

# AFRO BAROMETER

Working Paper No. 56

**POOR PEOPLE AND  
DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP  
IN AFRICA**

by Michael Bratton

**A comparative series of national public  
attitude surveys on democracy, markets  
and civil society in Africa.**



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### AFROBAROMETER WORKING PAPERS

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## POOR PEOPLE AND DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP IN AFRICA

### Abstract

Recent political transitions around the world have cast doubt on arguments about the socioeconomic preconditions for democracy. A democratic political regime has long been regarded as an attribute of high-income, industrialized economies. Yet new scholarship has revised this law by observing that “third wave” democracies have been installed in both rich and poor countries. We can only do justice to this topic, however, by testing the same relationship at a micro-level. Are poor *people* any more or less attached to democracy than rich *people*? Are they any more or less likely to act as democratic *citizens*? This paper explores the relationship of poor people to democratic citizenship in sub-Saharan Africa. Its findings are paradoxical. On one hand, poor people in Africa are clearly dissatisfied with the quality of governance provided by elected national leaders. On the other hand, they prefer to by-pass the formal channels of the democratic state in attempting to redress political grievances. Instead, the poor majority – especially the older, rural poor – remains embedded in informal relations of patron-clientelism. Not only do poorer people lack certain key capabilities of democratic citizenship; they have yet to find ways to make the institutions of democracy work in their favor.

## POOR PEOPLE AND DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP IN AFRICA

Recent political transitions around the world have cast doubt on arguments about the socioeconomic preconditions for democracy. A democratic political regime has long been regarded as an attribute of high-income, industrialized economies (Lipset 1960, Diamond 1992). Yet new scholarship has revised Lipset's law by observing that "third wave" democracies have been installed in both rich and poor countries (Huntington, 1991; Przeworski et al. 2000; Bratton and van de Walle 1997; Collier 1999; Dorenspleet 2005). Regardless of fresh insights into the birth of democracy, however, analysts still tend to agree that the regime's subsequent *survival* prospects are better in the presence of national wealth and aggregate economic growth.

To date, the literature has usually approached the subject of democratic consolidation from a macro-perspective, with whole countries as the units of analysis and comparison. Yet we can only do justice to the topic by also posing a similar set of questions at a micro-level. Are poor *people* any more or less attached to democracy than rich *people*? Are they any more or less likely to act as democratic *citizens*? If democracy consists of "rule by the people" then the values, attitudes and behaviors of ordinary folk are central to considerations of the fate of democracy. If it turns out that democratic stability in the medium to long-term depends on the economic wellbeing of citizens, then democracies can be expected to be especially fragile in world regions where many people live in poverty.

This paper explores the relationship of poor people to democratic citizenship in sub-Saharan Africa. It is prompted in part by intriguing research results emerging from South Asia that suggest that poor people are equally or more likely to hold democratic values, support democratic regimes, and vote in democratic elections. For example, Yadav finds for India in the 1990s "a participatory upsurge" among scheduled castes and tribes leading to "turnout of the lower orders of society...well above that of the most privileged groups" (2002, 120, 133). Bratton, Chu and Lagos have replicated this result using National Election Survey data for India, confirming that Indians of lower material status were significantly more likely to cast a ballot in the 1999 election (2006). Krishna makes the more modest claim that the political attitudes of the poor are, at minimum, no less democratic than those of the rich. He argues from survey data on north Indian villages that "faith in democracy as a system of governance does not appear to be significantly different among different levels of material wellbeing" (2005, 10).

To test these findings in African contexts, data are drawn from the Afrobarometer. The Afrobarometer is a series of comparative national surveys that, among other things, measures the economic living conditions and political orientations of ordinary Africans.<sup>1</sup> Each national survey – covering 15 countries in Round 2 – is based on a probability sample representing the adult population 18 years and above. In each round, face-to-face interviews are conducted with more than 21,000 respondents in the language of the respondent's choice. Because the surveys use a standard instrument, comparisons are possible across countries and over time. While most of the results reported here are from the survey in 2002-3, occasional comparisons are made with Afrobarometer Round 1 (1999-2001) and Afrobarometer Round 3 (2005-6).

The paper starts by reviewing the concept and measurement of poverty at the individual level and makes a case for the utility of the Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index. The second, demographic section provides answers to the query: "Who are the African poor?" and confirms that they tend to be rural and elderly. The paper then briefly reviews the political values, attitudes and behaviors of ordinary Africans, concluding that democratic orientations are surprisingly widespread but often shallow. A fourth section analyzes the simple, bivariate effects of lived poverty on various dimensions of democratic citizenship. A fifth section uses multivariate models to test if these results are robust. And a conclusion adds interpretation.



To anticipate results, I find that poor Africans are *no more or less likely* than their wealthier counterparts to hold democratic values or to prefer democracy above other political regimes. But they vote more frequently than richer people (at least in recent elections) and more regularly attend community meetings between elections. In only two respects, however, is poverty the *main* demographic consideration: poorer people are less likely to judge that African governments are consolidating democracy and more likely to make political contacts with informal political leaders.

These results lead to paradoxical conclusions. On one hand, poor people in Africa are clearly dissatisfied with the quality of governance provided by elected national leaders. On the other hand, they prefer to bypass the formal channels of the democratic state in attempting to redress political grievances. Instead, the poor majority – especially the older, rural poor – remains embedded in informal relations of patron-clientelism. Not only do poorer people lack certain key capabilities of democratic citizenship; they have yet to find ways to make the institutions of democracy work in their favor.

### **Indicators of Poverty**

Poverty is difficult concept to encapsulate for purposes of research, especially cross-national, comparative research (Atkinson, 1987; Clark and Hulme 2005).

The first issue is whether poverty is best understood in terms of absolute levels of deprivation or the relative social positions of individuals and groups (Seers 1969; Sen 1976; Sen 1981). Standard metrics of poverty – such as poverty datum lines – do not have universal meaning in all settings. Not only does the purchasing power of any monetary unit vary greatly across countries; the salience of poverty depends critically on surrounding distributions of wealth and opportunity. The same absolute level of poverty will be much more visible in an unequal society, and have different social and political consequences, than in places where life chances are more evenly distributed.

Second, poverty is a multidimensional concept (Chambers 1983; Sen 1999; Alkire 2002). To be sure, the most basic deprivations are material, such as shortages of land or livestock in agrarian societies, or lack of employment and income in industrial and post-industrial settings. But poverty also has less tangible dimensions such as vulnerability to external shocks, social isolation, and political powerlessness. Poor people lack not only the wherewithal to thrive physically; they also lack the capability to make choices for themselves or, failing that, to obtain help in times of need. A set of purely economic indicators is unlikely to capture the complexity of these manifold dimensions; cross-disciplinary research is required instead (Hulme and Toye 2006).

Third, researchers debate the utility of objective versus subjective indicators of poverty (Narayan et al. 2000; Pradhan and Ravallion 2000; Clark 2002; White 2002). One approach uses concrete criteria to assess the extent of poverty, whether in terms of the proportion of landless people, those living on a dollar a day, or those in the bottom fifth of the income distribution. While seemingly resting on hard data, this approach does not always generate reliable results or valid inferences to the behavior of poor people. As an antidote, other researchers prefer subjective indicators that record how poor people define poverty or place themselves on a ladder of wellbeing. The problem with many qualitative definitions and scales is that they are self-anchoring and therefore of limited use for comparative purposes. Moreover, objective and subjective indicators often come up with widely varying estimates of the extent of poverty in any given society.

The Afrobarometer contains both objective indicators of absolute poverty and subjective assessments by survey respondents of their relative place in a “poor-rich” hierarchy. The database also allows the construction of an Index of Lived Poverty based on respondent reports of access to a range of basic human needs that goes a good part of the way towards capturing the complexity of poverty. Based on an individual’s recollections of “going without” basic needs, the Index of Lived Poverty is an “experiential”

indicator of poverty that mixes objective and subjective approaches (Mattes et al. 2003). Whether this experiential indicator can help bridge objective–subjective measurement gaps will be tested as the paper proceeds.

### **Measuring Micro-Poverty in Africa**

This section of the paper describes, compares, and evaluates various competing indicators of poverty as measured by the Afrobarometer at the individual level.

#### ***An Objective Indicator: Household Income***

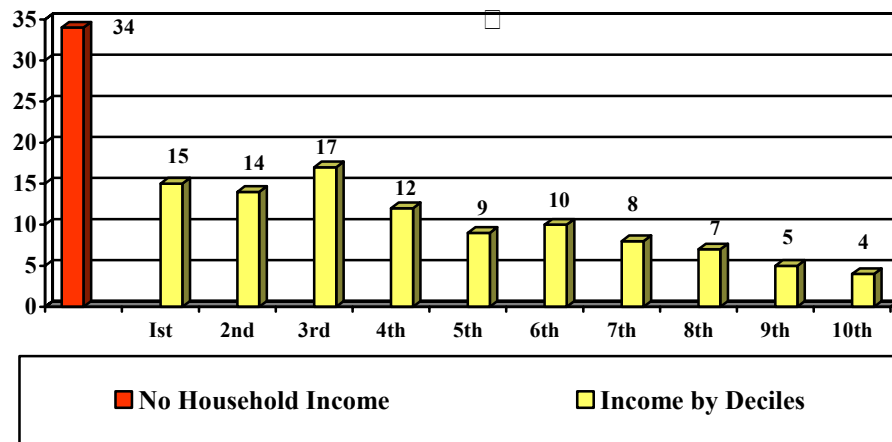
In Africa, researchers have found that household income is a poor proxy for poverty at the micro level. Especially in rural areas, self-provisioning peasants provide for many of their own basic needs and may have limited interactions with the formal cash economy. If income is produced, it is usually seasonal, depending on the timing of the harvest or the liquidation of livestock assets to cover periodic or emergency expenses. In urban areas, where unemployment and underemployment are widespread, most people piece together livelihoods from a variety of part-time income streams, whose flow may be intermittent and unpredictable.

