Student Perceptions of Student Leadership:
Involved, Responsive, Corrupt

Evidence from HERANA Higher Education & Democracy Surveys

African Student Leaders' Summit 2010

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The HERANA Student Governance in Africa Project

Key Questions and Approach

o *CRQ: How do universities contribute to democratization in Africa?*

o Focus on student attitudes, 'being a student' and on the university as a place of living and learning (not pedagogy etc.)

Research Design

o Representative surveys of third year undergraduate students

o Representative across faculties and gender & subsample of student leaders.

o Implemented at three premier African universities: UON, UCT, UDSM

o 1,411 student responses (weighted to 1,200)

o 301 current and former student leader (weighted to 10%)

Key Dimensions of the Presentation

What are students' conceptions and perceptions of university governance and student leadership?

o Students' idea of the university

o Students' preferences of how universities should be governed

o Students' view of the (political) role of university students

o The extent of student demand for student involvement in university governance and demand for accountability

o Students' evaluation of the performance of student leadership and other constituencies

o How to improve the democratic nature of student leadership?

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Background I

University of Nairobi (UON), Kenya

o   Oldest university in Kenya (1956; full university since 1970)

o   Top technical university in East Africa; leading university in Kenya (Webometric ranking of African universities rank: 28)

o   Total 36,000 students (2008/09); 16,000 government / 20,000 privately sponsored (vast growing).

University of Cape Town (UCT), South Africa

o   Oldest university in South Africa (1829; full university since 1918)

o   leading African university in all global rankings; leading university in South Africa (Webometric ranking of African universities rank: 1)

o   Total 24,000 students; of which 16,000 undergraduates; (ca. 20% international)

University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM), Tanzania

o   Oldest and largest university in Tanzania (1961; full university since 1970)

o   Among best universities of East Africa, leading university in Tanzania; (Webometric ranking of African universities rank: 24)

o   Total 22,000; ca. 18,000 undergraduate students (ca. 10% international)

Background II
Social Characteristics of Student Leadership

o Overall student leaders (SL) are largely representative of the student body in terms of age, rural/urban origin, home language, faculty cluster of studies, and source of funding.

o At UON, SL tend to be more often male, of urban origin and government funded than SNL; and a half-year younger than student in general. SL are also more often Dholuo speaking (33% as against 15% in the student body), while the greatest language group in the non-leaders student body are Gikuyu speakers (29%). Lastly, SL more frequently study in the Humanities than students not in leadership.

o At UCT, student leaders are far more often black African (59%) than the racial composition of the student body suggests (i.e. 10% Indian, 18% Coloured, 26% African, 35% White and over 10% DK/RA). SL tend to be on average almost a half-year older than students not in leadership and are marginally more frequently of rural origin and on government scholarship.

o At UDSM, SL are more often male and of rural origin than those they represent, and a half-year older. There are also proportionally more SL who study in the Humanities. While the greatest proportion of SNL indicate as their home language Kiswahili (41%), only 20% of student leaders do so (SL languages: Chaga 11%, Sukuma 9% and Bena 7%).

What is students' idea of the University?

Findings:

1. Students overwhelmingly reject the notion of the university as a "service provider of educational products " that should be run like a private business.

2. Most students consider the African university rather an **"Academic facility and community of learning that ought to be governed democratically"**

