Dispatch No. 1246 | 27 October 2026

Majority of Batswana favour international trade, stronger African voice in global affairs

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 1246 | Elliot Abraham and Alfred Kwadzo Torsu

Summary[1]

Botswana is a landlocked country, but much of its economic growth has been powered by export earnings. While the country enjoys upper-middle-income status, its economy is highly dependent on diamond mining, which accounts for about two-thirds of export revenues, leaving it susceptible to global market fluctuations and declining demand in the diamond sector (International Monetary Fund, 2025; World Bank, n.d.; Schilirò, 2022). Economic diversification is a strategic priority for the government (Ministry of Finance, 2025).

Politically, Botswana has a reputation for stability and good governance; it ranked fifth out of 54 African countries in the 2023 Ibrahim Index of African Governance (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2024). The government works constructively with the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) to support peace efforts, economic cooperation, and regional integration. For instance, President Mokgweetsi Masisi chaired SADC's Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation in 2020-2021, and Botswana contributed troops to the SADC Mission in Mozambique from 2021 to 2024. The country also participates in SACU's common revenue pool and joint institutions (Southern African Development Community, 2020, 2024; Southern African Customs Union, 2025).

Botswana maintains strong economic and diplomatic relations with major global powers outside the continent, including China, the United States, and the European Union (EU). In 2025, China and Botswana signed an agreement on economic and technical cooperation (State Council, 2025). Botswana retains preferential access to the EU market under the EU-SADC Economic Partnership Agreement, which remains an important avenue for trade and investment cooperation, while it qualifies for textile and apparel benefits with the United States under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (European Commission, 2025; Office of the Historian, 2025; Office of the United States Trade Representative, 2025).

Botswana has ratified the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement, which aims to build an integrated African market with more than 1 billion consumers and opportunities for export diversification. In 2025, Botswana began developing a national AfCFTA implementation strategy, identifying where the country's comparative advantages align with continental demand, with the goal of breaking into value chains in sectors beyond diamonds (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2025).

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

Findings from the most recent Afrobarometer survey show that citizens are largely supportive of international trade and political cooperation.

[1] The authors used ChatGPT-5 to brainstorm the structure of the dispatch.

Copyright ©Afrobarometer 2026

Respondents tend to welcome the economic and political influence of SADC, the African Union (AU), China, the United States, and other major powers, though many citizens say they don't know enough to offer an opinion. And fewer than one in 10 are aware of the AfCFTA.

Citizens express greater satisfaction than dissatisfaction with the way Botswana's needs and interests are recognised in SADC and AU decision making. But a large majority say that African countries need a stronger voice on global platforms such as the United Nations.

Among Batswana who are aware of the Russia-Ukraine war, most favour taking a neutral stance.

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 (2024/2025) surveys cover 38 countries. Afrobarometer's National Partners conduct face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Botswana, led by Star Awards, interviewed a nationally representative sample of 1,200 adult Batswana in March 2024. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Margins of error are larger for subgroup analyses (e.g. demographic groups) due to smaller sample sizes. For more on the sampling methodology, click here. Previous surveys were conducted in Botswana in 1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2019, and 2022.

Key findings

- Batswana are more satisfied than dissatisfied with the way that SADC (49% vs. 15%) and the AU (45% vs. 12%) recognise their country's needs and interests in their decision making.
    - But two-thirds (66%) say African countries should have a greater say in international decision-making bodies such as the United Nations.
- More than half of Batswana prefer free trade over limiting international trade to protect domestic producers (55% vs. 42%).
    - If leaders facilitate international trade, a majority (63%) of Batswana favour trade with countries throughout the world, while about three in 10 would privilege trade with all countries in Africa (19%) or with countries in Southern Africa (10%).
- Only 8% of respondents say they have heard of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).
- Batswana hold more positive than negative views of the economic and political influence on their country of SADC, China, the United States, the AU, the EU, Britain, and India. But more see Russia's influence as negative than positive.
- Asked who helped Botswana most during the COVID-19 pandemic, respondents most frequently cite China (46%). Much smaller shares point to the United States (10%), while 35% say they "don't know."
- The proportion of citizens who see China's influence on Botswana as substantial has declined sharply compared to a decade ago (from 76% to 50%), as has the share who see China's influence as positive (from 74% to 37%).

