

# BASELINE SURVEY REPORT – VOTERS’ COMPASS PROJECT ON POLITICAL MANIFESTOS

# 2024

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# Executive Summary

Voter behavior is a topic of equal interest to both politicians and academics worldwide. Research has identified various determinants that influence voters, including policy positions, ideologies, ethnicity, and party affiliation. In Ghana, political manifestos serve as the primary platform for parties to communicate their ideas and persuade voters. These manifestos are central policy documents that outline a party's key stances and serve to simplify campaign messages. Additionally, they aim to help voters choose the party that best aligns with their aspirations and needs.

This baseline study aimed to achieve two main objectives. First, it sought to gather information from potential voters regarding the importance of manifestos and identify key issues that political parties should address in their manifestos for the upcoming December 2024 elections in Ghana. Second, the study serves as a foundation for the Voters' Compass project, which aims to project key issues raised by political parties in their manifestos. This project's goal is to empower voters to make informed choices in the forthcoming elections.

An online baseline survey was conducted using a semi-structured questionnaire. The survey was completed by 325 participants via an online survey. The results revealed that a significant majority (96.6%) of respondents are aware of political manifestos during Ghanaian elections. Furthermore, a substantial proportion (over two-thirds or 63.1%) indicated that manifestos hold some degree of importance in their voting decisions. Interestingly, half of the respondents (50.1%) believe parties fulfill their manifesto promises to some extent, while a significant percentage (34.4%) feels promises are rarely met.

The study investigated which issues Ghanaians believe political parties should prioritize in their manifestos. The results overwhelmingly identified the economy (jobs, exchange rate, inflation, and wages) as the top concern, with a staggering 90.7% of respondents ranking it as the most pressing issue. This was followed by corruption in second place and infrastructure in third, among other issues. Respondents also provided justifications for their rankings.

In conclusion, this study sheds light on key issues that political parties should prioritize in their 2024 manifestos to resonate with Ghanaian voters.

## 1.0 Introduction

Globally, the phenomenon of voter behaviour has attracted equal attention from both politicians and scholars. This has led to a significant amount of research effort being devoted to identifying the factors that determine such behaviour. Factors such as policies, ideologies, ethnicity, and party identification have all been identified as determinants of voter choices. Nevertheless, the medium through which such factors are communicated is very important.

For Ghanaian voters specifically, the key issue lies in the vehicle through which political parties convey their messages. The evolution of social media has created a vast platform for politicians to leverage and disseminate their messages. However, the challenge with social media is the rampant spread of fake news, disinformation, and biased political reporting.

As a result, citizens face difficulties in discerning accurate information, hindering their ability to make informed decisions during elections.

In light of this problem, political manifestos have been identified as the primary vehicle used by political parties in Ghana. These manifestos serve as central policy documents that provide a summary of a party's key positions. They not only streamline campaign messages but are also intended to guide voters in determining which political party best aligns with their aspirations and needs.

This baseline survey report, a precursor to the Voters' Compass project, aims to empower Ghanaians with accurate electoral information about the manifestos and policy positions of all political parties and presidential candidates for the December 2024 national elections. The project is supported with German Federal Foreign Office's funds by ifa (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen), zivik Funding Programme. The baseline survey sought to elicit information from a cross-section of Ghanaian voters regarding key policy issues that both young voters and the general voting population would like to see addressed in the manifestos of all political parties.

## 1.2 Methodology

The sample for the survey consisted of 325 respondents who were 18 years or older, and were identified as likely voters. Given that the number of online participants was uncertain, a target of 50% of eligible visitors was chosen to maximize the variation within the sample. A 95% confidence level ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) with a precision level of  $\pm 5\%$  was desired. Cochran's formula for calculating sample size indicated a target sample size of 385, but 325 respondents answered the survey questions, representing an 84% response rate. Within the two-week period that the data was collected, all the participants who took the survey mimicked a census sampling technique for those who will eventually access the Voters' Compass portal across Ghana.

