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## **Afrobarometer Round 6**

**New data from  
across Africa**

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Accra, Ghana  
16 December 2016

## News release

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### **50 years of freedom of association: Right is firmly established, though far from absolute, in Africa (Afrobarometer findings)**

A half-century after the United Nations formalized the freedoms of assembly and association, eight out of 10 Africans feel at least “somewhat free” to join any political organisation they want, a new Afrobarometer report shows.

But despite this encouraging news, significant challenges remain: Only 21 out of 36 countries have majorities who feel “completely free” to associate, and some countries have seen sharp declines in perceived freedom. Moreover, one in three Africans say that the government should have the right to ban any organisation that “goes against its policies” – a less-than-absolute endorsement of a fundamental human right.

These Afrobarometer findings are being released today (16 December), the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UN’s adoption of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Based on interviews with about 54,000 citizens in 36 African countries, they are detailed in Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 128, titled “After 50 years, freedom of association is firmly established, though far from absolute, in Africa,” available in English and French at [www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org).

### **Key findings**

- On average across 36 countries, eight in 10 Africans feel at least “somewhat free” to join any political organisation they want, including a majority (58%) who feel “completely free” to do so. About one in six citizens (17%) say they feel “not very” or “not at all” free to associate as they wish.
- “Complete” freedom of association is a minority perception in 15 of 36 countries. While more than eight in 10 citizens feel “completely free” in Senegal (85%), Malawi (85%), Ghana (84%), and Botswana (83%), fewer than one-third say the same in Algeria (32%), Zimbabwe (30%), Sudan (27%), Egypt (27%), and Swaziland (7%) (Figure 1).
- Across 20 countries tracked since 2008/2009, the perception of “complete” freedom of association has been stable. In six of these countries, however, this perception declined significantly between 2008 and 2015, led by drops of 23 percentage points in Benin and 21 points in Burkina Faso (Figure 2). In four countries, the proportion of citizens who feel “completely free” increased significantly: Uganda (by 18 percentage points), South Africa (15 points), Namibia (14%), and Cape Verde (5 points).
- Women are somewhat less likely to feel “completely free” than men, 55% vs. 60%. The perception of being free increases modestly with age.

- In general, perceived freedom of association is correlated with higher levels of actual engagement in civic and political activities (Figure 3).
- Freedom of association also goes hand in hand with democracy: Citizens who feel free to associate also tend to feel free to speak and vote their minds, and to see their countries as well-functioning democracies (Figure 4).
- Despite high perceptions of freedom of association and its linkages with democracy, one-third (32%) of Africans “agree” or “agree very strongly” that governments “should be able to ban any organisation that goes against its policies” (Figure 5).

### **Afrobarometer**

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 30 countries in Africa. Five rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2013, and findings from Round 6 surveys (2014/2015) are currently being released. 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% (for samples of 2,400) or +/-3% (for samples of 1,200) at a 95% confidence level.

Interested readers should visit <http://globalreleases.afrobarometer.org> for previous Round 6 releases and watch for additional releases over the coming months.

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**For more on the United Nations' 50<sup>th</sup>-anniversary  
celebration of its two human rights covenants, see:**

