

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Satisfaction with democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa: Assessing the effects of system performance

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This paper examines the relationship between system performance and satisfaction with democracy in sub-Saharan African countries. On the basis of comparable survey data from the third round of Afrobarometer from 2005, we have assessed a number of economic and political performance indicators. In doing this, we employ an elaborate theoretical framework and multilevel analysis. The results show that system performance is indeed related to levels of satisfaction with democracy. Both micro-level and macro-level, economic and political variables are important in relation to the differences in the African citizens' satisfaction with democracy. More particularly, the macro-level variables economic growth and respect for the rule of law are positively associated with satisfaction with democracy. On the micro-level, the citizens' positive evaluations of their own as well as the national economic situation increases satisfaction, while unequal treatment under the law and, first and foremost, poor election quality show negative effects. Thus, even under economic hardship, satisfaction with democracy may persist if the citizens think that fundamental democratic principles are respected. On the other hand, dissatisfaction is likely to take root if the citizens think that those principles are not respected.

**Key words:** Afrobarometer, satisfaction with democracy, system performance, multilevel analysis.

## INTRODUCTION

Popular satisfaction with the way democracy works, is an essential characteristic of a well-functioning democracy as satisfaction supports the link between citizens and the representative institutions. Low levels of citizen support can pose serious problems for political regimes. With regard to democratic regimes, it has forcefully been argued that both their functioning and endurance are intimately and systematically linked to citizens' both diffuse and specific support for democratic governance (Lipset, 1994; Powell, 1982; Easton, 1965). This means that even though critical citizens could signify a vibrant democracy, prolonged periods of marked dissatisfaction carry the potential to undermine democracy. It is obvious that understanding why countries differ in their degree of citizen satisfaction with democracy is important from the perspectives of democratic consolidation (Diamond, 1999) and democratic quality (Diamond and Morlino, 2005). Thus, even though most research on satisfaction with democracy has focused on the mature democracies

of Western Europe and North America (Anderson, 1998: 2; Fuchs et al., 1995)), the relevance is particularly high for political systems with recent democratization experiences.

Among these systems, we find the many new fragile and defective democracies in sub-Saharan Africa. Most of them have gone through democratic transitions in the aftermath of the Cold War but still have not achieved a consolidation of their democratic institutions. One of their most obvious shortcomings is actually a low popular satisfaction with the way democracy works. On the other hand, some citizens in this part of the world are dissatisfied with their democracy. There are remarkable differences across both countries and individuals. But how can we assess and explain this variation?

Until recently, problems of data availability put severe limitations on the investigation of such research questions. Fortunately, systematic comparative survey data on African countries are now collected by the Afrobarometer. Systematic cross-national studies have already made use of the data to account for satisfaction with democracy in the context of sub-Saharan Africa (Bratton et al., 2005: 81-84; Bratton, 2006; Alemika,

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2007; Cho, 2004; 2007). However, we take the road not traveled yet. Besides focusing on the effects of economic and political system performance, we distinguish between a macro and a micro perspective on the one hand and respect for different democratic rights (free elections, civil liberties and the rule of law) on the other. The macro perspective links satisfaction with democracy to general institutional performance in terms of economic progress and respect for democratic rights. By contrast, the micro perspective understands satisfaction with democracy to be the consequence of the individual citizen's evaluation of institutional performance and consequently, to be conditioned by personal taste and experiences.

To integrate the macro and micro perspectives, we rely on a multilevel model, which enables us to handle individual and aggregate factors simultaneously. Although multilevel analysis has not been used in previous studies to study satisfaction with democracy in sub-Saharan Africa, we argue that it is the appropriate choice, given our research agenda.

Using this method, our findings strongly support that system performance plays an important role for the level of satisfaction with democracy. Economic and political performance indicators on both the national and the individual level, show significant explanatory power, indicating that our institutional and multilevel approach makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of a multifaceted relationship.

In the first section below, we operationalize our dependent variable, viz. satisfaction with democracy.

