

# AFRO BAROMETER

Working Paper No. 63

**VOTERS BUT NOT YET CITIZENS:  
THE WEAK DEMAND FOR  
POLITICAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN  
AFRICA'S UNCLAIMED  
DEMOCRACIES**

by Michael Bratton and Carolyn Logan

**A comparative series of national public  
attitude surveys on democracy, markets  
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by Michael Bratton and Carolyn Logan

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## AFROBAROMETER WORKING PAPERS

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## **Voters, But Not Yet Citizens: The Weak Demand for Vertical Accountability in Africa's Unclaimed Democracies**

### *Abstract*

Transitions to competitive, multiparty politics in African countries during the 1990s were jubilantly welcomed, both on the continent and internationally. Today, Africans enjoy unprecedented opportunities to vote, and many still revel in greater individual and political freedoms. But the full potential of democracy – including the promise of accountable governance – has yet to be fulfilled. Why has democracy – or, at least, multiparty elections – so far failed to secure better governance and greater accountability? One answer concerns how Africans themselves understand the contours of new political regimes and, in particular, their own roles in a democracy. On the one hand, Africans enthusiastically support electoral politics, in principle the most direct means for influencing leaders. They do not, however, believe that elections have been particularly effective at securing political accountability. And when it comes to asserting control over elected leaders in the long intervals between elections, a substantial number of Africans do not see any role for themselves. People in African countries may have begun to transform themselves from the “subjects” of past authoritarian systems into active “voters” under the present dispensation. But at the same time, they do not appear to fully grasp their political rights as “citizens,” notably to regularly demand accountability from leaders. As such, most African political regimes have yet to meet the minimum requirements of representative democracy. Instead, African democracies share many characteristics of Latin America’s “delegative democracies.” But this description does not necessarily capture the crux of the deficiencies that we observe. In fact, the problem for many new democracies in Africa is not so much that citizens knowingly *delegate* authority to strong presidents, but that democracy remains *unclaimed* by mere “voters.”



## Introduction

Transitions to competitive, multiparty politics in African countries during the 1990s were jubilantly welcomed, both on the continent and internationally. Today, Africans enjoy unprecedented opportunities to vote, and many still revel in greater individual and political freedoms. But the full potential of democracy – including the promise of accountable governance – has yet to be fulfilled. Corruption remains endemic, economic growth is still elusive, and aid dependency continues to frustrate recipients and donors alike. As global leaders contemplate massive increases in international assistance to the continent, questions therefore have been raised about indigenous capacity to absorb an influx of new funds without exacerbating old problems. A program of smart aid would seem to require that African political leaders are held accountable – not only to donor agencies but, more importantly, to their own people – for sound policy choices and the effective use of resources.

But why has democracy – or, at least, multiparty elections – so far failed to secure better governance? If elected leaders are supposed to be rewarded for good choices and sanctioned for bad ones, why is policy performance still so poor? Why haven't democratic governments in Africa demonstrated a significantly greater degree of accountability to their publics than the authoritarian systems that they replaced? How is it, for example, that the multiparty political systems in Kenya, Uganda, Zambia and Nigeria receive lower scores on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index than much less open and competitive societies like Burkina Faso, Gabon, Rwanda, Equatorial Guinea, and Côte d'Ivoire?<sup>1</sup>

One answer concerns how Africans themselves understand the contours of new political regimes and, in particular, their own roles in a democracy. Our intention in this chapter is to explore Africans' understandings of political accountability and their responsibility for securing it. To what extent do they demand answers from their elected leaders? And to what extent do they feel they receive satisfactory responses?

Our findings suggest that the road to accountable governance may be a long one. On the one hand, Africans enthusiastically support electoral politics, in principle the most direct means for influencing leaders. They do not, however, believe that elections have been particularly effective at securing political accountability. And when it comes to asserting control over elected leaders in the long intervals between elections, a substantial number of Africans do not see any role for themselves. Instead, a majority apparently opts for a broadly delegative form of democracy, granting authority to oversee elected representatives either to the president, or to other political actors. Only about a third of the Africans we interviewed feel confident in asserting that elected leaders must answer directly to them. Nor do Africans feel that they are receiving a great deal of accountability from leaders; the reported supply of vertical accountability is even less than the demand for it.

People in African countries may have begun to transform themselves from the “subjects” of past authoritarian systems into active “voters” under the present dispensation. But at the same time, they do not appear to fully grasp their political rights as “citizens,” notably to regularly demand accountability from leaders. As such, most African political regimes have yet to meet the minimum requirements of representative democracy. Some indicators point towards these regimes as “delegative democracies,” albeit in a somewhat broader form than originally described by O'Donnell (1994). But this description does not necessarily capture the crux of the deficiencies that we observe. In fact, the problem for many new democracies in Africa is not so much that citizens knowingly *delegate* authority to strong presidents but that democracy remains *unclaimed* by mere “voters.”

## Overview of the Data

This analysis draws on the results of 25,397 face-to-face interviews conducted in 2005-2006 during Round 3 of the Afrobarometer. The data are pooled from 18 country surveys, all of which used a



standard survey instrument.<sup>2</sup> Each country is represented by a national probability sample in which every adult citizen had an equal and known chance of inclusion. Sample sizes ranged from 1161 to 2400 respondents per country, although, in the descriptive statistics reported here, the data are weighted to represent each country equally (n=1200). The margin of sampling error for country aggregates ranges from +/-2 to 3 percent at a 95 percent level of confidence.<sup>3</sup> Note that Afrobarometer surveys are concentrated in countries that have undergone at least some degree of political and economic liberalization in the last decade. As such, the results represent the continent's most open societies and cannot be taken as representative of sub-Saharan Africa as a whole.<sup>4</sup>

### **Accountability in Perspective**

The obligation of political leaders to answer to the public for their actions and decisions – the obligation of *accountability* – is a cornerstone of a well-functioning democratic system. In principle, political accountability serves a dual purpose. It checks the power of political leaders to prevent them ruling in an arbitrary or abusive manner, and helps to ensure that governments operate effectively and efficiently. Moreover, accountability is intimately linked to citizen participation, leadership responsiveness, and the rule of law, three other pillars that both define and reinforce the practice of democracy. Particularly in representative democracies, the level of accountability of elected representatives to their constituents is regarded as a key indicator of the quality of democracy actually enjoyed by a society (O'Donnell, *et al.*, 2004: 33; Diamond and Morlino, 2005: xiii).

Political accountability, in its wide sense, is concerned with the decisions and actions of all public officials, including not only politicians, but also bureaucrats and civil servants, as well as the judiciary, police and military (Schedler, 1999: 21-22). O'Donnell (1994) coined a useful distinction between two primary types of accountability: horizontal and vertical. Horizontal accountability refers to restraints imposed by the state on itself, or more specifically, by one institution of government upon another. It broadly refers to the system of separation of powers – with checks and balances within government – along with the state's internal adherence to the constitution and the rule of law. But it can be designed in numerous ways, and operate both within and between the three primary branches of government.

In O'Donnell's initial elaboration, vertical accountability – the primary focus of the present analysis – was defined purely in terms of electoral accountability, or “making elected officials answerable to the ballot box” (O'Donnell, 1994: 61). By definition, this type of vertical accountability therefore exists in every democracy, even the most minimal, electoral forms, as long as the political system provides both widespread opportunity to cast a ballot, and real choice to voters.

But the inherent limitations of individuals' votes as a means of enforcing accountability upon elected leaders are well known. Most significantly, opportunities to cast a ballot are infrequent, arising for president or parliament only once every four or five years. Moreover, elections force voters to compress myriad preferences – of political identity, competing policies, and retrospective evaluations and future expectations of performance – into a single choice. Because incumbent leaders can easily break promises and resort to evasion (Maravall, 1996), elections constitute a blunt instrument for enforcing accountability. In Africa, where ethnic or regional voting patterns are common and party platforms are weak, elections rarely offer real programmatic alternatives to voters. Elections also can do almost nothing to hold bureaucrats, the judiciary, or security forces to account for their actions.

