A price worth paying? How Sudanese balance human rights and the pursuit of security

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 144 | Thomas Isbell

Summary

Post-independence, many states in Africa faced a plethora of challenges, from poverty and ethnic cleavages emphasized by former colonizers to corrupt political elites and non-functioning institutions. In numerous cases, this mixture resulted in civil war or violence, further weakening the state. In Sudan, peace has been the exception since independence in 1955: Two civil wars (1955-1972 and 1983-2005), conflict in Darfur since 2003, and violence surrounding the struggle for independence of South Sudan have claimed tens of thousands of lives and left many more destitute or forced to flee (Berry, 2015; Ahmad, 2010).

Against this background of conflict and violence, this dispatch examines Sudanese attitudes regarding possible trade-offs between citizens' human rights and the pursuit of peace and security.

Afrobarometer survey findings show that for a majority of Sudanese, government efforts to ensure peace and security do not justify violations of individual human rights. But a substantial minority (41%) disagree. This willingness to trade human rights for a more effective fight against insecurity is most common in the conflict regions of Darfur and Kurdufan, as well as among citizens who fear political violence and intimidation and who prioritize government efficiency over accountability.

Key findings:

- A majority (55%) of Sudanese say the government should never violate human rights, even to ensure peace and security. But a substantial minority (41%) say suspected terrorists should be dealt with "in any way necessary" – a view that has above-average support in the violence-torn regions of Darfur (50%) and Kurdufan (48%).

- The view that human-rights violations are acceptable in the pursuit of peace and security is especially common among Sudanese who are wealthy, who have only a primary-school education, who are older, or who live in rural areas.

- Respondents who fear political violence or intimidation "somewhat" or "a lot" are more accepting of rights violations in pursuit of peace and security (47%) than those who fear violence and intimidation only "a little" or "not at all" (38%).

- Compared to other Africans, Sudanese are more likely to prioritize a government that "can get things done" over one that is accountable to its citizens. Respondents who share this preference for efficiency over accountability are more accepting of human-rights violations as a price for peace and security.

Afrobarometer

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across Africa. Six survey rounds were completed between 1999 and 2015, and Round 7 (2016/2017) is currently underway. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

This dispatch is based on the Round 6 survey of 1,200 adult Sudanese in June 2015. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of sampling error of +/-3% at a 95% confidence level. One previous Afrobarometer survey was conducted in Sudan in 2013.

Human rights vs. peace and security

A majority (55%) of Sudanese say the government should never violate human rights, even to ensure peace and security. But four in 10 (41%) say that people suspected of connections to terrorists should be dealt with "in any way necessary," even if it means violating their human rights (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Can government violate human rights to ensure security? | Sudan | 2015
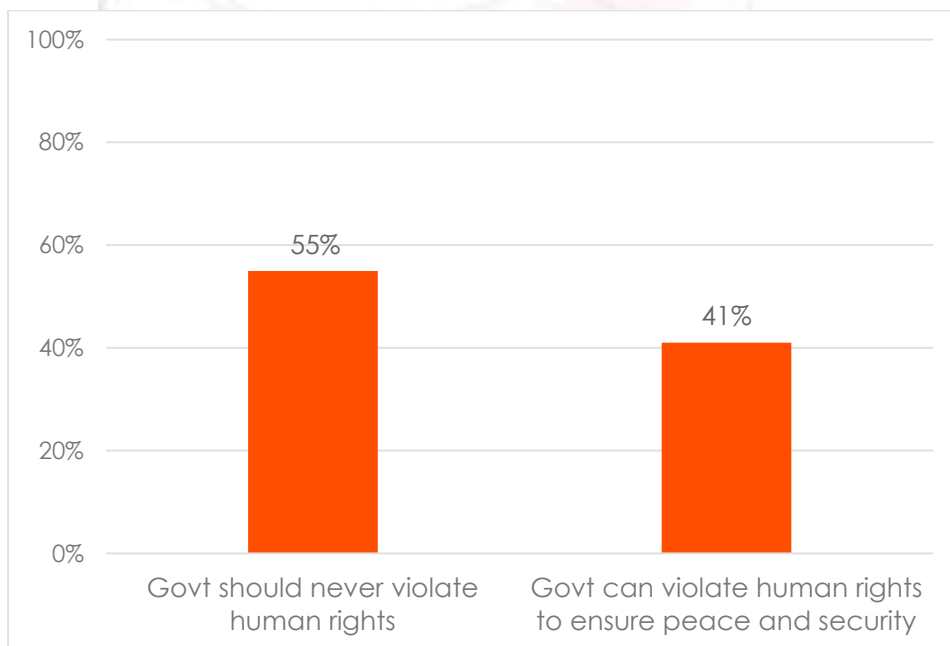
*Respondents were asked:* *Which of the following statements is closest to your view?*
Statement 1: Government should be free to deal with persons suspected of connection with terrorism in any way necessary to ensure peace and security, even if it means violating their rights.
Statement 2: Government should never violate individuals' human rights, even when it comes to ensuring peace and security for the country.
(% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

