



Swazis reject multiparty politics amid decreasing satisfaction with democracy

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 92 | Sipho Kunene

Summary

If supporters of democratic reform in Swaziland see multiparty competition as the path to a more transparent and accountable government, they face an uphill struggle: Almost two-thirds of citizens say multiple political parties are divisive and unnecessary in Swaziland.

After two years of “monarchical democracy,” fewer than half of Swazis surveyed by Afrobarometer express support for democracy over all other political systems. At the same time, strong majorities reject non-democratic alternatives. Public satisfaction with the way democracy is working in their country is declining, and almost one-third say Swaziland is not a democracy at all.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 30 countries in Africa. After five rounds of surveys between 1999 and 2013, results of Round 6 surveys (2014/2015) are currently being published. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent’s choice with nationally representative samples of 1,200 or 2,400 respondents.

The Afrobarometer team in Swaziland, led by activQuest, interviewed 1,200 adult Swazis in April-May 2015. A sample of this size yields results with a margin of error of +/-3% at a 95% confidence level. One previous survey was conducted in Swaziland in 2013.

Key findings

- Almost two-thirds (64%) of Swazis say that political parties create division and confusion, and it’s therefore unnecessary to have many of them in Swaziland. The proportion endorsing this view has increased by 6 percentage points since 2013.
- Less than half (45%) of Swazis prefer democracy over all other kinds of political systems, the third-lowest level of support among 36 African countries surveyed in 2014/2015. But strong majorities reject one-party rule (65%), military rule (86%), and the abolition of elections and Parliament so that the king can decide everything (79%).
- Only one-third (33%) of Swazis see their country as “a full democracy” (6%) or “a democracy, but with minor problems” (27%), a slight decrease from 2013. Almost as many (31%) say Swaziland is not a democracy at all.
- Public satisfaction with “the way democracy works” in Swaziland has decreased from 36% in 2013 to 28% in 2015.

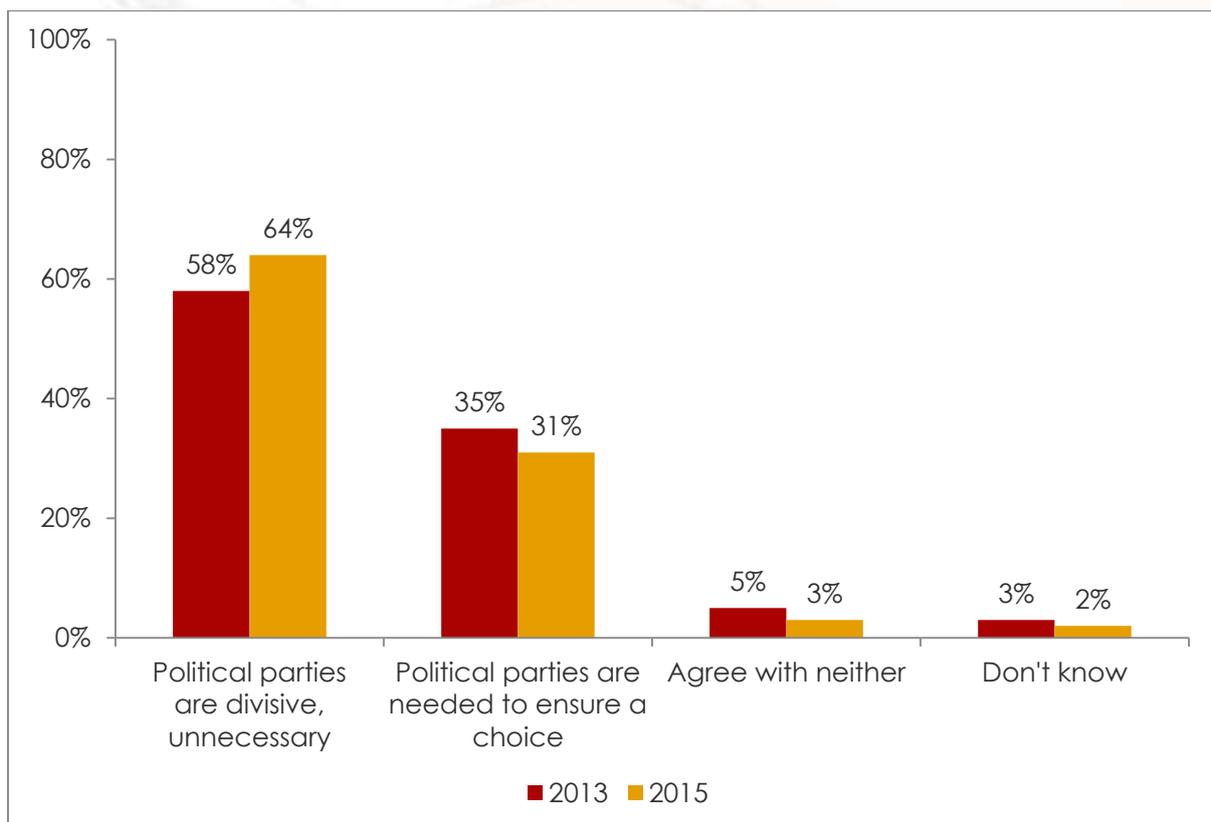
Political parties seen as divisive and unnecessary

