



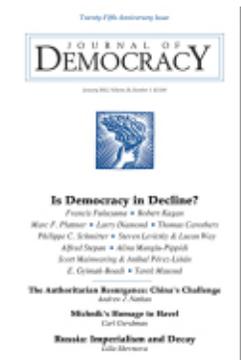
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How People View Democracy

AFRICANS' SURPRISING UNIVERSALISM

Michael Bratton and Robert Mattes

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Africa is a latecomer to democratization. In terms of timing, Africa has followed rather than led other continents in giving birth to the reform movements that have installed elected governments, multiparty systems, and more open societies around the world. Since many African countries are dependent on foreign aid, they have also experienced weighty external pressures to liberalize. One should not automatically conclude, however, that the impetus for reform comes from outside the continent rather than from within.

If political liberalization were a Northern idea being foisted on an unwilling South, then certain empirical facts should follow. One would expect Africans to 1) be unaware of the concept of democracy; 2) have distinct cultural understandings of its content; 3) be unsupportive of regimes based on competitive principles; 4) prefer alternative political regimes; and 5) be unsatisfied with the performance of democratic regimes in practice.

Alternatively, if there is popular awareness of, support for, and satisfaction with recent political reforms in African countries, one can conclude that democratization has an indigenous base. It is important to know this because democracy can help alleviate Africa's problems only if it is embraced by Africans themselves.

To measure public attitudes in Africa, we employ an original set of data from a large-scale, crossnational survey research project known as the Afrobarometer. This essay reports the results of surveys taken

between July 1999 and February 2000 in Botswana, Ghana, Malawi, Namibia, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe.¹ A caveat is in order about generalization. The six countries selected, which are all English-speaking territories that have recently undergone political transitions to electoral democracy, are not completely representative of sub-Saharan Africa as a whole. We do not argue that our findings can be extended to Francophone Africa, to the continent's remaining authoritarian regimes, or to states that are imploding through civil war. When we refer to "Africans," we have a more limited populace in mind.

Africans (so defined) overwhelmingly support democracy and reject authoritarian regimes. They are much less happy with the way that democracy actually works, however, though a majority is satisfied in five out of the six countries we studied. The fact that survey respondents support democracy even when dissatisfied with its capacity to deliver suggests that Africans are committed to democracy for intrinsic as well as instrumental reasons.

Let us now turn to a more detailed examination of our findings.

1) Awareness of democracy. Because democracy means different things to different people, we began by asking "What, if anything, do you understand by the word 'democracy'?" Although the question was posed in the local language of the respondents' choice, the word "democracy" was always presented in English. To all survey respondents who suggested a meaning, we attributed an awareness of democracy. All those who replied that they didn't know what democracy meant—or had never heard the word—were considered to be unaware. By this criterion, the concept of democracy is recognizable to most Africans. More than seven out of ten respondents (74 percent) were able to volunteer a definition of the term.² By no stretch of the imagination can democracy be described as a construct that would be strange and incomprehensible to them.

Yet interesting crossnational variations exist. The level of public awareness of democracy ranges from a low of 65 percent in Namibia to a high of 88 percent in Malawi (see Table 1 on the facing page). We speculate that political ideas spread more easily in geographically small countries with high population densities than in large, underpopulated countries. Urbanization probably helped to increase awareness of democracy in Ghana (72 percent aware, 36 percent urban) and Nigeria (77 percent aware, 43 percent urban). Education also fosters awareness, as we will explore later.

2) The meaning of democracy. What do Africans think democracy means? We asked the question in an open-ended way to allow respondents to answer in their own words. We adopted this procedure so as not to overlook any distinctive meanings that Africans might attach.

