



Citizen response points to appreciation, challenges of Kenya's devolved governance

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 105 | Winnie V. Mitullah

Summary

The promulgation of Kenya's Constitution in 2010 and the ushering in of county governments in 2013 generated high public expectations of efficient service delivery without much consideration of the complexity of such a transition in governance. Kenya's devolution involves both political and administrative changes, requiring the national government and counties to collaborate in building a new political culture and leadership, with citizens as the pillar of reflexive governance. If that pillar is weak, the form of governance that Kenya has embraced is threatened.

Implementation of devolved governance in Kenya has attracted the interest of policy makers, practitioners, scholars, and citizens, leading the Afrobarometer team in Kenya to work with stakeholders in developing questions on devolved governments for Afrobarometer's 2014 national survey.

According to survey findings, a majority of Kenyans trust their county leadership and approve of their performance. Trust ratings are higher in rural areas than in urban areas, and more Kenyans trust their governors than their county assemblies. More than half of Kenyans support a call for a referendum on changing constitutional provisions for revenue sharing between county and national governments. However, a majority of Kenyans say members of county assemblies (MCAs) "never" or "only sometimes" listen to citizens' views, and about eight in 10 find it difficult to participate in key county activities and to access information on county budgets, legislation, and project plans.

These findings provide a good reference point for citizen perceptions of devolved governance in Kenya, and repeat surveys every two years can serve county governments as a useful yardstick for measuring performance and highlighting issues that stakeholders must work together to address.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 30 countries in Africa. After five rounds of surveys between 1999 and 2013, results of Round 6 surveys (2014/2015) are currently being published. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples of 1,200 or 2,400 respondents.

The Afrobarometer national partner in Kenya, the Institute for Development Studies, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 2,397 adults in November-December 2014. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2% at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys have been conducted in Kenya in 2003, 2005, 2008, and 2011.

Key findings

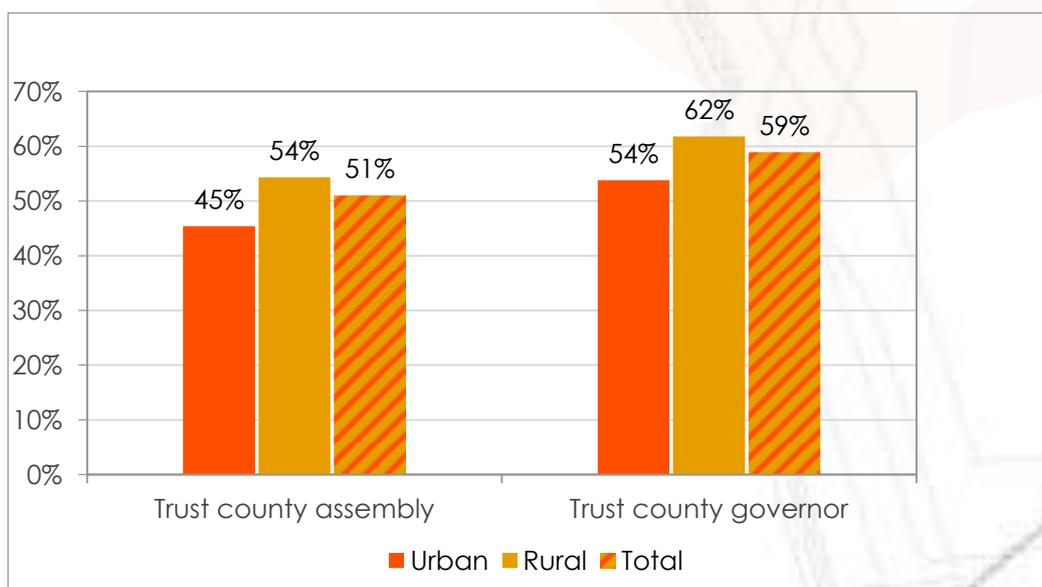
- A majority of Kenyans say they trust their county leadership “somewhat” or “a lot.” County governors rate somewhat higher in trust (59%) than county assemblies (51%). Rural residents are more likely to trust their county government than urbanites.
- Similarly, a majority of citizens “approve” or “strongly approve” of the performance of county governors (61%) and county assemblies (55%).
- By a 51%-to-39% margin, Kenyans support a call for a referendum on changing the constitutional provisions for revenue sharing between county and national governments.
- About eight in 10 Kenyans find it difficult to participate in key county activities and to access information on county budgets, legislation, and project plans.