3. UDSM students are most inclined towards assigning the university a national developmental role (and concede government involvement). UCT students the least.
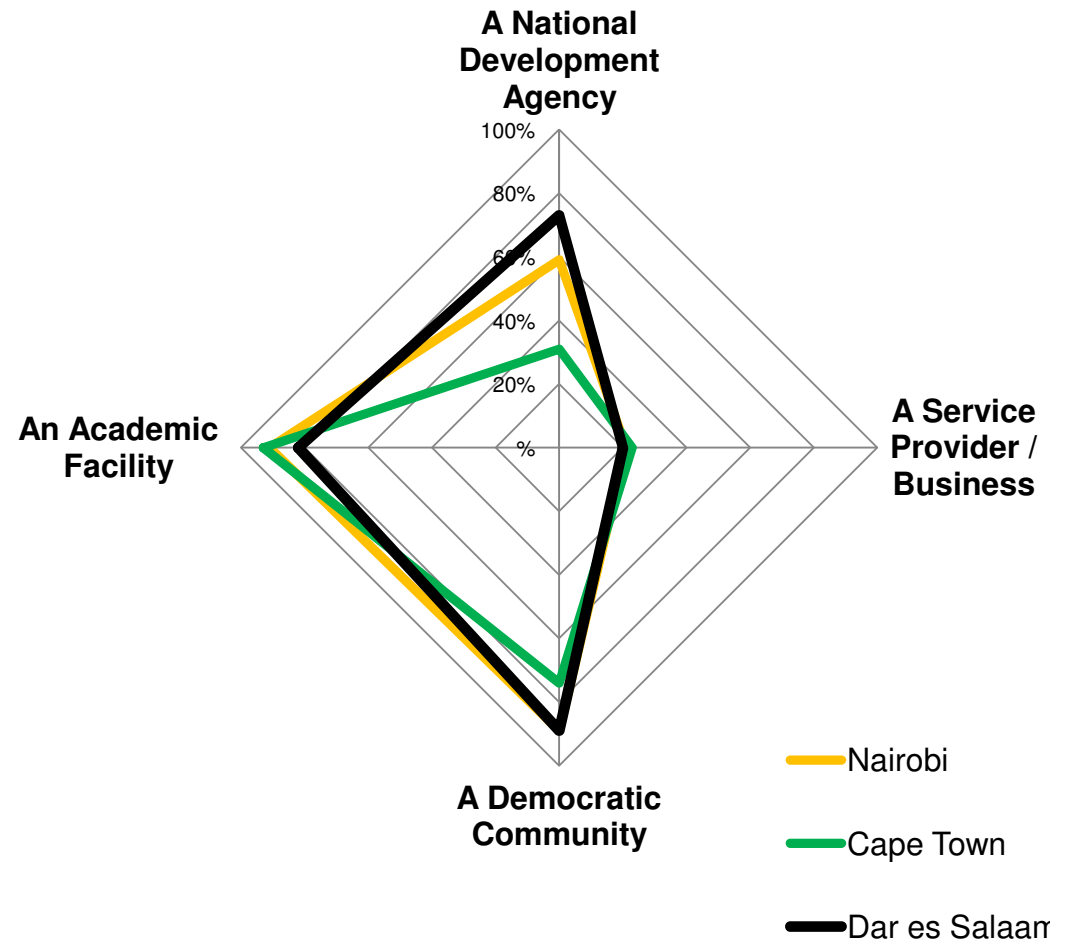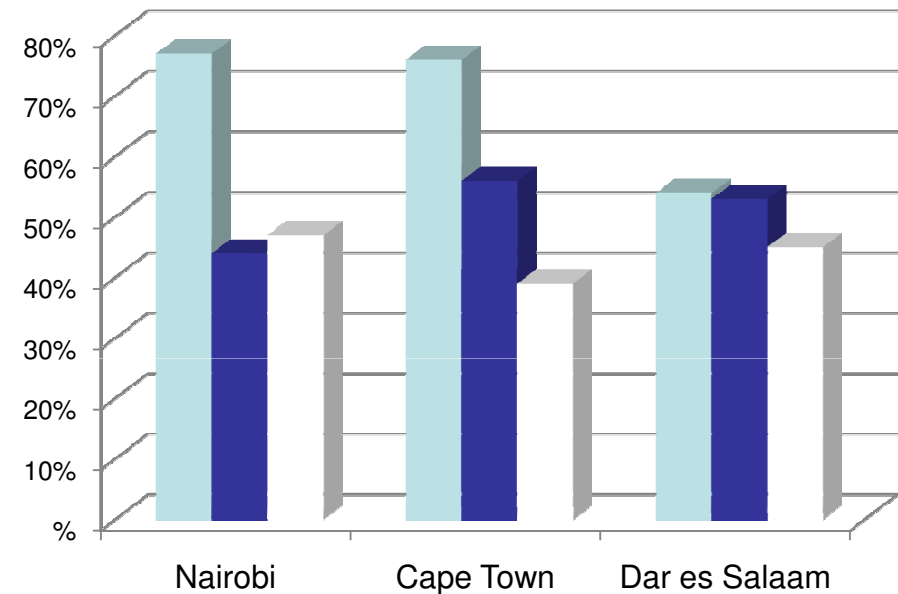
What should be the university's priority?

Findings: <u>Most important to students:</u>

1. "Provide me with the qualification to get a good job"

2. "Maintain highest international academic standards"

3. "Contribute to national development"

<u>Least important:</u>

-Offer a wide variety of sports and social activities
- Provide access to all who want to learn..

■ Qualification to get a good job

■ Highest international standards

National development

Who should govern the university and along what principles?

Findings:

Decisions about the university should be made predominantly by **internal constituencies** (especially students, academics and top management) in keeping with their respective criteria and interests.

