



Report

## What's behind the demand for governance?

An assessment of people's  
views

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## Key messages

- People across the world care deeply about governance, but some dimensions of governance emerge as more important to them than others.
- People's top priority is for governments that are honest and effective and can deliver on their needs and expectations. Political freedoms are also important, but remain secondary to concerns about performance and the delivery of goods and services.
- A post-2015 framework that responds to these views would focus more on the the capacity of governments to deliver than on specific institutional forms, with targets designed to strengthen performance across other goals.

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# Governance as a priority to people

As a growing body of research suggests, governance processes and institutional dynamics matter for development. The observation that wealthier countries (with the exception of some oil-rich states) tend to have better governance across a range of dimensions and are more democratic than poorer ones is incontestable and has endured the test of time (Fritz 2008; Rocha Menocal, 2013a). Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson's (2012) analysis of *Why Nations Fail*, for instance, finds that institutions and the quality of governance are the critical hinge separating prosperous states like South Korea from stagnating ones like its neighbour to the north. But while effective and legitimate institutions are an integral part of most successful countries and economies these days, how they got there is less clear – and what institutions matter most, when and why, remains an open question (Rocha Menocal, 2012).

This puzzle has placed governance at the core of the international development agenda, as reflected in ongoing debates around what a post-2015 framework should look like, and what governance dimensions (if any) should be prioritised. While governance was a [blind spot of the Millennium Development Goals](#) (MDGs) (Bergh et al., 2012b), it has moved to the centre of policy discussions over what is needed to bring about inclusive sustainable development by 2030. Arguing that effective governance is a core element of well-being, and not an optional extra, the UN High-Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Framework went further than some had expected in proposing a standalone governance goal with a broad range of possible indicators. At the same time, numerous other proposals on how governance (and relevant measures) could be integrated into a post-2015 framework are being put forward by different global experts and international organisations (Foresti et al., 2014).

## Box 1: Conceptualising 'governance'<sup>1</sup>

Governance is a multidimensional concept that lies at the core of relations between state and society. It is also process-oriented – it focuses on how things are done and how decisions are made rather than simply on what is done or decided. As such, governance can be understood as the rules that regulate the space where state, economic and societal actors interact to make decisions, and the processes and institutions, both formal and informal, through which public authority is exercised.

Governance touches upon all main functions and institutional arenas of a political system, including:

- *Civil Society* (governs the way citizens become aware of/raise issues and participate in the political process)
- *Political Society* (governs the way issues are combined into policy by political institutions like parties and legislature)
- *Executive* (governs the way policies are made by institutions)
- *Bureaucracy* (governs the way policies are administered and implemented by public servants)
- *Economic society* (governs the way state and market interact to promote development)
- *Judiciary* (governs the way disputes and conflict can be resolved peacefully)

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<sup>1</sup> Drawn from Hyden et al, 2003.

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Interestingly - alongside but apart from ongoing high-level policy discussions - governance is also emerging as an issue that ordinary people are deeply concerned about in their day to day lives. Understanding people's views, and specifically what aspects of governance they think matter most for their wellbeing and development, offers a useful perspective to complement more expert-driven proposals emerging to date. It also allows for a timely assessment of whether people's views are being captured in dominant post-2015 proposals and any implications that may arise from that.

In order to address these questions, this paper analyses emerging data from the United Nations (UN)'s MY World survey of people's priorities for the future and how they have voted on governance-related issues<sup>2</sup>. We compare this with a review of available evidence from global perception surveys<sup>3</sup> and participatory research<sup>4</sup> on people's views and experiences relating to governance. As governance consists of a range of different dimensions (Box 1), a key objective is to understand whether there are some aspects that seem to matter more to people than others, and to identify associated trends. Based on findings emerging from the data, we reflect on what this may imply for governments and for post-2015 development goals.

## A snapshot of MY World survey results

What do ordinary people care about when they consider what would make the most difference to their wellbeing, and how does governance fit in? MY World, an innovative global UN survey on people's priorities for the future, seeks to get to the heart of this question. The survey identifies 16 development issues and asks respondents to select their top six, providing a snapshot of what ordinary people (including the poor) think might be more or less important to secure future global development – see Box 2. The survey offers data at scale on people's priorities in relation to a global policy process in ways which would not have been possible in the past.

### Box 2: The MY World survey

MY World is an anonymous survey that seeks to identify what is most important to people in different countries around the world, so as to help inform a new global development framework to succeed the MDGs. Responses are collected online, via SMS, and by paper with the help of grassroots organisations, faith based communities, youth groups, private sector bodies and NGO partners around the world. MY World will run up to 2015, when new global goals are intended to be agreed.

The survey asks people to identify six out of sixteen possible issues they think would make the most difference to their lives and wellbeing:

- *A good education*
- *Better healthcare*
- *Better job opportunities*
- *An honest and responsive government*
- *Affordable and nutritious food*
- *Protection against crime and violence*
- *Access to clean water and sanitation*
- *Equality between men and women*
- *Freedom from discrimination and persecution*
- *Protecting forests, rivers and oceans*
- *Support for people who can't work*
- *Better transport and roads*
- *Political freedoms*
- *Phone and internet access*
- *Reliable energy at home*
- *Action taken on climate change*

These vote options were selected based on the priorities expressed by poor people in existing research and polling exercises, as well as on-going technical and political discussions about post-2015 goals. The survey is not designed to provide an in-depth understanding of what considerations may have contributed to people's

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<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.myworld2015.org/>

