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Integration in East Africa: Uninformed Kenyans Oppose Political Federation

Introduction

When the treaty establishing the East African Community came into force on July 7, 2000, the three East African countries of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania officially set their goal as the creation of a federation of East African states. The founders of the East African Federation (EAF) expected it to be realized in four stages – a customs union¹, a common market², a monetary union³, and eventually a political federation⁴ to be achieved in 2013. A committee on Fast Tracking East African Federation (the *Wako Committee*)⁵ was established to help speed up the process. A timetable was made according to which a referendum on the establishment of the federation would be held in September 2009, and a Transitional Federal Government put in place by January 2010. Between 2010 and 2012, the major institutions of the federal government are to be put in place. They include a Transitional Federal Parliament, Judges of the East Africa Supreme Court, joint Defense Forces, Federal Police and other Federal Institutions as provided for under the Treaty. This will culminate in the establishment of the Federation of Eastern Africa States in 2013.

According to the Wako Committee, the EA Federation would serve two major purposes. First, the federation would be a catalyst for economic growth. Secondly, it would be a major pillar for the attainment and maintenance of peace, political stability and security in the member states. The Federation is expected to eliminate the possibility of Partner States fighting each other. Thus, as more countries join, the political stability of the entire region would be enhanced.

However, although the Federation is meant to be people centered, the process seems to be dominated by the political class. The East African populations do not seem to have been involved in the process in any significant manner, which has serious implications for the Federation, since it is these same EA citizens who will vote in the referendum on establishing it.

¹ A customs union aims at the eventual elimination of all tariffs and other non-tariff barriers between the trading partners as well as the establishment of a common external tariff.

² A common market calls for free movement of goods, services and other factors of production, including labor and capital.

³ A monetary union, by creating a single currency area, dramatically cuts cross-border transaction costs.

⁴ This involves the formation of a unitary government, including having one East African President.

⁵ The Committee was chaired by Amos Wako, Attorney General of Kenya. Other members were Professor Haidan Amani, Vice Chairman (Tanzania); Dr. Ezra Suruma, Secretary (Uganda); and Associate Members Professor Sam Tulya-Muhika (Uganda), Ms. Margaret Chemengich (Kenya), and Mr. Mohamed Fakh Mohamed (Tanzania).

According to a recent Afrobarometer study, a large number of Kenyans do not seem to know much about the proposed EA Federation. Even among those who have heard about the proposed EA Federation, over half of them do not approve of its formation. Indeed, only 19 percent of Kenyans approve of its formation and an even smaller number (8 percent) feel that the Federation would be of significant benefit to the country. The perceptions of Kenyans on the various stages of the formation of the federation are, however, mixed.

The Survey

The latest round (Round 4) of Afrobarometer surveys has been conducted in 20 African countries based on a common methodology and survey instrument. But the instrument also included space for adding selected country specific questions to enable country teams to explore issues of particular relevance to their respective countries. In Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, this space was used in part to explore attitudes toward the proposed EA Federation.

The latest survey in Kenya, conducted from 29th October to 17th November 2008, was the third in a series. The first two were conducted in 2003 and 2005. Like the 2005 survey, the most recent survey was carried out by the Institute for Development Studies (IDS), University of Nairobi, in collaboration with Center for Democratic Development (CDD), Ghana and Michigan State University (MSU), USA. It was based on a nationally representative random sample of 1,200 adult Kenyans of voting age. This sample was drawn based on the latest projections (2008) of the National Sample Frame obtained from the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS).

Given Kenya's estimated population of 36 million people, a sample of this size gives an overall margin of sampling error of +/-3 percent at a 95 percent confidence level⁶. The survey was conducted in all eight provinces, and 63 of the country's 71 districts. Each province contributed to the sample based on its share of the national population, with the exception of a deliberate over-sample of North Eastern Province to obtain an analyzable sub-sample⁷, and a targeted sample among Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)⁸ to help capture the experience of this subgroup following the post-election violence of 2007. Deliberate measures were instituted to help attain fair distribution of respondents on the basis of gender as well as along the rural-urban divide.

