

Even weak demand for democracy not met by supply in São Tomé and Príncipe

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 118 | Kakra Adu Duayeden and Daniel Armah-Attoh

Summary

Since gaining independence from Portugal in 1975, the Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe has experienced 15 years of one-party rule and, starting with a new constitution in 1990, 26 years of fast-moving multiparty competition marked by frequent changes in government and two attempted coups.

August 2016 brought another transition with the election of former Prime Minister Evaristo Carvalho as president over incumbent and former strongman leader Manuel Pinto da Costa.

The country's distinctive politics reflect complex constitutional mandates for power-sharing and separation of executive powers between president and prime minister.

Afrobarometer's first survey in the island nation, in 2015, suggests that after more than two decades of multiparty politics, São Toméans are only moderately supportive of democracy and largely dissatisfied with the way democracy is working in their country.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 30 countries in Africa. After five rounds of surveys between 1999 and 2013, results of Round 6 surveys (2014/2015) are currently being published. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples of 1,200 or 2,400 respondents.

In São Tomé and Príncipe, Afrosondagem of Cape Verde in partnership with a local consultant and the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) interviewed 1,200 adult citizens in July and August 2015. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3% at a 95% confidence level.

Key findings

- Half (51%) of São Toméans prefer democracy to any other form of government, one of the lowest levels among 36 surveyed countries in Africa. Large majorities reject military rule (80%), one-party rule (76%), and one-man rule (68%).
- Three-fourths (74%) of citizens support regular transparent elections as the best way to choose their leaders, and a majority (56%) support multiparty competition. Six in 10 (63%) favour limiting the president to a maximum of two terms in office.
- Only about half of all citizens insist on the National Assembly's roles as lawmakers (45%) and monitors of the government's expenditures (51%).

- While eight in 10 São Toméans (83%) describe the 2014 national election as completely or mostly free and fair, only 52% consider their country to be “a full democracy” or “a democracy, but with minor problems,” and fully three-fourths (75%) are dissatisfied with the way their democracy is working.
- While São Toméans' demand for democracy is relatively weak, it far outpaces the supply of democracy they see in their country.

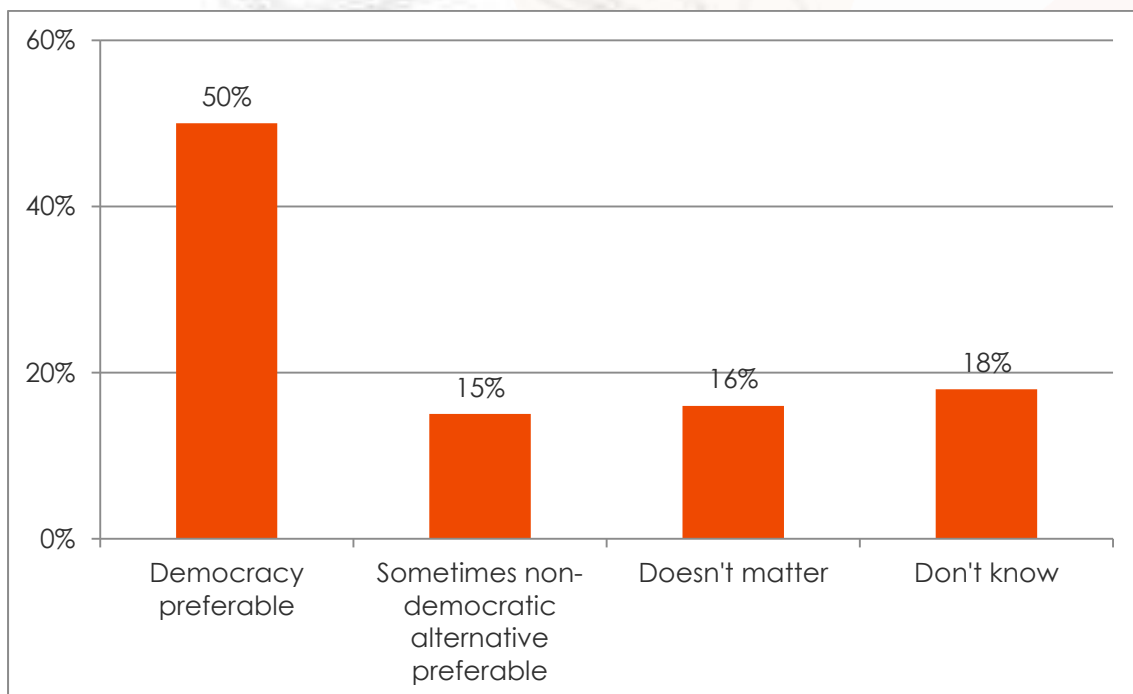
Demand for democracy

Afrobarometer measures the level of demand for democracy in a country by asking citizens whether they prefer democracy over other political systems and whether they approve or disapprove of three non-democratic alternatives (one-party rule, one-man rule, and military rule).