Trust in county leadership

Trust is an important factor in leveraging support from citizens. If trust is high, leaders are likely to face less opposition to their policies and strategies for addressing development issues. A majority of Kenyans say they trust their county leadership “somewhat” or “a lot”; trust in county governors is higher (59%) than trust in county assemblies (51%) (Figure 1).

Rural residents express higher levels of trust than urban residents (62% vs. 54% for county governor, 54% vs. 45% for county assembly). A number of factors may help explain the higher trust among rural communities. Although there is demand for service delivery in both rural and urban areas, service delivery in rural areas was comparatively worse before devolution, and rural citizens may be seeing improvements that they largely attribute to the leadership of county governments. In addition, a good percentage of urban residents, over the years, have opted for private services and have little interaction with public service delivery, and thus little basis for building trust in county governments.

Figure 1: Trust in county leadership | Kenya | 2014



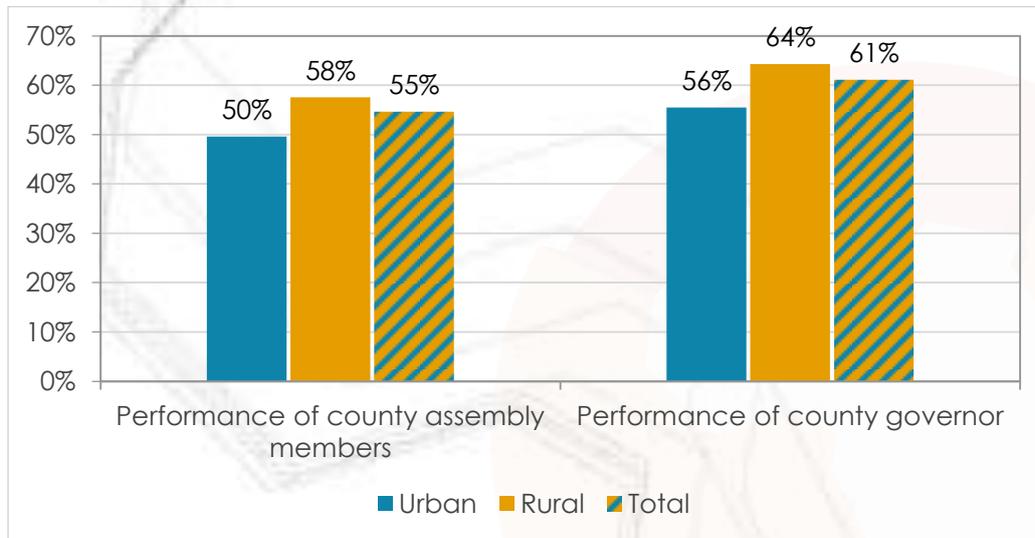
Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: County assembly? County governor? (% who say “somewhat” or “a lot”)

Performance of county leadership

Trust is related to performance, and public assessments of how county leaders have been doing their jobs are similar to scores on trust. The performance of county governors is rated higher than that of county assembly members, with 61% and 55% of survey respondents, respectively, saying they “approve” or “strongly approve” (Figure 2). Again, rural communities are more likely to approve of county performance than urbanites.

However, a majority of citizens say that MCAs “never” (33%) or “only sometimes” (47%) listen to what they have to say.

Figure 2: Performance of county leadership | Kenya | 2014



Respondents were asked: Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the following people have performed their jobs over the past 12 months, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Members of the county assembly? County governor? (% who “approve” or “strongly approve”)

As for holding county leaders accountable for their performance, a majority of citizens (61%) see it as the voters' responsibility to make sure that, once elected, members of county assemblies do their job (Table 1). Overall, a majority of Kenyans see this as the voters' responsibility in the case of the president and members of Parliament (MPs), too, although one-third (33%) expect Parliament and local councils to have this oversight responsibility in the case of the president.

