



Sustained Support for Democracy in Ghana

Nearly thirteen years ago, Ghana embarked on a peaceful transition to democratic governance. Popular enthusiasm and participation in highly competitive multiparty elections have since sustained that process. The third democratic elections in 2000 produced an alternation in office, with Mr. John Agyekum Kufuor of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) capturing the presidency from the ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC) and his party winning a parliamentary majority. The NPP electoral victory was repeated in December 2004 with the party increasing its parliamentary majority as well.

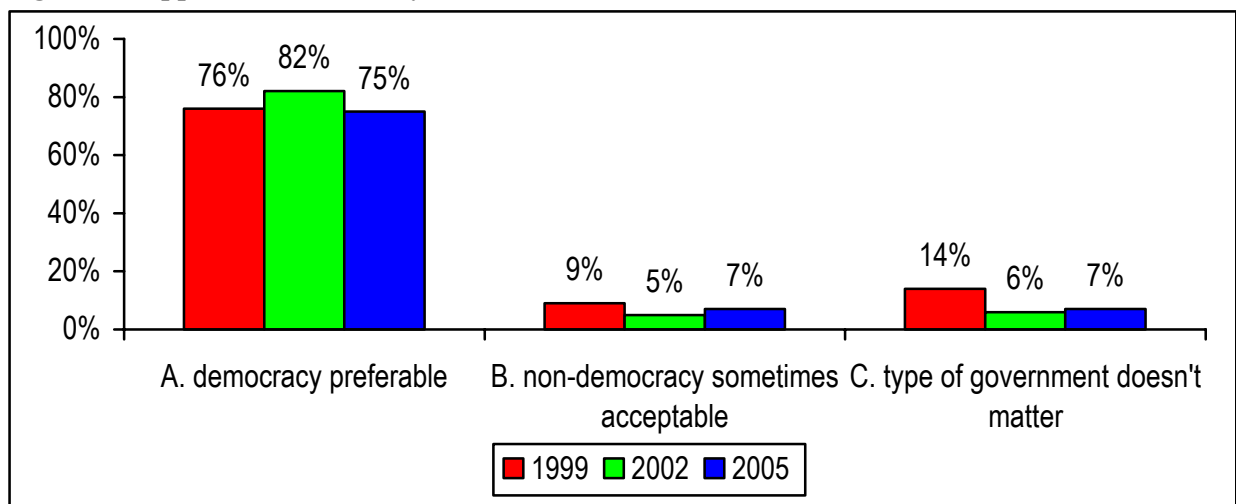
Is popular support for democracy in Ghana holding up after four successful elections and a peaceful political turnover? How satisfied are Ghanaians with their democracy? Do they perceive Ghana to be verging on full democracy or do they have misgivings about the current state of Ghanaian democracy? In short, what are the prospects for sustaining and deepening democracy in Ghana's Fourth Republic?

This Briefing Paper reports results on these topics of a Round 3 Afrobarometer survey of adult Ghanaians conducted in March 2005. Details on sponsorship and methodology are provided at the end.

Demand for Democracy

Democracy is still the preferred form of government for 75 percent of Ghanaians. While the current level of support lags somewhat behind the figures recorded in 1999 (76 percent) and 2002 (82 percent), these differences are due partly to variations in the method of measurement. Importantly, the preference for democracy among Ghanaians has remained consistently high over the past six years.

Figure 1: Support for Democracy



Another indication of strong popular demand for open politics in Ghana is the resounding rejection of non-democratic alternatives. These alternatives include one party rule (which 82 percent reject), military

rule (83 percent), and one-man rule (85 percent). As shown in the next set of figures, disapproval ratings for various autocratic systems in 2005 compare very favorably with those in earlier periods.