(compare previous slide on the 'idea of the university')

% strongly agree/agree
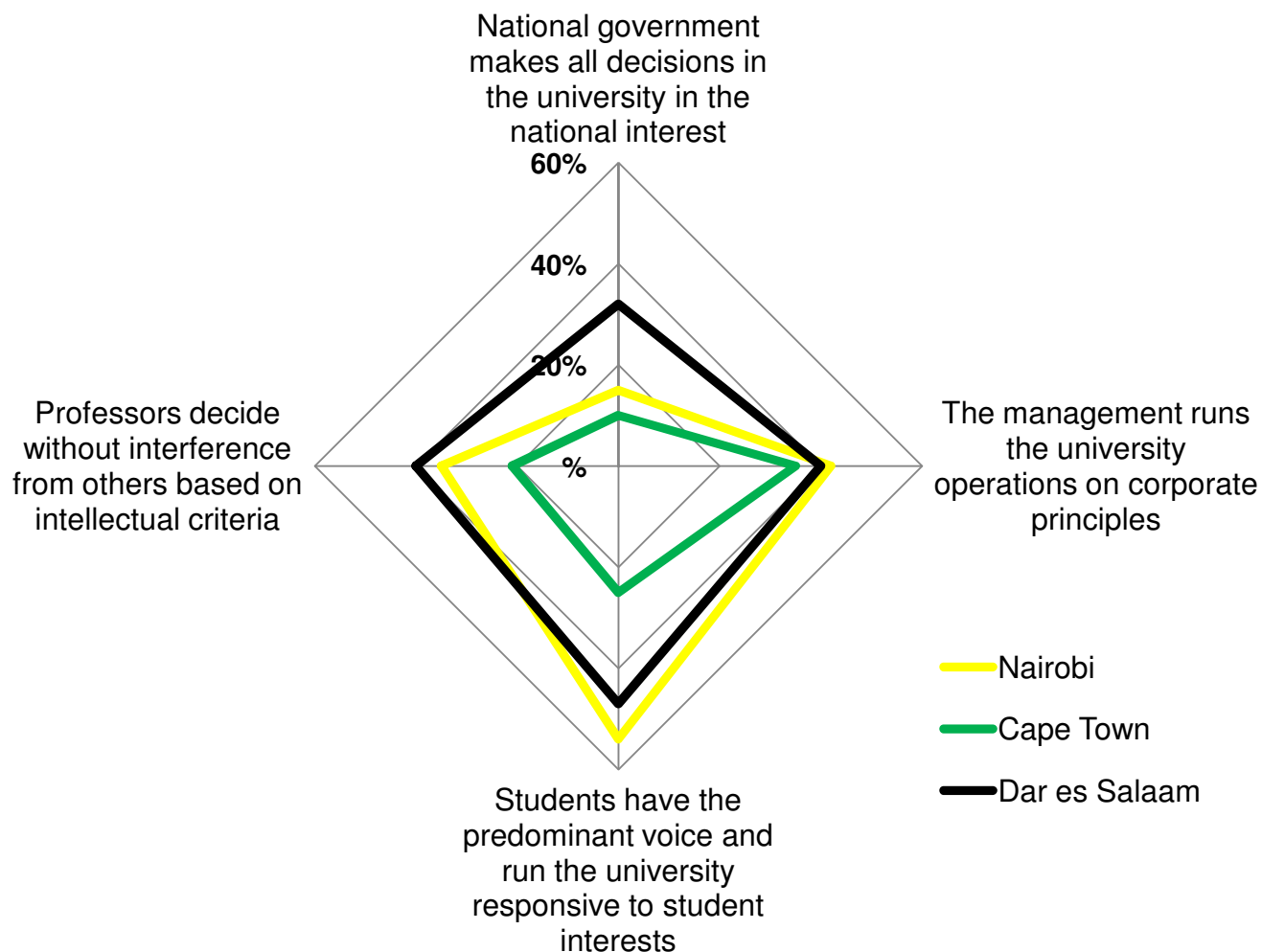
Should students be involved in politics and university governance?
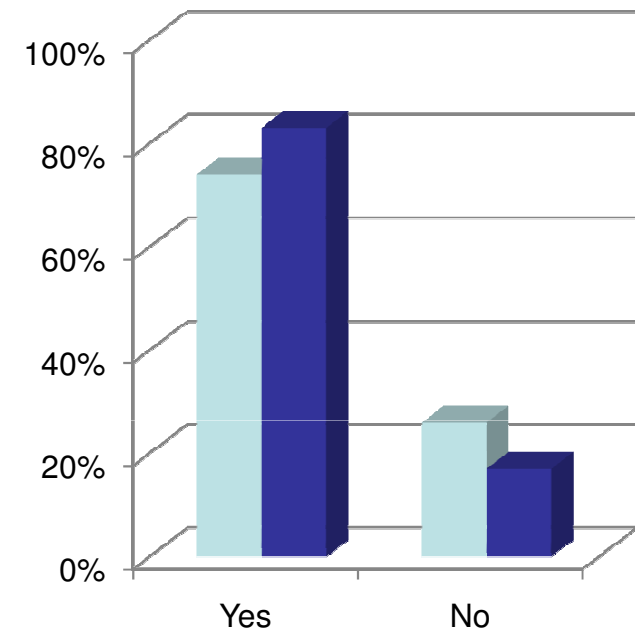
Politics in general

73% of students *disagree* with the statement that "students should concentrate on their studies and not be involved in politics" (UON 77%; UCT 67%; UDSM 75%)

75% of students *agree* that "**students must examine and criticize government** on behalf of the less privileged in the country" (UON 76%; UCT 66%, UDSM 83%)

University governance

86% of students *disagree or strongly disagree* that "including students in decision-making is a waste of time for everybody involved (UON 89%, UCT 83%, UDSM 86%).