After 35 years under a Tinkhundla system blending elements of electoral democracy with traditional Swazi government led by the king, Swaziland in 2013 became a “monarchical democracy” under which citizens elect members of Parliament. Political parties remain banned by the Constitution. Pro-democracy reformers have argued that multiparty competition is needed to ensure transparency and accountability of the government (Hlatshwayo, 2014).

But even more strongly than in Afrobarometer’s 2013 survey, Swazis say they do not want multiparty democracy. Almost two-thirds (64%) of respondents – an increase of 6 percentage points from 2013 – say that political parties create division and confusion, and Swaziland does not need to have many of them (Figure 1).

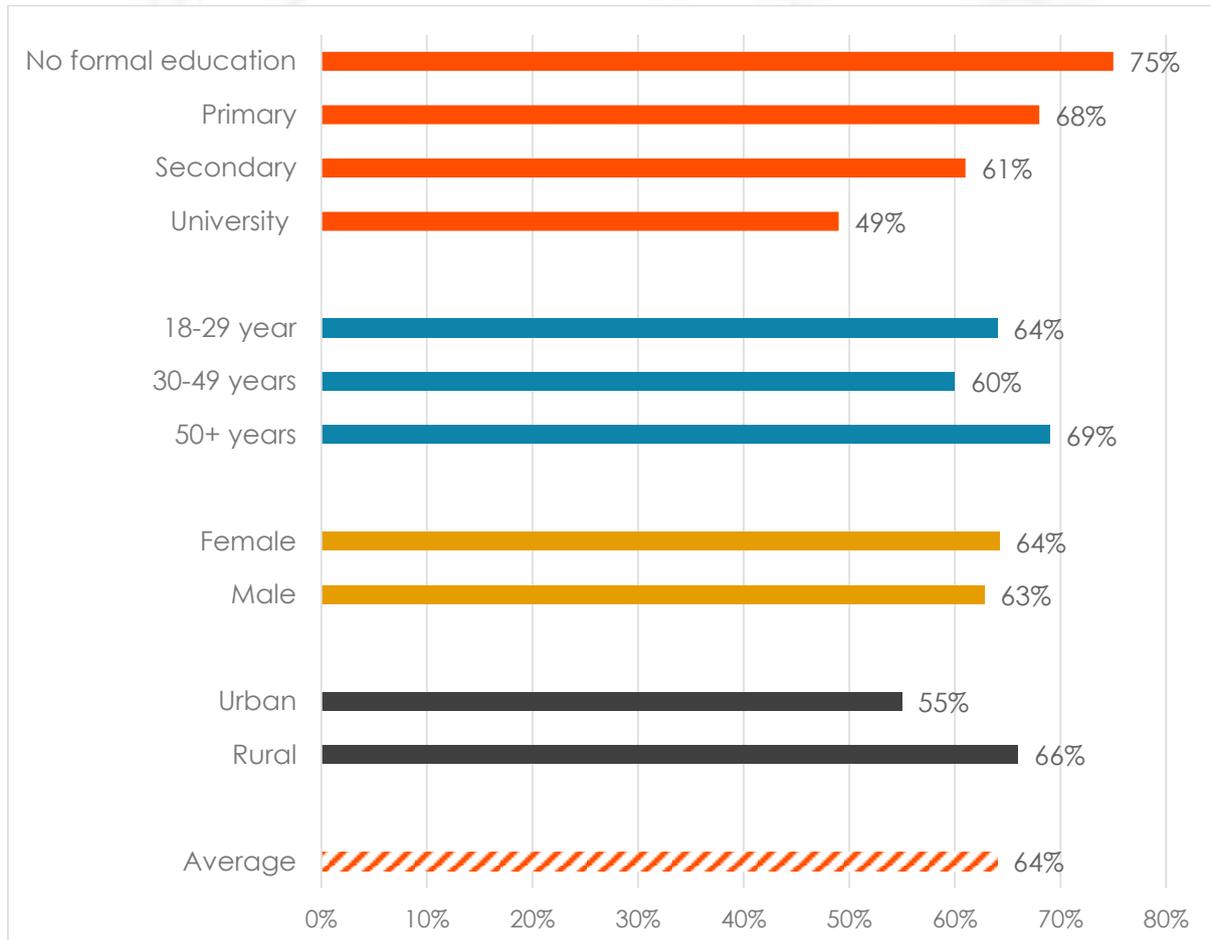
This negative view of political parties becomes less common as citizens’ education level increases: Three-fourths (75%) of respondents with no formal education say multiple parties are unnecessary, compared to 49% of those with post-secondary education (Figure 2). Rural residents (66%) are more likely than urbanites (55%) to find political parties unnecessary, and older citizens (69%) are more critical of multiparty competition than their younger counterparts. Men and women hold similar views on this question.

