

Seychellois open to international collaboration, want greater African voice on global platforms

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 1175 | Daniel Iberi and Kofi Otu-Beecham

Summary

Seychelles' economy is a development success story in a region marked by high debt distress, geopolitical tensions, and unemployment (World Bank, 2026). In 2015, Seychelles became the first African country to achieve high-income status (African Development Bank Group, 2025). With a gross domestic product per capita of \$17,858 and economic growth averaging 3% over the past two decades, this small island state's economy has been primarily driven by tourism and industrial fishing supported by market-based structural reforms (World Bank, 2021).

Seychelles maintains strong trade links with countries in the Middle East (United Arab Emirates, its largest export destination), Europe (France, United Kingdom, Spain, Italy), Asia (Singapore, India), and Africa (South Africa) (World Bank, 2022). While it is an active member of both the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), its trade is anchored more in global markets than these regional economic communities (RECs) (Trade Law Centre, 2019). According to the World Bank (2022), Seychelles' imports far exceed its exports, highlighting the country's dependence on external markets.

Despite trading more with countries outside Africa, Seychelles has made efforts to integrate into the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) (Ministry of Finance, National Planning and Trade, 2024). In March 2026, it signed a memorandum of agreement with the AfCFTA Secretariat to establish a digital trade architecture and promote e-commerce integration (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Diaspora, 2026; News Ghana, 2026).

Politically, Seychelles maintains a non-alignment posture and has cultivated strong ties with many African countries as well as China, India, and the European Union (EU), a strategic foreign-relations approach that has enabled it to optimise development cooperation, security, trade, and investment opportunities (Cabestan, 2021). Beyond the RECs, its affiliation with the Indian Ocean Rim Association, the Indian Ocean Commission, and the Alliance of Small Island States places it at the centre of Indian Ocean geopolitics as an influential actor in blue economy, ocean governance, and maritime security (Observer Research Foundation, 2019; International Maritime Organization, 2025).

How do Seychellois view their economic and political relations with the rest of the world?

Findings from the most recent Afrobarometer survey show that citizens tend to support free international trade, although a sizeable share would prefer protectionist policies. Few are aware of the AfCFTA.

They generally welcome the economic and political influence of India, China, the AU, the EU, and SADC, although many express neutral or "don't know" assessments. In particular, perceptions that China's influence on Seychelles is both substantial and positive have increased significantly in recent years.

Citizens generally express satisfaction with the way their country's needs and interests are recognised in AU and SADC decision making, but they say African countries need a stronger voice on global platforms such as the United Nations.

Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Ten survey rounds in up to 45 countries have been completed since 1999. Round 10 surveys (2024/2025) cover 38 countries. Afrobarometer's National Partners conduct face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

In Seychelles, the Institute for Development Studies of the University of Nairobi, in partnership with a local consultant, interviewed a nationally representative sample of 1,200 adult Seychellois in May 2025. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. A previous survey was conducted in Seychelles in 2022.