80% of students say that **student representation** in **university councils and senates ensure** that the student voice is heard.(UON 87%; UCT 69%, UDSM 85%).

Bar chart legend:
■ Demand for student involvement in politics in general
■ Demand for student representation in university governance

What decisions should students be involved in? And to what extent?

Findings ("sensitive areas") :

The majority of students and student leaders say that students should participate in **academic and management appointments**

An even greater majority (3/4) say students should be **involved in Council and Senate** for the student voice to be heard.

But, the majority of students think that **students should *not* have the predominant voice** in university decision-making
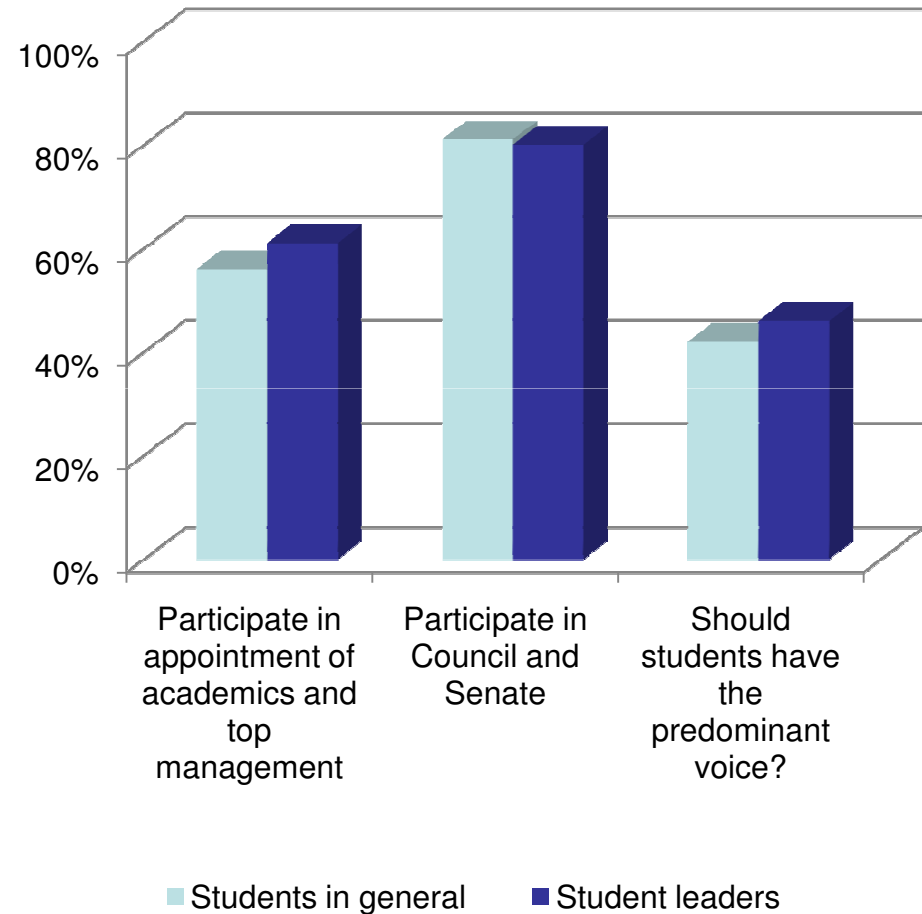
Who must hold student leaders, VC, etc. accountable?

Findings:

The majority of students across all three campuses see it as the role of students to hold student leaders accountable.

Most students think that academics should be held accountable for their performance by the university management.