**TABLE 1—POPULAR ATTITUDES TO DEMOCRACY
SELECTED AFRICAN COUNTRIES, 1999–2000
(PERCENTAGES OF NATIONAL SAMPLE, INCLUDING “DON’T KNOWS”)**

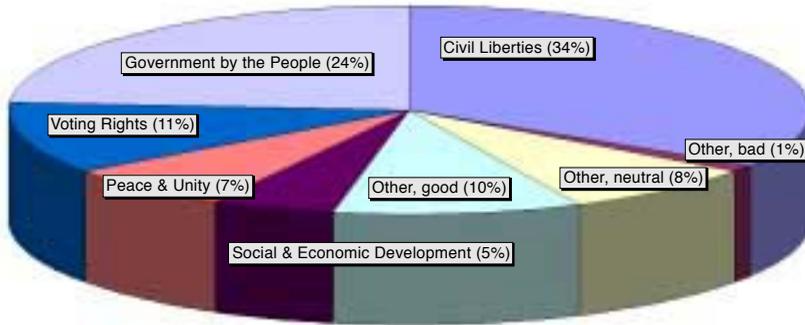
	BOTSWANA (n=1200)	GHANA (n=2004)	MALAWI (n=1208)	NAMIBIA (n=1183)	NIGERIA (n=3603)	ZIMBABWE (n=1200)
KNOWLEDGE OF DEMOCRACY: What, if anything, do you understand by the word “democracy”? (percentage of respondents able to supply a meaning)	69	72	88	65	77	70
SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government. (percentage choosing this option)	82	76	66	57	81	71
REJECTION OF NONDEMOCRATIC ALTERNATIVES: Military rule One-party state (percentage rejecting these alternatives)	85 78	89 80	82 77	59 63	90 88	79 74
EXTENT OF DEMOCRACY: How democratic is the way [your country] is governed today? (percentage saying “completely democratic”)	46	—	34	30	17	9
SATISFACTION WITH DEMOCRACY: Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in [your country]? (percentage saying “fairly” or “very” satisfied)	75	54	57	63	84	18

As it happened, though, our interviewees tend to have arrived at understandings of democracy that are universal rather than culturally specific.

First, with few exceptions, the survey respondents attached a *positive* value to democracy. Among those people aware of the concept, more than nine out of ten (92 percent) believed that democracy was a public “good” that in some way would make conditions “better” (see the Figure on the following page). Fewer than 1 percent saw democracy as “bad” in any way. This small minority thought that democratic reforms brought elite corruption, conflict among social interests, or “confusion” in political life. The remainder (8 percent) saw democracy in neutral terms, usually as a “change of government” or as “civilian politics,” without implying that a new regime would be better or worse than its predecessor.

Second, respondents understand democracy in *procedural* as well as *substantive* terms. This finding runs counter to much of the scholarly literature, which paints democratization in Africa as a quest for equal social and economic outcomes. This portrayal is often accompanied by a critique of procedures like constitutional reform and multiparty elections as mere formalities. Yet in defining democracy, almost seven out of ten of our survey respondents (69 percent) refer to political procedures like the protection of human rights, participation in decision-making, and voting in elections, while fewer than one in five (17 percent) refer to substantive outcomes like peace and unity, social and economic development, and equality and justice. Thus, when left unprompted, the

**FIGURE—THE MEANING OF DEMOCRACY,
SELECTED AFRICAN COUNTRIES, 1999–2000**
(PERCENTAGE, n = 10,184)



majority of Africans interviewed see democratization as a limited political process rather than as an expansive socioeconomic transformation.

Moreover, the rank order of substantive interpretations is revealing: More respondents associate democracy with *political* goods (such as peace, order, unity, equality, justice, or national independence, which together account for 11 percent of responses) than with *economic* goods (social and economic development, which accounts for just 5 percent). The “peace or unity” responses are particularly interesting since none of the countries in the sample, with the possible exception of Namibia, employed democratic elections to implement a peace agreement.³ One would expect an even closer identification of democracy with peace in countries emerging from civil wars.

