

# Predictors of citizens' trust in public leadership in Ghana: a comparison between the president, MPs and MMDCEs

Predictors  
of citizens'  
trust

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This study was designed to assess the predictors of citizens' trust in public leaders in Ghana. Specifically, it assesses the effect of eight trust variables—competence/ability, integrity, communication, benevolence, political/quality of governance, rational/economic, risk-taking and socio-demographic characteristics—on citizens' trust in public leaders—the president, members of parliament (MPs) and metropolitan, municipal and district chief executives (MMDCEs)—in Ghana from 2016 to 2018.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Summary statistics, bivariate correlation and binary logistic regression were employed to analyze 2,400 responses of Ghanaians obtained from the Afro-Barometer round seven surveys on Ghana (2016–2018).

**Findings** – The results reveal that competence/ability, that is to say, the performance of the president, MPs and MMDCEs, influence citizens' trust in these leaders. Furthermore, communication, benevolence, rationality, risk-taking and socio-demographic variables were significant predictors of citizens' trust in the president. Likewise, competence/ability, communication, politics, benevolence and socio-demographic variables were predictors of citizens' trust in MPs. Additionally, competence/ability, communication, integrity, politics, benevolence and socio-demographic variables influence citizens' trust in MMDCEs. In short, the rationality and risk-taking variables only influence trust in the president, while the political variables influence trust in MPs and MMDCEs. However, integrity influences trust in MMDCEs. Future studies can investigate the factors that account for these differences to augment the current literature.

**Originality/value** – This article is unique because it examines and compares citizens' trust in three categories of public leaders—the president, MPs and MMDCEs—in Ghana using nationally representative data.

**Keywords** Public trust, Leadership, President, MPs, MMDCEs, Ghana

**Paper type** Research paper

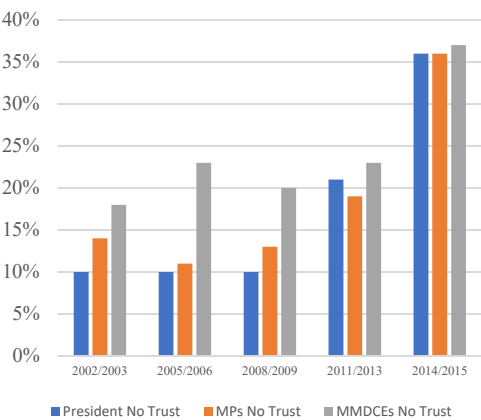
## Introduction

Studies examining citizens' trust in their leaders and institutions have taken different forms throughout history because of the interest of different disciplines in the subject matter (Pillay, 2017). The multi-disciplinary interest in trust has led scholars to identify several factors that influence citizens' trust. Specifically, socio-economic, political, cultural and societal power dynamics; competence, integrity and communication; and socio-demographic variables have been observed to influence citizens' trust (Van de Walle *et al.*, 2008; Bok, 1997, 2001; Pillay, 2017).

Scholarships about citizens' trust in the global north starting in the 1980s suggest a steady decline in trust (see Van de Walle *et al.*, 2008). Several factors have been found to influence this decline in the existing literature (Bok, 2001). In contrast, studies from the global south, especially Africa, suggest similar declines in citizens' trust since 2011 (see Pillay, 2017; Kerr and Wahman, 2021). For example, citizens' trust in leaders from 2000 to 2011 was about 62% in most countries in Africa. However, since 2011, citizens' trust has declined to about 34%. Evidence from Ghana from 2002 to 2015 suggests that citizens' trust in their political leaders is very high, which contradicts Pillay's findings (see Figures 1 and 2).

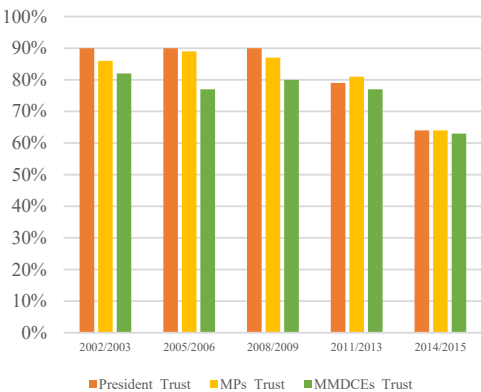


**Figure 1.**  
Citizens trust in the president, MPs and MMDCEs in Ghana from 2002 – 2015 (Comparison of citizens level of “no trust” in public leaders in Ghana)



**Source(s):** Compiled by author from the Afro-barometer Survey Rounds 2, 3, 4, 5, 6  
**Figure by author**

**Figure 2.**  
Citizens trust in the president, MPs and MMDCEs in Ghana from 2002 – 2015 (Comparison of citizens level of “trust” in public leaders in Ghana)



**Source(s):** Compiled by author from the Afro-barometer Survey Rounds 2, 3, 4, 5, 6  
**Figure by author**

The current literature about citizens’ trust in leaders in Africa, especially Ghana, has two major gaps. First, the results from these studies are inconsistent and inconclusive. Thus, further investigation can help add nuance to the current literature. Second, only a handful of studies focus on examining and comparing citizens’ trust in different categories of leaders within the same country.

Against this background, this article has the following research objectives: (1) examine and compare the levels of citizens’ trust in three categories of leaders—the president, MPs and MMDCEs—in Ghana from 2016 to 2018, and (2) examine the predictors of citizens’ trust in these leaders in Ghana. Theoretically, this research addresses gaps in the current literature while also augmenting our understanding of leadership and public trust, especially in Ghana, Africa, and beyond. Practically, the knowledge acquired from this study can help improve public leadership, public trust and governance in Ghana and beyond.

## Literature review

### *Presidents, MPs and MMDCEs in Ghana: a review*

“Ghana was the first country south of the Sahara to obtain independence in 1957 and to practice democracy. However, less than a decade after independence, Ghana’s first president, Kwame Nkrumah, was overthrown in 1966”, (Bauer and Darkwah, 2022, p. 553). Between 1966 and 1992, Ghana’s political landscape was dominated by military regimes, with brief intermissions under civilian regimes (Ayee, 2017; Brierley and Ofori, 2014; Daddieh, 2009; Bauer and Darkwah, 2022; Kumah-Abiwu and Abidde, 2022).

