



Dispatch No. 168 | 24 October 2017

Amid declining trust in IEC, Botswana skeptical of electronic voting but favour other reforms

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 168 | Keneilwe Sadie Mooketsane, Batlang Seabo, and Kabelo Moseki

Summary

As Botswana approaches 2019 elections that will determine President Ian Khama's successor and challenge the half-century rule of the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) a bill requiring the use of electronic voting machines has sparked increasing controversy.

Khama has signed the Electoral Amendment Bill of 2016 as a step toward introducing electronic voting in 2019. The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) and BDP supporters have argued that the switch to electronic voting is needed to improve election management by reducing the amount of time spent counting ballots, the number of spoilt ballots, and the cost of elections (Galekutlhe, 2017).

But their arguments have sparked controversy, including unanimous rejection by opposition parties concerned that electronic voting machines fail to provide a paper trail and could be manipulated to steal the election. In the face of public criticism, even the ruling BDP has signaled that it may reconsider its support for electronic voting (Bagwasi, 2017).

The 2019 elections are widely seen as an important test for the opposition, which has been gaining strength under its Umbrella for Democratic Change coalition (Reuters, 2017).

In its 2017 national survey, Afrobarometer explored Botswana's attitudes toward the IEC and proposed electoral reforms. Survey findings suggest considerable popular skepticism: Trust in the IEC continues to decline, and a majority of Botswana are not satisfied with the IEC's reasons for introducing electronic voting machines. Most say that not enough public consultation was done on this issue.

However, strong majorities favour two other proposed reforms that would give the IEC, rather than the president, the power to determine election dates and require that members of Parliament (MPs) who resign from their political parties vacate their parliamentary seats – a response to party-switching that reform supporters say is unfair to voters as well as the former parties.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues in African countries. Six rounds of surveys were conducted in up to 37 countries between 1999 and 2016, and Round 7 surveys are currently underway. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Botswana, led by Star Awards Pty Ltd, interviewed 1,200 adult Botswana in July 2017. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of

+/-3% at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Botswana in 1999, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2012, and 2014.

Key findings

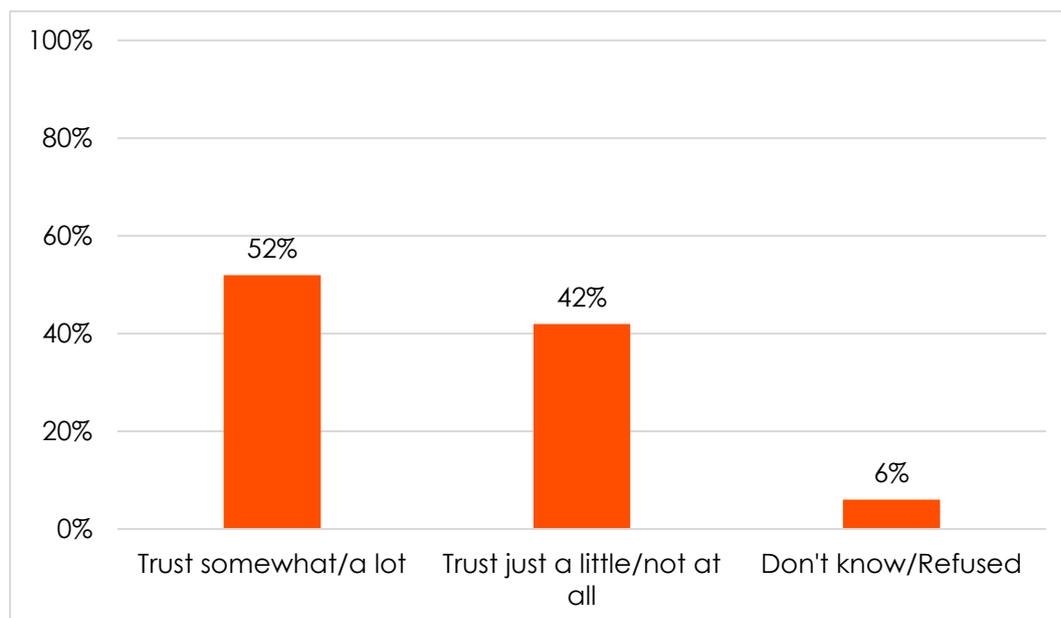
- Only a slim majority (52%) of Botswana trust the Independent Electoral Commission “somewhat” or “a lot.” This proportion has declined by 18 percentage points over the past decade.
- More than half (53%) of respondents say they are not satisfied with the reasons advanced by the IEC in favour of using electronic voting machines in 2019.
- More than two-thirds (69%) say the IEC did not consult adequately with the public on whether electronic voting machines should be used.
- Despite declining popular trust, more than two-thirds (68%) of respondents say the IEC should have the power to determine national/local election dates.
- Eight in 10 Botswana (81%) say MPs who leave their political party should have to vacate their seat in Parliament.