In São Tomé and Príncipe, half (51%) of all respondents say they prefer democracy over all other political systems. A substantial minority of citizens say that a non-democratic government can sometimes be preferable (15%) or that it doesn't matter which form of government the country has (16%), while almost one in five (18%) say they don't know (Figure 1).

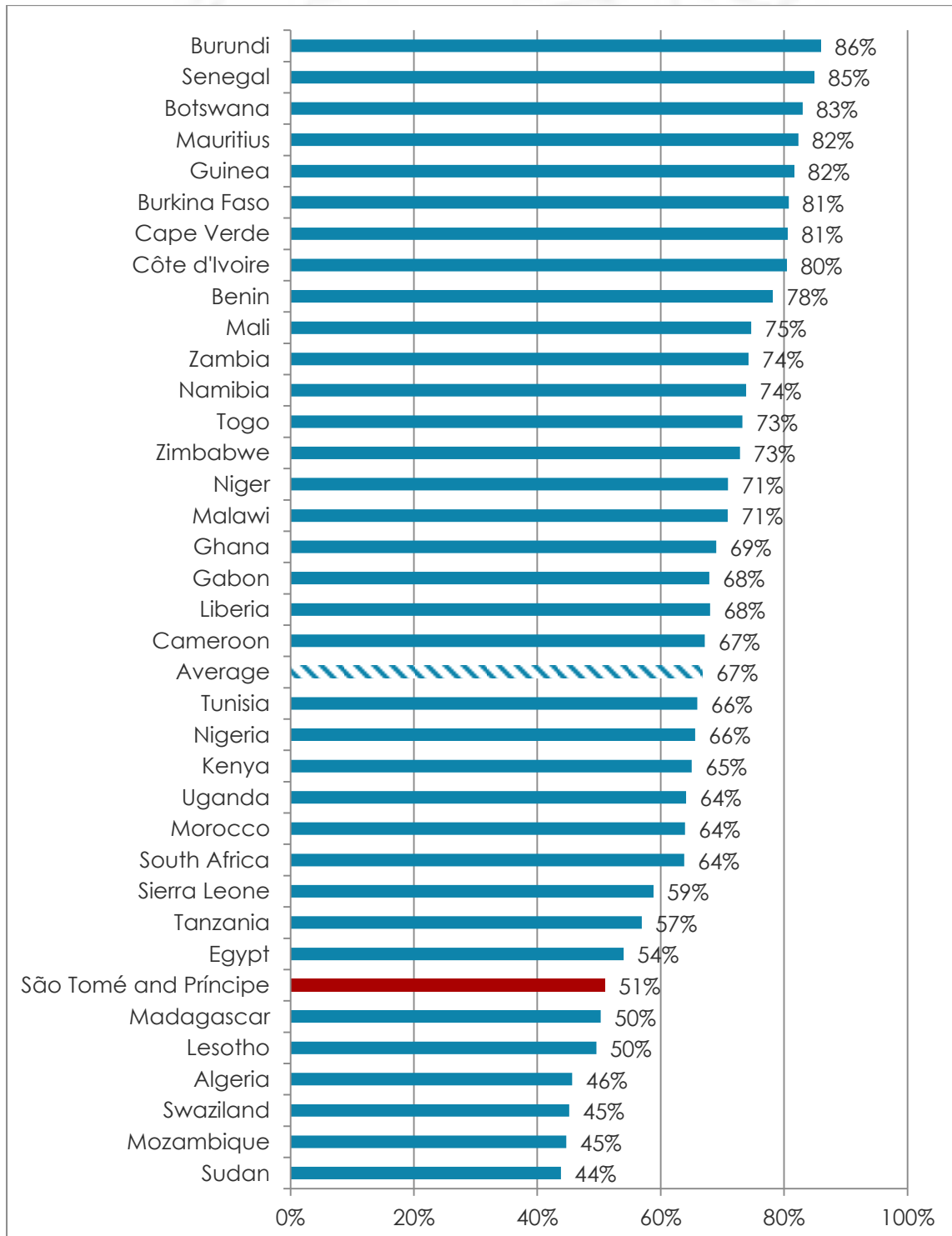
The level of preference for democracy in São Tomé and Príncipe is significantly lower than the 67% average across all 36 countries surveyed by Afrobarometer in 2014/2015, ahead of only Sudan (44%), Mozambique (45%), Swaziland (45%), and Algeria (46%) (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Preference for democracy | São Tomé and Príncipe | 2015



Respondents were asked: Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion?
 Statement 1: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.
 Statement 2: In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable.
 Statement 3: For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.

