Lived Poverty and the Fate of African Democracies

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Abstract

In comparative politics, economic development is a requisite for democracy. Democracy is deemed to fail in less developed countries as poverty has proven to be detrimental to democratic performance. This study offers a perspective on the effects of poverty on the fate of democracy in Africa using the Afrobarometer panel survey data (2002–2018). Recognising the ordered nature of the dependent variable, an ordered logistic regression model and descriptive statistics are used to examine the effect of lived poverty on the fate of African democracy. The results indicate that poverty in Africa has a mixed effect on democracy more generally. In particular, the analysis indicates that the experience of poverty, which we have termed 'lived poverty', has a negative effect on the demand and supply of democracy and on several attributes of political participation. The fact that the poor demand democracy less than the well-to-do while at the same time perceiving a limited supply of democracy, in our view, explains why more African regimes are consolidating as hybrid regimes instead of moving towards democratic consolidation.

Keywords: Democracy, Afrobarometer, Lived Poverty, Political Participation, Economic development

Introduction

> "*From Aristotle down to the present, men have argued that only in a wealthy society in which relatively few citizens lived at the level of real poverty could there be a situation in which the mass of the population intelligently participate in politics and develop the self-restraint necessary to avoid succumbing to the appeals of irresponsible demagogues*." Seymour Martin Lipset, 1959:75

Democratic theory, as enunciated by Lipset in the quotation above, holds that poor people make poor Democrats. Many scholars have echoed Lipset's argument over the years, including, most notably, Przeworski and Limongi (1997), who went on to contend that democracies had little chance of sustained stability and survival in societies with per capita incomes of less than $8,000 per person a year in 2005 prices. Given that the poor make up nearly 40% of the sub-Saharan population (Schoch & Lakner, 2020), several studies have postulated that Africa's democratic transitions of the 1990s faced a high likelihood of reversal (Mbaku, 2020; Norris, 2016; Bigman, 2011; Jackman, 1973). However, nearly three decades after democracy's third wave hit the African

shores, the fears of full-fledged democratic reversal have not materialised. Indeed, not only has democracy proven resilient, but, as Cheeseman (2019) notes, African democracies have grown stronger. This is notwithstanding poor and sometimes contested elections, a spattering of military coups, and several attempts to roll back constitutional rules to end the culture of personal rule, such as presidential term limits.

The continuing resilience of African democracies, as the Lipset thesis suggested otherwise, begets asking the question again as to whether poor African peoples are lesser democrats than their richer counterparts. Drawing from several rounds of Afrobarometer survey data, our findings paint a somewhat mixed picture of the relationship between poverty and democratic attitudes among African citizens that might suggest a more nuanced revision of the democracy-development theses. On the one hand, the survey data shows that poor African citizens are more likely than their richer compatriots to express support for democracy over other forms of government. However, at the same time, Africa's poor express lower levels of rejection for non-democratic forms of government such as one man, one party, and military rule. The evidence further suggests that Africans who experience extreme poverty have higher expectations than the non-poor about the quality of democracy and therefore express less satisfaction with the performance of their democracies and are less likely to rate their countries as democratic. While the higher levels of support for non-democratic forms of government among Africa's poor might point towards a higher risk of democratic regression, the fact that this group demonstrates less contentment with the quality of democracy while expressing their support for it might offset the non-democratic tendencies. The pressure for further democratic reforms in Africa is thus likely to come from the poor rather than the contented middle class. This scenario can lead to an uneasy equilibrium where the political elites are pressurised to maintain certain minimum attributes of democracy. This state of affairs might shed more light on why other studies have concluded that most African regimes are consolidating as hybrid regimes, which are neither moving towards full democracies nor regressing to authoritarianism (cf. Bratton and Mattes, 2001, 2007, Bratton, 2015).

The rest of the paper is organised as follows: The rest of this section presents a review of the relevant literature on the relationship between poverty and democracy. The next section describes the data and estimation techniques employed in the study. The third section presents descriptive statistics and empirical findings. The final section concludes and highlights policy implications.

The relationship between poverty and democracy

The relationship between democracy and development has been a matter of continuous debate. Over the last half-century, numerous studies have sought to test and establish the relationship between the two. The evidence from these studies has, however, led to a rather mixed picture, where "a number of different predictions about the relationship between economic growth and democracy… are split sufficiently evenly between positive and negative correlations that no overall theoretical presumption may be claimed" (Minier, 1998:241; see also Remmer, 1995). Drawing from the modernization theories of the late 1950s and 1960s, the predominant school of thought in this debate has claimed that mass poverty poses substantial challenges to democratic survival. The poor, in other words, are considered to be poor Democrats. This proposition is best summed up by Seymour Lipset's (1963:75) seminal thesis stating that "the more well-to-do a nation, the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy."

Over the years, the proposition that democracies will more likely exist and survive in richer societies has been substantiated by analyses of cross-country data that have shown democracy to be more prevalent and more stable in countries that have higher per capita incomes (Diamond, 1992; Lipset, 1994; Przeworski et al., 1996; Przeworski et al., 2000; Posner, 1997; Sklar and

Whitaker, 1997; Krishna, 2008). In one such study, Przeworski et al. (2000:273) have gone further to place a monetary premium on the prospects of democracy's endurance, arguing that the probability of the survival of democracy in any country is greater when the country is richer and that prospects of survival "increase steeply and monotonically as per capita incomes get larger."