Key findings

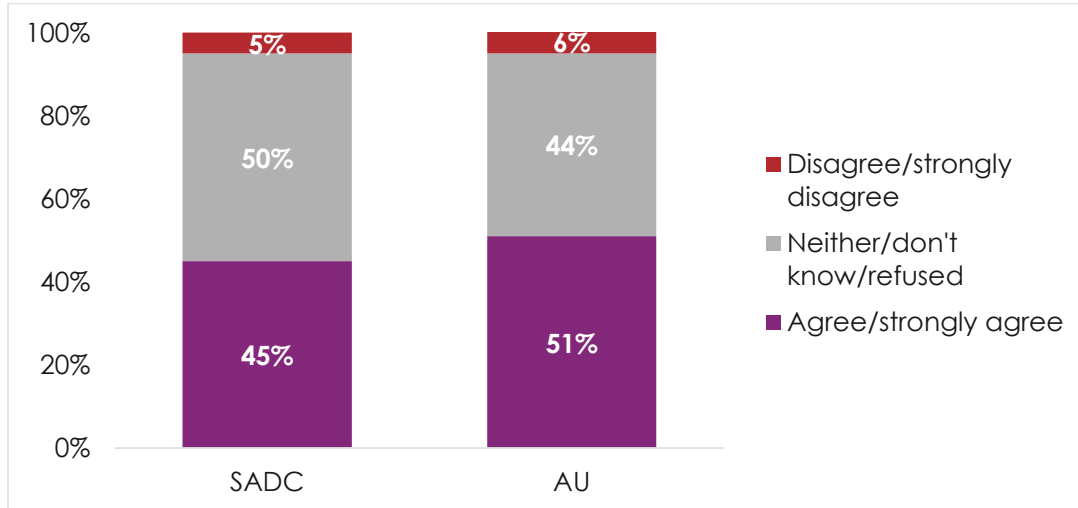
- By a ratio of about 9 to 1, satisfaction outpaces dissatisfaction with the way the AU and SADC recognise Seychelles' needs and interests in their decision making, although many Seychellois offer neutral or "don't know" responses.
 - A majority (59%) of citizens say African countries should have a greater say in international decision-making bodies such as the United Nations.
- Almost half (47%) of Seychellois endorse free trade to generate economic opportunity, but a substantial minority (39%) prefer limiting international trade to protect domestic producers.
 - If leaders choose to make international trade easier, most Seychellois (72%) would favour trade with countries around the world, while only small minorities would prefer focusing on Africa (11%) or the Southern African region (3%).
 - Only 20% of respondents say they have heard of the AfCFTA.
- Positive assessments outweigh negative ones when it comes to the economic and political influence of India (55% vs. 9%), China (53% vs. 9%), the AU (45% vs. 5%), the EU (45% vs. 9%), SADC (43% vs. 4%), Britain (39% vs. 9%), and the United States (35% vs. 14%).
 - Asked who helped Seychelles most during the COVID-19 pandemic, citizens are most likely to cite China (32%), followed by India (13%).
 - A growing share of citizens say that China's economic activities have "some" or "a lot" of influence on Seychelles' economy, rising from 41% in 2022 to 48% in 2025. Over the same period, the proportion who view China's economic and political influence as positive increased by 20 percentage points.
- Among the 94% of Seychellois who are aware of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, an overwhelming majority (92%) favour taking a neutral stance on the war.

Africa's voice in international affairs

By a ratio of about 9 to 1, Seychellois say their country's needs and interests are adequately recognised in decisions by SADC (45% agree vs. 5% disagree) and the African Union (AU)

(51% vs. 6%) (Figure 1). But in both cases, large proportions indicate uncertainty (50% and 44%, respectively), saying they “neither agree nor disagree” or “don’t know” or declining to offer a response.

Figure 1: Recognition of Seychelles’ interests in regional and continental affairs
 | Seychelles | 2025

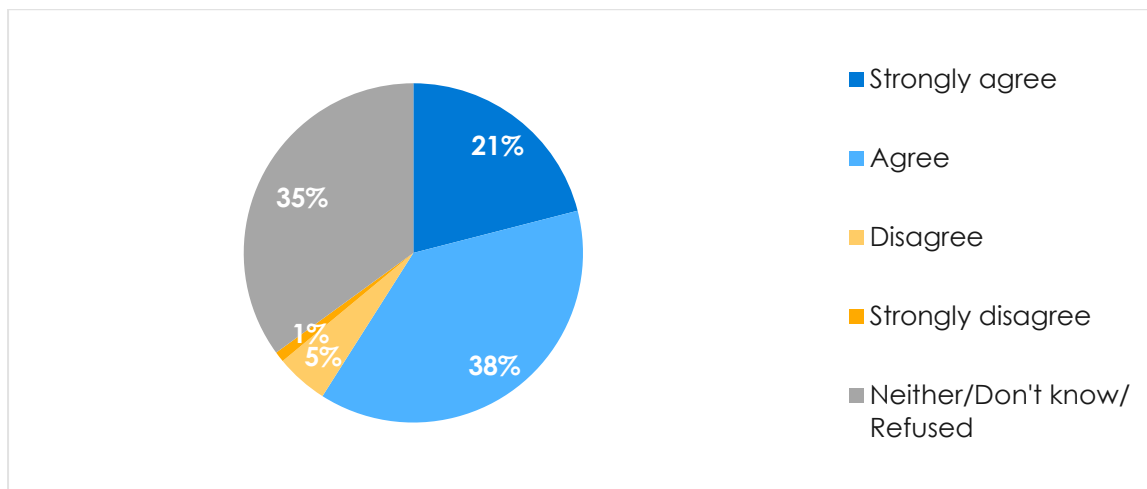


Respondents were asked: Do you agree or disagree with the following statements, or haven't you heard enough to say:

- The needs and interests of Seychelles are adequately recognised in the decisions of SADC?
- The needs and interests of Seychelles are adequately recognised by the African Union when it is making decisions for the African continent?

