



*Afrobarometer Briefing Paper No. 137*

## **The Practice of Democracy in Ghana: Beyond the Formal Framework**

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### **1. Introduction**

Ghana is widely applauded by the international community as the ‘Golden Child’ of West Africa for the manner in which the democratic process appears to be consolidating, and for leading the way for peaceful, free and fair elections in the sub-region.

Writing on the formal, participatory and social dimensions of democracy, Huber et al (1997) argued that formal democracy is a political system with key features which include universal adult suffrage, regular, free and fair elections, and effective guarantees for freedom of expression and association.<sup>1</sup> It is further argued that a political system that has these features and has a high level of participation devoid of systematic difference such as class, ethnicity and gender is a participatory democracy. This form of democracy takes into account the level of engagement between government and civil society, which consequently give voice to citizens when it comes to policy decision-making. Finally, these authors agreed that formal democracy helps in advancing toward participatory democracy where higher levels of political mobilisation support reformist political movements.

In December 2012, Ghana held its sixth multi-party elections under the Fourth Republic. Given this record and the subsequent esteem with which Ghana’s democracy is held, this paper seeks to examine the depth of both formal and participatory democracy in Ghana using Afrobarometer survey data. Furthermore, the paper will examine whether citizens’ quest to secure basic public service facilities and delivery in their communities encourages some forms of participatory democracy in Ghana.

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<sup>1</sup> See Huber, E., Rueschemeyer, D., and Stephens, J. D. (1997) “The Paradoxes of Cotemporary Democracy: Formal, Participatory, and Social Dimensions” *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 29, No. 3, *Transitions to Democracy: A Special Issue in Memory of Dankwart A. Rustow* (Apr., 1997), 323-342.

The other features of formal democracy are the protection against state arbitrariness, and state administrative organs that are accountable to elected representatives.

## 2. Afrobarometer Survey

The Afrobarometer is a comparative series of public attitude surveys, covering 35 African countries in Round 5 (2011-2013). It measures public attitudes on democracy and its alternatives, evaluations of the quality of governance and economic performance. In addition, the survey assesses the views of the electorate on critical political issues in the surveyed countries. The Afrobarometer's main goal is to produce scientifically reliable data on public opinion in Africa while strengthening institutional capacities for survey research, and sharing research findings to inform policy and practice. The Afrobarometer also provides comparisons over time, as five rounds of surveys have taken place from 1999 to 2013. Previous Afrobarometer surveys were conducted in Ghana in 1999 (Round 1), 2002 (Round 2), 2005 (Round 3), and 2008 (Round 4).

Afrobarometer surveys use a common survey instrument and methodology. The instrument asks a standard set of questions that permits systematic comparison in public attitudes across countries and over time. The methodology was based on a national probability sample of 2,400 adult Ghanaians selected to represent all adult citizens of voting age, allowing for inferences with a sampling margin of error of +/- 2% at a 95% confidence level. The sample was drawn randomly based on Probability Proportionate to Population Size (PPPS), thus taking account of population distributions, gender as well as rural-urban divides. The sampling process ensured that every adult Ghanaian citizen had an equal and known chance of being selected in the sample. Fieldwork in Ghana was conducted by Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) between 9 May and 1 June 2012.<sup>2</sup>

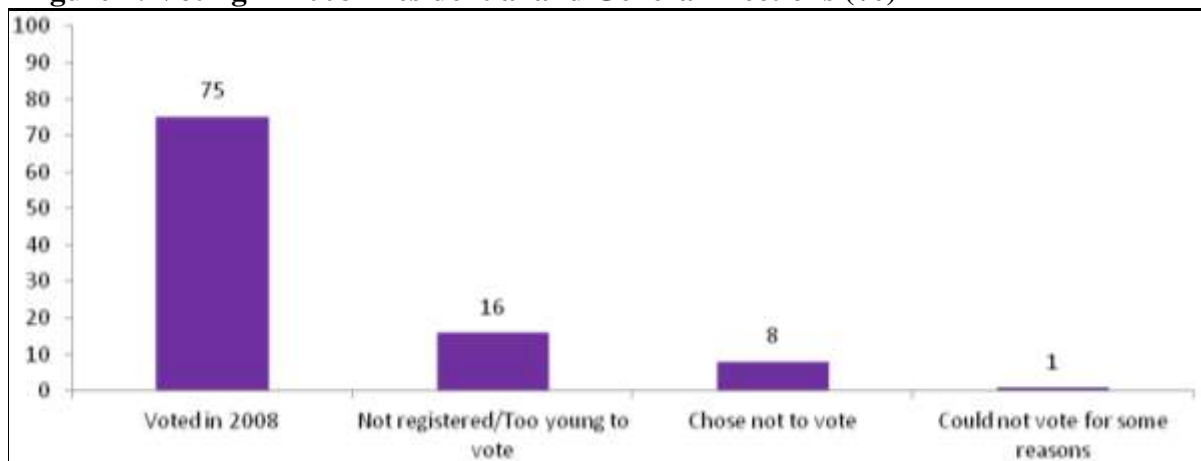
## 3. The Depth of Formal Democracy in Ghana

