



*June 2008*

**POPULAR ATTITUDES TO DEMOCRACY IN GHANA, 2008**

**Introduction**

Ghana embarked on a transition to democratic rule in the early 1990s after eleven years of quasi-military dictatorship under Ft. Lt. Jerry John Rawlings and the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC). Since then, Ghana has experienced four regularly scheduled multi-party elections (1992, 1996, 2000 and 2004). The third election produced the country's first experience with an electoral turnover. For the first time, power was transferred through the ballot box. Ghana is now headed for its fifth multi-party elections (in December 2008). The election is generally expected to be competitive yet peaceful and its outcome largely credible. Ghana's experience so far makes the country one of the rare cases of stable and reasonably functioning multiparty democracies in Africa and among new democracies globally.

Data from the most recent Afrobarometer survey, together with data from three previous surveys, enable us to assess the progress of Ghanaian democratization. Specifically, we track the following:

- How much support does democracy enjoy among Ghanaians?
- How deep are popular attitudes to democratic politics?
- How satisfied are Ghanaians with the way democracy works in the country?
- What threats does Ghanaian democratization face (if any)?

The Afrobarometer is a comparative series of public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, markets and living conditions. The survey is based on a randomly selected national probability sample of 1200 respondents representing a cross-section of adult Ghanaians aged 18 years or older, which yields a margin of error of  $\pm 2.5$  at a 95 percent confidence level. All interviews are conducted face-to-face by trained fieldworkers in the language of the respondent's choice. Fieldwork for Round 4 of the Afrobarometer in Ghana was undertaken between March 4 and 27, 2008. Note that for purposes of cross-national comparison, the questions on the survey will be administered to random national samples in 19 other African countries before the end of 2008; comparative results will be presented in upcoming briefing and working papers from Afrobarometer Round 4.

Table 1: Sample Distribution

Variable	Categories	Percent/No.
Location Distribution	Urban	45%
	Rural	55%
Gender	Male	50%
	Female	50%
Age	Less than 35 years	50%
	36 – 55	33%
	56 +	16%
	Oldest Respondent	110
Education	Primary	37%
	Secondary/High School	30%
	Tertiary	8%
	No Formal Education	25%
Religion	Christian	77%
	Muslim	16%
	Atheist	2%
	Traditional	3%
	Western	10%
	Central	9%
	Greater Accra	15%
	Volta	9%

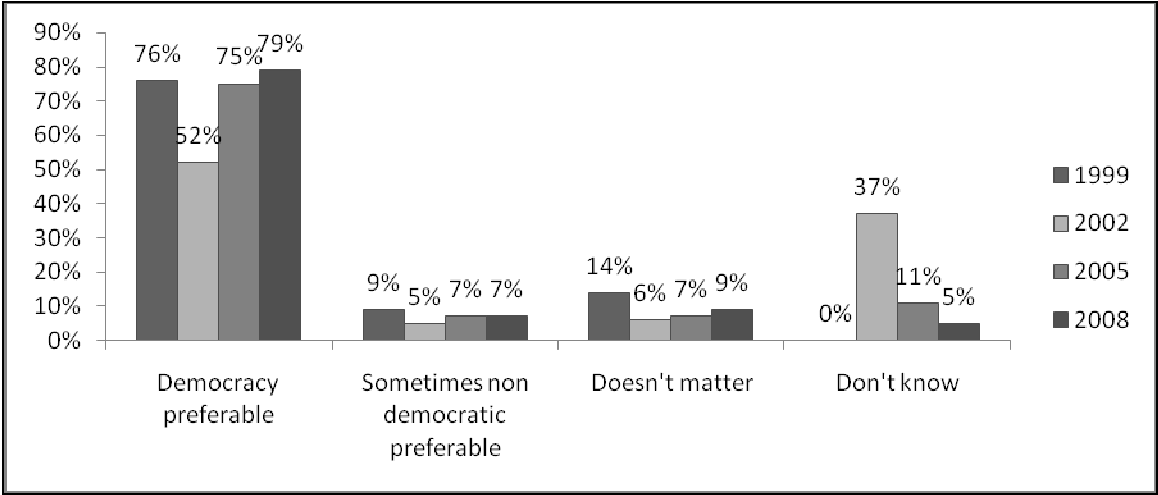
Variable	Categories	Percent/No.
Region	Eastern	11%
	Ashanti	20%
	Brong Ahafo	9%
	Northern	9%
	Upper East	5%
	Upper West	3%

