

CRISIS, GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE AND SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY

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by

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Dedicated to my parents, Gary and Rumi Westergren, for giving me everything.

To my wife, Hye Westergren, for giving me perspective when my focus becomes too narrow.

To Cuneyt Ozsahin and Frank Pumipuntu, for making political science enjoyable.

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# CRISIS, GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE AND SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY

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## ABSTRACT

Studies of regime performance effects on support for democracy have neglected the possible impact of economic and political crisis. Using survey data from the second and third waves of the Afrobarometer survey, this study finds some evidence that rapid democratization decreases the impact of performance on support for democracy. I also find strong evidence that political performance has a stronger impact on pro-democratic sentiment than economic performance.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### *INTRODUCTION*

Africa is the most recent continent to experience the widespread political reform and liberalization, following East Asia and Latin America into the delicate realm of Huntington's (1991) Third Wave. However, few countries have fully democratized. A key question of interest in political science is- what are the requisite conditions for democratic consolidation? Political culture literature attempts to answer this question using survey data to verify theories regarding the development of pro-democratic attitudes. This paper is interested in answering four questions- 1) How does economic crisis or rapid institutional reform impact support for democracy? 2) Does government performance matter to an individual's commitment to democracy? 3) What types of performance matter? 4) Do external and domestic shocks affect the impact of assessments of government performance on support for democracy? In order to answer these questions I test Regime Performance Theory (RPT) with cross-sectional OLS. I find evidence that economic crisis lowers average support for democracy while experiencing substantial democratic reform raises support. It also appears that individuals are increasingly supportive of democracy when the government guarantees political rights and civil liberties.

Drawing on the early work by Easton (1965), who saw specific and diffuse support as necessary components of democracy, some scholars have found empirical evidence that political and economic performance affect public support for democracy



(Lockerbie 1993; Minkenberg 1993; Clark, Dutt, Kornberg 1993; Shin 2007; Widmaier 1990; Cusack 1999). Others have disputed this connection (Weil 1989, Mattes and Bratton 2007). Nonetheless, there is a general consensus in recent literature looking at government performance effects on support for democracy that assessments of political performance have a stronger effect on diffuse support than does the more immediate economic assessments of government performance, at least in literature looking outside of Africa. In the case of sub-Saharan Africa, research done on public opinion and democracy has found that both economic and political assessments have effects on mass support for democracy, although the effects appear weak (Bratton, Mattes, and Gylmah-Boadi 2005).

Although some studies have incorporated the vast array of possible explanations for democratic support, I believe past research on pro-democratic attitudes have missed an important concern for individuals living in newly democratized countries- that of political and economic stability. If transitions to democracy are marked by rapid institutional change or economic instability, individuals may have a heightened awareness of the regime's performance and this may affect their support for the system. What is also unclear is how instability within democratic institutions and the economy affects popular support for political systems in sub-Saharan Africa. This paper will attempt to contribute to our understanding of this dynamic by measuring changes in popular support for democracy against the various explanations generally seen as contributing to such support.

Another point I wish to make here is that the notion of external and domestic shocks forces us to depart with cross-national aggregates and to focus on individuals

living in states that have recently experienced some form of economic or political instability. Experiencing significant democratic reform should have a positive effect on support for democracy. Likewise, in countries that have undergone some form of economic instability I expect individuals to respond with lower support for democracy. By incorporating measures representing assessments of government performance, this paper will also investigate the impact that experience with economic crisis and institutional reform has on the importance of these variables.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### *LITERATURE*

A problem with past research is it did not measure the effects of macro-level shocks on political and economic performance assessments and support for democracy. What scholars have tended to miss is the potential for shocks, whether it is political or economic, to adversely affect society, causing previously dormant demands to make an impression on the individual's level of diffuse system support.

But why should this matter in Africa? The reason is financial crises were at one time endemic in sub-Saharan Africa. Not only has sub-Saharan Africa suffered for decades with financial crises as a result of wide government intervention in the market, but also recent structural adjustment policies aimed at liberalizing these markets have not had the desired effect of greater prosperity (Van de Walle 2001: 21). Largely a result of elite resistance to reforms and the vulnerability of poorer countries to international economic crises (Van de Walle 2001:50), part of this may also be due to the “double edged sword” of liberalization, which is a consistent finding in literature looking at the liberalization process (Eichengreen 2004:260). In other words, African states have faced the threat of economic crisis whether they implemented reforms or not. Not only has economic crisis been a problem, but the frequency of financial crises increased substantially since the 1960's (Bordo et al. 2001). So although most African countries made progress on economic issues in the 1990's, the existence of external economic shocks reversed these gains (Van de Walle 2001: 4). But the impact of these crises is not

necessarily as strong as they are in wealthier parts of the world. Being one of the poorest continents, African countries typically have “households [that] are only loosely linked to the financial economy and feel only indirect effects when financial markets malfunction or collapse” (Eichengreen 2004: 251).

For decades, one of the most remarkable characteristics of African political systems was the prevalence of authoritarian “big men” supported by their practice of neo-patrimonialism (Bratton and Van de Walle 1997). This pattern significantly changed starting in the 1980’s and 1990’s with an explosion in the number of peaceful executive power turnovers and constitutional changes to term limit rules (Posner and Young 2007). In the cases of Kenya, Malawi, and Nigeria, the growing influence of legislatures was largely responsible for the progress on democratic reform (Barkan 2008:137). This shift from region-wide autocratic regimes to greater democratic practices marked the beginning of a rapid institutionalization of democratic norms across sub-Saharan Africa. There have been exceptions and optimism has been tempered by setbacks in state building (Joseph 2008), but recent changes have certainly been unprecedented in post-colonial Africa. How have these improvements affected African public opinion? As a group, Africans express pro-democratic sentiment at comparable levels to other regions (Bratton and Mattes 2001b). Bratton (2004) reports a significant increase in pro-democratic sentiment, both satisfaction and support for democracy, immediately after the alternation of power in an election. As a manifestation of successful and extensive democratic reform, this may point to a tendency for massive reform movements to increase support for democracy, while at the same time lowering the importance of performance in the development of pro-democratic attitudes. Assuming people desire

reforms, if people see such progress being made, their diffuse support may become sturdier against short-term changes in performance.