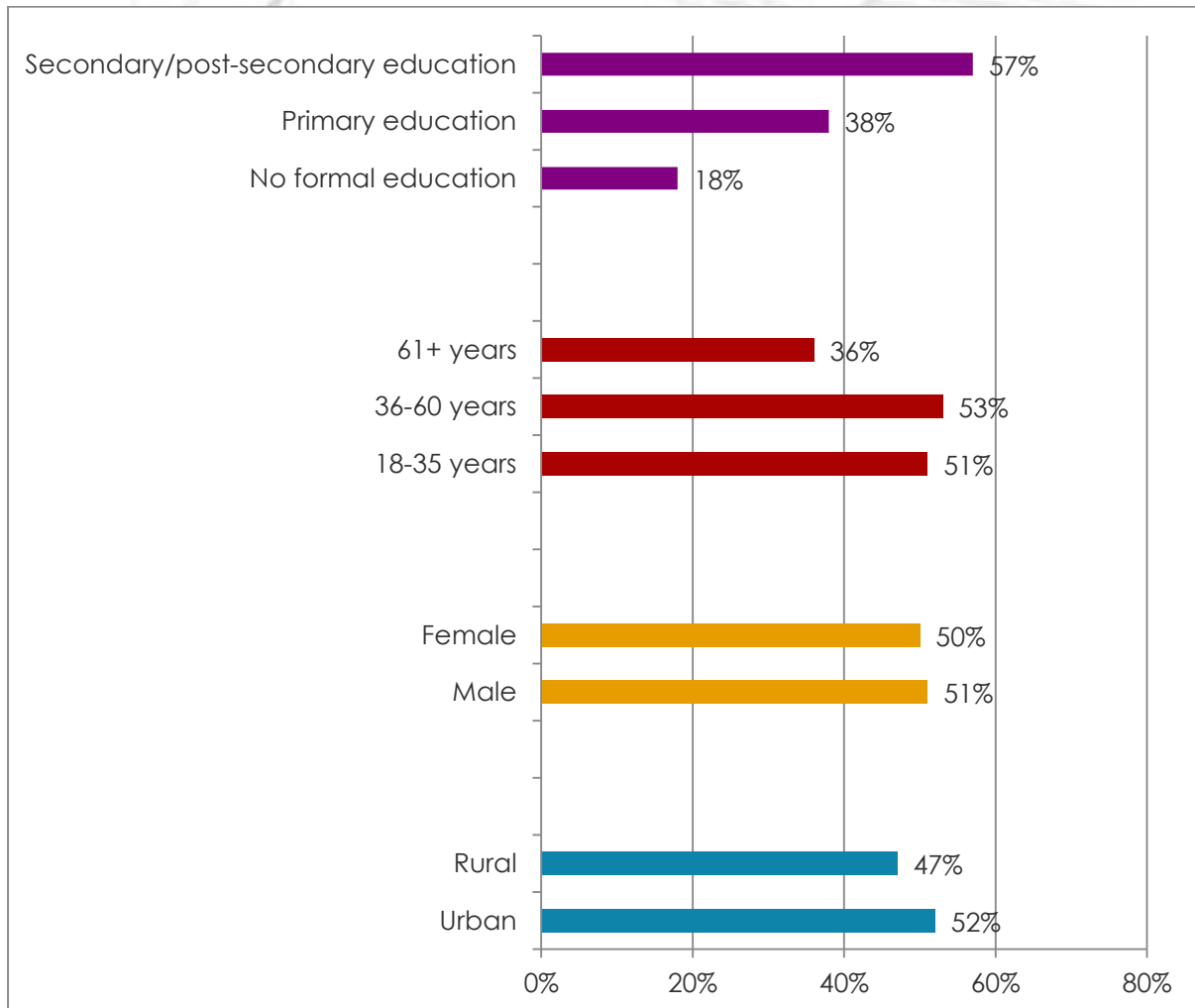
Figure 2: Preference for democracy | 36 countries | 2015



Respondents were asked: Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion?
 Statement 1: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.
 Statement 2: In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable.
 Statement 3: For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.
 (% who say democracy is preferable to any other kind of government)

Citizens with secondary or post-secondary education are more likely to favour democracy (57%) than those with only primary schooling (38%) or no formal schooling (18%). In addition, youth (ages 18-35 years) (51%) and adults (ages 36-60) (53%) are more likely to prefer democracy than senior citizens (ages 61 years or more) (36%). And support for democracy is higher among urban residents (52%) than among rural residents (47%) (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Preference for democracy | by education, age, gender, and residency location | São Tomé and Príncipe | 2015



Respondents were asked: Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion?

Statement 1: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.