While there is very little agreement as to why higher per capita incomes should increase the prospects of democracy survival, one of the main arguments is that poor people are more preoccupied with survival and therefore have very little interest in taking part in democratic political activities. Others, meanwhile, contend that democracy is a luxury good for which poor people have less need (Przeworski et al., 1996). The poor, in other words, are more willing to trade off democracy in favour of immediate consumption. This view was first advocated by Schattschneider (1960) when he argued that poor people had less incentive to participate in electoral processes that, for the most part, advance the interests of the well-to-do. Rosenstone (1982:25) echoed this view, arguing that "when a person suffers economic adversity, his scarce resources are spent holding body and soul together, not on remote concerns like politics."

While the bulk of the literature has tended to side with the argument that poverty suppresses democratic values and behaviour among the public, there are a handful of dissenting voices. The group of dissenters includes Helliwell (1994), who advances the view that democracy has an intrinsic value that is increasingly sought after as populations become better off. We should thus expect support for democracy to rise as levels of poverty decline. This school of thought is consistent with studies that have looked at how African citizens define democracy, which have mostly concluded that a large majority of citizens on the continent attach a positive value to the meaning of democracy. Consequently, there is an expectation that democracy is a public "good" that, in some way, would make conditions "better" (Bratton & Mattes, 2001).

The argument that poverty is ill-suited to sustaining democratic politics has led many scholars to predict that the extension of the third wave of democratization to the developing world in the 1990s, particularly in Africa, was doomed to failure since many of the countries on the continent are characterized by widespread and deep-rooted poverty (Norris, 2016). Magnusson and Clark (2005:553), for example, contend that the first decade of the third wave of democracies in Africa confirms the proposition that "impoverished states do not consolidate democratic regimes easily." Thus, nearly thirty years into the democratic era, scholars remain sceptical about democratic survival in Africa. As Cheeseman (2019) notes, the contested and poor quality of elections and highly publicised campaigns to roll back key democratic institutions such as presidential term limits and military coups that are sometimes celebrated by the public mean that Africa is often depicted as a bastion of authoritarianism.

However, the majority of the studies that have informed the argument that poor people make poor democrats have tended to conclude by comparing predominantly richer industrial and largely democratic countries against the essentially authoritarian regimes of the developing world prior to the onset of the democracy third wave. The assumption underpinning these studies is that aggregate poverty at the national level is what drove the adoption of authoritarian rule, even if a number of these countries had never experienced any form of democracy in the first place. These arguments also tend to overlook the fact that the protests that ushered in democratic rule in the developing world in the early to mid-1990s were primarily driven by the very poor, who bore the brunt of the failed authoritarianism, which had been justified as offering the best prospects for democracy (Sandbrook, 1996; Joseph, 1997; Bratton & van de Walle, 1997). Similar lessons can also be taken from the recent protests that have precipitated the Arab Spring (Anderson, 2011). As with the democratic protests of the 1990s in Africa, the protests that precipitated the Arab Spring

were led by the poor, suggesting that the existence of authoritarianism does not equate to its acceptance and approval by the poor.

Drawing from early rounds of Afrobarometer surveys, Bratton (2008:29) observes that Africa's poor people are "no more or less likely than their wealthier counterparts to hold democratic values or to prefer democracy above other political regimes." Taking advantage of the expansion of public attitude survey research that now covers more developing countries, some of this burgeoning literature has questioned the modernization arguments by adducing evidence that suggests that poor people in the developing world, including those from Africa, Latin America, and South Asia, do not value democracy any less than their richer counterparts. As Krishna (2008:9) surmises, these new studies are increasingly demonstrating that the conventional view that poor people make poor Democrats is "wrong, or at least, if ever correct, no longer true". Instead, the poor in these regions exhibit as much faith, or greater faith, in democracy as the non-poor and poor people participate in democratic activities no less, and sometimes more, than other citizens.

In his contribution to the Krishna volume, Bratton (2008) has examined how poverty interacts with various dimensions of democratic citizenship in 15 African countries. Among several findings, Bratton demonstrates that poorer Africans are less politically tolerant than their wealthier colleagues, although they are more likely to favour political equality; higher levels of lived poverty are associated with lower levels of both demand for and satisfaction with democracy. One of Bratton's more interesting findings, however, is that poverty in Africa is associated with higher levels of political participation, demonstrated by higher propensities among Africa's poor majority to vote in elections than their wealthier counterparts. Thus, rather than being absent from the political sphere, the poor on the continent are active in the democratic space.

Despite Bratton's positive findings, doubts still remain about whether the widespread and deep-rooted nature of poverty in Africa can explain several challenges with the continent's democracies over the last two decades. In the ten years between 2010 and 2020, Africa has registered nearly two dozen military coup attempts, with nearly ten succeeding in removing elected political leaders, the most recent occurring in mid-2021 in Guinea. Many of these coups d'états have been celebrated by the public, who have grown tired of elected leaders prone to manipulating elections and the rules of the game in their favour. Beyond military coups, African elections have resulted in only a handful of partisan turnovers. Lindberg (2006), for example, notes that out of 44 African elections held between 1989 and 2001, there were only nine turnovers. Thus, despite evidence suggesting Africa's majority poor are supportive of democracy and take part in elections more than the well-to-do, they are not utilising their electoral clout to vote out parties that are failing to uplift their lives.

Do these recent experiences suggest that Africa's predominantly poor majorities do not hold strong democratic values? This is the question we address once again in this paper as we seek to understand the prospects of democracy's survival on the continent.

