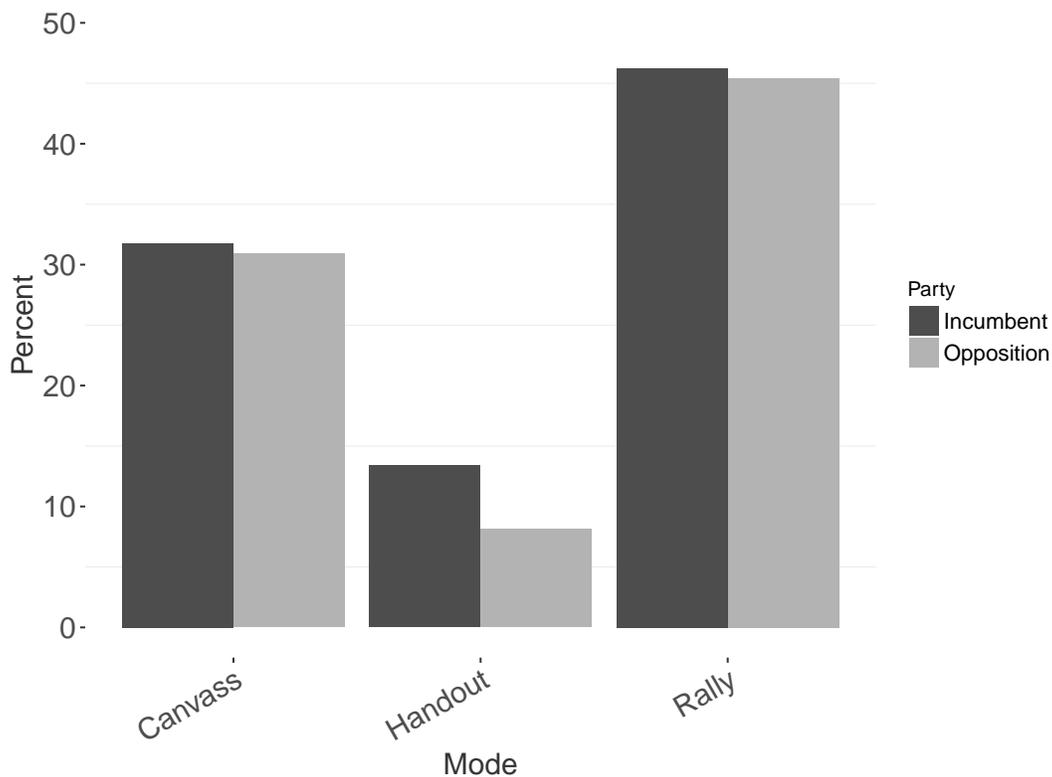
3.2 Where do parties campaign?

Figure 2 disaggregates the raw data across different electoral environments. We categorize constituencies as incumbent strongholds, opposition strongholds, and as competitive according to the vote share of each party in the prior election.¹⁶

The far left plot in Figure 2 displays the results for canvassing. The incumbent party (solid line) canvasses the most in constituencies that are strongholds of their opponents, and the least in their core constituencies. Indeed, while 35 percent of respondents are canvassed by the incumbent party in opposition strongholds, only 23 percent are in the party's own core constituencies (a 34 percent decrease).

¹⁶We classify constituencies where the NDC got over 65 percent of the vote in 2008 as NDC strongholds, and where they received less than 35 percent of the vote (i.e., the NPP got 65 percent of the vote) as NPP strongholds. The remaining constituencies are coded as competitive. In the Appendix (Figure B.1), we show that the results are robust to an alternative coding that classifies swing constituencies as those that swung between parties in prior parliamentary elections.

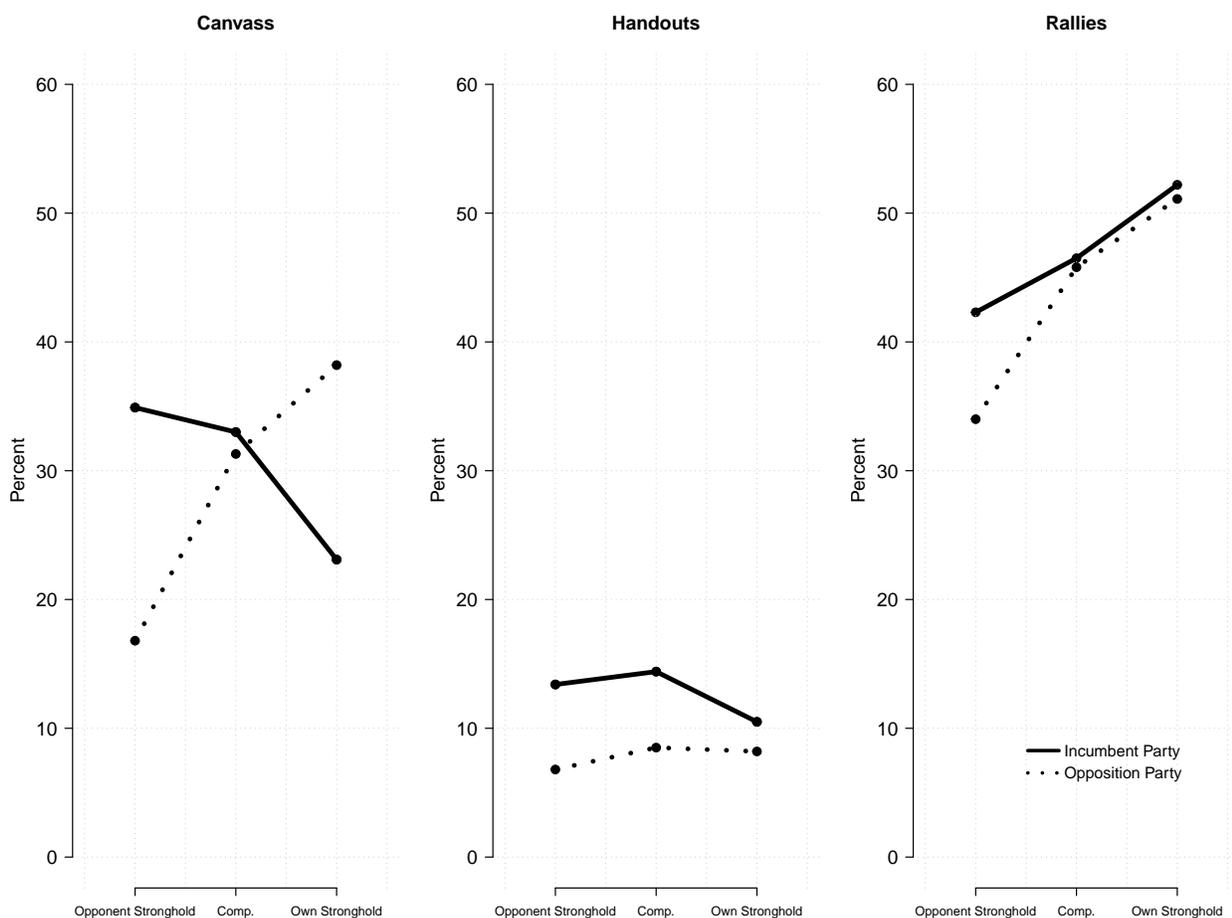
Figure 1: Incumbent and opposition party campaign strategies



