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Democratization in Kenya: Public Dissatisfied With the *Benefit-less* Transition

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1. Introduction

Africa's transition to multiparty democracy has often been accompanied by a re-institutionalization of autocratic regimes and authoritarianism. This tension between the forces of progress and regression has become an enduring feature of Africa's electoral and democratic transitions, a contradiction of more frequent elections and the consolidation of multipartyism accompanied by a reversal of democratic gains and the institutionalization of violence during elections. Elections and democracy have not always correlated strongly.

In Kenya, there is consensus about the value of increased democratization and the opening up of the political space to more participants – more political parties, more media outlets, freer expression of views, and more freedoms. But clearly anti-democratic features – rigging of elections, violence, bribery, and attempts to close political spaces for some groups – have also increased. Despite more than two decades of democratization in Kenya, the transition does not seem to have yielded significant changes in the institutional composition of the country. And even when institutions have changed, this does not seem to have brought about meaningful socio-economic and security gains for the citizenry. Despite the promulgation in 2010 of a new Constitution that enjoyed widespread popular support, the politics that have characterized its implementation and the increased tensions and conflicts that have emerged in the pursuit of the “freedoms” that the new Constitution has provided have coloured Kenyans' perceptions of the democratization taking place in the country.

This paper, drawing on the results of Afrobarometer surveys in Kenya, examines the changing perceptions of Kenyans regarding the country's democratic transition and the benefits the transition has brought them.

2. Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is an African-led, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 30 countries in Africa. Five rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2013, and Round 6 surveys are currently under way (2014-2015). Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples of between 1,200 and 2,400 adults.

In Kenya, surveys have been conducted in 2003, 2005, 2008, and 2011. The Afrobarometer team, led by the Institute for Development Studies at the University of Nairobi, interviewed 2,400 adult Kenyans in all nine provinces. A sample of this size yields results with a margin of error of +/-2% at a 95% confidence level.

3. Perceptions of democracy

Kenya’s democratic transition began in 1991 with the repeal of Section 2(a) of the Constitution, which had barred the formation of political parties to challenge the ruling Kenya Africa National Union (KANU). Since the repeal, Kenya has witnessed the formation of dozens of political parties and conducted four multiparty elections. The 24-year rule of the Moi regime finally came to an end in 2002, followed by the 10-year tenure of President Kibaki. In 2010, the country promulgated a new, progressive Constitution, which increased the level of freedoms in Kenya, especially freedoms of expression and association.

Increased freedoms

Kenyans’ perceptions of their “freedom to say what you think” and “freedom to join any political organisation” remain high and did not change significantly between surveys in 2008 and 2011. About four out of five respondents in 2011 affirmed that they were “somewhat free” or “completely free” to express their thoughts, and 83% said they were somewhat/completely free to associate (a slight decrease from 87% in 2008). Similarly, more than 90% of respondents said they were somewhat/completely free to “choose who to vote for.”

Extent of democracy

Despite these freedoms, Kenyans do not see their country as a full democracy. Results from the 2011 survey reveal that only 9% of Kenyans consider theirs a full democracy. In a significant shift in perceptions of democracy and democratization, the number of respondents who consider Kenya either “not a democracy” or “a democracy with major problems” increased from 17% in 2003 to 47% in 2011 (Table 1).

