

Tanzanians express strong support for elections, multiparty competition, presidential term limits

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 278 | Thomas Isbell

Summary

Elections are considered a core element of democratic rule (Przeworski et al., 1999). However, in many African countries, the introduction of regular elections has not resulted in liberal democratic reforms and the guarantee of civil and political freedoms (Gyimah-Boadi, 2004; Teshome, 2008).

Since independence in 1961, Tanzania has recorded a history of political and civil stability, including multiparty elections since 1995. The ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) party has never lost a presidential election, but close results in the 2015 general election suggest the possible emergence of a more competitive environment. Despite the growing vibrancy of Tanzanian political-party landscape, however, observers have voiced growing concern about the shrinking political space under President John Magufuli's rule, in particular for civil society and the media (Economist, 2018; Ahearne, 2018; Mbowe, 2016; Wolfe, 2018). The next presidential election, in which Magufuli could seek his second term, will take place in 2020.

Against this setting, this dispatch examines ordinary Tanzanians' views on electoral democracy. Findings from Afrobarometer's most recent survey show that Tanzanians overwhelmingly support democracy, high-quality elections, multiparty competition, and a two-term limit for presidents.

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 2015, and Round 7 surveys were completed in 2018. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative sample.

The Afrobarometer team in Tanzania, led by REPOA, interviewed 2,400 adult Tanzanians in May 2017. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Tanzania in 2001, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, and 2014.

Key findings

- More than three-quarters (78%) of Tanzanians prefer democracy over any other kind of government, an increase of 21 percentage points from 2014.
- Large majorities of citizens reject the non-democratic alternatives of one-party rule (69%), one-man rule (92%), and military rule (87%).
- As of mid-2017, three-quarters (76%) of citizens described Tanzania as "a full democracy" or "a democracy with minor problems," an increase from 59% in 2014.

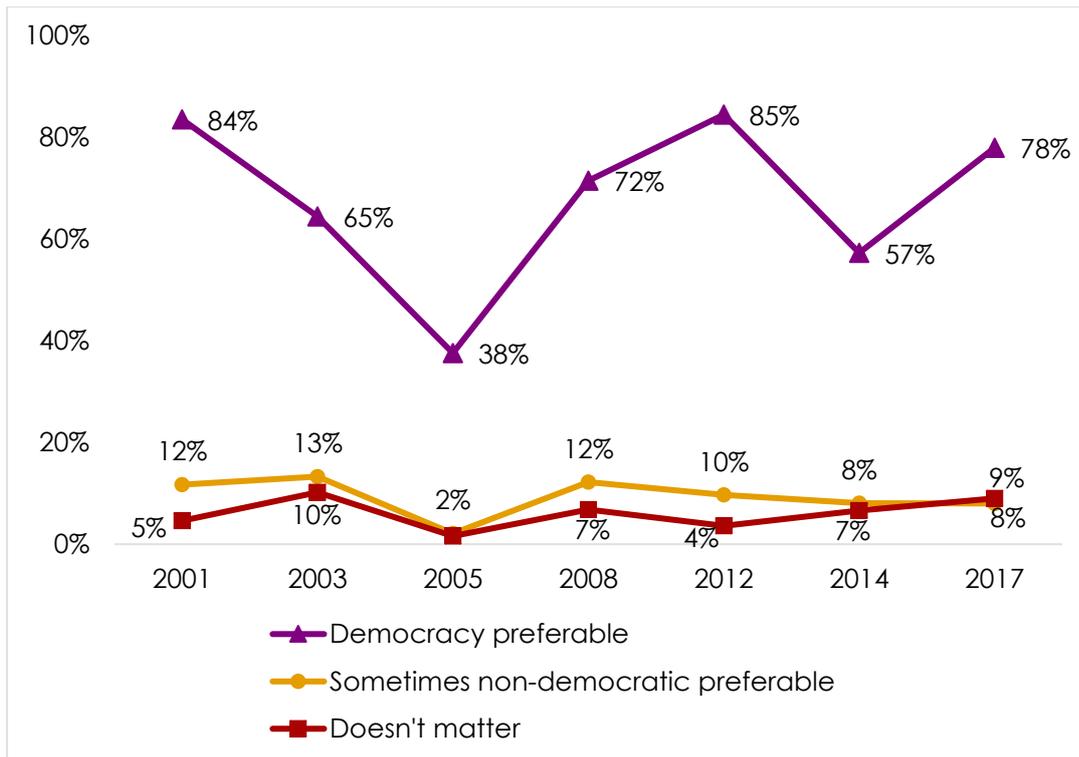
About the same proportion (75%) said they were “fairly satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the way democracy works in the country, a return to 2008 and 2012 levels of satisfaction after a dip to 60% in 2014.