The *opposite* pattern is true for the challenger (dashed line). Only 17 percent of respondents report being canvassed by the NPP in the ruling party’s core constituencies. In contrast, the NPP canvassed 38 percent of respondents in the party’s stronghold constituencies (a 124 percent increase). The parties thus pursue different targeting strategies with canvassing: the incumbent mounts a more national campaign and disproportionately targets competitive and opposition constituencies, while the opposition disproportionately targets its own strongholds.

The central plot in Figure 2 displays the rates of electoral handouts. We continue to find that the ruling party allocates more campaigns resources to constituencies where they are electorally weak. In opposition strongholds and competitive constituencies, 14 percent of respondents report that the incumbent party distribute gifts in their community. In its stronghold constituencies, roughly 10 percent of respondents reported that gifts are distributed. The difference in these two means is statistically significant (p -value = 0.001). Once again, the opposition party targets handouts differently. They distribute the most handouts in constituencies where they are already electorally dominant. In their strongholds and in competitive constituencies, the opposition party distributed gifts to 9 percent of citizens, while

Figure 2: Incumbent and opposition campaign strategies by constituency type (party vote share)



Notes: Incumbent strongholds are constituencies where the incumbent party (NDC) received over 65 percent of the vote in the prior election. Opposition strongholds are constituencies where the incumbent party received less than 35 percent of the vote in the prior election. See Appendix Figure B.1 for an alternative classification of constituencies.

in the incumbent party's stronghold only about 7 percent of citizens received gifts from the opposition. Finally, the plot also shows that in every type of constituency, the opposition distributed fewer gifts than the incumbent.

In contrast with the previous two methods, both parties adopt similar strategies when targeting rallies; both parties hold the most rallies and campaign events in their core constituencies (far right plot in Figure 2). In the NDC's stronghold constituencies, 52 percent of respondents reported attending an NDC rally, compared to 42 percent in NPP strongholds. Similarly, 42 percent of respondents saw NPP candidates as rallies in the opposition parties's stronghold, while 34 percent did in constituencies where

Table 1: Logistic regressions predicting incumbent party campaign contact

	Incumbent canvass		Incumbent rally		Incumbent handouts	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
NDC vote share (08)	-0.745*** (0.223)	-1.061*** (0.260)	0.329 (0.208)	0.469* (0.240)	-0.402 (0.273)	-0.038 (0.327)
NDC voter		0.311*** (0.082)		0.170** (0.078)		-0.292** (0.114)
Education		0.078* (0.047)		0.128*** (0.043)		0.134** (0.062)
Female		0.023 (0.058)		-0.168*** (0.056)		0.010 (0.084)
Poverty index		0.038* (0.021)		0.071*** (0.019)		0.046* (0.026)
Constant	-0.936** (0.477)	-1.365** (0.539)	0.388 (0.436)	0.059 (0.487)	-3.298*** (0.571)	-3.926*** (0.666)
Constituency controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Individual controls		Yes		Yes		Yes
<i>N</i>	5,376	3,915	5,355	3,899	5,403	3,922
Log Likelihood	-3,332.143	-2,410.621	-3,669.518	-2,655.617	-2,112.951	-1,493.928

Notes: Constituency controls are: degree of urbanization, share of houses with electricity, and share of houses made of natural materials (earth or wood). Individual controls are: education, gender, poverty index, and NDC voter in 2008. Clustered standard errors (polling station level) are in parentheses.

the ruling party was dominant. These differential targeting strategies are likely to be explained by the behavior of incumbent MPs (i.e., there are more NDC incumbent parliamentary in NDC strongholds, and vice versa for the NPP) and the fact that rallies are a cost effective method for reaching and mobilizing larger numbers of core supporters; those who are most likely to vote for the party if they turn out to vote.

