



Trust in political institutions in Senegal: Why did it drop?

By Ibrahima Sall



Introduction

The 2000 presidential elections were a turning point in the political trajectory of Senegal. After four decades of single-party and limited multi-party rule, the country's first true political alternation handed power to Abdoulaye Wade and ushered Senegal into the ranks of stable democracies in Africa. President Wade won re-election, with a comfortable majority, in 2007.

Just one year later, however, public opinion survey results showed that citizens' trust in Senegal's president, Parliament, and local government had dropped dramatically. While trust levels rebounded in later surveys, 2008 serves as a case study of key factors that can undermine public trust in political institutions – an element of crucial importance for the consolidation of democracy. Drawing on data from Afrobarometer surveys, this analysis examines whether trust in political institutions is related to government performance, the economy and lived poverty, perceived corruption, interpersonal trust, and exposure to the news media.

Afrobarometer survey

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

The Afrobarometer team in Senegal, led by Carrefour d'Etudes et de Recherches-Action pour la Démocratie et le Développement (CERADD), interviewed 1,200 Senegalese adults in November 2005 and May 2008. Samples of this size yield country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3% at a 95% confidence level. Afrobarometer surveys were also conducted in Senegal in 2002, 2013, 2014.

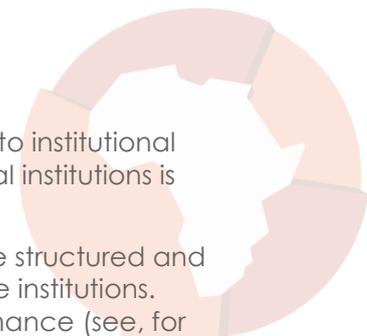
Key findings

- The key factor in the drop in citizens' trust in Senegal's president, Parliament, and local government was the high public perception of corruption among elected leaders.
- Trust was also correlated with citizens' assessment of the country's economic condition and their evaluation of government performance in managing the economy.
- There was no significant relationship between citizens' economic status and their trust in elected officials.
- Exposure to the news media had a weak negative effect on trust in political institutions.

Trust and democratic consolidation

Public trust reflects the legitimacy of political institutions and is thus crucial for the consolidation of democracy. Scholars have examined a wide variety of factors that can affect the level of trust that citizens have in their institutions.

Trust in institutions may depend on cultural or historical factors (Nunn & Wantchekon, 2011; Mishler & Rose, 2002) as well as on citizens' individual characteristics, such as economic status and education (Rose, Mishler, & Haerpfer, 1998). According to Nunn and Wantchekon, interpersonal trust is positively correlated with institutional trust, while Newton (1999) argues that there is not a consistent association between social



and political trust. Putnam (1993) finds that interpersonal trust leads to institutional trust, while Brehm and Rahn (1997) argue that confidence in political institutions is likely to influence interpersonal trust.

Trust in political institutions may depend on how these institutions are structured and managed, and on citizens' perceptions of officials who manage the institutions. Importantly, trust has been found to depend on institutional performance (see, for example, Coleman, 1990; Dasgupta, 1988; Hetherington, 1998). Miller and Listhaug (1990) argue that poor economic performance can contribute to undermining trust in government. According to Almond and Verba (1963), if people become disillusioned with the perceived performance of democratic governments over successive administrations, in time this can erode their belief in democracy itself.

A related and very important aspect of trust is the perception of official corruption, which can have a negative effect on the performance of political institutions and public confidence in them (Anderson & Tverdova, 2003; Della Porta, 2000). Bardhan (1997) and Bayley (1967) highlight the negative effects of corruption on the economies of developing countries. Anderson and Tverdova show that citizens of countries with high levels of corruption place less value on political institutions and are less confident in their political system. Perceived or experienced corruption can lead to public disaffection with political institutions and reduce regime legitimacy (Seligson, 2002; Lavallée, 2006; Méon & Sekkat, 2005; Chang & Chu, 2006).

The erosion of public support for core representative institutions can weaken advanced industrialized democracies (Dalton, 2008) as well as fledgling or flawed regimes characterized by abuses of human rights and civil liberties. Political institutions in Africa are notably weak, in part because elected officials treat these institutions as private resources to serve their personal interests (Chabal & Daloz, 1999). Political leaders come and go, and trust in them may rise and fall with citizens' evaluations of their performance in office.

