



## **POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND POPULAR PERCEPTION OF POLITICAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN GHANA**

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### **Introduction**

Ghana's political history has been a checkered one, with non-democratic regimes<sup>1</sup> dominating the greater part of the post-independence history until the re-emergence of constitutional rule in 1992. Sandbrook et al (1999)<sup>2</sup> described these period as hegemonic with only sporadic respect for the rule of law, as dictated by the patrimonial political leaders. Policies instituted during these periods curtailed citizens' civil liberties and democratic rights and made political/public office holders less accountable. However, the democratic periods counterbalanced these shortcomings, and made citizens more active in demanding accountability from their leaders. The current democratic dispensation is believed to have deepened the processes for demand and supply of accountability.

This paper examines the hypothesis that there is a link between Ghanaians' political participation and popular perception of political accountability, and uses data from the Rounds 2 and 3 Afrobarometer surveys<sup>3</sup> carried out in 2002 and 2005 to test this hypothesis. It commences with a discussion on the conceptualized elements of political participation and how they influence perception of political accountability. This provides the framework within which the survey findings are discussed.

### **Elements of political participation**

Political participation, according to Jan Teorell et. al., enables citizens to voice their grievances through numerous channels and be heard by those in authority. These channels include voting, writing letters to representatives, campaigning for a political party, signing a petition and joining a protest march. A more subtle approach may involve offering financial support to charity and boycotting certain products on the market.<sup>4</sup> Nelson (1987)<sup>5</sup> and Bray (1999)<sup>6</sup> corroborate Jan Teorell

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<sup>1</sup> 1957 – 1966: Independence and 1<sup>st</sup> Republic with Convention People's Party (CPP) as ruling party; 1966 – 1969: 1<sup>st</sup> military overthrow and government; 1969 – 1972 2<sup>nd</sup> Republic with United Party as the ruling party; 1972 – 1978: 2<sup>nd</sup> military overthrow and government, including a palace coup in 1978 to restructure the then military government; June – September 1979: 3<sup>rd</sup> military overthrow and government; September 1979 – December 1981: 3<sup>rd</sup> Republic with People's National Party as ruling party; 1982 – 1992: 4<sup>th</sup> military overthrow and government; 1992 – 2000: 4<sup>th</sup> Republic with the National Democratic Congress (NDC) as the ruling party; 2001 – 2005: 4<sup>th</sup> Republic with the New Patriotic Party (NPP) as the ruling party.

<sup>2</sup> Sandbrook, Richard and Jay Oelbaum. "Reforming the Political Kingdom: Governance and Development in Ghana's Fourth Republic." Critical Perspectives. Ghana Center for Democratic Development; June 1999.

<sup>3</sup> The Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from 18 African countries. The Institute provides coordination for Democracy in South Africa (Idasa), the Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) and Michigan State University. Afrobarometer surveys select nationally representative, randomly stratified, probability sample of citizens of voting age (18 years and above) and administers face-to-face interviews using standard survey instrument that ask the same set of questions from one round to another so that trends in public opinion can be tracked over time. Rounds 2 and 3 survey were conducted in September, 2002 and March 2005 with sample size of 1,200 each which give the margin of error of  $\pm 3\%$ . See [www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org), for more.

<sup>4</sup> Jan Teorell, Mariano Torca, and José Ramón Montero "Political Participation" Second Draft of Chapter 12 of Volume B: Population Studies.

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of definitions of political participation, see Nelson, Joan "Political Participation" in Weiner, Myon and Samuel P. Hustington "Understanding Political Development. Boston & Toronto. Little Brown & Company 1987 Pp. 103 – 159.



et. al. by defining political participation as any behavior intended to directly or indirectly influence public decision-making process thereby securing a particular political outcome.

In the light of these descriptions, this paper conceptualizes political participation as series of activities that significantly influence public policy or government actions, including participation in political discourse, election processes and community action. These broad activities comprise of the specific actions below.

1. Participation in political discourse
  - a. Discussions among citizens on issues bordering on public affairs and politics.
  - b. Contact between civil society and public office holders.
2. Participation in election processes
  - a. Citizens' efforts aimed at exercising their franchise (registering to vote and voting).
  - b. Citizens' knowledge in current affairs and constitutional matters.
3. Participation in community action
  - a. Citizens' membership in civil society or religious organizations and political parties.
  - b. Citizens' involvement in community meetings, demonstrations and joining others to raise issues.

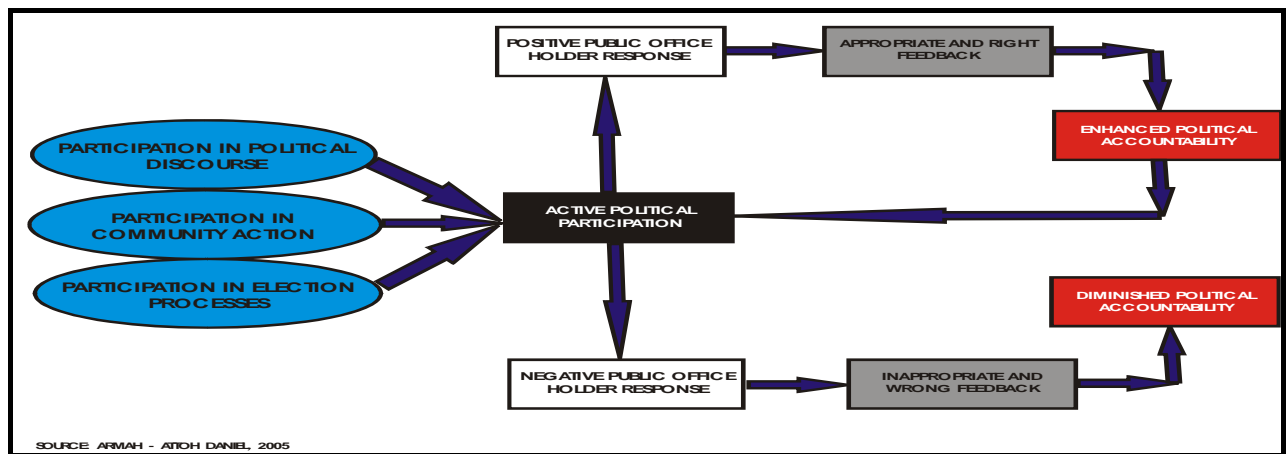
### **Political participation and popular perception of political accountability**