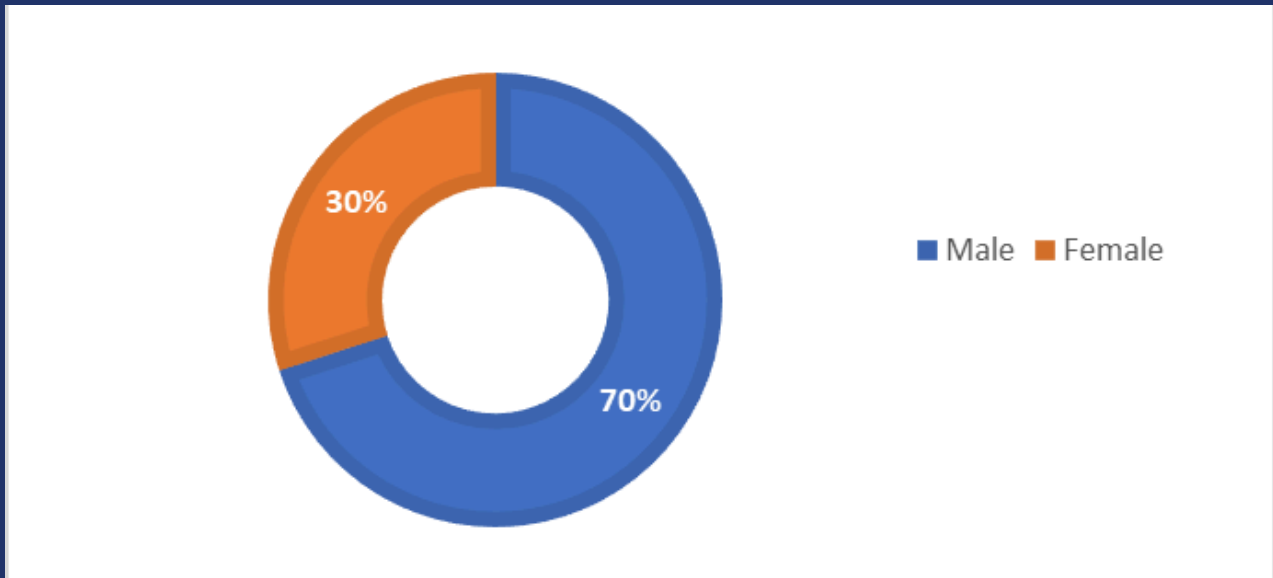
The survey employed a semi-structured questionnaire, which included mostly closed-ended questions with a few open-ended ones. Divided into four sections – demographic background, influence of political manifestos, voter behaviour and important issues, and general comments – the questionnaire took less than five minutes to complete. A Likert scale and dichotomous questions were used to measure the respondents' knowledge about manifestos and key issues for inclusion in manifestos. Responses were tabulated and analyzed by section. Graphs and charts were then used to add a visual representation to the analysis. To ensure confidentiality, the survey was anonymous, assuring respondents that the data would be used solely to inform political parties and independent candidates on policy issues for their manifestos. A pilot survey was conducted at an Accra workshop for a cross-section of Ghanaian media personnel and political activists. This pilot helped to identify ambiguities in the questionnaire and any challenges with its administration.

This baseline survey aimed to identify key issues for political parties and independent candidates to address in their manifestos, informing the issues highlighted in the Voters' Compass project leading up to Ghana's December elections. Data was collected from a cross-section of Ghanaians through an online survey, achieving this purpose. However, some limitations may have affected the study's generalizability. Only visitors to the online survey platform could participate. Ideally, a larger pool of respondents would have been preferable. Nevertheless, the homogeneity of issues affecting all Ghanaians suggests a nationwide sample might not be necessary, as similar groups likely share the same opinions on these crucial manifesto topics. While respondents' political affiliations might influence their answers, the identified key issues align with similar research findings by Afrobarometer and Global Info Analytics, suggesting a focus on these issues remains relevant regardless of political leaning.

## 2.1 Demographic Background of Respondents

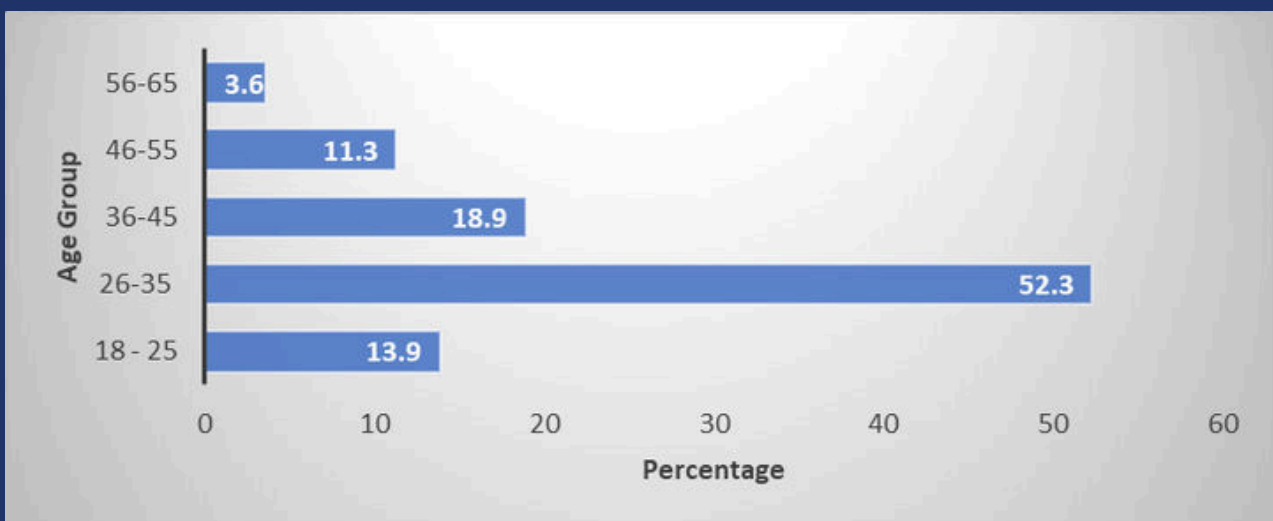
Party manifestos serve as the cornerstone of the social contract between voters and political parties. They are a vital document for assessing policy priorities, promises made, and the winning party's subsequent delivery. Manifestos typically reflect a party's vision for tackling Ghana's key development challenges. The baseline survey revealed a gender imbalance in respondents. Seventy percent of respondents were male, and 30% were female. Figure 2.1.1 depicts the gender of the respondents.

