

# The Nexus between Good Governance and Citizen Participation in Local Governance: Insights from Afrobarometer Round 7

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## **Abstract**

Good governance has been advocated as the ideal which governments should embrace. The concept relates to a governance system that is transparent, accountable, effective and participatory. This study investigated the relationship between these tenets of good governance and citizen participation in local governance in Ghana. The study utilized data from the Afro-barometer survey for Ghana. The study modestly attempted to provide an empirical and theoretical assessment of the socio-economic and attitudinal characteristics of individuals, as well as the institutional environment that determines citizen participation in local governance. The results revealed that, individual demographic factors, such as age, gender, and education, were the significant determinants of citizen engagement in local governance in Ghana. The results also suggested that, attitudinal factors, such as interest in political activities, membership of associations, and institutional factors, such as local government transparency and improved service delivery, greatly impacted and influenced citizens' participation in local governance. The findings presented vital practical

implications for Ghana's public sector to implement standards that could increase citizens' participation in local governance. They also offered impetus to create an environment in Ghana that advocates for the principles of good governance.

**Keywords:** Socio-economic factors, citizen attitudes, institutional environment, good governance, citizen participation, local governance, Ghana.

## **Introduction**

Good governance has become the ideal which numerous governments and decision-making bodies strive to achieve (Pomeranz & Decker, 2017). Though the fundamental principles that comprise good governance practices vary, this study contextualizes good governance to mirror principles such as transparency, legitimacy, inclusivity, fairness, direction, accountability, performance, and capability (Pomeranz & Decker, 2017).

Some analysts consider good governance as highlighting sound-operative market machineries and sound-systematized resource management, placing the link between the government and market at the centre of economic progress and development (Krawczyk & Sweet-Cushman, 2017). However, opponents of this neoclassic economic description of good governance contend that the conceptualization overlooks the 'people-centred' aspect of good governance, as well as its political and social contexts (Krawczyk & Sweet-Cushman, 2017). More recent and wider conceptions and notions of good governance place considerable prominence on citizen engagement and participation as fundamental to the concept. Many actors have endeavoured to strengthen participation and good governance principles (Van Doeveren, 2011).

This study, therefore, utilized the tenets of good governance to investigate the relationship between governance and citizen participation in local governance in Ghana. Bovaird and Löffler (2002) argue for a 'local governance' model that emphasizes citizen engagement. They employ the tenets of accountability, transparency, trust, equity, and citizen involvement in conceptualizing good local governance. This study draws on citizens' evaluation of these principles of good governance as measures in the model to analyse the impact of good governance on

citizen participation in local governance. Several past and ongoing studies have theorized that good governance fashions the environment that leads to positive exchanges between citizens and the political system. Citizen engagement and participation in local governance actions are, therefore, enhanced since they have positive encounters with the political and administrative system (Lawton & Macaulay, 2014; Fung, 2015; Krawczyk & Sweet-Cushman, 2017).

Citizen participation, engagement and involvement in the political system, including, for example, decision-making processes at the local level, have long been emphasized by many established democracies in Africa and the world at large (Lowndes, Pratchett & Stoker, 2006). In many African countries, where issues of poor governance are increasingly widespread, citizen engagement in local governance is particularly paramount. This, if not attained, has the tendency to undermine the legitimacy of the government, and the capacity and integrity of institutions (LeVan, 2014). Enhancing citizen participation and engagement in local governance progressively is viewed as imperative to achieving and sustaining democratic development in Africa (Nelson & Agrawal, 2008). Enhanced citizen participation and involvement in local governance have the potential to improve the administration of public resources, decrease corruption, mount pressure on public and political leaders to be accountable, transparent and positively impact democracy through inclusive governance (Nelson & Agrawal, 2008; Michels and De Graaf, 2010).

