

Mauritians welcome ethnic/religious diversity but are less tolerant of homosexuals and people living with HIV/AIDS

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 28 | L. Amédée Darga and Gilles Joomun

Summary

Despite their multiplicity of ethnic/cultural (European, African, Indian, Chinese) and religious (Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist) backgrounds, Mauritians have experienced few incidents of ethnic or religious violence. The last major incident dates back to 1999, when the popular Creole musician Kaya was found dead whilst in police custody, triggering riots against the mostly Hindu police and fights between Creoles and Hindus. Since then, the country has lived in relative harmony through three successive national elections.

The latest Afrobarometer survey confirms Mauritians' acceptance of the multi-ethnic and multicultural character of their country, marked by a strong national identity in spite of significant perceptions of unfair treatment of their ethnic or cultural groups.

A majority of Mauritians express tolerance for ethnic and religious diversity and do not exhibit xenophobic attitudes toward immigrants or foreign workers. But they show less tolerance for people living with HIV/AIDS and homosexuals.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is an African-led, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 30 countries in Africa. Five rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2013, and Round 6 surveys are currently under way (2014-2015). Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples of between 1,200 and 2,400 respondents.

The Afrobarometer team in Mauritius, led by StraConsult, interviewed 1,200 adult Mauritians in June and July 2014. A sample of this size yields results with a margin of error of +/-3% at a 95% confidence level. A previous survey was conducted in Mauritius in 2012.

Key findings

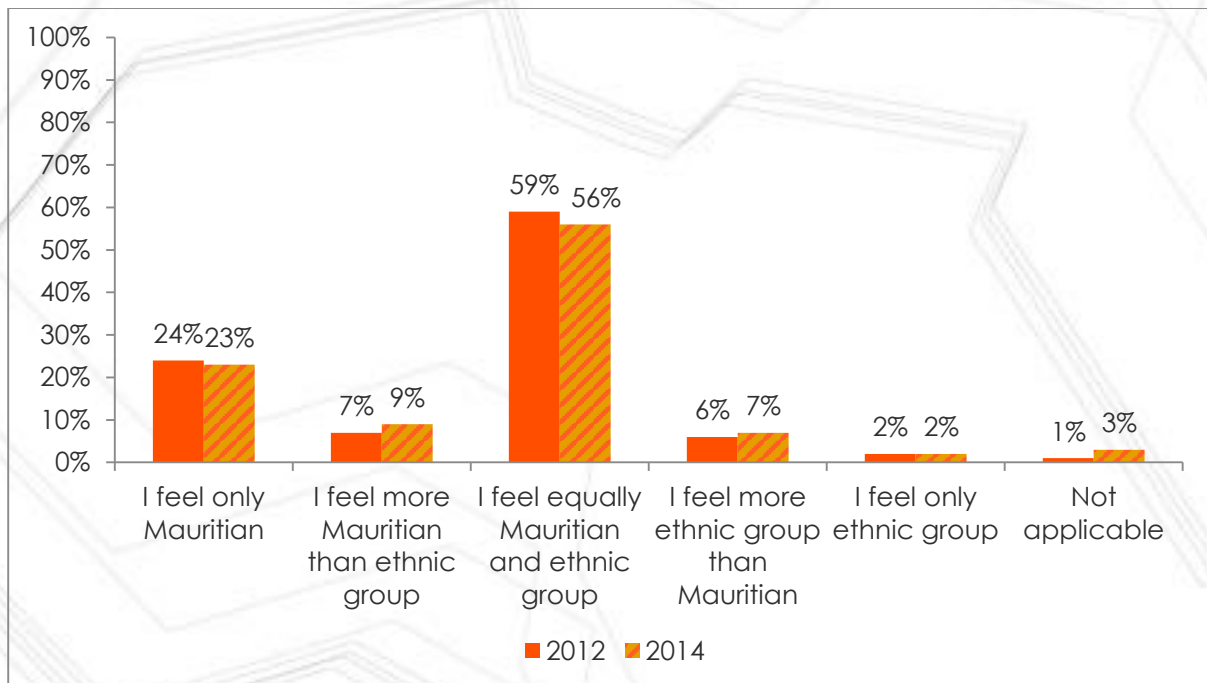
- Mauritians express a strong sense of national identity; only 9% identify more strongly with their ethnic group than with their country.
- A majority (54%) of Mauritians say the government treats their ethnic/cultural group unfairly. This feeling is especially strong among Creoles, Tamils, and Muslims.
- Two-thirds of Mauritians (68%) would not mind having people of different religions or ethnic groups as neighbours, and 58% would not mind living near immigrants or foreign workers.