**<http://freeassembly.net/foaa-at-50/>**

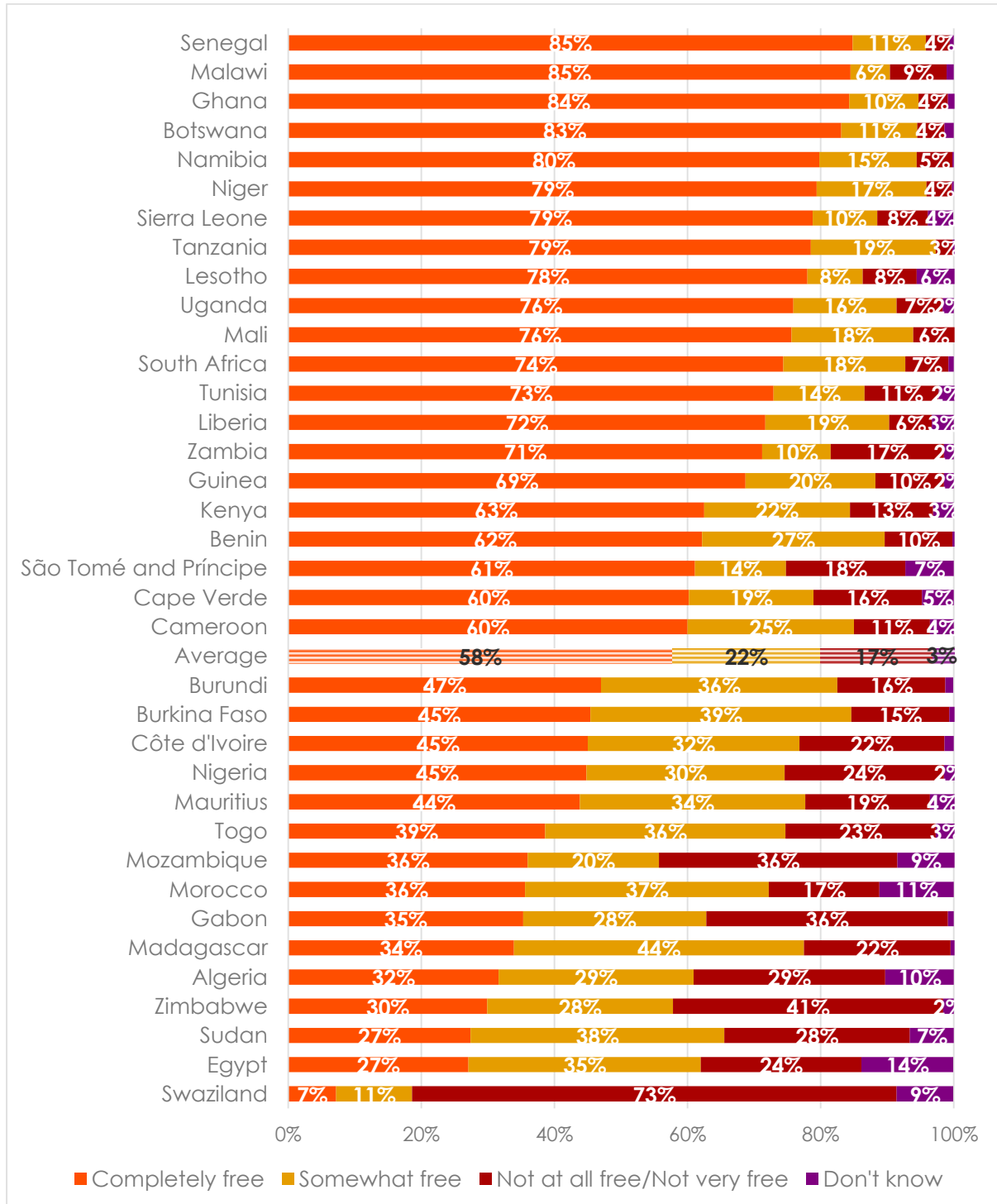
**<http://2covenants.ohchr.org/>**

**#FOAAat50**

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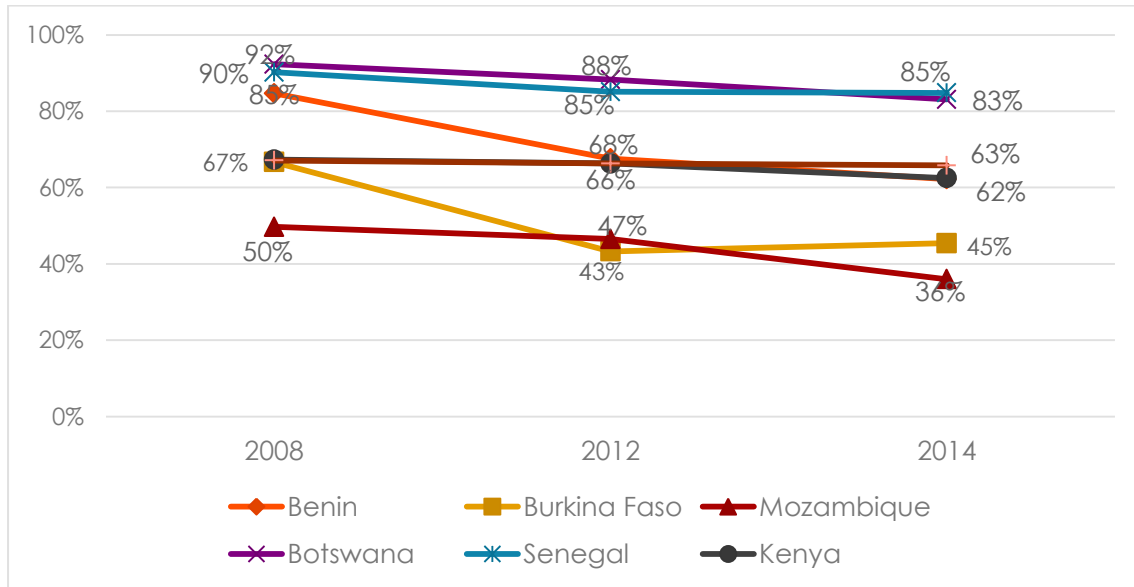