Where applicable, 'don't know' responses are not reported

**Attitudes to democracy:**

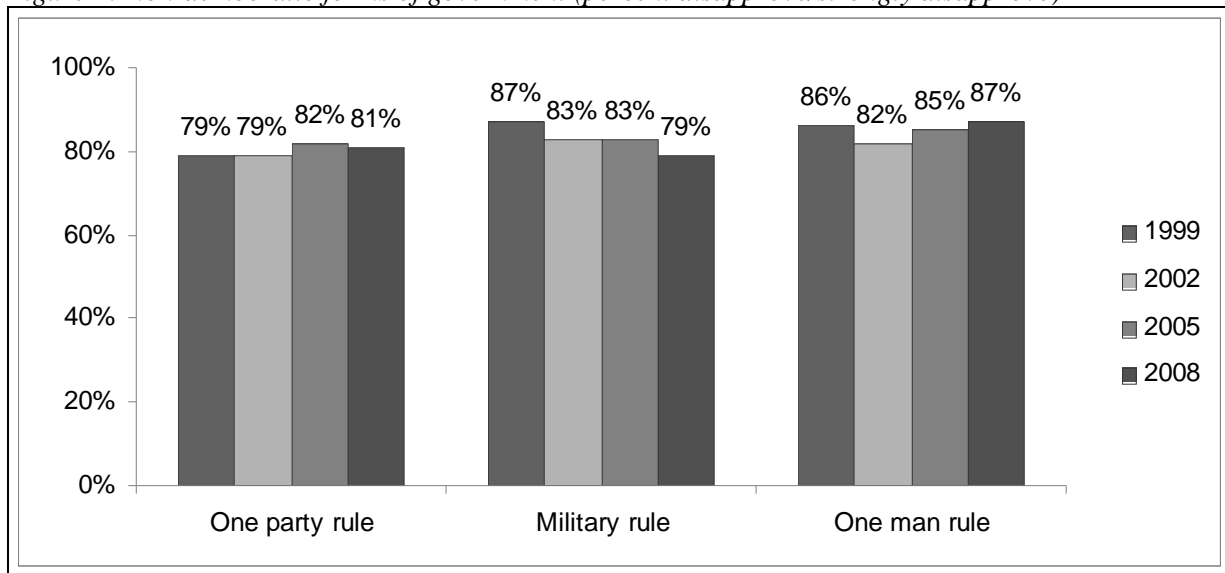
As of March 2008, large majorities of Ghanaians say that they support democracy: nearly 8 in 10 (79 percent) consider democracy as their preferred form of government, representing a 4 percentage point increase over 2005 and the highest rating since 1999 (Figure 1). Because the percentage increase is within the combined margin of error of two Afrobarometer surveys, we conclude that Ghanaian preference for democracy has at least held steady since 2005.

Figure 1: Popular support for democracy (percent saying democracy is preferable)



While endorsing democracy as the preferred form of government, Ghanaians also reject non-democratic regimes. About 8 in 10 disapprove of presidential dictatorship (84 percent); single party rule (81 percent) and military rule (79 percent). Popular rejection of these non-democratic forms of government has remained high in all rounds of the survey, never dropping below 79 percent (Figure 2). However, the rejection rate for the military has declined from 87 percent in 1999 to 79 percent in 2008, which suggests a softening of historical memory with the passage of time.

Figure 2: Non-democratic forms of government (percent disapprove/strongly disapprove)



**But how deep are popular attachments to the values and practices of democratic politics?**

Most Ghanaians (86 percent) endorse the ballot box as the ideal mechanism for choosing leaders. Over time, popular support for elections has remained very high among Ghanaians with 87 percent and 91 percent in 2002 and 2005 respectively expressing support for elections. Moreover, a large majority (71 percent) also endorse multi-party politics, representing a significant jump in support from 2002 when only a slim majority (57 percent) expressed similar sentiments.

