

AFRO BAROMETER

Working Paper No. 104

**DO FREE ELECTIONS FOSTER CAPABLE
GOVERNMENTS? THE DEMOCRACY-
GOVERNANCE CONNECTION IN AFRICA**

by Michael Bratton

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**Do Free Elections Foster Capable Governments?
The Democracy-Governance Connection in Africa¹**

Abstract

Does democratization lead to improved governance? This exploratory paper addresses this question with reference to a cross-section of sub-Saharan African countries using macro, micro and trend data. The results show an elective affinity between free elections and improved governance. But any democracy advantage is more apparent in relation to some dimensions governance than others. For example, while elections apparently boost the rule of law and control of corruption, they also seem to undercut the transparency of government procedures and the responsiveness of elected officials. To address the debate on causality, the paper compares governance performance before and after electoral alternations, both across countries and in one particular country (Mali). It concludes that, as a rule of thumb for policy sequencing, democracy promotion need not await the prior establishment of a rule of law.

¹ Paper presented at a World Bank/Yale University Workshop on “Managing the Politics of Governance Reform in Africa and the Middle East,” Washington D.C., October 24-26, 2008



Introduction

Over the last two decades, Africa's political environment has opened up. To varying degrees in different countries, military and *de jure* one-party regimes have made way for multiparty competition. To be sure, the quality of new African democracies is often strained. In many countries, fragile multiparty regimes coexist with persistent social conflict, imperfect elections, weak political institutions, and presidents who seek to govern outside the rule of law.

But there is no gainsaying the fact that, over the twenty-year period from 1988 to 2007, sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) became a more democratic region. According to Freedom House, the number of countries designated "not free" dropped by half (from 32 to 14), alongside a doubling of those that moved from "not free" to "partly free" (from 12 to 23). Most importantly, the number of countries that became "free" increased from 2 to 11 (Freedom House 2008; Puddington 2008).¹ Given a low starting point, the rate of political liberalization in the post-Cold War period was actually greater in sub-Saharan Africa than in any other world region apart from the former Soviet bloc (Finkel et al. 2006; Markoff 2009).

But does democratization lead to improved governance? Do freely elected regimes automatically perform better at public management than regimes installed by authoritarian means? Even if multiparty rule offers certain advantages, do these apply equally to all dimensions of governance? And what is the causal direction of any democracy-governance connection? After all, if democratization occurs more commonly in countries that are already relatively well governed, then it would be a mistake to attribute any improvements in governance to political liberalization and free elections.

This exploratory paper seeks preliminary answers to these questions with reference to a cross-section of sub-Saharan African countries in 2005. I examine the democracy-governance connection both at macro level, using aggregate data, and at micro level, drawing on a comparative survey of the attitudes of African citizens. The paper also employs inter-temporal analysis in a bid to advance the debate on causality. I compare perceived governance performance before and after electoral alternations, both across countries and in one particular country (Mali).

A Democracy-Governance Connection?

A valid inquiry into linkages between democracy and governance requires strict independence of key concepts. It is necessary to reject at the outset the conflated, hybrid notion of "democratic governance," which seeks to merge concepts by definition. A more fruitful approach begins by breaking apart the two components and describing each separately. For the purposes of this paper I define *democracy* in minimal, procedural terms as a political regime installed by a free and fair multiparty election in which all contenders accept the results (Collier and Levitsky, 1997). I define *governance* broadly as the act or process of imparting authoritative direction and coordination to organizations in an environment (Hyden and Bratton 1992; Pierre 2000). But I apply the concept narrowly to central governments, excluding global, corporate, civic and local forms of governance (Hirst 2000).

Thus, when the democracy-governance connection is boiled down to operational essentials, we are left with the following research question: Do free elections foster capable governments?

It seems sensible to suppose that the advent of a freely elected political regime would have beneficial consequences for governmental performance. One possible reason is that elections confer political legitimacy: having voted for a government, citizens are more willingly to comply with it, thus reducing the costs of enforcing public policies, especially unpopular ones. Secondly, democratic regimes are installed by means of a mechanism of political equality: one person, one vote. Especially where poverty is widespread, political democratization implies social and economic redistribution, including by making public services more accessible, efficient and equitable. A final and more explicit route from democracy to good



governance concerns political responsiveness. Because political leaders – from local government councilors all the way up to the national president – are subject to reelection after a fixed term of office, they face incentives to attend to the expressed needs of constituents in the intervals between elections.

Of course, democratization may undermine good governance, for example by encouraging populist policy responses that exceed the limits of prudent governance (Huntington 1968; Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007). A transition to democracy may also allow an increase in corruption; since the prospect of open elections raises political insecurity for incumbent elites, they may choose to discount the future by accelerating the rate at which they grab rents (Bates 2008). Or by diffusing power and multiplying the number of potential veto points, the introduction of democratic procedures may make decision-making less transparent and less understandable to ordinary citizens (Tsebelis 2002).

