



# AFROBAROMETER *Briefing Paper*

## POLITICAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN EAST AFRICAN COUNTRIES: WHO SHOULD MAKE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT AND COUNCILLORS DO THEIR JOBS?

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### Key messages:

- Citizens are generally becoming more aware that it is the voters' responsibility to make members of parliament and local government councillors do their job.
- There are, however, considerable differences between countries:
  - ◆ During the last eight years Kenyans have made a significant leap in awareness of the political right to hold MPs and councillors accountable.
  - ◆ By contrast, Tanzanians and Ugandans have lagged behind. In both countries, it is only a minority of citizens that see holding MPs accountable as the voters' job, and citizens show some signs of surrendering this right to other institutions.
  - ◆ Burundians are similar to Tanzanians and Ugandans in their position concerning who should hold MPs accountable, but the majority claim the right to hold local government councillors accountable.

By Rose Aiko

### INTRODUCTION

One of the critical challenges facing African countries today is how to make governments work for the people – using resources at their disposal efficiently, delivering public goods and services to the people, and guaranteeing an equitable distribution of opportunities and national income among citizens. In many places, systems for checks

and balances have not lived up to expectations in making state institutions deliver such public goods. As a result, the once taken-for-granted citizen participation in government oversight is now recognized as almost indispensable.

In representative democracies citizens elect politicians at predefined intervals, who then take on the role of overseeing the executive. Members of parliament are one such group, alongside local government councillors and the president. Since these politicians obtain their mandate from

voters through elections, they should therefore be answerable primarily to the voters. In fact, with weaknesses in the functioning of horizontal checks and balances, the primacy of voters in holding their elected leaders to account cannot be overstated.

In an ideal world where democratic elections occur regularly, voters should be able to remove poorly performing politicians from office by rejecting them at the ballot box, and electing strongly performing or promising ones into office instead. Nevertheless, elections are rather infrequent, taking place every four to five years in most countries, and they do not always guarantee optimal results in terms of rejecting bad performers and electing good ones. Likewise, a lot can go wrong during the long period between elections. These challenges provoke several questions: who should take responsibility for monitoring politicians and making sure that they do their job once in office? Moreover, to what extent do citizens claim for themselves the right to hold politicians accountable?

In an inspiring paper examining citizens' attitudes concerning who should hold political representatives to account,<sup>1</sup> Bratton and Logan used Afrobarometer survey data collected in 2005 to show that the majority of citizens in most of the 18 African countries participating in the survey tended to assign this responsibility to other institutions rather than claim it for themselves. Only 34% on average claimed the right to hold MPs accountable.<sup>2</sup> A slightly higher proportion (40%) of respondents claimed the right to hold local government councillors to account.<sup>3</sup>

Citizens in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania – the East African countries participating in the survey at the time – did a little better, with an above-average proportion demonstrating awareness that it's the voters' responsibility to hold MPs (Figure 1) and councillors (Figure 3) to account. Uganda was the only case where a majority demonstrated awareness of this right, and then only to hold councillors accountable.

Based on their analysis, Bratton and Logan's key conclusion is that

*“...Citizens have yet to fully appreciate that democratization endows them with the right to monitor their leaders between elections. Rather than being predisposed to vigorously call their elected leaders to account on a regular basis, African publics are instead primed to defer to the authority of big men.”<sup>4</sup>*

Eight years down the line, this policy brief uses data from Afrobarometer Rounds 3, 4, and 5, collected between 2005 and 2012, to discern whether East Africans<sup>5</sup> have changed their opinions about the primacy of voters holding politicians to account.

The question this brief investigates is, can we detect any indication that citizens in East Africa are more appreciative of their democratic right to make sure that politicians do their job once in office? Burundi, a new entrant in the Afrobarometer survey in 2012, is included in the analysis for a comparative presentation of where citizens in these countries stand today with regard to the right of voters to hold their elected representatives accountable.

<sup>1</sup> Michael Bratton and Carolyn Logan (2006): Voters but not yet citizens.

<sup>2</sup> In Malawi, Madagascar, and Zimbabwe a majority of respondents in the 2005 survey assigned voters with the role of making MPs do their jobs. In Namibia, Mozambique, and Cape Verde less than 10% of the respondents assigned voters with this responsibility.

<sup>3</sup> A majority in six countries – Malawi, Madagascar, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Benin – supported the notion that the voters should be the ones to make elected councillors do their job.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Bratton and Carolyn Logan (2006): Voters but not yet citizens, page 11.

<sup>5</sup> Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, and Burundi. Burundi has been surveyed by the Afrobarometer only once, in the fifth round (2011–2013). As such, we cannot offer a time series analysis for it.