Table 1: Responsibility for making sure elected leaders do their job | Kenya | 2014

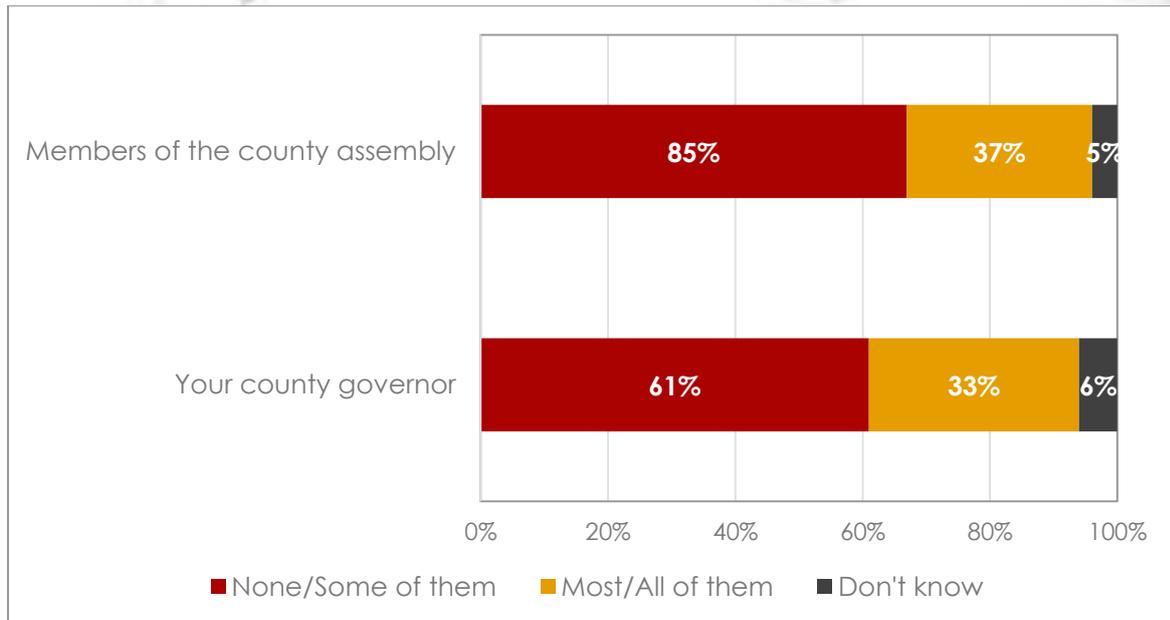
Whose responsibility	To hold accountable:		
	President	MPs	MCAs
President / executive	6%	13%	6%
Parliament / local council	33%	15%	19%
Their political party	4%	6%	10%
Voters	52%	62%	61%
No one	1%	1%	1%
Don't know	4%	4%	4%

Respondents were asked: Who should be responsible for making sure that, once elected, the president, MPs, and members of the county assembly do their jobs?

Corruption in county leadership

Corruption is a vice that negatively affects governance and leadership performance. The Afrobarometer survey reveals that about one-third of citizens perceive “most” or “all” county governors, staff in their offices, and members of county assemblies as corrupt (Figure 3). It is encouraging to note, though, that a clear majority of Kenyans think that corruption exists among “none” or only “some” of these county leaders.

Figure 3: Corruption in county leadership | Kenya | 2014



Respondents were asked: How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?

This finding is not unique to counties. A majority of Kenyans say that corruption in their country increased between 2013 and 2014. Nearly one in three Kenyans say they had to pay a bribe at least once in the year preceding the survey, and most did not report the bribery incident to the authorities. The lack of reporting is mainly due to fear of consequences and perceived inaction by the authorities. The data indicate that Kenyans believe that ordinary citizens can make a difference in the fight against corruption, mainly by refusing to pay bribes and reporting corruption incidents, and that difficulty in accessing services is a driving factor in citizens' payment of bribes.