Early studies of RPT attempted with varying success to account for the effects of economic crises and institutional reform on public opinion. Most were case studies of only a few countries. For example, after Costa Rica experienced an economic crisis in 1973, there was no noticeable change on the coefficients for general government performance (Finkel, Muller, and Seligson 1989: 350). The political unification of Germany introduced a radical institutional change to East Germany and results from two studies seem to confirm RPT (Minkenberg 1993; Cusack 1999). These studies are only marginally helpful in understanding the effects of shocks on support for democracy because they did not systematically investigate this effect nor were their approaches comparative.

This consideration has been absent from more recent tests of performance. Even as models have become more sophisticated and comprehensive, they have neglected possible effects of crisis on individuals. A positive relationship between economic crisis and support for democracy in Latin America has been detected using data from the Latinobarometer (Graham and Sukhtankar 2004: 370). This was observed across all countries in the region that had recently experienced economic crisis. Surprising? Yes, and it demonstrates how important it is for studies investigating the factors behind support for democracy to control for crisis effects. Interestingly, coefficients for demographic factors, such as education and employment, changed post-crisis (2004: 371). This suggests controlling for crisis may alter the impact of other variables. Their

study points to a need for tests of RPT to look at the effects of crisis on the relationship between support for democracy and its theorized predictors.

Studies looking at determinants of system support vary substantially. In their findings, performance either matters or it does not. When it does matter, results are conflicted over whether economic performance matters or if it is only political performance that determines support. The indices used to capture performance vary, as does the operationalization of democratic support. These methodological differences do not seem related to differences in findings, which makes it all the more difficult in drawing some general conclusions about the relationship between government performance and democratic support.

Is there empirical evidence that general government performance matters to levels of democratic support? Considering that support for democracy is believed by many to initiate democratization and foster democratic consolidation and it has been demonstrated that people believe in democracy for its individual and social utility (Gastil 1992: 444 Cusack 1999:654), it is important to develop an understanding of how vulnerable this support is to changes in state output. Needless to say, the literature is divided between studies finding evidence of a connection between performance and support and other studies finding no connection. The literature is further divided into those finding that both political and economic performance matters and studies finding only political performance effects democratic support. In studies where both political and economic performance is found to affect system legitimacy, political performance has a consistently stronger effect than economic performance.

Some would argue that democratic support is not affected by government performance. Instead, they claim that beliefs in democracy are more durable than confidence in the present government and that state output only significantly affects public confidence in institutions or current government leaders (Weil 1989). They claim that political culture or a “reservoir of legitimacy” buttress public support for democracy against economic or political crises (Weil 1989:690). Weil’s data showed that political responsiveness, unemployment, inflation, economic growth, and public opinion about the economy had minimal effects on support for democracy and that at times poor performance can still lead to growing support. Although they find evidence that legitimacy is dependent on government performance, Clark, Dutt, and Kornberg (1993) assert that established democracies are protected from rapid changes in mass support for democracy due to the development of a political culture that accepts democratic values as a norm while rising expectations on state capacity serve to raise demands. These competing forces constrain public opinion while at the same time explain minor variance over time. Any observed relationship between output and democratic satisfaction would thus be small. The results in Africa, at least according to the study by Mattes and Bratton (2007), show various indicators of institutional trust, political rights protection, economic conditions, and support for structural adjustment policy had no statistically significant effect on support for democracy, yet they do find that the perceived supply of democracy is affected by both types of performance. From this list of literature, one might be tempted to reject Regime Performance Theory but as I show below a large number of scholars have concluded that RPT does capture the causal mechanism behind regime support.

Many other studies have found empirical evidence showing that there is a relationship between state performance and democratic support. Using a measure of general government satisfaction, Finkel, Muller, and Seligson (1989) found results indicating positive performance assessments raised support for democracy. However, I am also interested in whether democratic support depends on economic or political performance. General measures of government performance do not tell us much about the difference between political and economic performance so most studies have relied on indices separately tapping levels of satisfaction with political and economic performance.

Tests of RPT in the 1980's and 1990's have found a consistent link between both forms of government performance and system support. In their separate studies of German unification Minkenberg (1993) and Cusack (1999) concluded that increasing unemployment, economic inequality, and government policies had a substantial impact on East German support for democracy.<sup>1</sup> According to a study of Western European democracies, a growing unemployment problem and rising inflation negatively impacted satisfaction with democracy, while governing party support, not exactly performance, had an even larger coefficient in the opposite direction (Clarke, Dutt, and Kornberg 1993). The effect of economic dissatisfaction on democratic attitudes was supported in another

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<sup>1</sup> In his study, Minkenberg (1993) demonstrates how perceptions of continuing economic stagnation in East Germany delayed the development of a pro-democratic political culture. East Germans by and large considered themselves a subordinate class within Germany. Unfortunately, this study only used descriptive statistics of individual economic assessments instead of showing correlations between these measures and measures of support for democracy. Minkenberg also used survey data that referred only to economic conditions instead of a measure of perceived government performance on the matter. This makes his conclusion less than convincing. Data used by Cusack suggest that "economic conditions and government policies strongly influence satisfaction with government performance and the latter...has a strong impact on satisfaction with the Federal Republic's political regime" (1993:668).



study of Western Europe published the same year (Lockerbie 1993).<sup>2</sup> Others confirmed RPT using economic indicators-national and household economic conditions in the past and expectations for the future- and political indicators-evaluations of the supply of democracy, their perceived influence on government, government responsiveness (Evans and Whitefield 1995, Whitefield and Evans 1999). These authors observed a stronger effect on support for democracy coming from political performance than economic performance. Overall, most early evidence supported the claim that “public support for incumbent governments, as well as for polity and society more generally, are driven by reactions to the performance of national economies and judgments concerning governments’ effectiveness in managing them” (Clarke, Dutt, and Kornberg 1993:999).