When it comes to the global stage, a majority (59%) of Seychellois say that African countries should be given greater influence in international decision-making bodies such as the United Nations (Figure 2). Only 6% disagree with the proposition.

Figure 2: Should African countries have more say in international bodies such as the United Nations?
 | Seychelles | 2025



Respondents were asked: Do you agree or disagree with the following statement, or haven't you heard enough to say: African countries should be given greater influence in the decision making of international bodies like the United Nations?

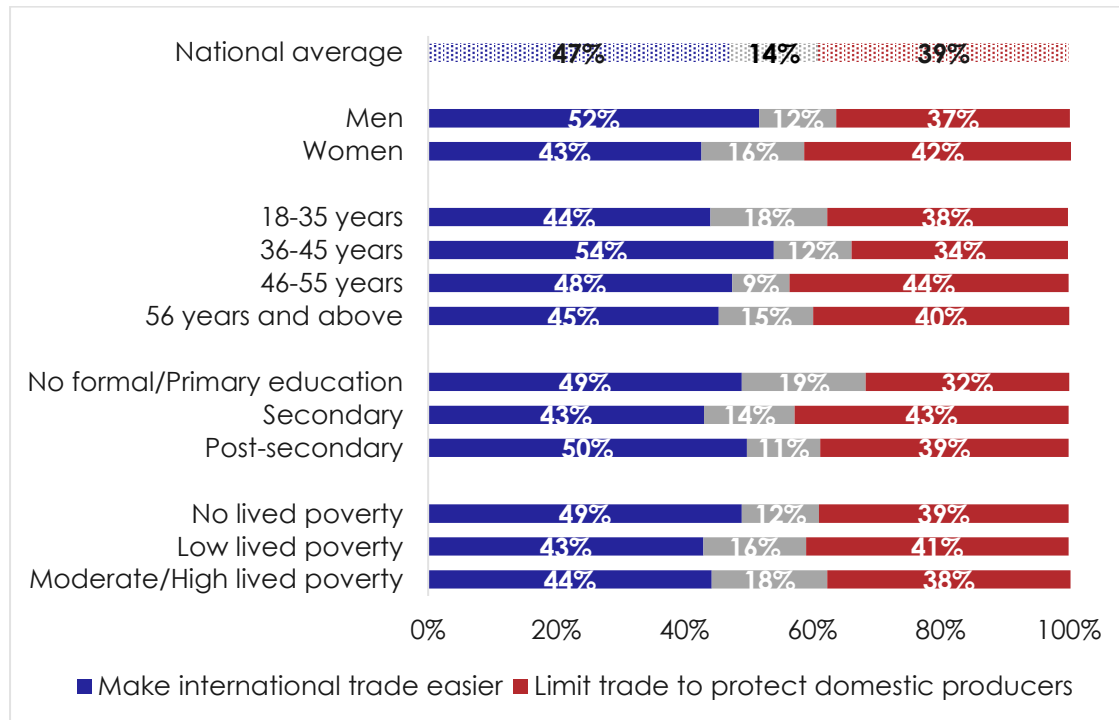
Trade with other countries

Despite Seychelles' extensive international commerce, citizens are less than overwhelming in their support for free trade: While almost half (47%) say it is better for their economy if the government creates economic opportunities by making it easier to trade with other countries, about four in 10 (39%) would prefer to limit international trade to protect domestic businesses (Figure 3).

Men (52%) are more likely than women (43%) to favour open trade. Support peaks among 36- to 45-year-olds (54%), while both younger and older citizens are somewhat less supportive (44%-48%).