Copyright ©Afrobarometer 2026

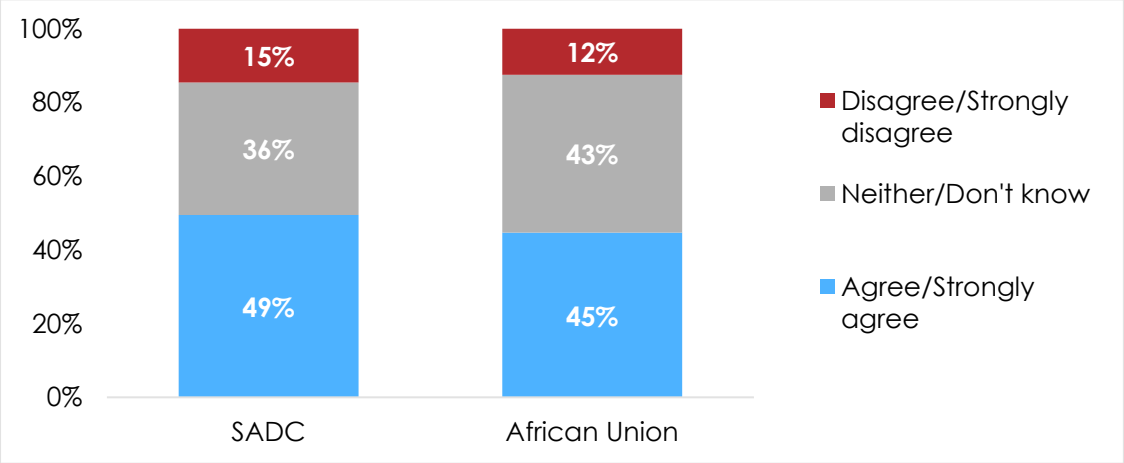
- Among Batswana who are aware of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, most (85%) favour taking a neutral stance in the war.

Africa's voice in global affairs

Batswana offer mixed assessments of their voice in international affairs. By more than 3 to 1, respondents say their country's needs and interests are adequately recognised in the decisions of SADC (49% "agree" or "strongly agree" vs. 15% "disagree" or "strongly disagree") and the AU (45% vs. 12%) (Figure 1). However, large proportions don't offer an opinion on these questions.

In contrast, when it comes to international bodies such as the United Nations, most Batswana (66%) say that African countries should be given greater influence in decision making (Figure 2). Very few (6%) disagree with the idea, while 28% don't offer an opinion.

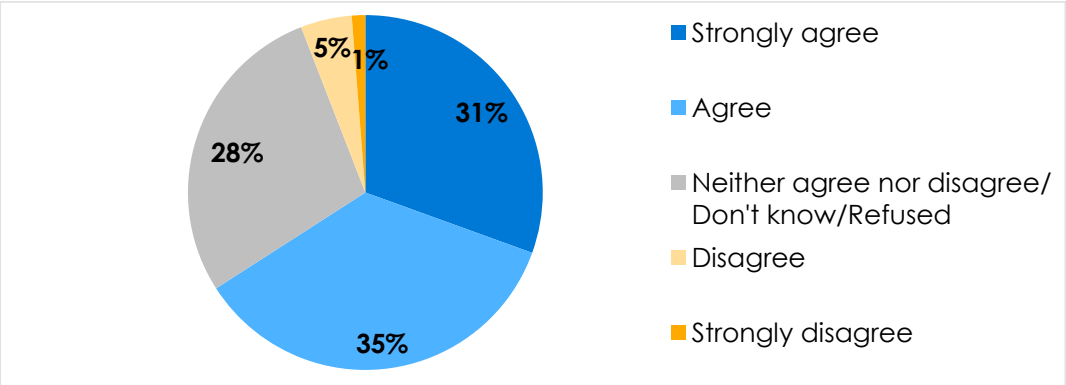
Figure 1: Recognition of Botswana's interests in continental affairs | Botswana | 2024



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

Figure 2: Should African countries have more say in international bodies such as the United Nations? | Botswana | 2024



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 such as the United Nations?*