Some analysts have rebelled against the notion of relegating the general public to such a minimal and potentially ineffective role. Others counter that demands for accountability from outside the state are far more subtle and varied – and important – than recognized by an electoral conceptualization of vertical accountability. As a result, the scope of action defined as vertical accountability has gradually expanded

over the last decade. Noting that “the traditional understanding of the concept of accountability has largely ignored civil society,” Smulovitz and Peruzzotti (2000) identify what they call “societal accountability” as:

a nonelectoral, yet vertical mechanism of control that rests on the actions of a multiple array of citizens’ associations and movements and on the media, actions that aim at exposing governmental wrongdoing, bringing new issues onto the public agenda, or activating the operation of horizontal agencies (149-50).

The role of bar associations, women’s groups, and human rights monitoring bodies in checking government behavior has received increasing recognition. So too, the critical role of independent and pluralistic media of mass communication that provide – or reveal – information about politics and government that is a critical component of the quest for accountability (Diamond, 1999: 4). But even this expanded conceptualization still accords only a secondary role to individuals; outside of their *direct* efforts at enforcing accountability through the ballot box, it seems to suggest that the only other means for individuals to have any influence on the demand for accountability in the inter-electoral period is by channeling their efforts through intermediary organizations.

Other analysts go a step further, identifying not only organized collective action as a means for individuals to be a part of the accountability matrix, but also noting that there is considerable scope for individual initiative through mass mobilization and public protest, advocacy campaigns, lawsuits and other “new accountability initiatives” such as participatory budgeting and expenditure monitoring (Anderson, 2006; Goetz, 2005; Malena, et al., 2004). Goetz (2003) notes that, “the new accountability agenda is characterized by an *expansion* of accountability along the many dimensions of this concept . . . Accountability-seekers . . . now include more ordinary people seeking to engage directly – rather than relying upon intermediaries – in efforts to make power-holders answer for their actions” (4-5).<sup>5</sup>

One reason these alternate societal mechanisms may be overlooked is that most do not include formal means of *enforcing* accountability or of punishing offenders. Schedler (1999) suggests that, “exercises of accountability that expose misdeeds but do not impose material consequences will usually appear as weak, toothless, ‘diminished’ forms of accountability. They will be regarded as acts of window dressing, rather than real restraints on power” (15-16). But it can still be legitimate to speak of acts of accountability even when the punishment component is missing. Schedler cites the value of institutions like South Africa’s truth commission that focused on obtaining information and was effective even when sanctions were limited to public exposure and disapproval of wrongdoing (17). Smulovitz and Peruzzotti (2000) argue that these measures can serve as an effective form of control over public servants, potentially destroying their reputations and political capital, and activating horizontal mechanisms of accountability.

Potentially, the relationship between mechanisms of horizontal and vertical accountability is mutually supportive. Political leaders who face sanction via elections or citizen action may have considerable incentive to establish or enforce institutional checks and balances. As such, “the linkage between voters and elected representatives sets the tone for all other accountability relationships” (Mainwaring, 2003: 21), because “the effective operation of vertical accountability, through the electoral process, the news media and concerted civic action, causes governments to take seriously the perils of failing to sustain horizontal accountability” (Schacter, 2001: 3).

As noted, however, the existing literature grants more attention to horizontal than vertical mechanisms. This preoccupation arises partly out of a bias towards formal institutions and relationships, as well as a tendency to focus on traditional means of enforcement, as compared to the more varied and often *ad hoc* nature of popular efforts to secure accountability from below.



The current literature on vertical accountability fails to fully understand why individuals might be motivated to seek accountability from elected leaders. How do individuals in new democracies understand their own relationship to political representatives, and to the state more generally? And how do they therefore conceive of their own appropriate role in the accountability dynamic? An implicit assumption is that competitive electoral politics automatically unleash public desires and expectations for answerability. Goetz (2003), for example, claims that, “since the last wave of democratization in the late 1980s and early 1990s *great expectations have been raised* amongst newly enfranchised subaltern groups about their rights under liberalized governance systems” (3, emphasis added).

But it is not at all clear that popular understandings of roles and responsibilities can be taken for granted. Jalal (1995) argues that, due to the colonial experience and cultural trajectory, “the extension in India of universal adult franchise did not energize the polity with the spirit of citizens’ rights as distinct from the formal periodic exercise of voters’ rights” (19-20). Relations between voters and leaders were largely limited to elections, and considerations of “caste and communal modes of mobilizing voters” inhibited “the rise of an ethic of representatives’ accountability to citizens that would be the hallmark of any substantive democracy” (20).

North (1990) makes a similar point in broader terms (see also Helmke and Levitsky, 2006). He argues that, at least in the short term, radical changes in the formal institutions that govern societies – a frequent occurrence over the last century in most African countries – are not necessarily matched by corresponding changes in the informal institutions – including the norms, values and expectations of society. He attributes poor performance in transitional societies to a mismatch, and search for reconciliation, between formal and informal institutions. This analysis suggests a powerful degree of path dependence, whereby a country’s historical experience influences – and perhaps limits – the societal response to political regime changes.

A society’s adherence to preexisting values and expectations can have meaningful implications for the realization of political accountability. Schaffer (1998) highlights the importance of understanding local intentions, interpretations and explanations of politics, that is, “how local populations understand their own actions” (7). He contends that analysts often mistakenly assume, for example, a direct and inevitable connection between participation in elections and public accountability and transparency. Rather, he finds that, in Senegal people vote for reasons of community solidarity or for personal gain rather than to influence public policy or ensure accountability. He argues that the very notion of public accountability must be questioned in Senegalese society, where many people have a weak sense of a “national good” that politicians should be expected to pursue, or of themselves as individuals with democratic rights in the national arena.

There is increasingly *some* recognition in the literature on accountability that individuals’ underlying attitudes and expectations do matter. Ippolito-O’Donnell proposes that, “democracy entails a particular conception of the human being *cum* citizen as an agent. . . . an autonomous, reasonable and responsible individual” (2006, 10-11; see also O’Donnell, *et al.*, 2004: 24-31). And Smulovitz and Peruzzotti note that societal mechanisms tend to be activated by actors “that recognize themselves as legitimate claimants of rights” (2003, 310).

But beyond these brief references, little of real substance has been said about the role of citizens in seeking and securing accountability. The routes by which citizens come to claim political rights are often glossed over. And case studies of civic organizations refer only in passing to programs that train, mobilize, or educate the public. Yet immense metamorphoses are required for individuals to transit from “subjects” under authoritarian rule, to “voters” in electoral democracies, and thereafter to rights- and accountability-demanding “citizens.” The assertion by individuals of *superior authority* over public



officials is no small matter (Mulgan, 2000, cited in Malena, et al., 2004: 2). As Goetz (2003) acknowledges:

For poor rural women to stand up in front of local officials and politicians and accuse them of lying and theft is an extraordinary achievement in a traditional, some say feudal, society... (it) center(s) mainly upon inculcating the very modern view that in a democracy, the role of civil servants is to serve the public, making no distinctions between citizens. (2)

In fact, Goetz notes that it was only after “years of investment . . . in changing local attitudes towards domestic tyrants and towards the state” (2) that women and poor men were willing to engage in this struggle.

If public attitudes lag behind opportunities offered by political liberalization, what are the implications for accountability, and for democracy more generally? One key implication is that, as North suggested, history matters. Democratic citizenship is not built in a day, and a legacy of authoritarianism cannot be wiped out overnight.