- Almost half (46%) of respondents would not like to have people with HIV/AIDS as neighbours. More than half (51%) express the same intolerance for people who are homosexual.

A strong Mauritian identity

Survey respondents indicate a strong sense of being Mauritian. Only about one in 10 (9%) identify more strongly with their ethnic or cultural group than with their country, while one-third (32%) feel more Mauritian and a majority (56%) feel equally strongly about their Mauritian and ethnic/cultural identities (Figure 1). These numbers are almost unchanged since the 2012 survey.

Figure 1: Sense of belonging: Mauritian or ethnic/cultural group? | Mauritius
 | 2012-2014

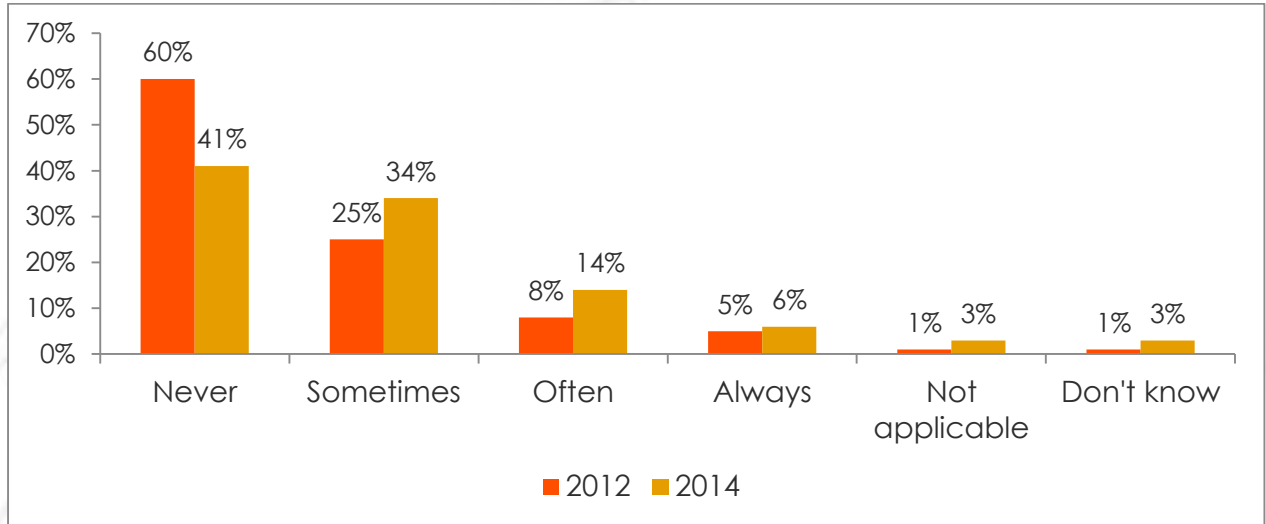


Respondents were asked: Let us suppose that you had to choose between being a Mauritian and being a _____ [member of your ethnic/cultural group]. Which of the following statements best expresses your feelings?

Perceptions of unfair treatment based on ethnic/cultural origin

Despite their strong national vs. ethnic/cultural identity, a majority of respondents say that members of their ethnic/cultural group are treated unfairly by the government (Figure 2). The proportion of citizens who say that the government “sometimes,” “often,” or “always” treats their group unfairly rose from 38% in 2012 to 54% in 2014, including 20% who say this happens “often” or “always.” The proportion who say that such unfair treatment “never” occurs dropped from 60% in 2012 to 41% in 2014.