Table 1: Extent of democracy in Kenya | 2003-2011

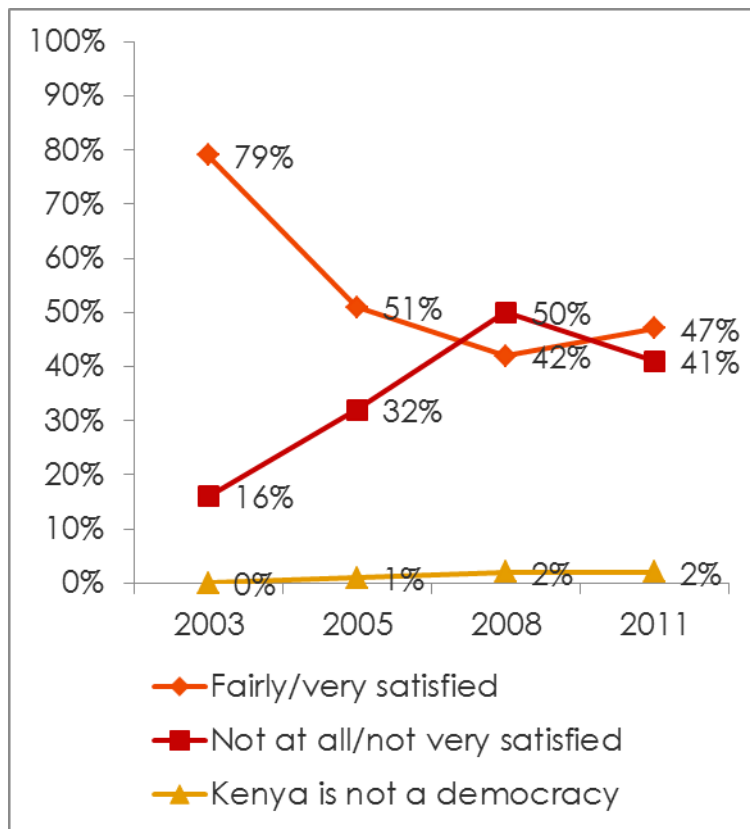
	2003	2005	2008	2011
Not a democracy	2%	3%	8%	8%
A democracy with major problems	15%	29%	40%	39%
A democracy, but with minor problems	64%	40%	31%	33%
A full democracy	12%	10%	13%	9%
Do not understand question/democracy	3%	7%	2%	4%
Do not know	4%	11%	4%	7%

Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, how much of a democracy is Kenya today?*

Dissatisfaction with Kenya’s democracy

In a similar vein, the level of satisfaction with democracy declined over time. While in 2003, 79% of Kenyans were either fairly or very satisfied with Kenya’s democracy, this proportion dropped to 51% in 2005 and then declined still further to 42% in 2008 before increasing marginally to 47% in 2011 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Level of satisfaction with Kenya’s democracy | 2003-2011

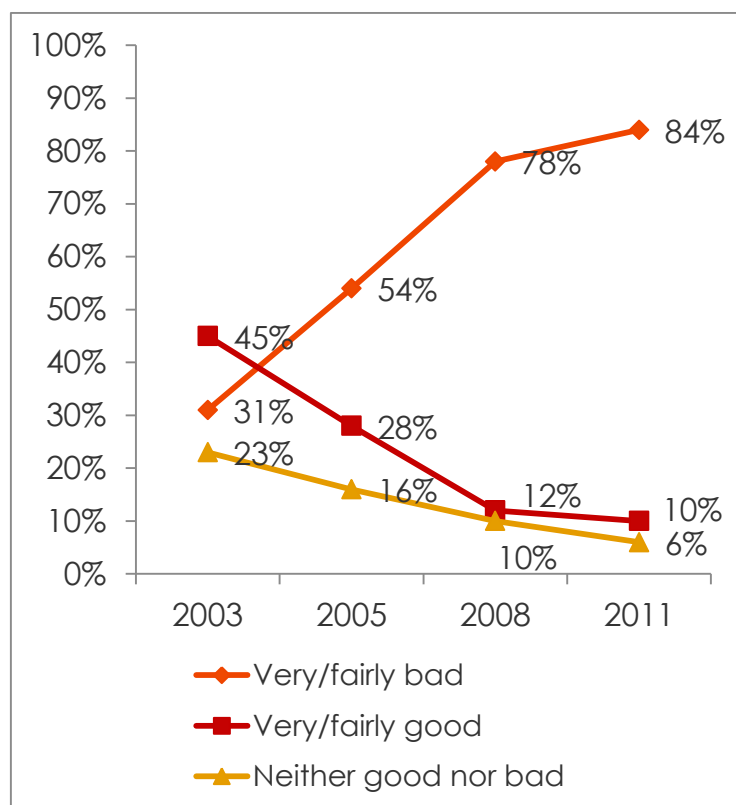


Respondents were asked: *Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Kenya?*

4. Perceptions of the economy and living conditions

Parallel to decreasing levels of satisfaction with Kenya’s democracy, perceptions of economic conditions are on the decline as well. When asked about the country’s economic conditions in 2003, 45% of respondents stated that they were fairly or very good. But this proportion decreased to 28% in 2005, to 12% in 2008, and to 10% in 2011 (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Perceptions of the country's economic condition | 2003-2011



Respondents were asked: *In general, how would you describe the present economic condition of this country?*

Perceptions of economic trends have also deteriorated. While in 2003 only 23% of respondents stated that the country’s economic conditions were worse or much worse than they had been 12 months previously, in 2011 more than half (58%) said the same (Table 2). Overall, the trend from 2003 to 2011 clearly reflects public perceptions that are growing increasingly negative.

