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Working Paper No. 119

CITIZEN PERCEPTIONS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT RESPONSIVENESS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

by Michael Bratton

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SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA**

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Citizen Perceptions of Local Government Responsiveness in Sub-Saharan Africa

Abstract

This paper examines local government performance from the perspective of users, with special attention to questions of *responsiveness, representation and accountability*. The results both confirm and challenge conventional wisdom. On one hand, we verify that popular assessments of political accountability at the local level are driven by instrumental attitudes about government performance. In short, people in Africa judge the quality of local government primarily in terms of whether they think elected leaders “deliver the goods.” On the other hand, we discover that, while citizen activism boosts the popular perception that local leaders are responsive, we discover that tax compliance is only weakly connected to responsiveness, and thus to representation and accountability. And, contrary to expectations, a citizen’s experience as a victim of corruption leads to perceptions of more, not less, responsive leadership.

Introduction

The daily lives of Africans remain relatively untouched by the agents and institutions of a central state. Ordinary people are more likely to experience day-to-day interactions with local government entities or with informal, traditional or religious leaders in the community. Setting aside informal contacts for the moment,¹ this paper focuses on the emerging, formal political relationships between citizens and *local government authorities*. It examines local government performance as seen from the perspective of users, with special attention to questions of *responsiveness, representation and accountability*. To this end, we employ systematic social survey data from a module on citizen perceptions of local authorities gathered across 20 African countries in Round 4 of the Afrobarometer (2008-2009).²

Since little is known about the citizen-state interface at the local level in sub-Saharan Africa, the paper first addresses a series of descriptive questions: What governmental and service delivery functions do Africans attribute to local councils? How well do they think these functions – from maintaining roads to collecting taxes – are being performed? To what extent do citizens think that elected councilors are qualified to undertake local government functions? And how accountable are council officials seen to be in informing, consulting and involving citizens in the management of local affairs? Generally speaking, we find that citizens have a realistic understanding of the limited scope of local government functions, but that they find fault with both the process of local decision-making and the substance of developmental outcomes.

Seeking explanation, the paper then tests hypotheses about the grounds for popular judgments about the accountability of elected local government officials. We ask which social, attitudinal and behavioral characteristics of citizens are associated with popular perceptions that local councilors are responsive to the preferences of their constituents. Our narrative builds upon, but also aims to move beyond familiar social and attitudinal explanations. For example, it is commonly argued that, because rural dwellers have lower expectations of service delivery, they are more easily satisfied than urbanites with government performance (Bratton 2009a). And because citizens often use trust in leaders as a shortcut to appraising institutional performance, it is unclear which of two attitudes – perceptions of trust or expressions of satisfaction – takes causal precedence (Bratton 2009b).

In an effort to break the Gordian knot of endogeneity (Franzese 2007; Evans and Andersen 2006), we make a concerted effort to model objective political behaviors – such as political activism, tax payment, and experience with corruption – with a view to testing effects on the perceived responsiveness of local government leaders. The purpose is to avoid explaining one subjective perception (e.g. political responsiveness) solely in terms of other, closely related, and perhaps commonly derived attitudinal indicators (e.g. political efficacy). As Schmitter has argued, “the subjective data collected by opinion pollsters have a place in research on accountability, but only when surrounded by more-objective measures of actual behavior” (2004, 58). Accordingly, we explore whether the concrete political actions of energetic, honest, tax-paying citizens have positive effects on public sentiments about the responsiveness of leaders. In short, do public activism and the payment of taxes boost political representation? And conversely, does exposure to official corruption – having to pay a bribe or offer a gift to obtain a public service – undermine confidence in leadership accountability?

The results of analysis both confirm and challenge conventional wisdom. On one hand, we confirm that popular assessments of political accountability at the local level are driven by instrumental attitudes about government performance. In short, people in Africa judge the quality of local government primarily in terms of whether they think elected leaders “deliver the goods” (Shotton and Winter 2006). On the other hand, we discover that, while citizen activism boosts the popular perception that local leaders are responsive, we discover that tax compliance is only weakly connected to responsiveness, and thus to representation and accountability. And, contrary to expectations, a citizen’s experience as a victim of corruption leads to perceptions of more, not less, responsive leadership.

Framework

This paper focuses on local *government*, understood as the set of formal institutions legally established to deliver a range of specified services to relatively small geographic jurisdictions. In democratizing societies, these institutions typically take the form of an elected council representing an urban municipality or rural district, supported by a small professional staff that is responsible for the day-to-day management of parochial affairs.³ To this end, and depending on the degree of administrative decentralization, central governments delegate to local authorities certain taxing, spending and regulatory functions. The paper's scope of analysis does not extend to all aspects of local *governance*, a broader term that encompasses the organization and coordination of collective action at the local level through government hierarchies, private firms, voluntary associations and informal norms as well as directly through the channels of local government (Shah 2006; UNDP 2009).

The countries of sub-Saharan Africa display considerable variation in the *institutionalization* of local government structures as marked by age, coverage, and capacity. At one extreme, South Africa has a long-standing hierarchy of metropolitan, district and local municipalities, some of which are located in economically developed enclaves (Parnell and Pieterse 2002; Lieberman 2003; Bratton and Sibanyoni 2006; Hoffman 2008; van Donk 2008). At the other extreme, a comprehensive system of local government was introduced only recently in Malawi, Namibia, Mozambique and Mali, resulting in institutional fragility and gaps in geographical coverage in some rural areas of these countries (e.g. Seeley 2001; Hussein 2006; Wing 2008). In between lie cases like Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria and Zimbabwe, which have long histories of local administration stretching back to colonial times but where mismanagement and resource constraints have led to declining institutional capacity in recent years (e.g. Suberu 2001; Fjeldstad 2001; Fjeldstad and Therkildsen 2008). In some extreme cases – represented here by outlying areas of conflict in Uganda and Zimbabwe – informal taxation at the hands of political predators and the collapse of services may prevail (Englebert 2009).

As for administrative *functions*, local governments in Africa tend to have acquired few powers, attained limited technical competencies, and often been subordinated – politically, organizationally and fiscally – to central states (Olowu and Smoke 1992; Olowu and Wunsch 2004; Chaligha et al 2007). Their operations have been oriented more to top-down mandates than to bottom-up demands. While donors now aggressively promote reforms aimed at decentralization, participation and empowerment (Crook and Manor 1998; Ndegwa and Levy 2004; Grindle 2007; Harrison 2008), local government entities in Africa have rarely attained the accountability, responsibility and responsiveness envisaged as the outcomes of reform (Shah 2006, 22).

A core assumption of this paper is that the prospects for the development of African local governments depend on the establishment of a *local revenue base*. Analysts of Western European history have noted the affinity between the collection of taxes and the construction of states (Levi 1988, Tilly 1990). In order to raise revenue for defending borders, protecting trade, and waging war, rulers imposed taxes on the assets, incomes and transactions of ordinary citizens. Other things being equal, an abundant resource base and high tax rates provide the wherewithal for building strong state institutions and set in motion a virtuous cycle by which these institutions are administratively capable of extracting yet more resources (Brautigam, Fjeldstad and Moore 2008). In African settings, such as resource-poor rural areas or overpopulated urban centers, however, public institutions lack the material and organizational means to govern effectively. A comparative study of thirty African countries estimated that, in more than half the cases, local governments controlled less than 5 percent of overall public expenditure (Ndegwa 2002). Low-capacity institutions of this sort can neither reliably extract adequate resources nor finance the delivery of development services.

