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Public Approval of Legislators' Job Performance in Africa

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Abstract

The study of African legislatures or legislators is a neglected area. The Afrobarometer, an African-led series of national public attitude surveys on democracy and governance in Africa, have been interviewing thousands of Africans overtime asking more than two-hundred questions each time on the quality of democracy and governance, political institutions and public officials as well as writing and publishing on those issues. However, to date it appears that no one has written or published using the Afrobarometer data on the topic of citizens' orientations toward their National Assembly representatives. This paper contributes to our knowledge by analysing public approval of legislators' job performance in Africa at the micro and macro level and the factors that account for it using the 2008/9 Afrobarometer data from 20 African countries. Multi-level evidence shows that the approval of legislators' job performance in Africa is primarily accounted for by presidential job performance. This is followed by trust in parliament, the electoral system, political efficacy, contacting MPs, satisfaction with the economy, discussion of politics, affiliation in community group, identification with the winning party, the government system and knowledge about legislators.

Keywords: legislators, legislatures, parliament, democracy, political systems, Africa.

Public Approval of Legislators' Job Performance in Africa

1. Introduction

Twenty-three years ago, Patterson and colleagues highlighted that the study on public approval or disapproval of state legislatures and Congress was "flawed mainly by simplistic analysis, taking into account too few explanatory variables and failing to control for multiple effects" (Patterson, Ripley and Quilan 1992:316). By involving themselves into multivariate analysis, they tested the effects of nine sets of explanatory variables on approval of Congressional and state legislatures job performance, namely: 1) people's feeling about their representatives, 2) socioeconomic status, 3) political involvement, 4) political efficacy, 5) party identification, 6) political ideology, 7) relations with legislators, 8) evaluation of the executive and 9) economic conditions.

While they probed the approval of legislative job performance at the micro level taking into account many variables they did not analyze this at the macro level. This study contributes to our knowledge on legislatures and legislators by adding, to the micro/individual level analysis, the macro/country level analysis. It argues that the political system where individuals inhabit also shapes their attitudes about political institutions and officials. Context matters (Rule 1992, Trounstine and Valadini 2008).

This study investigates the effects of ten sets of explanatory variables on the approval of legislators' job performance at multi-level (individual and country) analysis. It examines how public approval of legislators' job performance varies across African countries; the patterns of the factors accounting for variation in approval of legislators' job performance; and why some Africans approve legislators' job performance while others disapprove.

This study probes these aspects cross-nationally by employing individual level data comprising 20 Sub-Saharan African countries from the 2008/9 Afrobarometer surveys[1] and country level data gathered from online sources.

Legislative Studies in Africa

Multiparty legislatures emerged in most Sub-Saharan African countries only in the 1990s when the Third Wave of democratization swept the sub-continent. "During the 1960s, [the decade of independence of most African countries], only Botswana, Gambia and Mauritius were democracies" (Diamond 2008:8). As result of regular multiparty elections from 1990s onwards, legislatures have been emerging in the sub-continent (Barkan 2009) recruiting better-qualified legislators, creating new rules of procedure, internal structures and working conditions, creating capacity, gaining autonomy and

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[1] The Afrobarometer countries surveyed in 2008/9 include: Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. In Zimbabwe the survey was conducted in 2009. www.afrobarometer.org

performing well in law-making, conducting oversight and representing voters (Shenga 2013, 2014). However legislative studies have been neglected in the sub-continent, meaning that very little is known about African legislatures (Barkan 2009) and/or legislators.

The majority of legislative studies in the world focus on the United States Congress (Gamm and Huber 2002) or other political systems (Shepsle 2002, Kiewiet, Loewenberg and Squire 2002) that are different to African countries.[2]

Since 1999 the Afrobarometer have been conducting public opinion surveys in more than 30 Sub-Saharan African countries asking in each of them more than two-hundred questions about democracy and its performance, political institutions and officials. Whilst there have been numerous books, articles and working papers written on those issues, so far none of them have specifically analysed the attitudes of Africans toward their legislators or legislatures.[3]

This paper seeks to contribute to knowledge on African legislatures and be the first in-depth analysis using Afrobarometer data focusing on legislators or legislatures.

The Relevance of Public Approval of Legislators' Job Performance

The relevance of public approval of legislators' job performance is that it has consequences for democracy and consolidation. In the same way as the democratic regimes of which they are part, legislative institutions and legislators depend for their survival and effective functioning on public approval (Mishler and Rose 1994, Kim and Loewenberg 1976). If public orientations toward legislatures and legislators are negative legislatures and legislators will not work well (Rosenthal 2009:433). They can even be replaced sometimes by the public demanding direct democracy through referenda or plebiscites rather than allowing legislatures and legislators to represent them by making laws.

Legislators need support from their citizens in order to do their job. The attachment to legislatures contributes overall to attachment to institutions of representative democracy (Loewenberg, Mishler and Sanborn IV ND).

Literature review

The amount of information people have shapes their attitude toward democracy. People with high *levels of information* based on formal education and access to news media are more likely to support democracy (Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi 2005). While

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[2] Some of what is known about African legislatures include studies conducted by Burnell (2001), Nijzink and Piombo (2004), Pereira and Shenga (2005), Salih (2005), Hughes (2005), Barkan (2005, 2008, 2009), Nijzink, Mozaffar and Azevedo (2006), Bauer and Britton (2006), Schrire (2008), Azevedo (2009), Mattes and Mozaffar (2011) and Shenga (2013, 2014).