In theorizing mechanisms through which democratic elections might plausibly affect governance, it becomes apparent that governance has multiple aspects. Analysts have long recognized the multidimensionality of the concept. The World Bank Institute, for example, proposes six dimensions ranging from “voice and accountability” to “control of corruption” (Kauffmann et al. 2008). I find this classification useful and employ it in an initial analysis below. But for theoretical and methodological reasons I prefer to further decompose governance along different lines, both to identify additional governance dimensions and to enable operational research using indicators available in Afrobarometer surveys.

My alternate scheme proposes three main types of governance: administrative, economic, and political. Each can be broken down in three ways, making a total of nine dimensions in all.

The *administrative* dimensions of good governance concern:

- (a) *legality* (whether the government observes a rule of law);
- (b) *transparency* (whether government procedures are open for all to see); and,
- (c) *honesty* (whether government officials are free of corruption).

The *economic* dimensions of good governance cover:

- (a) *effectiveness* (whether government is able to attain its stated policy goals);
- (b) *efficiency* (whether public goods are delivered on a cost-effective basis); and,
- (c) *equity* (whether citizens enjoy equality of access to available public goods).

And the *political* dimensions of governance consist of:

- (a) *responsiveness* (whether elected officials act according to popular priorities);
- (b) *accountability* (whether unresponsive public officials can be disciplined); and,
- (c) *legitimacy* (whether citizens willingly obey the government).

A fine-grained framework of this sort allows us to unpack the encompassing notion of governance as a prelude to exploring the possibility that democratization has differential effects. For example, I hypothesize that free elections will boost the political legitimacy of an incumbent government, especially if elections



precipitate an alternation of ruling parties. On the other hand, I expect that elections and alternations offer no guarantees that political representatives will readily respond to popular preferences in the periods between elections. Having presented evidence in support of these hypotheses, this paper concludes by arguing that new African democracies manifest a worrisome “representation gap” between the electorate and representative institutions.

Macro Connections

If the recent wave of free elections in sub-Saharan Africa has fostered gains in the quality of public management, then a general democracy-governance connection should be evident across countries. The availability of aggregate indicators of democracy – e.g. from Freedom House – and governance – e.g. from the World Bank Institute – facilitate such an analysis.

But words of caution are due about the limitations of common data sources (Bollen 1993; Arndt and Oman 2006; Kurtz and Schrank 2007). Take the measurement of democracy. The “Freedom in the World” survey published annually over the past thirty years by Freedom House (FH) evaluates the political rights and civil liberties available to citizens, now across 193 states. It measures the range of voter choices and the enjoyment (or not) of supportive constitutional guarantees. As such, the survey tends to capture the openness of political regimes as experienced within society – that is, popular freedoms – rather than the democratic qualities of political institutions *per se*. Hence, freedom indicators are best supplemented and validated by institutional indicators. The Polity IV Project, for example, distinguishes democratic and autocratic forms of authority (on a scale of +10 to –10) with reference to institutional characteristics like the mode of executive recruitment, the extent of constraints on executive authority, and the degree of political competition (Polity 2008).²

Due to complex dimensionality of the concept of governance, its measurement is not straightforward. The World Governance Indicators (WGI) currently set the methodological standard by providing systematic estimates of relative public sector performance for 212 countries and territories from 1996 onwards. Reflecting inherent imprecision, the World Bank Institute (WBI) provides explicit margins of error for each country estimate. For the purposes of this study, I find utility in just five of the six WGI dimensions of governance: political stability, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption. The sixth dimension – voice and accountability – is based partly on FH scores for civil liberties and political rights (among ten other representative sources). Thus, to reduce possible endogeneity in estimates of the effects of democratization on good governance, I drop the “voice and accountability” dimension of governance.

Table 1 is a summary of the macro-level connections between metrics of democracy – as measured by Freedom House and Polity IV – and the World Governance Indicators. All aggregate data are drawn from the universe of sovereign states in sub-Saharan Africa (N= 48). Cell entries are bivariate correlation coefficients.³

The first result worth noting is that, regardless of the method of measurement, democracy has substantively strong and statistically significant links to governance. Democracy is positively associated with every governance dimension (as these are conceived by the WBI) and with a mean WGI score calculated as an average of five dimensions (excluding “voice and accountability”). Without at this stage imputing directionality to the relationship, a simple macro analysis suggests an apparent elective affinity within African countries between democracy and governance: the more democratic the regime, the better its record at governance.

Second, the strength of this democracy-governance connection depends on the method of measurement. When democracy is measured using FH scores, correlations are systematically stronger than when



democracy is measured using Polity IV indicators. Indeed the FH-WGI coefficients are so large ($r = .774^{***}$ for a mean index, rising to $r = .830^{***}$ when the dimension of “voice and accountability” is included in the index) as to call into question the independence of indicators. Could it be that *all* WBI indicators overlap with FH scores? Stated differently, are the WBI indicators a methodological analog of the hybrid concept of “democratic governance”? One possibility is that the compilers of the WBI source materials inadvertently incorporate knowledge about a country’s status of freedom into their judgments about the quality of its governance. The Polity indicators were developed for a separate purpose and are not employed as a WGI source. Perhaps for this reason, the Polity-WGI coefficients – although positive, strong and significant (mean $r = .545^{***}$) – are more plausible because they provide a greater degree of assurance that democracy and governance were conceived and measured separately.