The conceptual framework of the linkage between political participation and perception of political accountability is captured in the model below (Figure 1). Ghanaians' involvement in political discourse, election processes and community action creates an "active political participation" environment that demands either positive or negative response from political/public office holders. While a positive response sends appropriate signals/feedback to the citizenry and enhances political accountability (which subsequently feeds back into the political participation processes to deepen the democratic culture of the country), a negative response does otherwise.

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<sup>6</sup> Brady, Henry.1999. "Political Participation", in Robinson, John et al., eds., Measures of Political Attitudes, Pp 737. San Diego & London: Academic Press.

FIGURE 1: POLITICAL PARTICIPATION - PERCEPTION OF POLITICAL ACCOUNTABILITY MODEL



### General findings

Political participation in recent times has occurred within the framework of multi-party democracy; hence the opinions of Ghanaians about democracy are first discussed to provide the context for discussions on political participation and perception of political accountability linkage.

Generally, Ghanaians have positive opinions about democracy. Significant majorities (79 percent in 2002 and 82 percent in 2005) reject one party rule; 83 percent in both years reject military rule; while 82 percent in 2002 and 85 percent in 2005 reject presidential dictatorship. Preference for democracy significantly increased from a little above half of the respondents (52 percent) in 2002 to three-fourths (75 percent) in 2005.

Indeed, the proportion who think multiple parties provide real opportunity to choose who governs them also went up from 56 percent in 2002 to 69 percent in 2005. It is not surprising that over eight in every ten Ghanaians (87 percent in 2002 and 91 percent in 2005) believe in regular, open and honest elections for selection of national leaders; while over four in every five Ghanaians in both years (81 percent and 87 percent respectively) agree that everyone should be permitted to vote irrespective of knowledge of electoral issues.

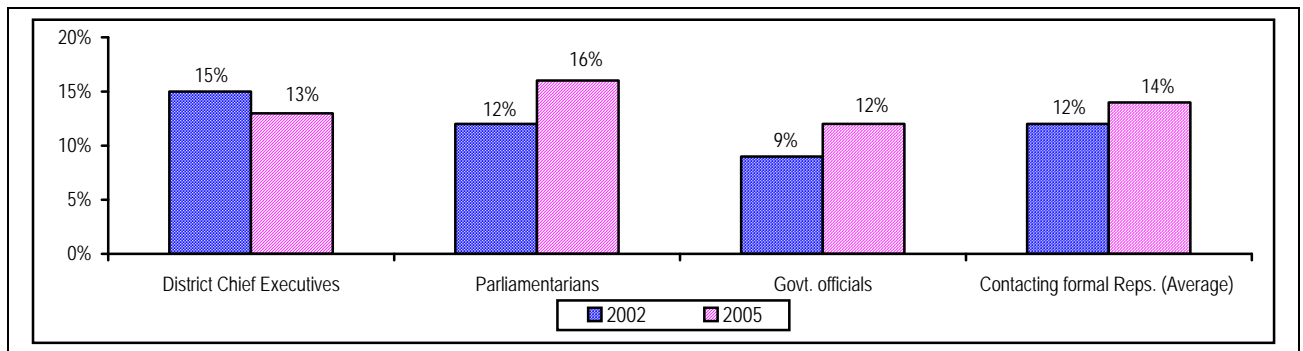
### Political participation of Ghanaians

#### *Participation in political discourse:*

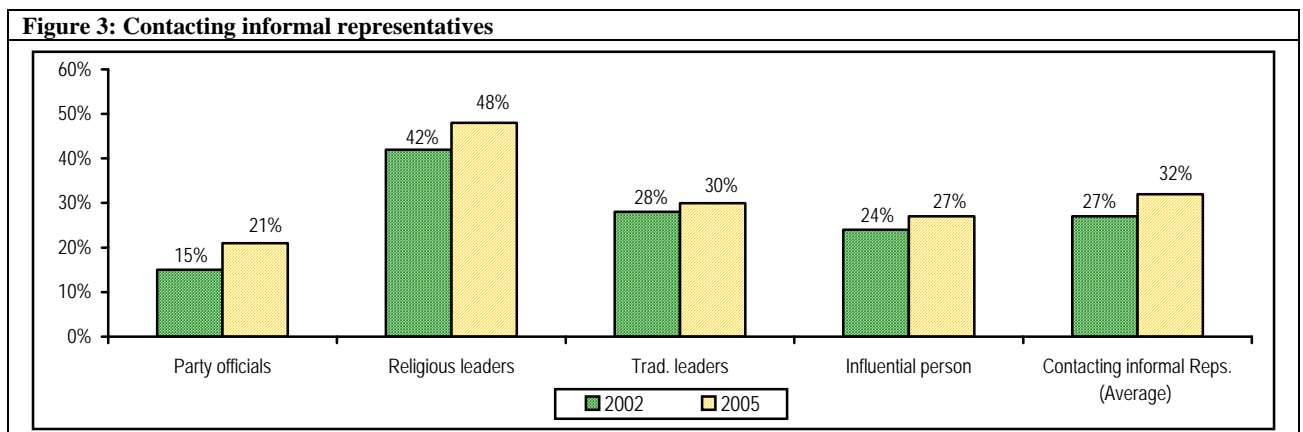
A majority of Ghanaians are interested in public affairs/politics. Close to three-fourths in 2002 and 2005 (74 percent and 72 percent) express interest in public affairs/politics. The proportion that engaged others in political discourse also shows substantial increase, from a little below half in 2002 (49 percent) to nearly three-fourths (74 percent) in 2005.