*Universal suffrage and the exercise of right to vote:* In Ghana, every adult who per the constitution is qualified to vote has both the right and opportunity to vote in both local and national elections. Ghanaians generally consider the exercise of this franchise, particularly in national elections, as an important civic responsibility. Three-quarters of Ghanaians (75 percent) reported voting in the 2008 presidential and general elections. Sixteen percent did not vote because they were either not registered voters or too young at that time to vote. About a tenth (8 percent) did not vote because they decided not to, did not have time to or did so for other reasons (see Figure 1).

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<sup>2</sup> The sample has the following distribution: **Gender** (Male = 50%; Female = 50%), **Age** (Mean Age = 37 years; Youngest respondent = 18 years; Oldest respondent = 100 years; 18-30 years = 45%; 31-45 years = 30%; 46-60 years = 16%; 60 years and above = 9%), **Education** (None/Informal = 21%; Primary (Complete/Some) = 37%; Secondary (Complete/Some) = 32%; Tertiary = 10%), **Regions** (Western = 9.5%; Central = 8.7%; Greater Accra = 18.6%; Volta = 8.6%; Eastern = 10.6%; Ashanti = 19.5%; Brong-Ahafo = 9.0%; Northern = 8.9%; Upper East = 4.0%; Upper west = 2.6%); and **Settlement location** (Rural = 46%; Urban = 54%).

**Figure 1: Voting in 2008 Presidential and General Elections (%)**



Source: Ghana Afrobarometer survey 2012

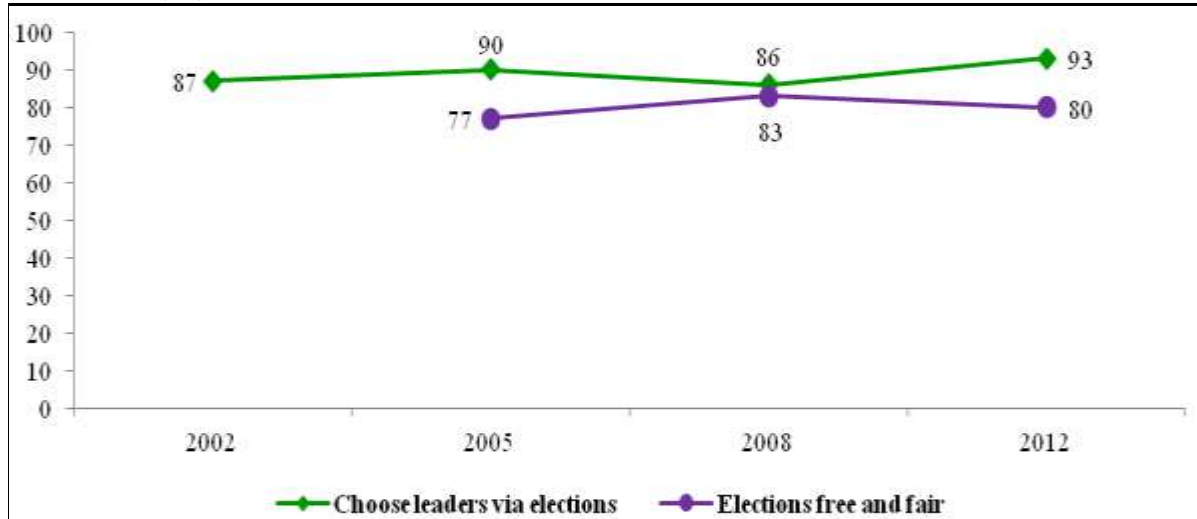
Indeed, Afrobarometer surveys' self-reported voter turnout in national elections in Ghana closely match official figures. For instance, in 2005 (Round 3) and 2008 (Round 4) Afrobarometer surveys, 87 percent and 81 percent respectively claimed they voted in the 2004 elections compared to the official turnout rate of 85.1 percent. Similarly, in 2012 (Round 5) Afrobarometer survey, the proportion of Ghanaians who said they voted in the 2008 national election (75 percent) does not differ significantly from the official voter turnout rate of 72.9 percent.<sup>3</sup>