Data and methodology

This paper draws from six rounds of Afrobarometer survey data collected between 2002 and 2018. The 2002 survey covered 16 countries and had a sample size of just over 23,000 respondents. The next set of surveys was conducted in approximately 2008, 2011, 2014, and 2017. In all the survey cycles, respondents were selected using a random, stratified, multistage, national probability sample representing adult citizens aged 18 years or older. The sample size in each country ranged from 1,200 to 2,400. While the number of surveyed countries had increased to 34 by 2017, for

the sake of genuine comparison and to avoid our analyses being skewed by the addition of new survey countries over time, our analyses only focus on the 16 countries surveyed in 2002, which were all maintained through 2017. These countries are Botswana, Cape Verde, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. It bears emphasising that Africa is a much larger continent with 54 countries. These 16 countries are, thus, less than one-third of the total number of countries on the continent. While in the analysis that follows, we generalise our reporting as representative of 'Africa,' it needs to be borne in mind that the sample choice, in terms of countries, is limited. Notwithstanding this disclaimer, it is also important to point out that the choice of countries represents most of the major regions of sub-Saharan Africa. In order to generate greater confidence in the findings, we also ran several statistical tests and analyses, for example, by estimating ordered logistic regression analyses using a merged data set that combined observations from all six surveys put together.

An ordered logit regression model is used to establish an estimated relationship between lived poverty and democracy. It uses the maximum likelihood approach to estimate the parameters. Demand for democracy (dependent variable) is composed of 5 ordered discrete choices, namely: 0 "Do not reject all three authoritarian rules (military rule, one-party rule, and dictatorship)", 1 "reject at least one authoritarian rule", 2 "reject at least two authoritarian rules", 3 "reject all three authoritarian rules", and 4 "individuals who reject all three and support democracy". The supply of democracy is composed of 3 ordered discrete choices, namely: 0 "perceives no supply of democracy", 1 "perceives supply of one, not both, and 2 "perceives full supply of democracy (extent plus satisfaction).

Ordered outcomes are modelled to arise sequentially as a latent y^* variable crosses progressive higher thresholds (Cameron & Trived, 2005). In this study y^* is unobserved measure of the demand and supply of democracy and the latent variable model is given as:

$$y_i^* = X_i'\beta + \mu_i$$

Where is a matrix of explanatory variables, β is a vector of parameters and μ_i is the white noise error term. For an M ordered dependent variable model,

$$y_i = j \text{ if } \alpha_{j-1} < y_i^* < \alpha_j,\ j = 1, 2, \ldots, M$$

From the above, it can be determined that the probabilities that Y will take the value j is equal to

$$\begin{aligned}\Pr(y_i = j) &= Pr\left(\alpha_{j-1} < y_i^* < \alpha_j\right) \\ &= Pr\left(\alpha_{j-1} < X_i'\beta + \mu_i < \alpha_j\right) \\ &= Pr\left(\alpha_{j-1} - X_i'\beta < \mu_i < \alpha_j - X_i'\beta\right) \\ &= F\left(\alpha_j - X_i'\beta\right) - F\left(\alpha_{j-1} - X_i'\beta\right)\end{aligned}$$

For ordered logit model, μ_i is logistically distributed and its cumulative distribution function is expressed as follows

$$F(X_i'\beta) = \frac{exp(X_i'\beta)}{1 + exp(X_i'\beta)}$$

Where *exp* is the exponential function, X is a matrix of independent variables including lived poverty, β is a vector of slope coefficients to be estimated in the model.

Measuring poverty: The Lived Poverty Index

The conceptualization of poverty presents definitional and measurement challenges, especially when comparing it across time and space (Hagenaars, 1988; Bourguignon and Chakravarty, 2003; Clark & Hume, 2005; Bratton, 2005). While many authors have insisted on defining *poverty* as a multidimensional concept, more needs to be done to include the various dimensions of deprivation in the practical definition and measurement of the term. This is largely due to the absence of people-centric measurements of deprivation. Perhaps the most comprehensive people-centric approach to defining poverty was the World Bank's "Voices of the Poor: Can Anyone Here?" edited by Narayan et al. (2000), which captured narratives of poverty by poor people themselves from multiple countries.

How does this article contribute to the body of literature on poverty and African democracies? This study adds to the scanty literature that focuses exclusively on the role of individual resources or lived poverty other than monetary indicators (per capita income, poverty head count ratio) for explaining African political participation or democracies (see Isaksson, 2014; Mattes, Bratton, & Davids, 2002; Tambe, 2017). However, the study differs from the cited work in two ways. Firstly, the method employed in this paper is different from the ones used in other literature cited above. This study used an ordered logistic model that takes into account the natural ordering of the dependent variables, demand and supply, for democracy. In that way, the model accounts for differences in the intensity of preferences for democracy, which the other papers ignored. Failure to account for these different intensities of preferences would result in biased and inconsistent results. Secondly, the study uses the lived poverty index, which is disaggregated into four categories: no lived poverty (0), low lived poverty (0.2–1), moderate lived poverty (1.2–2.0), and high lived poverty (2.2–4.0). This will enable us to analyse differences in the demand or supply of democracy across different poverty levels. This can help us determine the threshold deprivation level above which the survival of democracy is threatened.