In regard to contacting formal representatives, large majorities — over eight in every ten Ghanaians (88 percent in 2002 and 83 percent in 2005) — had not contacted their Members of Parliament in the twelve months preceding the two surveys. Similarly, 85 percent each in both periods had no contact with their District Chief Executives (DCE); while 91 percent in 2002 and 86 percent in 2005 had not contacted any public officials in the various government ministries. Only 12 percent, 15 percent and 9 percent in 2002; and 16 percent, 13 percent and 12 percent in 2005 respectively did contact these officials (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Contacting formal representatives



Conversely, Ghanaians find it is more convenient to contact informal representatives when in need. On average, comparatively higher proportions had contacted informal representatives (27 percent, 2002; 32 percent, 2005) than formal counterparts (12 percent, 2002; 14 percent, 2005). Contact with religious leaders topped the list, with 42 percent in 2002 and 48 percent in 2005; followed by traditional leaders (28 percent and 30 percent in 2002 and 2005 respectively). More than a fifth (24 percent in 2002 and 27 percent in 2005) had contacts with ‘persons with influence’ in Ghanaian society while 15 percent and 21 percent of contacts were with officials of a political party in 2002 and 2005 (Figure 3).



The average rates of participation in political discourse<sup>7</sup> improved significantly from 24 percent in 2002 to 30 percent in 2005. Nonetheless, participation rates in both years are less than encouraging.

***Participation in election processes:***

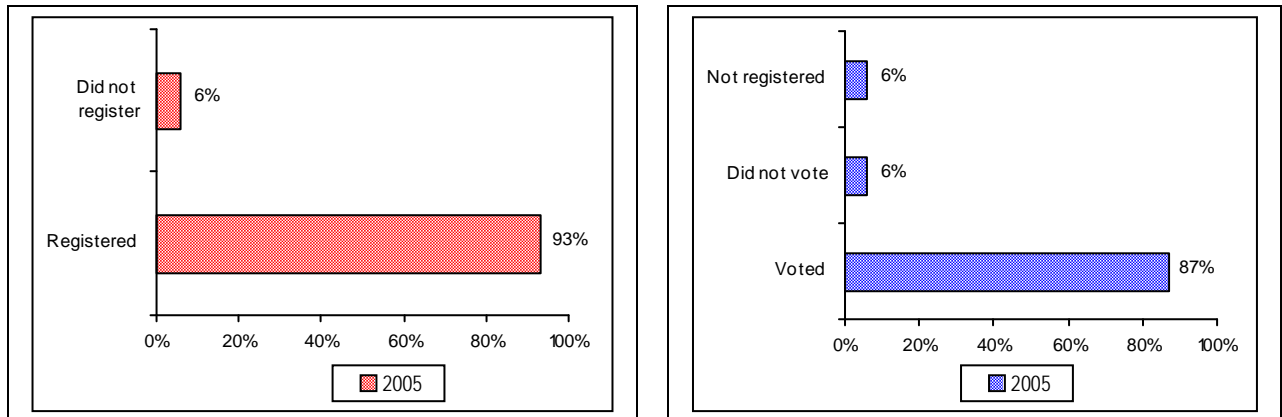
Self-reported voter registration and voting in elections (only obtained for 2005) are very high. Over nine in every ten Ghanaians registered (93 percent) to vote while over four in every five (87 percent) say they voted in the last general elections, held in December 2004<sup>8</sup> (Figures 4 and 5).

**Figure 4: Registered to vote**

**Figure 5: Voted in 2004 general elections**

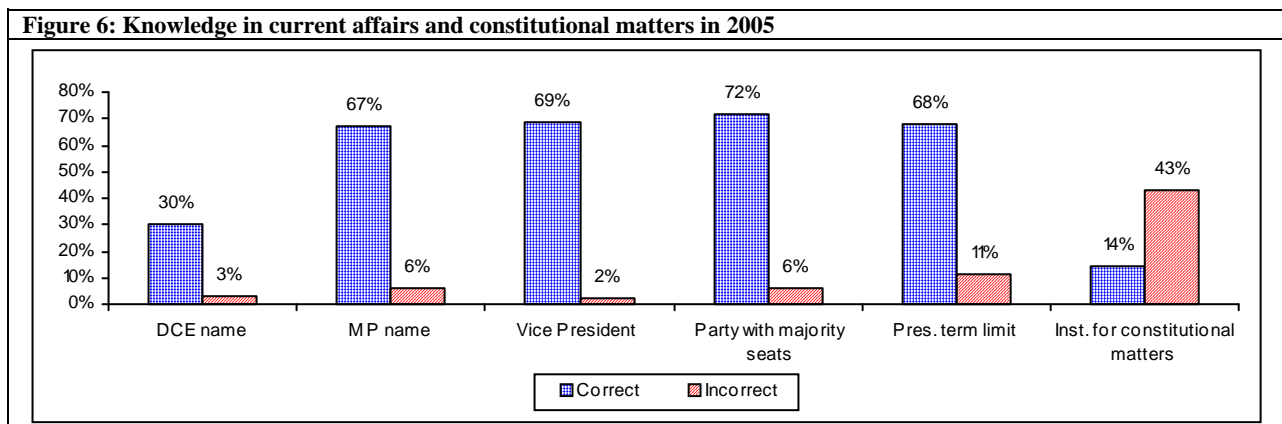
<sup>7</sup> The rates of participation in political discourse in 2002 and 2005 are calculated as a simple average of the proportions that engaged in political discussions and contacted formal and informal representatives.