## AFROBAROMETER DATA

The Afrobarometer measures public attitudes towards democracy and its alternatives, and evaluates the quality of governance and economic performance. The survey also assesses the views of the electorate on critical political issues in the surveyed countries.

In East Africa the surveys have been carried out regularly in Tanzania and Uganda since the first round in 1999–2001, and in Kenya since the second round in 2002–2003. Burundi entered the Afrobarometer survey for the first time during its fifth round, 2011–2013, while Rwanda has not participated in the surveys thus far.

The surveys are based on a national probability sample proportionate to population size (PPPS) of the voting age population in each country. Depending on the diversity of populations and the size of countries, the sample sizes may be either 1,200 or 2,400 persons of voting age. Between 2005 and 2008 the samples in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda each comprised 1,200 adult respondents. During the fifth round the sample size in Tanzania was increased to 2,400, whereas in Kenya, Uganda, and Burundi the sample sizes were 1,200. These samples allow for inferences with a sampling margin of error of +/-2 per cent at a 95 percent confidence level.

## FINDINGS

### **Who should hold members of parliament to account?**

The Afrobarometer examines popular attitudes to the political accountability of members of parliament by asking its respondents to say who they think should be responsible for making sure that MPs do their job after they are elected. When this question was asked for the first time in 2005,

only a minority (34%) in the 18 African countries<sup>6</sup> covered by the survey at the time were aware that this was the voters' duty.<sup>7</sup> East Africans seemed to fare a little better than others, with an average of 43% assigning voters with the responsibility. However, even in these countries it remained a minority opinion.

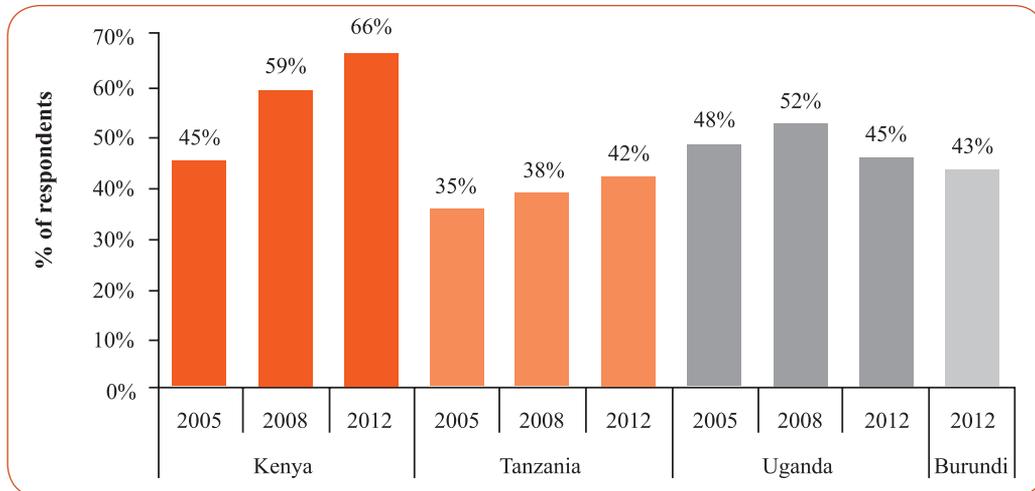
In terms of how citizens' attitudes in the East Africa region have evolved since 2005, the Afrobarometer data show that Kenyan's awareness of the political right to hold MPs to account is rapidly increasing: a majority (66%) in 2012 said it was the voters' job, representing an increase of almost 21 percentage points since 2005. In Tanzania citizens are also becoming more aware of the right to hold MPs accountable, albeit at a much slower pace compared to Kenya, so that it remains a minority position that voters should make MPs do their job. Ugandans, on the other hand, seem to vacillate on this question.

In Burundi, the situation is similar to Uganda and Tanzania in that only a minority say that voters should be the ones to hold MPs accountable (Figure 1). It is possible that the rapid change that has taken place in Kenya in terms of how citizens view their position *vis-à-vis* their politicians has been invigorated by the path that politics has taken in this country during the last eight years. Notwithstanding the immense challenges, including the 2007 post-election violence, Kenya stands out today as the first country in the East Africa region where multiparty elections have led to changes in the political party in power. Kenya was also the first country in the region to pass a new constitution in recent years, and other countries reviewing or contemplating a review of their constitutions are seeking lessons from Kenya.

<sup>6</sup> Benin, Botswana, Cape Verde, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Bratton and Carolyn Logan (2006): Voters but not yet citizens.

