Drivers of Satisfaction with Democracy in Africa

By Lexi Shechtel

Democracy in Africa is a relatively new and often unstable institution. Collective buy-in (support for and satisfaction with) democracy can help ensure the future of democratic regimes. Using regression analysis of data from the Afrobarometer, this paper explores what factors most affect African satisfaction with democracy. The most crucial factor is for a government to be seen as handling the tasks and challenges of governing well, followed in importance by the delivery of political goods such as freedom of speech. In contrast to the prevailing literature, corruption and bribery are not statistically important drivers of satisfaction with democracy.

Broad based political participation remains a key part of successful democratic transition in Africa.
Throughout the world, the pressure is on authoritarian and hybrid regimes to transition to or consolidate democracy. Governance issues can affect aid given to developing countries by the World Bank or the Millennium Challenge Corporation, and the UN has a special fund for democracy. Moreover, democracy is seen by Western leaders as "front and center of Africa’s future". In a July 2009 speech in Ghana, US President Barack Obama said that "development depends upon good governance. That is the ingredient which has been missing in far too many places, for far too long. That is the change that can unlock Africa’s potential." In Africa, countries often slide back and forth between regime types and levels of freedom (as has happened with Ghana, Kenya, Zimbabwe, among many others). One of the most important aspects of maintaining a democracy is public opinion. In fact, "the stability of a democratic nation has long been thought to rest on its level of legitimacy among the mass public." Larry Diamond writes that "democracies have been undone... when they lost or failed to build legitimacy." Satisfaction with democracy is an important measure of public legitimacy. Diamond specifies that when the public "comes to believe the system of government lacks the moral authority to rule," the system, particularly a democratic one, can become threatened. But what drives this satisfaction? What is most important for governments to do in order to court popular satisfaction? This paper will use regression analysis of Afrobarometer public opinion data in order to determine which aspects of perceived government performance are most vital to public satisfaction with democracy. How do political performance, delivery of political goods, and perceived corruption impact satisfaction with democracy? Delineation of these categories into narrower aspects of governance aids in understanding specifically what matters for satisfaction with democracy.

**BACKGROUND**

It is important to first draw a distinction between support for democracy and satisfaction with democracy. "Support for democracy" is an abstract judgment about views on democracy as a form of government. Satisfaction of government refers to "an assessment of the concrete performance of elected governments" and is a much more concrete measure. All over the world, satisfaction with democracy lags behind support for democracy, meaning that actual governments fail to live up to the ideals of their citizens. This is especially true in Africa, where the gap between "support for democracy" and "satisfaction with democracy" is seventeen percentage points, larger than other regions with new democracies. Certainly, some disillusionment is setting in after successful transitions to democracies in several countries. This paper will address how democratic governments can avoid creating this gap and attempt to keep satisfaction high and legitimize their administration and the very idea of democracy.

Before ascertaining levels of satisfaction with democracy (SWD), an African definition of democracy must be established. Afrobarometer respondents see democracy in both procedural and substantive terms. Seventy percent of respondents (free to answer in their own words) listed political procedures such as the protection of human rights and voting as defining democracy. Only one fifth of respondents mentioned substantive outcomes like justice, equality, or economic development. Even in terms of these substantive measures, respondents associated democracy more with the delivery of political goods than economic goods. This implies that satisfaction with democracy will depends on political goods and institutions rather than on substantive outcomes.

Consistent with this idea, Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi posit that a 'performance evaluation' construct is the correct framework for determinants of satisfaction with democracy. They discuss five possible explanations for regime support. Sociological, cultural, and institutional explanations, as well as awareness of public affairs, are important, but the most salient is 'performance evaluations'. The performance evaluation construct holds that Africans act rationally to advance their interests and "if people see leaders and governments as effective at delivering desired goods and services, then they will give backing to liberalized regimes." This construct implies that delivery of goods affects satisfaction with democracy.

The literature suggests that delivery of political goods is more relevant than that of economic goods in driving satisfaction with democracy. Bratton, Mattes,
& Gyimah-Boadi point out that political goods are far easier for governments with at least some authority to achieve. Empirical findings support the idea that while delivery of both economic and political goods is important for satisfaction with democracy, politics matter more. Bratton and Mattes find that performance in delivery of both economic and political goods together explain between one quarter and two fifths of the variance in expressed satisfaction in three African countries (in a 1996-8 survey). However, trust in the government and the delivery of political goods were more important than the delivery of economic goods. Political institutions can also affect satisfaction with democracy in Latin America and Europe. This paper aims to desegregate the broad category of "political goods" and discover what exactly a government should do to encourage SWD.