Second, we revisit the literature on the relationship between satisfaction with democracy and system performance, and elaborate on some theoretical and conceptual distinctions. Next, we argue that the employment of a multilevel analysis is the proper method to examine the research questions. Fourth, the results of the statistical analyses are discussed in the light of previous findings. We conclude the paper with a summary of the findings and suggestions for further research.

## **THE MEANING AND MEASUREMENT OF SATISFACTION WITH DEMOCRACY**

The concept of political support is a multi-dimensional phenomenon, depending on the objects or levels of abstraction that it refers to. David Easton (1965) distinguished between support for the political community, regime and authorities, but refined distinctions are needed in order to avoid the confusion of various aspects. Elaborating on Easton's framework, Pippa Norris (1999) has proposed a fivefold conceptualization, making a distinction between political community, regime principles, regime performance, regime institutions and political actors. According to Norris (1999: 9-10), "these levels can be seen as ranging in a continuum from the most diffuse support for the nation-state down through

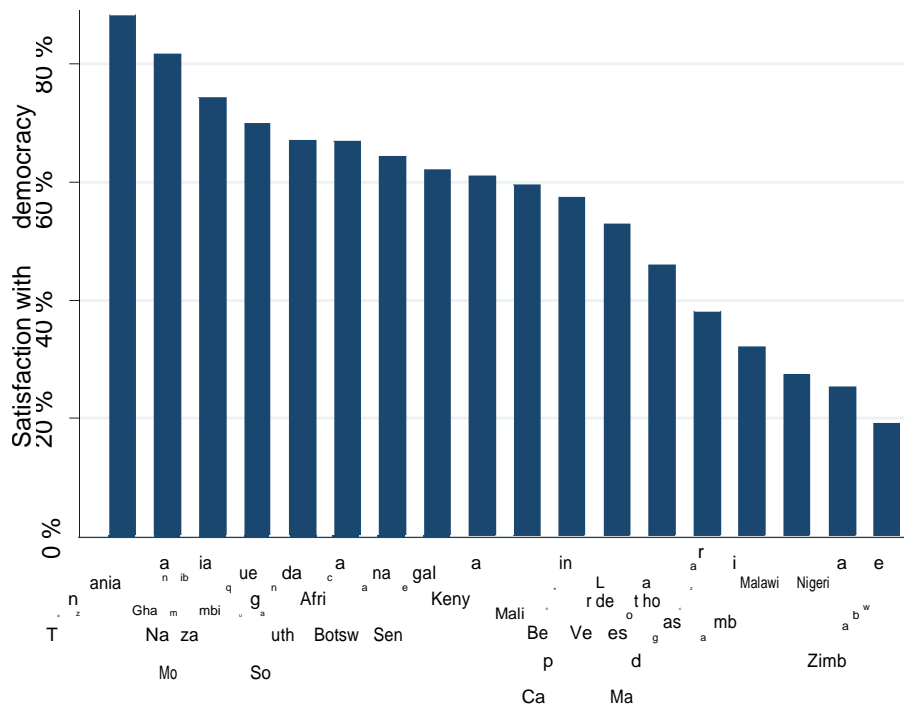
successive levels to the most concrete support for particular politicians." While the distinctions can be blurred in practice, the adjustment is justified by the fact that, in practice, citizens do seem to distinguish between different levels of the regime. They can, for example, believe faithfully in democratic values and simultaneously be very critical of the practical functioning of democracy (Norris, 1999; Klingemann, 1999).

The meaning of political community is the same as Easton's original concept, indicating a fundamental attachment to a particular political system or nation. Hence, it goes beyond current governmental institutions. But the supplementary distinction between regime principles and regime performance is essential in order to separate opinions about the best form of government from evaluations of the way democracy works in practice, that is, at a given point in time in a particular country (Linde and Ekman, 2003).