Trust in the Independent Electoral Commission

Established in 1997 to manage elections, the IEC is also charged with enhancing election quality, although critics have questioned its independence on the grounds that the president appoints its head and determines its funding.

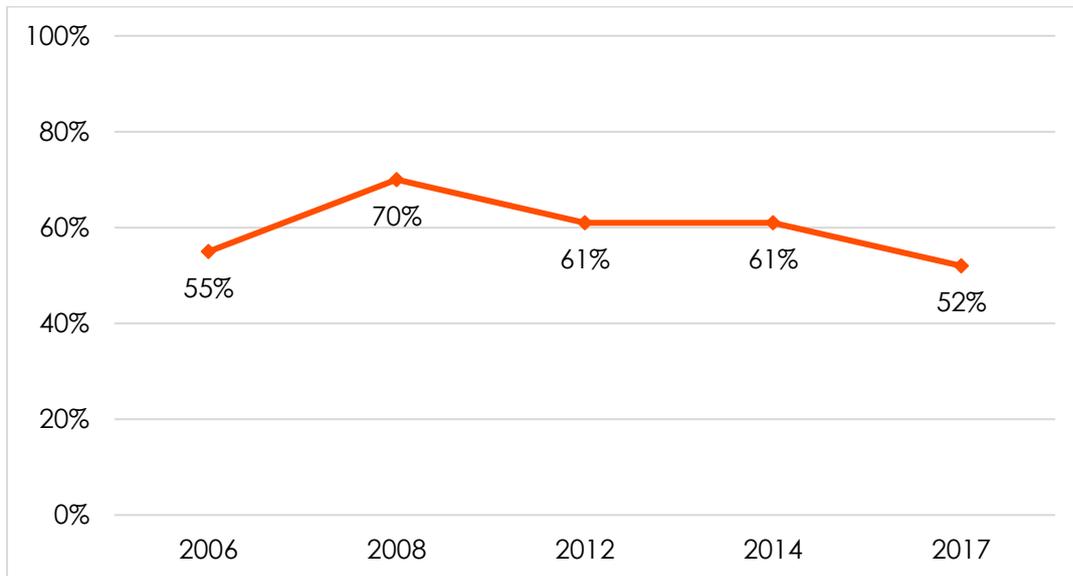
Only slightly more than half (52%) of Botswana say they trust the IEC “somewhat” or “a lot,” while four in 10 (42%) trust it “just a little” or “not at all” (Figure 1). The proportion of citizens who express trust in the IEC has dropped by 18 percentage points over the past decade (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Trust in the Independent Electoral Commission | Botswana | 2017



Respondents were asked: How much do you trust the following, or haven't you heard enough to say: The Independent Electoral Commission?