Table 1: Democracy and Governance: Macro Connections, 2005

World Governance Indicators	Indicators of Democracy	
	Freedom House	Polity IV
Political Stability	.706***	.455***
Government Effectiveness	.730***	.525***
Regulatory Quality	.684***	.488***
Rule of Law	.751***	.526***
Control of Corruption	.693***	.488***
Mean WGI Score, 2005	.774***	.545***

Sources: Freedom House 2008 (N = 48), Polity 2008 (N = 41), World Bank Institute (2008)

Cell entries are bivariate correlation coefficients

*** signifies $p < .001$.

Third, and notwithstanding the method of measurement, there is rough equivalence in the relative importance of democracy to different dimensions of governance. For both FH and Polity, democracy is more closely associated with the *rule of law* and *government effectiveness* than with *regulatory quality* and *control of corruption*. I take this as *prima facie* evidence that, if democratization has formative effects on the subsequent quality of governance (a proposition yet to be confirmed), then it does so more through some governance channels than via others. I would expect, for example, that democracy – a form of constitutional rule requiring regular elections and term limits on office holders – helps to reinforce a rule of law. But precisely because free elections may compel politicians to seek an expanded pool of patronage resources, democratization is less strongly associated with policies to deregulate economic markets or to control corruption. A key purpose of the rest of this paper is to further explore such differential effects.

Micro Connections

So far, macro-level analysis suggests a crude association between democracy and governance, with the strength of the connection dependent on the dimension of governance. This section of the paper seeks to refute, corroborate or refine these results at the micro level using survey data on the popular perceptions of ordinary Africans. Do Africans themselves think they are obtaining good governance? By way of answer, I compare public opinions across democratic and non-democratic regimes.

Data are drawn from 25,397 face-to-face interviews conducted in 2005 during Round 3 of the Afrobarometer. The data are pooled from 18 country surveys, all of which used a standard survey instrument.⁴ Each country is represented by a national probability sample in which every adult citizen had an equal and known chance of inclusion. Sample sizes range from 1161 to 2400 respondents per country, although, in the descriptive statistics reported here, the data are weighted to represent each country equally ($n = 1200$). The margin of sampling error is never more than 3 percent at a 95 percent level of confidence.⁵ Afrobarometer surveys are concentrated in countries that have undergone at least some degree of political and economic liberalization in the last decade. As such, the results represent the continent’s most open



societies and cannot be taken as representative of SSA as a whole.⁶

To measure the extent of democracy, the Afrobarometer asks: “in your opinion, how much of a democracy is (this country) today?” The response options are on a four-point scale: 1 = “not a democracy,” 2 = “a democracy with major problems,” 3 = “a democracy with minor problems,” and 4 = “a full democracy.” For the purposes of this analysis, those whose answers are coded 3 or 4 are held to live in a “democracy”; those whose answers are coded 1 or 2 are said to reside in a “non-democracy.” The distinction between democracies and non-democracies, which appear as column headings in Table 2, is employed as a device to distinguish among popular attitudes toward governance.

To confirm the face validity of Afrobarometer’s democracy indicator, I can report that, in 2005, fully 71 percent of Ghanaians thought that their country was a democracy compared to just 14 percent of Zimbabweans. Moreover, in an external validity test for the same year, AB assessments of the extent of democracy (aggregated to country level) correlate extremely highly with the FH index ($r = .802$), which suggests that citizens and experts come to remarkably similar judgments about each country’s democratic attainments. And, to address the conceptual validity of a minimal, electoral definition of democracy, it is reassuring to discover that public opinion about the quality of the last election (how free and fair was it?) is the best single predictor of whether Africans think that they live in a democracy (Bratton 2007).

The nine dimensions of governance, as defined earlier in this paper, appear as row headings in Table 2. For example, to assess if the government operates within a framework, of *legality* the survey asks whether citizens think “the president usually observes (or often ignores) the constitution.” A strong and significant difference in public opinion is detectable between regime types: in democracies, almost two thirds of citizens (65 percent) perceive a rule of law in the president’s office as compared to less than one half in non-democracies (46 percent). Take another example. To evaluate whether the civil service is *honest*, the survey asks how many public officers are perceived as corrupt. Whereas in democracies just over one quarter of citizens (28 percent) perceive corruption among “most or all” government officials, more than one half (51 percent) do so in non-democracies. In this initial test, therefore, we find no evidence that democratization is associated with higher levels of perceived corruption. Indeed, on this dimension of governance, the positive democracy connection is especially strong.