Kenyans Uninformed About Proposed EA Federation

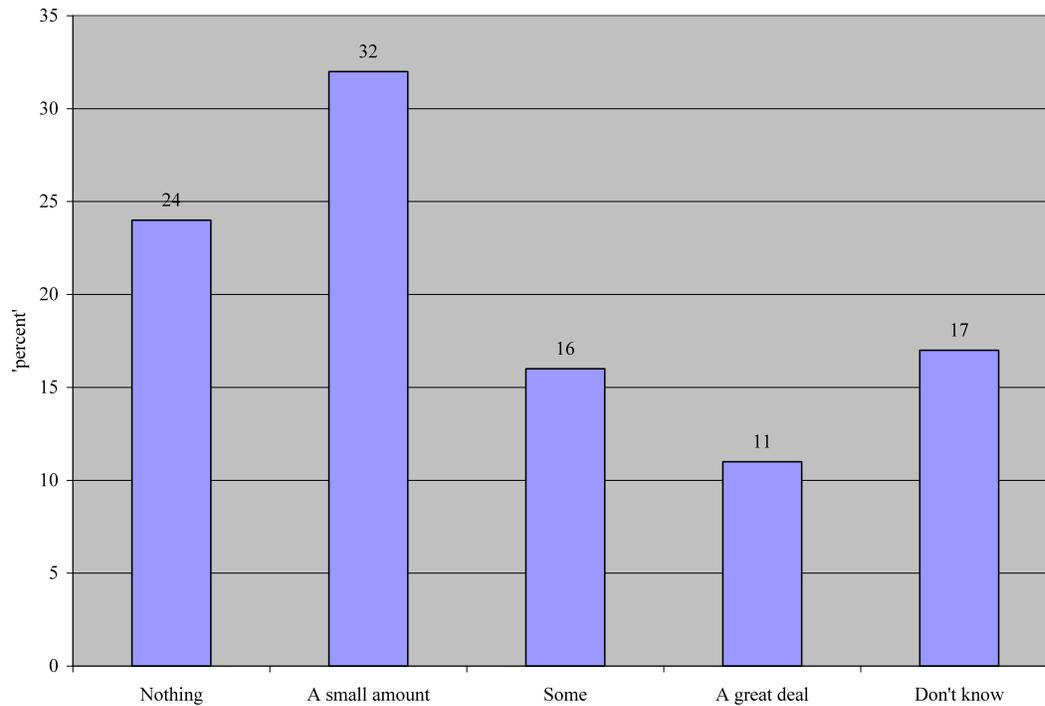
One of the most disturbing results of the Afrobarometer study is the high percentage of Kenyans who are not well informed about the affairs of the EAC or the proposed EA Federation. When asked how much they "*have heard about the proposed Federation of the East African States*", only 11 percent of Kenyans answered that they had heard a great deal, while over 24 percent had heard nothing at all (Figure 1). Fully 56 percent of Kenyans had heard either nothing or very little. And another 17 percent "did not know" – presumably indicating that they, too, were not well informed.

⁶ For instance, a result 60 percent indicates that there is a 95 percent chance that the actual percentage lies between 57 percent and 63 percent.

⁷ The resultant outcome reflected in the report has however been weighted; as such North Eastern Province only contributes in proportion to its actual share in the national population.

⁸ Responses from IDPs have not been included in the analysis for this bulletin. The dataset is however, available for analysis of IDP-specific issues.

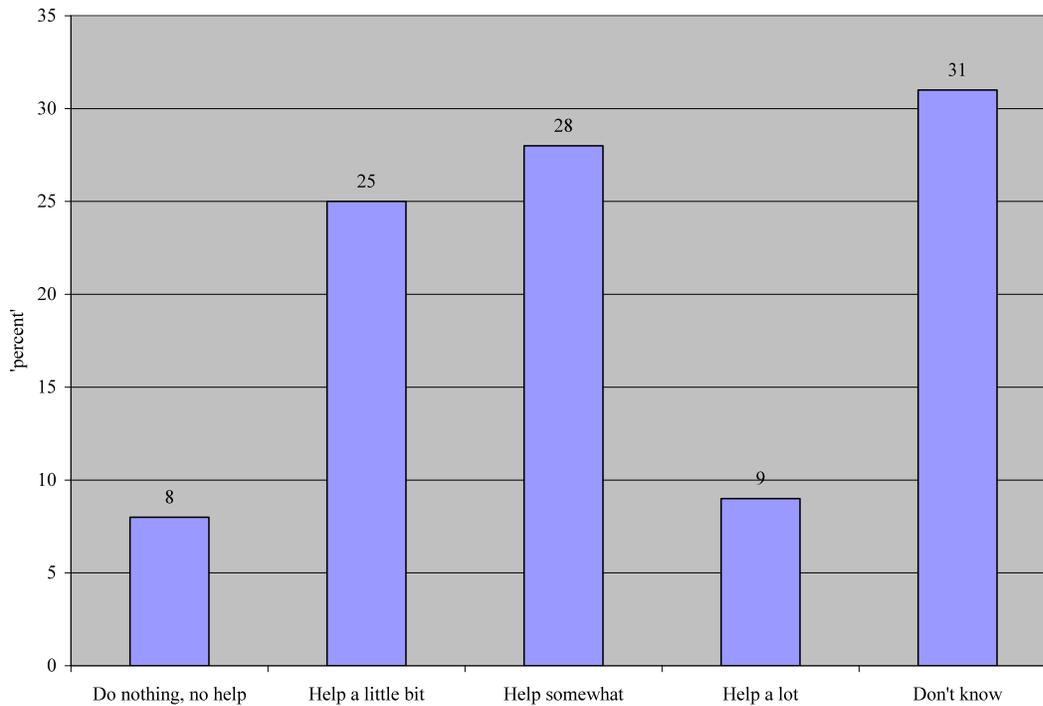
Figure 1: Knowledge of Proposed Federation of East African States