Since Ghana transitioned into democratic politics in 1992 and commenced its fourth republic, governments have alternated every eight years between the two major parties—the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) (Bauer and Darkwah, 2022). Table 1 provides a summary of the post-independence regimes, leaders and governments in Ghana. This study falls under the Fourth Republic (1993–present), specifically from 2016 to 2018. This study examines citizens’ trust in public leaders under the Mills/Mahama and Akufo-Addo governments.

MPs in Ghana are elected to serve for four years based on Article 113 (1) of the 1992 Constitution. The president is required by the constitution to appoint the majority of his/her ministers from parliament (Parliament of Ghana, 2022). The Mills government had about seventy-five ministers, compared to the Mahama government with eighty-five ministers. The current Akufo-Addo government has about one hundred and ten ministers (Citi Newsroom, 2017). The dual responsibilities of most MPs as ministers of state and members of parliament lead to high expectations from the constituents they represent and the public (Van Gyampo, 2015). Additionally, access to financial resources for developmental projects through the MPs Common Fund further increases citizens expectations of their MPs in Ghana (Appiah-Agyekum *et al.*, 2013).

MMDCEs, unlike MPs, are appointed by the president based on Article 243 of the 1992 Constitution. Article 240 of the constitution and the Local Government Act of 1993 provide a framework for the operation of the local government structure in Ghana (Agomor *et al.*, 2020; Appiah-Agyekum *et al.*, 2013; Brierley and Ofori, 2014; Daddieh, 2009). The local government structure of Ghana consists of metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies (MMDAs) headed by chief executives (MMDCEs) appointed by the president (Agomor *et al.*, 2019; Owusu, 2004).

The central government is required by law to give about 5% of its yearly revenue to MMDAs for their developmental projects through the MMDAs Common Fund (Appiah-

Years	Leaders	Governments	Regimes
1957–1966	Nkrumah	Convention People’s Party (CPP)	Civilian
1966–1969	Ankrah/Afrifa	National Liberation Council (NLC)	Military
1969–1972	Busia	Progress Party (PP)	Civilian
1972–1978	Acheampong	National Redemption Council (NRC)	Military
		Supreme Military Council (SMC) I	Military
1978–1979	Akuffo	Supreme Military Council (SMC) II	Military
1979–1979	Rawlings	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC)	Military
1979–1981	Limann	People’s National Party (PNP)	Civilian
1982–1992	Rawlings	Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC)	Military
1993–2001	Rawlings	National Democratic Congress (NDC)	Civilian
2001–2009	Kufuor	New Patriotic Party (NPP)	Civilian
2009–2017	Mills/Mahama	National Democratic Congress (NDC)	Civilian
2017–Now	Akufo-Addo	New Patriotic Party (NPP)	Civilian

**Source(s):** Bauer and Darkwah (2022), Bauer (2018), Tandoh-Offin (2011)

**Table 1.**  
Post-independence  
leaders, governments  
and regimes in Ghana,  
1957 – present

Agyekum *et al.*, 2013). Some studies have found that MMDAs are under-resourced because 5% is not enough to support the efficient administration of these units. Also, delays in receiving such funds further hinder the effective administration of MMDAs (Antwi-Boasiako, 2010; Nyendu, 2012). Political decentralization has been suggested by some studies as the best solution to address the current weaknesses associated with MMDAs and their operations (Dzordzormenyoh *et al.*, 2022; Van Gyampo, 2017; Yeboah-Assiamah, 2016). However, efforts at political decentralization continue to be more rhetorical than practical under successive governments (see Dzordzormenyoh *et al.*, 2022).

#### *Definition and conceptual challenges of trust: a review*

Despite the proliferation of trust studies, there is no universally accepted scholarly definition of trust (Rousseau *et al.*, 1998; Bijlsma-Frankema and Costa, 2005; McEvily, 2011). To date, the definition and measurement of trust have been swallowed up in a conceptual quagmire (Metlay, 2013; Castelfranchi and Falcone, 2010; Dietz and Den Hartog, 2006; Gambetta, 1998). Complaints about the lack of scholarly consensus about the definition and measurement of trust are also well documented in current studies (Vigoda-Gadot and Mizrahi, 2014; Li, 2015).

Attempts to understand, clarify and define trust have continued to be a challenge for scholars across various disciplines (Albrecht and Travaglione, 2003; PytlikZillig and Kimbrough, 2016). Reviews of trust conducted by business, management and organizational science scholars did not lead to an acceptable definition of trust (Bigley and Pearce, 1998; Burke *et al.*, 2007; Castaldo *et al.*, 2010; Dietz and Den Hartog, 2006; Fulmer and Gelfand, 2012; Hosmer, 1995; Kramer, 1999; Lane, 1998; Lewicki *et al.*, 1998; Mayer *et al.*, 1995; Möllering *et al.*, 2004). Similar efforts by sociologists and psychologists failed to produce a definition accepted by most, if not all, scholars (Bijlsma-Frankema and Costa, 2005; Frederiksen, 2012; Khodyakov, 2007; Lewis and Weigert, 2012).

Political scientists (Bouckaert *et al.*, 2002; Hardin, 2006; Kong, 2014; Levi and Stoker, 2000; Nannestad, 2008), economists (Bachmann, 2011; Williamson, 1993), interdisciplinary scholars (Cao, 2015; Earle *et al.*, 2007; Gambetta, 1998; Li, 2007; Möllering, 2006; Rousseau *et al.*, 1998), and others (Castelfranchi and Falcone, 2010; Earle, 2010; McKnight and Chervany, 2001), were not left out of efforts aimed at arriving at a universal definition of trust. In sum, efforts by these studies to produce a universally accepted definition of trust among scholars did not accomplish that; however, they produced other benefits.