To further explore this data, please visit Afrobarometer's online data analysis facility at www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

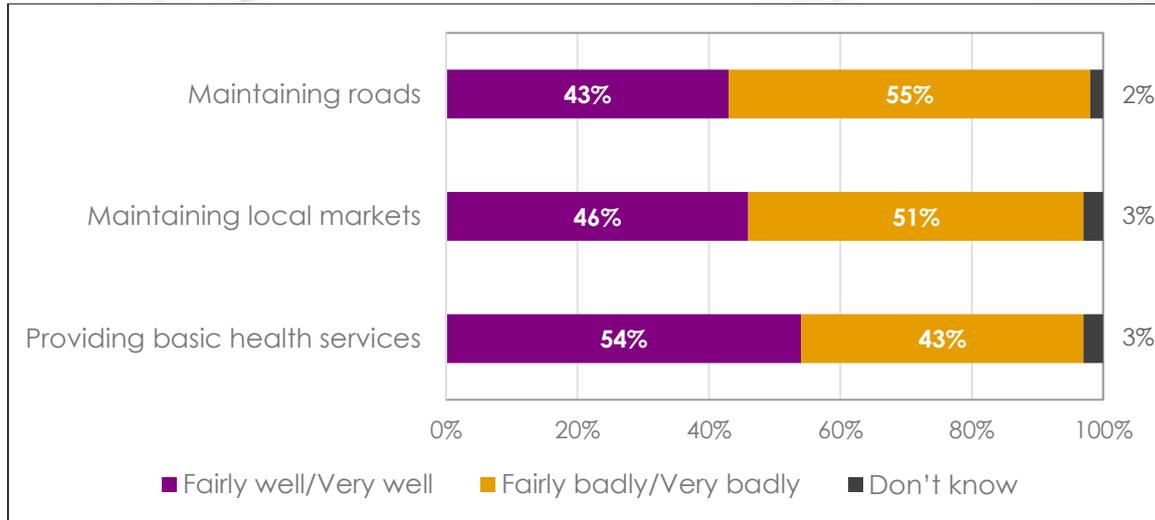
Addressing corruption in counties requires an examination of service delivery, in particular how citizens interact with those charged with

service delivery. It seems that in cases where services have been automated, corrupt practices have been reduced and services are becoming more efficient. The national programme through HUDUMA Centers is becoming a reference point for improved service delivery. Some counties have also automated some services, resulting in improved service delivery and revenue collection and reduced corrupt practices.

County service delivery, disbursement of funds, and call for referendum

Service delivery is a core business of county governments, but two years into the implementation of devolution, citizens were not satisfied with the performance of county governments in a number of areas. Only in regard to the provision of basic health services does a majority (54%) say that their county government is performing “fairly well” or “very well” (Figure 4).

Figure 4: County performance in service delivery | Kenya | 2014



Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say your county government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?

Funding is important for efficient service delivery, but citizens are divided as to whether the funds disbursed to counties by the national government are adequate: 47% believe that funding is inadequate, while 34% consider it adequate (Table 2). One in five survey respondents (19%) say they do not know or refused to take sides.

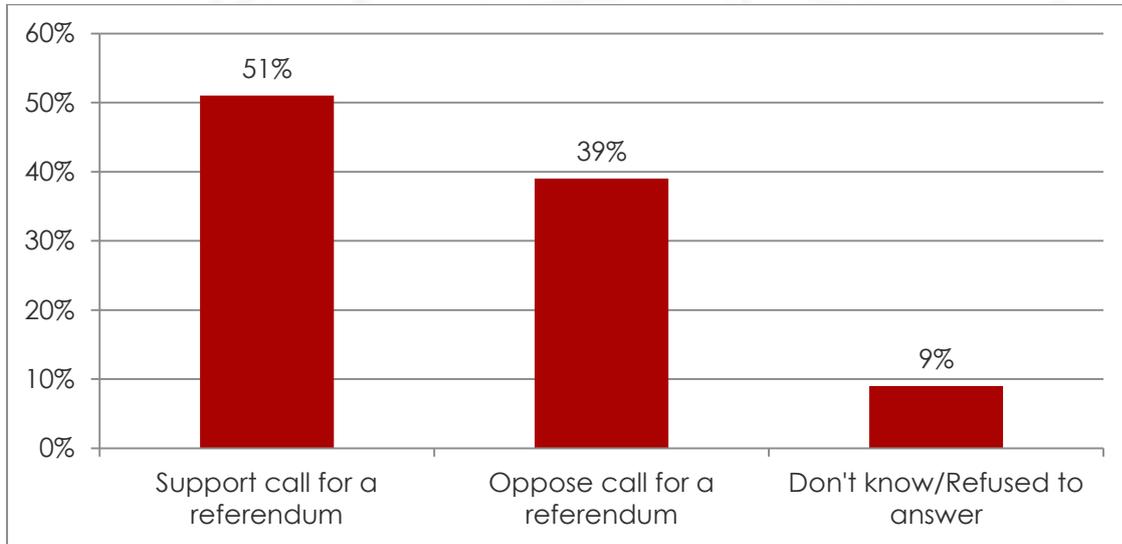
The ignorance of some citizens regarding the ongoing debate over disbursement of funds to counties has implications for the call for a referendum (*pesa mashinani*) on the issue, as well as the outcome if a referendum is held. Slightly more than half (51%) of the population support the call for a referendum on revenue sharing, while 39% do not and 9% do not know or refused to answer the question (Figure 5). The potential swing vote of 19% who do not know or don't take sides on whether funds disbursement is adequate represents an opportunity for education and persuasion by either side in the debate.