It is also worth noting that, in democracies, most Africans interviewed (69 percent) consider that their government is *effective* at solving the most important problems in society. When quizzed in open-ended fashion about the nature of these problems, respondents most often mention unemployment, food security, and the paucity of health care. One is struck that affirmative views of administrative capability are at odds with academic portrayals of African governance as an arena of state failure (Rotberg 2004; Bates 2008). To be sure, the survey data reveal variations across regimes – only 45 percent of citizens in non-democracies see the state as effective – but even this result hardly amounts to the journalistic trope of African state collapse. For serious analysis, we require a nuanced portrayal of state failure as a variable quality, whose manifestations are hardly universal across the continent.

Admittedly, democracy’s association is weaker on other dimensions of governance. According to the 2005 Afrobarometer data, the public sees more fragile linkages to government *efficiency*, procedural *transparency*, and regime *legitimacy*. To be sure, all these relationships are positive and statistically significant, suggesting an underlying democracy advantage; but they are feebler than democracy’s association with a rule of law and official probity. For example, in both democracies and non-democracies, majorities within the national adult population think that public services are easily accessible (64 and 51 percent) and that the government should always be obeyed, despite whether an individual voted for it (90 and 84 percent). As such – and, like effectiveness, perhaps surprisingly – perceptions of government efficiency and regime legitimacy are widespread across a range of regime types in Africa, including electoral autocracies.



Table 2: Democracy and Good Governance: Micro Connections, 2005
Popular Perceptions in 18 African Countries

Dimension of Governance	Indicator	Democracy ¹	Non-Democracy ²	R (Democracy) ₃	R (Free Elections) ³
Legality				.268***	.216***
	The president usually observes constitution	65	46		
	The president often ignores constitution	16	36		
Effectiveness				.265***	.253***
	Government can solve most important problems	69	45		
	Government cannot solve important problems	31	55		
Efficiency				.160***	.152***
	Public services are easily accessible	64	51		
	Public services are difficult to obtain	36	49		
Equity				.207***	.173***
	Government usually treats people equally	56	37		
	Government often treats people unequally	44	63		
Transparency				.102***	.069***
	Government procedures are easy to understand	21	17		
	Government procedures are too complicated	64	71		
Responsiveness				.172***	.139***
	Elected representatives usually try to listen	30	18		
	Elected representatives often fail to listen	70	82		
Accountability				.262***	.240***
	Elections allow the removal of poor leaders	51	31		
	Elections do not ensure the will of the people	28	48		
Honesty				.280***	.286***
	No or few government officials are corrupt	72	49		
	Most or all government officials are corrupt	28	51		
Legitimacy				.088***	.108***
	The government must always be obeyed	90	84		
	If you did not vote for a govt., you need not obey	9	13		

Cell entries are percentages of adults surveyed. Calculated using binary or 3-point scales. Totals may not add to 100 where “don’t know” are not reported. *** signifies $p < .001$

¹ Respondents regard the political regime as a full democracy or a democracy with minor problems

² Respondents regard the political regime as having major problems or not a democracy at all

³ Pearson’s product moment correlation coefficient (range 0-1), calculated using full variable ranges (i.e. 4 and 5 point scales)

Citizens in democratic regimes also see a slight advantage with regard to the *transparency* of governmental operations, thus undermining the hypothesis about the complicating effects of veto points. Perhaps press freedoms help to offset shortages of information. But it is worth noting that majorities everywhere, regardless of the type of political regime in which Africans live, regard government procedures as too complex to fully understand (64 and 71 percent). Reportedly, the process of political decision-making is relatively more transparent in Africa’s emergent democratic regimes but, even there, this dimension of governance remains opaque to almost two thirds of citizens.

I end this stage of microanalysis with observations about the centrality of free elections to the associations with governance that I have just described. The last column of Table 2 depicts coefficients when the nine governance dimensions are correlated with popular African perceptions of the freeness and fairness of the last national election in their country. Without exception, the perceived quality of elections generates predictions about governance with the same sign and statistical significance as a broader democracy standard. Since democracy is more than mere elections, the observed relationships may not always be quite



as strong, as visible on seven of the nine dimensions of governance. But, importantly, citizens seem to see a *direct* line of connection between free and fair elections and two leading elements of governance: control of corruption and the legitimacy of government. Stated differently, high quality elections seem to give citizens confidence that abuse of public office will be reigned in and that official policy directives ought to be obeyed.

The Arrow of Causality

So far, this paper has established a democracy-governance connection in sub-Saharan Africa at both macro and micro levels. But correlation is not causation. To establish the direction of any arrow of attribution, it is necessary to ask: Is democracy in Africa built on the foundation of strong states that have already established a semblance of capable governance? Or – in the key question for this paper – does the installation of multiparty electoral democracies in Africa create conditions for improvements in public governance?