More recently, a study of Finland, Sweden, New Zealand, and Japan noticed a recovery in support for democracy, confidence in institutions, and satisfaction with democracy once these countries experienced political and economic improvements (Newton 2006). Unfortunately, the conclusions reached in this study are based on a combination of individual and national level descriptive statistics and anecdotal evidence, not multivariate analysis so it is difficult to have confidence in these findings.

On the other hand, a majority of recent studies have found no evidence of economic performance influence, only political performance. Not all studies have been comparative. Some have restricted their analysis to single countries. Contradicting similar studies preceding it, Weil’s (2000) study of post-unification Germany found that an index of personal and national economic evaluations and worries about unemployment

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<sup>2</sup> In that study, which looked at four countries separately, found significant relationships between all four economic performance indicators in most countries but found party support only mattered in Germany.

had no impact on mass democratic values, whereas the impact of political performance (an index of trust in government and that government is capable of solving problems) was statistically significant and substantively stronger than other variables. A broader comparative study of East Asia obtained similar results, although only institutional trust and perceived corruption had an effect on support (Shin 2007). Perception of economic performance was insignificant. Unlike their later study on Africa, Bratton and Mattes (2001a) found mixed results regarding performance. Economic performance measures were mostly insignificant while approval of government performance and delivery of political goods raised respondent's level of democratic support. In their book, Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi (2005) conducted a more extensive test and found slightly different results. Economic performance measures were all insignificant but their measures of political performance- institutional trust and perception of corruption- were both strongly related to their measure of support-an index containing support for democracy and rejection of three types of authoritarian systems.

Analysis of RPT has not consistently found evidence to accept or reject it. The answer to the question of whether government performance influences individual support for democratic systems seems to be yes. As for the question about economic or political performance, evidence is mixed with recent analysis pointing to a rejection of the economic performance hypothesis. Confusion over the role of economic performance is found even when analysis is limited to Africa.

To sum this section up, lingering questions remain about the ability of state output to affect support for democracy. The scholarly community is still lacking agreement over the extent to which diffuse support is influenced by state output. Some doubt the

connection between performance outputs and attitudinal inputs. Others argue that diffuse support responsiveness is constrained by the development of pro-democratic norms. Of the scholars who find that state performance has an effect, there is no consensus over which type of performance matters more, with some claiming that political and economic performance has a significant affect and some finding evidence that it is only political performance that impacts support for democracy. Until there are conclusive results able to resolve these differences, our understanding of the forces behind support for democracy will be inadequate. What is needed now and what this study attempts to do is a comprehensive look at the types of performance found to affect support for democracy in past studies and if their relationship with support for democracy changes at all when I control for the effects of economic and political crisis.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### *THEORY*

The idea that the survival of a political system depends on system support is attributed to David Easton (1965a, 1965b), who theorized that political systems are maintained and sustained by different forms of inputs, which are determined by the systems output. In other words, system inputs are popular reactions to system outputs, which work to raise or lower system support (Easton 1965b: 111). Consequently, higher diffuse support is interpreted as “endowing the system with political legitimacy” (Bratton and Mattes 2001a: 447). A number of different approaches to explaining observed levels of system support have emerged in subsequent years. This section will explore one of the most common theories- Regime Performance Theory.

The rational choice approach is the most relevant way to interpret Easton’s model political system support. Easton argued that political systems depend on specific support generated by benefits or losses experienced by society (1965a: 268).<sup>3</sup> Some have

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<sup>3</sup> Easton describes two types of support. Specific support is likely to change and is “associated with the satisfaction obtained from specific classes of output” (Easton 1965: 268). At the same time, he also proposed that these short-term evaluations are insufficient to explain system support. If they were sufficient, then sudden changes in government performance would lead to immediate crises of legitimacy and political systems would not survive longer than a few years. For performance to matter without constantly undermining the legitimacy of the political system, individuals must filter or process what they observe against a more stable collection of beliefs. Diffuse support is more resistant to change and the product of structural factors such as ideology. It is “support offered because of affective ties to an object in and of itself” (Easton 1965: 268). This distinction, while interesting, is not analytically useful for this study because both forms are dependent on outputs (Easton 1965: 466). If authorities could rely on diffuse support indefinitely, then they would have little reason, besides reelection, to be responsive to the demands of society. This distinction is interesting theoretically but analytically it poses a problem. If both types of support are vulnerable to government outputs, then measuring them separately but accurately

interpreted Easton's model as specifying separate forms of support- volatile short-term satisfaction and stable long-term support (Newton 2006; Bratton and Mattes 2001a; Mattes and Bratton 2007; Weil 1989), the clearest example being Bratton and Mattes' (2001a) instrumental or intrinsic argument. Others have gone further, arguing that different types of performance affect diffuse support and system satisfaction differently (Mattes and Bratton 2007). Instead of following this framework, this study focuses solely on separate types of output that lead to an overall level of diffuse support. Before moving on to a discussion of this other source of support, I should explicate more fully the performance aspect of system support.