[3] None of the 151 working papers so far written and published on the Afrobarometer website or the two Afrobarometer books include this in their title key words, such as: legislators, Members of Parliament (MPs), Assembly or National Assembly, parliament or legislature.

more educated citizens might be more supportive of political institutions (Patterson, Ripley and Quilan 1992) the same does not apply to access to news media. As the media accentuates the negative, people who have access to news media are likely to disapprove of legislative job performance. "Too often it appears that the media operates to highlight the bad and perhaps make it worse than it is" (Patterson 1994). "When the legislature is working satisfactorily it is not at all newsworthy [but] when there is controversy, conflict or deadlock then [it is] newsworthy" (Rosenthal 2009). In fact, "constituents who pay attention often to news stories featuring their representative, arrive at negative assessments of Congress" (Patterson, Ripley and Quilan 1992).

But regardless of the amount of information they have from being taught at school or accessing news media, people might still develop awareness that enables them to assess institutions and public officials by *engaging cognitively,* more specifically: discussing politics with others and being interested in public affairs. Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi (2005) and Shenga (2007) found that people who discuss politics with others and are interested in public affairs are more supportive of democracy than others.

They can also develop awareness of public affairs, political institutions and representatives by becoming active members of interest groups. *Group membership* affects people's attitudes toward voting (Gunther, Montero and Puhle 2007) and support for democracy (Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi 2005 and Shenga 2007). But the attitudes they form toward legislatures and legislators might be negative. Rosenthal (2009) stressed that members of interest groups are less satisfied with the job of legislators and legislatures. Even if they win something from the legislative process they want more. So they think that the legislative process is defective and non-functional (Rosenthal 2009).

People's *political involvement* whether they participate or not in elections and know their legislators affects evaluation of legislative job performance. Those who register to vote and voted in elections might be more supportive of legislative job performance but, as seen below, those who have knowledge about their legislators are less supportive (Patterson, Ripley and Quilan 1992).

Relations with legislators and/or legislatures, whether you trust legislature and contact legislators often, might also have a significant effect. While trust in parliament might affect support for legislative performance positively, contacting legislators may have the opposite effect. Patterson, Ripley and Quilan (1992) found that Americans who contacted their congressman often were more likely to disapprove legislative job performance. In fact, "constituents who write to their congressmen [and/or] receive communication from the member arrive at negative assessments of Congress" (Patterson, Ripley and Quilan 1992:331). They add: "relatively extensive knowledge about members of Congress and communication with them do not build confidence or engender supportive orientations toward Congress" (Patterson, Ripley and Quilan 1992).

The assessments of legislatures and/or legislators are "heavily coloured by the image of the [executive] President" (Davidson and Parker 1972:608). *Evaluation of presidential job performance* impacts on how people view legislative job performance. Studies show that "when the public evaluates the [executive] president in a positive light, there is a strong tendency for Congress to be popular, as well" (Patterson and Caldeira 1990, Parker 1977:102-4).

Feelings of political effectiveness or *political efficacy* also have an impact on legislative job performance. Patterson, Ripley and Quilan (1992) found that "citizens who believe the government will be responsive to them are likely to evaluate political institutions [and representatives] favourably than those who lack a sense of effectiveness of politics".

There is also a belief that *party identification* affects evaluation of legislative performance. "That democrats would be supportive of a democrat-controlled legislature, and Republicans would be more supportive of a Republic-controlled legislature" (Patterson, Ripley and Quilan 1992). This study looks at whether identification with the winning party leads to attitudes that are supportive to legislative job performance.

Finally, support of legislative job performance might be affected by *satisfaction with economy* (Patterson, Ripley and Quilan 1992). People who assess their economy positively are also likely to be supportive of legislative performance.

However, the *political system* where individuals live also affects their attitudes and even behaviours. As posited earlier, context matters. For example Single Member District (SMD) electoral systems narrow the distance between voters and representatives, therefore individuals living under these electoral systems are likely to disapprove legislators' job performance; they know better his or her representative and have better information to evaluate them critically than those living under Multi Member District (MMDs) electoral systems. Where as in dominant party systems evaluations of legislatures are often coloured by the image of the president, therefore people living in these systems tend to be more supportive of legislative job performance.

Hypotheses

This working paper aims to test ten sets of explanations that account for variation in approval of legislators' job performance, as follows:

1. *Levels of information hypothesis*
   All else being equal, people with high levels of formal education will be more likely to approve legislators' job performance than those that don't. On the other hand, those who are exposed to news media will be less likely to approve legislative job performance than those who are not exposed.

2. *Cognitive engagement hypothesis*
   All else being equal, those who are interested in public affairs and discuss politics will be more likely to approve legislators' job performance.

3. *Group membership hypothesis*
   All else being equal, affiliation in groups/associations will lead to their members to form attitudes that disapprove legislators' job performance.

4. *Relation with legislators/legislatures hypothesis*
   All else being equal, people who trust their legislature will be likely to support legislators' job performance than those who distrust. But those who contact legislators often will be less likely to approve legislators' job performance than those who do not contact.

5. *Approval of presidential job performance hypothesis*
   All else being equal, people who approve the performance of the president will be likely to approve legislators' job performance.

6. *Political involvement's hypothesis*
   All else being equal, those who are involved in politics, especially those who voted in the last election, will be likely to approve legislators' job performance than those who did not vote. Those who know their legislators will be less likely to approve legislators' job performance than those who do not know.