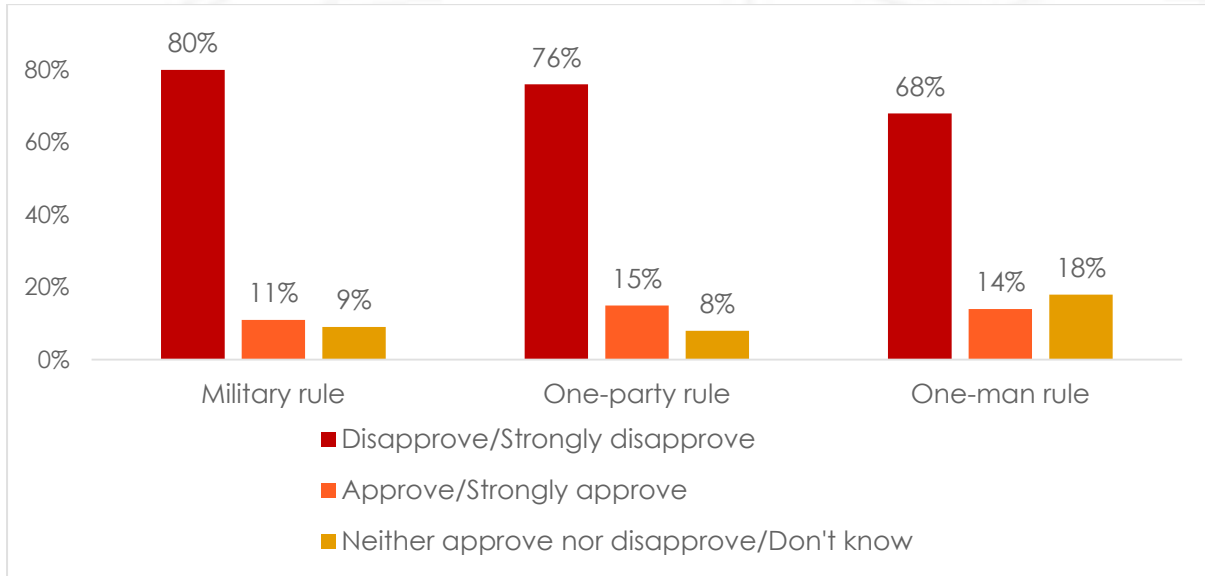
Statement 2: In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable.

Statement 3: For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.

(% who say democracy is preferable to any other kind of government)

In addition to preferring democracy, committed democrats can be expected to reject non-democratic alternative regimes. By substantial majorities, São Toméans “disapprove” or “strongly disapprove” of military rule (80%), one-party rule (76%), and one-man rule (68%) (Figure 4). These attitudes place them above the 36-country average for rejection of military rule (73%), near the average for rejection of one-party rule (78%), and below average for rejection of one-man rule (73%).

Figure 4: Rejection of non-democratic forms of government | São Tomé and Príncipe | 2015



Respondents were asked: *There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives: (a) Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office? (b) The army comes in to govern the country? (c) Elections and House of Representatives are abolished so that the president can decide everything?*

Differences between urban and rural residents as well as between men and women are quite marginal when it comes to rejection of non-democratic forms of government. However, senior citizens and less educated citizens are less likely than younger citizens and less educated citizens to reject the three forms of non-democratic government (Table 1).