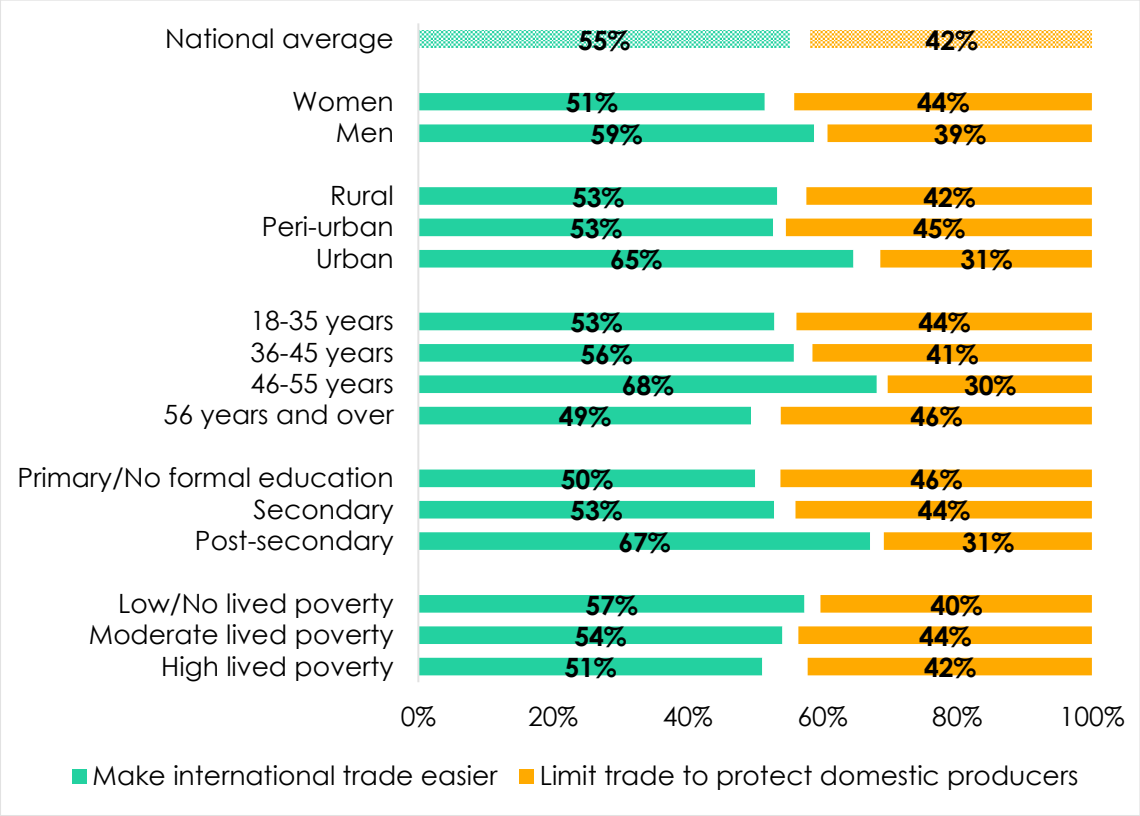
Copyright ©Afrobarometer 2026

Trade with other countries

More than half (55%) of Batswana say that it is better for their economy if the government creates economic opportunities by facilitating international trade (Figure 3). But a substantial minority (42%) disagree, preferring instead to limit international trade to protect local businesses.

About two-thirds support free trade among 46- to 55-year-olds (68%), respondents with post-secondary education (67%), and urban residents (65%). Support is higher among men (59%) than women (51%), and drops with an increase in lived poverty[2] (from 57% among those experiencing low or no lived poverty to 51% among the very poor).

Figure 3: Open trade or limit trade? | by demographic group | Botswana | 2024



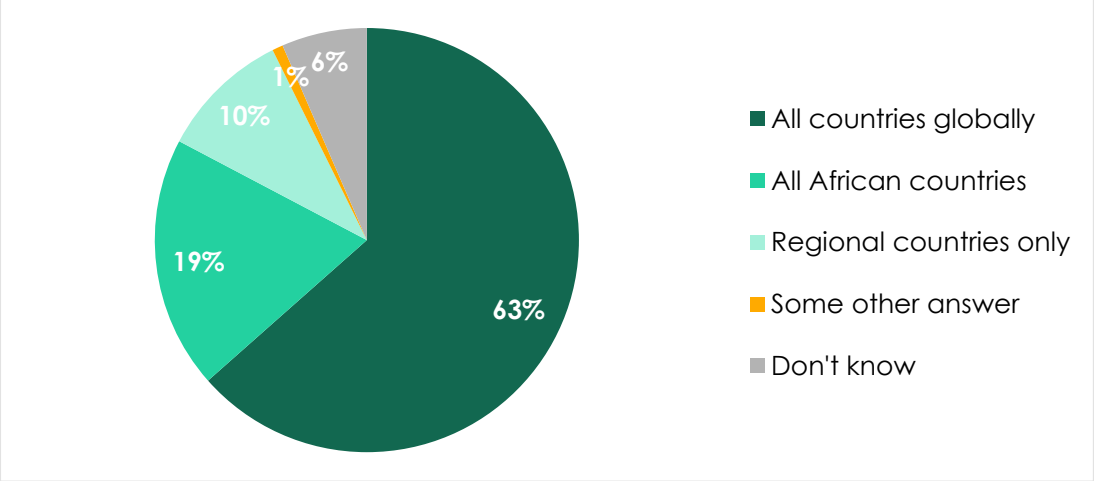
Respondents were asked: *Which of the following statements is closest to your view?*
Statement 1: It is better for our economy if the government makes it easier for Botswana to trade with other countries to create economic opportunities.
Statement 2: Our country should limit trade with other countries in order to protect Botswana producers.