Finally, the values of a society can affect support for, satisfaction with, and expectations of democracy. The literature holds that self-expression values emphasizing tolerance, trust, political activism, and freedom, rather than survivorship values developed in oppressive regimes, are essential for creating robust democracies. Preferences for democratic values, which can be culturally induced, can help explain the expectations of democracy and therefore satisfaction with democracy. Those societies with self-expression value systems (which correlates highly with effectiveness of democracy) may value the democratic institutions enough to ignore or put up with poor outcomes after transitions. Alternatively, these people may have higher expectations for democracies and may therefore be its harshest critics. Controlling for education and other demographic characteristics is therefore important, as these characteristics could affect attitudes, which affect SWD.

The Afrobarometer

The Afrobarometer is an "independent, nonpartisan research project that measures the social, political, and economic atmosphere in Africa." Surveys are designed by African think-tanks in cooperation with Michigan State University and administered by partners in each country. Surveys are conducted in 21 countries across the continent every two or three years (the 4 rounds of the survey occurred in 2000, 2003, 2005, and 2008). The standard questionnaire allows for comparisons across countries and over time.

This paper will use Round 3 data from 2005. Although there was a fourth round in 2008, this data is not yet fully publicly available. Previous rounds of the survey will not be used, because earlier surveys do not include some of the countries that appear in round 3. Also, since the same people are not surveyed in each round, using earlier surveys doesn’t allow time series data, it simply provides a larger N. Since N is 25,000 for just Round 3, including earlier rounds adds complications (the questions are numbered differently and survey different groups of countries) but no real benefits.

In order to assess satisfaction with democracy, only African democracies are analyzed. The Polity IV democracy index is used to indicate which Afrobarometer countries are democracies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Democracy</th>
<th>Non-Democracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benin</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Botswana</td>
<td>Tanzania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Verde</td>
<td>Uganda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>Zambia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesotho</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Madagascar</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Malawi</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mozambique</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Namibia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Countries need a 6 on this scale to qualify as a democracy. Using this measure qualifies Benin, Botswana, Cape Verde, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Senegal, and South Africa. This totals 13 countries spread across Sub-Saharan Africa.

Methodology

The dependent variable is the answer to the Afrobarometer question "Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in [country]?" Options: Very satisfied, Fairly satisfied, Not very satisfied, Not at all satisfied. I coded this question so the "not a democracy" "not satisfied" and "not very satisfied" corresponded to a score of 0 and "fairly satisfied" and "very satisfied" corresponded to 1.
The independent variables are answers to the following questions in the main indices. I have chosen questions that deal with corruption, delivery of political goods, and political performance, which are things that the government can theoretically control. Each question forms a sub-index, and questions are aggregated to form three main indices. Each response is coded to a corresponding numerical value in order to run regressions.

**Main Index 1: Corruption**

This index is formed by the following two questions.

1. **Corruption sub-index** How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or have you not heard enough about them to say?
   None, Some of them, Most of them, All of them
   - A. The President and Officials in his Office
   - B. Members of Parliament
   - C. Elected Local Government Councilors
   - D. National Government Officials
   - E. Local Government Officials
   - F. Police
   - G. Tax Officials
   - H. Judges and Magistrates
   - I. Health Workers
   - J. Teachers and school administrators

2. **Bribery sub-index** In the past year, how often (if ever) have you had to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favor to government officials in order to:
   - No experience with this in past year; Never; Once or Twice; A Few Times; Often.
   - A. Get a document or a permit?
   - B. Get a child into school?
   - C. Get a household service (like piped water, electricity or phone)?
   - D. Get medicine or medical attention from a health worker
   - E. Avoid a problem with the police (like passing a checkpoint or avoiding a fine or arrest)?
   - F. And during the 2002 election, how often (if ever) did a candidate or someone from a political party offer you something, like food or a gift, in return for your vote?

The summary statistics for the Corruption main index are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.327</td>
<td>3.432</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is a bit surprising that the mean is relatively low (a high score on this index indicates high perceived corruption). The literature holds that corruption is a large problem in Africa.