University management, in turn, should be accountable to national government (as well as internal constituencies).
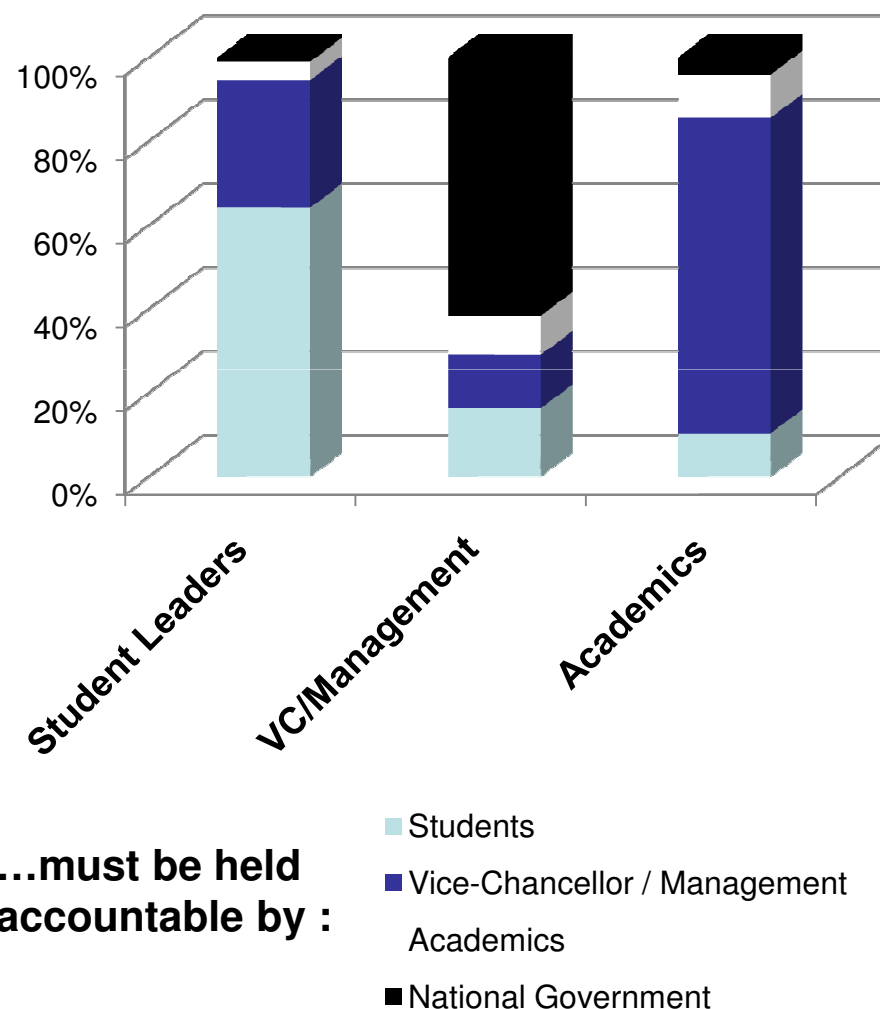

…must be held accountable by :

- Students
- Vice-Chancellor / Management
- Academics
- National Government

Are students satisfied with student representation?

Findings:

Student perception of the adequacy of student representation and satisfaction with the way it works differs greatly between universities.

Only at UCT is a majority of students satisfied with SR. At UDSM only 1/3 of students are satisfied; at UON satisfaction is less than 1/5 of students.

In the two East African universities, the student leaders tend to be more 'generous' in the evaluation of student representation and their performance as student leaders than students not in leadership.
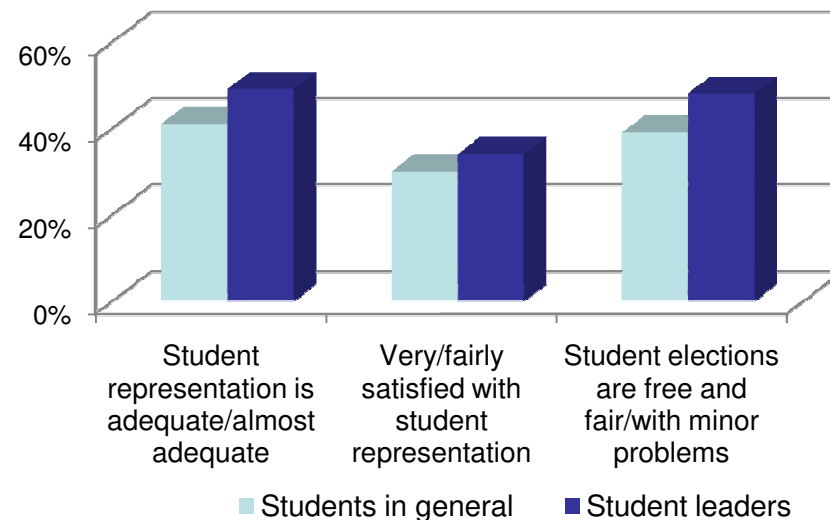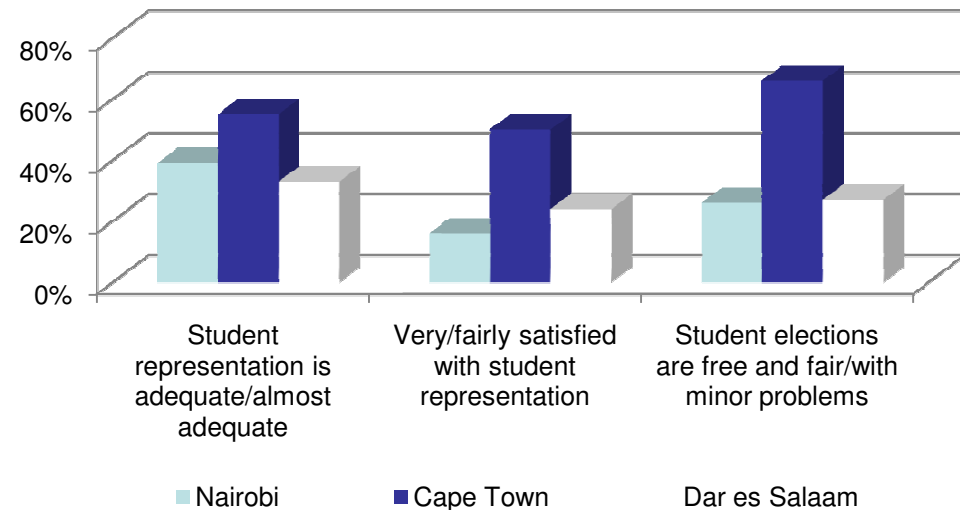
Do students trust their student representatives?