7. *Party identification's hypothesis*
   All else being equal, individuals who identify with the winning party will be less supportive of legislators' job performance.

8. *Satisfaction with economy's hypothesis*
   All else being equal, people who are satisfied with their economy will be more likely to approve legislators' job performance.

9. *Political efficacy's hypothesis*
   All else being equal, individuals with a sense of political efficacy, that is, believe that the means of influencing government are available to them, will be likely to approve legislators' job performance.

10. *Political system's hypothesis*
    All else being equal, people who live in countries that adopted SMD electoral systems will be less likely to approve legislators' performance than those who live in MMDs. On the other hand, those who live in presidential system countries will be more likely to approve legislators' job performance than those who live in other government systems.

The Study Methods and Outline

This paper uses a bi-variate descriptive technique to analyze the patterns of explanatory and outcome variables by country. Secondly, it employs a multivariate OLS (Ordinary Least Square) regression technique, at individual level, to analyze the effects of nine sets of explanations (*levels of information, cognitive engagement, group membership, relations with legislators/legislatures, political involvement, evaluation of presidential job*

performance, party identification, political efficacy, and satisfaction with economy) on approval of legislators' job performance.

Third, it uses the multivariate OLS regression method, at multilevel analysis, to test and analyze the impacts of both the nine sets of individual level explanations and the country level explanation of *political system* on the outcome variable.   See Annex 1 for operationalization of the variables.

2. Findings

The Patterns of Explanatory Considerations by Country

Levels of information

The 2008/9 Afrobarometer surveys from 20 African countries show that the average result of Africans' level of formal education is 81 percent. Of this, less than half of the respondents refer to university (11 percent) and secondary (37 percent) education. One-third (33 percent) refer to primary education. Thirteen countries are above that average and seven below. Cross-national comparison shows variations on Africans' levels of formal education. University and secondary education tends to be higher among South Africans (78 percent), Nigerians (73 percent) and Namibians (71 percent) and lower among the Francophone countries: Mali (11 percent), Burkina Faso (21 percent), Senegal (25 percent), Benin (35 percent) and Madagascar (37 percent).

However formal education also tends to be shallow in Anglophone countries, including Tanzania (25 percent), Malawi (28 percent), Lesotho (35 percent) and Ghana (38 percent). Lusophone countries (Mozambique and Cape Verde) tend to have higher levels of university and secondary education compared with Francophone countries and even some Anglophone. Mozambicans and Cape Verdeans lag 4 percent behind the African average (48 percent).

With respect to access to news media, Africans are more likely to use radio (87 percent) than television (54 percent) or newspapers (40 percent). Of the 20 African countries, half are above the average of news radio access; eight are above the average of news television access; and seven are above for newspaper news access. Radio ownership is likely to be more affordable than television for average Africans. The lack of formal education in Africa also limits their ability to read newspapers.

South Africa leads in obtaining news media from television and newspapers while Liberia and Mali, respectively, lag behind obtaining news media through television and newspapers. Among the 5 Francophone countries, all are behind the average in accessing news media. Exception applies to Senegal and Benin with access to radio news and Senegal with access to television news. Of the two Lusophone countries, Cape Verde tends to access more news media than Mozambique. This reflects Cape Verde's relative stability over Mozambique which experienced almost two decades of destructive civil war (1977-1992). While South Africans access more news media than

any other Africans, those from Liberia, Malawi, Lesotho and Uganda are less likely to obtain news from television among African Anglophones.

Cognitive engagement

Nearly 62 percent of Africans responded that they are 'very interested' or 'somewhat interested' in public affairs. Cross national variation shows that while Tanzania leads in interest in public affairs, most Africans, with the exception of Liberia (48 percent) and Cape Verde (49 percent), tend to be more interested in public affairs.

When Africans get together with friends or family, roughly two-thirds (68 percent) discuss political matters frequently or occasionally. This proportion is highest in Kenya and Senegal (both with 80 percent), Nigeria and Tanzania (both with 79 percent), Benin (78 percent) and Zimbabwe (77 percent); and lowest in Madagascar (48 percent). Mozambique is about at the Afrobarometer average (at 68 percent).

Group Membership

Group membership in Africa is shallow. Less than half (45 percent) of Africans are 'active members' or 'official leaders' of a religious group; and only two-fifths (24 percent) are 'active members' or 'official leaders' of voluntary or community groups. Cross national evidence shows that membership in religious groups is high in Liberia (72 percent) and Zambia, Tanzania and Ghana (with 71 percent); and lowest in Madagascar (9 percent) and Mali (10 percent). Mozambicans are 9 percent ahead of the average (45 percent). Further, membership in voluntary or community groups is highest in Liberia (36 percent), Tanzania and Ghana (both with 35 percent) and lowest in Madagascar (4 percent).

Political Involvement

Overall seven out of ten (70 percent) Africans interviewed responded that they voted in the last election. This figure is highest in Benin (91 percent) and lowest in Botswana and Zambia (both with 59 percent). However, conversely to official voting turnout data, most Africans tend to report they have voted in the last election when asked by interviewers.[4] Over reporting of voter turnout tends to be highest first, in Francophone countries (Senegal, Mali and Benin); second, Lusophone (Mozambique and Cape Verde); and third, Anglophone (Zimbabwe). It is possible that over reporting of voting in these emerging democracies has to do with fear and intimidation that ensues from authoritarianism and dominant party systems (see Mattes and Shenga 2013). Some Africans may feel there will be an aftermath if their government finds out they did not vote. Also, as people like to be viewed as good citizens, it is convenient for them to say they voted while they may have not. On the other hand, the data reveals under reporting in voting turnout in Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zambia.