The increasing availability of cross-national survey data that examines the experiences of deprivation among respondents makes it possible to fully capture the multidimensional nature of poverty in ways that were not previously possible. As such, survey data serves as a very important tool to measure the experiential dynamics of poverty from the perspectives of the poor themselves instead of relying solely on experts' perceptions. Within the African context, the Afrobarometer surveys have included questions that provide objective indicators of the standard of living. Additionally, these surveys also include questions that gauge subjective measures of poverty, which focus on people's access to different resources or lack thereof. Specifically, Afrobarometer survey respondents are asked to indicate whether over the previous year they or anyone in their family had gone without (a) enough food to eat; (b) enough clean water for home use; (c) enough medicines or medical treatment; (d) enough fuel to cook their food; and (e) a cash income. A range of ordinal-level response scales is then offered with the options "never," "just once or twice," "several times," "many times," or "always".

Because the existential reports refer to income flows and other felt needs, the Afrobarometer data has made it possible to develop a hybrid *Index of Lived Poverty*. This Index starts by identifying citizens who can be considered non-poor, those who, during the year, prior to the survey, never went without food, clean water, medicine, cooking fuel or a cash income. The second category includes respondents experiencing low poverty, namely those who report occasionally going

without several basic necessities. The third category is the moderately poor, individuals who report experiencing several shortages in the previous year. The fourth category is the extremely poor – those who suffer regular and persistent shortages across various basic needs.

Empirical results

Descriptive statisticss

Table 1 provides a summary of the proportions of individuals in each poverty category in the Afrobarometer surveys that form the basis of this paper:

Table 1: Classifications of African survey respondents by poverty category, 2002–2017 (16 countries. Numbers are proportions in each lived poverty category)

	Index range	Circa 2002 (n=18,880)	Circa 2005 (n=18,867)	Circa 2008 (n=18,920)	Circa 2011) (n=18,976)	Circa 2014 (n=19,005)	Circa 2017 (n=19019)
No Lived Poverty	0	12	13	13	14	19	13
Low Lived Poverty	0.2-1.0	34	33	34	34	37	41
Moderate Lived Poverty	1.2-2.0	35	33	34	34	30	32
High Lived Poverty	2.2-4.0	19	22	20	18	14	14

It is worth noting that while the proportions of the people in the non-lived poverty category have remained the same over the six Afrobarometer survey rounds, there are differences in the proportions of the remaining poverty categories over time. The proportion of people living in extreme and moderate poverty has declined by 5 and 3 percentage points, respectively, from 19% to 14% and 35% to 33% in the fifteen years between 2002 and 2017. On the other hand, the proportion of those reporting low poverty increased by 7%, the biggest change amongst all poverty categories. This implies that more Africans are graduating to the low poverty category, from up the ladder of poverty categories towards better access to basic needs.

Poverty and democratic attitudes in Africa

To gauge the effects of poverty on democratic attitudes, we first examine how poverty influences attitudinal indicators that measure demand for democracy. These look at data on support for democracy as the best system of government and those who explicitly reject authoritarian alternatives (military rule, one-party rule and strongman rule).

Poverty and demand for democracy

Demand for democracy is a scale constructed from four survey questions that measure support for democracy and the rejection of the three authoritarian alternatives. Respondents who prefer democracy and reject all three non-democratic alternatives are held to demand full democracy. The logic of the scale is that effective demand requires "more than lip service [i.e., expressed support] to democracy; it also implies that people abandon attachments to old autocratic [modes

of governance]" (Bratton, 2012). This narrative is consistent with theories that state that democracy can only be consolidated when this mode of governance becomes the default. In the words of Przeworski, (1991:26), "given political and economic conditions a particular system of institutions becomes the only game in town, when no one can imagine acting outside the democratic institutions when all the losers want to do is to try again within the same institutions under which they have just lost. Democracy is consolidated when it becomes self-enforcing, that is when all the relevant political forces find it best to continue to submit their interests and values to the uncertain interplay of the institutions" (see also Huntington, 1991; Linz & Stepan, 1996).

In recent years, evidence of African citizens celebrating the ouster of constitutionally elected governments in countries such as Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Zimbabwe, have led to questions about the depth of commitment of African citizens towards democratic rule. Similar observations have been noted when African leaders have sought to remove constitutional provisions imposing tenure limits on individuals serving as presidents, citing widespread popular support for such adventures (Dulani, 2011, 2015). In order to test the extent to which African citizens are committed to democracy, we develop a measure of demand for democracy, which is an additive index that combines those who say they reject three forms of authoritarian rule (military rule, one man dictatorship and one-party rule) and also express a preference for democracy as the ideal form of government. Table 2 presents a breakdown of those making a full demand for democracy, that is, those rejecting each of the authoritarian alternatives and expressing support for democracy.

Table 2: Lived Poverty and Demand for Democracy, percentages (%) (16 African countries, 2002-2017)

	Reject Presidential Dictatorship		Reject One-party rule		Reject Military Rule		Prefer democracy		FULL DEMAND FOR DEMOCRACY (prefer democracy and reject all 3 alternatives)	
	c2002	c2017	c2002	c2017	c2002	c2017	c2002	c2017	c2002	c2017
Non-Poor	76	84	73	77	77	76	67	72	43	48
Occasionally Poor	78	83	69	75	78	77	67	72	40	47
Poor	77	80	65	70	78	76	63	69	35	42
Extremely Poor	74	78	63	67	75	71	56	66	30	39

Question wording

1. 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? Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office? The army comes in to govern the country? (Figures are for respondents who say "strongly disapprove" or "disapprove" for each alternative.)
2. Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion?

- Statement 1: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.
- Statement 2: In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable.

- Statement 3: For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.

(Figures are for those who indicate that democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.)