The preponderance of relevant theory in political science suggests that state building, including the governance function of effective policy implementation, is a prerequisite of democratization. Linz and Stepan stake out a definitive position: “No modern polity can become democratically consolidated unless it is first a state” (1996, 7). Rose and Shin add that new democracies tend to be unstable because they democratize “backwards,” that is, by introducing mass elections without prior benefit of modern state institutions, including a rule of law and a working bureaucracy (2001). With reference to Yugoslavia among other places, Mansfield and Snyder contend that, lacking foundational political order, new democracies are more susceptible to conflict than stable autocracies (2005), a proposition pertinent to sub-Sahara’s conflict-prone settings.

I am persuaded by the powerful argument that democracy can hardly be established in the absence of political order. Simply stated, the existential dilemma for an African citizen is this: why should she turn out to vote in a founding election if, in so doing, she risks being intimidated, assaulted or killed? The establishment of political order requires a capable state that can, without abuse, assert authority throughout a territory. One irreducible requirement of such authority is that citizens voluntarily comply with state commands, thus granting legitimacy to rulers. But what better way has been found to establish political legitimacy in the modern world than the through the installation of rulers in open and competitive elections? In other words, democratization may itself be a prerequisite for well-governed and consolidated states.

The question of which comes first – democracy or governance? – has found expression in the so-called “sequencing” debate among democracy scholars and practitioners. Thomas Carothers argues that, because “persuading people to defer their ambition to vote in a free election is most often not an option,” democracy promoters should not “put...off for decades or indefinitely the core element of democratization – fair and open processes of political competition and choice” (2007, 23 and 25). Rather than “sequentialism” (rule of law first, elections second), Carothers favors what he calls “gradualism,” which involves slowly creating conditions for free and fair elections wherever possible. Indeed, “prescribing more rule of law...as the basis for eventual democratization gets it backwards: more democratization is vital to strengthening the rule of law” (2007, 17). Those democratic theorists who see the rule of law as a pillar of democracy support this view (O’Donnell 2004; Diamond and Morlino 2005).

Testing the sequencing debate against African materials, Bratton and Chang (2006) find some support for both sides. On one hand, they report that democratic regimes (measured as FH’s “free” countries) have only ever arisen in stronger African states (that is, with an above-average WGI mean score). In other words, the continent’s 11 current democracies – from Benin to South Africa – are all erected on a foundation of states that enjoy relative capacity to create political order, govern through legal means, and control corruption. On the other hand, these researchers employ a simultaneous equations model to show that the relationship



between state building and democratization is thoroughly recursive. Not only do strong states breed democratic regimes but, in turn, democratic regimes foster the law enforcement capacity and political legitimacy necessary for good governance. By demonstrating statistically that the establishment of a rule of law is an implicit product of democratization, Bratton and Chang make a case that democratization can come first.

Electoral Alternation

In this paper, I build on this groundwork by devising two additional tests of causality in the democracy-governance relationship. On the common assumption that prior events are candidate causes for subsequent outcomes, both tests involve the factor of elapsed time. Each makes reference to the concept of electoral alternation, or the peaceful transfer of power from one ruling party to another by means of a free and fair election. Sometimes called a “turnover” of governments, alternation is a relatively infrequent outcome in African elections, having occurred some 43 times across 232 elections between 1989 and 2003 (Lindberg 2006, 79).

I start by observing that electoral alternation boosts mass commitments to democracy, both on the demand side and (especially) in terms of popular estimates of the supply of democracy (Bratton 2004). Indeed, by demonstrating that incumbency is not forever, alternation deepens democracy by giving both electoral winners and electoral losers an incentive to support the rules of the democratic game. It seems reasonable to wonder whether, as a core attribute of democratization, a turnover of political elites also contributes to improved governance. For the first test, I therefore propose that an electoral alternation will be followed in time by positive upward increments in indicators of good governance.

Table 3 presents largely supportive evidence. In column headings, I first distinguish African countries that underwent an electoral alternation at any time *after* the country’s founding multiparty election but *before* the Afrobarometer measured perceptions of governance in 2005.⁷ An alternation is scored as 1, its absence as 0. In eight out of nine cases, significant differences in popular perceptions of governance performance are evident for citizens in countries that experienced alternations. In six out of these nine cases, differences run in the expected direction. For example, citizens who experienced a democratic turnover were significantly *more* likely to regard the government as *effective* at problem solving. And, by the same token, experience with alternation made citizens *less* likely to regard all or most public officials as *corrupt*.

But there are anomalies. The coefficients for three dimensions of governance have unexpected signs. One is not statistically significant: the occurrence of an electoral alternation seemingly makes no difference to popular perceptions of *equity* in treatment by government. But two dimensions of governance – *transparency* and *responsiveness* – stand in significant *negative* relationships to democratization. Even after democracy begins to take root through peaceful electoral alternation, citizens are apparently *less* likely to find government procedures easy to understand or to consider that elected representatives listen to them. Perhaps citizens remain uncertain about the exact roles that elected representatives are supposed to play. Or they soon discover that novice occupants of these offices are even less responsive than the leaders they replace. These inverted democracy-governance relationships, although hardly strong, nonetheless raise red flags about possible areas of governance in which an elective affinity with democratization begins to break down.

