

# What shapes citizens' evaluations of their public officials' accountability?

*Evidence from local Ethiopia*

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## Summary

In this article, we study which institutional factors shape citizens' views of the local accountability of their public officials. Our departing assumption is that evaluations of local accountability do not merely reflect citizens' political attitudes and beliefs, but also whether local institutions contribute to an environment of mutual trust, accountability and ultimately democratic legitimacy. Combining public opinion data from a large-N citizen survey (N=10,651) with contextual information for 63 local governments in Ethiopia, we look at access to information, participatory planning and the publicness of basic services as potential predictors of citizens' evaluations of local public officials. Our findings suggest that local context matters. Jurisdictions that provide access to information on political decision-making are perceived to have more accountable officials. Moreover, when local governments provide public fora that facilitate citizens' stakes in local planning processes, it positively affects citizens' evaluations of the accountability of their officials. Our study adds to the empirical literature by showing that establishing local institutions that can foster citizen-government relations at the local level through inclusive processes is crucial for improving public perceptions of accountability.

Keywords: Access to information, accountability, citizen-government relations, Ethiopia, local government, participatory planning, publicness

## 1. Introduction

Local accountability in developing countries is often regarded as being weak (cf. Narayan, Petesh, 2002). Improving accountability relations among citizens, street-level bureaucrats and their political leaders is repeatedly seen as a ‘silver bullet’ for a more responsive and effective local governance structure (see most prominently World Bank, 2003). When citizens are able to hold public officials to account, it provides incentives to local governments to deliver (Besley, Ghatak, 2003). Broadly speaking those effects may range from the reduction of perceived corruption (Deininger, Mpunga, 2005) and local nepotism (Crook, 2003), to greater access (Björkmann, Svensson 2007) and better quality of basic service delivery (ibid.; Caseley, 2006; Deininger and Mpuga, 2005), ultimately aiming at poverty reduction (World Bank, 2003) and fostering state legitimacy (Brinkerhoff, 2005).

Within this article we refer to local accountability as a local form of social accountability, which has been described by commentators arguing that citizens in developing contexts increasingly make use of more direct, partly informal and new forms of accountability (Anderson, 2006; Goetz, Jenkins, 2005). This means that citizens themselves more and more hold public officials directly to account through ‘new accountability initiatives’, such as participatory planning, participatory budgeting or other organised forms of influencing the public sphere and putting public pressure on officials. Compared to conventional forms of engagement such as electoral voting, these direct forms of collective voice establish a visible connection between citizens’ demands and official actions (Goetz, Jenkins, 2005). This is especially important in environments where elections are regarded as ineffective in holding public agents to account.

But how do citizens themselves perceive their actual chances of holding local officials directly to account? And more importantly, what determines their perceptions? Most development research on citizens’ attitudes in general and on perceptions of local accountability in particular has mainly concentrated on individual level factors to explain the views of citizens. These factors include

respondents' socio-economic characteristics, their political attitudes and beliefs, as well as their political reported behaviour. There exists only a few works that look at the role local institutions play in this regard, and those studies concentrate on the national level (see for example Bratton, Mattes, 2001; Mattes, Bratton, 2007) with very little emphasis on sub-national determinants of citizens' perceptions. This is rather surprising since examining structural factors, such as whether local governments actual use participatory planning mechanisms or provide performance information for the wider public, are important as these factors shape the environments in which citizen-government interactions take place. They thus influence the behaviour of citizens and more importantly their opinions and attitudes towards local government (Oskamp, Schultz, 2005; Vetter, 2007). Therefore, citizen perceptions of accountability may not merely reflect individual respondents' attitudes and beliefs, but also whether local institutions contribute to an environment of mutual trust, accountability and ultimately state legitimacy - exemplifying the relevance of studying local determinants of citizens' perceptions of their public officials' accountability. Furthermore, in order to improve perceived and actual accountability relations between citizens and local governments, it is important for development policy practioners to uncover the factors that affect citizens' views towards local government.

Studies that look at the role institutional factors play in citizens' perceptions of local governments in OECD countries are quite common (for example Andrews, Cowell, Downe, 2011; Andrews, Van de Walle, 2013; Rahn, Rudolph, 2005). However, in development administration research they are rare, and there is a notable gap in the current scholarship of studying the linkages between citizens' political attitudes and local institutions in developing countries. Therefore, in this study we look at institutional predictors of citizens' perceptions of the accountability of their local public officials. We do so by employing a two-step estimation strategy utilising a unique dataset containing both public opinion data and contextual information for 63 local governments in Ethiopia.

In the first part of our article we provide a discussion on what we mean when talking about local accountability, and subsequently review the existing literature on citizens' perceptions of governments' accountability. We present our theoretical model by developing hypotheses concerning three potential predictors: access to information, participatory planning and publicness of basic services. In the second part, we introduce our data, the operationalisation of indicators and make reference to the Ethiopian research context. Consecutively, we present the results of our empirical investigation, discuss and review our hypotheses. On this basis, we draw conclusions with regard to our theoretical model, development policy in general and implications for future research on the topic.