First, several thematic areas of trust definitions were identified, and second, variations in the thematic areas were also accounted for (Castaldo *et al.*, 2010; Fink *et al.*, 2010). The former revealed that trust definitions encompass these areas and others, namely: (1) trustor; (2) trustee; (3) interdependence of both trustor and trustee on each other; (4) involves risking taking situations; (5) or goals for the trustor; (6) is often a voluntary experience for the trustor and involves autonomy, agency and motivation; and (7) positive evaluation by others or expectations (Bachmann, 2011; Castaldo *et al.*, 2010; Castelfranchi and Falcone, 2010; Drewry, 1999; Fink *et al.*, 2010; Frederiksen, 2012; Eagly and Chaiken, 2007; Hardin, 2006; Hosmer, 1995; Lane, 1998; Levi and Stoker, 2000; Li, 2015; Mayer *et al.*, 1995; Mayer and Davis, 1999; Schoorman *et al.*, 2015).

For the latter, distinctions between different types of trust exist in the extant literature, specifically between interpersonal and institutional trust (Bachmann, 1998; Putman, 2000). Interpersonal trust deals with issues such as familiarity, similarity and reputation. Thus, this trust is often labeled as characteristic-based and particularized trust (Zucker, 1986; Uslander, 2002; Cook, 2005; Granovetter, 1973). On the other hand, institutional trust, often referred to as political trust by political scientists and system trust by sociologists, covers trust in public institutions, leaders and services (Giddens, 1990; Newton, 2001; Secor and O'Loughlin, 2004). Therefore, institutional, political, or system trust involves the perceived legitimacy, technical competence and ability to perform assigned duties effectively and efficiently (Khodyakov, 2007).

### *Predictors of trust: a review*

Several factors influence trust, and the existing literature provides evidence to this effect. For instance, communication, competence/ability, integrity, risk-taking, performance, socio-cultural values, political, rational and socio-demographic characteristics all influence trust in leaders (Beslin and Reddin, 2004; Mayer *et al.*, 1995; Welzel and Dalton, 2016). A detailed discussion of the predictors of trust will require a monograph. However, this article attempts to provide a brief but succinct review of these predictors of trust.

First, the competence or ability of leaders, i.e. their performance, has been found to influence citizens' trust in their leaders. Competence/ability deals with the skills, expertise and competencies that allow leaders to perform their tasks effectively and have influence over their followers (Mayer *et al.*, 1995; Sitkin and Roth, 1993; Rosen and Jerdee, 1977). Some studies suggest that benevolence—the desire of a leader to meet expectations—should be included in the concept of competence or ability (Mayer *et al.*, 1995). Other studies argue that benevolence—the goodwill or mutual trust and dependency of the parties involved—should be considered independently (Fairholm *et al.*, 2018; Cook and Wall, 1980; Larzelere and Huston, 1980). Despite this difference, there is a consensus among researchers that benevolence influences trust in leaders. Hence, it is hypothesized *that the competence or ability (performance) of the president, MPs and MMDCEs will influence citizens' trust in these leaders in Ghana (H1)*.

Second, empirical evidence suggests that communication influences citizens' trust in their leaders. More specifically, effective communication has been observed to improve trust, while ineffective communication leads to the loss of trust (Albrecht and Travaglione, 2003; Beslin and Reddin, 2004; Fairholm *et al.*, 2018). Effective communication involves an open flow of information through formal and informal channels, the clarity of the information being communicated and encouraging evaluation and feedback from followers (Beslin and Reddin, 2004; Dzordzormenyoh, 2022). In contrast, ineffective communication is characterized by a lack of clarity, secrecy, a lack of information sharing and bottlenecks aimed at preventing evaluations and feedback (Beslin and Reddin, 2004; Fairholm *et al.*, 2018). Thus, it is hypothesized *that communication will influence citizens' trust in the president, MPs and MMDCEs in Ghana (H2)*.

Third, risk-taking influences citizens' trust in their leaders in several ways. Trusted relationships are built on taking risks and being vulnerable. Thus, a follower's trust in a leader places a certain risk or vulnerability on the follower (Beslin and Reddin, 2004; Drewry, 1999). Some studies view the risk-taking behavior of followers as a rational endeavor that involves maximizing trust decisions (Ali and Bhuiyan, 2022; Campbell, 2004). This strand of studies suggests that followers rational risk-taking decisions are based on their retrospective and prospective evaluations of the performance of their leaders, the quality of life and governance (Ali and Bhuiyan, 2022; Campbell, 2004; Brehm and Rahn, 1997; Rothstein and Teorell, 2008).

On the other hand, some studies suggest that followers risk-taking decisions to trust their leaders are devoid of rationality (Kim, 2005; Welzel and Dalton, 2016). Specifically, these studies suggest that cultural and institutional factors influence followers risk-taking decisions to trust their leaders (Kim, 2005). For instance, Welzel and Dalton (2016) suggest that power distance relationships influence followers risk-taking decisions to trust their leaders. A distinction between “high-power distance” and “low-power distance” societies can be made, and this influences the risk-taking decisions of followers. “High-power distance” societies are characterized by low contact with leaders and high dependence on them, low levels of accountability and high levels of trust, while “low-power distance” societies are characterized by easy access and less dependence on leaders, high levels of accountability and low levels of trust (Welzel and Dalton, 2016).

Furthermore, most African societies are characterized by collectivism and communitarianism as well as individualism (Malunga, 2006; Mbigi, 2007). Collectivism and communitarianism emphasize collective ownership, the importance of relationships over things, participatory leadership and decision-making, patriotism and conflict resolution or reconciliation. Collectivism and communitarianism are more common at the local or traditional level, while individualism is common at the national or state level (Malunga, 2006; Mbigi, 2007). Mbigi (2007) contends that collectivism and communitarianism promote “lower-power distance” societies, while individualism promotes “high-power distance” societies. However, Welzel and Dalton (2016) found the opposite of Mbigis’ result. Overall, rationality and non-rationality factors influence citizens’ trust in their leaders (Granovetter, 1985; Coulson, 1998).

Finally, the integrity of leaders has been found to influence citizens’ trust in their leaders (Sitkin and Roth, 1993; Butler, 1999). Citizens have standards they expect their leaders to adhere to, and the ability of leaders to do just that is what integrity is all about (McFall, 1987). Integrity also represents the idea of consistency regarding the actions, decisions, attitudes and results of leaders (Mayer et al., 1995). Furthermore, the extant literature reveals that regime change, political factors and the socio-demographic characteristics of both leaders and followers influence trust (Tyler and Kramer, 1996; Sheppard et al., 1992; Rogers, 1995; Tan and Tan, 2000; Mayer and Davis, 1999; Zucker, 1986). It is hypothesized that *the socio-demographic characteristics of citizens will influence trust in the president, MPs and MMDCEs in Ghana (H<sub>3</sub>)*. Table 2 provides a summary of the predictors of trust and the study variables.