Many observers argue that social and political stability and integration depend on confidence in institutions rather than trust in individuals (Luhmann, 1988; Dunn, 1984; Giddens, 1990; Seligman, 1997). But given the strong link between political institutions and the public officials who run them, the personification of political institutions may lead ordinary citizens to conflate their evaluations of the two, i.e. their trust in political institutions may reflect their assessment of individual office-holders.

Senegal 2008: A dramatic dip in public trust

Senegal's peaceful, democratic leadership transition in 2000 created an atmosphere of euphoria. Many citizens felt a new wind of hope as Wade took over from the socialist regime. This optimism, especially among younger citizens, is reflected in high levels of trust in 2002 and 2005: Almost three-fourths (73%) of citizens said they trusted the president "a lot" or "somewhat."

But after Wade's re-election in 2007, trust levels dropped dramatically: By 2008, trust in the president had declined by 27 percentage points, or more than one-third, to 46% (Figure 1). At the same time, the percentage of Senegalese who expressed trust in Parliament declined from 56% to 37%, and trust in local government decreased from 56% to 40%.

By 2013, after Macky Sall defeated Wade in the presidential elections of 2012, trust levels returned to near-2005 levels. These shifts suggest that public perceptions of political institutions may be closely tied to perceptions of the individuals who lead them.

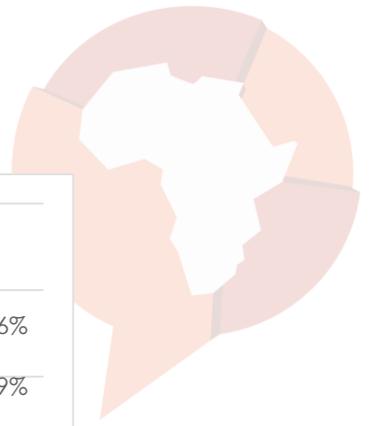
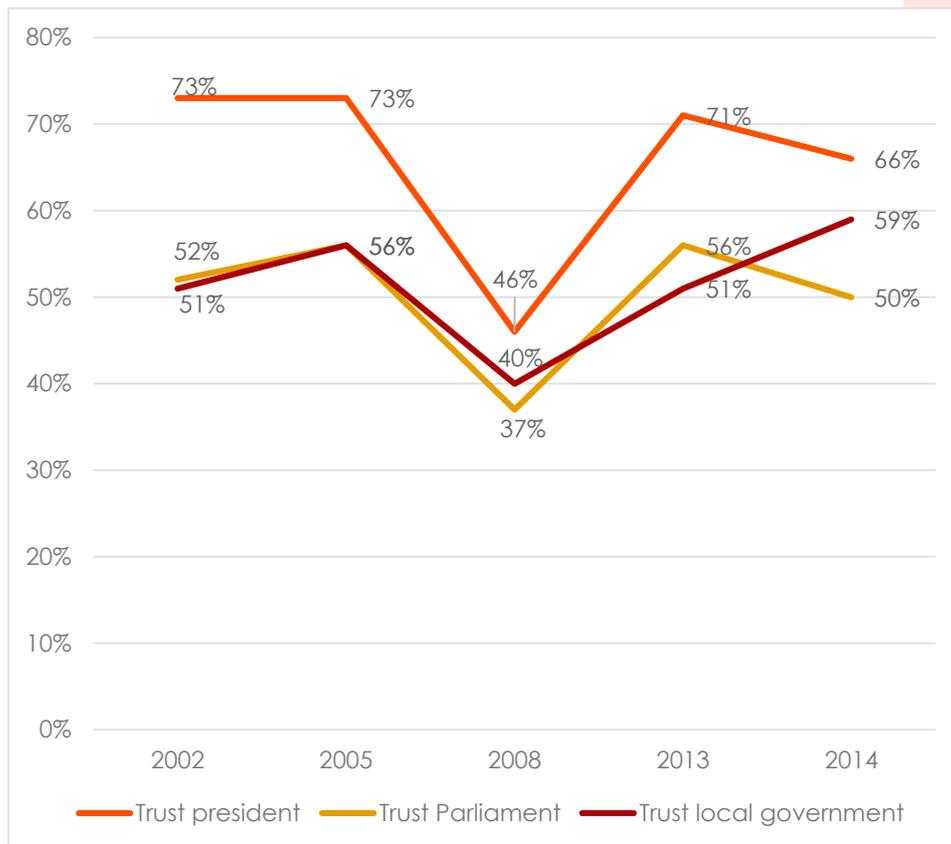