**Regular open, free and fair elections:** In Ghana, national elections are held every four years to elect a president and representatives to the national assembly or parliament. Similarly, local level elections are also held in all metropolitan, municipal and district authority areas to elect local councilors every four years.

Ghanaians are strongly in favor of upholding the practice of electing representatives. An absolute majority of Ghanaians (93 percent) want the selection of leaders to be done through regular, open and honest elections. Only 7 percent think elections sometimes produce bad results and therefore other methods of choosing leaders should be adopted. Also, a large majority (80 percent) believe the 2008 national election was “*completely free and fair*” or “*free and fair with minor problems*”. Indeed, since 2002, on average eight in every ten Ghanaians have supported the selection of leaders through the ballot box while a majority (77 percent in 2005; and 83 percent in 2008) have expressed faith in the efficacy previous national elections (Figure 2). In fact, in 2005, 71 percent claimed elections enable voters to remove leaders from office.

<sup>3</sup> Official voter turnout rates reported in this paper are those for presidential elections.

**Figure 2: Overtime Trends: Selecting Leaders Through Elections and Efficacy of Elections (%)**



Source: Ghana Afrobarometer survey 2002, 2005, 2008 and 2012.

**Effective guarantees for freedom of expression and association:** The 1992 Constitution of Ghana guarantees that every person in Ghana, irrespective of race, place of origin, political opinions, colour, religion, creed or gender shall be entitled to all the fundamental human rights and freedoms, subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others and for the public interest. Specifically, all persons are entitled to the right of free speech and expression (including freedom of the press/media, freedom of thought, conscience and belief) and freedom of association, which includes the freedom to form or join trade unions and other associations.<sup>4</sup>

To a large extent, Ghanaians believe they enjoy unfettered freedom of speech, association and thought, conscience and belief. An absolute majority agreed that Ghanaians are “completely free” or “somewhat free” to choose who to vote for without feeling pressured (98 percent), join any political organization of their choice (97 percent), and say what they think (93 percent). Indeed, a large majority (84 percent) strongly believe that it is not likely for the powerful in the society to find out who one voted for in an election. In fact, nearly seven in every ten Ghanaians “strongly agree” or “agree” that citizens should be able to join any organization, whether or not the government approves of it.

On the media front, any government that attempts gagging the media is likely to run into serious difficulties. A small majority of Ghanaians (55 percent) “strongly agree” or “agree” that the media should have the right to publish any views and ideas without government control. Indeed, a large majority (82 percent) appreciate the effectiveness of the media in revealing government’s mistakes and corruption.