**Figures**

**Figure 1: Freedom of association** | 36 countries | 2014/2015



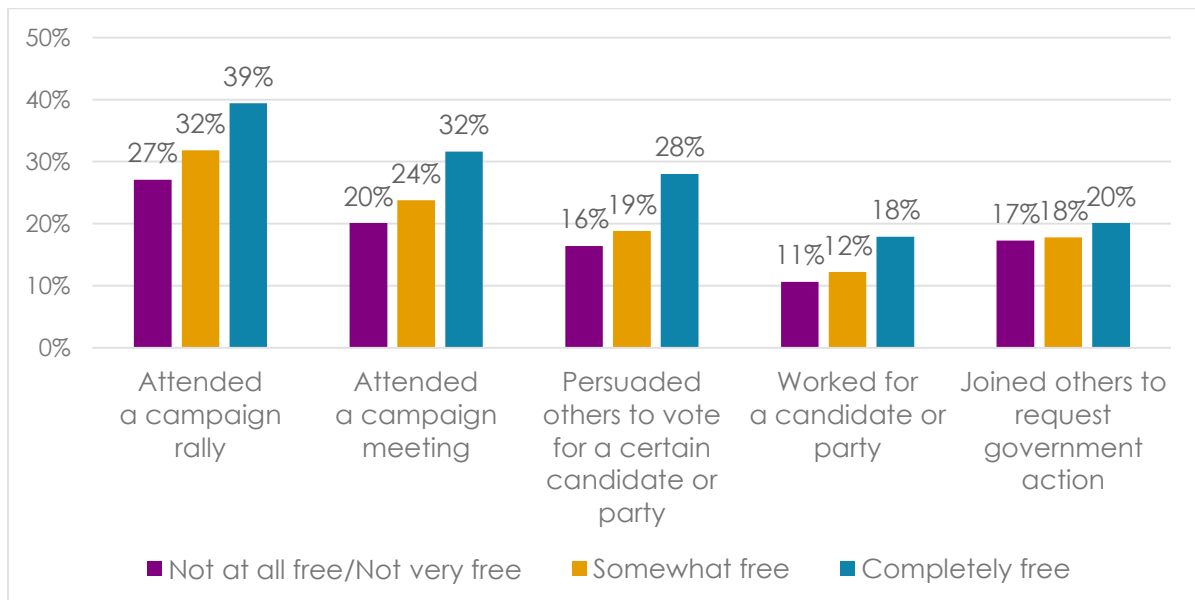
Respondents were asked: *In this country, how free are you to join any political organisation you want?*