But an alternate question about the components of democracy gave rise to dissonant results. Noting that “people associate democracy with many diverse meanings,” we asked respondents to say whether a list of political and economic features were “essential . . . for a society to be called ‘democratic.’” The list included procedural political features like “majority rule,” “freedom to criticize the government,” and “regular elections,” but it also added substantive socioeconomic features like “jobs for everyone,” “equality in education,” and “a small income gap between rich and poor.” In two countries (Botswana and Zimbabwe), respondents rated political and economic attributes as equally essential to democracy. In three other countries (Malawi, Namibia, and Nigeria), however, respondents rated economic components as significantly more essential than political ones. This finding suggests that African conceptions of democracy also include important substantive elements of economic delivery.⁴

Third, popular African conceptions of democracy are, perhaps unexpectedly, quite *liberal*. When open-ended responses are analyzed,

people cite civil liberties and personal freedoms more frequently than any other meanings (34 percent). These represent a conception of democracy based on individual rights that stands in marked contrast to the one-in-a-thousand respondents (0.1 percent) who make reference to group rights. Thus Africans do not seem to perceive democracy and associated rights differently than people elsewhere. And to the extent that they claim such rights as a means of resisting repression at the hands of an authoritarian ruler, Africans are beginning to think more like citizens of a constitutional state than clients of a personal patron.

Nevertheless, Africans speak of political freedoms in very general terms, referring to “freedom as a birthright,” “the right to everything,” and “control over one’s own life.” This vague language—used by more than half (56 percent) of those who define democracy in terms of civil liberties—suggests that the popular conception of human rights remains highly undifferentiated. When people do mention specific rights, they overwhelmingly define democracy in terms of freedom of expression (including the freedoms of speech, press, and dress), which accounts for 35 percent of the references to civil liberties. All other specific freedoms (of movement, association, property, and religion) together account for only 9 percent.

Are there crossnational variations in the way citizens understand democracy? Botswana stands out as the most liberal country, with more than half of its citizens (55 percent) identifying democracy with civil and political rights. Nigerians are distinctive insofar as they are almost twice as likely (38 percent) as any other Africans to see democracy as “government by the people.” That they also associate democracy with voting rights (14 percent) is surely attributable to their country’s recent historic transitional elections. Malawi, for its part, is the only country in this sample in which more than one in ten persons (11 percent) offer a substantive definition of democracy. Interestingly, like other Africans, Malawians see democracy’s substance less in terms of socioeconomic development than as a guarantee of political order and social harmony, which, given the country’s regional rivalries, may reflect wishful thinking.

Finally, the meanings imputed to democracy help us interpret the contrasting levels of democratic awareness noted earlier for Namibia and Malawi. In 1989, a dominant political party came to power in Namibia in a transition from colonialism that marked the achievement of state sovereignty. As such, Namibians are significantly more likely than other Africans to associate democracy with national independence. By contrast, Malawi’s 1994 transition signaled a largely indigenous process involving the collapse of an authoritarian single-party monopoly and the introduction of open multiparty competition. Thus Malawians (as well as Nigerians and Ghanaians) equate recent political events in their country with the installation of democracy rather than with decolonization.

3) Support for democracy. To assess support for democracy, the Afrobarometer poses a standard question that has been employed in Barometer surveys in Western Europe, Latin America, and the former Soviet bloc. It asks: "Which one of these statements do you most agree with? a) Democracy is preferable to any other form of government; b) In certain situations, a nondemocratic government can be preferable; or c) For someone like me, it doesn't matter what form of government we have." Those persons who find democracy to be the best form of government were deemed to support democracy.

By this measure, three-quarters of our respondents (75 percent) identified themselves as supporters of democracy. This average figure, high by global standards, compares with mean scores (recorded in 1995) of 65 percent for six Eastern and Central European countries and 63 percent for four Latin American countries.⁵ The strength of commitment to democracy in Africa can be explained in good part by the exceptional levels of support in just two countries—Botswana and Nigeria. If these two countries are excluded and South Africa is brought into the sample, then the level of support for democracy becomes almost identical to that in new democracies elsewhere.⁶

Botswana has the highest levels of support for democracy (82 percent) found so far in any African country (see Table 1 on p. 109). This appreciative public mood probably reflects a rational assessment that the country's stable political regime based on regular elections has served it well over the past 40 years. By contrast, the high level of public support for democracy in Nigeria (81 percent) likely reflects the popular euphoria over the restoration of civilian rule after a particularly corrupt and repressive interlude of military dictatorship. While a jubilant mood prevailed at the time of this survey (January 2000), just half a year after the inauguration of an elected government, there is no guarantee that high levels of support for democracy can be sustained indefinitely. Note also that support for democracy in Nigeria varies by region, reflecting a power shift in 1999 from the north to the south of the country. While support for democracy is high throughout Nigeria, it is markedly higher in the south (86 percent, even higher than Botswana) than in the north (75 percent, which matches the continental standard).