Figure 2: Reject One Party Rule

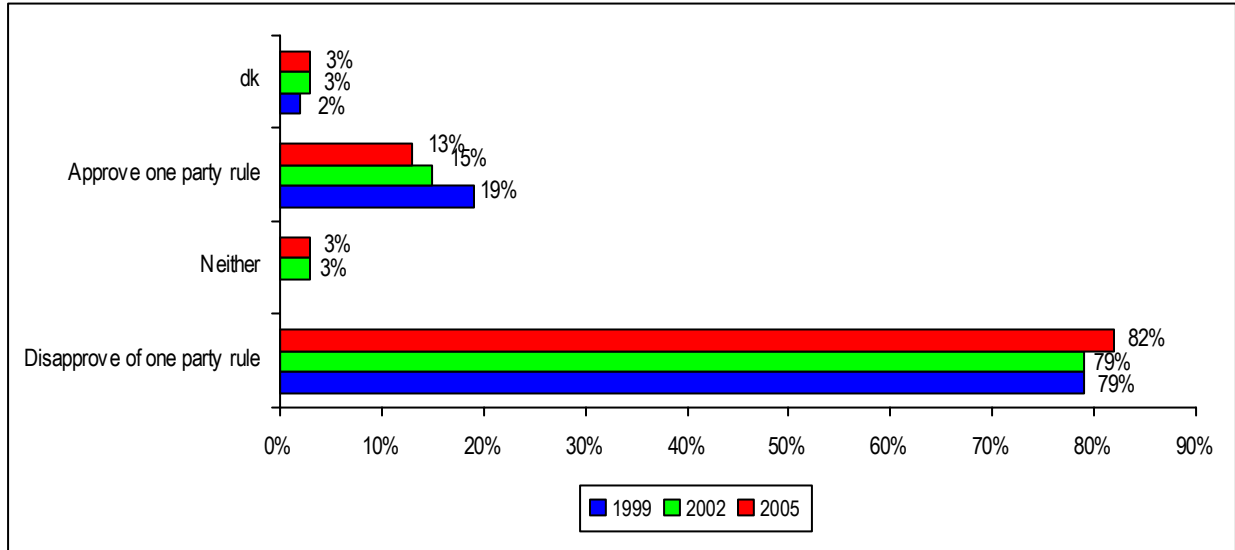


Figure 3: Reject Military Rule

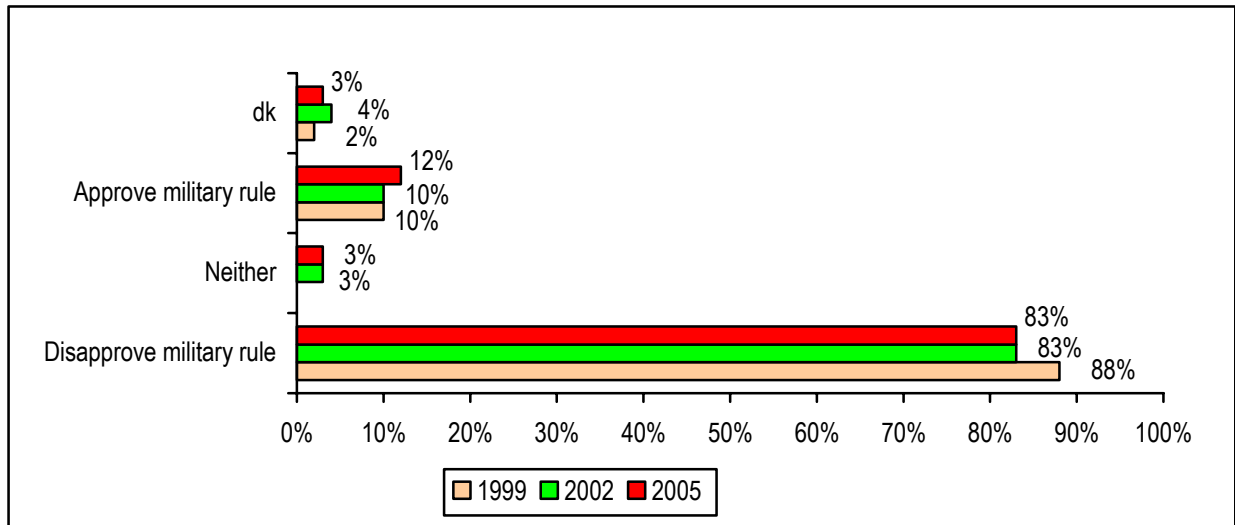
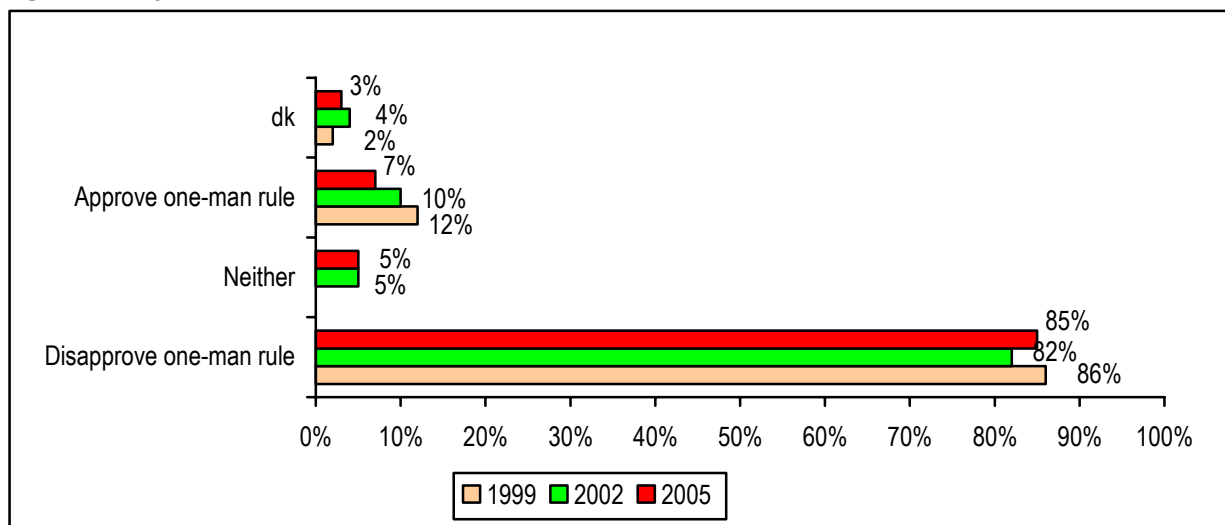