As well as leading to debilitating economic consequences, the weakness of the local tax base also has political implications. Analysts have noted that monarchs in early modern Europe could secure a guaranteed revenue stream by agreeing to address popular preferences in policy making (Bates and Lien 1985; North and Weingast 1989; Ross 2004). But there is precious little evidence that African local

governments have entered an equivalent *fiscal contract* through which taxation begets representation. Because these institutions rely on transfers from national treasuries rather than on parochial sources of revenue, local leaders do not have to justify spending decisions to their electorates, thus avoiding accountability from below (Herbst 2000; Timmons 2005; Bates 2008). Instead, they tend to respond to the preferences of the state authorities, international donors, or foreign-funded NGOs that provide the necessary resources.

Moreover, there is no guarantee that state officials will always uphold their part of any fiscal bargain. If those in power lack political will or administrative capacity, they may simply impose taxes but deliver little or nothing in return. For example, Englebert notes that:

Even in very weak African states, the extent to which security and police functions endure, and are even apparently multiplied, is quite surprising...The level of detail with which they purport to control one's activities stands in remarkable contrast with their apparent complete failure to provide any security (2009, 68).

We would therefore expect that, absent an enforceable fiscal contract, citizens would regard elected government councilors as being insufficiently responsive as political representatives. By contrast, if local authorities establish a reliable system for extracting fees or taxes in return for services, and if citizens voluntarily consent to comply, then we can expect to see evidence of emerging political accountability. For example, a recent study in Tanzania and Zambia found that local governments in both countries increase the delivery of public services in proportion to their budget's share of local taxes (Gibson and Hoffman, 2005; see also Joshi and Ayee 2008).

Another factor potentially favoring accountability is the global dissemination of *political rights*. In the post Cold War era, African countries have undergone a measure of democratization as a combined result of foreign and domestic pressures for open politics (Bratton and van de Walle 1997; Villalon and von Döepp 2005; Mustapha and Whitfield 2009). Multiparty competition has been introduced not only at the national level but also to the election of local municipal and district councils. Independent of any reforms of local government tax systems, elected councilors are presumably exposed to a greater volume and wider array of popular demands from constituents. These officials face a changed structure of incentives: no longer can they function entirely as the local agents of dominant ruling parties; instead, they must respond to rising popular pressures for participation in decision-making, access to budget information, and the delivery of services (McNeil and Mumvuma 2006; Mattes 2008; Snyder 2008). In principle, the ultimate sanction for non-performance is defeat at the next local government election.

Much depends, however, on whether local residents take advantage of newly available political opportunities: do they behave as rights-bearing citizens? One encouraging sign is that Africans are more likely to see that voters are responsible for holding leaders accountable at the local government level than at the level of the national assembly (Bratton and Logan, 2009). On the other hand, voting in Africa is encumbered by an institutional legacy in which incumbents expect voters to express loyalty at the polls and to delegate all authority to representatives between elections. Citizen-state linkages at the local level must therefore be placed within the context of African political practice, a context that features informal political processes and tendencies toward predatory rule. Public employees at the front line, including those elected or appointed to local government offices, sometimes take advantage of their political positions to extract illicit payments from citizens. Englebert again:

The subversion of rules by state agents for revenue extraction is particularly popular because the implementation of state regulations is, with taxation, one of the most decentralized forms of sovereign command...Particularly interesting here is the notion that 'people have little choice in the matter' of paying the fees. This is not so much because of their fear of violence, but because...sovereign agencies can legally harass local economic operators: 'You can't refuse. If you don't pay, they arrest you and make you pay double'" (2009, 86-7; see also von Soest 2009).

From this perspective, corruption displaces taxation as the fiscal link between political principals (the citizens) and their agents (elected representatives). All participants come to regard dishonest rents as the normal costs of doing business and as obligations that do not necessarily carry with them any right to demand accountability. People instead suffer resentfully under illicit forms of “taxation” because they know that the proceeds of graft are used to line the pockets of government officials. In administrative systems that are distorted by widespread corruption, therefore, we would expect that paying bribes would have a negative impact on political accountability.

To Be Explained: Political Responsiveness

This paper seeks to explain whether and why citizens across selected African countries regard elected local government councilors as politically responsive to their needs. The key dependent variable – political responsiveness – is measured by a survey question that asks: “How much of the time do you think elected local government councilors try their best to listen to what people like you have to say?” Answers are classified on a closed-ended four-point ordinal scale of “never,” “only sometimes,” “often” or “always.”

Strictly speaking, we distinguish *responsiveness* measured in this way from other, closely related concepts such as representation and accountability. In our view, political responsiveness refers to the willingness of leaders to register the preferences of constituents, that is, by paying attention to their requests and complaints. Responsiveness can be differentiated from political *representation*, which refers to the role of elected officials in conveying popular demands onward to deliberative and decision-making bodies. Because direct “rule by the people” is not possible in large-scale societies, it falls to elected representatives to project constituent views into policy forums. Responsiveness and representation are further distinguished from political *accountability*, which refers to the willingness of leaders to periodically make their performance available for popular evaluation, most commonly through exposure to election.

Together, these three concepts – responsiveness, representation, and accountability – summarize the nature of the intended relationship between citizens and politicians in a modern democracy. But since listening comes first and is foundational for the other concepts, this analysis focuses on responsiveness. Recognizing that all three concepts are closely related, however, and that responsiveness is a first step toward accountability, we sometimes use the terms interchangeably.

Based on Afrobarometer surveys in 2008, Table 1 portrays mixed popular feelings about the political responsiveness of local government councilors. Respondents across 20 African countries fell into three groups of roughly equal size: 28 percent felt that councilors “never” listen to people like themselves, 33 percent that they listen occasionally (“only sometimes”), and 31 percent that they listen “often” or “always.” At minimum, a normal distribution of this sort provides sufficient variation for analysis to proceed productively; in other words, there is enough difference across individuals in perceptions of political responsiveness to warrant a search for explanation.

Table 1: Perceived Responsiveness of Local Government Councilors, Mean Distribution, 20 African Countries, 2008

Responsiveness of Local Councilor	Percent of Survey Respondents
Never	28
Only sometimes	33
Often	21
Always	10
Don't Know	7

How much of the time do you think elected local government councilors try their best to listen to what people like you have to say?

N = 27,713 (unweighted) 24,000 (weighted). Results calculated on weighted data.