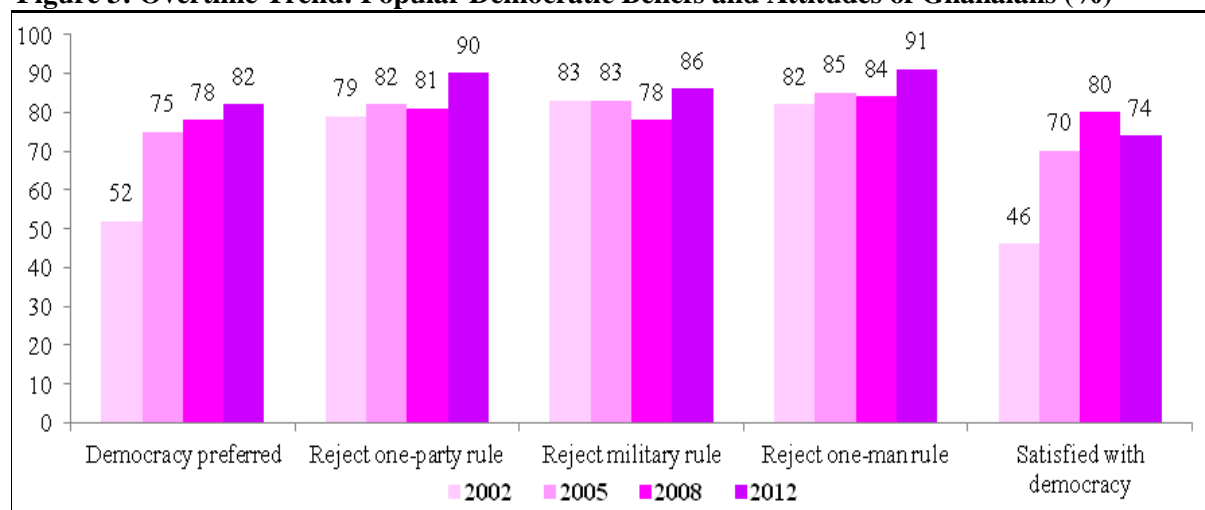
Public opinion on the measures of formal democracy in Ghana demonstrates that it is highly developed and deeply embedded in the Ghanaian socio-political environment. This outcome is better understood within the context of some democratic beliefs and attitudes espoused by Ghanaians over the years. For instance, an overwhelming majority of Ghanaians (82 percent)

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 5 of the 1992 Constitution on Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms of Ghanaians.

prefer democracy to any other form of government. Complementing this high preference is the similarly high rates of disapproval of non-democratic forms of government: rejection of one-man rule (91 percent); rejection of one-party rule (90 percent); and rejection of military rule (86 percent).

Without doubt, the preference for democratic and rejection of non-democratic governments have generally remained high over the period 2002 to 2012. These figures indicate a sophisticated understanding amongst the citizenry of what constitutes democratic governance and reveal the high value that is placed on formal democratic principles. In fact, the growth in the level of satisfaction with the way democracy works in Ghana (from 46 percent in 2002 to 74 percent in 2012) largely supports this assertion (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Overtime Trend: Popular Democratic Beliefs and Attitudes of Ghanaians (%)**



Source: Ghana Afrobarometer survey 2002, 2005, 2008 and 2012.

#### 4. Participatory Democracy Beyond the Formal

The Ghanaian Constitution underscores the freedom of citizens to mobilize, partake in demonstrations and to form or join any association (e.g. trade unions or other national and international groups) for the protection of their interest. It further grants citizens the right and freedom to form or be part of a political party and to participate in political activities subject to laws of the country.<sup>5</sup>

These forms of freedom are intended to further extend the frontiers of citizens' involvement in the democratic process. Surprisingly, the practice of democracy in Ghana does not appear to have progressed far beyond the formal forms of participation.

**Engagement in collective action:** Though there is freedom of expression and association in the political environment, most Ghanaians do not take advantage of these fundamental rights. For

<sup>5</sup> Ghana 1992 Constitution (ibid).

instance, 63 percent of Ghanaians (including 26 percent who would never) never engaged in collective action by joining with others in the past year to raise an issue. A little over a third (37 percent), however, did so either “once/twice”, “several times” or “often”.

Quite alarming, most Ghanaians are not ready to exercise the right to embark on demonstration or protest marches. The overwhelming majority of Ghanaians (95 percent) have not participated in protest marches in the past 12 months. This figure included 84 percent who say they will never do such a thing. Only 4 percent of Ghanaians have engaged in this kind of collective action “once/twice”, “several times” or “often” in the past year.

Since 2002, the rate at which Ghanaians participate in demonstrations has been consistently lower than the rate at which Ghanaians join with others to raise issues. Between 2002 and 2012, the number of Ghanaians who joined others to raise an issue or participated in demonstrations remained largely unchanged. However, in the last four years (2008 to 2012), the number of those who did join others to raise an issue declined by a significant 16 percentage point (Table 1).