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[4]Actual/official voting turnout data comes from the African Election Database: http://africanelections.tripod.com/. Over reporting is the difference between reported and actual voting turnout. Official voting turnout is 'Not Available' (NA) for Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Nigeria, Tanzania and Uganda.

Africans are less likely to know their representatives in the National Assembly. When asked whether they can guess the name of their representative in their National Assembly, only 40 percent were able to provide a 'correct guess'. About 55 percent scored 'incorrect guesses' and 5 percent said 'know but cannot remember'. Kenya (85 percent), Malawi (79 percent), Botswana (74 percent) and Uganda (73 percent) are more likely to name correctly their Members of Parliament while South Africa (1 percent), Mozambique (13 percent), Burkina Faso (19 percent), Senegal (22 percent) and Cape Verde (25 percent) are less likely to do so.

This reflects in part the electoral systems these countries adopted. Countries with mainly Single Member District systems, including: Kenya (85 percent), Malawi (79 percent), Botswana (74 percent), Uganda (73 percent), Zambia (55 percent) and Ghana (54 percent) tend to have citizens who know their MPs. Exception applies to a lesser extent to Zimbabwe (47 percent), Lesotho, Liberia and Tanzania (with 44 percent) and to a greater extent to Nigeria (17 percent). It is possible that Nigerians and Tanzanians are less likely to know their MPs because of the size of their parliaments. Both Tanzanian and Nigerian parliaments have a high number of seats (respectively 357 and 360).[5] On the other hand, Multi Member District countries, including: Namibia (33 percent), Benin (26 percent), Cape Verde (25 percent), Burkina Faso (19 percent), Mozambique (13 percent) and South Africa (1 percent), are less likely to have citizens who know their MPs.

Party identification

When asked about their partisanship, 42 percent of Africans say that they are not identified with a political party (that is, they are independent from political parties), 38 percent identify with the winning party, and 20 percent identify with opposition or losing parties.

By comparing countries, we observe that identification with the winning party tends to be dominant in Tanzania (73 percent), Mozambique (65 percent) and Botswana (56 percent) while independents are more likely to be found in Madagascar (66 percent), Benin (63 percent), Liberia (56 percent), Zimbabwe (52 percent), and to some extent Burkina Faso (50 percent). Mali (44 percent), Zambia (34 percent) and Cape Verde (31 percent) present high proportions of citizens who identify with opposition parties; in the last two (Zambia and Cape Verde) there has been alternation of political power while in the first (Mali) there was a coup.

Political efficacy

The sense of political efficacy – the individuals' belief that means of influencing government are available to them (Balch 1974) - among Africans is shallower at the national level than local level. Overall less than half (43 percent) of Africans believe their legislator will listen to their concerns about a matter of importance to the community. Tanzania (64 percent), Botswana (62 percent), Zimbabwe (61 percent), Burkina Faso

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[5] Data on country parliamentary seats and electoral systems comes from the African Election Database: http://africanelections.tripod.com.

(55 percent), Malawi (54 percent) and Ghana (52 percent) are more likely to believe that their legislators will be responsive to their concerns than citizens from other African countries.

More than half (55 percent) of Africans believe their local councillor will listen to them. Tanzania (77 percent), Zimbabwe, Botswana and Burkina Faso (73 percent) lead in the belief that their local councillor will listen to them while citizens of Cape Verde (36 percent), Nigeria (44 percent), Senegal (45 percent), Liberia (45 percent), and Madagascar (46 percent) lag behind. Mozambique and South Africa are at the mid-point (50 percent) while other Africans are nearly above average.

Relations with Legislators and or Legislatures

The surveys inquired about citizen's immersion in politics by asking how often they contacted their MPs and trust legislature. The results show that only one-tenth (12 percent) of Africans contacted their parliamentary representative. In Madagascar, for instance, 97 percent said that they 'never' contacted. There is no significant country variance in contacting MPs 'often'.

Trust in parliament is shallow among Africans. Only 52 percent of Africans expressed that they trust 'a lot' or 'somewhat' in their legislatures. Cross national variations show higher levels of trust in the parliament can be found in Tanzania (83 percent), Mozambique (71 percent), Namibia (69 percent) and Botswana (66 percent) while lower levels can be found in Nigeria (33 percent), Senegal (37 percent) South Africa and Liberia (41 percent), Madagascar and Cape Verde (47 percent), Zambia (48 percent) and Lesotho (49 percent). Other Africans from Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Benin, and Uganda are in between.

Evaluation of presidential job performance

Nearly 64 percent of Africans expressed that they 'strongly approve' or 'approve' presidential job performance. Cross national comparison shows three clusters: first are countries that overwhelmingly 'strongly approve or approve' (Tanzania, Botswana, Namibia, Malawi, Madagascar, Mozambique, Ghana and Benin). Second are those that more than half 'strongly approve or approve' (Kenya, Uganda, Liberia, Lesotho and Mali). Third are countries that mostly 'strongly disapprove or disapprove' presidential performance (Zimbabwe, Senegal, South Africa and Zambia).