One can just think of a situation in which a person supports the specific form of democracy while being ready to support a non-democratic alternative should problems with democracy arise. People can also be strong proponents of democracy as the ideal type of government, but not in their particular country which they think is not yet ready for democracy. Even though we make the analytical distinction between regime principles and regime performance, we are aware that in practice, it might be difficult for citizens to keep the two concepts apart. Linde and Ekman (2003: 397) argued that people can hardly avoid evaluating their attachment to the ideals of democracy, partly because of the way democracy works in practice. One might suspect that the opposite is equally true, that is, if you feel strongly attached to democratic values, you will be more likely to judge the specific form of democracy in a positive way.

On the fourth level of abstraction, Norris places support for and trust in core political institutions, such as the parliament, the military and the courts, while the support for and trust in concrete groups or persons (e.g. the president, the prime minister and concrete parties) constitutes the fifth, and most specific, level (Norris, 1999: 9-12).

This study addresses the third level: citizen evaluations of how the (democratic) political system functions in practice. This intermediate level of support is difficult to measure, though, because of its ambiguity. In short, different interpretations are possible with regard to the question used to capture the issue in previous studies, namely asking how satisfied are citizens with the way democracy functions in their country (Canache et al., 2001). Nevertheless, research in this field has shown that respondents do tend to link the question to regime performance rather than principles (Klingemann, 1999; Linde and Ekman, 2003). Thus, for comparative purposes and lacking a clear and available alternative, we rely on the answers on a similar item provided by the Afrobarometer survey to operationalize the dependent



**Figure 1.** Satisfaction with democracy in sub-Saharan Africa.  
 Note: The figure shows for each country the share of respondents who are either fairly or very satisfied with the way democracy works in their country.

variable (the scale of raw scores – reflecting whether people were very satisfied (4), fairly satisfied (3), not very satisfied (2), not at all satisfied (1), or stated that their country is not a democracy (0) – is employed in the analysis). To be concrete, we use the answers to the following question: Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in the country? We have translated the different answers into a scale. It reflects whether people were very satisfied (4), fairly satisfied (3), not very satisfied (2), not at all satisfied (1), or stated that their country is not a democracy (0). The data refer to the third survey round (year 2005) covering 18 sub-Saharan African countries. (As regards the macro-level data, they are based on the World Bank’s (2008) World Development Indicators and the disaggregated country scores from Freedom House’s (2008) Freedom in the World 2005.)

Sub-Saharan Africa is interesting because of flagrant dissimilarities in satisfaction with democracy between and within the countries. Figure 1 shows that, on an aggregated level, the percentage of people expressing that they are very or fairly satisfied with the way democracy works in their respective countries is virtually spread over the whole continuum, ranging from an impressive maximum of 88% in Tanzania and to an unsurprising minimum of 19% in Zimbabwe. Among the other countries, we find Nigeria, Madagascar, Zambia and Malawi in the lower end, South Africa and Namibia in the higher end, and the remaining countries placed somewhere in-between. Now, how can we account for these obvious differences?

### System performance and satisfaction with democracy

Previous studies have shown that variation in system outcome is a prominent explanation of differences in citizen satisfaction with the way democracy works (Anderson, 1998; Anderson and Guillory, 1997; Harmel and Robertson, 1986; Wagner et al., 2003; Weatherford, 1987). Their findings are in accordance with rational institutional theory. It says that satisfaction is rationally based and that it hinges on citizens’ evaluation of institutional performance (Mishler and Rose, 2001). Thus, we expect that satisfaction with democracy is high if institutions are judged to perform well and low if they are judged to fail in their purpose of ‘good governance’.