**Figure 2.1.1: Gender of Respondents**



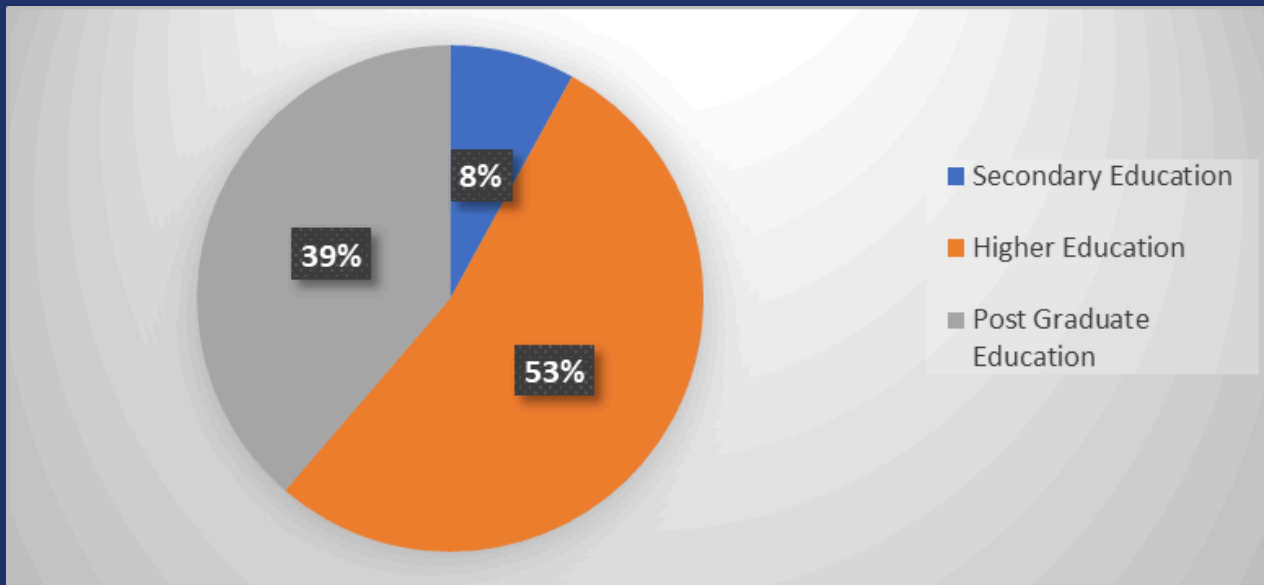
In terms of age, the largest group (52.3%) fell within the 26-35 age range, followed by 18.9% in the 36-45 age bracket. Young voters (18-25 years) comprised 13.9% of respondents. Figure 2.1.2 shows the ages of the respondents.

**Figure 2.1.2: Age Group of Respondents**



Education wise 53.3% of the respondents had attained higher education (diploma or bachelor's degree), while 38.7% of the respondents had postgraduate qualifications (master's degree or above). Eight percent of the respondents had completed secondary or technical/vocational training. Figure 2.1.3 depicts the pictorial representation of the respondents.