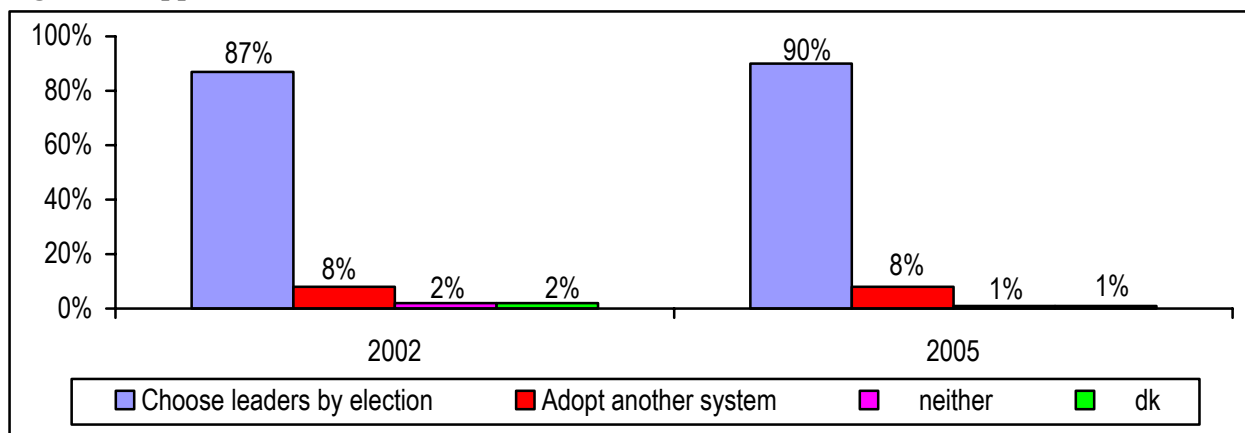
Figure 4: Reject One Man Rule



Support for Democratic Institutions

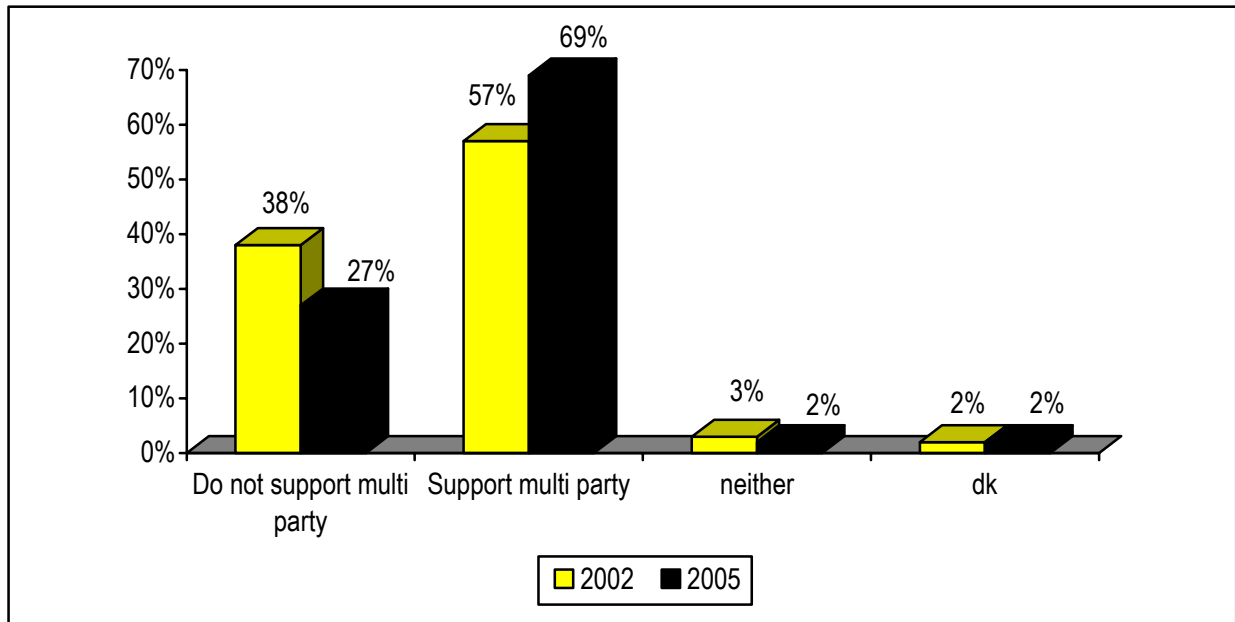
An overwhelming majority (90 percent) of Ghanaians “agree” or “strongly agree” that leaders should be chosen through regular, open and honest elections. Only 8 percent of respondents in both 2002 and 2005 suggest that elections sometimes produce bad results and should be replaced by other methods for choosing the country’s leaders. It is therefore a safe bet that popular support for elections is becoming consolidated. The widespread perception that