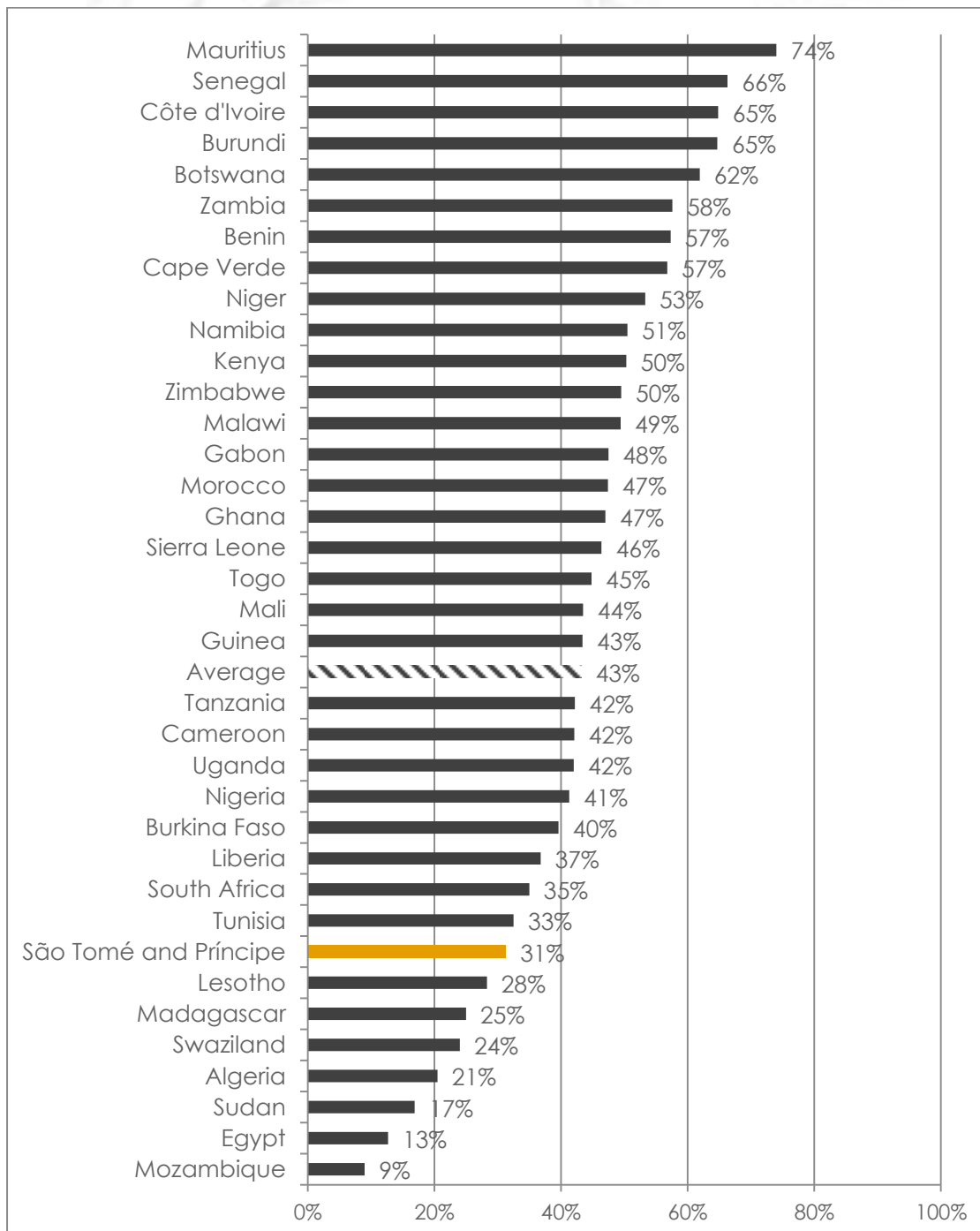
Table 1: Rejection of non-democratic forms of government | by residency location, gender, age, and education | São Tomé and Príncipe | 2015

	Reject one-party rule	Reject military rule	Reject one-man rule
Urban	77%	80%	68%
Rural	74%	79%	66%
Male	78%	80%	68%
Female	74%	79%	67%
Youth (18-35 years)	76%	80%	71%
Adults (36-60 years)	78%	79%	66%
Senior citizens (61+ years)	65%	69%	43%
No formal education	55%	72%	58%
Primary education	67%	71%	55%
Secondary or post-secondary education	81%	83%	73%

Respondents were asked: *There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives: (a) Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office? (b) The army comes in to govern the country? (c) Elections and House of Representatives are abolished so that the president can decide everything? (% who "disapprove" or "strongly disapprove")*

Afrobarometer calculates demand for democracy as the proportion of citizens who both prefer democracy over other political systems and reject all three non-democratic forms of government (one-man, one-party, and military rule). Three in 10 São Toméans meet these criteria for “true democrats” – significantly fewer than the 43% average across 36 surveyed countries (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Demand for democracy | 36 countries | 2014/2015



(Figure shows proportion of respondents who both prefer democracy and reject all three non-democratic alternatives.)

Support for democratic practices

São Toméans voice stronger support for some key democratic practices than for democracy itself. Almost three-fourths (74%) of respondents “agree” or “strongly agree” that regular, open, and honest elections are the best way to choose their leaders. A smaller majority support multiparty competition: 56% “agree” or “strongly agree” that that many political parties are needed to make sure that São Toméans have real choices in who governs them. Close to one-third (30%), however, say the country does not need many political parties because they create division and confusion (Table 2).

Six in 10 citizens (63%) also support the two-term limit on presidential mandates enshrined in the country’s constitution. (No limit is placed on the prime minister’s mandate.)

