

Health Reporting and Public Attitudes Towards Media and Government Accountability in Five West African Countries

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Abstract

This study examines how citizens of Benin, Cape Verde, Ghana, Liberia, and Sierra Leone view their relationship with the government and media performance in terms of the reporting on the government's handling of public health services by using the Afrobarometer data set. Results show that among the respondents only a small proportion of them held the opinion that the government was handling well the job of combating HIV/AIDS. On improvement of basic health services and ensuring everyone has enough to eat, very few respondents stated that their government was handling this "very badly." Findings also indicated going without health related necessities significantly predicted how well/badly one perceives the government's handling of health related issues and also significantly predicted perceptions of the effectiveness of the news media in revealing corruption.

Introduction

- ❖ Traditional media in several parts of Africa, including radio, television, and newspapers, are regarded as instrumental in educating citizens about aspects of social wellbeing and community development.
- ❖ Recent research suggests in Eastern and Southern Africa, traditional mass media are probably neither reaching rural populations nor consistently report on public health services which impact children, women and youth (Araia, 2009; Mwesige, 2011).
- ❖ The primary purpose of this study is to examine how West African citizens view their relationship with the government and media performance in terms of reporting on the government's handling of public health services.

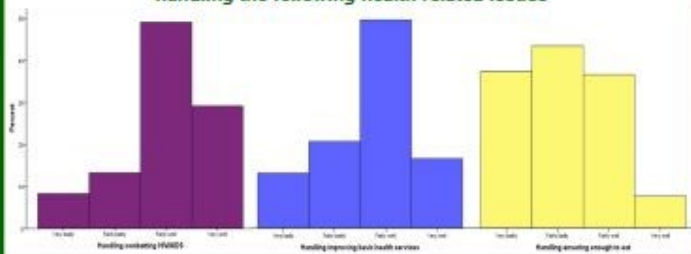
Data and Methods

- ❖ Biannual 2012 Afro-Barometer public opinion survey
 - Reports the results of national sample surveys on the attitudes of citizens in select African countries towards democracy, markets and other aspects of social development
 - Countries of interest include Benin, Cape Verde, Sierra Leone, Ghana, and Liberia.
 - Questions were extracted relating to media use and media exposure as well as demographic variables
 - Two composite variables were created:
 - Tendency to go without health related services
 - Perceptions of the government's efficacy in handling certain health related issues



Results

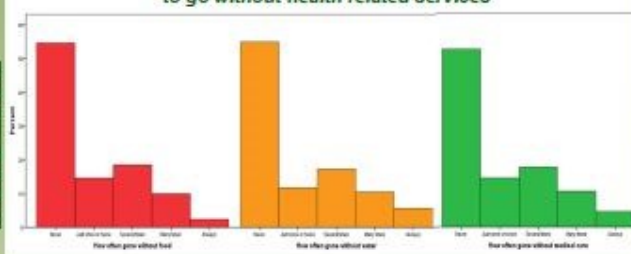
Participant responses to question assessing how well the government is handling the following health related issues



The majority of respondents felt the government was handling "fairly well" HIV/AIDS, improving basic health services, and "fairly badly" ensuring people have enough to eat.

The majority of respondents reported they have "never" had to go without food, water, or medical care.

Participant responses to question assessing how often they have had to go without health related services

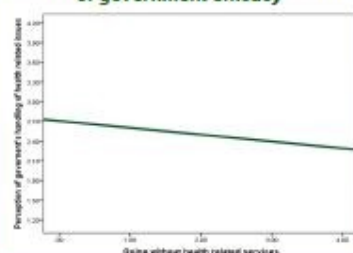


Correlations between main variables of interest

	1	2	3
1. Effectiveness of news media	1	.111*	-.065*
2. Perceptions of government		1	-.154*
3. Going without health related services			1

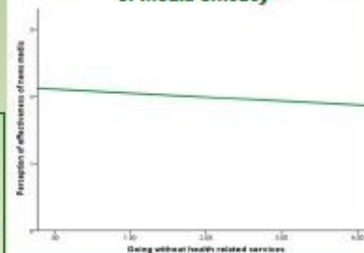
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Relationship between going without health related services and perceptions of government efficacy



Going without health related necessities significantly predicted how well/badly the government is perceived to be handling health related issues

Relationship between going without health related services and perceptions of media efficacy



Going without health related necessities significantly predicted perceptions of the effectiveness of the news media in revealing corruption.

Conclusions

- ❖ These results are surprising because these countries still face major health problems, including the distribution of health resources, lack of medical tools, scarce health care workers, lack of nutrition for children, waste disposal problems, water scarcity, infant mortality rates, and reproductive health in rural communities, just to name but a few.
- ❖ Limitations
 - The Afrobarometer uses preset standard questions and scales in the instrument, which makes it very difficult to delve into specific media use questions that would yield better explanations for these contradictory results.
- ❖ Future research
 - Develop a new instrument and scale that would better explain these contradictions in public attitudes (in some instances quite glowing nods) towards their governments' delivery of health services.