Despite these stated benefits of citizen participation and engagement in local governance in Africa and the world at large, prospects for the citizens of West Africa to participate and engage in local governance are minimal and virtually non-existent in some countries (Donkor et al., 2020). Even in countries where these opportunities exist, the citizens often fail to participate much beyond voting during general elections (Krawczyk & Sweet-Cushman, 2017). Olsson (2014) indicates that, without citizen engagement and participation in the local political system, both national and local governments and administrations continue to be unaccountable and unresponsive.

The question, therefore, arises as to how Ghana can strengthen her citizens to participate in local governance and demand accountability from its duty bearers. This question is what this study explored by

making a modest attempt to provide an empirical and theoretical assessment of socio-economic and attitudinal characteristics of individuals that determine citizens' participation in local governance. The study contributes to increasing understanding of the attitudinal and socio-economic factors that influence the prospect of citizens' engagement in local level governance. Many studies on issues of participation in governance in Ghana concentrate on national level voter choices and voting behaviour (Achanso, Benson & Zuure, 2021). The study also contributes to the emerging literature on the effects of local institutional environment on citizen engagement and participation in local governance (Krawczyk & Sweet-Cushman, 2017) which demonstrate that citizens assessment of the performance of their government, their attitude and perception about their government as well as their experiences with government institutions affect citizens participation in governance (Holzner, 2010; Bratton, 2013; Krawczyk & Sweet-Cushman, 2017).

#### **Framework: Good Governance**

This study focuses on local governance, which is conceptualized as established formal institutions lawfully set up to deliver a range of amenities to a relatively small area (Ahwoi, 2010; Bratton, 2013). These establishments in democratizing civilisations typically assume the form of elected officials representing the citizens of a particular area (e.g., Member of Parliament (MP), District Chief Executive (MMDCE), Presiding Members (PM), Assembly Members, Unit and Zonal Committee Members). These officials assume responsibility for the full management of parochial affairs (Bratton, 2013). Consequently, and contingent on the degree of organizational decentralization, the national government delegates some regulatory functions, taxing, and spending power to local authorities (Ahwoi, 2010).

The operations of local government administration have been leaning towards the top-down mandate than to bottom-up demands in many African countries, and Ghana is not an exception (Bratton, 2013). Though the donor community now relentlessly encourages modifications designed toward the decentralization of administrative functions to local government entities, many countries in Africa have rarely attained this desired outcome and concerns about local government accountability, transparency and responsiveness envisaged as the outcomes of these reforms are yet to be realised (Bratton, 2013).

There is an explicit assumption that the tenets of good governance have the potential to enhance citizen participation and engagement in local governance systems, yet the views and sentiments of the citizens on the performance of government have an influence on local government systems and by implication citizen participation. This issue is currently under-researched, especially in Ghana. The effects of the local institutional environment, such as transparency, corruption and service delivery, on local citizen participation and local government system—despite the worth to democratic governance – have not been thoroughly investigated in Ghana (Krawczyk & Sweet-Cushman, 2017).

Transparency by government and/or public office holders, viewed as the open flow of information from government and/or public sector to the citizens, is ever more imperative in the discourse on the tenets of good governance (Park & Blenkinsopp, 2011). Transparency by government and public administrators has the potential to raise the level of citizen trust for elected political and public office holders (Heald, 2006), leading to a more engaged citizenry (Welch, 2012). The study of the impacts of good governance on citizen engagement in West Africa by Krawczyk, Sweet-Cushman and Muhula (2013) has offered profound evidence to back this idea in the African context, including Ghana. A similar study by Krawczyk & Sweet-Cushman (2017) found that citizens who trust and perceive local government institutions and structures to be more transparent, most often participated more in local governance and political activities, hence, a more vibrant local government system.