## 2. Local accountability: what are we talking about?

Lindberg (2009) proposes a typology of different subtypes of accountability, arranged according to their 1) source of control, 2) strength of control and 3) spatial distribution (vertical [upward and downward] versus horizontal). Systems of checks and balances within governments, for example, are regarded as a form of accountability among equals (horizontal), with an external source of control: the constitutional law (see also O'Donnell 1998). Electoral, or representative, accountability, in turn, describes the possibility of citizens to hold their political leaders to account via elections. This subtype of accountability operates upwards along a vertical dimension between the electorate as the principal and elected leaders as the agent. However, in Ethiopia, local elections are regarded as being comparatively ineffective to holding public leaders to account (Aalen, Pausewang 2002; Aalen, Tronvoll 2008, 2009). This is especially true after the controversial 2005 national elections and the turbulent post-election period, which resulted in a curbing of opposition parties prior to the 2008 local elections (Aalen, Tronvoll, 2009). Furthermore, here local public officials were used to pressurize the local electorate to vote in favour of the ruling party (ibid.). These developments emphasise the importance of alternative ways for Ethiopian citizens to hold their local leaders to account.

Smulovitz and Peruzzotti (2000, cited after Lindberg 2009) describe a sub-type of accountability which has been labelled 'societal accountability'. It describes the upward vertical accountability relation between civil society (including the media) and public agents. Here, civil society organisations, for example, force political leaders to provide information for their public conduct. However, within the Ethiopian context we do not find a strong and independent media and/or civil society, especially since the controversial 2005 national elections, and the accompanying tightening of the political arena at the local level (Aalen, Tronvoll, 2009a). Thus, in Ethiopia citizens themselves need to play a crucial role in holding officials to account by monitoring their actions, and expressing their needs and demands. Within the international donor community this has been labelled as 'social accountability' (Malena, Forster, Singh, 2004; World Bank 2011). Like the concept of 'societal accountability' it makes an explicit link between responsiveness and accountability - "[...] *the former referring to whether governments respond to citizens' expressed needs, and the latter to whether citizens are able to hold governments to their promises*" (Malena, Forster, Singh, p. 3). But it also incorporates ordinary citizens and not just 'civil society' and the media. Practically, social accountability initiatives include citizens' engagement in participatory planning (Blair, 2000; Gaventa, Barrett, 2010), participatory budgeting (Santos, 1998; Wampler, 2007), or other organised forms of 'new accountability initiatives' that influence the public sphere (for an overview see Goetz, Jenkins, 2005). Within this article, we refer to local accountability as an extended form of social accountability that is exercised at the local level.

### 3. Linking public perceptions with local accountability

The way in which citizens perceive government actions can be affected by a number of determinants. A considerable amount of studies on citizens' attitudes towards (local) government in developing and developed countries alike strongly emphasise respondents' social characteristics. This includes, among others, effects of age, income, social-class and gender (e.g. Bratton, 2010; Edlund, 1999; Klingemann, Fuchs, 1995; Svallfors, 1997). Here, a commonly articulated assumption is the self-

interest hypothesis: if citizens are, for example, in need of welfare distribution (e.g. those who are poor or unemployed), then they are more likely to support governmental policies that aim at increasing welfare services. In addition, citizens' attitudes towards government in general are often explained as a result of other underlying political attitudes and more general values, such as trust (Bratton, Logan, 2006; Li, 2004), or partisan ideology (Jacoby, 1994; Van de Walle, Jilke, 2013). In other words, if citizens have a particular ideological disposition, this may influence their attitudes towards government. Sticking with the example of welfare distribution, those citizens who are more egalitarian would tend to be in favor of governments that support policies towards increasing welfare services (Blekesaune, Quadagno, 2003). As regards local accountability, one may argue that citizens who perceive that local governments are acting in their specific interest, e.g. building a school in their district, have more positive attitudes towards their local public officials in general. Or citizens who are in general optimistic towards government express this in their accountability assessments.

Using data from the Afrobarometer project on public perceptions of local accountability and public officials' responsiveness on a national level, Bratton (2010) studies the effects of i) citizens' social characteristics, ii) their attitudes and beliefs, and iii) their political behaviour. All three sets of predictors serve as factors that shape citizens' views of the responsiveness of their local leaders. Furthermore, he stresses that positive perceptions of local government performance matter for citizens to form their perceptions. The study also exemplifies that those perceptions are strongly driven by local governments' openness in decision-making, such as positive perceptions of access to governmental information, or participatory planning. In other words, if African citizens perceive that they *"[...] have an ownership stake in the political process, they are more likely to feel satisfied with substantive outcomes"* (p.19), which in turn influences the way they evaluate the accountability of local leaders. These findings highlight the importance of process-oriented factors in the formation of political attitudes of African citizens, which, in turn, may also positively influence their subsequent assessment of political outcomes. The evidence on self-reported political behaviour, however, is rather weak.

Only popular political activism between elections provides a substantive effect. This may suggest that contacts with local government representatives are positively related with perceptions of local accountability.

