



# Africans want more democracy, but their leaders still aren't listening



By the Afrobarometer Network

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## Summary

The last several years in Africa have been marked by both encouraging democratic highs and troubling anti-democratic lows. Bright spots include the Gambia's successful 2021 presidential election, the 2021 ruling-party transition in Zambia, and the first democratic transfers of power in Niger (2020/2021) and Seychelles (2020). We can add the February 2020 decision by Malawi's Constitutional Court to annul the results of the country's flawed 2019 presidential election and call for a new election, and the ouster of long-running autocrats in Sudan and Zimbabwe.

Contrast these gains, though, with setbacks elsewhere, including increasing restrictions on opposition parties in Benin, Senegal, and Tanzania; the use of vote rigging, violence, and intimidation during elections in Côte d'Ivoire and Uganda; and a wave of recent military coups in Chad, Mali, Sudan, and Guinea in 2021 and two in Burkina Faso just in 2022.

The continent's most autocratic incumbents appear at times to have been emboldened in wielding anti-democratic tactics by factors such as the West's increasing focus on combating violent extremism and rising insurgency; the growing influence of China and Russia; the indifference, or even hostility, of these and other African development partners to democratic governance; and the cover that the COVID-19 pandemic has sometimes offered for limiting freedoms, restricting fair campaigning, or postponing elections.

These contradictory developments have contributed to dire warnings from experts that democracy is losing ground in Africa. But what can we learn about the state of democracy on the continent from Africans themselves? How are these developments in the African democratisation project reflected in trends in popular attitudes toward democracy? Are these efforts to either undermine or promote and defend democracy evident in the views of ordinary citizens?

Afrobarometer's Round 8 surveys took place across 34 countries during 2019-2021, alongside many of these democratic highs and lows, and straddling the onset of the pandemic. And the findings reveal that, for the most part, Africans remain committed to democracy. We find that despite the many efforts to undermine democratic norms and freedoms, citizens continue to adhere to them. They believe that the military should stay out of politics, that political parties should freely compete for power, that elections are an imperfect but essential tool for choosing their leaders, and that it is time for the old men who cling to power to step aside.

But their political reality often falls short of these aspirations: It is often the supply of democracy that citizens find lacking. The perception of widespread and worsening corruption is particularly corrosive, leaving people increasingly dissatisfied with political systems that are yet to deliver on their aspirations to live in societies that are democratically and accountably governed. And although citizens find myriad ways to voice their concerns, they feel that their governments are not listening.

Simply put, Africans want more democratic and accountable governance than they think they are getting.

## Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan survey research network that provides reliable data on Africans' experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Eight rounds of surveys have been conducted in up to 39 countries since 1999. Round 8 surveys were completed in 18 countries between August 2019 and March 2020 before fieldwork was suspended because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Surveys in 16 more countries between October 2020 and July 2021 completed the 34-country round. (See Appendix Table A.1 for a list of countries and fieldwork dates.)

Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples that yield country-level results with margins of error of

+/-2 to +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level.<sup>1</sup> The data are weighted to ensure nationally representative samples. When reporting multi-country averages, each country is weighted equally (rather than in proportion to population size).

This 34-country analysis, based on 48,084 interviews, includes findings reported previously in the *Journal of Democracy*, Chatham House's *The World Today*, the Washington Post Monkey Cage, and other outlets (see references throughout).



## Key findings

### On demand for democracy:

- For the most part, African citizens are committed to democracy. Most indicators of support for democracy and democratic institutions remain strong and quite steady.
- Although support for elections is down somewhat over the past decade, support for accountability and rule of law have climbed substantially over the same period.
- Support for term limits is also strong, and growing stronger.

### On supply of democracy:

- Indicators of supply largely lag behind those for demand, and have tended to decline over the past decade. Fewer people think their countries are democracies, and satisfaction with democracy is even lower, and dropping faster.
- In sum, when we compare our aggregate indicators of “demand for democracy” and “supply of democracy,” we see a modest downward trend in both, with a consistent deficit in the supply.

### On democratic attitudes among young people:

- Compared to their elders, citizens aged 18-30 show stronger commitment to democracy on some indicators, especially those related to the importance of multiparty competition, but slightly lower support for elections and for democracy overall.
- The young are also significantly less satisfied with the way democracy works in their countries.

### On election quality:

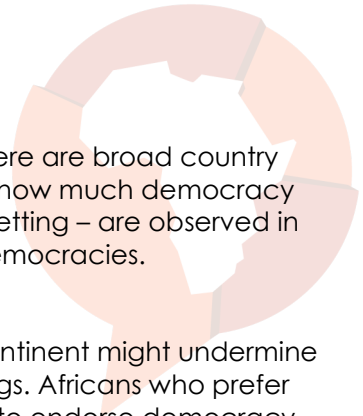
- Despite challenges to election quality, Africans generally remain fairly positive about many aspects of their elections. Most importantly, large majorities in most countries feel free to vote as they choose. On average, other indicators suggest considerable confidence in election quality.
- But these averages can obscure deep problems in some countries – especially Cameroon, Gabon, Sudan, and Zimbabwe – where substantial proportions report significant problems with election quality.

### On corruption and dissatisfaction with democracy:

- The declining trend in satisfaction with democracy is broadly matched by an upward trend in the proportion of citizens who say corruption is getting worse in their country. We find a significant correlation between the numbers reporting substantial corruption in the office of the presidency and dissatisfaction with democracy.

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<sup>1</sup> The weighted Mozambique Round 8 sample is nationally representative except that it excludes rural Cabo Delgado, comprising 6.3% of the adult population of Mozambique. Insecurity and resulting difficulties in obtaining necessary fieldwork clearances prevented Afrobarometer from collecting sufficient data in this area.



### **On trends in some of the continent's leading democracies:**

- While overall demand for democracy is relatively resilient, there are broad country differences, and some of the most negative trends – both in how much democracy people say they want and in how much they feel they are getting – are observed in what have long been considered the continent's leading democracies.

### **On China and African democracy:**

- Concerns that China's active economic presence on the continent might undermine democracy are generally not supported by our survey findings. Africans who prefer the Chinese model of development are about equally likely to endorse democracy and democratic institutions as those who favour the U.S. model. And those who see China's influence as positive are actually significantly more likely to hold pro-democracy attitudes than those who think the country has a negative influence.

### **On the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on democratic values:**

- The pandemic does not appear to have weakened African democracies. Comparing countries surveyed before and after the onset of the pandemic, differences in how democratic commitment and democratic satisfaction have changed since the previous survey round are quite modest, and generally suggest both slightly stronger commitment to democracy and slightly more positive evaluations of democratic performance in countries where Round 8 surveys were done after the pandemic began.
- But citizens reveal some willingness to tolerate restrictions on certain democratic freedoms, at least temporarily, in the name of combating the pandemic and protecting security and health.

### **On whether governments are listening to the people:**

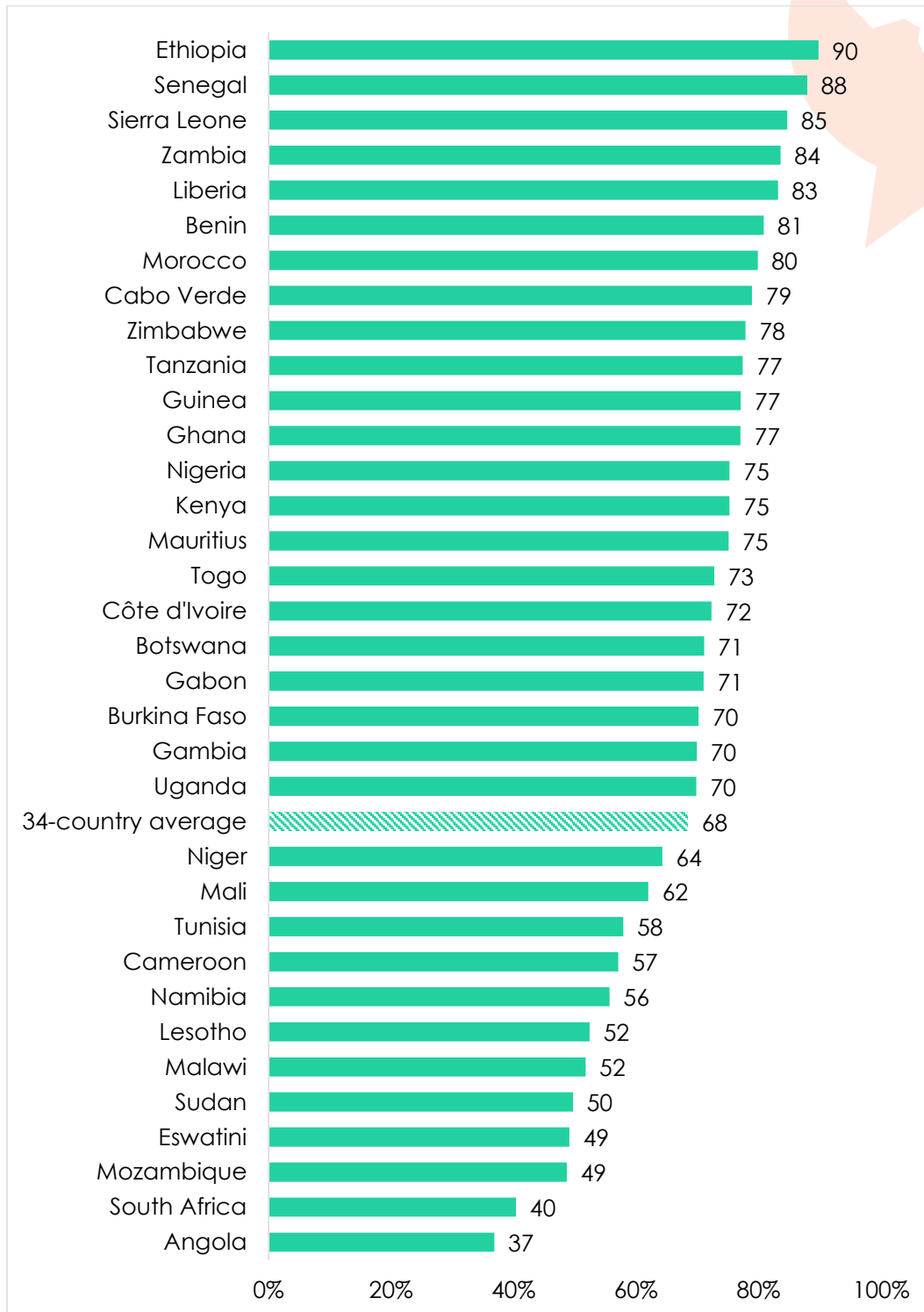
- Africans invest considerable effort in making themselves heard – whether through voting, contacting leaders, or joining with others to express their concerns – but very few think their governments are actually listening.
- In fact, large numbers expect they would face retaliation if they registered complaints about corruption with the authorities, a fact that likely inhibits citizen action and undermines citizen satisfaction with democracy in their countries.

## **What the people want: Resilient demand for democracy and good governance**

For the most part, African citizens remain committed to democracy and democratic institutions. Across 34 countries surveyed during Round 8 (2019/2021), 68% say they prefer democracy to any other system of government (Figure 1), and large majorities reject military rule (74%), one-party rule (77%), and especially one-person or “strongman” rule (82%) (Figure 2). Military rule is opposed by majorities in every country except Burkina Faso (44%), including 90% or more in Zambia, Eswatini, Mauritius, and Morocco (Figure 3) (Gyimah-Boadi, Logan, & Sanny, 2021; Asunka, Gyimah-Boadi, & Logan, 2022; Asunka & Gyimah-Boadi, 2021). (Complete Round 8 country results for these and other key indicators are available in tables A.2 and A.3 in the Appendix.)

And when we look at trends over time, most indicators remain strong and quite steady. Across 30 countries tracked since 2011, the proportion of citizens who say that “democracy is preferable to any other kind of government” is down modestly, from 73% a decade ago to 69% in Round 8 (Figure 4). But large and steady majorities consistently reject all three authoritarian alternatives.

**Figure 1: Support for democracy** | 34 countries | 2019/2021



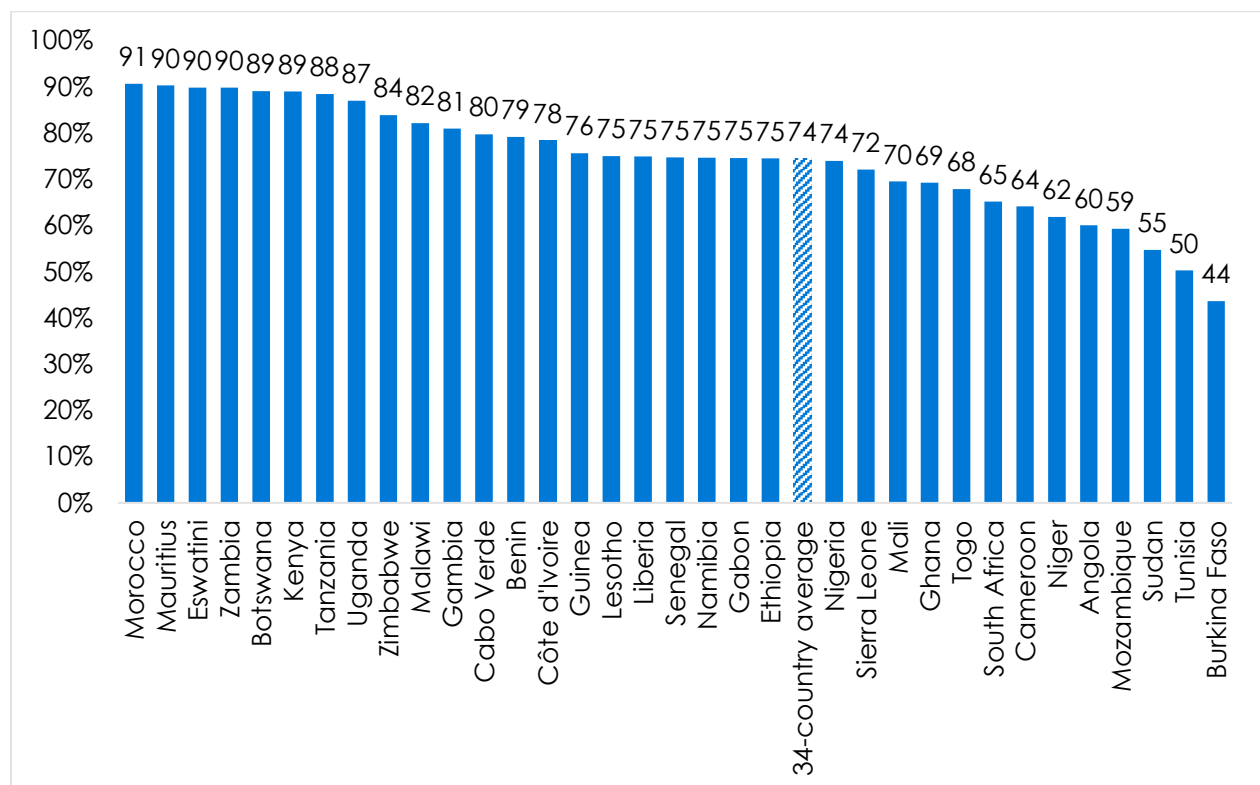
**Respondents were asked:** Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion?  
 Statement 1: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.  
 Statement 2: In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable.  
 Statement 3: For someone like me, it doesn't matter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

**Figure 2: Rejection of authoritarian alternatives** | 34 countries | 2019/2021



**Respondents were asked:** There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives: 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 president can decide everything? (% who “disagree” or “strongly disagree”)

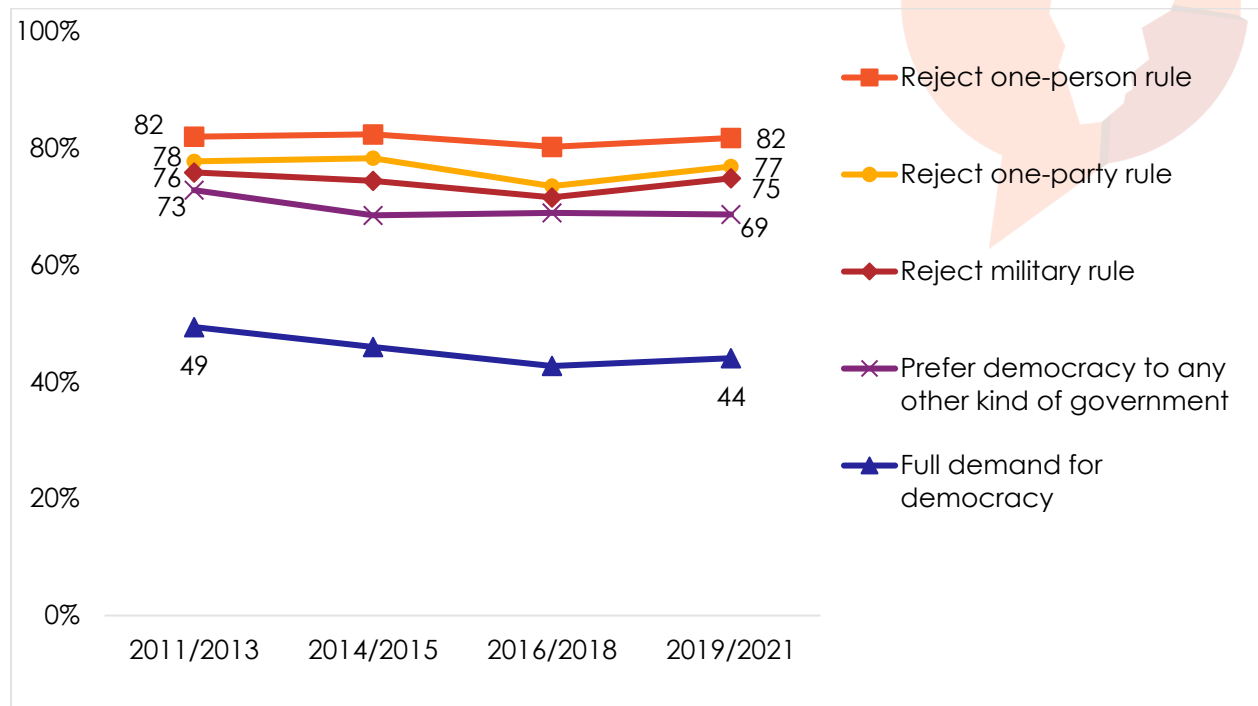
**Figure 3: Rejection of military rule** | 34 countries | 2019/2021



**Respondents were asked:** There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives: The army comes in to govern the country? (% who “disagree” or “strongly disagree”)

**Figure 4: Support for democracy and rejection of authoritarian alternatives**

| 30 countries\* | 2011-2021



**Full demand for democracy** = % who prefer democracy and reject all three authoritarian alternatives  
 \* "Reject one-person rule" was not asked in Eswatini, so this and "full demand for democracy" include 29 countries.

We also see some slippage in the combined index of "demand for democracy," a long-standing Afrobarometer indicator that combines explicit support for democracy with rejection of all three non-democratic alternatives. By this stringent definition, 44% of Africans fully demand democracy in 2019/2021, and the 30 countries tracked since Round 5 show a modest 5-percentage-point decline from 49% in 2011/2013. Does it suggest that commitment to democratic norms and institutions is in decline on the continent?

To test this, Afrobarometer asks respondents about their commitment to a range of other core democratic norms and institutions. We again see that support on most indicators is robust and, with a couple of exceptions, relatively steady or even increasing (Figure 5).

