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Guineans want accountable government and presidential term limits

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 328 | Thomas Isbell, Sadhiska Bhoojedhur, and Aliou Barry

Summary

In Guinea, elections have rarely been routine. Delays, disputes, and violence have marked many elections as scores of political parties slug it out and security forces confront protesters in the street.

Municipal elections scheduled for 2010, for example, were delayed for eight years due to lack of funding, political conflict, and the Ebola outbreak (News24, 2018). When they were finally conducted in February 2018, the opposition claimed electoral fraud and violence erupted in the streets, killing more than 10 people. It took ruling and opposition parties more than six months to agree on the final outcome of the election – an agreement that quickly succumbed to more political disputes (Corey-Boulet, 2018).

Similarly, parliamentary elections have been repeatedly delayed, also resulting in protests and violence. In many instances, security and armed forces have been accused of using excessive force against protesters (Human Rights Watch, 2018).

In recent weeks, protests against a possible constitutional change that could let President Alpha Conde run for a third term turned deadly as police fired on demonstrators (Samb, 2019; Corey-Boulet, 2018; Africanews, 2019). In this context, it is unclear whether the 2020 presidential election will go ahead as planned.

In this dispatch, we use Afrobarometer survey data to examine how ordinary Guineans perceive their elections. We find widespread support for competitive elections as the best way to choose leaders, even though a majority of citizens distrust the electoral commission and think that multiparty competition often leads to violent conflict.

Most Guineans favour limiting the president to two terms. Concerning changes to the electoral rules, Guineans support allowing independent candidates to stand for election and requiring gender quotas to promote the election of women.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer heads a pan-African, nonpartisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across Africa. Seven rounds of surveys were completed in up to 38 countries between 1999 and 2018. Round 8 surveys are planned in at least 35 countries in 2019/2020. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Guinea, led by Stat View International, interviewed a representative, random, stratified sample of 1,200 Guinean adults in May 2017. A sample of this size produces results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Guinea in 2013, 2015, and 2017.