Figure 1: Trust in political institutions | Senegal | 2002-2013



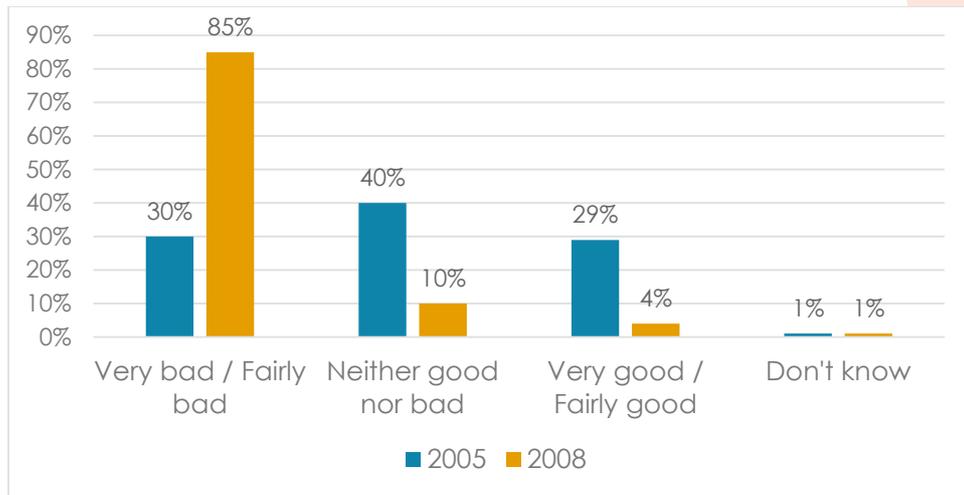
Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (% who said "somewhat" or "a lot")

Economic context and poverty

Did Senegal's deteriorating economy and increasing poverty negatively affect public trust in political institutions? Between 2002 and 2005, the macroeconomic situation of the country was relatively stable, with GDP growth of about 3% driven by the building industry, major infrastructure projects, social reforms that provided jobs, good rainfall, and an acceptable groundnut harvest. However, the situation deteriorated between 2005 and 2008, increasing poverty and inequality. The year 2008 was marked by higher prices of certain foodstuffs and an increased cost of living in general, leading to public demonstrations in many parts of the country.

These observations are confirmed both by public perceptions of the country's economic conditions and by a measure of citizens' lived poverty. While in 2005 only 30% of survey respondents described the country's economic condition as "fairly bad" or "very bad," in 2008 that proportion grew to 85% (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Perceptions of the country's economic condition | Senegal | 2005-2008



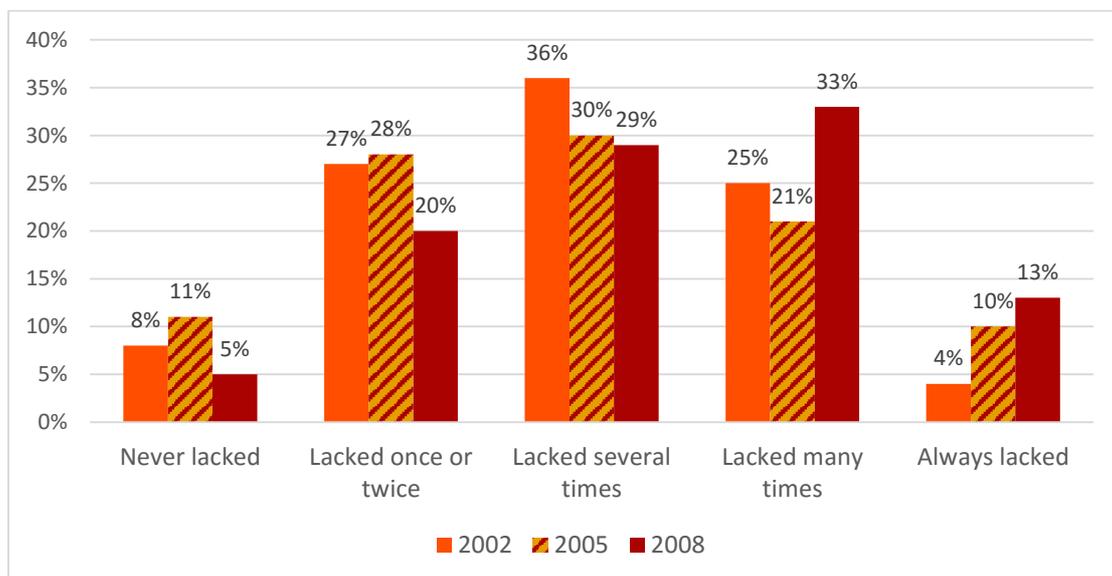
Respondents were asked: *In general, how would you describe the present economic condition of this country?*