This proposition is neither bold nor original. Even though broad comparative studies on the link between performance and satisfaction in Africa are still in their virginity, it would hardly be surprising also to find the link confirmed on this continent. Therefore, our primary research agenda is to distinguish between different kinds of system performance to shed light on what particular aspects contribute the most to generating satisfaction. In fact, institutional theories disagree with which aspects of performance matter the most. In established democracies where the structure of political institutions is relatively stable over long periods of time, institutional theories typically emphasize in particular the importance of economic performance (Przeworski et al., 1996). From this perspective, one can expect people to be satisfied with democracy to the extent that governments deliver the desired economic outcome. But as Diamond (1999:

**Table 1.** Four potential causes of satisfaction with democracy.

	<b>Economic performance</b>	<b>Political performance</b>
Macro level	System's general economic performance	System's general political (democratic) performance
Micro level	Individual evaluations of system's economic performance	Individual evaluations of system's political (democratic) performance

13) notes, it is not only material progress that democratic citizens value. In new democracies, the political character of institutions can matter as much as or even more than their economic performance (Mishler and Rose, 2001: 36).

In countries recently under authoritarian rule, where democratic rights were systematically repressed for decades, citizens are likely to value institutions that succeed in ensuring people sovereignty and increased individual freedoms. In this way, satisfaction with democracy can be viewed as a consequence of political performance rather than economic performance.

Within the institutionalist tradition, another analytical distinction needs to be made, that is, between macro and micro perspectives. Macro-institutional theories emphasize the general performance of institutions in such matters as promoting growth, governing effectively and avoiding corruption (Mishler and Rose, 2001: 32). The outputs of institutions are assumed to determine individual responses. By contrast, micro-institutional theories argue that evaluations of performance are not determined by aggregate performance alone. Hence, they emphasize that individual evaluations of institutional performance are conditioned by individual circumstances, tastes and experiences. People who make use of democratic rights and appreciate them higher than personal financial well-being are expected to express satisfaction with democracy if the democratic rights are respected, even though their financial conditions are bad. Whether a person gives the highest priority to democratic rights could be the consequence of personal experiences under authoritarian rule such as harassment because of oppositional political views.

By combining the distinctions between economic and democratic performance on the one hand and macro-level vs. micro-level on the other, four analytical categories emerge, suggesting different origins of democratic satisfaction (Table 1).

As mentioned in the introduction, we are interested in disaggregating the explanations as much as possible. Thus, we introduce some further distinctions on the performance dimension. As regards economy, we distinguished between inflation and growth on the macro-level and evaluation of personal versus the country's economy on the micro-level. Furthermore, based on democratic theory, we make a distinction between three attributes of democracy on both the aggregate and individual level. This tripartition reflects the electoral core (free elections) accentuated by Schumpeter (1974), the civil liberties elaboration (freedom of speech, assembly,

and association) of Dahl's (1989) concept of polyarchy and O'Donnell's (2005) addition of the rule of law (no one is *de legibus solitus*).

Based on these distinctions, we can now formulate three questions on the relationship between system performance and satisfaction with democracy: 1) Does satisfaction with democracy vary more within than across countries? 2) Does economic performance or political performance matter the most? 3) Among the democratic rights, are free elections, civil liberties, or the rule of law, respectively, the most important element when measuring the degree of satisfaction with democracy? Before we move on to the analysis that provides the empirical grounding for answering these questions, however, the choice of method needs some justification.

### **A multilevel approach**

From the African barometer, we have access to survey data from 18 countries. We exclude Uganda and Zimbabwe from further analysis because they are not even minimalist/electoral democracies. This being so, their status as non-democratic makes it difficult to interpret answers about satisfaction with democracy. One way to treat the survey data from the remaining countries is simply to pool all the individual observations from each country and then estimate individual-level regression models to account for the respondents' satisfaction with democracy. One could also estimate macro-level regression models using country-level factors as independent variables so as to explain the variation between countries showing average satisfaction with the way democracy works. However, if we are to take proper account of differences both between and within countries in our analyses, the more appropriate statistical tool is multilevel (hierarchical) modeling (Achen, 2005).