Why do citizens have such divergent perceptions of the approachability of their local government councilors? One possibility is that country context matters. Table 2 shows marked differences across African countries in the proportions of citizens who find their local councilors responsive. At the extremes, residents of Burkina Faso (57 percent) are more than three times more likely than Nigerians (17 percent) to think that councilors listen “often” or “always.” Such profound cross-national discrepancies require that the macro-level characteristic of “country” be included in any comprehensive account of the origins of responsiveness. As a first rough cut at interpreting the content of this country “dummy,” we see no evidence that the institutional age of the local government system has much bearing. For example, South Africa – the country with the longest history of local administration – scores below average on political responsiveness in 2008 (25 percent). This outcome is probably a lingering outcome of mass boycotts of local government decisions and services in urban townships during the late apartheid era. And countries with newly established local government systems – for example Mali (52 percent) and Liberia (18 percent) – are scattered widely across the responsiveness spectrum. Rather, a country’s level of urbanization may be a more formative factor. Citizens seem to perceive more local government responsiveness in predominantly rural countries like Tanzania and Uganda than in urbanized places like Zambia and Nigeria (and South Africa), a matter to be explored further as we proceed.

Table 2: Perceived Responsiveness of Elected Representatives, by Country 2008

Country	Responsiveness of Local Councilor	Responsiveness of National Representative
Burkina Faso	57	34
Mali	52	29
Botswana	44	30
Tanzania	42	23
Ghana	41	25
Uganda	40	23
Mozambique	35	25
Madagascar	32	19
Kenya	31	16
Zimbabwe*	29	24
Lesotho	28	16
Senegal	27	19
South Africa	25	21
Benin	26	12
Namibia	24	15
Malawi	22	14
Cape Verde	19	15
Zambia*	19	14
Liberia	18	15
Nigeria	17	13
Mean	31	20

How much of the time do you think elected local government councilors (Members of Parliament/National Assembly Deputies) try their best to listen to what people like you have to say?

Figures are percentages saying “often” or “always.” * 2009 data.

Can we characterize the observed level of local government responsiveness – an average of 31 percent across individuals and countries – as “high” or “low”? It all depends on the point of comparison. On one hand, when viewed against the indicator’s full range (0-100 percent), the fact that only one-third of individuals perceive that councilors are regularly responsive seems rather low. Along similar lines, regular responsiveness is a majority sentiment in only two out of 20 countries (Burkina Faso at 57 percent and Mali at 52 percent). On the other hand, when respondents are asked to compare local councilors with other elected representatives within their own countries – such as members of parliament (MPs) or deputies in the national assembly (DNAs) – then the picture improves. As Table 2 shows, survey respondents give local councilors an average 11-percentage point advantage over these national leaders. The size of this edge varies from country to country, but local councilors are seen as more responsive than MPs or DNAs *in every country surveyed*. From this perspective, it would appear that – as a stepping-stone to representation and accountability – local government has an important role to play in the development of responsive leadership in Africa.

Explanatory Factors: Social, Attitudinal and Behavioral

To explain citizen perceptions of local government responsiveness, this paper tests three alternative accounts:

- a *social* explanation based on the demographic characteristics of survey respondents;
- an *attitudinal* explanation based on people’s subjective evaluations of local government and politics;
- and a *behavioral* explanation based on objective political actions undertaken by citizens in the local government arena.

For reasons discussed above, these individual-level tests are nested within a multivariate model that takes into account the fact that political responsiveness also varies across countries.

Social Characteristics

The social explanation is based on a standard set of demographic indicators: gender, age, education, poverty, and place of residence (urban or rural). Poverty is measured with the Afrobarometer’s Index of Lived Poverty, which records how often over the past year an individual’s family went without five basic human needs: food, household water, medical care, cooking fuel and cash income (Afrobarometer 2003).⁴ Place of residence is derived from the sampling frame for Afrobarometer surveys, which stratifies primary sampling units into urban and rural areas based on each country’s most recent national census (see Table 3).

Table 3: Demographic Distributions of the Survey Sample Mean Distributions, 20 African Countries, 2008

	Percent		Percent
Gender		Poverty (in past year)	
Male	50	Ever went without food	57
Female	50	Ever went without water	48
		Ever went without medical care	60
Age		Ever went without cooking fuel	46
18-29	40	Ever went without cash income	80
30-45	36		
46 or older	24	Religious Association	
		Not a member	26
Education		Inactive Member	29
None	22	Active Member	38
Primary	34	Official Leader	6
Secondary	35		
Post-Secondary	9	Other Voluntary Association	
		Not a member	61
Place of residence		Inactive Member	14
Urban	36	Active Member	19
Rural	64	Official Leader	5

Among demographic factors, we anticipate that poverty and urban residence will have the strongest effects in reducing citizen perceptions of whether local representatives “listen.” The logic of these expectations is that the voices of poorer people are rarely heard (Narayan 2000) and that urban residents are more vocal in expressing political demands than rural residents (Bates 1981).

We also expect that an individual’s position in civil society will impinge on satisfaction with the responsiveness of leaders. The survey therefore measures membership in both religious and secular associations, with the former being far more common than the latter. As Table 3 shows, active membership is twice as high in churches and mosques than in labor, professional or community groups (38 versus 19 percent). The argument here is that, by belonging to voluntary associations, individuals learn about citizenship and possess a vehicle for collective action (Mitlin and Satterthwaite 2004; but see Lambright 2007).

Political Attitudes

An alternative attitudinal explanation assumes that African citizens reason instrumentally about political institutions (Bratton and Mattes 2001). In other words, popular assessments of leaders are driven by considerations of institutional performance in the delivery of desired political and economic goods. As demonstrated in related research, citizens are more likely to grant legitimacy to governments if they perceive the performance of public institutions to be effective and fair (Levi and Sacks 2009).

The first step in uncovering popular views about local government *performance* is to establish the scope of council responsibilities as seen by citizens. To this end, the survey asks respondents to envisage how various public functions are distributed across tiers of government – central, local and communal. Table 4 lists a range of activities from “maintaining law and order” to “keeping the community clean.” Not surprisingly, and reflecting centralized policing in most African countries, citizens regard the maintenance of law and order primarily as a central government responsibility. Quite accurately, people also grant the central government a leading role in income tax collection and the management of clinics and schools, even though they recognize that local authorities sometimes play support roles in delivering the latter services. But they seem confused about income tax collection, which, to our knowledge, is never a local government function in any of the countries studied here.

Table 4: Popular Perceptions of the Distribution of Governmental Responsibilities

	Central Government*	Local Government	Traditional Leaders	Community Members
Maintaining law and order	65	18	7	6
Managing health clinics	56	30	2	7
Collecting income taxes	53	32	3	3
Managing schools	51	30	2	11
Protecting rivers and forests	45	24	9	13
Allocating land	27	36	25	6
Solving local disputes	18	32	33	13
Keeping the community clean	11	30	5	50

Who do you think actually has **primary** responsibility for managing each of the following tasks?

Is it the central government, local government, traditional leaders, or members of your community?

Cell entries are percentages of respondents attributing primary responsibility to this tier of government.

Where percentages do not add up to 100, the remainder say “none of them” or “don’t know.”

Popular perceptions of lead institutions are signified in **bold**.

*If applicable, as in federal systems, central government is held to include state or provincial government.