Findings: Student representatives are faced with low levels of trust from students; students trust their representatives far less than they trust academics or their fellow students in general, and even less than they trust the top management (except at UDSM).

Student leaders trust each other more than what students in general trust them.

% trust them somewhat/trust them a lot
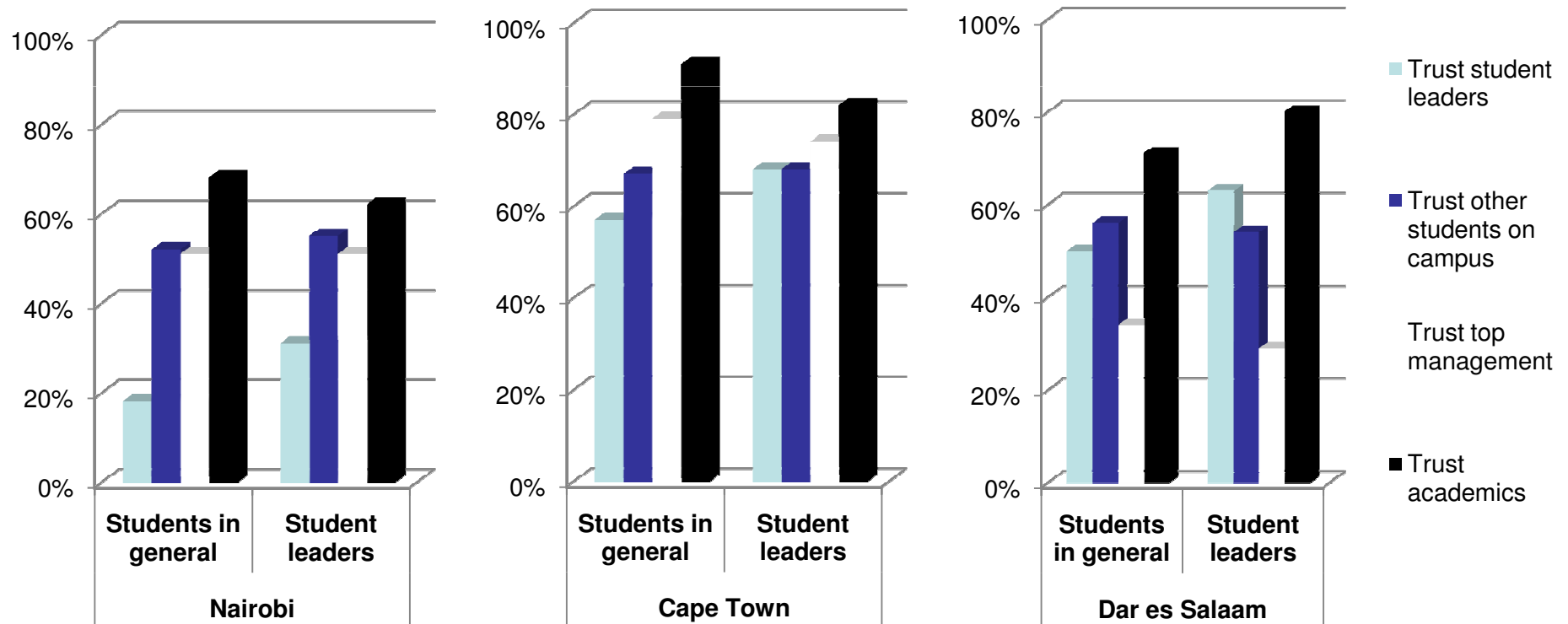
Are student leaders corrupt?