By employing multilevel models, we can simultaneously handle the effects from both the micro- and macro-level. In a multilevel setup, the respondents in each country can be viewed as level 1-units, whereas the level 2-units consist of the countries under study. Thus, with this clearly hierarchically structured data, level 1-respondents can be considered as nested in countries at level 2. The problem with simply pooling all the individual observations is that in this way we would implicitly assume that all the observations are independent.

It seems more realistic to assume that individual observations from within the same country might resemble

each other (the errors might be correlated). For this reason it might be more viable to integrate the knowledge of the multilevel structure in our models. A general multilevel model with both micro- and macro-level variables can be formulated as:

$$Y_{ij} = \beta_1 + \zeta_j + \beta_2 X_{2ij} + \beta_3 X_{3ij} + \varepsilon_{ij} \quad (1)$$

where  $\beta_1$  is the intercept,  $\zeta_j$  is a random intercept component,  $X_{2ij}$  is a variable that only varies at country level and  $X_{3ij}$  is a variable that varies across individuals, while  $\varepsilon_{ij}$  is an error term for each individual.

By allowing the intercept to vary between countries  $j$ , we relax the unrealistic assumption of independence among responses for the same person given the covariates (Rabe-Hesketh and Skrondal, 2005: 116). The random intercept represents the combined effect of all omitted country-specific variables that cause some countries to be more prone to be satisfied with democracy than others. This model is also called the random intercept model.

To first test whether there are in fact differences in intercepts between countries, we have fitted a logistic multilevel regression model with  $j-1$  country dummies. The results (not shown) clearly confirm our assumption; we see strongly significant differences in intercepts between the African countries. The significant coefficients of this model clearly indicate that a random intercept model is relevant.

In order to establish further to what extent country-level explanatory variables are needed in the model, we first fit a simple multilevel logistic model with no regressors. If we compare the variance that can be traced back to differences on the individual level with the variance that can be traced back to differences on the country level, it is possible to get an estimate of the relative importance of macro variables in explaining satisfaction with democracy. From equation 1 we can see that the total variance of the model is

$$\text{VAR}(Y_{ij}) = \text{VAR}(\beta_1 + \zeta_j + \varepsilon_{ij}) = \text{VAR}(\zeta_j + \varepsilon_{ij}) \quad (2)$$

which is also the sum of the between-country (level 2,  $\zeta_j$ ) and within-country (level 1,  $\varepsilon_{ij}$ ) variances. In the simple model with no regression variables included, the estimate of the level 2 variance is 0.778. Since the variance for the standard logistic distribution is  $\pi^2/3$ , we can take this variance to be the level 1 variance (Goldstein, 2003: 110). The proportion of the total variance that is due to countries ( $\rho$ ) is then found as

$$\rho = \frac{\text{Var}(\zeta_j)}{\text{Var}(y_{ij})} = \frac{\text{Var}(\zeta_j)}{\text{Var}(\zeta_j + \varepsilon_{ij})} = \frac{0.778}{0.778 + \pi^2/3} = \frac{0.778}{0.778 + 3.29} \approx 0.19 \quad (3)$$

In other words, roughly 19% of the variation in satisfac-

tion with democracy is attributable to the country level. This preliminary result indicates two things. First, crucial differences between countries seem to exist, which requires that we pay considerable attention to particular national features in our examination. Second, even though differences between countries seem to play a huge role, it does not justify running regression models that pay attention only to macro-level variation. This is simply because variation between African citizens accounts for an even larger share of the total variation in satisfaction with democracy. Hence, this is also an answer to the first question that we posed: satisfaction does vary more within than between countries. However, considering that both differences between nations and differences between individuals are indispensable in explaining satisfaction, the result at the same time underlines the need for multilevel modeling.

### Explaining satisfaction with democracy

After having established that both micro- and macro-level factors are likely to influence satisfaction with democracy, the natural next step is to examine which individual factor really matter. Recall that aside from distinguishing between micro- and macro-level explanations, we distinguish between political and economic explanations. Before turning to the results of the analyses, it is worthwhile stressing that to a great extent, the citizens are able to distinguish between, on the one hand, their satisfaction with the current state of democracy and, on the other hand, their support for democracy as an ideal. This conclusion is substantiated by the fact that the correlation between the two variables is only 0.167 (Pearson's  $r$ ).

