

Kampala, Uganda
17 March 2021

News release

Most Ugandans feel free to speak, assemble, and vote – but are careful when they talk about politics

Most Ugandans report feeling free to say what they think, join political organizations, and vote as they wish, but a majority also say they have to be careful about what they say about politics, Afrobarometer survey findings show.

The perception that people have to be cautious about political speech has seen an upward trend over the past two decades, with spikes during election years.

This trend does not appear to erode the large majorities who say they feel free to say what they think, to join any political organization, and to vote for the candidate of their choice without feeling pressured. But caution about political speech is increasing alongside fear of falling victim to political intimidation and violence during elections.

These survey findings highlight concerns voiced by some civil society organizations that Uganda's electoral environment is growing more violent and less protective of political freedoms.

Key findings

- A large majority of Ugandans feel free to say what they want (83%), join any political organization (88%), and vote without being pressured (93%). But seven in 10 citizens say people "often" or "always" have to be careful about what they say about politics (69%) (Figure 1).
- Caution about political speech has been increasing for the past two decades, from 47% in 2002 to 69% in 2019. Caution appears to spike during election years, although the increase has been continuous since the 2016 general election (Figure 2).
- Fear of political intimidation and violence during elections has been high since 2008, with 70% of Ugandans reporting at least "a little" fear in 2021 (Figure 3).
- Caution about political speech is highest in Kampala (82%) and Central (75%) regions as well as in urban areas (76% vs. 67% in rural areas), among supporters of the political opposition (73% vs. 64% of those who feel close to the ruling party), and among men (72% vs. 66% of women) (Figure 4).

Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan survey research network that has provided reliable data on experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life in 38 African countries since 1999. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

With financial support from the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Uganda, the Afrobarometer team in Uganda, led by Hatchile Consult Ltd., interviewed 2,400 adult Ugandans between 22 December 2020 and 7 January 2021 in 300 enumeration areas across 110 districts. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2

percentage points at a 95% confidence level. This was the 11th Afrobarometer survey in Uganda since 1999.

Charts

Figure 1: Freedom of speech, association, and voting choice | Uganda | 2019/2021

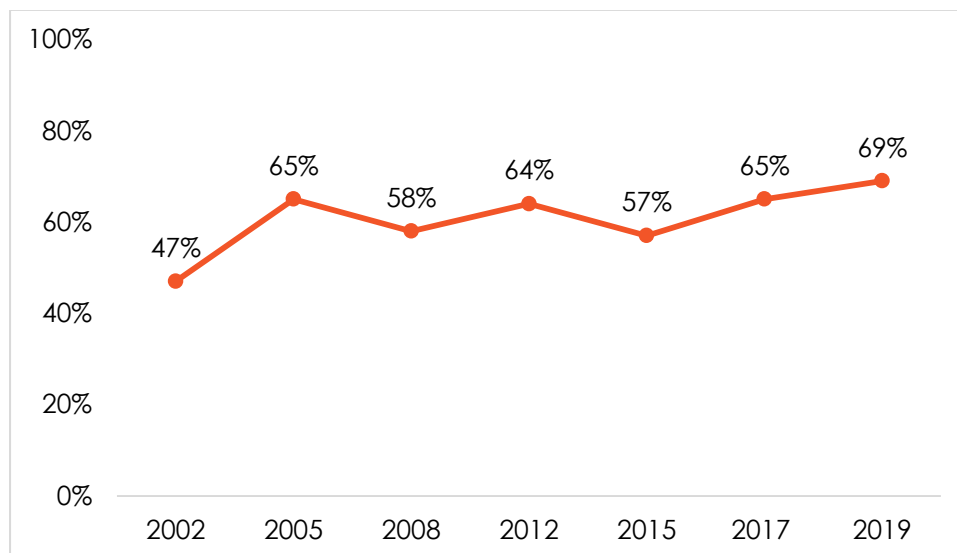


Respondents were asked:

In this country, how free are you: To say what you think? To join any political organization you want? To choose whom to vote for without feeling pressured? (% "somewhat free" or "completely free")