As a result, respondents have a hard time calculating correct answers to survey questions about household income. The Afrobarometer asks: “Before taxes, how much do you and your spouse together earn per month?” Quite apart from the challenge of converting seasonal earnings into monthly increments, the question invites other errors: some respondents may be unmarried, others may not know what their spouse earns, and some may live in households with income earners other than spouses. Add to these concerns the likelihood that some people will intentionally disguise their true earnings, and it becomes clear that income data from African surveys must be viewed with considerable skepticism. For this reason, Afrobarometer Round 3 has dropped the income question in favor of enumerating household assets.

Nevertheless, and with due caution, several general features can be noted about these income data (see Figure 1). To begin with, one-third (34 percent) of respondents report no household income at all. Moreover, the distribution of income is skewed toward the low-end of the scale: there are more than three times as many people in the bottom fifth of the income distribution (29 percent) than in the top fifth (9 percent). The modal income is in the third decile which, when averaged across all 15 countries, is the equivalent of less than US\$2 per day. Taken together, these data confirm a profile across sub-Saharan countries in which extensive poverty coexists with major income disparities.

Finally, average measures of income poverty obscure major cross-national variations (not shown in Figure 1). In four countries – Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique and Senegal – over half of the national sample reports no income at all. In three other countries – Ghana, Mali and Zambia – about one half of respondents fall into the bottom fifth (two deciles) of income earners. Taken together, these seven countries contain the highest proportions of income-poor people among the countries studied in the Afrobarometer.

**Figure 1: Distribution of Household Income:  
15 African Countries, 2002-3**



### *The Meaning of Poverty*

Before searching for alternatives to a standard income indicator, it seems worthwhile to ask how Africans themselves regard poverty. Subjectively, do Africans see poverty as a lack of income or in broader, more multidimensional terms?

To this end, the Afrobarometer poses an open-ended question: “In your opinion, what does it mean to be ‘poor’?” Respondents are encouraged to offer up to three responses. In 2002-3, 99 percent could offer at least one definition of poverty, which suggests that the concept is universally understood. While somewhat fewer (81 percent) could offer two definitions, these survey respondents thereby implied that they see poverty in multifaceted terms. Along these lines, a smaller majority (58 percent) could offer three definitions, a capability that was significantly associated with an individual’s level of education.

The distribution of popular meanings is displayed in Figure 2. The Africans we interviewed most commonly associate being poor with a lack of food, a meaning mentioned by 46 percent of respondents. This connotation draws attention to the fundamental importance of nutritional intake as the basis of economic wellbeing for many Africans. Interestingly, urban and rural dwellers were about equally likely to see poverty as a lack of food. It seems that, while rural dwellers face problems of food insecurity due to the uncertainty of seasonal rainfall, urban dwellers face a parallel problem due to the unpredictability of income flows from part-time or occasional employment. Because an (unknown) proportion of all adults (including some self-described “farmers”) purchase at least some food, a subjective perception of poverty as a lack of food is not entirely at odds with an objective definition based on household income.

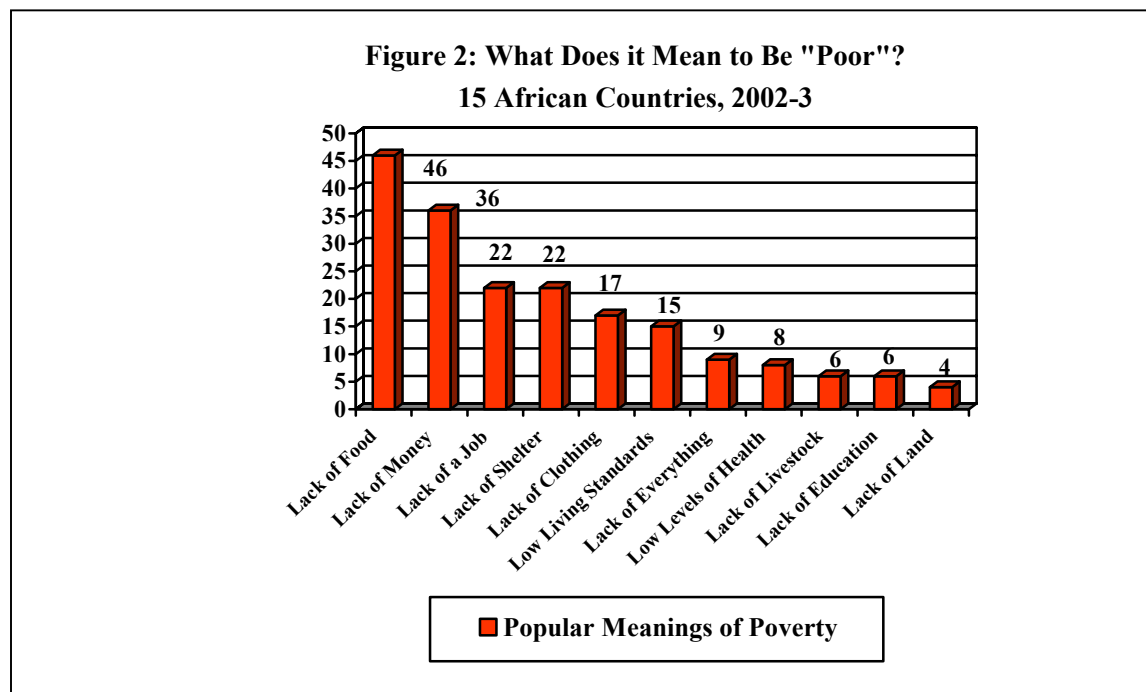
The connection between poverty and income is made explicitly in the second and third most commonly cited meanings of poverty: “lack of money” (mentioned by 36 percent) and “lack of a job” (22 percent). If these responses together amount to two different ways of saying “lack of income,” then a majority (58 percent) of Africans interpret poverty in this way. Income-based measures of poverty thus appear to have some conceptual validity, reflecting as they do the increasing monetization of all economic transactions in Africa, including securing daily subsistence.

Other common interpretations of poverty – for example, “lack of shelter,” (22 percent) and “lack of clothing” (17 percent) – would also seem to contain an income component, though they also signify social status. Respondents who refer to poverty as “low levels of health” and “lack of education” stretch the concept to embrace a couple of key determinants of life chances. And those who mention shortages of

land and livestock emphasize again poverty’s material base, but here primarily with reference to fixed assets rather than flows of income.

Contrary to the assumption that Africans possess communal cultures, people rarely interpreted poverty as social isolation: fewer than four percent emphasized a “lack of family” or social support network; and an equal proportion preferred to turn the tables by pointing to poverty as an “inability to *meet* family obligations.” And less than one percent mentioned powerlessness (e.g., “no-one listens to you”) or vulnerability (e.g., “having misfortune, bad luck”).

All told, however, African conceptions of wellbeing, while income-based, are qualified by strong connotations of eating adequately and presenting oneself as a well-clothed and well-housed person. There is also recognition that good health and educational attainment offer opportunities for people to obtain social and economic mobility. Oddly underemphasized are the traditional ties of family, kin and community that have often been assumed to protect the individual from lapsing into poverty.



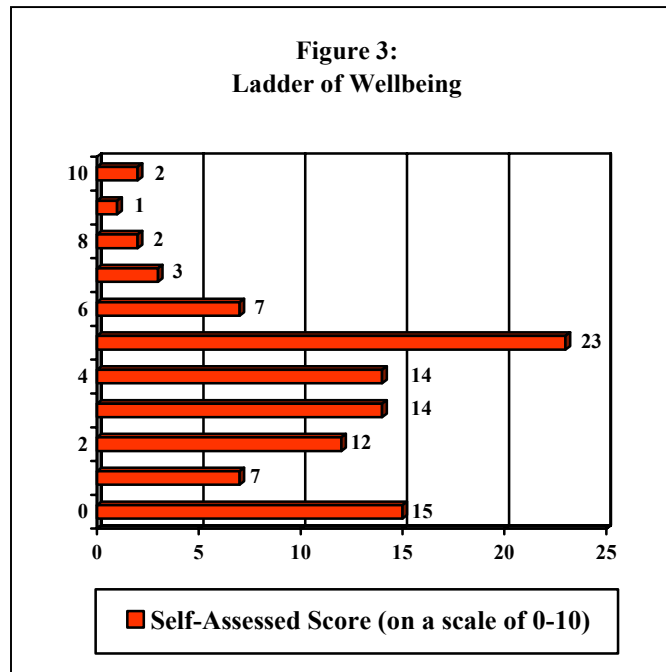
***A Subjective Indicator: A Ladder of Wellbeing***

Using their own definitions, how do Africans locate themselves on a ladder that reaches from poverty to the good life? Specifically, the Afrobarometer asks, “on a scale between 0 and 10, where 0 are ‘poor’ people and 10 are ‘rich’ people, which number would you give yourself today?” To help people who were not fully literate or numerate, interviewers were permitted to sketch an eleven-step ladder – with 0 on the bottom rung and 10 on the top rung – on a piece of paper or in the dirt underfoot. With this visual aid, all but two percent were able to offer a numeric answer.