In Latin America, for example, O’Donnell (1994) has proposed that the outcome of the region’s widespread legacy of populism and authoritarianism has culminated, under the auspices of competitive electoral politics, in a limited form of “delegative democracy.” In delegative democracies, the public readily engages in electoral accountability when selecting presidents, but they also willingly grant them a mandate to rule essentially unilaterally.

Delegative democracies rest on the premise that whoever wins election to the presidency is thereby entitled to govern as he or she sees fit, constrained only by the hard facts of existing power relations and by a constitutionally limited term of office. The president is taken to be the embodiment of the nation and the main custodian and definer of its interests. . . . After the election, voters/delegators are expected to become a passive but cheering audience of what the president does (59-60).

O’Donnell characterizes the key distinction between delegative democracies and representative democracies primarily as a failure on the part of state institutions, not the public. Referring to vertical accountability in its original, narrow, electoral sense, he observes:

Vertical accountability . . . exists in both representative and delegative democracies. But the horizontal accountability characteristic of representative democracy is extremely weak or nonexistent in delegative democracies. Furthermore, since the institutions that make horizontal accountability effective are seen by delegative presidents as unnecessary encumbrances to their “mission,” they make strenuous efforts to hamper the development of such institutions. (61-62)

But by focusing on the institutional failures underlying weak horizontal accountability, O’Donnell may be overlooking the crux of the problem: the failure of the public to demand a fully articulated representative democracy. While he implicitly conceives of the public in these societies as having an underdeveloped desire for accountability, he treats such demand-side failures as clearly secondary to the shortcomings of governmental institutions, and the president’s efforts to undermine them. But as noted earlier, analysts – including O’Donnell in recent work (Mainwaring, 2003: 21) – increasingly agree that horizontal and vertical accountability are mutually reinforcing.

We thus offer an alternative characterization that focuses on vertical accountability first and foremost, and in particular, on the demand side of the political process. We contend that accountability remains incomplete because of individuals' limited conception of political rights, of reasonable expectations, and of their own public roles and responsibilities. In other words, the general public's adoption of an ethic of citizenship may lag well behind the adoption of a system of voters' rights. In effect, democracy in these societies remains *unclaimed* by the people. Africans may be evolving from subjects into voters, but not yet into citizens.

The availability of Afrobarometer data allow us to explore Africans' perceptions of accountability – horizontal and, especially, vertical – in a way that has not previously been possible. We begin with a brief look at attitudes concerning horizontal accountability. We then consider perspectives on the traditional mechanism of vertical accountability: elections. Finally, we turn our attention to the primary object of inquiry in this chapter: individual attitudes toward and evaluations of vertical accountability between elections. We consider both the popular demand for vertical accountability – which will reveal whether average Africans are evolving into full-fledged democratic citizens – as well as the supply of accountability that they report receiving from elected leaders.

### **Horizontal Accountability: Are Africans Delegative Democrats?**

With reference to horizontal accountability, do Africans resemble the delegative democrats of Latin America? Do they prefer the centralization of power in a single strong (but elected) president? Or do they value a system of separation of powers with checks and balances that provides horizontal accountability and characterizes democratic rule (O'Donnell, 1994; Sklar, 1987)?

The Afrobarometer data seem to suggest the latter. With regard to legislative checks on the executive we asked people to choose between two statements. Do they concur that “the members of the Parliament represent the people; therefore they should make laws for this country, even if the President does not agree”? Or do they instead believe that, “since the President represents all of us, he should pass laws without worrying about what the Parliament thinks”? Across 18 countries, two-thirds of respondents (65 percent) back the sovereignty of parliament in drafting laws, which is hardly a level of deference to presidential power that we would expect to see in a delegative democracy. Support for an independent legislature is a majority position in all countries, ranging as high as 78 percent in Senegal and 74 percent in Mali and Benin. In Malawi and Namibia, however, some 40 percent instead side with presidential dominance.

Nor do African publics believe their presidents should be above the law. Do respondents agree that, “since the President was elected to lead the country, he should not be bound by laws or court decisions that he thinks are wrong”? Or, rather, do they hold that, “the President must always obey the laws and the courts, even if he thinks they are wrong”? We again find that a solid two-thirds majority (67 percent) believes that the president must remain subject to a rule of law. Even Malawians now join the cross-country consensus about the power-balancing role of the judiciary (64 percent). In some states, however, support for a regime of constitutional legality appears shaky. In Mozambique and Namibia, less than half the adult population (47 and 48 percent respectively) unequivocally backs the legal system's supremacy over presidential decrees.

Thus, there is little indication that Africans – except possibly Namibians – are inclined towards delegative democracy in the sense described by O'Donnell. They clearly prefer a system of horizontal accountability to unilateral decision-making by a powerful president. Rather, they see both parliament and the courts as playing important roles in balancing the exercise of power.



To be realistic, however, the Africans we interviewed recognize the weakness of existing horizontal restraints on the executive: only one third (36 percent) think that presidents never “ignore the constitution”; and, in Nigeria, only 9 percent feel this way. Moreover, people may not fully grasp the intended division of labor between branches of government or the crosscutting forces at work in a system of checks and balances. Only 14 percent of survey respondents, for example, can correctly identify the courts as the body having responsibility for determining whether or not a law is constitutional (Afrobarometer Network, 2006a: 2). Africans may therefore adhere to the general principle of executive restraint, without necessarily having a good understanding of exactly how this should actually occur.

### **Vertical Accountability: Are Elections Working in Africa?**

If agencies of horizontal accountability are weak, then mechanisms of vertical accountability take on enhanced importance. Periodic elections are among the only formal opportunities enjoyed by ordinary citizens to punish or reward political representatives for their performance in office.

There is little doubt that Africans welcome the advent of competitive elections. Across 18 countries in 2005-6, more than four out of five Afrobarometer respondents (82 percent) agree that, “we should choose our leaders in this country through regular, open and honest elections.” Fewer than one in four (16 percent) disagree: “since elections sometimes produce bad results, we should adopt other measures for choosing this country’s leaders.” Strong majorities favor elections in all 18 countries surveyed, peaking at 94 percent in Benin. Having voted for turnovers in top leadership, fully nine out of ten Beninois express “very strong” agreement that elections are the best way for ordinary people to discipline the political elite. Thus, like democracy, free elections have become widely regarded – almost universally in some places – as a desirable public good (Bratton 2006a: 2).

Because people easily pay lip service to universal norms, expressions of support for electoral mechanisms may not always reflect deep popular commitments. If they have never experienced free and fair contests, citizens may regard “no party” or “one-party dominant” elections as desirable. Therefore, it is important to know whether Africans endorse the idea of multiparty competition itself. Here the evidence is also positive, but less compelling: some 63 percent prefer “many political parties... (so people) have real choices,” versus 32 percent who regard many political parties as “unnecessary” because they cause “division and confusion.” So, while a clear majority of Africans favors multiparty competition, a substantial minority (about one third) apparently does not. Note, however, that the proportion supporting multiple parties is rising over time – up 8 points from 55 percent circa 2002 (Afrobarometer Network, 2006b: 21) – a trend that suggests a groundswell favoring a choice of candidates. In places like Zimbabwe, where a de facto one-party state has used manipulation and violence to dodge accountability, fully three quarters of all adults now call for “real choice” among multiple political parties.

On the whole, people also express considerable confidence in the quality of African elections. Across all 18 countries, two-thirds (66 percent) report that their elections were either “completely free and fair,” or “free and fair, but with minor problems.” This obscures the fact, however, that in four countries – Malawi, Nigeria, Zambia and Zimbabwe – ratings of electoral quality are much lower; an average of just 35 percent gives their elections positive ratings in these countries. But across the remaining 14 countries, positive marks are given by an average of 75 percent, peaking at 84 percent in Botswana.