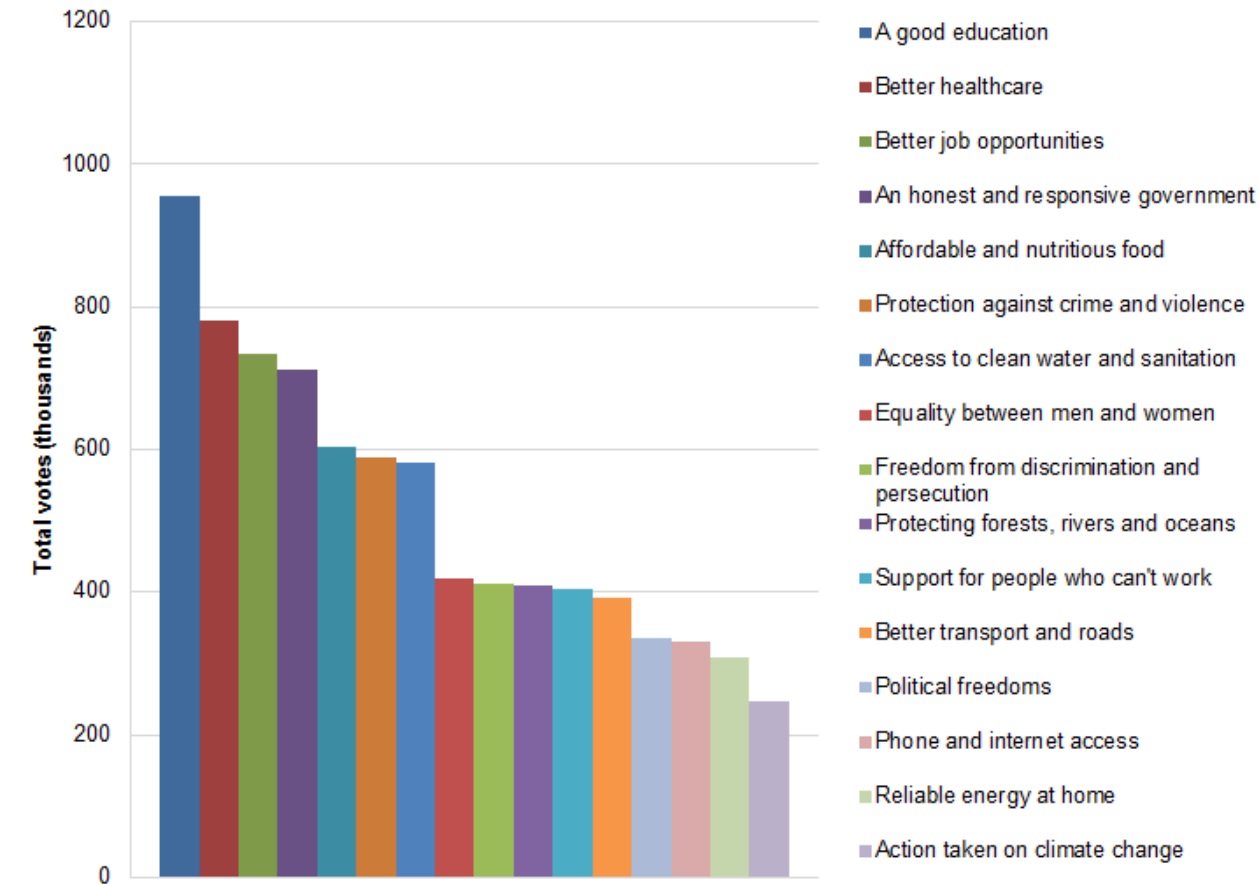
<sup>3</sup> World Values Survey, Global Corruption Barometer and regional Barometers.

<sup>4</sup> Global and multi-country synthesis studies and country-specific participatory research.

choices, but rather to capture a brief, static picture of people's priorities. The MY World data applied in this paper includes all votes submitted via all methods (online, by paper or via SMS). At the time of writing almost 1.5 million people from 194 countries had submitted votes. Some country surveys are representative sampled surveys, while others are not. When working with the data for individual countries, we only use data from those countries where there are at least 1000 votes. The country sample used in this report consists of over 1.3 million voters in 74 countries from across different regions, income levels and political systems (see Appendix 1).

The MY World survey results reveal some very interesting findings in relation to governance. Out of the 16 different development issues it identifies, at least four have important governance dimensions (honest and responsive government, political freedoms, freedom from discrimination, and equality between men and women – see Box 3 for definitions used in the survey for the first two). Of these, 'honest and responsive government' emerges as a clear top priority for survey respondents. It ranks only below education, health and jobs. Other governance-related options, on the other hand, do not rank nearly as high (Figure 1). In particular, 'political freedoms' is the fourth to last option in the overall ranking. This result seems especially prescient in the context of growing popular protests and uprisings around the world, from the Middle East and North Africa to Latin America and parts of Asia, with people clearly clamouring for greater democratic rights and increased representation, but more fundamentally are also expressions of a profound dissatisfaction with leaders and/or political systems who are perceived to be deeply corrupt and unwilling or unable to address the everyday needs and grievances of ordinary citizens.

**Figure 1: MY World priorities rankings<sup>5</sup>**



<sup>5</sup> As of 12 February 2014.

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On its own, of course, the MY World data does not offer insights into what factors might cause voters to rank certain aspects of governance so highly, or why so many people seem to think that ‘an honest and responsive government’ is more important than other aspects of the governance agenda, especially ‘political freedoms’. This speaks to questions at the core of on-going debates on how governance should feature in a post-2015 framework, and understanding more about people’s views on this may offer a fresh perspective.

### Box 3: Governance vote options as defined in MY World<sup>6</sup>

**An honest and responsive government:** *“This means that governments should be effective, transparent, accountable and not corrupt. People should have a say on what the government’s priorities should be, and confidence that they will implement those priorities competently. Governments should agree and implement standards for making information available to all people on how public money is spent.”*

**Political freedoms:** *“This means that every person should be able to play a part in political processes in their own country, including through voting and forming or joining political parties. People should be able to exercise freedom of expression including through free media. People should be able to join and participate in trade unions and all aspects of civil society including diverse forms of civic engagement and voluntary action.”*

A closer analysis of the data suggests some interesting patterns. The total sample consists of 74 countries in different income categories:

- 12 low income countries
- 17 lower-middle income countries
- 22 upper-middle income countries
- 23 high income countries

Out of the 45 upper middle or high income countries included in the sample, 33 (or fully 75%) identify the ‘honest and responsive government’ option as one of their six priorities.<sup>7</sup> By contrast, only 7 out of 17 (or 41%) of lower middle income countries and 3 out of 12 (25%) of low income countries do so. Thus, as shown in the graph below, within the subset of 43 countries<sup>8</sup> where half or more MY World voters have selected ‘an honest and responsive government’ as a high priority, the vast majority is higher income (Figure 2a). This seems to corroborate findings discussed in the literature elsewhere: that in poorer countries immediate ‘bread and butter’ issues remain people’s core priority, and therefore, from their perspective, addressing basic needs takes precedence over what they may consider somewhat loftier concerns such as governance. It also reflects another broad theme in the literature – that populations in wealthier countries have higher expectations of their governments and therefore tend to demand more from them than those in poorer countries. A breakdown by regime type also shows that ‘an honest and responsive government’ is much more of a priority in countries that are more democratic (30 out of 43, or around 70%, Figure 2b). This suggests a similar

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<sup>6</sup> Available at <http://www.myworld2015.org/>. Clearly, not all of these characteristics will be present in all governments to the same degree, and there may even be some trade-offs involved, but this list represents the different elements that together make up indicators of honesty and responsiveness in governments and other public institutions.