Other country features stand out. For example, Malawians display much more nostalgia for authoritarian rule than other Africans surveyed. More than one out of five respondents in Malawi (22 percent) agree that "in certain situations, a nondemocratic government can be preferable." These sentiments are most prevalent in Malawi's Central Region (30 percent), the homeland and political base of Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, the country's former strongman. In Namibia, 20 percent of respondents "don't know" whether they support democracy (20 percent), a figure four times higher than for other African countries in the sample. This

finding suggests popular doubts about whether the *de facto* one-party regime emerging in Namibia is really a democracy at all.

Ghana and Zimbabwe are in the middle range of popular commitment to democracy, even though the two countries were embarked on very different trajectories at the time of the surveys: Ghana was in the process of completing an extended transition from military to democratic rule on the basis of increasingly open elections, while Zimbabwe was descending into political crisis at the hands of a dictator bent on retaining power by openly flouting the law. Under such divergent circumstances, it is perhaps surprising that the mass electorates in these countries would express such similar levels of commitment to democracy. This finding (together with the finding of high levels of public support for democracy in the contrasting cases of Botswana and Nigeria) suggests that African citizens distinguish between democracy as a political system (which they support) and the imperfect democratic status of their own regimes.

4) *Opposition to nondemocratic alternatives.* To explore this issue further, we asked respondents to contrast democracy as a concrete regime form, described as “our present system of government with regular elections and many parties,” with the “previous regime,” whether colonial, one-party, or military. Using such regime comparisons, Ghanaians rated democracy (6.7 on a scale of 1 to 10) well above “the former system of military rule” (just 3.6 on the same scale). Malawians, however, granted the new regime, which permits multiparty elections, only a slightly higher rating than the old one-party system (6.1 versus 5.4).

We also asked about other alternatives to democracy. Respondents were informed that “some people say that we would be better off if the country was governed differently,” and were asked what they thought of the following alternatives to their current system: military rule, one-man rule, one-party rule, and rule by traditional leaders. Clear patterns emerge when regime preferences are probed this way. Generally, we can reconfirm that Africans living in new democracies wish to retain their current political regimes and decisively reject nondemocratic alternatives.

Military government is the least popular form of rule, rejected by an average of 81 percent of respondents in the six countries surveyed. This average is pulled up by Nigeria, where a resounding 90 percent said “never again” to a form of government that they now associate with the abuses of General Sani Abacha (see Table 1 on p. 109). The proposition that “the army should come in to govern the country” was rejected with almost equal vehemence in Ghana (89 percent) and Botswana (85 percent). By contrast, only a modest majority of Namibians (59 percent) opposed the prospect of the military taking political power. This suggests that, while neither Botswana nor Namibia has ever experienced a coup,

citizens of Botswana would be much less likely than their Namibian counterparts to tolerate one if it ever occurred.

Africans also reject rule by strongmen and single parties. They seem to see one-man rule and one-party rule as inextricably linked, and very similar majorities (76 and 77 percent, respectively) shun these options. Yet cross-country comparisons reveal interesting differences. In Botswana, Ghana, and Zimbabwe, slightly more respondents oppose one-man rule than oppose one-party rule. This may indicate that in these three countries, all of which have relatively well developed political institutions by African standards, citizens are becoming more attached to political institutions than to individual leaders.⁷ Malawi, Namibia, and Nigeria display a different pattern, with slightly more respondents opposing one-party rule than opposing one-man rule. Indeed, only a slim majority of Namibians (56 percent) opposes strongman rule. Other things being equal, these seem to be the countries where personalistic politics is most deeply entrenched and poses the biggest threat to the health of new democracies.