Even so, Africans have yet to be convinced that competitive contests always guarantee the vertical accountability of leaders to the electorate. Asked to consider “how elections work in practice in your country,” fewer than half think they work well. Just 47 percent report that elections “enable voters to remove from office leaders who do not do what the people want” and only 46 percent consider that elections “ensure that members of parliament/deputies in the national assembly reflect the views of voters.” To be sure, these averages conceal considerable cross-national variation: whereas three quarters



of Ghanaians (79 percent) see elections as a reliable means of replacing unresponsive political representatives, barely one quarter of Nigerians (26 percent) share the same conviction. Inevitably, these public views embody popular judgments about whether the last national election – that is, Ghana’s model 2004 poll and Nigeria’s disputed contest of 2003 – accurately reflected the will of the voters. Unless well conducted, elections can hardly be expected to serve as mechanisms of vertical accountability.

Most importantly for an inquiry into accountability, Africans insist that political representatives should respond to their needs. By a margin of almost six to one (82 percent) they believe that “elected officials should listen to constituents’ views and do what they demand.” They roundly reject the proposition that “elected leaders should follow their own ideas in deciding what is best for the country” (14 percent). In other words, citizens do not regard elections as a blank check that permits political representatives to exercise wide discretion. Citizens are especially insistent on controlling leaders in Kenya, where a mere 4 percent is willing to cede decision-making authority between elections exclusively to legislators and local government councilors. Instead, as we will show below, people want leaders to maintain regular contact with their home constituencies and to routinely consult citizens on the important issues of the day.

It is within this context of these popular views – widespread support for elections, general satisfaction with their quality, mixed feelings about their effectiveness, and strong preferences for responsive governance – that we pose our central research questions. Among Africans, who wants vertical accountability? And why don’t people think they are getting it?

### **Other Forms of Vertical Accountability: Who Wants Them?**

Delving deeper into the demand side of the political process, this section explores forms of vertical accountability other than elections. It asks whether Africans see roles for themselves – beyond voting – as citizens in a representative democracy. We limit our inquiry to elected representatives (members of parliament or deputies in the national assembly, and local government councilors), rather than all government officials. We want to know whether ordinary folk feel responsible for holding these elected leaders accountable between elections, or whether they would rather delegate the monitoring function to other agents or institutions. And we will examine who demands a popular form of vertical accountability. We are interested in whether a predisposition for citizenship arises from the attitudinal characteristics of individuals, the attributes of social groups, or from the shared institutional legacies of whole societies.

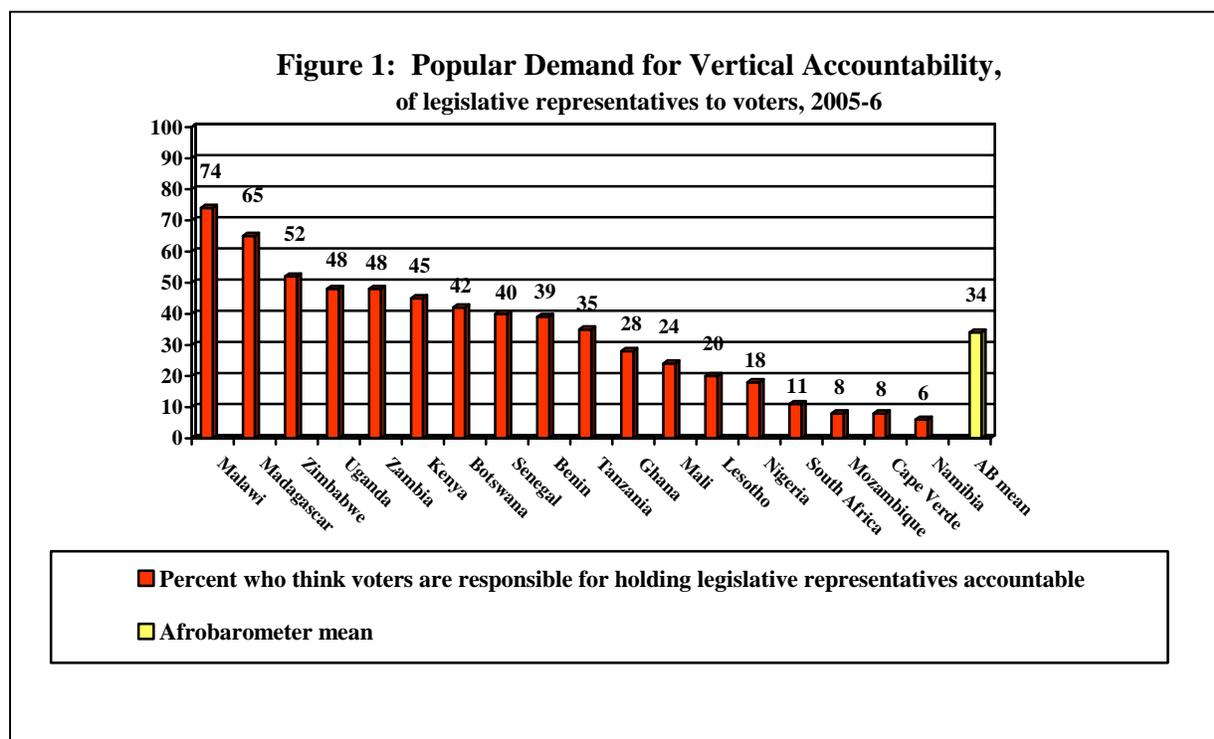
Africans now appear divided on whether they prefer a representative or delegative form of democracy. When asked: “who should be responsible for making sure that, once elected, members of parliament/deputies in the national assembly do their jobs,” they split into two main camps. Across 18 African countries in 2005-6, one third of the survey respondents say that “the voters” should take the lead in holding legislators accountable (34 percent). Countering this view, however, a proportion of equal size considers that “the President” (or the “executive branch of government”) should supervise the work of legislators (33 percent). The remainder of the survey respondents either say they “don’t know” who is responsible for ensuring accountability (10 percent) or that the political parties represented in the parliament should police their own members (23 percent).

One can even make a case from these results that Africans seem to *prefer* a broadly delegative form of democracy. Adding together all valid responses that do not cite “the voters,” we can see that more than one half of all adults (56 percent) apparently stand ready to abdicate their democratic right to discipline their representatives between elections. In lieu of vertical accountability, they seem willing to accept some form of horizontal accountability exercised by either the legislative or executive branches of government. Let us be clear: these are weak substitutes for popular oversight. Accountability of elected representatives to a legislature or party requires leaders to monitor themselves without any form of external check or balance. And accountability to a president constitutes an extreme form of horizontal



accountability in which the arrow of sovereignty— which, in a democracy, grants precedence to an elected legislature – is reversed. It proposes that the legislature should be held accountable to an executive branch whose members, save usually the president, are unelected.

Do Africans everywhere spurn vertical accountability between elections? Not necessarily. Figure 1 shows the percentage of survey respondents in each country who say that “the voters” are responsible for making sure parliamentary representatives do their work. The Afrobarometer mean score (34 percent) conceals a remarkably wide range of cross-national variation. To be sure, only 6 percent of Namibians say they want MPs to be answerable to voters in a context where almost half the adult population (48 percent) would gladly delegate this task to the executive president. A further 17 percent regards the ruling party, SWAPO, as a reliable agent of restraint. By contrast, a clear majority of almost three quarters of Malawians prefer that MPs report directly to voters, in a country where only 12 percent countenance entrusting such authority to the president.