The view that human-rights violations are acceptable in the pursuit of peace and security is especially common among wealthy respondents (49% among those experiencing "no lived poverty"), those with only a primary-school education (48%), older Sudanese (57% among those aged 56 or older), and rural residents (44%, vs. 35% of urbanites) (Figure 2). The difference between women (42%) and men (39%) is within the margin of sampling error.
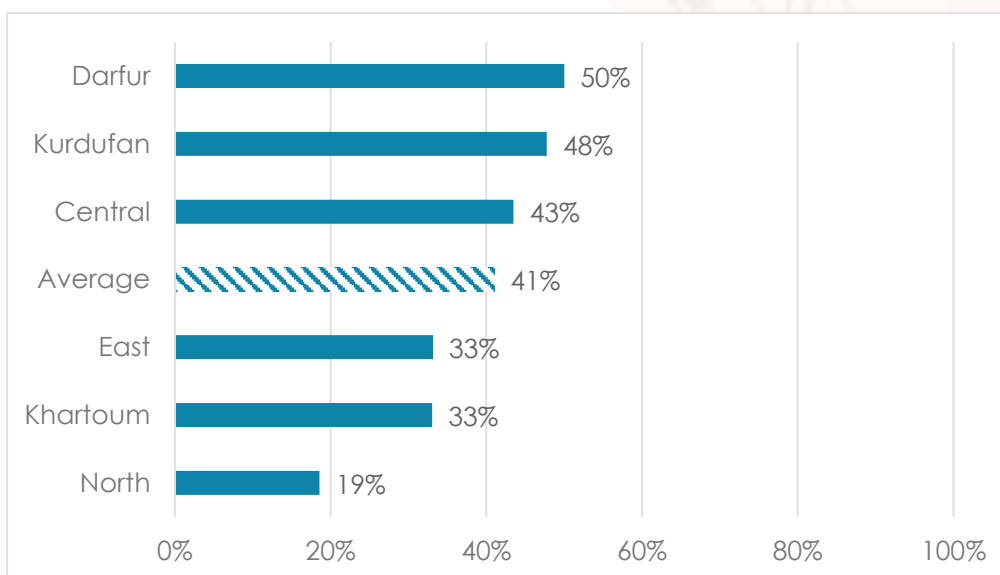
Figure 2: Government can violate human rights to ensure security
| by socio-demographic group | Sudan | 2015
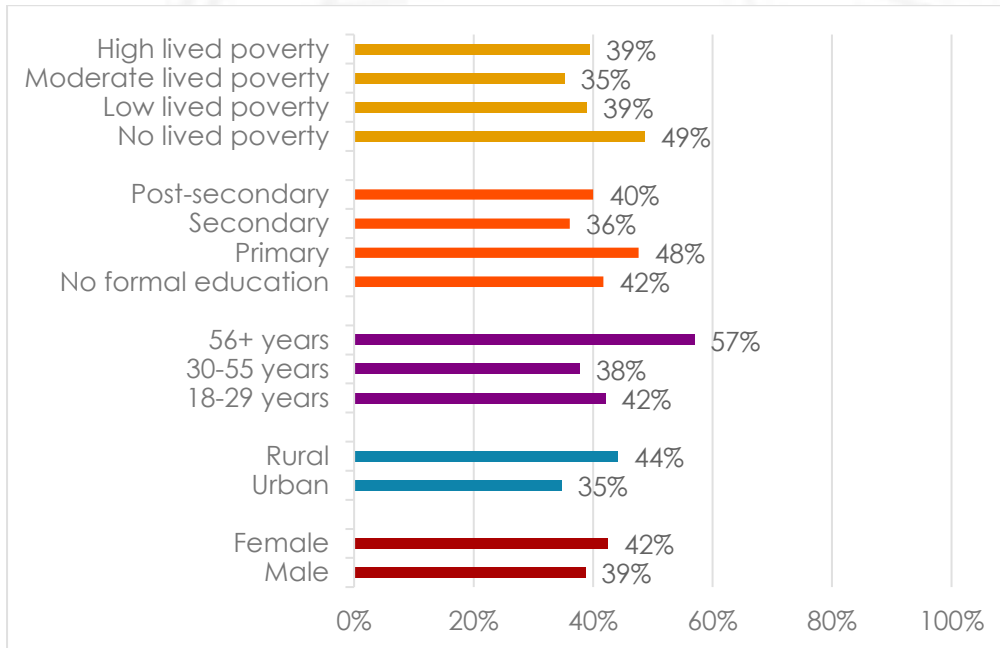
(% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" that the government can violate human rights in pursuit of peace and security)