Findings: There are great variations in students' perception of the extent of corruption on university campuses, e.g. at UON over 70% of S/SL say that some/all student leaders are involved in corruption vs. 16% at UCT.

Student leaders are considered by students in general and by themselves (!) as the most corrupt of the three main internal university constituencies (i.e. students, academics, top managers).
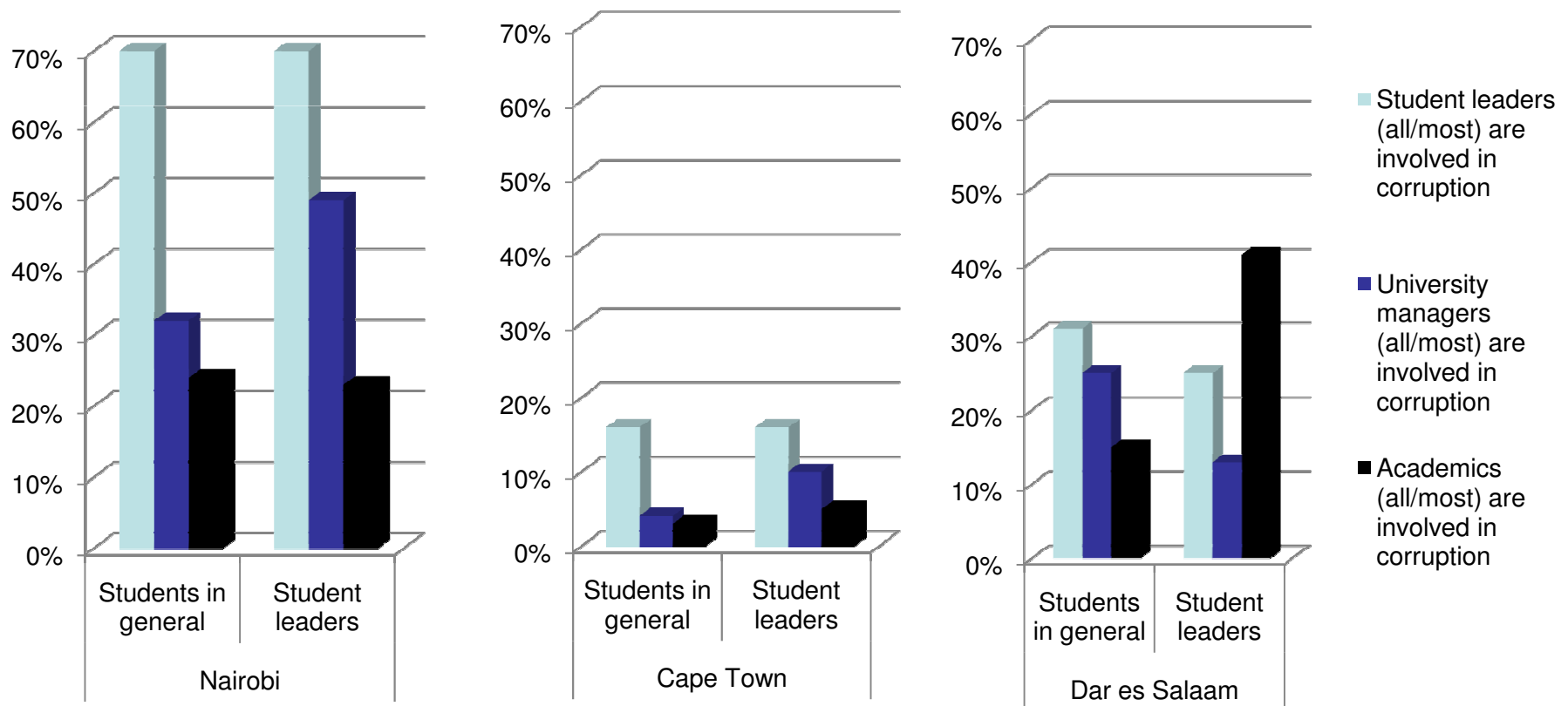
Do student leaders listen to students?

Findings: The majority of students at UCT (54%) and UDSM (68%) perceive that their student leaders often or always "try their best to listen to students".
At UON the percentage is much lower (only 20%).

Student leaders consider themselves more responsive than what the student body perceives them.