Figure 2: Trust in the Independent Electoral Commission | Botswana | 2006-2017

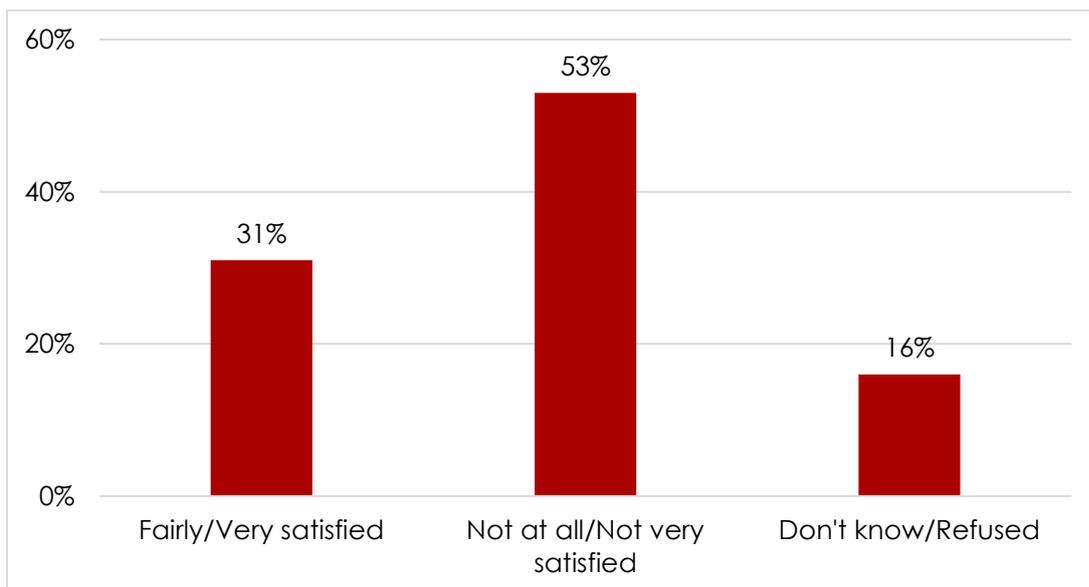


Respondents were asked: How much do you trust the following, or haven't you heard enough to say: The Independent Electoral Commission? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")

Introduction of electronic voting machines

A majority (53%) of Botswana say they are "not very satisfied" or "not at all satisfied" with the reasons advanced by the IEC for introducing electronic voting machines (Figure 3). Only about three in 10 (31%) say they are "fairly" or "very" satisfied, while 16% say they don't know or refused to answer.

Figure 3: Satisfaction with reasons for electronic voting machines | Botswana | 2017