In searching for political regimes appropriate to Africa, we asked about the contemporary relevance of traditional forms of authority. Would citizens countenance a return to decision making by chiefs or a council of elders? Survey respondents everywhere were less resistant to this option than to military or one-party rule, but opposition to traditional rule was strongest where chiefs actually retain some real power, formal or informal, over decision making (Botswana and Ghana). Those who had actually experienced the involvement of traditional leaders in governance were most likely to express reservations. And overall, twice as many respondents repudiated a traditional regime as supported it.

5) Satisfaction with democracy. Do Africans think that their own countries are governed according to democratic principles? To find out, the Afrobarometer surveys asked respondents whether their countries were: (a) completely democratic; (b) democratic, but with minor problems; (c) democratic but with major problems; or (d) not a democracy.

Nowhere did a majority of respondents think that the current regime in their country was completely democratic. Even in Botswana, only a plurality (46 percent) perceived democratization to have been fully achieved, but the overwhelming majority thought that democracy was either “complete” or incomplete only in “minor” respects (82 percent). In Ghana, where the question was asked in a more compact form, 69 percent thought that the country was a democracy, whereas 12 percent thought that it was not.

These cases, which show some evidence of gradual regime consolidation, stand in marked contrast to Namibia and Nigeria. In Namibia, a plurality of respondents (41 percent) thought that the country was “democratic, but with minor problems.” In Nigeria, a larger plurality

(46 percent) was even less optimistic, finding the country “democratic, but with major problems.” This last assessment strikes us as intuitively reasonable, especially given the tremendous challenges of recovery and development that Nigeria’s new elected government must confront with untested democratic institutions. While Nigerians say they support democracy at almost the same levels as Botswana, perceptions of the extent of democracy in the two countries differ dramatically, with the same proportions of Nigerians seeing “major problems” with their democracy as Botswanans who see democracy in their own country as “complete.”

This brings us to Zimbabwe, the exception among the countries studied here. A majority of Zimbabweans (55 percent) either think that their country is “not a democracy” or say they “don’t know” or “don’t understand.” The proportion who deny that their country is a democracy (38 percent) is three times larger in Zimbabwe than in Malawi (12 percent) and 30 times larger than in Nigeria (1 percent), while the proportion of Zimbabweans who “don’t know” (17 percent) far exceeds the equivalent proportion in Namibia, a country already noted for having the lowest levels of popular awareness of democracy in the sample. We suspect that many Zimbabweans, far from being oblivious to the meaning of democracy, simply have a hard time thinking of their own country in these terms during a period of enforced one-party dominance.

At best, then, most respondents regard democracy in Africa as a work in progress. Because actual regimes imperfectly reflect citizen preferences, regime performance may not induce popular satisfaction. Much depends on whether people judge the new regime’s accomplishments against recollections of a previous regime’s record or against a yardstick of future expectations. If the former, democracy may appear as the lesser of two evils; if the latter, democracy is destined to always fall short.

Thus we draw a sharp distinction between *support* for democracy and *satisfaction* with democracy. The former refers to a judgment in the abstract about one’s preferred form of government. The latter refers to an assessment of the concrete performance of elected governments. We also note that satisfaction with democracy is a much more concrete standard, and therefore it almost always trails support for democracy wherever it is measured around the world.

The Afrobarometer surveys track satisfaction with democracy by asking the standard question: “Generally, how satisfied are you with the way that democracy works in [your country]?” Respondents are offered the options of “very satisfied,” “fairly satisfied,” and “very unsatisfied.” (In the discussion that follows we describe as satisfied all those who answered either “very satisfied” or “fairly satisfied.”) These results reveal the widest variation in attitudes reported so far. At one extreme is Nigeria, where 84 percent of adults interviewed said that they were satisfied with democracy; at the other extreme stands Zimbabwe, where only 18 percent

said that they were satisfied. This stark difference can be interpreted as a contrast between people celebrating a long-awaited transition to democracy and those bemoaning the intransigence of an entrenched autocracy. Expressions of satisfaction with democracy are subject to the exigencies of regime life cycles and must be regarded as much more volatile than other, more stable attitudes like support for democracy. The level of satisfaction with democracy in Nigeria could decline if the administration of Olusegun Obasanjo fails to live up to popular expectations. Similarly, if Robert Mugabe's party had been defeated in the June 2000 elections, Zimbabwean respondents might have expressed more satisfaction with democracy.