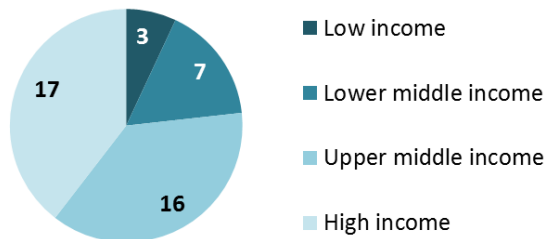
<sup>7</sup> Where at least half of the voters chose the ‘honest and responsive government’ option as one of their top six priorities.

<sup>8</sup> These include: Algeria; Argentina; Australia; Bangladesh; Belarus; Belgium; Brazil; Canada; China; Colombia; Costa Rica; Denmark; Egypt; Gabon; Indonesia; Ireland; Italy; Jordan; Korea (Republic of); Kyrgyzstan; Malaysia; Maldives; Netherlands; New Zealand; Nigeria; Norway; Pakistan; Poland; Portugal; Russian Federation; Serbia; South Africa; Spain; Switzerland; Thailand; Turkey; Ukraine; United Kingdom; United States; Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of); Viet Nam; Yemen; Zimbabwe.

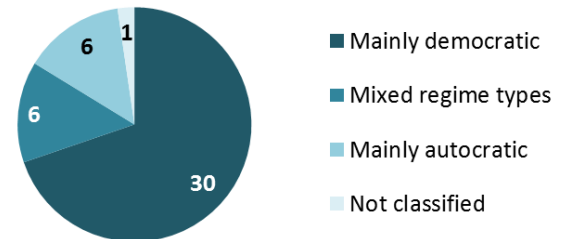
phenomenon – that people living in democratic states are more inclined to have higher expectations of their government and to be more demanding in terms of accountability and effectiveness.

**Figure 2: Countries where half or more MY World voters prioritise ‘an honest and responsive government’<sup>9</sup>**

a) By income levels:



b) By regime type:



*n*=43

As for *political freedoms*, there is a smaller set of countries (26 in total) where people can be said to consider this option as a priority (Figure 3) – i.e. where 30% or more voters in a given country have chosen this among their top 6 priorities.<sup>10</sup> The data suggests that a higher proportion of people voting for *political freedoms* come from countries with autocratic or mixed regime types (15 compared to 11 in mainly democratic ones, Figure 3b), which makes sense in terms of aspirations people may have for freedom when they lack essential political rights. Voters prioritising ‘political freedoms’ tend to be concentrated in higher income countries (17 compared to 9 lower income countries in Figure 3b, or 65% of the countries in the sample), which again highlights that people in wealthier societies are also more likely to be more demanding in terms of protecting certain basic rights and freedoms. Even in these 26 countries where ‘political freedoms’ are seen to be very important, an ‘honest and responsive government’ is still ranked more often as a priority.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> ‘Regime type’ assessment based on *Polity IV: Regime Authority Characteristics and Transitions Datasets, 2012*. Available at: <http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscr/inscr.htm>. Code categorisation: ‘Mainly autocratic’ = more autocratic than democratic points out of 10 for each; ‘Mixed regime types’ = less than 5 out of 10 points democratic; ‘Mainly democratic’ = more than 5 out of 10 democracy points and 1 or less autocratic point. 1 country of the full set is not assessed by Polity IV.

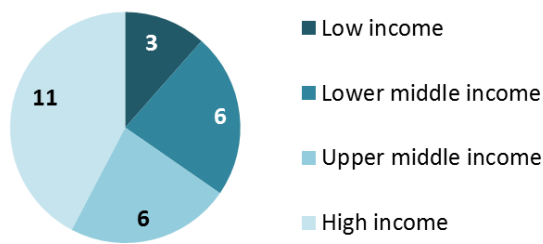
<sup>10</sup> We use a lower threshold to determine the countries where ‘political freedoms’ have been prioritized given that overall, fewer voters selected this option in MY World. 30% of voters corresponds roughly to the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of the distribution of voters for ‘political freedoms’. There are no countries for which ‘political voice’ was chosen by more than 50% of the voters (i.e. the threshold used for ‘an honest and responsive government’).

<sup>11</sup> This applies to all but one country - Democratic Republic of Congo - for which ‘political freedoms’ is ranked in the 4<sup>th</sup> position and ‘honest and responsive government’ just below in the 5<sup>th</sup>.

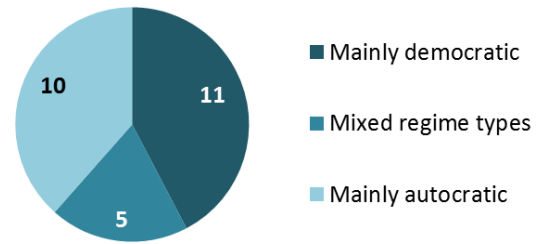


**Figure 3: Countries where 30% or more MY World voters prioritise ‘political freedoms’<sup>12</sup>**

a) By income levels:



b) By regime type:



*n*=26

The profile of voters prioritising each of these different aspects of a possible governance agenda suggests two main things. Firstly, in both wealthier countries and countries where more established democratic forms of governance are in place, people tend to have higher expectations of their governments to deliver, and to do so honestly (Figures 2a and 2b). This may not be surprising if one considers the observation we made at the outset of the paper that, historically and over time, wealthier countries also tend to be more democratic and to have better governance. But in countries with more autocratic or mixed forms of governance, where people do not enjoy political freedoms, gaining these freedoms is more often among people’s top concerns, and the connection to income levels is less strong.