Satisfaction with economy

Africans are more positive about both the future economic condition of their countries and personal living condition even though their past and present appear to be negative. They tend to provide negative assessment of their past (35 percent) and present (28 percent) country economic condition and individual living condition, but expect a 'much better' or 'better' future (53 percent).

Political system

Of the 20 sub-Saharan African countries assessed here, 8 (corresponding to 44 percent in the surveys) adopted SMD electoral systems for legislative assemblies; 6 (33 percent) MMDs and 4 (22 percent) adopted a mix between the two.[6]

Sixteen out of the 20 African countries adopted a presidential system of government corresponding to 80 percent. Besides inability of the legislature in removing the government, in a presidential system the president is popularly elected and is both the head of state and head of the executive. Whereas the president appoints the prime-minister,[7] the prime-minister is not the head of the executive in these countries. Only one country - Lesotho - corresponding to 5 percent of the sample adopted a parliamentary system where the government is responsible to the legislature; the leader of the majority party in the legislature automatically becomes the prime-minister following a legislative election and the head of state is not popularly elected for a fixed term in office.

Other countries, South Africa, Botswana and Cape Verde, corresponding to 15 percent of Africans, adopted mixed systems. In the first two the president is elected from the legislature and the government is responsible to it, but the president is both the head of the executive and head of state. In Cape Verde although the government is elected from the legislature, there is separation between the head of state and head of the executive. The president, that is the head of state, is popularly elected to a fixed term in office and the prime-minister, the head of the executive, is elected from the legislature.[8]

Patterns of the Outcome Variable: Approval of Legislators' Job Performance by Country

The evidence shows that 50 percent of Africans strongly approve or approve legislators' job performance (Figure 1). This level is highest in Mozambique and Namibia (67 percent) then follows Tanzania (61 percent), Burkina Faso (59 percent), Madagascar, Uganda and Botswana (58 percent), Kenya (56 percent), Ghana (55 percent), Mali (53 percent) and Benin (52 percent). On the other hand, it is lowest in Zimbabwe followed by Senegal and Zambia. Only about one-quarter (26 percent) of Zimbabweans and one-third of Senegalese (34 percent) and Zambians (35 percent) approve legislator's performance. Nigeria, Mali, Cape Verde, Liberia, Lesotho and South Africa are also less likely to approve legislators' performance.
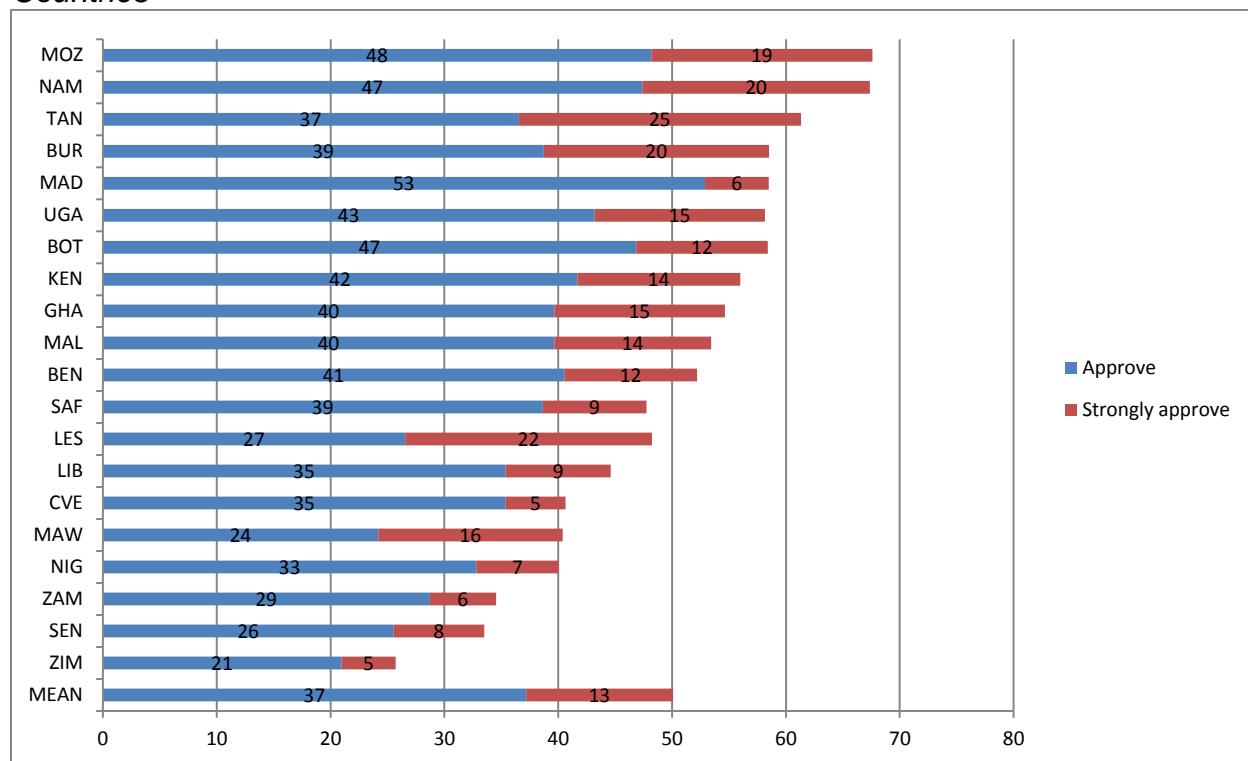
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[6] Madagascar and Mali are missing. There is no data available from the African Election Database.
[7] In some presidential systems this is vice-president.
[8] Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland (2010) classify Cape Verde more specifically as semi-presidential system.