Figure 1: Perceptions of the need for political parties | Swaziland | 2013-2015



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 Swaziland.
 Statement 2: Many political parties are needed to make sure that Swazis have real choices in who governs them.
 (% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” with each statement)

Figure 2: Political parties divisive | by education level, age, sex, and location
 | Swaziland | 2015

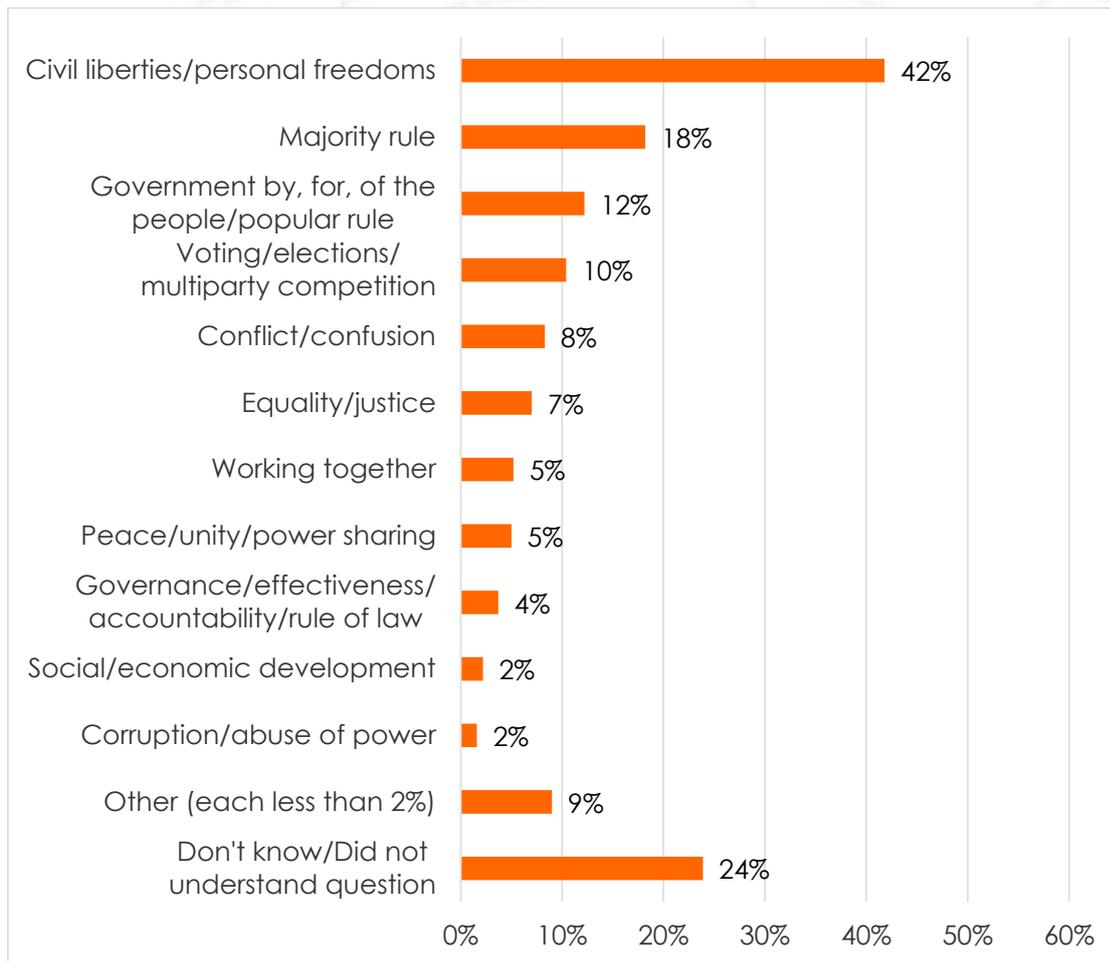


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 (% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” that political parties are divisive and unnecessary)

