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Political Accountability in Ghana: Evidence from Afrobarometer Round 5 Survey

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1. Introduction

As Ghana matures in its democratic process, policymakers and scholars suggest that Ghana still has a long way to go by way of political accountability.¹ Ghana has consistently improved on measures of civil and political rights, but they still suffer from high levels of corruption and low levels of transparency.

The standard political science definition of political accountability emphasizes the formal-institutional and procedural realm - the capacity of citizens to sanction their leaders, usually through elections.² Lindberg attempts to simplify the core concept of accountability by arguing for a mechanism for holding an agent (e.g. government) to account for their decisions and if necessary, for imposing sanctions (e.g. removing the agent from power) where decision-making power is transferred from a principal (e.g. the citizens) to that agent.³ While these definitions of political accountability emphasize the procedural effectiveness of institutions, they do not consider how individuals in new democracies understand the concept of accountability and how they act to hold leaders to account.

This briefing paper intends to shed light on Ghanaian attitudes toward political accountability and assess the ordinary citizens' role in this crucial part of the democratic process. In doing so, the paper draws from evidence from Round 5 of the Afrobarometer survey regarding five key aspects of political accountability - associational activity and local political participation; citizen engagement with the state; access to information; accountability and responsibility; and perceptions of corruption.

¹ E. Gyimah-Boadi, "Another Step Forward for Ghana." *Journal of Democracy* 20:2 (April 2009): 138-152; and Jemima Agyare, "Transparency, Accountability and Participation: A formula to enhance the Governance of Ghana's Petroleum Sector." *Ghanaian Chronicle* August 3, 2012.

² Adam Przeworski, Susan C. Stokes, and Bernard Manin, *Democracy, Accountability, and Representation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

³ Staffan I. Lindberg, "Accountability: the core concept and its subtypes," *Africa Power & Politics Working Paper* No. 1, Apr. 2009.

2. Afrobarometer Survey

The Afrobarometer is a comparative series of public attitude surveys, covering 35 African countries in Round 5 (2011-2013). It measures public attitudes on democracy and its alternatives, evaluations of the quality of governance and economic performance. In addition, the survey assesses the views of the electorate on critical political issues in the surveyed countries. The Afrobarometer's main goal is to produce scientifically reliable data on public opinion in Africa while strengthening institutional capacities for survey research, and sharing research findings to inform policy and practice. The Afrobarometer also provides comparisons over time, as five rounds of surveys have taken place from 1999 to 2013. Previous Afrobarometer surveys were conducted in Ghana in 1999 (Round 1), 2002 (Round 2), 2005 (Round 3), and 2008 (Round 4).

Afrobarometer surveys use a common survey instrument and methodology. The instrument asks a standard set of questions that permits systematic comparison in public attitudes across countries and over time. The methodology was based on a national probability sample of 2,400 adult Ghanaians selected to represent all adult citizens of voting age, allowing for inferences with a sampling margin of error of +/- 2% at a 95% confidence level. The sample was drawn randomly based on Probability Proportionate to Population Size (PPPS), thus taking account of population distributions, gender as well as rural-urban divides. The sampling process ensured that every adult Ghanaian citizen had an equal and known chance of being selected in the sample. Fieldwork in Ghana was conducted by Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) between 9 May and 1 June 2012.

3. Associational Activity and Local Political Participation

How do ordinary Ghanaians participate in politics? One way that citizens participate and contribute to the democratic process is by holding their leaders accountable. This participation happens at the grassroots, often taking place in the communities where people live. Evidence suggests that Ghanaians are willing to attend community meetings and join others to raise issues, but they do not have the chance to do so. For example, 58 percent of Ghanaians have never attended a community meeting and 63 percent have never joined others to raise issues in the past year. However, 42 percent and 37 percent of those same respondents, respectively, answered that they would do so if they had the opportunity.

While the media often emphasizes and reports protests, demonstrations and violence, contrary to conventional wisdom, most Ghanaians do not engage in aggressive political behavior. An overwhelming majority of Ghanaians (95 percent) have never attended a protest or demonstration in the past year. As a matter of fact, 84 percent of those respondents said that they would never attend protest marches. Very encouraging is the finding that an absolute majority of Ghanaians (98 percent) never used violence while supporting a political cause (Table 1).