<sup>8</sup> These findings are consistent with the Electoral Commission of Ghana voters’ registration figures and voter turnout rate in 2004 (i.e. 10,288,382 registered voters out of estimated population of 18.9 million; voter turnout rate of 86 percent).



A substantial majority of Ghanaians in 2005 exhibit considerable knowledge in current affairs. Two-thirds or more (67 percent and 69 percent) correctly mentioned the names of their MPs and the Vice-President respectively. Also, nearly three-fourth (72 percent) correctly named the party with the most seats in the 230-seat Parliament.<sup>9</sup> Less than a third (30 percent) provide the correct names of their DCEs. Unfortunately, Ghanaians knowledge of constitutional matters is not as impressive as that of current affairs. While 68 percent provide the correct number of term limits imposed by the constitution on the President,<sup>10</sup> only 14 percent mention the judiciary or law courts as the appropriate institution that determines the constitutionality of laws. In fact, nearly half of the respondents (43 percent) do not know (Figure 6) who is responsible for this task.

**Figure 6: Knowledge in current affairs and constitutional matters in 2005**



The 63 percent average rate of participation in election processes<sup>11</sup> in year 2005 is very encouraging.

#### ***Participation in community action:***

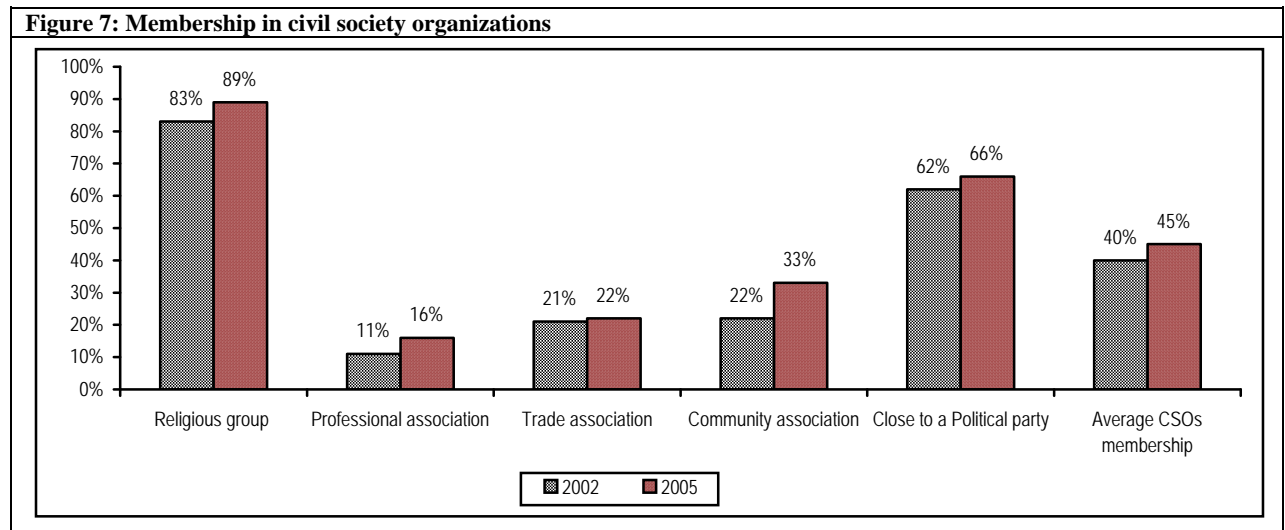
In conformity with the findings on contact with informal representatives, the Ghanaian communal spirit revolves mainly around religious activities. Memberships of the various civil society organizations captured in the two surveys (i.e. religious, business, trade, community development and political associations) increase from 2002 to in 2005.

<sup>9</sup> The New Patriotic Party (NPP) has 128 seats in Parliament.

<sup>10</sup> Presidential term limit is two (2) terms (i.e. 4 years per term)

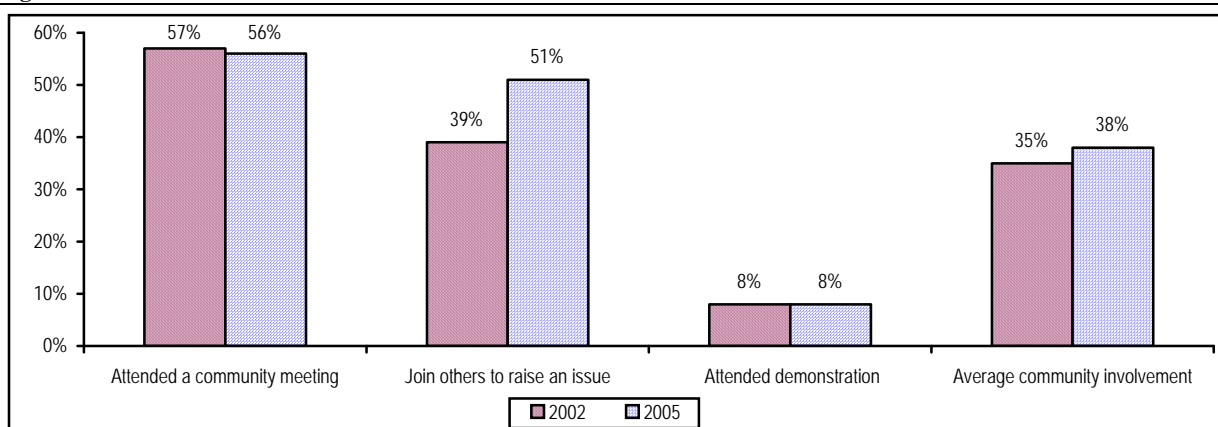
<sup>11</sup> The rates of participation in election processes is calculated as a simple average of proportions who registered to vote, voted in 2004 general elections and correctly answered current affairs and constitutional matters.