**Figure 2.1.3: Level of Education**



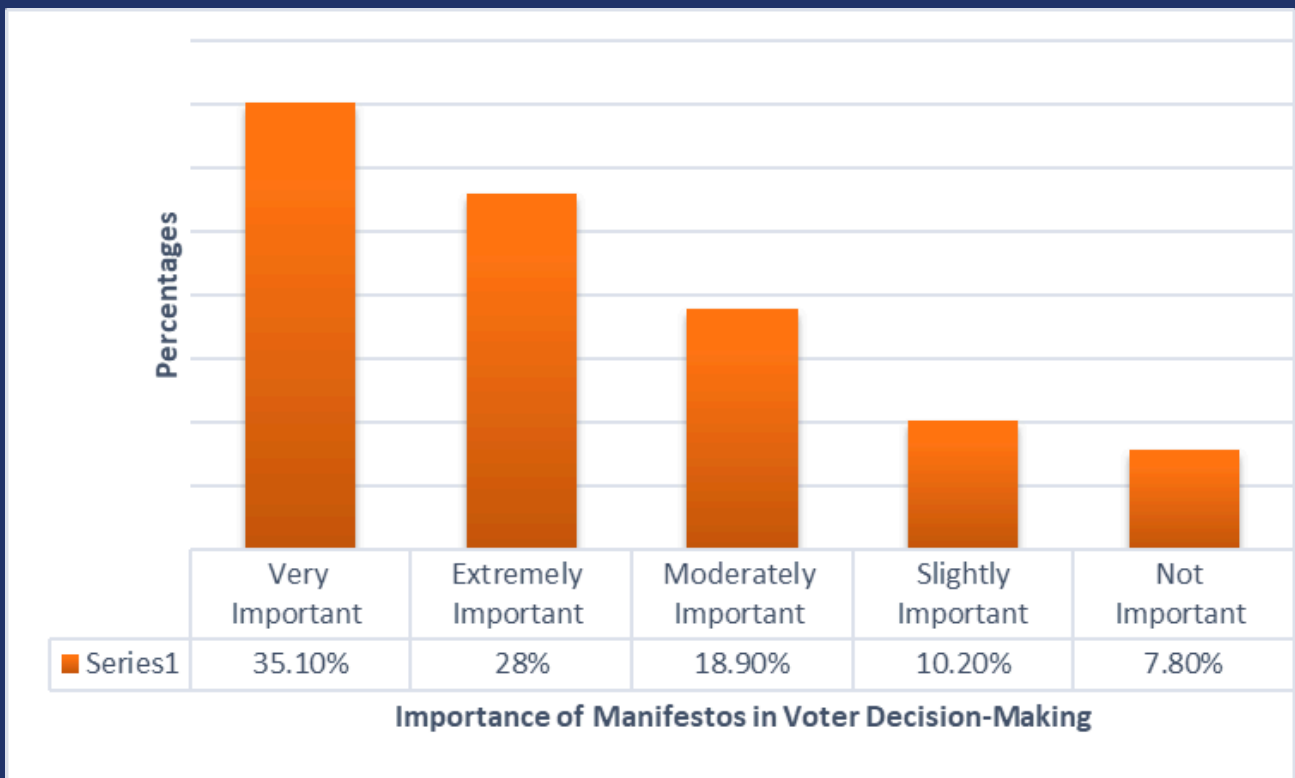
The demographic findings of the baseline survey align with Afrobarometer (2022) round 9 results, which also showed a male majority and a dominance of the 25-36 age group. However, Afrobarometer found secondary or technical/vocational education to be the highest level of attainment. Most respondents' high level of education likely indicates their ability to read, write, and understand the manifestos and the policy issues they contain.

## 2.2 Influence of Political Manifestos

The baseline survey tried to find out if respondents are first time voters or otherwise. The survey found that 88.8% of respondents were regular voters, suggesting most have likely heard of manifestos. The remaining 11.2% were first-time voters, who may or may not have had awareness of political manifestos. Probing further, the survey found that a high proportion of respondents (96.6%) are aware of political manifestos during Ghanaian elections. This awareness suggests that voters may pay attention to the promises and policy issues outlined in manifestos. Consequently, political parties should prioritize these elements in their manifestos

One key issue the baseline survey investigated was the importance of political manifestos in voters' decision-making process. The responses revealed that a significant portion of the electorate considers manifestos to be influential. Over two-thirds (63.1%) of respondents indicated that manifestos hold some degree of importance, out of this 35.1% find them very important and 28% extremely important. While 18.9% consider them moderately important, and 10.2% find them slightly important, only 7.8% reported that manifestos are not important who they vote for at all. Figure 2.2.1 is the pictorial representation of the importance of manifestos in voter decision-making.

**Figure 2.2.1: Importance of Manifestos in Voter Decision-Making**



These findings suggest that manifestos play a role in shaping voters' decisions for a majority of the electorate. Political parties and politicians should therefore prioritize outlining clear programs and policy positions within their manifestos, as these documents demonstrably influence voters' choices. The importance of manifestos was echoed by a respondent thus:

*Apart from manifestos establishing expectations for a party's performance, allowing voters to hold them accountable for delivering on promises, they also offer insight into a party's priorities and promises, motivating voters to choose a candidate who aligns with their values (Respondent D).*

In addition to exposure through media and campaign platforms, reading political manifestos directly is a key factor in raising voters' awareness of the issues parties aim to address. These manifestos are therefore considered by voters before they cast their ballots. The survey investigated the frequency with which voters engage with manifestos. Figure 2.2.2 pictorially shows the percentages of respondents who read political manifestos.