**Figure 1: Who should make MPs do their job? By country**



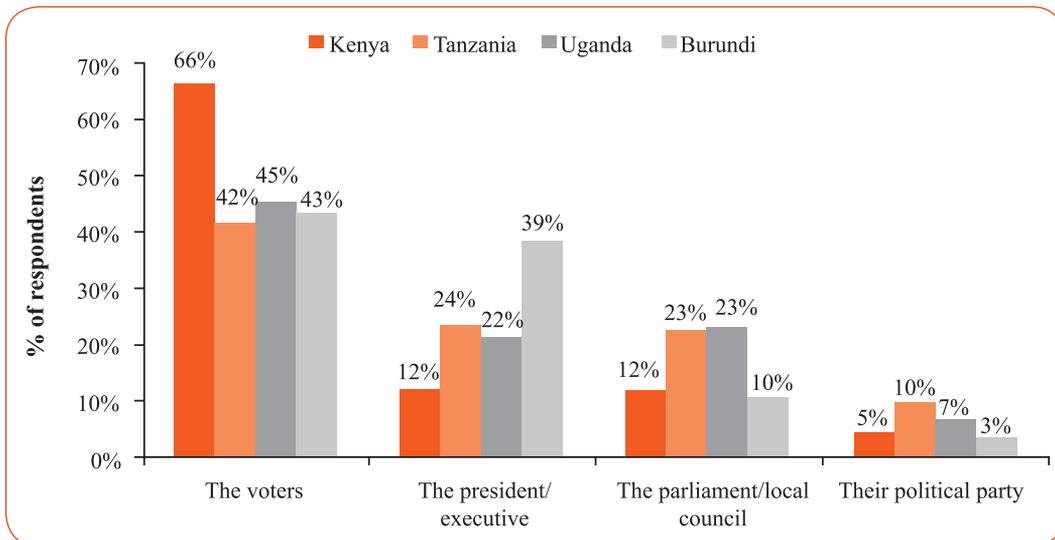
*Question: Who should be responsible for making sure that once elected, members of parliament do their jobs?*

A finer examination of the 2012 survey data shows that in Burundi, nearly as many citizens assign the president with the role of holding MPs accountable as claim it for themselves. In Tanzania and Uganda at least one in five believes the president should hold MPs accountable, while similar proportion says the parliament should.

**Who should hold local government councillors accountable?**

The Afrobarometer also asks respondents to say who they think should be responsible for making sure that elected local government councillors do their job once they are in office. Compared to members of parliament and except for Tanzania during 2012, the survey results suggest that a much

**Figure 2: Who should make MPs do their job? 2012**



*Question: Who should be responsible for making sure that once elected, members of parliament do their jobs?*

higher proportion of citizens have always believed that it is the voters' responsibility to make local government councillors do their job. During 2012, 57% of respondents in the East Africa region said that voters should hold councillors accountable. This is a slight increase compared to 52% for East Africa as a whole in 2005. However, it compares favourably with Africa in general today (34 countries for which Round 5 data was available as of May 2014<sup>8</sup>), where only 35% of survey respondents<sup>9</sup> believe it is the voters' responsibility to hold local government councillors to account.

Whereas a consistently higher proportion of Kenyans, since 2005, have said that it is the voters' right to hold councillors accountable, Ugandans are backing out, where from 2005 to 2012 there was a 13 percentage-point decline in the proportion of respondents who said that voters should hold councillors accountable. Similarly, in Tanzania from 2005 to 2012, there was a 6 percentage-point decrease in the proportion of citizens saying voters should be the ones to hold councillors accountable. In Burundi, by contrast, a majority recognize that the voters should hold councillors accountable.

**Figure 3: Who should make local government councillors do their job? 2005–2012**



**Question:** *Who should be responsible for making sure that, once elected, local government councillors do their jobs?*

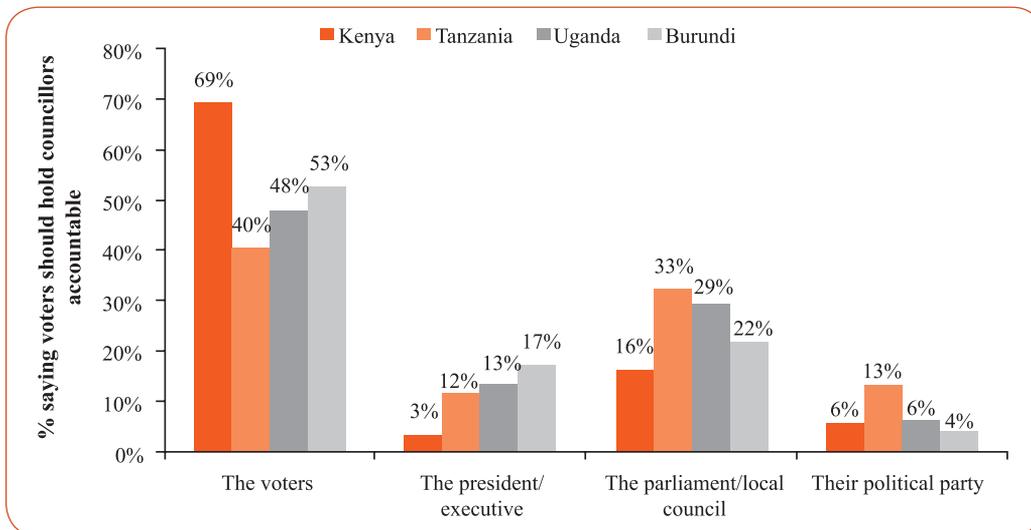
There are also illuminating differences in how citizens' opinions in the four countries have changed with regard to political accountability of councillors.