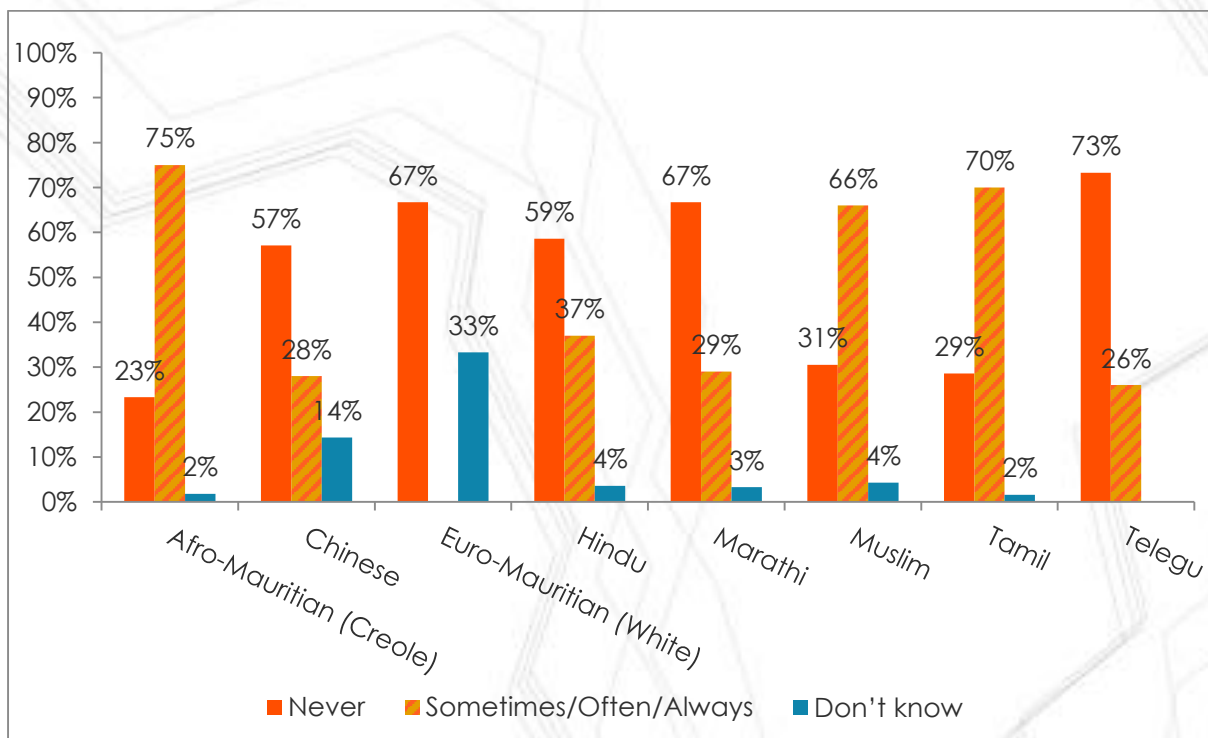
Figure 2: Perceived unfair treatment by government based on ethnic/cultural origin
 | Mauritius | 2012-2014



Respondents were asked: How often, if ever, are _____ [members of your ethnic/cultural group] treated unfairly by the government?

As presented in Figure 3, an analysis of responses by ethnic/cultural category shows that perceptions of unfair treatment are particularly strong among Creoles (75% of whom say they are treated unfairly at least "sometimes"), Tamils (70%), and Muslims (66%). This contrasts with majorities of Telegus (73%), Marathi (67%), Whites (67%), Hindus (59%), and Chinese (57%) who say they are never treated unfairly.

Figure 3: Perceived unfair treatment by government based on ethnic/cultural origin
 | by ethnic/cultural group | Mauritius | 2014