Meaning of democracy

When asked what democracy means to them (and allowed to give up to three responses), Swazis are most likely to cite civil liberties and personal freedoms (42%) (Figure 3). Only 10% say democracy means voting/elections/multiparty competition, although the idea of electoral competition is also reflected in responses citing majority rule (18%) and government by, for, and of the people/popular rule (12%). One in four respondents (24%) say they “don’t know” or did not understand the question.

Figure 3: Meaning of democracy | Swaziland | 2015



Respondents were asked: *What, if anything, does “democracy” mean to you?*
 (Note: Respondents’ were allowed to give up to three answers, so total exceeds 100%.)

Support for democracy and rejection of non-democratic alternatives

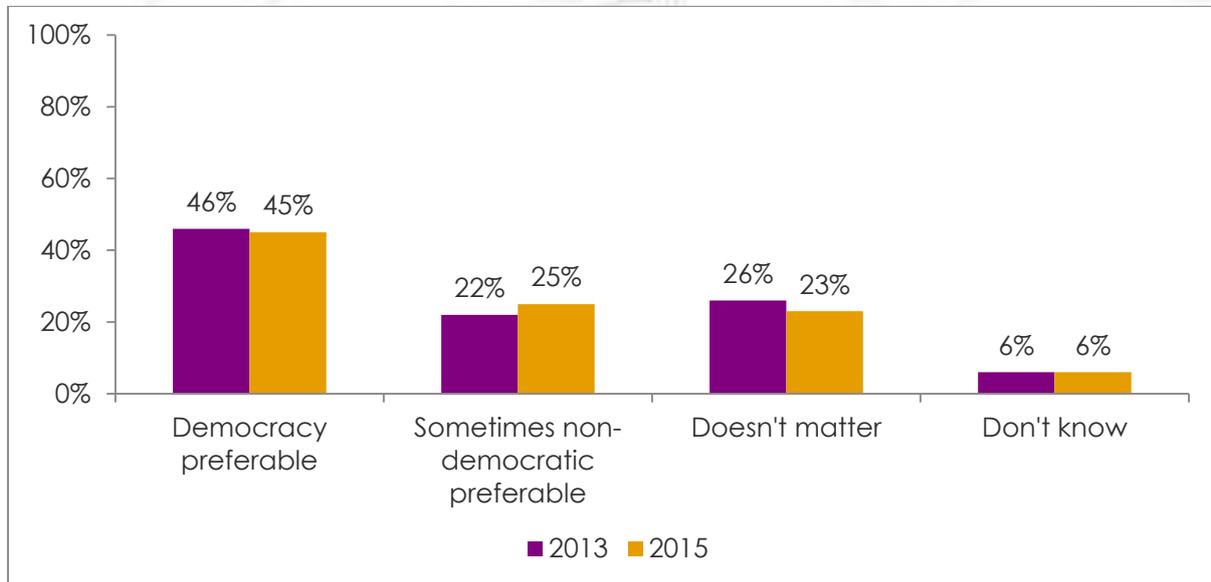
Support for democracy is low in Swaziland: Less than half (45%) of Swazis say that “democracy is preferable to any other kind of government” (Figure 4). This proportion, virtually unchanged since the 2013 survey, is the third-lowest among 36 African countries surveyed in 2014/2015; only Sudan and Mozambique record lower levels of preference for democracy. About one in four Swazis say that a non-democratic government can be preferable in some circumstances (25%) or that it doesn’t matter what kind of government they have (23%).

As on the question about political parties, support for democracy is higher amongst Swazis who have completed secondary education (56%) or university education (62%) than among those with only primary (35%) or no formal education (25%) (Figure 5). Older Swazis (ages 50 years and older) are considerably less likely to support democracy (31%) than their younger compatriots (49%). More urbanites (50%) support democracy than do rural dwellers (44%), and men (48%) are somewhat more pro-democracy than women (42%).