<sup>12</sup> This data comprises 26 countries where at least 30% of the voters chose the ‘political freedoms’ option, noted here in descending order by proportion of votes for ‘political freedoms’: Belarus; Denmark; Congo (Democratic Republic of the); Germany; Norway; Ethiopia; China; Turkey; Sweden; Russian Federation; Switzerland; Netherlands; Nigeria; Belgium; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Jordan; France; Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of); Saudi Arabia; Morocco; United States; Zimbabwe; Yemen; Egypt; Sudan; Korea (Republic of).

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# People's views on governance

The MY World survey indicates that certain aspects of governance are fundamentally important to people. It also shows that 'an honest and responsive government' is a priority for many more voters than 'political freedoms' and other governance-related vote options. But these results are snap shots: they show what people care about without revealing much about what specific factors could be driving their concerns. Nonetheless, it is striking how closely our assessment of participatory research and perception surveys exploring people's views on aspects of governance agrees with MY World survey results in finding that people are more interested in honest governments who respond to their needs than they are in certain forms of governance, like political freedoms. The correlation here is promising, because although the MY World survey does not apply rigorous sampling methods, regional and global perception surveys assessed here<sup>13</sup> draw on larger, consistently representative samples, thus offering a relatively robust evidence base.<sup>14</sup>

As has been discussed, over the past two decades, and building on the lessons emerging from the MDGs, governance and institutions have emerged as a leading concern in the promotion of development. There is growing recognition that the challenge of development, including the effective delivery of core public goods and services, is not so much *what* needs to be done (be it to build schools or provide vaccinations), but, crucially, *how* (processes that facilitate or obstruct change) (Rocha Menocal, 2013b). However, much of the 'good governance' agenda that has come to define development thinking and practice since the 1990s has left much to be desired (yielded disappointing results despite considerable investment from the international assistance community) and is increasingly being called into question (Grindle, 2007). A big part of the problem has been that the standard package of institutional reforms is excessively normative and tends to prioritise specific institutional *forms* a political system takes (e.g. presidential vs. parliamentary systems; elections; anticorruption commissions) over the *functions* a government performs (e.g. the promotion of economic development and management of public finances; the provision of goods and services, investment in human capital, equitable distribution, etc.) (Bratton and Mattes, 2000). Countries across the developing world have been able to make considerable progress in the fight against poverty without fulfilling all the 'good governance' criteria (Rocha Menocal, 2012). Take, for instance, Rwanda's strides in maternal health, or China and Vietnam's rapid economic growth (Chambers & Booth cited in Bergh et al, 2012a; Rocha Menocal and Wild, 2013). This emphasis on form over function (or what governments look like rather than the purposes they serve) has taken much needed attention away from the fundamental question of whether and how governments can improve their performance and deliver on what they are expected to do (Rocha Menocal, 2013c; Andrews, 2013 and Pritchett et al 2010, cited in Foresti et al, 2014).

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<sup>13</sup> Our assessment draws on an analysis of global (The World Value Survey and the Global Corruption Barometer) and regional (Afrobarometer, Latinobarometer, Asianbarometer, Arabbarometer) perception surveys. We conducted a detailed review of the questions in these surveys that describe people's preferences in relation to the government and other aspects of governance. Not all questions were included in all surveys and not all were included in a comparable way (See Annex 2 for details on the specific questions used), which limited the number of questions available for the analysis. We complemented this information with a review of secondary literature interpreting regional Barometers surveys. The country sample was matched as far as possible with that used for the MY World data analysis (the 74 countries in Annex 1), note that the data availability largely depended on the country coverage of the perception surveys.

<sup>14</sup> We also undertook a review of relevant participatory research (both global syntheses and country level studies) in order to deepen our interpretation of survey results.

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These concerns about governance and about form vs. substance are also reflected in our analysis of MY World survey results and of global perception surveys. Findings from MY World and other survey data suggest that, overwhelmingly, people across regions seem to care about effective states that can deliver. We also find that people also care about democracy, especially when asked if they prefer this to other forms of governance. However, they tend to have rather negative assessments of how democracy works in practice, and these assessments are grounded in a fundamental dissatisfaction with the ability of these democracies to deliver. In other words, people's views on governance indicate that the ability of the state to perform is central to their perceptions of what they want/need; and although they also care about democracy (and implicitly political freedoms), they think that this should above all support effective delivery. So the concern is not fundamentally about governance forms per se but with performance. It is worth noting that there is nothing inherent in the nature of a democratic system that should automatically lead to better outcomes, but people, especially across the developing world, do seem to expect that, and as discussed later in the paper this can place democracy under considerable strain (Rocha Menocal, 2013a).

### People's top priority is that their governments deliver effectively and honestly

Analysis of global and regional perception surveys covering countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia reveals that the aspect of governance respondents care most about is that their governments 'deliver the goods' (Bratton, 2010; Leavy and Howard, 2013) – in other words that people can rely on their governments to provide essential support and services. Survey results show that the main 'goods' implied here are economic development and employment, as well as essential public services such as health, education, water and sanitation. Perception surveys strongly support MY World survey results on this point, where voters identified education, health and jobs as their core concerns, followed closely by 'an honest and responsive government'. Corruption is also an issue that emerges as an absolute priority for people everywhere. Regional Barometer survey results<sup>15</sup> show that the percentage of people pointing to economic concerns as the main challenge that their governments should address is much higher than concerns about democracy and rights:

- In Asia (2010), 40 per cent of people interviewed think their government should first address the management of the economy, poverty or unemployment, while less than one per cent think it should be democracy / political rights.
- In Latin America (2010), unemployment and economic problems constitute about 37 per cent of what people think are the most important problems in their countries, while issues of governance such as political crisis are much further down the list, accounting for less than seven per cent of the votes.
- In five<sup>16</sup> countries of the Middle East (2006-08), 46 per cent of people highlight economic concerns as the main challenge facing the government. Authoritarianism is only a priority issue for less than five per cent. This may seem striking in light of the uprisings that have engulfed the region since, calling for the end of dictatorial rule and the institution of democratic systems, but it does help to shed light on some of the profound causes of dissatisfaction rooted in the economic and social grievances of vast pockets of those populations that led to the unrest.<sup>17</sup>
- Only 0.4 per cent of African people interviewed in Afrobarometer (2008) think democracy or political rights should be a national priority. Instead, ensuring economic growth and adequate rates of employment emerge as the top priorities (Mattes 2010b).