Question: “How much have you heard about the proposed federation of the East African States, that is, the formation of a unitary government of Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi, with a joint army, parliament, presidency, and the economy?”

We also asked about whether they approved or disapproved of specific aspects of federation, and about whether or not they thought federation would benefit the country in various ways. On these questions, even larger percentages responded that they “didn’t know” or simply “hadn’t heard enough” to venture an opinion. And when we asked “*In your opinion, how much (does the East African Community) do to help your country, or haven’t you heard enough to say?*” a plurality of over 30 percent of respondents said they didn’t know or had not heard enough to say. Only 9 percent said that the EAC helps the country a lot, while almost 33 percent of Kenyans said that it either did not help at all, or helped only a little (Figure 2).

Figure 2: How Much Does the EAC Do to Help the Country?



Question: " In your opinion how much does (the EAC) do to help your country, or haven't you heard enough to say"

The establishment of the EA Federation is supposed to be approved through a referendum in the five EA countries. But with such a high number of Kenyans who are not well informed, there is a high likelihood that either the referendum might not be successful, or that people will vote on an issue about which they know very little. It seems clear that the proponents of the EA Federation still have a big job to do in selling the benefits of the East African Federation to the public at large.

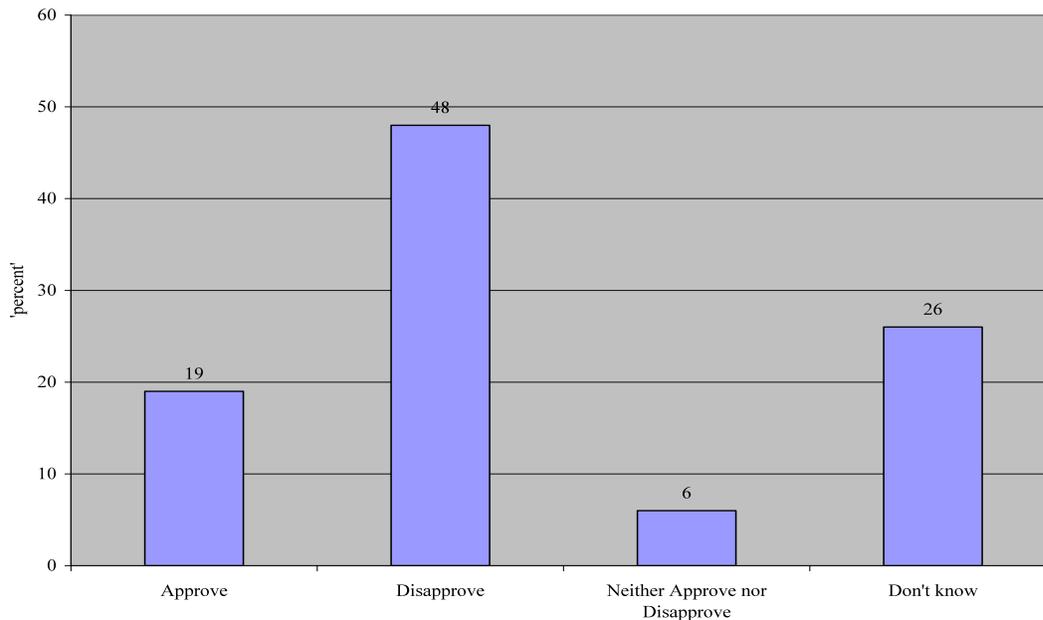
Aspects of Integration

Now let's turn to public attitudes toward specific aspects of federation.