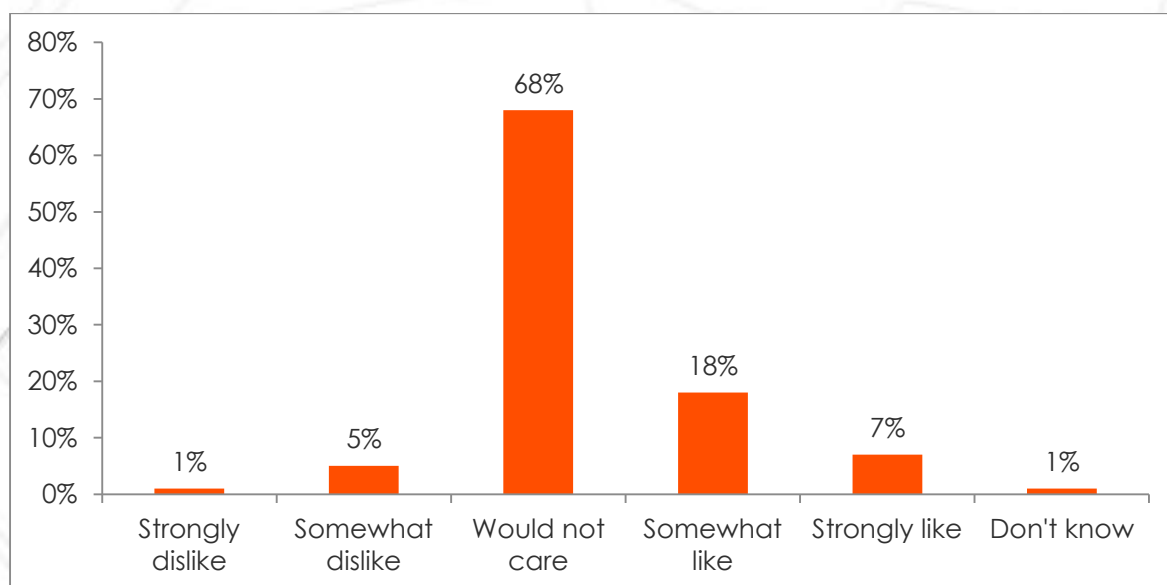


High tolerance for ethnic and religious diversity

The generally good relations among the country's various ethnic and religious groups are confirmed by Afrobarometer data. As shown in Figure 4, more than two-thirds (68%) of Mauritians would not care if someone of a different religion lived in their neighbourhood, while one-quarter of respondents say they would actually like to live with people of other religions.

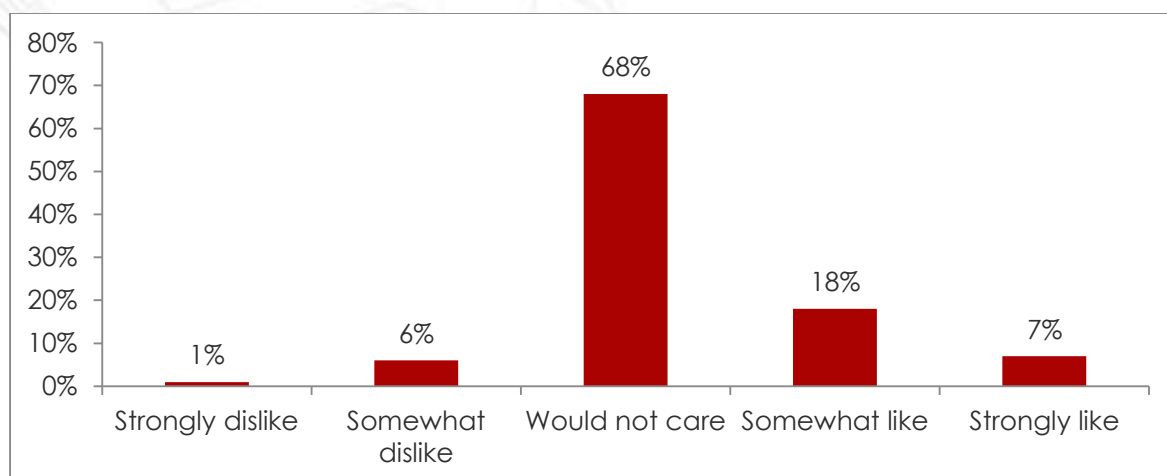
The same feeling is observed when it comes to living in the same neighbourhood as people from different ethnic groups (Figure 5).

Figure 4: Tolerance for different religions | Mauritius | 2014



Respondents were asked: For each of the following types of people, please tell me whether you would like having people from this group as neighbours, dislike it, or not care: People of a different religion?