Table 1: Citizens' Engagement in Community Meetings and Communal Actions (%)

		2002	2005	2008	2012
Attend community meetings	No (Would never do this)	22	6	8	16
	No (But would do if had the chance)	20	37	33	42
	Yes (Once/twice, Several times/Often)	57	56	58	42
Joining others to raise issue	No (Would never do this)	37	11	13	26
	No (But would do if had the chance)	22	37	33	37
	Yes (Once/twice, Several times/Often)	39	51	53	37
Attend demonstration/protest march	No (Would never do this)	83	67	69	84
	No (But would do if had the chance)	8	22	20	11
	Yes (Once/twice, Several times/Often)	8	8	9	4

Source: Ghana Afrobarometer survey 2002, 2005, 2008 and 2012.

As depicted in the above table, from 2002 to 2008, a sizeable minority of Ghanaians (i.e. from 20 percent to 37 percent) have expressed a willingness to engage in community meetings and to join together with others to raise issue if they get the opportunity. Only in 2005 and 2008 did at least a fifth of Ghanaians indicate their readiness to participate in demonstrations if the opportunity arises.

4. Citizen Engagement with the State

An important way that citizens can hold their leaders accountable is through regular contact and engagement with their authorities. Unfortunately, the Afrobarometer evidence suggests that most Ghanaians do not have consistent contact with their authorities. In the past year, the majority of Ghanaians never contacted an official at a government agency (89 percent), their Member of Parliament (86 percent), a political party official (85 percent) and their local government councillor (68 percent) about important problems or to give them their views (Table 2).

Since 2002, the majority of Ghanaians (from 63 percent to 90 percent) never interfaced with their elected national and local representatives, an official at any government ministry/agency or an official of a political party.

Table 2: Popular Ratings of Citizens' Engagement with the State (%)

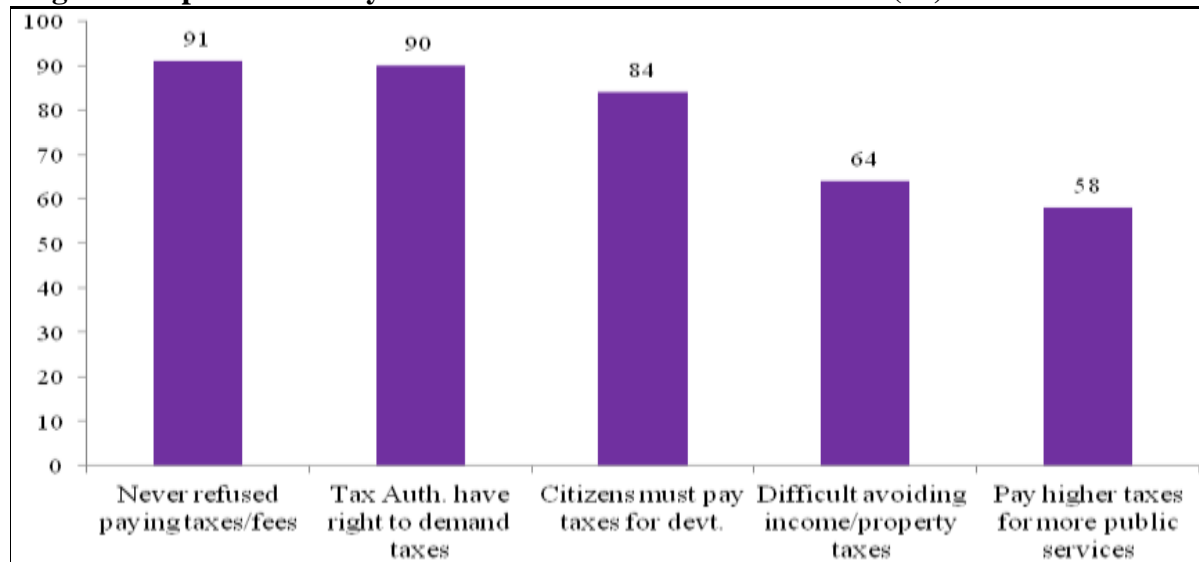
		2002	2005	2008	2012
Contacted Member of Parliament	Never	87	83	85	86
	Once/A few times/Often	12	16	14	13
Contacted Local Councillor	Never	83	85	63	68
	Once/A few times/Often	15	14	36	31
Contacted Political Party Official	Never	84	78	--	85
	Once/A few times/Often	15	21	--	14
Contacted Govt. Official at a Ministry	Never	90	86	86	89
	Once/A few times/Often	9	13	13	10

Source: Ghana Afrobarometer survey 2002, 2005, 2008 and 2012.

