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Source: *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (Jul., 2001), pp. 447-474
Published by: Cambridge University Press
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3593285
Accessed: 22-12-2015 16:38 UTC

B.J.Pol.S. **31,** 447–474
Printed in the United Kingdom

Support for Democracy in Africa: Intrinsic or Instrumental?

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Comparative analysis of original survey data from Ghana, Zambia and South Africa is used here to assess the attitudes of African citizens towards democracy. Is democracy valued *intrinsically* (as an end in itself) or *instrumentally* (for example, as a means to improving material living standards)? We find as much popular support for democracy in Africa as in other Third Wave regions but less satisfaction with the performance of elected governments. The fact that Africans support democracy while being discontented with its achievements implies a measure of intrinsic support that supersedes instrumental considerations. At the same time, approval of democracy remains performance-driven; but approval hinges less on the government's capacity at delivering economic goods than its ability to guarantee basic political rights. Our findings extend recent arguments about the importance of political goods in regime consolidation and call into question the conventional wisdom that governments in new democracies legitimate themselves mainly through economic performance.

'The people for whom the form of government is intended must be willing to accept it; or at least not so unwilling as to oppose an insurmountable obstacle to its establishment. They must be willing and able to do what is necessary to keep it standing.'

John Stuart Mill, *On Representative Government*

'Freedom is meaningless if people cannot put food in their stomachs.'

Nelson Mandela

Popular support for a political regime is the essence of its consolidation. By voluntarily endorsing the rules that govern them, citizens endow a regime with an elusive but indispensable quality: political legitimacy. The most widely accepted definition of the consolidation of democracy equates it squarely with legitimation. In a memorable turn of phrase, Linz and Stepan speak of democratic consolidation as a process by which all political actors come to regard democracy as 'the only game in town'.[1] In other words, democracy is consolidated when citizens and leaders alike conclude that no alternative form of regime has any greater subjective validity or stronger objective claim to their allegiance.

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[1] Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 5.

This article explores how the general public in new multiparty political regimes in sub-Saharan Africa is oriented towards democracy. What, if anything, do Africans understand by the concept? Do they resemble citizens in new democracies elsewhere in the world in their willingness to support a regime based on human rights, competing parties and open elections? And beyond democracy as a model set of rights and institutions, are citizens in Africa satisfied with the way that elected regimes operate in practice? All of these questions are coloured by the fact that many of Africa's democratic experiments are taking place in countries with agrarian economies, low per capita incomes and minuscule middle classes. Under such unpropitious conditions, observers have every reason to wonder whether elected governments have the capacity to meet citizen expectations and, if they cannot, whether citizens may therefore quickly lose faith in democracy.

We assume that citizens will extend tentative support to neo-democracies, if only because they promise change from failed authoritarian formulae of the past. But what is the nature of any such support? Is it *intrinsic*, based on an appreciation of the political freedoms and equal rights that democracy embodies when valued as an end in itself? Or does support reflect a more *instrumental* calculation in which regime change is a means to other ends, most commonly the alleviation of poverty and the improvement of living standards?

The resolution of this issue has direct implications for regime consolidation. Intrinsic support is a commitment to democracy 'for better or worse'; as such, it has the potential to sustain a fragile political regime even in the face of economic downturn or social upheaval. By contrast, instrumental support is conditional. It is granted, and may be easily withdrawn, according to the temper of the times. If citizens evaluate regimes mainly in terms of their capacity to deliver consumable benefits or to rectify material inequalities, then they may also succumb to the siren song of populist leaders who argue that economic development requires the sacrifice of political liberties.

Let us be clear. We do not dispute that evaluations of democracy in new multiparty regimes are likely to be based in good part on the performance of the government of the day. After all, it is very unlikely that citizens in neo-democracies would possess a reservoir of favourable affective dispositions arising from a lifetime of exposure to democratic norms.[2] If democracy is a novel experience, how could such socialization have taken place? Instead of bestowing 'diffuse support', citizens fall back on performance-based judgements of what democracy actually does for them.

We wish to divide regime performance, however, into distinct baskets of goods: an *economic* basket (that includes economic assets, jobs and an array of basic social services) and a *political* basket (that contains peace, civil liberties, political rights, human dignity and equality before the law). The African cases provide a critical test of the importance of political goods to evaluations of

[2] David Easton, *A Systems Analysis of Political Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 273, and 'A Reassessment of the Concept of Political Support', *Journal of Political Science*, 5 (1975), 435–7.

democracy. If the denizens of the world's poorest continent make 'separate and correct' distinctions between 'a basket of economic goods (which may be deteriorating) and a basket of political goods (which may be improving)',[3] then citizens everywhere are likely to do so. And if political goods seem to matter more than economic goods in judging democracy, then we can cast light on the 'intrinsic v. instrumental' debate. If democracy is valued by citizens as an end in itself in Africa, then this generalization probably holds good universally.

In this study we find that citizen orientations to democracy in Africa are most fully explained with reference to both baskets of goods. With one interesting country exception, satisfaction with democracy (the way elected governments actually work) is driven just as much by guarantees of political rights as by the quest for material benefit. Support for democracy (as a preferred form of government) is rooted even more deeply in an appreciation of new-found political freedoms, a finding that runs counter to the conventional view that the continent's deep economic crisis precludes regime consolidation. At least so far, new democratic regimes in Africa have been able to legitimate themselves by delivering political goods.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Our substantive focus is intentionally restricted – to attitudes to democracy, among masses rather than elites – because our geographical coverage is broader than most studies in Africa. This article uses standard survey items to compare political attitudes in Ghana, Zambia and South Africa, thus bridging the major regions of the sub-Saharan sub-continent and situating public opinion in Africa in relation to other new democracies in the world.

All three countries underwent an electoral transition to multi-party democracy during the last decade but their political trajectories have since diverged. Both of South Africa's competitive polls (in April 1994 and June 1999) were ruled substantially free and fair by independent observers. By contrast, Zambia's founding elections of October 1991 were far more credible than its dubious second contest of November 1996. For its part, Ghana experienced improved electoral quality, with flawed elections in November 1992 being followed by a December 1996 poll that drew almost universal praise. Thus, with reference to the institution of elections alone, South Africa's democracy has stabilized, Ghana's is gradually consolidating, and Zambia's is slowly dying.

In reality, democracy is a fragile species throughout Africa. It is far from clear that a pervasive political culture exists to promote and defend open elections, let alone any other democratic institution. Regime transitions in Africa commonly resulted from intense struggles between incumbent and opposition elites, whose interest in self-enrichment was sometimes more palpable than their commitment to democracy. Even elected leaders have tampered with

[3] Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, p. 442.

constitutional rules in order to prolong a term of office or to sideline rivals. And the armed forces continue to lurk threateningly in the wings: about half a dozen of Africa's new democracies succumbed to military intervention within five years of transition. Only in places like South Africa in 1994 (and possibly Nigeria in 1999), where transitions were lubricated by pacts among powerful insiders, are there signs that a culture of compromise and accommodation has penetrated the ranks of the political elite.

The extent to which a commitment to democracy has radiated through the populace is also open to question. After all, regime transitions in Africa were sparked by popular protests that were rooted in economic and political grievances. While the protesters had clear ideas about what they were *against* (the repressions and predations of big-man rule) they did not articulate an elaborate or coherent vision of what they were *for*. Judging by the issues raised in the streets, people seemed to want accountability of leaders and to eliminate the inequities arising from official corruption. To be sure, these preferences loosely embodied core democratic principles. And multiparty elections quickly became a useful rallying cry for would-be political leaders. But, during the tumult of transition, relatively little attention was paid to the institutional design of the polity. Emerging from life under military and one-party rule, citizens could hardly be expected to have in mind a full set of democratic rules or to evince a deep attachment to them.