the conduct of December 2004 polls had been free and fair (see below) is likely to have reinforced this sentiment.

Figure 5: Support Elections



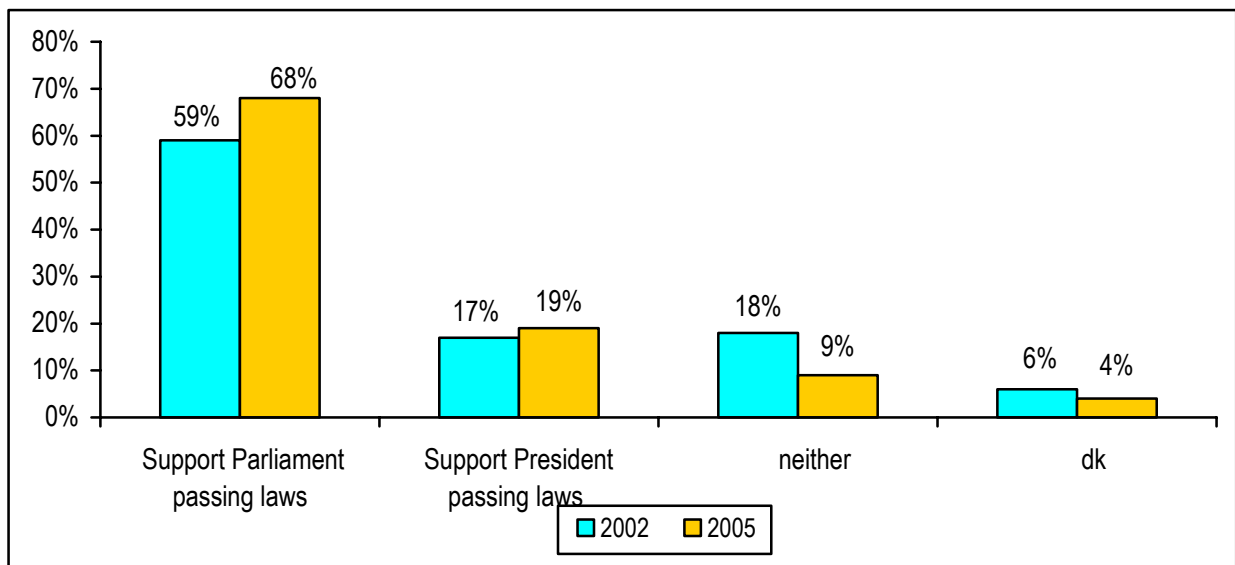
Majority and growing public support for competition among multiple political parties provides additional confirmation that democratic institutions are taking root in Ghana. Acceptance of the idea that “many political parties are needed to make sure that Ghanaians have real choices in who governs them,” which stood at 57 percent in 2002, has climbed to 69 percent in 2005 (this question was not asked in 1999).