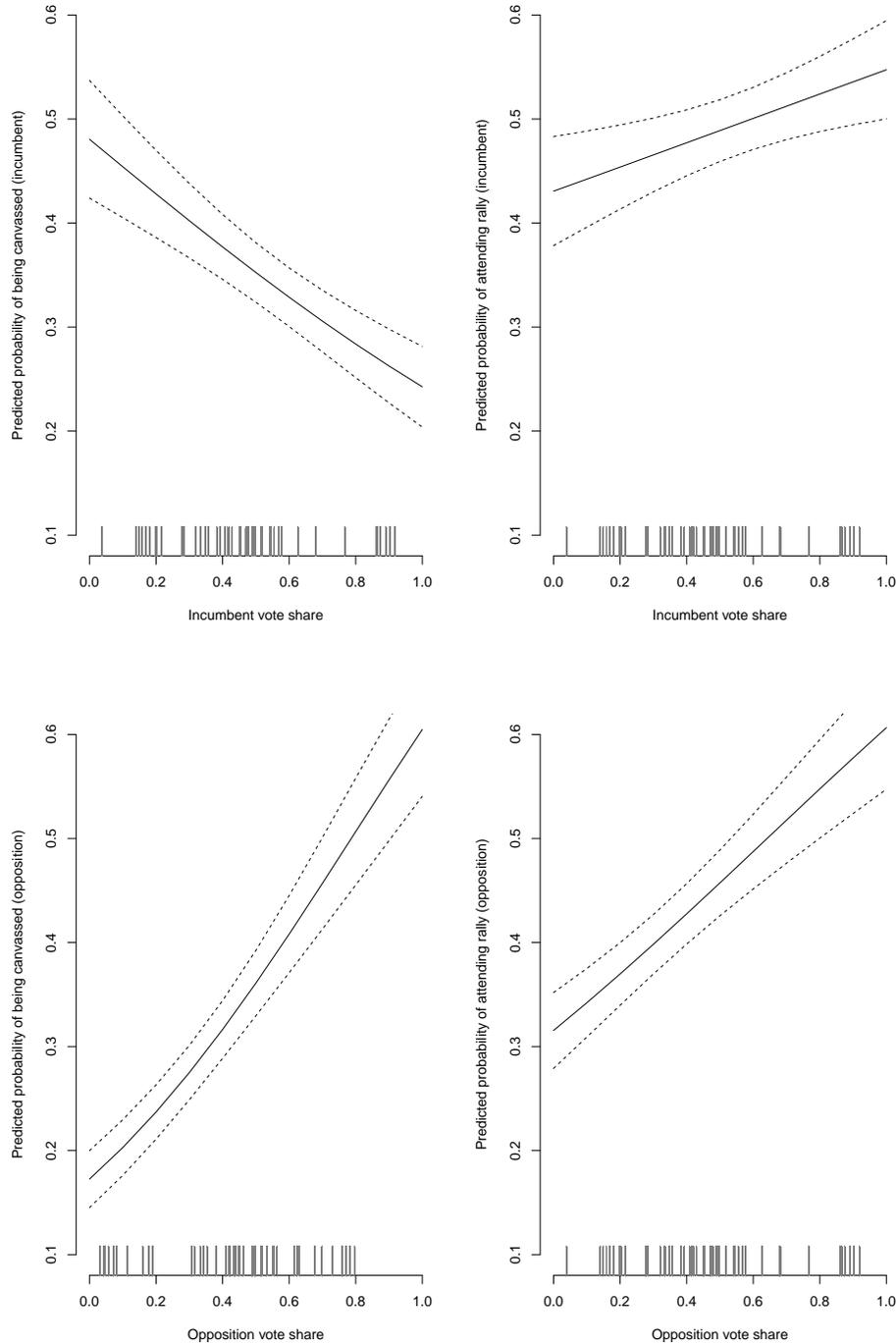
3.3 Regression Analysis

The results of our regression analyses, which allow us to control for individual- and constituency-level factors that might shape party campaign strategies, are consistent with the descriptive patterns described above. The results in Tables 1 and 2 are from a logistic regression where the dependent variables take a value of 1 if the respondent was canvassed, witnessed a rally, or received a handout by the party in question. The main independent variable is the vote share of the party (the NDC when analyzing incumbent strategies and the NPP when analyzing the strategy of the opposition).

Table 1 displays the results for the incumbent. Columns 1 and 2 of Table 1 show that there is a negative and statistically significant relationship between the incumbent party's vote share in the con-

stituency (in 2008) and the probability of a respondent being were canvassed by the incumbent party (in 2012). Column 1 controls for constituency-level characteristics that may influence rates of campaign contact. Column 2 adds controls for a host of individual-level factors. The negative relationship remains unchanged. Figure 3 displays the predicted probability of canvassing as a function of each party's voteshare in the previous election. In constituencies where the incumbent party received less than 20 percent of the vote in 2008, the probability of a citizen being canvassed before the 2012 election is over 40 percent. This figure drops by 15 percentage points in constituencies where over 80 percent of the population voted for the incumbent in the prior election. In short, the incumbent canvasses more voters in constituencies where its voteshare was lower in the previous election.

Figure 3: Predicted Probabilities of Canvassing and Rallies by Party Voteshare in the Previous Election
(Table 1 and Table 2)



Notes: The top panel presents predicted probabilities of canvassing and rallies for incumbent party strategies (Table 1) and the bottom panel presents the same predicted probabilities for the opposition (Table 2). The left plots display results for canvassing. The right plots display results for rallies.