From a popular perspective, local councils apparently lead the way among the various tiers of government in relation to only one public function: the allocation of land. This perception correctly reflects the gradual transfer of this responsibility from the hands of traditional leaders over recent years in many countries. Note, however, that local governments usually control land affairs on behalf of central governments, which

continue to hold land rights (Boone 2007). Moreover, local councils are seen to cede leadership to traditional leaders when it comes to solving local disputes (especially with reference to family law). And people consider that their own communities bear the prime responsibility for maintaining the cleanliness of the local environs. Therefore, all told, the African citizens we interviewed seem to view local councils as having sharply restricted powers.

Against this background of limited expectations, we turn to institutional performance. We conceptualize the performance of local government councils along two dimensions: substance and process. The first *substantive* dimension describes the “what” of local government activities. It captures council performance at tangible tasks of service delivery and resource extraction, such as the maintenance of roads, market places and sanitation systems and the collection of fees and taxes. The second *procedural* dimension concerns the “how” of local government operations. We make particular reference to the council’s efforts to publicize its activities, consult stakeholders, and involve citizens in policy decisions.

The distribution of political attitudes regarding the substantive dimension of performance is shown in Table 5. It lists a set of six functions that are commonly assigned to local authorities in African countries. The first thing to notice is the negativity of popular evaluations. On average, there is no function – from environmental sanitation to property tax collection – at which the general public thinks councils are performing “well.” Indeed, absolute majorities think that local councils are doing “badly” at maintaining market places and local roads. Citizens are somewhat more forgiving with regard to the collection of license fees and property taxes, where small pluralities express approval. But citizens cannot pronounce definitively on tax performance because one-third of the respondent’s said they “didn’t know” or “hadn’t heard enough to have an opinion.” Taken together with previous evidence of popular uncertainty about who collects income taxes, these data point to serious information gaps among citizens about the role of taxation in local development.

Table 5: Popular Perceptions of Local Government Performance (Substantive)

	Well	Badly	Don’t Know
Keeping the community clean	45	47	8
Maintaining local market places	39	51	10
Maintaining health standards in eating places	39	48	13
Maintaining local roads	37	58	5
Collecting license fees	36	33	31
Collecting property taxes/housing rates	35	31	34

How well or badly would you say your local government (municipal or district council) is handling the following matters, or haven’t you heard enough to have an opinion? “Well” = “fairly well” + “very well.” “Badly” = “fairly badly” + “very badly.”

What about local government procedures? Table 6 displays a set of six “best practices” of decentralized governance to which most African governments are at least willing to pay lip service. These functions range from publicizing the council’s work plan to providing public information on the council’s budget (World Bank 2009). Popular performance evaluations on these procedural matters are even less positive than on the substance of the councils’ business. Absolute majorities perceive “bad” performance on every indicator except “consulting others before making decisions.” And only a quarter or less of the adult population thinks that councils are doing “well” at handling complaints, allowing participation in planning, preventing corruption, and providing budget transparency. Once again, citizens seem to lack information on fiscal affairs as evidenced by almost one in four who admit that they are unable to comment on whether the council is managing revenues in the public interest.⁵

Table 6: Popular Perceptions of Local Government Performance (Procedural)

	Well	Badly	Don't Know
Making known the council's program of work	31	52	17
Consulting others before making decisions	30	49	21
Effectively handling complaints	26	52	23
Allowing citizen participation in decision making	25	58	17
Using revenues for public, not private, gain	24	53	23
Providing information about the council's budget	24	58	18

How well or badly would you say your local government (municipal or district council) is practicing the following procedures, or haven't you heard enough to have an opinion?

Table 7: Mean Popular Assessment of Overall Local Government Performance, by Country, 2008

Country	Mean Satisfaction Score*
Mozambique	2.58
Tanzania	2.55
Namibia	2.52
Ghana	2.48
Madagascar	2.39
Burkina Faso	2.33
Mali	2.23
Botswana	2.17
Cape Verde	2.16
South Africa	2.15
Uganda	2.14
Malawi	2.11
Liberia	2.10
Nigeria	1.97
Lesotho	1.90
Kenya	1.88
Zimbabwe**	1.82
Zambia**	1.80
Benin	1.79
Senegal	1.76
Mean	2.14

* Cell entries are calculated on a four-point scale (1-4) for 12 items (6 substantive and 6 procedural) that together form a coherent scale (Alpha = .906) of overall local government performance.

** 2009 data.

As it happens, each dimension of performance is statistically coherent, as is an overall measure of performance containing both substantive and procedural dimensions.⁶ We are therefore able to summarize mass attitudes on a single scale of overall local government performance. We use this indicator in the analysis that follows.

In an aside, Table 7 shows the aggregate distribution of overall government performance by country on a four-point scale where 1 = “very badly” and 4 = “very well.” Only three countries – Mozambique, Tanzania and Namibia – score above the midpoint (= 2.5). Since these three predominantly rural countries repeatedly show up in Afrobarometer surveys as having the least critical citizens, we can attribute these positive scores at least partly to a political culture of acceptance and acquiescence (Chaligha et al. 2002; Mattes and Shenga 2007). Otherwise, we are inclined to interpret above-average evaluations in places like Ghana, Mali, Botswana, Cape Verde and South Africa, where citizens are more outspoken, to genuine achievements in local government performance.

The performance of institutions depends in good part on the quality of the individuals recruited to occupy key offices. The survey therefore also asked respondents to comment on the qualifications of elected councilors to hold local government office (see Table 8). While citizens again lacked information (up to a quarter “didn’t know” or “hadn’t heard”), they offered somewhat more favorable evaluations of leaders than of institutions. Twice as many citizens felt that councilors had attained enough education as thought they were educationally unqualified (50 percent versus 26 percent). And, by small margins, more people held that councilors possessed the necessary commitment to “care about the community” and experience to “manage public service programs.” When it came to “honesty in handling public funds,” however, people saw councilors as unqualified rather than qualified (43 percent versus 33 percent). So, as well as being concerned that budget affairs lack transparency, citizens also apparently worry that intentional opacity may mask fraud and mismanagement.

Table 8: Popular Perceptions of Councilor Qualifications

	Qualified	Unqualified	Don’t Know
Level of education	50	26	24
Caring about the community	44	39	17
Experience at managing public service programs	41	38	22
Honesty in handling public funds	33	43	24

Looking at the group of elected councilors who are presently serving on your local government council, how qualified do you think they are to do their jobs? Please rate them according to the following types of qualification. Or haven’t you heard enough to have an opinion? “Qualified” = “fairly qualified” + “very qualified.” “Unqualified” = “fairly unqualified” + “very unqualified.”

For this reason, the Afrobarometer digs into popular perceptions of *corruption*. Table 9 shows the proportion of respondents who consider that “most” or “all” of eight types of public official are involved in corrupt behavior. Interestingly, local government councilors fall exactly at the mean (26 percent) for all officials on the list. They are seen to be less corrupt than members of the police force (42 percent) but more corrupt than traditional leaders (16 percent). Because, in most African countries, police officers are agents of central government, their perceived dishonesty does not have direct impact on evaluations of local government councilors. But because, in rural areas, traditional leaders offer an alternative channel of political representation, elected councilors stand to lose legitimacy in the eyes of their constituents in an unfavorable head-to-head comparison on levels of corruption with chiefs or headmen.