Similar patterns prevail when people consider local government councilors. Who should guarantee that these grassroots representatives do their jobs? Once again, Malawians are more insistent than other Africans on the right of popular review (76 percent). They are followed by Malagasy (74 percent), in whose vast country local government is often more visible than central authority, and Ugandans (61 percent), who enjoy a strong recent tradition of participatory local administration. As before, Namibians readily surrender their political rights (just 12 percent demand vertical accountability) but now less so than Cape Verdians (5 percent), where local government is seen as highly dependent on, and therefore largely indistinguishable from, national government.

Importantly, the Africans we interviewed demand more popular accountability from local government than from central government. Overall, some 40 percent think that local government councilors should be subject to oversight from voters, which is six points higher than their views about legislators. Moreover, only 19 percent think that the national president should have any role in supervising councilors, some 15 points lower than for MPs. These differences reflect the relative physical proximity of voters to local

councilors and, by contrast, the remoteness of the office of the president, other agencies of central government, and even members of parliament, from the areas where citizens live. The data also suggest that a popular constituency for representative democracy (rather than delegative democracy) is likely to emerge first at the local government level, and only later with regard to the national parliament.

Nonetheless, popular attitudes about the accountability of elected representatives are forged from the same mold. Public opinion about the locus of responsibility for responsive governance is correlated across central and local government levels.<sup>6</sup> At both levels, there are strong delegative and weaker representative tendencies. Because these attitudes are linked, for purposes of further analysis it is possible to combine them into a single item that refers generally to elected representatives, both local and central.<sup>7</sup> This produces a single variable on a 3-point scale that we call “popular demand for vertical accountability.”<sup>8</sup> It constitutes the object of explanation in the analysis that follows.

We already know that mass demand for vertical accountability varies substantially across countries. So it is reasonable to expect that the aggregate-level features of nation states – whether historical, economic or institutional – will explain differences in whether Africans grant voters the leading role in seeking accountability. Before leaping to this conclusion, however, we wish to probe alternative explanations embedded in the social characteristics and political attitudes of individuals. For example, it is reasonable to expect that urban residents would be more politically sophisticated than rural dwellers and thus more likely to think that voters should be responsible for monitoring leaders. We might also expect that those with more education would have a better understanding of the rights and responsibilities of citizens in a democracy. Additionally, it is also plausible to propose that people who possess relevant political knowledge – such as the names of elected representatives or the requirements of presidential term limits – would be more insistent about vertical accountability.

The results of a regression analysis on demand for vertical accountability are displayed in Table 1. The table shows the effects of social, attitudinal and contextual factors on the formation of this claim. Let us examine the impact of each block of factors in turn.<sup>9</sup>

One would anticipate that an individual’s demographic characteristics would help determine who expects popular accountability. But we find that, other things being equal, standard social indicators like age and education have no significant effect. There is a gender gap in the expected direction – women are slightly less likely to think that voters should be in charge – but it is not statistically significant. The same holds true for unemployed people. As Model 1 shows, the only meaningful social characteristics are rural residence and wealth.<sup>10</sup> It is hardly surprising that people who have amassed personal assets have a stake in political outcomes and will be more active in seeking direct accountability. Against predictions, however, rural dwellers are *more* likely than urbanites to demand vertical accountability as we have defined it, that is, to expect voter representation ahead of delegation to presidents. This revealing result is consistent with other observations that rural Africans display higher rates of voter turnout, attendance at community meetings, and contact with informal leaders (Bratton 2006b). Taking the effects of habitat and wealth together, we infer that the urban poor would most readily surrender their rights to a powerful executive presidency.

Note, however, that social characteristics explain very little variance (less than 1 percent) in the demand for responsive leadership. So the moving force behind accountability must lie elsewhere, perhaps in the attitudinal realm of mass opinion.

We considered a wide array of attitudinal predictors. For the record, we find that an individual’s political engagement<sup>11</sup> and political efficacy<sup>12</sup> play no role in shaping demand for accountability. And, once other attitudes are taken into account, even persons who say they are inclined to “question leaders” rather than



to automatically “respect authority” are no more likely than anyone else to want leaders to answer directly to voters.

Instead, as Model 2 shows, what matters most is individual political knowledge. Not surprisingly, people who know the names of their legislative representatives and local government councilors<sup>13</sup> are most likely to demand their accountability. And, other things being equal, people who know the constitutional rule about how many terms in office a national president may serve are also primed to call their representatives to account. On a related matter, people who reject a regime in which “elections and parliament are abolished so that the president can decide everything” (i.e., one-man rule), also want an assertive citizenry. Finally, the more that people perceive that elected representatives are corrupt,<sup>14</sup> the more likely they are to want to hold them to account.

But we must again concede that attitudinal effects are not large. All told, social and attitudinal factors together barely explain 5 percent of the variability in demand for vertical accountability. This result suggests that, in sub-Saharan Africa, demand for the accountability of elected leaders to voters is nascent at best. In the realm of public opinion, such preferences are barely formed. And the limited demand that does exist it is widely dispersed among all classes and categories of people. In short, we discern a vacuum in African politics in the arena where pressures for representative democracy are expected to originate. Citizens have yet to fully appreciate that democratization endows them with the right to monitor their leaders between elections. Rather than being predisposed to vigorously call their elected leaders to account on a regular basis, African publics are instead primed to defer to the authority of big men. They have adopted the attitudes of “voters” by showing strong support for the electoral process, but have yet to transform themselves into “citizens,” who take on the added responsibility of monitoring and, where possible, sanctioning their leaders in the long intervals between elections. Too many ordinary people instead assume that the head of state (or, to a lesser extent, other arms of the government and the political system) will somehow perform the role of holding elected representatives to account.

Where does this prevalent public mindset originate? We now confirm that, rather than being an attribute of particular individuals or groups, low demand for accountability is better understood at the country level through the shared experiences of whole populations. Model 3 shows clearly that people who live in Namibia, Mozambique or South Africa, among other countries, are less likely than the average African to demand popular accountability.<sup>15</sup> By contrast, living in Malawi or Madagascar is the main determinant of such demand. Once the latter countries are included – with their predominantly rural populations – the positive effect of rural residence is revealed as spurious because it is displaced by a country effect. Indeed, a credible account of demand for vertical accountability can be constructed using country-level considerations alone.<sup>16</sup>

The challenge for theory building and policy prescription, however, is to replace country names with underlying historical and institutional features. Without exhausting all possibilities, Model 4 reveals several relevant elements. Because this model explains only half the variance of Model 3, however, we must conclude that other unmeasured influences are also at work.

First, African citizens are more likely to demand vertical accountability if their countries have been independent for a long time. This implies that demand for public accountability is an attribute that people learn over time, and that learning occurs largely through their accumulated experience with self-governance. In other words, citizens usually seek inter-electoral accountability to voters only after they discover that leaders are not governing in the public interest. This insight helps us to interpret the relatively high levels of demand for such accountability in countries like Benin, Madagascar and Malawi, all of which gained independence in the early 1960s and which subsequently suffered indigenous dictatorships. In newly free countries, such as South Africa (1994) and Namibia (1990), insufficient time has yet elapsed for citizens to learn this lesson. Like other Africans did before them, South Africans and



Namibians are allowing leaders considerable latitude in the early years of the founding democratic regime.

Second, much depends on the mode of decolonization. National liberation movements led armed struggles in the latecomer countries just mentioned above, plus Cape Verde, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. This mode of decolonization featured dominant political parties based on revolutionary discipline and democratic centralism. These organizational features were carried over into the postcolonial phase, with leaders like Samora Machel, Sam Nujoma and Robert Mugabe being resistant to, even intolerant of, political pluralism and competition. Instead, they sought to indoctrinate their compatriots to follow an official party line. In this way, the legacy of national liberation has discouraged a political culture of bottom-up accountability.