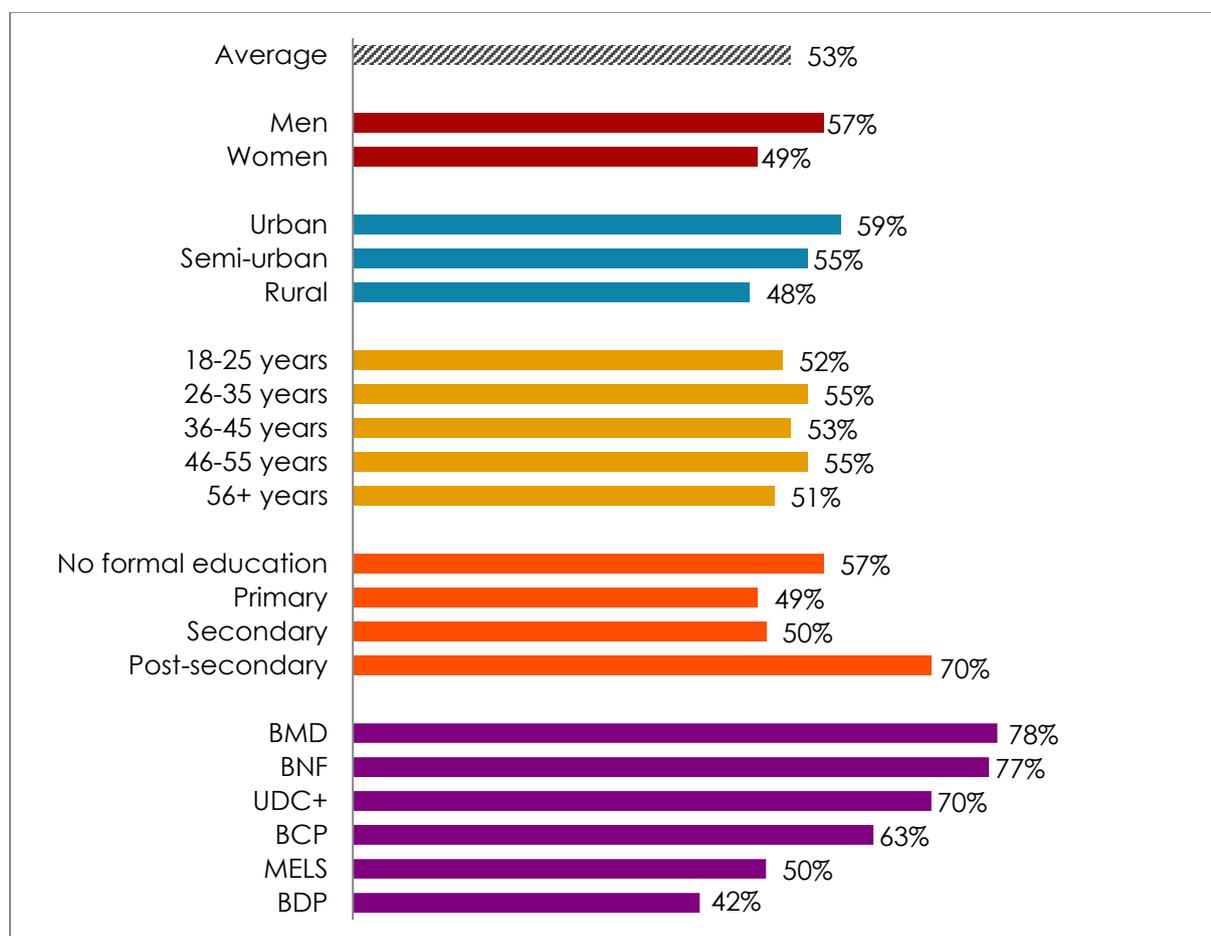


Respondents were asked: As Botswana prepares for the next general elections in October 2019, a number of suggestions have been made aimed at improving the quality of our elections. I would now like to ask whether you approve or disapprove of the following suggested changes: Overall, how satisfied are you with the reasons advanced by the Independent Electoral Commission for introducing electronic voting machines?

Dissatisfaction with the IEC's reasons is particularly strong among respondents with a post-secondary education (70%) (Figure 4). Urban residents (59%) are more likely to express dissatisfaction than semi-urban (55%) or rural (48%) residents, and men (57%) are more often dissatisfied than women (49%). Age groups differ only marginally in their views on this issue.

When analyzed by respondents' voting intentions in a hypothetical National Assembly election,¹ dissatisfaction with the IEC's reasons for introducing electronic voting is highest among supporters of the Botswana Movement for Democracy (BMD) (78%), the Botswana National Front (BNF) (77%), and the Umbrella for Democratic Change (UDC+) (70%), and lowest among BDP adherents (42%).

Figure 4: Dissatisfaction with reasons for electronic voting machines
 | by socio-demographic group | Botswana | 2017