Support for accepting human-rights violations in exchange for peace and security is highest in Darfur (52%) and Kurdufan (48%) – two regions strongly affected by prolonged violent conflict and humanitarian tragedy (Korybko, 2017; United Nations, 2016). In contrast, only one in five residents in the North region (19%) would accept this trade-off (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Government can violate human rights to ensure peace | by region
| Sudan | 2015

(% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" that the government can violate human rights in pursuit of peace and security)

Safety concerns and human rights

In violence-torn Sudan, especially Darfur and Kurdufan, safety concerns would seem a likely reason for significant popular acceptance of human-rights violations in pursuit of peace and security. Survey responses provide limited evidence of such a link.

Respondents who express greater fear for their personal safety (as measured by feeling unsafe walking in their neighbourhoods or fearing crime in their homes) are no more likely to indicate acceptance of human-rights violations in pursuit of peace and security (Figure 4). However, respondents who fear election-related violence or intimidation "somewhat" or "a lot" are considerably more willing to accept the possibility of human-rights violations (47%) than those who fear such violence or intimidation only "a little bit" or "not at all" (38%) (Figure 5).

Figure 4: Government can violate human rights to ensure peace | by fear for personal safety | Sudan | 2015
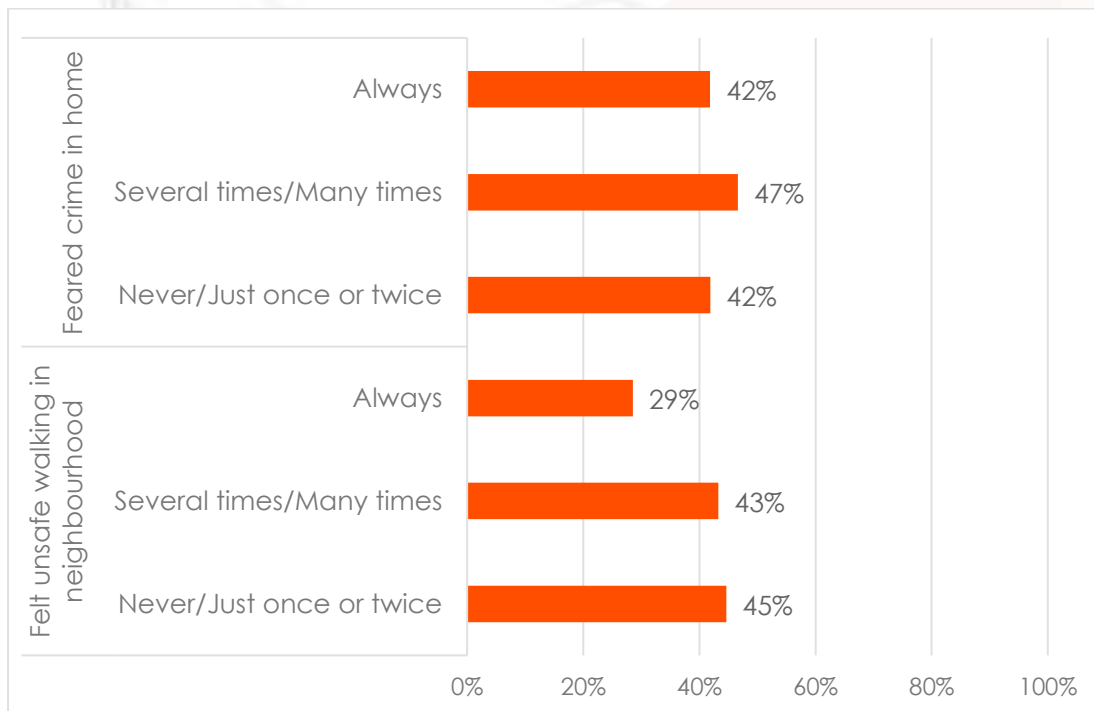
Respondents were asked: *Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family: Felt unsafe walking in your neighbourhood? Feared crime in your own home?*
(Figure shows percentage, disaggregated by level of fear for personal safety, who "agree" or "agree very strongly" that the "government should be free to deal with persons suspected of connection with terrorism in any way necessary to ensure peace and security, even if it means violating their rights.")