The results are displayed on the “ladder” in Figure 3. As often happens, people gravitated to the end- and mid-points of the scale. A plurality of respondents (23 percent) located themselves on the middle rung, either because they truly felt they were half way between poverty and wellbeing, or because they saw themselves as enjoying an “average” quality of life, or because they were uncertain about how to choose. The next most common response was “poor” as signified by the lowest possible score of zero. And well over half (62 percent) judged their status to be below the mid-point on the ladder. Only 2 percent saw

themselves as rich. On the basis of this evidence, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that, subjectively, most Africans consider themselves to be victims of poverty.

The incidence of self-assessed poverty (mean score = 3.6 on the scale of 0 to 10) varies across and within African countries. Whereas Malawians are most likely to see themselves as poor (mean country score = 1.9), Nigerians and South Africans are the least likely to do so (mean country scores = 4.8 and 4.6 respectively). Note, however, that all mean country scores lie below the middle rung of the ladder.



Poverty perceptions also vary across time. The adult Africans we interviewed in 2002-3 think they are poorer than the previous generation. People place their parents on a significantly higher rung ten years ago (mean score = 4.1) than they place themselves today. A negative generation gap has apparently opened up over the past decade in 12 of the 15 countries studied and is widest in Senegal (-1.4) and Zambia (-1.5). Only in Botswana (+0.21) and Tanzania (+0.22), do people generally perceive a modest alleviation of poverty during the last ten years.<sup>2</sup>

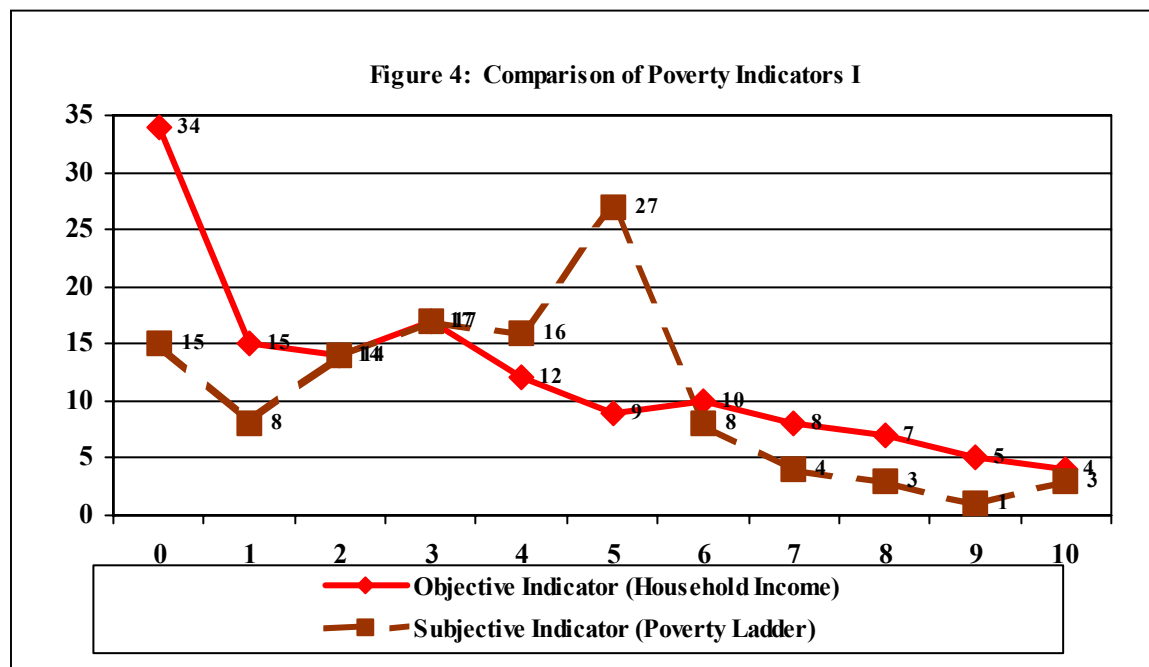
As for the economic future, Africans are universally optimistic. In every Afrobarometer country, without exception, adults consider that their children will attain greater wellbeing than themselves (mean score = 6.6). And, by crossing the middle rung, children are expected to climb out of relative poverty. Nigerians are typically exuberant: they expect their children to attain a score of more than 9 on the 10-point scale! And Kenyans, Cape Verdeans, Ghanaians and Batswana also expect their children to be twice as wealthy in the future as they are today. These data provide evidence that, even on a continent where poverty is a daily reality for most people, hope springs eternal.

One wonders, however, about the validity and reliability of a subjective ladder of wellbeing, especially under conditions where, demonstrably, people define poverty in a variety of ways. To gauge the relative utility of different indicators, I compare the (objective) household income with the (subjective) wellbeing ladder.<sup>3</sup> Figure 4 plots the distribution of both indicators.

I note two major differences and one basic similarity. First, more than twice as many people say they have “no income” as judge themselves to be on the bottom rung of the ladder. This divergence strongly suggests that income is not an essential component of African conceptions of poverty. Stated differently,

some people who lack income do not automatically judge themselves to belong among the poorest of the poor. Important in this group would be self-provisioning peasants who cater to their own basic needs largely or wholly outside of the cash economy. Second, three times as many people place themselves on the middle rung of the ladder as in the fifth decile of income-earners. This discrepancy may be due to the proclivity of respondents to locate themselves subjectively in the “middle” when, in objective income terms, the central tendency (mode) is on the third decile. But, again, people may be trying to indicate that, even though they lag behind in earning income, their sense of wellbeing is on a par with the average citizen. In both these instances, an objective, income-based indicator would classify people as poorer than they subjectively feel themselves to be.

Apart from these major deviations, the two indicators tend to track together, especially in the lower middle and upper ends of each scale. It is striking, for example, that the second and third deciles of income earners place themselves on the second and third rungs of the wellbeing ladder. And similar slopes connect upper deciles and upper rungs. Thus, there appears to be a degree of overlap between objective and subjective poverty indicators, at least for the one-third of the population that is moderately poor and the one-fifth or more of the population that is relatively rich.

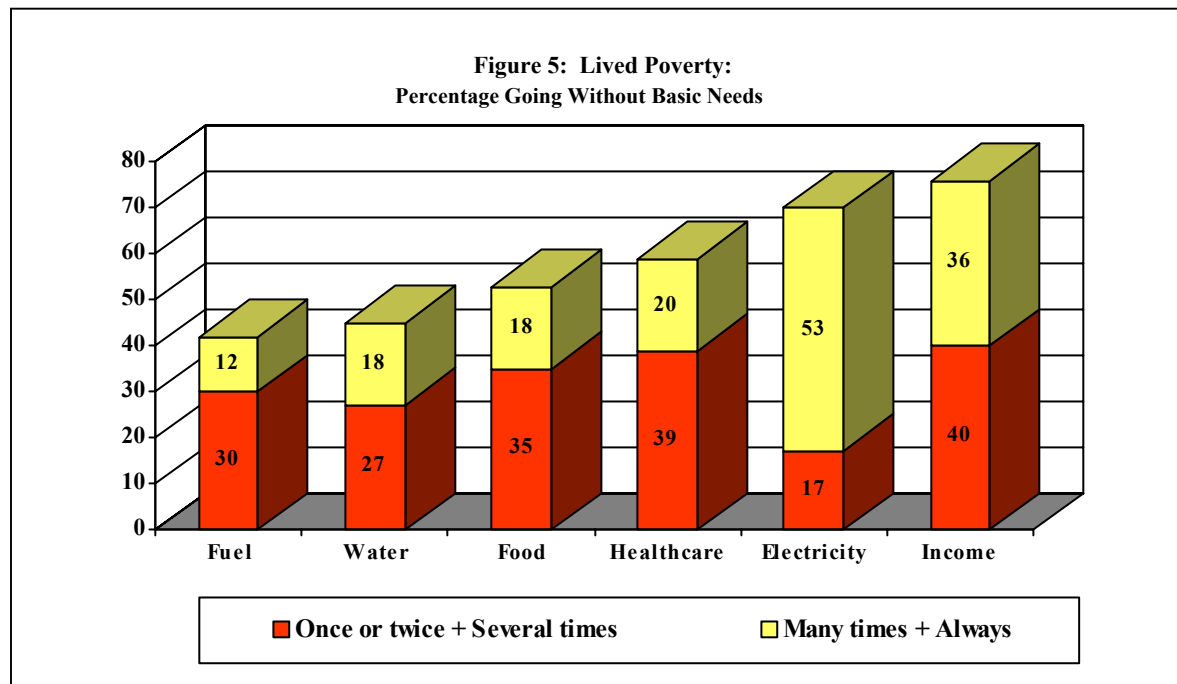


***An Experiential Indicator: Lived Poverty Index***

The above analysis points to the need for an overarching indicator that can capture both objective material resources (notably income) and broader, subjective perceptions of wellbeing. I have shown that, apart from income deficits alone, Africans define poverty in terms of lack of access to a range of basic human needs. Why not therefore ask people to recall their experiences in trying to meet such needs?