Citizens' experience of poverty, as measured by the Lived Poverty Index (LPI), confirms the negative perceptions of the economy. The LPI is the average of respondents' answers to the question, "Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without: Enough food to eat? Enough clean water for home use? Medicines or medical treatment? Enough fuel to cook your food? A cash income?"

For this analysis, responses were coded as follows: 0=never went without any of those basic necessities, 1=went without them "once or twice," 2=went without them "several times," 3=went without them "many times," and 4="always" went without them.

As shown in Figure 3, the percentage of people who were able to meet all their needs decreased by more than half between 2005 and 2008, from 11% to 5%. At the same time, the proportion of those who lacked basic necessities "always" or "many times" increased by 15 percentage points.

Figure 3: Trends in Lived Poverty Index | Senegal | 2002-2008





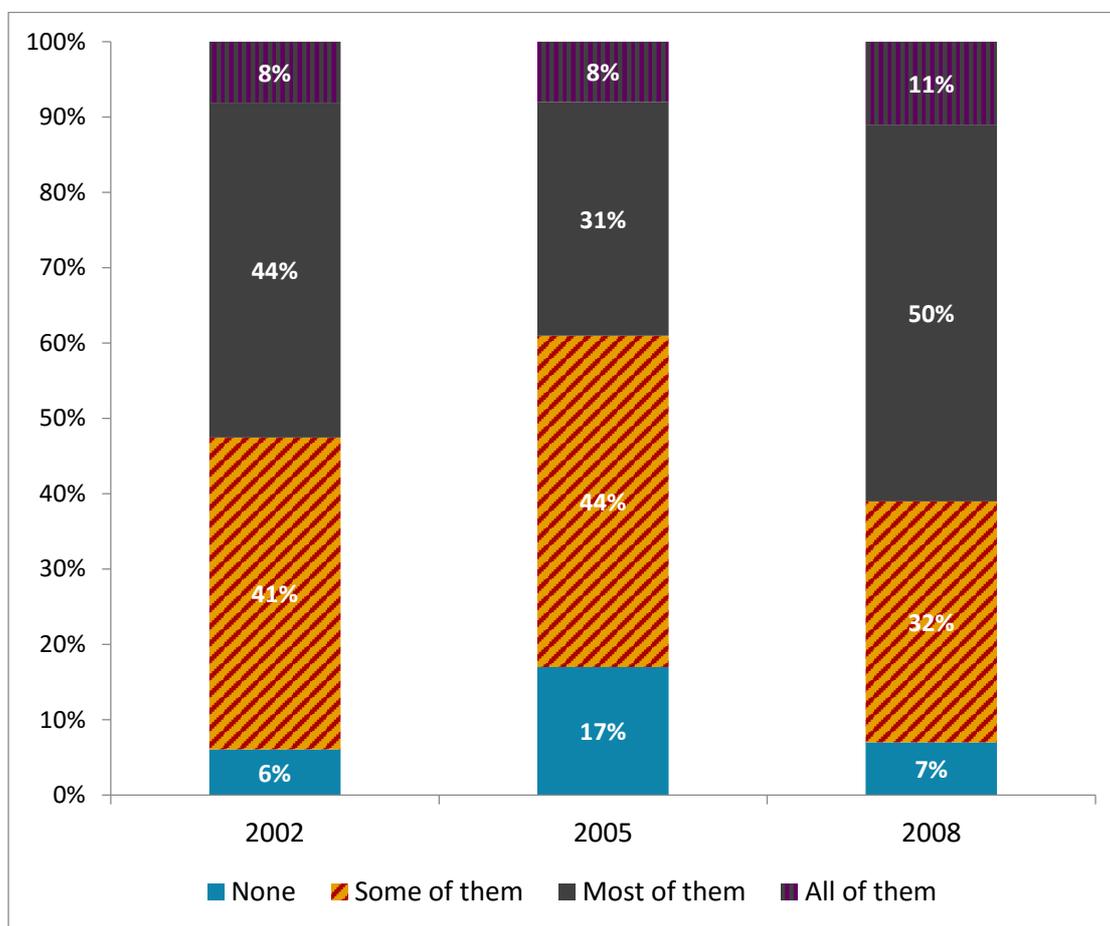
Perceptions of corruption

Another potential contributing factor is the public perception of the involvement of public officials in corruption. Corruption is a perennial problem in Senegal, often making headlines, and public perceptions of corruption among government officials increased between 2005 and 2008.

The surveys asked respondents, “How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven’t you heard enough about them to say: The president and officials in his office? Members of Parliament? Elected local government councillors? Government officials? Police? Tax officials? Judges and magistrates?”

Constructing a corruption index from the average of responses to these items, the proportion of Senegalese who said that “some,” “most,” or “all” of these officials were involved in corruption increased from 83% in 2005 to 93% in 2008 (Figure 4). (For details on the corruption index, see the Appendix.)

Figure 4: Perceptions of corruption among public officials | Senegal
| 2005-2008



Determinants of trust in elected officials

To examine which of these factors had a significant influence on public trust in political institutions, a linear regression is used to test determinants of the dependent variables *Trust president*, *Trust Parliament*, and *Trust local government*, defined as continuous variables going from “not at all” (0) to “a lot” (4).



The independent variables are:

Lived Poverty Index (from 0=*richest* to 4=*poorest*).

Perception of country's economic condition (from 1=*very bad* to 5=*very good*).

Perception of corruption (from 0=*none of the officials are involved in corruption* to 3=*all of the officials are involved in corruption*).

Interpersonal trust (*Do you trust other Senegalese?*), (from 0=*not at all* to 3=*a lot*).

Government performance in managing the economy (from 1=*strongly disapprove* to 4=*strongly approve*)

