

Abstract:

The post-1990 wave of democratization and public sector reforms brought the concept of public accountability into the limelight. Prior to this, most countries in Africa had poor records of public accountability. Since the beginning of the 1990s, the Kenyan government has put in place a number of measures aimed at improving public accountability and service delivery, including codes of ethics, performance contracting, and developing work plans with monitoring and evaluation indicators, among others. But the focus has tended to be on state mechanisms to check and guide the behavior of public officials, as opposed to relying on the actions of citizens in holding their governors accountable. This paper will use data from four Afro barometer surveys in Kenya between 2002 and 2011 to assess the extent to which citizens demand accountability from public officials charged with the responsibility for public service delivery, and what improvements they might be seeing as a result. We explore trends in how citizens engage with their leaders either positively (with questions and demands) or negatively (with bribes). We also examine the results: is accessing public services becoming easier as a result of increasing public engagement and greater accountability?