Many studies have established that citizens' satisfaction with service delivery greatly improves local government systems. The scrutiny and measurement of pointers of citizen satisfaction with social amenities provided by the local government have been upgraded in recent times (Park and Blenkinsopp, 2011). This notwithstanding, studies investigating the link between citizens' satisfaction with local government provision of social amenities and participation and/or engagement in local governance remains under-studied, particularly in Ghana. If citizens' satisfaction, evaluations and observations of the local governance system influence their level of engagement (Holzner, 2010), we may surmise those citizens' evaluations, observations and satisfaction of local service delivery, viz social amenities provided, will influence how frequently citizens will participate in the local governance system. Positive evaluations and satisfaction will more likely lead to higher levels of

citizen engagement, and negative evaluations and dissatisfaction will less likely lead to any significant levels of citizen engagement in the local governance system.

Corruption is explained to imply the 'misuse of public office for private gain' (Rose- Ackerman, 2008: 551). It is obvious that corruption is an important bottleneck to political participation in many parts of the globe and Ghana is not an exception (Mbaku, 2010), but how precisely it influences participation in local governance is deliberated. Some studies have discovered that adverse experiences with the political system by citizens lead to decreased interaction between the citizens and the governance system (Hiskey & Bowler, 2005; Hiskey & Seligson, 2003; Holzner, 2010). Many other studies have discovered that corruption can act as an impetus for citizens to act, conceivably as a determination to demand accountability from leaders (Inman & Andrews, 2009; Krawczyk et al., 2013). Recent examples in Ghana include the pressure by civil society organizations on the government to probe the Agyapa royalties' deal for instance. It is hypothesized that good governance creates conditions necessary for the interactions between citizens and their political systems, thereby enhancing citizen participation. This study seeks to assess whether citizens' experiences with the local institutional environment more likely increases their participation, engagement and involvement in local governance and consequently good local governance.

### **Data and Methods**

This study utilized the 2018 Round 7 Afrobarometer data for Ghana for the individual level analysis. The sample size for the Afrobarometer is 2400, which was stratified nationally across the previously 10 administrative regions of Ghana. Respondents were selected randomly and interviewed using face-to-face interviews (Afrobarometer, 2020). Afrobarometer collects data about individuals' basic demographic characteristics, attitudes, and behaviour. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed to estimate the model parameters. The one-way ANOVA is appropriate given that it compares the means of the explanatory variables of interest and determines whether any of those means are statistically significant in explaining the dependent/outcome variable. Specifically, it tests the null hypothesis. However, the one-way ANOVA assumes equality of variances for each group, hence its

limitation, it is more powerful in the model estimation since the normality assumptions are held true.

### **Variables and measures**

Local political participation is the dependent variable in the model. The dependent variable is a count variable that measures how Ghanaians participate in governance and political activities in their local areas. Table 1 provides a detailed list of the six acts of participation captured in the response variable. These acts of local governance and/or participation are precise to the local context. The 12 individual level explanatory variables employed in the model are also explained in Table 1 while Table 2 provides a descriptive statistic of the model variables. The demographic variables in the model include location, age, gender, and education. These variables have been found to have an association with political participation (Verba & Nie, 1987; Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995). Individual-level attitudinal variables were also included in the model estimation, that is, an individual's interest in political matters.

Other estimation variables in the model measured the effects of an individual's contact with government institutions and the context of the institutions themselves. These variables include voluntary association membership, likelihood of local government solving problems, party attachment, freeness and fairness of the last election, experience with corruption index, local service delivery and local government transparency. These variables have been associated with political participation in other previous studies, conducted within the context of Africa (Bratton, Mattes & Gyimah-Boadi, 2005; Krawczyk & Sweet-Cushman, 2017). With regards to corruption, the index of corruption was measured using specific questions in the Afrobarometer survey, which questions respondents about the frequency of incidences they offered bribes, gifts and favours to public and/or government office holders in order to complete a desired business or interaction. Social amenities and/or service provision was also determined by the Afrobarometer survey questions that ask respondents: 'how well they think government provides basic social amenities in six vital areas – public infrastructure (e.g., roads), markets, health facilities, sanitation services, taxes, and license fees on private property. An Afrobarometer survey question that asked study respondents how well government officials follow practices such as making the local government's programme of work known,

providing citizens with information about the local budget, allowing citizens to participate in local government decisions, consulting others before making decisions, effectively handling complaints, and guaranteeing the proper use of public funds was used to measure the transparency index.