If the government were to make it easier to trade with other countries, a significant majority (63%) of citizens would favour open trade with all countries worldwide, rather than limiting it to certain countries (Figure 4). About one-fifth (19%) would privilege African countries for trade, while 10% would prefer to focus on Southern Africa.

[2] 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).

Copyright ©Afrobarometer 2026

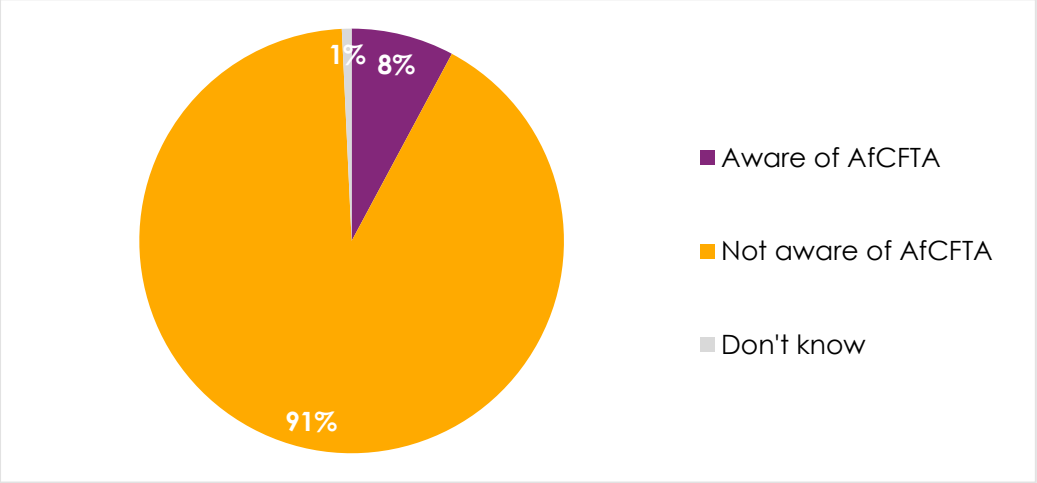
Figure 4: Which countries should leaders make it easier to trade with? | Botswana | 2024



Respondents were asked: *If Botswana's 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?*

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is an initiative aimed at creating a single market for goods and services across the African continent. While a majority of Batswana favour open trade, most citizens are unaware of the continent's signature treaty to promote free trade and continental integration: Only 8% say they have heard of the AfCFTA (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Awareness of AfCFTA | Botswana | 2024



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

Influence of external actors

Batswana hold more positive than negative views of the economic and political influence of most of the major foreign powers the survey asked about. But the predominant response is "don't know" (46%-67%) (Figure 6).

Opinions on the influence of SADC are overwhelmingly favourable: 47% say it is "somewhat positive" or "very positive," compared to just 5% who see it as negative.