**Figure 2.2.2: Reading of Political Manifestos**



The results revealed that 39.8% of respondents sometimes read manifestos, while 16.8% and 16.5% rarely and often read them, respectively. Notably, 16.1% of respondents always read manifestos before voting. However, 10.9% of respondents indicated they never read manifestos before casting their vote. These findings suggest that a majority of respondents (62.7%) gain some level of awareness about election-related issues by reading manifestos directly. To this end, a respondent said:

*While some politicians may exploit voters' lack of knowledge, clear manifestos can counteract this issue. When manifestos effectively communicate a politician's plans and their impact on citizens' lives, voters can make informed choices based on their interests after reading them (Respondent C).*

Voters' perception of a candidate or party's ability to fulfil campaign promises is crucial to their credibility. To gauge this perception, the survey investigated whether Ghanaians believe political parties deliver on their manifesto promises. The results reveal a mixed picture. Half of the respondents (50.1%) believe parties fulfil their promises sometimes, while a significant portion (34.4%) feels promises are rarely met. This suggests a general sense of skepticism. On a more positive note, 3.7% believe parties fulfil promises most of the time. However, a concerning 11.8% believe promises are never kept. Table 2.2.1 shows ability of politicians to fulfil their campaign promises.

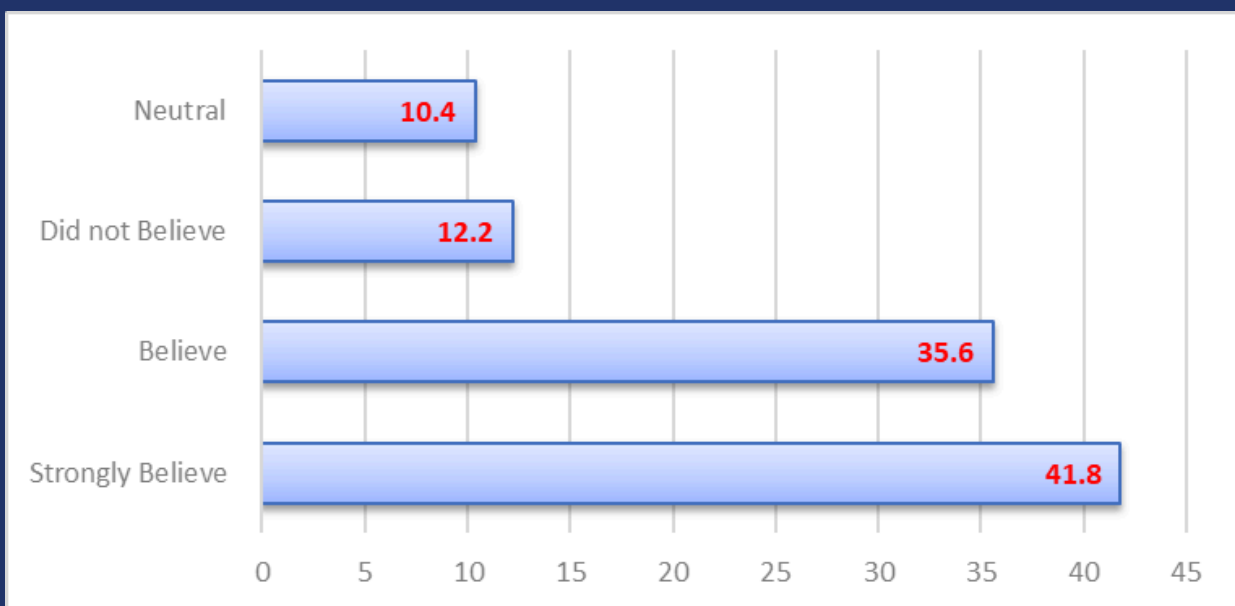


**Table 2.2.1: Ability to Fulfil Campaign Promises**

Ability to Fulfil Campaign Promises	Percentage
Sometimes	50.1
Rarely	34.4
Fully	3.7
Never	11.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

While not mandatory for electoral success, political manifestos have become a tradition in Ghana's Fourth Republic. These manifestos serve as blueprints for the country's future direction and act as a social contract between voters and political parties/candidates. The survey explored public opinion on manifesto development. The results showed strong support for manifestos: 41.8% of respondents strongly believe all parties and candidates should write them, while another 35.6% consider manifestos important. Combined, nearly 80% believe manifestos are crucial. Notably, only 10% remained neutral, and another 10% opposed manifestos. These findings suggest that a significant majority (almost 80%) view manifestos as essential. Figure 2.2.3 is the pictorial depiction of the belief of respondents in the development of political manifestos.