To further explore the connection between democratic turnover and good governance, I specify the time elapsed since the last electoral alternation. I assume that any democratizing effects will be strongest right after an election that rotates leaders, but that such effects will decay with the passage of time. Time is counted as the number of months between the last electoral alternation (or December 1989 in countries where there is no post-transition alternation) and December 2007. If temporal proximity to alternation



actually matters, then the signs on relevant governance coefficients should be negative (that is, shorter lapses equal greater effects). The only exception is honesty, which is measured by its inverse, corruption. The expected result is obtained for seven of nine governance dimensions. It is notable that perceptions of government *effectiveness* and *legitimacy* receive especially strong boosts from electoral alternation.

The only anomaly is *responsiveness*, which has an unexpected positive sign. I read this to mean that the longer the passage of time after an alternation, the more elected representatives learn to listen. Perhaps the newcomers who are installed in legislatures and local government councils as a result of a power shift gradually learn how to do their jobs, which include responding to the demands of their constituents. But, as the next section shows, it may be premature to come to such an optimistic conclusion.

**Table 3: Electoral Alternation and Governance:
Popular Perceptions in 18 African Countries, 2005**

Dimension of Governance	Indicator	Country has had an Electoral Alternation ¹	Sign ³	Time Elapsed since last Electoral Alternation ²	Sign ³
Legality	The president usually observes constitution	.056***	E	-.033***	E
Effectiveness	Government can solve most important problems	.109***	E	-.151***	E
Efficiency	Public services are easily accessible	.040***	E	-.010	E, ns
Equity	Government treats people equally now (vs. before)	-.011	U, ns	-.056***	E
Transparency	Government procedures are easy to understand	-.074***	U	-.089***	E
Responsiveness	Elected representatives listen	-.065***	U	.086***	U
Accountability	Elections are efficacious	.071***	E	-.026***	E
Honesty	Most or all government officials are corrupt	-.068***	E	.033***	E
Legitimacy	The government must always be obeyed	.123***	E	-.141***	E

Cell entries are Pearson's product moment correlation coefficients (R, range 0-1), calculated using full variable ranges (i.e. 4 and 5 point scales). *** signifies $p < .001$.

¹ Scored 1 for electoral alternation if any presidential election after 1989 leads to a turnover of ruling parties, 0 if not. Legislative elections are used in parliamentary systems.

² Counted as the number of months elapsed from the last electoral alternation (or December 1989 where there is no alternation) to December 2007.

³ E = expected sign, U = unexpected sign, ns = relationship not statistically significant.

The Case of Mali

The previous section of this paper unearthed trace evidence that an electoral alternation – an event that signals the deepening of democracy – has positive causal impact on the perceived quality of governance. While this result takes the passage of time into account, it is based on a cross-sectional research design, which compares average citizen attitudes to governance in groups of countries “with and without” alternation. We still do not know whether these average results apply equally to all African countries or whether specific changes in governance are discernible in particular countries over time.

One solution is to devise a “before and after” test of governance conditions in a given country, with a



democratic alternation as the pivotal event. But which country? Out of the eight countries in the Afrobarometer that have undergone alternation, there is only one in which survey data are available on relevant governance indicators both before and after such a landmark event. That country is Mali. Mali experienced electoral alternation in May 2002, when Amadou Toumani Touré (known colloquially as A.T.T.) – a former military leader who had earlier helped pave the way for Mali’s transitional multiparty elections – won presidential elections without, at the time, a party label or organization. Applicable data for Mali are found in Afrobarometer Round 1 of January 2001 (the “before” survey) and Round 2 of November 2002 (the “after” survey).

Mali is an interesting case in its own right. The country has embarked on an experiment in decentralized democracy against a legacy of centralized governance inherited from ancient kingdoms, French colonial administration and, after independence in 1960, military and one-party regimes. By the end of the 1980s, students and public employees signaled their displeasure with postcolonial leaders who had violently repressed opposition, confiscated food surpluses from the countryside, and failed to pay public salaries and student stipends. With the help of the military, these popular forces ousted the then president, Moussa Traoré, and convened competitive elections that, in May 1992, voted Alpha Omar Konaré into the national presidency with a mandate for political and economic change (Vengroff 1993; Smith 2001; Clark 2001).

Elected governments have since accumulated a mixed record. The major political achievement was a negotiated peace agreement with guerrilla forces of the semi-nomadic Touareg peoples of Mali’s northern zone, which culminated in the symbolic burning of weapons of war in a 1996 Flame of Peace ceremony (Poulton and Youssouf, 1998). Through personal example, Presidents Konaré (who stepped down after two terms) and Touré (who has since attracted a coalition of parties known as the Alliance for Democracy and Progress, ADP) have sought to cultivate a culture of democracy. Their policies have allowed regular citizen *concertations* on policy matters and the formation of the most vibrant network of community radio stations in West Africa. The government of Mali aims at a comprehensive decentralization program that, once fully implemented, would give some 700 elected communes substantial control over local budgetary, developmental, and environmental affairs (Davis, 2000; Seeley, 2001; Ouedraogo 2003).