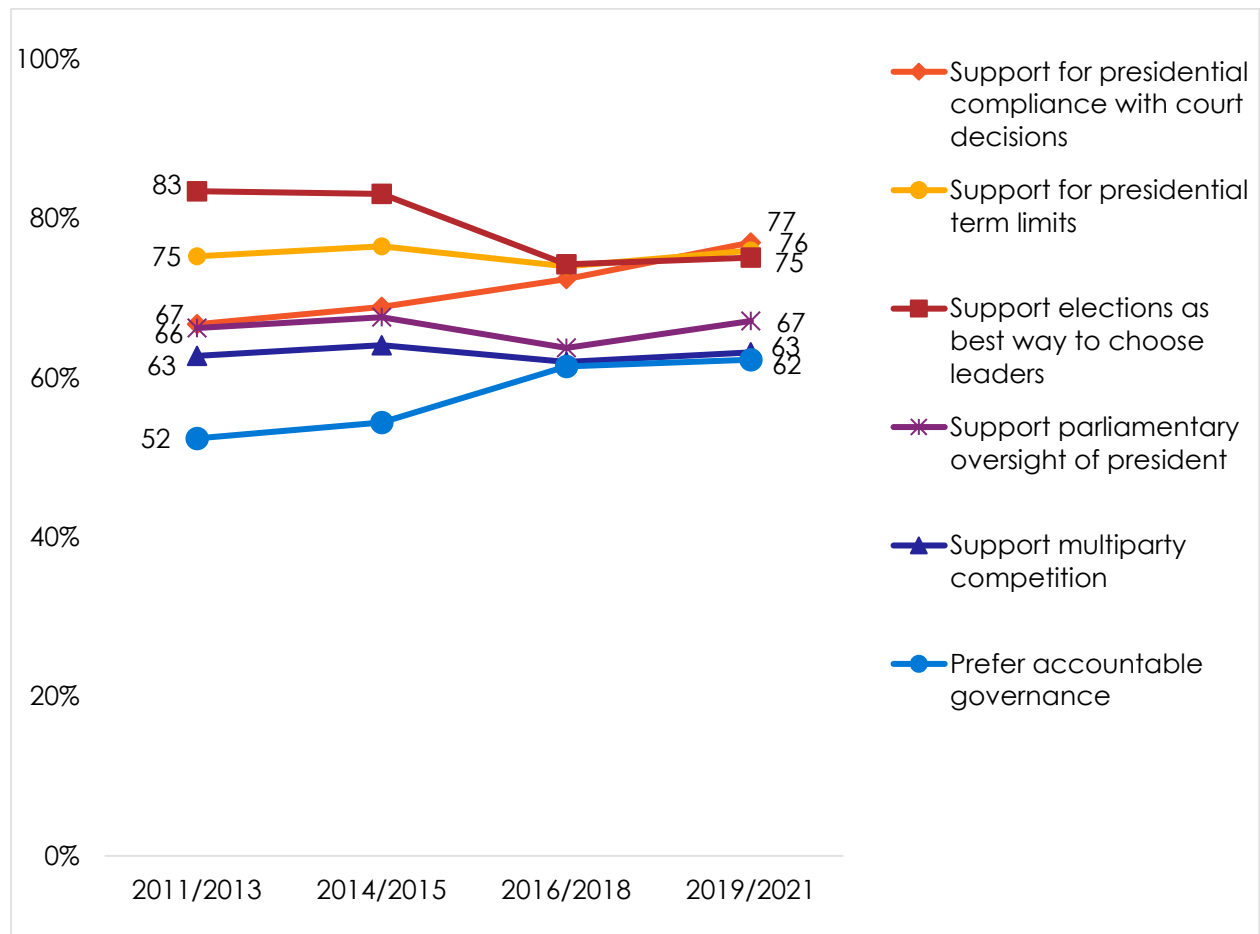
Several indicators are remarkably constant. Across 30 countries surveyed regularly since 2011/2013, more than three-quarters of Africans have consistently supported presidential term limits (76% in 2019/2021), while roughly two-thirds have stood behind parliamentary oversight of the president (67% in 2019/2021) and multiparty competition (63% in 2019/2021).

Support for elections as the best system for selecting leaders has, however, dropped significantly, down 8 percentage points from a high of 83% in 2011/2013, though it remains at a very robust 75% (Logan & M'Cormack-Hale, 2021; M'Cormack-Hale & Dome, 2021). This decline may reflect some real disillusionment with elections and/or democracy, perhaps in light of often contested and sometimes violent polls. Alternatively, it may represent a more specific recognition that elections – often heralded as the hallmark of democracy while other critical aspects such as accountability, participation, and responsiveness are overlooked – are malleable and imperfect and do not, by themselves, guarantee democratic outcomes.

Changes in commitment to elections since 2011/2013 vary widely, but Sierra Leone (+11 points) is the only country showing a large increase (Figure 6). Thirteen countries record double-digit decreases in commitment to elections, led by Lesotho (-23 points), Tunisia (-21), and South Africa (-20).

This interpretation – that the decline in support for elections reflects a growing popular understanding that elections, especially poor-quality ones, are not enough to ensure democracy, or even just better governance – is reinforced by evidence that demand for accountability and rule of law have been climbing steadily and substantially over the past decade. More than three-quarters (77%) of Africans now agree that their president must “obey the laws and courts, even if [s/he] thinks they are wrong,” up from 67% a decade ago. And more than six in 10 (62%) say it is more important for a government to be accountable to the people than to “get things done,” compared to 52% a decade ago. This represents a remarkable public position considering the scope of needs that people want their governments to address. More than any other Afrobarometer finding, the growing demand for accountable governance seems to suggest a true deepening of popular democratic understanding and commitment.

**Figure 5: Support for democratic norms and institutions** | 30 countries\* | 2011-2021



% who “agree” or “strongly agree” that the Constitution should limit the president to serving a maximum of two terms in office.

% who “agree” or “strongly agree” that the president must always obey the laws and the courts, even if s/he thinks they are wrong.

% who “agree” or “strongly agree” that we should choose our leaders in this country through regular, open, and honest elections.

% who “agree” or “strongly agree” that Parliament should ensure that the president explains to it on a regular basis how his/her government spends taxpayers’ money.

% who “agree” or “strongly agree” that many political parties are needed to make sure that citizens have real choices in who governs them.

% who “agree” or “strongly agree” that it is more important for citizens to be able to hold government accountable, even if that means it makes decisions more slowly, than to have a government that gets things done.

\* Results for compliance with court decisions include 28 countries. Results for support for elections and support for parliamentary oversight include 29 countries.



**Figure 6: Change in support for elections (percentage points) | 29 countries**  
| 2011-2021

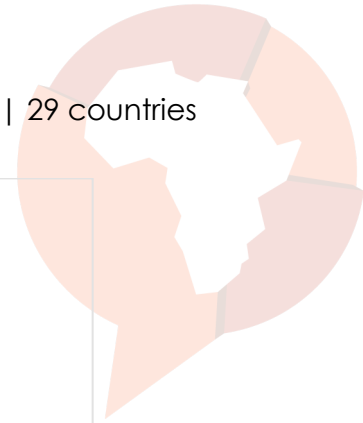
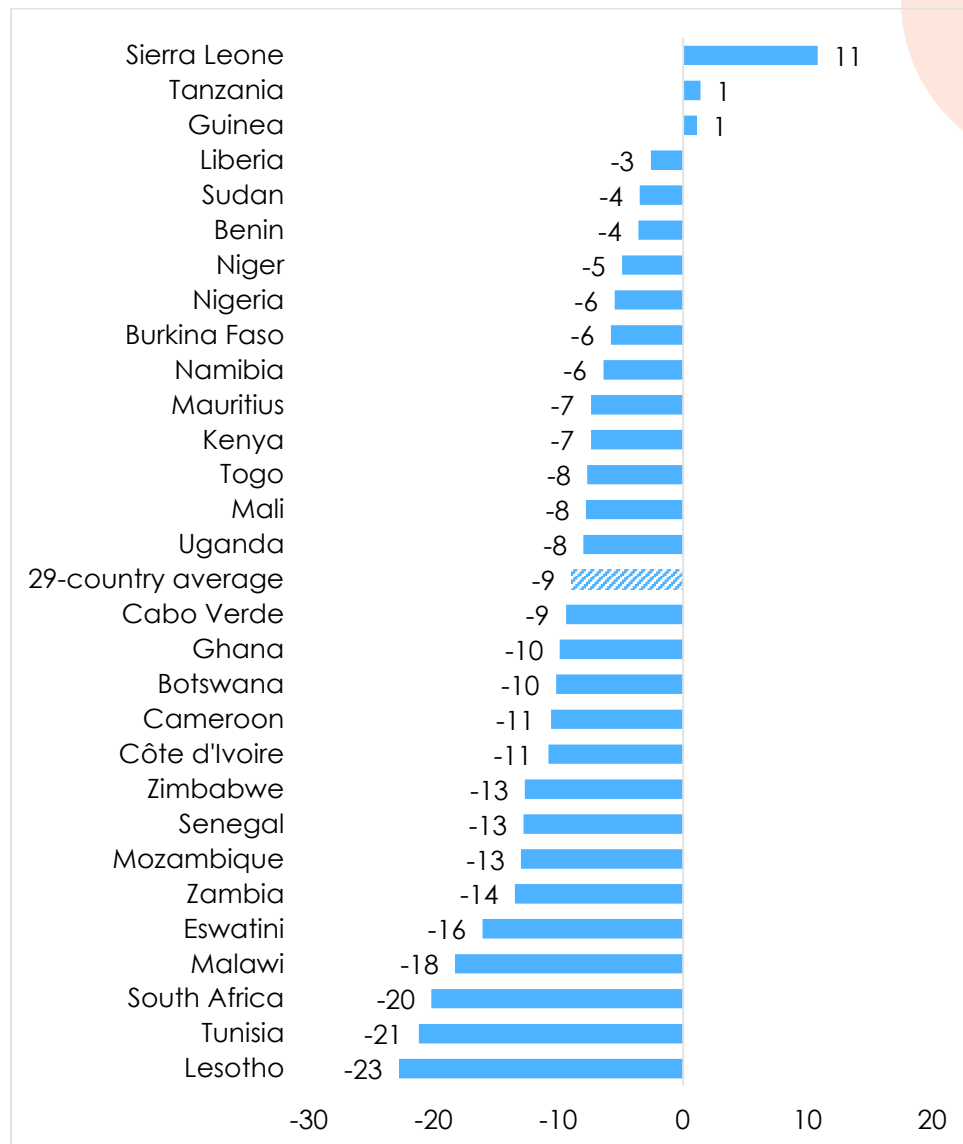


Figure shows change, in percentage points, between survey rounds in 2011/2013 and 2019/2021 in the proportion of respondents who “agree” or “strongly agree” that leaders should be chosen through elections.

### The test of term limits

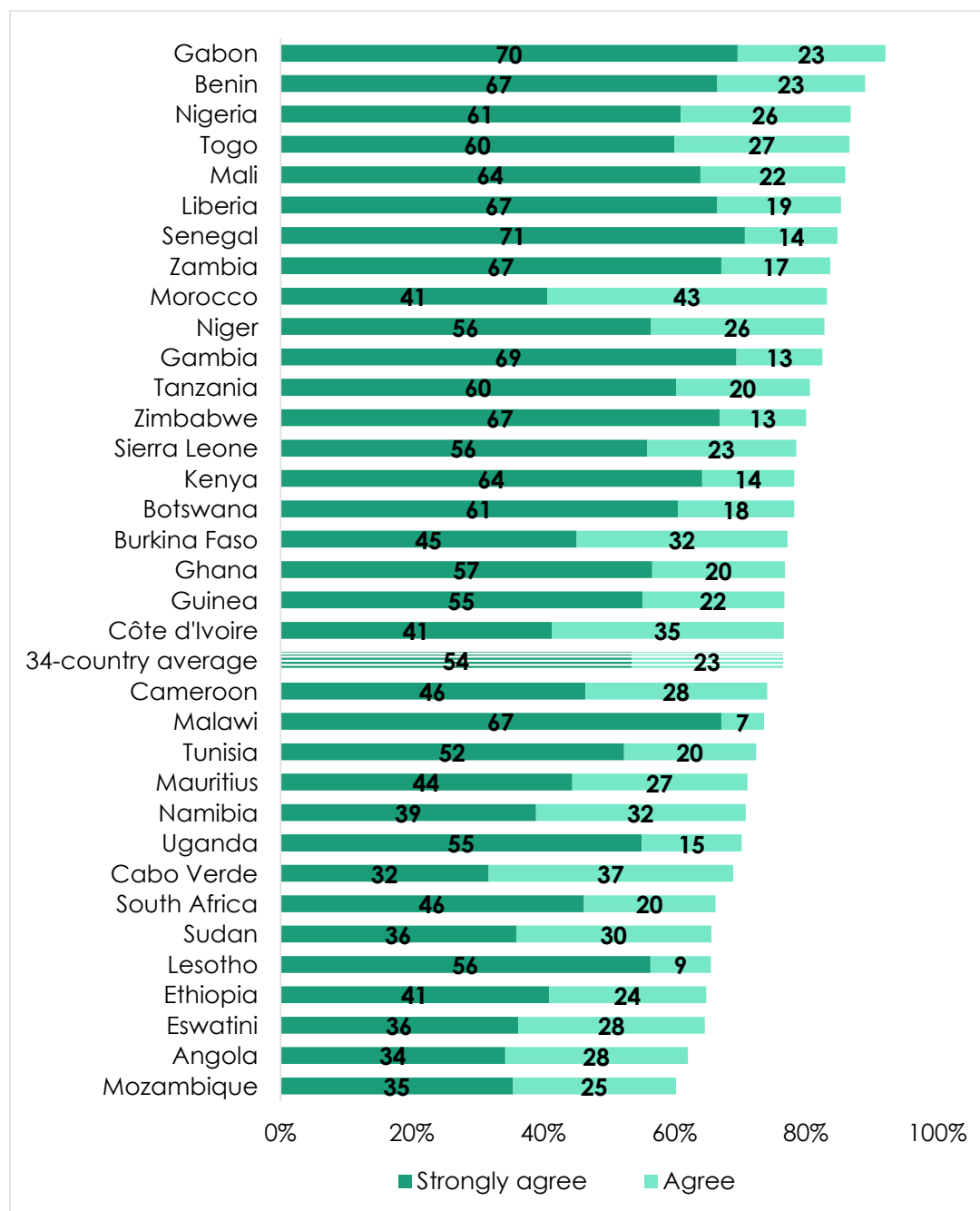
Many analysts who study the processes of democracy see presidential term limits as more than just a nice tradition. They argue that limiting terms at the top nurtures political competition and participation, demonstrates that change via the ballot box is possible, and reduces the risk of personality cults, authoritarianism, corruption, and coups. At his first inauguration in 1986, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni famously blamed Africa’s problems on leaders who stay in power too long.

But 37 years later, Museveni is settling into his sixth term in office. And he is just one of many African presidents who have maintained their hold on power by circumventing, modifying, or eliminating constitutional clauses limiting presidents to a maximum of two terms. In 2020 alone, Alpha Condé of Guinea and Alassane Ouattara of Côte d’Ivoire followed the well-trodden trail blazed by Zaili Assoumani of the Comoros, Paul Kagame of Rwanda, Paul Biya of Cameroon, Denis Sassou Nguesso of the Republic of Congo, and Ismail Guelleh of Djibouti, among others.

Almost invariably, these leaders justify their next run by saying the people want them to stay on. But do they?

Ordinary Africans need little convincing that there is such a thing as being in power too long: Support for term limits is strong, and growing stronger (Dulani, 2021). Across 34 countries, an average of 76% favour limiting their presidents to two terms, including a majority of 54% who “strongly” support this rule (Figure 7). Term limits enjoy majority support in every surveyed country, and majorities “strongly agree” in 21 of the 34. Support is strong across age, education level, and economic status. Even among those who trust their presidents and approve of their job performance, 73% and 74%, respectively, endorse a two-term limit.

**Figure 7: Support for term limits** | 34 countries | 2019/2021

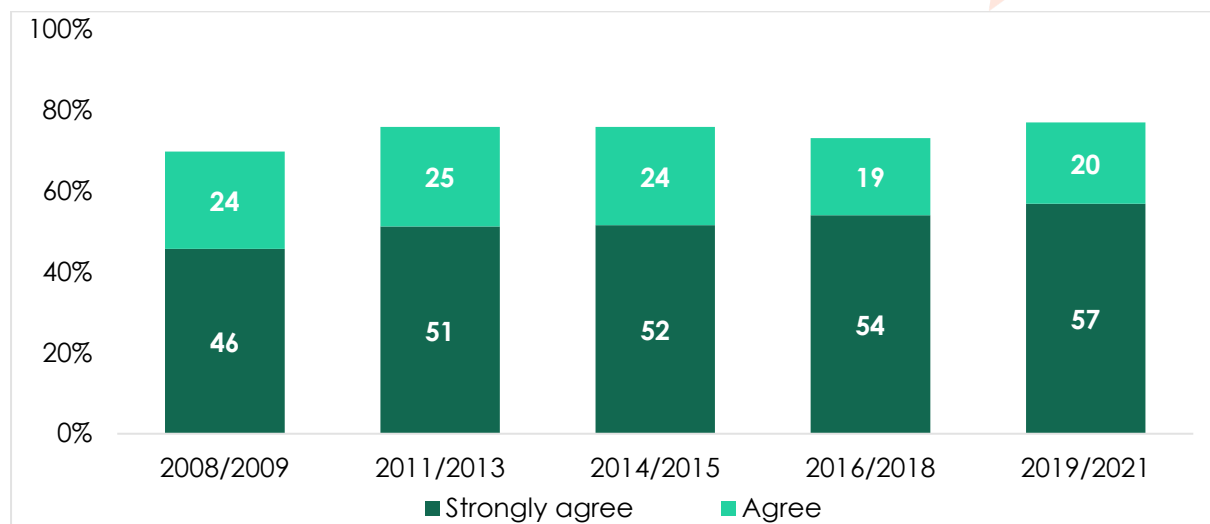


**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statement 1: The Constitution should limit the president to serving a maximum of two terms in office.  
 Statement 2: There should be no constitutional limit on how long the president can serve.

This includes 77% in both Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, the most recent countries to discard these restraints. It also includes 92% in Gabon<sup>2</sup> – where Omar Bongo Ondimba ruled for 41 years and his son was elected following his death – and 87% in Togo, where Faure Gnassingbé has held power since 2005, following his father's 37-year rule.

Across 19 countries where this question has been asked since 2008, popular support for presidential term limits has increased from 70% to 77%. The proportion who “strongly” agree has grown by 11 points, from 46% to 57% (Figure 8).

**Figure 8: Growing support for term limits | 19 countries | 2008-2021**



**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.

### What the people get: A weakening supply of democratic institutions

While we have seen that for the most part, demand for democracy and democratic institutions is robust, and in some cases increasing, indicators of the supply of democracy and accountable governance largely lag behind, and continue to decline over time.

On average across 34 countries in Round 8, only a very slim majority (51%) say they consider their country either a “full democracy” or a democracy with only “minor problems,” while 45% say their country is either “a democracy with major problems” or “not a democracy.” And only 41% say they are “fairly satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the way democracy works in their country (Figure 9) (Gyimah-Boadi et al., 2021; Asunka et al., 2022; Asunka & Gyimah-Boadi, 2021).

Across the 30 countries tracked since 2011/2013, ordinary citizens perceive a very modest weakening of the extent of their democracies: The proportion who perceive their country to be either mostly or fully democratic is down 2 percentage points, from 54% in 2011/2013 to 52% in 2019/2021 (Figure 10).

But satisfaction with how democracy is working is far lower, and dropping faster – down 7 percentage points, from 50% in 2011/2013 to 43% in the most recent round.

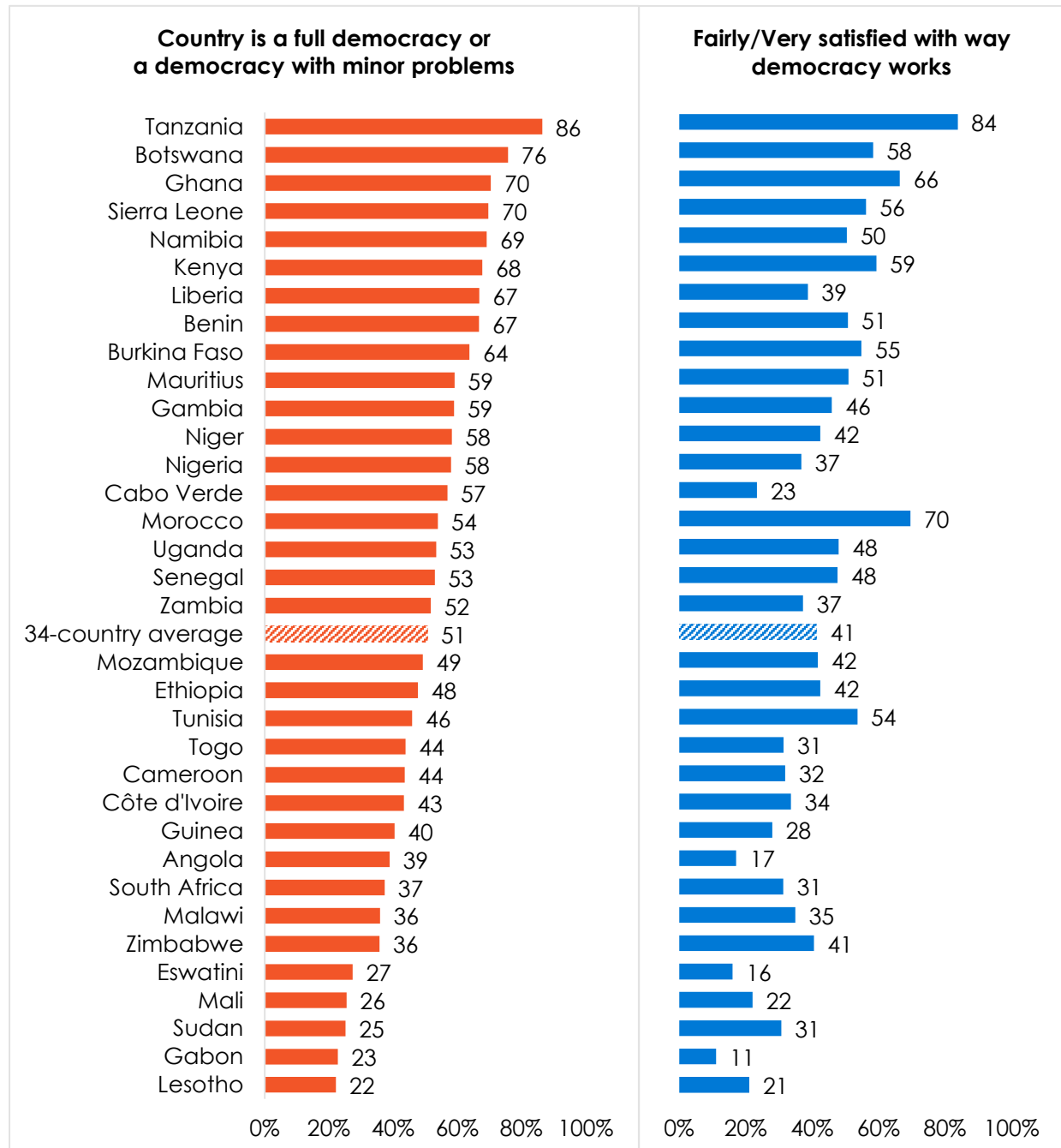
And when we combine these two indicators to capture what Afrobarometer describes as the “supply of democracy,” we see that only about one in three Africans (35%) both think they live in a country that is mostly or completely democratic and are satisfied with how that democracy functions, down 5 points from a decade ago.