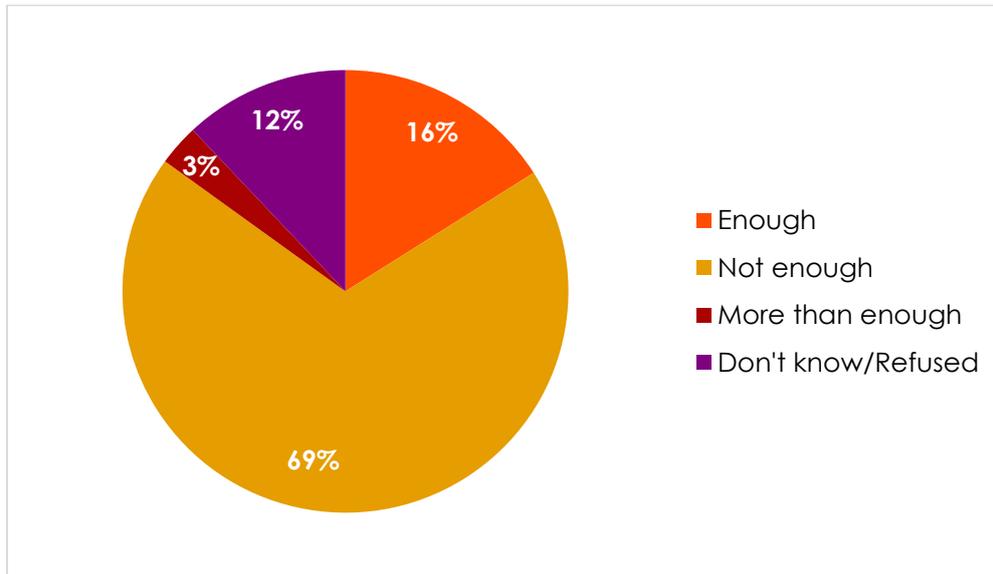
Respondents were asked: Overall, how satisfied are you with the reasons advanced by the Independent Electoral Commission for introducing electronic voting machines? (% who say "not very satisfied" or "not at all satisfied")

More than two-thirds (69%) of respondents say the IEC failed to adequately consult the public on the issue of electronic voting machines (Figure 5).

¹ Voting intentions were determined by responses to the question, "If National Assembly elections were held tomorrow, which party's candidate would you vote for?"

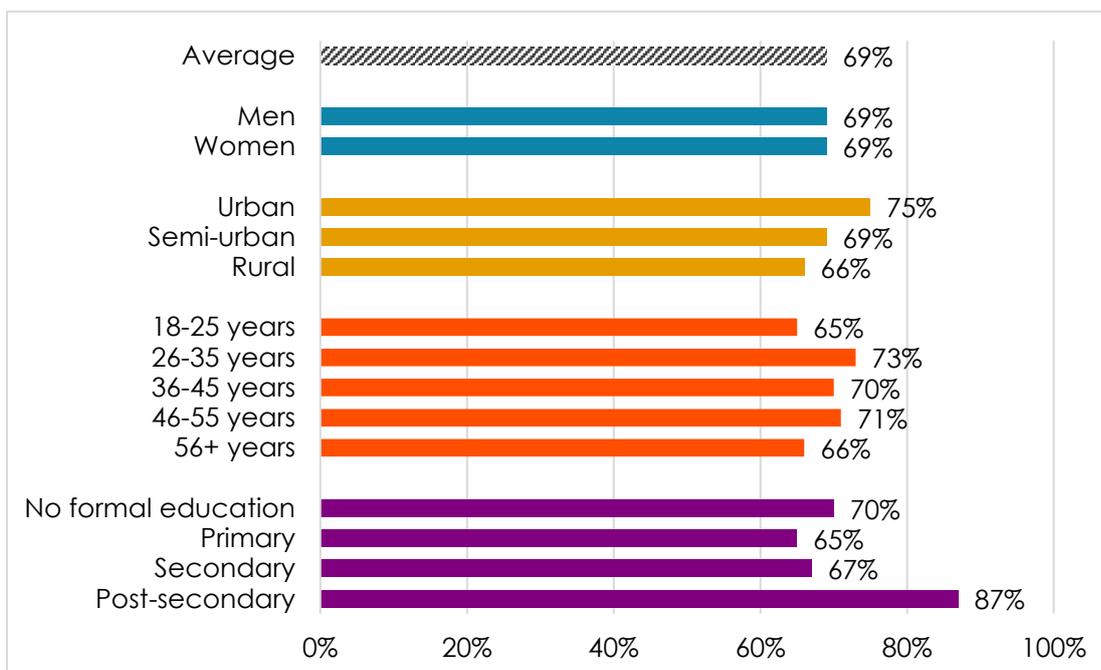
The best-educated Batswana are most critical: 87% of those with a post-secondary education say not enough consultation was done (Figure 6). The view that insufficient consultation was done increases with urbanization, ranging from 66% of rural residents and 69% of semi-urban dwellers to 75% of urbanites.