An emerging body of literature also finds increasing support for the role of national context in the formation of citizens' political attitudes and perceptions of government. Within Europe, a wide range of scholars exemplify this point by illustrating that the 'performance' of a country's economy (Blekesaune, Quadagno, 2003; Guldbrandtsen and Skaaning, 2010; Kumlin and Svallvors, 2007), different types of welfare regimes (Gelissen, 2001) or political system (Guldbrandtsen, Skaaning, 2010) matter for public perceptions towards government. Within the developing world, Bratton and Logan (2006) find that demand for accountability is related to the institutional legacies of African countries. The time from their independence, for example, is positively associated with demands for vertical accountability.

Similarly, Escobar-Lemmon and Ross (2011) assess the impact of institutional design, particularly the degree of decentralisation, on citizens' perceptions of accountability in i) managing fiscal resources, ii) perceptions of citizen consultations and iii) governmental information sharing in Colombia. Besides social characteristics and political predictors at the individual-level such as political participation, optimism toward government and political knowledge, the authors find that where decentralisation has been implemented more extensively, citizens' evaluations of consultations and information sharing are more positive. This implies that contextual factors, such as the degree of decentralisation, matter for citizens' perceptions of different types of department-level accountability, at least within the Colombian case. In terms of individual level predictors, the study illustrates that those citizens "[...] *who are more involved in and participate in government see it as more accountable*" (p.17). This again highlights the importance of citizen involvement and contact with public officials which increases positive perceptions of accountability. Overall it exemplifies the fact that citizen's



perceptions of public officials are shaped by individual's experiences with government and the (political and administrative) context in which they live.

However, one has to note that the aforementioned study refers to the level of departments, which are administrative clusters of numerous jurisdictions. Thus, it does not provide any insight into how factors at the local level shape citizens' views on local accountability. Still, there has been only limited attention to 'local determinants' of citizen perceptions towards local government. One notable study is the work by Rahn and Rudolph (2005, see also Lyons, Lowery, DeHoog, 1992 for their work on city-level predictors of citizen satisfaction with public services). In their study on determinants of public trust in local government, the authors look at a set of jurisdictions in the US and found that attitudes towards local government are not only affected by individual level factors such as ideology, or political efficacy, but also by city-level determinants such as political institutions, size of population and the composition of the city population.

With a few exceptions, studies of public attitudes toward (local) government have examined individual or country-level factors in order to predict citizens' perceptions in general. This is rather surprising since it is mainly the local sphere where citizens and the state interact, thus their attitudes and perceptions are most likely to be also influenced by the local arena (Oskamp, Schultz, 2005; Vetter, 2007). Besides the aforementioned factors that shape citizens' attitudes, positive perceptions of local accountability may even simply reflect good accountability relations between public officials and citizens at large. We assume that those relations are perceived positively in environments where citizen-government relations are supported by local institutions, as exemplified by Bratton (2010), and Escobar-Lemmon and Ross (2011). Thus, in the following, we will look at potential drivers of local accountability that lie at the jurisdictional level.

#### 4. Local institutions and citizens' evaluations

Recent studies identify government transparency and access to information as pre-conditions for upwards vertical accountability to work (for example Bauhr, Grimes, Haring, 2010; Reinikka, Svensson, 2004). Once governmental information is made available, they claim, it reduces information asymmetries between local governments and their respective citizens. Indeed, greater information about the process of local government decision-making and the conduct of public officials increases citizens' capacity to hold their leaders to account (cf. Fox, 2007). Citizens are thus empowered to engage in a citizen-government relationship where they judge public officials' political behaviour based on the information they have (Bovens, 2007). According to Willems and Van Dooren (2012: 8), once such a political forum has been established, a public official has “[...] *an obligation to justify his or her conduct, and the accountant [local public officials] may face consequences*”. Yet, this does not necessarily mean that local leaders will automatically become more accountable once information is made available, and we also have to keep in mind the rather harsh political climate in local Ethiopia (Aalen, Tronvoll 2009a). However, it dramatically increases the number of local government ‘auditors’ (Bellver, Kaufmann, 2005) and hence accelerates the possibility of greater accountability. This in turn may have positive effects on citizens' views of their propensity to hold public officials to account.

A critical stage of the policy-cycle within (local) governments lies at the stage of decision-making. Here, citizens can judge whether public officials' decision-making is responsive to their needs and demands. Providing access to information on the process of local government decision-making is crucial for citizens' perceptions of local accountability. Thus, we assume that people feel they can hold public officials to account if they are able to see into the black box of local decision-making. Thus, from a process-oriented perspective, it will positively influence their perceptions of local accountability. This leads us to our first hypothesis:

H1: *Local governments that provide access to information on political decision-making are more likely to be positively perceived in terms of their accountability.*

Literature on citizen participation in developing countries illustrates that popular perceptions towards local government are shaped by individual's experiences with government and by the local context they live in (see for example Blair, 2000; Dauda, 2006; Gaventa, Barrett, 2010). Dauda (2006), in her review of two African local communities concludes that *"developing ways of demanding accountability and transparency involves developing new political relationships which, in turn, demands popular participation in, and engagement with, local government institutions"* (p.301). Likewise, in their meta-analysis of 100 case studies on citizen engagement, Gaventa and Barrett (2010) find that in a considerable number of cases, institutionalised practices of citizen involvement in local governments' planning processes strengthen popular demand for accountability. In other words, if citizens are provided the opportunity to participate in the process of local government planning, it makes them more sensitive to the conduct of their public officials, which in turn is thought to strengthen local accountability relations (Malena, Forster, Singh, 2004).