<sup>8</sup> Algeria, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Egypt, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

<sup>9</sup> If one only considers the 18 countries that were already participating in the Afrobarometer in 2005, the proportion of citizens who say voters should hold local councillors accountable rises to 39% in 2012. However, this is not significantly different from the 40% that had a similar view out of the 18 countries in 2005. This suggests that not much change has taken place among these 18 countries during the last eight years, and that in new countries that have entered the Afrobarometer network since 2005, a much lower proportion of citizens subscribe to the democratic ideal that voters should hold the elected leaders accountable.

A closer look at the 2012 survey responses (Figure 4) reveals that one third of Tanzanians (33%) expect the parliament/local council to hold local government councillors to account. In Uganda, 29% of respondents say the parliament/local council should make councillors do their job. Burundi has the highest proportion of respondents (17%) saying that the president/executive should hold councillors accountable, while Kenyans are the least likely to assign this role to the parliament or the president/executive.

**Figure 4: Who should make local government councillors do their job? 2012**



**Question:** *Who should be responsible for making sure that once elected, local government councillors do their jobs?*

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this analysis was to examine the evolution of citizens' awareness of their democratic right to hold politicians in office (members of parliament and local government councillors) accountable in East Africa, and to compare how the countries fare in this regard today. Results demonstrate that progress is mixed, with remarkable differences between the countries in the extent to which citizens are embracing their democratic rights to hold politicians accountable. In Kenya, a majority of citizens have consistently reported an awareness of this political right. By contrast, Tanzanians' attitudes are changing slowly and the tendency to default to the president is still high, whereas Ugandans display indications of renegeing and leaving this role to the executive. Burundians, assessed on the basis of 2012 data only, hold views similar to those of Ugandans and Tanzanians with regard to who should hold MPs accountable, although they display the strongest tendency in the region to delegate this obligation to their president/executive. Nevertheless, a majority in Burundi expect voters to hold elected councillors accountable.

Given that horizontal checks and balances between institutions cannot replace vertical oversight by citizens, citizens in other countries in East Africa would also do well to increase their awareness and claim their political right to hold politicians accountable. Ugandan and Kenyan citizens have an advantage, compared to Tanzania and Burundi, in that their constitutions provide the electorate (the citizens) with the right to recall members of parliament before the end of their term in office if they fail to do their duty. The fact that a majority of Ugandans are not claiming this right might suggest that majority of the electorate are unaware of the constitutional provision, or else they are wary of the ineffectiveness of this process.

The latter notion is difficult to prove or disprove in the Ugandan case with the current Afrobarometer data, and it could therefore be the subject of future research. In terms of the former, increasing public awareness can be very beneficial for the electorate.

Results from Tanzania and Burundi demonstrate that a majority of the citizens are yet to appreciate their democratic right and obligation to monitor the actions of politicians and hold them accountable. Both countries lack the provision for the electorate to recall MPs, and it is therefore necessary that these countries consider adopting this provision in their constitutions. This would be particularly easy for Tanzania to accomplish during the ongoing review of its National Constitution. A clearer understanding of the way the accountability chain is supposed to work for them, and particularly of the link between themselves and their MPs and between MPs and the president, is essential for citizens. Civil society organizations can help to bridge this knowledge and awareness gap, through civic awareness/educational messages and debates that target voters individually and collectively. Of course, knowing one has a right is only a first step; voters also need to put this right to the test in practice and thereby help to drive the accountability loop, ultimately making governments deliver services to their people more efficiently.

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## **ABOUT THE AFROBAROMETER**

This Briefing Paper was prepared by Rose Aiko.

The Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists in more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation in South Africa (IJR), the Institute for Development Studies (IDS), University of Nairobi, and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin. Afrobarometer's work in Tanzania is coordinated by REPOA. We gratefully acknowledge generous support from the UK's Department for International Development (DfID), the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the World Bank for Afrobarometer Round 5.

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