Figure 6: Support for Multiple Political Parties



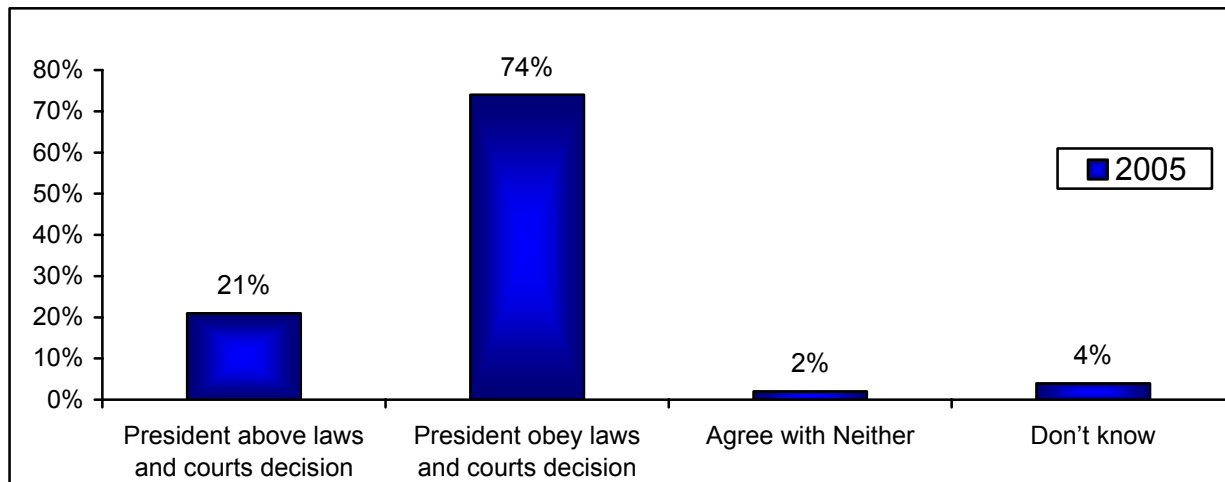
Popular preferences for institutional checks and balances are also rising, suggesting that Ghanaians are not only interested in electoral democracy but also in constitutionalism. They want to see a balance among political institutions rather than privileging the executive branch over the legislature. Indeed, Ghanaians favor a more assertive role for parliament vis-à-vis the presidency. In 2002, 59 percent of Ghanaians had expressed support for legislative independence (“Parliament...should make laws for this country even if the President does not agree). This preference had risen to over two-thirds (68 percent) by 2005. Only 19 percent felt that “since the President represents all of us, he should pass laws without worrying about what the Parliament thinks.” A mere 9 percent of respondents supported neither side, a drop of 9 percentage points over three years.