The fact that fewer than half of Swazis support democracy does not mean that they endorse autocracy. As Figure 6 shows, strong majorities “disapprove” or “strongly disapprove” of one-party rule (65%), of military rule (86%), and of abolishing elections and Parliament so that the

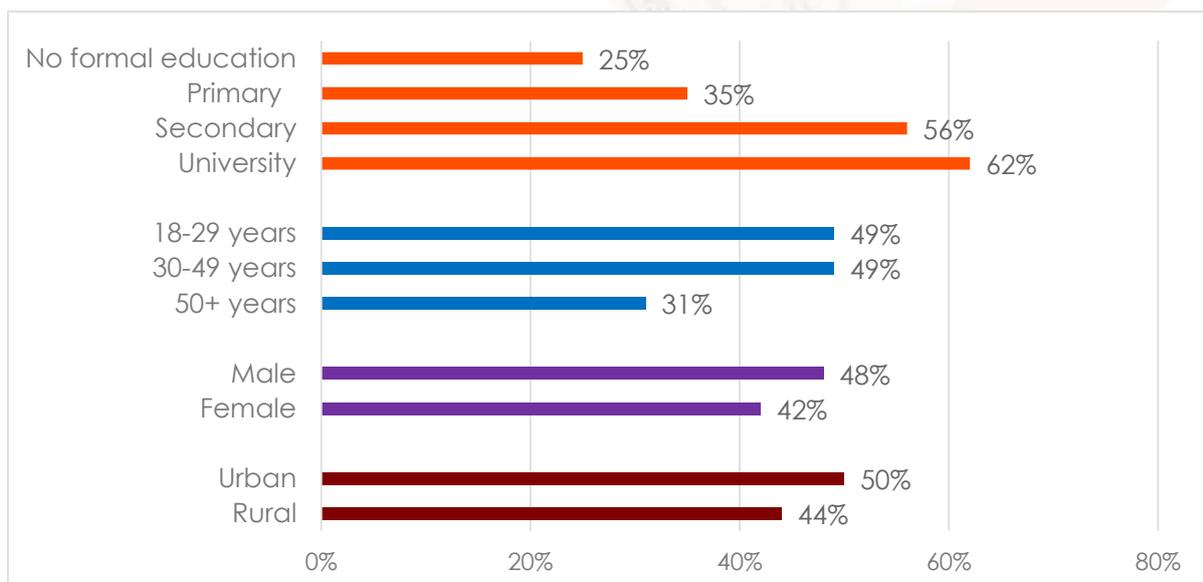
king can decide everything (79%). Rejection of one-party rule has seen a small decline (4 percentage points) since 2013; on the other questions, views have not changed significantly.

Figure 4: Support for democracy | Swaziland | 2013-2015



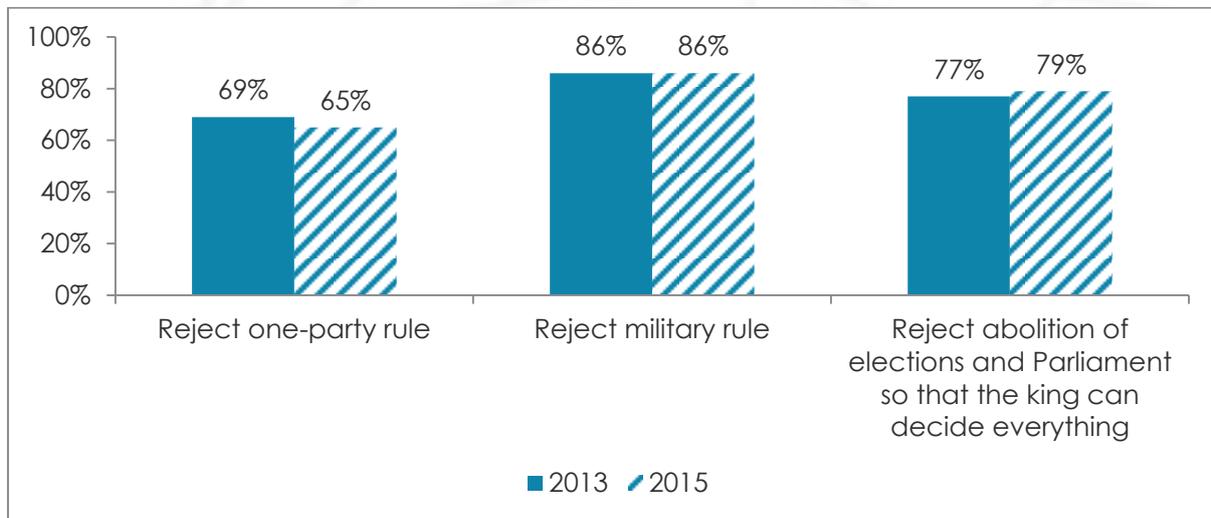
Respondents were asked: Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion?
 Statement 1: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.
 Statement 2: In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable.
 Statement 3: For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.