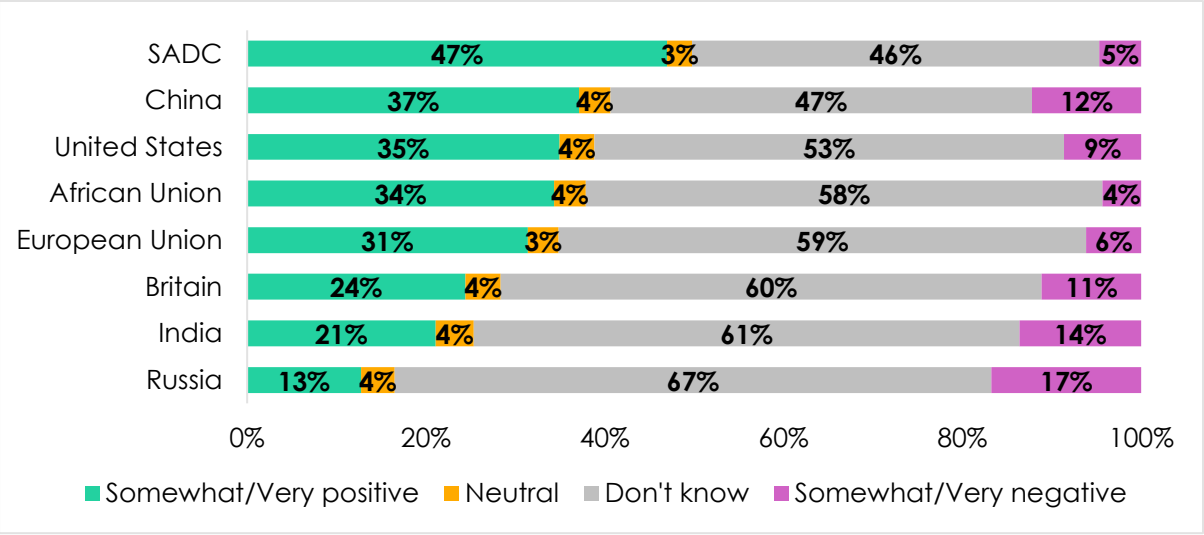
Copyright ©Afrobarometer 2026

Similarly, more than one-third of respondents welcome the influence of China (37%), the United States (35%), and the AU (34%), while few see them as having a detrimental impact.

Smaller shares appreciate the influence of the European Union (31%), Britain (24%), and India (21%), though positive appraisals still outnumber negative ones.

Russia is the exception: More Batswana say its influence is negative than positive (17% vs. 13%), though two-thirds (67%) say they "don't know" what influence it has.

Figure 6: Influence of foreign powers | Botswana | 2024

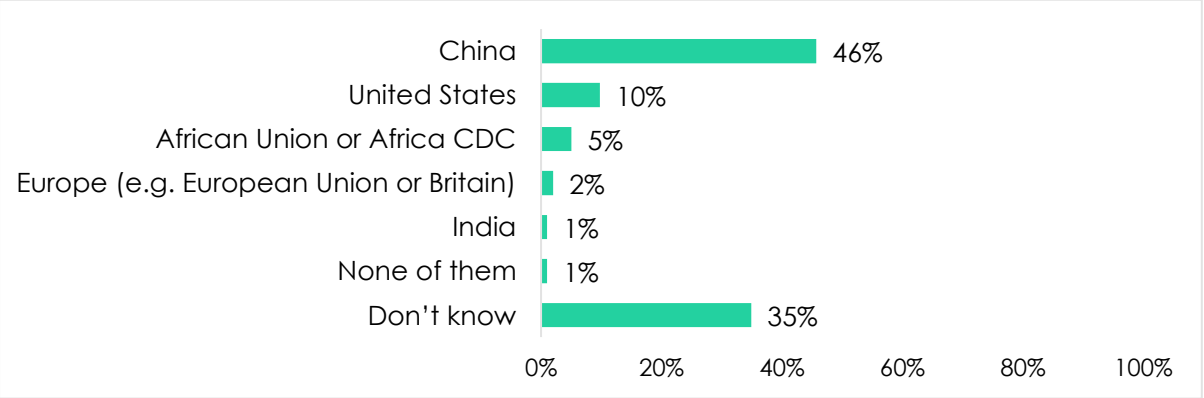


Respondents were asked: *Do you think that the economic and political influence of each of the following countries or organisations on Botswana is mostly positive, mostly negative, or haven't you heard enough to say?*

Asked which countries or organisations were most helpful to Botswana during the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly half (46%) of respondents cite China (Figure 7). The United States comes a distant second (10%), followed by the AU or Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) (5%).

More than one in three (35%) express uncertainty about the country's biggest benefactor.

Figure 7: Most helpful actors in managing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic | Botswana | 2024