Figure 7: Support Legislative Control of Executive



Similarly, Ghanaians endorse constitutional and legal restraints on executive power. A large majority (74 percent) supports the view that “The President must always obey the laws and the courts, even if he thinks they are wrong.” Only a small minority of respondents (19 percent) disagreed, feeling 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.”

Figure 8: Support Legal Restraints on Executive



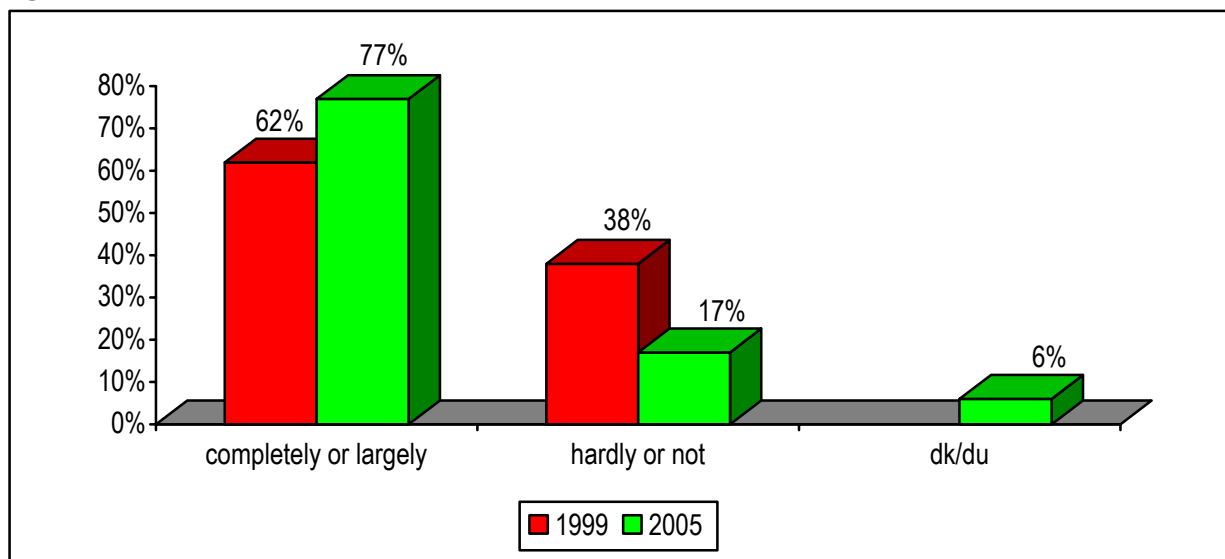
These findings reveal popular distaste for the strong odor of presidentialism in the Ghanaian system. Taken together, they suggest that Ghanaians are wary about tilting the political system in favor of executive privilege and would like to see institutional imbalances redressed. If Parliament cannot serve as a countervailing force to the executive, then Ghanaians would like to restrain the executive branch by subjecting it to a rule of law exercised by the judiciary. These results suggest that greater recourse to judicial review might curry favor with Ghanaians. At minimum, the survey finds a level of sophistication in popular understandings of political checks and balances for which Ghanaians had not previously been given due credit.

The Supply of Democracy

So far, we have seen that Ghanaians continue to demand democracy and have a growing appreciation for the functions of democratic institutions. But, how well do they think these institutions, and the political regime as a whole, are actually working? In short, do they think their leaders are supplying them with democracy?