Opposition to a Unitary Government

Almost half of Kenyans are opposed to full federation under the terms agreed in the Treaty. Asked if they approve or disapprove of the "*Formation of a unitary government, including having one East African President*", over 48 percent of Kenyans reported that they disapproved or strongly disapproved, compared to just 19 percent that approved or strongly approved (Figure 3). A large proportion (26 percent) of Kenyans, however, did not know or had not heard enough to say whether they approved or disapproved of such a federation.

Figure 3: Support for Formation of a Unitary Government



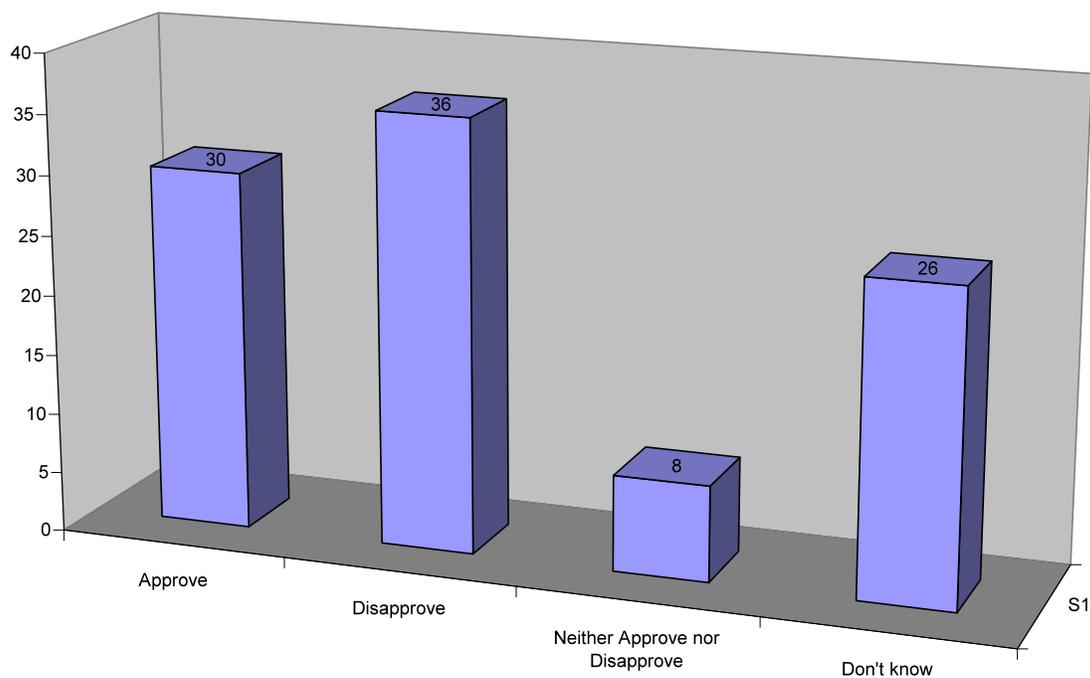
Question: "People have different ideas about how much integration of economies and political systems of the East African states is right amount. Some don't want any integration. Others support complete unification of governments. Please tell me if you approve or disapprove of each of the following proposed aspects of integration, or haven't you heard enough to say: formation of unitary government, including having one EA President."⁹

Opposition to Monetary Union

Support for the formation of a single EA Currency (monetary union) is also relatively weak, although Kenyans are somewhat more ambivalent on this issue. While only about 30 percent of Kenyans approved, a larger percentage (36 percent) disapproved (Figure 4). And a large number of Kenyans (26 percent) again did not know enough to offer an opinion.

⁹ For Figures 4, 5, and 6, the same question was asked about free movement of goods and services; free movement of labor, and monetary union, i.e., the formation of a single EA Currency.