In addition people express concerns about how 'the goods' are distributed - so for many it is not enough that governments deliver, but also that they do so equitably. Again, this is at the core of

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<sup>15</sup> These are based on the full country sample in each regional barometer survey.

<sup>16</sup> Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Yemen

<sup>17</sup> See [After the Arab Spring: The Uphill Struggle for Democracy](#), Freedom House

governance and its focus on the ‘how’ things are done and not simply the ‘what’. For instance, in Africa, confidence in economic performance and other aspects of government delivery is low and declining. Across 34 countries between 2011 and 2013 Afrobarometer finds strong dissatisfaction with economic conditions despite robust growth rates in many of the countries included. In fact, 56 per cent of Africans view their governments as doing ‘fairly/very badly’ on economic management; 69 per cent ‘fairly/very badly’ at improving living standards of the poor; and 71 per cent ‘fairly/very badly’ at creating jobs. The same survey finds that dissatisfaction with economic performance is mainly due to government failures to ensure growth gains provide sufficient jobs or reach the poor, as the vast majority of Africans surveyed (at 76 per cent) see their governments as doing ‘fairly/very badly’ at narrowing income gaps (Hofmeyr, 2013).

Participatory research also points to the importance of inclusive delivery as fundamental to effective governance. Recent global participatory research syntheses find that people living in poverty see governance dynamics as closely inter-linked with their experience of poverty and exclusion – for instance, when even the most basic services, such as decent sanitation facilities, are not allocated and distributed fairly (CAFOD, 2013; Leavy and Howard, 2013). For example, in Bangladesh those living in poverty endure persistent drainage problems, with sewage flooding their homes. In these areas people have a strong sense that a lack of government action to resolve the problem is the result of their inability to hold the government to account because of their marginalised position in society (Leavy and Howard, 2013).

Inclusive delivery thus requires that governments respond to the needs of all citizens and not just those of specific groups or elites, in order to address underlying dynamics of exclusion and marginalisation (often along ethnic, religious or gendered lines), now widely recognised as central to MDG gaps in reaching the poorest. While MY World did assess this dimension to some extent through the options of *freedom from discrimination and persecution* and *equality among men and women*, it did not contain a clear option on social or economic inclusion, so it is difficult to compare these results across our data sources. Nonetheless, the literature indicates such dynamics should be seen as central elements to any agenda that seeks to strengthen government performance in ‘delivering the goods’ in more inclusive and equitable ways.

We also find that corruption is a key factor in relation to people’s satisfaction with their governments, and perceptions of government performance overall. As Table 1 suggests, people from countries all over the world, irrespective of income levels, believe that ‘corruption is a problem’ in their country. On a scale from one to five, the average score people give is 4.1. This echoes MY World results where ‘an honest and responsive government’ is ranked as a leading priority for voters from around the world.

**Table 1: Perceptions of corruption**

	All countries	Low income	Lower-middle income	Upper-middle income	High income
<i>Corruption is a problem</i>	4.1	4.1	4.1	4.3	3.8

*Note: On a scale from 1 to 5, 5 indicates that people think corruption is a very serious problem*

Source: Global Corruption Barometer (2013)

Participatory research highlights that problems of corruption have a defining influence on whether people view their governments as effective, fair and responsive. Moreover, it is seen to strongly affect whether and how resources, services and other forms of intended support (like social protection) are distributed and made available to the poorest (Leavy and Howard, 2013; CAFOD, 2013; UNDP and OHCHR, 2013).

Corruption can also have a pernicious effect on the quality of services provided. For example, in Nigeria there is a serious problem of unreported crime incidents to the police, as people fear that they

will be asked to pay bribes for police assistance (Afrobarometer, 2013). The presence of corruption in state bureaucracies tends to undermine the legitimacy of governments in the eyes of the population, and so, irrespective of whether corruption does in fact have an adverse impact on the delivery of outcomes (a point that remains much contested in academic and policy circles and which we will touch on later), it is certainly perceived as doing so.

### Political freedoms are also important, but they remain secondary to concerns about what governments deliver

Surveys show that people also care about democracy, but often appreciations of democracy are linked to how they perform. When asked in the abstract about which form of government they prefer, an overwhelming majority of people surveyed across countries and income groups choose democracy and, implicitly, political freedoms (see Table 2)<sup>18</sup>.

**Table 2: Preference for democracy by income group - percentage of people that think that democracy is...**

	All countries	Low income	Lower-middle income	Upper-middle income	High income
<i>Preferable</i>	70	75	71	68	73
<i>Not preferable</i>	12	8	13	14	12
<i>Not important</i>	11	11	10	12	11
<i>DK/No answer</i>	6	7	7	6	4

Yet even if people care about democracy and political freedom in the abstract, they tend to think about democracy in more instrumental terms. In general, they feel that democracy is working poorly in practice, and this is mainly linked to fundamental dissatisfaction with the ability of democracies to deliver. The main challenge therefore is that, even in contexts where democracy exists, it is not seen to be delivering well by most people – and, as we have seen, delivery is the overwhelming priority for most people. For instance, participatory research finds that people feel deeply disappointed by governance failures, especially in the provision of basic services like health and education, in terms of both access and quality (Leavy and Howard, 2013). Over two-thirds of Barometer respondents across regions define their country as ‘a democracy with problems’ (Table 3).