Regime Performance Theory (RPT) is an attempt to explain fluctuating levels of regime support found in democracies with popular perceptions of regime performance. Its primary argument is that support for democracy is a function of positive popular perception of government performance (Shin 2007). This explanation for mass democratic support is essentially rationalist. It assumes that individuals are supportive of a political system because it provides certain tangible and intangible goods (Mattes and Bratton 2007: 197, Bratton and Mattes 2001a, Evans and Whitefield 1995, Whitefield and Evans 1999). Support for democracy has been described as a multidimensional phenomenon composed of various functional elements (Gastil 1992). Individuals develop their attitudes towards democracy based on the personal, social, and value-expressive utility it offers (Gastil 1992). One of the claims implicit in this theory is that the public credits political systems and not just incumbent governments for political and economic circumstances. Prosperity and decline are to some extent seen by individuals

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becomes very difficult. Therefore, instead of treating support as two distinct outcomes of system output, I refer to support for democracy as diffuse support.

as the result of systemic design. A second, related claim is that individual support for democracy is dynamic and not static. If certain benefits are not received, support for the system “may be easily withdrawn, according to the temper of the times” (Bratton and Mattes 2001a: 448). Thirdly, individuals judge regimes on their provision of collective goods, not just their personal conditions. This assumption is supported by a number of studies showing a weak relationship between retrospective voting behavior and individual economic circumstances (Lewis-Beck 1986). Instead of responding to individual experience, most voters develop their assessments based on “sociotropic interests” (Kinder and Kiewiet 1981:156).

Although many accept that perceptions of political and economic performance should have some effect on popular attitudes towards democracy, there remain questions about the magnitude of performance effects and the sources of change. If performance does affect support for democracy, is it economic or political performance that matters? Theoretically, perception of political output has a clear link to popular support for the political system. If the government does not function according to expectations, then it is possible that citizens will attribute this failure to the system itself. The link between economic performance and democratic support is less clear- it requires individuals to connect the political system to the government’s record on the economy. Both the government’s economic and its political performance contributes to an individual’s overall satisfaction with the government (Cusack 1999:654), which then either helps to reinforce diffuse support or weakens it.

The main advantage that the rationalist approach has over other more structurally oriented approaches is parsimony (Whitefield and Evans 1999). Other political culture

theories suffer from conceptual stretching and ambiguities whereas the RPT approach “requires much less complexity with respect to the causal relationship between the subject and the political object” (Whitefield and Evans 1999: 133).

I am interested in understanding how exogenous and endogenous shocks affect support for democracy. According to Easton, systems experience disturbances, which, if strong enough, can threaten the viability of the system itself (1965b: 90). Disturbances can place stresses on the system, forcing output to drop to very low levels. One might interpret this as a warning from Easton that crises could play a very large role in determining the levels of social input/demands/expectations by adversely threatening the supply side of the political system. Exogenous and endogenous shocks, which I use to mean economic crisis and rapid democratic reform, are essentially disturbances that affect the system to the point where “some normal pattern of operation which has been displaced” (1965b: 92). For all we know about the effects of government performance on diffuse support, can we safely assume this relationship remains unchanged during periods of system instability? This paper theorizes that certain events, such as significant democratic reform or severe economic downturn, could potentially raise awareness of the failings or successes of the government. In other words, diffuse support becomes more responsive to government performance when individuals live in countries that experience substantial change.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, I expect economic crisis to lower average support for

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<sup>4</sup> A useful analogy is the death penalty. Let us assume that supporters and opponents do not often change their position. Imagine a situation where the authorities prosecute, sentence and execute an innocent man. In the minds of the public the blame for the failure to protect this individual may fall on the authorities, but we might also expect some the blame to be targeted at the system itself. While an individual’s position on the issue of the death penalty is normally stable, the serious consequences of such a failure reoccurring in the future may cause some supporters of the death penalty to reassess their reasons for favoring it.

democracy. In countries that undergo significant institutional reform, I expect support for democracy to be stronger. I also expect experience with economic crisis to heighten the importance of government performance in the development of support for democracy. Rapid democratic reform should have the opposite effect, decreasing one's reliance on government performance to shape one's attitudes towards democracy.

And if it turns out that perceived political and economic performance affects support for democracy, then what would be the wider implications? Easton suggested a model of political input and output that positioned regime assessments and diffuse system support as occurring simultaneously (Easton 1965b: 112). What he failed to clarify was whom the public would lay blame for unfulfilled demands or expectations, or as Easton puts it "output failure" (Easton 1965b: 120). Regime Performance Theory modifies Easton's original model slightly, theorizing that regime assessments, or specific support, contributes to higher or lower levels of system support, which then feeds back into the system. Past performance might threaten the survival of an incumbent in an election but what is the connection, if one exists, between popular attitudes and the survival of a political system? Without a suitable answer to these questions one could easily claim that all studies of political attitudes are a waste of time. The justification lies in the premise that "a democratic political system requires the 'software' that is congruent with the various hardware components" (Shin 2007:260). Institutions contain characteristics that increase their chances for stability but they alone cannot function unless combined with complementary mass support. More importantly, some have argued that the existence of pro-democratic attitudes is crucial to democratic consolidation, along with the absence of significant anti-democratic movements and the institutionalization of democratic



practices (Linz and Stepan 1996: 16). This means democratic political systems survive as long as individuals lend their support. If a state is composed of nothing but individuals whole-heartedly opposed to the system, then even the fact that a democracy requires less coercive capacity than an authoritarian one would not help (Tilly 2007).

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### *HYPOTHESES*

The primary question here is whether shocks to the system raise individual awareness or the salience of government performance in relation to their support for democracy. Can significant change mitigate or amplify the importance of government performance on system support? The problem with not accounting for crisis experience is that it forces us to assume that system output affects individual's attitudes on a constant level. If this were true then I would expect people living in flood prone areas to be as concerned about flood insurance as people living in deserts or that a victim of theft would only be as concerned with home security as someone without such experience. If people living in countries have recently experienced some sort of radical change due to structural influences or events, then it is reasonable to expect their support for the political system to be more sensitive to the performance of the government. It is also worth confirming whether Graham and Sukhtankar's (2004) findings that economic crisis affects support for democracy applies to sub-Saharan Africa and whether the influence decreases over time. This study will go on to investigate whether significant institutional change leads to higher support for democracy. My hypotheses will also reflect my desire to clear up some lingering questions about exactly what kind of government performance matters to support for democracy.

H1: Political crisis is positively associated with support for democracy. Respondents in countries that have recently experienced political reform should be more likely to have pro-democratic attitudes than those individuals in countries that have not engaged in recent reform.