**Table 1: Popular Ratings of Engagement in Collective Action (%)**

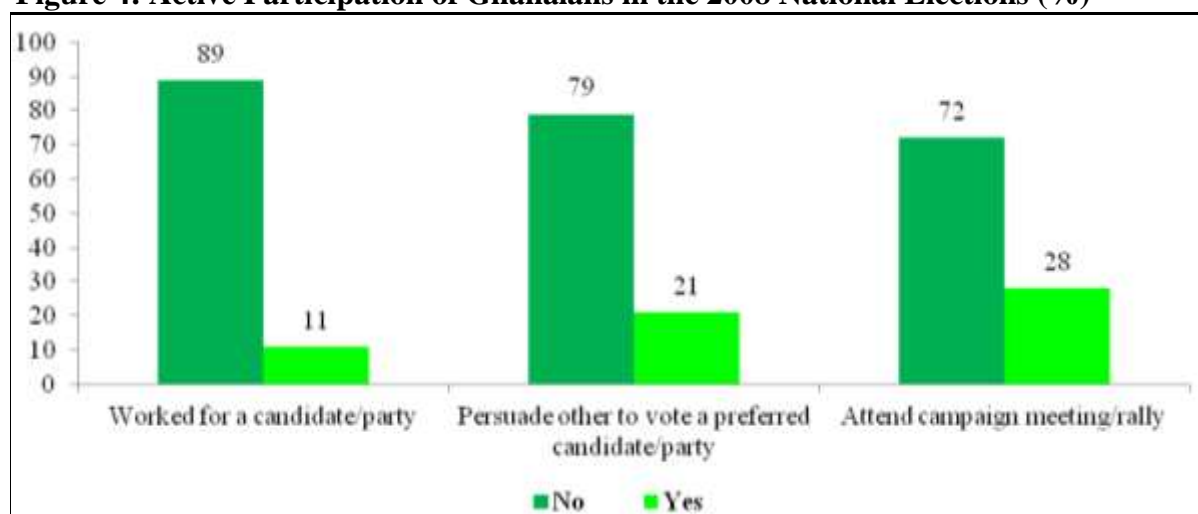
		2002	2005	2008	2012
Joining others to raise issue	No (Would never do this)	37	11	13	26
	No (But would do if had the chance)	22	37	33	37
	Yes (Once/twice, Several times/Often)	39	51	53	37
Attend demonstration/protest march	No (Would never do this)	83	67	69	84
	No (But would do if had the chance)	8	22	20	11
	Yes (Once/twice, Several times/Often)	8	8	9	4

*Source: Ghana Afrobarometer survey 2002, 2005, 2008 and 2012.*

**Working for a party/candidate and attending campaign rally:** Equally alarming is that despite the fact that participation in politics is constitutionally guaranteed right, a very small number of Ghanaians worked for a political party or candidate. Similarly, very few Ghanaians persuaded others to vote for a particular candidate/party or attended a political party campaign rally in 2008.

An absolute majority (89 percent) never worked for any political party or candidate, however around 11 percent did work for a political party or candidate. Another 79 percent never persuaded others to vote for a preferred candidate or party. A fifth (21 percent) did campaign for a particular party or candidate. Furthermore, 72 percent never attended a campaign meeting or rally of a political party or candidate. On the other hand, a little above a quarter (28 percent) participated in a political rally (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Active Participation of Ghanaians in the 2008 National Elections (%)**



Source: Ghana Afrobarometer survey 2012

**Contact with formal and informal leaders:** Similar to the low ratings for engagement in collective action and participation in a political party, and working for a party/candidate and attending campaign rally, Ghanaians have low contact rates with both formal and informal leaders. Thus, there appears to be a significant gap between civil society and government and consequently, a potentially weak accountability relationship between government and the citizenry.

During the past year, a majority of Ghanaians had no contact with their formally elected representatives at the national and local levels such as Members of Parliament (85 percent) and Local Councillors (68 percent), or with their informal leaders (i.e. political party officials (85 percent). In fact, this trend of weak interface between formal and informal leaders and their constituents has persisted since 2002 (Table 2).

**Table 2: Popular Ratings of Contact with Formal and Informal Leaders (%)**

		2002	2005	2008	2012
Contacted Member of Parliament	Never	87	83	85	86
	Once/A few times/Often	12	16	14	13
Contacted Local Councillor	Never	83	85	63	68
	Once/A few times/Often	15	14	36	31
Contacted Political Party Official	Never	84	78	--	85
	Once/A few times/Often	15	21	--	14

Source: Ghana Afrobarometer survey 2002, 2005, 2008 and 2012.