Figure 1: Percentage of Public Approval of Legislators Performance in 20 African Countries

Question: Do you approve or disapprove of the way you representative to the National Assembly have performed their jobs over the past twelve months?

The high rate of legislators' job approval in Mozambique and Namibia reflects the MMD electoral systems that these countries adopted for their citizens. As this system widens the distance between voters and representatives, citizens do not have enough knowledge to evaluate their representatives extensively so they end up rating them positively. But this also reflects the amount of information people have. When citizens have less knowledge about their representatives they tend to assess them positively (Patterson, Ripley and Quilan 1992). Mozambique is a low information society characterized by low levels of formal education and limitation of news media access (Mattes and Shenga 2013). South Africa is a different case. Even though it did adopt a MMD electoral system the country has high levels of information that lead its citizens to evaluate members of parliament negatively. To verify this, the effect of electoral system, controlling for all other explanations, was included in the multilevel analysis of approval of legislators' job performance. This is the focus of the next section.

Explaining Approval of Legislators' Job Performance in Africa

The impacts of the explanatory factors were tested twice. First, an individual level analysis in Model 1 incorporated simultaneously the effects of *levels of information, cognitive engagement, group membership, party identification, political efficacy, evaluation of presidential job performance, political involvement, relations with legislators* and *satisfaction with economy* on the outcome variable: approval of

legislator's job performance. Second, a multi-level analysis, Model 2, incorporates the effect of the country's *political system* into Model 1.

The results from Model 1 show that while formal education does not matter for approving legislator's job performance, access to news media does. Africans who obtain news media are more likely to approve legislators' job performance, which is unexpected (Table 1).

Table 1: Explaining Approval of Legislators Job Performance in Africa, Multi-level OLS Regression Model

	Model 1	Model 2
Levels of information		
Formal education	-.009	.000
News media access (index)	**.017****	-.002
Cognitive engagement		
Interest in public affairs	**.015***	.012
Discuss politics	**-.038*****	**-.030*****
Group membership		
Religious groups	**-.028*****	.007
Community groups	**.014****	**.020****
Relation with legislators		
Contact MP	**.058*****	**.069*****
Trust parliament	**.180*****	**.175*****
Evaluation of presidential job performance	**.381*****	**.362*****
Political involvement		
Voted in last election	.001	-.007
Knowledge about MP	**-.045*****	**-.015***
Political efficacy	**.065*****	**.074*****
Party ID w/winner	-.007	**-.018****
Satisfaction with economy (index)	**.048*****	**.053*****
Political system		
Electoral system (SMD)		**-.166*****
System of government (Presidential)		**.018****
Adjusted R Square	**.249**	**.270**
N	**27 713 citizens**	

Note: Entries are standardized beta coefficients.
*** Significant at the level of .001; ** significant at the level of .01; * significant at the level of .05

However this is not the case in Mozambique, Tanzania and Ghana. As expected, Mozambicans, Tanzanians and Ghanaians are less likely to approve the way legislators' performed their job. In other words, Mozambicans, Tanzanians and Ghanaians who access news media are likely to disapprove legislators' job performance (Table 2). They follow news stories that lead them to arrive at a negative assessment. This finding supports the theory that news media access leads to negative attitudes toward

legislatures and legislators (Patterson, Ripley and Quilan 1992) as it accentuates the negative (Rosenthal 2009).

Cognitive engagement also matters for approval of legislators' job performance. Africans who are interested in public affairs tend to approve their legislators job achievement but, also as unexpected, those who discuss politics with others are less likely to do so.

Moving to group membership, while membership in a religious group has a negative effect on approving legislators' job performance, as expected, membership in a community group has a positive impact, which is unexpected. The negative effect of membership in religious groups confirms Rosenthal's theory that normally interest groups do not get as much as they think should deserve from the legislative process. Even if they get something they want more. Then they may feel that the process is defective (Rosenthal 2009).

The evidence also shows that people who trust parliament and contact legislators often, as expected and unexpected respectively, are likely to approve legislators' job achievement. Also, as expected, those who approve presidential job performance tend to approve legislators' job performance (Patterson, Ripley and Quilan 1992). If approval of the president is high then approval of the legislature is also high.

Participation in elections does not matter but knowledge about legislators does. As expected, people with knowledge about their legislators arrive at a negative evaluation of legislative job performance. As they know their legislators they follow news stories about their legislative performance and as news stories tend to accentuate the negative then they arrive at negative evaluations.

Also as expected, individuals with a sense of political efficacy tend to be supportive of legislators' job performance. The individuals believe that means of influencing government are available to them which leads to their approval of legislative job performance.

Finally, people's satisfaction with the economy affects greatly their attitudes toward legislators. People who rate their country and personal living conditions 'much better' or 'better' are more likely to approve legislators' job performance.

Adding political system considerations

When taking into account political system factors (Model 2), one observes significant changes. Levels of information do not matter at all. At multi-level analysis news media access loses its significance. Interest in politics also does not make any difference but discussion of politics does even though it drops 0.8 percent points in magnitude. On group membership, while membership in a religious group becomes insignificant the effect of membership in a community group continues holding and even increases in magnitude.