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Figure 5: Government can violate human rights to ensure peace | by fear of political violence | Sudan | 2015
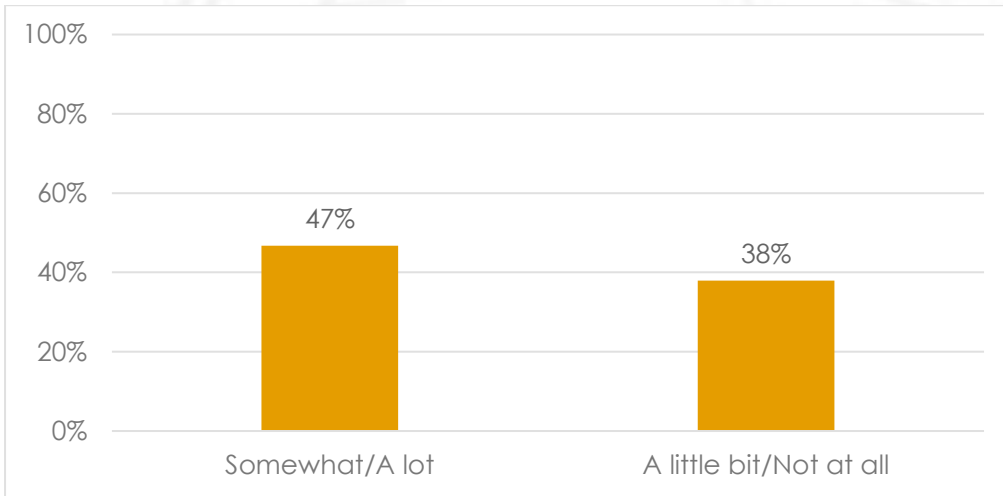
Respondents were asked: *During election campaigns in this country, how much do you personally fear becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence?*
(Figure shows percentage, disaggregated by level of fear of political intimidation or violence, who "agree" or "agree very strongly" that the "government should be free to deal with persons suspected of connection with terrorism in any way necessary to ensure peace and security, even if it means violating their rights.")

Perceptions of whether law, order, and stability in the country have increased or decreased since the 2011 Arab Spring make no difference in how Sudanese view the issue of government violating human rights to ensure security (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Government can violate human rights to ensure peace | by views on how law, order, and stability have changed since Arab Spring | Sudan | 2015
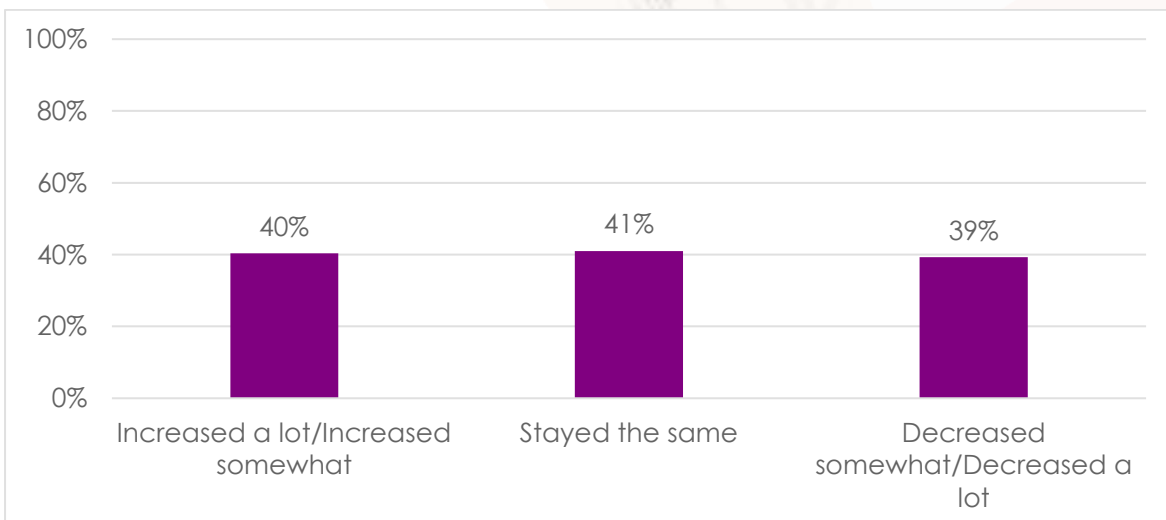