**Figure 2.2.3: Believe in the Development Political Manifestos**



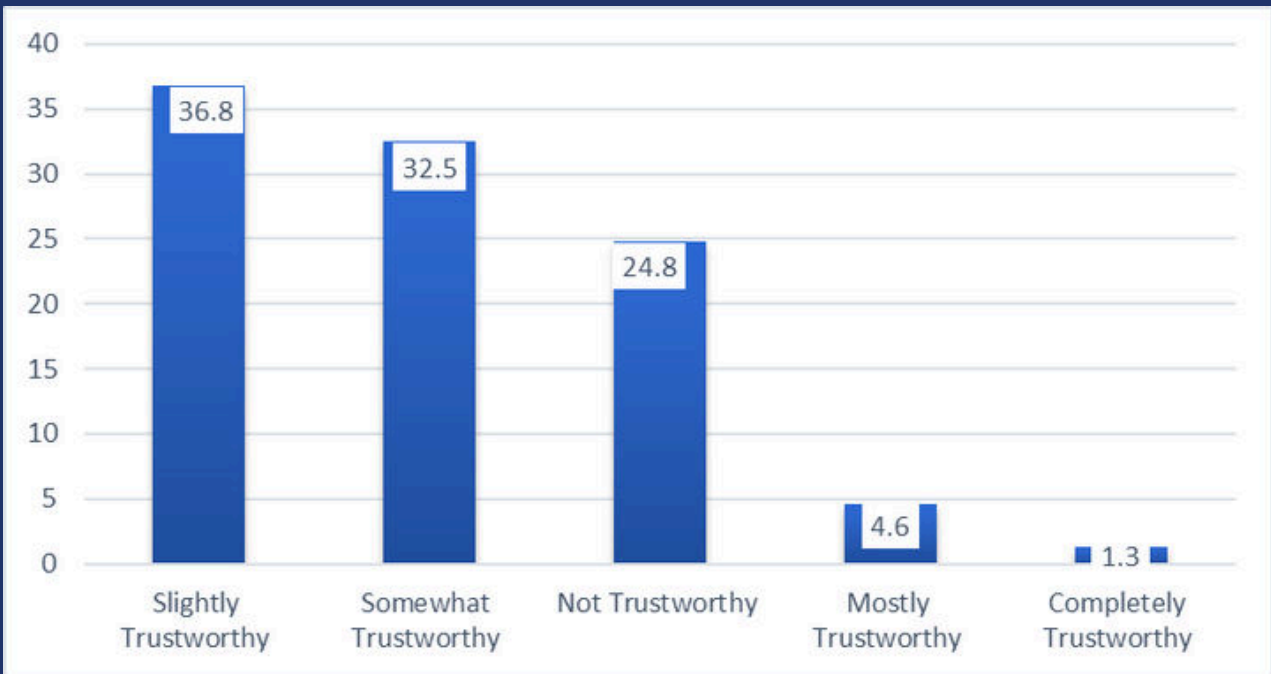
As a physical document, manifestos hold parties and candidates accountable to the promises outlined. To concur, a respondent posited that:

*Manifestos offer a clear overview of a party's core beliefs, values, and policies, helping voters make informed decisions based on their own priorities (Respondent B).*

To ensure a level playing field for all parties in Ghana's upcoming December elections, it's crucial to provide them with an equal platform to showcase their policies. This survey investigated whether an online tool like a "Voters' Compass," designed to match voters' aspirations with manifesto promises, should include manifestos from all contesting parties and independent candidates. The response was a resounding yes for inclusivity. A massive 93.8% of respondents agreed that all parties and candidates deserve this platform, while only 6.2% disagreed. Notably, those who disagreed offered reasons reflecting Ghana's political landscape, such as the dominance of the NDC and NPP, or concerns about the seriousness of smaller parties. However, these viewpoints highlight the very reason for an equal platform: to allow voters to make informed decisions based on all available information. By featuring manifestos from all contenders, the Voters' Compass can empower voters and promote a more democratic election process.

Voters' trust in manifesto promises is a key factor in validating those promises through their votes. This survey investigated how Ghanaians perceive the trustworthiness of political party manifestos. The results revealed a spectrum of trust: 36.8% of respondents found promises slightly trustworthy, 32.5% somewhat trustworthy, and 24.8% not trustworthy at all. Only 4.6% considered them mostly trustworthy, and a mere 1.2% completely trustworthy. Figure 2.2.4 shows the trust of respondents in political manifestos.