H2: Economic crisis is negatively associated with support for democracy.

H3: As political performance improves, support for democracy increases.

H4: Economic performance is not associated with support for democracy.

H5: The average level of diffuse support in countries that experienced economic crisis will be higher than the regional average three years after the crisis.

H6: The effect of regime performance with diffuse support for democracy in countries that have experienced a recent economic or political shock will be significantly different from the relationship in countries that have not experienced economic crisis or democratic reform.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### *DATA AND METHOD*

The datasets used in this study were the second and third waves of the Afrobarometer. The second survey, conducted from 2002 to 2004, contains answers from 24,228 respondents on questions regarding society, politics, and the economy.<sup>5</sup> It covers sixteen sub-Saharan countries- Botswana, Cape Verde, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.<sup>67</sup> The third Afrobarometer was carried out between 2005 and 2006. It surveyed 25,086 people in the sixteen previous countries as well as Benin and Madagascar, which were excluded from this study.

To test my hypotheses I construct 8 models. The first four models use data from the second Afrobarometer and the remaining four models use the third Afrobarometer. The first and fifth models are a simple replication of past RPT analysis. They include the

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<sup>5</sup> The sample in the second Afrobarometer shrank to 6,507 observations and 12,742 in the third survey because of “I don’t know” responses. Mattes and Bratton (2007) simulated responses to avoid this large loss in data but this was not done in this study. I discuss the possible consequences in more detail in the conclusion.

<sup>6</sup> Because of missing data for the dependent variable, Zimbabwe was excluded.

<sup>7</sup> It could be argued that I should reject quasi-democracies in order to avoid any sort of “electoral fallacy” that comes with minimalist definitions of democracy (Karl in Rose 2000:95). Other studies using the Afrobarometer have used all countries included in the survey but point out that data from some “unreformed autocracies” was unavailable (Mattes and Bratton 2007:193). Because this study is concerned with individual perception of democratic government performance and hopefully contributes to a broader discussion about democratic consolidation, I believe systems where there are at least some procedural democratic elements should be included (Lindberg 2006).

main economic performance variables, the political performance variables, and three control variables. The second and sixth models introduce an economic crisis dummy variable. The third and seventh models include an institutional reform dummy variable and omit the economic crisis variable. The fourth and eighth models contain all variables. I use ordinary least squares regression, reporting beta coefficients to allow comparability and apply robust standard errors to account for heteroskedasticity.<sup>8</sup>

### **Dependent Variable**

Instead of using the Afrobarometer's *support for democracy* variable, I include measures of respondent's rejection of various forms of autocracy.<sup>9</sup> It might seem better to use *support for democracy* or *satisfaction with democracy* but by asking respondents whether they would be opposed to one-party rule, military rule, or one-man rule makes sure that any ambiguity surrounding the term "democracy" is factored out of the

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<sup>8</sup> All models contain probability weights. I also conducted diagnostics tests. I tested for multicollinearity between explanatory variables and found mean variance inflation factors no higher than 1.27. Model specification tests failed to reject the null for all models. The only diagnostics check that causes some concern is the Shapiro-Wilk test for normal residual distribution. The tests indicated that the residuals of all of the models were not normally distributed, which lowers confidence that some coefficients are statistically significant.

<sup>9</sup> According to Canache, Mondak, and Seligson (2001) there is some confusion amongst scholars over the interpretation of the *satisfaction with democracy* measure (see also Cusack 1999). Using Lockerbie (1993) as a prototypical example, his study relies on the satisfaction with democracy measure. As a dependent variable the satisfaction measure might be too ambiguous to serve as a reliable measure of regime support. Due to its nebulous meaning, survey respondents may have interpreted the concept in a number of different ways. Studies have inconsistently interpreted it as measuring government performance (Bratton and Mattes 2001a), support for the incumbent government (Clark, Dutt, and Kornberg 1993), the political regime (Newton 2006), or some combination of these three (Shin 2007). The ability of individuals to differentiate between system and incumbent government is likely to be lower in newly democratized countries, (Cusack 1999:646). From this we can conclude that the *satisfaction with democracy* measure is incapable of accurately measuring support for democracy. To some this ambiguity may be acceptable while others reject it outright as unclear and analytically invalid (Canache, Mondak, and Seligson 2001). In any case, this debate has not been settled.

dependent variable (Mattes and Bratton 2007:193).<sup>10</sup> This also increases the scale of the dependent variable from 3 to 13. Omitting the support for democracy variable from the index not only improves the reliability of the index (Cronbach's alpha= .584 to .670), but again, considering the nebulous meaning of democracy, it seems that very little is lost by its removal.

## **Independent Variables**

Because past studies have generally relied on non-attributive measures I use a measure of *current household economic condition* and *current national economic condition*. These variables do not sufficiently measure government performance on the economy.<sup>11</sup> In light of this problem I should try to find measures that directly link the government's handling of the economy. In order to measure the perception of the government's role in the economy, I use a government *handling managing the economy* measure. I also use Bratton and Mattes (2001) *economic goods delivery index*, which has a Cronbach's alpha of .681. This measure is meant to capture respondent's perception of changes in the economy over the past few years and can be interpreted as the respondent's perception of the changes in the economy as a result of the government's policies.

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<sup>10</sup> See Appendix for full questions.

<sup>11</sup> Lockerbie (1993) analyzes the effect that disapproval of the government's handling of the economy has on popular satisfaction with democracy in their country. He suggests "in order to better measure dissatisfaction with the economic outputs of government, we should employ economic questions that employ some sense of attribution to the government" (Lockerbie 1993:283).

To measure assessments of political performance I create two indexes- *guarantee of political rights* and *institutional trust* (Cronbach's .751 and .761, respectively). The first index-*guarantee of political rights*- contains questions regarding the improvements in freedom of speech, freedom of association, rule of law, individual influence on government, and political equality (for similar approaches see Evans and Whitefield 1995; Bratton and Mattes 2001a; Mattes and Bratton 2007). The *institutional trust* variable captures individual experience with democratic institutions. It is a combination of party and legislative trustworthiness, perception of corruption, and government responsiveness (Shin 2007, Weil 1989, Mattes and Bratton 2007, Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi 2005; Cusack 1999).