Table 2: Support for key democratic practices | São Tomé and Príncipe | 2015

	%
Choose leaders through elections	74%
Choose leaders through other methods	17%
Many political parties are needed	56%
Unnecessary to have many political parties	30%
President should serve for a maximum of two terms	63%
President should serve without any term limit	27%
Prime minister should explain government spending to National Assembly	51%
Prime minister does not need to explain government spending to National Assembly	31%
National Assembly should make laws	45%
President should make laws	25%

Respondents were asked:

- Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
Statement 1: We should choose our leaders in this country through regular, open, and honest elections.
Statement 2: Since elections sometimes produce bad results, we should adopt other methods for choosing this country's leaders.
- Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
Statement 1: Political parties create division and confusion; it is therefore unnecessary to have many political parties in São Tomé and Príncipe.
Statement 2: Many political parties are needed to make sure that São Toméans have real choices in who governs them.
- Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
Statement 1: The Constitution should limit the president to serving a maximum of two terms in office.
Statement 2: There should be no constitutional limit on how long the president can serve.
- Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
Statement 1: The National Assembly should ensure that the prime minister explains to it on a regular basis how his government spends taxpayers' money.
Statement 2: The prime minister should be able to devote his full attention to developing the country rather than wasting time justifying his actions.
- Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
Statement 1: The representatives to the National Assembly represent the people; therefore, they should make laws for this country, even if the president does not agree.
Statement 2: Since the president represents all of us, he should pass laws without worrying about what the National Assembly thinks.
(% of “agree” or “strongly agree” with each statement)

Views are more mixed on executive and legislative roles. A slim majority (51%) “agree” or “strongly agree” that the National Assembly should require the prime minister to give a regular accounting of government expenditures, while about three in 10 (31%) say the prime minister should devote all attention to developing the country instead of spending time justifying the government’s actions.

And only a plurality (45%) “agree” or “strongly agree” that the National Assembly should make laws for the country even if the president disagrees, whereas one-quarter (25%) say the president should make laws without worrying about what the National Assembly thinks.

Supply of democracy

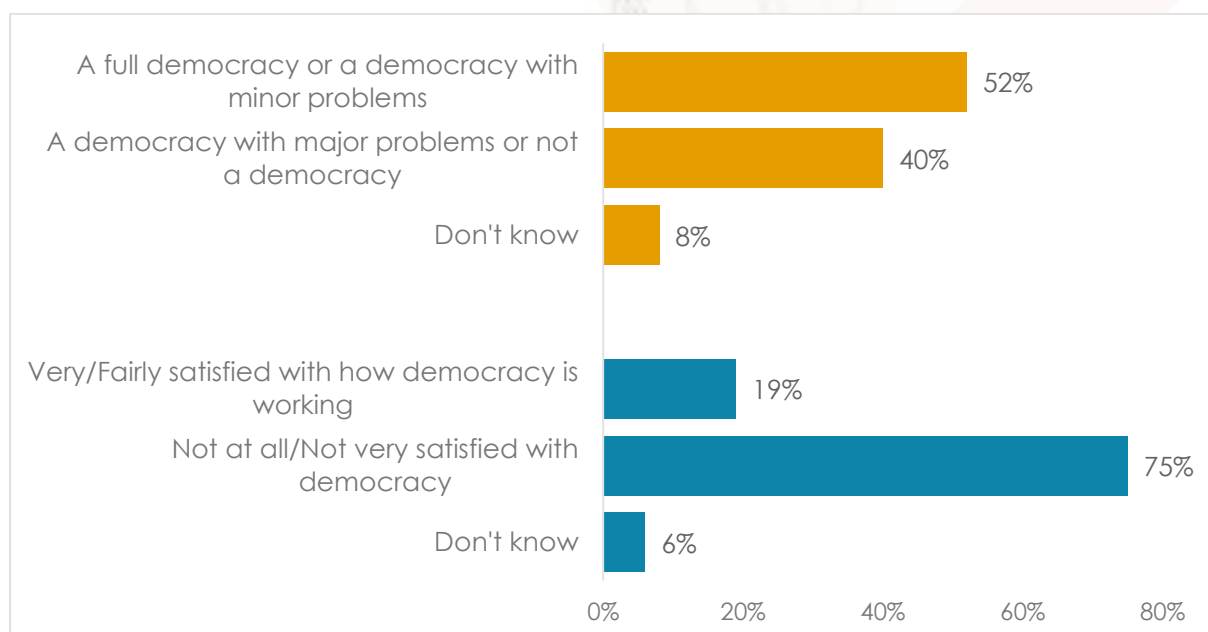
Afrobarometer measures the supply of democracy in a country by asking citizens whether they consider their country a democracy and how satisfied they are with the way democracy actually works in their country. Survey responses in São Tomé and Príncipe show fairly critical assessments of the supply of democracy in the country (Figure 6).

About half (52%) of citizens consider the country to be “a full democracy” or “a democracy, but with minor problems,” which is slightly higher than the 36-country average of 49%. A sizeable minority (40%) say the country is either “not a democracy” or “a democracy with major problems.”