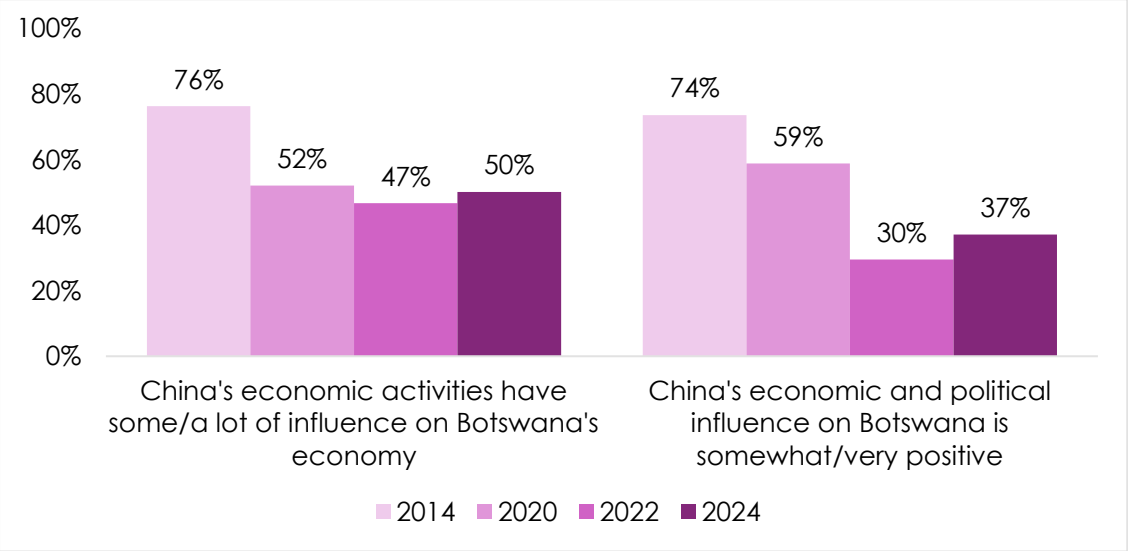
Respondents were asked: *Which of the following countries or organisations, if any, did the most to help Botswana manage the negative impacts of COVID-19, or haven't you heard enough to say?*

Copyright ©Afrobarometer 2026

Half (50%) of Botswana say that China's economic activities have "some" or "a lot" of influence on Botswana's economy (Figure 8). This perception dropped sharply between 2014 (76%) and 2020 (52%), and has not rebounded since.

Similarly, the proportion who see China's economic and political influence on Botswana as "somewhat positive" or "very positive" has halved over the past decade, from 74% to 37%.

Figure 8: Trends in perceptions of Chinese influence | Botswana | 2014-2024



Respondents were asked:

How much influence do you think China's economic activities in Botswana 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 Botswana is mostly positive, mostly negative, or haven't you heard enough to say: China?

Perceptions that China's influence is substantial and positive are more common among men and urbanites than among women and residents of peri-urban and rural areas (Figure 9). Highly educated respondents are twice as likely as those with primary or no formal education to say Chinese influence is significant (67% vs. 33%) and beneficial (50% vs. 23%).

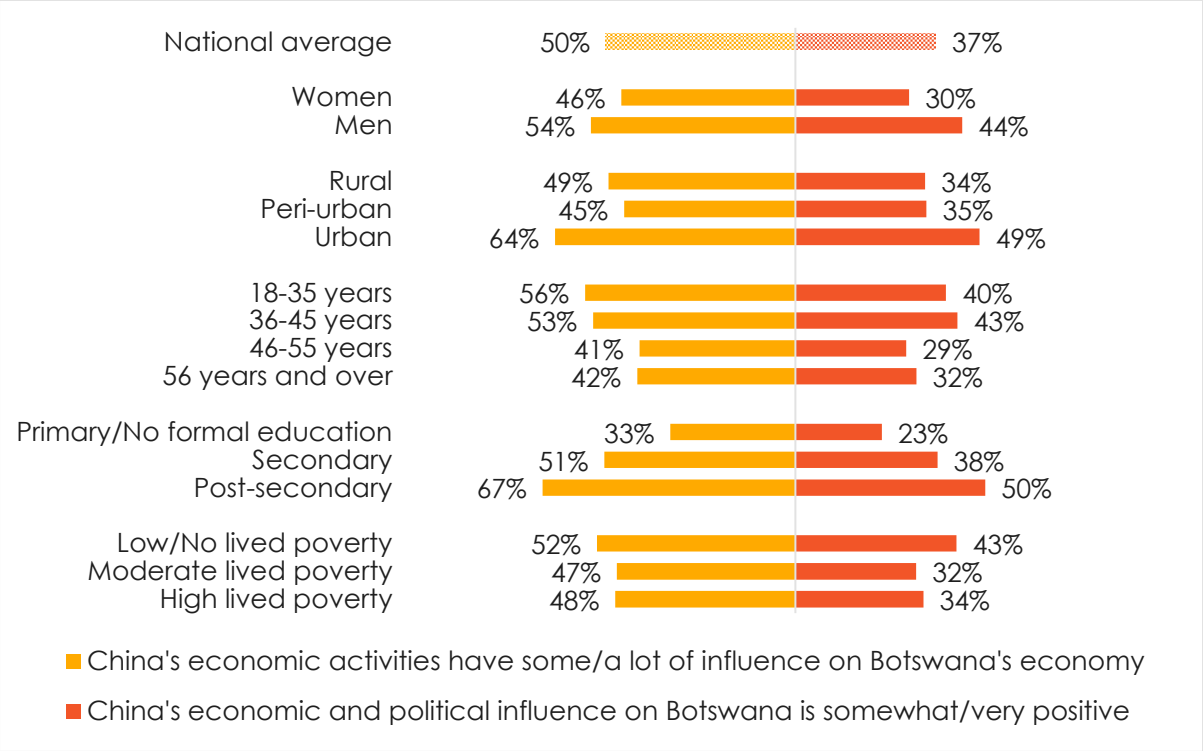
These assessments are also more common among respondents aged 45 and under than their elders.