Methodology

Data

Individual-level data on Ghana obtained from the Afro-barometers round 7 survey that happened between 2016 and 2018 was used for this study. Afro-barometer is a non-partisan, non-profit organization that collects data across the continent using random sampling methods and probability sampling proportionate to the size of the actual population. The survey collects data on the opinions of citizens regarding several issues: economics, politics,

Predictors of trust from the review	Current study variable
Trust variables	Trust in the President, Members of Parliament and Metropolitan, Municipal and District Chief Executives
Communication variables	Access to news, contact Members of Parliament and Metropolitan, Municipal and District Chief Executives, trust in information from the media
Ability or competence variables	Performance of the President, Members of Parliament and Metropolitan, Municipal and District Chief Executives
Benevolence variables	Trust in other leaders (traditional and religious)
Integrity variables	Corruption of the President, Members of Parliament and Metropolitan, Municipal and District Chief Executives
Risk taking variables	Report corruption without fear of retaliation
Rational choice and economic variables	Handling the economy, employment status, problems facing Ghana and economic/living condition
Political and Quality of Governance (QoG) variables	Satisfaction with democracy, crime victimization, neighborhood security, discrimination, access to services and facilities
Socio-demographic variables	Party affiliation, rural-urban residency, region, education, religion, gender, ethnicity and age

Table 2.  
Predictors of trust and  
the current study  
variables

Source(s): Table 2 by author

democracy, governance, crime, immigration, security, access to services and facilities, leadership, public institutions and the socio-demographic characteristics of citizens. The survey also collects data on country-specific issues at the time of its administration. The round 7 data utilized in this study was collected across the ten regions of Ghana, now sixteen. The present data has 2,400 respondents.

### *Study variables*

*Dependent variables:* This study has three main dependent variables. Each variable measures citizens' trust in public leaders in Ghana between 2016–2018. More specifically, variable I measures citizens' trust in the president of Ghana. This variable was measured and coded as a binary variable, with 0 representing no trust and 1 representing trust. Variable II measures citizens' trust in members of parliament (MPs) in Ghana. The variable was measured and coded as a dichotomous variable, with 0 = no trust and 1 = trust. Variable III measures citizens' trust in local government leaders in Ghana, specifically metropolitan, municipal and district chief executives (MMDCEs). This variable was measured and coded as a binary variable, with 0 signifying no trust and 1 signifying trust.

*Independent variables:* One independent variable, the performance of public leaders in Ghana, was assessed on the dependent variables. The performance variable gauges citizens' attitudes about the ability of their public leaders to accomplish the responsibilities of their office. Specifically, the performance variable measures citizens' attitudes about the performance of the president, MPs and MMDCEs. The performance variable was measured and coded as 1 representing strongly disapprove, 2 representing disapprove, 3 representing approve and 4 representing strongly approve.

*Control variables:* The analysis controlled for the effects of six categories of variables found to influence trust in leaders. The first category is integrity variables, which include the following variables: perceived corruption of the president (0 = no, 1 = yes), perceived corruption of MPs (0 = no, 1 = yes), perceived corruption of MMDCEs (0 = no, 1 = yes), perceived corruption of traditional leaders (0 = no, 1 = yes) and perceived corruption of religious leaders (0 = no, 1 = yes).

The second category is communication variables and includes the following: access to news (0 = no, 1 = yes), citizens contact with MPs (0 = no, 1 = yes), citizens contact with MMDCEs (0 = no, 1 = yes), citizens trust in the information from the public media (0 = no, 1 = yes) and private media (0 = no, 1 = yes). The third category is rational choice and economic variables and includes the following: handling the economy (1 = very badly, 2 = fairly badly, 3 = fairly well, 4 = very well), problems facing Ghana (0 = no problem, 1 = crime, 2 = unemployment, 3 = others), employment status (0 = unemployed, 1 = employed), economic and living conditions (1 = very bad, 2 = fairly bad, 3 = neither good nor bad, 4 = fairly good, 5 = very good).

The fourth category is political/quality of governance variables, which include the following: satisfaction with democracy (1 = not at all satisfied, 2 = not very satisfied, 3 = fairly satisfied, 4 = very satisfied), crime victimization (0 = no crime, 1 = theft, 2 = physical attack, 3 = armed robbery), neighborhood insecurity (0 = no fear, 1 = fear walking in the neighborhood, 2 = fear at home), discrimination (0 = no discrimination, 1 = gender, 2 = religion, 3 = ethnicity), access to services (0 = no access, 1 = access to electricity, 2 = access to clean water, 3 = access to sewage systems); and facilities (0 = no access, 1 = access to schools, 2 = access to health centers, 3 = access to markets and stores, 4 = access to transportation).

The fifth category is benevolence variables, which include trust in traditional leaders (0 = no, 1 = yes), and trust in religious leaders (0 = no, 1 = yes). The sixth category is the risk-



taking variable, specifically, the fear of retaliation for reporting corruption (0 = no, 1 = yes). The last category is the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics, which included the following variables: party affiliation (0 = no party, 1 = NPP, 2 = NDC, 3 = others), rural-urban residency (0 = rural, 1 = urban), region (1 = Ashanti, 2 = Greater Accra, 3 = Eastern, 4 = Western, 5 = Brong-Ahafo, 6 = Northern, 7 = Volta, 8 = Central, 9 = Upper East, 10 = Upper West), education (0 = no education, 1 = primary/secondary, 2 = post-secondary), religion (0 = no religion, 1 = Christianity, 2 = Muslim, 3 = others), gender (0 = male, 1 = female), ethnicity (1 = Akan, 2 = Ewe, 3 = Ga-Adangbe, 4 = Dagomba, 5 = others), age (1 = 18–35 years, 2 = 36–65 years, 3 = 66+ years).