Moreover, São Tomé and Príncipe ranks near the bottom among 36 surveyed countries in satisfaction with the way democracy is working: Fewer than two in 10 citizens (19%) say they are “fairly satisfied” or “very satisfied” – ahead of only Madagascar (11%) and Gabon (15%), and far below the 36-country average of 44%.

However, more than eight in 10 citizens say their 2014 national election was “completely free and fair” (64%) or “free and fair, but with minor problems” (19%), one of the most favourable assessments among the 36 surveyed countries.

Figure 6: Supply of democracy | São Tomé and Príncipe | 2015



Respondents were asked:

1. In your opinion, how much of a democracy is São Tomé and Príncipe today?
2. Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in São Tomé and Príncipe?

Adults (aged 36-60) are more likely to express satisfaction with the country's democracy (24%) than youth or senior citizens (both 16%) (Table 3). The perception of the country as a democracy increases with respondents' education level, ranging from 27% of citizens with no formal education to 57% of those with a secondary or post-secondary education. There are no significant urban-rural or male-female differences of the two components constituting supply of democracy.

Table 3: Supply of democracy | by residency location, gender, age, and education
| São Tomé and Príncipe | 2015

	Country is a democracy (full or with minor problems)	Very/Fairly satisfied with democracy
Urban	51%	18%
Rural	54%	20%
Male	52%	19%
Female	53%	19%
Youth(18-35 years)	54%	16%
Adults (36-60 years)	54%	24%
Senior citizens (61+ years)	34%	16%
No formal education	27%	21%
Primary education	46%	22%
Secondary/post-secondary education	57%	18%

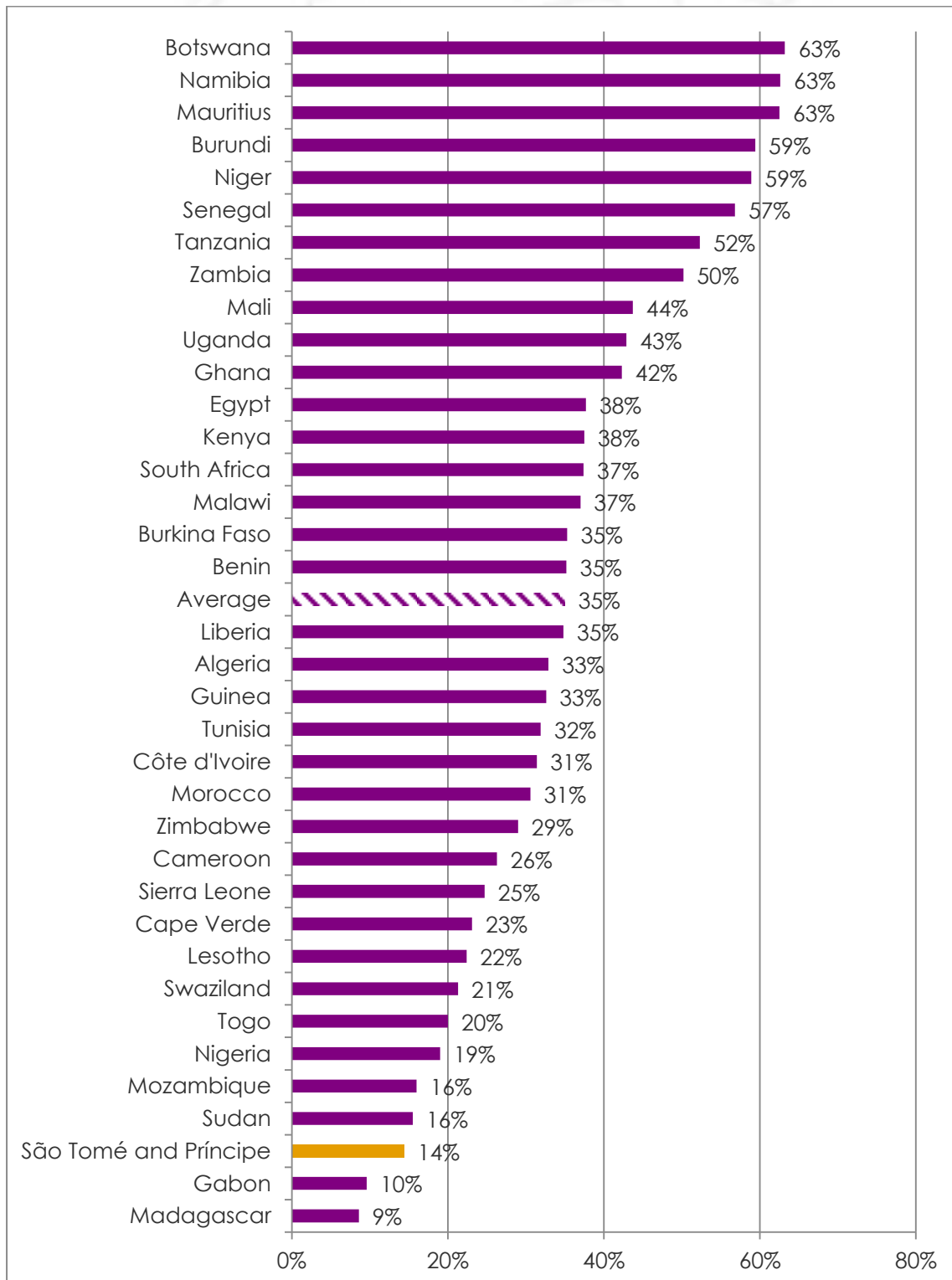
Respondents were asked:

1. *In your opinion, how much of a democracy is São Tomé and Príncipe today?*
2. *Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in São Tomé and Príncipe?*

Combining perceived extent of democracy and satisfaction with democracy to measure the supply of democracy in the country, only 14% of São Toméans both see their country as a democracy (a "full democracy" or one with minor problems) and are "fairly" or "very" satisfied with the way democracy is working. This places São Tomé and Príncipe near the bottom among 36 surveyed countries in terms of perceived supply of democracy, again ahead of only Madagascar (9%) and Gabon (10%) (Figure 7).

To further explore this data, please visit Afrobarometer's online data analysis facility at www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

Figure 7: Supply of democracy | 36 countries | 2014/2015



Respondents were asked:

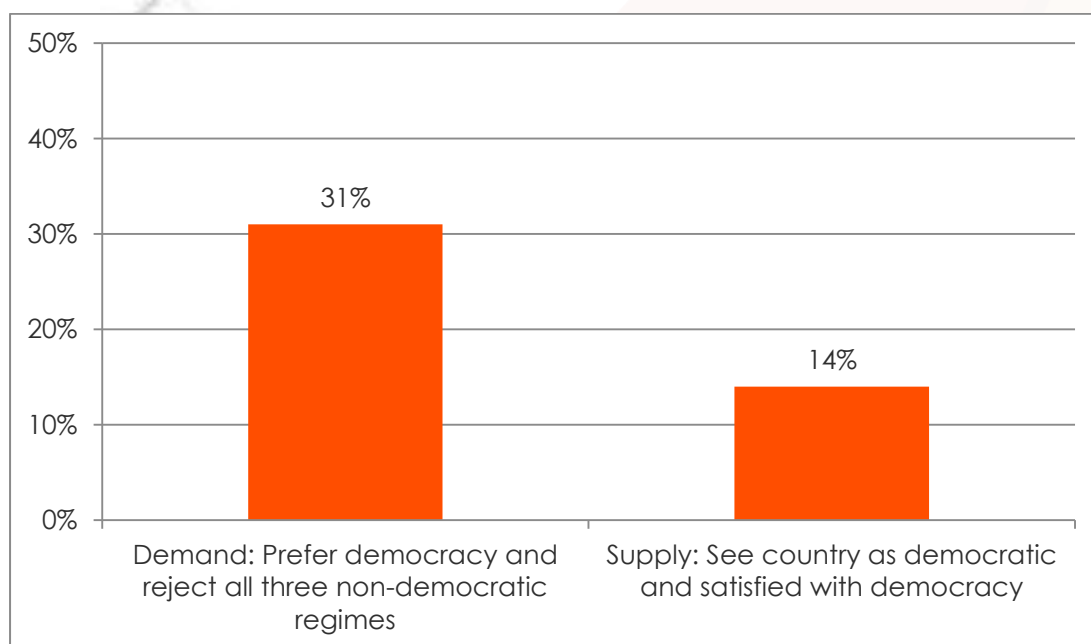
1. In your opinion, how much of a democracy is São Tomé and Príncipe today?
2. Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in São Tomé and Príncipe?

Conclusion

Despite their support for elections as the best way to choose their leaders and their rejection of autocratic regimes, São Toméans' demand for democracy is relatively weak. Just half of citizens say they always prefer democracy over other political systems, and only slim majorities endorse multiparty competition and the National Assembly's watchdog role over the executive.

But even this weak demand for democracy (by 31% of citizens) is far from being met: Only 14% see their country as democratic and are satisfied with the way democracy is working (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Demand for democracy vs. supply of democracy | São Tomé and Príncipe | 2015



Respondents were asked:

- Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion?
 Statement 1: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.
 Statement 2: In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable.
 Statement 3: For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.
 (% who say democracy is preferable to any other kind of government)
- There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives: (a) Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office? (b) The army comes in to govern the country? (c) Elections and House of Representatives are abolished so that the president can decide everything?
- In your opinion, how much of a democracy is São Tomé and Príncipe today?
- Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in São Tomé and Príncipe?

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Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD) in Ghana, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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