Respondents were asked: *Comparing the situation in your country today to how things were before the Arab Spring, do you think the following things have increased, decreased, or stayed the same: The preservation of law, order and stability?*
(Figure shows percentage, disaggregated by perceptions of law, order, and stability since the Arab Spring, who "agree" or "agree very strongly" that the "government should be free to deal with persons suspected of connection with terrorism in any way necessary to ensure peace and security, even if it means violating their rights.")

Likewise, differences in perceptions of the threat of Islamic terror groups do not seem to affect how willing Sudanese citizens are to accept human-rights violations in pursuit of peace and security. Respondents who see the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Al-Qaeda, and Boko Haram as "not at all active" or "not very active" in Sudan are no less willing to accept rights violations than are those who see these groups as "somewhat" or "very" active (Figure 7).

And respondents who feel that ISIL and Al-Qaeda represent only "a little bit" or "not at all" of a threat in Sudan are no less willing to accept human-rights violations than those who say that ISIL/Al-Queda threaten the country "somewhat" or "a lot" (Figure 8).

Figure 7: Government can violate human rights to ensure peace | by perceived activity of terror groups | Sudan | 2015
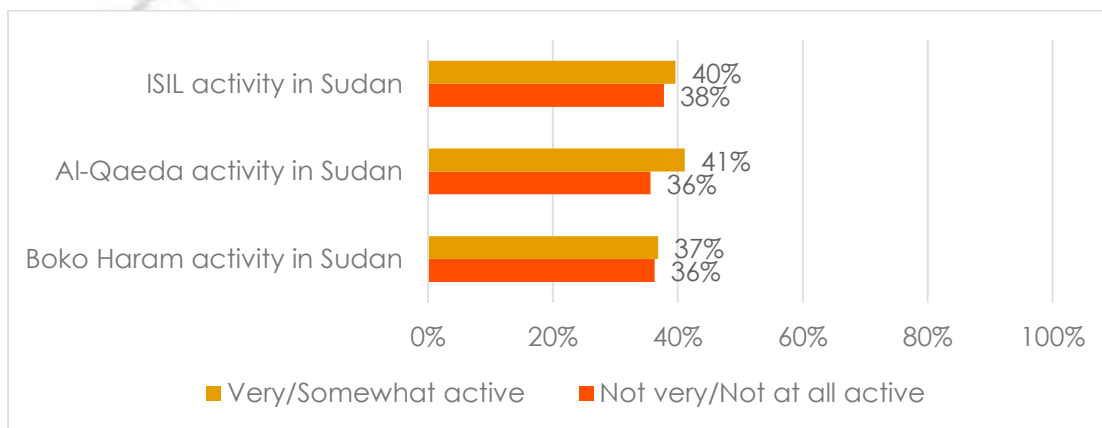
Respondents were asked: *How active do you think each of the following Islamic movements are in Sudan: ISIL? Al-Qaeda? Boko Haram?*
(Figure shows percentage, disaggregated by perceptions of how active terror groups are in Sudan, who "agree" or "agree very strongly" that the "government should be free to deal with persons suspected of connection with terrorism in any way necessary to ensure peace and security, even if it means violating their rights.")