Columns 3 and 4 in Table 1 present the same analyses with rally attendance as the dependent variable. In contrast to the first two columns, the results display a positive relationship between incumbent party vote share and seeing politicians at rallies. After controlling for individual-level characteristics, this relationship is statistically significant at conventional levels (Column 4). The probability of seeing a candidate at a rally increases by about 7 percentage points when we move from constituencies where only 20 percent of the electorate voted for the incumbent party in the previous election to those in which over 80 percent did so (see Figure 3). Consistent with the analysis of the raw data, the incumbent conducts more rallies in districts where its voteshare was higher in the previous election.

Columns 5 and 6 of Table 1 present the results on handouts. We do not find a significant relationship between the incumbent party's vote share and the distribution of handouts. However, consistent with the patterns described above, there is a negative correlation between handouts and the incumbent's voteshare in the previous election.

Table 1 also provides evidence on the individual-level variables that correlate with party campaign contact by the incumbent. On average, the incumbent party was more likely to canvass past NDC voters than to canvass opposition voters. Core supporters are also more likely to report attending a rally held by the incumbent party. By contrast, NDC voters were less likely to observe handouts by the incumbent. This suggests that canvassing and rallies may on average be methods for mobilizing core supporters, while handouts may be used for persuading opposition and swing voters. Female respondents are no more likely to be canvassed than males, but do appear less likely to attend rallies. Additionally, individual poverty levels are positively correlated with being canvassed, seeing a rally, and indicating that the party distributed electoral handouts.

Table 2 presents the same set of analyses for the opposition party. There is a strong and positive relationship between opposition party voteshare and the probability of a respondent being canvassed (Columns 1 and 2). Thus, the canvassing strategy is the *opposite* of what we observe for the incumbent; the opposition party canvasses most frequently in districts where its voteshare was higher in the previous election. NPP voteshare in constituency is also positively associated with seeing a campaign rally organized by the MP (Columns 3 and 4). Again, we do not find a statistically significant relationship between the vote share of the party and distribution of electoral handouts. In short, the opposition is much more

Table 2: Logistic regressions predicting opposition party campaign contact

	Opposition canvass		Opposition rally		Opposition handouts	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
NPP vote share (2008)	1.917*** (0.245)	1.993*** (0.270)	1.647*** (0.216)	1.208*** (0.241)	-0.008 (0.402)	-0.344 (0.458)
NDC voter		0.183** (0.080)		-0.144* (0.076)		0.104 (0.134)
Education		0.092** (0.046)		0.137*** (0.043)		0.017 (0.070)
Female		-0.058 (0.059)		-0.141*** (0.053)		-0.174 (0.111)
Poverty index		0.021 (0.020)		0.038** (0.019)		-0.027 (0.036)
Constant	-2.253*** (0.485)	-2.273*** (0.560)	-1.121*** (0.377)	-0.855** (0.432)	-5.106*** (0.800)	-5.645*** (0.982)
Constituency controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Individual controls		Yes		Yes		Yes
<i>N</i>	5,669	4,092	5,641	4,069	5,628	4,072
Log Likelihood	-3,391.897	-2,453.165	-3,821.565	-2,766.266	-1,555.055	-1,064.684

Notes: Constituency controls are: degree of urbanization, share of houses with electricity, and share of houses made of natural materials (earth or wood). Individual controls are: education, gender, poverty index, and NDC voter in 2008. Clustered standard errors (polling station level) are in parentheses.

likely to engage in both canvassing and rallies within its own strongholds than outside these areas.

Finally, an alternative approach to analyzing our survey data is to aggregate the data up to the polling station level.¹⁷ In such an analysis, the dependent variable takes a value of 1 when any of the respondents from the station report attending in a rally, being canvassed, or seeing handouts being distributed. Our main results remain identical if we adopt this approach. We present these results in Appendix Section B.

4 Qualitative evidence

Our argument highlights differences in the campaign strategies between the incumbent and challenger. One limitation of our analysis is that while the survey data are unusually rich, we collected it during a single election. This makes it difficult for us to rule out the possibility that the differences in party strategies that we document are the result of other differences between the two parties, as opposed to their status as incumbent versus challenger.

¹⁷On average, we surveyed 4 respondents at each polling station in the sample

In this section, we provide qualitative evidence to further support our interpretation of the results. These accounts are from the election campaigns immediately prior and subsequent to the election that we study (in 2008 and 2016). They reinforce the idea that both how and where parties campaign depends partly on their status as incumbents versus challengers.¹⁸

We first consider how each party behaved in the prior election in 2008. During the 2008 campaign, the NPP was the incumbent party. Our theory would predict that the NPP took advantage of its position as incumbent and allocated more resources than they otherwise would to strongholds of the NDC, such as the Volta region. Qualitative accounts suggest that this was the case. As Jockers, Kohnert and Nugent (2010) observe, “The NPP exploited the advantage of incumbency in the Volta Region. For example, apart from the usual distribution of large numbers of T-shirts, they provided school books in the villages, traditional presents to the chiefs and... also cash as an incentive to vote for the right candidate” (108). These authors also observe that the NPP sought to capture four parliamentary constituencies in the region. The heightened presence of the NPP seemed to be at least moderately successful: “ Their party offices were very well frequented and their public meetings well attended” Jockers, Kohnert and Nugent (2010, 108).