**Main Index 2: Political Goods**

This index is formed by the following three questions:

3. **elections sub-index** On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the last national election, held in 2002, Was it:
   - A. Completely free and fair
   - B. Free and fair, but with minor problems
   - C. Free and fair, with major problems
   - D. Not free and fair

This question was coded so that 0=completely free/minor problems, 1=major problems/not at all free. The mean for this question was .485 across all countries, indicating that, on average, people are slightly more satisfied than unsatisfied with elections.

4. **Political goods sub-index** In this country, how often:
   - Always, Often, Rarely, Never
   - A. Do people have to be careful of what they say about politics?
   - B. Does competition between political parties lead to violent conflict?
   - C. Does the President ignore the constitution?
   - D. Are people treated unequally under the law?

5. **Political goods, past vs present sub-index** Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they were a few years ago, or are they about the same:
   - Much worse, Worse, Same, Better, Much Better
   - A. Freedom to say what you think
   - B. Freedom to join any political organization you want
   - C. Freedom from being arrested when you are innocent
   - D. Freedom to choose who to vote for without feeling pressured
   - E. The ability of ordinary people to influence what government does
   - F. Safety from crime and violence
   - G. Equal and fair treatment of all groups by government

The summary statistics for the political goods main index are presented below. A high score indicates poor delivery of political goods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>2.102</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interestingly, the average is again relatively low, indicating that people are in general moderately satisfied with delivery of political goods.
Main Index 3: Political Performance

6. [Government Performance sub-index] How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven’t you heard enough to say?

- Very Badly
- Fairly Badly
- Fairly Well
- Very Well

A. Managing the economy
B. Creating jobs
C. Keeping prices stable
D. Narrowing gaps between rich and poor
E. Reducing crime
F. Improving basic health services
G. Addressing educational needs
H. Delivering household water
I. Ensuring everyone has enough to eat
J. Fighting corruption in government
K. Combating HIV/AIDS

7. [Approval sub-index] Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the following people have performed their jobs over the past twelve months, or haven’t you heard enough about them to say?

- Strongly Disapprove
- Disapprove
- Approve
- Strongly Approve

A. President/PM
B. Your Member of Parliament
C. Your Elected Local Government Councilor

The summary statistics for the political performance index are presented below. In this case, a high score indicates approval. The mean of just under seven indicates that respondents are, on average, slightly less than satisfied with political performance overall.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6.719</td>
<td>3.821</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results

The coefficients on all three indices are statistically significant at the five percent level and have the correct signs. In Table 1, which uses the three main indices and no sub-indices, the coefficients of interest are the "standardized betas" on "total performance", "all political goods including elections" and "total index bribes and corruption" (boxed in yellow). Beta is used instead of B because it uses standardized variables, so that the variance of independent variable is equal to one. The interpretation of Beta is the amount that the dependent variable (SWD) increases when the independent variable increases by one standard deviation. Using this coefficient makes it much easier to compare the effects of different independent variables, because the ratio of beta weights is the ratio of the estimated predictive importance of the independent variables. This method is especially important in this case because the independent variables are on very different scales. A one-point increase on a six-point scale is the same as a two-point increase on a 12 point scale, but the B-coefficients do not take this varying distribution into account. Using a standardized beta
allows the conversion of the independent variables into scales that can be compared.

The coefficients show that "total performance" is the most important determinant of SWD (out of the given indices). The coefficient is .283, which is statistically significant at all levels and positive. The positive sign means that the higher the rating of performance, the more likely the respondent is satisfied with democracy. This consistent with the hypothesis that perceived government performance positively predicts satisfaction with democracy. From this regression, it seems that total performance is 1.5 times as predictive as political goods and 18 times as important as corruption. The coefficient on political goods is -0.181, which is statistically significant at all levels. The negative sign is in line with the hypothesis that increased delivery of political goods increases SWD, because the political goods scale is created in such a way that a low score indicates high approval of political goods delivery. Although not as important as total performance, this measure is still important for determining SWD (about eight times more predictive than gender, the most predictive control variable). Delivery of political goods is also about 12 times more important for determining SWD than the corruption and bribes index. Although the coefficient (beta) on corruption is significant at the five percent level and in the "correct" direction (more perceived corruption decreases SWD), it seems to be insignificant compared to other indicators. It is less important than country, age, gender, or race. The beta for country is 0.018, which is greater in magnitude than the beta (-0.015) for corruption. Betas on age and gender (0.016 and 0.023, respectively) are both statistically significant at the five percent level and greater in magnitude than corruption. This is a bit of a surprising finding, as the literature suggests that corruption is relevant to SWD. Possible explanations will be explored in the discussion section.