<sup>2</sup> Due to rounding, percentages for combined categories reported in the text may differ slightly from the sum of sub-categories shown in figures.

The same general trends are evident with regard to several other supply-side indicators (Figure 11). Ratings of election quality have held essentially steady (66% in 2011/2013 to 65% in 2019/2021), as have perceptions that officials enjoy impunity when they commit crimes (40% in both cases). Other indicators display only very modest declines: Perceptions that the president is generally accountable to Parliament (dropping from 62% to 59%) and obeys laws and courts (from 60% to 58%) have shifted slightly downward.

In sum, when we compare our aggregate indicators “demand for democracy” and “supply of democracy,” we see a modest downward trend in both, with a consistent deficit in the supply (Figure 12). African states are not fulfilling the pro-democracy aspirations of their citizens.

**Figure 9: Extent of and satisfaction with democracy | 34 countries | 2019/2021**

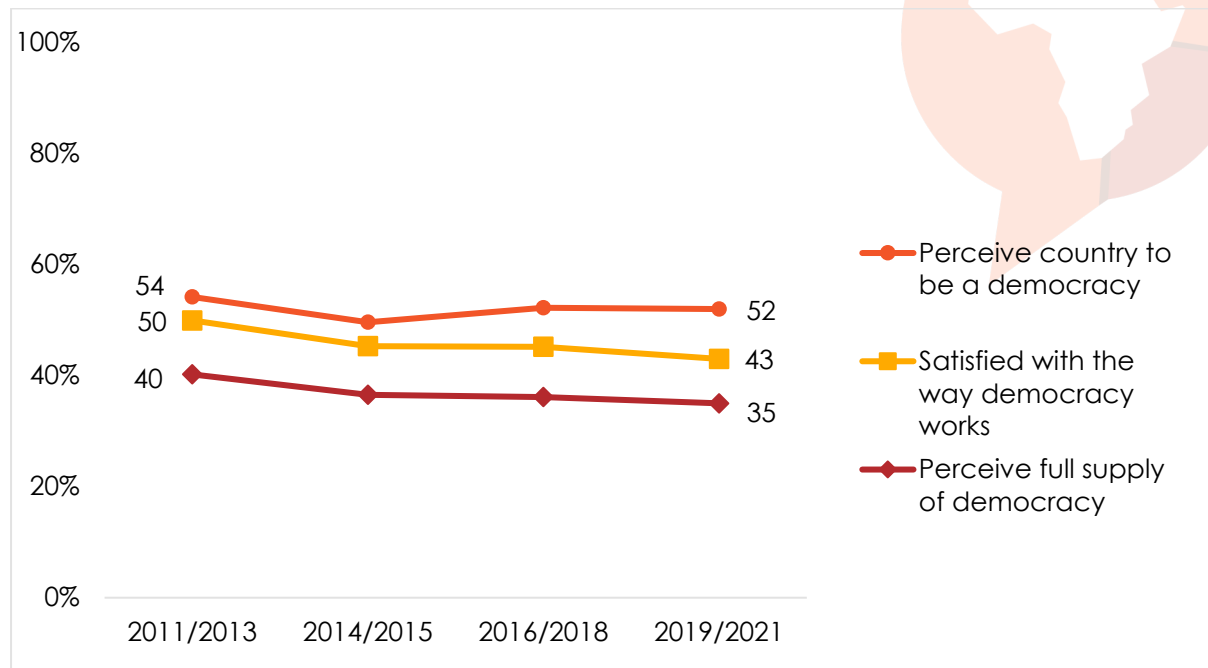


**Respondents were asked:**

*In your opinion, how much of a democracy is [your country] today?*

*Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in [your country]?*

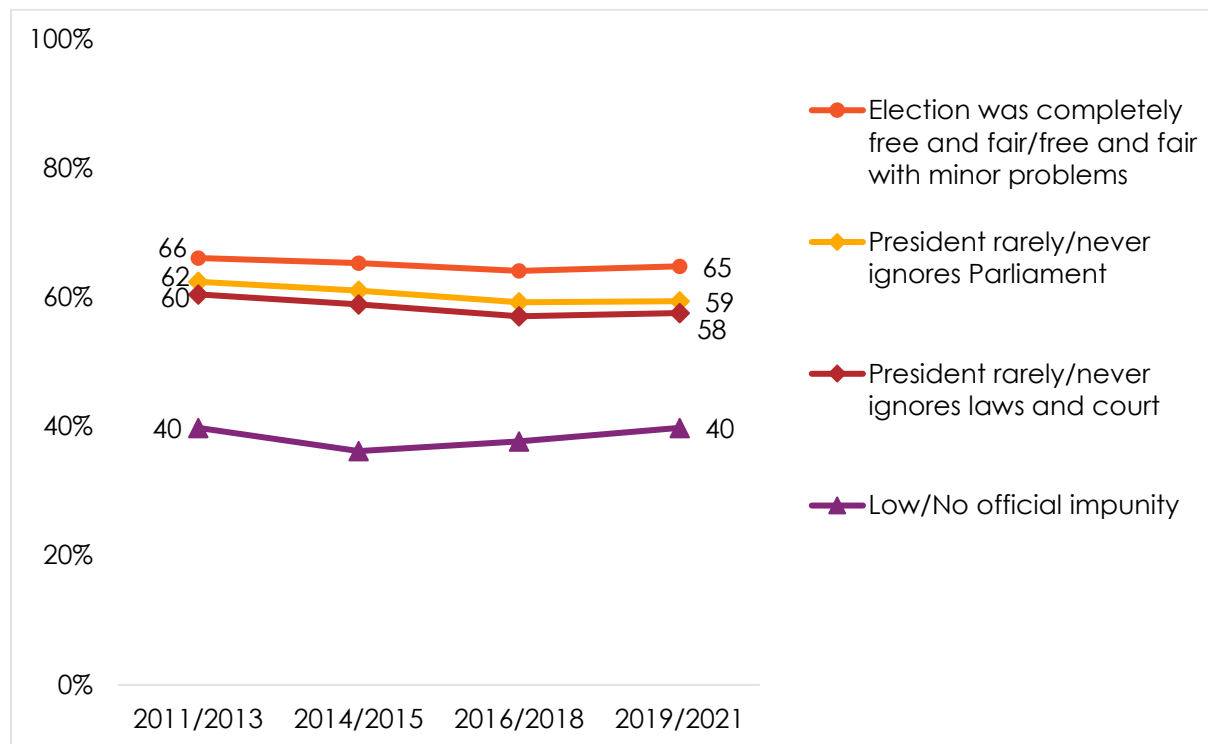
**Figure 10: Supply of democracy** | 30 countries | 2011-2021



**Respondents were asked:**

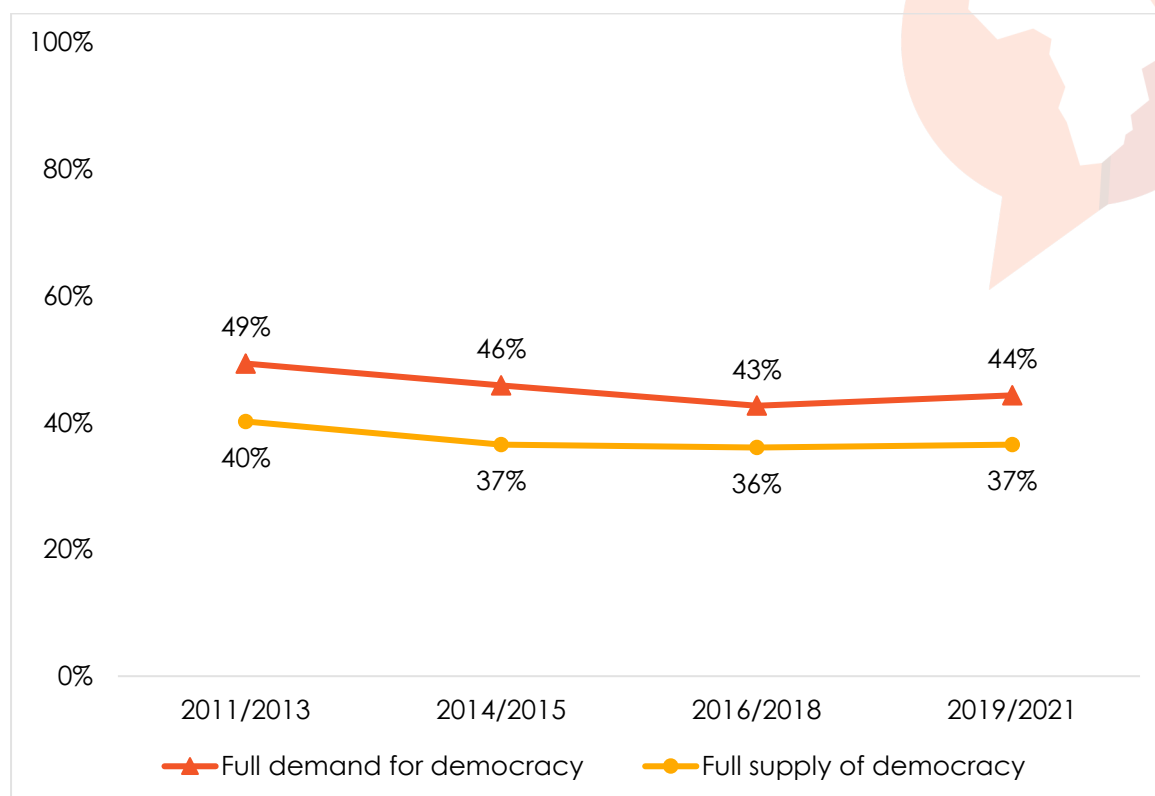
*In your opinion, how much of a democracy is [your country] today?  
 (% who say "a full democracy" or "a democracy with minor problems")  
 Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in [your country]?  
 (% who say "fairly satisfied" or "very satisfied")*

**Figure 11: Supply of democratic institutions** | 30\* countries | 2011-2021



% who say the recent election was "completely free and fair" or "free and fair with minor problems"  
 % who say the president "rarely" or "never" ignores Parliament  
 % who say the president "rarely" or "never" ignores the laws and court  
 % who say officials who commit crimes "rarely" or "never" go unpunished  
 \* Questions about president ignoring Parliament and laws/court were not asked in Sudan.

**Figure 12: Demand for democracy and the supply deficit | 29 countries\* | 2011-2021**



*Full demand for democracy: % who prefer democracy and reject all authoritarian alternatives*  
*Full supply of democracy: % who describe their country as a “full democracy” or a “democracy with minor problems” and are “fairly satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the way democracy works*  
 \* Does not include Eswatini

### Democratic commitment among Africa's youth

Amid challenges facing democracy on the continent, many analysts and activists pin their hopes for a democratic future on the youth (Mampilly, 2021). Youth engagement is often identified as a pillar of democracy; for example, it is younger people who are most likely to be involved in the protests that can sometimes serve as the voice helping to press for or preserve democratic institutions. But there are also many factors – from lack of economic status to lack of experience with the autocratic alternatives that their parents once knew – that can undermine young people’s willingness or ability to demand and fight for democracy (Cheeseman, 2022). An exhaustive analysis of this issue is beyond the scope of this report, but we offer a few important data points that suggest the value of further analysis.

Overall, aggregate findings across a range of indicators do not reveal a consistent trend. The youngest (18-30 years) and oldest (over 60 years) cohorts in our samples are about equally likely to reject one-person rule and support term limits (Figure 13). The young are, however, slightly less likely to reject military rule (a -4-percentage-point difference), to support elections as the best method to select leaders (-6 points), and to support democracy overall (-5 points). Yet they are somewhat more likely than their elders to reject a one-party state (+5 points) and especially to believe in the value of multiparty competition (+10 points).

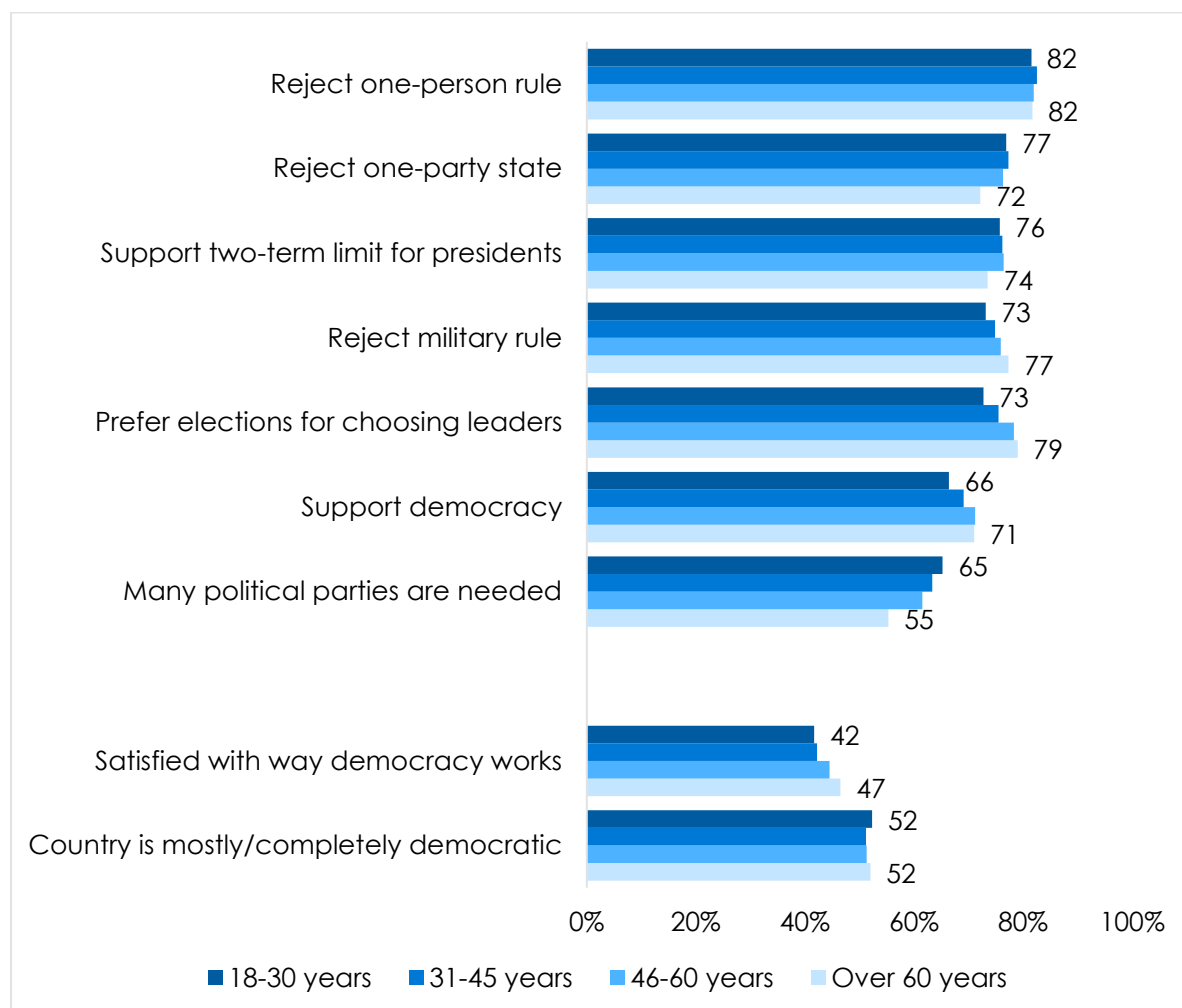
When it comes to evaluating political outcomes in their country, younger and older Africans are very similar in their assessments of how democratic their countries are, but the youth are significantly less satisfied (-5 points) with those political outcomes, perhaps suggesting that the young have higher expectations of their political systems than their elders.

But as is often the case, sharp differences across countries underlie these relatively modest aggregate differences. As noted, support for democracy among the oldest cohort is 5 points

higher than among the youngest (Figure 14). But the gap swells to 15 points or more in Gabon, South Africa, Côte d'Ivoire, Uganda, and Namibia, a stark warning for these countries about the relative disenchantment of youth with democracy. In contrast, in Eswatini and Sudan, two countries shaped by pro-democracy protests and struggles over the past few years, the young are far more likely to favour democracy, by a margin of 19 points in both countries. Clearly African youth are not a monolith, and assessing country contexts will be an important element in building a more comprehensive understanding of youth perspectives on democracy.

Younger people have a reputation for being more willing to take action, for example by taking to the streets to protest when they are dissatisfied with their government, and the numbers bear this out: 19% of those aged 18-30 say they participated in a demonstration or protest march in the past year, compared to 12% of those over 60. But when it comes to more everyday actions that are part of building and defending democracy, such as voting, the record for youth is far less encouraging. Fully one-third (33%) of 18- to 30-year-olds report not voting in the last national election (not including those who were too young to vote), compared to just 16% of those over 60 (Figure 15) (Logan, Sanny, & Han, 2021). We again see wide cross-country variation, but in this case the pattern is more consistent: Youth are less likely to vote than older citizens in every country except Sierra Leone, and they are about equally likely to (not) vote in Mauritius. The gap falls below 10 percentage points in only two other countries, Benin and Morocco, and peaks at 33 points in Sudan.

**Figure 13: Democracy demand and supply indicators, by age** | 34 countries  
| 2019/2021



**Figure 14: Gap between oldest and youngest age cohorts in support for democracy as best system | 34 countries | 2019/2021**