Not all has gone well, however, especially on the governance front. Citing poor organization of voter registration, the Constitutional Court annulled the first round of the 1997 presidential elections and opposition parties subsequently called for election boycotts. Voter turnout in Mali remains among the lowest in the world. Local government polls were repeatedly delayed and not completed until 1999. Within the public service, too many officials still see themselves as directive “state functionaries” rather than responsive “civil servants,” while others have failed to wean themselves from habits of rent seeking. Because the capacity of the central government remains weak, many citizens rarely come into contact with the state. And, because decentralization was undertaken from the top down according to a standardized administrative blueprint – for example, all villages in a given territory, regardless of cultural traditions, are grouped together into rural communes – local government programs have not won popular support everywhere.

Some of these political dynamics are reflected in the survey data from Mali. Table 4 shows changes in public opinion along the nine dimensions of governance from surveys before and after the May 2002 elections that led to a turnover of rulers. Because the margin of sampling error is plus or minus 3 percent for each survey, I infer changes in opinion only if there is a 6 percentage-point difference across surveys. By this criterion, Malians perceived no discernible change in the equity (up just 3 points) or transparency (down just 2 points) of governance procedures that could be attributed to a democratic alternation.

Other alternation effects are much clearer. Most strikingly, the *legitimacy* of the government – measured as a popular willingness to abide by official commands – registers a 36-point upsurge. Whereas in January 2001 fewer than half of Malian adults (42 percent) agreed that the government had a right to demand citizen



compliance, by November 2002 more than three quarters (78 percent) felt this way. Admittedly, the question in the second survey mentioned specific institutions: the courts, the police, and the tax department rather than “the government” writ large. While these stricter criteria could have inflated the observed difference across time, they could just as easily have reduced it. In any event, a virtual doubling of the proportion of the population who regard the authorities as legitimate constitutes powerful evidence of the impact of leadership alternation by means of a free election.

Other changes of opinion mark incremental improvements in governance. In the post-alternation environment in Mali, citizens are significantly more likely to think that public services are more *efficient* (plus 9 points), that the president bases decisions on a foundation of *legality* (plus 8 points), and that official *corruption* is in decline (minus 7 points).

Notably, however, a “before and after” comparison in Mali reveals that electoral alternation has *negative* effects on the *responsiveness* of elected officials. This incongruous result repeats a pattern seen earlier in cross-sectional analysis. In the case of Mali, the proportion of adults who thought themselves able to make representatives listen to their needs in January 2001 (36 percent) was more than halved by November 2002 (15 percent). Again, there were slight variations in question wording: Afrobarometer Round 1 referred to “a community” and Round 2 to “people like you,” but in each case the root of the question asked whether or how often these groups were “able to make...elected representatives...listen.” While not identical, the questions were at least conceptually equivalent. In any event, a 21-point gap between pre- and post-alternation observations is almost certain to reflect a real diminution in the receptiveness of elected leaders to constituent needs in the aftermath of a landmark election.

This finding draws attention to a *representation gap* in new African democracies. African citizens have high expectations about the amount of time that legislative representatives should spend on constituency service: on average, some 12 percent unrealistically think that MPs should reside in their electoral districts “all the time,” more so in places like Mali (19 percent) and Malawi (26 percent). Yet citizens estimate that, in practice, only 3 percent of MPs actually establish a permanent presence. The rest are judged to stay away for longer periods of time and, on average, 35 percent are held to “never” visit the district (Mali represents the Afrobarometer norm in this respect). The representation gap can be measured by subtracting citizen estimates of the amount of time MPs *actually* spend with constituents from the amount of time citizens think they *should* spend. Whereas three quarters (76 percent) think it reasonable that MPs ought to visit constituents at least once per month, only one quarter (26 percent) say that they actually do so.

A huge 50-point representation gap (with Mali again exactly representing the Afrobarometer mean) bespeaks African electorates estranged from their leaders. Explanations for this democratic shortfall are plentiful. The representation gap could be a function of electoral systems based on proportional representation, for instance where representatives on national party lists are not tied to any defined electoral district (Mattes 2008). Or the gap could result from patronage demands that representatives encounter every time they set foot in their home districts, a deluge whose volume provides strong incentives to shirk constituency service (Davies 2008). Or the gap could reflect a lack of effective popular demand for vertical accountability; one third of African citizens are willing to delegate to national presidents the authority for “making sure MPs do their jobs” (Bratton and Logan 2009). Whatever the reason, the accumulated evidence suggests that responsiveness by elected officials is the weakest link in the chain that connects democracy to good governance.