In order to get a fuller and more precise picture of what drives SWD, I ran a regression that used the question-level sub-indices instead of the broader cumulative indices. The betas in Table 3 (highlighted in yellow) show that perceived government performance (assessed by the question: "How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters?") is the most important driver of SWD. In Table 2, the rest of the sub-indices are arranged from most to least important. Bribery and corruption are statistically significant at the five percent level, and all the rest are statistically significant at all levels. All have the "correct" sign (sign as expected) except for Bribery. The positive (and significant) coefficient on Bribery seems to indicate that higher perceived levels of bribery lead to higher SWD, which is definitely counter-intuitive, as one would expect that higher levels of perceived bribery would undermine satisfaction with democracy.

One thing that is important to test is the correlations between sub-indices. For instance, if "administrative performance" and "government performance" are highly correlated, then the relative betas do not hold any meaning, since these two sub-indices cannot fully be separated and compared. I tested for the Pearson correlation between all the sub-indices and determined from statistical literature that 0.75 would serve as the cutoff—any correlation above this would cause concern. The only correlations that were above 0.75 (or even above 0.65) were correlations between various sub-indices and the aggregate indices. For
instance, the correlation between "administrative performance" and "total performance" is 0.681. This is not of concern, as sub-indices and main indices are never simultaneously run as independent variables in the same regression.

Non-linearity is also a concern. Perhaps the independent variables have non-linear distributions and exhibit diminishing returns (or increasing returns) that bias the coefficients. To test for this, I created a quadratic version of each of the main indices and included it in the regression. The coefficients on the quadratic terms were very small (0.001) and not statistically significant, implying that there is not a quadratic relationship. Because the sub-indices are highly correlated with the composite indices, the absence of a quadratic relationship for the main indices suggests a similarly linear distribution for the sub-indices.

The results in Table 2 can be even further desegregated. I broke the "administrative performance" and "government performance" question-level indices (which together form the "total performance" main index) into variables for each separate part of the question and ran a regression using these fourteen independent variables (I also included controls and the other two main indices as covariates). Results are presented in Table 4 in descending order. (The starred 'sig's were not significant). "Political Goods" is included as a comparison (the coefficient on the corruption main index was not significant). The farther down the list in importance, the less significant. However, the top nine are all very statistically significant. Overall, however, no sub-question level assessment is individually more important than the index of political goods.

**Table 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Question- level Variable</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Handling: Managing Economy</td>
<td>.118</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance: President</td>
<td>.100</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance: MP/National Assembly Rep</td>
<td>.068</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handling: Addressing Educational Needs</td>
<td>.051</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handling: Enjoying enough to eat</td>
<td>.046</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handling: Keeping Prices Stable</td>
<td>.040</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handling: Creating Jobs</td>
<td>.029</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handling: Narrowing Income Gaps</td>
<td>.027</td>
<td>.018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handling: Combating HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>.020</td>
<td>.045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance: Local Government Representative</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>.091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handling: Fighting Corruption</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>.449*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handling: Delivering Household Water</td>
<td>-.005</td>
<td>.655*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handling: Reducing Crime</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.768*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handling: Improving Basic Health Services</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.901*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*All Political Goods (Composite Index 2)</td>
<td>-.159</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion**

Overall, the findings appear statistically robust and significant. The major outlier is corruption, a finding that is at odds with the literature. This section will discuss some possible explanations for this finding. Additionally, this section will also discuss the importance (at the single-question-level) of various aspects of political goods and government performance.