Third, the way that leaders governed after independence was also important, especially the extent to which they concentrated power in the presidency. As a way of differentiating among African countries on this dimension, we calculated the number of years each country spent under personal dictatorship, military rule or plebiscitary one-party rule from independence to 1989 (“past presidential rule”). We think that the relatively low demand for accountability in Nigeria, for example, can be traced in part to 18 years of highly centralized military dictatorship during this period (Sklar, *et al.*, 2006: 102). At a general level, a legacy of past presidential rule is negatively and significantly correlated with demand for

**Table 1: Popular Demand for Vertical Accountability, Explanatory Factors Compared**

	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 3</b>	<b>Model 4</b>
Constant	(1.852)	(1.657)	(1.995)	(1.326)
<b>Social Characteristics</b>				
Rural	.071	.055		
Wealth	.075	.038	.042	.044
<b>Political Attitudes</b>				
Know Political Leaders		.144	.042	.068
Know Term Limits		.026	.042	
Reject One-Man Rule		.096	.036	.050
Perceive Corruption		.044	.031	.030
<b>Country Contexts</b>				
Namibia			-.163	
Mozambique			-.162	
South Africa			-.143	
Nigeria			-.127	
Cape Verde			-.126	
Lesotho			-.125	
Ghana			-.059	
Mali			-.052	
Malawi			.133	
Madagascar			.112	
Benin			.036	
<b>Institutional Legacies</b>				
Years of Independence				.123
Liberation Movement				-.031
Past Presidential Rule				-.073
Plurality Electoral System				.126
<b>Adjusted R square</b>	<i>.008</i>	<i>.045</i>	<i>.167</i>	<i>.085</i>

Cell values are standardized regression coefficients, i.e. beta.

(Values in parentheses are unstandardized regression coefficients)

All unstandardized regression coefficients (not shown) are statistically significant at  $p < .001$



accountability. To state the result differently, Africans who were socialized under the rule of strong presidents in the past have limited experience with representative democracy and are likely to default to a delegative form of democracy today.

Finally, as an alternative to historical path dependencies, we consider contemporary political institutions, notably the electoral system. Among the countries studied here, 11 possess plurality systems (like “first past the post” elections in single member districts) and 5 employ proportional systems (like “list PR” with various district magnitudes).<sup>17</sup> We find that plurality systems have a more positive effect than proportional and mixed systems on popular demands for political accountability. This stands to reason since, under plurality systems, citizens can identify and locate a single representative, whom they can hold accountable. Under the list PR system, especially as in South Africa where the whole country forms one electoral district for parliamentary elections, citizens do not know whom to approach as “their” representative. A mixed electoral system has been introduced for local government elections in South Africa, in part to address the problem of ambiguous lines of accountability. Thus respondents in the February 2006 Afrobarometer survey were somewhat more likely to demand accountability from local councilors (17 percent) than national MPs (11 percent).

We further find that a model based on institutional factors alone (not shown in Table 1) performs just as well as model 4, which also includes social and attitudinal factors.<sup>18</sup> We therefore conclude that, at least with reference to factors considered here, historical legacies and contemporary institutional choices largely determine who among Africans want elected representatives to be accountable to voters.

### **Why Don’t Africans Get Vertical Accountability?**

Turning to the supply side of the political process, this section explores whether Africans think that elected representatives are delivering accountable governance. Or not. And why? If citizens perceive low levels of vertical accountability (and they do), then we will search for the roots of this sentiment. Can citizen discontent with the accountability of leaders again be traced to institutional histories or, in this case, do we discover more proximate causes embedded in mass opinions about the current behavior (and misbehavior) of political elites?

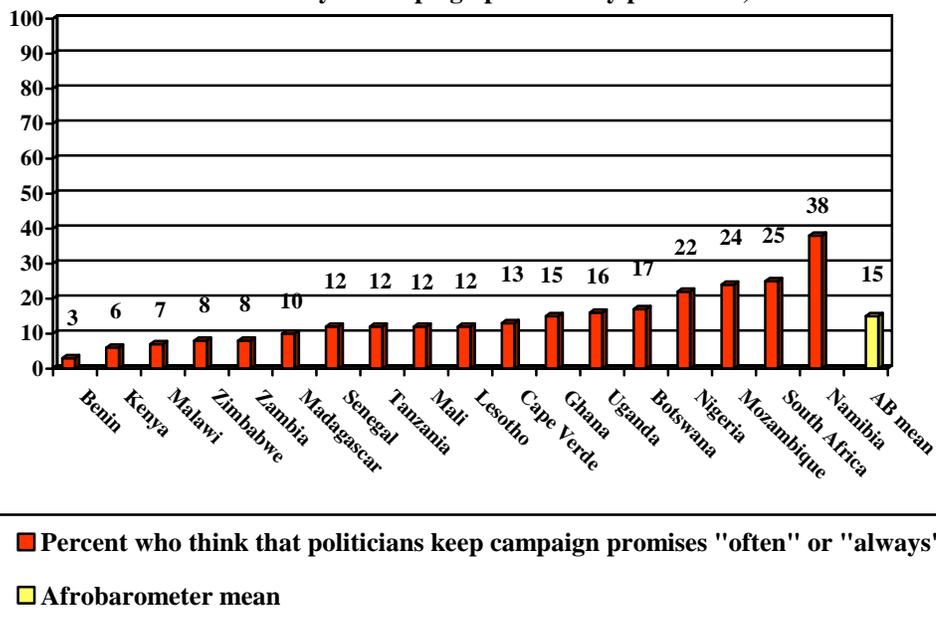
To measure the supply of vertical accountability, we focus on the perceived credibility of politicians. The Afrobarometer survey asks, “in your opinion, how often do politicians keep their campaign promises after elections?” Like people elsewhere in the world, Africans have skeptical views on this subject. Across 18 African countries in 2005-6, an average of just 15 percent opine that elected leaders keep their word “often” or “always.” Some 38 percent say they do so “rarely,” and a plurality (44 percent) say “never.” With only 3 percent “don’t know,” almost everyone has an opinion on this hot topic.

Figure 2 depicts the extent to which people think campaign promises are believable across African countries. Whereas more than one-third of Namibians put faith in the pledges of politicians, just three percent do so in Benin. A visual comparison of Figures 1 and 2 reveals two insights: first, fewer people perceive a supply of vertical accountability than the (already low) proportion who demand it; and second, there is a systematic inverse relationship between demand and supply of vertical accountability at the country level.<sup>19</sup> For example, Namibians and Mozambicans are both very unlikely to say they *want* accountability, and also very likely to report that they are *getting* it. In these places, low popular expectations are easily satisfied. By contrast, Malawians and Zimbabweans insist that they *want* leaders to be beholden to citizens, but they do not report *getting* much responsive service. In these settings, widespread popular demands are routinely frustrated.



Africans also doubt that politicians “do their best to deliver development after elections.” Instead, people commonly complain that candidates for office make grandiose guarantees of social and economic investments that are never subsequently fulfilled. The distribution of this attitude closely mirrors opinion about campaign promises.<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, we calculate an average construct of these two items that we call “the perceived supply of vertical accountability” to serve as an object of explanation.

**Figure 2: Perceived Supply of Vertical Accountability:  
credibility of campaign promises by politicians, 2005-6**



What accounts for the generally low levels of this indicator in sub-Saharan Africa? In particular, why are most Africans getting less accountability than they say they want? A regression of the supply of accountability on various social, attitudinal and contextual predictors is shown in Table 2.

One immediately notices the absence of a demographic story. Neither gender nor education – but now also neither wealth nor rural residence – helps to discern whether people see themselves as supplied with accountability. For all intents and purposes, every segment of society sees itself as supplied – or, more commonly, *undersupplied* – to a roughly equal extent.