### **Democratic Reform and Economic Crisis**

I create a dummy variable for significant democratic reform. By creating this variable I am able to, as has been pointed out in another study, analyze public opinion in countries "in which they may or may not have been in crisis" (Graham and Sukhtankar 2004: 354). I developed my sample of institutional reform countries by looking for positive Polity IV score changes of two points or more, one year prior to the survey (Carey 2007: 53). This method is intended to capture rapid institutional reform within a country. I identify three countries undergoing significant change in this period- Ghana, Lesotho, and Zambia.

I control for economic crisis with a dummy variable. Borrowing from the study by Graham and Sukhtankar, economic crisis used here refers to countries that

experienced negative growth in GDP per capita for two years before the survey (Graham and Sukhtankar 2004: 354). I determine my sample using data from the UN statistics division. It shows that in 2000 Mali experienced negative growth and in 2001 Malawi's GDP shrank by five percent.

Along with these main independent variables, I include controls for respondent age, gender, and level of education (Bratton and Mattes 2001; Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi 2005; Mattes and Bratton 2007).



## **CHAPTER SIX**

### *RESULTS*

Overall, Africans are heavily in favor of a democratic political system. Sixty-four percent of those surveyed are what could be considered committed democrats. If I look exclusively at the countries that recently experienced economic crisis, there is a drop of almost five percent. The difference is even starker when I look at the percentage of committed democrats in countries that had recently undergone dramatic institutional reform (almost nine percent). Considering that there are many possible determinants of support for democracy, it is probably best not to draw conclusions from this statistic.

<Insert Table 1 here>

<Insert Table 2 here>

I will first look at the relationship between government performance and support for democracy when I control for economic crisis and institutional reform. The first statistic that stands out is the increase in variance explained once economic crisis and democratic reform are controlled. The difference between models one and four is not remarkable, but the change from an R-squared of .037 for model five to .069 in model eight demonstrates the added explanatory power of models that incorporate external and internal shocks. Institutional reform is statistically significant and is positively correlated with support for democracy, indicating slightly higher average support for democracy in countries that had recently undergone institutional reform. It seems that individuals

perceive significant institutional reform positively and one of their reactions to this is an increase in support for the system. Economic crisis has a negative sign, indicating a very slight influence on support for democracy. The economic crisis dummy is only statistically significant in models six and eight. Apparently, experiencing severe economic downturn has a lagged effect on support for democracy. This result does not confirm Graham and Sukhtankar's (2004) earlier findings. In their study, economic crisis had a significant negative impact on preference for democracy immediately after financial crisis. They also observed an increase in democratic support in economic crisis countries over time (2004: 370). My results show that diffuse support is still lower than the regional average four years after the crisis. Another notable finding is the higher average diffuse support found in institutional reform countries. It suggests the process of democratization reinforces faith in democracy. The evidence allows me to accept the first and second hypotheses but the fifth hypothesis, that over time the effect of crisis shrinks and even reverses does not appear to be true in Africa.

As the results in the standard model in table 1 show, perception of the *guarantee of political rights* and assessments of the *national economic condition* are statistically significant predictors of support for democracy. Comporting with some past studies, *guarantee of political rights* has a greater impact on support for democracy than assessments of the national economy. *Guarantee of political rights* is positively associated with support for democracy while, surprisingly, positive *national economic conditions* reduce commitment to democracy. This is contrary to the findings of most early studies of RPT, which found a positive but weak relationship between economic performance and support for democracy. These associations remain unchanged between

the standard model and the crisis model. Bivariate analysis produces a negative coefficient, suggesting the result in the full model is robust. RPT expects support to increase as economic performance increases so it is very difficult to interpret this coefficient.

From the results in table 1, I can also conclude that other types of commonly used performance measures, such as the *delivery of economic goods* and *institutional trust* have no relationship with support for democracy and this is independent of the presence of political reform and economic crisis. I must qualify my acceptance of hypotheses 3 by pointing out that support for democracy seems to depend on the way governments guarantee civil liberties, political rights, and political equality. Because my indicator of *institutional trust* is unrelated to support for democracy, it may be that the appearance of corruption and lower institutional trust are limited to individual's feelings about the incumbent government's failings and not the political system.

Another surprising finding is that the attributive measures of *government management on the economy* and the *delivery of economic goods index* are statistically insignificant. Earlier, I discussed Lockerbie's argument about the merits of using such a variable (Lockerbie 1993:283), but the results indicate it might not be a predictor of democratic support. Because this clear reference to government responsibility over the economy is unrelated to support for democracy, perhaps people are less concerned about performance as they are with tangible results. This does suggest that there is no evidence that government performance on the economy is related to support for democracy. The notion that non-attributive measures have poor construct validity is difficult to ignore. At best, questions asking about the economy in general are poor proxies for attributive

measures. When I link directly the government to the economy, the results are weak and insignificant. Therefore, I conclude that government performance on the economy has no impact on support for democracy.