**Figure 2.2.4: Trust in Political Manifestos**



This low level of trust (61.6%) underscores the importance of politicians making realistic promises and demonstrably fulfilling them to gain voter confidence. To underscore this point, a respondent opines that:

*Ultimately, manifestos serve as a tool for holding politicians accountable and ensuring they fulfil their promises once elected. This enables voters to establish expectations for a party's performance, allowing voters to hold them accountable for delivering on promises (Respondent A).*

## 2.3 Voter Behaviour and Important Issues

The Ghanaian economy is widely considered the primary driver of the country's development and citizens' well-being. Its historical performance directly impacts Ghanaians' standard of living. This study investigated what issues Ghanaians believe political parties should prioritize in their manifestos. The results revealed the economy (jobs, exchange rate, inflation, and wages) as the top concern, with a staggering 90.7% of respondents ranking it as the most pressing issue. This finding affirms the position of Afrobarometer round 9 survey (2022) where a large number of respondents ranked the economy as the number one problem government must address. Corruption and its associated problems were also deemed highly important by 60.7% of respondents.

Infrastructure development (roads, markets, bridges, sports complexes) followed closely, ranked as most important by 57.3%. Taxes and government spending, healthcare (including dialysis), and education all received significant attention, with 57%, 52%, and 52% of respondents ranking them as very important, respectively. The power crisis was another major concern, highlighted by 52% of respondents. Environmental damage from galamsey (illegal mining) garnered attention from 48% of the respondents, while utilities and energy costs were flagged by 44.3% of the respondents.

Security services, social service delivery, and digitization were also identified as crucial issues, with 35.9%, 30%, and 25.1% of respondents ranking them as key areas for manifesto focus, respectively. Notably, the overwhelming majority (90.7%) prioritized the economy, suggesting it should be prominently addressed in manifestos. Public discourse on this issue should be encouraged, as it directly impacts the lives of all Ghanaians, regardless of employment sector, and their dependents. Figure 2.3.1 pictorially depicts the ranking of issues political parties should consider in their manifestos.

**Figure 2.3.1: Ranking of Issues Political Parties Should Consider in their Manifestos**



The survey delved deeper into the reasons why respondents ranked the economy as the most pressing issue. Box 1 captures the key reasons they mentioned. Overall, these responses highlight the crucial role the economy plays in Ghanaians' daily lives and aspirations. Voters prioritize clear plans from political parties on job creation, inflation control, and fair wages, factors directly impacting their livelihoods and the future of the country. Box 1 captures the key reasons that underpin the ranking of economy as the most important.

## **Box 1: Reasons for Ranking the Economy as the Most Important**

### **Impact on Daily Life:**

- "The media constantly reports on frustrated unemployed youth resorting to crime due to lack of opportunity."
- "Rising inflation makes it difficult for low-income earners to afford basic necessities."

### **Desire for Solutions and Informed Decisions:**

- "Voters want to see how candidates plan to address the economic crisis, regardless of feasibility, so they can make informed choices."
- "Manifestos should outline plans for economic recovery, demonstrating a commitment to solving the problem."

### **Building a Better Future:**

- "A stable economy creates opportunities for everyone, especially young people. We deserve decent jobs to build our lives. I graduated in 2016 and haven't found employment."

### **Accountability and Transparency:**

- "Concerns exist about misused loan funds intended for job creation and economic stabilization."

### **Impact on Families:**

- "Inflation and currency depreciation directly affect wages, purchasing power, and a family's ability to meet basic needs."
- "More graduates enter the workforce each year, adding to the unemployment problem. The effort put into campaigning should be matched by efforts to create jobs and stabilize the currency."

### **Security and Social Stability:**

- "An improved economy leads to happiness and reduces the threat of crime and social unrest. As the saying goes, 'An idle mind is the devil's workshop.'"

### **Standard of Living:**

- "The high cost of living necessitates addressing wages and job creation for young people."

The study delved further to explore the reasons behind the ranking of other issues that should be highlighted in the political manifestos. Box 2 presents the reasons given for these rankings. By addressing these key concerns in their manifestos, political parties can demonstrate their understanding of Ghanaians' priorities and their commitment to building a better future for the country. Box 2 contains the reasons for the ranking of other challenges face on daily basis and must be addressed in the manifestos of the various political parties and independent candidates.