Table 2: Explaining Approval of Legislator's Job Performance, OLS Multiple Regression Models

	BEN	BOT	BUR	CVE	GHA	KEN	LES	LIB	MAD	MLW	MAL	MOZ	NAM	NIG	SEN	SAF	TAN	UGA	ZAM	ZIM
Levels of information																				
Formal education	NS	NS	NS	-.068*	NS	NS	NS	-.060*	NS	-.074*	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Media use index	NS	NS	NS	NS	-.078**	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	-.093***	.071*	NS	NS	NS	-.087***	NS	NS	NS
Cognitive engagement																				
Interest in pub. affairs	NS	NS	NS	NS	.083**	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	-.067*	NS	NS	-.055**	NS	NS	NS	.080**
Discussion of politics	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	-.066**	NS	NS	NS	NS	-.081***	NS	NS	-.085**	NS	NS	-.063*
Membership in interest group																				
Religious groups	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	.055*	NS	NS	-.064*	NS
Community group	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	-.070**	-.058*	NS	NS	.060*	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Relations with legislators																				
Contact MP	.077***	.101***	.077***	.111***	.088***	.078**	.079***	NS	NS	.168***	NS	NS	NS	NS	.087***	NS	.155***	.041*	.188***	NS
Trust parliament	.213***	.207***	.055*	.198***	.238***	.182***	.131***	.159***	.216***	.158	.223***	.138***	.249***	.176***	.178***	.222***	.214***	.165***	.089***	.123***
Evalu. of president	.381***	.109***	.611***	.398***	.292***	.272***	.457***	.517***	.300***	NS	.474***	.492***	.365***	.470***	.518***	.243***	.194***	.414***	.265***	.463***
Political envolvement																				
Voted in last election	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	-.051*	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	-.055*	NS
Knowledge of MP	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	-.075**	.041*	NS	NS
Political efficacy	.089***	.085*	.062**	.070**	.102***	.123***	.138***	NS	NS	.067*	.073***	.111***	.009	.071***	.009	.109***	.170***	.086***	.114***	.067**
Party ID w/Winner	-.066**	.059*			-.073	NS	NS	NS	.057*	-.078**	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	.038	-.060*	-.063**	NS	NS
Satisf. w/ecconomy																				
Present	.061*	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	.056*	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	.066**	NS	NS	NS	.068*	NS
Retrospective	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	.049*	NS	NS	.079***	.078***	.064**	NS	.076**	NS	NS
Prospective	NS	NS	NS	-.105***	NS	NS	NS	.063*	.057*	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	.104***	NS	.084***	NS	NS
Adjusted R Square	.28	.12	.45	.29	.21	.16	.33	.36	.22	.07	.35	.38	.25	.35	.42	.21	.19	.29	.20	.28

Note: 2008/9 Afrobarometer Survey Data. The number of observations (N) for each country is 1200, excepting South Africa and Nigeria (both with samples of 2400).
Entries are beta standardized coefficients.*** means significant at the level of .001, ** means significant at the level of .01, * means significant at the level of .05.

The effects of relations with legislators/legislatures factors continue holding and the magnitude of contacting legislators often increased while trust in parliament declined. The impacts of evaluation of presidential job performance, political efficacy and knowledge about MPs also continue to hold but their magnitudes changed. Presidential job performance and knowledge about MPs reduced magnitude while political efficacy increased.

More interestingly is the effect of party identification. When considering the political system party identification becomes significant. People who identify with the winning party are less likely to approve legislators' job performance. This is because the legislators' job of holding the executive president to account is seen by Africans as disruptive from the eyes of those who identify with the winning party.

The impact of satisfaction of the economy also continues holding and even increases magnitude. Satisfaction with the economy leads Africans to approve legislative job performance.

Does the political system matter? These results suggest that the political system of African countries shapes the attitudes of its citizens. As expected, Africans who live in countries that adopted SMD electoral systems are less likely to approve legislators' job performance, as expected, than those who live in countries that adopted MMDs. In SMDs voters know better their representatives in the National Assembly and they assess the performance of their representatives according to the knowledge they have about legislators individually. In MMDs voters tend to know less about their representatives, as the distance between voters and representatives is wide, and assessing the performance of their representatives on the basis of the knowledge they have about legislators in general.

As expected, Africans who live in countries that adopted presidential systems are more likely to approve legislators' job performance than those who live in countries that adopted other systems. This shows the same positive relationship between presidential and legislative job performances.

The multilevel model that this study uses explains 27 percent of the total variance in job performance of legislators in Africa. The country model contributes with 2 percent to all the individual level factors.

3. Conclusions

Multilevel evidence shows that approval of legislators' job performance in Africa is accounted for mainly by evaluation of presidential job performance followed by trust in parliament, the electoral system, political efficacy, contacting MPs, satisfaction with economy, discussion of politics, affiliation in a community group, identification with the winning party, government system and knowledge about legislators. Africans who approve presidential job performance, trust parliament, have sense of political efficacy, contact legislators, are satisfied with economy, members of community groups, and live in countries that have adopted presidential systems of government are likely to approve legislators job performance. On the other hand, those who live in countries that adopted SMD electoral systems, discuss politics with

others, identify with the winning party and know their legislators are likely to disapprove legislators' job performance.