We thus hypothesise that making use of participatory planning mechanisms at the local level has two complementary effects on public assessments towards local accountability. First, citizens are sensitised to demand accountability from their elected leaders and public officials - they want to have a stake in local government affairs, or at least they should be responsive to their needs and demands. Second, their actual participation is thought to make administrative actions in these fields more responsive. Moreover, when planning processes go in the opposite direction than planned initially, citizens do have an institutionalised fora to hold their public agents to account. Thus we assume that jurisdictions that provide institutionalised frames of interaction between citizens and their local officials are perceived as being more accountable. This brings us to our second hypothesis:

*H2: Jurisdictions that employ participatory planning are more likely to be positively evaluated in terms of their accountability.*

While our second hypothesis mainly addresses the availability of institutionalised participation frameworks and the involvement in local government planning processes, we furthermore assume that more generic contacts between citizens and public officials have a positive impact on the way citizens perceive local accountability. Citizens in jurisdictions that have direct contact with local government officials may positively regard the responsiveness and local accountability of their local governments. In this vein, basic service delivery - by this we mean the provision of health, water and education - is the most frequently used point of interaction between citizens and local government representatives. Even if frontline service providers - such as teachers or health workers - are not formally elected leaders, for citizens they represent their respective local governments. This, in turn, makes local government more visible for ordinary citizens. Therefore, the process of citizen interactions with frontline service providers contributes to the bonding between citizens and local government (Van de Walle, Scott, 2011).

Such interactions between citizens and public officials are more likely if basic services are publicly provided, when compared to non-profit or private provision. Thus the publicness of service delivery, or more precisely the degree of publicness (defined by its ownership status) as perceived by citizens, may be reflected in their evaluations of the accountability of their jurisdictions and its public officials. Thus we assume that the degree of publicness of basic services in local governments is positively related with citizens' evaluations of local accountability. However, if basic services are provided through private or nonprofit suppliers, citizens may disregard their chances to hold public agents to account, as they then perceive them as 'too far away'. This brings us to our third hypothesis:

*H3: The degree of publicness of basic services within a jurisdiction is positively related with citizens' perceptions of local accountability.*

## 5. Research context, data and measures

Our research focuses on local governments in Ethiopia, East-Africa, and our empirical tests rely on a dataset that comprises contextual information on local governments and data on citizens' perceptions of local accountability from a Citizen Report Card (CRC). We estimate a hierarchical model with citizens' perceived accountability as the dependent variable using jurisdictional predictors, such as whether jurisdictions employ participatory planning, grant citizens access to key governmental information or provide basic services through public channels.

The primary unit of our analysis is Ethiopian local governments. Ethiopia is a federal republic with eleven regional states, including two city-administrations. Its administrative structure is a three-tier system which consists of a federal government, regional states, and local governments. At the local level, our analytical unit, substantial decentralisation reforms have been initiated by the Government of Ethiopia in collaboration with international donors in the early 1990s and implemented in the following decades. This includes administrative devolution, the delegation of responsibilities for basic service delivery, greater fiscal autonomy of local governments (e.g. through the introduction of an intergovernmental fiscal transfer scheme) and local capacity building (Chanie, 2009; Garcia, Rajkumar, 2008; World Bank, 2007). However, one has to note that full fiscal autonomy within jurisdictions has been achieved very seldomly. There remains a high fiscal dependency on regional and central government in order to be able to effectively fulfill local government functions (Garcia, Rajkumar, 2008).

In Ethiopia, elections largely serve as “[...] *instruments of political control rather than devices of liberty*” (Aalen, Tronvoll 2009:193). During the national elections 2000 and local elections in 2001, for example, Ethiopian's ruling party Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)

gained a substantial share of votes by oppressing the electorate and opposition parties (Aalen, Pausewang, 2002). In contrast to this stand the pre-2005 national elections period; this initially has been conducted in a relatively fair manner by providing a level playing field for opposition parties and the press. However, the situation started worsening the closer the election date came, and eventually resulted in a harsh tightening of the legal space for opposition parties and civil society during the post-elections period (Aalen, Tronvoll, 2009). Manifesting their political power, the EPRDF increasingly made use of local public officials to secure their support at the local basis. Some commentators report that the EPRDF deliberately uses local administrators to pressurize the electorate to vote in their favour (ibid.). In such a harsh political climate, alternatives forms of accountability gain importance.