Membership of religious associations is very significant. It increased by 6 percent points to 89 percent in 2005 from 83 percent in 2002. Political parties recorded the next largest following in 2002 and 2005 (62 percent and 66 percent); followed by community development associations (22 percent and 33 percent); with trade associations (21 percent and 22 percent) and professional associations (11 percent and 16 percent) following in that order (Figure 7).



Given the fairly encouraging membership in civil society organizations, it is not too surprising that on average, Ghanaians do not exhibit high levels of communal spirit in the areas of participating in community meetings, joining others to engage in advocacy and attending protest marches. Whereas a little over half of the respondents in 2002 and 2005 (57 percent and 56 percent) attended community meetings, the proportion that joined others to advocate on issues rose significantly from 39 percent in 2002 to 51 percent in 2005. However, a majority (92 percent, 2002 and 89 percent, 2005) never attended protest marches. Only an insignificant minority (8 percent apiece) demonstrated (Figure 8).

**Figure 8: Involvement in communal action**



The average rate of participation in community action<sup>12</sup> increased from 38 percent in 2002 to 43 percent in 2005: fairly encouraging rates in both years. However, the increase is insignificant.

#### ***Overall political participation rate:***

The overall rates of political participation<sup>13</sup> were 31 percent in 2002 and 45 percent in 2005. The increase in 2005 over the 2002 rate (14 percent points) is due to the effect of the high rate of participation in electoral processes, which is absent in 2002. When this is excluded, the overall political participation rate for year 2005 is 37 percent, and the increase over the 2002 rate declines to 6 percent points: still quite a significant increase. Thus, overall political participation rates for 2002 and 2005 could be described as fairly encouraging.

#### **Public office holders' response and feedback**

This section explores the nature of public/political office holders' response and feedback to the fairly reasonable level of political participation.

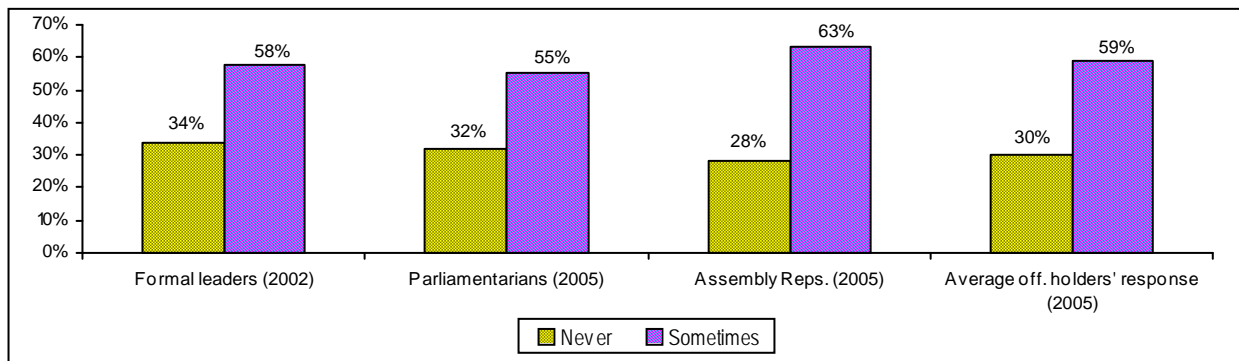
Most Ghanaians believe their local and national representatives do listen to the views of ordinary Ghanaians. Over half of the respondents (58 percent) in 2002 hold this opinion<sup>14</sup>; in 2005, 55 percent and 63 percent respectively believe the same about their MPs and assembly representatives (Figure 9).

<sup>12</sup> The rate of participation in community action by Ghanaians is a simple average of proportions who claim to (a) be close to a political party, (b) be members of CSOs, (c) have attended community meetings and protest march respectively and (d) joined others to raise an issue.

<sup>13</sup> Overall political participation rate is calculated as a simple average of the rates of participation in political discourse, election processes for only 2005 and community action.

<sup>14</sup> In 2002, the question combined Parliamentarians and Assembly representatives, hence the reference to formal representatives.

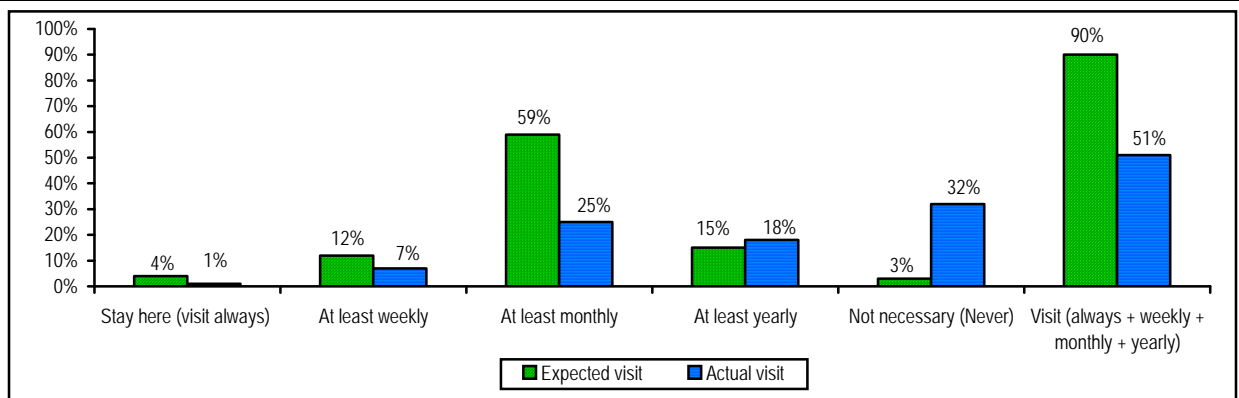
**Figure 9: Regularity with which public officials listen to what their constituents say**