The Afrobarometer employs a battery of questions along these lines: “Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or your family gone without: (a) enough food to eat; (b) enough clean water for home use; (c) medicines or medical treatment; (d) electricity in your home; (e) enough fuel to cook your food; and (f) a cash income.<sup>4</sup> Figure 5 reports the distribution of people who reported “going without” each necessity at least once during the previous year.

More than half the Africans we interviewed reported being able to obtain sufficient fuel for cooking their food and clean water for home use. More than half, however, reported at least occasional shortages of food and medicines. Fully one fifth reported that access to healthcare was a persistent problem (“many times” or “always”). The limits of electrification, especially rural electrification, in Africa are reflected in the seven out of ten Africans who reported lack of access to electricity; more than half said “many times” or “always,” which usually meant that they were entirely unconnected to an electricity grid. The most common experience, however, was with shortfalls of income, either intermittent or persistent. Fully three quarters of all respondents said that they or their families had gone without cash on at least one occasion during the previous year.



Because these existential reports refer to both income flows and other felt needs, they can potentially constitute a hybrid indicator. As it happens, people who experience difficulty in covering one type of basic need usually also have trouble in satisfying all others. Stated differently, all items in the experiential battery hang together into a single, coherent factor, which in turn allowed the construction of a valid and reliable *Index of Lived Poverty*.<sup>5</sup>

As shown in Table 1, the Index of Lived Poverty is more highly correlated with both household income and the wellbeing ladder than either of these indicators is correlated with the other. We take this as evidence that this experiential indicator meets the goal of bridging objective and subjective perspectives on poverty. We expect that this item, which combines income with other, less tangible and “in kind” manifestations of wellbeing (like food, education and health), is a more valid and reliable construct than either alternative. As a quick guide to levels of poverty, the Lived Poverty battery is also less costly to administer than an in-depth household income and expenditure survey. In sum, as the best single indicator we have discovered to date, I will use the Lived Poverty Index to measure levels of poverty for the remainder of this paper.

**Table 1: Comparison of Poverty Indicators II**

	Household Income	Ladder of Wellbeing	Index of Lived Poverty
Household Income	1.000		
Ladder of Wellbeing	.204***	1.000	
Index of Lived Poverty <sup>a</sup>	-268***	-.312***	1.000

\*\*\*  $p < .001$

<sup>a</sup> Because the index measures poverty and the other indicators measure wealth or wellbeing, relationships are expected to be negative.

### Who Are the African Poor?

In order to summarize the nature, incidence, and distribution of poverty in sub-Saharan countries, I classify Afrobarometer respondents according to their position on the Index of Lived Poverty (see Table 2).

At the top of this distribution are those “*well-to-do*” individuals who, during the year prior to the survey, never went without food, clean water, health care, cooking fuel, or cash income. This relatively wealthy elite, which manages to cover its own basic needs, constitutes just 13 percent of all Africans surveyed. They are followed by a group of “*occasionally poor*” individuals, defined as those who encountered at least one unmet basic need in the last twelve months. Then comes a core population of “*poor*” people who confronted several shortages of certain basic needs during the same period. The classification is rounded out by “*very poor*” people (16 percent), who suffer regular and persistent shortages across many basic needs, and by the “*destitute*” (2 percent), who insist that they “always” lack the essential requirements for a decent life. This rather normal distribution, which places over two-thirds of the populations surveyed in two middle categories, is consistent with more casual observations about the distribution of poverty in Africa.

The classification is also validated by the distributions of the various social groups across African countries. As might be expected, the largest proportion of well-to-do people is found in South Africa (40 percent), though Namibia and Ghana are above average in the proportion of the population that reportedly meets basic needs (22 and 18 percent respectively). The largest proportions of destitute folk are found in Mozambique and Senegal (each 3 percent). And Lesotho and Malawi display the largest proportions of very poor people (33 and 30 percent respectively). The most “typical” African country is Nigeria: the 36 percent of its population who are poor, and 34 percent who are occasionally poor, represent a microcosm of the sub-continent as a whole.

**Table 2: Classification of African Survey Respondents, by Poverty**

Frequency of Going Without Basic Needs <sup>1</sup>	Response Category	Index Range	Percent Distribution	Classification
Never	0	0	13	Well-to-do
Just Once or Twice	1	0.2 – 1.0	34	Occasionally Poor
Several Times	2	1.2 – 2.0	35	Poor
Many Times	3	2.2 – 3.0	16	Very Poor
Always	4	3.2 – 4.0	2	Destitute

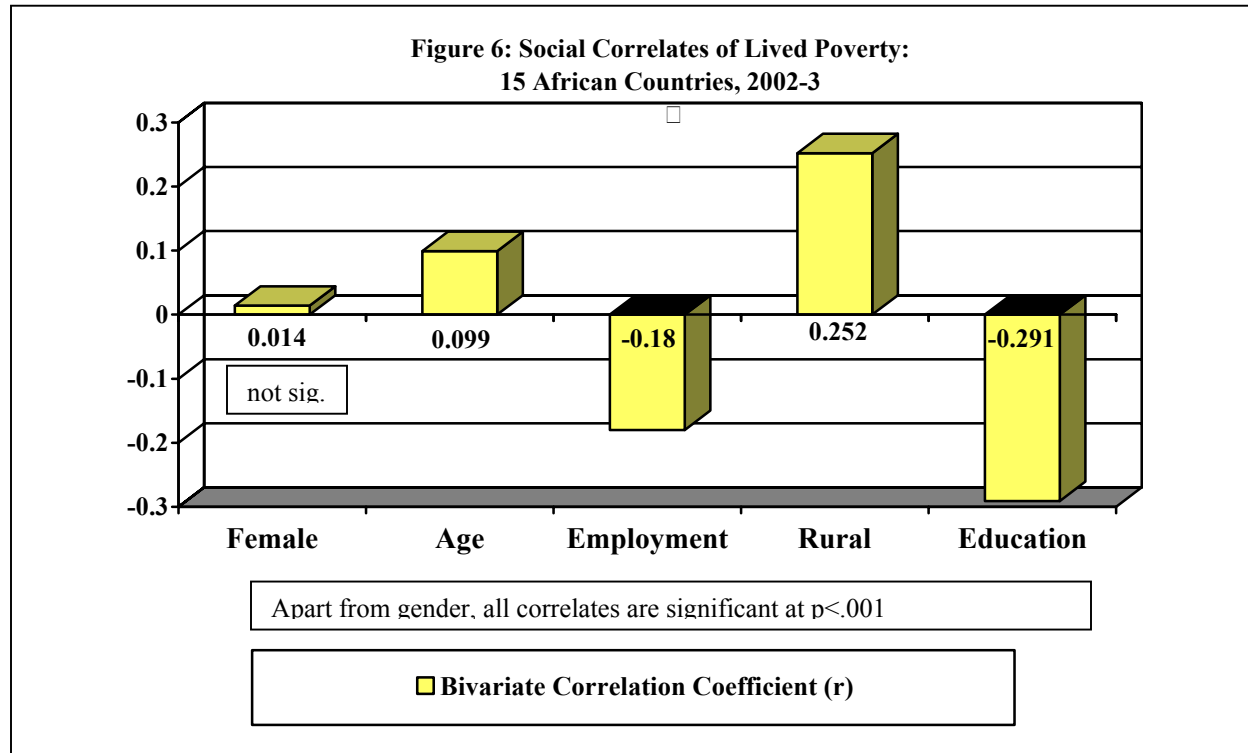
<sup>1</sup> Reference is made to five basic needs: food, clean water, health care, cooking fuel and cash income. The duration of need is the “past year.”  $N = 17,617$ .

In the tables that follow, the effects of poverty on democratic citizenship are traced primarily by means of the Lived Poverty Index, which is an interval scale. But the text provides illustrations by discussing observed differences between particular social groups, whether well-to-do, destitute, or somewhere in between. Occasionally, I even use a shorthand reference to the “non poor minority” (comprised of the 47



percent in the two wealthiest categories) and the “poor majority” (comprised of the 53 percent in the three poorest categories combined).

But who belongs to these groupings? Apart from level of poverty, what other social characteristics do their members share? As it happens, *gender* appears to play no meaningful role in distinguishing an individual’s poverty status: men and women are equally distributed within each category (see Figure 6). This would stand to reason if poverty were a household characteristic rather an individual one, with nuclear family members (notably spouses) having roughly the same socioeconomic status. But the Index apparently fails to capture differences of wellbeing within the family arising from gender-based power differentials.



But four other social characteristics, presented in ascending order of importance, show strong and significant connections to the Index of Lived Poverty. First, age correlates positively with poverty. For example, persons sixty or older are 10 percentage points more likely than adults thirty or younger to be very poor. Second, naturally enough, poverty is a negative function of employment. The unemployed are twice as likely as those employed full time to be very poor and twice as unlikely to be well-to-do. Third, in Africa, poverty is a predominantly rural phenomenon. To be sure, we find all categories of wellbeing (or “illbeing”) in both cities and countryside. But three times as many members of the poor majority live in rural areas than in urban centers. Finally and unsurprisingly, poverty and education are inversely related. Indeed, education is the best predictor of an escape from poverty, with a college postgraduate being seven times more likely to be well-to-do than a person with no formal education (42 versus 6 percent).