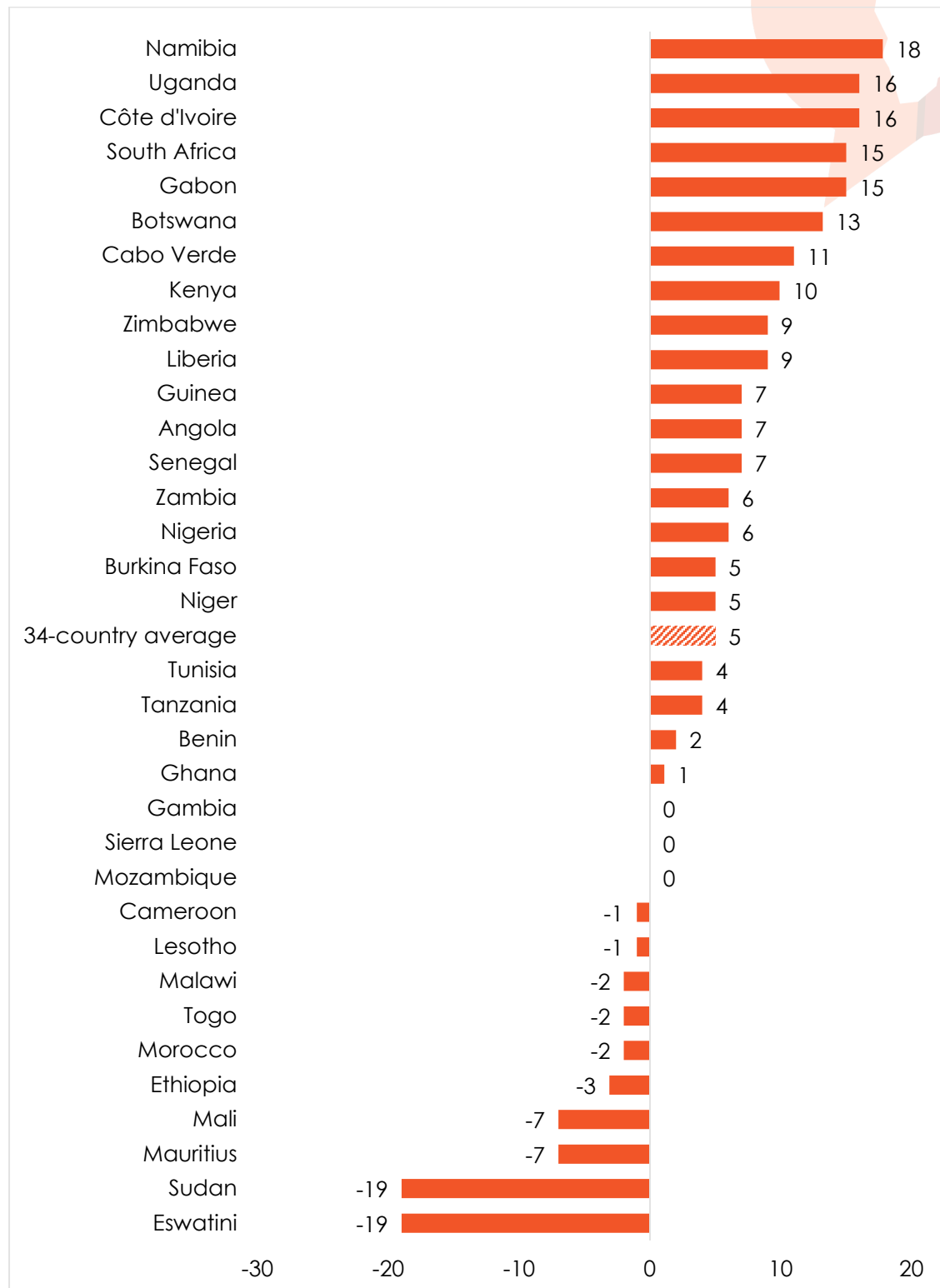
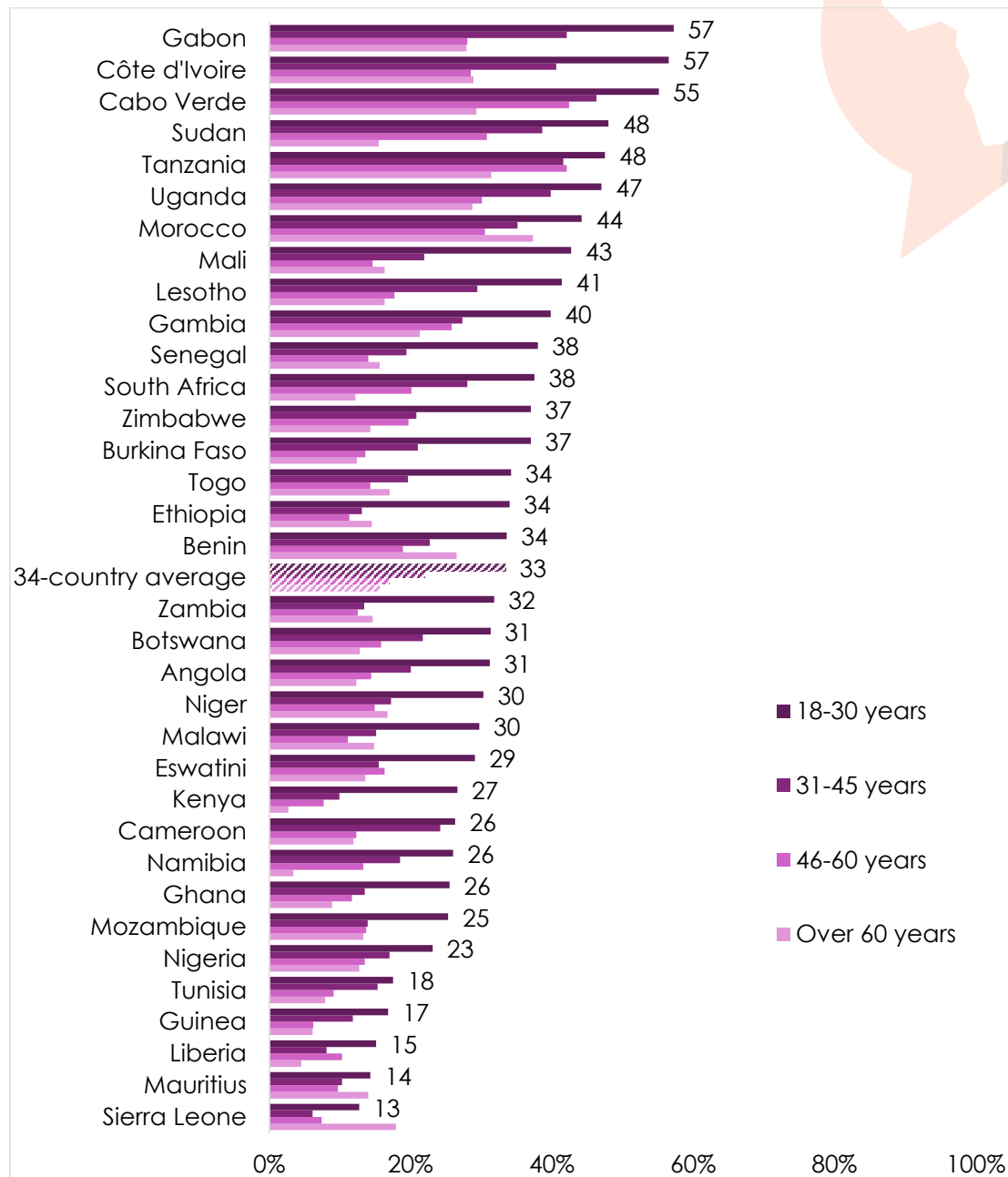


Figure shows the percentage-point difference in support for democracy between the oldest cohort (over 60 years) and youngest cohort (18-30 years). Positive numbers indicate support is higher among the older cohort, while negative numbers indicate support is higher among the youth.



**Figure 15: Did not vote in the last election, by age | 34 countries | 2019/2021**



**Respondents were asked:** In the last national election, held in [20xx], did you vote, or not, or were you too young to vote? Or can't you remember whether you voted? (% who say "did not vote," excluding respondents who were too young to vote)

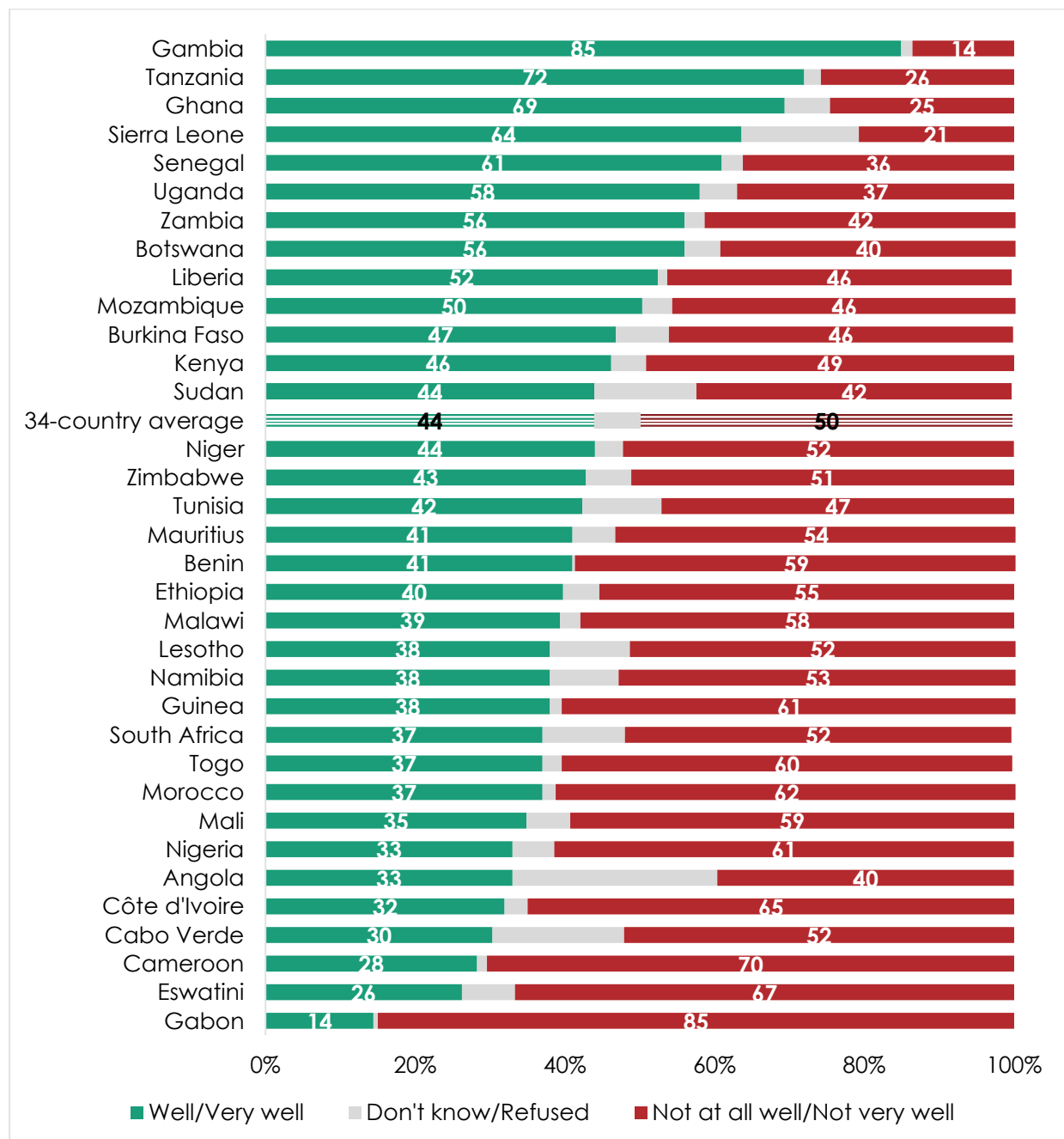
### Election efficacy and quality

Elections remain a central, though controversial, institution of democracy. Fair elections can serve as the foundation for political change, and perhaps lead to progress against corruption and flagging development. For example, in August 2021, challenger Hakainde Hichilema's victory over Zambian President Edgar Lungu gave democracy advocates hope of reversing the country's seeming slide into authoritarianism. Similarly, South Africa's 2021 local government elections energised opposition supporters and shocked the ruling African National Congress (ANC), which fell short of 50% of the vote for the first time since the country's transition to majority rule. But in other cases, such as Uganda's January 2021 poll, they have been marred by violence and human-rights abuses as well as the weaponisation of COVID-19 to justify restrictions on campaigning.

We have seen that Africans remain committed to democratic elections: Support for elections as the best system for choosing a government is still strong, although down from earlier levels. But they also have concerns about election quality, and many are sceptical about the capacity of elections to bring about real change. Fully 50% say they do not think elections are effective in enabling voters “to remove from office leaders who do not do what the people want” (Figure 16) (Logan & M’Cormack-Hale, 2021; M’Cormack-Hale & Dome, 2021).

But the range in views is startling: Just 14% of Gabonese think elections are an effective means to bring about leadership change, compared to 85% of Gambians. In surveys before their recent change-producing elections, just 56% of Zambians and 37% of South Africans were optimistic about the effectiveness of elections.

**Figure 16: Do elections enable voters to remove non-performing leaders?** | 34 countries | 2019/2021



**Respondents were asked:** Think about how elections work in practice in this country. How well do elections enable voters to remove from office leaders who do not do what the people want?

Optimism about the utility of elections in bringing about change supposes some confidence that elections are free and fair. But elections can go wrong — or right — in any number of ways. Key issues range from the fairness of campaign conditions to the safety and integrity of the voting environment and the transparency of the count on Election Day.

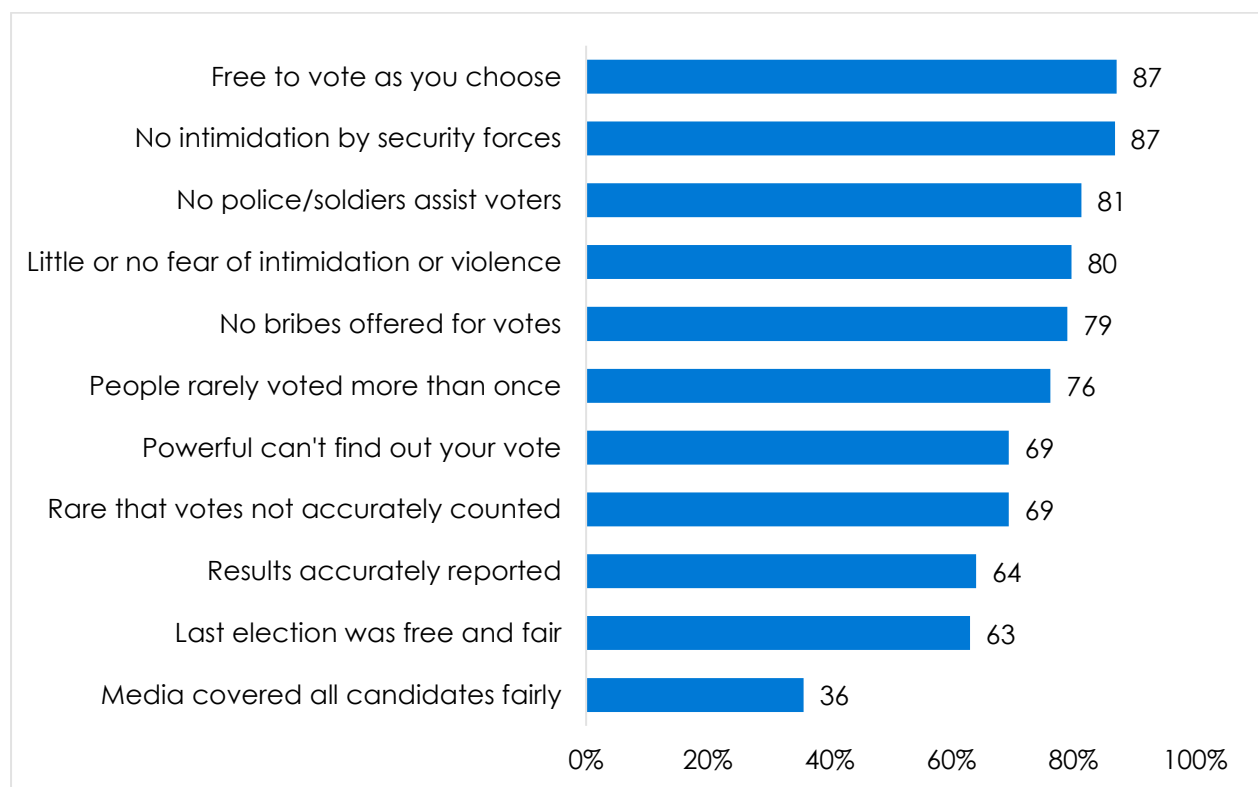
Given analysts' concerns about election quality in Africa, it may come as a surprise that on average, Africans are quite positive about some aspects of their elections. Perhaps most importantly, almost nine in 10 (87%) say they are free to vote as they choose (Figure 17). Sizeable majorities agree in all 34 countries surveyed, including 90% or more in 19 countries. Even among Angolans, who are the least confident about their freedom of vote choice, 66% say they are free to vote as they choose.

Large majorities also report positively on their country's election environment. Asked about their most recent election, at least eight in 10 say they did not observe intimidation (87%) or interference (81%) by security forces and did not fear intimidation or violence (80%). Nearly as many report that no bribes for votes were offered (79%) and that people voting twice happened rarely or not at all (76%).

Solid majorities also express confidence in ballot secrecy (69%), in the fairness of the vote count (69%), and in the accuracy of results reported by their electoral commission (64%). But considering that 15% of Africans report that votes are "often" not counted fairly and 26% think the announced results did not match the actual vote, election quality still has important shortcomings to address. In addition, Africans do not think candidates compete on a level playing field: Only 36% say the media covered all candidates fairly in the last election.

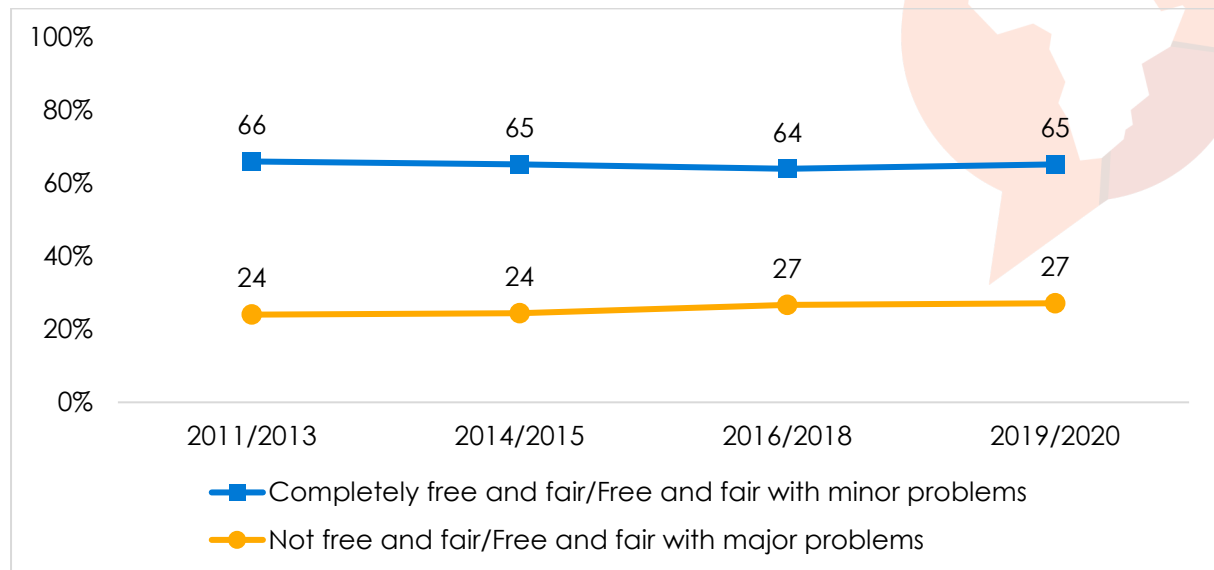
As a summary indicator, almost two-thirds (63%) of Africans say their country's most recent national election was either "completely free and fair" or "free and fair with minor problems." However, about three in 10 say the last election either had "major problems" (13%) or was "not free and fair" (16%). These assessments have held quite steady over the past decade in the 30 countries where they have been tracked since 2011 (Figure 18).

**Figure 17: Positive assessments of election conditions** | 34 countries | 2019/2021



*With the exception of "Free to vote as you choose," all questions reported here asked about conditions during the most recent national election. Source: Afrobarometer surveys, 2019/2021.*

**Figure 18: How free and fair was the most recent election? | 30 countries | 2011-2021**

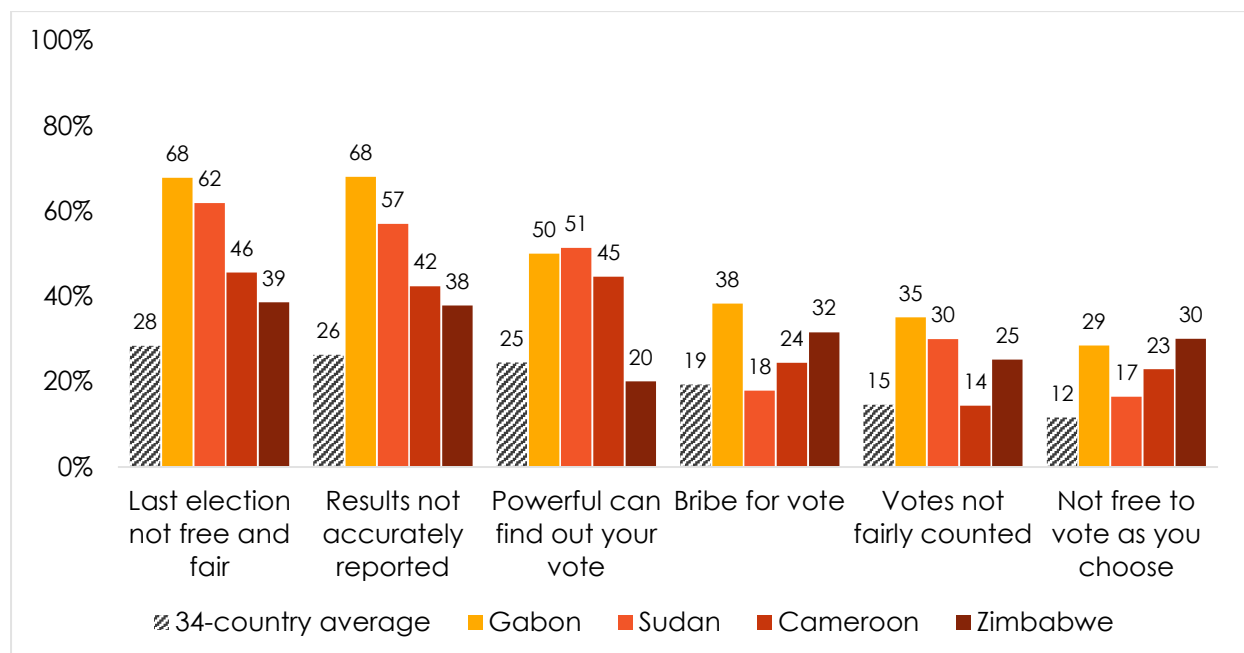


**Respondents were asked:** *On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the last national election, held in [20XX]?*

But these encouraging averages can obscure deep problems in some countries. For example, while only 3% of Namibians say votes are “often” not counted fairly, one-fourth or more of citizens cite inaccurate counts as a frequent problem in Zimbabwe (25%), Sudan (30%), and Gabon (35%) (Figure 19). Similarly, while only 2% of Guineans and 3% of Cabo Verdeans, Gambians, and Ghanaians say they are not free to vote as they choose, 30% of Zimbabweans and 29% of Gabonese say they lack this basic right.