In the light of these developments, the reform of local accountability relations has been put at the forefront of development initiatives in Ethiopia. Following the Ethiopian parliamentary elections of 2005 and its violent aftermath, a considerable share of the international donor community withdrew direct budget support to Ethiopia and implemented novel aid modalities. They focused on the protection of basic services and the improvements of accountability structures at the local level (World Bank, 2010). These reforms included various sub-programs aimed at improving social accountability relations, e.g. through greater access to governmental information.

For our empirical analysis, we utilise data from the third Ethiopian Woreda and City Administration Benchmarking Survey (WCBS III) which was conducted in early 2010. On behalf of the Ethiopian Government, WCBS III was administered by an international consortium consisting of the Ethiopian Central Statistical Agency, the Ministry of Capacity Building, the World Bank, the Canadian International Development Agency and the UK Department for International Development. The core part of WCBS III is a survey of local government representatives (supply-side survey). It collects administrative information on topics such as finance, human resources and service delivery, among

others. The supply-side survey targets those local governments with a population of 10,000 inhabitants or above. It makes use of a multi-stage stratified random sampling with stratifications of all relevant Ethiopian jurisdictions according to i) remoteness from the regional capital and ii) food security. Based upon probability proportional to size (PPS), where size is the population of the 2007 national census, 384 out of 601 jurisdictions (64%) have been randomly selected to take part in the supply-side component of WCBS III (Government of Ethiopia, 2010).

In addition to the supply-side component of WCBS III, a public opinion survey (a so-called Citizen Report Card) was conducted. It collects the views and perceptions of 10,657 citizens for different aspects of local government performance, service delivery and accountability. For our study, we will combine data from both sources. For the CRC survey, a subsample of 68 jurisdictions from the supply-side sample of 384 jurisdictions has been drawn randomly by the Ethiopian Central Statistical Authority. During the CRC fieldwork, second-stage sampling units through enumeration areas (EA) within each jurisdiction were selected using PPS, where size is the number of households in each EA - households were selected at random from within the EA by fieldworkers (ibid.). Due to non-responses we work with a total number of 63 jurisdictions. These jurisdictions represent all of Ethiopia's regions and city administrations<sup>1</sup>.

### *Dependent variable*

We use citizens' perceptions of local accountability as our dependent variable. More specifically, respondents have been asked to indicate on a four-point Likert scale "*If local government leaders fail to keep their promises, how much do you think an ordinary person can do to improve the situation?*". The evaluations of their chances to hold local leaders to account are used as a measure for citizens' perceptions of

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<sup>1</sup> The number of jurisdictions included in the study can be found in parenthesis: Addis Ababa (1); Afar (1); Amhara (10); Benishangul-Gumuz (2); Gambela (1); Harari (1); Oromia (24); Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region (13); Somali (4); Tigray (6).

local accountability. In line with our initial assumptions, evaluations across jurisdictions are not evenly distributed, which suggests that there are structural differences in citizens' perceptions of local accountability across local governments. Table one exemplifies that there is a considerable variance across citizens from different jurisdictions.

**[Table 1 about here]**

### *Independent variables*

We use access to information on political decision-making as one of our main predictors for citizens' perceptions of local accountability. During the supply-side survey of WCBS III, representatives of local governments were asked whether citizens had access to the agendas and decisions taken at council meetings within their jurisdictions. Based on this, citizens would have the chance to monitor the actual decision-making behaviour of their elected representatives and public officials. Local governments that do provide such information have been coded '1', those that do not '0'.

As regards participatory planning, local government representatives have been asked *"Do you employ participatory planning? If yes, whom do you consult when preparing the strategic plan, the budget capital investment plan, and changes in service delivery?"*<sup>2</sup>. When jurisdictions have indicated that they consult ordinary citizens, we have coded our variable '1', in all other cases it was coded '0'. By this, we want to make sure that we only measure participatory planning mechanisms that are open to all citizens, and not only for local elites.

As regards the publicness of basic service delivery, we constructed a scale which aims at measuring the overall degree of basic service delivery in Ethiopian jurisdictions by focussing on the ownership status of service delivery. This approach is commonly used among scholars interested in the effects of different degrees of publicness of service provision (cf. Andrews, Boyne, Walker, 2011). In doing so, we grouped jurisdictions in three categories for each service under consideration: i) private or

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<sup>2</sup> Possible answers included: Citizens, business community, local associations, NGOs, regional government, federal government.



non-profit provision, ii) mixed provision, iii) public provision - due to item non-response this indicator was only available for 59 jurisdictions. Then we took the ownership status of service provision for health services, primary education and water provision and transformed them into a scale using principal factor analysis<sup>3</sup>. A higher value indicates a higher degree of publicness. The excellent Cronbach's Alpha score of 0.83 exhibits that we are indeed measuring a latent construct of the publicness of basic services.

