The Uses of the Afrobarometer in Promoting Democratic Governance

Introduction
Over the past twenty years, approaches to development in Africa have undergone a fundamental change. Practitioners no longer regard development as a largely technical exercise. Economic growth and social wellbeing are now rarely seen as simple matters of, say, getting the prices right for maize production or finding a medical cure for guinea worm disease. Instead, we now understand that technical fixes only work well if embedded in a political and organizational infrastructure that generates broad support for policies and ensures the reliable delivery of goods and services. In short, development practitioners now recognize the critical importance of institutions.
Institutions are the norms, rules, procedures and structures that underpin the development policy process. They provide the stability, predictability and legitimacy that enable stakeholders to make commitments to development.

Institutions are found within both the regime (a realm of politics) and the state (a realm of policy and administration). With regard to *regimes*, institutions such as constitutions, electoral laws, and political party regulations govern who may participate in collective decisions, and how. These rules distinguish democratic from authoritarian regimes, as well as both these pure regime forms from the actual hybrid systems that lie in between. As for the *state*, institutions such as the presidency, central government ministries, public enterprises, private contractors and local planning committees together determine whether policies are effectively implemented. And norms about legality and morality determine whether these institutions operate free of corruption.

Democratic Governance
These days, the consolidation of regimes and states is fashionably summarized under the loose rubric of "democratic governance." This term is useful insofar as it proposes a conjunction between democratic regimes and well-governed states. It suggests that an institutional environment of *both* political accountability *and* managerial effectiveness is the most conducive combination for socioeconomic development.

The notion of democratic governance highlights some important implications for policy analysis that are commonly overlooked. First, development is an unavoidably political process. Development involves competition – even conflict – among social groups over scarce economic resources. And it generates political winners and losers. This requires policy actors (especially external actors) to acquire a deep understanding the political environment in which they are operating or otherwise risk making costly policy errors. Second, the basic meaning of democracy is "rule by the people." As a result, policy actors (especially those in national governments who heretofore have been tempted to assert that they know

what the people want) must give serious consideration to popular values, attitudes, preferences and behaviors. In short, policy actors need to attend to public opinion.

Finally, a glib "DG" slogan should not blind analysts to the fact that democracy and good governance may not always go together. Examples of disjuncture between regime and state in Africa abound. On one hand, apartheid South Africa was a powerful, effective, law-driven state but it was guided by a decidedly non-democratic regime (as is Singapore today). On the other hand, the wave of competitive elections that started in sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s has given rise to nominally democratic regimes whose governance capacities still leave a lot to be desired (think Kenya or Nigeria). Indeed, one can count on the fingers of one hand the number of countries in Africa that have reliable democratic institutions and, at the same time, are governed by high standards of effectiveness, efficiency, and transparency. In sum, the challenge is the simultaneous attainment of *both* democracy *and* governance, preferably by discovering the synergies between them.

The Afrobarometer
The Afrobarometer – an African-led, cross-national survey of public opinion in 20 sub-Saharan countries – takes democratic governance as its main subject matter. From the project's founding in 1999, the Afrobarometer Network has sought to discover what ordinary Africans think about they way they are governed. Over the past 12 years we have accumulated in-depth interviews with over 100,000 randomly selected respondents in 70 national surveys. We have used this information as a lens for explaining the evolution and performance of Africa's democratic and governance institutions. Because the project is based in Africa and directed by Africans, the Afrobarometer may even contribute to "rule by the people." By conveying public opinion to policy actors, the project has the potential to express a collective voice in the policy process for the man in the street and the woman in the fields.

Who are the "users" (or consumers) of Afrobarometer results? They are a diverse bunch: elected officials, civil servants, political party leaders, international donors, NGO policy advocates, academic researchers, students, journalists, and ordinary citizens. Obviously, when it comes to sources of policy-relevant information, one size does not fit all. For example, while academics, journalists and students are interested in big concepts like "governance" and broad trends like "democratization," development practitioners want hard and precise indicators of the performance of particular institutions. So various "policy actors" find different pieces of the Afrobarometer more useful than others.

On democracy, the AB can:

- Reveal how people understand the normative and contested concept of "democracy";

- Track levels of popular demand for democracy (do people say they *want* this kind of regime?);

- Track levels of the perceived supply of democracy (do people think they are *getting* it?);

- Break down popular attitudes to the quality of particular democratic institutions (e.g. elections, political party competition, or legislative and judicial checks on executive power).