The low contact ratings notwithstanding, Ghanaians cannot be said to be consciously avoiding the state or authorities. Rather, there is a strong and positive sense of honoring civic responsibility, such as paying their taxes. An overwhelming majority of Ghanaians (91 percent) indicated that they have never refused to pay taxes or fees to government. Included in this number is just 15 percent who said they will evade taxes if they get the chance. One probable hypothesis is that they have not been able to circumvent the system because nearly two-thirds (64 percent) believed it is "very difficult" or "difficult" to avoid paying income or property taxes owed to the state while another 84 percent "strongly agree" or "agree" that citizens must pay

their taxes to the government in order for our country to develop. Nine in ten Ghanaians (90 percent) “agree strongly” or “agree” that tax authorities always have the right to make people pay taxes. In fact, 58 percent expressed the willingness to pay higher taxes if it will guarantee more government services (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Opinions on Payment of Government Taxes and Fees (%)



Source: Ghana Afrobarometer survey 2012.

5. Access to Information

A challenge to young democracies is a citizenry that is not educated on the political process. Lack of information on government performance and political procedures is a threat to high quality of democracy because citizens do not know the appropriate means to participate and might not be able to hold leaders to account for their actions.

The Afrobarometer survey results strongly suggest that Ghanaians do not have access to important information that might improve their democracy in the midst of remarkable access to radio and television news. Despite the fact that majority of Ghanaians have access to news from radio (88 percent) and television (68 percent) either “daily”, “a few times a week” or “a few times a month”, two-thirds (68 percent) find it “very difficult” or “difficult” to find out what taxes or fees to pay to government. Another 74 percent also find it “very difficult” or “difficult” to find out how government uses the revenue that it generates. Less than a fifth of Ghanaians, however, think it is “very easy” or “easy” to find out what taxes or fees to pay to government (19 percent) and how tax revenues are utilized by government (14 percent).

Surprisingly, sizeable percentages of Ghanaians claim it is required of them to pay income tax deducted from the gross income at source (48 percent) and self-employed taxes on their earnings (56 percent).

6. Accountability and Responsibility

Whose responsibility is it to hold the government accountable? Voters, the media, and political parties all play an important role in holding leaders accountable by examining, questioning, and criticizing government policies.

The evidence from the Afrobarometer survey shows that citizens ascribe some appreciable amount of watchdog responsibility to voters. Sizeable percentages believe that when voted into power, it is the responsibility of voters to ensure that the president (42 percent), Local councilors (44 percent) and MPs (40 percent) do their jobs. Interestingly, Ghanaians also believe that these three parts of government must also hold each other to account: the President plays an important role in making sure Members of Parliament do their jobs. Likewise, the Parliament and local council must make sure that Assembly men and women and the President do their jobs (Table 3, Part A).

From 2005 to 2008, the percentages of Ghanaians saying voters should demand job performance from MPs and local councilors increased by 12 and 6 percentage points, respectively. The two points trend regarding voters demanding job performance from the president also increased by 13 percentage points between 2008 and 2012. Thus, quite encouraging, the number of Ghanaians who hold the view that voters should be the exacting accountability from their elected representatives has been growing (Table 3, Part B).

Table 3: Who Ensures that Elected Leaders Do Their Jobs (%)

Part A (2012 results)	Voters	President / Executives	Parliament / Local Council	Their Political Parties
Making sure the President does his job?	42	17	32	6
Making sure MPs do their jobs	40	35	16	5
Making sure local govt. councilors do their jobs	44	12	36	5
Part B (Overtime trend)		2005	2008	2012
Voters making sure the President does his job		--	29	42
Voters making sure MPs do their jobs		28	25	40
Voters making sure local govt. councilors do their jobs		38	39	44

Source: Ghana Afrobarometer survey, 2005, 2008, and 2012.

Complementary to the watchdog role of voters, the media is also considered by most Ghanaians as another key watchdog institution. A solid majority of Ghanaians (69 percent) “agree strongly” or “agree” that the news media should constantly investigate and report on government mistakes and corruption. This could possibly be because citizens believe this does more good than harm for the country. Indeed, a small majority (55 percent) “agree strongly” or “agree” that the media should have the right to publish any views and ideas without government control. And in fact, an absolute majority of those interviewed (82 percent) believe the media is very or somewhat effective in revealing government mistakes and corruption.