Figure 5: Views on consultation on electronic voting machines | Botswana | 2017



Respondents were asked: In your opinion, how much public consultation was done by the Independent Electoral Commission on the introduction of electronic voting machines: Enough? Not enough? More than enough?

Figure 6: Insufficient public consultation on electronic voting machines | Botswana | 2017



Respondents were asked: In your opinion, how much public consultation was done by the Independent Electoral Commission on the introduction of electronic voting machines: Enough? Not enough? More than enough?

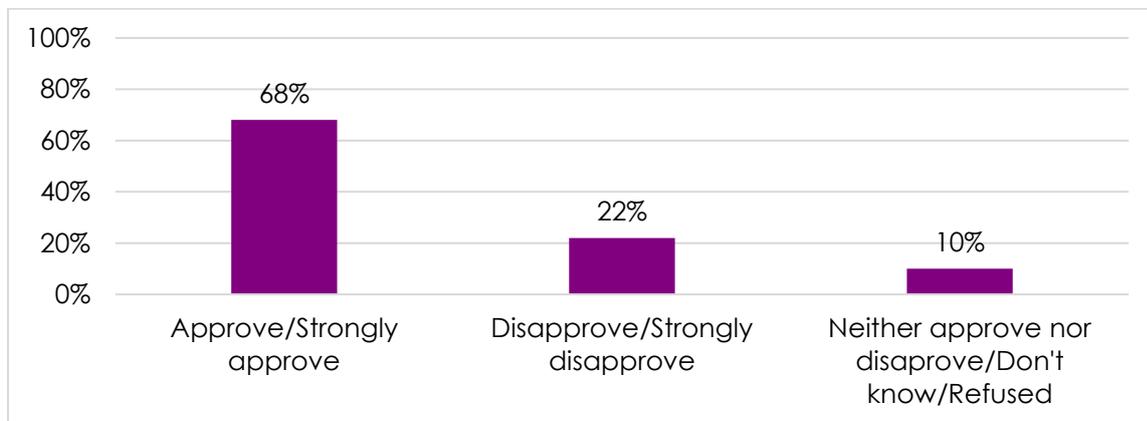
Other reforms to improve the quality of elections

Should the IEC set election dates?

Despite the decline in popular trust in the IEC, more than two-thirds (68%) of respondents “approve” or “strongly approve” of a proposition that the IEC have the power to set dates for national and local elections (Figure 7).

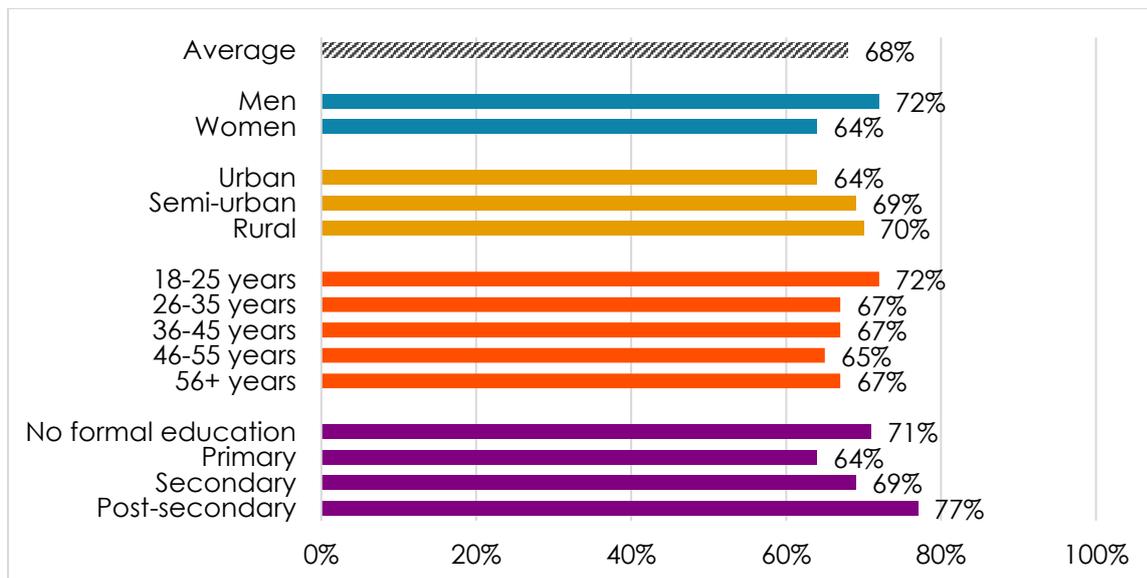
Majorities across all key socio-demographic groups agree that the IEC should determine dates of national and local elections. Support is especially strong among citizens with a post-secondary education (77%), men (72%), rural residents (70%), and the youngest respondents (72% of those aged 18-25) (Figure 8).