On governance, the AB can:

- Reveal popular attitudes to the rule of law and the legitimacy of the state;

- Track indicators of policy performance across an assortment of development activities (e.g. employment generation, inflation control, food security, environmental protection);

- Document popular appraisals of service delivery in selected development sectors (especially health and education) and at various tiers of administration (including local government); and

- Track levels of popular trust and perceived corruption in particular governance institutions (e.g. the presidency, the parliament, the courts, the electoral commission).

All these indicators can be compared across countries and over time, thus establishing cross-national rankings and temporal trends. And all of the data can be broken down according to the categories relevant to policy analysts: for example, by sub-national region, by ethnic group, by education or by gender.

But beyond descriptive statistics, the real power of AB data lies in its ability to provide answers to explanatory questions about democracy and development. For example: Does education affect the meanings that people attach to democracy? Is the perceived supply of democracy a function of government performance? Is institutional trust inversely related to perceptions of official corruption? (By the way, the general answer to all the above questions is "Yes").

AB Results about Democratic Governance
This Briefing Paper simply draws attention to a few policy-relevant facts and trends about democratic governance as seen from a public opinion perspective. Since the Afrobarometer database is now so broad, the presentation is bound to be selective; it represents only the tip of the iceberg.
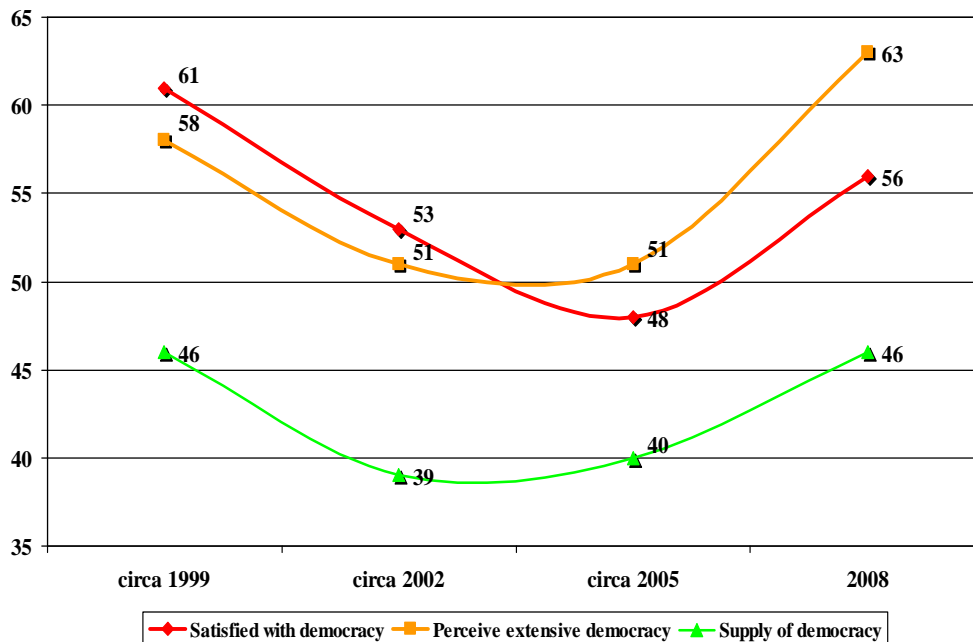
On democracy:

- In 2008, some 70 percent of Africans interviewed said they supported democracy. Support was especially strong in Botswana.

- In 2008, even more people – an average of 75 percent – rejected military rule. But citizens of Burkina Faso seemed undecided.

- Some democratic institutions garner more support than others. Whereas 77 percent think that open elections are the best way to choose leaders, fewer (66 percent) accept the idea of multiparty competition, which some people, especially women, associate with political violence. Africans also broadly accept the idea of presidential term limits (69 percent in 2008). Our finding that 84 percent of Nigerians wanted term limits in 2007 was widely publicized in the local and international press and may even have helped to block Obasanjo's third-term bid.

- Over time (1999-2008), popular demand for democracy fell then rose again (see Fig.1). Note, however, that fewer than half of the Africans we interviewed are "committed democrats" who *both* support democracy *and* reject all forms of authoritarian rule.

- Moreover, our respondents are split (49 percent) on satisfaction with the way democracy *actually works* in their country. Compared to others, Ghanaians are rather satisfied.

- Yet almost three in five people think that they live in a democracy (59 percent). Though Zimbabweans clearly thought otherwise.