*NB: In 2002, the question combined Parliamentarians and Assembly representatives, hence the reference to formal representatives.*

Given the fairly encouraging opinion Ghanaians hold about national and local representatives with regards to their disposition towards the views of ordinary citizens, it is reasonable to assume that response and feedback by way of MPs visits to their constituencies would be regular and frequent. On the contrary, there is a big deficit: a huge unfulfilled expectation captured by the wide margin between the proportions of cumulative expected visits (i.e. 90 percent) and actual visits (i.e. 51 percent) made by MPs to their constituencies (Figure 10).

**Figure 10: Expected and actual MP constituency visit in 2005**



*NB: "Visit always" and "Never" responses relate to actual situation*

### **Overall response and feedback rate:**

The average response and feedback rates<sup>15</sup> are very encouraging (58 percent for 2002 and 56 percent for 2005).

### **Nature of the link between political participation and perception of political accountability**

This section attempts to examine the nature of the link between political participation and the perception of political accountability held by politically active Ghanaians. One major test of political accountability in a democracy is the adherence to the tenets of a country's constitution by its political leaders. In this paper, the core elements of whether politicians are seen as accountable are considered to be the opinions of politically active Ghanaians — as established by the questions above — on: (a) whether citizens should question leaders' actions, (b) which institution should be responsible for law-

<sup>15</sup> The response and feedback is given by the average of the proportions who say their MPs and Assembly members listen to them and the overall MPs visit to their constituencies.

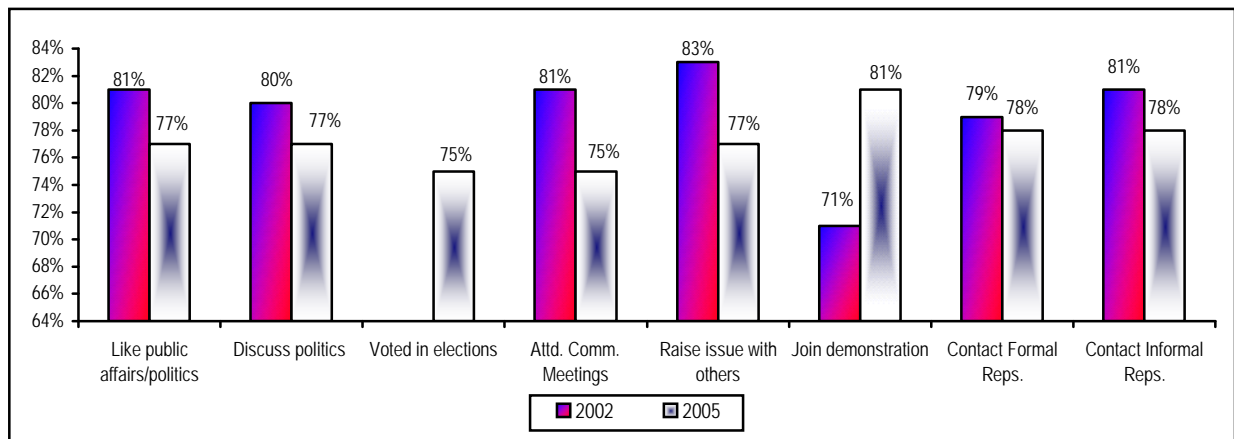
making, (c) whether the President should obey the law and decisions of the courts, and (d) who has the primary responsibility of ensuring that elected representatives do their jobs.

**Actively question leaders:**

Politically active Ghanaians want to see leaders actively questioned by citizens. Significant proportions in 2002 (from a low of 71 percent of those who attended demonstration, to a high of 83 percent of those who had raised issues with others) and 2005 (from a low of 75 percent who voted in the last general election or attended community meetings to a high of 81 percent who had joined demonstration) believe leaders should be actively questioned (Figure 11).

The averages across these activities are 79 percent in 2002 and 78 percent in 2005, excluding the proportion for voting. When we include this, the average reduces marginally to 77 percent.