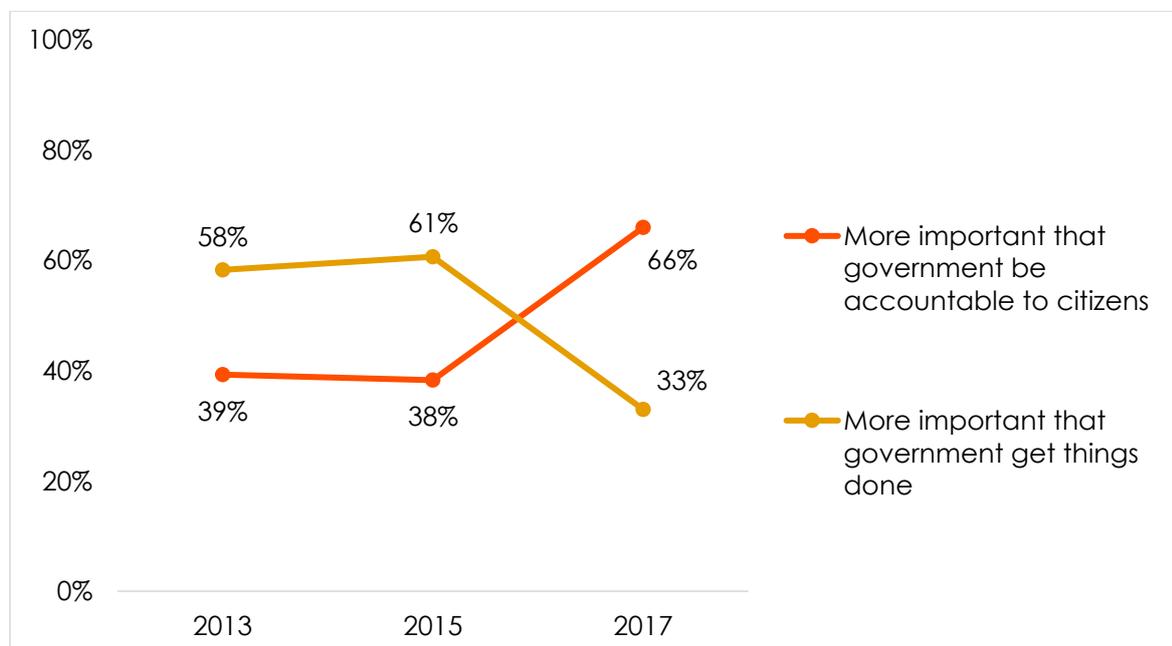
Key findings

- Two-thirds (66%) of Guineans say it's more important that the government be accountable to the people than that it get things done, an increase of nearly 30 percentage points from previous survey rounds.
- Eight out of 10 Guineans (80%) support elections as the best way to choose their leaders. While most Guineans (77%) believe that party competition "often" or "always" leads to violent conflict, two out of three (65%) nonetheless say many parties are needed to give voters real choices.
- Six out of 10 Guineans (61%) say their last national election was generally free and fair.
- With regard to electoral rules, more than eight out of 10 citizens (82%) say the president should be limited to two terms. Majorities support changing the rules to allow independent candidates to run for office (57%), to institute a 30% gender quota for female candidates (85%), and to make neighbourhood and district leadership positions elective (85%).

Accountability over efficiency

Two out of three Guineans (66%) consider it more important to have a government that is accountable to its citizens, even if that means it makes decisions more slowly, than to have a government that gets things done. Support for government accountability over efficiency has increased by almost 30 percentage points since surveys in 2013 and 2015 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Government accountability vs. efficiency | Guinea | 2013-2017



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.

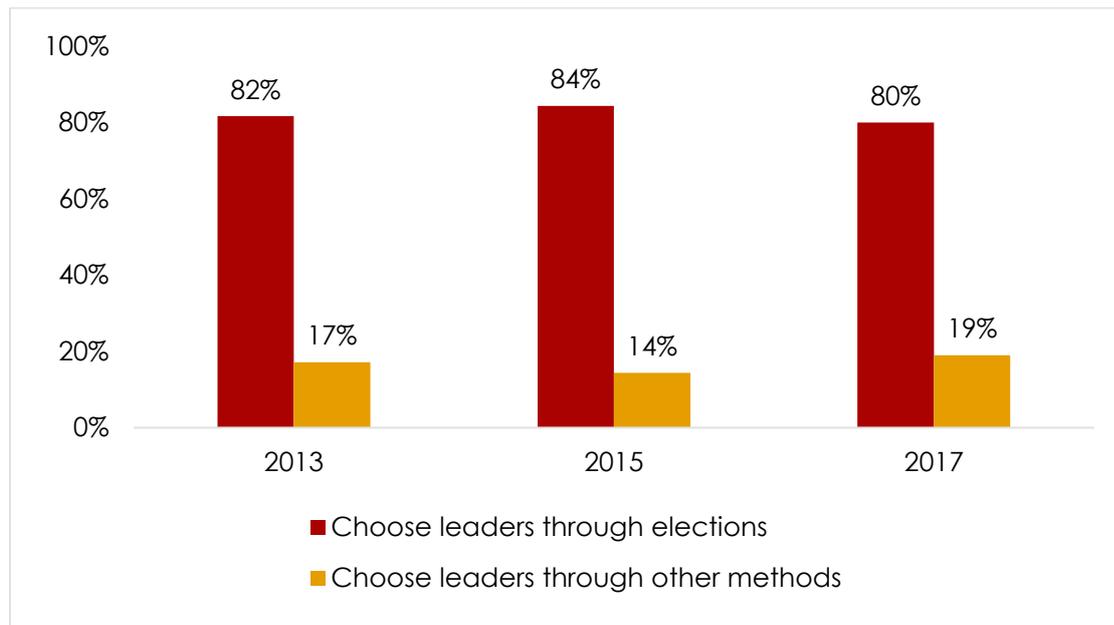
Statement 2: It is more important for citizens to be able to hold government accountable, even if that means it makes decisions more slowly.

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

Views on elections

In line with demand for government accountability, eight out of 10 Guineans (80%) say regular, open, and honest elections are the best way to choose their leaders – somewhat stronger support for elections than on average across 34 African countries surveyed in 2016/2018 (75%). Support for elections has been fairly consistent in Guinea since the first Afrobarometer survey in 2013 (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Choose leaders through elections vs. other methods | Guinea | 2013-2017



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.