After winning the 2012 election (the focus of our study), the NDC were the incumbent party for the next election in 2016. Consistent with the results that we present, scholarly accounts of this campaign document high levels of vote-buying by the incumbent party. In a direct comparison of strategies across the two major parties, Cheeseman, Lynch and Willis (2017) note that “the NDC gave out more money and gifts than the NPP” (95). These authors also note that the opposition were very active in their stronghold (the Ashanti region), working hard to “foster internal unity and boost turnout” (97). In comparison, the authors argue that in the NDC’s stronghold the opponent NPP were more selective with which voters they contacted, not wanting to waste funds. For their part, as in the 2012 election, the NDC continued to be very active in their opponent’s stronghold. More than a year before election day the party launched a specific campaign to win 1 million votes in the Ashanti region.¹⁹ The commitment of the party’s national leadership to the plan was noted by the NDC’s Ashanti regional organizer (Brogya Genfi) who said “the

¹⁸We are unable to use quantitative data to investigate campaign strategies over time because other data sources, such as the Afrobarometer, do not distinguish between political parties.

¹⁹From a baseline of just over 610,000 votes in the prior election.

NDC youth in Ashanti remains resolute to lead the battle and with the determination of the General Party, operation 1 million votes in Ashanti in 2016 election will be a reality."²⁰

These accounts from other elections are consistent with the argument. The alternative is that there are other differences between the NDC and NPP that could explain the results. For example, there may be relevant differences between the characteristics of each party's stronghold areas. However, our results are robust to controlling for a number of potentially important constituency-level and individual-level variables, including poverty and urbanization. Alternatively, the NDC could generally have a larger stable of committed activists who are willing and able to campaign intensely in swing and opposition areas. Yet this interpretation is not consistent with the patterns from other elections that are described above. Additionally, existing research suggests that both parties are able to recruit large numbers of party activists (Bob-Milliar, 2012).

In summary, qualitative accounts support our theory and are consistent with the data that we present. We also note that our theory and findings are consistent with data from a number of African countries which shows that electoral support for opposition parties is more geographically confined than for incumbents (Wahman, 2015).

5 Discussion and conclusion

This study has investigated party campaign strategies in Ghana. One important nuance of our data is that we disaggregated between each of Ghana's two major parties – the incumbent and the opposition – when we ask respondents about their contact with parties during the campaign.

Our findings make several contributions. First, our analysis produces an important descriptive finding: door-to-door canvassing is extremely widespread. About 30 percent of our sample of Ghanaians reported that at least one of the two major political parties visited their home in an attempt to win their vote. A significant number of voters are targeted by both parties. Ghanaians also attend campaign rallies and meetings at very high rates – over 40 percent. Importantly, our data also suggests that canvassing and rallies are substantially more prevalent than electoral handouts. Thus, while the literature

²⁰See: *NDC: 1 million votes in Ashanti guaranteed*, <https://citifmonline.com/2015/04/10/well-get-1-million-votes-in-ashanti-ndc-to-nana-addo/>.

on African politics has typically emphasized the importance of exchange-based or otherwise manipulative campaign strategies, our results imply that parties also generate support by discussing their policies and programs with citizens. More generally, this highlights that campaigns in new democracies are not simply clientelistic or programmatic, but contain elements of both approaches.

Second, our argument and results contribute to the literature on distributive politics, which has addressed the question of whether parties target core or swing voters (Franck and Rainer, 2012; Kasara, 2007; Kramon and Posner, 2013). We suggest that the incumbent party does both, distributing benefits to different groups of voters in different time periods. Specifically, the ruling party uses public resources to distribute club goods and private benefits to core voters during their tenure in office in order to suppress the risk of defection by core voters (Diaz-Cayeros, Estévez and Magaloni, 2016). Shoring up core voters during its term in office then allows the incumbent party to dedicate resources to a broader group of voters during the campaign. Future research could further investigate the timing of distributive exchanges, and consider other instances of politicians substituting core and swing voter targeting during different periods of the electoral cycle.

We also find that the incumbent party targets rallies differently than canvassing and handouts: specifically, the incumbent targets its own strongholds more heavily with rallies while it targets opposition and competitive constituencies more heavily with canvassing. Thus, the party uses different strategies to target different groups of voters. This finding differs from Horowitz (2016), which argues that presidential candidates in Kenya held more rallies in swing areas in order to avoid the public appearance that they are favoring their own ethnic constituency. Our results are likely different because we focus on rallies organized by MP candidates. In addition, political parties in Ghana are multi-ethnic in composition and the country does not have a history of ethnic conflict. Thus, the differences may also reflect differences in the nature of ethnic politics in the two countries. Indeed our results are consistent with Rauschenbach (2017), who also argues that presidential candidates in Ghana targeted their core districts with rallies during the 2012 election.

The finding that the incumbent targets rallies differently than canvassing and handouts may be explained by the actions of individual candidates for parliament in incumbent stronghold areas and the different costs and benefits of each of these types of strategies. While the start-up cost for organizing

rallies is higher than it is for canvassing and handouts, the marginal costs of targeting extra voters are smaller for rallies. Therefore, rallies can be a cost-effective strategy to reach large numbers of citizens. However, individualized methods are likely to have more certain electoral returns than rallies: compared to canvassing and handouts rallies are a more diffuse and less personal form of campaign contact.²¹ Thus, if parties have sufficient resources, they may be likely to pursue these more expensive but electorally more certain strategies in swing and opposition areas where the party has less overall support. In stronghold areas, where parties enjoy high levels of support, rallies can be a more cost-effective way to mobilize supporters. Additionally, rallies can serve as a signal that the party remains committed to serving its core districts (Rauschenbach, 2017). Indeed in stronghold areas, it remains crucial for parliamentary candidates to demonstrate that they are active in their constituencies and to mobilize high rates of voter turnout.