Since there is neither a perfect nor a near-perfect correlation, it makes sense to uphold Norris' distinction between regime principles and regime performance. Notice, moreover, that roughly 20% of the African respondents in Afrobarometer signified that they did not understand the word "democracy", not even when it was translated to their local language. This problem is not isolated to the African context, though. In Latin America, for instance, The Latinobarometro report from 2006 states that "there are ever more people who do not know how to reply to the question on the meaning of democracy". 32% of the respondents did not know how to answer this question. This finding should, of course, lead to considerable caution when drawing conclusions on the causes of satisfaction with democracy. This said, however, we believe that such analyses are still warranted.

The results of the multilevel regression analyses are shown in Table 2. While model 1 and model 2 test economic explanations, models 3 and 4 examine political explanations. Referring to our other core distinction, models 1 and 3 test macro-level explanations, whereas model 2 and model 4 include micro-level explanations. In

**Table 2.** Multilevel models explaining satisfaction with democracy.

Fixed effects	Model 1 Economic macro explanations	Model 2 Economic micro explanations	Model 3 Political macro explanations	Model 4 Political micro explanations	Model 5 Complete model
Intercept $\beta$	-1.005 (1.364)	-1.077 (1.139)	-2.537 (1.979)	1.333 (1.011)	-5.640 (1.663)
<b>Macro economic</b>					
Log inflation	-0.296* (0.154)				0.084 (0.117)
Average gdp/cap growth 2000-05	0.828* (0.494)				1.357*** (0.297)
<b>Micro economic</b>					
Country's economy		0.334*** (0.017)			0.293*** (0.020)
Personal economy		0.105*** (0.018)			0.074*** (0.021)
<b>Macro political</b>					
Rule of law			0.129 (0.114)		0.166** (0.071)
Free elections			0.047 (0.103)		-0.017 (0.063)
Civil liberties			-0.024 (0.108)		0.061 (0.069)
<b>Micro political</b>					
Poor election quality				-0.577*** (0.020)	-0.554*** (0.020)
Restrictions on freedom of speech				0.001 (0.017)	0.007 (0.018)
Unequal treatment under the law				-0.243*** (0.018)	-0.227*** (0.019)
<b>Control variables</b>					
Electoral system	-0.180 (0.297)	-0.205 (0.312)	-0.131 (0.303)	-0.320 (0.276)	0.013 (0.183)
Ethnic fractionalization	0.528 (0.964)	0.347 (1.094)	1.206 (1.077)	0.843 (0.970)	1.739** (0.614)
Generalized trust	0.385*** (0.046)	0.349*** (0.047)	0.391*** (0.046)	0.316*** (0.052)	0.269*** (0.054)
Political interest	0.241*** (0.017)	0.214*** (0.016)	0.234*** (0.016)	0.197*** (0.018)	0.189*** (0.019)
Gender	0.035 (0.034)	0.066* (0.034)	0.061* (0.033)	0.050 (0.037)	0.036 (0.039)
Education	-0.020*** (0.009)	-0.044*** (0.009)	-0.021** (0.009)	-0.014 (0.010)	-0.033** (0.011)
<b>Random effects</b>					
Var, intercept $\zeta_j$	0.428*** (0.158)	0.554*** (0.199)	0.443*** (0.160)	0.433*** (0.157)	0.118*** (0.047)
N	17,063	17,827	18,139	15,631	14,691

Note: Two-sided tests; \* = 0.1 significant, \*\* = 0.05 significant, \*\*\* = 0.01 significant.

all of the models, the same control variables are included. The first model, which includes the economic macro-level explanations, shows that even when checking for several competing explanations, country-specific economic factors seem to be of vital importance. Both the inflation rate and the average GDP growth between 2000 and 2005 significantly affect the level of satisfaction with democracy in the theoretically expected directions. Since logarithm transformation cannot be defined for negative values, we have followed Sarel's recommendation to transform negative values to 0.1 (Burdekin et al., 2004:

528). If we use an alternative method for log transformation, that is  $\log(1+)$ , which is preferred by, for example, Ghosh and Phillips (1998), the effects from the macro-economic performance variables are still significant and the substantial conclusions remain the same.