- The perceived supply of democracy also rose recently after dipping earlier in the decade (Fig. 2). Two observations are pertinent here:

Figure 1: Demand for Democracy Average Trends, 11 Countries, 1999-2008
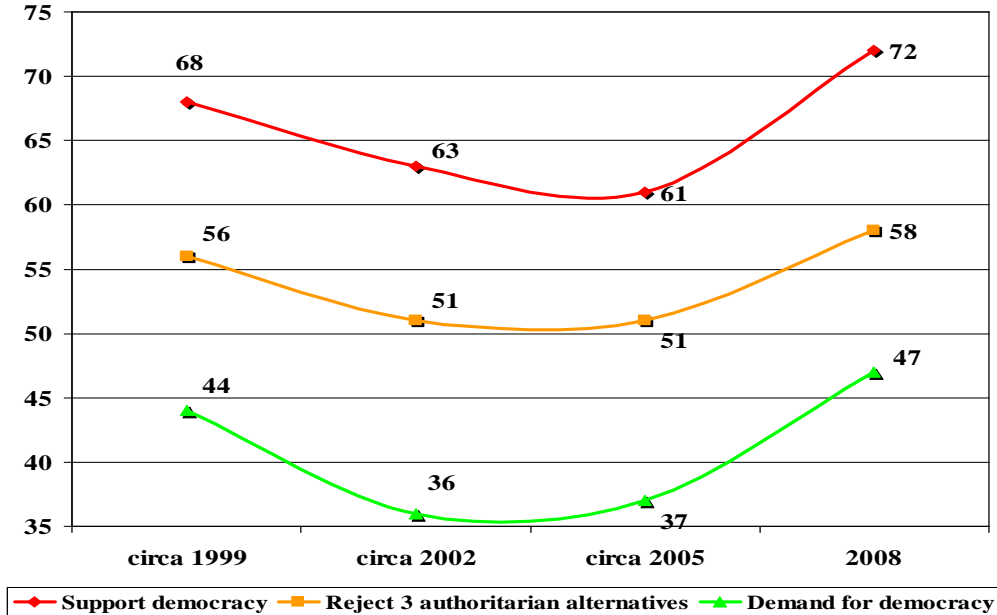
Countries included are Botswana, Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia.

*Figure 2: Supply of Democracy, Average Trends, 11 Countries, 1999-2008*

Percentages (a) satisfied with "the way democracy works" (b) perceiving that country has "full" or "almost full" democracy. Countries covered are Botswana, Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia.

First, we note that the perceived extent of democracy has risen even as satisfaction has dropped. This unexpected result suggests an adjustment of mass expectations. People are recognizing a measure of democratic progress even as they realistically conclude that actual democratic practice is falling short of their dreams.

Second, repeated analyses suggest that popular appreciation of democracy does not require an economic miracle. For instance, recent evidence of recovering satisfaction with democracy does *not* seem originate from a period of economic growth in Africa in the mid 2000s. Rather it is due to popular appreciation of democracy's provision of *political* goods such as free speech and electoral choice.

On governance:

- Current Afrobarometer data reveal solid popular respect for the rule of law. Between two thirds and three quarters of the Africans we interviewed think that the state has a right to compel their obedience (See Fig. 3). Granted, they are more willing to accept direction from the police than from the tax authorities; but, basically, they regard the state as legitimate.

- Not all is well, however, with public opinion about the quality of the state's governance. For example, while one-half of all adults think that public officials can get away with committing crimes, only one quarter think that ordinary citizens can similarly escape prosecution. In short, while ordinary people respect the law of the land, they worry that it is applied unevenly, especially to elites who enjoy political positions or connections.

- As one possible consequence, only about half of Afrobarometer respondents show trust in governmental institutions (See Fig. 4). The national presidency and traditional leadership were consistently considered across most countries to be the most trustworthy institutions. But, compared to ruling parties (52 percent), opposition parties were seldom trusted (36 percent), an alarming result that ought to interest the leaders of such parties.

- As for perceptions of corruption, chiefs and presidents again score relatively well, with tax collectors and police officers generally arousing most suspicion in all rounds of AB surveys, including in 2008/9 (see Fig.5).