Figure 4: Support for Formation of a Single EA Currency (Monetary Union)

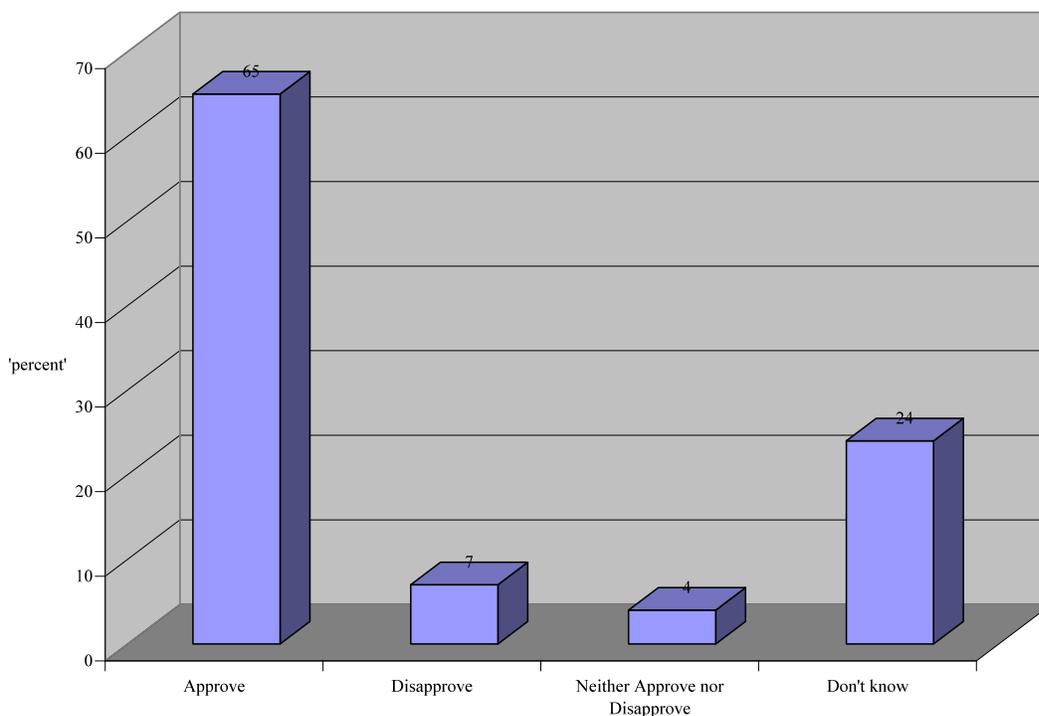


This response is not necessarily surprising because in the region, Kenya has the strongest economy and currency. The opposition to the formation of a single currency in the region might therefore reflect a fear that monetary union with Uganda and Tanzania (and later with Burundi and Rwanda) might weaken Kenya's currency. It is perceived that a monetary union tends to favor those countries with weaker currencies more than those with a strong currency. A similar reaction has been witnessed in the European Union, where Britain, with its strong currency (the Pound), has opposed switching to the Euro.

Preference for a Common Market

One of the earlier stages in the establishment of the EA Federation is the creation of a common market. A common market calls for the free movement of goods and services and the free movement of other factors of production such as labor. When asked whether they would prefer integration allowing for free movement of goods and services in the region, a sizeable majority (65 percent) either approved or strongly approved. In fact, only an insignificant minority (7 percent) disapproved or strongly disapproved (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Support for Free Movement of Goods and Services (Common Market)