### **Analytical strategy**

To answer this study's research questions and test its hypotheses, the following analytical strategies were adopted and utilized. To begin, descriptive or summary statistics were identified to properly ascertain the distribution of scores for all the variables utilized in this analysis (see [Table 3](#)). Furthermore, a bivariate correlation was conducted between the study variables. The study also checked for the presence of multicollinearity by performing a collinearity test. Results from both bivariate correlation and multicollinearity analyses show there are no issues with two variables being highly correlated in the data. Finally, a binary logistic regression was conducted to assess the predictors of citizens' trust in public leaders, that is, the president, MPs and MMDCEs in Ghana (see [Table 4](#)).

## **Results**

### *Sample distribution*

The discussion of the distribution of scores for the study variables will focus on the dependent and independent variables and the significant control variables in this study. A detailed description of the distribution of scores for all the study variables can be found in [Table 3](#). Regarding the dependent variable, namely, trust in public leaders, about 89% of the respondents trust the president, 84% trust MPs and 80% trust MMDCEs in Ghana (see [Figure 3](#)). Furthermore, regarding the independent variable, that is to say, the performance of public leaders, about 82% of the respondents strongly agree or agree with the performance of the president, 61% strongly agree or agree with the performance of MPs and 64% strongly agree or agree with the performance of MMDCEs (see [Figure 4](#)).

Additionally, about 91% of the respondents trust the information they receive from the public media, while 89% trust the information, they receive from the private media in Ghana. Furthermore, 43% had no party affiliation, 38% belonged to the NPP, 18% to the NDC and 1% to other parties. In terms of ethnicity, 56% were Akan, 16% were Ewes, 9% were Ga-Adangbe, 5% were Dagomba and 14% were other ethnicities. For education, 16% had no education, 71% had primary/secondary education and 13% had post-secondary education.

Furthermore, 20% did not trust traditional leaders, compared to 80% that did. Around 8% did not trust religious leaders, compared to 91% who did. Furthermore, 5% had no access to facilities, 8% had access to schools, 3% had access to health centers, 4% had access to markets/stores, 79% had access to transportation/roads. Additionally, 12% believe the economy is being handled very badly, 16% suggest fairly badly, 57% suggest fairly well and 14% suggest very well. Similarly, 37% of respondents express no fear of retaliation when reporting corrupt practices, compared to 63% who express fear of retaliation. Finally, 3% experience gender and religious discrimination, respectively, compared to 12% that experience ethnic discrimination. Overall, about 82% did not experience discrimination in Ghana.



Variables	N	M(SD)	Min	Max	Predictors of citizens' trust
<i>Dependent variables</i>					<b>197</b>
Trust in President	2,329	0.88 (0.31)	0	1	
Trust in MPs	2,290	0.83 (0.36)	0	1	
Trust in MMDCEs	2,194	0.80 (0.39)	0	1	
<i>Independent variables</i>					
Ability and Competence					
Performance of the President	2,235	3.07 (0.84)	1	4	
Performance of MPs	2,070	2.60 (0.92)	1	4	
Performance of MMDCEs	1,803	2.64 (0.85)	1	4	
<i>Control variables</i>					
<i>Integrity variables</i>					
President corrupt	2,127	0.87 (0.33)	0	1	
MPs corrupt	2,137	0.93 (0.24)	0	1	
MMDCEs corrupt	2,100	0.93 (0.25)	0	1	
Traditional leaders corrupt	2,213	0.87 (0.33)	0	1	
Religious leaders corrupt	2,205	0.79 (0.40)	0	1	
<i>Communication variables</i>					
Access to news	2,399	0.94 (0.23)	0	1	
Contact MPs	2,392	0.15 (0.36)	0	1	
Contact MMDCEs	2,391	0.28 (0.45)	0	1	
Trust information from public media	2,228	0.91 (0.27)	0	1	
Trust information from private media	2,205	0.89 (0.30)	0	1	
<i>Rational and Economic variables</i>					
Handling the economy	2,227	2.73 (0.85)	1	4	
Problems facing Ghana	2,386	2.63 (0.65)	0	3	
Employment status	2,399	0.66 (0.47)	0	1	
Economic/living conditions	2,397	2.65 (1.32)	1	5	
<i>Political and Quality of Governance variables</i>					
Satisfaction with democracy	2,348	3.07 (0.83)	1	4	
Crime victimization	2,391	0.28 (0.69)	0	3	
Neighborhood insecurity	2,330	0.28 (0.65)	0	2	
Discrimination	2,399	0.43 (1.00)	0	3	
Access to service	2,400	2.27 (0.80)	0	3	
Access to facilities	2,400	3.45 (1.18)	0	4	
<i>Benevolence variables</i>					
Trust in traditional leaders	2,329	0.79 (0.40)	0	1	
Trust in religious leaders	2,346	0.91 (0.27)	0	1	
<i>Risk Taking variables</i>					
Report corruption with fear of retaliation	2,298	0.63 (0.48)	0	1	
<i>Socio-demographic variables</i>					
Party affiliation	2,324	0.77 (0.78)	0	3	
Rural-urban residency	2,400	0.54 (0.49)	0	1	
Region	2,400	4.17 (2.66)	1	10	
Education	2,393	0.97 (0.54)	0	2	
Religion	2,282	1.16 (0.49)	0	3	
Gender	2,400	0.50 (0.50)	0	1	
Ethnicity	2,206	2.07 (1.46)	1	5	
Age	2,399	38 (15.26)	18	98	
<b>Source(s):</b> Table 3 by author					<b>Table 3.</b> Distribution of scores for the study variables