This article takes stock of what has been learned from the first generation of research on political attitudes in new African democracies in the 1990s. We report results from three attitude surveys, each based on a national probability sample and part of a nascent time series. In Zambia, a survey conducted by the University of Zambia's Institute for Economic and Social Research covered 1,182 respondents in November 1996, immediately following the country's second election. In South Africa, a sample of 3,500 persons stratified by race, province and community size was interviewed in June and July 1997 for the Institute for Democracy in South Africa. In Ghana, a survey conducted in July 1999 by the Centre for Democracy and Development included 2,005 voting-age adults from all ten regions of the country.[4]

In all cases the survey instrument included questions on citizen understandings of the meaning of democracy, and their support for and satisfaction with this regime form in theory and practice. These data offer a rare opportunity to

[4] The surveys were commissioned and supervised in Zambia and Ghana by Michael Bratton and in South Africa by Robert Mattes. Although the instruments for Zambia and South Africa were conceived independently, they reflected a common theoretical agenda and considerable item-by-item equivalence. The Ghana instrument was worded by both authors to ensure exact comparisons with the other two countries. Thanks are due to E. Gyimah-Boadi, Peter Lewis and Neo Simutanyi for collaboration on fieldwork. Research funds were provided by National Science Foundation (SBR-7926795) and by USAID/South Africa, USAID/Zambia, USAID/Ghana, Irish Aid and the US Institute for Peace, to whom we are grateful. Our work in Ghana also benefited from a post-election survey run by the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES) in February to April 1997. Thanks to Keith Klein, Joe Baxter, Steve Snook and Rakesh Sharma for facilitating access to this data.

compare African countries along such dimensions, both one with another and with newly liberalized regimes elsewhere.

For any exploratory research, caveats are in order. The first concerns comparability. Because two of the three survey instruments were designed independently, questionnaire topics and items were only partly standardized across all three countries. Nevertheless, we contend that, for purposes of preliminary analysis, our topics and items are equivalent. As a prominent survey researcher has argued, 'the problem of equivalence is mitigated by research designs in which the substantive meaning and the context of topics being investigated do not differ excessively'.[5]

The second caveat concerns generalization. Rather than referring broadly to 'Africa' and 'Africans', we try to restrict our claims to the three countries surveyed. Because all officially speak English, we recognize the need to widen the scope of survey research to a larger sample of countries that represent a fuller range of linguistic, regional and other variations. Nevertheless, in the virtual absence of any reliable data or analysis on public opinion in Africa, we think that it is justifiable to report the commonalities that we have discovered in our exploratory research. These working generalisations can be treated as hypotheses in subsequent studies.

PROPOSITIONS FROM THE LITERATURE

Democracy is a disputed term. The literature offers multiple definitions that range from a minimalist concern with election procedures to sweeping requirements for socio-economic equality.[6] Nor do analysts agree on the reasons underlying the consolidation of democracy. Some scholars point to effectiveness of government at economic delivery as the key to democratic durability. Others see the ability of citizens to exercise basic political rights as the *sine qua non* of legitimation. Since this article seeks to test these propositions in Africa, let us rehearse the respective arguments.

Adam Przeworski has proposed that democratization and economic reform are incompatible. In order to deliver material benefits, elected governments have no alternative but to swallow the bitter pill of orthodox economic reforms. Even if market-oriented policies enjoy initial popular backing, such support is likely to be eroded over time in the face of unemployment and income gaps. Besieged, fragile governments lapse into policy vacillation, which is politically

[5] Samuel Barnes, 'Electoral Behavior and Comparative Politics', in Mark Irving Lichbach and Alan S. Zukerman, eds, *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture and Structure* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 115–41, at p. 116.

[6] See Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1942, reprinted 1976); C. B. MacPherson, *Democratic Theory: Essays in Retrieval* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973); David Held, *Models of Democracy* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1987); David Collier and Steven Levitsky, 'Democracy with Adjectives', *World Politics*, 49 (1997), 430–51.

destabilizing. Finally, 'authoritarian temptations are ... inevitable'.[7] In Elster's words, 'democracy will be undermined if it cannot deliver the goods in the economic sphere'.[8]

Consistent with this position, Claude Ake argues that Africans view democracy in economic and instrumental terms. Contending that 'Africans are seeking democracy as a matter of survival', he posits that 'the democracy movement in Africa will emphasize concrete economic and social rights rather than abstract political rights; it will insist on the democratization of economic opportunities, the social betterment of people, and a strong social welfare system'.[9] In this formulation, democracy is valued not so much for what it is but for what it can do.

The weakness of Ake's position is that it grants no inherent worth to political values. It cannot move beyond a static portrayal of African politics as a 'politics of the belly' that is driven mainly by material deprivation. Ake writes movingly of the indignities of underdevelopment but he fails to acknowledge that humans are complex beings who do not live by bread alone. Nor does he seem to regard democratization as endowing citizens with anything more than a louder voice in debates over economic development. Yet empowerment has a broader connotation: it involves citizens attaining a new measure of self-confidence and a wider scope for taking control of their own lives. Africans, like people anywhere, value the opportunity to speak and act without constraint and not only on some collectively mandated 'development agenda'.

Taking an opposite tack, Larry Diamond regards beliefs about democracy *per se* as central factors in consolidation. In a meta-analysis of findings from public attitude studies in new democracies worldwide he concludes that 'the most striking finding here is the autonomy of the political', which often overpowers 'the country's level of socio-economic development, the individual's socio-economic status, and the regime's economic performance'.[10] Similarly, Richard Rose and colleagues contend that, in post-communist societies, public opinion about various political regimes is shaped more by guarantees of basic

[7] Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 189. See also Luiz Carlos Bresser Pereira, José Maria Maravall and Adam Przeworski, *Economic Reforms in New Democracies: A Social-Democratic Approach* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993). And Adam Przeworski, Adam Alvarez, José Antonio Chiebub and Fernando Limongi, 'What Makes Democracies Endure?' *Journal of Democracy*, 7 (1996), 39–55.

[8] Jon Elster, 'The Necessity and Impossibility of Simultaneous Economic and Political Reform', in D. Greenberg, ed., *Constitutional Democracy: Transitions in the Contemporary World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 267–74. at p. 268.

[9] Claude Ake, *Democracy and Development in Africa* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1996), p. 138. See also 'The Unique Case of African Democracy', *International Affairs*, 69 (1993), 239–44.

[10] Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation* (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), p. 162.

political rights than by a track record of material delivery.[11] Whereas economic factors contribute to regime legitimation, especially popular perceptions of the health of the national economy, 'politics matter more'.[12]

Yet there are dangers in modelling support for democracy in purely intrinsic terms. An explanation of support for democracy in terms of citizen attachment to democratic values risks circular reasoning, especially if overly similar measures are used for both dependent and explanatory variables. A good way to avoid tautology is to observe conceptually distinct entities, each measured independently at a different level of analysis. In this article we draw upon the important distinction between regimes, states and governments.[13] We seek to predict citizen attachment to whole *regimes* (such as democracy) from popular perceptions of particular *state* institutions (such as their perceived trustworthiness) and particular incumbent *governments* (such as their performance at delivering goods). If support for and satisfaction with the regime of democracy derive from evaluations of the delivery performance of particular governments, then popular conceptions of democracy inevitably take on an instrumental hue. This is true whether the goods in question are economic or political. Thus, even where citizens hinge regime support on the delivery of political goods, one is likely to end up with a multi-causal model that leaves room for a healthy dose of instrumentalism.

THE MEANING OF DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA

In considering the meaning of 'democracy' in Africa, the first possibility is that the term has not entered popular discourse, especially where indigenous languages contain no direct semantic equivalent. Some cultural interpretations emphasize that the word changes its meaning in translation, sometimes even signifying consensual constructs like community or unity.[14] Or, because African languages borrow new terminology from others, a phonetic adaptation from a European language (like 'demokrasi') may have become common currency.