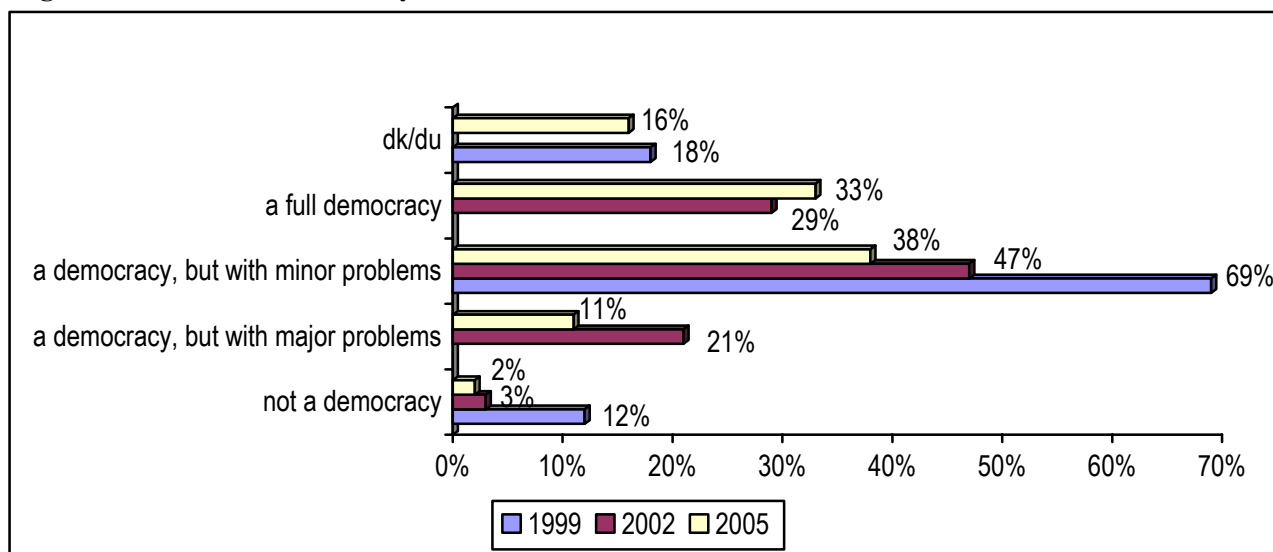
Take elections, for example, the conduct of which remains a vexing issue in contemporary African politics. Ghana may be more fortunate than its counterparts elsewhere in the West African sub-region because of a broad-based consensus that its elections are increasingly free and fair. Whereas 62 percent of Ghanaians in Round 1 felt that the 1996 elections were completely or largely free and fair, an overwhelming 77 percent gave the same thumbs up to the December 2004 elections. Whereas many respondents in Round 1 felt that previous elections had major problems or were not free and fair (38 percent), this level of disapproval was cut in half (17 percent) by the time of the Round 3 survey.

Figure 9: Elections: Free and Fair?



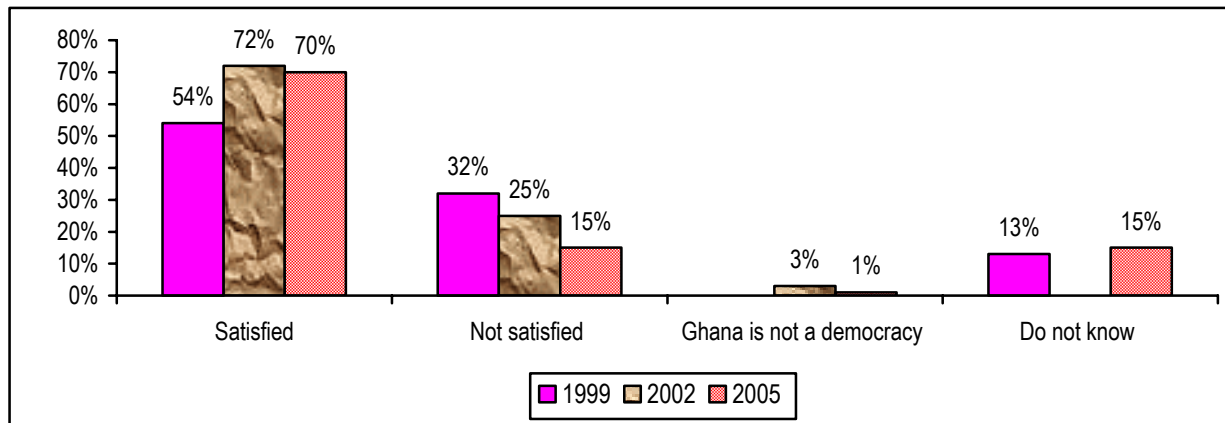
Ghanaians also seem to consider that democracy is being built in their country. Slightly more than two-thirds (71 percent) of respondents feel that Ghana is a complete democracy, or nearly so. Although this figure represents a slight drop from Round 2 (76 percent), it is more than compensated by the 4 percentage-point increase in the number of respondents who saw Ghana as “completely democratic” in Round 3. Furthermore, the number of respondents who saw major problems with Ghana’s democracy was reduced by half from 21 percent in 2002 to 11 percent in Round 2005. The growth of Ghana’s democracy is also affirmed by the dramatic decline (from 12 to 3 to 2 percent over time) in the proportion of respondents who see Ghana as “non-democratic.”