**Figure 11: Cross-tab: Actively questioning leaders - specific elements of political participation**



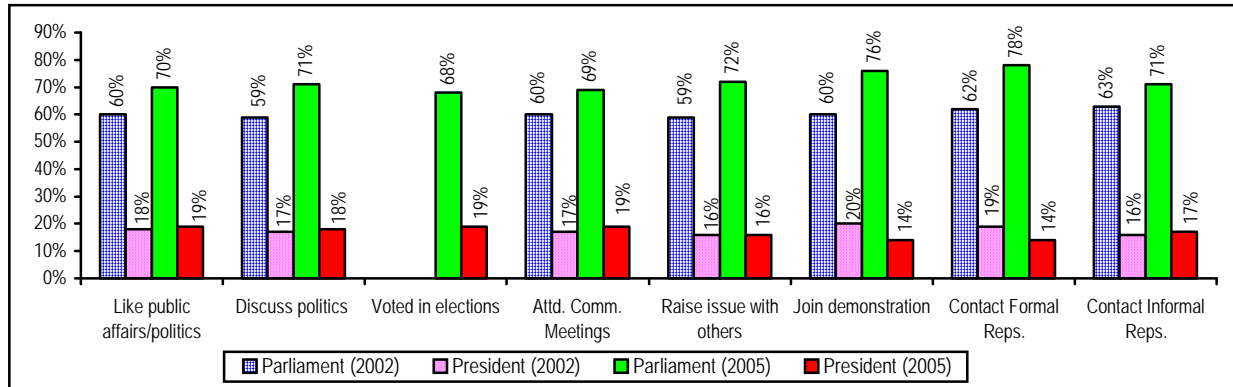
The Chi square test conducted yielded the following: in 2002, like public affairs/politics is significant at  $p = 0.001$ . Those for discuss politics, raise issue with others, join demonstration and contact informal reps are significant at  $p = 0.05$  while attd. comm. meetings and contact formal reps are insignificant. In 2005 like public affairs/politics, voted in elections and contact informal leaders are significant at  $p\text{-value} = 0.001$  while discuss politics is significant at  $p = 0.01$ . Attd. comm. meetings, raise issue with others, join demonstration and contact formal reps are insignificant.

**Parliament rather than President should be responsible for legislative matters:**

Ghanaians will not countenance a President who arrogates to him/her self Parliament’s law making function. In both 2002 and 2005, comparatively higher proportions of politically active Ghanaians do not want Parliament to relinquish its legislative responsibility; not even to the President. While the proportions of active Ghanaians who support Parliament as the constitutional law-making institution range from a low of 59 percent to a high of 63 percent in 2002, the lowest and highest proportions for 2005 are 68 percent and 78 percent.

The average proportions across the various dimensions of political participation for 2002 and 2005 are 60 percent and 72 percent irrespective of whether the proportion for voted in election in included or otherwise (Figure 12).

**Figure 12: Cross-tab: Adherence to Parliament’s constitutionally mandate legislative function - specific elements of political participation**



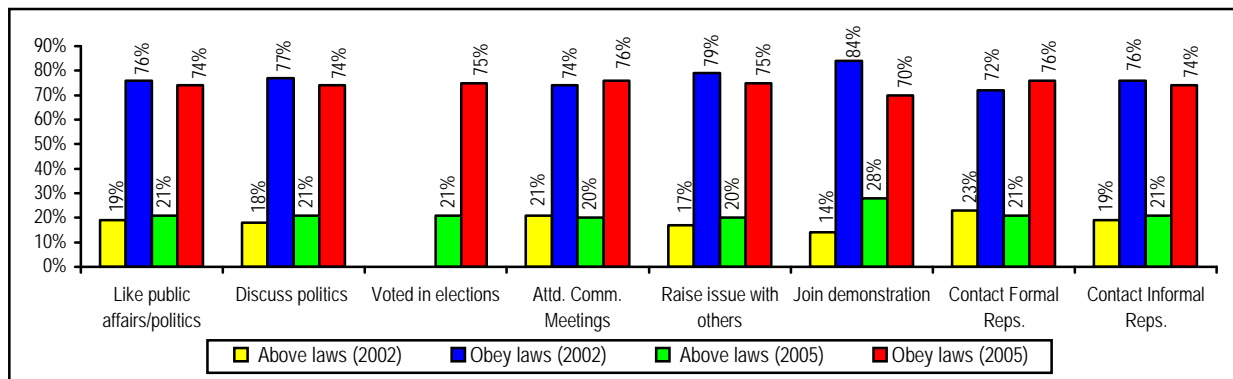
The Chi square test conducted yielded the following: in 2002, like public affairs/politics, discuss politics, raise issue with others and contact informal reps are significant at  $p = 0.001$  while attd. comm. meetings, join demonstrations and contact formal reps are insignificant. In 2005, contact formal reps. is significant at  $p = 0.001$ , discuss politics, attd. comm. meetings and raise issues with others are significant at  $p = 0.01$  and voted in election, join demonstration and contact informal reps. are significant at  $p = 0.05$ . Like public affairs/politics is not significant.

**President must obey the laws and court decisions:**

Again, Ghanaians object to a President who would want to live above the laws of the country. Sizeable majorities of politically active Ghanaians — ranging between 72 percent to 84 percent in 2002 and 74 percent to 76 percent in 2005 — disapprove of a President who disregards laws and court decisions that he/she thinks are wrong.

The averages rate of disapproval across these dimensions of political participation are 77 percent in 2002 and 74 percent in 2005, whether or not we consider the proportion of voted in elections (Figure 13).

**Figure 13: Cross-tab: President obey laws and courts decisions - specific elements of political participation**



The Chi square test conducted yielded the following: like public affairs/politics is significant at  $p = 0.001$  in 2002 while discuss politics, attd. comm. meetings and join others raise issue are significant at  $p = 0.05$ . Join demonstrations, contact formal and informal reps are not significant. In 2005, attend demonstration and voted in elections are significant at  $p = 0.001$ , contact informal reps., discuss politics and like public affairs/politics are significant at  $p = 0.01$  while contact formal reps. is significant at  $p = 0.05$ . Raise issues with others and attd. comm. Meetings are insignificant.