Other countries find themselves between these extremes. In terms of the proportion of people professing themselves "very satisfied" with democracy, Botswana (32 percent) actually exceeds Nigeria (26 percent), while Ghana scores lower on satisfaction than its relatively high score on support for democracy would lead one to expect. When calculated as a mean for all respondents across the six countries, popular satisfaction with democracy averages 64 percent. This cross-national average is inflated by the presence of Nigeria, with its high satisfaction scores and large sample size. Satisfaction with democracy drops to 59 percent if sample sizes are standardized by calculating satisfaction as an average of aggregate country scores (that is, controlling for the large size of the Nigeria sample). And satisfaction declines further still to 51 percent if we set aside the two countries (Nigeria and Namibia) where, contrary to the global pattern, citizens report more satisfaction than support.

Overall, satisfaction with democracy lags behind support for democracy in Africa, and the gap is wider in Africa than in Eastern and Central Europe or in South America.⁸ We interpret this to mean not only that African citizens have inflated expectations of democracy but also that African governments are often unable to fulfill them.

Understanding Democratic Attitudes

1) *The impact of education.* A common prediction in social science is that demographic attributes such as gender, age, and income shape mass beliefs. We find that, with the exception of education, such factors have relatively little influence on attitudes to political reform in six African countries.

Men and women display very similar levels of support for, and satisfaction with, democracy, differing only in their awareness of democracy: Twenty-one percent of males in the six countries had never heard of democracy, compared to 31 percent of females. This difference survived a statistical control for the respondents' level of education, thereby suggesting a genuine "gender gap" in awareness of the political world.

Neither were there any meaningful distinctions between the attitudes to democracy expressed by urban and rural respondents. Urban and rural dwellers in the six countries supported democracy in roughly equal proportions. In five countries (especially Botswana, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe) urbanites were more likely to express dissatisfaction with the way their democracy was working, but this general finding was offset by results from Malawi, where urbanites were more satisfied with democracy than their country cousins.

Of all demographic factors, education has the greatest observed effects on attitudes to democracy. Not surprisingly, the higher their educational attainment, the more likely Africans are to be aware of democracy. Nine out of ten persons with a university education said that they knew something about it, whereas just six out of ten persons with no formal schooling made the same claim. Education also has strong effects on the numbers of people who equate democracy with “government by the people.” We are inclined to think that this interpretation of democracy is a learned response, possibly reflecting exposure to Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address in school.

Unlike in the West, however, education does not build support for democracy in Africa. University postgraduates are no more likely than people who have never been to school to say that democracy is “always preferable.” Indeed, the very highly educated in Africa seem to have qualms about democracy precisely because they fear that it endows illiterate citizens with political rights that may be exercised unreflectively or irresponsibly.⁹ Moreover, educated Africans are critical of democracy in practice. Only 10 percent of university postgraduates are “very satisfied” with democracy, compared to 32 percent of those without formal schooling. If educated people are satisfied at all, they are likely to damn with faint praise by saying they are only “fairly satisfied.”

2) *The eye of the beholder.* Individuals who cannot define democracy are much less attached to it as a preferred form of regime. Compared to politically conscious citizens, they are twice as likely (19.5 versus 8.9 percent) to say that “it makes no difference to me what form of government we have.” More interestingly, citizen support for democracy increases if it is conceived in procedural rather than substantive terms: 81 percent of those who see democracy as “government by the people” also name it as the best form of regime; the comparable figure is 73 percent for those who define democracy as “social and economic development”—a small but statistically significant difference. Moreover, support for democracy is lowest among those who associate it with “social and economic hardship” (56 percent). Thus support for democracy seems to be strongest among “minimalists,” for whom democracy’s scope is limited to setting the rules of the political game, and more tentative

TABLE 2—RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY AND SATISFACTION WITH DEMOCRACY (PERCENTAGES OF NATIONAL SAMPLES, EXCLUDING “DON’T KNOWS”)¹