Figure 10: Extent of Democracy



The level of overall public satisfaction with “the way democracy works” in Ghana is also high. Over two-thirds of respondents (72 percent and 70 percent respectively in 2002 and 2005) were “fairly satisfied” or “very satisfied” with Ghanaian democracy. Just as importantly, there is a dramatic decline in the level of dissatisfaction with Ghanaian democracy. Dissatisfaction levels plummeted from 32 percent in Round 1 to 25 percent in Round 2 to just 15 percent in Round 3.

Figure 11: Satisfaction with Democracy



Because fledgling democracies are prone to reversals, the survey asked, “In your opinion, how likely is it that Ghana will remain a democratic country?” The results reveal that Ghanaians perceive the prospects for their democratic future to be good. Almost seven in ten respondents (69 percent) felt that Ghana is “very likely” or “likely” to remain a democratic country. Only 12 percent had any doubts, suggesting that it was “not very likely” or “not at all likely” that democracy would be sustained in the future.

Ghanaians also display political patience. The survey asked them whether “Our present system of elected government should be given more time to deal with inherited problems” or “If our present system cannot produce results soon, we should try another form of government.” An overwhelming majority of respondents (79 percent) “agreed” or “very strongly agreed” that electoral democracy should be given more time. As far as democratic durability is concerned, this may be the best news of these findings because, in the final analysis, the survival of any country’s democracy hinges in large part on how large a reservoir of patience the citizenry has in stock.

Conclusion

An Afrobarometer Round 3 survey in Ghana reveals strong support for democracy in Ghana and an almost unqualified rejection of non-democratic alternatives. The level of satisfaction with the day-to-day operations of the democratic system is also high, as exemplified by popular judgments about the free and fair quality of the 2004 elections. There is also a widespread willingness to give the political regime more time to become unambiguously democratic.

Just as importantly, high levels of public support are evident for the institutions that constitute the building blocks of a sustainable democracy. These include representative institutions like elections and multiple parties, which attract growing support. But Ghanaians also increasingly call for checks and balances on “presidentialism” in the executive branch by means of the assertion of institutional independence by parliament and the judiciary.

Finally, the survey hints that the future of Ghanaian democracy could be bright. A dozen years of rough and tumble multiparty competition has not diminished the popular appetite for democratic governance. Notwithstanding the fact that democratic practice in Ghana is sometimes messy, Ghanaians seem willing to wait patiently for the system to inch toward the consolidation of democracy.

Three rounds of Afrobarometer surveys have been conducted in Ghana since August 1999. Rounds 2 and 3 took place in September 1992 and March 2005 respectively. Each Afrobarometer survey selects a nationally representative, randomly stratified, probability sample of citizens of voting age (18 years and above) and administers face-to-face interviews. The Afrobarometer instrument asks a standard set of questions from one round to another so that trends in public opinion can be tracked over time. Samples consisted of 1,200 respondents in each survey (1,199 in Round 3).

Round 3 interviews were conducted in all ten regions of the country and in both urban (47 percent) and rural (53 percent) areas. Respondents could choose to answer in any of the six predominant languages spoken in the country - Akan, Ewe, Ga/Adangbe, Dagbani, Hausa and English. Using the Ghana 2000 census data in March 2005, enumeration areas were randomly selected with the probability proportionate to its size in the overall population. Random procedures were also used to select households and respondents, though a gender quota was introduced at the last stage of sampling to ensure an equal representation of men and women. Every eligible adult in Ghana thus had an equal and know chance of being selected. As such, results can be generalized to the voting-age population of Ghana with a margin of error of plus or minus 2.5 percent at a confidence level of 95 percent.

The Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from 18 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (Idasa), the Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) and Michigan State University. Several donors support the Afrobarometer's research, capacity-building and outreach activities, including the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Department of International Development (UK). For more information, see: www.afrobarometer.org