Economically better-off respondents are more likely than their poorer counterparts to see China as having a positive impact on the country's economy (43% vs. 32%-34%).

Do your own analysis of Afrobarometer data – on any question, for any country and survey round. It's easy and free at www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

Copyright ©Afrobarometer 2026

Figure 9: Perceptions of Chinese influence | by demographic group | Botswana | 2024



Respondents were asked:

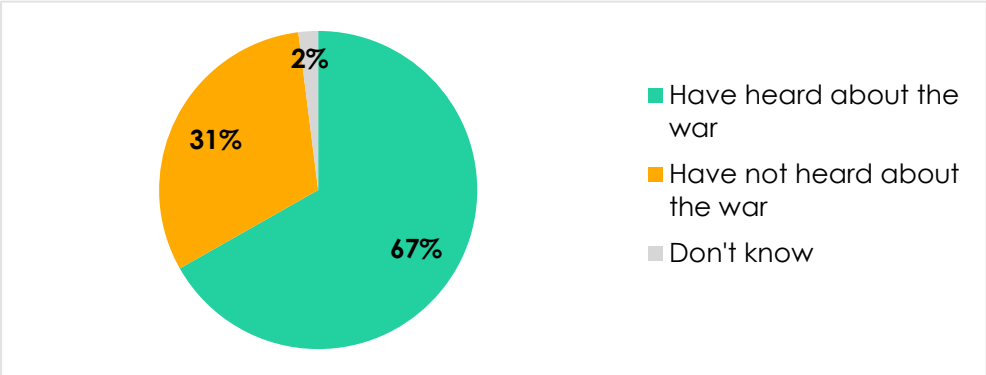
How much influence do you think China's economic activities in Botswana have on our economy, or haven't you heard enough to say?
Do you think that the economic and political influence of each of the following countries or organisations on Botswana is mostly positive, mostly negative, or haven't you heard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

Russia-Ukraine war

Turning to another important international topic, Afrobarometer asked Batswana about their perceptions of the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine. Two-thirds (67%) of respondents report having heard about the war (Figure 10).

Among those who are aware of the war, an overwhelming majority (85%) say Botswana should adopt a neutral stance rather than support Ukraine (6%) or align with Russia (3%).

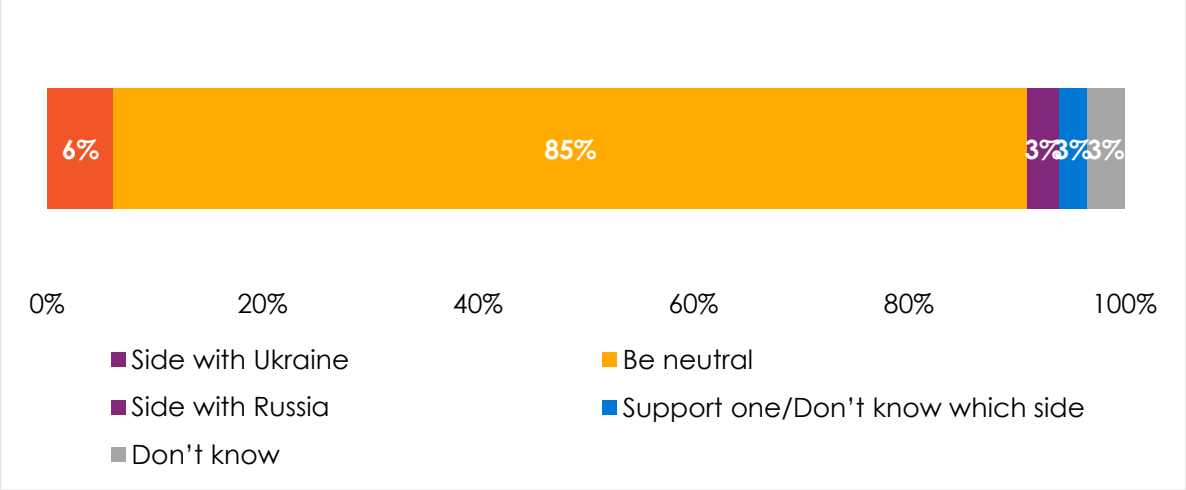
Figure 10: Awareness of the Russia-Ukraine war | Botswana | 2024