- Most Tanzanians want their leaders to be chosen through elections (80%), support multiparty competition (77%), and see the most recent national elections in 2015 as having been “completely free and fair” or “free and fair with minor problems” (85%).
- Nine out of 10 citizens (89%) favour a two-term limit on presidents.
- Almost unanimously (95%), Tanzanians say it is important to obey the government in power regardless of which party one voted for.

Support for democracy

More than three out of four Tanzanians (78%) say that “democracy is preferable to any other kind of government,” an increase of 21 percentage points from 2014. In surveys since 2001, popular support for democracy has ranged from just 38% in 2005 to a high of 85% in 2012 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Support for democracy | Tanzania | 2001-2017



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.

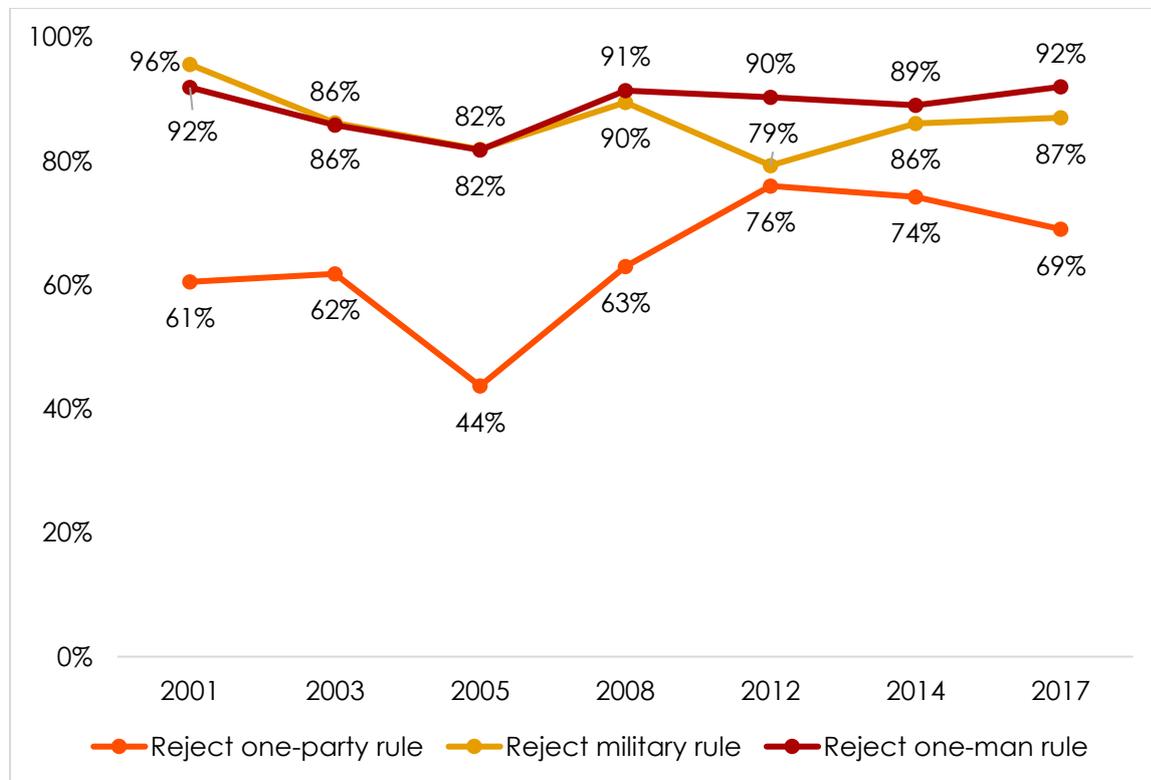
Statement 2: In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable.

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

In addition to supporting democracy, Tanzanians widely reject non-democratic alternatives (Figure 2). In 2017, around nine out of 10 respondents “disapprove” or “strongly disapprove” of one-man rule (92%) and military rule (87%). This opposition has been fairly stable over the past 15 years. Seven out of 10 Tanzanians (69%) reject one-party rule, a decline from 76% in

2012. Nonetheless, rejection of one-party rule remains stronger than it was before 2012, when as few as 44% disapproved of a single-party system.

Figure 2: Reject non-democratic alternatives | Tanzania | 1999-2017



Respondents were asked: There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives?

Elections and Parliament are abolished so that the president can decide everything."

Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office.