In one form or another, democracy seems to have entered the vocabulary of most African citizens. When the 1997 Ghanaian survey asked respondents 'What is the first thing that comes to mind ... when you think of living in a

[11] Richard Rose, William Mishler and Christian Haerpfer, *Democracy and Its Alternatives: Understanding Post-Communist Societies* (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 160.

[12] Rose *et al.*, *Democracy and Its Alternatives*, p. 176.

[13] Robert Fishman, 'Rethinking State and Regime: Southern Europe's Transition to Democracy', *World Politics*, 42 (1990), 422–40. Regimes are sets of rules, states are sets of institutions, and governments are sets of leaders.

[14] Mikael Karlstrom, 'Imagining Democracy: Political Culture and Democratisation in Buganda', *Africa*, 60 (1996), 485–505; Frederic C. Schaffer, *Democracy in Translation: Understanding Politics in an Unfamiliar Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); Dan Ottemoeller, 'Popular Perceptions of Democracy: Elections and Attitudes in Uganda', *Comparative Political Studies*, 31 (1998), 98–124.

democracy?', 61.5 per cent were able to provide a meaningful response, rising to 75 per cent in 1999. Interestingly, even more respondents felt that Ghana was a democracy in 1997, implying that some people who could not specify a meaning for democracy could nevertheless recognize one if they saw one. In both countries, the salience of the concept was a function of education, with democracy having meaning in direct proportion to a respondent's years of schooling.

Contrary to cultural interpretations, we contend that standard liberal ideas of civil and political rights lie at the core of African understandings of democracy. In Zambia in 1993 and 1994, participants in two rounds of focus groups were asked 'What does democracy mean to you?'[15] In the ensuing discussions, democracy was most commonly decoded in terms of the political procedure of competitive elections in which 'people are free to vote if they want to' and 'have a right to choose their own leaders'. Informants described how they resented having been forced to vote for the former ruling United National Independence Party (UNIP) and decried the political intimidation exerted by the party's youth wing. They favourably compared a choice of candidates under a multi-party regime with the system of 'appointed representatives' under a one-party state.

An open-ended question in the 1999 survey in Ghana about 'the first thing that comes to your mind ... when you hear the word "democracy"' elicited the following responses, in frequency order: civil liberties and personal freedoms (28 per cent of all respondents), 'government by the people' (22 per cent), and voting rights (9.2 per cent).[16] The only other major response was 'Don't know' (24.8 per cent) and very few respondents offered a materialistic interpretation (2.5 per cent). These findings seem to suggest that Ghanaians view democracy almost exclusively in political terms, with an emphasis on selected civil liberties (especially free speech), collective decision-making and political representation.

Survey findings point to a much more materialistic world view in South Africa. In 1995, South Africans were asked to choose from a list of diverse meanings (both political and economic) that are sometimes attached to democracy. At the top of the popular rankings, 91.3 per cent of respondents equated democracy with 'equal access to houses, jobs and a decent income' (with 48.3 per cent seeing these goods as 'essential' to democracy). This earthy image of democracy far outstripped all other representations: for example, regular elections (67.7 per cent), at least two strong parties (59.4 per cent), and minority rights (54.5 per cent). To be sure, a majority of South Africans did

[15] Michael Bratton and Beatrice Liatto Katundu, 'A Focus Group Assessment of Political Attitudes in Zambia', *African Affairs*, 93 (1994) 535–63; and Michael Bratton and Mapanza Nkwilimba, 'Analysis of Post-Survey Focus Group Transcripts, 1994' (unpublished document, Department of Political Science, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan 48824).

[16] Because IFES's 1997 Ghana sample randomly drew an equal number of respondents from every administrative region, it was not representative of the national population as a whole. As a result, descriptive statistics for Ghana in 1997 are calculated using a weighting variable to correct for the over-representation of under-populated regions.

associate democracy with procedures to guarantee political competition and political participation, but their endorsement of these political goods was far less ringing than the almost unanimous association of democracy with improved material welfare. Tellingly, only small minorities found it 'essential' to democracy to hold regular elections (26.5 per cent) or guarantee minority rights (20.6 per cent).

Because South Africa is a deeply divided society with mutually reinforcing fault lines of race and class, one would expect that various social groups would hold disparate views of democracy. We have noted elsewhere 'massive racial differences in agreement with regime norms'.[17] Whites are much more likely than blacks to agree that regular elections, free speech, party competition and minority rights are essential to democracy. This procedural interpretation of democracy most likely reflects their own minority status and their reliance for protection on constitutional and legal rules. South African blacks, for their part, attach just as much or more importance to narrowing the gap between rich and poor. And while many South Africans of all races say they accept the necessity of redistributing jobs, houses and incomes, blacks seem to focus more on 'equality of results' while whites stress 'equality of opportunity'.[18]

We reach four working conclusions based on recent research on citizen conceptions of democracy in three African countries. First, Africans here are more likely to associate democracy with individual liberties than with communal solidarity, especially if they live in urban areas. Secondly, popular conceptions of democracy have *both* procedural *and* substantive dimensions, though the former conception is more common than the latter. Thirdly, citizens rank procedural and substantive attributes in different order across countries. Zambians place political rules at the top of the list of democratic attributes, whereas South Africans relegate such guarantees behind improvements in material living standards. Finally, rankings differ even within the category of political goods: whereas Zambians (and to a lesser extent South Africans) grant primacy to elections, Ghanaians elevate freedom of speech to the top of their own bill of democratic rights.

These cross-national differences can be interpreted in terms of the life experiences of citizens under each country's old regime. Zambians may regard democracy mainly in terms of competitive multi-party elections because of their disappointing experiences with the ritual of 'elections without choice' under Kenneth Kaunda's one-party state. Ghanaians, for their part, emphasize freedom of speech as a reaction against the tight controls over communication imposed by the previous military regime, whose populist ideology was the only approved form of political discourse. Finally, South Africans place socio-economic considerations at the heart of their notion of democracy because of the integrated structure of oppression experienced under apartheid. Impoverished under the old regime, they see the attainment of political freedom as only the

[17] Robert Mattes and Hermann Thiel, 'Consolidation and Public Opinion in South Africa', *Journal of Democracy*, 9 (1998), 95–110.

[18] Mattes and Thiel, 'Consolidation and Public Opinion', p. 103.

TABLE 1 *Public Attitudes to Democracy: Preliminary Cross-National Comparisons*

	Support democracy	Satisfied with democracy	Supportive and satisfied	Supportive but not satisfied
European Union	*78*	*53*	—	—
Southern Europe	*84*	*57*	*79*	*11*
Greece	90	52	84	11
Portugal	83	60	77	9
Spain	78	60	75	12
East and Central Europe	*65*	*60*	*72*	*6*
Czech	77	56	70	8
Poland	76	61	70	4
Romania	61	77	68	4
Bulgaria	66	61	75	2
Slovakia	61	49	62	14
Hungary	50	53	79	4
South America	*63*	*50*	*45*	*22*
Uruguay	80	54	57	29
Argentina	77	53	55	28
Chile	53	48	38	17
Brazil	41	46	32	16
Sub-Saharan Africa	*64*	*48*	*41*	*18*
Ghana(1997)	74	53	46	13
Zambia (1996)	63	53	49	14
South Africa (1997)	56	38	29	13
South Africa (blacks)	61	45	35	11
South Africa (whites)	39	7	5	18

Note: Regional means are raw estimates, uncorrected for proportional population size of countries. Further fnn. to Table 1 can be found in the electronic version of the journal available at www.cup.cam.ac.uk

first step in rectifying manifold inequalities in society. In this conception, democracy has an inclusive meaning; it is as much a means to social transformation as a politically desirable end in itself.

SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA

The best way to ask questions about popular support for democracy is in concrete terms and in the form of comparisons with plausible alternatives.[19] Since democracy has motley meanings, it is not useful to ask whether people support it in the abstract. It is far better to elicit opinions about a real regime with distinctive institutional attributes, such as a 'system of governing with free elections and many parties'. And if citizens support democracy as the 'least worst' system (the so-called 'Churchill hypothesis'), it is worth testing their levels of commitment against other regime forms that they have recently experienced or could conceive of encountering in the future.[20]

Table 1 reports results of survey questions of this sort from various world regions, with sub-Saharan Africa represented by Ghana, Zambia and South Africa. In so far as these countries are representative of the region, Table 1 shows that the level of public commitment to democracy is much the same in Africa as in other regions of the world that have recently undergone regime change.[21] Excluding Southern Europe, almost two out of three citizens in new democracies extend legitimacy to elected government as their preferred political regime: the relevant mean figures are 65 per cent for East and Central Europe, 63 per cent for South America, and 64 per cent for the three countries of sub-Saharan Africa. Indeed, the average level of support in Africa (64.3 per cent) is virtually identical to the combined mean for Latin America and post-Communist Europe (64.2 per cent).

Moreover, deviation in support for democracy around the regional mean is lower for the three African countries than for other parts of the world. The countries with the lowest and highest levels of support for democracy are separated by just 18 per centage points in the African cases, but by 27 points for Eastern Europe and 39 points in South America. We interpret this to mean that authoritarian regimes have been widely discredited across the continent. Although the citizens of Ghana and Zambia may not have committed themselves to democracy as firmly as the citizens in Uruguay and the Czech Republic, they evince less nostalgia for hardline rule than citizens in Hungary and Brazil. Once again, though, South Africa is an exception. And we would need many more

[19] Rose *et al.*, *Democracy and Its Alternatives*, chap. 1.

[20] Rose *et al.*, *Democracy and Its Alternatives*, p. 11

[21] The major exception among newly democratic regions is Southern Europe: 84 per cent of citizens on average express support for democracy, which exceeds even the 78 per cent mean that prevails in the established democracies of Western Europe. This intra-European comparison suggests that levels of citizen support decline as democracies mature and that, in time, the euphoria of democratic transitions wears off.

confirming cases before we could be sure that legitimating sentiments are evenly spread across all African countries.

Indeed, variations are evident within Africa in the extent to which citizens support new regimes. Of the three cases under review, Ghana displays the highest levels of citizen commitment to democracy. In 1997, fully 73.5 per cent of citizens thought it somewhat or very important for Ghana to 'have at least two political parties competing in an election'. The intensity of this support appears to be strong, as reflected by the 55.9 per cent of respondents who thought these institutions 'very important'. And the quality and depth of this support is underlined by the even higher proportions who granted importance to the right of citizens to form parties representing diverse viewpoints (82.5 per cent), to the openness of the mass media to political debate (89.3 per cent), and to the regular conduct of honest elections (92.7 per cent). While there is some possibility that respondents are acquiescing here to non-controversial 'motherhood' questions, Ghanaians nonetheless appear to consistently favour a full basket of liberal political rights.

Among the countries considered, legitimation of the new regime was lowest in South Africa, where citizens do not yet feel a widespread attitudinal commitment to democracy.[22] A 1997 survey asked respondents to choose between the following statements: '[When] democracy does not work ... some say you need a strong leader who does not have to worry with elections. Others say democracy is always best'. Since only a bare majority chose the democratic option (56.3 per cent, up from 47 per cent in 1995, but dropping back again below 50 per cent in 1998), support for democracy appeared to be weaker there than in the other African countries. Other responses underscore the shallowness of democratic legitimacy and the appeal of authoritarian alternatives in South Africa. In 1997, about one-third of the population thought that, under democracy, 'the economic system runs badly' (29 per cent), order is poorly maintained (30.2 per cent), and leaders are 'indecisive and have too much squabbling' (35.1 per cent). And more than half of all South Africans (53.8 per cent) stated that they would be 'willing to give up regular elections if a non-elected government or leader could impose law and order and deliver jobs and houses'.

Thus, the potential constituency for forceful rule appears to be larger in South Africa than in South America, where an average of just 15 per cent of citizens considers that 'in some circumstances an authoritarian government can be preferable to a democratic [one]'.[23] Sentiments for a strong man were higher in South Africa (30.8 per cent) than in Chile (19 per cent) and Brazil (21 per cent), where authoritarian nostalgia is usually considered to be high. Question wording may have had a significant effect, with the cue of higher material living standards ('jobs and houses') inducing even some of democracy's supporters to abandon

[22] Mattes and Thiel, 'Consolidation and Public Opinion', p. 95.

[23] Calculated for the four South American countries in Table 1 from data presented in Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, p. 222.

it. But, at minimum, this finding draws attention to the role of instrumental calculations in the assessments of democracy by many South African citizens.

South Africa's deviance is explicable again, however, in terms of its cultural diversity. White South Africans were much less likely to judge that 'democracy is always best' (39 per cent) than the country's African citizens (61 per cent). And, while 'coloureds' situated themselves between blacks and whites when granting such support to democracy (53 per cent), Asian South Africans were the least supportive of all (27 per cent). Thus the cautious, even retrogressive, attitudes of ethnic minorities tended to depress overall levels of commitment to democracy in South Africa. Examined alone, African citizens can be seen to support this form of regime at the highest level of any ethnic group in South Africa (61 per cent), a level not too different from citizens in Zambia (63 per cent) and the sub-Sahara region as a whole (64 per cent).

In Zambia, the question on support for democracy differed slightly, while still focusing on a political system featuring elections and posing a comparison with a realistic alternative regime. Respondents were asked to choose: Is 'the best form of government ... a government elected by its people' or 'a government that gets things done'? On the assumption that support erodes as regimes mature, especially if citizens' expectations are not fully realized, we thought that support for 'elected government' would decline over time. To date this has not happened in Zambia. Public support for democracy held steady, at 63.4 per cent in 1993 and 62.9 per cent 1996.[24] As in Ghana, other related items bespoke an electorate with a relatively firm syndrome of democratic commitments. In 1996, 73 per cent preferred 'a choice of political parties and candidates' to 'a return to a system of single-party rule'.

SATISFACTION WITH DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA

Democracy looks better in theory than in practice. In elected regimes worldwide, more citizens support democracy as their preferred form of government than express satisfaction with the way that it actually works. This generalization holds true not only for Third Wave neo-democracies but, even more so, for the established regimes of Western Europe. On average for all the countries listed in Table 1, citizens express satisfaction with democracy at a rate some 17 per centage points lower than their willingness to support it. The widest gap (27 per centage points) appears in Southern Europe, whose transitions occurred over twenty years ago, whose democracies have moved well towards consolidation, and whose relatively low levels of satisfaction are now similar to those in Western Europe.

Unlike support for democracy, satisfaction with democracy is not as widespread in the three African countries as it is in South America and Eastern Europe. Satisfaction lags support by a wider margin in the sub-Saharan region

[24] Michael Bratton, Philip Alderfer and Neo Simutanyi, 'Political Participation in Zambia, 1991–1996: Trends and Determinants', *MSU Working Paper on Political Reform in Africa*, No. 16 (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University, 1997), p. 13.

(16 per centage points) than in the other two world regions (13 and 5 per centage points respectively). Substantively, fewer than half (48 per cent) of the citizens in these new African democracies report satisfaction with key aspects of the performance of elected regimes. Once more, the African average is pulled down by South Africa, with Ghana and Zambia displaying popular approval of regime performance at levels similar to consolidating democracies like Uruguay and Argentina. Although different racial groups in South Africa again evince distinct levels of satisfaction (45 per cent for blacks versus just 7 per cent for whites), black South Africans in this instance trail their fellow citizens elsewhere on the continent in their contentment with democracy in practice (39 per cent). Instead, they tend to more closely resemble the citizens of Brazil (41 per cent), more of whom are unhappy with democracy than are satisfied with it.