Instead, as shown in Models 5 through 7, political attitudes now loom large. Even when controlled for country contexts or institutional legacies, the same set of political attitudes, in the same order, lies at the heart of an explanation of the supply of vertical accountability.

First, the most important determinant is political responsiveness, or the extent to which citizens think elected representatives actually “listen.” The interviewers asked, “how much of the time do you think (MPs/local government councilors) try their best to listen to what people like you have to say?” Again, local leaders fare slightly better than national leaders: 62 percent think local councilors listen at least “sometimes,” compared to 54 percent for national legislators. But, importantly, only about one quarter of all adults think that either set of leaders listen “often” or “always.”<sup>21</sup> The negative tilt of public opinion on this subject indicates that leaders are seen as insufficiently attentive. The large and significant

coefficients in the regression models signify that people base their judgments about the supply of accountability in the first instance on whether their leaders recognize their needs. In short, from a popular perspective, an accountable leader is seen as one who listens carefully to constituents.

Second, the next most important consideration is whether people think leaders get special treatment under the law. The survey asks, “how likely do you think it would be that the authorities could enforce the law if a top official (a) committed a serious crime (b) did not pay tax on some of the income they earned?” The same questions were then asked about the likelihood of law enforcement if “a person like you” committed these offenses. The “expectation gap” is wide. For example, whereas 90 percent think that ordinary citizens would be punished for committing a serious crime, only 53 percent think that a top official would receive the same treatment.<sup>22</sup> The uneven application of the rule of law is a leading factor that predicts the perceived supply of accountability almost as well as political responsiveness. But, in this case, the effect is not positive. If citizens think that leaders benefit from a culture of impunity, then they doubt that vertical accountability is being supplied.

Third, confidence in the effectiveness of elections also matters. As reported earlier, less than half of all Afrobarometer respondents think that elections work well at replacing unresponsive leaders and ensuring that popular preferences are aired in parliament. Because these outcomes are seen to go together, we construct a single indicator of whether people “think elections work.”<sup>23</sup> Those who see elections as effective are significantly more likely to believe that they are being supplied with accountable governance. This result helps to confirm the centrality of elections to any conception of vertical accountability, including in Africa.

But, fourth, leadership performance between elections is almost equally important. In this case, we probe whether legislative representatives actually perform constituency service with the intensity expected by citizens. The survey asks two related questions: “How much time *should* your MP spend in this constituency?” and “how much time *does* your MP spend?” The “performance gap” between these two estimates is again wide. Whereas, for example, 33 percent of Africans interviewed want their legislative representative to visit the community at least weekly, only 8 percent report that he or she actually does appear with this frequency.<sup>24</sup> The performance gap on MP service is a solid, negative predictor: the larger the gap between expectation and delivery, the less the general public thinks it is being supplied with vertical accountability. The clear implication is that leaders must be present and visible in the locality for citizens to consider that they are being served.

Finally, Model 5 contains two lesser considerations of roughly equal importance, though they pull in opposite directions. On the positive side, citizens who trust representative institutions (the national assembly and local government council) are more likely to perceive accountable governance. But on the negative side, citizens who see corruption among assembly and council representatives are less likely to think they are being supplied with accountability (Githongo, 2006). As expected, institutional trust and perceptions of official corruption are inversely related.<sup>25</sup> And there is evidence that a reputation for graft leads to the development of popular distrust in an institutions, rather than vice-versa.<sup>26</sup> But the model suggests that neither attitude cancels out the other. Instead, while corruption clearly diminishes accountability, citizens arrive at their estimates of the trustworthiness of institutions with reference to considerations other than representatives’ reputations for corruption alone.

Before we settle on a conclusion that political attitudes explain the supply of vertical accountability, it is necessary to confirm that these attitudes are not trumped by institutional legacies. Table 2 shows the names of countries that have significant effects in Model 6. A familiar pattern emerges: Namibians (along with Nigerians, Mozambicans and South Africans) think they are getting more accountability than the average African,<sup>27</sup> whereas Malawians think they are getting less.



**Table 2: Perceived Supply of Vertical Accountability, Explanatory Factors Compared**

	<b>Model 5</b>	<b>Model 6</b>	<b>Model 7</b>
Constant	(.661)	(.548)	(.891)
<b>Political Attitudes</b>			
Political Leaders Listen	.138	.132	.134
Expectation Gap: Rule of Law	-.137	-.102	-.124
Think Elections Work	.116	.109	.107
Performance Gap: MP Service	-.106	-.077	-.103
Perceive Corruption	-.047	-.063	-.049
Trust Representative Institutions	.042	.063	.049
<b>Country Contexts</b>			
Namibia		.149	
Nigeria		.116	
Mozambique		.088	
South Africa		.080	
Zambia		.051	
Malawi		-.073	
<b>Institutional Legacies</b>			
Years of Independence			-.092
Proportional Elec. System			.055
<b>Adjusted R square</b>	<i>.112</i>	<i>.160</i>	<i>.130</i>

Cell values are standardized regression coefficients, i.e. beta  
(Values in parentheses are unstandardized regression coefficients)

All unstandardized regression coefficients (not shown) are statistically significant at  $p < .001$

Model 7 tests the relevant institutional legacies; only those with significant effects are shown in Table 2. As expected, citizens in newly liberated countries are more likely to give elected representatives the benefit of the doubt.<sup>28</sup> Consistent with our earlier argument, citizens have not yet learned – either because insufficient time has passed, or because representatives are so far doing a good enough job – that, in the long run, leaders are rarely effective at holding themselves to account. Moreover, the perceived supply of accountability is now higher in countries that have adopted an electoral system based on proportional representation. We interpret this to mean that, under PR, minority groups – who tend to be permanently shut out in “winner takes all” plurality systems – are likely to be somewhat more satisfied with the existing supply of accountability.

Importantly, however, neither country context nor institutional legacies displace an explanation based mainly on political attitudes.<sup>29</sup> We get far more explanatory mileage from a set of individual attitudes – especially whether citizens think that leaders listen to constituents and subject themselves to a rule of law – than from shared institutional histories. This is just as well for purposes of devising policies to improve vertical accountability. After all, institutional histories can hardly be changed. But the elite behaviors on which mass attitudes are based are subject to at least a measure of reengineering. Thus we make use of the previous analysis to derive a “smart” set of policies to boost accountability in the final section below.

### **Conclusion: Beyond Unclaimed Democracy?**

This chapter has explored the stance of ordinary Africans in relation to the contest between delegative and representative forms of democracy. At first glance, the concept of delegative democracy would seem to travel well: there is an apparent affinity between O’Donnell’s image of unrestrained presidential government in Latin America and the continued dominance, even after democratic transitions, of Africa’s political big men. Our intended contribution has been to review the validity of this model of governance when viewed through African eyes, that is, from the popular perspective of public opinion. Accordingly,

we found evidence that a substantial proportion of Africans we interviewed seemingly prefer a delegative democracy to a representative one.

Yet the evidence also requires that the delegative model be adjusted to African circumstances. First, equal proportions of people (one third each) think that the voters – not the president – should be responsible for holding leaders accountable. Second, large majorities in every country firmly oppose the notion of one-man rule in which the president decides everything. And, perhaps most tellingly, two out of three Africans interviewed say that, at least in principle, the legislature and the courts should limit the decision-making power of the political chief executive. In this regard, ordinary Africans reject a key tenet of delegative democracy, namely that the president should be unrestrained by horizontal checks.

In reality, however, the legislative and judicial branches of government remain weak in Africa and usually prove ineffective in the face of presidential power. We therefore paid greater attention to vertical accountability, both as a mode of direct popular control of elected leaders, and as an essential complement to the strengthening of horizontal agencies of restraint. We expanded the definition of vertical accountability beyond the common references in the literature to periodic elections and the watchdog functions of organized civil society. Putting a spotlight on individual Africans in the periods between elections, we asked instead whether ordinary people demand vertical accountability from elected representatives, and whether they think such accountability is actually supplied.