Ghanaians also express strong support for the rule of law. Large majorities say the police have the right to make people obey the law (86 percent); that tax authorities have the right to make people pay their taxes (85 percent) and that people must always obey the decisions of courts (70 percent). Moreover, majority (62 percent) say the President must always obey the laws and the courts even if he thinks they are wrong.

Additionally, Ghanaians are opposed to an overly powerful executive: a clear majority of Ghanaians want the president to be answerable to parliament (64 percent); believe the president must obey the decisions of the courts (62 percent); and assign legislative authority to parliament rather than the president (60 percent). Moreover, some 72 percent endorse constitutional limits on presidential tenure. Majority endorsement of presidential term limits has held stable since 2002 when 75 percent of Ghanaians expressed same view.

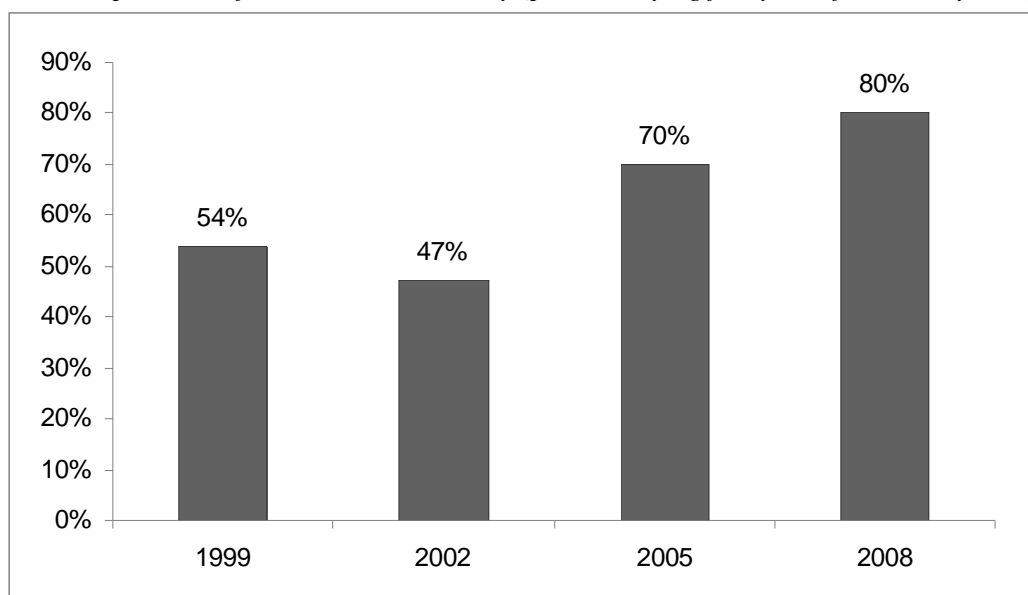
Finally, Ghanaians overwhelmingly endorse free speech and freedom of the media. A large majority (78 percent) say people should be free to speak their minds about politics no matter how unpopular those views might be. In 2005, almost the same proportion (79 percent) expressed the same view. Popular endorsement of press freedom in Ghana jumped from a slim majority (56 percent) in 2005 to a solid majority (68 percent). Similarly, a large majority (75 percent) of Ghanaians say the media should be more vigilant in investigating and reporting on corruption and mistakes made by government. In short, Ghanaians seem to have come to view untrammelled power as offensive.

**But how satisfied are Ghanaians with democratic practice in their country?**

Eight in ten Ghanaians (80 percent) report being fairly or very satisfied with the way democracy works in Ghana. Popular satisfaction with democracy has remained very high and displays an upward trend.

Indeed, satisfaction with democracy jumped by 10 percentage points between 2005 and 2008 and represents the highest level of contentment recorded within the country since 1999 (Figure 3). Indeed, the Afrobarometer has only ever previously noted such high levels of democratic satisfaction in the immediate aftermath of democratic transitions, such as in Nigeria in 1999 and Kenya in 2002. Moreover, rising satisfaction in Ghana stands in marked contrast to a trend in which average satisfaction among Africans fell from a majority to minority sentiment (from 58 to 45 percent) across 18 African countries between 2000 and 2005.