## Box 2: Reasons for Ranking the Other Challenges Ghanaians Face

- *Combating Corruption: Corruption erodes public trust and hinders development. Voters seek clear strategies to tackle this issue. For example, reducing corruption could free up resources for vital sectors.*
- *Reliable Power Supply: Consistent electricity is essential for homes, businesses, and the national economy. Voters want solutions to power outages that disrupt daily life.*
- *Environmental Sustainability: Environmental degradation, including illegal mining (galamsey), has severe consequences. Voters seek plans for a sustainable future. Addressing galamsey, for instance, could improve food security, water quality, and combat climate change.*
- *Affordable Utilities: Access to affordable water and electricity is crucial for meeting basic needs. Voters want to know how parties plan to manage utility costs.*
- *Digital Transformation: The digital world is increasingly important. Voters deserve a vision for promoting digital access and literacy.*
- *Public Safety: Security is paramount. Voters want to understand how parties plan to address crime and other threats. The recent rise in crime rates has heightened concerns for personal safety.*
- *Education Quality and Access: Education is the bedrock of individual and national development. Voters seek plans to improve the quality of education and ensure broader access.*
- *Accessible Healthcare: Affordable healthcare is essential. Voters deserve to know how parties plan to address healthcare needs, including dialysis.*
- *Responsible Taxation and Spending: Taxes fund government services. Voters want to know how parties plan to raise revenue and spend it responsibly.*
- *Effective Social Services: Effective social services provide a vital safety net. Voters want to see plans for delivering quality social services.*
- *Infrastructure Development: Strong infrastructure benefits everyone. Voters want to see plans for maintaining and improving roads, bridges, markets, and sports facilities.*

## 2.4 General Concerns about Party Manifestos

The survey additionally solicited respondents' thoughts on political manifestos and their place in Ghana's voting landscape. The results revealed a diversity of views on the role of manifestos. Box 3 shows the general concerns expressed by the respondents about political manifestos.

### Box 3: General Concerns about Party Manifestos

- **Cynicism and Skepticism:** Some respondents view manifestos with cynicism, believing they are crafted without sincerity and used solely for marketing purposes.
- **Limited Voter Engagement:** A significant portion of the electorate may not actively engage with manifestos due to factors like lack of access to information or entrenched political affiliations.
- **Accountability through Scrutiny:** A suggestion was made to establish a panel to analyze and hold politicians accountable for manifesto promises.
- **Value for Informed Voters:** Manifestos can still be valuable tools for voters who prioritize aligning their vote with a candidate's values.
- **Limited Influence Due to Broken Promises:** Some believe manifestos hold little weight due to a history of unfulfilled promises.
- **National Development Plan vs. Party Manifestos:** A suggestion was made to consider a national development plan as a framework, with each government focusing on its approach to implementation.
- **Selective Attention and Media Bias:** Concerns were raised that voters often only focus on popular slogans and miss the details within manifestos. Media, especially local language outlets, were seen as potentially misleading voters.
- **Impact on Undecided Voters:** Manifestos are believed to have the most influence on undecided voters, though material incentives can also sway their choices. Party loyalists, however, tend to be less swayed by manifestos.
- **Role of the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE):** The NCCE was identified as having a crucial role in educating voters on manifestos and the importance of informed voting.

### 3.0 Conclusion

While election manifestos differ in detail, trustworthiness, and interpretation, recurring themes still offer valuable insights. Even parties unlikely to win may propose sound ideas that deserve recognition.

The survey, though skewed towards male and well-educated respondents aged 26-35, highlights a potential for voter education initiatives encouraging manifesto analysis before elections.

The high awareness of political manifestos (96.6%) presents an opportunity for voters to engage with party promises (62.7% read manifestos). Notably, two-thirds (63.1%) consider them crucial for informed voting. Specific policy issues documented in manifestos also influence voting decisions.

Opinions on fulfilled promises are mixed: half believe parties fulfil them occasionally, while a significant portion (34.4%) feels they are rarely met. Despite this low trust (61.6%), nearly 80% consider manifestos essential accountability tools. Parties and independent candidates should create manifestos for inclusion in the Voters' Compass project.

The survey reveals that the economy (jobs, exchange rate, inflation, wages) is the top concern (ranked by 90% of respondents) for political parties to address. This focus reflects its impact on Ghanaians' standard of living. Respondents believe a strong economy will significantly improve their lives. Corruption and infrastructure development followed in importance.

Overall, the survey suggests Ghanaians are aware of political manifestos, their importance, and the key issues they expect parties to address in the upcoming elections.

### 3.1 Recommendations

For the Voters' Compass design, the research findings recommend the following:

- Create a searchable database of all party manifestos, including those from smaller parties, to facilitate easy comparison of policies and programmes for voters.
- Develop a feature allowing users to compare party stances on specific issues, particularly focusing on the thematic areas of economy, corruption, and infrastructure development, which were rated very highly in the survey.
- Prioritize targeted campaigns to reach underrepresented groups identified in the survey, such as women and older voters, to encourage broader participation in the voter platform design and project rollout.
- Ensure the Voters' Compass is easily accessible on mobile devices to expand reach, especially among younger voters.
- Strategize the implementation (the project team and software engineers) of a feature tracking the fulfillment of manifesto promises over time to promote accountability and enable voters to assess the performance of the winning political party.

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