Across virtually all social and attitudinal groups, we found low expectations that voters had a right to demand that representatives do their jobs between elections. In newly minted democracies, especially in countries without previous experience of indigenous dictatorship, people tend to absolve representatives of the responsibility of reporting back to the grassroots communities. Moreover, since people broadly agree that the promises of politicians lack credibility, we found even lower perceived levels of a supply of accountability. Which few leaders are deemed accountable? Only those who have developed a reputation for listening to the needs of constituents and who subject themselves to equal treatment under the law.

What implications does limited vertical accountability hold for democratization? Africans clearly value open and competitive elections and vote in large numbers. In this role, they undoubtedly help to underpin fragile new electoral democracies in Africa. But elections are hardly inconsistent with delegative democracy; indeed, elections are the very device by which delegation of authority occurs from people to president. A more rigorous test is whether Africans demand – and think they receive – vertical accountability in the long intervals between elections. To do so, Africans would have to assert citizenship rights more regularly and vigorously than the survey evidence so far reveals. In the absence of a popular groundswell in this direction, we cannot describe African political regimes as representative democracies.

Are African regimes therefore best regarded as being delegative democracies? Not necessarily. The term “delegative” suggests a degree of agency on the part of individual members of society that may be misleading. Coming out from under the shadow of authoritarian pasts, Africans may not so much be intentionally delegating power to their governments, as failing to claim it from them. Whether unwilling, unable, or simply unaware, many Africans have hesitated to take advantage of the rights and opportunities – along with accompanying responsibilities – that are meant to be theirs in a liberalized political world. They have not yet made a personal transition from mere voters into fully engaged citizens. Thus, to the extent that democracy is supposed to mean “power to the people” and not just “a vote to the people,” democracy in Africa remains largely *unclaimed*.

What, then, is to be done? Can Africans be helped to become rights-demanding citizens? Despite the residual influence of historical legacies, there remains considerable room for popular political learning. As Ensminger (1997) has aptly observed, “African social norms and informal institutions are currently a rapidly moving target” (175).



Based on the analysis in this paper, we propose the following elements for a package of smart aid:

- \* Start locally. The more directly an issue affects a person, the more readily she will be motivated to assert her rights as a citizen. People will more readily seek – and secure – accountable representation through local government channels than via the national parliament.
- \* Build on elections. Since Africans value their rights as voters, use elections as a vehicle for publicizing the broader rights and responsibilities of citizenship. Expand voter education campaigns into civic education programs. Support citizen groups to monitor not only elections, but post-electoral performance of elected representatives.
- \* Provide access to information. Political knowledge is a first step in enhancing mechanisms of vertical accountability. Beyond publicizing the identities of elected representatives, disseminate information on policy choices and the institutional separation of powers. Pressure legislators to pass, and require administrators to enforce, freedom of information laws.
- \* Make representatives listen. Enable community groups to organize “meet the representative” forums. Initiate “report cards” that track and publicize the constituency service of every elected representative. Consider incentives for performance such as recall provisions in the electoral law. Reward conscientious representatives with programs of honorary and material awards.
- \* Aggressively pursue an anti-corruption agenda. Punish corrupt legislators with heavy legal sentences and shame them with public condemnation. Establish programs to encourage whistleblowers to come forward in the national assembly and local councils.

For all of these recommended actions, the key actors are citizens themselves. After all, the choice about whether to leave unclaimed one’s share of political authority, or to assert one’s rights as a citizen, is the individual’s alone. In the final analysis, only citizens – and not external agencies – can guarantee representative democracy.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index 2005, [www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indeces/cpi/2005](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indeces/cpi/2005)

<sup>2</sup> Benin, Botswana, Cape Verde, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

<sup>3</sup> The large size of the pooled sample means that measures of association easily qualify as statistically significant at conventional levels of 0.05 or even 0.01. We therefore use a more rigorous standard for the pooled data by reporting significance only at  $p < 0.001$ .

<sup>4</sup> For more information on the Afrobarometer, visit the website at [www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org).

<sup>5</sup> T Goetz also suggests that the goals of accountability are expanding as well, to encompass not just procedural concerns with process integrity, but to incorporate a new outcomes-based objective of social justice as well (5).

<sup>6</sup> Pearson's  $r = .711$ ,  $p < .001$

<sup>7</sup> Cronbach's Alpha = .830

<sup>8</sup> 1 = think president is responsible for holding elected representatives accountable, 2 = think elected representatives will hold themselves accountable (plus "don't know"), 3 = think voters are responsible.

<sup>9</sup> The regression method is ordinary least squares. The model is trimmed to display only those predictors that are significant at  $p < .001$ .

<sup>10</sup> Wealth is measured on an additive scale (0-6) of the number of personal assets owned among a book, radio, television, bicycle, motorcycle and motor vehicle.

<sup>11</sup> A construct of expressed interest in politics and regular discussion of public affairs.

<sup>12</sup> This consists of two separate indicators of comprehending government and feeling that others listen to you.

<sup>13</sup> "Know political leaders" is a construct of these two related items (Cronbach's Alpha = .556).

<sup>14</sup> "Perceive corruption" is a construct of items tapping the reputations for corruption of MPs /deputies and local government councilors. Note, however, that the experience of corruption (actually paying a bribe) is not significant (and the sign is negative).

<sup>15</sup> Across 18 countries, the proportion of Tanzanians who demand accountability to voters most closely matches the Afrobarometer mean (31 percent for *both* MPs *and* councilors). Thus, for the purpose of this analysis, which is based on country dummy variables, Tanzania is the excluded reference category.

<sup>16</sup> A model with country dummies alone explains 16 percent of the variance. Thus, cumulatively, social and attitudinal variables add less than one percent to explained variance.

<sup>17</sup> The remaining two systems – in Lesotho and Senegal – are mixed.

<sup>18</sup> It explains 8.5 percent of variance. Thus, cumulatively, social and attitudinal variables add virtually nothing.

<sup>19</sup> With aggregated data ( $n=18$  countries), wanting accountability and getting it are strongly correlated ( $r = -.690$ ). At the individual level, however, the relationship is negative and significant, but it is hardly strong ( $r = -.084$ ).

<sup>20</sup> Pearson's  $r = .634$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cronbach's Alpha = .776.

<sup>21</sup> This common structure allows us to treat the responsiveness of elected representatives as a single construct: Pearson's  $r = .660$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cronbach's Alpha = .795.

<sup>22</sup> Because expectations for both crimes are correlated, average expectation scores are generated for leaders (Pearson's  $r = .805$ , Cronbach's Alpha = .892) and "person(s) like you" (Pearson's  $r = .646$ , Cronbach's Alpha = .784). The "expectation gap" is calculated by subtracting the leaders' score from the citizens' score.

<sup>23</sup> Pearson's  $r = .559$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cronbach's Alpha = .717.

<sup>24</sup> The "performance gap" is calculated for each respondent by subtracting the "does visit" score from the "should visit" score on a 5-point scale from "never" to "all of the time."

<sup>25</sup> Pearson's  $r = -.377$ ,  $p < .001$ .

<sup>26</sup> Removing corruption has a larger effect on variance explained than removing trust (Adj.  $r^2 = .098$  versus .111).

<sup>27</sup> On the supply side, the mean (excluded) reference category is Kenya.

<sup>28</sup> See the negative sign on "years of independence." Nigeria is an anomaly in this regard, perhaps reflecting the "fresh" democratic start initiated by the founding elections of 1999.

<sup>29</sup> Alone, country contexts and institutional legacies explain just 6 percent and 2 percent of variance, respectively.



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