Figure 7: Should IEC set election dates? | Botswana | 2017



Respondents were asked: As Botswana prepares for the next general elections in October 2019, a number of suggestions have been made aimed at improving the quality of our elections. I would now like to ask whether you approve or disapprove of the following suggested changes: The Independent Electoral Commission should have the power to independently determine the dates of national and local elections?

Figure 8: IEC should set election dates | by socio-demographic group | Botswana | 2017

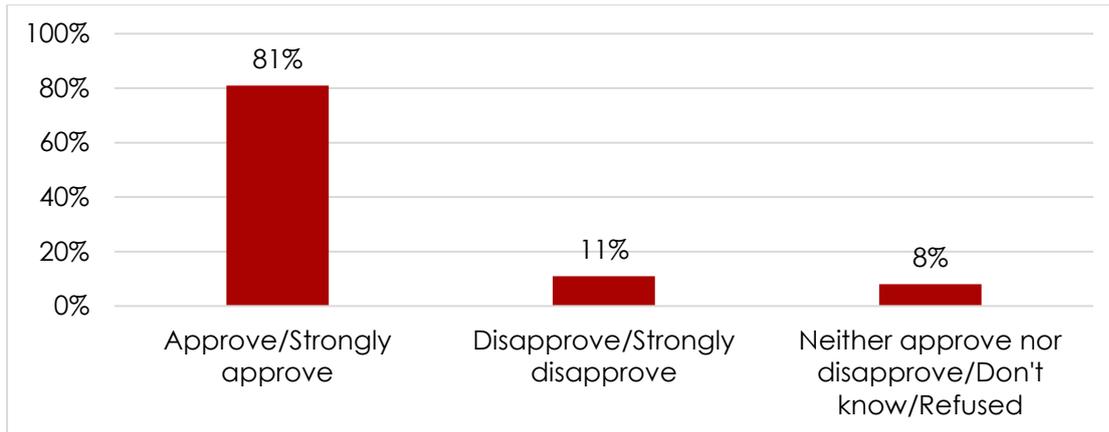


(% who “approve” or “strongly approve”)

Should MPs who join other parties vacate their seats?