**Table 3: Perceptions on democracy - percentage of people that think their country is...**

	Total
<i>Not a democracy</i>	5.56
<i>A democracy with problems</i>	67.46
<i>A full democracy</i>	16.96

The challenge of democracies not seen to be performing well is acute across the developing world, where governments and political parties are not seen to be delivering on promises made or living up to people’s expectations. For example, in Latin America countries are seeing widespread declines in public confidence that their governments can solve some of the most pressing challenges of crime, corruption and drug trafficking. According to Latinobarometer survey results, expectations that the

<sup>18</sup> Statistics derived from surveys have a margin of error that depends on the sample size and sampling strategy. This needs to be taken into account when interpreting results. With a sample size of 1,000 people, a difference of approximately 3 percentage points is significant ‘at the 95% confidence interval’ (i.e. if the survey is conducted 100 times using the exact same procedures, the margin of error would include the “true value” in 95 out of the 100 surveys (Gallup, 2014).

state can address crime fell from 61 per cent in 2011 to 55 per cent in 2013. In 2009, eight governments in the survey had more than 60 per cent approval ratings, but by 2013 this number had come down to four (Latinbarometer, 2013). Countries of the region experiencing civil protest and upheaval in recent years illustrate this trend. Recent protests in Brazil, for instance, are widely attributed to dissatisfaction with the quality of services in spite of relatively high taxes, coupled with perceptions of a largely corrupt political system – even as Brazilian democracy has become one of the most established in the region (Americas Barometer 2012 in Moseley and Layton, 2013; Benequista and Gaventa, 2011).

These trends are by no means limited to Latin America. The world is witnessing increasing civic protest linked to people’s dissatisfaction with their governments and their failures to deliver for vast pockets of the population in countries across the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa, and, most recently Central Asia. Even established Western democracies in Europe and elsewhere have not been spared, with people beginning to show profound disenchantment with the distributive impacts of democracy in the context of the financial crisis and austerity programmes. Growing discontent with governments and political leaders across countries and regions reflects that today people have little patience for governments that do not quickly and fulsomely rise to the challenge of delivery (often with similar concerns about how equitably ‘the goods’ are being distributed).

Associated with this, we find that democracy and its institutions are facing a severe crisis of representation in the face of growing citizen dissatisfaction and disengagement (Mainwaring et al., 2006). Crucial institutions of democratic representation and accountability, including both parliaments and political parties, are consistently ranked as the institutions that people trust the least, while the military emerges as the institution that enjoys most confidence with the public across the board (Table 4 below).

**Table 4: Confidence in institutions - percentage of people that trust...**

	All countries	Low income	Lower-middle income	Upper-middle income	High income
<i>The army</i>	61.0	41.4	65.9	57.6	63.6
<i>The police</i>	56.0	45.9	50.7	51.0	68.2
<i>The president/prime minister</i>	54.5	58.2	51.4	56.8	35.7
<i>The justice system</i>	50.9	52.6	48.3	50.2	52.4
<i>The local government</i>	49.2	51.9	51.8	48.5	44.3
<i>The electoral commission</i>	49.1	42.0	50.9	50.0	55.6
<i>The civil services</i>	48.0	44.2	58.4	47.3	44.8
<i>The government</i>	46.2	26.4	55.6	53.6	38.2
<i>The parliament</i>	43.0	54.3	44.7	45.5	34.7
<i>The political parties</i>	30.3	41.0	37.2	32.3	20.1

People experience difficulty engaging with the state effectively. Even where they feel that they have the freedom to express their ‘political voice’ (through elections for instance, or the freedom to say what they think), they don’t see this as having a substantive effect and making a difference to their lives on its own (and this can be an important marker of how democracy is seen to be functioning) (Table 5). Participatory research highlights people’s need for their governments to respond effectively to challenges that they face, and finds that, even in contexts where people feel that they have the freedom to express their ‘political voice’, they are deeply frustrated by a lack of government responsiveness and accountability (Leavy and Howard, 2013; CAFOD, 2013).

**Table 5: Perceptions on freedom of expression and political action - percentage of people that...**

<i>Think that they are free to say what they think</i>	75
<i>Voted in last elections</i>	77
<i>Think they have voice between elections</i>	22
<i>Have engaged in political action</i>	38
<i>Think that they are free to join an organization</i>	43

This is an especially worrisome trend among young people, who tend to be the least satisfied and most disengaged from the democratic process (Table 5). Young people's feelings of dissatisfaction are notably more prevalent in low and middle income countries than in high income ones (Table 7).

**Table 6: Perceptions by age groups - percentage of people that...**

	Age			
	18-30	30-45	45-60	60+
<i>Are satisfied with Democracy</i>	48.19	53.12	57.61	55.24
<i>Voted in last elections</i>	66.68	81.97	88.77	78.01
<i>Have engaged in political action</i>	38.71	42.22	36.31	32.73
<i>Think that they are free to say what they think</i>	71.58	76.79	76.77	75.96
<i>Think that they are free to join an organization</i>	36.21	40.81	48.74	53.49

**Table 7: Perceptions of young people by country income level - percentage of young people that are...**

18-30 year-olds	Low income	Lower-middle income	Upper-middle income	High income
<i>Not satisfied with democracy</i>	48.45	50.49	47.9	33.77

Over the past several years there has been a growing interest in greater government transparency as a means of facilitating participation and government accountability, and there is evidence that gaps in transparency certainly add to the challenge in these areas (Gyimah-Boadi et al., 2013). However, consistent with findings by others studying dynamics of transparency and accountability as a means to improve outcomes (Bergh et al., 2012a), transparency (and specifically increased access to information) is not sufficient on its own to ensure greater government responsiveness, and that other contextual variables are crucially important.

In summary, based on our analysis of global and regional perception survey data, alongside MY World survey results, we find that people's main concern is above all that governments 'deliver the goods'. Consistent with other studies in this area, the discussion above suggests that there is a considerable 'representation gap' between governments and citizens (Bratton, 2010a), and a deep seated dissatisfaction with government performance (Bratton, 2010a). In this sense perceptions about governance are rather instrumental, or focused on function more than on form. This does not mean that people do not want and value political freedom in principle, but in practice this remains a secondary concern. In other words, even if most people prefer democracy, this is mainly in relation to what they hope it can deliver, and perceptions of government are judged firmly on this basis. Thus the main challenge on the table is for governments to close the gap between what people expect and what is provided. Doing this would help to restore confidence in political institutions, and begin to address people's frustration that even if they have the freedom to speak they will not be heard.

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# What does this all mean?

## Implications for governments

As has been discussed, since the 1990s, governance has been a leading concern in international development policy circles, and it is now at the centre of high level debates about what a post-2015 development framework should look like and how it should take governance issues into account. This paper, which has analysed governance perspectives from the bottom-up, has helped to highlight that governance is also something that ordinary people care deeply about, and see it (or at least some of its dimensions) as essential to improving their wellbeing and future prospects.