The descriptive results show that demand for democracy is nine percentage points among the non-poor (48%) compared to the extremely poor citizenry at 39%. The results further suggest that rejection of authoritarianism is on average lower among Africa's poor citizens compared to the non-poor. Overall, the data suggest that Africa's poor reject presidential dictatorship, one party and military rule less relative to their wealthier counterparts. Indeed, over the fifteen-yearperiod, rejection of military rule has declined among the continent's poor and extremely poor citizens. However, overall, there is a notable increase in the proportion of citizens rejecting dictatorship, one-party rule and expressing a preference for democracy.

The most notable increases are among the poor and extremely poor citizens, resulting in an overall net gain in demand for democracy across the board, with the highest jump among the extremely poor (from 30% in 2002 to 39% in 2017). This might suggest that even after some citizens have graduated from severe poverty, those left behind have gained more faith, rather than lost faith, in democracy. This is in sharp contrast to the predictions of doom that suggested that democracy in Africa would come under increasing threat from the poor. This suggests that rather than considering the poor as less supportive of democracy, it perhaps takes more time for them to warm up to the concept. Thus, rather than read the low levels of support for democracy among the poor when it was a relatively new concept, the evidence suggests that support might actually increase rather than decrease over time. In sum, while the poorer African citizens exhibit low demand for democracy than their non-poor counterparts, the evidence is still somewhat positive given that there is very little evidence to suggest that the poor are losing faith in democracy nor are they warming up to non-democratic alternatives.

Poverty and the supply of democracy

To what extent does lived poverty impact perceptions of the supply of democracy across Africa? To answer this question, we construct a second index of the perceived supply of democracy based on two survey questions: the first measures evaluations of the quality of democracy, and the second draws from expressed satisfaction with democracy in practice.

Poverty and perceptions of the extent of democracy

The first measure of the supply of democracy draws from the question that asks respondents to place their country on a continuum of democracy ranging from a full democracy to not a democracy. Figure 1 provides a summary of the proportion of citizens in the sixteen study countries who perceive their countries as full democracies or democracies with only minor problems, disaggregated by lived poverty categories:

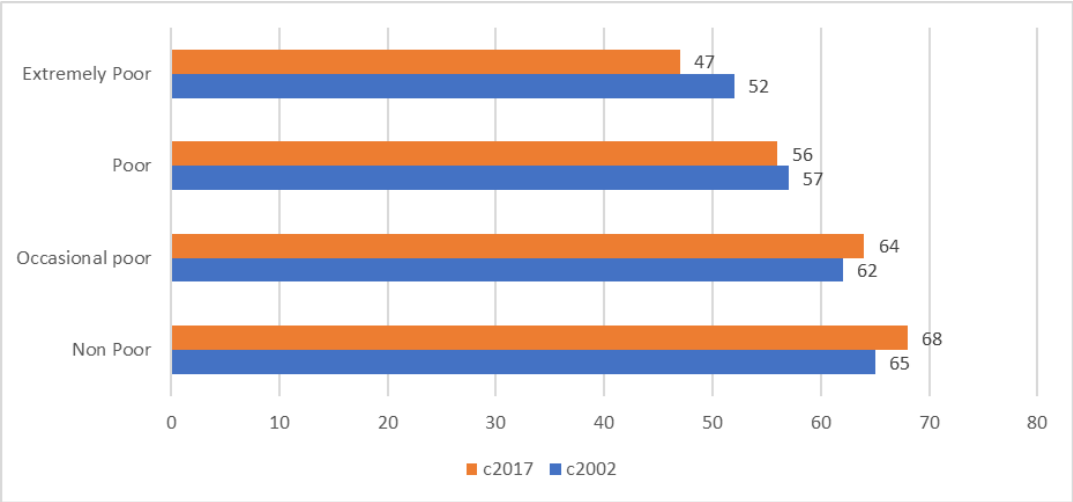

Figure 1: Proportion of African Citizens who perceive their countries as democratic (16 countries, 2002 and 2017)

The evidence from the two surveys, which took place fifteen years apart, shows the same consistent picture concerning citizens' evaluations of the extent of democracy in their countries: the well-to-do are consistently more likely than the poorest citizens to rank their countries as full democracies or democracies with minor problems. It is worth noting that while the wealthier African citizens believe that the overall state of democracy in their countries had improved marginally by three percentage points between 2002 and 2017, at the other end of the scale, both the poor and extremely poor citizens perceived regression of democracy and registered declines in the proportion of citizens who considered their countries full democracies or democracies with minor problems.

It is often said that poor people hardly understand the meaning of democracy and can, therefore, not be expected to be well placed to assess their country's democratic credentials. Citing the main thrust of this school of thought, for example, Dalton et al. (2007:3) point out that "democracy has supposedly become a vague referent that has positive connotations, but these [poor] publics lack any real understanding of the concept". In order to address the claim that Africa's poor do not understand the meaning of democracy and are hence more likely to consider their countries as less democratic than they are, we examined in greater detail the case of Zimbabwe, whose democratic scores had progressively declined on multiple democracy indices since the turn of the Century when the late president Robert Mugabe became increasingly authoritarian and suppressed the rights of his country's citizens. Even after Mugabe's ouster in a military coup in 2017, the country's democratic credentials have plummeted. The results even, in this case, are starker: in both 2002 and 2017, large and growing majority of Zimbabwe's wealth elites rated their country to be fully democratic, while the proportion of the poorer citizens holding this view has progressively declined in the fifteen years (see Figure 2).