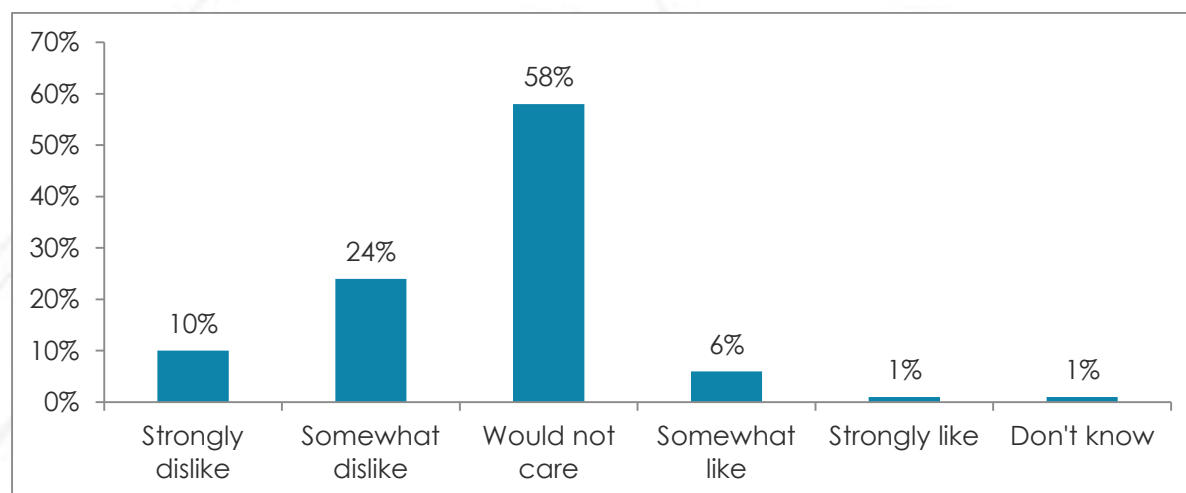
Figure 5: Tolerance for different ethnic groups | Mauritius | 2014



Respondents were asked: For each of the following types of people, please tell me whether you would like having people from this group as neighbours, dislike it, or not care: People from other ethnic groups?

Tolerance for immigrants or foreign workers is somewhat lower. Still, almost six in 10 Mauritians (58%) would not care and 7% would actually like it if they had immigrants or foreign workers as neighbours, while one-third (34%) would dislike it (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Tolerance for immigrants/foreign workers | Mauritius | 2014

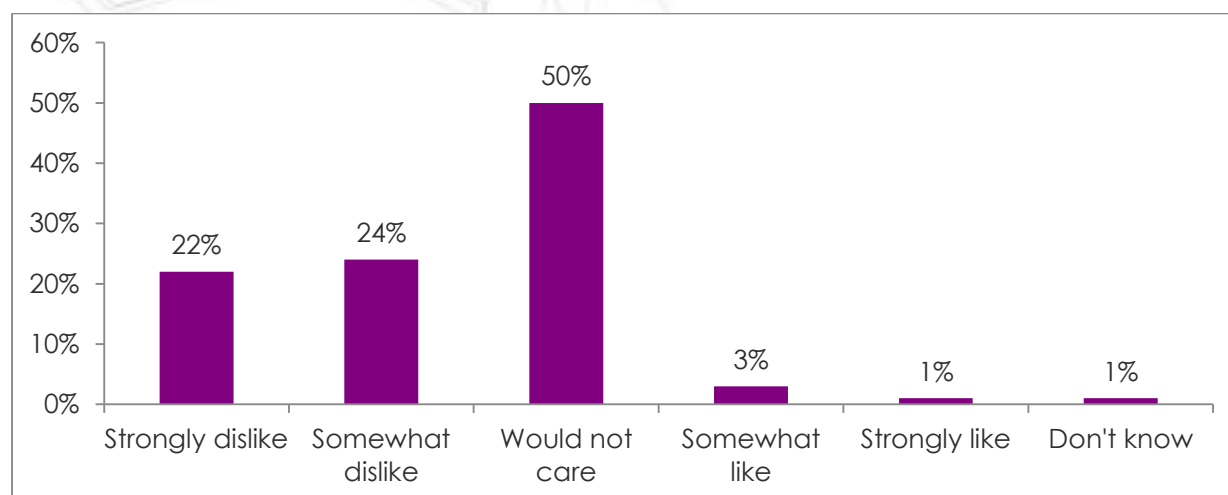


Respondents were asked: For each of the following types of people, please tell me whether you would like having people from this group as neighbours, dislike it, or not care: Immigrants or foreign workers?