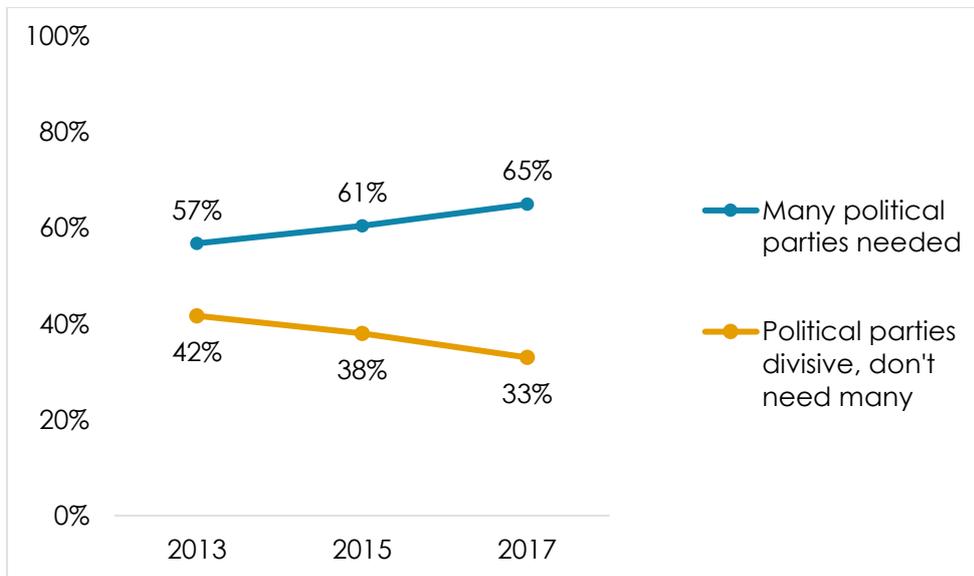
Statement 2: Since elections sometimes produce bad results, we should adopt other methods for choosing this country's leaders.

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

And elections should feature multiparty competition, according to two-thirds (65%) of Guineans. Amid a volatile political scene (Economic Commission for Africa, 2013) with more than 150 parties, many created and controlled by a single leader, the proportion of citizens who say that many political parties are needed to ensure that citizens have real choices in who governs them has increased steadily since 2013 (57%). Meanwhile, the share of respondents who argue that political parties create division and that Guinea doesn't need to have many of them has dropped to one-third (33%) (Figure 3).

Support for multiparty competition is strong even though more than three-fourths (77%) of Guineans believe that competition between political parties "often" or "always" leads to violent conflict – a perception that has increased by 10 percentage points since 2015 (Figure 4).

Figure 3: Political parties divisive vs. many parties needed | Guinea | 2013-2017



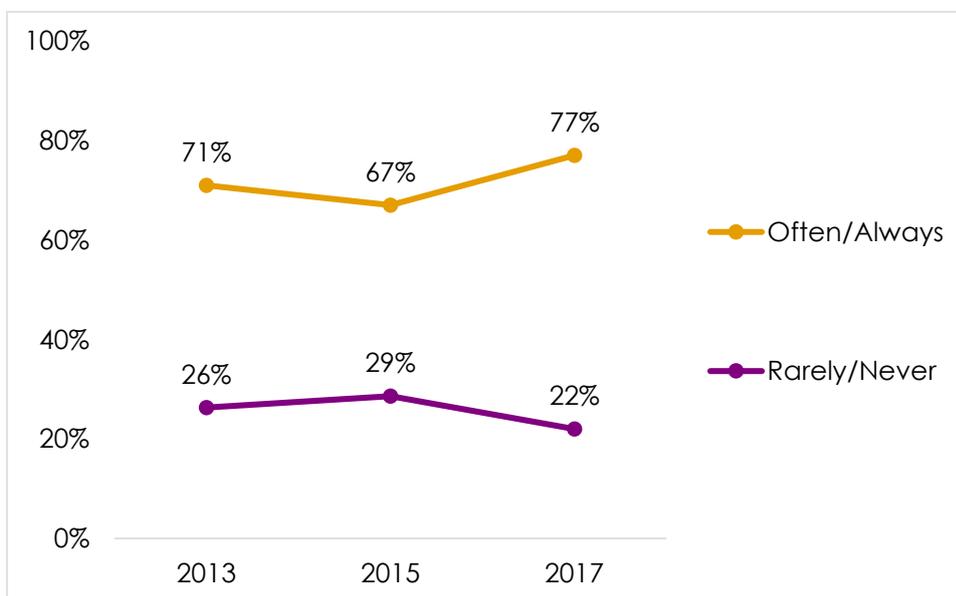
Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

Statement 1: Political parties create division and confusion; it is therefore unnecessary to have many political parties in Guinea.