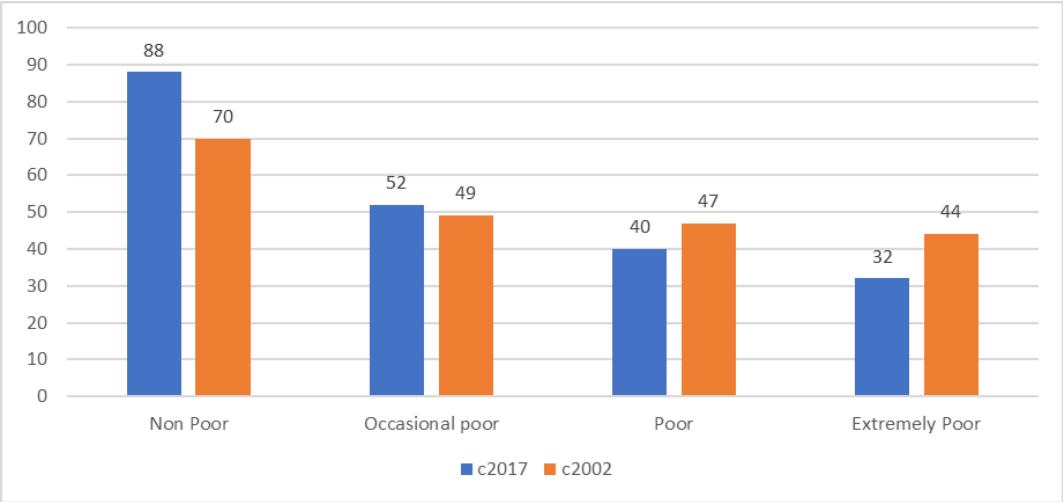

Figure 2: Proportion of Zimbabweans saying their country is a full democracy/democracy with minor problems by lived poverty categories, 2002–2017

The evidence from Figure 2 shows that Zimbabwe's wealth elites were almost three times as likely to say their country is a full democracy or one with minor problems in 2017 compared to those living in extreme poverty that suffer frequent and regular shortages of life's necessities. Zimbabwe's case offers, arguably, the best evidence suggesting that the wealth elites might have a tendency to unrealistically inflate their evaluations of democratic attributes compared to the poor. In this case, the low levels of poor Zimbabweans rating their country as less democratic are consistent with expert measurements of democracy. For example, in Freedom House's Freedom of the World Report for 2002 and 2017, Zimbabwe was placed in the category of "Not Free," on the back of widespread violence against the opposition, civil society organizations, independent media and attempts to stifle judicial independence (Freedom House, 2002, 2018). The Zimbabwe case shows, therefore, that being poor is not necessarily always a predictor of citizenship that will inflate perceptions about their country's democratic credentials. Indeed, what we learn from the Zimbabwe case is the exact opposite in terms of citizen understanding of democracy: the wealthy elites tend to view the democratic credentials of their country with a less critical lens, in the process, inflating their perceptions of the extent of their country's democracy.

Thus, the evidence from Figures 1and 2 should be taken to imply that the poor might apply more stringent tests in their rating of democracy than the wealthier citizens. Because the poor are less beholden to incumbent governments, they might use tougher and more objective standards to evaluate the quality of democracy compared to the non-poor.

Poverty and satisfaction with democracy

Beyond the evaluations of the extent of democracy, the Afrobarometer surveys ask respondents to indicate their levels of satisfaction with the way democracy works in their country. As with the previous evaluations of the extent of democracy demand, the evidence yet again shows that Africa's poor generally express low levels of satisfaction in the working of democracy than the non-poor (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Proportion of African citizens expressing satisfaction with democracy by Lived poverty category, 2002 & 2017 (16 countries)

Question wording: Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in [name of country]? Figures are the proportions of those who say they are either "fairy satisfied" or "very satisfied".

Consistent with our earlier findings, the poorest African citizens express less satisfaction with democracy compared to their wealthier counterparts. Taking together the findings on the perceived extent of democracy and satisfaction in it, it becomes clear that contrary to the school of thought that perceives Africa's poor as less democratic, they have higher standards in defining not only democracy but also their overall expectations.

This aspect is further reflected in the perception of the freeness and fairness of elections in Afrobarometer-surveyed countries. Examining the characterization of the previous elections, we find, once more, that the poorest citizens are less likely than the less-poor folk to describe the earlier elections as either "completely free and fair" or "free and fair but with minor problems" (Table 3).

Table 3: Proportion (%) of respondents describing most recent national elections as completely free and fair/free and fair with minor problems by well-being category (2005 and 2017)[1]

	Non-Poor	Occasional Poor	Poor	Extremely Poor
circa 2005 (16 countries)	73	70	65	57
circa 2017 (16 countries)	76	71	63	57

Question wording: "On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the last national elections, held in [election year]?" Figures are for respondents who say it was "completely free and fair" or "Free and fair, but with minor problems".