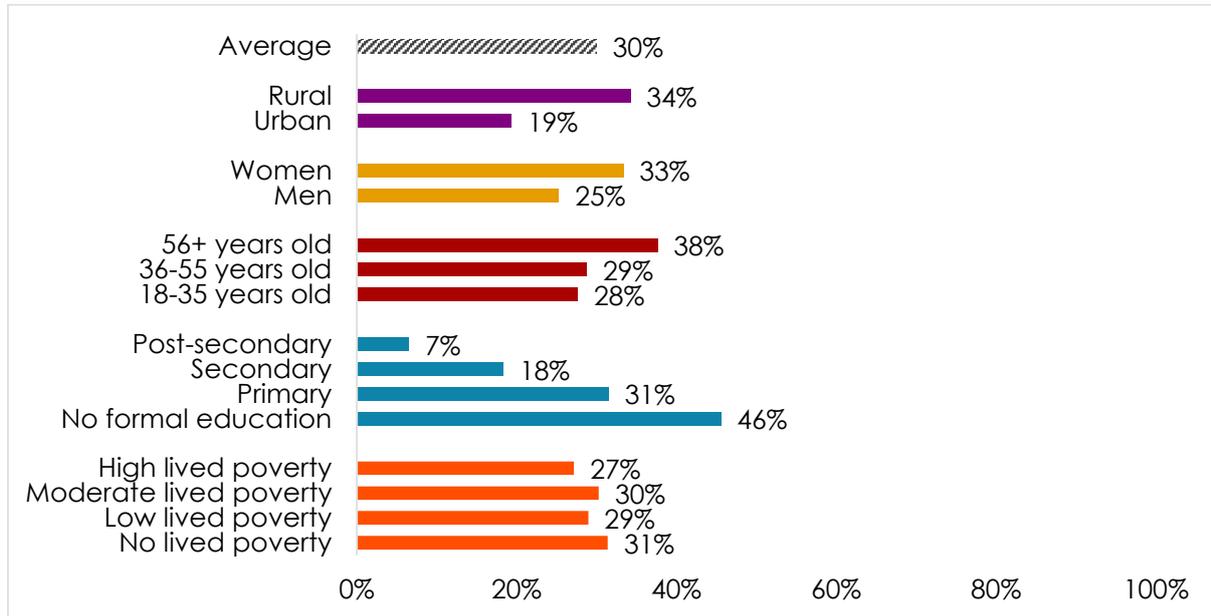
The army comes in to govern the country.

(% who "disapprove" or "strongly disapprove" of each alternative)

With support from three in 10 Tanzanians (30%), one-party rule remains by far the most widely accepted of the three non-democratic alternatives. Comparing acceptance of one-party rule across key socio-demographic groups shows that this alternative is more popular among rural residents than urbanites (34% vs. 19%) and among women compared to men (33% vs. 25%) (Figure 3). Older Tanzanians are more likely to approve of one-party rule (38% of those over age 55) than younger respondents (28%-29%). Acceptance of one-party rule shrinks significantly with increasing education, ranging from 46% of those without formal education to just 7% among those with post-secondary qualifications. But few differences exist across levels of lived poverty.¹

¹ Afrobarometer assesses lived poverty based on responses to the following questions: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without: Enough food to eat? Enough clean water for home use? Medicines or medical treatment? Enough fuel to cook your food? A cash income?

Figure 3: Approve of one-party rule | by socio-demographic group | Tanzania | 2017

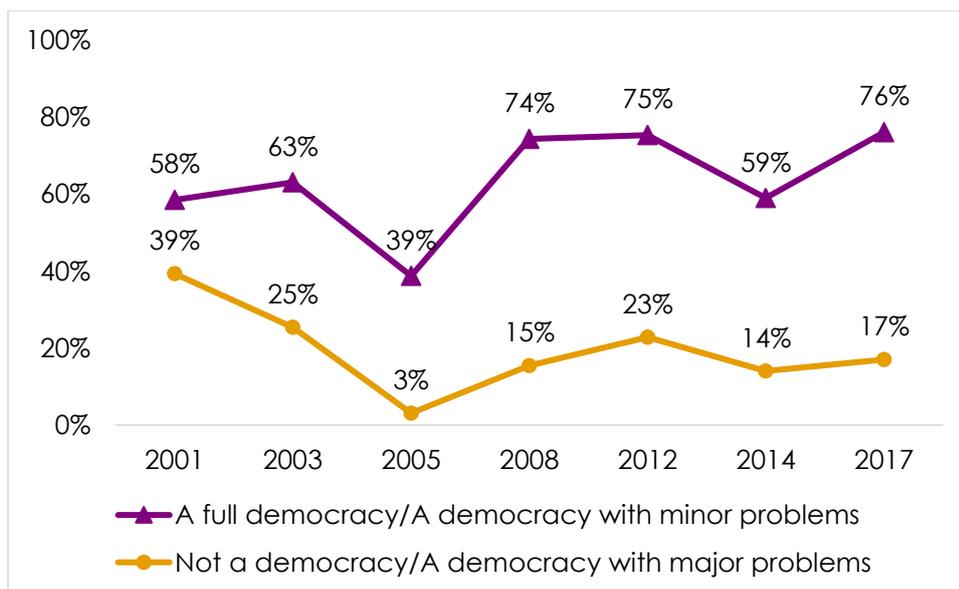


Respondents were asked: There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternative: Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office?