The average proportion of Ghanaians who think leaders ought to be questioned as well as that for those who hold the opinion that the President must be subject to the law and court decisions fell marginally by 1 percent to 3 percent points in 2005. These findings may be indicative of gradual decline in Ghanaian perception regarding demand for accountability, possibly attributable to increasing complacency borne out of confidence in the democratic principles of their local and

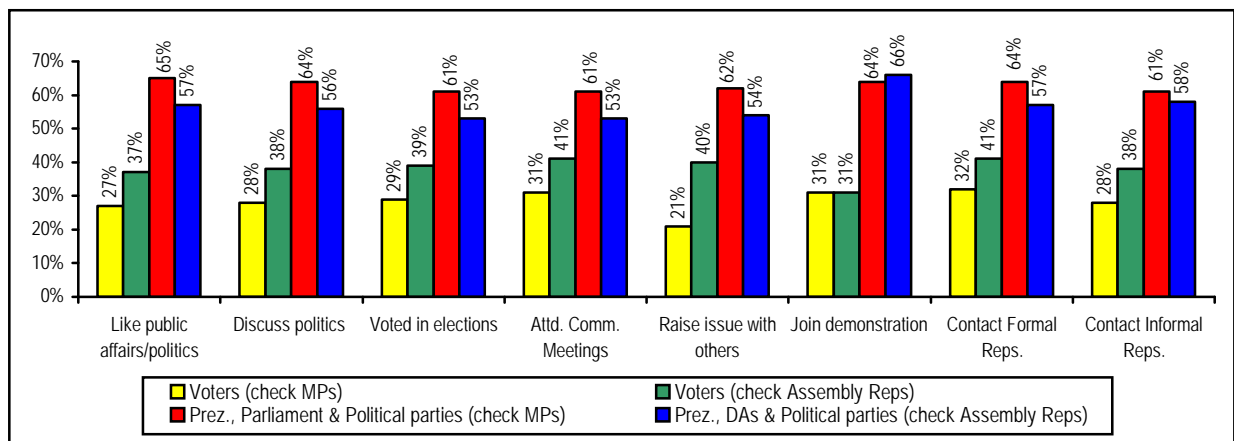
national leaders, including the President. This could be a recipe for abuse of constitutional and good governance principles, especially in situations where such local and national leaders; particularly the President may be exploring for opportunity to wield excessive power which in the long-run will make him unaccountable.

**Who ensures that MPs and District Assembly representatives do their job:**

Sizeable proportions of politically active Ghanaians do not think that voters in general have the responsibility of ensuring that once elected into office, local and national representatives do their work. Rather, they think (at a rate of between 61 percent and 65 percent) that the responsibility of ensuring that MPs do their work rests with the President, Parliament and political parties. A similar proportion believe that the President, District Assemblies and political parties should hold Assembly representatives accountable rather than voter. Nonetheless, the differences across the various dimensions are lower where Assembly representatives are concerned. Again, comparing the lowest and highest proportions who think that voters should ensure that their MPs and Assembly representatives do their work, those for District Assembly representatives (31 percent and 41 percent) are relatively higher than those for MPs (21 percent and 31 percent).

The average proportions who think voters should make sure MPs and Assembly representatives do their work are 28 percent and 38 percent. The average proportions who think other institutions/persons are responsible are 63 percent for MPs and 57 percent for Assembly representatives (Figure 14). Comparatively larger proportions think voters ought to demand accountability from Assembly representatives than from MPs. One probable explanation is that the closer the office holder is to the grassroots, the more Ghanaians tends to think demand for accountability rests with civil society.

**Figure 14: Cross-tab: Who ensures that MPs and Assembly Reps do their jobs - specific elements of political participation in 2005**



The Chi square test conducted yielded the following: for ensuring that MPs do their work, like public affairs/politics, contact formal and informal reps. are significant at  $p = 0.001$  while discuss politics and attd. comm. Meetings are significant at  $p = 0.01$ . Voted in elections, raise issues with others and join demonstrations are insignificant. For ensuring that District Assembly representatives do their job, like public affairs/politics, contact formal and informal reps. are significant at  $p = 0.001$ , attd. comm. meetings and join demonstrations significant at  $p = 0.01$  and voted in elections significant at  $p = 0.05$ . Discuss politics and raise issues with others are however not significant.

**Overall rate of political participation – perception of political accountability linkage:**

The analysis reveals that to an appreciable extent, political participation is linked to Ghanaians’ perception of political accountability. The overall average rate of linkage between participation and

perception of accountability<sup>16</sup> for 2002 is 72 percent. Excluding the data for opinions on who ensures that MPs and Assemblies representatives do their work, the overall average increases marginally to 74 percent in 2005. However, if we include these, the overall average rate reduces substantially to 58 percent.

## Conclusions

Analysis of the Rounds 2 and 3 Afrobarometer survey data establish that

1. In general, the nature of the link between political participation and perception of political accountability in 2005 is not significantly different from what pertains to 2002.
2. Ghanaian perception of political accountability from public/political office holders is very much linked to their political participation, given the overall averages of 72 percent in 2002 and 58 percent in 2005. It therefore supports the hypothesis that perception of political accountability is linked to political participation in the Ghanaian political environment.

Other findings included that:

3. Ghanaians to an appreciable extent are politically active. However, in 2005, they participated more actively in matters bordering elections;
4. Though political participation is fairly encouraging with overall average rates of 31 percent in 2002 and 45 percent in 2005, response and feedback from public/political office holders to this level of political participation (i.e. 58 percent for 2002 and 56 percent for 2005) is highly encouraging;
5. Sizeable proportions of politically active Ghanaians do not think voters have the primary responsibility of ensuring that elected representatives are accountable.

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<sup>16</sup> Overall rate of linkage between political participation and perception of political accountability is calculated as an average of the rates of politically active Ghanaians who think elected leaders should be actively questioned, Parliament should perform its legislative functions unhindered, the President should not be above laws and courts decisions and voters should ensure that MPs and Assembly representatives do their job.