*Figure 3: Popular satisfaction with democracy (percent saying fairly satisfied or very satisfied)*



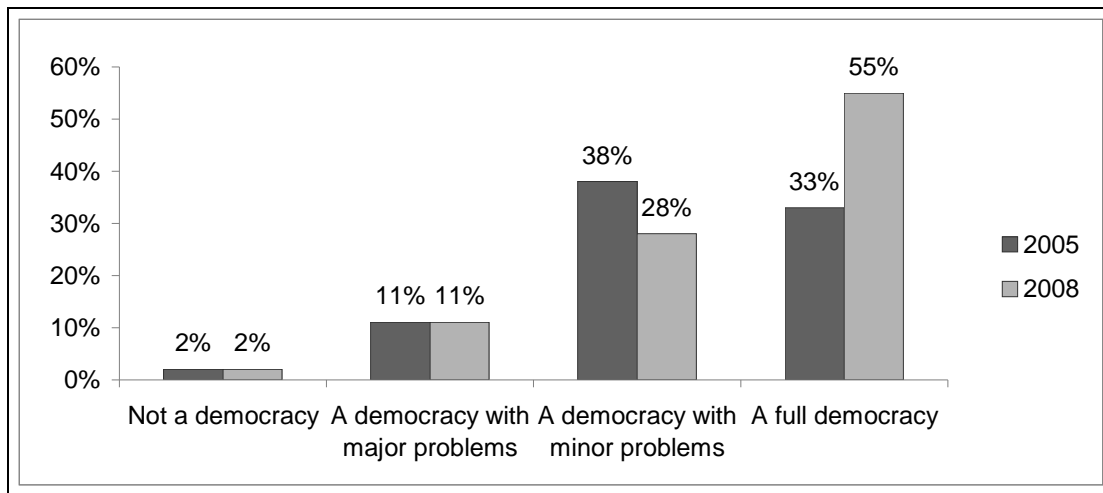
The high level of satisfaction with the practice of democracy in Ghana is underscored by generally positive popular assessments of the degree of democratic freedom enjoyed in the country and high levels popular confidence in key institutions and processes of democratic governance.

Overwhelming majorities believe that they enjoy freedom of choice at the polls (94 percent); associational freedom (94 percent); and freedom of expression (90 percent). In addition, about 70 percent say it is not likely that whistleblowers (people who complain about the poor quality of government services or abuse of funds) would suffer official reprisals.

A high majority expresses confidence in the quality and integrity of elections and the voting process. Most Ghanaians judge the 2004 elections to have been either completely free and fair (61 percent) or free and fair with minor problems (22 percent); 70 percent believe in the efficacy of their votes and nearly 70 percent believe that elections ensure that MPs reflect the views of voters. Similarly, a large majority (79 percent) believes their vote is always secret. Moreover, most Ghanaians (65 percent) believe that multi party competition never or rarely leads to violence, while only a minority (46 percent) in 2005 held the same view. The evidence suggests that successive elections have had a reassuring effect. A solid majority (72 percent) harbor no fear of becoming victims of political intimidation or violence in election campaigns. A large majority believes the president abides by the laws of the country. Nearly 8 in 10 (79 percent) say the president never or rarely ignore the laws of the country compared with 67 percent who held the same view in 2005.