- Public attitudes to the police across African countries reveal the association between perceived corruption and institutional trust (see Figure 6). The relationship is strongly negative, with most countries hugging the regression line (r =-.643). Where citizens see the police as very corrupt (as in Kenya and Nigeria) they also deeply distrust the police as an institution. And vice versa: a police force with a clean reputation tends to engender public trust (as in Botswana and Senegal). Certainly there are anomalies: Cape Verdeans distrust their police even though they think they are quite honest and Namibians grant more trust to their relatively compromised police force than perhaps it deserves. But the main governance point stands: perceptions of corruption undermine institutional trust.

Figure 3: Popular Perceptions of Rule of Law, 20 African Countries, 2008/2009
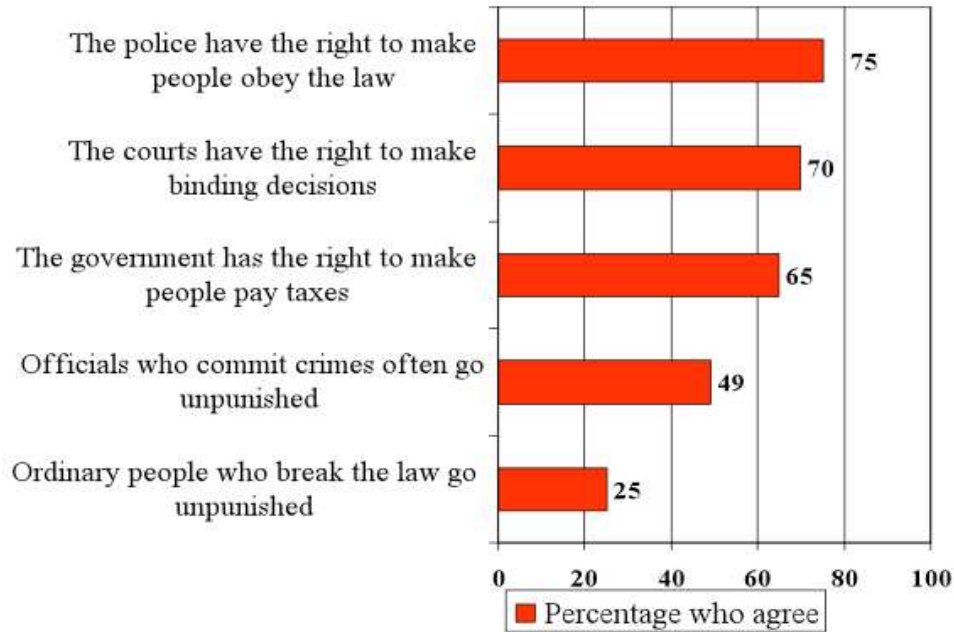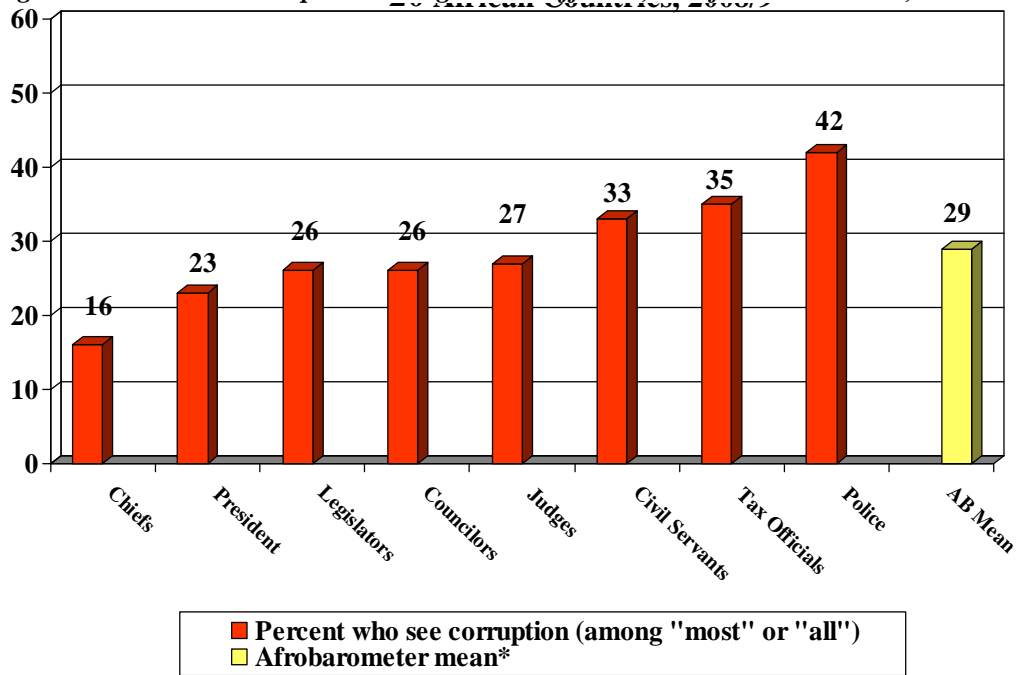