Statement 2: Many political parties are needed to make sure that Guineans have real choices in who governs them.

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

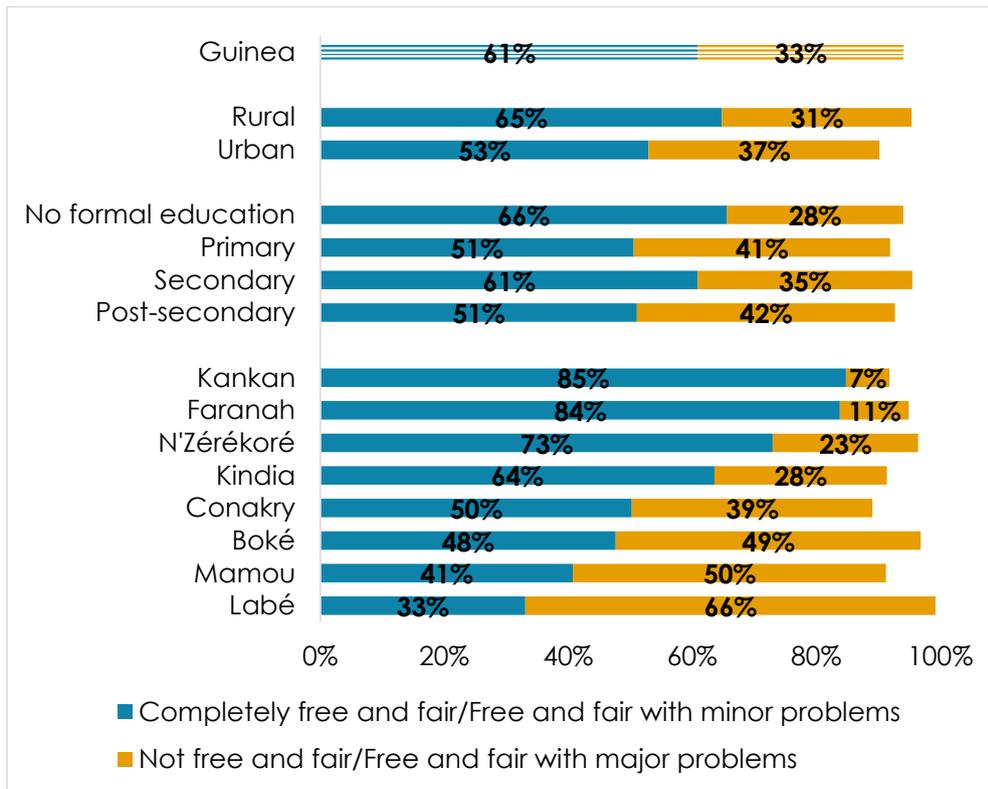
Figure 4: How often party competition leads to conflict | Guinea | 2013-2017



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

Six in 10 Guineans (61%) see their most recent national election, in 2015, as having been either "completely free and fair" or "free and fair with minor problems." Positive assessments of the quality of the election are more common among rural residents (65%) and respondents with no formal education (66%) (Figure 5).

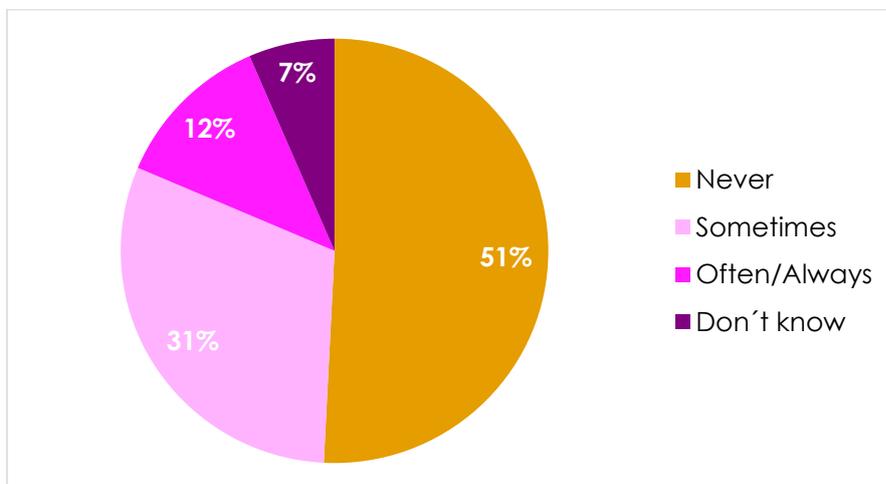
Figure 5: Freeness and fairness of the last national election | by socio-demographic group | Guinea | 2017



Respondents were asked: On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the last national election, held in 2015?