Table 2: Views on adequacy of funds disbursed to counties | Kenya | 2014

Funds disbursement inadequate:	Urban	Rural	Male	Female	Total
Disagree / Strongly disagree	36%	32%	36%	31%	34%
Agree/strongly agree)	46%	48%	50%	44%	47%
Neither agree nor disagree	6%	5%	5%	5%	5%
Don't know	13%	15%	9%	19%	14%

Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you disagree or agree, or haven't you heard enough to say: The national government has not been disbursing adequate funds to county governments as required by the new Constitution?

Figure 5: Support call for a referendum on revenue sharing | Kenya | 2014

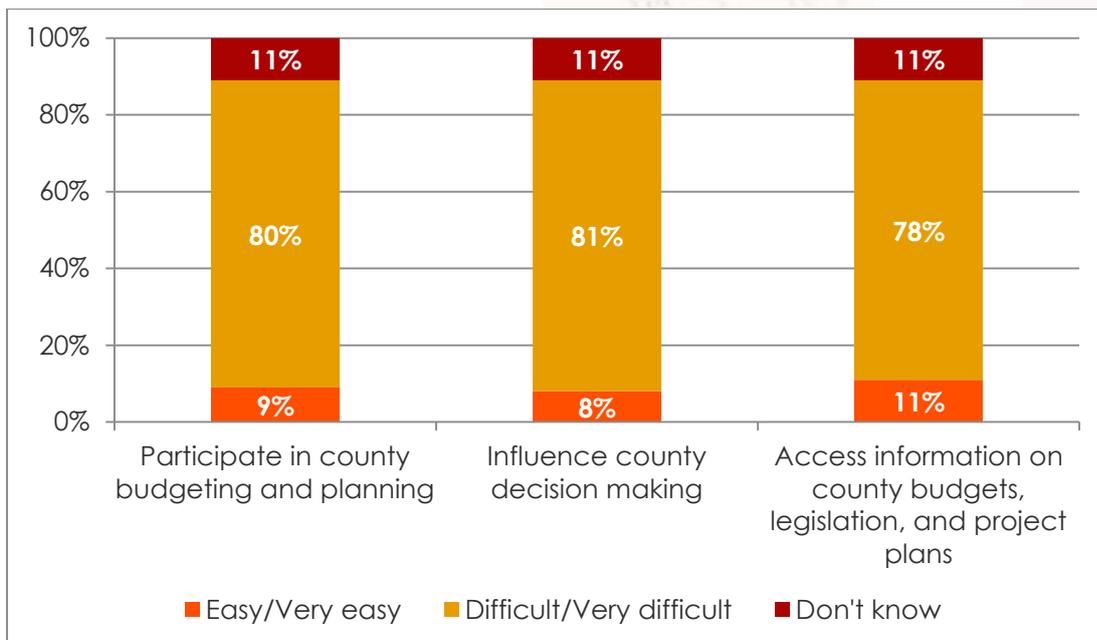


Respondents were asked: Do you support the call to hold a public referendum about changing the provisions for revenue-sharing between county and national governments?