Overall, our results suggest several areas for future research. First, our analysis highlights the benefits of examining multiple campaign strategies in a single study. Through analyzing the party's campaign portfolios, we show that the incumbent targets core, swing, and opposition supporters with different types of strategies. Future research should continue to analyze campaigns more holistically. Second, we suggest that the structure of party organization, and the individual decisions of different actors within a party — in this case, parliamentary candidates and national party campaign managers — may help to explain these differential targeting strategies. In addition, different strategies may be more beneficial in different electoral contexts. Finally, our findings suggest that access to financial resources — and disparities in resources between parties — has implications for the campaign footprints and strategies of parties in Africa's young democracies. Additional studies concerning how incumbency advantage manifests itself on the campaign trail will be important for our understanding of elections and democratic consolidation in new democracies in Africa.

²¹This argument mirrors Magaloni, Diaz-Cayeros and Estévez (2007), who argue that private goods are more certain than public goods in their electoral returns.

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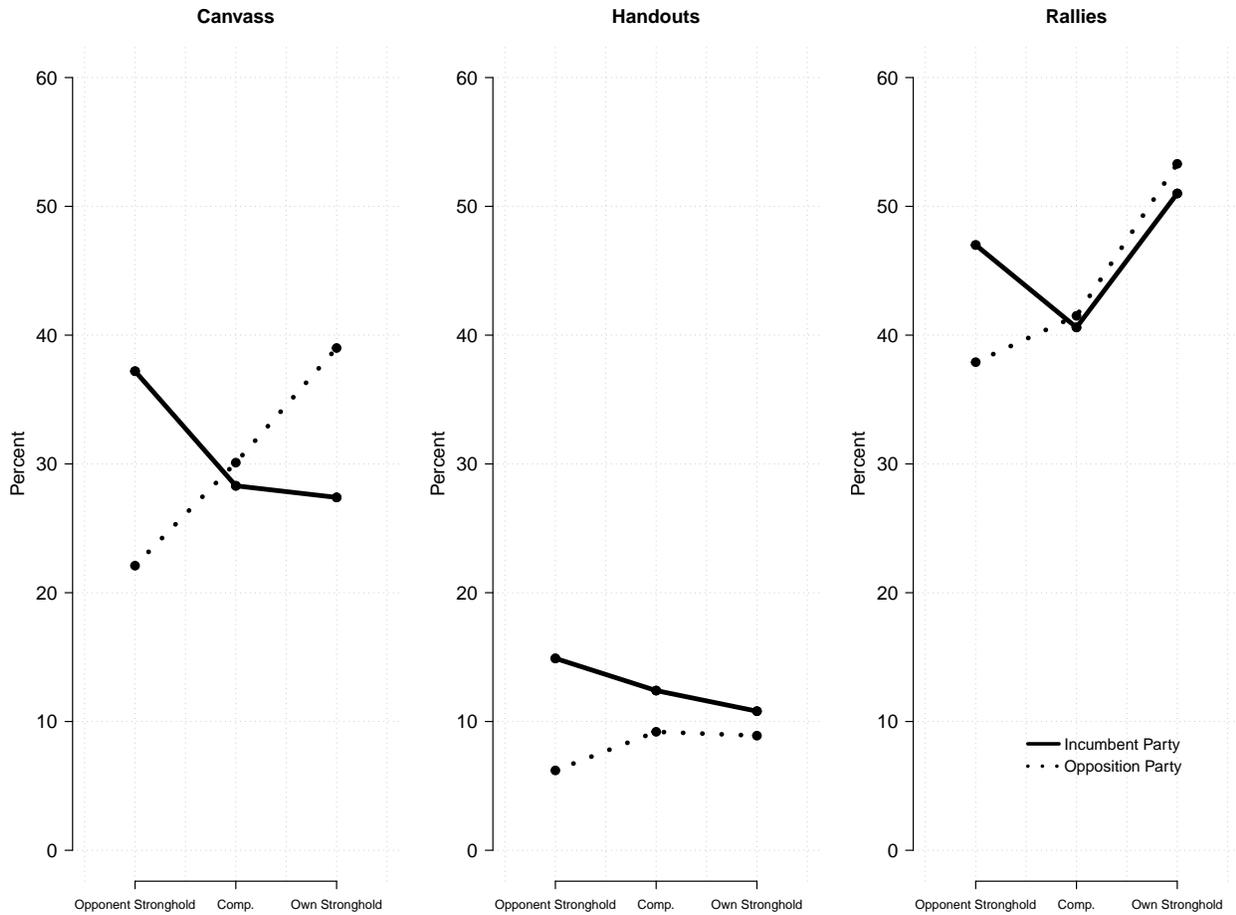
Online Appendix

A Selection of survey participants

To select respondents, we first drew a random sample of polling stations from the four regions. To do so, we first selected 60 electoral constituencies, ensuring variation in constituencies that are electorally competitive or not. Because of challenges in data collection in the days after the election, we were able to collect data from 56 of the sampled constituencies. After selecting constituencies, we randomly sampled 30 percent of polling stations in each constituency to serve as sampling points. Survey enumerators found a central location near the polling station and used a random-walk technique to select households. To select respondents, enumerators created a list of all voting-age adults living in the household. They then selected one individual at random, alternating between males and females. We surveyed 5,968 citizens.