While a majority sees the most recent election as fair, on one indicator of election fairness, only half (51%) of respondents say opposition candidates are “never” prevented from running for office. More than four in 10 say this occurs “sometimes” (31%), “often” (9%), or “always” (3%) (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Opposition prevented from running in elections | Guinea | 2017

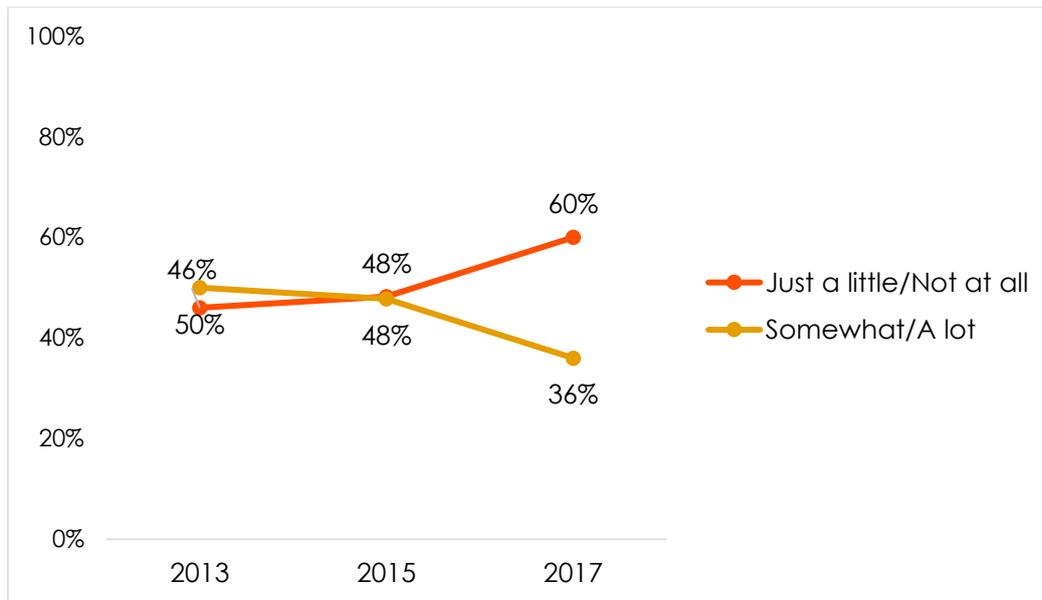


Respondents were asked: In your opinion, during this country's elections, how often are opposition candidates prevented from running for office?

Moreover, only about one in three Guineans say they trust the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) “somewhat” or “a lot.” Distrust of the electoral management body has increased sharply, from 48% in 2015 to 60% in 2017 (Figure 7).

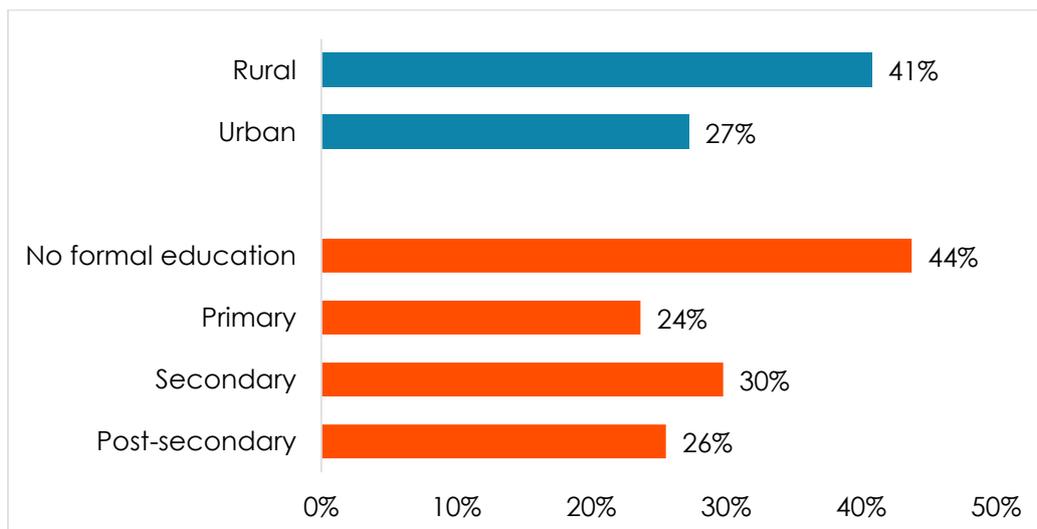
Trust is higher than average among rural residents (41% and, respondents with no formal education (44%) (Figure 8).