Figure 5: Support for democracy | by education level, age, sex, and location | Swaziland | 2015



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.
 (% who say "democracy is preferable to any other kind of government")

Figure 6: Rejection of non-democratic alternative regimes | Swaziland | 2013-2015



Respondents were asked: *There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives? (% who "disapprove" or "strongly disapprove")*

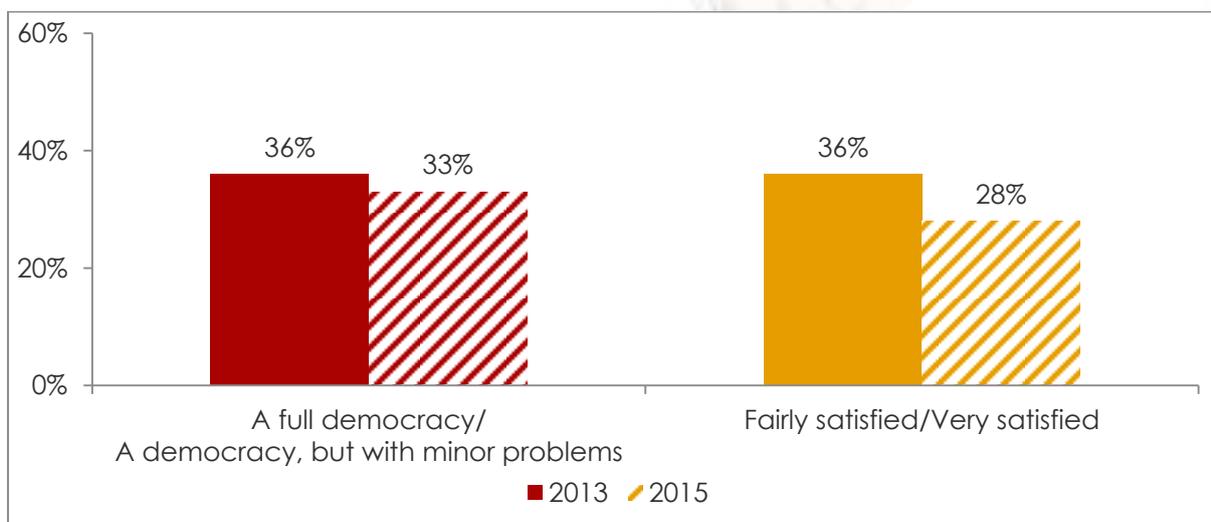
- Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office.
- The army comes in to govern the country.
- Elections and Parliament are abolished so that the king can decide everything.

Perceived extent of and satisfaction with democracy

After two years of "monarchical democracy," Swazis are less likely to consider their country a democracy and less satisfied with how democracy is working (Figure 7). Only one-third (33%) of Swazis see their country as "a full democracy" (6%) or "a democracy, but with minor problems" (27%), a slight decrease from 36% in 2013. Almost as many (31%) say Swaziland is not a democracy at all.

Only three in 10 Swazis (28%) are satisfied with the way democracy works in Swaziland, and this has decreased by 8 percentage points from 2012.

Figure 7: Perceived extent of and satisfaction with democracy | Swaziland | 2013-2015



Respondents were asked:

- In your opinion, how much of a democracy is Swaziland today?
- Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Swaziland?

Conclusion

Two years into its “monarchical democracy,” Swazis clearly reject political parties as divisive and undesirable, despite growing public dissatisfaction with how democracy is working in Swaziland. Support for democracy remains low, although strong majorities reject autocratic alternatives.

To further explore this data, please visit Afrobarometer's online data analysis facility at www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

References

Hlatshwayo, V. (2014). Unpacking Swaziland's 'monarchical democracy.' Available at <https://africacheck.org/2014/02/21/unpacking-swazilands-monarchical-democracy>.

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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.

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

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