The low levels of contact with formal and informal leaders may be explained by Ghanaians' perception of leaders' responsiveness to citizen engagement. Over half of Ghanaians think Members of Parliament (63 percent) and local government councillors (53 percent) never listen to what ordinary citizens have to say. This perception worsened by 31 percentage points for Members of parliament and 25 percentage points for local government councillors since 2008 (Table 3).

**Table 3: Popular Ratings of Ghanaians' Engagement in Collective Action (%)**

		2005	2008	2012	Change
Member of Parliament Listens	Never	32	37	63	+31
	Sometimes/Always/Often	55	57	33	-22
Local Councillor Listens	Never	28	23	53	+25
	Sometimes/Always/Often	63	72	44	-19

*Source: Ghana Afrobarometer survey 2002, 2005, 2008 and 2012.*

## 5. Public Service Delivery and Participatory Democracy

Although it has been shown that collective action and engagement with leaders by community members is generally weak in Ghana, the question remains: what are the issues that provide an impetus for citizens to make demands on the state, and how does this manifest at a local level? Some may expect that in a democracy, the level of provision of basic public goods and services that inure to the collective benefit of members of a given community will have some correlation with the level of citizens' engagement with the political system.

In this section of the paper, contingency table analysis (i.e. cross-tabulation)<sup>6</sup> was adopted using the Afrobarometer contextual questions on the availability of specific public services<sup>7</sup> in the survey areas and specific forms of participation (i.e. contact with MP; contact with local government councillor; joining others to raise issues; and embarking on protest marches). We use the Pearson's Chi-square statistic ( $\chi^2$ ) to test the significance of the association (if any at all) between the unavailability of a specific public service facility and a given form of citizens' participation. The estimates of the Cramer's V statistic provided an indication of the strength of association between any two variables of interest. Table 4 displays the results of the analysis.

<sup>6</sup> The contingency tables from the cross-tabulation analysis are not presented in the paper because our interest is in the significance of the two statistics computed from the analysis.

<sup>7</sup> The contextual questions were completed by fieldworkers on the basis of their collective observation of conditions within the survey areas. Analysis of these questions showed that 18 percent of the survey areas lacked electricity grid; 44 percent lacked No pipe water system; 49 percent do not have sewage system; 70 percent do not have No Police station; and in 49 percent, health clinics are not available.



**Table 4: Estimates of the Contingency Table Chi-Square and Cramer's V Statistics**

<b>Participation - Unavailable service facilities</b>	<b>Pearson Chi Squared</b>	<b>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</b>	<b>Cramer's V</b>	<b>Approx. Sig.</b>
Contact MP – Pipe water system	0.000	0.995	0.000	0.995
Contact MP – Public school	0.019	0.892	0.003	0.892
Contact MP – Health clinic	0.690	0.406	0.017	0.406
Contact MP – Sewage system	0.007	0.931	0.002	0.931
Contact MP – Electricity grid	0.143	0.705	0.008	0.705
Contact MP – Police station	1.737	0.188	0.027	0.188
Contact Local Councilor – Pipe water system	<b>10.594</b>	<b>0.001</b>	<b>0.067</b>	<b>0.001</b>
Contact Local Councilor – Public school	0.083	0.774	0.006	0.774
Contact Local Councilor – Health clinic	3.604	0.058	0.039	0.058
Contact Local Councilor – Sewage system	<b>5.881</b>	<b>0.015</b>	<b>0.050</b>	<b>0.015</b>
Contact Local Councilor – Electricity grid	<b>9.803</b>	<b>0.002</b>	<b>0.064</b>	<b>0.002</b>
Contact Local Councilor – Police Station	0.539	0.463	0.015	0.463
Join others raise issue – Pipe water system	<b>31.512</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.115</b>	<b>0.000</b>
Join others raise issue – Public school	2.165	0.141	0.030	0.141
Join others raise issue – Health clinic	<b>15.400</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.080</b>	<b>0.000</b>
Join others raise issue – Sewage system	<b>58.305</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.156</b>	<b>0.000</b>
Join others raise issue – Electricity grid	<b>60.339</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.159</b>	<b>0.000</b>
Join others raise issue – Police Station	2.290	0.130	0.031	0.130
Attend demonstration – Pipe water system	<b>5.130</b>	<b>0.024</b>	<b>0.046</b>	<b>0.024</b>
Attend demonstration – Public school	0.000	0.998	0.000	0.998
Attend demonstration – Health clinic	1.000	0.317	0.020	0.317
Attend demonstration – Sewage system	1.257	0.262	0.023	0.262
Attend demonstration – Electricity grid	2.247	0.134	0.031	0.134
Attend demonstration – Police Station	3.736	0.053	0.040	0.053