Respondents were asked: *Have you heard about the war between Russia and Ukraine, or haven't you had a chance to hear about it yet?*

Copyright ©Afrobarometer 2026

Figure 11: Support Russia or Ukraine? | Botswana | 2024



Respondents who have heard of the war were asked: *Should Botswana 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 show that a majority of Batswana favour open trade and international collaboration. Approval far exceeds disapproval when it comes to the economic and political influence of international organisations such as SADC, the AU, and the EU and of major foreign powers such as China, the United States, Britain, and India – but not Russia. However, many citizens voice uncertainty about the influence these foreign powers have.

Notably, perceptions of China's influence on Botswana as substantial and positive have declined sharply over the past decade.

While few Botswana feel under-represented in SADC and AU decisions, there is strong support for enhancing Africa's voice in global forums. When it comes to global conflicts, however, most citizens approach the implications of the Russia-Ukraine war with caution, preferring that Botswana maintain a neutral stand.

While a majority of citizens support fostering international trade to create economic opportunities, a significant minority are eager to protect local businesses from foreign competition. Meanwhile, few know about the AfCFTA, suggesting a clear need for awareness-raising if the initiative is to receive public support.

Copyright ©Afrobarometer 2026

References

European Commission. (2025). Botswana.

International Monetary Fund. (2025). Botswana: 2025 article IV consultation – press release; staff report; and statement by the executive director for Botswana. IMF Country Report No. 25/325.

Mattes, R., & Lekalake, R. (2025). Decade of destitution? Severe lived poverty is surging in many African countries. Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 943.

Ministry of Finance. (2025). People's summary of the 2025/2026 budget.

Mo Ibrahim Foundation. (2024). 2024 Ibrahim index of African governance (2014-2023): Key findings.

Office of the Historian. (2025). A guide to the United States' history of recognition, diplomatic, and consular relations, by country, since 1776: Botswana. U.S. Department of State.

Office of the United States Trade Representative. (2025). Botswana. Executive Office of the President.

Schilirò, D. (2022). Botswana's economy and the question of diversification. *International Journal of Business Management and Economic Research, 13*(3), 1-8.

Southern African Customs Union. (2025). 2024 integrated annual report. SACU Secretariat.

Southern African Development Community (SADC). (2020). Communiqué of the 40th ordinary summit of SADC heads of state and government. 17 August.

Southern African Development Community (SADC). (2024). Withdrawal of the Southern African Development Community mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) force members from Cabo Delgado. 5 April.

State Council. (2025). China, Botswana sign agreement on economic, technical cooperation.

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. (2025). Botswana sets course for economic diversification under the AfCFTA. 6 March.

World Bank. (n.d.). Botswana.

Copyright ©Afrobarometer 2026

Elliot Abraham is a Ph.D. student at the Legon Center for International Affairs and Diplomacy at the University of Ghana. Email: eabraham895@gmail.com.

Alfred Kwadzo Torsu is a policy consultant and former data analytics lead for Afrobarometer. Email: atorsu@afrobarometer.org.

Afrobarometer, a nonprofit corporation with headquarters in Ghana, is a pan-African, nonpartisan research network. Regional coordination of national partners in about 40 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 Partnership, the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Open Society Foundations – Africa, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Obama Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Bratton-Schneller Family Fund, the European Union Commission, the World Bank Group, the Population Institute, the Centre for International Governance Innovation, the International Development Research Centre, the Royal Embassy of Denmark in Uganda, the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Uganda, and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) supported by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH.

Donations help Afrobarometer give voice to African citizens. Please consider making a donation to Afrobarometer. To make an online donation, kindly follow this link or this link. To discuss institutional funding, contact Felix Biga (felixbiga@afrobarometer.org) or Runyararo Munetsi (runyararo@afrobarometer.org).

Follow our releases on #VoicesAfrica.

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 1246 | 27 October 2026

Copyright ©Afrobarometer 2026