Table 4: The Effects of Electoral Alternation on Good Governance
Popular Perceptions in Mali, 2001-2002

Dimension of Governance	Indicator	Before Alternation (Jan. 2001)¹	After Alternation (Nov. 2002)²	Change
Legality	The president usually observes constitution	55 ³	63	+8
Effectiveness	Government can solve most important problems	55	61	+6
Efficiency	Public services are easily accessible	49	58	+9
Equity	Government treats people equally now (vs. before)	14	17	+3
Transparency	Government procedures are easy to understand	27	25	-2
Responsiveness	Citizens are able to make representatives listen	36	15	-21 ⁴
Accountability	Elected representatives look after citizen interests	49	55	+6
Honesty	Most or all government officials are corrupt	66	53	+7 ⁴
Legitimacy	The government has a right to demand compliance	42	78	+36 ⁴

Cell entries are percentages of adults surveyed.

¹ An alternation of leader and ruling coalition occurred in Mali's presidential election of May 2002. See text for details. Afrobarometer Round 1 in Mali (the "before" survey) was conducted prior to this event, namely in January and February 2001 (N = 2089).

² Afrobarometer Round 2 in Mali (the "after" survey) was conducted following the electoral alternation, namely in October and November 2002 (N = 1283).

³ The question on legality was not asked in Afrobarometer Round 1. Thus the cross-national average for 16 countries in Round 2 (2002) is used as a point of comparison for Mali in 2002.

⁴ Values may embody minor changes in question wording or response categories. For details see text.

Conclusion

In this paper I have tried to disentangle democratization from governance reform in sub-Saharan Africa. Beyond having a vague sense that these political and administrative processes are somehow related, policy planners rarely know which to tackle first or which dimensions of governance are more susceptible to reform in multiparty settings.

Having defined and measured democracy and governance separately, I have shown consistent patterns of association. Various sorts of African evidence – macro, micro and temporal – indicate that there is indeed an elective affinity between free elections and improved governance.

Nonetheless, the democracy connection is more consistent in relation to some dimensions of good governance than others, namely:

(1) *Administrative dimensions.* Democratic elections are linked more strongly and consistently to the establishment of a *rule of law* and the *control of corruption* than to the attainment of *transparency* in decision-making procedures.

(2) *Economic dimensions.* Whatever the test, democracy and elections have surprisingly strong and consistent associations with governmental *effectiveness*. But the links to *efficiency* and (especially) *equity* in



public goods provision are less reliable.

(3) *Political dimensions.* Unsurprisingly, democratic elections are closely associated with *legitimate* and *accountable* governance, especially so where elections lead to peaceful alternations of rulers. Unexpectedly, however, democratic elections do not reliably guarantee that elected leaders will subsequently be more *responsive* to their constituents.

The paper also offers evidence to support the claim that democratization and good governance are mutually constitutive. On one hand, democracies emerge more readily on the foundations of a steady and orderly state. But, by instituting a rule of law and providing electoral legitimacy, democratization also contributes to the consolidation of state institutions and good governance. As a rule of thumb for policy sequencing, therefore, democracy promotion need not await the prior establishment of a rule of law.

Other recommendations to governance practitioners include:

- (1) Continue to promote free and competitive elections, for example by strengthening the management of independent electoral management bodies;
- (2) Promote greater openness and transparency in government operations, for instance through freedom of information legislation, media pluralism, and civic education;
- (3) Aim at greater equity in public goods provision with particular emphasis on the needs of poor and marginalized communities; and
- (4) Introduce measures to allow closer citizen monitoring of public officials, for example through electoral system reform, participatory budgeting, and popular oversight of service delivery.



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Endnotes

¹ Benin, Botswana, Cape Verde, Ghana, Lesotho, Mali, Mauritius, Namibia, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, South Africa.

² The FH and Polity IV scores for all available SSA countries in 2005 are correlated at $r = .888^{***}$

³ *Polity IV (N=41) excludes island states – Cape Verde, Seychelles, Sao Tome and Principe – and does not offer a regime score for states in conflict. In 2005, these states were Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia and Sudan.*

⁴ Benin, Botswana, Cape Verde, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

⁵ The large size of the pooled sample means that measures of association easily qualify as statistically significant at conventional levels of 0.05 or even 0.01. We therefore use a more rigorous standard for the pooled data by reporting significance only at $p = < 0.001$.

⁶ For more information on the Afrobarometer, visit the website at www.afrobarometer.org.

⁷ There were eight such countries (alternation dates in parentheses): Cape Verde (February 01), Ghana (December 02), Kenya (December 2002), Madagascar (December 2001), Mali (May 2002), and Senegal (March 2000). For the purposes of this study, Lesotho (May 2002) and Malawi (May 2004) were included, even though these countries experienced only partial alternations: presidents formed new parties so ruling parties turned over even though the chief political executive remained the same. Benin was excluded since its latest alternation – the accession to power of independent presidential candidate, Yayi Boni – took place in March 2006, that is, *after* the Round 3 Afrobarometer survey.