In sum, therefore, the experience of lived poverty in Africa is concentrated among those older, less educated, rural dwellers that also lack formal employment. It is these marginalized and vulnerable people who are most likely to encounter difficulty in fulfilling their basic human needs. The question now arises as to whether this poor majority is also less likely to possess the capabilities of democratic citizenship.

### **Dimensions of Democratic Citizenship**

As a prelude to addressing this question, it is first necessary to parse the concept of democratic citizenship. I distinguish three main dimensions that can be captured using social survey data: *values*, *attitudes* and *behaviors*.

#### ***Political Values***

At root, democratic citizens are distinguished by a set of *value* orientations that underpin popular rule. These values include, *inter alia*, political tolerance and a desire for political equality and accountability (Inglehart 1997; Gibson and Gouws 2003). Democratic “citizens” – as opposed to autocratic “subjects” (Mamdani 1996) or patrimonial “clients” (Fox 1990) – tolerate a diversity of political opinion, support principles of universal suffrage, and demand that leaders respond to mass needs. The Afrobarometer Round 2 questionnaire contains survey items that provide insight into these value orientations. Each item offers the respondent two opposing statements, asks them to choose the one closest to their own view, and then probes whether they “agree” or “agree very strongly.”

On political *tolerance*, respondents were asked to choose between the following statements: “A. In order to make decisions in our community, we should talk until everyone agrees” or “B. Since we will never agree on everything, we must learn to accept differences of opinion within our community.” By this measure, individuals are most tolerant (option B) in Uganda, Kenya and Namibia (at least 58 percent) and least so in Senegal, Mali and Mozambique (33 percent or less). Overall, however, the Africans we interviewed were split on this issue, with 50 percent favoring unanimity in public opinion and 46 percent accepting dissent. As such, one can only conclude that the democratic norm of political tolerance has yet to take root in Africa.

Africans seem, at least at first, to speak more clearly about political *accountability*. The survey choice was as follows: “A. As citizens, we should be more active in questioning the actions of our leaders” or “B. In our country these days, there is not enough respect for authority.” Fully two thirds of all respondents (68 percent) said they want to hold leaders accountable (Option A) compared to 27 percent who preferred to defer to authority. This time, Ugandans, Ghanaians and Malawians led the way (at 80 percent or more) with only Namibians seeing virtue in respectfully submitting (58 percent chose Option B). Apart from this single exception, and perhaps because of hard-won experience with bad governance, Africans otherwise seem to consider that the power of incumbent rulers must be checked.

Finally, the survey item on political *equality* posed a contrast between “A. All people should be permitted to vote, even if they do not understand all the issues in an election” and “B. Only those who are sufficiently well educated should be allowed to choose our leaders.” In this instance the citizenship value was clearly ascendant. Many more Africans favored universal suffrage (78 percent) than a qualified franchise (17 percent). This principle was pervasive in Kenya, Senegal, and Cape Verde (85 percent or above) and was valued by a two-thirds majority in all countries except Mozambique and South Africa. If nothing else (and other values remain contested), Africans have embraced political equality, a core value of democratic citizenship.

#### ***Political Attitudes***

Beyond fundamental values, citizenship in a democracy involves a distinctive set of mass political attitudes. Among other things, citizens are expected to be committed to democracy and to express greater

satisfaction with its supply. Unlike political values, which are imbibed in childhood and are slow to change, political attitudes may be learned in adulthood, often quickly and even fleetingly, on the basis of direct firsthand experiences with different political regimes.

The Afrobarometer measures the standard set of political attitudes usually found in barometer-type surveys worldwide, plus a several original items. As reported elsewhere, the sum total of these measurements reveals an African populace with favorable attitudes to democracy that are widespread but shallow (Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi, 2005).

On the demand side, most Africans – some 64 percent in 2002-3 – say that they “*prefer democracy* to any other kind of government.” But this average “continental” score masks cross-country variations over time, with low support for democracy gradually rising in Lesotho, but with initially high support quickly falling in Nigeria. At the same time, the Africans we interviewed clearly *reject the ancien regimes* of military, one-party and one-man rule that prevailed on the continent from independence to the 1990s. For example, three quarters consistently abjure the notions that “the army comes in to govern the country” or that “elections and parliament are abolished so that the president can decide everything.”

What is much less certain, however, is the depth of these commitments. Some people do little more than pay lip service to democracy since support for this regime coexists with a willingness to simultaneously countenance one or more autocratic alternatives. Indeed, in 1999-2001, fewer than half of all respondents (48 percent) *both* supported democracy *and* rejected all three authoritarian regimes. And this index of demand for democracy fell to just over one in three respondents (37 percent) by 2002-3 (Bratton 2004).

On the supply side, popular *satisfaction with “the way democracy works”* has also settled at a relatively low level, with some 54 percent satisfied across 15 African countries in 2002-3. And the same proportion felt that that their country was either “*a full democracy*” or a “*democracy with (only) minor problems.*” Both these averages, however, conceal considerable variation across countries and volatility over time. While satisfaction with democracy has steadily risen in Ghana, it has plummeted in Nigeria. And while Malians have come to believe that problems with their new democracy are minor only, Malawians have lost faith that democracy can solve their country’s deep-seated problems of development and governance.

Beyond these standard items, the Afrobarometer probes several original attitudes to democracy. The first concerns *support for democratic institutions* on the assumption that elections, parties, the legislature and the presidency are more tangible referents for survey respondents than the abstract concept of “*democracy*” writ large. We find that Africans overwhelmingly (79 percent) prefer to “choose leaders in this country through regular, open and honest elections” than by any other means (Afrobarometer Network 2004). Given past experiences with leaders who overstayed their welcome, the electorate also favors term limits on the presidency (74 percent). Concomitantly, they prefer that the parliament make laws for the country, “even if the president does not agree” (61 percent). People are somewhat more cautious and divided, however, about political parties: whereas a slim majority acknowledges that, “many political parties are needed...for real choices” (55 percent), a sizeable minority fears that “political parties create division and confusion” (40 percent).<sup>6</sup> And, as with political values, isolated expressions of support for various separate institutions have yet to cohere into a single, overall factor of support for democratic institutions generally.

Secondly, we measure *political patience*. Respondents are asked to choose whether “A. Our present system of elected government should be given more time to deal with inherited problems” or “B. If our present system cannot produce results soon, then we should try another form of government.” Reassuringly, Africans are not eager to abandon democracy: by a 20-point margin (56 versus 36 percent in 2002-3), they choose to stick with their present system of elected government rather than to cast it aside. But, this patience is not inexhaustible. For the five countries where we have comparable data, the

level of political patience dropped from 73 to 63 percent over the three-year interval between the first two surveys.

Finally, we sought to measure the nature of popular support for democracy. Is it *intrinsic*, based on the inherent qualities of democracy itself, such as civil liberties and political rights? Or is support *instrumental*, being granted only conditionally, for example if democracy improves economic standards of living or the delivery of social services? The question took the familiar forced choice format: Agree with A or B? “A. Democracy is worth having simply because it allows everyone a free and equal voice in making decisions.” “B. Democracy is only worth having if it can address everyone’s basic social and economic needs.” Somewhat to our surprise, and contrary to expectations in much of the literature (Ake 1996; but see Bratton and Mattes, 2001) we found more intrinsic (50 percent) than instrumental (38 percent) support for democracy. One out of ten people “didn’t know.” This result gives reason to counter the conventional wisdom that democracy will automatically founder in Africa because governments fail to deliver socioeconomic development.

### ***Political Behavior***

Democracy also requires active citizens. Not only are individuals in a democracy obliged to exercise their right to vote. But they are also expected, between elections, to engage with others in collective action and to take initiatives to contact their leaders.

According to the Afrobarometer, Africans participate in the political process at quite high levels. Take *voting*. To be sure, Africans were somewhat less likely to turn out for recent presidential and parliamentary elections (70 percent) than East Asians (74 percent) and Latin Americans (76 percent) (Bratton, Chu and Lagos, 2006). But low voter turnout rates in places like Zimbabwe (44 percent in 1996) are offset by high turnout rates in places like Ghana (89 percent in 1996<sup>7</sup>). And, generally speaking, Africans tend to appear at the polls more frequently than the citizens of certain advanced democracies, notably the United States and Switzerland.

As for *collective action*, Africans are slightly more likely than East Asians to regularly discuss politics with others (20 percent versus 18 percent<sup>8</sup>), but less likely to do so than Latin Americans (31 percent). Africans nevertheless evince high levels of voluntary association: for example, a majority (52 percent) claims to be an active member or official leader in a religious group like a church, sect or mosque. Africans are also distinguished by regular attendance at community meetings (47 percent say they did this “several times” or “often” during the previous year) and by informally “joining with others to raise an issue” (33 percent). They even report comparatively high levels of unconventional political participation, with 14 saying they joined a demonstration or a protest march.