Figure 7: Popular trust in the electoral commission | Guinea | 2013-2017



Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI)?

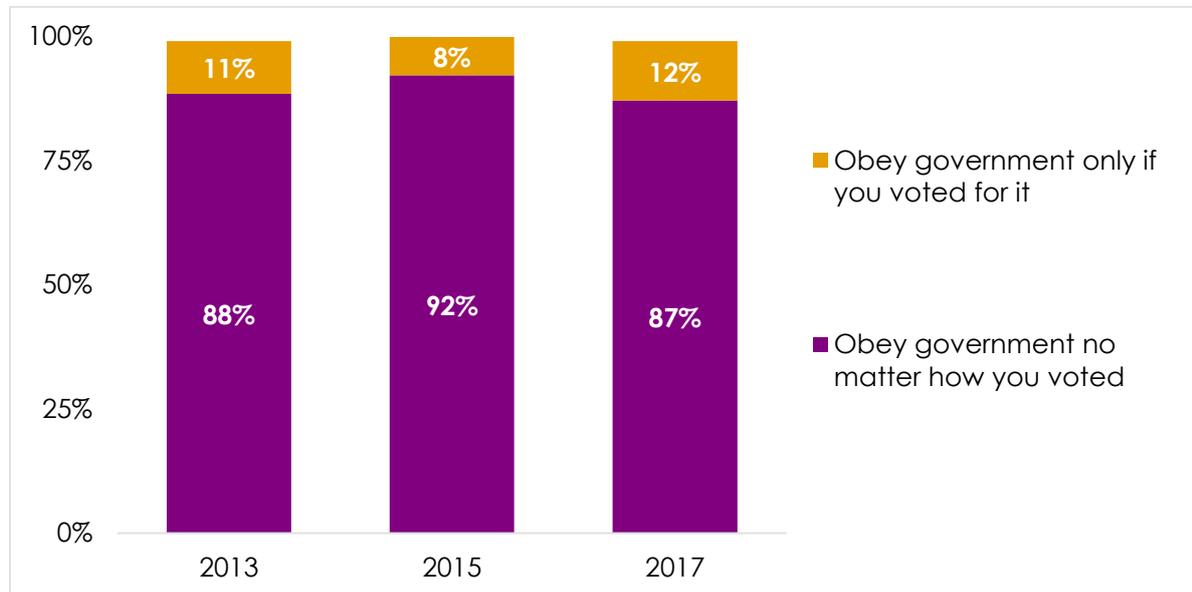
Figure 8: Popular trust in the electoral commission | by socio-demographic group | Guinea | 2017



Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI)?

Despite these reservations, about nine out of 10 Guineans consistently affirm that citizens must obey the elected government, no matter which party they voted for (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Obey government always vs. only if you voted for it | Guinea | 2013-2017