Contrasting the role assigned to voters and the media, Ghanaians generally do not think their political parties can effectively demand accountability from the president, MPs and local councillors. Understandably, just negligible percentages of Ghanaians ascribe the responsibility of demanding job performance from the president (6 percent), MPs (5 percent) and local councillors (5 percent) to their political parties (Table 3, Part A above). Quite disappointing is the finding that most Ghanaians do not endorse a critical opposition. Six in every ten Ghanaians

(60 percent) would want the opposition political parties to cooperate with government. Perhaps the nature and consequence of political competition in Ghana, and the conduct of both ruling and opposition parties has created some amount of doubt in the minds of Ghanaians regarding the extent to which political parties can exact accountability from their compatriots.

7. Perceptions of Corruption

Citizens who think that their government representatives are corrupt might also have less trust in the state. This might undermine the quality of democracy because citizens might disengage from participating in politics and become politically apathetic.

The Afrobarometer evidence suggests that Ghanaians perceive widespread corruption among various categories of public office holders. This includes the President and officials in his office, Members of Parliament, government officials, local government councillors, Ghana Revenue Authority officials (or tax officials), the Police, Judges and Magistrates, and District Chief Executives. Quite frightening, overwhelming majorities (i.e. from 86 to 94 percent) of Ghanaians perceive “some”, “most” or “all” of these officials to be involved in corruption. In fact, the overtime trends reveal an upsurge in corruption between 2002/05 and 2012 of 15 to 41 percentage points (Table 4). This suggests that political accountability failures are a challenge for all functions of government and every level of society. It is a challenge that confronts most aspects of Ghanaian society.

Table 4: Perceived Corruption among Public Officials (%)

	2002	2005	2008	2012	2002/05 - 2012
President and officials in his office corrupt	47	56	70	88	+41
Members of Parliament corrupt	--	59	74	90	+31
Government officials corrupt	--	66	77	92	+26
Local Government Councilors corrupt	--	60	71	86	+26
Tax officials corrupt	--	70	79	91	+21
Police corrupt	79	81	86	94	+15
Judges and Magistrates corrupt	70	72	79	90	+20
District Chief Executives	--	--	--	89	--

Source: Ghana Afrobarometer survey, 2002, 2005, 2008, and 2012.

8. Predictors of Demand for Accountability

Political accountability is of significant importance in democratic consolidation as it constrains public office holders’ behavior by increasing the cost of decisions aimed at satisfying private interests at the expense of public interest. From the descriptive analysis above, Ghanaians who appear to be exacting accountability by way of contact with public officials and joining others to raise issues are in the minority. What are the factors that could help in raising the level of citizens’ demand for accountability from their formal leaders? The results of the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression analysis as presented in Table 5 offers some insight into factors that drives demand for accountability.⁴

⁴ Three indexes (Demand for accountability Index; Easy Access to Information Index; and Taxpayers Index) were developed from a collection of questions after conducting Factor Analysis using principal components extraction

Table 5: Ordinary Least Squares Regression Result of the Demand for Accountability Model

	B	Beta	Std. Error	p-value
Constant	-0.762	--	0.556	0.171
Easy Access to Information Index	0.041	0.014	0.083	0.623
Tax payers Index	0.410	0.113	0.104	0.000
Support opposition & Voted Opposition	-0.232	-0.049	0.137	0.090
Male gender	0.976	0.205	0.137	0.000
Educated	0.198	0.077	0.077	0.009
Age	0.032	0.198	0.005	0.000
Employed	0.096	0.019	0.143	0.500
Religion	0.299	0.017	0.496	0.547

Note: R² = 0.114; Adj. R² = 0.108; Std. Error of the Estimate = 2.24026; F_(8, 1129) = 18.103; F significance = 0.000

In general, the social factors had much more predictive power than other factors in the demand for accountability model. Gender (i.e. being a man), education, and age exhibited linear relationships with citizens' demand for accountability. By their p-values (i.e. gender = 0.000; education = 0.009; age = 0.000), these relationships are statistically significant.

Being male increases the demand for accountability from public office holders by 0.205 compared to being female.⁵ This finding is to some extent informed by male dominance in the Ghanaian society which is largely dictated by traditional and cultural norms. This unfortunate cultural norm functions in the Ghanaian political and democratic environment.