Participation in county affairs

Participation is an important constitutional principle in Kenya, but participatory governance remains weak. In the Afrobarometer findings, only about one in 10 Kenyans say they find it “easy” or “very easy” to participate in county budgeting and planning, to influence county decision making, and to access information on county budgets, legislation, and project plans (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Ease of participating in county affairs | Kenya | 2014



Respondents were asked: Thinking about public participation as enshrined in the new constitution, how easy or difficult would you say it is: To participate in county budgeting and planning? To influence county decision making? To access information on county budgets, legislation, and project plans?

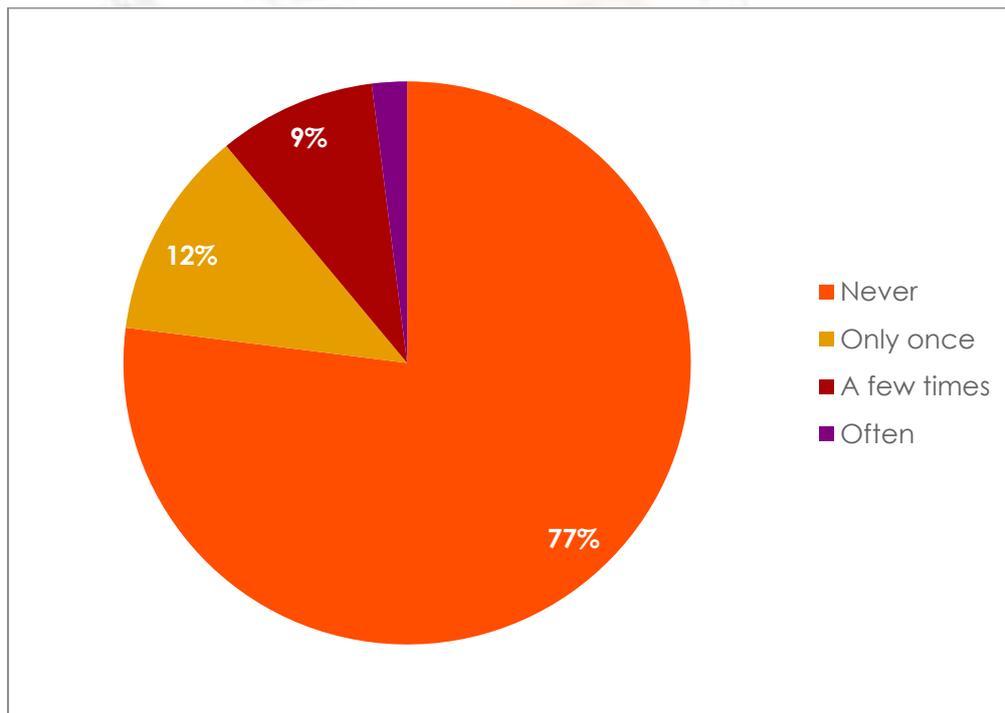
Findings reveal that citizens have limited contact with county leadership. During the year preceding the survey, 15% of the population attended a county government meeting, including 6% who did so “several times” or “often” (Table 3). About 23% say they contacted a county assembly member about a problem or to share their views (Figure 7). More than three-fourths of the population had no contact with county assembly members.

Table 3: Attendance of a county government meeting | Kenya | 2014

	Urban	Rural	Male	Female	Total
No, would never do this	13%	11%	8%	15%	12%
No, but would do if had the chance	72%	73%	72%	73%	73%
Yes, once or twice	8%	9%	11%	7%	9%
Yes, several times	5%	4%	6%	3%	4%
Yes, often	1%	2%	2%	1%	1%
Don't know	0	1%	1%	1%	1%

Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year: Attended a county government meeting? If not, would you do this if you had the chance?