A crucial message emerging from the analysis, which draws from both the MY World survey and other, more detailed global and regional perception surveys (particularly the regional Barometers), is that, when thinking about governance, people tend to care first and foremost about state effectiveness and the ability of the state to deliver (be it in terms of generating growth and jobs, providing basic services, ensuring a more equitable distribution of the 'goods' provided, etc). In other words, their view of governance is quite instrumental, based on outcomes and not necessarily on which normative attributes that should be inherent to governance or particular forms it should take. This is clearly illustrated in MY World survey results, which show that respondents overwhelmingly privilege 'an honest and responsive government' over other options that also have important governance dimensions, including 'political freedoms'.

In the analysis we have undertaken in this paper, corruption also emerges across the board as an issue that people everywhere, be it in wealthy or less wealthy countries, are deeply concerned about. Corruption features prominently in high level policy making circles. In the UK for example, combatting corruption is at the heart of the Prime Minister's 'golden thread' narrative on development. Clearly, corruption is a big problem, as it can foster impunity, impose high costs on poor people, increase inequality, and lower the returns to development investment. However, it is not clear from the available evidence whether corruption can be linked in a linear way with weaker development outcomes, and some emerging literature suggests that corruption may not always be as harmful to outcomes as is generally assumed (Booth, 2012). Moreover, corruption is likely to be more of a symptom of deeper governance (as well as other) weaknesses than an innate pathology. Thus, beyond a focus on the manifestations of corruption itself, it is essential to address these more fundamental factors, given that this is where the root cause(s) of the problem actually lie (Kolstad et al., 2008).

Issues related to political voice and participation (and more broadly democracy) may also matter to people, but they are only secondary to performance. For instance, the different surveys show that, in the abstract, people support democracy over all other forms of government, but they remain deeply dissatisfied with the quality of democratic governance, which across the developing world is rooted in perceptions that it has failed to deliver tangible benefits and to improve the wellbeing of ordinary people. There is also growing disillusionment with and disenfranchisement from the political system, especially among the young, with core democratic institutions like parliaments and political parties consistently appearing as those least trusted by the population (much below the army, the police, and the executive branch of government).



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This has important implications for legitimacy. States are legitimate when ‘key political elites and the public accept the rules regulating the exercise of power and the distribution of wealth as proper and binding’. Legitimacy is multifaceted and complex, and historically, states have relied on a combination of sources and methods to build their legitimacy (Rocha Menocal, 2011). However, the analysis above suggests that performance-based legitimacy may be particularly important, and ordinary citizens may deem it more essential than other forms (e.g. legitimacy based on process and the way decisions are made, or on ideology etc.). In effect, as has been discussed in this paper, the survey data we studied suggests that people in general feel that they have the freedom to express their voice, in the sense that they can vote, etc., but it’s what they can do with their voice, and whether they can make it heard, that matters the most. Here assessments are less positive: very few survey respondents feel that they can actually affect how governments work, and they are disappointed in the way those governments work because they are failing to deliver the goods.

This is particularly challenging if we consider that there has been a fundamental shift in the nature of political regimes across the developing world over the past several decades, and that most countries in the world today are formal democracies. Most recently, the Arab Spring (which generated tremendous enthusiasm for bottom-up change in the Middle East) and its aftermath have shown that it is easier to oust a dictator than to establish a functioning democracy that can effectively address people’s demands and expectations. Thus the most pressing concern of the 21<sup>st</sup> century may well be to support emerging democracies so that they can deliver and improve the well-being of their populations (Rocha Menocal, 2013a).

### Implications for a post-2015 framework

What does all this imply for a post-2015 framework? Clearly, governance matters to people. But governance is multi-dimensional, and some aspects may matter more to people than others. Thus the key question is how governance can most effectively feature in future goals.

On one hand **it would be useful to include a stand-alone goal on governance**, signalling clearly the centrality of governance to development outcomes. But while governance comprises many dimensions and may be deserving as a stand-alone goal area, not all good things necessarily go together, and there are also risks to ‘putting all the eggs in one basket’ in a governance goal that seeks to address lots of dimensions (Foresti, 2014).

As this assessment highlights, it is more useful to understand governance primarily as a means to support concrete outcomes that make a difference to people’s lives and wellbeing, than as an end in itself, which people see as less important. This calls for governance to be **included not only as a stand-alone goal, but also as a cross-cutting category placed in targets**, and a key agenda is for governance debates to offer clear and specific ideas on how governance targets can support outcomes across other goal areas. This approach would help to identify some of the governance bottlenecks that have impeded MDG progress in areas like education, health, water and sanitation, and which have contributed to the biggest progress gaps.

Of all the possible dimensions of governance that could be part of a post-2015 development framework, state effectiveness and capacity to deliver would be central. This is borne out not only by the people’s perceptions explored here, but also by a growing body of scholarly and academic research (Keefer, 2009). Here, it seems that the focus will need to be on enabling key (government) functions than on fixating on any particular institutional form. This is essential in order to help support improved outcomes across other goal areas. This would signal a step-change in thinking about governance and development, and requires moving away from normative models about how change happens.

To some extent, a greater focus on governance in terms of how governments can deliver rather than what they look like is already emerging in proposals on how to incorporate governance into a post-

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2015 framework. Out of a total of 40 key proposals for governance-related targets and indicators identified by Foresti et al. (2014), for example, 28, or almost three-quarters, are intended to focus on 'function', while only 8, or less than a quarter, concentrate on 'form'.<sup>19</sup>

A useful post-2015 approach to governance would thus identify targets to support increased state effectiveness to deliver outcomes across most other goals, but particularly health, education, and the management of water and other natural resources, where better governance can support how services are delivered and to reach those 'left behind'. Here (as we have argued previously<sup>20</sup>), transparency and accountability remains a useful entry point. But such targets would need to be tailored to how they can best support outcomes in each other goal area, rather than applying generic or normative approaches. Otherwise there is a risk that this becomes another tick-box exercise where form (e.g. laws to ensure right to information) is privileged over function (actual accountability).

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<sup>19</sup> A small remainder (4) are uncategorised or address both.