Variables	Model 1 OR (SE)	Model 2 OR (SE)	Model 3 OR (SE)
Constant	0.03 (0.07)***	0.17 (0.32)	0.03 (0.06)*
<i>Competence/ability</i>			
Performance of the President	2.37 (0.46)***	0.90 (0.14)	0.96 (0.15)
Performance of MPs	0.86 (0.16)	1.58 (0.22)**	1.27 (0.17)
Performance of MMDCEs	1.20 (0.25)	1.08 (0.16)	1.71 (0.25)***
<i>Integrity variables</i>			
President corrupt	0.67 (0.44)	0.49 (0.24)	1.33 (0.51)
MPs corrupt	0.90 (0.73)	1.64 (1.04)	0.59 (0.39)
MMDCEs corrupt	1.32 (0.88)	1.11 (0.60)	0.74 (0.41)
Traditional leaders corrupt	0.72 (0.46)	0.59 (0.29)	0.85 (0.38)
Religious leaders corrupt	1.24 (0.60)	1.69 (0.60)	1.99 (0.65)*
<i>Communication variables</i>			
Access to news	1.34 (0.93)	1.47 (0.78)	1.53 (0.80)
Contact MPs	1.33 (0.56)	1.56 (0.55)	1.47 (0.50)
Contact MMDCEs	0.66 (0.23)	0.90 (0.24)	0.99 (0.25)
Trust information from public media	2.93 (1.78)	2.63 (1.39)*	2.93 (1.39)*
Trust information from private media	3.54 (2.05)*	2.33 (1.12)	2.14 (0.95)
<i>Rational and Economic variables</i>			
Handling the economy	2.17 (0.43)***	1.28 (0.19)	1.06 (0.15)
Problems facing Ghana	0.83 (0.17)	1.26 (0.19)	0.92 (0.13)
Employment status	1.11 (0.35)	1.10 (0.25)	0.78 (0.17)
Economic/living conditions	1.05 (0.12)	1.16 (0.10)	1.02 (0.08)
<i>Political and Quality of Governance variables</i>			
Satisfaction with democracy	0.95 (0.15)	0.95 (0.12)	1.02 (0.12)
Crime victimization	0.75 (0.12)	1.16 (0.17)	0.99 (0.13)
Neighborhood insecurity	1.19 (0.25)	0.82 (0.13)	0.96 (0.15)
Discrimination	0.79 (0.10)	0.72 (0.07)**	0.75 (0.07)**
Access to service	1.34 (0.32)	0.98 (0.19)	0.89 (0.17)
Access to facilities	0.89 (0.16)	0.74 (0.10)*	1.11 (0.14)
<i>Benevolence variables</i>			
Trust in traditional leaders	1.08 (0.44)	1.99 (0.54)*	4.79 (1.18)***
Trust in religious leaders	4.14 (2.04)**	4.08 (1.51)***	3.08 (0.15)**
<i>Risk Taking variables</i>			
Report corruption with fear of retaliation	1.94 (0.59)*	0.94 (0.21)	0.81 (0.18)
<i>Socio-demographic variables</i>			
Party affiliation (No Party = RC)			
NPP	3.62 (1.63)**	1.49 (0.40)	1.35 (0.35)
NDC	0.81 (0.29)	0.59 (0.18)	0.76 (0.23)
Others	0.11 (0.08)**	1.75 (1.50)	0.56 (0.45)
Rural-urban residency	0.71 (0.27)	1.15 (0.32)	0.60 (0.16)
<i>Region (Upper West = RC)</i>			
Ashanti	0.42 (0.63)	0.15 (0.19)	0.45 (0.45)
Greater Accra	0.30 (0.45)	0.17 (0.23)	1.16 (1.19)
Eastern	0.34 (0.53)	0.17 (0.23)	0.71 (0.77)
Western	0.17 (0.25)	0.13 (0.17)	0.75 (0.78)
Brong-Ahafo	0.41 (0.62)	0.19 (0.24)	0.79 (0.81)
Northern	0.47 (0.62)	0.31 (0.39)	1.29 (1.26)

**Table 4.**  
Predictors of citizens' trust in the president, MPs and MMDCEs in Ghana. Odd Ratio

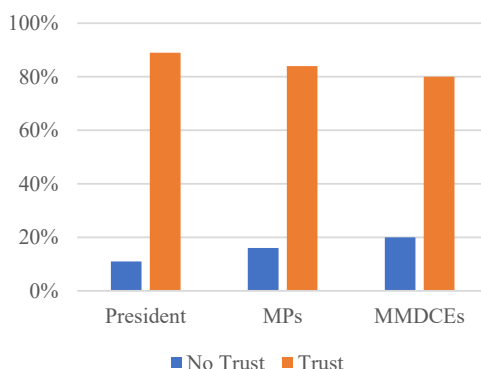
(continued)

Variables	Model 1 OR (SE)	Model 2 OR (SE)	Model 3 OR (SE)
Volta	0.33 (0.49)	0.47 (0.62)	1.62 (1.77)
Central	0.78 (1.21)	0.22 (0.28)	1.68 (1.82)
Upper West	0.24 (0.36)	1.05 (1.67)	1.13 (1.55)
<i>Education (No Education = RC)</i>			
Primary/Secondary	0.82 (0.39)	2.08 (0.74)*	1.75 (0.64)
Post-Secondary	0.83 (0.49)	2.13 (0.97)	2.15 (1.00)
<i>Religion (No Religion = RC)</i>			
Christian	2.35 (1.58)	1.85 (0.96)	1.54 (0.80)
Muslim	1.89 (1.57)	1.09 (0.71)	0.75 (0.49)
Other Religions	1.15 (1.58)	0.23 (0.26)	0.14 (0.14)
Gender	0.59 (0.17)	0.81 (0.18)	0.88 (0.19)
<i>Ethnicity (Others = RC)</i>			
Akan	0.35 (0.28)	0.63 (0.35)	0.51 (0.27)
Ewe	0.23 (0.20)	0.25 (0.15)*	0.17 (0.11)**
Ga/Adangbe	0.35 (0.31)	0.92 (0.63)	0.44 (0.28)
Dagomba	0.27 (0.17)*	0.57 (0.31)	1.34 (0.78)
<i>Age (66+ = RC)</i>			
18–35 years	0.65 (0.50)	0.51 (0.31)	0.50 (0.30)
36–65 years	0.81 (0.63)	0.62 (0.39)	0.70 (0.43)
Model Fit	345.67***	302.25***	373.15***
R <sup>2</sup>	47%	33%	36%

**Note(s):** Standard errors in parentheses, RC = Reference Categories. \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