*Figure 4: Trust in Public Institutions, 20 African Countries, 2008/2009*
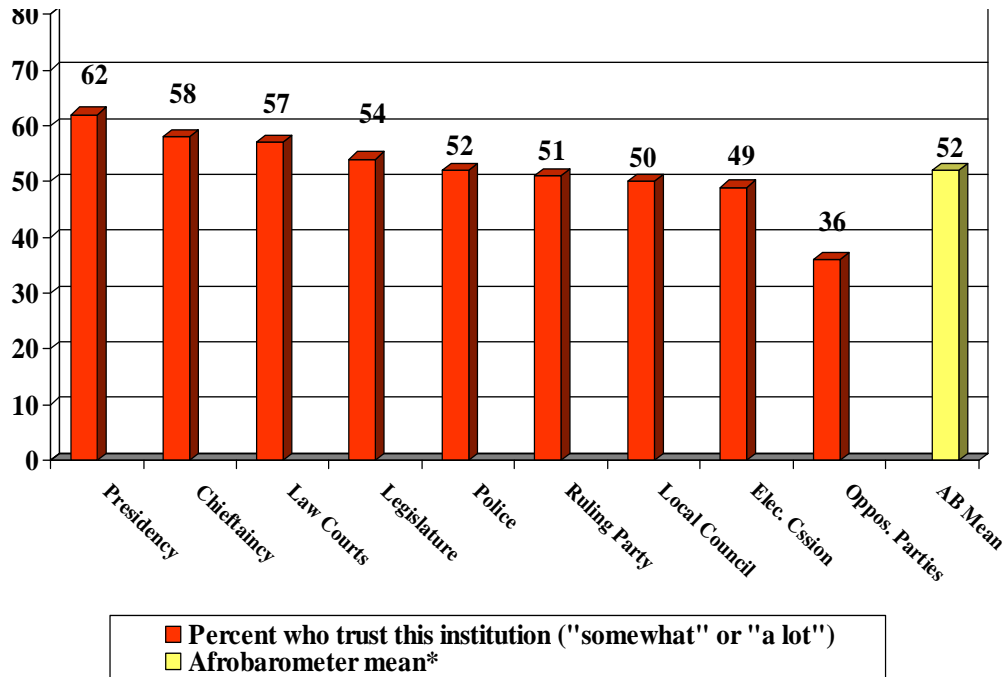
"How much do you trust each of the following? Or haven't you heard enough about them to say?"

Figure 5: Perceived Corruption among Public Officials, 20 African Countries, 2008/2009

"How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption? Or haven't you heard enough about them to say?"

Figure 5: Police in Africa, 2008: Perceived Corruption and Institutional Trust
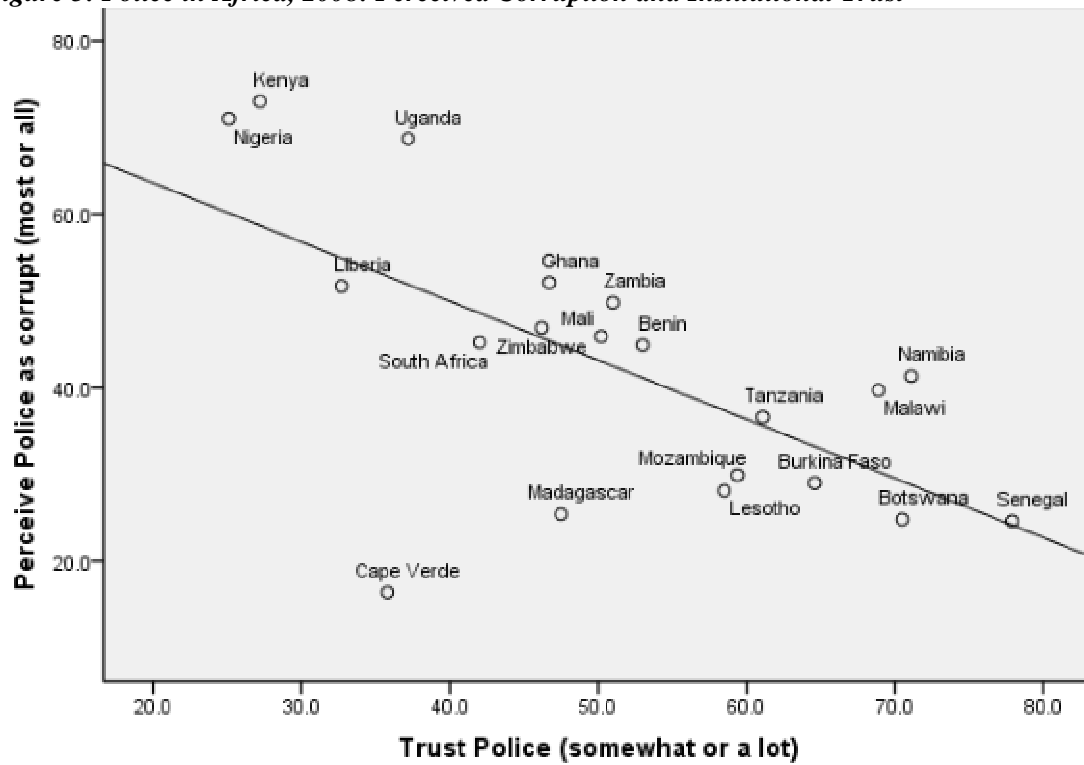
Do Democracy and Good Governance Go Together in Africa?
By way of conclusion, we return to questions raised earlier: do democracy and good governance go together in Africa? And if so, which policy should be promoted first?