B Replication of Figure 2 with alternative measure of constituency competition

Figure B.1: Incumbent and opposition campaign strategies by constituency type (swing classification)



Notes: Incumbent strongholds are constituencies where the incumbent party (NDC) received got a majority in the parliamentary race in 2004 and 2008. Opposition strongholds are constituencies where the NPP won majorities in the two prior elections. Competitive constituencies are those that swung between the two major parties.

C Replication of results with data aggregated at the polling station level

In the follow analyses the dependent variable take a value of 1 when *any* respondent at the polling station was (i) canvassed by the party in question (ii) observed/attended a rally (iii) saw gifts being distributed in their local area. Our main results are robust to this alternative model specification. Specifically, we continue to find that the incumbent party were more likely to canvass voters in constituencies where they had a low vote share in the prior election, while they continue to rally the the most in their stronghold constituencies. Again, we find that the opposition party are more likely to both rally or canvass support in their stronghold constituencies. We continue to find that vote share in the prior election is not predictive of where either party distribute campaign gifts.

Table C.1 displays the regression results. Figure C.1 and C.2 display the marginal effects (with other constituency level variables held constant at the mean).

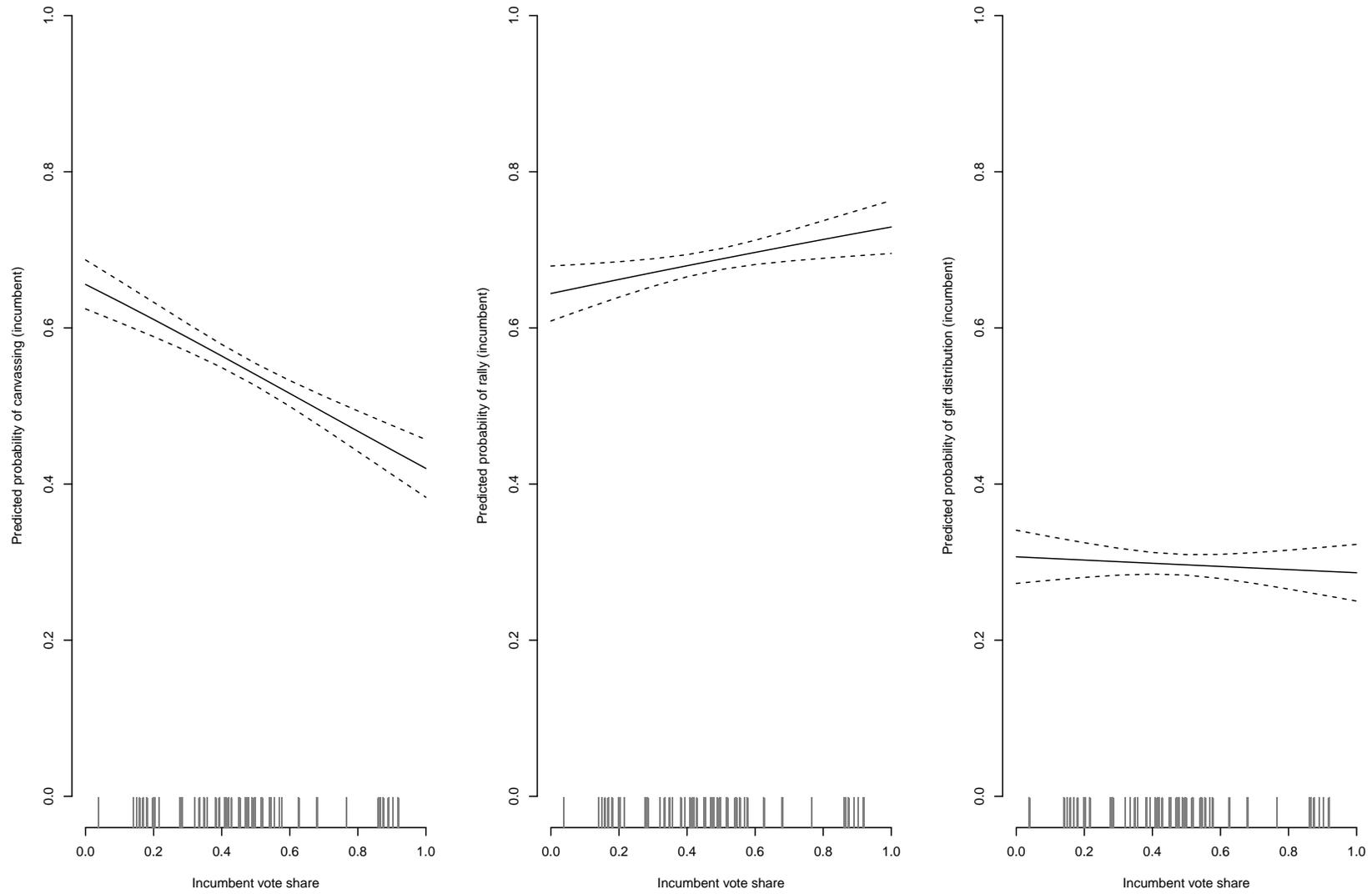
Table C.1: Logit regressions: Predicting any campaign activity at the polling station