Table 9: Perceived Corruption among Public Officials, 20 African Countries, 2008

Type of Official	See Corruption
Police	42
Tax collectors	35
Civil servants	33
Judges and magistrates	27
Local government councilors	26
MPs/DNAs	25
Officials in the Presidency	23
Traditional leaders	16

How many (officials) do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough to say?
Cell entries are the percentages of respondents who perceive corruption among "most" or "all."

Also important to the present inquiry is the strong link in the popular imagination between official graft and tax collection. Tax collectors are described in the Afrobarometer question as "officials of the Ministry of Finance or local government tax officers." More than one-third of citizens regard most or all of these officials as dishonest (35 percent), second only to the police. If citizens believe that collectors misappropriate tax payments, then we can certainly expect to observe a negative effect on political accountability.

Parenthetically, the cross-country distribution of perceived local government corruption displayed in Table 10 has considerable face validity. Nigeria's standing – 55 percent think most or all councilors are corrupt – confirms this country's popular reputation for high levels of corruption. By contrast, only 14 percent in Botswana, a country associated with much cleaner governance, expressed the same concern. (We do not give credence to the low corruption perception scores for Cape Verde and Madagascar; almost half of all respondents there claimed insufficient information to form an opinion on graft among local councilors).

To conclude our discussion of relevant political attitudes, we draw attention to a citizen's subjective sense of *political efficacy*. In general, the concept refers to an individual's belief in his or her ability to influence the political system (Campbell 1954, Balch 1974, Morell 2003). Political efficacy is conventionally conceptualized along two dimensions: internal efficacy, or one's personal sense of competence as a political animal, and external efficacy, the confidence that the political system will react favorably when individuals attempt to exert influence.

The Afrobarometer indicator of political efficacy partakes of the first, internal dimension.⁷ But it refers to third persons in a local government context. Specifically, the survey question asks: "when there are problems with local government in your community, how much can an ordinary person do to improve the situation?" The four-point response scale runs from "nothing" through "a small amount" and "quite a lot" to "a great deal." Table 11 exhibits results. About one third of all respondents across 20 African countries think citizens can do "nothing" to solve problems with local government (36 percent), indicating limited efficacy within this group. But at the other end of the scale, a similar proportion (34 percent) think they can accomplish "quite a lot" or "a great deal," thus claiming considerable efficacy. We predict that a person's sense that citizens are politically efficacious will be related to perceived responsiveness among local governors.

Table 10: Perceived Corruption among Local Government Councilors, by Country 2008

Country	See Corruption
Nigeria	55
Kenya	43
Mali	38
Uganda	37
Liberia	36
South Africa	34
Zimbabwe*	29
Benin	28
Zambia*	28
Senegal	26
Namibia	26
Malawi	24
Burkina Faso	23
Ghana	20
Mozambique	17
Lesotho	16
Botswana	14
Tanzania	13
Cape Verde	11
Madagascar	6
Mean	26

How many elected local government councilors do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough to say?

Cell entries are percentages who perceive corruption among “most” or “all” local government councilors.

Table 11: Popular Political Efficacy toward Local Government

An ordinary person can do:	Percent
Nothing	36
A small amount	22
Quite a lot	19
A great deal	15
Don't know	8

When there are problems with how local government is run in your community, how much can an ordinary person do to improve the situation?

As should be clear by now, political efficacy is not just a psychological disposition, but a prelude to action. A subjective feeling of efficacy, an attitude that usually increases with age and education, can be expected to correlate with participation in social and political life. Some analysts even see political efficacy as reciprocally related to action, with engagement in politics feeding back into a sense of competence, both internal and external (Finkel 1985). As such, political efficacy promises to link attitudes and behaviors, our next topic.

Political Behaviors

Do ordinary people take advantage of the political rights implicit in democratic forms of local government, for example by voting in elections, discussing political affairs with one another, and registering political complaints with political leaders? And do they seek to enforce their demands by making payments for local government services, either in the form of official fees and taxes, or through illicit bribes and “gifts”?

The most basic expression of active citizenship is voting in elections. Unfortunately, the Afrobarometer does not have a direct measure of an individual’s voting record in local government contests. So we employ a proxy indicator that asks whether respondents voted in the “the most recent national elections.” The 71 percent of survey respondents across 20 countries who claim to have done so excludes those who were not registered to vote, were afraid to vote, were prevented from voting, could not find a polling station, or otherwise did not vote. While this proxy is imperfect, we assume that people who did not vote in national elections would also abstain from local elections, where voter turnout is always lower.

However, the survey does contain plentiful data on popular political activism *between* elections. Of great relevance are personal contacts between constituents and councilors. Asked how often these contacts occurred in the past year, some 27 percent of all respondents mentioned at least one instance. This unexpectedly high figure implies a regular relationship between political principals (in this case, voters) and their agents (in this case local councilors). Because this relationship is prompted and driven by issues as they arise, it is even more intimate for persons who perceive “problems with how local government is run in your community” (see Table 12). For this subset, some 35 percent had contacted a councilor, including those who had done so “a few times” (16 percent) or “often” (8 percent).

Table 12 also shows the frequency with which people undertake other participatory initiatives in response to perceived problems with local government. The table excludes the 58 percent of the adult population who “saw no problems” with their local council in the past year. Some 28 percent of all respondents reported “discussing the problem with others in the community,” 24 percent said they “joined with others to address the problem,” and 19 percent “discussed problems with a community, religious or traditional leader.” But fewer than 10 percent lodged a formal complaint with a government official or contacted the mass media.⁸ To summarize the data in Table 12, we created an eight-point (0-7) additive scale of *political activism*, which is a simple count of the number of the above acts undertaken by each individual.

Table 12: Popular Political Activism in Local Government

	<u>Never</u>	Once or Twice	Several Times	Many Times
Contact a local councilor about a problem	7	11	16	8
Discuss problem with others in community	14	11	12	5
Join with others to address the problem	19	10	10	4
Discuss problem with community leaders	22	8	8	3
Make a complaint with a local govt. official	33	4	3	1
Make a complaint to other govt. official	35	4	2	1
Write to newspaper, call radio show	36	3	2	1

If you have seen problems in how local government is run in the past year, how often, if at all, did you do any of the following?

Cell entries are percentages of respondents claiming to have taken these actions.

Percentages exclude the 58 percent of respondents who “saw no problems,” who “didn’t know.”

But do citizens put their money where their mouths are? Do they actually pay some of the associated costs of addressing local problems?

In an effort to document the extent of local input to taxation, the survey asked respondents to report various payments made in the previous year. Table 13 indicates that service fees – which are reportedly paid by more than two-thirds (70 percent) of all respondents – are by far the most common contribution. Typically, these fees apply to private goods like school tuition or educational materials or to consultations or drugs provided by health clinics. Note also that such payments usually accrue to central government ministries

rather than to local governments. In addition, almost half of all respondents (46 percent) – rising to nearly three quarters (73 percent) in urban areas – report paying public utility fees, for example for private services like piped water, electricity, or telephone. Once again though, apart from the possible exception of water supplies, household services are usually delivered by centralized utility companies (often public, sometimes private) rather than by local authorities. And, of course, income taxes – reportedly paid by only one in five Africans interviewed – are a source of revenue reserved exclusively for central government.