**Source(s):** Table 4 by author

**Table 4.**



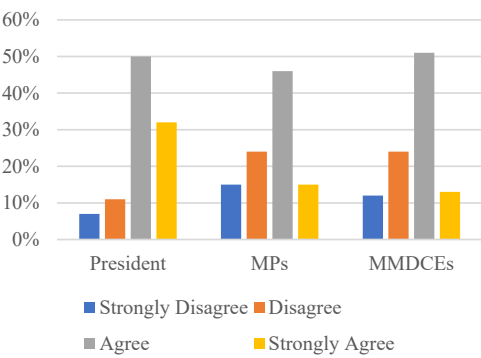
**Source(s):** Figure 3 compiled by author using data from the Afro-barometer round 7 survey  
Figure by author

**Figure 3.**  
Distribution of  
respondents based on  
trust and performance  
of public leaders in  
Ghana (Citizens trust in  
public leaders  
in Ghana)

### *Predictors of citizens' trust in public leaders in Ghana*

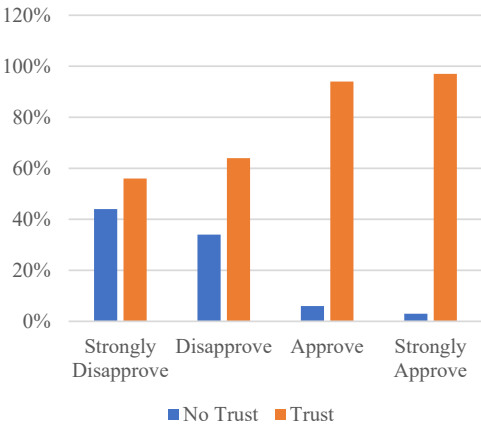
Before discussing the regression estimates for the predictors of citizens' trust in the president, MPs and MMDCEs in Ghana, this study examines the relationship between trust and performance (see Figures 5–7). Overall, strongly agree/agree with the performance of the president, MPs and MMDCEs correlates with higher levels of trust in these leaders.

**Figure 4.**  
Distribution of  
respondents based on  
trust and performance  
of public leaders in  
Ghana (Citizens view of  
public leaders  
performance)



**Source(s):** Figure 4 compiled by author using data from the Afro-barometer round 7 survey  
Figure by author

**Figure 5.**  
Trust in public leaders  
(President, MPs and  
MMDCEs) by  
performance in Ghana  
(Trust in the president  
by performance)

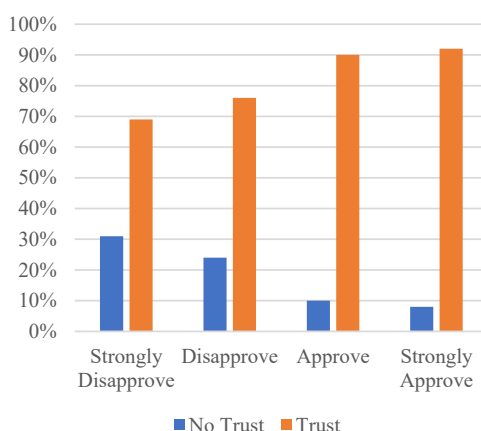


**Source(s):** Compiled by author using data from the Afro-barometer round 7 survey  
Figure by author

*Predictors of citizens' trust in the president*

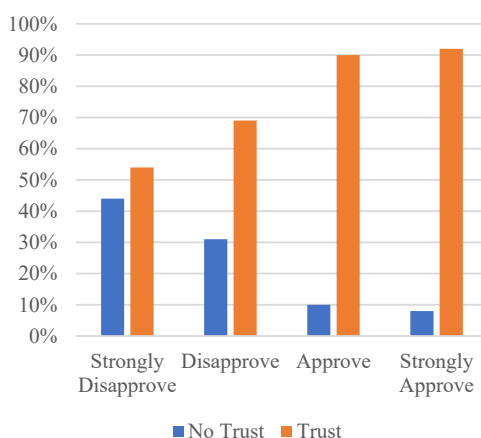
Table 4-Model 1 examines the predictors of citizens' trust in the president. Overall, the model was significant and explained about 47% of the variance in the data. According to Model 1, the performance of the president positively influences citizens' trust in the president. Empirical evidence from previous studies suggests that a leader's performance, that is to say, the competence/ability of the president, influences citizens' trust (Mayer *et al.*, 1995; Rosen and Jerdee, 1977). The present result lends support to hypothesis one of this study, that leaders' performance will influence citizens' trust in Ghana.

Additionally, the present results indicate that citizens' trust in the information from the private media, the handling of the economy, trust in religious leaders, reporting corruption



**Source(s):** Compiled by author using data from the Afro-barometer round 7 survey  
Figure by author

**Figure 6.** Trust in public leaders (President, MPs and MMDCEs) by performance in Ghana (Trust in MPs by performance)



**Source(s):** Compiled by author using data from the Afro-barometer round 7 survey  
Figure by author

**Figure 7.** Trust in public leaders (President, MPs and MMDCEs) by performance in Ghana (Trust in MMDCEs by performance)

without retaliation, affiliation to the NPP and other parties, and the Dagomba were significant predictors of citizens' trust in the president. This result is consistent with empirical evidence from previous studies examining the predictors of citizens' trust in leaders (Beslin and Reddin, 2004; Drewry, 1999; Fairholm *et al.*, 2018; Rothstein and Teorell, 2008). The present result supports hypothesis two, whereby communication influences trust in leaders, and hypothesis three, that the socio-demographic characteristics of citizens' influence trust in leaders.

*Predictors of citizens' trust in MPs*

Table 4-Model 2 examines the predictors of citizens' trust in MPs. This model was significant and explains approximately 33% of the variance in the data. The result from this model shows that the performance of MPs positively influences citizens' trust in MPs. This result is consistent with empirical evidence from previous studies (Mayer *et al.*, 1995; Rosen and Jerdee, 1977) and supports hypothesis one of this study that the performance of leaders will influence citizens' trust.

Furthermore, the present results reveal that citizens' trust in information from the public media, discrimination, access to facilities, trust in traditional and religious leaders, primary/secondary education and Ewe were significant predictors of citizens' trust in MPs in Ghana. This result is consistent with evidence from previous studies (Beslin and Reddin, 2004; Drewry, 1999; Fairholm *et al.*, 2018; Rothstein and Teorell, 2008) and lends support to hypotheses two and three.