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Canvass (Inc.)	Rally (Inc.)	Gift (Inc.)	Canvass (Opp.)	Rally (Opp.)	Gift (Opp.)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
NDC Vote Sh. (2008)	−0.992*** (0.143)	0.398*** (0.153)	−0.098 (0.160)	−1.723*** (0.140)	−1.370*** (0.145)	0.099 (0.174)
Electricity	−1.255*** (0.268)	−2.156*** (0.297)	−0.293 (0.296)	−1.201*** (0.254)	−1.187*** (0.271)	0.949*** (0.327)
Urban	1.704*** (0.200)	0.516** (0.208)	2.024*** (0.217)	1.743*** (0.191)	1.280*** (0.205)	1.463*** (0.234)
Housing	0.896*** (0.284)	−0.361 (0.310)	2.221*** (0.306)	0.539** (0.272)	0.433 (0.290)	2.517*** (0.333)
Constant	0.306 (0.296)	1.828*** (0.327)	−2.454*** (0.330)	0.643** (0.282)	1.449*** (0.300)	−3.734*** (0.361)
Observations	4,839	4,795	4,872	5,380	5,325	5,268
Log Likelihood	−3,265.183	−2,950.264	−2,926.787	−3,584.626	−3,232.076	−2,599.466
Akaike Inf. Crit.	6,540.367	5,910.528	5,863.575	7,179.252	6,474.151	5,208.933

Note:

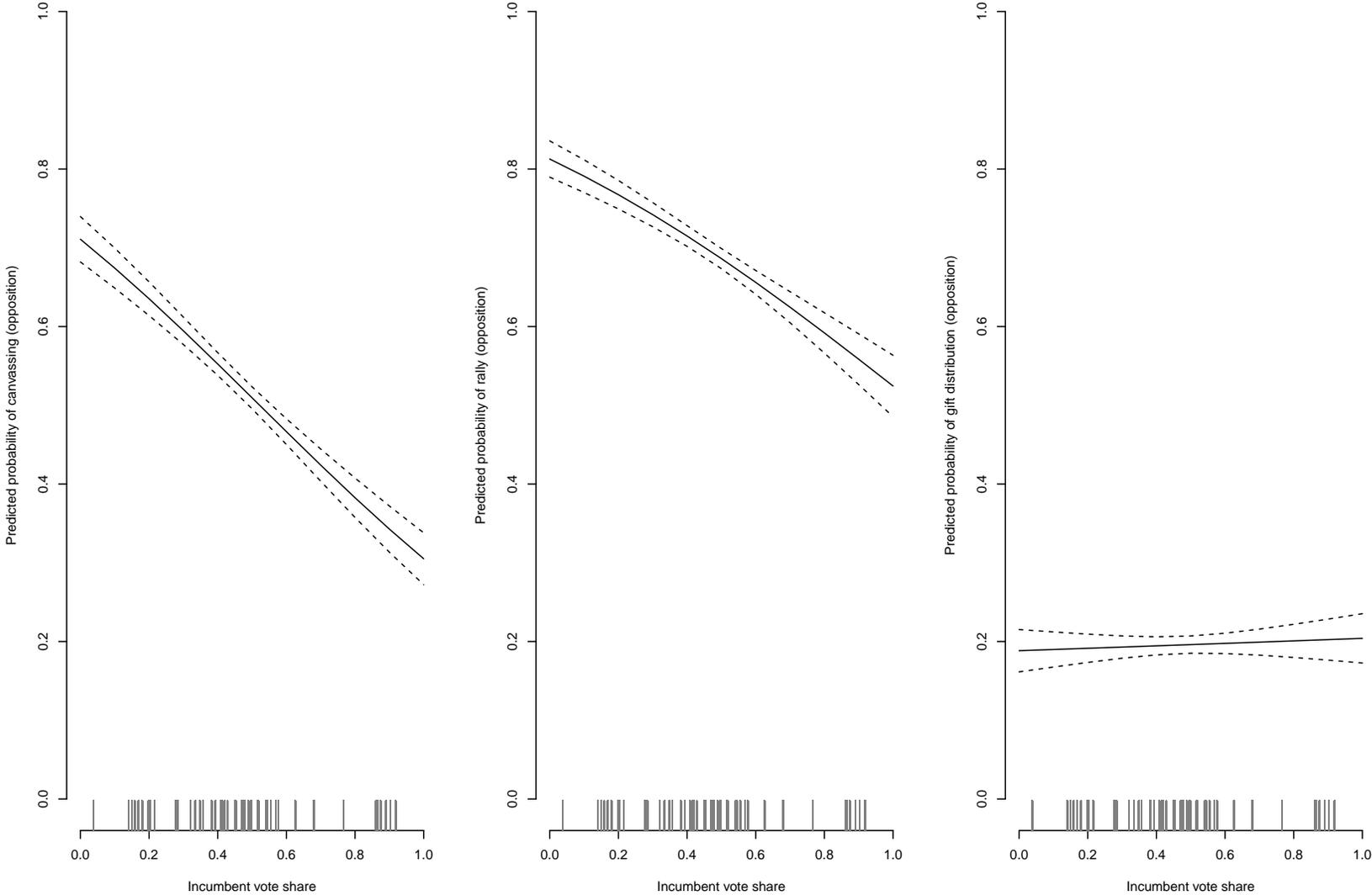
*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Figure C.1: Incumbent party campaign strategies (marginal effects)



Notes: Figure C.1 displays the marginal effects calculated from columns 1, 2 and 3 of Table C.1.

Figure C.2: Opposition party campaign strategies (marginal effects)



Notes: Figure C.2 displays the marginal effects calculated from columns 4,5, and 6 of Table C.1.