Economically well-off citizens (49%) are slightly more supportive of free trade than those experiencing some level of lived poverty (43%-44%).¹

Figure 3: Open trade or limit trade? | by demographic group | Seychelles | 2025



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

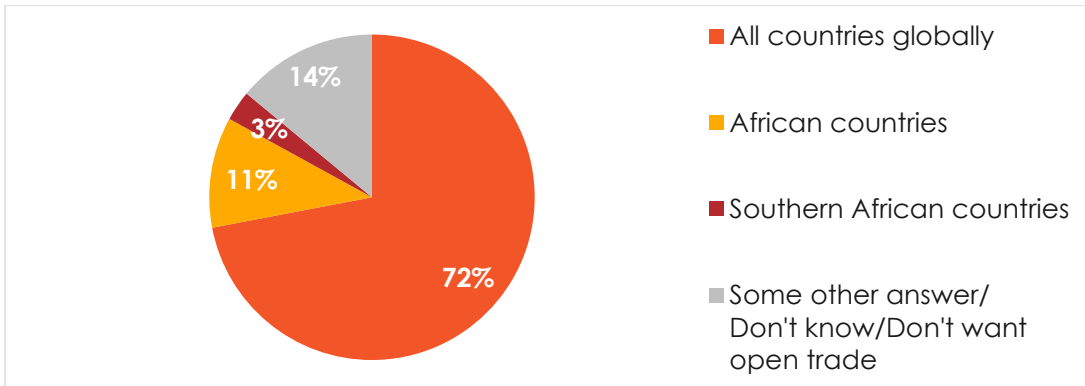
Statement 1: It is better for our economy if the government makes it easier for Seychelles to trade with other countries to create economic opportunities.

Statement 2: Our country should limit trade with other countries in order to protect Seychellois producers.

If the government were to facilitate greater trade with other countries, most citizens (72%) would favour trade with all countries worldwide, rather than limiting it to African countries (11%) or the Southern Africa region (3%) (Figure 4).

¹ Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents' levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes and Lekalake (2025).

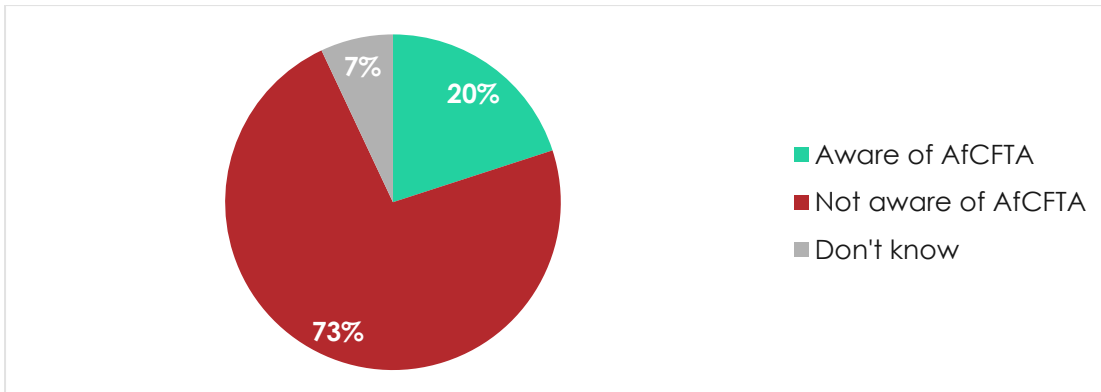
Figure 4: Which countries should leaders make it easier to trade with? | Seychelles | 2025



Respondents were asked: *If Seychelles leaders are going to make it easier to trade with other countries to create economic opportunities, which countries should they make it easier to trade with?*

Despite some support for free trade, most Seychellois are unaware of the initiative to create a single market for goods and services across the African continent: Only 20% of respondents say they have heard of the AfCFTA (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Awareness of the AfCFTA | Seychelles | 2025



Respondents were asked: *Have you heard about the African Continental Free Trade Area, also known as AfCFTA?*