	SUPPORT DEMOCRACY		SUPPORT AN ALTERNATIVE REGIME ²	
	SATISFIED WITH DEMOCRACY	UNSATISFIED WITH DEMOCRACY	SATISFIED WITH DEMOCRACY	UNSATISFIED WITH DEMOCRACY
Malawi	53	22	13	13
Namibia	54	18	17	11
Ghana	53	26	10	11
Botswana	70	17	7	6
Nigeria	72	11	14	6
Zimbabwe	15	59	8	17
All	58	21	12	10

¹ Figures may not agree with Table 1 because “don’t knows” are removed in Table 2. Row percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

² Includes those who support nondemocratic alternatives and those for whom the type of regime “does not matter.”

among “maximalists,” who hope that democracy will herald sweeping socioeconomic change.

The same applies, but with greater force, to satisfaction with the way that democracy actually works. The most satisfied citizens are those who define democracy in terms of the procedural notion of electoral choice (73 percent). The least satisfied are those who expect democracy to deliver such substantive goods as economic equality or social justice (60 percent), social or economic development (58 percent), and security from crime (57 percent). We conclude that citizens who have modest expectations—namely, that democracy will enable them to choose their leaders and participate in decision making (and not much more!)—are relatively likely to be satisfied with democracy. If, however, they believe that democracy will automatically provide jobs, redistribute income, and ensure social peace, they are likely to be disillusioned. In short, the perceived performance of democracy is partly in the eye of the beholder.

3) From satisfaction to support. Does satisfaction with democracy in practice drive overall support for democracy? One might expect that popular assessments of an elected regime’s performance would deeply influence whether citizens opt for democracy as their preferred form of government. The African data support this proposition, though less strongly than expected. Support is positively related to satisfaction in five out of the six countries surveyed (see Table 2 above). If “don’t knows” are excluded, 58 percent of all respondents are both supportive of and satisfied with democracy. Yet although this relationship is statistically significant in all five countries, it is strong only in Malawi. And in Zimbabwe, the relationship runs in the opposite direction, with high levels of support for democracy coinciding with low levels of satisfaction.

We interpret these data as follows. On the one hand, in at least five of

our six countries, popular support for democracy has a strong instrumental component. Citizens extend support to a democratic regime in good part because they are satisfied with its performance in delivering desired goods and services. Yet 21 percent of all survey respondents (and 59 percent in Zimbabwe) say that they support democracy in principle *even though* they are dissatisfied with the performance of their own regime. These citizens value democracy intrinsically, that is, not merely as a means of delivering development but as an end in itself.

These results cast new light on the quality of the democracy emerging in African countries. Take Zimbabwe, for example, which harbors the most dissatisfied democrats. Zimbabweans apparently cling intensely to democracy precisely because their current government has broken most of the rules of the political game. Thus intrinsic support for the principle of democracy is best revealed in regimes in crisis, when citizens have abandoned all pretense of instrumental support for an underperforming incumbent government.

There is also evidence of intrinsic support for democracy in Ghana. Three-fourths of Ghanaians endorse democracy even though only half of them are satisfied with the way it works in practice. In other words, the quality of the “democracy” they have experienced under soldier-turned-civilian Jerry Rawlings falls short of the ideal regime they would prefer. Such intrinsic attachments suggest that the democracy is relatively well-established in Ghana, a country that once led Africa to political independence.

Table 2 should not be read as raising concerns about Botswana, which our surveys portray as the paragon of African democracies. This country has the highest levels of expressed support for democracy in the sample, but most of this support appears on the surface to be instrumental. At this time, we do not know if high levels of instrumental satisfaction in Botswana mask high underlying levels of intrinsic support. Nor can this issue be resolved unless the regime undergoes a period of crisis. Should economic or political performance ever take a serious turn for the worse, and should public attachment to democracy falter in response, then democracy will have been revealed to be less secure in Botswana than commonly thought. More likely, however, as in the case of Zimbabwe, citizen attachment to democracy in Botswana will then be revealed as being deep-seated.