Satisfaction with democracy is measured inconsistently in the literature. The New Democracies Barometer that covers the post-communist countries contains no direct measure of regime satisfaction; indeed, its indicator of regime support – which is cast in terms of 'how the government works' – blurs the vital distinction between support and satisfaction. The Latinobarometer first tapped satisfaction in South and Central America by asking whether democracy 'allows the solution of problems'. Within Africa, our survey instruments posed the straightforward Eurobarometer question in South Africa in 1997 and in Ghana in 1999: 'How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way democracy works?' In Zambia, satisfaction with democracy was measured using the mean scores of satisfaction with specific attributes of democracy like political freedoms, elections and the performance of elected representatives. As stated earlier, we claim equivalence for these indicators, recognizing all along that the standardization of questions about democratic orientations is a top priority item for future political attitude research in Africa.

As long as these limitations are borne in mind, preliminary cross-national comparisons are possible. In Ghana, the proportion of satisfied citizens was 52.9 per cent in 1997; this figure was confirmed by a very similar 54.5 per cent in 1999.[25] Generally speaking, Ghanaians were more satisfied with regime performance at providing political goods like elections and civil rights (75.6 per cent) than delivering socio-economic benefits like jobs, education, health care and social security (41.6 per cent). The high scores that Ghanaians gave for political performance appear more believable in the context of their lowly assessments of socio-economic delivery. Low scores imply that respondents were being frank in their opinions; therefore, high scores imply genuine contentment with newly acquired political rights and electoral procedures.[26]

[25] The former figure was constructed by averaging respondents' proclaimed comfort with regime performance on six dimensions, ranging from 76.7 per cent satisfaction with the electoral system to 33.5 per cent satisfaction with health care services. The latter figure records responses to a simpler formulation: 'Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way democracy works in Ghana?'

[26] Chris McCarty, *Public Opinion in Ghana, 1997* (Washington, DC: International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 1997), p. 27.

In Zambia the proportion of satisfied citizens was virtually identical to Ghana (53 per cent). This figure was calculated as a mean score of satisfaction along four dimensions: with the democratic transition, with the second elections, and with the performance of Members of Parliament and local government councillors. As reported earlier, the 75.9 per cent who saw political transition as 'good for the country' usually attached a positive political meaning to the practice of democracy as it was unfolding in Zambia. As in Ghana, overall satisfaction was driven by high levels of satisfaction with the electoral system (80.9 per cent). Fewer than one in five eligible voters thought 'some candidates had an unfair advantage' in Zambia's controversial 1996 elections and only 3 per cent thought that the election was unfair because former president Kenneth Kaunda was barred from running. Indeed, many respondents welcomed Kaunda's elimination, opining that it was time for the 'old man' to retire from politics. These exclusionary attitudes are hard to square with an understanding of, and professed commitment to, democracy as a system of electoral rights and civil liberties, but they are a feature of the kind of regime that is solidifying in Zambia.

Perhaps the most notable feature of public satisfaction with democracy in Zambia is the widespread disapproval among citizens of the constituency service provided by elected representatives. It is not as if Zambians are poorly informed about the identity of their representatives: 65.1 per cent can correctly name their local government councillor and 61.7 their Member of Parliament, figures that would be impressive in an established democracy. Citizens are even taking the initiative to contact these elected leaders, with rising numbers claiming such encounters between 1993 and 1996 (up to 19 per cent for councillors and 12.9 per cent for MPs). Nevertheless, only about a quarter of all citizens approve of the job performance of councillors and MPs (28.7 per cent and 24.6 per cent respectively in 1996), commonly complaining that leaders never visit their constituencies or otherwise neglect them. For the most part, and especially in rural areas, a 'representation gap' has opened up between citizens and leaders that undermines public acceptance of the new regime.

In South Africa, only 37.6 per cent were satisfied with democracy in 1997; by contrast 34.2 per cent were dissatisfied, and fully 24.4 per cent were neutral on the question. In comparative perspective, the level of satisfaction in this country is remarkably low, being bottom, not only in Africa, but worldwide among countries listed in Table 1. This relative lack of satisfaction would seem to derive from the intensely materialistic interpretations that black South Africans attach to democracy, from the high levels of economic expectation that they brought to the political transition, and from perceptions (correct or not) that the government led by the African National Congress (ANC) has been slow to deliver desired services. We will test these ideas further as this article proceeds.

By contrast, satisfaction (such as it is) also seems quite firm. It is not notably reduced when a middle value ('neither satisfied or dissatisfied') is added to the question; instead, the alternative wording gives those who have not attained satisfaction another way to express their feelings. After all, South Africans expressed roughly the same level of contentment in a 1995 survey (41.1

per cent) in the absence of a neutral option (when 56.8 per cent said they were dissatisfied). Thus we should not overestimate levels of dissatisfaction with democracy in South Africa since many people who seem unsatisfied have actually not made up their minds. Instead, these citizens exhibit a 'wait and see attitude' that allows elected leaders a measure of leeway, especially in the early days of a new democratic regime.

EXPLANATORY FACTORS

So far, we have documented the different levels of public support for, and satisfaction with, democracy in selected African countries. This article seeks not only to describe such cross-national variations, but to explain them.

In probing 'why?', we propose four candidate explanations. The first is rooted in the social characteristics of African populations such as literacy, income and gender. One might expect, for example, that low levels of mass literacy would inhibit popular understanding of, and support for, democracy. The second candidate explanation involves economic goods. Following the instrumentalist argument, one would predict that (popular perceptions of) national economic conditions, personal quality of life, and access to materials and services would shape how citizens come to feel about democracy. The third postulate concerns political goods. The interesting question here is whether the delivery of (relatively less tangible) civil rights and political equality is sufficient to sustain democracy. At minimum, positive findings would cause us to expand and revise the instrumental thesis; at most, positive findings could be interpreted as confirming the intrinsic argument.

Finally, we consider what we call 'general performance factors' – such as citizens' overall assessment of governmental performance – for three interrelated reasons. Conceptually, we recognize that the analytic distinction between political and economic goods may be artificial to some degree and that citizens often evaluate government performance holistically. Operationally, we want to make use of the general measures of governmental and regime performance that are available in the survey data for the three African countries. And, theoretically, we argue that satisfaction with democracy can be modelled in two ways: as a dependent variable that demands explanation in its own right and as a general performance factor that, alongside other explanatory variables, belongs on the independent side of any equation purporting to explain support for democracy. Satisfaction with democracy will be used in both ways in the analysis that follows.

We end this section by drawing attention to the empirical features of these explanatory factors. The survey data provide insights into the structure of public opinion in three African countries that are interesting in themselves, not widely known, and help to put the subsequent analysis into context. A summary of the relevant economic and political factors appears in Table 2.

Since Africans live in a continent in crisis, they are predictably dissatisfied with national economies and their own economic status, with South Africans

TABLE 2 *Selected Public Attitudes in Three African Countries*

	S. Africa (1997) All races	S. Africa (1997) blacks	Ghana (1999)	Zambia (1996)	Mean
Economic factors					
Satisfied with current economic conditions	20.9	(25.4)	34.1	46.0	33.7
Satisfied with current personal QOL	32.6	(35.1)	31.7	45.4	36.6
Expect improvement in future personal QOL	47.6	(60.1)	52.2	57.3	52.4
Support market reforms	32.0	(28.0)	51.9	50.9	44.9
See improvement in delivery of economic goods	33.4	(40.4)	38.5	54.6	42.2
Political factors					
Interested in politics	61.7	(60.4)	72.1	64.6	66.1
Trust government institutions	45.0	(56.0)	61.2	57.6	54.6
See government as responsive	48.2	(59.4)	50.7	34.5	44.5
Perceive regular official corruption	49.8	(56.0)	85.0	56.6	63.8
See improvement in delivery of political goods	58.4	(74.0)	77.9	74.0	70.1
General performance factor					
Approve government performance	46.7	(59.1)	36.2	43.1	42.0

Note: All figures are valid percentages: i.e. including 'don't knows', excluding missing values. Means are raw estimates, uncorrected for proportional population size of countries. Further fnn. to Table 2 can be found in the electronic version of the journal available at www.cup.cam.ac.uk

being the least satisfied of all. Notwithstanding present privations, however, most Africans are somewhat hopeful about future economic prospects, with black South Africans in this case being the most optimistic. As for economic reform, Ghanaians and Zambians are divided squarely down the middle over the appropriateness of free markets to African circumstances. What about the delivery of economic goods? The mass public in the three study countries diverge on whether they have seen improvements along this key dimension for democracy's consolidation. Most Zambians say they have seen improvements (54.6 per cent) whereas others complain about a lack of economic delivery (with only 38.5 per cent of Ghanians and 33.4 per cent of South Africans saying they have seen improvements). A deep sense of economic grievance is pervasive in South African society and is not confined to one racial group.