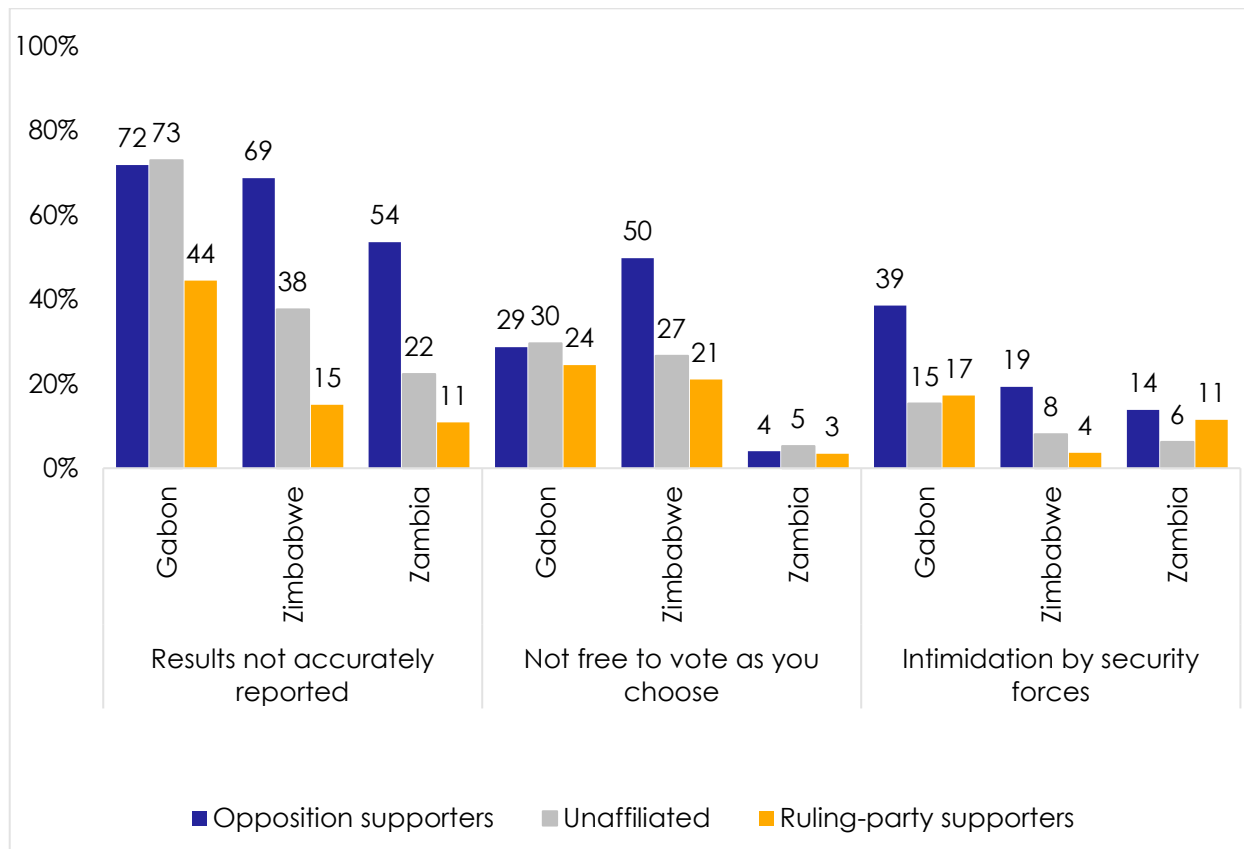
In the four worst-performing countries — Gabon, Sudan, Cameroon, and Zimbabwe – this pattern plays out across all of the indicators identified above. In all four countries, across 10 indicators (excluding media fairness), an average of more than one in four citizens cite problems with their electoral system.

**Figure 19: Negative assessments of election conditions: Worst performers among surveyed countries | 34 countries | 2019/2021**



Our findings suggest that supporters of opposition parties often bear the brunt of repressive electoral tactics. For example, opposition supporters in Zambia and Zimbabwe are more than four times as likely as ruling-party adherents to think that election results are not reported accurately (Figure 20). In Gabon, even ruling-party supporters have little faith in the quality of their elections (44% think results are inaccurate), but opposition supporters are far more negative (72%). We see similar differences with regard to personal experiences of intimidation and views about vote choice.

**Figure 20: Gaps between ruling and opposition perspectives on election obstacles**  
| Gabon, Zimbabwe, and Zambia | 2019/2021



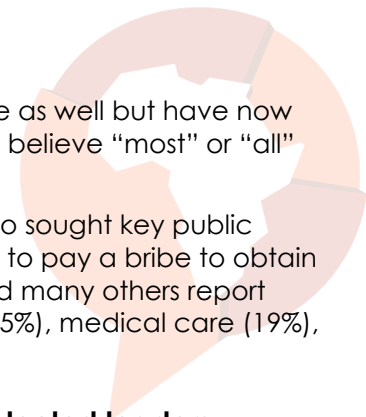
### Corruption and dissatisfaction with democracy

While South Africa, Senegal, and Mauritius are very different societies, one thing they have in common is that their citizens are all increasingly unhappy about the way their democracies are working. Another is that huge majorities in each say that corruption in their country is increasing. On average across 34 countries, almost six in 10 respondents (58%) say corruption in their country increased “somewhat” or “a lot” over the past year, including 72% of South Africans, 75% of Senegalese, and 77% of Mauritians. In addition, almost two-thirds (64%) say their government is doing a “fairly bad” or “very bad” job of controlling corruption (Keulder, 2021).

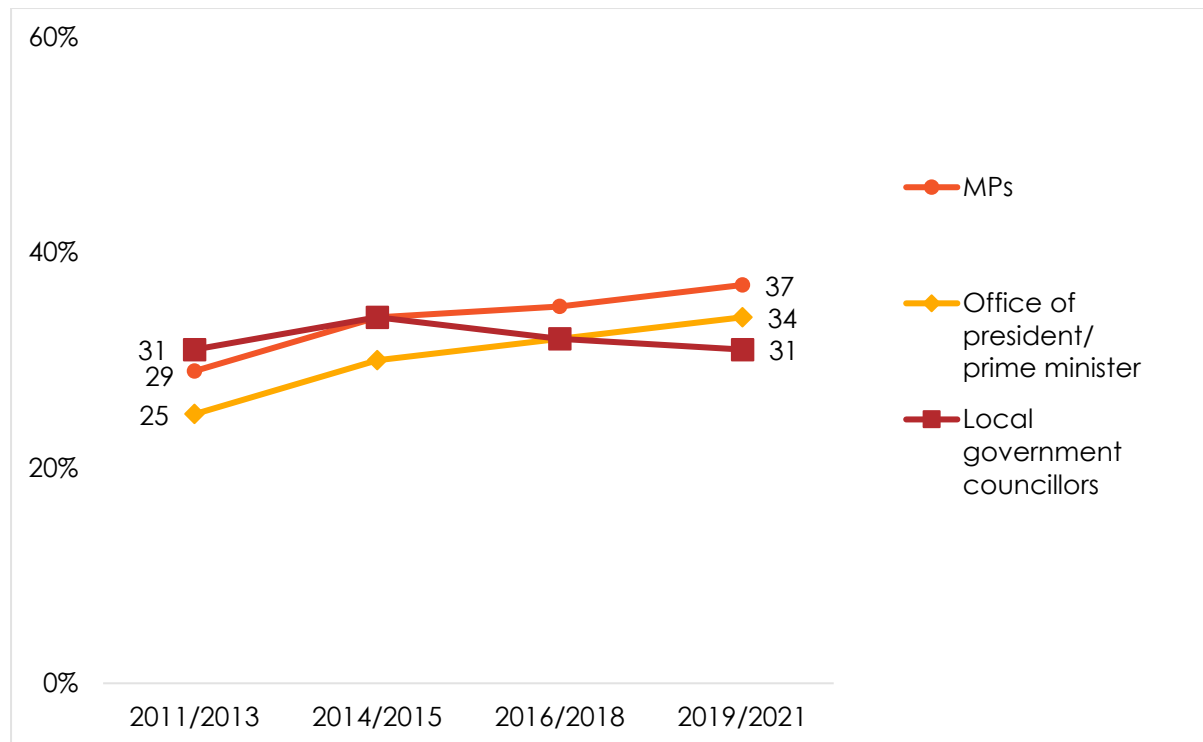
These parallel trends are not a coincidence (Keulder & Mattes, 2021). Our findings suggest that as people see levels of corruption rising in their key governing institutions, they grow increasingly dissatisfied with their democracy. Perceived corruption among elected officials may be particularly damaging. Perceptions that substantial numbers of members of Parliament (MPs) and officials in the office of the president are engaging in corrupt behaviour have increased steadily for the past decade, resulting in an 8-percentage-point increase for MPs and a 9-point increase for the office of the president (Figure 21). Perceived

levels of corruption among local government councillors initially rose as well but have now returned to the same level recorded a decade ago (31% of citizens believe “most” or “all” are corrupt).

And this isn't just a problem of perceptions. Among respondents who sought key public services during the previous year, more than one-third say they had to pay a bribe to obtain police assistance (36%) or avoid problems with the police (34%), and many others report paying bribes to get basic services such as an identity document (25%), medical care (19%), or public school services (18%).



**Figure 21: Changes in perceived levels of corruption among elected leaders**  
| 30 countries\* | 2011-2021



**Respondents were asked:** How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (% who say "most" or "all")

\* The question about the president/prime minister was not asked in Morocco in 2011/2013. Question about local government councillors was not asked in Malawi in 2014/2015.

While many factors may drive citizens' disenchantment with the way democracy works, our findings suggest that increasing perceptions of corruption play a major role. Among respondents who report extensive institutional corruption in their country, just 39% say their country is democratic, and 30% are satisfied with the way democracy works. Among all other respondents, in contrast, 57% say they live in a democracy, and 45% are satisfied with its functioning. With few exceptions, countries where people perceive high levels of corruption also register high levels of dissatisfaction – that's certainly the story in Gabon, Mali, Lesotho, Guinea, and South Africa (Figure 22).

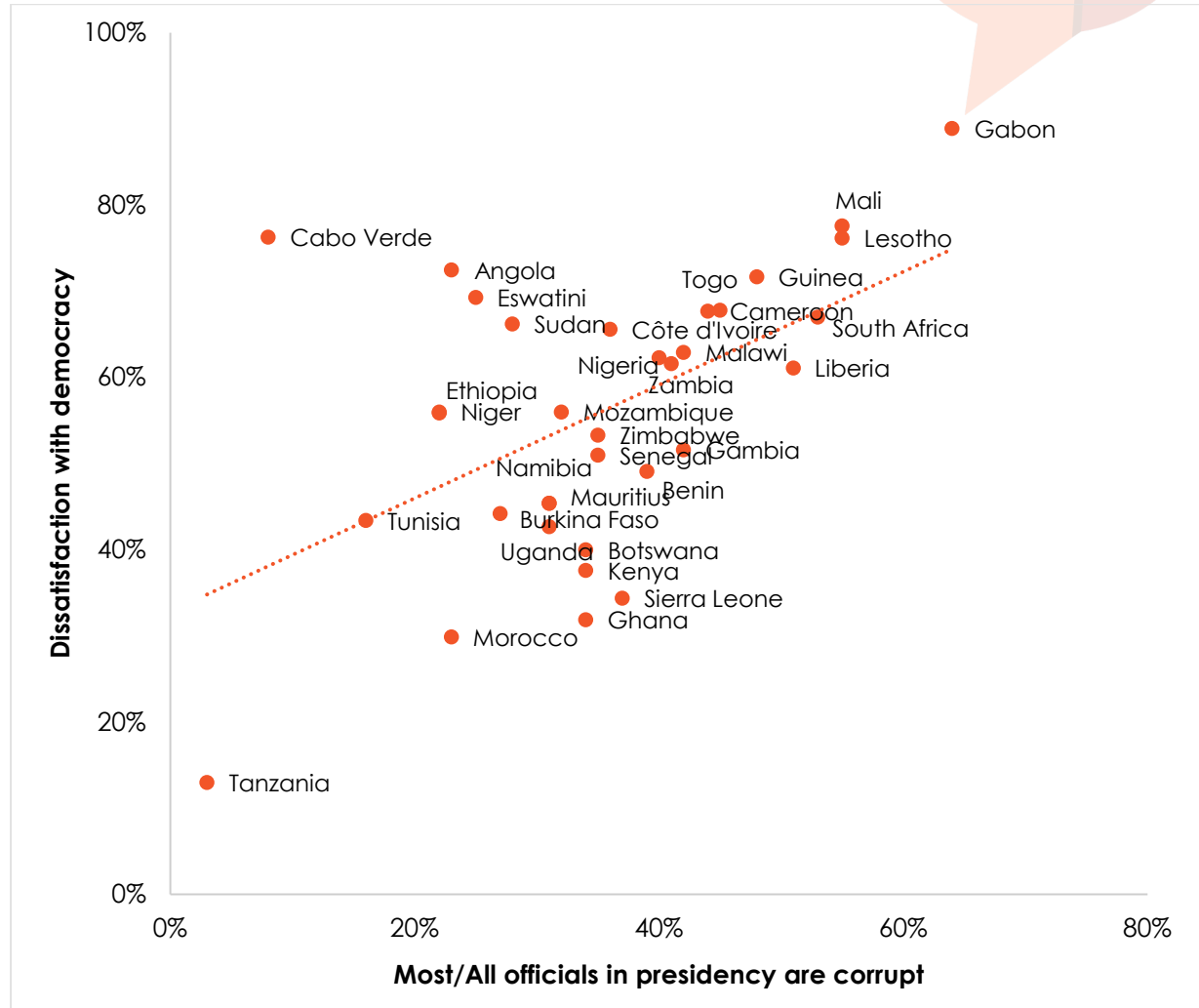
And over time, when perceptions of corruption rise or fall, levels of dissatisfaction with democracy tend to follow suit. In Guinea and Mali, rising perceptions of corruption and dissatisfaction with democracy formed the backdrop for military coups. We will discuss other examples in the following section.

In contrast, having to pay a bribe appears to have little impact on support for or satisfaction with democracy. The most likely reason is that people make distinctions: When they are asked for a bribe, they see a problem of underpaid or greedy low-level civil servants. But

when they hear about massive embezzlement, bribes, or contracts for cronies, they are much more likely to see a failure of the democratic system. Grand corruption schemes usually require the involvement or implicit assent of elected officials, and thus directly link corruption and democracy in people's minds.



**Figure 22: Corruption and dissatisfaction with democracy | 34 countries | 2019/2021**



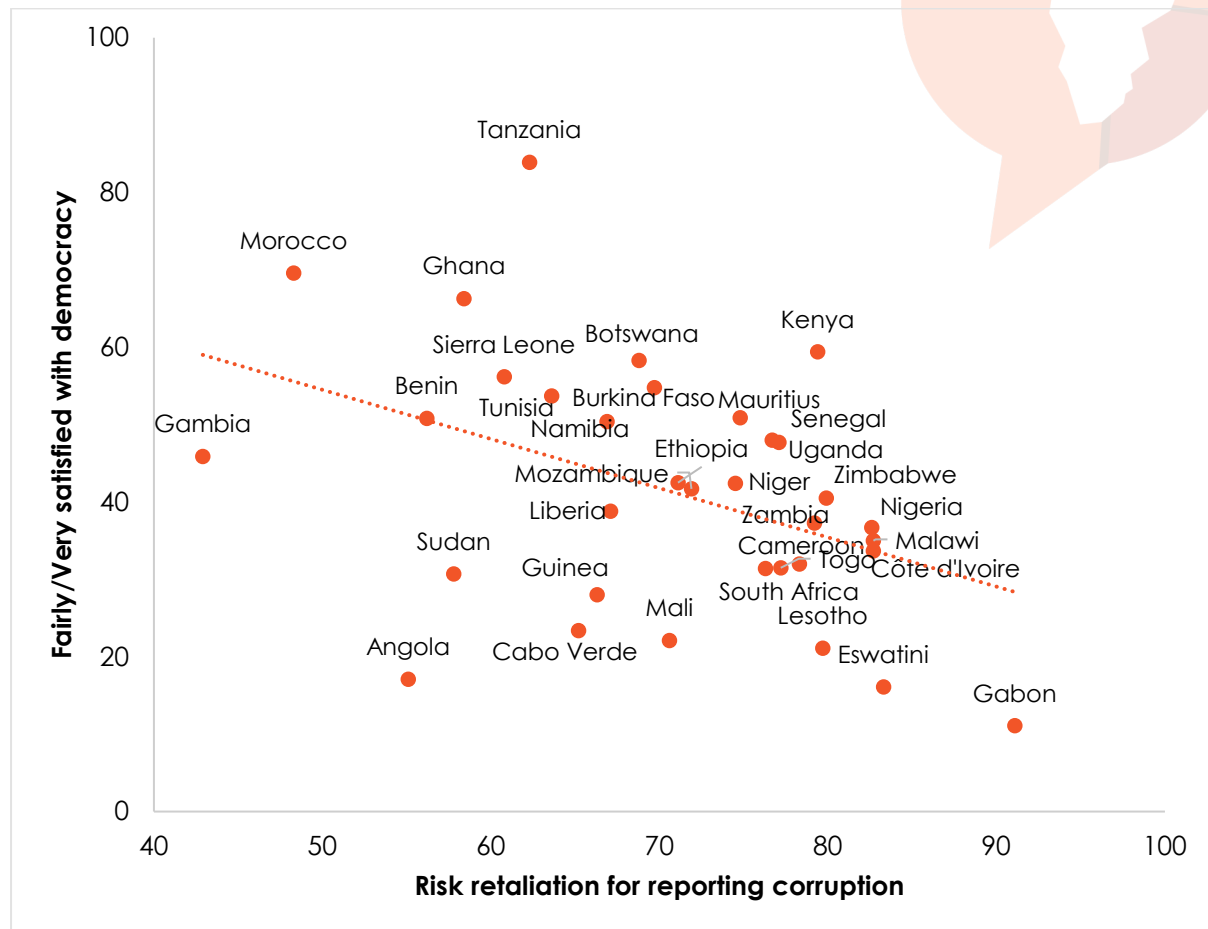
**Respondents were asked:**

How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The president and officials in his office? (% who say "most" or "all")  
 Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in [your country]? (% who say "fairly satisfied" or "very satisfied")

Pearson's  $r=0.536$ , significant at .01 level

Democracy also appears to be undermined by the fact that the public's ability to engage in the fight against corruption is severely constrained by fear of retaliation: Seven in 10 Africans (70%) believe that ordinary citizens risk retaliation or other negative consequences if they report corruption to authorities, while only one in four (27%) believe they can speak up without fear. This has direct implications for democracy: Countries where fewer people believe they risk retaliation for reporting corruption tend to report greater satisfaction with democracy (Figure 23).

**Figure 23: Correlation between satisfaction with democracy and risk of retaliation for reporting corruption | 34 countries | 2019/2021**



**Respondents were asked:**

*In this country, can ordinary people report incidents of corruption without fear, or do they risk retaliation or other negative consequences if they speak out? (% who say they risk retaliation or other negative consequences)*

*Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in [your country]? (% who say "fairly satisfied" or "very satisfied")*

Pearson's  $r = -0.426$ , significant at .05 level

**Leading democracies in trouble?**

In South Africa, dissatisfaction with democracy grew steadily alongside corruption scandals involving then-President Jacob Zuma's efforts to help his cronies capture contracts and accumulate influence in his administration. And dissatisfaction has continued to rise under his successor, Cyril Ramaphosa, whose office has faced scandals of its own, including the implication of Ramaphosa's personal spokesperson in major theft of coronavirus relief and the more recent cash-in-couch scandal (Wroughton & Houreld, 2022).

Until 2014, Ghana also saw parallel increases in perceived corruption and dissatisfaction with democracy. However, the 2105 high-profile firings of judges on charges of bribery, the 2016 election of President Nana Akufo-Addo on an anti-corruption ticket, and the appointment of a special prosecutor for corruption appear to have reversed these trends, at least temporarily.

While up to now we have argued that Africa generally expresses a resilient demand for democracy even as the supply of democracy lags, here we turn to some specific country cases that give greater cause for concern. When we dig deeper into the continent-wide public opinion averages, a surprising finding emerges: Some of the most negative trends –



both in how much democracy people say they want and in how much they feel they are getting – are observed in the continent's up-to-now leading democracies. Our findings make it clear that country context matters a lot, and that these democratic leaders warrant particular attention.

As of 2021, Washington-based think tank Freedom House (2021) identified nine African countries as “free” on its Global Freedom Index. Afrobarometer has tracked trends over the past decade in seven of these: Botswana, Cabo Verde, Ghana, Mauritius, Namibia, South Africa, and Tunisia. Almost all show increasing public dissatisfaction and declining support for democracy as the best system of government (Logan & Howard, 2021).

The trends are most striking in the three countries that have anchored democracy in Southern Africa for three decades. Botswana is one of the only African countries that remained democratic throughout the 1970s and '80s. In the early 1990s, Namibia and South Africa joined it as white-minority rule gave way to new constitutions and new leadership.

All three have encountered democratic challenges. Most notably, despite regular and free elections, each has been ruled by a single dominant political party throughout the democratic period. The lack of a viable opposition is a fundamental weakness in their political systems, although South Africa's 2021 local elections, in which the ruling ANC won only 46% of the vote nationwide, suggests that ANC dominance may be waning.