Figure 8: Government can violate human rights to ensure peace | by perceived threat of ISIL and Al-Qaeda | Sudan | 2015
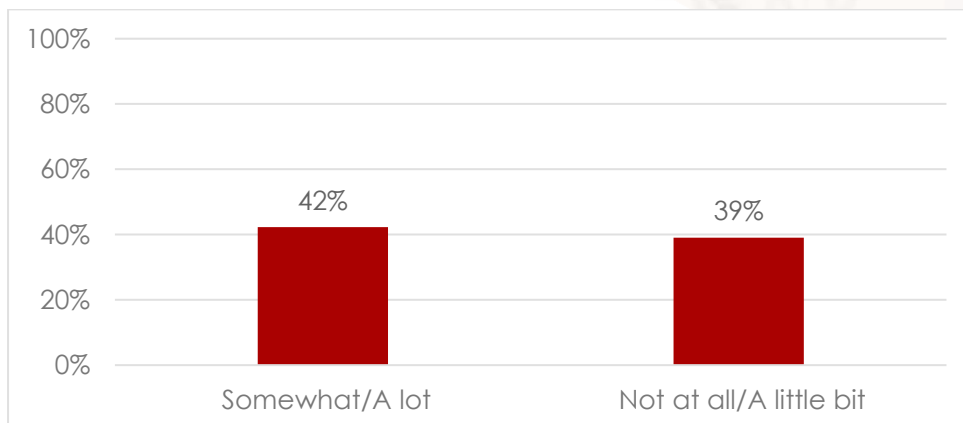
Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, to what extent do ISIL or Al-Qaeda pose a threat to Sudan's security?*
(Figure shows percentage, disaggregated by perceptions of how much of a threat terror groups pose to Sudan, who "agree" or "agree very strongly" that the "government should be free to deal with persons suspected of connection with terrorism in any way necessary to ensure peace and security, even if it means violating their rights.")

Getting things done vs. human rights

In line with substantial (though minority) public acceptance of possible human-rights violations, Sudanese express a strong preference for a government that "can get things done," even at the cost of reduced accountability to its citizens. Asked to choose between government efficiency and accountability, six in 10 Sudanese (60%) say it's more important to have a government that can get things done, while only 36% instead prioritize ensuring that the government is accountable. This level of preference for efficiency is second-highest among 36 African countries surveyed in 2014/2015 (on average 43%), second only to Guinea's (61%).

Support for this position is especially strong among respondents in Darfur (67%) and Kurdufan (62%) – echoing regional differences in attitudes toward possible rights violations – as well as in Khartoum (64%) (Figure 9).

Compared to other Africans, Sudanese are also more likely to assert that the president should be free to act without judicial oversight (46%, vs. 25% on average across 36 African countries) and without parliamentary oversight (48%, vs. 31% across Africa), and less likely to say that the news media should "constantly investigate and report on government mistakes and corruption" (56%, vs. 69% across 36 countries).