Influence of external actors

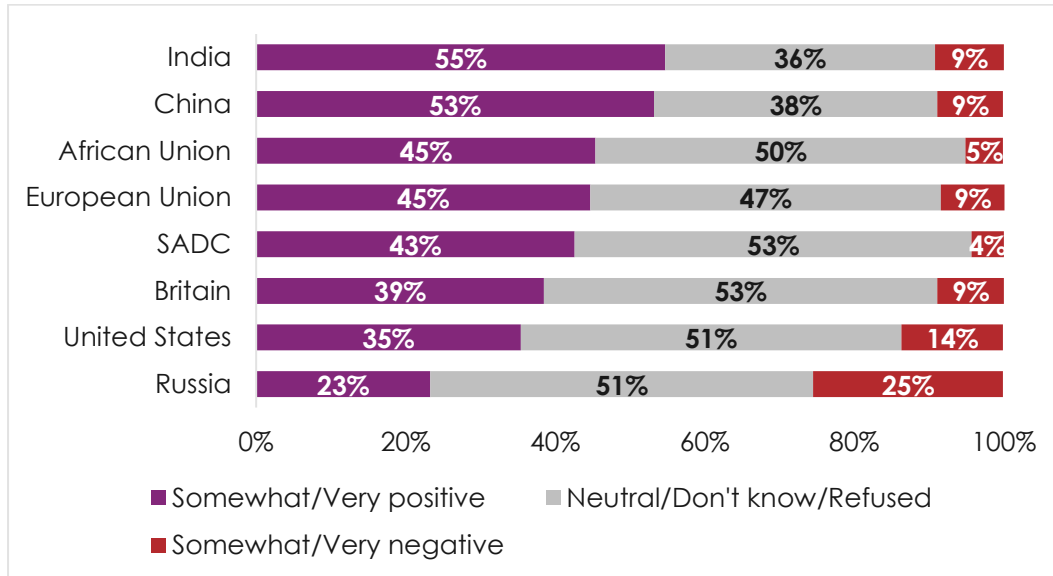
Seychellois are more likely than not to welcome the economic and political influence of major foreign nations and organisations on their country. But large proportions of respondents decline to offer an opinion or remain ambivalent (Figure 6).

A majority (55%) of respondents say India's influence is "somewhat positive" or "very positive," the most favourable assessment among the eight powers the survey asked about. More than half (53%) also hold positive views of Chinese influence, while nearly half express favourable assessments of three key multilateral organisations: the AU (45%), the EU (45%) and SADC (43%). Smaller shares recognise the value of the roles played by Britain (39%) and the United States (35%).

Russia is the only country for which negative perceptions outweigh positive ones (25% vs. 23%). Few Seychellois see the influence of the other powers as negative (4%-14%), but large

proportions are uncertain: Between 36% and 53% express neutral views, say they “don’t know,” or refused to answer the question.

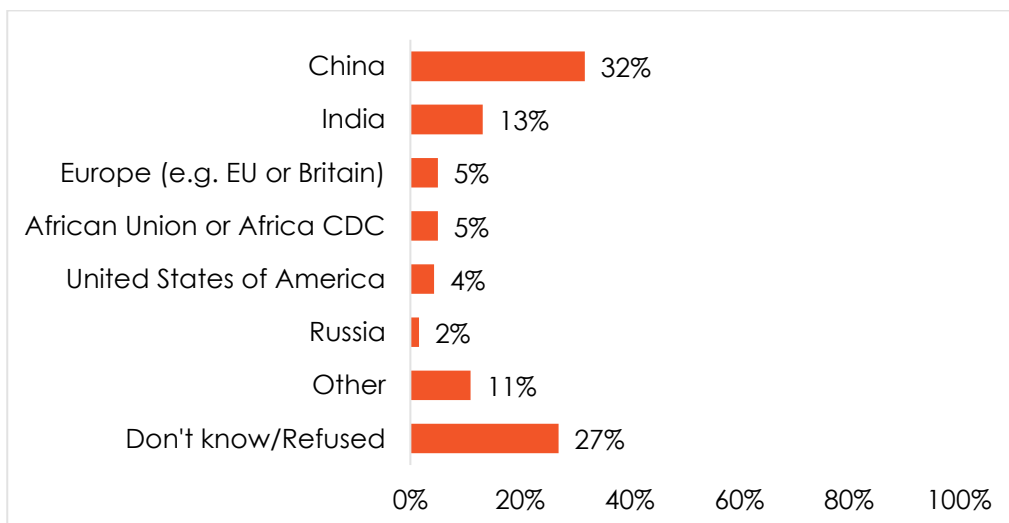
Figure 6: Influence of foreign powers | Seychelles | 2025



Respondents were asked: Do you think that the economic and political influence of each of the following countries or organisations on Seychelles is mostly positive, mostly negative, or haven’t you heard enough to say?