Southern Africa has also had a reputation as the least corrupt region on the continent. But that's been shaken by Namibia's Fishrot scandal, in which senior government officials stand accused of accepting bribes in exchange for lucrative fishing quotas, and the proliferating corruption scandals in South Africa. Even in Botswana, rising perceptions of corruption have been in the spotlight (Isbell & Seabo, 2020). These experiences appear to have sharply affected public attitudes.

We focus here on four key indicators: Preference for democracy, satisfaction with democracy, the perception that there is little or no corruption in the office of the presidency, and the belief that the country is going in the right direction. For all three countries, all of these indicators have sagged substantially over the past decade (Figure 24 and Figure 25).

Botswana started with the most positive perceptions, and has had the smallest declines. But even here, perceptions of the presidency's honesty have dropped by 21 percentage points, while the other indicators have declined by more than 10 points.

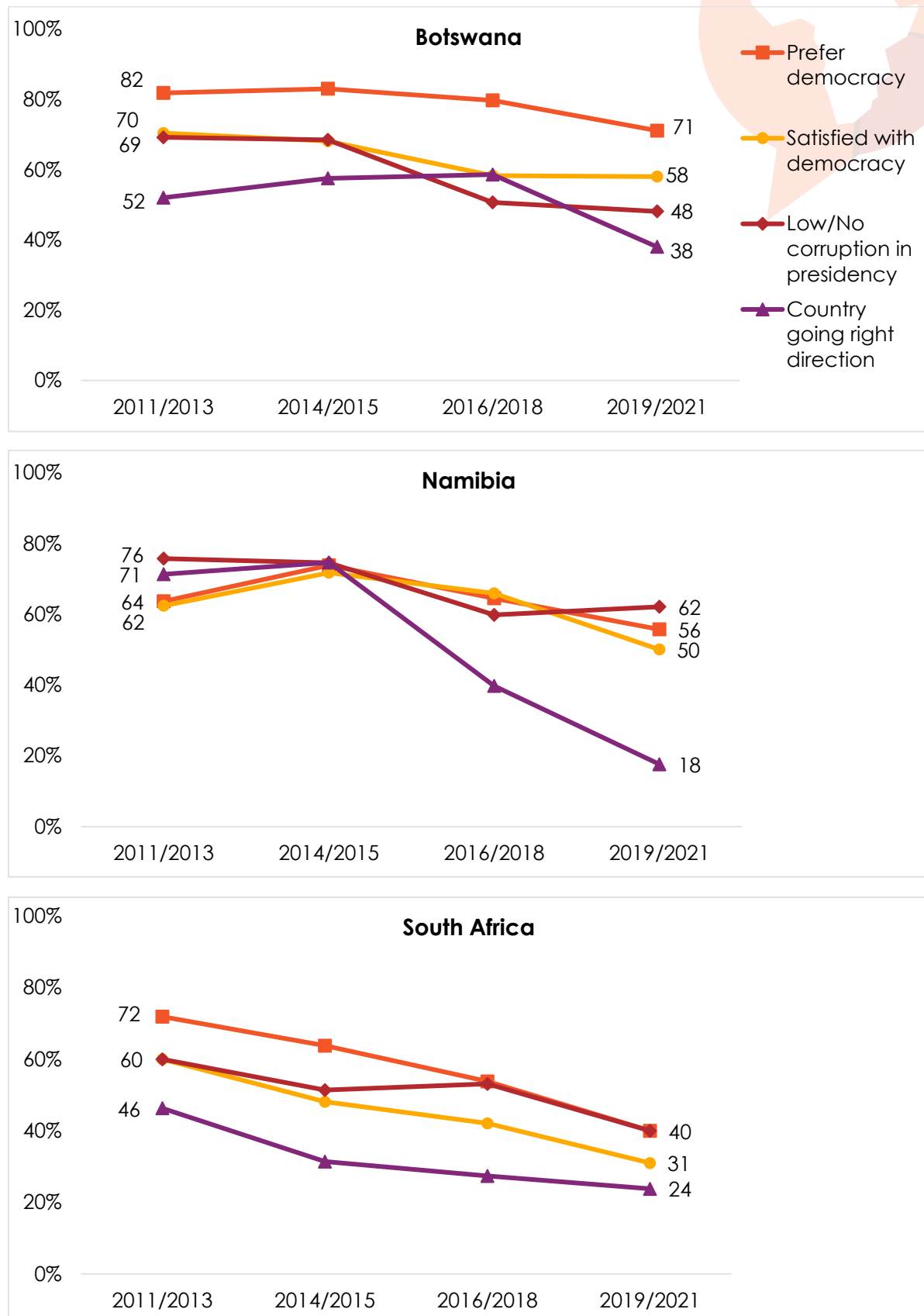
Namibia's declines include a 14-point loss of confidence in the integrity of the presidency and a remarkable 54-point collapse in the perception that the country is going in the right direction, to just 18%, one of the lowest levels recorded across 34 countries.

In South Africa, meanwhile, all of the indicators have dropped by 20 to 32 points. Citizens' attitudes signal the potential for democratic disaster, with support for democracy now among the lowest levels recorded across 34 countries.

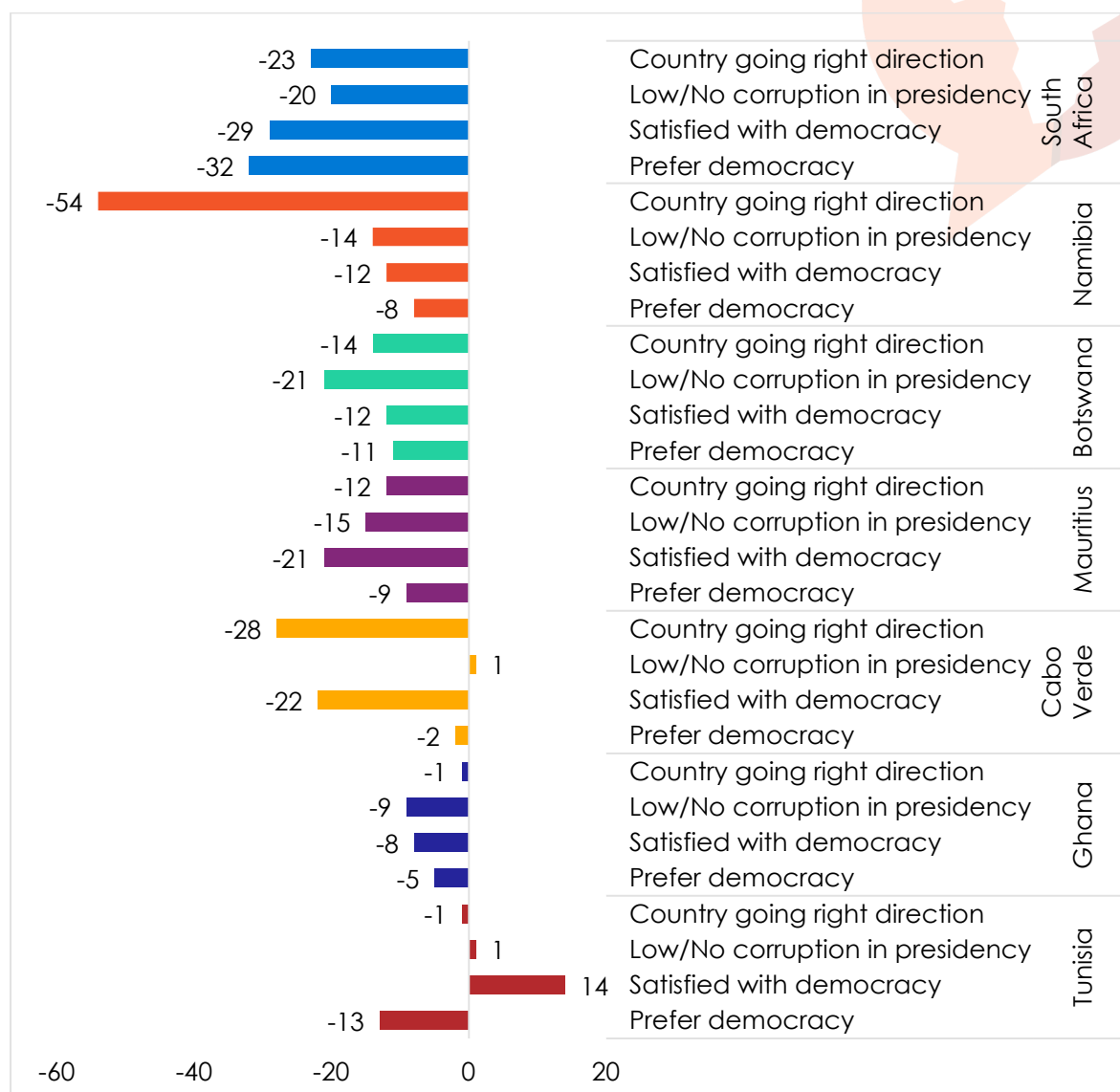
Turning to Africa's small island states, several have achieved notable levels of democracy: Freedom House rates Cabo Verde, Mauritius, São Tomé and Príncipe, and the Seychelles as “free,” and Comoros as “partly free.” But the trends in Cabo Verde and Mauritius, though less pronounced than those in South Africa, are also mostly negative. Cabo Verdeans are relatively constant in their preference for democracy and confidence in their leaders' honesty. But their satisfaction with democracy has dropped by 22 points, and just 38% now believe the country is headed in the right direction, down 28 points over the decade.

Meanwhile, analysts have recently cited Mauritius both as one of the world's most democratic countries (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2020) and as one of the countries most rapidly heading toward autocracy (Varieties of Democracy Project, 2021). Here again, we see declines of 9-21 points across all four indicators, including a 21-point drop in satisfaction with democracy and a 15-point fall in perceptions of honesty in the presidency.

**Figure 24: Southern Africa key democracy indicators | 3 countries | 2011-2021**



**Figure 25: Gains or losses in key democracy indicators for leading democracies**  
 | 7 countries | 2011-2021

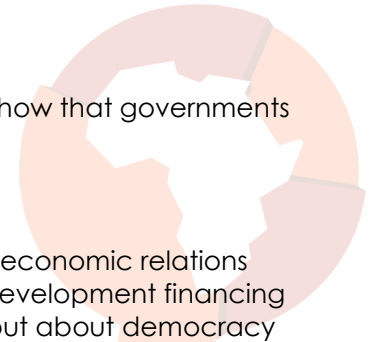


Finally, we turn to two countries further north, Ghana and Tunisia. Ghana has in many respects become the continent's democratic leader, in part because, unlike their Southern African counterparts, citizens have voted the ruling party out of office several times. Although the trends here are also downward, the declines are considerably smaller, and the overall pattern is modest volatility rather than substantial long-term decline. With support for democracy at 77% and one of the highest levels of satisfaction recorded at 66%, Ghana's democracy seems to be on somewhat more solid footing, although it remains to be seen whether the country's currently unfolding debt crisis will undermine this position (Gyimah-Boadi, 2022a, b).

Tunisia, meanwhile, previously appeared to be the only Arab Spring country set to maintain a democratic path. But as the country has struggled to realise hoped-for economic and political gains, support for democracy has dropped by 13 points over the decade. In fact, the country slipped from "free" to "partly free" status in Freedom House's 2022 rankings.

There is no single diagnosis – or antidote – for what ails these African democracies. In Mauritius, a flawed election in 2019 eroded citizens' confidence in the health of their democracy. Corruption has fuelled deepening dissatisfaction in South Africa and elsewhere.

Ghana's aggressive steps to tackle corruption, on the other hand, show that governments needn't accept democratic decline as inevitable or irreversible.



## China, Africa, and democratic attitudes

The past two decades have seen enormous growth in political and economic relations between Africa and China. China's increasingly prominent role in development financing has raised questions not just about debt and economic influence, but about democracy and political influence as well. Both domestic and international democracy advocates have voiced the concern that the ability of Africa's fledgling democracies to access Chinese development resources free of the democratic conditionalities and pressures that are typically attached by Western donors may undermine efforts to promote more democratic and accountable governance across the continent.

But is growing Chinese influence on the continent having an impact on the views of ordinary citizens vis-à-vis the democratic project? This does not appear to be the case.

Afrobarometer asked respondents which country offers "the best model for the future development of [your] country." Across 34 countries, 33% identify the United States as the best model, while 22% prefer to emulate China. Others choose South Africa (12%) or their country's former colonial power (11%), while 7% prefer their own country's model (Sanny & Selormey, 2021).

But for the most part, Africans who favour the China model and those who prefer the U.S. model are about equally likely to endorse democracy, elections, multiparty competition, and accountable government and to reject authoritarian alternatives such as a one-party state or military rule (Figure 26). In short, for the most part there are no statistically significant differences in support for democracy or democratic institutions and norms between respondents who prefer China as a development model and those who prefer the U.S. (the 3-point difference on preference for accountability barely crosses the threshold for significance) (Logan & Sanny, 2021).

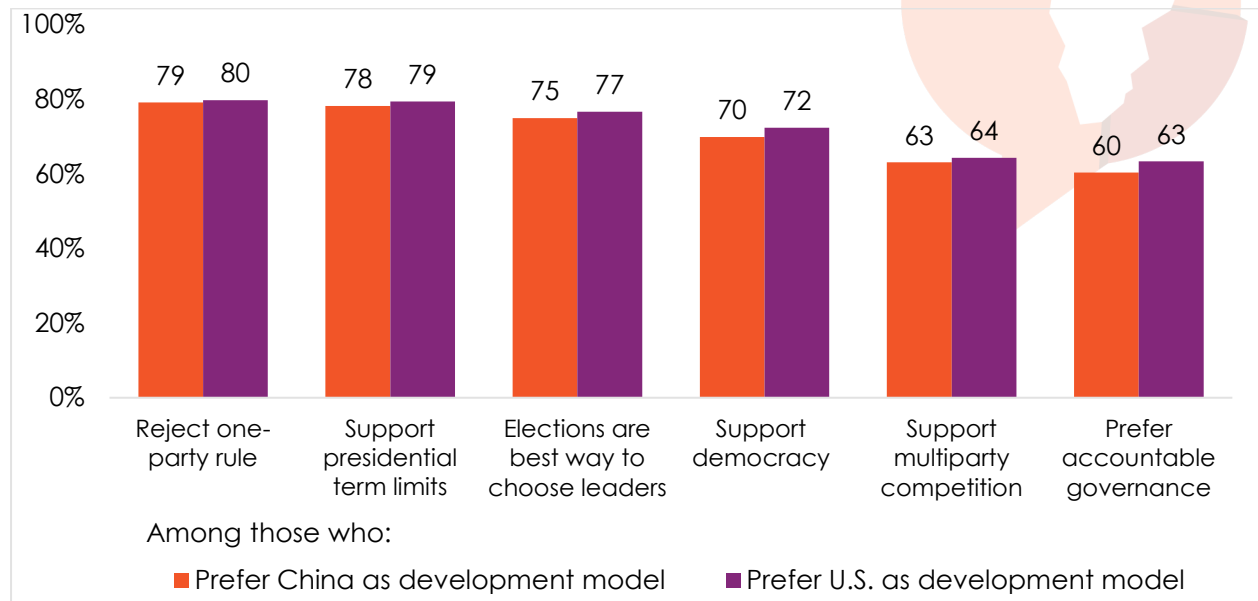
Afrobarometer also asked respondents how much influence China's economic activities have on their own country's economy; 61% say "some" or "a lot" (down 12 percentage points since 2014/2015). Asked whether China's influence is mostly positive or mostly negative, 63% say it is "somewhat" or "very positive," while 60% say the same about the U.S.

Once again, when we compare attitudes toward democracy between those who rate China's influence as "very positive" and those who rate it as "very negative," the differences, where they exist, are actually in the opposite direction of what concerned democracy advocates might predict. Those who express a more positive view of China's influence (as well as those who say China has "some" or "a lot" of influence, not shown) are modestly *more likely* to support democratic institutions and norms (Figure 27). In brief, positive attitudes toward China do not appear to undermine Africans' commitment to democracy.

When it comes to how much democracy Africans are getting, we do see modest evidence of a "China effect": When citizens admire China as a development model, they feel better about their own country's democratic governance. There is no difference in ratings of the *extent of democracy* in a country between those who prefer the China and U.S. models (53% each) (Figure 28). But on measures of satisfaction with democracy, the quality of elections, and accountability of presidents to Parliament and to the courts, Africans who prefer the China model evaluate democratic conditions in their own country somewhat more positively.

This may suggest that Africans with a pro-China stance hold their governments to slightly lower democratic standards. But the differences are not large enough to suggest that China's presence substantially undermines Africans' preferences for or perceptions of their countries' political systems.

**Figure 26: Support for democratic norms and institutions** | by preference for China or U.S. as a development model | 34 countries | 2019/2021



*Reject one-party rule: % who "disapprove" or "strongly disapprove" of allowing only one political party to stand for election and hold office*

*Support presidential term limits: % who "agree" or "strongly agree" that the Constitution should limit the president to serving a maximum of two terms*

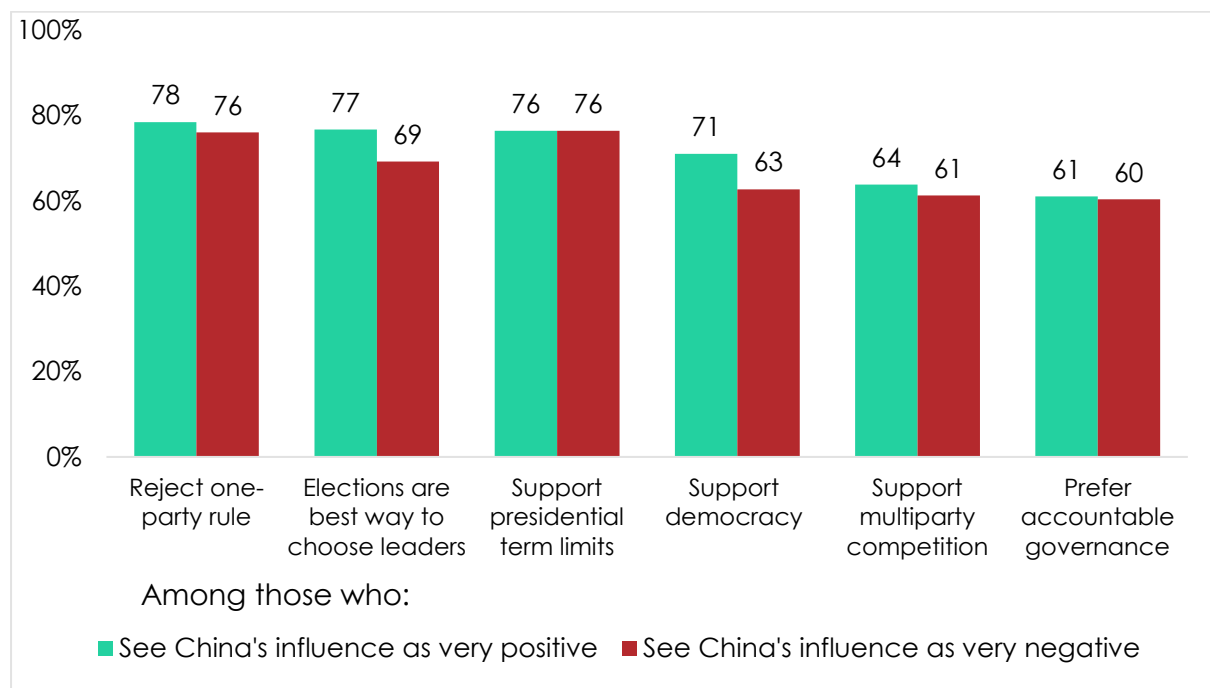
*Elections are best way to choose leaders: % who "agree" or "strongly agree" that "we should choose our leaders in this country through regular, open, and honest elections"*

*Support democracy: % who say democracy "is preferable to any other kind of government"*

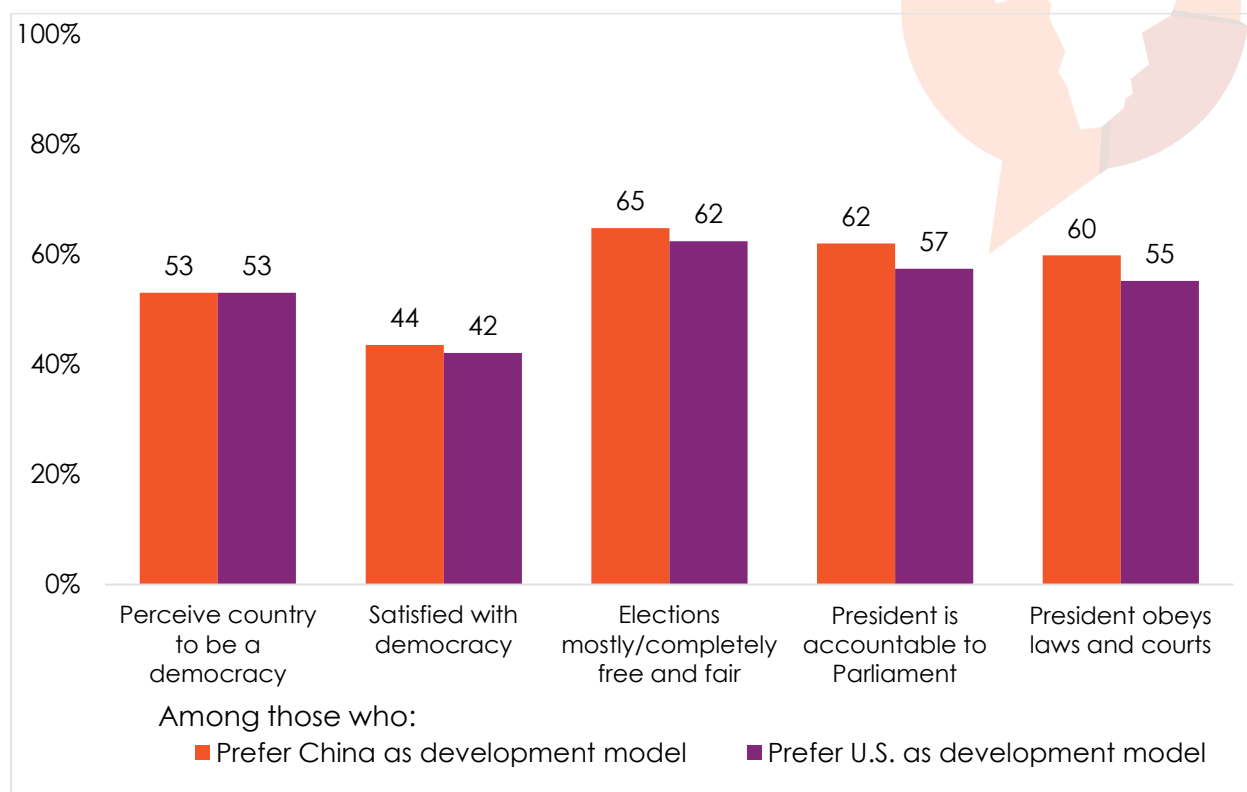
*Support multiparty competition: % who "agree" or "strongly agree" that "many political parties are needed to make sure that [citizens] have real choices in who governs them"*

*Prefer accountable governance: % who "agree" or "strongly agree" that "it is more important for citizens to be able to hold government accountable, even if that means it makes decisions more slowly"*

**Figure 27: Support for democratic norms and institutions** | by perceptions of China's positive/negative influence | 34 countries | 2019/2021



**Figure 28: Assessments of supply of democracy** | by preference for China or U.S. as development model | 34 countries | 2019/2021



*Perceive country to be a democracy: % who say country is “a full democracy” or “a democracy with minor problems”*

*Satisfied with democracy: % who say they are “fairly satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the way democracy works in their country*

*Elections mostly/completely free and fair: % who say their last national election was “completely free and fair” or “free and fair with minor problems”*

*President is accountable to Parliament: % who say the president/prime minister “rarely” or “never” ignores the national legislature*

*President obeys laws and courts: % who say the president/prime minister “rarely” or “never” ignores the country’s laws and courts*

### COVID-19 and democracy

Finally we consider whether the COVID-19 pandemic appears to have had any appreciable impact, positive or negative, on democratic attitudes and evaluations, particularly in the context of concerns that some leaders may have used the pandemic as an excuse to close political space, limit democratic freedoms, and entrench their power.