Finally, Nigeria and Namibia are the only two countries in Africa—and possibly the world—where more citizens report satisfaction with democracy than support for it. In these countries, even people who do not support democracy in principle stand ready and willing to consume the products of a regime that calls itself democratic. Citizens here seem to be instrumentalists *par excellence*. Many of them apparently care less about the form of government than about the capacity of rulers—any rulers—to deliver the goods. Under these circumstances, we are tempted

to conclude that the consolidation of democracy is a distant prospect in both these countries.

The Legitimacy of Democracy in Africa

At this time, several leading sub-Saharan African countries display a significant degree of popular support for democracy. Yet there are reasons to be concerned about the limited depth of this attachment and the quality of democracy that is emerging.

There can be little doubt that democracy, broadly defined, has attained wide legitimacy in Africa. More than seven out of ten respondents to six national Afrobarometer surveys in late 1999 and early 2000 named it as their preferred form of government. Since military and one-party rule are discredited in these countries, support for democracy is not seriously compromised by large pockets of authoritarian nostalgia. These findings also suggest that, while outsiders may have influenced political reform in Africa, democratic sentiments have their own indigenous sources.

Yet while popular support for democracy seems to be a mile wide, it may be only an inch deep. Even though many Africans interpret democracy in universal terms, and value it intrinsically as well as instrumentally, their understanding of democratic principles is extremely vague. Education can help to offset some of these shortcomings by closing gaps in political knowledge, but it does not always deepen commitment to democratic values. Moreover, compared to citizens in other regions of the non-Western world, Africans express considerable dissatisfaction with the performance of their elected governments. In every African country that we surveyed, majorities of the adult population regard their new democracies as seriously incomplete. Thus, when it comes to building democracy, Africans themselves acknowledge that much work remains to be done.

NOTES

1. All samples are national probability samples. The sample sizes for each country are shown in Table 1. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 3 percent (2 percent in Nigeria). Fieldwork was conducted by national research institutions affiliated with the Afrobarometer project, to whom we are grateful. The authors acknowledge research funding from the National Science Foundation and the U.S. Agency for International Development. Trained interviewers conducted face-to-face interviews in local languages with a total of 10,398 respondents, using a questionnaire that contained a core of common items.

2. Except where noted, all crossnational averages are calculated as the raw mean of the total population interviewed. This has the effect of representing countries in proportion to their sample sizes.

3. Namibians actually chose the "peace or unity" option less frequently (5 percent) than all respondents (6 percent).

4. At first we wondered whether respondents were led by the closed-ended list, being prompted to choose substantive attributes that they would not freely associate with democracy if asked in a completely undirected way. But factor analysis shows that political and economic responses cluster along separate dimensions and that people who emphasize democracy's political procedures are not necessarily those who emphasize its economic substance.

5. New Democracies Barometer IV (1995), cited in William Mishler and Richard Rose, "Five Years After the Fall: Trajectories in Support for Democracy in Post-Communist Europe," *Studies in Public Policy* 298 (Glasgow: University of Strathclyde, Centre for the Study of Public Policy, 1998): 13; Latinobarómetro (1995), cited in Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 222.

6. See Michael Bratton and Robert Mattes, "Support for Democracy in Africa: Intrinsic or Instrumental?" *British Journal of Political Science* (forthcoming 2001). The unstandardized average score for Ghana, Malawi, Namibia, Zimbabwe (1999), and South Africa (1997) is 65 percent.

7. In Ghana and Zimbabwe, however, opposition to strongman rule also surely reflects popular disaffection with sitting leaders who have overstayed their welcome. Since some of these differences fall within the surveys' margins of sampling error, they should not be overinterpreted.

8. With data from New Democracies Barometer IV (1998), we estimate an average support satisfaction gap for Eastern and Central Europe (6 countries) of about 5 percentage points. With data from the Latinobarómetro (1995), we estimate an average gap for South America (4 countries) of about 13 percentage points. Depending on how it is measured, the average gap for sub-Saharan African countries in 1999–2000 is between 11 and 21 percentage points.

9. Among Zambians, for example, educated persons are less likely to agree with the principle of universal suffrage. They are also less likely to vote. See Michael Bratton, "Political Participation in a New Democracy: Institutional Considerations from Zambia," *Comparative Political Studies* 32 (August 1999): 564.