Asked which countries or organisations were most helpful to Seychelles during the COVID-19 pandemic, about one-third (32%) of respondents cite China, with India (13%) placing second (Figure 7). Few Seychellois point to assistance from Europe (5%), the AU or Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) (5%), the United States (4%), and Russia (2%), while about one-quarter (27%) say that they “don’t know.”

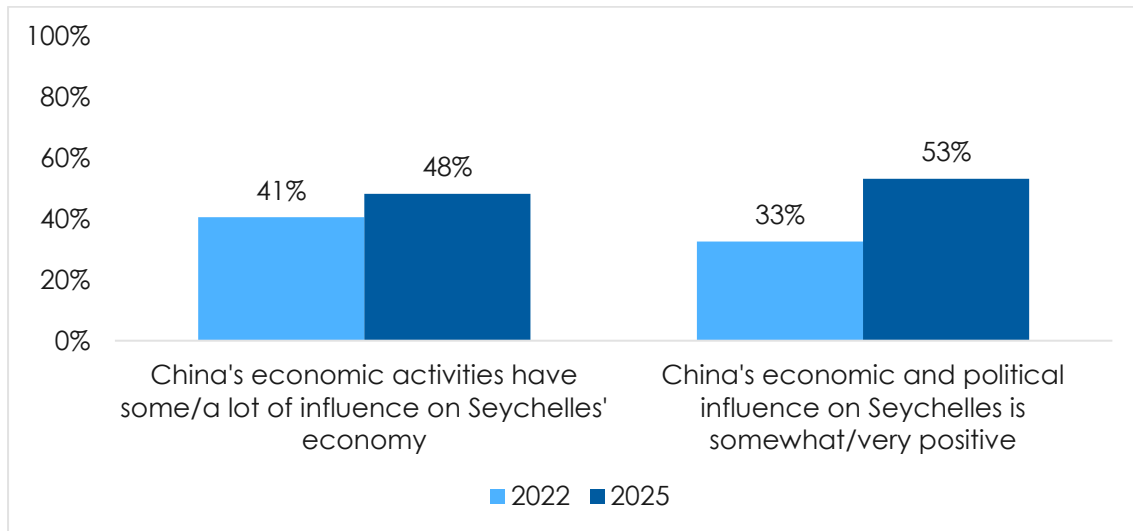
Figure 7: Most helpful countries or organisations in managing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic | Seychelles | 2025



Respondents were asked: Which of the following countries or organisations, if any, did the most to help Seychelles manage the negative impacts of COVID-19, or haven’t you heard enough to say?

More broadly, China has gained considerable ground in the eyes of Seychellois (Figure 8). The share of respondents who say that China's economic activities have "some" or "a lot" of influence on their country's economy increased from 41% in 2022 to 48% in 2025, and positive assessments of China's economic and political influence jumped by 20 percentage points, from 33% to 53%.

Figure 8: Trends in perceptions of Chinese influence | Seychelles | 2022-2025



Respondents were asked:

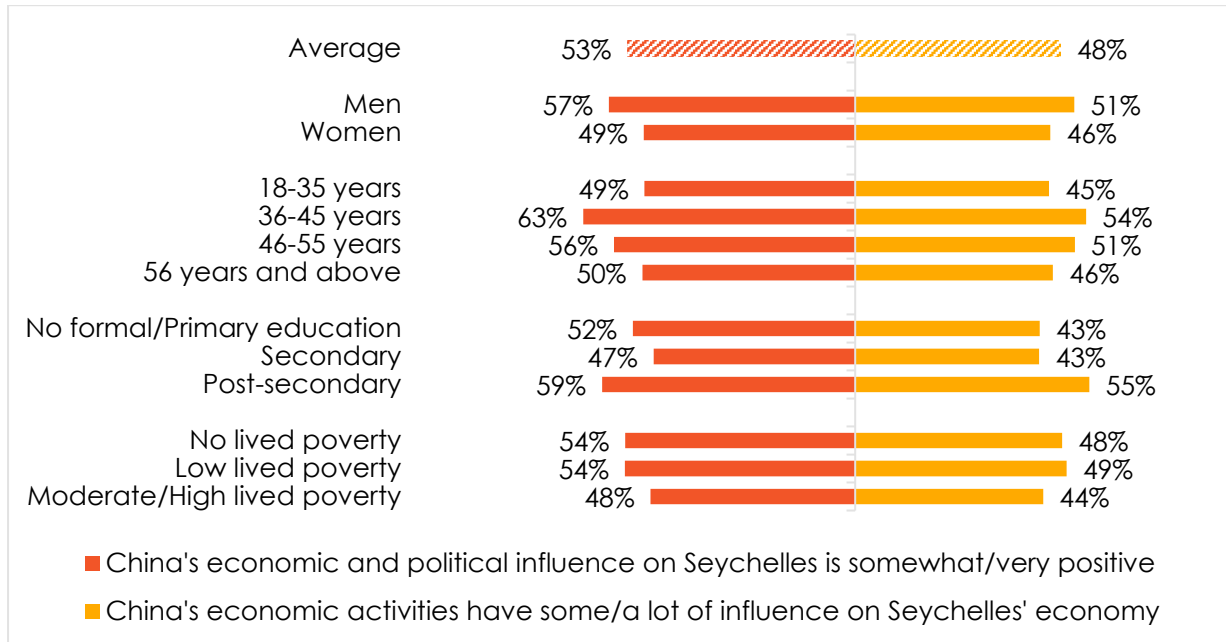
How much influence do you think China's economic activities in Seychelles have on our economy, or haven't you heard enough to say?

Do you think that the economic and political influence of each of the following countries or organisations on Seychelles is mostly positive, mostly negative, or haven't you heard enough to say: China?

More men than women see China's influence as substantial (51% vs. 46%) and positive (57% vs. 49%) (Figure 9). Citizens aged 36-45 are more likely than other age groups to say China has substantial and positive influence on Seychelles, as are the most educated respondents compared to those with less schooling. These perceptions are less common among people experiencing moderate or high levels of lived poverty than among their better-off counterparts.

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Figure 9: Perceptions of Chinese influence | by demographic group | Seychelles | 2025



Respondents were asked:

How much influence do you think China's economic activities in Seychelles have on our economy, or haven't you heard enough to say?
 Do you think that the economic and political influence of each of the following countries or organisations on Seychelles is mostly positive, mostly negative, or haven't you heard enough to say: China?

Russia-Ukraine war

Afrobarometer also asked Seychellois about their perceptions of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. An overwhelming majority (94%) of respondents report having heard about the conflict (Figure 10).

Among those who are aware of the war, more than nine in 10 (92%) say Seychelles should adopt a neutral stance (Figure 11). About one in 20 (4%) want the country to align with Ukraine, while almost no one urges support for Russia.