Table 13: Reported Tax Payments

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Fees for a government service (e.g. health, education)	70	29	1
Charges for public utilities (e.g. water, electricity, telephone)	46	53	1
License fees to local government (e.g. bicycle, cart, market stall)	25	73	2
Property rates or taxes (e.g. land, housing)	24	74	2
Income taxes	21	76	3

Have you made any of the following payments during the past year?

As far as we can determine, the main sources of revenue routinely controlled by local government councils are license fees (e.g. for bicycles, carts and market stalls) and property taxes (e.g. on fixed assets like land and housing). Yet, according to our data, only about a quarter of the population makes these types of payments. Whereas there is no significant difference in license fee payment by residential location, urban dwellers are twice as likely as rural dwellers to pay property taxes (34 percent versus 17 percent). In sum, local government tax systems suffer from limited *scope*, being restricted for rural councils mainly to various fees on small-scale enterprises. Moreover, the *reach* of tax collection is also truncated, since councils have induced only a small minority of citizens to actually make direct payments of this kind.

Table 14 provides summary information on tax reach. It reports an additive, six-point (0-5) scale based on the number of tax payments made by individuals in our survey. Only six percent of respondents make *all* possible payments, that is, ranging from service fees to income taxes. Not surprisingly, twice as many urban as rural dwellers pay all five charges.

Table 14: Number of Reported Tax Payments

Number of Taxes	Percent
0	20
1	26
2	25
3	14
4	9
5	6

The problem of limited tax reach is not so much that that Africans regard taxation as illegitimate: some 65 percent agree that government “always has the right to make people pay taxes.” Rather, low yields from local tax regimes result from a range of other factors: the narrow legal authority of local councils, underdeveloped tax bases, difficulties in taxing informal enterprises, and high rates of tax avoidance and evasion. In this paper, we pursue one further line of analysis, namely that tax extraction is undercut by corruption.

Unlike before, the focus is no longer on mass *perceptions* of official corruption but on popular *participation* in actual corrupt transactions. The Afrobarometer’s behavioral indicator measures experience with corruption with a two-part question that asks: “In the past year, how often (if ever) have you had to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favor to a government official in order to (a) get a document or permit or (b) get water or sanitation services?” We hold that local governments usually perform the functions in question.

Table 15 reports raw results. While almost one in five Africans (19 percent) said they had recently made a side payment of one sort or another, they were more likely to do so to obtain documents (14 percent) rather than services (9 percent). Actual experience with corruption is reportedly most rife in Uganda (where 22 percent paid a bribe within the last year for water or sanitation), Mozambique, Nigeria, and Kenya (where 27 percent paid a bribe within the last year for a document of permit). Reinforcing its reputation as a place where few perceive corruption, Botswana ranked lowest on both forms of political behavior because side payments for documents and services were virtually undetectable there.

Combining the above indicators, we derive an average construct of *experience with local government corruption*, reported at an aggregate level in the last column of Table 15. This construct is used in the models that follow. Our expectation is that experience with corruption will lead to disillusionment about local governance. We therefore predict that it will be negatively related to the perceived responsiveness of local government councilors.

Explaining Political Responsiveness

Previous research has shown that democratization is conducive to good governance at the national level in Africa. But political responsiveness is a critical missing ingredient, “the weakest link in the chain that connects democracy to good governance” (Bratton 2008, 15):

“Democratic elections do not reliably guarantee that elected leaders will subsequently be more responsive to their constituents. A principal challenge in deepening democratic governance is to strengthen procedures for ensuring that representatives listen to the populace and respond to their needs between elections” (ibid. 16).

Numerous reasons underpin citizen opinions that MPs and assembly deputies are unsympathetic. These include: physical isolation of many localities from the capital city, social distance between political elites and ordinary folk, scarce resources for constituency service, and overwhelming demands by clients on patrons. Whatever the reasons, principal-agent relations are marked by a “representation gap” between the expectations of citizens and the performance of elected leaders.

Table 15: Reported Experience with Local Government Corruption, by Country 2008

Country	Pay bribe for document or permit	Pay bribe for water or sanitation	Experience local govt. corruption*
Uganda	24	22	.453
Mozambique	21	13	.382
Nigeria	21	15	.348
Kenya	27	12	.332
Zimbabwe**	23	8	.327
Senegal	20	4	.301
Burkina Faso	16	8	.299
Liberia	19	13	.270
Benin	14	6	.269
Mali	13	7	.187
Ghana	11	8	.184
South Africa	8	7	.169
Zambia**	13	5	.163
Cape Verde	9	8	.135
Tanzania	9	4	.133
Namibia	7	6	.124
Lesotho	10	3	.094
Madagascar	8	<1	.083
Malawi	7	3	.080
Botswana	1	<1	.010
Mean	14	9	.231

In the past year, how often (if ever) have you had to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favor to a government official in order to (a) get a document or a permit (b) get water or sanitation services?

Cell entries (middle two columns) are percentages of persons who report an experience with each type of bribery

* Average construct on a 0-1 scale. ** 2009 data.

Local government would seem to offer a more conducive setting than national politics for bridging the representation gap. Councils are conveniently located at local populations centers and councilors originate from much the same social milieu as constituents. And leaders who live in the locality need few resources in order to make themselves available for consultation. Indeed, the data presented so far seems to indicate that citizens find local leaders more politically receptive than national leaders (see Table 2). To build on this encouraging insight, it is worth exploring the reasons that seem to lead to political responsiveness among elected local government councilors.

Table 16 presents a multivariate OLS regression model of the perceived responsiveness of councilors across 20 African countries in 2008. To test hypotheses outlined earlier in this paper, the model weighs the relative impacts of social, attitudinal and behavioral influences. Taking into account country fixed effects (not shown), it offers an explanation encompassing almost one-fifth of the variance in the reputed amenability of councilors.

As indicated in the introduction, we are especially interested in whether leadership responsiveness is susceptible to popular political behavior. In other words, by what active means do citizens *hold* leaders accountable? In so doing, we wish to break out of the potentially circular argument that bedevils much public opinion research: that is, explaining attitudes with attitudes. Our goal is to focus on three main types of mass behavior: citizen activism, tax payment, and offers of bribes. In order to assess the relative impact of these behaviors on councilor responsiveness, we first need to report the effects of more conventional social and attitudinal explanations.

Social Explanations

Just four social indicators are relevant in the trimmed model in Table 16. Other things being equal, standard demographic indicators like age, education and poverty are not significantly associated with political responsiveness so are not reported here. But women are slightly less likely than men to regard local councilors as being politically responsive, perhaps reflecting their relative exclusion from a male-dominated preserve of local politics.⁹ And membership in a religious association has a slight positive effect on perceived leadership response, perhaps because churches and mosques provide conduits for contacting local officials and demanding attention.