Let us now turn to political attitudes. To the extent that the three surveyed countries are representative of the continent as a whole, clear majorities of African citizens, Ghanaians in particular, are interested in politics. Apart from in South Africa, trust in governmental institutions is also rather robust. But a glaring weakness of African political institutions is a perceived lack of responsiveness: the fact that only 34.5 per cent of Zambians thought that 'we can make our elected representatives listen to us' underscores the observation made earlier about a 'representation gap'. Another factor undermining trust in government – and thereby plausibly blocking the consolidation of democracy – is political corruption. A startling super-majority of Ghanaians (85 per cent) thought that public officials regularly took bribes.[27] And in at least two countries (Zambia and South Africa) more citizens thought that corruption was worse under democratically elected governments than before.[28]

Which brings us, finally, to the delivery of political goods. The data show that citizens feel positively about improvements in their availability, especially when compared to economic benefits. Overall, a remarkably high 70.1 per cent of persons interviewed thought that they had made recent political gains, defined variously as political equality, individual rights or voting choice. Ghanaians and Zambians made particularly rosy evaluations of these achievements (77.9 and 74 per cent respectively), and even Africans in South Africa were equally positively inclined. Only racial minorities in South Africa felt that they had lost out (37.1 per cent), regarding themselves (especially whites, 33.3 per cent) as politically excluded. Overall, Africans apparently feel more sanguine about the delivery of political goods than any other aspect of post-transition regime performance considered here.

[27] Offsetting the widespread popular perception of corruption, in practice fewer than a third of Ghanaians (30.4 per cent) said that they, themselves, had ever been asked for a bribe.

[28] IDASA's 1995 South Africa survey revealed that 40.9 per cent saw 'more corruption than there used to be' as against 23.9 per cent who saw a decline. The remainder perceived no change. MSU's 1993 Zambia survey found 49.7 per cent who thought corruption had worsened since the days of the UNIP government, though this proportion dropped to 38.3 per cent by 1996.

EXPLAINING SATISFACTION WITH DEMOCRACY

Do attitudes about a government's performance determine the way citizens regard democracy? Which of the foregoing explanatory factors is most powerful? And can we resolve the 'intrinsic versus instrumental' debate?

We begin by estimating models of satisfaction with democracy. Table 3 reports ordinary least squares regression estimates using data from the three national surveys.[29] The first noteworthy finding is that, in the parts of Africa surveyed, social background factors have little influence on citizen satisfaction with democracy. The gender and age of respondents made no difference to the extent of expressed satisfaction in any country. This is not to say that men and women participate in politics with equal frequency or that younger generations are as patient about political change as their elders. But, as far as we can tell, the lived experience of democratization seems to have been roughly uniform across major demographic groups, at least as reflected in citizen willingness to express satisfaction with recent political developments. Nor, in Ghana and South Africa, did the educational attainments of citizens affect their levels of political satisfaction. Only in Zambia were educated people more likely to say they were satisfied with democracy, a finding consistent with an earlier study on the effects of formal and civic education.[30] Even here, though, schooling was scarcely the strongest explanatory factor observed.

Rather, satisfaction with democracy in African countries is propelled by general considerations of government performance. As Table 3 shows, approval of the job performance of the national government was a strong and significant factor across the board in every country surveyed. It was the single most powerful element explaining satisfaction in South Africa and the second and third most influential component in Zambia and Ghana respectively. This finding tends to substantiate the conventional wisdom that attitudes to democracy in Africa are 'performance-driven' and that elected governments have to 'deliver the goods' in order to satisfy their constituents. Nevertheless, overall measures of job performance fail to distinguish the kind of goods to which constituents attach value. For this reason, it is necessary to parse performance into its economic and political components.

First, we review economic explanations of satisfaction with democracy. Table 3 shows that satisfaction is statistically associated with a wide range of diverse economic indicators. To the extent that they are knowledgeable (or at least opinionated) about trends in the country at large, citizens refer principally to the condition of the national economy in judging regime performance. In

[29] All variables representing the four candidate explanations (social background, general performance, economic factors, political factors) were entered into the regression equations. The variables that were not statistically significant were left in as controls. Our analysis regarding the relative explanatory strength of different variables is derived from the reported standardized beta coefficients.

[30] Michael Bratton and Philip Alderfer with Georgia Bowser and Joseph Temba, 'The Effects of Civic Education on Political Culture: Evidence from Zambia', *World Development*, 27 (1999), 807–24, p. 814.

TABLE 3 *Multiple Regression Estimates of Satisfaction with Democracy*

	S. Africa			Ghana			Zambia		
	B	(s.e.)	Beta	B	(s.e.)	Beta	B	(s.e.)	Beta
Social background factors									
Gender			0.005			0.034			−0.011
Age			−0.007			0.032			−0.027
Education			0.033	−0.012	(0.005)	−0.049*	0.024	(0.008)	0.083**
General performance factor									
Approval of government performance	0.296	(0.029)	0.212***	0.174	(0.032)	0.161***	0.162	(0.030)	0.185***
Economic factors									
Assessment of current economic conditions	0.178	(0.022)	0.166***	0.230	(0.037)	0.163***	0.115	(0.032)	0.123***
Assessment of current personal QOL	0.101	(0.024)	0.094***			0.025			0.041
Assessment of future personal QOL	0.117	(0.023)	0.109***	0.065	(0.027)	0.056*	0.094	(0.033)	0.101**
Support for market reforms			0.006			−0.012	0.066	(0.023)	0.086**
Delivery of economic goods	0.128	(0.029)	0.104***	0.040	(0.015)	0.075**			0.045
Political factors									
Trust in government institutions	0.154	(0.028)	0.110***	0.049	(0.010)	0.121***	0.043	(0.007)	0.188***
Perception of government responsiveness	0.058	(0.026)	0.048**			−0.020	0.188	(0.059)	−0.087**
Perception of official corruption			−0.024			−0.030	−0.076	(0.020)	0.105***
Delivery of political goods	0.097	(0.021)	0.088***	0.089	(0.012)	0.173***	0.180	(0.065)	0.077**
N		3,500			2,005			1,182	
R		0.637			0.501			0.592	
R^2		0.405			0.251			0.351	
Adjusted R^2		0.403			0.247			0.344	

*Significant at 0.05, **Significant at 0.01, ***Significant at 0.001

making such macro-economic (or socio-tropic) calls, Africans resemble citizens elsewhere in the world who take national conditions as the touchstone.[31] Thereafter, they refer to their own personal quality of life; but positive expectations of future prospects generally had more influence over democratic satisfaction than an individual's present situation. Consistent with what we already know about the high level of material expectations in South Africa, this relationship was most marked there.

Notably, the perceived current condition of the national economy had a *consistently significant* effect across *every* country. The effects of this socio-tropic economic factor, however, were slightly weaker than the 'leading' variable, namely approval of government performance.

Other economic variables had discrepant effects. For example, current personal quality of life was influential for democratic satisfaction only in South Africa. By contrast, Ghanaians and Zambians saw less personal economic progress than that reflected in national statistics showing economic growth. And they withheld political satisfaction accordingly.