<sup>20</sup> See Bergh et al, 2012a

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# Annex 1: Country sample

Algeria	Mexico
Argentina	Morocco
Australia	Nepal
Bangladesh	Netherlands
Belarus	New Zealand
Belgium	Nicaragua
Brazil	Nigeria
Cameroon	Norway
Canada	Pakistan
Chile	Peru
China	Philippines
Colombia	Poland
Congo (Democratic Republic of the)	Portugal
Costa Rica	Russian Federation
Côte d'Ivoire	Rwanda
Denmark	Saudi Arabia
Ecuador	Serbia
Egypt	South Africa
Ethiopia	Spain
Fiji	Sri Lanka
France	Sudan
Gabon	Swaziland
Germany	Sweden
Ghana	Switzerland
Haiti	Tanzania (United Republic of)
India	Thailand
Indonesia	Tunisia
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	Turkey
Ireland	Uganda
Italy	Ukraine
Jordan	United Kingdom
Kenya	United States
Korea (Republic of)	Uruguay
Kyrgyzstan	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)
Liberia	Viet Nam
Malaysia	Yemen
Maldives	Zimbabwe

# Annex 2: Selected perception survey questions

Question	Sample question	Source & coverage
<p><b>Preference for democracy</b>  <i>Recorded as the percentage of people that think democracy is Preferable; Not preferable; Not important</i></p>	<p><b>Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.</li> <li>- Sometimes non-democratic can be preferable to democracy.</li> <li>- Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Afrobarometer</b> (Round 4 2008); <b>Latinobarometer</b> (2010); <b>Asiabarometer</b> (Wave 3 2010); <b>Arab barometer</b> (Wave I 2006-2008); <b>World Value Survey</b> (Wave 5 2005-08)</p>
<p><b>Confidence in institutions</b>  <i>Recorded as the percentage of people that trust –a lot/some- each institution</i></p>	<p><b>Please look at this card and tell me, how much trust do you have in each of the following groups/institutions. Would you say you have a lot, some, a little or no trust:</b></p> <p>National Congress / Parliament; Judiciary; Political parties; Armed forces; Local government; National Electoral Commission; State</p>	<p><b>Afrobarometer</b> (Round 4 2008) (except the armed forces, the government and the civil services); <b>Latinobarometer</b> (2010); <b>Asiabarometer</b> (Wave 3 2010); <b>Arab barometer</b> (Wave I 2006-2008) (except the government, the civil service, the local government and the electoral commission); <b>World Value Survey</b> (Wave 5 2005-08) (except the electoral commission)</p>
<p><b>Corruption is a problem</b>  <i>Average score</i></p>	<p><b>To what extent do you think that corruption is a problem in the public sector in this country?</b></p> <p>1. Not a problem at all - 5. A very serious problem</p>	<p><b>Global Corruption Barometer</b> (2013)</p>
<p><b>Perceptions on democracy</b>  <i>Recorded as the percentage of people that think their country is Not a democracy; A democracy with problems; A full democracy</i></p>	<p><b>In your opinion how much of a democracy is [Country Name]?</b></p> <p>A full democracy / A democracy, but with minor problems / A democracy, with major problems / Not a democracy</p>	<p><b>Afrobarometer</b> (Round 4 2008); <b>Latinobarometer</b> (2010); <b>Asiabarometer</b> (Wave 3 2010); <b>Arab barometer</b> (Wave I 2006-2008); <b>World Value Survey</b> (Wave 5 2005-08)</p>
<p><b>Think that they are free to say what they think</b>  <i>Recorded as the percentage of people that agree or strongly agree</i></p>	<p><b>Now I am going to read to you a list of statements that describe how people often feel about the state of affairs in [country name]. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each of these statements.</b></p> <p>People are free to speak what they think without fear</p>	<p><b>Afrobarometer</b> (Round 4 2008); <b>Latinobarometer</b> (2010); <b>Asiabarometer</b> (Wave 3 2010)</p>
<p><b>Voted in last elections</b></p>	<p><b>Did you vote in your country's recent elections to the national parliament?</b></p> <p>Yes/No</p>	<p><b>Afrobarometer</b> (Round 4 2008); <b>Asiabarometer</b> (Wave 3 2010); <b>Arab barometer</b>(Wave I 2006-2008); <b>World Value Survey</b> (Wave 5 2005-08)</p>
<p><b>Think they have voice between elections</b>  <i>Recorded as the percentage of people that</i></p>	<p><b>How easy or difficult is it for an ordinary person to have his voice heard between elections?</b></p> <p>Very difficult / Somewhat difficult / Somewhat</p>	<p><b>Afrobarometer</b> (Round 4 2008); <b>Asiabarometer</b> (Wave 3 2010)</p>



<i>think is somewhat easy or easy</i>	easy / Easy	
<b>Have engaged in political action</b> <i>Recoded as the percentage of people that have done any of those actions at least once</i>	<b><i>Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have never, once, or more than once done any of these things during the past three years. (never, once, or more than once)</i></b> Attended a demonstration or protest march / Got together with others to raise an issue or sign a petition	<b>Afrobarometer</b> (Round 4 2008); <b>Asiabarometer</b> (Wave 3 2010); <b>Arab barometer</b> (Wave I 2006-2008); <b>World Value Survey</b> (Wave 5 2005-08)
<b>Think that they are free to join an organization</b> <i>Recoded as the percentage of people that think is somewhat free or free</i>	<b><i>In this country, how free are you to join any political organization you want?</i></b> Not at all free / Not very free / Somewhat free / Completely free	<b>Afrobarometer</b> (Round 4 2008); <b>Asiabarometer</b> (Wave 3 2010); <b>Arab barometer</b> (Wave I 2006-2008)
<b>Satisfied with Democracy</b> <i>Recoded as the percentage of people who are fairly satisfied or very satisfied</i>	<b><i>On the whole, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way democracy works in [Country]. Are you?</i></b> Not at all satisfied / Not very satisfied / Fairly satisfied / Very satisfied	<b>Afrobarometer</b> (Round 4 2008); <b>Latinobarometer</b> (2010); <b>Asiabarometer</b> (Wave 3 2010); <b>Arab barometer</b> (Wave I 2006-2008)



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