Only two social characteristics have strong effects. Respondents who live in *rural areas* report significantly higher perceptions of councilor responsiveness. One possible reason is that, in contrast to socially mixed and mobile urban areas, residents of tight-knit rural villages may have closer ties with others in the neighborhood, including the local councilor. Moreover, people who belong to a secular *voluntary association* – like a farmer’s organization, a trade union, or a community work group – are significantly more likely to think that they can register their demands for political accountability with a local government councilor. In this regard, citizens who belong to organized groups in the countryside feel themselves able to take actions to back up any political demands.

Attitudinal Explanations

Our attitudinal data confirm the common notion that Africans reason instrumentally. Popular considerations about *the performance of local government institutions* are uppermost in the entire model. Citizens judge the political responsiveness of elected councilors principally in terms of whether local government councils are seen to perform “well.” This rational calculation is shaped partly by acknowledgment that local authorities sometimes deliver substantive improvements like well-maintained roads and clean market places (see Table 5). But it is also driven by popular approval of openness in local government procedures, for example when councils publicize work plans and budgets and involve citizens in decision-making (see Table 6).

Thus, popular conceptions of institutional performance refer to political goods as well as to economic goods. Indeed, a basket of political procedures is more strongly associated with political responsiveness than is a battery of substantive services.¹⁰ This result suggests that, while citizens expect delivery on both economic and political fronts, the process of *how* councils operate is even more important to the populace than the substance of *what* councils actually deliver. In other words, when it comes to designing and implementing local-level development activities, citizens may well be willing to trade off a measure of economic performance in return for guarantees of political involvement. If they feel they have an ownership stake in the political process, they are more likely to feel satisfied with substantive outcomes.

Perceptions of official corruption tend to undermine such positive sentiments. If citizens associate local government councilors with corrupt practices then they discredit them as responsive leaders. Strong negative relationships between perceived corruption and dissatisfaction with the performance of political leaders and institutions is consistent across African countries (in this survey) and across time (as measured in previous rounds of Afrobarometer surveys). Indeed, popular concerns about official corruption are sufficiently strong and corrosive to partially offset – even if they do not completely counteract or eliminate – positive performance evaluations. It is worth noting, however, that perceptions of official corruption based on rumor or presumption may not be well founded. For this reason it is necessary to complement attitudinal data with behavioral indicators of involvement in corrupt transactions, as we do below.

But before leaving the discussion of political attitudes we wish to comment on *political efficacy*. Not surprisingly, and as predicted, citizens who feel personally competent to make councilors listen are more likely to report that, in fact, councilors *do* listen. While this is a statistically significant observation, it epitomizes the problem of mutuality (“endogeneity”) among political attitudes that this analysis seeks to escape. That being said, it is nonetheless worth noting that responsiveness among councilors is to a degree dependent on the existence of a self-confident citizenry. If citizens feel powerless, then the prospects for

political responsiveness, representation, and accountability are surely dim. By contrast, if citizens feel sure of themselves in making political demands, leaders are more likely to respond. And if, as we expect, political responsiveness depends in good part on civic participation, then a precondition for citizens to undertake objective political actions may well be that they harbor a robust subjective sense of political efficacy.

Behavioral Explanations

Thus we turn, finally, to behavioral explanations. Is there evidence that self-reported political behaviors are positively linked to responsive leadership in local government?

At first, the evidence seems positive, but weak. The significant coefficient for *voting* has the correct positive sign, but it is small. We attribute this result to the proxy indicator; it measures a respondent's turnout in the last national, not local, election. All we can do for the moment is speculate that appropriate data would provide a more forceful finding.

A scale of *political activism* between elections provides a much more compelling result. To recall, this index captures a range of citizen initiatives from contacting a councilor, though joining others in collective action, to getting in touch with the mass media outlets (see Table 12). Table 16 demonstrates that citizens who are politically active between elections are strongly and significantly more likely to regard local government councilors as being responsive.

This relationship – the second strongest in the model¹¹ – suggests key mechanisms whereby activism helps prepare the way to accountability. The most effective method of securing responsiveness is for citizens to use formal channels to make in-person overtures to elected representatives. Direct, face-to-face contacts reportedly elicit the strongest response among all actions considered.¹² They work best when citizens approach councilors in a group (rather than on their own) and raise community-wide (rather than personal) problems (not shown in Table 16). In addition to such formal approaches, other effective forms of activism circumvent official channels of representation. Citizens who independently “join with others in the community to address a problem” or who take the problem to “other community, religious or traditional leaders” are also likely to perceive high levels of councilor responsiveness (not shown in Table 16). We infer from these results that local government councilors are most likely to respond to mass demands when faced with collective requests to solve community problems. Moreover, these leaders are susceptible to organized mass mobilization and popular pressures asserted indirectly through informal leaders.

Does taxation help to obtain representation? To assess this perennial question in the context of African local governments we employ our scale of *tax payment*, which measures the number of taxes reportedly paid by each survey respondent (see Table 14). Our expectation, based on a prodigious literature on the positive link between taxation and representation, was that citizens who complied with their tax obligations would be more likely to successfully insist on responsive governance. But we must report that, as modeled here, tax payment has *no observable effect whatsoever*. Indeed, our indicator for this behavior is *completely* unrelated to the dependent variable.

The implications are potentially profound. Other things equal, we can find no evidence that African citizens employ payments for public services as leverage over their local government representatives. In the local government arena, the processes of meeting tax obligations and holding leaders accountable seem to be entirely disconnected. Several interpretations are possible. Perhaps Africans correctly perceive that local authorities have limited functions and that it is futile to demand responsiveness from local leaders, especially when central government ministries are the main beneficiaries of the school and clinic fees that most people pay. Or perhaps everyone knows that only a minority of adults – we estimate about one quarter – actually hands over any kind of payment directly to a local government council. With such a narrow tax base, taxpayers may feel aggrieved that they carry an unfair burden in paying for the provision of widely dispersed public goods.

Alternatively, the citizen-councilor linkage may be distorted by *corruption*. Is the universal right to demand accountability based on tax compliance displaced by a particularistic claim for special treatment in response to bribe payment? Table 16 reports trace evidence to this effect. Note that we now employ a behavioral indicator of corruption that measures whether individuals actually participated in corrupt transactions by offering “bribes, gifts or favors” to public officials during the past year. While the relationship between corruption experiences and perceived responsiveness is not especially strong, it is statistically significant. More to the point the connection is *positive*, a result that runs counter to conventional expectations. In other words, citizens who try to purchase special treatment from a public official by offering some sort of side payment, are usually satisfied with the outcome. The more frequently they offer bribes, the greater the responsiveness they perceive among local government councilors.

Taken alone, this troubling result might seem anomalous. But it confirms findings from other studies of service satisfaction, democratic supply, and tolerance of graft that corrupt behavior sometimes benefits supposed “victims” (Bratton 2009a; Bratton 2009b; Chang and Kerr 2009). The net implication for African local governments is that experience with corruption disrupts the taxation-representation rule. Some citizens are able to gain preferential access to political representation by making payments outside of the formal tax system. And those who are honest enough to pay taxes have reason to worry, either that their contributions will be misappropriated by corrupt officials, or that compliance with the tax laws will not lead to the political responsiveness they seek. Or both.