**Table 1: Variables and Measurement**

Response/Outcome Variable	Question
Local political participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has respondent seen problems in how local government is run?</li> <li>• Has respondent joined others to request government action?</li> <li>• Contact media</li> <li>• Contact official for help</li> <li>• Pay tax or fee to government</li> <li>• Attend a demonstration or protest march</li> </ul>
Individual level explanatory variable	
Type	Variable name
Demographic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rural/urban - respondent location</li> <li>• Gender - is respondent male or female</li> <li>• Age - number of years of respondent</li> <li>• Education - highest educational attainment of respondent</li> </ul>
Attitudinal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interest in political matters</li> </ul>
Institutional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voluntary association membership</li> <li>• Likely of local government solving problems</li> <li>• Party attachment</li> <li>• Freeness and fairness of last election</li> <li>• Experience with corruption index</li> <li>• Local service delivery</li> <li>• Local government transparency</li> </ul>



## Results and Discussion

The descriptive statistics for the independent variables used in estimating the model are presented in Table 2. The demographic variables include age, gender, and education. All the demographic variables have been found to significantly impact local governance. Another demographic variable used in the model was location, though not found to be significant in influencing political participation, which is contrary to many previous studies that assumed that location significantly determines political participation, and that those who live in rural areas, though they have limited opportunities to participate in local governance, are often apt to participate in local governance than people who live in urban areas (Bratton et al., 2005). Individual level attitudinal and institutional variables have also been included in the model estimation, as well as interest in political matters, membership of an association, corruption and transparency index, service delivery, freeness, and fairness of elections, among others.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Model Variables**

Variables	Mean	Std Dev.	Min.	Max.
Urban/Rural (Location)	1.46	.498	1	2
Age	38.18	26.565	18	110
Gender	1.50	.500	1	2
Education	2.55	.922	1	4
Interest in political matters	.83	.713	0	8
Likely of local government solving problems	2.53	2.264	0	9
Voluntary association membership	.73	1.349	0	9
Party attachment	.87	1.511	0	9
Freeness and fairness of last election	4.29	6.582	1	98
Experience with correction index	2.02	2.357	0	9
Local service delivery	1.01	.726	0	9
Local government transparency	1.96	2.070	0	9

The goal of this study was to contribute to fill the knowledge gaps on socio-economic, attitudinal characteristics of individuals and

institutional factors that determine citizen engagement in local governance in Ghana. The study found empirical evidence that endorses the findings of other research which suggest that socio-economic, attitudinal, and institutional factors greatly determine local political participation.

**Table 3: Socio-economic Factors and Attitudinal Characteristics that Determine Local Political Participation in Ghana**

Explanatory variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
(Constant)	.904	.211		4.296	.000
Location	.119	.057	.048	2.080	.038
Age	-.129	.037	-.071	-3.451	.001
Gender	-.185	.051	-.075	-3.607	.000
Education	-.121	.044	-.062	-2.783	.005
Interest in political matters	.109	.038	.060	2.877	.004
Likely of local government solving problems	-.076	.026	-.083	-2.976	.003
Voluntary association membership	.105	.019	.110	5.399	.000
Party attachment	-.001	.017	-.001	-.047	.962
Freeness and fairness of last election	-.007	.004	-.033	-1.642	.101
Experience with corruption index	-.022	.012	-.037	-1.788	.074
Local service delivery	-.195	.054	-.078	-3.624	.000
local government transparency	.046	.013	.074	3.510	.000