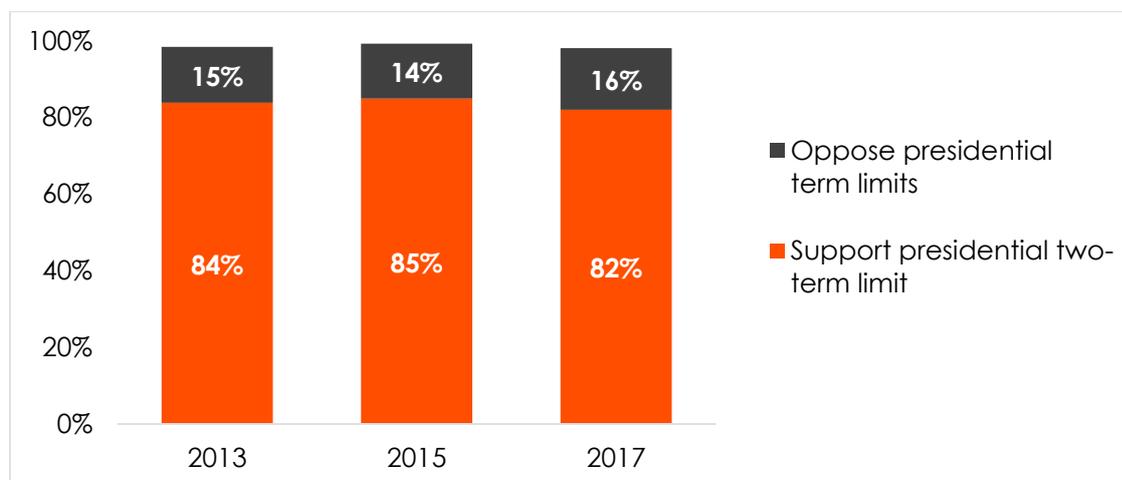


Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: It is important to obey the government in power, no matter who you voted for,
 Statement 2: It is not necessary to obey the laws of a government that you did not vote for,
 (% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” with each statement)

Views on electoral laws

In recent weeks, Guinea has seen large-scale protests in response to Condé's refusal to rule out changing the Constitution and seeking a third term in office in the 2020 election (Al Jazeera, 2019; Human Rights Watch, 2019). Eight out of 10 Guineans (82%) are in support of limiting their presidents to a maximum of two terms, as provided for in the Constitution. Support for term limits has been consistently strong since Afrobarometer started surveys in the country in 2013 (Figure 10).

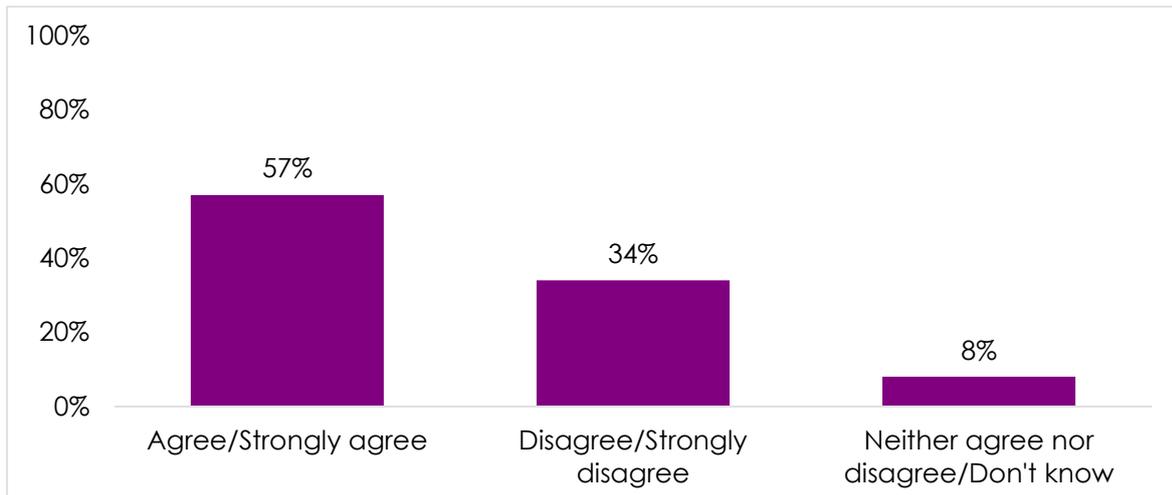
Figure 10: Views on presidential term limits | Guinea | 2013-2017



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)

A smaller majority (57%) also favour changing electoral laws to allow independent candidates to run in national and local elections. About one in three respondents (34%) “disagree” or “disagree strongly” with this proposal (Figure 11).