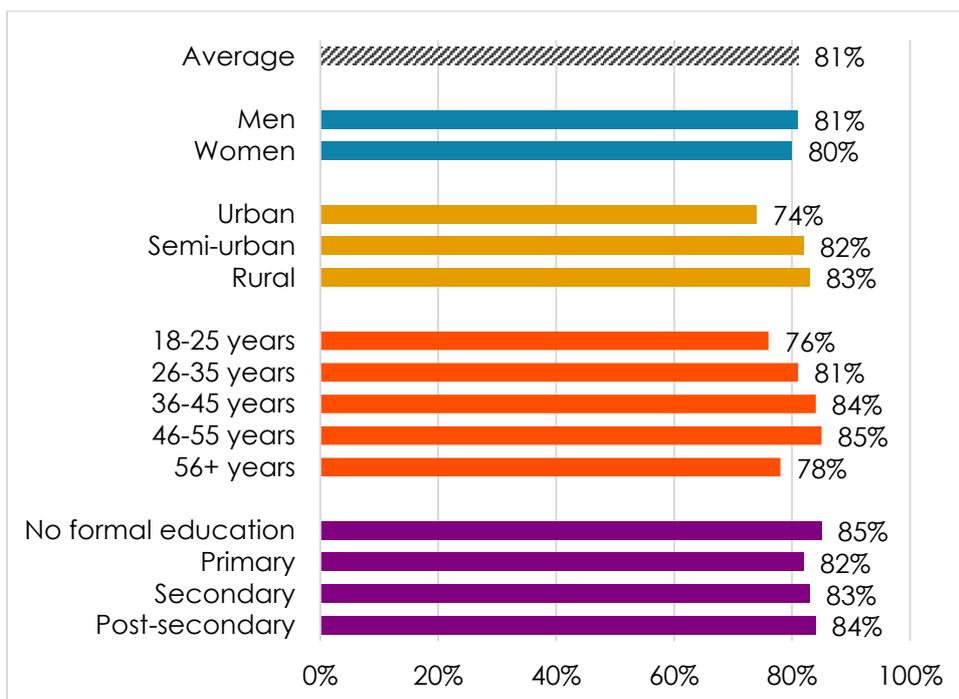
An overwhelming majority (81%) of Botswana want members of Parliament who join other political parties to vacate their parliamentary seats to pave the way for new elections in their area (Figure 9). This attitude varies little by education level or gender but is somewhat more common in rural areas (83% vs. 74% among urban residents) and among middle-aged respondents (Figure 10).

Figure 9: Should MPs who leave their party give up their seats? | Botswana | 2017



Respondents were asked: As Botswana prepares for the next general elections in October 2019, a number of suggestions have been made aimed at improving the quality of our elections. I would now like to ask whether you approve or disapprove of the following suggested changes: A member of Parliament who resigns from his or her party must vacate his or her seat so that fresh elections can be held in their area?

Figure 10: MPs who leave their party should give up their seats | by socio-demographic group | Botswana | 2017



(% who "approve" or "strongly approve")

Conclusion

Survey findings suggest that the government should consider consulting the public further before moving ahead with the use of electronic voting machines. Flagging popular trust in the IEC might also benefit from additional consultations and public education on the benefits of electronic voting. On the other hand, proposed reforms giving the IEC the power to set election dates and requiring MPs to give up their seats if they join a different party appear to have solid popular backing.

Do your own analysis of Afrobarometer data – on any question,
for any country and survey round. It's easy and free at
www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

References

- Bagwasi, T. (2017). Gov't may abandon EVMs. Weekend Post, 15 August 2017.
<http://www.weekendpost.co.bw>.
- Galekuthe, M. (2017). Electronic voting machine durable – Seeletso. Daily News, 26 March 2017.
<http://www.dailynews.gov.bw/mobile/news-details.php?nid=34994&flag=>.
- Reuters. (2017). Botswana opposition groups unite to challenge ruling BDP. 3 February 2017.
<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-botswana-politics/botswana-opposition-groups-unite-to-challenge-ruling-bdp-idUSKBN1512JN>.

Keneilwe Sadie Mooketsane is a lecturer in the Department of Political and Administrative Studies of the University of Botswana and a researcher for Star Awards, the Afrobarometer national partner in Botswana. Email: Keneilwe.Mooketsane@mopipi.ub.bw.

Batlang Seabo is a lecturer in the Department of Political and Administrative Studies of the University of Botswana. Email: Batlang.Seabo@mopipi.ub.bw.

Kabelo Moseki is a lecturer in the Department of Statistics of the University of Botswana. Email: Mosekikk@mopipi.ub.bw.

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.

Financial support for Afrobarometer Round 7 has been provided by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the U.S. State Department, and the National Endowment for Democracy.

Donations help the Afrobarometer Project give voice to African citizens. Please consider making a contribution (at www.afrobarometer.org) or contact Aba Kittoe (akittoe@afrobarometer.org) to discuss institutional funding.

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

Follow our releases on #VoicesAfrica.



Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 168 | 24 October 2017