Extent of democracy and popular satisfaction

When asked in May 2017 how much of a democracy they considered Tanzania, three-fourths (76%) of respondents described the country as either “a full democracy” or “a democracy with minor problems,” the highest level of this combined response since Afrobarometer surveys started in Tanzania in 2001. The total is 17 percentage points higher than in 2014, and comparable to levels recorded in 2008 and 2012. Only 17% of respondents described Tanzania as “not a democracy” or “a democracy with major problems” (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Extent of democracy | Tanzania | 2001-2017

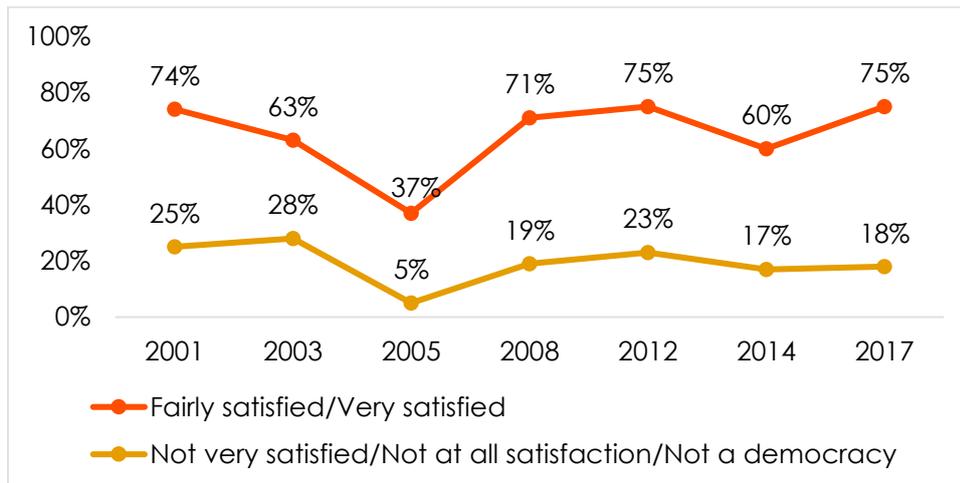


Respondents were asked: In your opinion, how much of a democracy is Tanzania today?

About the same proportion (75%) said they were “fairly satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the way democracy was working in Tanzania, an increase from 60% in 2014 and matching the 2012 peak in satisfaction (Figure 5).

It should be noted that these results were collected before some of the most recent presidential pronouncements that have alarmed pro-democracy activists; we do not know whether some of the widely criticized statements might have affected perceptions of the extent of Tanzania’s democracy or popular satisfaction with the way it is working.

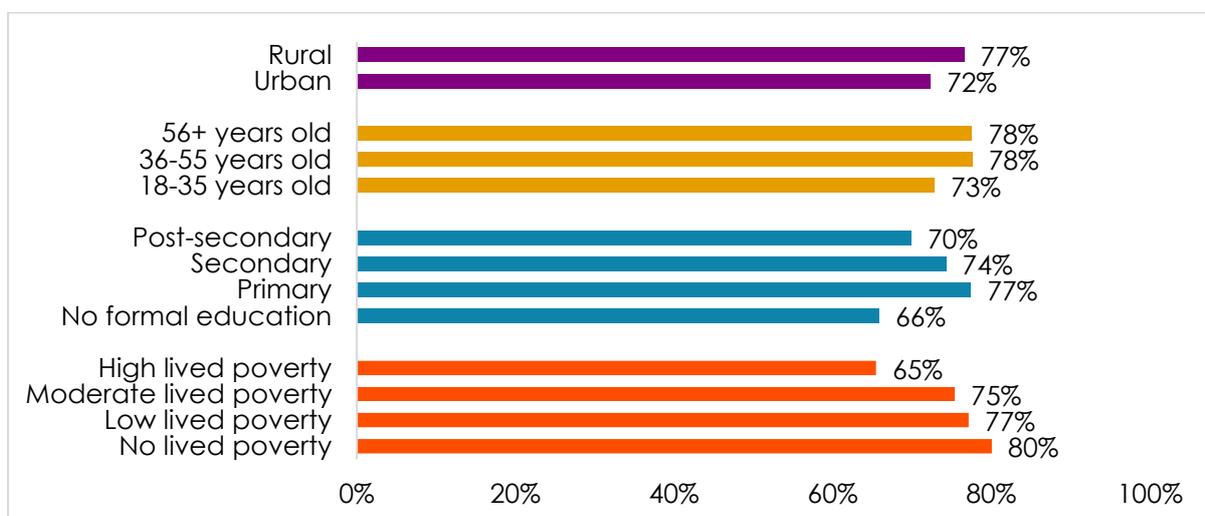
Figure 5: Satisfaction with democracy | Tanzania | 2001-2017



Respondents were asked: Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Tanzania?