Apart from enlightening and enabling citizens to analyze information to arrive at an opinion, education also bestows on citizens a mind that is very critical in examining issues and asking questions. It is therefore not surprising that the regression results established that as level of education increases, demand for accountability increases by 0.077 of a unit.⁶

The demand for accountability by Ghanaians rises by 0.198 as age increases. The plausible reason for this finding is the fact that people become more responsible as they grow up, start working, and start raising families. These roles automatically make them contributors to the country as well as consumers of public services and are therefore compelled to take interest in how the government manages the country.

In fact, the strong significant linear relationship established between demand for accountability and income and self-employed taxpayers supports this assertion. Indeed, a report by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)⁷ described tax payment as

with Direct Oblimin Method when delta equals 0 (the default) and Reliability Analysis to identify variables that together reliably measure the concept of interest to this paper. Variables used in composing these indexes are as follows: Demand for accountability Index (Join others to raise issue, Contact local govt. councilor, Member of Parliament and Official of govt. agency); Easy Access to Information Index (Easy to find out taxes/fees to pay and Easy to find out uses of tax revenues); and Taxpayers Index (Required to pay income taxes and Required to pay self-employer taxes). The three indexes have the following reliability Cronbach Alpha: Demand for accountability Index = 0.647; Easy Access to Information Index = 0.746; and Taxpayers Index = 0.577.

⁵ Gender was coded 0 = female and 1 = male.

⁶ Level of education was coded 0 = None/Informal education; 1 = Basic education (completed & some); 2 = Secondary education (completed & some); and 3 = Tertiary education (completed & some).

⁷ See DAC Reference Document on Governance, Taxation and Accountability: Issues and Practices by Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2008.

“fiscal social contract” between citizens and government whereby citizens accept the obligation to pay tax in return for rights to be represented in processes of decision-making about how public money is raised and spent. Inherent in this “fiscal social contract” is the demand for accountability from government. Surprisingly, one variable of interest - easy access to information - was insignificant even though it registered the expected positive effect on demand for accountability.

9. Conclusion

As active members of the democratization process, Ghanaians have the responsibility of holding their leaders to account as well as helping to improve the mechanisms by which citizens hold their leaders accountable. The results of the Afrobarometer survey as shown in this paper, however, suggest specific avenues for improvement.

First, citizens are willing to pay more taxes for more and better government services. Sadly, citizens responded that basic information on tax collection and what the government does with tax revenues are difficult to access. Thus, there exist the opportunity to harness citizens’ willingness to pay to generate more revenue from taxation by undertaking tax sector reforms coupled with the delivery of efficient and quality public service. In capitalizing on the willingness to pay taxes, government must remember that it will be called upon by citizens to give an account of its stewardship as suggested by the regression results where demand for accountability from public office holders is significantly influenced by whether one pays income and self-employed taxes or not. Increased transparency in the use of public resources and other government initiatives involves ensuring that citizens have easy access to information, which also showed a positive impact on the demand for accountability (though not statistically significant).

Secondly, from the regression results, as national literacy rate improves, citizens become more aware of their rights and are able to ask public officials to account for their stewardship. Thus, aside from encouraging and improving education policies, facilities and the content of our formal education system, there is also the need for comprehensive civic education at all levels to encourage effective citizens’ participation in the democratic process. The civic education should target many more females to bridge the gap between males and females demand for accountability as established from the regression results. Also, the civic responsibility of demanding accountability from leaders should be inculcated into citizens at a young age as the regression results showed that older people tend to demand accountability much more than young folks. Indeed, citizens express the willingness to participate in meetings at the community level, but that there appears to be limited spaces for such engagement. Civic education could help close this gap. Meanwhile, the appropriate institutions could also encourage more government-citizen forums at the local level since the Local Government Act (Act 462) already supports the organization of such community-based forums.⁸

⁸ Section 16 clause (1) of Act 462 requires that Assembly men/women shall as appropriate (and on behalf of the assembly) (a) Maintain close contact with his electoral area, consult the people on issues to be discussed at the assembly meetings and collate their views, opinions and proposal; (b) Present the views, opinions and proposals of the people to the assembly; (c) Meet the electorates before each meeting of the assembly; (d) Report to the

Lastly, corruption or at least the perception of it as being widespread among various public officials requires a nation-wide campaign and political will on the part of those in authority to fight this menace.

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electorates the general decisions of the Assembly and its Executive Committee and the actions taken to resolve problems raised by residents; and (e) Take part in communal and development activities in the district.