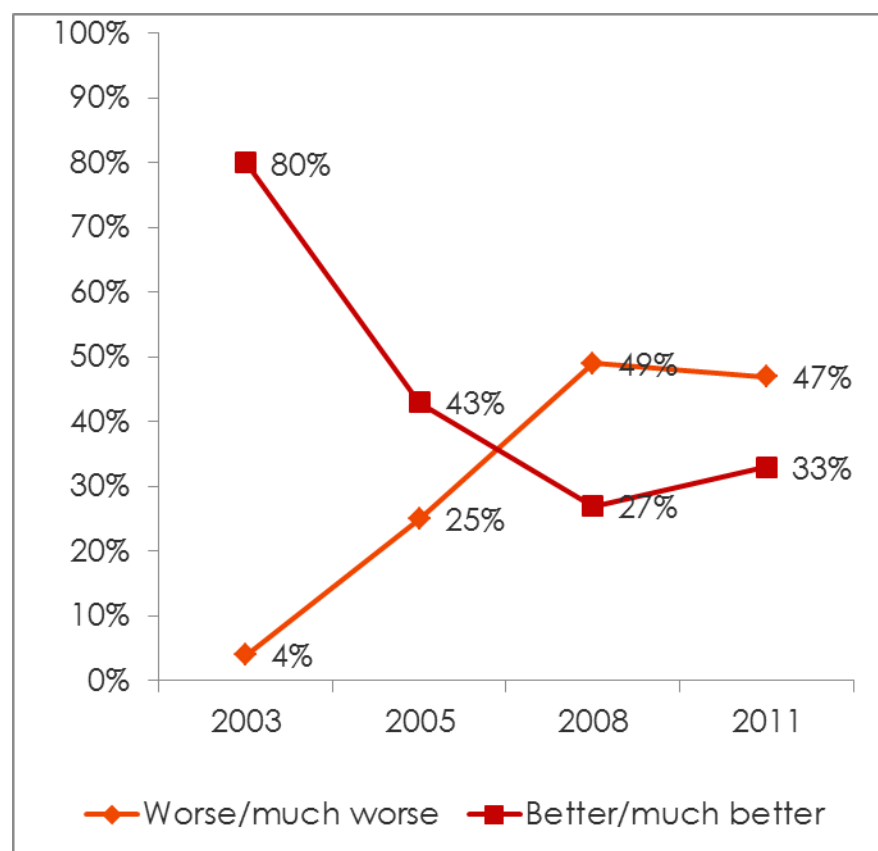
Table 2: Perceptions of the country’s economic conditions compared to 12 months ago | 2003-2011

	2003	2005	2008	2011
Worse / Much worse	23%	43%	60%	58%
Same	24%	25%	15%	8%
Better / Much better	51%	31%	24%	33%
Don't know	2%	1%	1%	1%

Respondents were asked: *Looking back, how do you rate the economic conditions in this country compared to twelve months ago?*

People’s optimism about the country’s future has also been eroded. In 2003, when asked what they thought the country’s economic condition was going to be in 12 months’ time, Kenyans were quite optimistic, with 80% stating that the future was going to be better or much better (Figure 3). By 2011, just 33% were optimistic about the economic future.

Figure 3: Optimism about the country's economic future | 2003-2011



Respondents were asked: *Looking ahead, do you expect the economic conditions in this country in 12 months' time to be better or worse?*

People's declining optimism seems to be related to their perceptions of Kenyan democracy (Table 1), their worsening living conditions (Table 3), and their pessimism about their future (Table 4). While in 2003 only 35% said that their living conditions were fairly bad or very bad, this deteriorated to 71% by 2011. More than half of respondents in both 2011 and 2008 said their living conditions were worse or much worse compared to 12 months earlier (not shown).