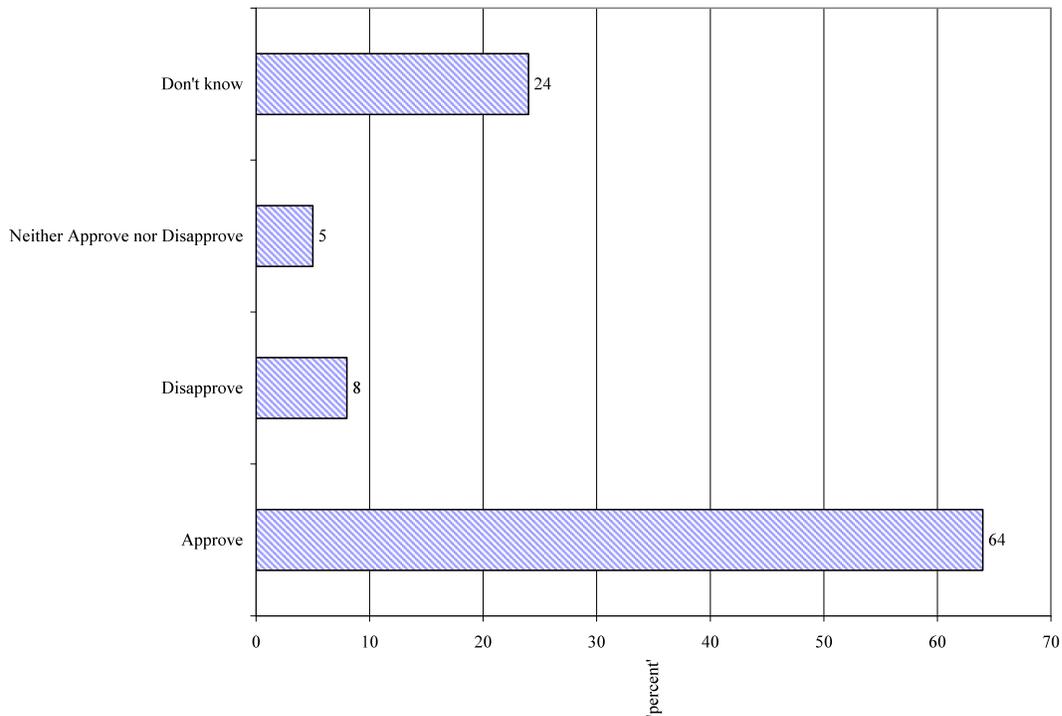


Preference for Free Movement of Labor

The other major feature of a common market is the free movement of other factors of production, including labor. When we asked whether respondents approved of allowing free movement of labor, again a large majority of Kenyans (64 percent) approved (Figure 6). As was the case with the free movement of goods and services, only a negligible 8 percent of Kenyans disapproved.

It is however, interesting that nearly a quarter of Kenyans (24 percent) do not know whether or not they want an EA integration that allows for either free movement of labor or free movement of goods and services. Note, however, that if we remove the “do not know” cases from the responses, we find that among those who have an opinion, overwhelming percentages support both free movement of labor (83 percent) and free movement of goods and services (85 percent). This is consistent with the perception that Kenya is the dominant partner in the EA region and therefore the establishment of a common market would benefit Kenyan workers and traders the most.

Figure 6: Support for Free Movement of Labour

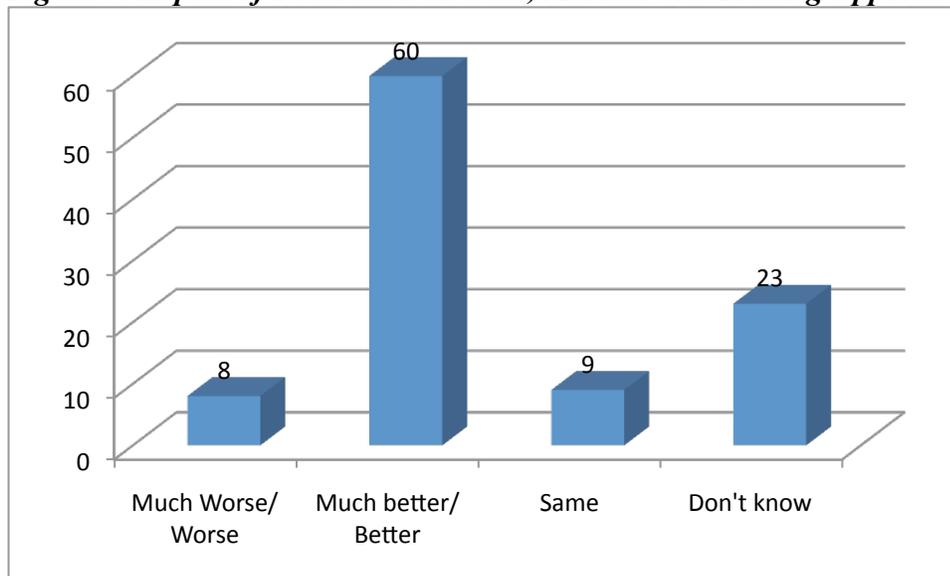


The Impact of East African Federation

Availability of Jobs, Markets and Trading Opportunities

Even though a majority of Kenyans are opposed to the formation of the EA Federation, many believe that a Federation would be beneficial to the country. Asked whether they think that a full federation of EA states would make the “*availability of jobs, markets and trading opportunities*” better or worse, a solid majority of Kenyans (60 percent) answered “*better*” or “*much better*”. Only 8 percent perceive that federation would make these opportunities “*worse*” or “*much worse*” (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Impact of Federation on Jobs, Markets and Trading Opportunities