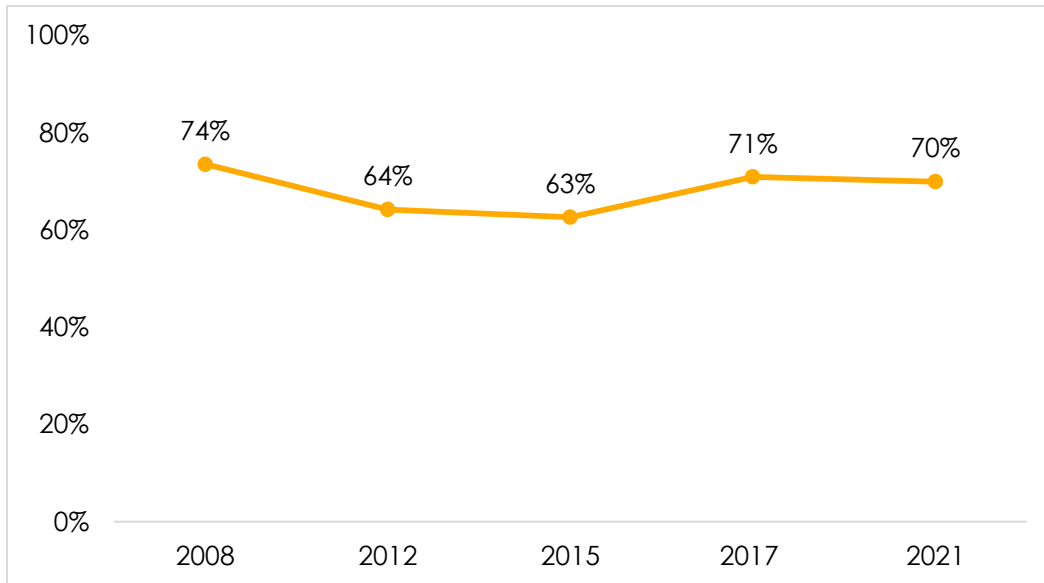
In your opinion, how often, in this country, do people have to be careful of what they say about politics? (% "often" or "always")

Figure 2: Caution about political speech | Uganda | 2002-2019



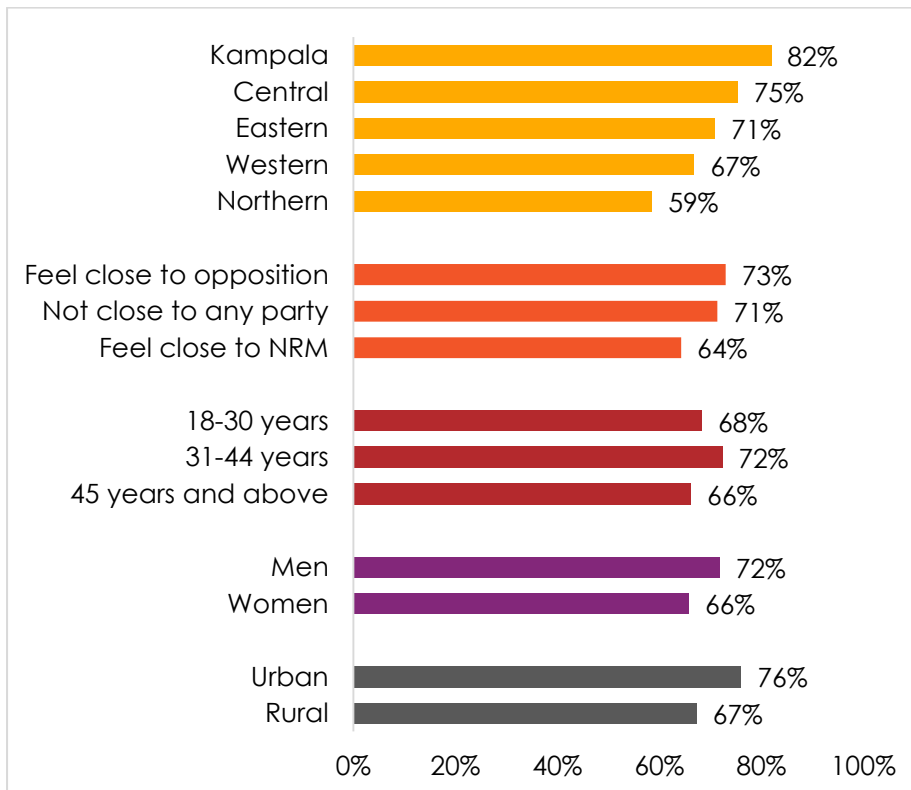
Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, how often in this country, do people have to be careful of what they say about politics? (% "often" or "always")*

Figure 3: Fear of political intimidation or violence | Uganda | 2008-2021



Respondents were asked: During the current/last national election campaign in [year], how much did you personally fear becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence? (% who fear “a little bit,” “somewhat,” or “a lot”)

Figure 4: Caution about political speech | by socio-demographic group | Uganda | 2021



Respondents were asked: In your opinion, how often in this country, do people have to be careful of what they say about politics?? (% who say “somewhat” or “a lot”)

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