While levels of satisfaction with democracy are high across key socio-demographic groups, they do vary by residential location, age, educational attainment, and poverty level (Figure 6). Urban residents (72%) and youth (73%) are somewhat less satisfied than rural (77%) and older (78%) respondents. The poorest respondents (65%) and those with no formal education (66%) are less likely to express satisfaction than better-off and better-educated citizens.

Figure 6: Satisfaction with democracy | by socio-demographic group | Tanzania | 2017



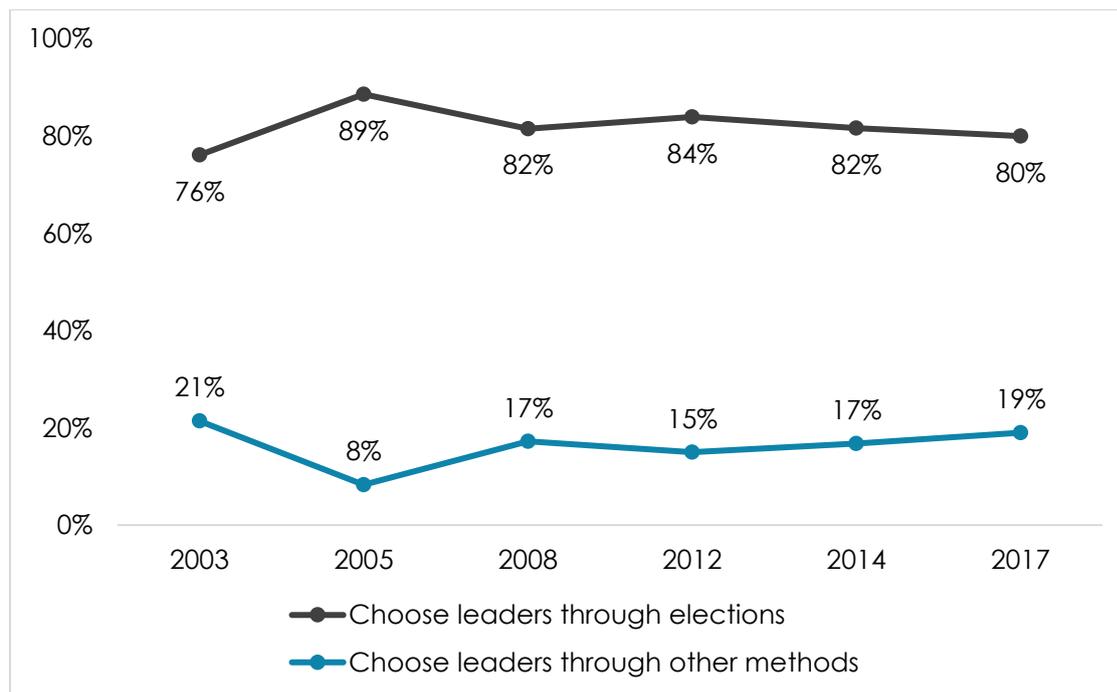
Respondents were asked: Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Tanzania? (% who say “fairly satisfied” or “very satisfied”)

Support for elections, multiparty competition, and term limits

Overwhelmingly, Tanzanians' vision of democracy seems to include high-quality elections, multiparty competition, a two-term limit on the president, and citizens who obey the government no matter which way they voted.

Eight out of 10 Tanzanians (80%) say regular, open, and honest elections are the best way to choose the country's leaders, while one in five (19%) say other methods would be preferable. Both views have been fairly constant in distribution over the past decade (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Choose leaders through elections vs. other methods | Tanzania | 2003-2017



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.