#### *Control variables – jurisdictional level*

We seek to control for other important factors that might have an influence on our results. In this regard, we first control for food security as a proxy indicator for the poverty status within jurisdictions. A number of works have repeatedly used food security and hunger as proxies for poverty (for an overview see Maxwell, 2003). Doing so, we use the official food security classification of the Government of Ethiopia, as provided within the supply-side data of WCBS III. In OECD countries, respondents' economic status is widely acknowledged to be positively related with citizens' attitudes and perceptions towards government (see for example Battaglio, Legge, 2009), and evidence within developing and transition countries points in a similar direction (Bratton, Logan, 2006; Escobar-Lemmon, Ross, 2010). In the Ethiopian case, we thus assume that within food secure jurisdictions, citizens' perceptions of local accountability are relatively better.

Taking into account the rural-urban divide in many aspects of the lives of African citizens, we furthermore control for rurality. We do this by using whether a jurisdiction is connected to an all-weather road as a proxy indicator. This item has been included in the supply-side questionnaire of WCBS III. Empirical works using Afrobarometer data (Bratton, 2010) have indicated that rural citizens in African countries do rate local governments' responsiveness higher than those living in urban areas. This is mainly so because in rural areas, the gap between citizens and their leaders might

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<sup>3</sup> The extracted factor reveals an Eigenvalue of 1.83. We also estimated our models using an additive index, it produced analogous findings to those obtained in this study.

be smaller, since residents of more homogenous and village-like jurisdictions may have stronger bonds with their neighbours, including their councillors and administrators. Hence we assume that rurality does have a positive effect on perceived accountability.

Furthermore, we use the total number of the jurisdictions' population in order to control for its size. These figures were taken from the Ethiopian census data of 2007 (CSA, 2007). In line with research on the rural nature of a jurisdiction, we assume that smaller jurisdictions, in terms of their overall population, exhibit higher levels of perceived accountability.

Ethiopia's jurisdictions can be divided into two different types: so-called *woredas* and cities/ city administrations. Woredas are mostly villages, while cities and city administrations are chartered local governments which perform a wide range of service delivery functions. In order to control for potential effects arising from differences in allocating different governmental functions to different types of jurisdictional entities, we control for the type of jurisdiction. We do so by constructing a dummy variable with '1' for woredas and '0' for cities/ city administrations.

**[Table 2 about here]**

## 6. Statistical results

In this study we test the direct effects of local institutional characteristics, such as access to governmental information, the availability of participatory planning procedures and the publicness of basic services on citizens' perceptions of the accountability of their public officials. Since our data is of hierarchical nature - individuals nested in jurisdictions – and our primary interest is in estimating contextual effects of citizens' perceptions of local accountability, we employ a two-step estimation strategy. In this regard, we follow the procedure recommended by Jusko and Shively (2005) and first estimate a conventional Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) model with individuals' perceptions of local accountability as the dependent variable, controlling for respondents' socio-economic status and

institutional trust<sup>4</sup>. Subsequently we calculate the standard deviation from the regression line for each jurisdiction. In a second step, we use the residuals' standard deviation from step one to perform a Feasible Generalized Least Squares (FGLS) model with known variance set-up. Because of space considerations and our primary interest in the second-step results, descriptive statistics and the accompanying results of our first-step estimation are not included in the text, but can be found in the annex of this article.

In table 3, the results from the FGLS models can be found. To illustrate the effects of our predictors, the first model incorporates all our control variables with access to information on political decision-making as the independent variable. In the second and the third model, we examine the availability of participatory planning mechanisms and the degree of publicness of basic service delivery respectively. The final model includes all our predictors simultaneously. Our models are robust to different model specifications.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, we also estimated the same model using a (one-step) multilevel modelling strategy. Results are analogous to the ones presented in this article. To correct for unobserved heterogeneity at the regional level e.g. differences in their developmental status, all models are estimated using fixed-effects for all regional states – not reported in the models.

**[Table 3 about here]**

Our control variables make a statistically significant contribution to the explanatory power of our models and all have the expected effect direction. Our final model shows that within rural jurisdictions, evaluations of local accountability are more positive than those in urban areas. Furthermore, the type of jurisdiction also matters. Within cities, perceptions of local accountability

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<sup>4</sup> Control variables include respondents' gender, age, education and self-perceived poverty status. We, furthermore, controlled for respondents' trust in local government (descriptive statistics and question wording can be found in the annex).

<sup>5</sup> Our findings are also not distorted by multicollinearity which can be shown by an average Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) of 3.41 with no single variable exceeding a VIF value of 5.5 or a tolerance value of less than 1.8 (Besley, Kuh and Welsh, 1980).

are on average greater than within woredas. We also find that food security is positively associated with perceptions of local accountability.