Most of the hypotheses of this study were corroborated by the data. Those that were not are deviant cases that deserve some discussion here. These are the unexpected effects of discussion of politics, membership in a community group and contacting legislators. The theory points out that the discussion of politics leads to attitudes that are supportive of democracy (Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi 2005). This study found that those who discuss politics with others are likely to disapprove legislators' job performance because they rely on information they obtain from news media to form their attitudes toward political institutions and representatives. As people discuss politics relying on news media (and media accentuates the negative), their attitude toward legislatures and legislators is likely to be negative. It is likely that they disapprove legislators' job performance.

The theory points out that "constituents who write letters to their congressmen arrive at negative assessment of Congress" (Patterson, Ripley and Quilan 1992) as they receive knowledge about legislators that make them critical citizens. This study found however that contacting legislators leads to attitudes that are supportive to legislative job performance. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Africans contact their MPs for help with paying school fees for their children or funeral costs for their families rather than to lobby for parliamentary or law-making changes. If African legislators tend to fulfil that voter's request, voters will appraise them positively.

The literature stresses that group membership is negatively associated with legislative support (Rosenthal 2009). This study found that membership in a community group however leads to positive evaluation of legislative job performance. This reflects the issues that members of these groups deal with. As community groups deal with local grassroot issues their members do not rely on these issues to judge legislators dealing with national issues. As they do not have much information about national issues to judge legislators job performance they arrive at a positive assessment. In contrast, religious groups deal with national issues such as peace, national reconciliation and unity, etc. they have more knowledge about national issues to evaluate legislators job performance negatively. This is to say that the type of groups that people affiliate with shape the attitudes of their members differently.

For democracy, while living under SMD electoral systems, discussing politics with others and being knowledgeable about legislators leads to forming attitudes that disapprove legislative job performance, these factors also lead to attitudes that are supportive of democracy. This suggests that the survival and consolidation of representative democracy depends on knowledgeable active citizens who engage themselves discussing politics with friends, co-workers, neighbours, family members or their spouse and live under SMD electoral systems. Rather than overrating uncritically the performance of political institutions and leaders these citizens offer healthy critical evaluations that help those institutions and leaders to boost their performance on behalf of the people. This is what needs to be considered by constitutionalists, decision-makers and democracy practitioners and promoters in African countries.

For scholars, although this study contributes to our knowledge by analysing Africans orientations towards their legislative representatives and the factors that account for it at multilevel analysis, what we do not know is how these factors interact with one another explaining approval of legislators job performance. This is an effort that further studies have to consider.

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Annex 1 - Operationalization of Variables

Outcome variable

Approval of legislators' performance is measured by the question: "Do you approve or disapprove of the way your representative to the National Assembly has performed his/her job over the past twelve months?"

Explanatory variables

Formal education is measured by the question: "What is the highest level of education you have completed?"

News media access is measured by the questions: "How often do you get news from 1) radio, 2) television and 3) newspapers?"

News media access index. Factor analysis extracted a single unrotated factor with eigenvalue greater than one (1.79), and common variance of 60 percent. Reliability analysis: Cronbach's Alpha =.66. Factor loadings: rejection of news radio access=.64, news television access=.85 and news newspapers access=.82.

Interest in public affairs is measured by the question: "How interested would you say you are in public affairs?"

Discussion of politics is indicated by the question: "When you get together with your friends or family, would you say you discuss political matters: frequently, occasionally or never?"

Membership in religious group is measured by the question: "Could you tell me whether you are an official leader, an active member, an inactive member, or not a member of a religious group (e.g., church, mosque)?"

Membership in community group is indicated by: "Could you tell me whether you are an official leader, an active member, an inactive member, or not a member of a voluntary association or community group?"

Voted in last election is measured by the question: "With regard to the most recent national elections, which statement is true for you: You were not registered or you were too young to vote, you voted in the elections, you decided not to vote, you could not find the polling station, you were prevented from voting, you did not have time to vote, or did not vote for some other reason?"

Party identification with winner is measured by the question" Do you feel close to any particular political party? [If yes,] Which party is that?

Knowledge about legislator is indicated by the question: "Can you tell me the name of your Member of Parliament?"

Political efficacy is measured by the following questions: "In your opinion, how likely is it that you could get together with others and make: 1) your MP and 2) your elected local councillor listen to your concerns about a matter of importance to the community?

Political efficacy construct. Variables measuring making MP and local government councillor listen correlate to each other at r=.66** with reliability Alpha=.80.

Contacting MP is measured by the question: "During the past year, how often have you contacted a MP about some important problem or to give them your views."

Performance of the president is measured by: "Do you approve or disapprove of the way the president have performed his/her job over the past twelve months, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?"

Trust parliament is measured by the question: "How much do you trust the parliament, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?"

Economic condition is measured by *present, retrospective and prospective economic conditions. Present economic condition* is measured by: "In general, how would you describe: 1) the present economic condition of this country; and 2) your own present living conditions?" *Retrospective economic condition* is measured by: "Looking back, how do you rate the 1) economic condition in this country, and 2) your living conditions compared to twelve months ago?" *Prospective economic condition* is measured by the question: "Looking ahead, do you expect the 1) economic condition in this country and 2) your living conditions in twelve months' time to be better or worse?"

Economic condition index. Factor analysis extracted one unrotated factor (Eigenvalue=1.67), which explains 55.6 percent of the common variance. Index reliability (Cronbach Alpha=.60) is acceptable. Factor loadings: retrospective economic conditions evaluation =.75; present economic conditions evaluations=.74; and prospective economic conditions evaluation=.74.

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