Table 16: Perceived Responsiveness of Local Government Councilors, Multivariate Regression, 20 African Countries, 2008

	B	S.E.	Beta	p
Social Characteristics				
Rural Resident	.122	.022	.062	.000
Female	-.034	.020	-.017	.089
Member of religious association	.021	.012	.020	.080
Member of voluntary association	.060	.011	.062	.000
Political Attitudes				
Perceives positive local govt. performance ¹	.336	.016	.239	.000
Perceives corruption among councilors ²	-.095	.012	-.082	.000
Feels politically efficacious ³	.048	.010	.055	.000
Political Behaviors				
Voted in last election	.062	.022	.029	.006
Is active politically between elections ⁴	.048	.005	.100	.000
Pays taxes ⁵	-.002	.007	.000	.997
Has experienced corruption ⁶	.037	.017	.023	.029
Constant	.400	.079		.000

Adjusted R squared = .193

Standard error of the estimate = .872

Trimmed model (most non-significant predictor variables are excluded)

Coefficients calculated with country fixed effects (not shown)

Zimbabwe (median responsiveness score) is the reference category for 19 country dummies.

1. Average scale of 12 items (6 substantive and 6 procedural) (see Tables 5, 6 and 7)
2. For question wording, see notes to Table 10
3. For question wording, see notes to Table 11
4. Additive scale of number of political actions (see Table 12)
5. Additive scale of number of taxes paid (see Table 14)
6. Average construct of two bribery indicators (see Table 15)

Conclusions

This paper has explored the link between citizens and elected leaders within the local government arena across 20 African countries. We have sought to understand the conditions – especially the behavioral conditions – under which ordinary people might come to believe that local government representatives are responsive to their needs.

The main findings are as follows:

- * Africans interviewed by the Afrobarometer in 2008 have mixed feelings about the responsiveness of elected local government councilors. Only about one third feel that these leaders listen regularly to what their constituents have to say. Another one third think they listen occasionally, but a final one-third report that councilors never listen. On balance, however, local councilors are seen as more responsive than leaders elected to national political office.
- * Citizens regard local government councils as weak institutions with limited functions. They attribute responsibility for most governmental tasks, including local service delivery, to central government institutions. And they regard certain other functions – like dispute resolution and environmental cleanup – as the prime responsibility of traditional and community organizations. Land allocation is the only function seen as the main preserve of local government.
- * The Africans we interviewed seemed to lack information on the fiscal foundations of local administration: up to one third of respondents say “don’t know” when faced with questions about tax collection or budget management.
- * In general, local governments are seen to perform below par. Indeed, there is no function or procedure on which a majority of citizens consider that their own council authority is performing “well.” People are especially unhappy with council performance at integrating citizens into the agenda-setting and decision-making processes of local self-government.
- * Perhaps as a result, the Africans we interviewed have instrumental views about political responsiveness. In other words, they tend to assess the openness of local leaders to popular demands mainly in terms of institutional performance at “delivering the goods.” In this regard, people regard the provision of opportunities for political participation even more highly than the delivery of concrete benefits like well-maintained roads and markets.
- * While our main aim was to explore whether leadership responsiveness is susceptible to popular political action (i.e. behaviors), we cannot discount the persistent influence of mass attitudes. Our multivariate analysis shows that local government councilors are given credit for listening to the extent that citizens feel politically efficacious and see their leaders as uncorrupted.
- * But mass behavior matters in at least one important way: the more that citizens are politically active in the local political arena between elections, the more responsiveness they attribute to local councilors. Direct, face-to-face contact with these leaders – especially on matters of communal interest – is the most effective measure that citizens can take to ensure a political response. But indirect efforts at collective action in the community and lobbying through informal leaders are useful methods too.

* Against expectations, we find that taxation does not lead to representation in African local government. Other things equal, there is no connection between the number of taxes or fees that a citizen pays and his or her perception that councilors are responsive. We regard the absence of this conventional tax linkage as the most important factor limiting political accountability in African local government arenas.

* Also against expectations, but consistent with an emerging literature, we find that corruption partially displaces taxation in linking people and leaders. If citizen behavior includes offering bribes to public officials, then perceptions of political responsiveness rise. Disassembling this perverse link is a high priority item for governance reforms in African local government.

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¹ See a parallel analysis by Carolyn Logan under the present contract. Thanks are due to Carolyn Logan and Olufunmbi Elemo for comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

² The Afrobarometer is a joint enterprise of the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (Idasa) and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP, Benin). Michigan State University and the University of Cape Town provide technical and advisory support services. Fieldwork, data entry, preliminary analysis, and the dissemination of survey results are conducted by National Partner organizations in each African country. Fieldwork for Round 4 Afrobarometer surveys was conducted in 18 African countries between March and December 2008 and in Zambia and Zimbabwe in mid-2009. All Afrobarometer interviews – totalling 27,713 in Round 4 – are conducted face-to-face by trained fieldworkers in the language of the respondent's choice. Respondents are selected using a random, stratified, multistage, national probability sample representing adult citizens aged 18 years. Each country sample yields a margin of error of +/- 3 percentage points at a 95 percent confidence level. The pooled, cross-country sample is equally weighted to standardize national samples at n = 1200, yielding a weighted sample size of 24,000. Note that Afrobarometer surveys can only be conducted in the continent's most open societies. Hence the results do not represent the continent – or Africans – as a whole.

³ In some countries – including Botswana, Ghana, Malawi – a minority of councilors are appointed (usually by the President or the Minister of Local Government, perhaps in consultation with local interest groups) or enjoy *ex officio* membership (for example, traditional leaders or NGO officials).

⁴ Using 2008 AB R4 data, factor analysis (principal components) extracts a single poverty dimension that captures 53 percent of the variance and is reliable (Alpha = .783).

⁵ There is less variance in the scale of procedural performance than in the scale of substantive performance. This regularity suggests that respondents find it particularly hard to discriminate among items of procedural performance, perhaps because they lack enough information. Indeed, the remarkably high reliability statistic on the procedural dimension (see next footnote) suggests that these items contain a response set bias.

⁶ Factor analysis produces a coherent scale of substantive performance from the six items in Table 5 (Alpha = .824). The same goes for procedural performance based on the six items in Table 6 (Alpha = .946). When the two dimensions are combined, factor analysis also generates a coherent scale of overall local government performance (Alpha = .906).

⁷ This approach is preferable to using an indicator of external efficacy, which would run dangerously close to measuring governmental responsiveness, thus risking a circular argument in the current analysis.

⁸ One possible reason is that more than one-third of respondents (35 percent) fear that “people can be punished by government officials if they make complaints about poor quality services or misuse of funds.”

⁹ Gender (and religious group membership) are significant only at a relaxed level ($p < .100$).

¹⁰ The political goods basket contains the items in Table 6 ($r = .289$). The economic goods battery includes the items in Table 5 ($r = .201$).

¹¹ Compare beta coefficients for performance (.239) and activism (.100). If performance is disaggregated into its substantive and procedural components, however, then the explanatory power of the activism scale edges ahead of (or at least equals) a purely economic or material (i.e. substantive) interpretation of performance (beta = .098).

¹² $r = .197$

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