<Insert Table 3 Here>

Next, I test hypotheses six. One of the main goals of this study is to examine whether exogenous and endogenous shocks have an influence on the relationship between government performance and support for democracy. Hypothesis 6 posits that experiencing an economic crisis or institutional reform may affect the relationship between economic performance and support for democracy. After running F-tests on each full model including interaction terms, I have collected the relevant findings in Table 3. The results in table 3 seem to give us cause to accept hypotheses six. Immediately after institutional reform, the relationship between government economic performance interaction term and support for democracy is significant, whereas alone in table 1 it is statistically insignificant. Four years after three countries underwent rapid democratization, institutional trust is strongly related to diffuse support but the interaction term with democratic reform shows that institutional trust is actually unrelated. The statistics presented in table 3 limit me to these few comments, what is unclear is the effect the interaction has on the relationship between independent variables and the dependent variable. My general models may overlook contextual differences within countries, but the significant difference between crisis and reform countries and the rest of the sample suggests the hypothesis will be supported upon closer analysis.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### *CONCLUSION*

I began this paper with a discussion about democratic consolidation and one of the necessary factors behind it-popular system support. A simple, yet reliable predictor of levels of diffuse support is government performance. Regime Performance Theory argues that individual rational interest governs commitment to a particular political system. It does not address the myriad other possible explanations for diffuse support, including context heavy structural explanations. This is not a weakness in the theory but instead it is one of its main strengths. A parsimonious explanation is direct and efficient, requiring fewer assumptions that fly in the face of equally plausible counterfactual arguments and evidence. This parsimony has not shielded literature looking at RPT from finding conflicting results.

This study makes a few important contributions to the study of political culture. My results confirm past findings about the importance the perception that authorities protect political rights and civil liberties. It could also be argued that my results resemble findings in Africa and other regions regarding the relative immunity of support for democracy to the government's performance on the economy, despite the statistically significant relationship between diffuse support and assessments of the economy. As I have already mentioned above, assessments of the economy have no clear connection to the government for either the respondent or for researchers. Whether the government appears to improve economic conditions or not appears to have no effect on an

individual's commitment to democracy. The negative relationship observed between economic crisis and support for democracy in Africa is similar to what has been found in Latin America. I find a regional difference in that this pessimism seems to persist and grow over time. This study went a step further in investigating the influence of rapid democratization on diffuse support. The strong positive relationship between institutional reform and attitudes supportive of democracy points to a need for future studies of political culture to take this phenomenon into account. I also find evidence that experiencing crisis or reform has an interactive effect on the RPT dynamic. Hopefully future studies will more thoroughly examine this relationship.

There are a few shortcomings worth exploring before I conclude this paper. I argued that it is important for research seeking to test RPT to consider the possible distorting effects of massive institutional change and severe economic downturns on the effects government performance have on diffuse support. Although there appears to be a link between shocks and the importance of government performance to diffuse support, it is still too early to completely accept the last two hypotheses tested in this study. The sample used in this study is a fraction of the total number of respondents in the Afrobarometer. This was due to missing observations in almost every explanatory variable. There is a possibility that the exclusion of over seventy percent of the available sample introduced some bias into my results. Another problem is the use of both surveys in this study. The use of cross-sectional OLS on two separate surveys does not replicate the mechanics behind time series cross-sectional analysis so my conclusions about changes in public opinion over time are not fully reliable (Graham and Sukhtankar 2004).

It is also impossible for this analysis to show the long term trends in public opinion, as the data only allows me to make conclusions about the period in between both surveys.

Future studies should develop better research designs for testing the connection between external and domestic shocks and diffuse support. The first step would be to investigate the nature of the crises in Mali and Malawi to see if their causes were exogenous or the result of a structural adjustment program. Another route to take would be to better define rapid democratic reform and to find more nuanced ways to operationalize it. Future studies looking at shocks should also try to incorporate other political culture theories into their models. If performance satisfies some individual expectations for democracy, it is important to keep in mind that perceptions of state or regime performance are but one of many possible sources of regime support. Arriving at a single explanation for individual beliefs, attitudes, and behavior that captures all of the variation one witnesses is near impossible. Not surprisingly, evidence that institutional learning, socialization, modernization, and the strength of civil society have all been put forward as competing explanations for democratic support (Shin 2007; Bratton, Mattes, and Gylmah-Boadi 2005). These theories are no less interested in how citizens become democrats but they tend to focus on exogenous influences on the individual. Future studies should incorporate these rival explanations of support for democracy along with experience with economic crisis and democratic reform.

## APPENDIX

Table 1: Results from OLS regression on 2<sup>nd</sup> Wave of Afrobarometer data  
Standardized coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses  
\*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

Independent Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Economic Goods Delivery Index	-.005 (.0177)	-.006 (.0177)	.001 (.0176)	.001 (.0177)
National Economic Condition	-.076*** (.0129)	-.079*** (.0129)	-.068*** (.0128)	-.069*** (.0128)
Personal Economic Condition	-.038* (.0128)	-.038* (.0128)	-.03 (.0128)	-.03 (.0128)
Government Management of Economy	-.015 (.0174)	.011 (.0176)	.008 (.0174)	.007 (.0176)
Guarantee of Political Rights	.088*** (.0180)	.092*** (.0183)	.081*** (.0183)	.083*** (.0186)
Institutional Trust	-.025 (.0366)	-.02 (.0373)	-.019 (.0365)	-.018 (.0372)
Democratic Reform			.082*** (.0300)	.08*** (.0307)
Economic Crisis		-.027 (.0437)		-.011 (.0446)
Controls				
Gender	.064*** (.0243)	.065*** (.0242)	.066*** (.0241)	.067*** (.0241)
Education	.172*** (.0069)	.166*** (.007)	.17*** (.007)	.167*** (.007)
Age	.047*** (.0141)	.046*** (.0142)	.039** (.0142)	.039** (.0142)
Constant	3.45*** (.0905)	3.45*** (.0905)	3.41*** (.0902)	3.41*** (.0902)
Observations	6507	6507	6507	6507
R-squared	.0481	.0487	.0544	.0545



Table 2: Results from OLS regression on 3<sup>rd</sup> Wave of Afrobarometer data  
Standardized coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses  
\*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