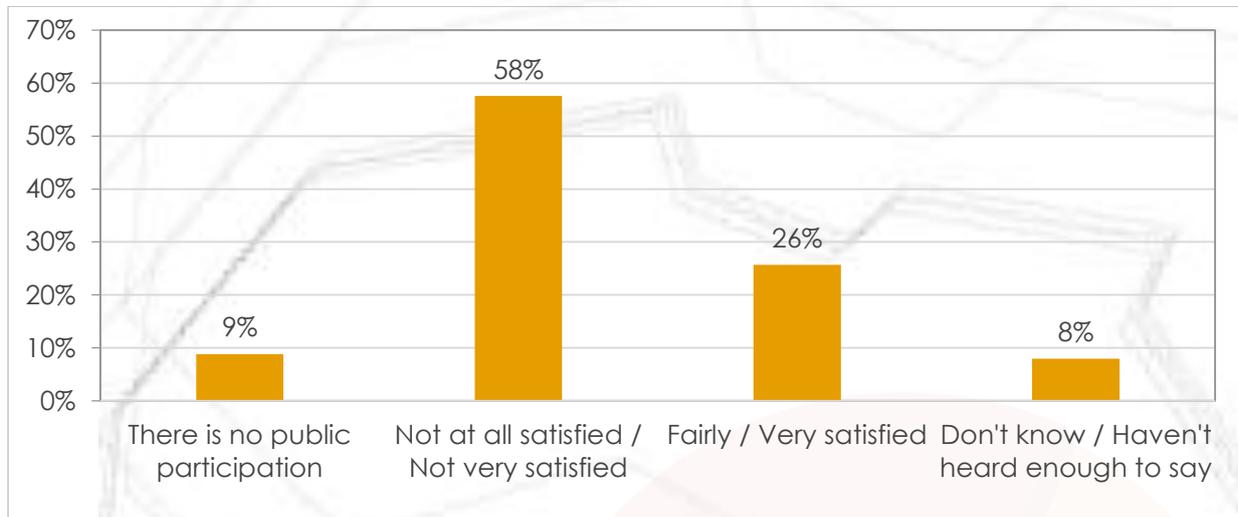
Figure 7: Contact with county assembly member | Kenya | 2014



Respondents were asked: During the past year, how often have you contacted any of the following persons about some important problem or to give them your views: A local member of county assembly?

Overall, citizens are not satisfied with the extent of public participation in the operation of county governments: 58% say they are “not at all” or “not very” satisfied, and an additional 9% say that “there is no public participation” (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Satisfaction with public participation in county affairs | Kenya | 2014



Respondents were asked: Overall, how satisfied are you with the extent of public participation in the operations of your county government?

Probing whether citizens are actually interested in public affairs reveals that half (50%) of them say they are “very interested” or “somewhat interested.” Urban residents (55%) are more likely to express interest in public affairs than rural citizens (47%). Two-thirds (66%) of respondents say they “occasionally” or “frequently” discuss political matters with their friends and family. Only about one-third (31%) of citizens are active members of voluntary associations or community groups, but 47% say they attended community meetings, and an additional 37% say they did not attend a meeting but would do so if they had a chance.

More than four in 10 (44%) say they got together with others to raise an issue during the previous year, while one-third (32%) joined with others in the community to request action from government, and one in five (22%) contacted a government official to ask for help or to make a complaint.

These findings indicate a willingness by many citizens to engage in public affairs, an aspect that should be exploited by county governments.

Conclusion

Kenyans' mixed feelings about devolution are not unique in a constitutional transition context. Considering the short time that county governments have been in operation, these findings dispel some dismissive criticisms and form a good baseline for benchmarking the performance of county leadership. What is important is how county governments use lessons informed by research to manage the transition. In this respect, the Council of County Governors' invitation to Afrobarometer to share its findings during planning for the 2nd Annual Devolution Conference and at its 2nd Annual Meeting is encouraging.

The transition to devolved governance is complex, shrouded in incomplete public management reforms, difficult not only for ordinary citizens but also for the leaders charged with the responsibility of transition. There is evidence that citizens, too, are willing to engage and participate, and county governments must seize this opportunity. Citizens' trust and appreciation, in particular the rural population's perception of strong county performance, are selling points that should be exploited to engage citizens, improve service delivery, and strengthen devolution.

Winnie V. Mitullah is an associate research professor for development studies and the director of the Institute for Development Studies at the University of Nairobi, Kenya. She is also the Afrobarometer project director for the East Africa region. Email: mitulla@uonbi.ac.ke.

Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD) in Ghana, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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For more information, please visit www.afrobarometer.org.

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