Tolerance for people living with HIV/AIDS

Half (50%) of respondents say they would not mind living near people who have HIV/AIDS, but almost as many (46%) would dislike having HIV-positive people as neighbours (Figure 7). Factors contributing to this high level of stigmatization might include the country's relatively limited experience with HIV/AIDS (with an adult HIV prevalence of 1.1%) and HIV's close association in Mauritius with drug addiction. More than 70% of HIV infections in Mauritius between 1987 and 2013 were a result of intravenous drug injection, according to a 2013 report by the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life. A neighbourhood where there is a high level of drug abuse (and which by extension is more prone to HIV/AIDS) is also associated with high levels of violence, theft, and other social evils.

Figure 7: Tolerance for people living with HIV/AIDS | Mauritius | 2014

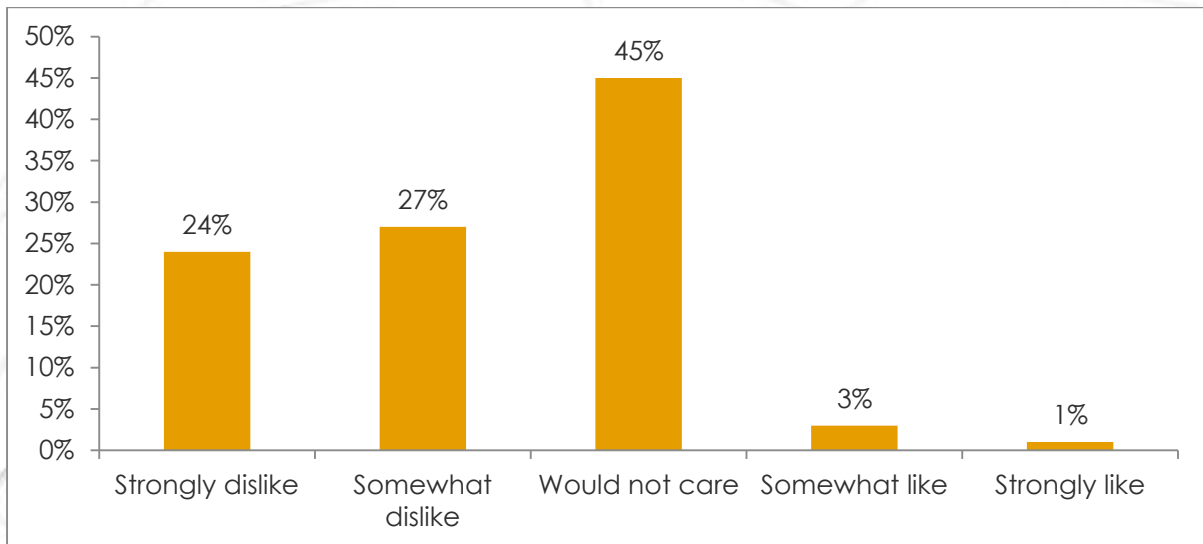


Respondents were asked: For each of the following types of people, please tell me whether you would like having people from this group as neighbours, dislike it, or not care: People who have HIV/AIDS?

Tolerance for homosexual people

With regard to tolerance for people who are homosexual, Mauritians are about evenly divided. As shown in Figure 8, 51% would not like to have homosexual people as neighbours, while 49% would not care or would like it.

Figure 8: Tolerance for homosexual people | Mauritius | 2014



Respondents were asked: For each of the following types of people, please tell me whether you would like having people from this group as neighbours, dislike it, or not care: Homosexuals?

Gilles Joomun is a consultant for StraConsult Ltd, the Mauritius Afrobarometer national partner in Port Louis. Email: straconsultoff@intnet.mu

L. Amédée Darga is the managing partner at StraConsult Ltd. Email: straconsult@intnet.mu

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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For more information, please visit www.afrobarometer.org.

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