Take another example: only in Zambia did support for economic reform induce satisfaction with democracy. For their part, citizens in Ghana and South Africa regard the processes of economic and political reform as unconnected. One possible reason is that the sequencing of the dual transition (to democracy and a market economy) varied across countries. Political and economic reform was roughly synchronous in Zambia when the Movement for Multiparty Democracy assumed power in 1991, whereas in Ghana it preceded the political transition and in South Africa it followed it. Thus in Zambia, more than other places, democratization and economic recovery (however partial and halting) became closely associated in the public imagination.

Most important for present purposes, the delivery of a basket of economic goods was not a universal requirement for satisfaction with democracy. According to available survey results, it was very important to satisfaction in South Africa, of middling importance in Ghana, but not important at all in Zambia. In South Africa, people who felt that their overall personal conditions had recently improved (only 33 per cent, but more than the 26 per cent who felt that their conditions had worsened) were significantly more likely to approve of 'the way democracy works'. By contrast, the self-proclaimed beneficiaries of personal economic recovery in Zambia (who constitute the highest proportion of any country: 55 per cent) were no more likely than other Zambians to attribute their condition to democracy. For these citizens, at least, other considerations applied.

Thus we turn to political factors. As Table 3 indicates, satisfaction with democracy was systematically shaped by a couple of key political considerations: trust in government and the delivery of political goods. In all three cases,

[31] Donald Kinder and D. R. Kiewiet, 'Socio-Tropic Politics: The American Case', *British Journal of Political Science*, 11 (1981), 129–61. See also Heinz Eulau and M. S. Lewis-Beck, eds, *Economic Conditions and Electoral Outcomes: The United States and Europe* (New York: Agathon Press, 1985).

satisfied democrats expressed higher levels of confidence in state institutions than the average person. It stands to reason that citizens who believe that public officials will act in the popular interest are likely to express satisfaction with the political regime as a whole. And we can confirm that, in all three countries, perceptions of official corruption undermine satisfaction with democracy, perhaps by eroding confidence in state institutions. To be sure, it is difficult in Africa to disentangle a citizen's trust in the person of the President from trust in the state and to distinguish identification with the ruling party from satisfaction with democracy. And it is generally hard to know which came first: trust in particular state institutions or satisfaction with the regime of democracy writ large. But even if the relationship is reciprocal, it points to the centrality of core political values – like trust in government – in the syndrome of democratic culture.

The availability of a basket of political goods (containing civil liberties, voting rights and equal treatment under the law) was also essential to satisfaction with democracy in Africa. Stated differently, the notion of government performance everywhere contained irreducible political elements. In Zambia, persons who felt that democratization had brought 'real choice' at the polls (some 74 per cent) were likely to express regime satisfaction. In Ghana, persons who thought that government authorities had delivered freedom of speech (85 per cent) were similarly inclined. And in South Africa, citizens who felt sure that they could obtain political equality (58.4 per cent said they thought the government was just as 'interested' in their social group as any other) tended to be satisfied with democracy too. Closely related to this point, South Africans (and Zambians) who regarded the government as responsive to their needs displayed higher levels of democratic contentment. Thus, to the extent that an elected government can guarantee a basket of basic political commodities, it would seem to breed a satisfied citizenry.

We summarize findings as follows. Satisfaction with democracy among African citizens appears to depend upon their assessment of the performance of government, particularly its performance at delivering *both* economic *and* political goods. Taken together, these factors explain between a quarter and two-fifths of the variance in expressed satisfaction in three African countries (see Table 3, adjusted R^2 statistics). Apart from social background, no set of factors – whether general performance, economic goods or political goods – can be discarded without a significant loss of explanatory power. Any ecumenical explanation of satisfaction with democracy in Africa must make reference to government performance in *both* its political *and* economic dimensions.

But what about the relative weight of economic and political explanations? We note that the delivery of economic goods sometimes has large independent effects on satisfaction with democracy in individual countries. Cross-nationally, however, such effects are rather inconsistent. We therefore conclude that economic effects are subject to the exigencies of time and place, such as gradual economic recovery in Ghana and persistent economic crisis in Zambia. We therefore doubt that a general explanation of satisfaction with democracy can

be constructed from economic data alone. At the same time, we note that the effects of political factors, while occasionally weaker than those of economic factors, prevail more consistently across countries. This observation suggests that the delivery of political goods is a more reliable general predictor of satisfaction with democracy and a more promising foundation on which to construct a theory of democratic consolidation. This line of argument is explored further in the next section.

EXPLAINING SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY

We turn, finally, to explain support for democracy as a preferred regime type. As Table 4 shows, our analysis accounts for 12 to 17 per cent of the variance in popular support (see adjusted R^2 statistics). Our explanation was less complete in this case perhaps because of the impalpability of the issue at hand: citizens may find it more difficult to assess the qualities of abstract constitutional rules than the concrete performance of actual governments. In any event, public opinion in Africa seems to be less fully formed, and more contradictory, when it comes to support for democracy.

Nevertheless, Table 4 does reveal interesting findings. First, it reconfirms that attitudes to democracy cannot be inferred from standard social background characteristics. Again, gender and age were irrelevant to the legitimation of democracy in all countries studied and education had a positive impact only in Zambia. These findings are consistent with the observations that 'the more education a person has, the more likely he or she is to reject undemocratic alternatives' but that, overall, 'social structure [has] little influence ... on attitudes towards the new regime'.[32] If African societies do not contain entrenched pockets of generational or gender-based resistance to democratization, then the prospects for the consolidation of democratic regimes would seem to be slightly brighter than is sometimes thought.

Secondly, regime legitimacy in Africa depends upon popular appraisals of government performance. Consistently, in all three countries, support for democracy was strongest among citizens who felt that elected governments were generally doing a good job. But approval of government performance was closely connected to party identification, with supporters of the ruling party in each country being much more approving.[33] Thus we must investigate further whether citizens are accrediting government performance – and thereby supporting democracy – out of 'knee-jerk' loyalty to a ruling party rather than a rational calculation that democratic governments deserve legitimation because they are more effective.

In Ghana and South Africa, support for democracy also was accompanied by

[32] Rose *et al.*, *Democracy and Its Alternatives*, pp. 139, 140.
[33] Eta = 0.460 (Ghana), 0.416 (Zambia) and 0.351 (South Africa), all significant at 0.0001.

TABLE 4 *Multiple Regression Estimates of Support for Democracy*

	S. Africa			Ghana			Zambia		
	B	(s.e.)	Beta	B	(s.e.)	Beta	B	(s.e.)	Beta
Social background factors									
Gender			0.028			−0.014			0.048
Age			−0.019			0.000			0.042
Education			−0.009			0.001	0.064	(0.010)	0.200***
General performance factors									
Approval of government performance	0.084	(0.014)	0.145***	0.368	(0.064)	0.169***	0.122	(0.030)	0.128***
Satisfaction with democracy	0.082	(0.011)	0.196***	0.393	(0.052)	0.195***			−0.010
Economic factors									
Assessment of current economic conditions			−0.013			0.038			0.001
Assessment of current personal QOL			−0.017			0.023			−0.021
Assessment of future personal QOL	0.035	(0.011)	0.077***			−0.023			0.067
Support for market reforms			0.038			−0.006			0.017
Delivery of economic goods			−0.002	0.066	(0.031)	0.062***			0.059
Political factors									
Interest in politics	0.054	(0.015)	0.077***			0.015	0.115	(0.025)	0.144***
Trust in government institutions			0.032			−0.003			0.018
Perception of government responsiveness			0.031			−0.008			0.012
Perception of official corruption			−0.003	−0.140	(0.072)	−0.045*			−0.020
Delivery of political goods			0.028	0.158	(0.025)	0.153***	0.461	(0.080)	0.181***
N		3,500			2,005			1,182	
R		0.349			0.417			0.382	
R^2		0.122			0.174			0.146	
Adjusted R^2		0.120			0.171			0.142	

*Significant at 0.05, **Significant at 0.01, ***Significant at 0.001

expressions of satisfaction with democracy.[34] We take this as further evidence that regime legitimation in Africa rests squarely upon performance considerations. On the up-side, popular demand for government performance increases the likelihood that citizens will make use of the rules of democratic governance to hold their leaders accountable. On the down-side, it also raises the possibility that citizens may conflate the performance of governments (that is, the achievements of incumbent groups of elected officials) with the performance of regimes (that is, the rules by which governments are constituted). The risk thus arises that, faced with continued mismanagement by ineffective governments, Africans may throw the baby out with the bath-water. By punishing government under-performance, they may inadvertently dismiss democracy.