In general, residents in areas lacking public service facilities chose to either join others to raise issues or contact their local government representatives. There is a weak association between the lack of public services and contact with MPs or protest marches. The results showed significant relationships between the lack of pipe water systems, health clinics, sewage systems and electricity grids and people joining with others to raise issues. The Chi-squared values range from 15.400 to 60.339 for these paired variables are statistically significant (p-value = 0.000). On a lower scale, residents in areas lacking pipe water systems, sewage systems and electricity grids aside joining others to raise issues, also engage their local government representatives (i.e. Chi-squared values range from 5.881 to 10.594 with p-values of 0.001 to 0.015).

By the Cramer's V statistics, the association between joining others to raise issues and unavailability of public service facilities is much stronger than that between contacting local government representatives and the lack of public service facilities. Thus, citizens in areas deprived of basic public services are more likely to participate in informal collective action by joining with others to raise issues, than using formal structures to find solutions to public service delivery challenges within their communities.

Indeed, in recent times, Ghana has witnessed pockets of collective action by residents in a number of communities agitating for improvements in public services delivery (particularly road networks) in their areas. In some of these instances, local government authorities have had to quickly move in to undertake rehabilitation (sometimes cosmetic). Also, national government officials have had to assure residents of government's efforts to address these difficulties.

## 6. Conclusion

The data from Afrobarometer and subsequent analysis reveals clear and identifiable strengths and weaknesses in Ghana's democratic system. Formal democracy is firmly rooted in the country's political structure. Universal suffrage is guaranteed and citizens get the opportunity to elect their local and national representatives periodically in open, free and fair elections. Most people also believe in the efficacy of elections in the country. Furthermore, freedom of expression (including media freedoms) and freedom of association are firmly guaranteed by the constitution. Popular opinion shows that most Ghanaians affirm that these freedoms and formal measures of democracy are practiced and upheld, with the vast majority of Ghanaians highly valuing the democratic system.

However, analysis shows the limited extent to which civil society engages with the current state of democracy in Ghana and reveals that the democratic superstructure is less entrenched than what it may initially appear. Nearly all the measures that indicate the existence of a participatory democracy, namely engagement in collective action, working for a party/candidate and attending campaign rally, and engagement with formal and informal leaders, lag far behind the formal indicators of democracy. This is a situation that has serious implications for the country's democratic development in the years ahead.

Notwithstanding the low levels of participatory democracy and the inherent implications, most citizens in areas where specific public service facilities and delivery are unavailable readily join others to raise issues and engage their local government representative, potentially to seek action on these challenges. Thus, it can be seen that the search for public goods that benefit a community encourages forms of participatory democracy to some extent. However, it can also be seen that citizens tend to engage in participatory democracy that uses informal (i.e. joining others to raise issues) rather than formal (i.e. contact local government representative) structures in seeking solutions to community-wide problems.

Any dialogue on democratic development in the country should therefore seek ways of strengthening and encouraging the participatory forms of democracy, particularly those that utilize formal structures among the populace.

This Briefing Paper was prepared by **Daniel Armah-Attoh**, a Senior Research Officer and Afrobarometer Project Manager for Anglophone West Africa at CDD-Ghana and **Anna Robertson**, a Monitoring and Evaluation Officer working with CDD-Ghana as a volunteer under the AusAid initiative Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development.

The Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation in South Africa (IJR), the Institute for Development Studies (IDS), University of Nairobi, and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin. Survey implementation in Afrobarometer's work in Namibia is coordinated by the Institute for Public Policy Research. We gratefully acknowledge generous support from the UK's Department for International Development (DfID), the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the World Bank for Afrobarometer Round 5.

For more information and further requests for analysis please visit Afrobarometer website: [www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org) or contact Daniel Armah-Attoh, AB Project Manager for Anglophone West Africa on +233 (0302) 784293/4; 776142 or email: [daniel@cddghana.org](mailto:daniel@cddghana.org).