Also note: Students consider student leaders much more attentive to their needs than university management (% of students who say management listens to students: UON 18%; UCT 41%; UDSM 15%).
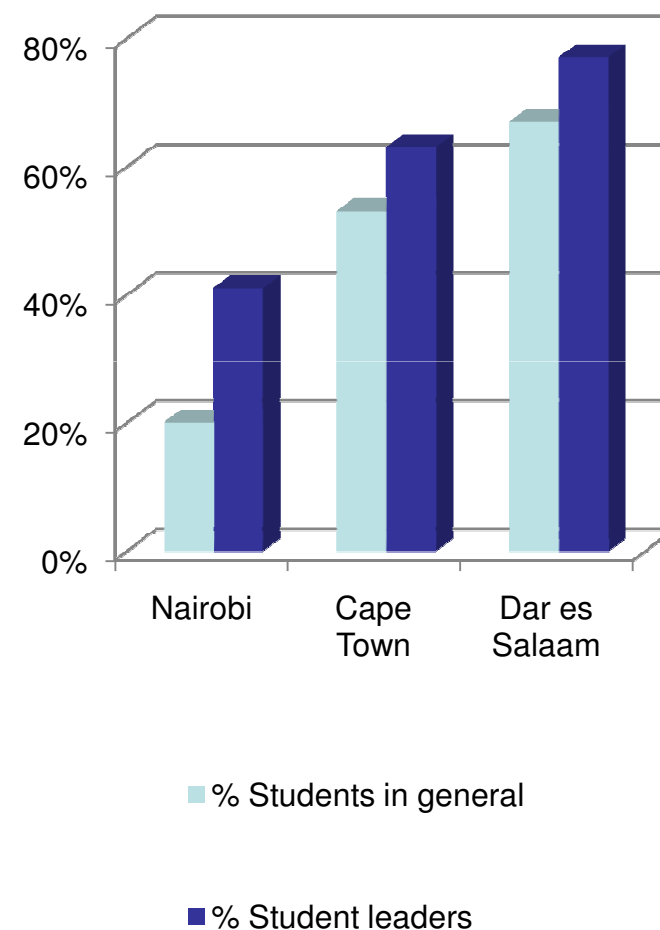
Summary of Key Findings

1. Student Conceptions of the African University

o Students' see the African university as an academic facility and a community of learning which should adequately equip them for a professional career.

o Students value high international academic standards and want their university to pursue such standards.

o The vast majority of students consider student involvement in national politics (on behalf of the less privileged) and in university governance as non-negotiable.

2. Students' Demands on University Governance

o Students demand to be involved in making key decisions in the university along with institutional management and academics.

o The university should be governed taking into account academic criteria and student interest, business principles as well as the national interest.

o Students should also be involved in sensitive areas of university governance such as the appointment of academics and top managers, and at the highest levels of decision-making, including University Council and Senate.

o Students want to hold their own leaders accountable.

Summary of Key Findings cont…

3. Students' Perception of the Way Student Representation currently works

- o Students are not very satisfied with the way student representation works currently (esp. at UON and UDSM).

- o In some universities (esp. UON) the majority of students do not trust the way student elections are run, they don't trust student leaders and fear that student leadership is corrupt in some way. (They are neither complementary about their university leadership either.)

- o In other universities (e.g. UCT, UDSM) there are fair levels of trust between students and student leaders.

- o Student leaders are seen to lend an ear and listen to students, and are perceived to be more responsive to student needs than university management.

- o *Levels of trust and responsiveness are positively correlated with each other and negatively correlated with perceptions of corruption.*

Involved, Responsive, Corrupt?
Understanding and Addressing Perceptions

Correlations

		Trust in Student Leaders	Responsiveness of Student Leaders	Perception of Student Leader Corruption
Trust in Student Leaders	Pearson Correlation	1	.442**	-.415**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	1071	1066	1062
Responsiveness of Student Leaders	Pearson Correlation	.442**	1	-.390**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	1066	1073	1067

Levels of trust and responsiveness are moderately positively correlated with each other and moderately negatively correlated with perceptions of corruption.

→ *Perceptions of student leadership corruption are likely to decrease as levels of trust and responsiveness increase (e.g. as student leaders are seen to listen more frequently to students).*

Some Conclusions and Implications

- Students' conceptions of student governance are very democratic. This mirrors other findings from the HERANA survey that shows that students are very supportive of democracy and reject non-democratic forms of rule to more strongly than mass publics in their countries.
- Students' demand for democratic governance in the institutional setting are seemingly thwarted by the way they perceive university governance and student representation in some institutions.
- Therefore, opportunities should be sought to further enhance the democratic nature of university governance and of student leadership (e.g. involving student leaders in key decisions; freeness & fairness of student elections; dealing with corruption; being accountable).
- Student leadership should also consider more effective ways of communicating with their student bodies (esp. UON, UDSM) to dispel wrong perceptions of corruption and increase student awareness of their work.
- Student leaders should encourage a vibrant student 'civil society' on campus, with independent student newspapers and a lively associational life (sports clubs, academic and recreational societies, development agencies) to increase levels of associational interaction and trust.

Thank you!

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