Figure 10: Awareness of the war between Russia and Ukraine | Seychelles | 2025

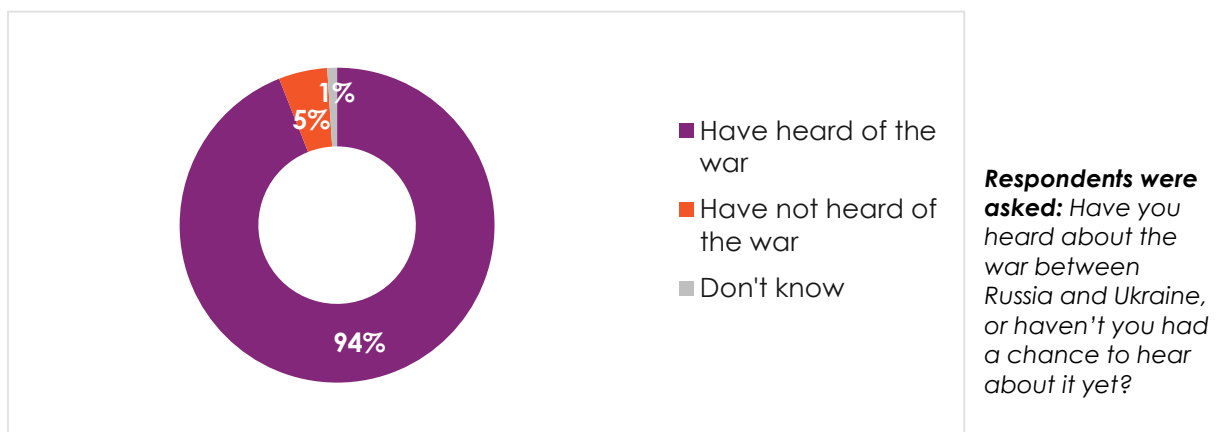
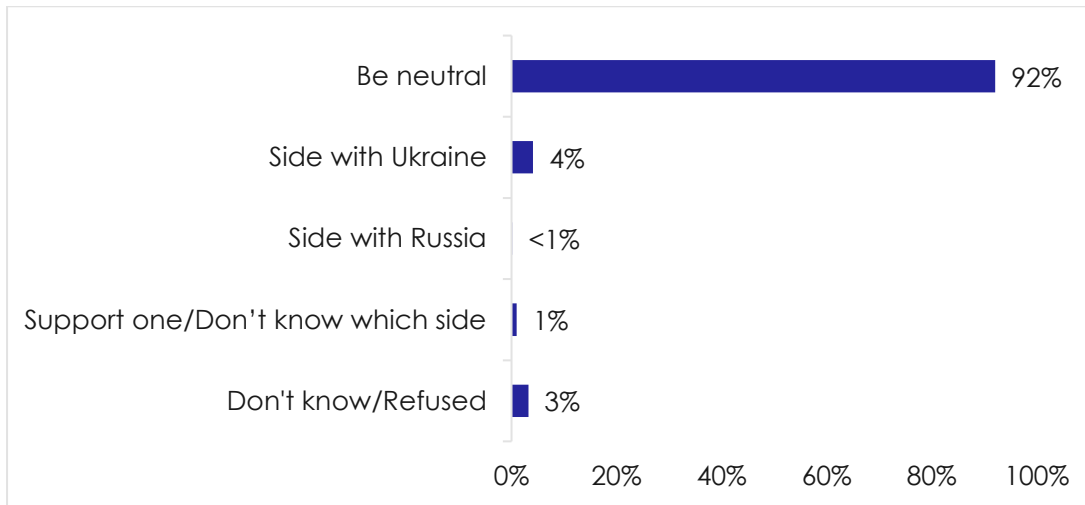


Figure 11: Support Russia or Ukraine? | Seychelles | 2025



Respondents who have heard of the Russia-Ukraine war were asked: *Should Seychelles be neutral or support one side or the other in the Russia-Ukraine war? [If "support one side":] Which side? (Respondents who have not heard of the war are excluded.)*

Conclusion

Survey findings suggest that Seychellois are more open than opposed to free international trade and collaboration with external powers such as India, China, the AU, the EU, and SADC, although many citizens don't take a stand either way. Notably, perceptions of the extent and positive impact of China's economic and political activities have grown significantly in recent years. Few citizens have heard of the AfCFTA.

Seychellois are also more satisfied than not with the way the AU and SADC take their country's needs and interests into account. But a majority say African countries should have a greater voice on international platforms such as the United Nations.

Most Seychellois are aware of the Russia-Ukraine war but would prefer that their country maintain a neutral stance.

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Afrobarometer, a nonprofit corporation with headquarters in Ghana, is a pan-African, nonpartisan 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, the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, and Innovante Recherche en Economie et Gouvernance (IREG) in Benin. Michigan State University and the University of Malawi provide technical support to the network.

Financial support for Afrobarometer is provided by Sweden via the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation via the World Bank Think Africa Project, the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Open Society Foundations - Africa, Luminate, the Ford Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Mastercard Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Obama Foundation, the European Union Commission, the World Bank Group, the Population Institute, the Centre for International Governance Innovation, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Uganda, the Royal Embassy of Denmark in Uganda/Danida, and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) supported by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH.

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Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 1175 | 1 May 2026