Exposure of respondents to the news media (from 0=*never* to 4=*every day*).

The respondent's level of education and residence location (urban or rural) are control variables.

Results

As shown in Table 1, there was no significant relationship between poverty and trust in political institutions. Higher food prices and massive youth unemployment may have led to angry demonstrations, but they did not influence the degree of public trust in political institutions.

However, with poverty increasing, citizens may have related their own situation to the country's economic condition, government performance in managing the economy, and perceived corruption among elected officials – all important determinants of public trust in political institutions. Trust was positively correlated with citizens' assessment of the country's economic condition. If the president and Parliament were perceived as the key institutions with the power to influence macroeconomic policies, then the country's meagre economic performance may have been blamed on government ineffectiveness and resulted in lower trust in its leaders. Similarly, the more favourable the public's perception of government performance in managing the economy, the higher its levels of trust.

The key determinant of trust was the public perception of corruption among elected officials. Many corruption scandals (including the Alex Segoura case and the misappropriation of funds for the Islamic Summit and the World Festival of Negro Arts) appear to have contributed to the loss of trust in politicians and contributed to the

To further explore this data, please visit Afrobarometer's online data analysis facility at www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

fall from power of Wade, whose patronage for political companions and friends was famous. In addition, during his eight years in office (2002-2010), Wade instigated 15 constitutional changes for the sole purpose of staying in power. His failed attempt to pass a constitutional amendment allowing for the election of a president and vice president with only

27% of the vote confirms the public's concern about this political manoeuvring. The National Assembly, where many of these political manoeuvres were orchestrated, was the least trusted institution in 2008.

Other variables were only weakly correlated with trust in political institutions. These include interpersonal trust: Citizens expressing trust in other Senegalese were slightly more likely to trust political institutions. Citizens with greater exposure to the news media were somewhat less likely to express trust in the president. This may be because news consumers are better informed about government mistakes and malfeasance, such as the government's shielding from prosecution of ruling-party members accused of crimes. Also showing weak negative effects on trust were education level, urban residence, and male gender.