Independent Variables	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Economic Goods Delivery Index	-.02 (.0120)	-.03** (.0119)	-.023* (.0118)	.029** (.0118)
National Economic Condition	-.06*** (.009)	-.076*** (.009)	-.038** (.009)	-.048*** (.009)
Personal Economic Condition	-.04*** (.009)	-.042*** (.009)	-.023* (.009)	-.026* (.009)
Guarantee of Political Rights	.021* (.0124)	.036*** (.0123)	.017 (.0122)	.026* (.0121)
Institutional Trust	-.025* (.0212)	-.029** (.0212)	-.038*** (.021)	-.04*** (.021)
Democratic Reform			.177*** (.0202)	.165*** (.0203)
Economic Crisis		-.09*** (.0332)		-.052*** (.0336)
Controls				
Gender	.043*** (.0181)	.047*** (.0180)	.05*** (.0178)	.051*** (.0178)
Education	.18*** (.005)	.155*** (.004)	.161*** (.005)	.149*** (.005)
Age	.05*** (.01)	.047*** (.01)	.037*** (.01)	.035*** (.01)
Constant	3.57*** (.0717)	3.63*** (.071)	3.43*** (.0707)	3.47*** (.0902)
Observations	12,742	12,742	12,742	12,742
R-squared	.0373	.0447	.0670	.0691

Table 3: F-Test of Interaction Terms

F-Test Statistic with significance performed separately on both full models.

\*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

Interaction Term	2002-2004 (Afrobarometer 2)	2005-2006 (Afrobarometer 3)
Democratic Reform*Guarantee of Political Rights	5.87***	1.64*
Democratic Reform*Institutional Trust	.99	1.62
Economic Crisis*Economic Goods Delivery	1.17	10.06***
Economic Crisis*National Economic Condition	.093	7.34***
Economic Crisis*Personal Economic Condition	2.02	6.95***

Survey Questions from Afrobarometer Wave 2  
(Beard 2006)

Support for Democracy/ Rejection of Authoritarianism (13 scale)

Question: There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives? Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office.

Question: There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives? The army comes in to govern the country.

Question: There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives? Elections and Parliament are abolished so that the president can decide everything.

Economic Goods Delivery index (21 scale)

Question: We are now going to compare our present economic system with the economic system a few years ago. Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they used to be, or about the same: The availability of goods?

Question: We are now going to compare our present economic system with the economic system a few years ago. Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they used to be, or about the same: People's standard of living?

Question: We are now going to compare our present economic system with the economic system a few years ago. Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they used to be, or about the same: The availability of job opportunities?

Question: We are now going to compare our present economic system with the economic system a few years ago. Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they used to be, or about the same: The gap between the rich and the poor?

Question: We are now going to compare our present economic system with the economic system a few years ago. Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they used to be, or about the same: The security of property from seizure by the government? [Interviewer prompted if necessary:] You know, the way the government sometimes takes land to give it to someone else.

National Economic Condition (5 scale)

Question: Let's begin by talking about economic conditions. In general, how would you describe: The present economic conditions of this country?

Personal Economic Condition (5 scale)

Question: In general, how would you describe: Your own present living conditions?

Government Management of the Economy (4 scale)

Question: Now let's speak about the present government of this country. How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Managing the economy?

Guarantee of Political Rights index (21 scale)

Question: We are going to compare the current administration under [president] with the previous administration under [president]. Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they used to be, or about the same: Freedom to say what you think?

Question: We are going to compare the current administration under [president] with the previous administration under [president]. Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they used to be, or about the same: Freedom to join any political organization you want?

Question: We are going to compare the current administration under [president] with the previous administration under [president]. Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they used to be, or about the same: Freedom from being arrested when you are innocent?

Question: We are going to compare the current administration under [president] with the previous administration under [president]. Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they used to be, or about the same: The ability of ordinary people to influence what government does?

Question: We are going to compare the current administration under [president] with the previous administration under [president]. Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they used to be, or about the same: Equal and fair treatment for all people by government?

Institutional Trust index (24 scale)

Question: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The President?

Question: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The Parliament?

Question: Do you approve or disapprove of the way the following people have performed their jobs over the past twelve months, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: President

Question: Do you approve or disapprove of the way the following people have performed their jobs over the past twelve months, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Your Member of Parliament?

Question: How much of the time do you think elected leaders, like parliamentarians or local councilors, try their best: To listen to what people like you have to say?

Question: How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The President and Officials in his Office?

Question: How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Elected leaders, such as parliamentarians or local councilors?

Question: How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Government officials?

Survey Questions from Afrobarometer Wave 3  
(Carter 2008)

Support for Democracy/ Rejection of Authoritarianism

Question: There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives? Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office.

Question: There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives? The army comes in to govern the country.

Question: There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives? Elections and Parliament are abolished so that the president can decide everything.

Economic Goods Delivery index

Question: We are now going to compare our present economic system with the economic system a few years ago. Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they used to be, or about the same: The availability of goods?

Question: We are now going to compare our present economic system with the economic system a few years ago. Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they used to be, or about the same: The availability of job opportunities?

Question: We are now going to compare our present economic system with the economic system a few years ago. Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they used to be, or about the same: The gap between the rich and the poor?

National Economic Condition

Question: Let's begin by talking about economic conditions. In general, how would you describe: The present economic conditions of this country?

Personal Economic Condition

Question: In general, how would you describe: Your own present living conditions?

Political Goods Delivery index

Question: We are going to compare the current administration under [president] with the previous administration under [president]. Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they used to be, or about the same: Freedom to say what you think?

Question: We are going to compare the current administration under [president] with the previous administration under [president]. Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they used to be, or about the same: Freedom to join any political organization you want?

Question: We are going to compare the current administration under [president] with the previous administration under [president]. Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they used to be, or about the same: Freedom from being arrested when you are innocent?

Question: We are going to compare the current administration under [president] with the previous administration under [president]. Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they used to be, or about the same: The ability of ordinary people to influence what government does?

Question: We are going to compare the current administration under [president] with the previous administration under [president]. Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they used to be, or about the same: Equal and fair treatment for all people by government?

Experience with Government index

Question: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The President?

Question: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The Parliament?

Question: How much of the time do you think elected leaders, like parliamentarians or local councilors, try their best: To listen to what people like you have to say?

Question: How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The President and Officials in his Office?

Question: How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Elected leaders, such as parliamentarians or local councilors?

Question: How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: National government officials?

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