Table 3: Perceptions of personal living conditions | 2003-2011

	2003	2005	2008	2011
Very bad / Fairly bad	35%	45%	69%	71%
Neither good nor bad	26%	22%	17%	14%
Very good / Fairly good	39%	33%	14%	15%

Respondents were asked: *In general, how would you describe your present living conditions?*

A similar response was recorded when Kenyans were asked about their expectations regarding their living conditions in the next 12 months. While in 2003 only 4% said that their living conditions were likely to be worse or much worse, this proportion increased to 42% in 2011 (Table 4).

Table 4: Expectations regarding personal living conditions in 12 months' time | 2003-2011

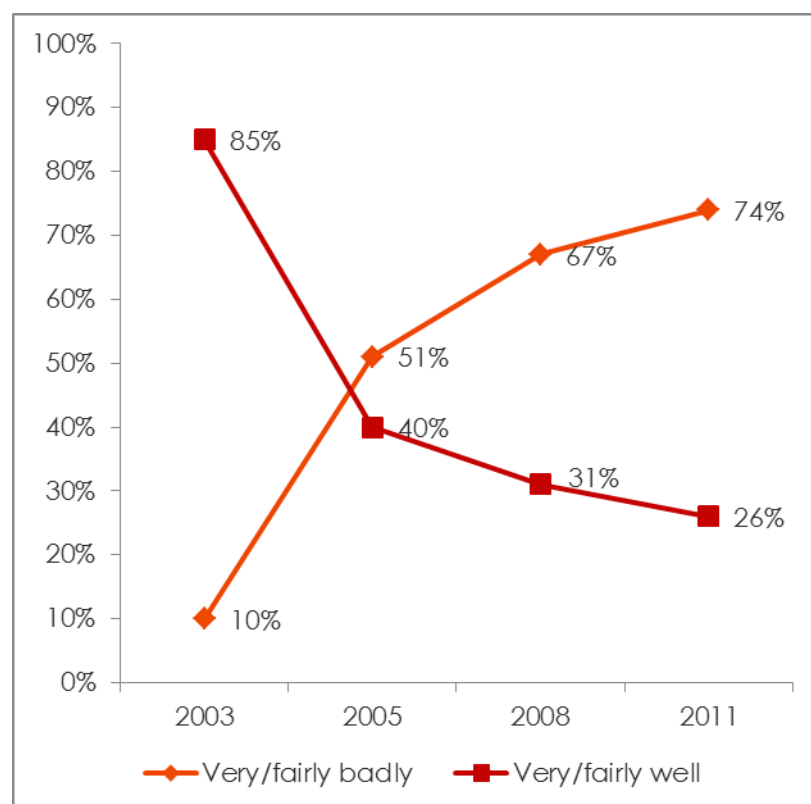
	2003	2005	2008	2011
Worse / Much worse	4%	22%	43%	42%
Same	9%	17%	14%	8%
Better / Much better	77%	47%	32%	36%
Don't know	10%	14%	11%	14%

Respondents were asked: *Looking ahead, do you expect your living conditions in 12 months' time to be better or worse?*

5. Perceptions of corruption

Alongside anxieties about personal living conditions and the economy, perceptions of corruption and governance may be factors contributing to public dissatisfaction with democracy in Kenya. People's perception of the government's handling of corruption dropped from a high level of approval (85%) in 2003 to an approval rating of only 26% in 2011 (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Government's handling of the fight against corruption | 2003-2011



Respondents were asked: *How well or badly would you say the current government is handling fighting corruption in government?*

6. Conclusion

Despite two decades of democratization in Kenya – including the introduction of a multiparty system, the promulgation of a progressive Constitution, and a number of institutional reforms – the levels of popular

satisfaction with Kenya's democracy have been declining dramatically. One possible explanation is that the democratic transition has not yielded tangible economic benefits for the people; survey results show that Kenyans have been growing increasingly negative about their living conditions and pessimistic about the future. This parallel decline in political and economic satisfaction deserves further testing through research, as well as careful attention from political leaders.

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

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