The individual assessment of each of our main independent variables shows their added value in predicting our citizens' perceptions of accountability (models 1-3). The full model displays the effects of each predictor while controlling for other possible influences. In this regard, our predictor variable on access to information is statistically significant across both models. It has a considerable effect; whether a jurisdiction provides access to information on political decision-making results in a .36 change on the accountability perception scale of one's jurisdiction. This provides support for hypothesis one which states that local governments that provide access to information on political decision-making are more likely to be positively perceived in terms of their accountability. As regards participatory planning, our independent variable is also statistically significant across both models. Its effect is slightly weaker than the one for access to information, but still has a reasonable influence on citizens' perceptions of local accountability. When jurisdictions employ participatory planning, it changes citizens' accountability evaluations across jurisdictions by .33 on average. This supports hypothesis two which notes that jurisdictions that employ participatory planning are more likely to be positively evaluated in terms of their accountability. As regards the degree of publicness of basic service provision, our third predictor variable is also statistically significant across both models – though it has a p-value at the 10% significance level for the full model. Also, one can see that its magnitude strongly decreases when access to information and participatory planning are entered into the equation. The final model shows that a one unit change on our publicness scale increases the accountability evaluation of one's jurisdiction by only .09 on average. This lends some support to hypothesis three, which notes that jurisdictions where basic services are provided through public channels are more likely to be positively perceived by citizens. However, we need to further examine whether this effect is substantial in nature.

Thus, to further assess the substantial magnitude of our main independent variables, we estimate their predicted values while holding all other covariates constant at their mean values (cf. King et al., 2000). The results are presented in figure 1. The upper left panel shows the differences between providing and not providing access to governmental information on political decision-making. One can see that both values are statistically distinct from each other with no overlappings of their corresponding 95% confidence bounds. As regards participatory planning (upper right panel), one can see that whether a jurisdiction provides an institutionalised fora for participatory planning has a substantive effect on citizens' accountability evaluations. Here as well, the 95% confidence bounds are not overlapping. Finally, we evaluate the substantive magnitude of jurisdictions' publicness of basic service delivery on citizens' perceptions of accountability. The lower panel of figure 1 displays the predicted values of the publicness of basic services on perceptions of accountability (y-axis) for different degrees of publicness (x-axis). From the figure we can see that the lower and the upper bound of the 95% confidence interval are completely overlapping<sup>6</sup>, which suggest that the revealed effect is not of substantive magnitude. Thus, on these grounds we have very limited support for hypothesis three; we find a positive relation between the publicness of basic service delivery within jurisdictions and citizens' perceptions of local accountability. However, this association is of trivial magnitude.

**[Figure 1 about here]**

In sum, our evidence suggests that two out of three jurisdictional factors that we incorporated in our model make a significant difference for citizens' perceptions of local accountability. First, local government transparency matters; providing citizens access to information on the process of political decision-making positively contributes to citizens' evaluations of local accountability. Second, providing opportunities for citizen participation matters; it provides an institutionalised forum for

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<sup>6</sup> Plotting the same graph with 90% confidence intervals instead, reveals as well as a rather non-substantive effect.

interactions between public agents and the citizenry at large, and, moreover, gives citizens the chance to have a stake in local government planning processes. It thus positively contributes to their perceptions of local accountability. Third, however, the degree of publicness of basic service delivery does not seem to matter to any large extent.

## 7. Conclusion

We have presented an empirical test of local institutional factors - particularly access to information, participatory planning and publicness of basic services - and their impact on citizens' perceptions of local accountability in Ethiopian local governments. Our empirical results show that two out of the three factors matter. Once a jurisdiction adopts participatory planning and/or provides access to information on political decision-making, it positively affects the way in which citizens perceive the accountability of their officials. In sum, both factors are thought to improve the relationship between citizens and their respective local governments. Hence, our findings suggest that establishing local institutions that can foster citizen-government relations at the local level are crucial for improving public attitudes towards local government. Furthermore, positive attitudes towards local government, furthermore, strengthen the democratic legitimacy of the state at the local level. Thus development practitioners and policy-makers may take these institutional factors into account when reforming local governments.

Our study did not reveal a substantial association between the publicness of basic service delivery and citizens' perceptions of local accountability, as suggested by our third hypothesis. However, one has to note that we were not able to effectively differentiate between the regional and local ownership status of service provision. This may have an impact on the way in which citizens perceive local accountability, since the regional level is an independent administrative and political tier. Future studies are advised to more effectively select cases that provide a clear differentiation between

different levels of public service provision. In the absence of such information, future research may look, for example, at differences between public service users and non-users in terms of their attitudes towards (local) government. Research so far (MacLean, 2011) has identified differences in political behaviour between public service users and non-users across African countries; however, the role of public opinion is still underexplored. For now, our evidence is inconclusive in this regard.

This study is also not without limitations in terms of the political climate in which the research was conducted. One has to remember the harsh political climate in which local governments in Ethiopia operate. Some authors have claimed that local public officials are often used to perpetuate the political dominance of the ruling party EPRDF, for example by extensively monitoring citizens' political behaviour (Aalen, Tronvoll, 2009). This may have influenced survey respondents to fear that they could be identified and punished later on, thus giving overly positive survey responses. During survey design and interviewer training this was a very sensible point. Therefore, the entire data collection of the CRC was done independently by a local research company, with the World Bank as the official sponsor – interviewers were trained in a way that they clearly emphasized the political independence of this research. Still, we cannot confidently rule-out that respondents did give such biased responses. Thus the results of this study should be interpreted with care. Moreover, one has to note that this study is indeed about perceptions of accountability and not actual accountability. It could also be that citizens are quite unrealistic about their actual chances to hold public officials to account. Thus future work may try to combine survey items of perceived with experienced accountability, e.g. whether citizens ever have held a local agent to account themselves.