We can see yet again from the foregoing that the poor not only have higher expectations of democracy but also employ a relatively higher standard in judging the freeness and fairness of their national elections. These findings suggest that the future of democracy in Africa, particularly on the supply side, might be less threatened by the continent's poor citizens. The poor have

1 This question was not asked in all countries in 2002

higher requirements for describing their countries as full democracies. They are not as easily satisfied with the quality of democracy on offer and are equally less satisfied with the quality of elections. By contrast, higher proportions of citizens who experience no deprivation and have rather lax standards in perceiving the extent of democracy are also easily satisfied with poor quality democracy and are quick to describe elections as free and fair. These findings suggest that rather than being a democratic liability, as intimated by the early modernization literature, Africa's majority poor might be the most stringent defenders of true democracy. Because they are unsatisfied with the quality of democracy and elections on offer, this block of voters is more likely to press for more democratic and electoral reforms. Indeed, anecdotal evidence already seems to suggest this is the trajectory on the continent, as many recent protests for democratic reforms in countries such as eSwatini, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burkina Faso, Malawi, Nigeria, Uganda, to mention but a few examples, have originated from the disconcerted poor, particularly the unemployed youth (EIU, 2021; Ayemi, 2021; Marima, 2021; Dulani, 2009, 2011). Meanwhile, wealthy elites have remained passive or supportive of the status quo.

Model estimation results

Does poverty cause low levels of demand and perceptions of low supply of democracy?

In order to test the robustness of the relationships observed in the descriptive results presented so far between poverty and democracy demand and supply, we tested the relationships using ordered logistic regressions. Yet again, the relationships illustrated in the descriptive findings above hold and are largely statistically significant: lived poverty is not only negatively related to democratic demand and supply, but the evidence further suggests a significant causal relationship between the two, even after controlling for several other variables (Table 4).

Table 4: Ordered Logistic regression estimates on the effects of poverty on demand and supply of Democracy (Odds Ratios)

	(1) Demand for Democracy	(2) Supply of Democracy
Lived Poverty index		
No Lived Poverty	1	1
Low lived Poverty	1.056***	.825***
Moderate Lived Poverty	1.025*	.59***
High Lived Poverty	.931***	.412***
Employment Status		
Unemployed	1	1
Employed	1.157***	1.112***
Educational qualification		
None	1	1
Primary	1.292***	.965***
Secondary	1.985***	.902***
Post-secondary	2.735***	.865***
University	2.66***	.622***
Post-graduate	2.412***	.639***

	(1) Demand for Democracy	(2) Supply of Democracy
Area of Residence		
Urban	1	1
Rural	.941***	1.178***
Age	1.006***	1.001***
/cut1	.094***	.455***
/cut2	.311***	1.219***
/cut3	.79***	
/cut4	2.646***	
Observations	220654	224430
Pseudo R2	.014	.013
*** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.1		

The logistic regression results in Table 4 underscore that demand for democracy decreases with higher poverty levels. In other words, the poor are less likely to demand democracy than the middle class or the rich, as evidenced by the reduction in the statistically significant Odds Ratios (ORs) as poverty levels increase. Concerning other variables, the results reveal that more educated individuals are more likely to demand democracy than the educationally deprived; the odds for demand for democracy increase with the level of education, with African citizens having postgraduate education registering the highest levels of demand for democracy. The results further suggest a rural-urban differential regarding the demand for democracy. Specifically, African citizens residing in rural areas are, not surprisingly, less likely to demand democracy than their urban counterparts (OR: 0.94). Citizens who are in employment are also more likely to demand democracy than unemployed individuals (OR: 1.157). The age of the individual also significantly affects the demand for democracy: the older an individual gets, the higher the demand for democracy. This might suggest an earning effect in that Africa's older citizens, who have firsthand experience of authoritarian rule, are wary of authoritarian modes of governance even if democracy comes with its challenges.

On the supply side of the regression results, the preliminary findings based on the descriptive data are also confirmed: the poor are relatively less satisfied with democracy than the non-poor. The odds of democracy satisfaction are higher for citizens that experience no poverty or low-lived poverty (1 and 0.825, respectively) and lower for the moderate and extreme poverty groups (0.59 and 0.412, respectively).

Interestingly, and in contrast to the findings on democratic demand, the regression results show that perceptions of the full supply of democracy decrease as the level of education increases. The odds of perceiving the full supply of democracy, in other words, are higher for the less educated group than the more educated group. Specifically, the odds for those who have completed no level of education and those who have completed primary level education are 1 and 0.965, respectively, while those who have attended university and post-graduate education are 0.62 and 0.63, respectively. This is contrary to the findings in the demand for democracy model. Similarly, the odds of democracy satisfaction are higher for rural residents (1.178) relative to urban residents (1). The age of the individual positively affects satisfaction with the supply of democracy. The older an individual gets, the more they perceive a higher supply of democracy.

Poverty and political behaviour

In his analysis of poverty and democracy using Round 2 survey data, Bratton (2005 and 2008) adduced evidence that showed a rather mixed picture in poverty's relationship with various forms of political engagement. To test the relationship between poverty and political behaviour, we did a re-run of the same tests that Bratton undertook in 2005 using the survey data from the 18 countries that were included in 2005 and 2017. The descriptive findings, which document the proportions of African citizens indicating having voted in the preceding national elections in their countries, are discussed below, starting with a descriptive presentation of the findings on voting behaviour by lived poverty categories (Figure 3).