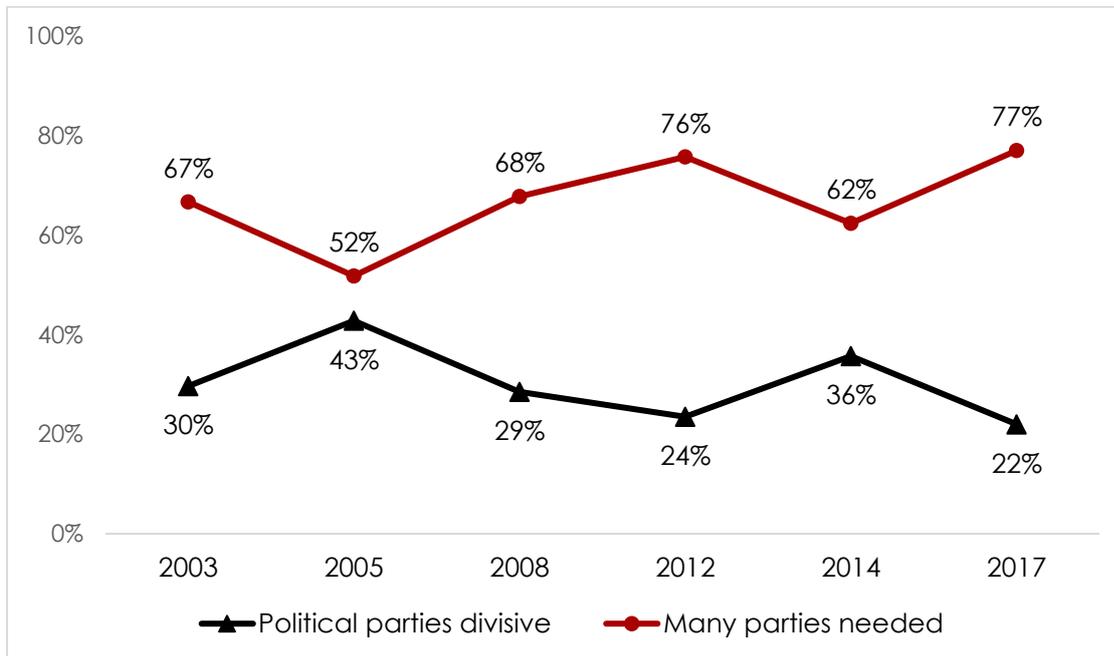
Statement 2: Since elections sometimes produce bad results, we should adopt other methods for choosing this country's leaders.

(% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

Moreover, Tanzanians overwhelmingly favour multiparty competition. Three-fourths (77%) say that "many political parties are needed to make sure Tanzanians have real choices in who governs them," an increase of 15 percentage points from 2014. The proportion of respondents who say the country doesn't need the divisiveness and confusion of multiparty politics is at an all-time low (22%) (Figure 8).

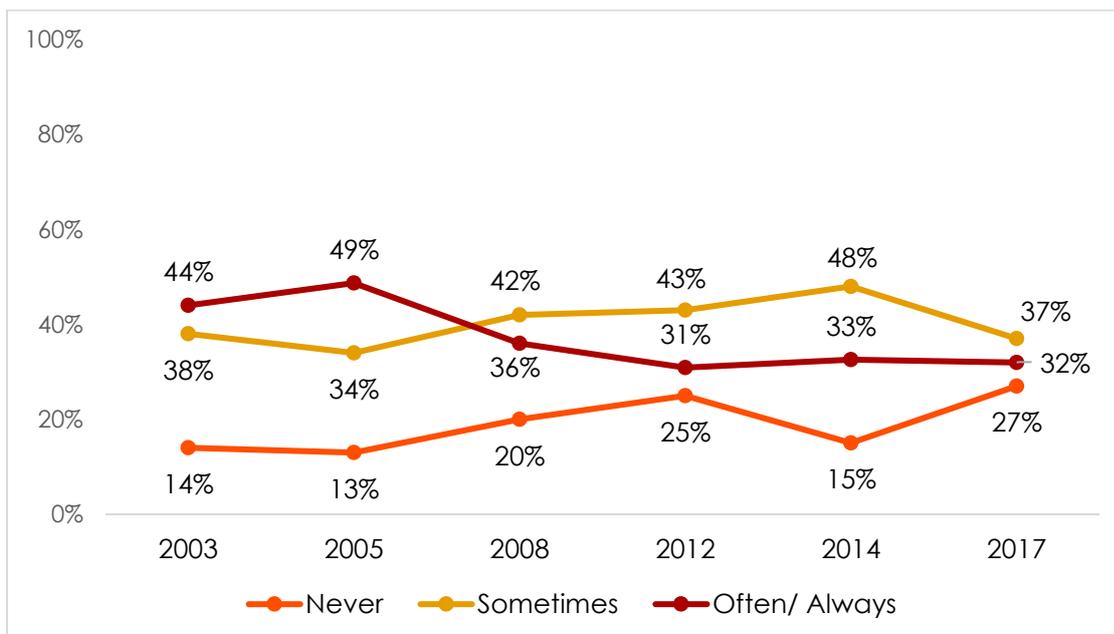
Popular support for having many political parties is strong even though more than two-thirds of Tanzanians believe that party competition at least sometimes leads to violent conflict. About one-third say this occurs "often" or "always" (32%), while slightly more see it as happening "sometimes" (37%) (Figure 9). The proportion of respondents who say that party competition "never" produces violent conflict has gradually increased over the years, reaching 27% in 2017.