Question: "In your opinion, do you think the full federation of these East African States would make the following things better or worse for Kenyans: Availability of jobs, markets, and trading opportunities?"¹⁰

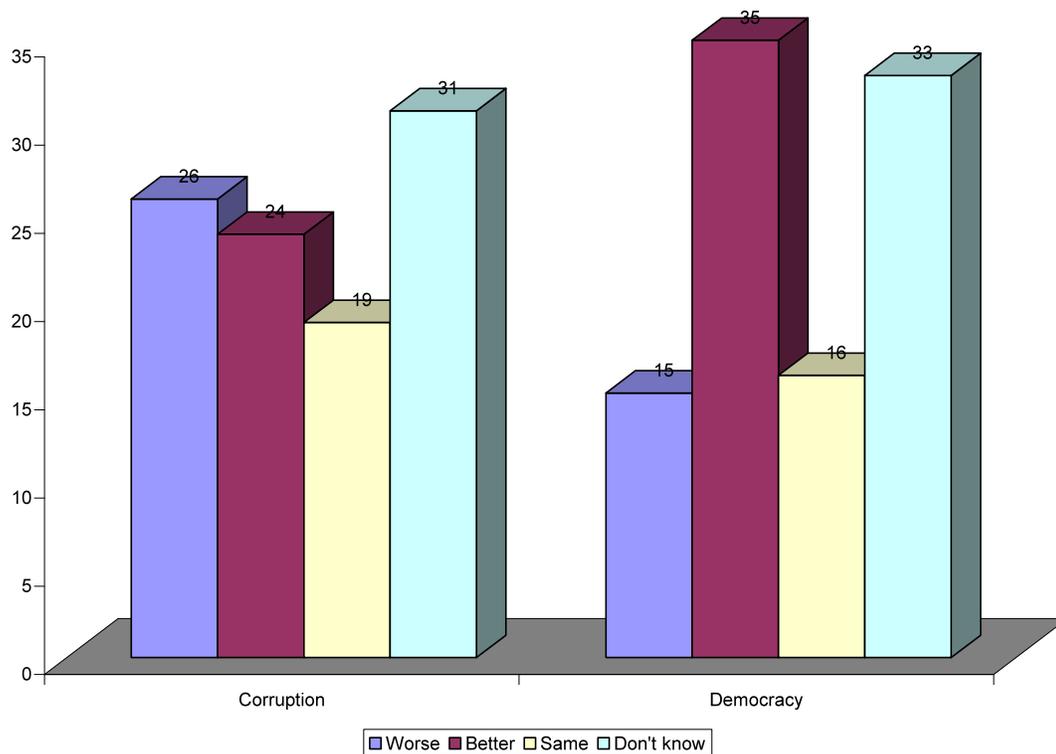
Democracy and Control of Corruption

Since the Afrobarometer study was introduced in Kenya in 2003, Kenyans have persistently shown their preference for a democratic system of government rather than any other system. In the 2003 Afrobarometer study, Kenyans' preference for a democratic system of government was 80 percent, while in 2005 it was 75 percent. In the current study (2008), the Afrobarometer team wanted to establish the perceptions of Kenyans on whether an EA Federation would "strengthen democracy" in the country or not. Asked whether they thought that a full federation of EA States would make the "strengthening democracy" better or worse, only 35 percent said it would make it better or much better (Figure 8).

But probably more interesting is the unusually large number of "don't know" responses. Despite the large numbers of Kenyans who prefer a democratic government, over 33 percent, (one in every 3 people), did not know whether the proposed EA Federation would strengthen democracy in the country or not. A smaller number of Kenyans (15 percent) felt that an EA Federation would make democracy worse or much worse, while 16 percent said it would remain the same.