The same general levels of importance are found in each regression (political performance, followed by political goods, are important, and corruption is relatively unimportant). These findings are generally in line with the literature, although it is interesting that elections are only the 4th most important sub-index (and corruption and bribery, numbers six and seven, are fairly negligible), as seen in Table 2. The literature generally suggests that perceived success of elections is an important predictor of satisfaction with democracy. Also surprising is the continued unimportance of corruption. Perhaps this is due to a flaw with the construction of the index—it is possible some types of corruption should have been weighed more or less heavily, or perhaps there are other questions that better measure perceived corruption. This is certainly a possibility, since the average score on the aggregate corruption scale is just over three. This means out of the ten possible groups
that can be cited as corrupt, and the six possible ways to be asked to pay a bribe, respondents only affirmed three. Perhaps this is because people are afraid to answer honestly, or perhaps corruption is captured in other questions (such as "performance approval"). Another possible explanation for corruption's low impact on SWD is that corruption is so universal that it is assumed that it happens with any government, and thus doesn't influence SWD. The bribery sub-index also consistently has a sign in an unexpected direction. Perhaps respondents were scared to answer truthfully. This fear might only apply to bribery and corruption questions and not to performance questions, because accusing government officials of illegal activity is much worse (and possibly more likely to be punished) that simply expressing performance disapproval. Also possible is that respondents did not have a clear idea of what was meant by "bribery," perhaps because it can be deeply ingrained into daily life and culture.

Possibly, certain types of corruption really do not matter. It is conceivable that centralized corruption is expected or tolerated and does not affect satisfaction with democracy or legitimacy. Instead, it is decentralized and disorganized bribery (which may not be captured by the bribery sub-index) that is really crushing for growth and development, because it creates uncertainty and creates disincentives for investment. This may be the "corruption" that the literature points to, but this is not the corruption that the "corruption" main index in this paper captures.

From Tables 2 and 3, it seems that comparative delivery of political goods matters more than absolute delivery, since "political goods: present v. past" is a stronger influencer of SWD than "political goods" (such as "are people treated unequally under the law"). This makes sense for the countries in this sample, most of which have recently transitioned and/or have wildly turbulent political histories. Attaining full freedom of speech might not seem as important as eliminating the practice of jailing people for their political beliefs. As already mentioned, it is surprising that elections are not more important. Perhaps there is some selection bias that causes this, since the countries in the sample are all democracies and were granted that title due to the relative success of elections.

It is important to make a key distinction when discussing the results shown in Table 4. At first glance, it appears that the economy is the most important question-level determinant of SWD. This seems to contradict the literature, which generally agrees that political goods are more important for satisfaction with democracy. However, there is a considerable difference between the actual performance of the economy and the question of whether the government is doing a good job of managing the economy. Citizens can realize that an international recession is not the fault of their leaders, but still hold leaders accountable for the efficacy of the policies they create to deal with the exogenous economic problems.

The performance of the president (or prime minister in some countries) is the next most important within the "total performance" category. Even though presidents can have varying degrees of actual power, they are still seen as representative of the government and its policies. Especially since Africa has historically experienced a high degree of one-man rule and presidents overstepping their legal roles, the approval of a president carries weight, both about whether democracy is actually functioning (does the president allow himself to be checked by other parts of government?) and how well the democratic government is performing. Approval of the president is a good proxy for approval of the government (just as in many Western countries). In many African states, democracies are not taken for granted, so "approval of government" translates more nearly to "approval of democracy".

Although approval of member of parliament performance is third on the list, approval of the president is 1.5 times more important as a determinant of SWD. The two biggest aspects of total performance that drive SWD are the government's handling of managing the economy and presidential approval. It is surprising and heartening that the addressing educational needs is 4th on the list, and is half as important as presidential approval. Demand for quality public education (or just any public education) is an important step to consolidating democracy. As Inglehart argues, self-expression values are important for consolidating democratic transitions, and the literature since Lipset points to education as a route to liberalizing values.

Finally, it is important to note that the R² for both regressions is reasonably high (0.169 and 0.168). Although political goods may not be wholly driving SWD, their significance is more than negligible.
Limitations

There are limitations to both the concept of this study as well as the specific methodology. This section addresses measurement and some concerns about the validity of using a survey to measure public opinion. It then addresses the statistical concerns of omitted variables, reverse causality, and comparability across countries.

It is crucial for the validity of any study using survey results to address the issues of measurement. Is a survey an appropriate way to measure public opinion in Africa? This technique was developed for urbanized, industrial societies—can it be applied to Africa? Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi address some of these concerns. In response to the critique that African respondents might have differing intellectual templates than survey designers, they cite focus groups with prospective respondents that were used to design the survey.

Another critique of survey data is that public opinion is ephemeral and inconsistent. This problem is especially true for abstract questions. Although this can still be a concerning, the Afrobarometer’s solution is to use concrete questions that are worded in layman’s terms and to always offer a variety of balanced answers to avoid passive acquiescence. In addition, analyses are done using indices that are made from multiple questions put together in order to increase robustness of instruments.