Thirdly, and notwithstanding what has just been said about performance, we find little systematic evidence from Africa that citizens predicate support for democracy on the delivery of economic goods. Generally speaking, the legitimation of democratic regimes does not depend on citizen assessments of personal or national economic conditions, either now or for the future. Only in South Africa are assessments of future personal conditions linked positively to support for democracy. Strikingly too, when other relevant factors are controlled for, citizen perceptions of economic delivery have no discernible effects on the endorsement of democracy in either Zambia or South Africa. The delivery of economic goods only seems to matter in Ghana, though the influence of this instrumental consideration is far from the strongest in the Ghana model.

Instead, we are led back again to the impact of political factors. For the first time, we find that citizen interest in politics had a positive effect on attitudes to democracy in two out of the three countries (Zambia and South Africa). It stands to reason that democracy will not consolidate where citizens remain disinterested in, and detached from, the political process; before people can actively become democracy's champions, they must orient themselves towards involvement in political life. One wonders why Ghanaians, who display the highest levels of interest in politics among the Africans surveyed, do not automatically support democracy. The answer appears to lie, at least in part, in the popular perception of rampant official corruption in that country. Many persons who are predisposed by their interest in politics to become active citizens are 'turned off' from democracy by what they see as the illicit machinations of civilian politicians. As one would expect, perceptions of official corruption are negatively associated with support for democracy in all three African countries; only in Ghana, however, is this relationship statistically significant.

Finally, and most importantly, the delivery of political goods bears a strong and significant relationship to the popular legitimation of democracy. In judging democracy, the Africans that we surveyed think of government performance first and foremost in political terms. Unlike the delivery of economic goods, a

[34] Note that, for South Africa, support for democracy was measured by a single, binary item that asked people to choose between 'a strong leader who does not have to worry with elections' and 'democracy is always best'.

factor that is relevant in only one country, this relationship holds in at least two country cases.

Let us first discuss the exceptional case. We have been least successful in explaining support for democracy in South Africa (adjusted $R^2 = 0.12$).[35] In this country, the provision of political goods apparently plays no meaningful part in building popular support for the new regime. And this finding is not a function of the respondent's racial group because, even an analysis of black South Africans alone does not bring political goods into play. We can only conclude that the key considerations for the consolidation of democracy in this country are the public's approval of the ANC government's performance to date and their persistent popular conviction that personal living standards will improve in the future. The negative signs on several coefficients for economic factors even imply that citizens support democracy *despite* persistent low living standards or the government's failure to deliver new jobs. It is also well worth noting that the delivery of economic goods has no discernible bearing on democratic consolidation in South Africa.

How can we interpret this odd case? Self-governing under majority rule only since 1994, this country is a late political developer. Flush with the enthusiasms of liberation, South Africans today share many of the economic expectations that other Africans felt a generation earlier. They are enticed by the promises of nationalist leaders who promote a substantive version of democracy that emphasizes the socio-economic elevation of the poor. Because leaders have not yet dashed these hopes, South Africans do not place high priority on procedural guarantees of leadership alternation. By contrast, other Africans are much more sceptical that democratization will automatically deliver economic goods. They know from bitter experience that politicians' promises of prosperity can easily evaporate into deepening poverty and widening income gaps. Rather, they want to know that they can replace failing leaders. In short, they have come to value a conception of democracy that is just as much procedural as substantive, if not more so.

Ghana and Zambia are representative in this regard. Both display a clear relationship between the delivery of political goods and the emergence of support for democracy. To be sure, Ghanaians take into account the delivery of jobs and the availability of affordable goods in assessing regime support. A comprehensive explanation of support for democracy (in this case up to 17 per cent of variance) clearly requires reference to a range of political, economic and other factors. But, unlike South Africans, Ghanaians extend prime value to civil rights (especially free speech), granting these goods precedence in their

[35] A more fully specified model explains additional variance in South Africa (adjusted $R^2 = 0.21$). This model includes assessment of future national economic conditions and assessment of 'overall' national conditions. Because we did not have equivalent measures for these indicators in Ghana and Zambia, they were not included in models designed for cross-national comparison. Note that this fuller model brings further into focus the picture we have drawn of South Africa as a country in which attitudes to democracy are shaped by performance considerations and popular economic expectations.

calculations about whether to support democracy. Indeed, even where both types of goods seem to matter, the basket containing the political items apparently carries greater weight.

The case for politically driven support for democracy is most clear-cut in Zambia. In this country, the relationship between the provision of political goods and support for democracy is among the strongest found in any model presented in this article. We interpret this result to mean that the new-found availability of electoral choice, which Zambians compare very favourably with the political restrictions of one-party rule, is paramount in building commitment to democracy in Zambia. Despite the parlous economic condition of the country, Zambians support democracy principally because it enables them to choose their own leaders, a consideration that overwhelms even their serious concerns with economic well-being.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have established that levels of popular support for democracy are roughly similar in three neo-democracies of sub-Saharan Africa as in other Third Wave countries. Almost two-thirds of eligible voters in these African countries say that they feel some measure of attachment to democratic rules and values. Under these circumstances, the popular consolidation of democracy in at least some African countries does not seem an entirely far-fetched prospect.

Yet the African cases stand apart from other new democracies in terms of lower levels of mass satisfaction with actual regime performance. The fact that African survey respondents support democracy while being far from content with its concrete achievements suggests a measure of intrinsic support for the democratic regime form that supersedes instrumental considerations. But, although support for democracy may be quite broad, we cannot confirm that it is deep. We do not yet know if citizens will vigorously defend the political regime if economic conditions take a decisive turn for the worse or if rulers begin to backtrack on hard-won freedoms.

Moreover, the general public in African countries thinks instrumentally: in other words, support for democracy hinges critically upon popular approval of government achievements. The continent has had little previous experience with open elections and its previous democratic interludes have been episodic; hence, a culture of democracy has had little chance to take root. Thus, regime consolidation will remain 'performance-driven' for the foreseeable future. And, as long as the regime of democracy is held hostage to the effectiveness of weak and self-serving governments, then popular satisfaction – and, by extension, support for democracy – will remain tentative. From the perspective of political culture, these remain 'democracies at risk'.

In our view, the most positive sign for long-term consolidation is that, at least outside South Africa, many Africans value political goods. At best, this finding reinforces what has already been inferred about the emergence of intrinsic support for democracy as an end in itself. Moreover, the prominence of political

goods imparts new meaning to the instrumental notion that, in order to survive and develop, democracies must 'deliver the goods'. In deciding whether to support democracy, African citizens seem to weigh the availability of political goods more heavily than the contents of the economic basket. This finding is consistent with results reported by Rose and Diamond,[36] among others, about the complex correlates of regime support in other new democracies. We extend their analysis by demonstrating that political goods take primacy in explaining, not only support for democracy as a preferred regime type, but also satisfaction with the practical performance of elected governments.

Taken together, these research results allow us to counter the economistic argument that the market will legitimate democracy. We concur with Linz and Stepan that intrinsic and politically-driven support for democracy will 'invert the legitimacy pyramid'; instead, 'democracy legitimates the market'.[37] Przeworski's simultaneity problem – that is, that economic and political goods must be delivered at the same time or poor economic results will rapidly undermine democratization – seems to be overstated.

[36] Rose *et al.*, *Democracy and Its Alternatives*; Diamond, *Developing Democracy*.
[37] Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, p. 435.