¹⁰ The same question was asked for Figures 8 (control of corruption and strengthening democracy) and 9 (management of national and cross-border conflicts)

Figure 8: Impact of Federation on Strengthening Democracy and Controlling Corruption

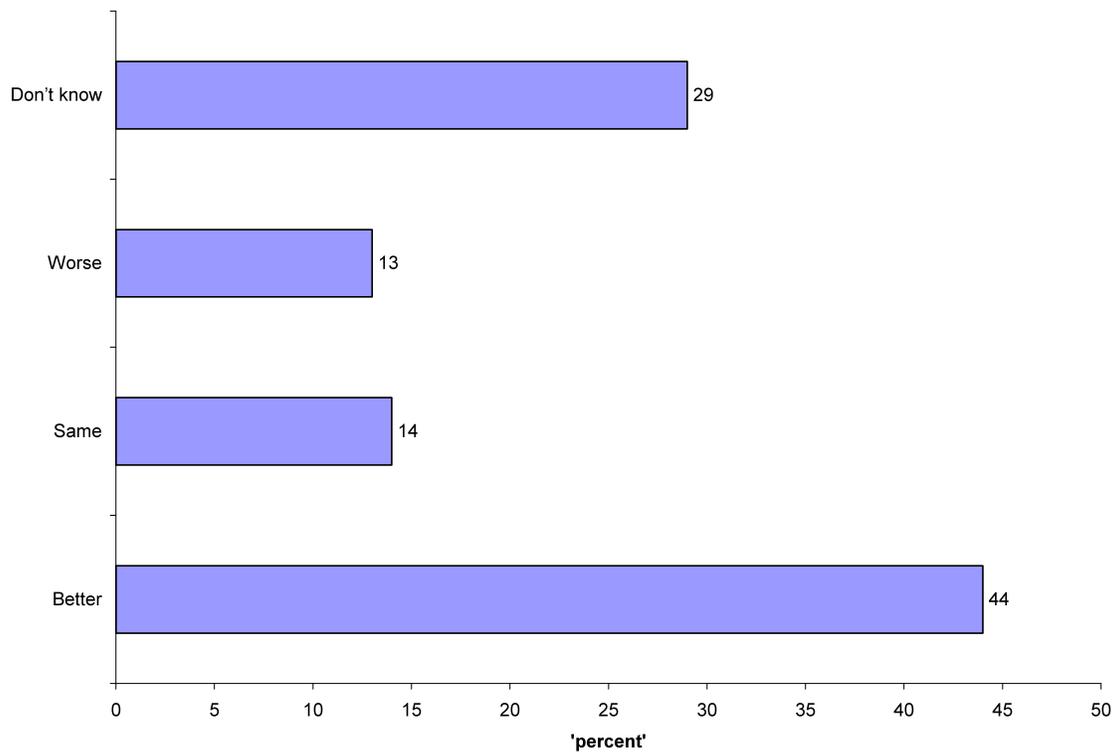


Kenyans were also asked whether they thought that an EA Federation would help control corruption. Kenyans are again very uncertain or undecided about the likely effects. One in four (26 percent) think federation would make the control of corruption worse, while a similar number (24 percent) think the opposite, and fully 31 percent are uncertain, (Figure 8).

Management of Conflicts

In the public's view, the greatest perceived benefit of federalism seems to be in the management of national and cross-national conflicts. Asked whether they thought that a full federation of the EA states would make the "management of national and cross-national conflicts" better or worse, 44 percent of Kenyans said better, compared to just 13 percent who say worse (Figure 9). Once again, a sizable number of Kenyans (almost 30 percent) don't know enough to say whether the federation would make the management of conflict better or worse.

Figure 9: Impact of Federation on National and International Conflict



The responses of Kenyans to this question seem to echo the sentiments of the Wako Committee, which argued that an EA Federation would be a major pillar for the attainment and maintenance of peace, political stability and security, both within and between member states. The Wako Committee argued that when societies integrate to form one large economic or political entity, problems of tribalism, religion and other social and cultural antagonisms tend to disappear. Under a Federation, their hope is that the people of Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi will begin to identify themselves as East Africans, and their reference to tribal affiliations – hitherto the major source of internal conflict – will be marginalized and eventually disappear. At the regional level, the Wako Committee argued that Federation would remove any possibility of Partner States fighting each other. Therefore, as more countries join the Federation, inter-state conflicts would decrease, and hence the political stability of the region will further be entrenched.

Conclusion

The results of the study show that Kenyans are not well informed about the proposed EA Federation. The large numbers of “do not know” responses in the study indicates that EA leaders need to do much more to educate their populations on the affairs of the proposed EA Federation. Results of the study have also shown a mixed perception about the likely benefits of the proposed Federation. This also calls for more efforts to be made to educate the people on the benefits (and even costs) of federation. This is necessary not just because the people’s support is required to approve the federation, but because the success of the Federation will also depend on the perceptions of the people about it.

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