With 18 country surveys completed as of 3 April 2020, Afrobarometer was roughly halfway through its eighth round of surveys when the pandemic closed down face-to-face fieldwork. But in October 2020, with protocols in place to assess the safety and viability of resuming face-to-face work in each country, Afrobarometer was able to resume fieldwork and complete surveys in 16 more countries. We therefore have two batches of Round 8 surveys – one pre-COVID, the other post-COVID-onset – and we can compare the findings from each set to Round 7 (2016/2018) findings in the same countries to see whether over-time trends differ between the two groups. Both the pre-COVID and the post-COVID-onset batches include 16 countries that were also surveyed in Round 7.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The 16 pre-COVID countries are Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Namibia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tunisia, and Uganda. Angola and Ethiopia were

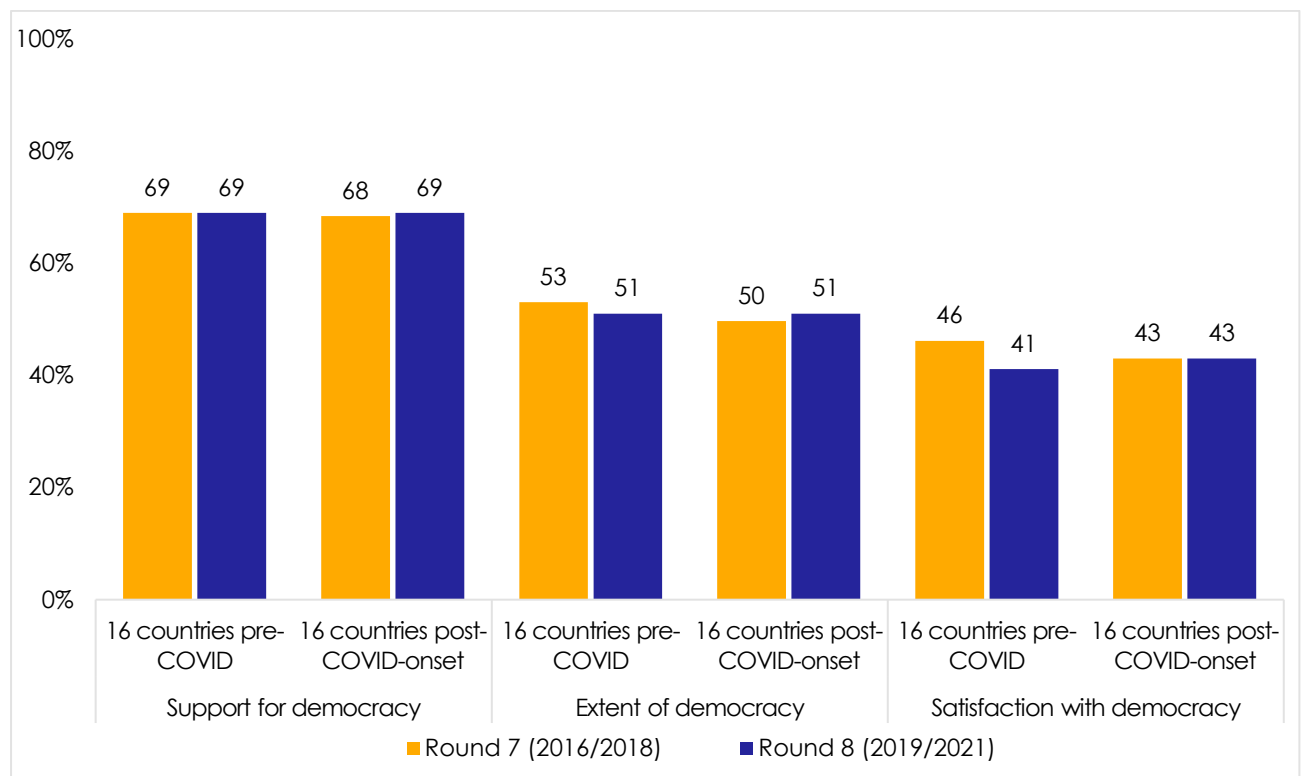
Overall, the differences between Round 7 and Round 8 are quite modest for both groups; in fact, most are not significant, although we do see a 5-percentage-point drop in satisfaction with democracy in the pre-COVID group, from 46% to 41% (Figure 29) (Gyimah et al., 2021).

But we note one modest pattern: The differences between Round 7 and Round 8 in pre-COVID countries are all either neutral (support for democracy) or negative (extent of democracy and satisfaction with democracy). But in the post-COVID-onset countries, the differences are all essentially neutral (maximum differences are 1 percentage point). Most notably, satisfaction with democracy remains steady across the 16 post-COVID-onset countries, compared to the 5-point drop observed in the pre-COVID group.

Across the three indicators, the trend in the post-COVID-onset group is +1 point over the pre-COVID group with regard to support for democracy, +3 points for extent of democracy, and +5 points for satisfaction. In sum, in all cases, the trend in the post-COVID-onset group is modestly more positive than in the pre-COVID countries.

What might explain this unexpected pattern? The 16 post-COVID-onset countries may have been particularly effective in managing the pandemic response and thus boosted appreciation for governments and their performance, although overall the data suggest that pandemic performance has been mixed at best (Sanny, 2021). It is also possible that publics have rallied to support their governments and their political systems in the face of a crisis. Alternatively, these changes may be entirely independent of the pandemic. Further analysis will be needed to make a clearer determination. But these preliminary findings suggest that, at least in the eyes of ordinary citizens, dire warnings about the implications of the pandemic for democracy may have been overblown.

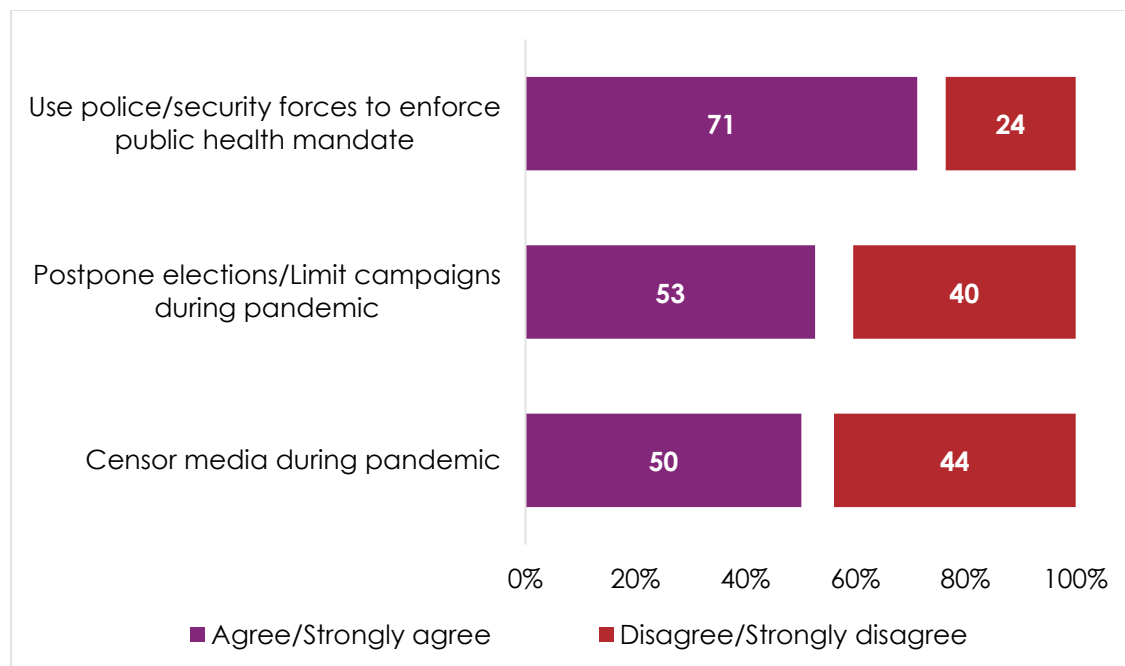
**Figure 29: Comparison of changes in democracy indicators in pre-COVID and post-COVID-onset countries | 32 countries | 2016-2021**



also surveyed pre-COVID in Round 8, but were not surveyed in Round 7 and are excluded from the rest of this analysis. The 16 post-COVID-onset countries are Benin, Cameroon, Eswatini, the Gambia, Liberia, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Niger, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

Afrobarometer also probed how willing African publics are to tolerate restrictions on certain democratic freedoms, at least temporarily, in the name of security and health. Seven in 10 respondents (71%) “agree” or “strongly agree” that the government is justified in using the police and security forces to enforce public health mandates such as lockdown orders, mask requirements, and restrictions on public gatherings (Figure 30) (Sanny, 2021). A slim majority (53%) would tolerate postponement of elections or limitation of political campaigns. And half (50%) say that censoring the news media is acceptable during a public health emergency like the pandemic, while 44% disagree.

**Figure 30: Restrict freedoms during health emergency? | 16 countries | 2020/2021**



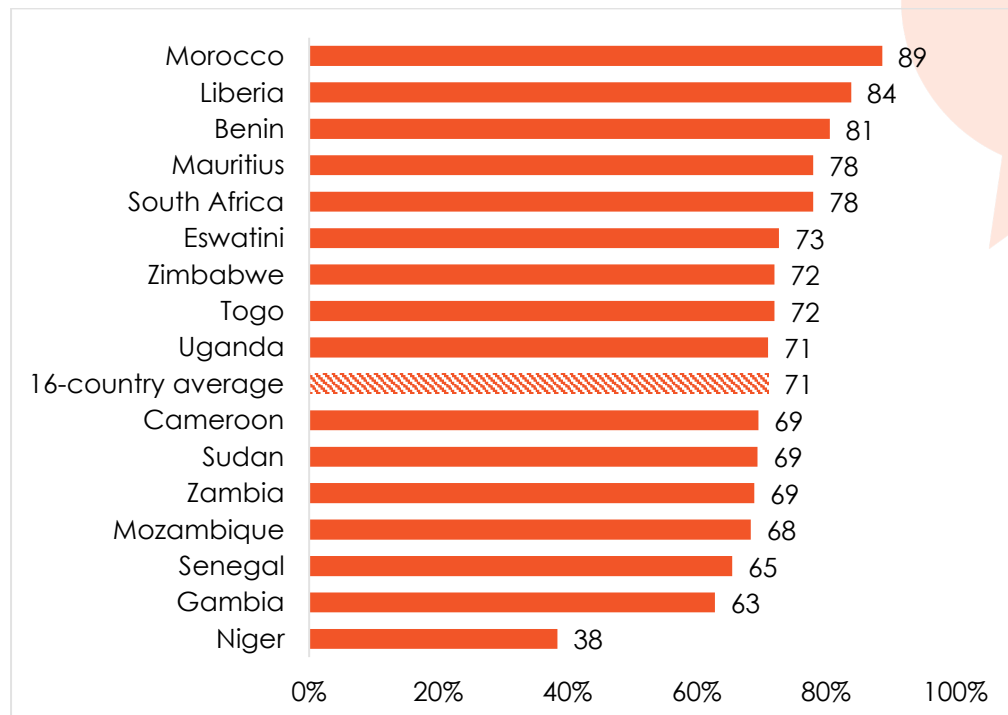
**Respondents were asked:** When the country is facing a public health emergency like the COVID-19 pandemic, do you agree or disagree that it is justified for the government to temporarily limit democracy or democratic freedoms by taking the following measures: Using the police and security forces to enforce public health mandates like lockdown orders, mask requirements, or restrictions on public gatherings? Postponing elections or limiting political campaigning? Censoring media reporting?

With the exception of Niger (38%), strong majorities in all surveyed countries would endorse the government’s use of security forces to enforce public health restrictions (Figure 31). Morocco and Liberia stand out for their willingness to accept the use of security forces (89% and 84%, respectively), the postponement of elections (70% and 81%) (Figure 32), and the censoring of the media (90% and 71%) (Figure 33) during public health emergencies. Niger, the Gambia, and Senegal are consistently among the least tolerant of these types of restrictions.

Asked whether they were concerned that politicians were using the pandemic to increase their power, six in 10 respondents (60%), on average, said they were “somewhat worried” or “very worried” (Figure 34). This concern was shared by seven in 10 Mozambicans (71%), Ugandans (71%), Senegalese (70%), and Mauritians (70%). Only in two countries did majorities say they were “not very worried” or “not at all worried” – Morocco (55%) and Benin (53%).

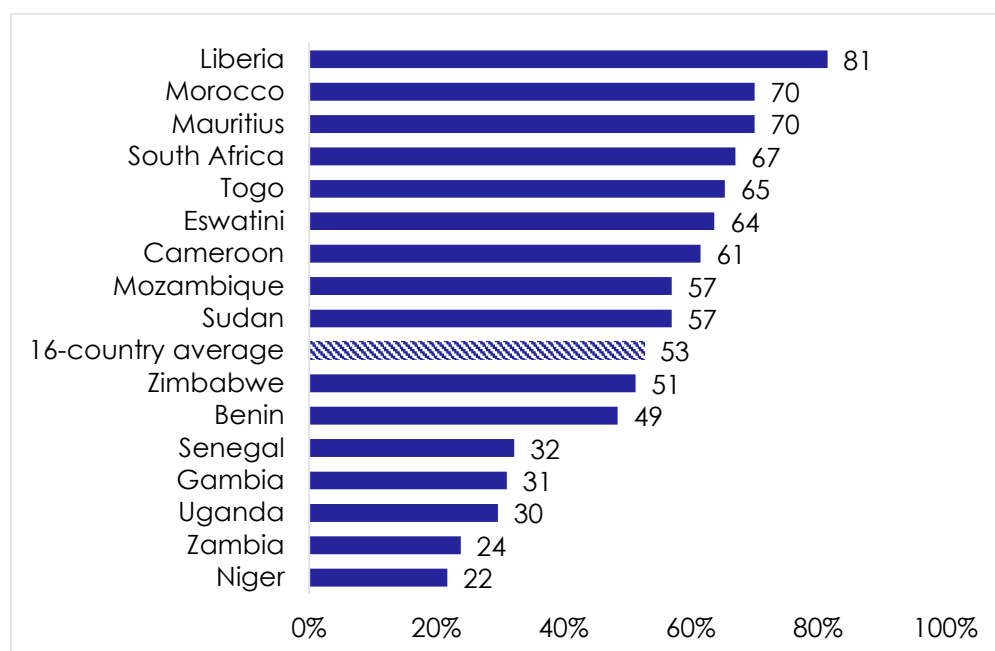


**Figure 31: Use security forces to enforce public health mandate | 16 countries**  
| 2020/2021



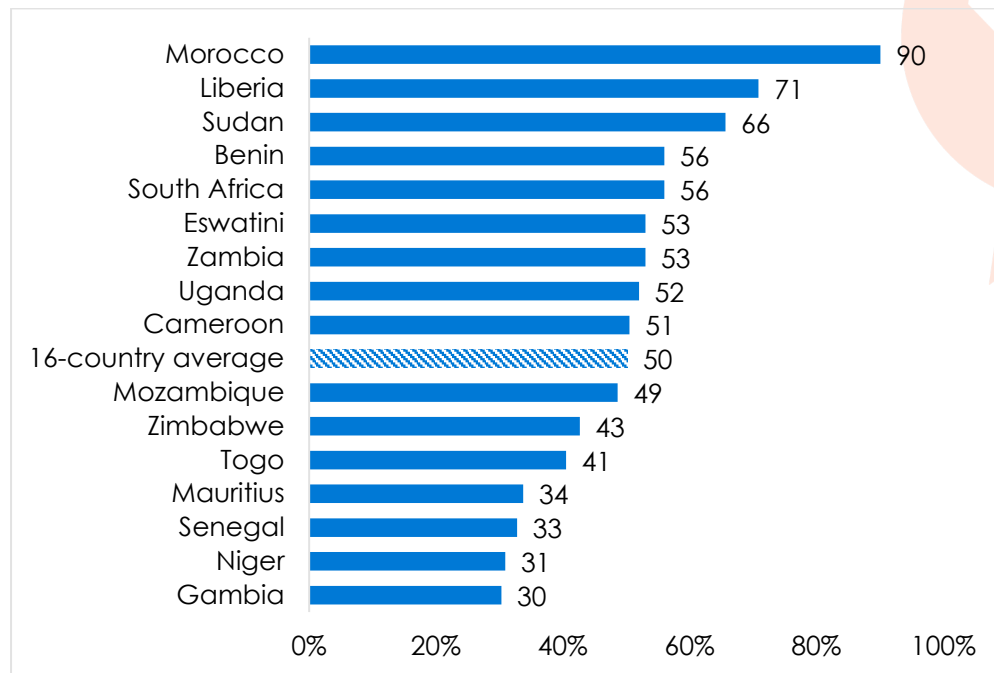
**Respondents were asked:** When the country is facing a public health emergency like the COVID-19 pandemic, do you agree or disagree that it is justified for the government to temporarily limit democracy or democratic freedoms by taking the following measures: Using the police and security forces to enforce public health mandates like lockdown orders, mask requirements, or restrictions on public gatherings? (% who "agree" or "strongly agree")

**Figure 32: Postpone elections or limit campaigns during pandemic | 16 countries**  
| 2020/2021



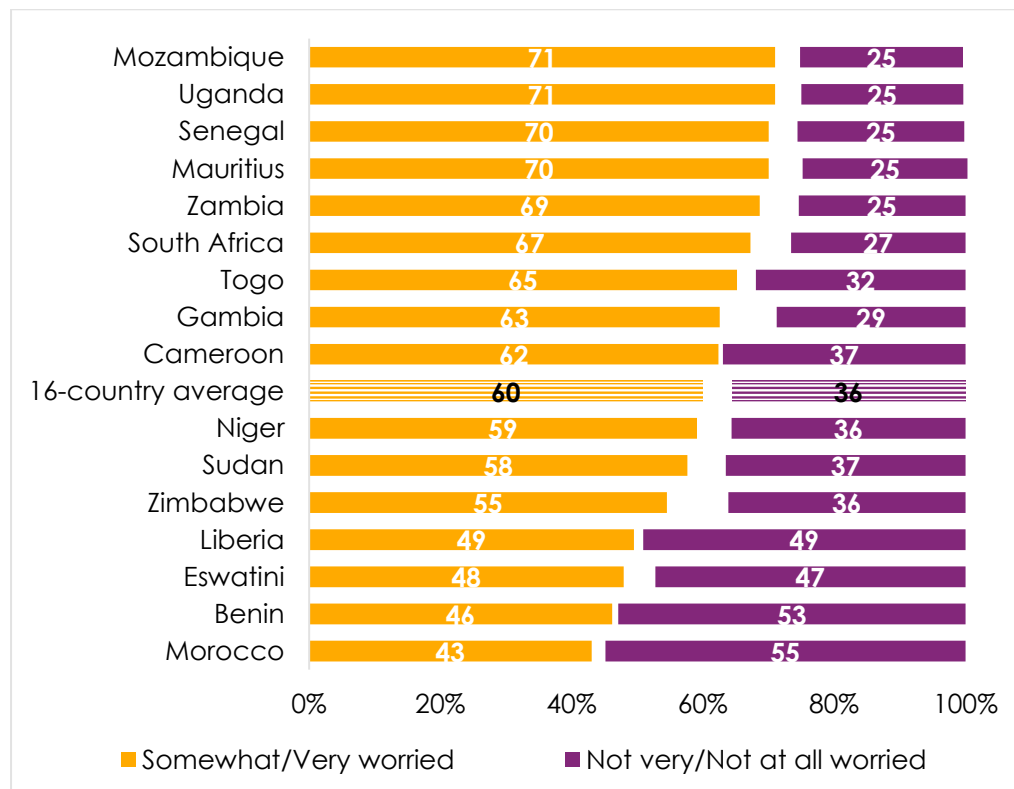
**Respondents were asked:** When the country is facing a public health emergency like the COVID-19 pandemic, do you agree or disagree that it is justified for the government to temporarily limit democracy or democratic freedoms by taking the following measures: Postponing elections or limiting political campaigning? (% who "agree" or "strongly agree")

**Figure 33: Censor media during pandemic** | 16 countries | 2020/2021



**Respondents were asked:** When the country is facing a public health emergency like the COVID-19 pandemic, do you agree or disagree that it is justified for the government to temporarily limit democracy or democratic freedoms by taking the following measures: Censoring media reporting? (% who "agree" or "strongly agree")

**Figure 34: Worried about politicians using the pandemic to increase their power** | 16 countries | 2020/2021



**Respondents were asked:** How worried are you, if at all, that the following things are taking place or might take place in [your country]: Politicians are using the pandemic as an opportunity to increase their power and authority?