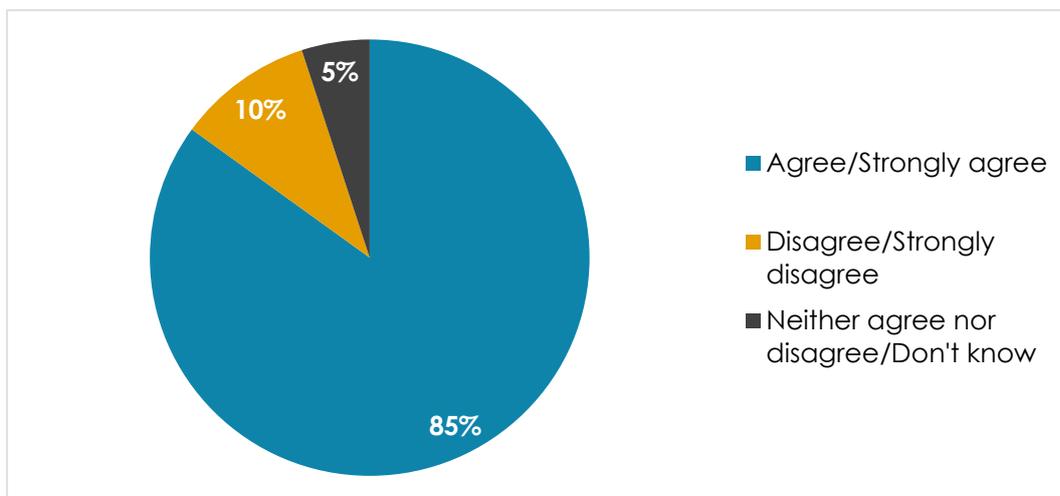
Figure 11: Electoral change: Allow independent candidates in national and local elections | Guinea | 2017



Respondents were asked: I will read you a list of actions that could be taken to change the electoral rules in Guinea. For each statement, please tell me whether you agree or disagree: The law should be changed to allow independent candidates to run for national and local elections.

To increase the number of women holding political office, an overwhelming majority (85%) of Guineans are in favour of requiring that at least 30% of each political party's candidates be women. Only one in 10 citizens (10%) oppose this reform (Figure 12). This would prove a promising first step toward achieving gender parity in Parliament, to which Guinea committed itself by passing the Law of Parity in May 2019. Currently women hold only 25 of 114 seats in Parliament (21.9%) (UN Women, 2019).

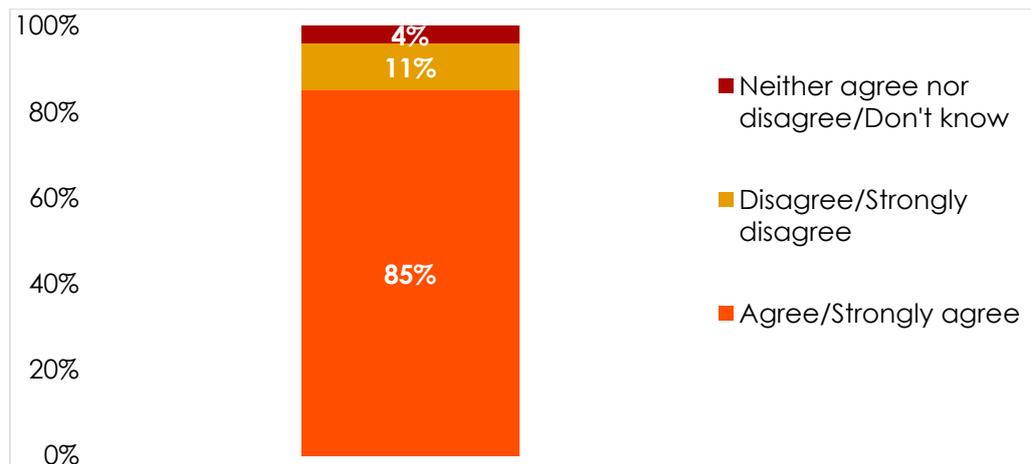
Figure 12: Electoral change: 30% quota of female candidates | Guinea | 2017



Respondents were asked: I will read you a list of actions that could be taken to change the electoral rules in Guinea. For each statement, please tell me if you agree or disagree: In order to increase the number of women in elected positions, the law should require political parties to set a minimum quota of 30% for female candidates.

Finally, to enhance local political participation, most Guineans (85%) think neighborhood and district leaders should be elected rather than appointed by the president. Despite past moves to decentralize the political administration of the Conté government, financial dependency on the central government remains high for local levels of government (Figure 13).

Figure 13: Electoral change: Election of neighbourhood and district leaders
 | Guinea | 2017



Respondents were asked: I will read you a list of actions that could be taken to change the electoral rules in Guinea. For each statement, please tell me if you agree or disagree: To provide for effective local participation, neighbourhood or district leaders should be elected rather than nominated.

Conclusion

Guineans strongly support competitive elections as the best way to choose their leaders. But many also have reservations about the conduct of their elections, expressing little trust in the electoral commission and expecting violent conflict as a result of party competition.

Most support term limits for the president and endorse improving their electoral rules by allowing independent candidates to run for office, boosting women's representation through gender quotas, and letting citizens elect their neighbourhood and district leaders.

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