To further test the strength of the results, we have run our original model, but this time including only respondents who claim they understand the word democracy. Inflation still has a significant effect on satisfaction, but growth rates now turn insignificant. Whereas, the economic macro explanations seem to be of substantial

importance to the citizens' satisfaction with democracy across the sub-Saharan continent, not all of the control variables play an important role. The results indicate that neither electoral systems nor ethnic fractionalization have a significant effect on satisfaction. By contrast, generalized trust, political interest and education are strongly associated with satisfaction. In model 2 we tested the micro-economic explanations and find that citizens' assessments of both the country's economic performance (sociotropic perspective) and their own personal financial situation (egotropic perspective) have an effect on their degree of satisfaction with democracy. As expected, both factors are positively associated with satisfaction, and both effects are highly significant. The coefficient 0.325 means that a one-unit change in the evaluation of the country's economy will increase the probability of being satisfied with democracy by a factor of  $e^{0.325}$  (=1.38). Similarly, the coefficient on the assessment of the personal financial situation signifies that the probability of being satisfied with democracy is increased by a factor of  $e^{0.120}$  (=1.13) for a one-unit increase in the evaluation of the personal financial situation. Apparently, evaluations of the economic performance represent important determinants of satisfaction. The conclusions remain the same if we only focus on respondents who understand the word democracy.

Further, our results are in line with Cho's (2004) study of opinions about democracy across ten African countries. He also finds that both sociotropic and egotropic evaluations play an important role in satisfaction with democracy and that the effect of sociotropic perspectives on the national economic situation account better for the level of satisfaction than personal financial conditions. But we also expected the political performance of governments to have an effect. Do the results also confirm this proposition? Aside from the control variables, model 3 contains the three macro-level indicators of political performance: free elections, civil liberties and the rule of law. None of the effects are significant, so, apparently, the political explanations linked to the macro level are less important than the economic macro-level factors. However, when we exclude respondents that do not know the word democracy, rule of law turns significant; the other variables continue to be insignificant. Accordingly, high levels of rule of law are positively associated with satisfaction with democracy.

Among others, Diamond (2008) has emphasized the importance of the rule of law in Africa for democratic endurance. Most African states are ridden by corruption and do not function effectively, so democracies in the region face a serious challenge when it comes to legitimacy. Since the system's performance with regard to corruption control, equal treatment by the courts and bureaucracy, as well as the provision of public order tend to be more important to citizen satisfaction than the country-level respect for free elections and civil liberties, some could be tempted to change priorities from the

latter rights to the former (Zakaria, 2003). However, this conclusion would be too hasty as it is very unlikely that one should experience improvements in the rule-of-law conditions under circumstances of unfree elections and repression of civil liberty (Carothers, 2007). Moreover, some additional analyses (not reported) indicate that the lack of statistical significance regarding macro-level free elections and civil liberty could be caused by a high level of multicollinearity between the political-institutional variables.

Moving on to the micro-level indicators of political performance (Model 4), two of the independent variables are strongly related to satisfaction with democracy in the expected direction. Hence, the citizens' perceptions of poor election quality and unequal treatment under the law are all associated with dissatisfaction with the way democracy functions in practice. Suppression of freedom of speech, however, does not show a significant association, indicating that this factor is not valued so high or even identified as a crucial component of democracy. If we run model 4 only with people who claim to know the meaning of democracy, there are virtually no changes in the significance levels and the size of the coefficients. This finding supports that perceptions of electoral quality and unequal treatment under the law are important in relation to the satisfaction with democracy in sub-Saharan Africa.