This study makes a contribution to research on citizens' attitudes in developing countries by focusing on the contribution local jurisdictions can make in enhancing the arena in which citizen-government interactions take place. Those interactions form the basis that shapes citizens' political attitudes and perceptions of local governments. Thus we have laid down a first stepping stone in assessing the role

of local context for citizens' opinion about local government in developing countries. This seems to be especially important when considering the authoritarian character of Ethiopia. Further research may look into the potential complementary effects local institutions and individual attitudes and beliefs may have for individual assessments of local accountability. Another possible future area of research might be the assessment of actual outcomes of local government participation processes and their effects on citizens' perceptions, while controlling for contextual factors. As for now we have only focused on process indicators (are certain facilities provided?), and the relationship between citizens and public officials. Further investigations of possible interactions between both process and outcome might reveal potentially interesting findings.



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## Annex

Table 1: CRC data on perceived accountability across 63 jurisdictions

Public officials' accountability	Percent of survey respondents*	Max. percent in jurisdictions	Min. percent in jurisdictions
A great deal	14	41	2
Something	34	60	11
Very little	25	56	6
Nothing	24	63	3

*If local leaders fail to keep their promise how much do you think an ordinary person can do to improve the situation?*

\* Missing percentage points are missing values

N = 10,657

Table 2: Descriptive statistics – jurisdictional level

Variable Name	Mean	Standard Deviation	Min, Max	N	Source
Perceived Accountability	1.412	0.372	0.685, 2.306	63	CRC
Jurisdiction type	0.698	0.463	0, 1	63	Supply-side
Population	115116.9	81804.53	12657, 388788	63	CSA 2007
Food security	0.397	0.493	0, 1	63	Supply-side
Rurality	0.159	0.368	0, 1	63	Supply-side
Access to information	0.714	0.455	0, 1	63	Supply-side
Participation	0.841	0.368	0, 1	63	Supply-side
Publicness of basic service delivery	1.46e-08	0.914	-2.563, .616	59	Supply-side



Table 3: Second-step model (FGLS): the impact of jurisdictional factors on perceived local accountability

Independent variable	Information Model	SE	Participation Model	SE	Publicness Model	SE	Full Model	SE
Constant	1.740**	.227	1.726**	.230	2.151**	.222	1.509**	.253
Jurisdiction type	-.199*	.064	-.201*	.064	-.215*	.068	-.230**	.068
Population	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000+	.000
Food security	.121*	.058	.110+	.058	.085	.061	.138*	.062
Rurality	.123	.078	.246*	.078	.242*	.082	.193*	.083
Information	.331**	.073					.364**	.074
Participation			.332**	.083			.329*	.095
Publicness					.124*	.047	.087+	.050
Model chi-square	144.10**		139.52**		116.77**		150.98**	
<i>J</i>	63		63		59		59	

Note: significance levels: + $p \leq .10$ , \* $p \leq .05$ , \*\* $p \leq .001$  (two-tailed tests).

Table 4: Descriptive statistics – individual level (CRC)

Variable Name & Wording	Mean	SD	Min, Max	N
Local accountability <i>If local government leaders fail to keep their promises, how much do you think an ordinary person can do to improve the situation?</i> <i>1: A great deal; 2: Something; 3 Very little; 4: Nothing.</i>	2.411685	1.007	1, 4	10321
Gender (Ref: Male)	1.453	.498	1, 2	10,657
Age	38.147	12.390	18, 99	10,657
School attendance <i>Have you attended school?</i>	1.577	.494	1, 2	10,657
Poverty status <i>Which of the following categories would you put yourself in?</i> <i>1: Very poor; 2: Poor; 3: Neither poor nor non-poor; 4: Non-poor.</i>	2.585	.781	1, 4	10,657
Trust in local government <i>How much do you trust each of the following to do their job fairly or don't you know enough about them to say?</i> <i>Your City Administration/ Woreda council</i> <i>1: Not at all; 2: Not very much; 3: A little; 4: A lot; 5: Don't know.</i>	2.7	.957	1, 5	10,657

Table 5: First-step regression: individual-level OLS with perceptions of accountability as dependent variable

Independent variable	Beta coefficient	SE
Constant	2.041**	.066
Gender (Ref: Male)	-.064**	.020
Age	.004	.001
School attendance (Ref: Not attended)	.082**	.021
<i>Poverty status (Ref: Very poor)</i>		
Poor	.113**	.037
Neither poor nor non-poor	.157**	.036
Non-poor	.101**	.046
<i>Trust in local government (Ref: Not at all)</i>		
Not very much	.046**	.034
A little	.114**	.031
A lot	.105**	.035
Don't know	.032*	.051
R <sup>2</sup>	.031	
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.030	
F-test	32.73**	
N	10,321	

Note: significance levels: + $p \leq .10$ , \* $p \leq .05$ , \*\* $p \leq .001$  (two-tailed tests).

Figure 1: Predicted values for main independent variables (95% confidence intervals)