*Predictors of citizens' trust in MMDCEs*

Table 4-Model 3 examines the predictors of citizens' trust in MMDCEs. This model was significant and explained about 36% of the variation in the data. The results revealed that the performance of MMDCEs positively influences citizens' trust in these leaders. Previous studies have found similar results (Mayer *et al.*, 1995; Rosen and Jerdee, 1977), which provides support for hypothesis one of this study, namely, the performance of leaders influences citizens' trust in leaders.

Moreover, the results reveal that the corruption of religious leaders, citizens' trust in information from the private media, discrimination, trust in traditional and religious leaders and Ewe were significant predictors of citizens' trust in MMDCEs in Ghana. Similar evidence can be found in the extant literature (Beslin and Reddin, 2004; Drewry, 1999; Fairholm *et al.*, 2018; Rothstein and Teorell, 2008), which supports hypotheses two and three.

**Discussion and conclusion**

The primary goal of this research was to examine the predictors of citizens' trust in three categories of public leaders in Ghana: the president, MPs and MMDCEs. Specifically, the study examines the effect of competence or ability, that is, the performance of leaders, and other variables on citizens' trust in these leaders. Data from the 2016–2018 Afro-barometer survey about Ghana, with approximately two thousand and four hundred responses, was obtained and analyzed in accordance with this study's three research objectives. Several intriguing and important observations were made worth discussing.

The results suggest that Ghanaians show significantly high levels of trust toward the three categories of leaders examined in this study. Several factors might account for this trend among Ghanaians. However, this study posits that the election of the current president, i.e. Akuffo-Addo, in 2016 and the change of power from the NDC to the NPP contributed to this trend. New governments often enjoy significant goodwill and high levels of trust from the public in their first year of governance (Sheppard *et al.*, 1992; Rogers, 1995). Although this study was unable to control for the effect of the change in power on citizens' trust in these leaders. More research is needed to account for the effect of this variable on citizens' trust in leaders.

Furthermore, Ghanaians advocate for the president, MPs and MMDCEs to perform well in their roles. More specifically, the performance of the president was significantly higher compared to that of MPs and MMDCEs. This finding can be explained by the lack of political decentralization, the appointment of two-thirds of MPs as ministers, the president's appointment of MMDCEs, and other factors that lead to citizens attributing these leaders' performance to that of the president (Dzordzormenyoh *et al.*, 2022; Bauer and Darkwah, 2022; Ohemeng *et al.*, 2020).

Furthermore, it was revealed that competence/ability, that is to say, the performance of the three categories of leaders, strongly influence citizens' trust in these leaders. Citizens' participation and expectations in Ghana continue to rise as democratic governance improves (Adu-Owusu, 2023; Arhinful, 2022). The public's expectations of the president, MPs and MMDCEs continue to rise. The ability of these leaders to meet some or most of these expectations influences citizens' trust in these leaders. Past and present leaders in Ghana have experienced public uproar due to poor performance and failure to meet the expectations of citizens. Recent "FixTheCountry" hashtags and demonstrations, for example, attest to this (see BBC, 2021; Nartey and Yu, 2023).

Additionally, although media freedom and communication have improved a great deal in Ghana since the inception of the Fourth Republic, there are still some concerns. The abuse of journalists and the perception that the government controls both the public and private media continues to influence interaction between leaders and citizens (Agyemang-Asante, 2022; Tettey, 2001; Moehler and Singh, 2011). This study recommends that the current and successive governments reduce the arrest and detention of journalists without due process, as well as implement intentional policies geared toward dispelling the negative public perception that the media is a puppet of the ruling class.

Moreover, the results show that ethnicity influences citizens' trust in these leaders. Ethnicity has been observed to play a vital role in Ghanaian politics since independence in 1957 (Bob-Milliar, 2011; Kelly, 2009; Nugent, 2001). These might explain why Ewes' and Dagombas, who are pro-NDC, might show negative trust toward these leaders during the NPP government. Since this research could not account for the effect of changes in government on citizens' trust, future studies can further investigate this result and add nuance to existing literature. To improve trust in the president, MPs and MMDCEs, this study provides the following recommendations: (1) leaders must enhance their performance; (2) improving the integrity of leaders will increase citizens' trust in leaders; (3) effective communication with citizens will increase citizens' trust in leaders; and (4) shifting the political discussion in Ghana away from ethnic cleavages to focus on policy ideas can increase citizens' trust in leaders.

Despite the intriguing and important results of this study, there are some limitations worth mentioning. The first limitation deals with the desirability bias associated with using secondary data. According to Boateng *et al.* (2022), desirability bias can affect the overall results and is beyond the control of researchers. Therefore, readers are cautioned against extrapolating the results beyond the scope of this study. The second limitation deals with the study's inability to control for the impact of the change of government in 2016 on citizens' trust in leaders in Ghana. To add nuance to the current literature, future studies should account for government change and its impact on trust in leaders. Finally, the third limitation deals with the omission of certain variables, such as the income and marital status of citizens, from the data and the present analysis. The inclusion of these variables in future studies is highly recommended.

To address the limitations of this research, the following recommendations are provided for future studies: First, conducting the same research using a qualitative approach can expand on the findings discussed above. Second, reassessing and measuring change in government and leadership and its influence on citizens' trust in the president, MPs and MMDCEs should be a priority for new studies on leadership and trust in Ghana. Third, expanding on and including variables not included in this analysis can help add nuance to understanding the predictors of citizens trust in Ghana. Future endeavors by researchers should focus on including omitted variables in their analysis.

In sum, scholarship has addressed trust in several domains. The message has consistently been that trust matters. Yet, there are no universally accepted definitions of trust, and the predictors of trust have remained inconclusive and inconsistent. This article addressed these



deficiencies by examining citizens trust in three public leaders—the president, MPs and MMDCEs—in Ghana and the predictors of such trust. This examination shows that trust across leadership domains is similar but also distinct. Across leadership domains, citizens tend to trust the president and MPs slightly more than MMDCEs. Importantly, the performance of leaders is a common factor found to influence citizens' trust across leadership domains. However, with the other predictors, variations exist across the leadership domains examined. Efforts to increase citizens trust in Ghana are likely to succeed when they expressly improve the performance of leaders as well as other variables found in this study to influence trust.

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