Figure 8: Political parties divisive vs. many parties needed | Tanzania | 2003-2017



Respondents were asked: 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 Tanzania.
 Statement 2: Many political parties are needed to make sure that Tanzanians have real choices in who governs them.
 (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

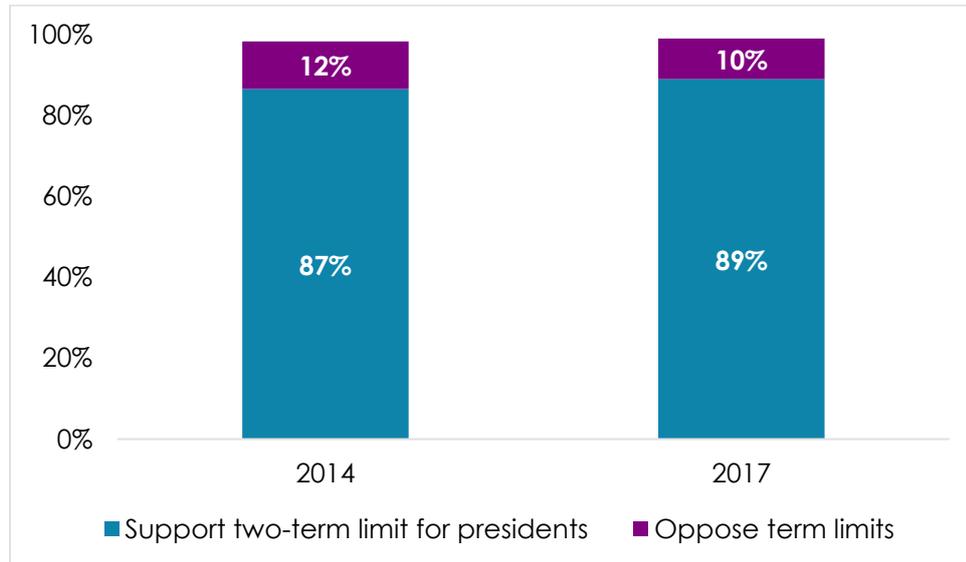
Figure 9: How often does party competition lead to conflict? | Tanzania | 2003-2017



Respondents were asked: In your opinion, how often, in this country, does competition between political parties lead to violent conflict?

Tanzanians also want a political system in which presidents are limited to a maximum of two terms in office, as is currently enshrined in the country's Constitution. Nine out of 10 respondents (89%) favour presidential term limits, continuing strong support expressed in 2014 (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Presidential two-term limit vs. no term limits | Tanzania | 2017



Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

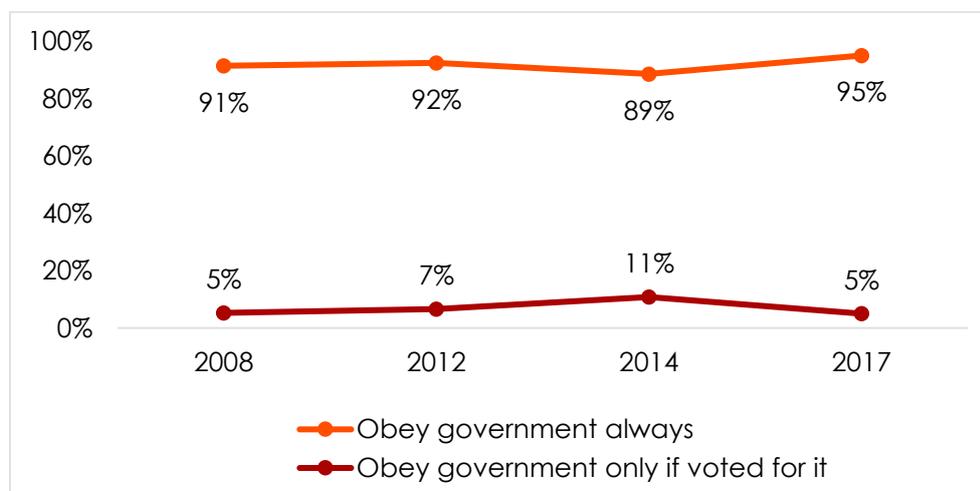
Statement 1: The Constitution should limit the president to serving a maximum of two terms in office.

Statement 2: There should be no constitutional limit on how long the president can serve.

(% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

Popular faith in elections is also reflected in Tanzanians' nearly unanimous affirmation of the legitimacy of the winner: 95% say it is important to obey the government in power regardless of which candidate or party you voted for. Support for this position has been consistently high over the past decade (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Obey government always vs. only if voted for it | Tanzania | 2008-2017



Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

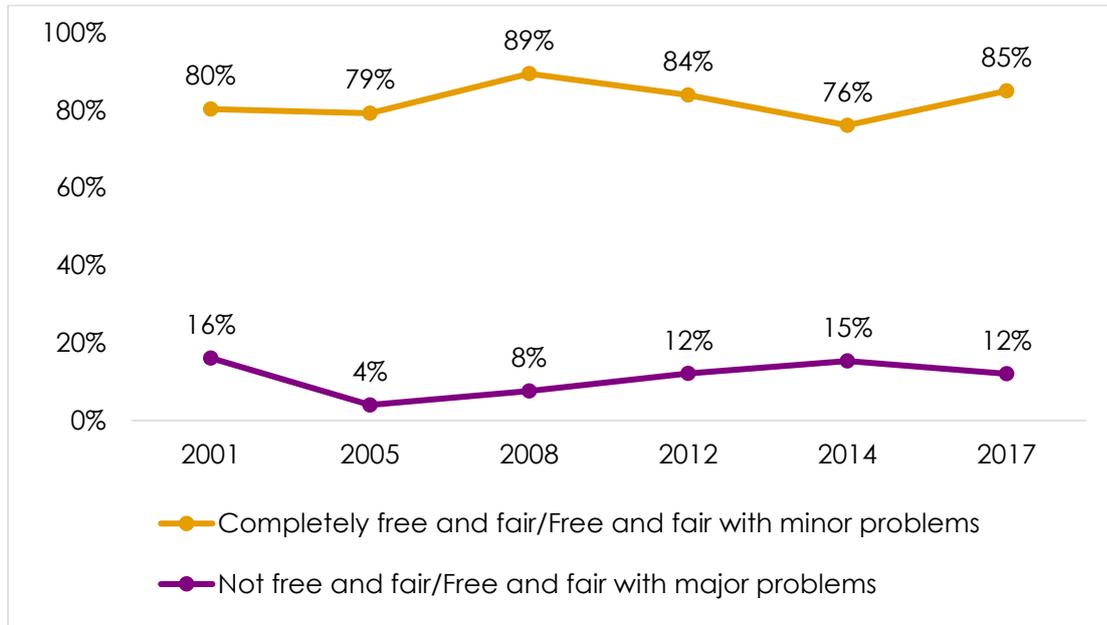
Statement 1: It is important to obey the government in power, no matter who you voted for.

Statement 2: It is not necessary to obey the laws of a government that you did not vote for.

(% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

In practice, most Tanzanians have consistently seen their elections as generally free and fair. More than eight in 10 respondents (85%) say the 2015 election was “completely free and fair” or “free and fair with minor problems,” a 9-percentage-point improvement from 2014 assessments of the 2010 election (Figure 12).

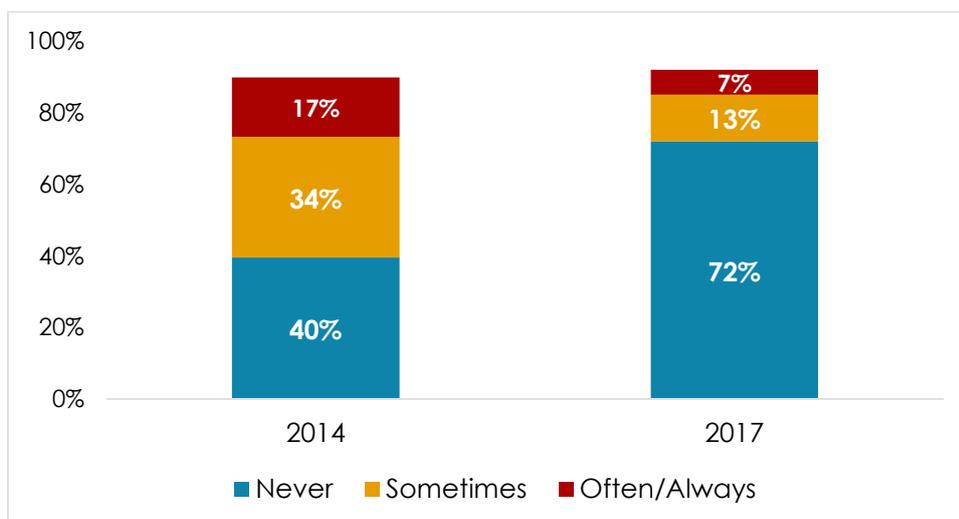
Figure 12: Freeness and fairness of the last national election | Tanzania | 2001-2017



Respondents were asked: On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the last national election, held in [20xx]?

As of 2017, most Tanzanians say that opposition candidates are “never” prevented from running for office (72%). This is a significant improvement compared to 2014, when only 40% shared this view. Conversely, the share of Tanzanians who say that opposition candidates are “often” or “always” prevented from running for office declined from 17% in 2014 to 7% in 2017, while the share who say this “sometimes” occurs dropped from 34% to 13% (Figure 13).

Figure 13: How often is the opposition prevented from running? | Tanzania | 2017



Respondents were asked: In your opinion, during this country's elections, how often are opposition candidates prevented from running for office?

Conclusion

As Tanzanians confront concerns about shrinking political space, they do so against a solid background of support for electoral democracy. Overwhelmingly, citizens support democracy, reject non-democratic alternatives, and demand high-quality elections with multiparty competition. They also insist on presidential term limits. Given a fair democratic playing field, Tanzanians say that election winners must be respected regardless of partisan preferences.

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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.

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

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Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 278 | 12 February 2019