Figure 9: Getting things done more important than accountability | Sudan by region and 36-country | 2014/2015
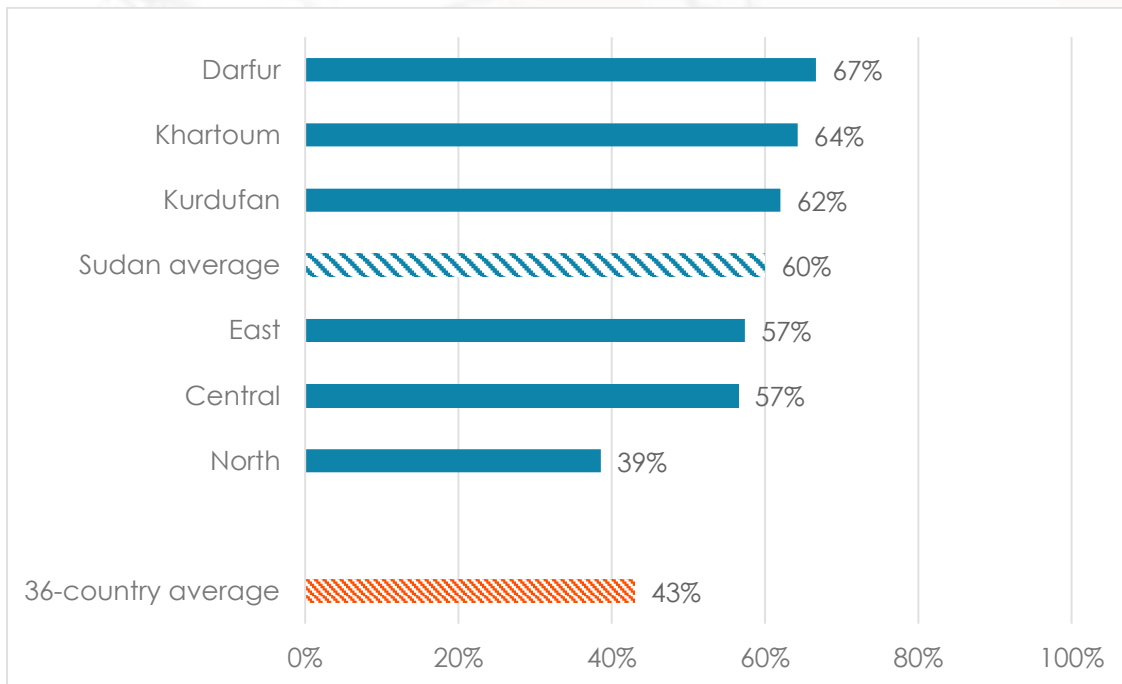
Respondents were asked: *Which of the following statements is closest to your view?*
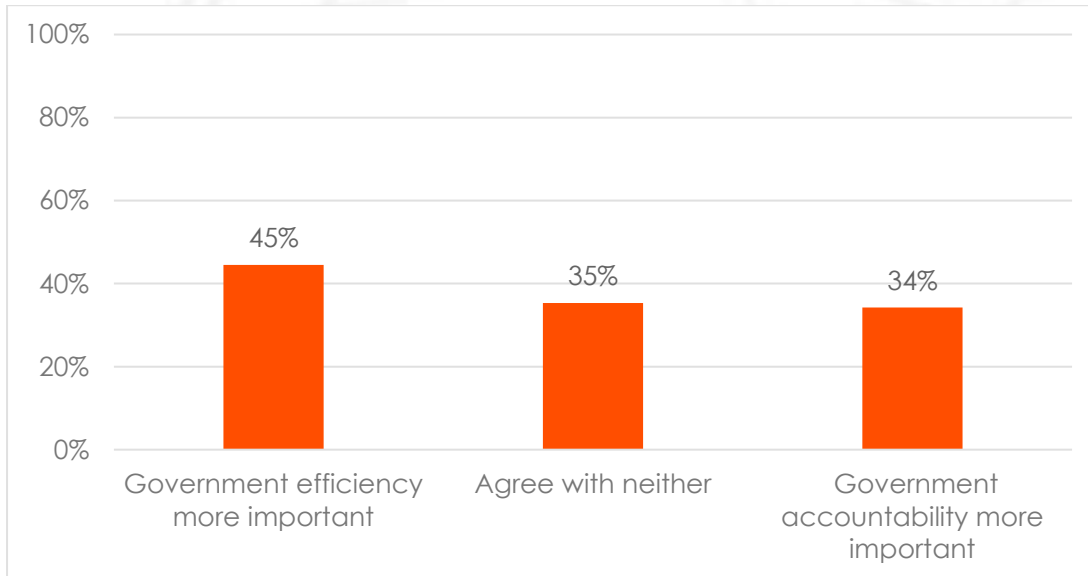*Statement 1: It is more important to have a government that can get things done, even if we have no influence over what it does.*
Statement 2: It is more important for citizens to be able to hold government accountable, even if that means it makes decisions more slowly
(% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with Statement 1)

As Figure 10 shows, Sudanese who prioritize government efficiency over accountability are also more likely to accept human-rights violations as a price for peace and security (45%) than those who insist on government accountability, even at the cost of efficiency (34%).

Figure 10: Government can violate human rights to ensure peace | by views on government efficiency vs. accountability | Sudan | 2015

Respondents were asked:

- *Which of the following statements is closest to your view?*
  Statement 1: It is more important to have a government that can get things done, even if we have no influence over what it does.
  Statement 2: It is more important for citizens to be able to hold government accountable, even if that means it makes decisions more slowly

(Figure shows percentage, disaggregated by prioritization of government efficiency vs. accountability, who "agree" or "agree very strongly" that the "government should be free to deal with persons suspected of connection with terrorism in any way necessary to ensure peace and security, even if it means violating their rights.")

Conclusion

Despite their country's history of violent conflict, a majority of ordinary Sudanese reject the notion that human-rights violations are acceptable in the fight for peace and security. But a substantial portion of the population is willing to accept this trade-off, especially in the conflict-torn regions of Darfur and Kurdufan.

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