A third objection is that random surveys are not a familiar tool in Africa and may prompt questions from respondents about the purpose of the surveys, the sponsor, and the potential risk of answering. This could lead to respondents giving cautious or self-protective answers. In addition, the governments of some countries control the media, limiting respondents' access to independent information or alternate points of view. This problem is dealt with in part through the selection of countries that have undergone sufficient political liberalization to allow for at least some free speech. Surveys are also scheduled in election ‘off-years’ to avoid inflamed political passions. Surveyors are also careful to introduce themselves as representing an independent NGO.

In addition to the issues dealing with the conceptualization of a study based on public opinion surveys, there are more specific potential problems with this study. First of all, there may be a problem with the formulation of the indices. Although I tried to follow the official Afrobarometer model of which questions are grouped together, it is possible that the indices are not perfect because they do not include enough of the questions to be robust, because they include non-representative questions, or group questions together incorrectly. It is hard to know exactly which questions best indicate what is referred to as “political performance”—is it performance approval, or is it better approximated by people’s satisfaction with various aspects of their lives? Also, it is possible that the weight of specific questions within the indices are wrong—perhaps "elections" should have been given more weight within the “delivery of political goods” index, etc. Finally, the actual distribution of opinion may have a shape that is not captured by a linear index. Although I tested for a quadratic shape, there are other more complicated possible distributions that are not captured by the additive indices.

There could also be other problems due to omitted variables. Though these are intended to be accounted for by controlling for demographic information and LPI, there are possibly other aspects that affect satisfaction. There are simply so many questions in the Afrobarometer that there are an endless number of possible controls. Yet they cannot all be included because of the risk of lowering the precision of the estimates of interest. Political party might have been a useful control, but because of the structure of the question and the multi-country nature of the data, it was not possible to include it in these regressions.

There is also the potential problem of reverse causality. Perhaps those who are more satisfied with democracy are more apt to give more favorable answers (more approval of government, better political goods) because they are willing to give the government the benefit of the doubt. Although there are multiple rounds of the Afrobarometer, it is not really possible to do a time-series estimation because the population in the sample changes each time. Without using time series data, it is very difficult to show causality. While the literature (and intuition) point to SWD as an effect rather than a cause of other attitudes, the reverse does have some limited plausibility.

Another problem is the comparability across countries. The thirteen countries in the sample differ geographically, culturally, and politically. Although the Afrobarometer was translated into native languages for the survey, some words may have different meanings or connotations in different languages or cultures. A more extensive analysis would examine individual countries
more closely and use particularities of each country to explain country-level variation (or similarities). Interestingly enough, "country" was not a significant contributor to SWD. Since countries were given numbers alphabetically for the purposes of coding, the coefficient on country has no true meaning and could be small because some of the country effects cancel each other out. However, running a regression without including "country" as a control did not significantly change the coefficients of interest or R². This suggests that the results are relatively similar across countries.

Finally, it should be noted that SWD, while important on its own, is also a proxy for "support for democracy," a more idealistic and abstract measure. Support for democracy was not used as the dependent variable in this study because it showed very little variability, with high levels of support in all African democracies in the study. While this is encouraging, it creates difficulties for running regressions.

**Conclusion and Policy**

**Prescription**

Although sound economic policies are the most important aspect of perceived government competence (the most influential driver of SWD), addressing education and hunger needs are important as well. This provides some evidential support for Estlund's contention that democratic regimes need to actually deliver services to be legitimate. The performance of the President and members of the National Assembly are relatively important as well. Although the results of this paper suggest corruption is not important, the literature suggests otherwise and it is likely that corruption is captured in presidential approval rating and other independent variables. In addition, fighting economic corruption could be a vital part of being seen as successful at managing the economy.

It is also important to remember that the key is not as much results as it is perceived skill at management. Governments facing external crises or problems left over from previous administrations are not necessarily doomed—even if they cannot immediately fix problems, come up with good ideas, or implement sensible policies, they can foster satisfaction with democracy and governmental legitimacy. The ability to satisfy citizens, while important in its own right, is crucial to legitimizing both the current administration and the entire idea of a democratic system of governance. §

**ENDNOTES**


11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.