## When Africans speak out, are their governments listening?

African citizens in many countries have been raising their voices, calling on their governments to fulfill their democratic aspirations. In the last three years alone, protesters have taken to the streets to demand women's rights and representation in Cameroon and democracy in Eswatini; oppose police brutality in Nigeria, Somalia, and Tunisia; reject anti-democratic power grabs in Tunisia and Sudan and third-term efforts in Côte d'Ivoire and Togo; and voice their concerns about the cost of living and inflation in Ghana, Madagascar, Malawi, Sierra Leone, South Africa, and Uganda. Since 2017, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace's (2022) Global Protest Tracker has recorded nearly 100 episodes of protest across 37 African countries.

Citizen participation and government responsiveness are cornerstones of democracy. How, and how much, do citizens express their preferences, evaluations, and aspirations? And are their governments listening?

The data reveal that Africans invest considerable effort in making themselves heard. But their governments are not always listening or responding. In fact, sometimes governments suppress citizen action (Gyimah & Asunka, 2021; Logan, Asunka, & Gyimah-Boadi, 2021; Asunka et al., 2022).

Voting is the most obvious and popular way for citizens to express themselves, and Africans take advantage of this opportunity. Two-thirds (67%) say they voted in their most recent national election. But elections occur only occasionally, and they force individuals to compress a wide array of views into very few choices. How do Africans find their voice during the long intervals between elections?

Many invest in personal efforts to act as agents of change. More than half (55%) say they joined with others to raise an issue at least once in the past year, and 17% attended a demonstration or protest. One-third (34%) contacted a political leader (a party official, MP, or local government councillor).

These robust levels of citizen engagement suggest that people feel they can make a difference. Unfortunately, decision makers are not always receptive or responsive to citizen voices. Fewer than one in five respondents (17%) think local government councillors "often" or "always" listen "to what people like you have to say," compared to 43% who say these elected officials "never" do so. The comparable numbers for MPs are even worse (12% and 55%, respectively).

Even more troubling is that more than two-thirds (70%) say they risk "retaliation or other negative consequences" if they take action by reporting incidents of corruption; just 27% think they can make such a report without fear. Majorities in 32 of 34 countries believe they would face retaliation (Figure 35), including more than eight in 10 citizens in Nigeria (83%), Côte d'Ivoire (83%), Malawi (83%), Eswatini (83%), and Gabon (91%).

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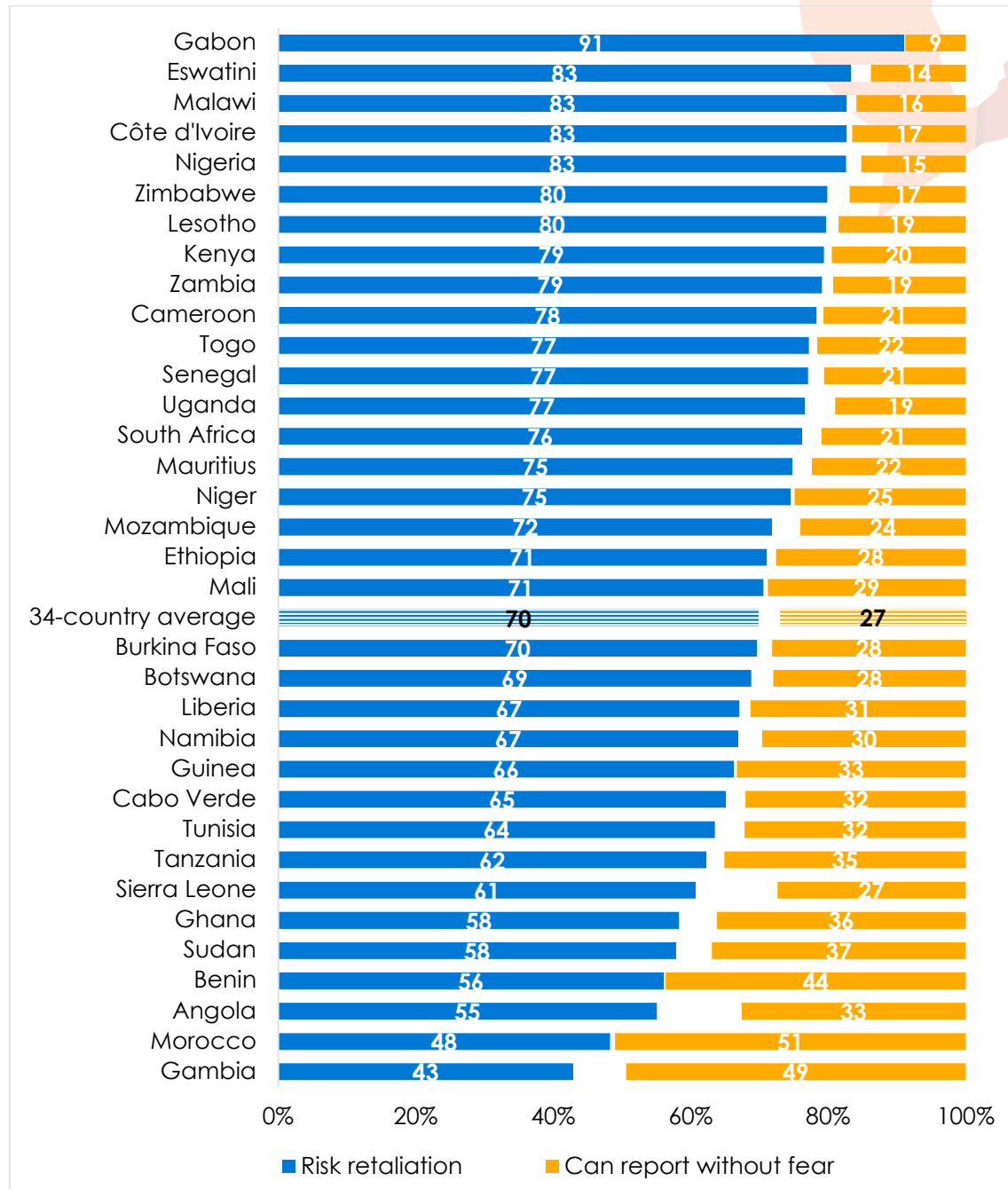
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As previously noted, respect for popular voices may have direct implications for citizens' satisfaction with democracy: As fear of retaliation goes up, satisfaction with

democracy declines (see Figure 23). We also find that people are more likely to contact leaders if they do not fear retaliation. In short, we can conclude that when governments are responsive, citizens are more likely to engage in addressing community needs and to be satisfied with their political system. Respectful and responsive governance has the potential to spur citizen action that can contribute to solving critical development challenges.

**Figure 35: Do citizens believe they can safely report corruption? | 34 countries**  
| 2019/2021




**Respondents were asked:** *In this country, can ordinary people report incidents of corruption without fear, or do they risk retaliation or other negative consequences if they speak out?*

### Conclusions

As the extensive data presented here make clear, it is not easy to summarise “the state of democracy” in Africa. But in aggregate, in these findings on public attitudes regarding democracy across 34 diverse countries, we see cause for both optimism and deep concern.

Popular demand for democracy remains largely steady and robust – albeit with exceptions on some indicators (especially support for elections) and in some countries.

But problems are evident on the supply side. Satisfaction with democracy has dropped, a decline that appears to be tied to perceptions that corruption is continuing to spread –

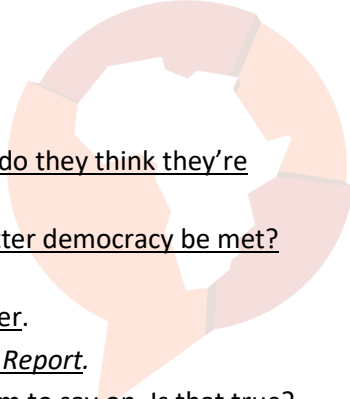


including in some countries, especially in Southern Africa, that had previously enjoyed quite positive evaluations of corruption levels. And while many citizens use their opportunities to make their voices heard, relatively few believe their governments actually listen. In fact, many fear they would face repercussions if they were to speak out on issues of corruption.

In sum, we find that African states are not fulfilling the pro-democracy aspirations of their citizens. The trends are especially troubling in some of the countries long regarded as leading democratic lights on the continent.

Contrary to their widely voiced concerns, however, pro-democracy activists may take some comfort in the findings that neither China's growing presence on the continent nor the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic appear to have significantly undermined popular commitment to, or satisfaction with, democracy in Africa.

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## Appendix

Table A.1: Afrobarometer Round 8 fieldwork dates and previous survey rounds

Country	Round 8 fieldwork	Previous survey rounds
<b>Angola</b>	Nov.-Dec. 2019	N/A
<b>Benin</b>	Nov.-Dec. 2020	2005, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2017
<b>Botswana</b>	July-August 2019	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017
<b>Burkina Faso</b>	Dec. 2019	2008, 2012, 2015, 2017
<b>Cabo Verde</b>	Dec. 2019	2002, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2017
<b>Cameroon</b>	Feb.-March 2021	2013, 2015, 2018
<b>Côte d'Ivoire</b>	Nov. 2019	2013, 2014, 2017
<b>Eswatini</b>	March-April 2021	2013, 2015, 2018
<b>Ethiopia</b>	Dec. 2019-Jan. 2020	2013
<b>Gabon</b>	Feb. 2020	2015, 2017
<b>Gambia</b>	Feb. 2021	2018
<b>Ghana</b>	Sept.-Oct. 2019	1999, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017
<b>Guinea</b>	Nov.-Dec. 2019	2013, 2015, 2017
<b>Kenya</b>	August-Sept. 2019	2003, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2016
<b>Lesotho</b>	Feb.-March 2020	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017
<b>Liberia</b>	Oct.-Dec. 2020	2008, 2012, 2015, 2018
<b>Malawi</b>	Nov.-Dec. 2019	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017
<b>Mali</b>	March-April 2020	2001, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2014, 2017
<b>Mauritius</b>	Nov. 2020	2012, 2014, 2017
<b>Morocco</b>	Feb. 2021	2013, 2015, 2018
<b>Mozambique</b>	May-July 2021	2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015, 2018
<b>Namibia</b>	August 2019	1999, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017
<b>Niger</b>	Oct.-Nov. 2020	2013, 2015, 2018
<b>Nigeria</b>	Jan.-Feb. 2020	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2015, 2017
<b>Senegal</b>	Dec. 2020-Jan. 2021	2002, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2014, 2017
<b>Sierra Leone</b>	March 2020	2012, 2015, 2018
<b>South Africa</b>	May-June 2021	2000, 2002, 2006, 2008, 2011, 2015, 2018
<b>Sudan</b>	Feb.-April 2021	2013, 2015, 2018
<b>Tanzania</b>	Feb.-March 2021	2001, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017
<b>Togo</b>	Dec. 2020-Jan. 2021	2012, 2014, 2017
<b>Tunisia</b>	Feb.-March 2020	2013, 2015, 2018
<b>Uganda</b>	Sept.-Oct. 2019	2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015, 2017
<b>Zambia</b>	Nov.-Dec. 2020	1999, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2013, 2014, 2017
<b>Zimbabwe</b>	April-May 2021	1999, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2012, 2014, 2017

**Table A.2: Round 8 indicators of demand for democracy** | 34 countries | 2019/2021

	Prefer democracy	Reject military rule	Reject one-party rule	Reject one-person rule	Full demand for democracy	Support elections as best way to choose leaders	Support presidential term limits	Support multiparty competition	Support presidential compliance with court decisions	Support parliamentary oversight of president	Prefer accountable governance
<b>Angola</b>	37%	60%	63%	64%	20%	61%	62%	47%	52%	48%	46%
<b>Benin</b>	81%	79%	89%	94%	59%	87%	89%	67%	82%	76%	61%
<b>Botswana</b>	71%	89%	86%	92%	57%	74%	78%	72%	80%	77%	79%
<b>Burkina Faso</b>	70%	44%	80%	81%	27%	84%	77%	53%	67%	74%	55%
<b>Cabo Verde</b>	79%	80%	91%	84%	53%	78%	69%	74%	81%	82%	80%
<b>Cameroon</b>	57%	64%	78%	80%	32%	70%	74%	72%	76%	50%	50%
<b>Côte d'Ivoire</b>	72%	78%	81%	85%	50%	76%	77%	73%	83%	70%	55%
<b>Eswatini</b>	49%	90%	67%	87%	27%	58%	65%	59%	80%	74%	65%
<b>Ethiopia</b>	90%	75%	76%	84%	54%	85%	65%	63%	70%	68%	64%
<b>Gabon</b>	71%	75%	91%	91%	51%	65%	92%	78%	89%	67%	46%
<b>Gambia</b>	70%	81%	89%	94%	56%	88%	83%	57%	72%	84%	75%
<b>Ghana</b>	77%	69%	80%	86%	49%	83%	77%	70%	78%	78%	78%
<b>Guinea</b>	77%	76%	71%	79%	43%	83%	77%	63%	81%	66%	46%
<b>Kenya</b>	75%	89%	79%	88%	56%	74%	78%	71%	83%	72%	76%
<b>Lesotho</b>	52%	75%	43%	75%	20%	40%	66%	36%	87%	64%	64%
<b>Liberia</b>	83%	75%	85%	88%	57%	90%	85%	50%	83%	66%	63%
<b>Malawi</b>	52%	82%	63%	78%	30%	54%	74%	70%	75%	57%	72%
<b>Mali</b>	62%	70%	76%	86%	40%	74%	86%	49%	81%	78%	50%
<b>Mauritius</b>	75%	90%	95%	94%	68%	83%	71%	73%	85%	78%	78%



	Prefer democracy	Reject military rule	Reject one-party rule	Reject one-person rule	Full demand for democracy	Support elections as best way to choose leaders	Support presidential term limits	Support multiparty competition	Support presidential compliance with court decisions	Support parliamentary oversight of president	Prefer accountable governance
<b>Morocco</b>	80%	91%	85%	77%	54%	80%	83%	60%	65%	64%	66%
<b>Mozambique</b>	49%	59%	49%	55%	16%	62%	60%	66%	64%	49%	47%
<b>Namibia</b>	56%	75%	83%	82%	36%	72%	71%	71%	69%	52%	64%
<b>Niger</b>	64%	62%	84%	84%	37%	80%	83%	64%	74%	66%	44%
<b>Nigeria</b>	75%	74%	81%	82%	53%	74%	87%	56%	70%	63%	51%
<b>Senegal</b>	88%	75%	92%	88%	57%	80%	85%	46%	74%	73%	53%
<b>Sierra Leone</b>	85%	72%	87%	91%	58%	87%	79%	62%	80%	77%	70%
<b>South Africa</b>	40%	65%	64%	67%	20%	55%	66%	64%	70%	50%	54%
<b>Sudan</b>	50%	55%	74%	71%	24%	80%	66%	54%			52%
<b>Tanzania</b>	77%	88%	66%	92%	51%	85%	81%	77%	76%	77%	60%
<b>Togo</b>	73%	68%	85%	87%	48%	74%	87%	72%	78%	74%	65%
<b>Tunisia</b>	58%	50%	56%	39%	15%	73%	72%	37%	58%	50%	65%
<b>Uganda</b>	70%	87%	78%	87%	49%	80%	70%	72%	77%	67%	71%
<b>Zambia</b>	84%	90%	83%	91%	64%	76%	84%	74%	82%	68%	75%
<b>Zimbabwe</b>	78%	84%	75%	87%	58%	75%	80%	70%	86%	64%	62%
<b>34-country average*</b>	68%	75%	77%	82%	44%	75%	76%	63%	75%	67%	62%

\* Questions on support for presidential compliance with court decisions and parliamentary oversight of the president were not asked in Sudan.

**Table A.3: Round 8 indicators of supply of democracy | 34 countries | 2019/2021**

	Perceive country to be a democracy	Satisfied with the way democracy works	Perceive full supply of democracy	Last election was free and fair (or minor problems)	President accountable to Parliament	President obeys laws and courts	Officials do not act with impunity
Angola	39%	17%	12%	47%	57%	55%	43%
Benin	67%	51%	45%	65%	74%	70%	55%
Botswana	76%	58%	53%	81%	75%	73%	43%
Burkina Faso	64%	55%	45%	87%	74%	72%	50%
Cabo Verde	57%	23%	21%	64%	73%	70%	51%
Cameroon	44%	32%	24%	47%	59%	56%	40%
Côte d'Ivoire	43%	34%	28%	62%	51%	48%	30%
Eswatini	27%	16%	10%	77%	62%	59%	39%
Ethiopia	48%	42%	33%	47%	65%	64%	43%
Gabon	23%	11%	8%	31%	38%	35%	21%
Gambia	59%	46%	38%	71%	45%	42%	42%
Ghana	70%	66%	56%	81%	65%	63%	34%
Guinea	40%	28%	24%	62%	50%	45%	40%
Kenya	68%	59%	51%	62%	79%	75%	32%
Lesotho	22%	21%	10%	64%	30%	33%	25%
Liberia	67%	39%	35%	83%	55%	52%	31%
Malawi	36%	35%	20%	41%	67%	69%	44%
Mali	26%	22%	14%	69%	49%	46%	32%
Mauritius	59%	51%	48%	63%	54%	53%	61%
Morocco	54%	70%	49%	54%	54%	57%	38%

	Perceive country to be a democracy	Satisfied with the way democracy works	Perceive full supply of democracy	Last election was free and fair (or minor problems)	President accountable to Parliament	President obeys laws and courts	Officials do not act with impunity
<b>Mozambique</b>	49%	42%	27%	62%	72%	72%	58%
<b>Namibia</b>	69%	50%	45%	78%	77%	75%	49%
<b>Niger</b>	58%	42%	37%	66%	66%	66%	50%
<b>Nigeria</b>	58%	37%	31%	67%	42%	41%	34%
<b>Senegal</b>	53%	48%	38%	68%	45%	44%	33%
<b>Sierra Leone</b>	70%	56%	53%	79%	44%	46%	37%
<b>South Africa</b>	37%	31%	19%	61%	57%	50%	26%
<b>Sudan</b>	25%	31%	16%	19%			23%
<b>Tanzania</b>	86%	84%	80%	90%	90%	91%	77%
<b>Togo</b>	44%	31%	25%	57%	56%	53%	32%
<b>Tunisia</b>	46%	54%	35%	69%	53%	48%	17%
<b>Uganda</b>	53%	48%	39%	62%	50%	50%	35%
<b>Zambia</b>	52%	37%	31%	61%	64%	62%	45%
<b>Zimbabwe</b>	36%	41%	32%	44%	38%	40%	33%
<b>34-country average*</b>	51%	41%	35%	63%	60%	58%	40%

\*Questions on presidential accountability to Parliament and compliance with laws and courts were not asked in Sudan.

# AFRO BAROMETER

LET THE PEOPLE HAVE A SAY



Afrobarometer, a nonprofit corporation with headquarters in Ghana, is a pan-African, non-partisan research network. Regional coordination of national partners in about 35 countries is provided by the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, and the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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