Table 1: Determinants of trust in public officials in Senegal – linear regression

Predictors	Dependent variables = Trust in elected officials					
	2005			2008		
	Trust president	Trust Parliament	Trust local gov't	Trust president	Trust Parliament	Trust local gov't
Lived Poverty Index	0.014 (0.025)	-0.044 (0.025)	-0.016 (0.027)	0.035 (0.023)	0.012 (0.029)	0.010 (0.032)
Country's economic condition	0.010 (0.025)	0.074* (0.025)	0.011 (0.027)	0.125** (0.023)	0.089* (0.029)	0.015 (0.032)
Perceived corruption	-0.256*** (0.035)	-0.296*** (0.035)	-0.106* (0.038)	-0.112** (0.029)	-0.184*** (0.037)	-0.256*** (0.042)
Interpersonal trust	0.115** (0.014)	0.048 (0.014)	0.052 (0.015)	-0.027 (0.015)	0.054 (0.020)	0.178*** (0.022)
Government performance	0.152** (0.050)	0.066 (0.050)	0.082 (0.054)	0.108** (0.050)	0.076 (0.063)	-0.009 (0.070)
Media exposure	-0.096* (0.029)	-0.005 (0.029)	0.010 (0.031)	-0.028 (0.023)	-0.077 (0.029)	-0.049 (0.033)
Education	-0.064 (0.013)	-0.024 (0.013)	0.012 (0.014)	-0.056 (0.011)	-0.169** (0.014)	-0.081 (0.016)
Location (Urban=1)	-0.112** (0.053)	-0.096* (0.052)	-0.110** (0.057)	-0.052 (0.054)	0.026 (0.068)	0.007 (0.076)
Gender (Male=1)	-0.18 (0.045)	-0.034 (0.045)	0.008 (0.048)	-0.038 (0.043)	-0.097** (0.054)	-0.091* (0.060)
Adjusted R ²	0.228	0.225	0.138	0.283	0.240	0.138
R ²	0.209	0.207	0.118	0.261	0.217	0.112

Note: This table shows standardized beta coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

Conclusion

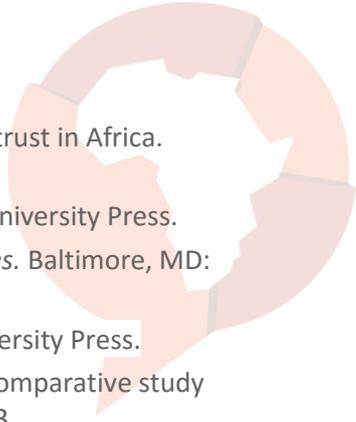
Several factors contributed to the dramatic dip in public trust in political institutions in Senegal in 2008. Contrary to Lavallée's (2006) finding, the key factor was the public perception of corruption among government officials, which negatively affects the performance of political institutions and reduces trust in elected leaders. Trust was also correlated with citizens' assessment of the country's economic condition and their evaluation of government performance in managing the economy. Citizens' level of poverty does not explain their level of trust in political institutions, while exposure to the news media had a weak negative effect on trust in political institutions.

Considering the significant impact of perceived corruption, the new government's steps to fight corruption through a ministry of good governance may be one factor in restored trust levels found in 2013 and 2014 Afrobarometer surveys.



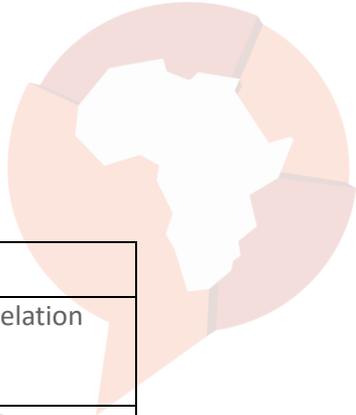
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Appendix

Construct of the corruption index



2005			2008	
	% of variance: 1 component extracted	Correlation	% of variance: 1 component extracted	Correlation
Corruption: Office of the Presidency	71.960	.832	68.392	.822
Corruption: Members of Parliament		.868		.886
Corruption: Local government councillors		.869		.846
Corruption: Government officials		.887		.868
Corruption: Police		.814		.783
Corruption: Tax officials		.834		.783
Corruption: Judges and magistrates		.831		.794
Extraction method: Principal component analysis N=1,200				

AFRO BAROMETER

LET THE PEOPLE HAVE A SAY



Ibrahima Sall is a researcher for Carrefour d'Etudes et de Recherches-Action pour la Démocratie et le Développement (CERADD), based in Dakar, Senegal.

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

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