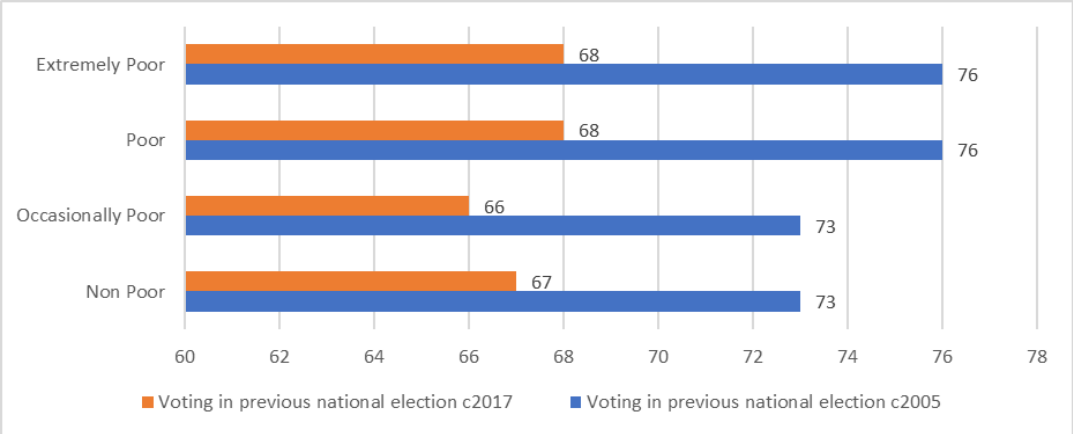

Figure 3: Poverty and voting in elections (2005 and 2017, 18 countries)

Question wording: With regard to the [year] national elections, which statement is true for you? Figures are for those who say they voted in the last elections.

The findings on the relationship between poverty and voting behaviour in the 2005[2] and 2017 Afrobarometer surveys contradict the conventional theories, which state that poverty and low socio-economic status depress political participation. Yet, the evidence from the 2005 and 2017 Afrobarometer surveys suggests that, at worst, the poor are just as likely as the non-poor to vote in elections and that, at best, the poor vote more in national elections than the non-poor. We speculate that rather than depressing voter turn-out, the incidence of poverty across Africa might have a catalysing effect on voting. Despite having low regard for the nature of their country's democracies and expressing low satisfaction with the quality of democracy on offer, Africa's poor are placing faith in democracy by turning out to vote as much as, or even more than, the non-poor. That this is the case is even more surprising, considering the findings that demonstrate that the poor in Africa demand less democracy on average compared to the richer folk. Thus, poverty appears not to diminish voting behaviour.Conditional effects of lived poverty on political behaviour

In order to understand the effects of lived poverty on political behaviour, we once again ran a logistic regression analysis that controlled for the same social aspects. The evidence presented in Table 5 suggests that, contrary to established theory, the poor are more likely than the well-off to take political action by voting, participating in community meetings, and joining others to

2 The relevant question was not asked in Round 2 which was conducted about 2002. In this case, therefore, data for Round 3 of Afrobarometer Surveys which was conducted about 2005, when this question was first asked, is compared with that of Round 7 which was conducted about 2017. Since Round 3 had 18 countries, comparison is made with the same 18 countries in Round 7.

request government action. The result is not surprising, considering that the poor are less pleased with democracy and would rather take action to bring about the political changes they desire.

Regarding education, the results show that educated African citizens are more likely to participate in community meetings and request government action. This is puzzling but not surprising since the more educated are less pleased with the supply of democracy. Another important finding is the positive influence of age on political behaviour. Older citizens on the continent are more likely than the youth to vote, participate in community meetings, and request government action. Similarly, the area of residence also plays a crucial role in influencing political behaviour. Specifically, rural residents are more likely than urban residents to vote, participate in community meetings, and request government action.

Table 5: Effects of poverty on political behavior

	(1) Voted in the last election	(2) Participated in Community meeting	(3) Requested for Government action
Lived Poverty Index			
No Lived Poverty	1	1	1
Low Lived poverty	1.06***	1.75***	1.4***
Moderate Lived poverty	1.08***	2.24***	1.77***
High Lived Poverty	1.06***	2.27***	1.93***
Employment Status			
Unemployed	1	1	1
Employed	1.55***	1.22***	1.27***
Education Qualification			
None	1	1	1
Primary	1.16***	1.45***	1.15***
Secondary	.95**	1.38***	1.36***
Post-secondary	1.14***	1.55***	1.88***
University	.92***	1.32***	1.59***
Post-graduate	.96	1.58***	2.26***
Area of residence			
Urban	1	1	1
Rural	1.38***	2.14***	1.59***
Age	1.05***	1.02***	1.01***
_cons	.31***	.2***	.08***
Observations	148222	223444	96717
Pseudo R2	.08	.05	.02
*** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.1			

Conclusion

We have offered in this paper some insights into the effects of poverty on the fate of democracy in Africa. Although more work remains to be done to make conclusive claims, our findings from six Afrobarometer survey rounds show that the experience of poverty in Africa has a mixed effect on democracy more generally. In particular, the analysis has suggested that the experience of poverty, which we have termed 'lived poverty', has a negative effect on the demand and supply of democracy and several attributes of political participation. The fact that the poor demand democracy less than the well-to-do while at the same time perceiving a limited supply of democracy, in our view, explains why more African regimes are consolidating as hybrid regimes instead of moving towards democratic consolidation. This is in part because the poor majority are not as demanding of greater democracy, even if they consider the current supply of democracy to be inadequate.

A further finding from this study has been the re-affirmation of the view that poverty in Africa positively affects the propensity to vote. This finding is in sharp contrast to the conventional wisdom that holds that struggles for survival would result in the poor looking at democratic participation as a luxury good. On the contrary, this finding suggests that Africa's majority poor have placed much faith in the power of the vote to uplift their lives. While the vote has in a few cases been used to vote out underperforming regimes, it is nonetheless encouraging to note that the poor are no more predisposed to vote for the ruling party than the rich. Thus, the vote remains a potent tool for the poor to remove governments that completely ignore their interests. This bodes well for the future of democracy on the continent, even if poverty does undermine other aspects of democracy.

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