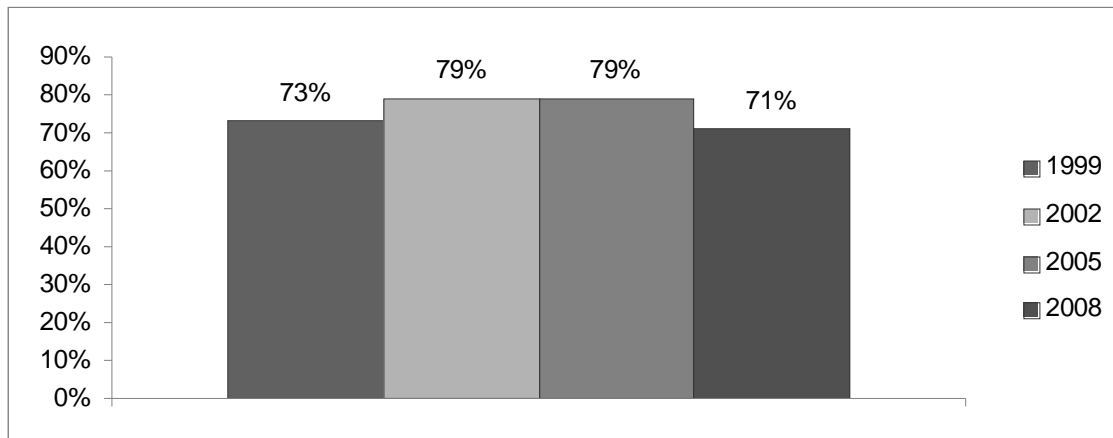
Accordingly, it is not surprising that most Ghanaians believe Ghana is a democracy. A large majority (83 percent) say Ghana is a full democracy or a democracy with minor problems. In fact more than half (55 percent) of Ghanaians believe Ghana is a **full** democracy, compared with only one third (33 percent) who held the same view in 2005 (Figure 4). Remarkably, Ghana is the **only** country covered by the Afrobarometer in which a **majority** of all adults have ever said that they think they live in a **full** democracy. A result of this magnitude has never yet been seen for example, in Botswana, South Africa or Namibia, which are generally rated, along with Ghana, as among Africa's most democratic countries. As such, Ghana can stake a claim to be leading the way in democracy construction in Africa, at least insofar as the opinions of a country's own citizens are concerned.

Figure 4: Evaluation of Ghana's democracy



Similarly, a majority expresses patience with democracy. More than 7 in 10 Ghanaians (71 percent) say the present system of government should be given more time to deal with problems. Indeed, popular patience with democratic reforms has remained consistently high since 1999, with each round of the survey recording not less than 7 in 10 respondents expressing patience with democratic reforms (though this indicator has declined by 8 percentage points between 2005 and 2008 (from 79 percent) (figure 5).

Figure 5: Patience with democratic reforms (percent agree/agree very strongly)



### **Nonetheless, there are some areas of concern with Ghanaian democratization**

Some mass attitudes cast doubt on popular attachments to democracy. For instance, a large majority express feelings of dependence on government: nearly 7 in 10 Ghanaians (69 percent) hold the view that government should serve as a parent in taking care of the people like children, which implies residual acceptance of patronage; and attitudes of subservience to authority are widespread. Nearly half (49 percent) of Ghanaians hold the view that citizens must show more respect for authority compared to less than a quarter (23 percent) in 2005 who held the same view. Thus over time, many Ghanaians prefer to remain uncritical of their leaders.

Moreover, Ghanaians evince a weak sense of civic responsibility. Few Ghanaians (25 percent) think it is the responsibility of voters to ensure that MPs do their jobs once elected; and only 28 percent think it is the responsibility of voters to ensure that the president does his job. These attitudes indicate an extremely weak level of demand for political accountability.

In addition, popular attitudes to nepotism are mixed. It is true that a small majority (53 percent) says leaders represent everybody and should not show favouritism; but more than 4 in 10 Ghanaian (44 percent) currently expect elected officials to help their home communities. .

### **Conclusion**

We conclude Ghanaian democratization is advanced in comparison to many other African countries and generally on a safe course. Popular support for and satisfaction with democracy in Ghana are high and trending upwards since 2002. In addition, Ghanaians continue to endorse several aspects of democratic practice and appear to be attached to democratic values, such as electoral choice and limited government. Nonetheless, there are few areas of concern, especially thinking of the medium to long term future. Levels of civic responsibility and civic engagement are low and some residual authoritarian attitudes prevail.

This Briefing Paper was prepared by CDD-Ghana (<http://www.cddghana.org/>).

The Afrobarometer, a cross-national survey research project, is conducted collaboratively by social scientists from 20 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA), and the Institute for Research in Empirical Political Economy (IREEP, Benin). Several donors support the Afrobarometer's research, capacity building and outreach activities, including the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the Department for International Development (UK), the Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the U.S. Agency for International Development. For more information, see: [www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org)