But parochial patterns are evident in popular *contacts with leaders*. Ordinary Africans are twice as likely to contact an elected local government councilor (25 percent had done this within the previous year) than their representative to the national legislature (12 percent) or an official of a national government ministry (13 percent). These results suggest that the central state remains a relatively remote and inaccessible apparatus to most Africans. Instead, ordinary people who want to accomplish a personal or collective goal are more likely to use familiar channels to religious leaders (45 percent had done this within the previous year), traditional rulers (32 percent, mostly rural folk), or “some other influential person” (26 percent). Thus, we find a strong predilection among Africans to bypass the official state in favor of informal relations with notables in the local community.

### **Poverty and Democratic Citizenship**

Having outlined the broad distributions of democratic values, attitudes and behaviors among Africans, we are now well placed to inquire whether these attributes vary according an individual’s experience of

living in poverty. As discussed earlier, I will use the Afrobarometer’s Index of Lived Poverty as the operational predictor. As a rough guide, one can hypothesize that the poorer the person, the less likely that he or she will display the capabilities of democratic citizenship. As we shall see, this generic hypothesis is borne out in many respects, but with exceptions of theoretical and substantive importance.

**Poverty and Political Values**

The differential effects of poverty on democratic citizenship are immediately evident with respect to political values. As expected, poorer people are less politically tolerant than wealthier people; nonetheless, they are more likely to favor political equality. The results that support these crosscutting conclusions are shown in Table 3.

On political *tolerance*, we find that destitute people are 7 percentage points *less* likely than well-to-do people to strongly agree that, “we must learn to accept differences of opinion within our community.” Instead, poorer folk are significantly more likely to favor a consensual approach to decision-making in which groups of people “talk until they agree” on unanimous, collective points of view. Social unity and political consensus are obviously valuable commodities in societies where political differences can easily escalate into conflict and violence. And one can even plausibly argue that, as a political procedure, consensus building is no less democratic than open competition. But it is difficult to make a case that the absence of difference, pluralism, and minority opinion is consistent with democracy. As such, poorer Africans seem less willing to risk attachment to political tolerance, a core democratic value, than Africans whose wellbeing is more secure.

By contrast, disadvantaged Africans are much *more* committed than their well-to-do compatriots to the democratic value of political *equality*. By a margin of 12 percentage points, the very poor consider that “all people should be permitted to vote, even if they do not understand all the issues in an election.” To be sure, there is a good deal of self-interest embedded in this value since poor people stand to benefit if decisions are made on the basis of the crude political arithmetic of majority rule. But there is also no gainsaying the fact that the poor do profess a belief in the principle of universal adult suffrage, a cornerstone of modern democratic theory. It is mainly wealthier people who express doubts about the wisdom of majority rule. The rich distrust the passions of a mass electorate, perhaps because they fear that these may be turned against property and privilege. As a result, the non-poor minority tends to align itself with the anti-democratic sentiment that “only those who are sufficiently well educated should be allowed to choose our leaders.”

**Table 3: The Effects of Poverty on Democratic Values**

		<b>Dependent Variable</b>	<b>Point Spread<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Bivariate Correlation (Pearson’s r)<sup>2</sup></b>
<b>Poor are</b>	Less likely	To be politically tolerant	-7	-.040***
	Equally likely	To want political accountability	+2	not sig.
	More likely	To want political equality	+12	+.051***

<sup>1</sup> Represents widest spread between categories on five-point poverty scale, usually between destitute and well-to-do people. Cell n’s for destitute may be small. Exceptional categories are noted in the text.

<sup>2</sup> Based on five-point poverty scale from destitute to well-to-do (\*\*\*p=<.001). Question wordings for dependent variables are given in the text.

Between these diverse effects, we discover that poverty does not shape values of political *accountability*. The small gap in preferences for leadership accountability between the destitute and the well-to-do is not statistically significant. Indeed, *identical* proportions of the poor majority and the non-poor minority (68 percent each) express the norm that “we should be more active in questioning the actions of our leaders.” Stated differently, about two out of three African adults, regardless of social stratum, have apparently

arrived at a common understanding that it is better to actively check, rather than blindly respect, political leaders.

Thus, the effects of poverty on popular attachments to core democratic values are decidedly mixed. While poverty suppresses political tolerance, it amplifies commitments to political equality. And poverty has no discernible effect on a widespread popular demand for political accountability. This combination of values suggests that poor people in Africa will not easily surrender their voting rights and may sometimes even use these rights to discipline poorly performing leaders. At the same time, they may too easily acquiesce *en bloc* to leaders who claim a popular mandate, but who ride roughshod over the rights of dissenting minorities.

### ***Poverty and Political Attitudes***

The effects of poverty on political attitudes are much more consistent. Moreover, the effects are *always negative*, at least for the range of democratic attitudes we have measured. Without exception, higher levels of lived poverty are associated with lower levels of both demand for democracy and satisfaction with democracy's supply. As such, the Afrobarometer results are consistent with Shin's observation that, in South Korea, "it is low-income people, not the wealthiest, who are least committed to regime change and future democratic reforms" (1999, 83).

Let us start on the demand side. Destitute people are 14 percentage points less likely than well-to-do people to consider that "democracy is always preferable." And, they are consistently less likely to reject all authoritarian alternatives, such as one-man rule (minus 11 points), one-party rule (minus 12 points), and military rule (minus 13 points). Reflecting the fact that poverty in Africa is most prevalent among elderly rural dwellers, the poor are least likely to reject a traditional form of government led by chiefs, headmen, or councils of elders (minus 19 points). This nostalgia for the past apart, poverty is most strongly connected to democratic citizenship in terms of an index of demand for democracy. The poor majority is significantly less likely than the non-poor minority to display deep commitments to democracy. That is, poor Africans do not simultaneously prefer this regime *and* reject *all* previous forms of dictatorship.

Poverty also suppresses popular perceptions that democracy is being supplied. Now by 17 percentage points, destitute people are less likely than well-to-do people to express satisfaction with the day-to-day performance of elected democratic regimes. And by an even wider margin (19 points), the destitute are less inclined than the well-to-do to think that a full, or close to full, democracy is being consolidated in their country. As expected, lived poverty is strongly and negatively associated with an average construct composed of these two intertwined indicators, which we summarize as the supply of democracy.

Possible reasons for poverty's negative effects on democratic attitudes are indicated at the bottom of Table 4. First, poverty decreases the tendency that an individual will view democracy intrinsically (as an end in itself) and increases the prospect that she will see it instrumentally (as a means to another, often material, end). I suspect that poor people are more prone than others to lose faith in democracy if elected governments fail to meet mass expectations for improved living standards. Second, poor people display lower levels of support for a full battery of key democratic institutions – including open elections, multiple parties, legislative sovereignty, and presidential term limits. I would venture that poor people who do not fully appreciate the concept of divided government find it difficult to accurately assess the essential contributions of these counterbalancing institutions. Finally, as a consequence, poor people are less likely to be patient (minus 13 points) with the slow, messy, and imperfect processes of decision-making in a real-world democracy.

**Table 4: The Effects of Poverty on Democratic Attitudes**

		Dependent Variable	Point Spread <sup>1</sup>	Bivariate Correlation (Pearson's r) <sup>2</sup>
<b>Poor are</b>	Less likely	To prefer democracy	-14	-.068***
	Less likely	To reject authoritarian alternatives	-11 to -19	-.045***
Thus,	Less likely	To demand democracy	(index)	-.073***
	Less likely	Be satisfied with way democracy works	-17	-.054***
	Less likely	To perceive extensive democracy	-19	-.074***
Thus,	Less likely	To perceive a supply of democracy	(construct)	-.073***
	Less likely	To value democracy intrinsically	-14	-.050***
	Less likely	To support key democratic institutions	-10	-.051***
	Less likely	To be patient with democracy	-13	-.054***

<sup>1</sup> Represents widest spread between categories on five-point poverty scale, usually between destitute and well-to-do people. Cell n's for destitute may be small. Exceptional categories are noted in the text.

<sup>2</sup> Based on five-point poverty scale from destitute to well-to-do (\*\*p<.001). Question wordings for dependent variables are given in the text.

### **Poverty and Political Behaviors**

As we turn from attitudes to behavior, the picture changes again. Compared with attitudes to democracy, poverty's relationship to mass action is somewhat less consistent. But the linkage is markedly more *positive*. In important respects, poverty in Africa is associated with *higher levels of political participation*.

The most remarkable result concerns *voting*. Across 12 African countries in Afrobarometer Round 1, members of the poor majority were somewhat and significantly *more* likely than the non-poor elite to report having voted in the last national election.<sup>9</sup> The same pattern holds even more strongly for Afrobarometer Round 3, at least for the six countries for which data were available at the time of writing. In 1999-2001, the very poor were 4 percentage points more likely to vote than the well-to-do; in 2005, they were 9 points more likely to do so. Except for Namibia in Round 1, the pattern of higher turnout among the poor majority held in *every* country over *both* time periods. And on both occasions, the gap between destitute and well-to-do people was widest in Botswana, rising from 13 points in 1999 to 21 points in 2005. Since many of Botswana's economically secure citizens apparently abstain from electoral politics, this result undercuts the country's reputation as a model African democracy.