Finally, in model 5, all the potential explanations are gathered in a full model. To a high degree, our previous results are corroborated in the final analysis. Country-level growth (but not inflation) and respect for the rule of law in addition to individual-level perceptions of the country's and one's own economy, on the one hand, and election quality and equal treatment under the law, on the other hand, continue to be significant. Thus, our main findings are rather robust. Furthermore, based on a different (superior) method, they lend further support to one of the main conclusions of Bratton and Mattes (2001) that both economic and political performance matter.

## CONCLUSION

The results presented in this article clearly show that in African democracies, no single explanation is sufficient in accounting for the level of satisfaction with current regimes. Rather, the assessments tend to depend on different dimensions of institutional performance. Moreover, we have shown that the consistent relationships between satisfaction with democracy and economic and political performance, respectively, are valid at both individual level and national level. By utilizing multilevel regression analyses, we have been able to consider the influence from both levels at the same time. Hitherto, the multilevel approach has been underutilized even though in our opinion, it constitutes a superior way to handle research questions of this kind

and, thus, should become standard practice in the field.

Even though more objective differences between countries also contribute with important explanatory power, the bulk of the variation in satisfaction with democracy is attributable to differences in the African citizens' subjective perceptions. As to the economic variables, our results strongly indicate that a system's economic performance is a crucial determinant for satisfaction. Hence, people who are satisfied with their own financial situation and the country's economic condition are inclined to favour the way democracy functions in their country. By contrast, people being very dissatisfied with the economic situation are significantly more apt to express dissatisfaction with the current state of democracy. Together with (macro-level) economic growth, these economic performance indicators have shown a remarkably consistent association with the dependent variable across different model specifications.

Among the political performance indicators, the results only emphasized one macro-level variable: the degree to which the rule of law was respected in the respective countries. As regards the micro-level indicators of political performance, poor election quality showed a strong and significant negative effect. That is not surprising. Nonetheless, it is still informative, and to some degree also encouraging to have this basic assumption confirmed; African citizens do in fact take the freeness and fairness of elections into consideration when expressing how satisfied they are with democracy.

Unequal treatment under the law is another violation of democratic principles that is reflected in the satisfaction levels. It is good news for democracy that citizens in some of the least developed countries in the world are not only concerned with their financial situation. Even during an economic crisis, democracy is not doomed to fail due to public pressure if only the masses feel that core democratic principles are respected. In that case, satisfaction with democracy can be upheld and play a crucial role for the long-term legitimacy and survival of the fledgling democracies.

Taken together, we have shown that economic development is of fundamental concern to African citizens. However, political performance understood as the adherence to essential democratic principles is also very important in relation to the satisfaction with democracy. In this article, we have focused on the effects of institutional performance. So what is the obvious next step? We think that three supplementary research agendas now need to be addressed. First, an extension of the analysis to other regions of the world that have been part of the third wave of democratization. Second, an extension of the analysis to include cross-temporal comparisons within the same African context. Finally, a systematic examination of the influence of cultural explanations. As regards the last point, our findings, especially the significant effect of generalized trust, clearly indicated that cultural conditions should not be neglected. Rather, a more detailed examination of such explanations in the African context is

warranted to complement our institutional approach. In a recent paper, Kryzaneck (2009) has taken a first step in this direction. Based on an analysis of South Africa and Botswana, she concludes that particularized trust harm participation, while generalized trust induces it. Moreover she argues that,

"In Africa, a democratic culture is only beginning to take root. [But] while it undoubtedly demonstrates promise for the future of democracy on the continent, civil society is still in an early, developmental stage. And ... social dynamics across the continent serve as a roadblock to widespread participation, hindering the development of an expansive democratic culture" (2009: 36).

Clearly, more research on this issue is warranted and debates about the causes (and consequences) of satisfaction with democracy in sub-Saharan Africa are still to be had.

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