At the individual level, the age of respondents was a significant determinant of local governance; the older the respondent, the less active they were engaged in local governance. A unit increase in the age of a respondent results in a 12.9% decrease in political participation. The youth more often participate in political activities than the elderly. This is

contrary to the Krawczyk & Sweet-Cushman (2017) study where the older were more likely to participate in politics. Men were also more likely to participate in local governance (Table 3). Being a woman statistically significantly reduced the level of participation in local political or governance activities by 18.5% (Table 3). Due to negative socio-cultural practices that marginalize women in decision making, women less often participate in local governance. This is in tandem with previous studies (Mahamadu, 2010; Acheampong & Dinye, 2015; Krawczyk & Sweet-Cushman, 2017). Educational attainment significantly determined the level of participation in local governance. More educated respondents were more likely to participate in local governance. Political participation among respondents with no education reduced by 12.1%. This finding was earlier discovered by Oli & Treue (2015) and Krawczyk & Sweet-Cushman (2017).

Regarding the attitudinal and institutional variables, the findings revealed that respondents with a high level of interest in political matters more likely participated in local governance. Those with a high level of interest in political matters participated 10.9% more than those with less or no interest in political matters. Consistent with previous studies, this finding revealed that the likelihood of local government solving problems increases the propensity of citizens' participation in local governance. Membership of voluntary associations also increased the tendency of an individual to participate in local governance by 10.5%, so did local service delivery. Local government transparency also marginally increased the propensity to participate in local governance by 4.6%. This study's finding supports determining the impact of good governance on local political participation. Among the three cardinal principles of good governance (anti-corruption policy, service delivery, and transparency) conceptualized and tested by this study's framework, two (local service delivery and transparency) were found to significantly impact local political participation. Low levels of local government transparency and less satisfaction with service delivery were most likely to pose a risk of apathy and consequently reduce the level of citizen engagement in local governance.

Although many studies have been conducted with regard to issues of voting behaviour in Ghana, very limited research has made modest attempts to examine the individual socio-economic, attitudinal, and institutional factors that determine citizen participation in local

governance. This study fills this knowledge gap by providing novel empirical evidence that explains socio-economic, attitudinal, institutional factors and good governance principles that influence the level of citizen engagement in local governance.

Individual-level variables such as age, gender, and education, as well as attitudinal and institutional factors such as interest in political matters, voluntary association, local service delivery and transparency, have a statistically significant impact on political participation. Men, youth and the educated were more inclined to partake actively in local political activities. Citizens' interactions with institutions more likely motivated their level of participation as citizens who belonged to associations and had a high interest in political matters, mostly participated in local governance activities. Citizens who also perceived local government structures and institutions to be transparent and capable of delivering essential local services and social amenities most likely engaged in local political governance. This is an indication that the fundamental principles of good governance vis-à-vis increased transparency and improved service delivery have the propensity to increase citizen engagement with local governance systems.

## **Conclusion**

While there exist ample studies that investigated factors affecting voters' behaviour in Ghana, little empirical knowledge exists on the determinants of local political participation. Many of the existing studies also failed to incorporate individual and institutional factors in assessing the drivers of participation at the local level. The present study provides novel empirical evidence that addresses these knowledge gaps. This study explored the individual socio-economic, attitudinal and institutional factors that impact citizen engagement in governance at the local level. Individual socio-economic factors, such as age, gender, and education, as well as attitudinal and institutional factors, such as interest in political matters, belonging to a voluntary association, and fundamental principles of good governance vis-a-vis local government transparency and improved service delivery, greatly impacted citizen participation in local governance activities. The study's findings have vital practical implications for Ghana's public administrators who seek to increase participation of citizens in local governance. The need for continued efforts to promote good governance programmes has been

rationalized. The findings also offer an impetus to create an environment in Ghana that underscores the principles of good governance. Given the diversity of social, political, and economic conditions present in the sixteen regions of Ghana, it is imperative to conduct further studies to examine the specific patterns peculiar to each region.

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