The African evidence runs counter to the conventional wisdom about voter turnout in advanced industrial democracies. The literature on the latter regimes indicates that low socioeconomic status usually *depresses* political participation (Almond and Verba, 1965; Verba, Nie and Kim 1978; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba, Scholzman and Brady, 1995). For example, Teixeira (1992) notes an income-based class gap in turnout in the US that gradually widened over three previous decades. The clear implication is that poverty and voting combine differently in new versus old democracies.

Poverty's influences are murkier for *collective action* between elections. On one hand, the poor are less likely than the wealthy to engage in political discussions during the regular course of daily life. On the other hand, the poor – especially the very poor – are significantly predisposed to attend community meetings. This last finding can be taken as an encouraging sign of mass involvement in politics beyond the act of voting. But, when paired with limited political discussion, it could also reveal low quality participation. My working hypothesis is that participation by poor people is rarely *autonomous*, meaning that it does not reflect strong individual attachments to personal values and attitudes that have been tested

in political debate. On the contrary, I expect poor people’s participation to be more *mobilized*, or a product of a process of groupthink that is mass-produced in collective settings such as community meetings.

Poverty also has mixed effects on *contacts between leaders and constituents*. As expected, poor people hold back from approaching government officials, perhaps because the state has no local presence or because they feel a lack of social or economic standing. Nevertheless, poor people do liaise easily with local government councilors; these elected representatives share a similar social status and live in the locality. Thus there is trace evidence (see contrasting signs) that central government in African countries may be captured by wealthier elites and that local government is the preserve principally of the poor.

The most striking result concerns contacts with *informal leaders*. In the strongest relationship discovered so far, destitute people are 25 percentage points more likely than well-to-do people to direct political demands along informal channels. In order of importance, the poor majority chooses to approach traditional authorities, religious leaders, and other local notables (like businesspeople) when they require a solution to a problem. The popular political choice of informal over formal channels reflects the twin facts that central government is remote and local government is under-resourced. As such, poor people may be doubly marginalized: they cannot reach the parts of the state where resources reside; and the local authorities that fall within their ambit are themselves notoriously poor and weak.

**Table 5: The Effects of Poverty on Democratic Behaviors**

		<b>Dependent Variable</b>	<b>Point Spread<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Bivariate Correlation (Pearson’s r)<sup>2</sup></b>
<b>Poor are</b>	More likely	To vote (Afrobarometer Round 1)	+4	+.036***
		To vote (Afrobarometer Round 3)	+9	+.069***
	Less likely	To discuss politics	-3	-.025***
	More likely	To attend a community meeting	+10	+.111***
	Less likely	To attend a protest demonstration	-6	-.034***
	Less likely	To contact a government official	-4	-.021***
	More likely	To contact a local govt. councilor	+11	+.068***
	More likely	To contact an informal leader <sup>3</sup>	+25	+.161***

<sup>1</sup> Represents widest spread between categories on five-point poverty scale, usually between destitute and well-to-do people. Cell n’s for destitute may be small. Exceptional categories are noted in the text.

<sup>2</sup> Based on five-point poverty scale from destitute to well-to-do (\*\*\*p<.001). Question wordings for dependent variables are given in the text.

<sup>3</sup> An index, distinguished by factor analysis, of contacts with religious leaders, traditional authorities, and “other influential persons” (Alpha = .617).

### **Interrogating Poverty’s Political “Effects”**

So far, we have only considered poverty’s simple (bivariate) connections to democratic citizenship. But do these coarse effects survive when poverty is controlled for other demographic factors? I have previously described the social identities of the African poor (see Figure 6). Now I argue that it is reasonable to expect that age, residential location, education, and employment status may independently shape individual attachments to democracy. Thus, in this final section, I use multivariate analysis to test whether poverty’s political effects are robust to these alternative social influences.



If the effects of poverty are spurious, opposite or secondary, then telltale signs will appear. First, we already know that several bivariate relationships between poverty and democratic citizenship are quite weak. Thus poverty's putative effects may turn out to be due to other social considerations. The key signal would be a loss of statistical significance on the lived poverty variable in multivariate models. Second, a change of signs on coefficients of association due to the introduction of statistical controls would suggest that we had initially assumed the wrong direction to any poverty effect. Finally, the explanatory rank order of predictors must be examined wherever poverty is one of several independent social factors that are significantly related to democratic citizenship. Unless standardized regression coefficients confirm that poverty is the strongest demographic predictor, we must conclude that its influence is merely secondary.

I find that many of poverty's political effects are indeed conditional on other aspects of social structure. Out of eight select aspects of democratic citizenship,<sup>10</sup> the poverty relationship is spurious for four, including for every political value (see Tables 6A and 6B). The poverty connection is moderate, but secondary, on two additional aspects of citizenship. Importantly, however, *poverty survives all tests* in explaining popular perceptions of the extent of democracy (a political attitude) and contacts with informal political leaders (a political behavior). For these critical dimensions of citizenship, an individual's experience with lived poverty is the *principal* social determinant.

### ***Political Values (Controlled)***

Take *democratic values* first. Once controlled for other social factors, poverty loses statistical significance on both political tolerance and political equality (see first two columns of figures in Table 6A).

Instead, *tolerance* is primarily a function of an individual's access to education. This clear result suggests that education of any kind (not just civic education) widens people's horizons, exposes them to new viewpoints, and enhances values conducive to democracy (Nie, Junn and Stehlik-Barry, 1996; Sullivan and Transue, 1999). Even primary schooling under autocratic regimes in Africa seems to have this positive effect (Evans and Rose, 2006). Of course, other social processes are positive for tolerance too, such as the natural cycle of aging (older Africans are more tolerant than the young) and the experience of holding a paid job (perhaps because employment leads to interaction with workmates from diverse backgrounds and with competing ideas).

Education and employment also affect a person's commitments to political *equality*, but this time in a negative direction. These results are consistent with the earlier observation that wealth undermines egalitarian values. Only now, education and employment displace wealth (and thus poverty) as a meaningful predictor. Just as important as education is residential location: living in a rural area is positive and significant for valuing political equality. My amended interpretation is as follows: while poor people in rural areas value political equality, they do so because of some attribute of residential location and not essentially because they are poor. Perhaps communal cultural norms play a role in promoting egalitarianism among country dwellers, but examination of this prospect must await a future study.<sup>11</sup>

**Table 6A: The Conditional Effects of Poverty on Democratic Citizenship, With Controls for Other Demographic Factors (Part I)**

	Democratic Values		Democratic Attitudes	
	Political Tolerance	Political Equality	Demand for Democracy	Supply of Democracy
<b>Lived Poverty</b>	.007	.008	-.011	<b>-.119***</b>
Gender (Female)	.008	.006	-.076***	-.019*
Age	.022*	.007	.027***	.002
Employed	.035***	-.024**	-.013	-.005
Rural	-.001	.064***	.006	.086***
Education	.156***	-.062***	.205***	-.079***

Cell entries are standardized OLS regression coefficients (beta).

**Bold figures in shaded cells** signify robust poverty effect.

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ .

### **Political Attitudes (Controlled)**

Second, we turn to *democratic attitudes*. It turns out that, other things being equal, poverty remains a significant factor only on the supply side. As far as demand for democracy is concerned, other social considerations matter more (see last two columns in Table 6A).

*Demand for democracy* is again driven by education. As people accumulate years of schooling they become ever more likely to say they prefer democracy and (especially) to reject various authoritarian alternatives. Individuals with some primary schooling may pay lip service to democracy, but they do not understand this concept well and continue to harbor nostalgia for strongman rule. By the time they reach post-secondary level, however, educated people come out clearly, not only *for* democracy, but also *against* autocracy, particularly *contra* military and one-man rule. This sequence of attitude formation via schooling (pro-democracy first, anti-autocracy later), plus the cumulative effects of media exposure and voluntary association, suggest that the acquisition of deep democratic commitments is a cognitive learning process (Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi, 2005).

It is also notable that, although women are no poorer or richer than men, they are significantly less likely to demand democracy. Apparently, there is a sizeable gender gap in the political regime preferences of men and women that is not accounted for by (non-existent) differentials in poverty or even by (sizeable) differences in educational attainment (Logan and Bratton, 2006).

As stated above, poverty's effects on democratic attitudes are evident only on the *supply side*. Even after an array of alternative social influences is included, an individual's experience with lived poverty clearly undermines his assessment of whether the elected government of the day is actually building a consolidated democracy. To be sure, education is also important in inducing people to adopt skeptical attitudes towards democratic performance. By contrast, living in a rural area apparently dulls critical faculties; country dwellers are prone to unquestioningly accept any type of political regime that governing elites choose to deliver.

But, other things being equal, *poverty is the single most important social factor shaping popular assessments about the quality of African democracies*. This finding is robust to all the tests we have devised here. And, given that poor people tend to view democracy instrumentally, I infer that unfulfilled popular expectations of improved wellbeing lead people to conclude that the quality of democracy is therefore low.

### **Political Behaviors (Controlled)**

Finally, let us account for *democratic behaviors* (see Table 6B). With reference to elections prior 2001, the finding that *poor people vote more frequently* at first seems to disappear (compare Table 6B with Table 5). Poverty is displaced by age (with older folk voting more frequently than youngsters) and by residential location (with rural dwellers turning out more often than their urban cousins). Moreover, the same analysis conducted with 2005 data confirms the importance of rival social influences: age and employment lead the way and rurality is still influential.

