

Afrobarometer
Accra, Ghana
26 June 2019

News release

Africans want high-quality elections – especially if they bring change, Afrobarometer surveys show

Most Africans support democratic elections as the best way to choose their leaders – if they see their previous elections as free and fair, and especially if those elections produced a change in leadership, new Afrobarometer survey data show.



In the seventh of its Pan-Africa Profiles series based on recent public-opinion surveys in 34 African countries, Afrobarometer reports that popular support for elections is driven by the perceived freedom and fairness of the balloting process. And the strongest evidence of a free and fair election is a change in ruling party.

“Simply stated, Africans support elections to the extent that these contests are seen to bring about desired political change,” the analysis concludes.

The new report, available at www.afrobarometer.org, indicates that while popular support for elections and assessments of election quality vary widely across countries and over time, a majority of Africans – both opposition-party and ruling-party supporters – have consistently seen their elections as generally free and fair.

Key findings

- On average, three-quarters (75%) of the Africans interviewed in 2016/2018 say they prefer to use regular, open, and honest elections to choose their country’s leaders (Figure 1). But popular support for elections was somewhat higher in the recent past, reaching 83% across 35 countries surveyed in 2011/2013.
- Almost two-thirds (63%) of all Africans interviewed see the last national election in their country as having been free and fair (either “completely” or “with minor problems”). About one in four say it had “major problems” (13%) or was “not free and fair” (15%) (Figure 2). Popular assessments of election quality have remained almost unchanged since 2005.
- Citizens who think their most recent elections were free and fair are more likely to support elections as the best way to choose their leaders.
- Surprisingly, opposition-party supporters are almost as likely as ruling-party supporters to see their elections as free and fair. Non-partisans are far less likely to perceive electoral integrity.
- Popular support for elections is higher in countries with two-round presidential electoral systems than in systems in which leaders are chosen indirectly by parliamentary majorities or that allow winners to take office with less than 50% of the votes.
- Importantly, the perceived quality of elections is closely linked to electoral changes in ruling party. Whereas 71% of Africans infer free and fair conduct in the wake of an electoral alternation, just 56% see the same for elections that confirm the incumbent party in power.

- Africans support “change elections.” Support for elections is a function of both leadership alternation and perceived election quality. Alternation is embedded in popular perceptions of electoral quality as the strongest evidence for what constitutes a high-quality election (see infographic).

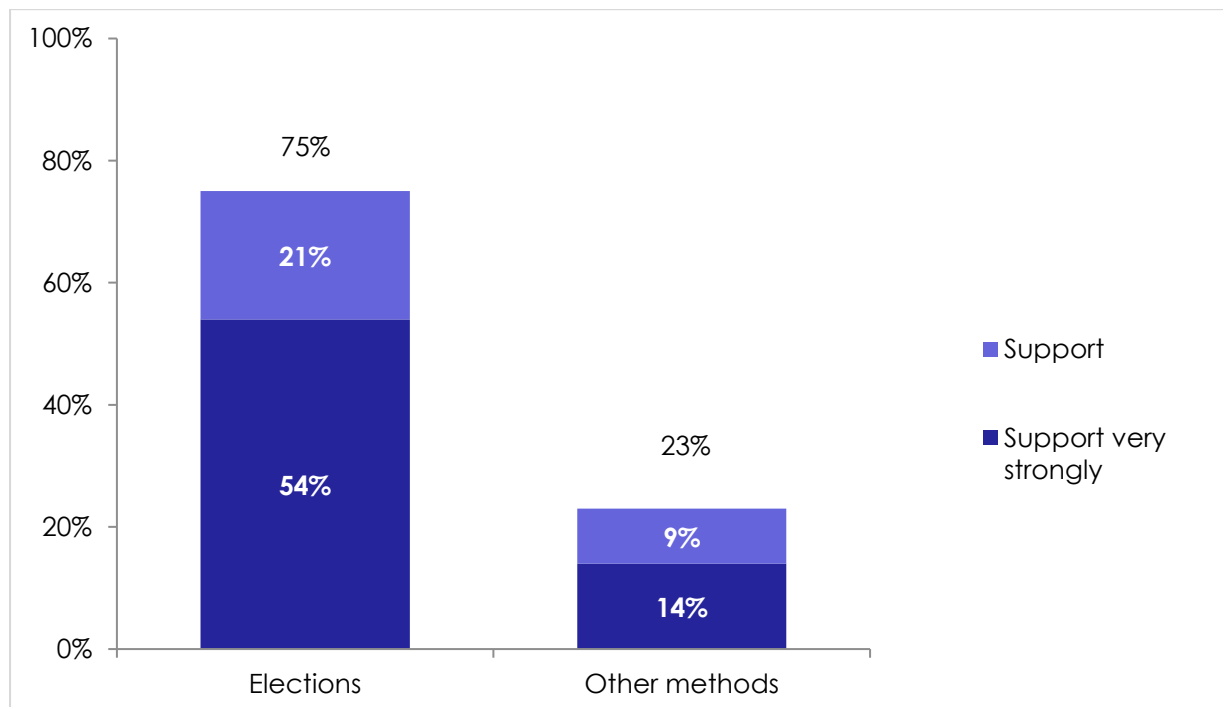
Afrobarometer surveys

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 between 1999 and 2015, and Round 7 survey findings in 34 countries are being released in 2018/2019. Interested readers may follow our releases, including our Pan-Africa Profiles series of cross-country analyses, at #VoicesAfrica and sign up for our distribution list at www.afrobarometer.org.

Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples. Sample sizes of 1,200-2,400 yield country-level results with a margin of sampling error of +/-2 to 3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level.

Charts

Figure 1: Popular support for elections | 34 countries | 2016/2018

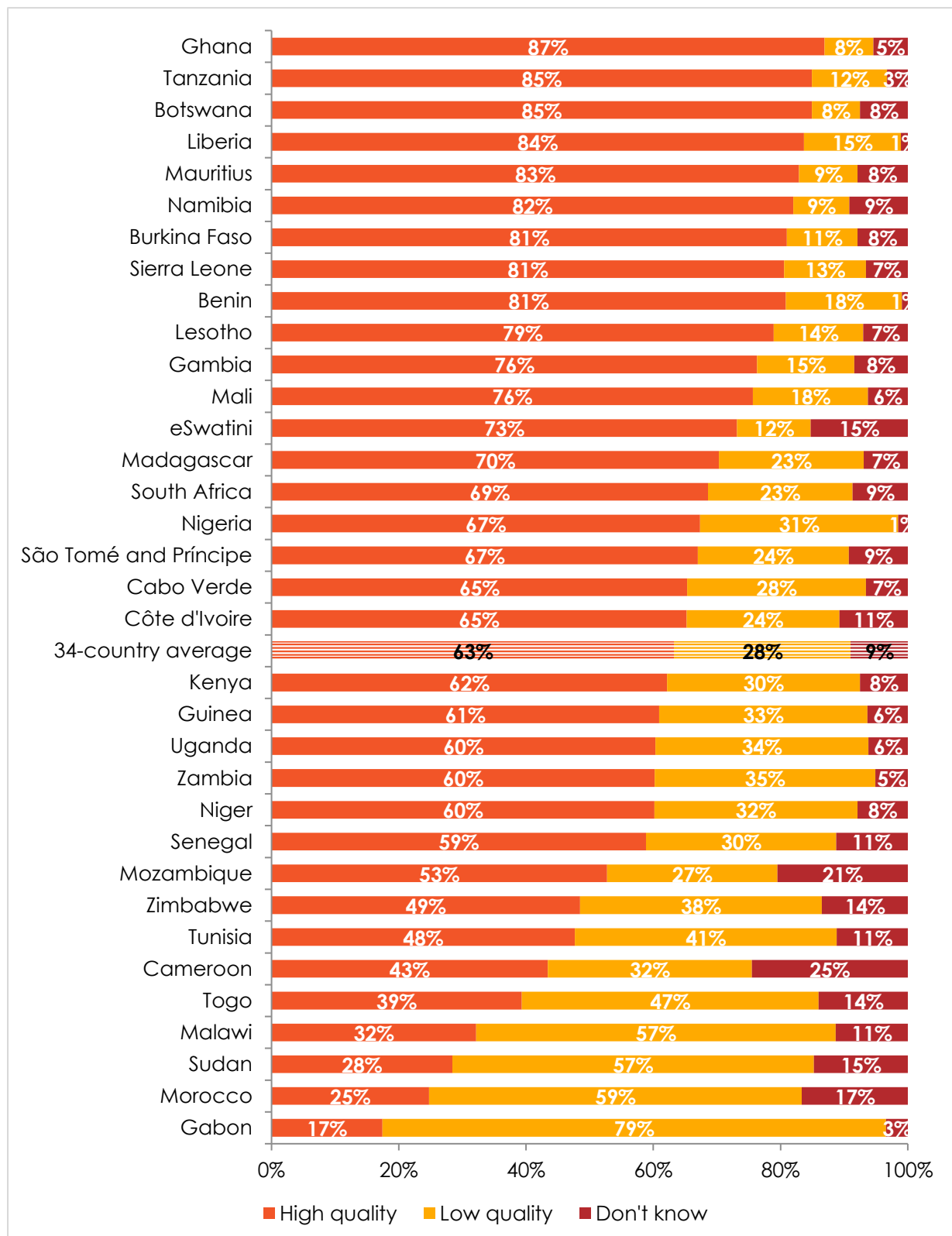


Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closer to your view?"

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.

Figure 2: Perceived quality of elections | by country | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked: On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the last national election, held in [20XX]? ("High quality" = "completely free and fair" or "free and fair with minor problems"; "Low quality" = "free and fair with major problems" or "not free and fair")

Building support for elections: Quality and change

34 African countries • 2016/2018



Popular support for elections

% who say elections are the best way to choose their country's leaders

1. Gambia	88%
2. Sierra Leone	87%

AVERAGE (34 countries) **75%**

33. eSwatini	54%
34. Lesotho	48%

High-quality elections
 increase support for elections

Perceived election quality

% who say most recent election was free and fair ("completely" or "with minor problems")

1. Ghana	87%
2. Tanzania	85%

AVERAGE (34 countries) **63%**

33. Morocco	25%
34. Gabon	17%

"Change elections"
 increase perceived election quality

Leadership change

% who say election was free and fair

when **opposition** won the election **71%**

when **incumbent** won the election **56%**

For more information, please contact:

Brian Howard
Telephone: +1 713-624-0373
Email: bhoward@afrobarometer.org

Gugu Nonjinge
Telephone: +27 72 788 5983
Email: gnonjinge@afrobarometer.org

Visit us online at: www.afrobarometer.org

Follow our releases on **#VoicesAfrica**.