Let us begin by using the AB's extent of democracy indicator to divide Africans into two groups: those who think they live in a democratic regime and those who think they do not. Then let us compare the attitudes of these two groups about the quality of governance in their countries. A recent AB Working Paper (No. 104) looks at nine dimensions of governance but, for ease of presentation, we will consider only three here: legality, effectiveness, and responsiveness (see Fig.6). These data suggest a clear democracy advantage: by a margin of 19 points, citizens in democracies are more likely think that the President abides by the Constitution; and by a margin of 24 points they see the government as more capable of solving the country's most important problems. At face value, therefore, democracy and good governance appear to be closely and positively associated, at least in the eyes of the state's main clientele: its citizens. In fact, the affinity between democratic regimes and well-governed states is borne out for all nine dimensions of governance (not shown here, see WP No. 104) and at the macro- as well as micro-levels (using World Bank and Polity data, not shown here).

But there is an important caveat. It concerns the responsiveness of public officials to citizen concerns. True, Fig. 6 shows that elected representatives are deemed more approachable in democracies than in non-democracies. But the positive relationship is weak for this aspect of governance and, substantively, only 30 percent are ever satisfied that leaders listen. These data and other analyses point to a fundamental problem of governance that even affects new African democracies: a *representation gap* between legislators and citizens. As previously shown, ordinary people are strongly attached to elections as a means of choosing leaders. But they remain frustrated in efforts to get elected officials to attend to their concerns *between elections*. This key result suggests that, to make a reality of democratic governance, policy actors ought to pay closer attention to policy initiatives that address the representation gap. Possible contenders include freedom of information legislation, electoral system reform, civic education, participatory budgeting, and popular oversight of service delivery.

Figure 6: Democracy and Governance: Micro-Connections, 18 African Countries, 2005

Dimension of Governance	Indicator	Democracy	Non-Democracy	R
Legality	The President usually observes the Constitution	65	46	.268***
	The President often ignores the Constitution	16	36	
Effectiveness	Government can solve most important problems	69	45	.265***
	Government cannot solve important problems	31	55	
Responsiveness	Elected representatives usually try to listen	30	18	.172***
	Elected representatives often fail to listen	70	82	

One last point. Scholars and practitioners are engaged in a vigorous running debate about the sequencing of democracy and governance programs. Some believe that democratic reforms are relevant everywhere, even in poor countries and post-conflict situations. Others contend that democracy can only take root where a stable and legitimate state (read good governance) is first put in place. The Afrobarometer cannot resolve the sequencing dilemma. But our analysis so far (see AB WP No. 43) suggests that the rule of law is central to the ways in which Africans conceptualize good governance. But where does the rule of law come from? Contemporary democratic theorists like Diamond and Morlino tell us it is one of the pillars of a high quality democracy. If this is the case, then we should not have to wait for the establishment of a legitimate political order before attempting democracy promotion. Instead, the promotion of a democratic regime will itself contribute to the development of a state that is governed by a rule of law.