But, in 2005, and despite controls, *poverty survives* as one of several formative influences on voting in Africa's most recent round of elections. As before, the relationship remains positive, with destitute people being 13 percent more likely than well-to-do people to cast a ballot. While we will continue to monitor this relationship in subsequent Afrobarometer surveys, I see no reason at this stage to back off the claim that, in Africa, *poor people are more reliable voters than rich people*.

But further discussion is required of the changing results for voting between 2000 and 2005. We know that urban uprisings, including the political mobilization of the urban poor, helped to prompt political liberalization and democratic transitions in Africa in the early 1990s. By the end of the decade, however, the urban poor appear to have become demobilized. The weak association between poverty and voting in 1999-2001 signifies this state of affairs, even as voting was vigorous in rural areas – where most poor people live. Since that time, the urban poor must have become *remobilized* because, despite a control for residential location, *poverty* becomes statistically significant in 2005. I surmise that the urban poor relaxed politically after democratic transitions, thinking that regime change would meet their aspirations. When it did not (and this became apparent by 2005), the urban poor rejoined the rural poor in turning out for elections in relatively large numbers.

**Table 6B: The Conditional Effects of Poverty on Democratic Citizenship, With Controls for Other Demographic Factors (Part II)**

	Democratic Behaviors			
	Vote 1999-2001	Vote 2005	Attend Community Meeting	Contact Informal Leader
<b>Lived Poverty</b>	<i>.047</i> (.012)	<b>.128***</b> (.052)	<b>.109***</b>	<b>.158***</b>
Gender (Female)	<i>-.039</i>	<i>.031</i>	<i>-.087***</i>	<i>-.069***</i>
Age	<i>.037***</i> (.200)	<i>.047***</i> (.247)	<i>.079***</i>	<i>.100***</i>
Employed	<i>.070*</i> (.026)	<i>.390***</i> (.147)	<i>.024**</i>	<i>-.010</i>
Rural	<i>.258***</i> (.056)	<i>.230***</i> (.045)	<i>.185***</i>	<i>.141***</i>
Education	<i>-.003</i>	<i>-.058***</i> (-.042)	<i>.101***</i>	<i>.121***</i>

Cell entries in normal font are standardized OLS regression coefficients (beta).

Italicized entries are unstandardized logistic regression coefficients (b).

**Bold figures in shaded cells** signify robust poverty effect.

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ .

To conclude empirical analysis, we revisit *political participation between elections*. The introduction of multiple social controls *does not displace poverty* as an influential catalyst of attendance at community meetings or informal contacts with political leaders. Indeed, an individual's experience with lived poverty remains a strong and significant predictor of both these forms of participation (see Table 6B).

A full range of social factors, all of which are statistically significant, help to explain who *attends community meetings*. Only rural residence does a better job than lived poverty in predicting attendance. The results indicate that the rural poor are the backbone of organized collective action in African countries. Whether the rural poor assemble in community meetings at their own initiative or at the behest

of agencies of mobilization is not, however, altogether obvious from these data. Nor is it clear whether such meetings provide venues for ordinary people to articulate demands upward into the political system or for political elites – both national and local – to discipline and control a far-flung electorate.

I lean towards the latter interpretation since, when left to their own devices, ordinary Africans prefer to avoid the apparatus of the state and to pursue politics through informal channels. Indeed, *the largest and clearest poverty effects in this study concern contacts with informal political leaders*. In the last column of Table 6B, an individual's experience with lived poverty is a strong, positive predictor that he or she will seek assistance from a traditional, religious, or other influential leader. We found earlier that poverty had its largest bivariate effects on informal contacts. We can now confirm that, notwithstanding a full array of controls (which show that rural dwellers and educated people also resort to informal political contacts), *poverty supersedes alternative explanations of who contacts informal leaders*.

### Conclusions and Interpretations

This paper set out to examine whether poor people in Africa display some of the basic capabilities of democratic citizenship. It concludes that, although mass publics have begun to transform themselves from clients to citizens, they are embarked on a long-term process that is far from complete. Moreover, while poverty is sometimes facilitates citizenship, it more often remains an obstacle yet to be overcome.

In an effort to capture the elusive concept of poverty, I argued that the Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index spans diverse approaches to measurement. As a summary indicator of an individual's access to basic human needs, the Index contains an income component but also addresses broader dimensions of poverty. Moreover, the empirical distribution of the Index confirms that poverty is both widespread and a disproportionately rural phenomenon in Africa.

Holding other social factors constant, the paper reports three general findings about democratic citizenship.

First, poverty is *neutral* for attachments to democratic values: other things being equal, people at all levels of material wellbeing tend to have similar views on political tolerance, political accountability, and political equality.

Second, poverty is *negative* for attitudinal commitments to democracy. On the supply side, poorer people are less inclined than wealthier people to think they are *getting* democracy from current African governments. But, on the demand side, we cannot be certain if poor people actually *want* less of this political regime.<sup>12</sup> In other words, we cannot reject Krishna's claim that poor people are no less likely than anyone else to have "faith in democracy." To be sure, this endorsement of democracy's universal appeal is lukewarm at best. But it does signal the clear absence of an anti-democratic constituency among the African poor.

Third, and perhaps surprisingly, poverty is actually *positive* for several important aspects of political participation. The African evidence supports Yadav's contention that voter turnout is more frequent among poor people, at least for elections in six African countries since turn of the century. As more data become available, we will continue to subject this tentative finding to further tests across all countries and subsequent rounds of the Afrobarometer.

Most importantly, poverty is also positive for popular political activity *between* elections, especially in terms of a person's attendance at community meetings and contacts with informal leaders. These political acts are probably more meaningful to ordinary folk than occasional balloting in intermittent national

elections. If so, then popular engagement in local political life on a day-to-day basis should be highly conducive to democracy building.

But is it? Much depends on the quality of collective action and nature of leadership contacts. Let us remember that the poor, as well as being rural, are predominantly older residents with limited access to formal education and paid employment. Further research is required to determine whether these people attend community meetings at their own initiative and with the intent of lobbying on behalf of their own interests. An uncharitable, but probably realistic interpretation would have national and local elites mobilizing the elderly rural poor to passively assemble to receive instructions, including for whom to vote. Further research is also required on whether poor people approach traditional, religious and other informal leaders as advocates or supplicants. Are their approaches to leaders couched in the dependent idiom of patron-clientelism or as the independent rights-driven demands of free citizens?

A final piece of evidence from the Afrobarometer suggests that ordinary Africans remain wedded to patronage norms; they still see themselves as the clients of political “big men” rather than citizens with rights (Schatzberg 2001). The survey asked respondents to choose which statement was closer to their own opinion: “A. People are like children; the government should take care of them like a parent” versus “B. Government is an employee; the people should be the bosses who control the government.” Discouragingly, a majority of people across 15 countries said that they preferred a patronage relationship with their leaders to a democratic one: 58 percent chose Option A versus 36 percent for Option B. And, by the same measure, the poor were significantly less likely than the non-poor to see themselves as rightfully empowered to demand accountability.<sup>13</sup> To all appearances, therefore, democratic citizenship remains a distant conception for Africa’s poor majority.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The Afrobarometer is a network of social scientists in Africa coordinated by the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (Idasa), the Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), and Michigan State University (MSU). Details on the project's objectives, coverage, questionnaires, sampling, fieldwork, data, and results are available at [www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org).

<sup>2</sup> The poverty situation in Cape Verde reportedly did not change.

<sup>3</sup> To enable comparison, the ladder data are adjusted to match the structure of the income data. The ladder score of zero is compared directly with "no income." And the percentage shares of ladder score between 1-10 are then recalculated to make them directly comparable with income deciles.

<sup>4</sup> We adapted and expanded this battery for use in Africa from items first devised by Rose and colleagues for the New Europe Barometer (Rose and Haerpfer, 1998, 39-40). Response categories are "never", "just once or twice," "several times," "many times," and "always."

<sup>5</sup> Factor analysis (maximum likelihood method) extracted a single, reliable factor without rotation: Eigenvalue = 2.628, variance explained = 33 percent, Cronbach's alpha = .723. Electricity was omitted from the Index because of missing values and a low loading on the factor. The index is an average score for all five indicators on the same five-point scale from "never" to "always."

<sup>6</sup> Especially in Uganda, Senegal and Lesotho, where majorities associate parties with conflict.

<sup>7</sup> Self-reported turnout rate of eligible voters from Afrobarometer Round 1.

<sup>8</sup> Due to a large sample size – almost 52,000 cases across three continents – this small difference is statistically significant.

<sup>9</sup> This result goes beyond the finding of no difference in voter turnout for Africa reported in Bratton, Chu, and Lagos (2006). This paper used a cruder, binary measure of poverty based on whether respondents had "ever" or "never" experienced shortages of just three basic needs.

<sup>10</sup> In the interest of brevity, I chose to examine only the aspects of democratic citizenship with which poverty had a strong bivariate relationship.

<sup>11</sup> An individual's support for the value of political equality is related to a willingness to put collective above individual interests, though not strongly ( $r = .033^{***}$ ).

<sup>12</sup> The relationship on demand for democracy, while negative, is not statistically significant.

<sup>13</sup> Pearson's  $r = -.071^{***}$ . The destitute are 15 percentage points less likely than the well-to-do agree with the democratic option.