**Figure 2: Decreased perceptions of freedom of association | 6 of 20 countries | 2008-2015**



**Respondents were asked:** *In this country, how free are you to join any political organisation you want?*

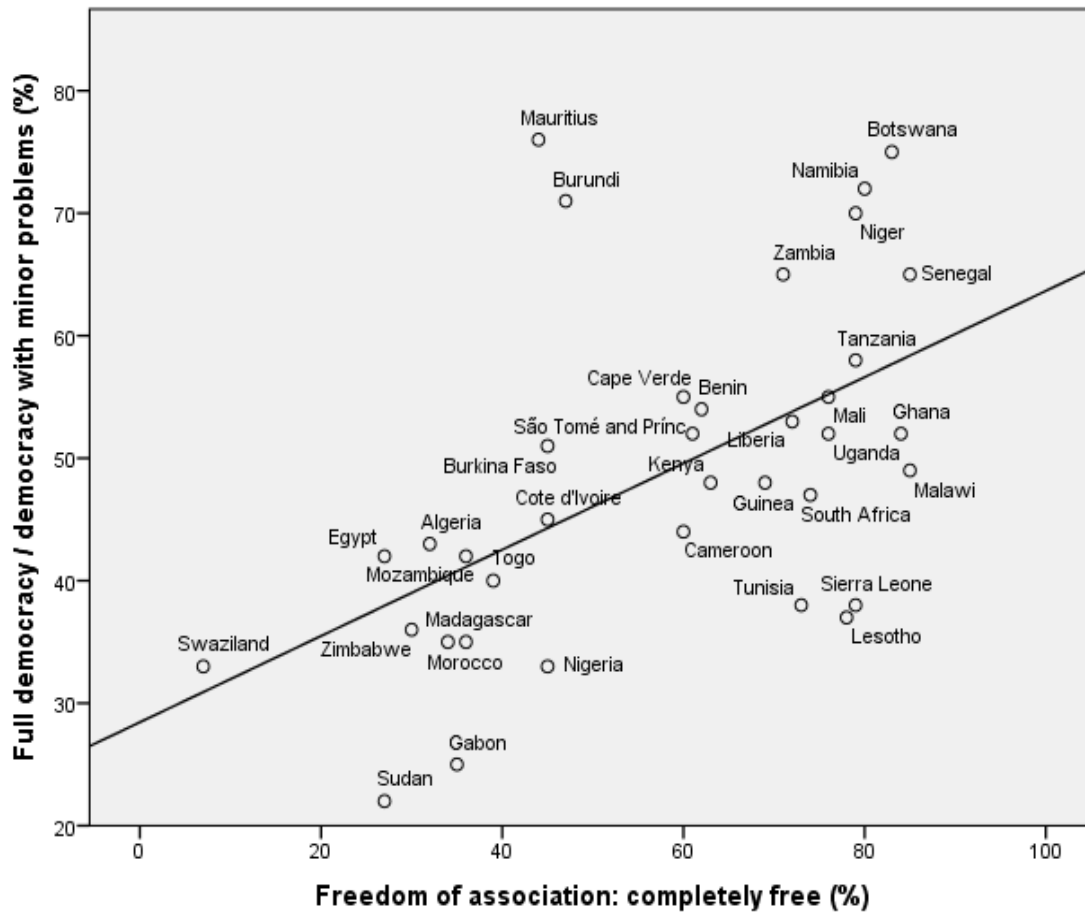
**Figure 3: Freedom of association and political participation | 36 countries | 2014/2015**



**Respondents were asked:**

- *In this country, how free are you to join any political organisation you want?*
- *Thinking about the last national election in [month, year], did you: Attend a campaign rally? Attend a meeting with a candidate or campaign staff? Try to persuade others to vote for a certain presidential or legislative candidate or political party? Work for a candidate or party?*
- *Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens when they are dissatisfied with government performance. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year: Joined others in your community to request action from government?*

**Figure 4: Freedom of association and extent of democracy | 36 countries**  
 | 2014/2015



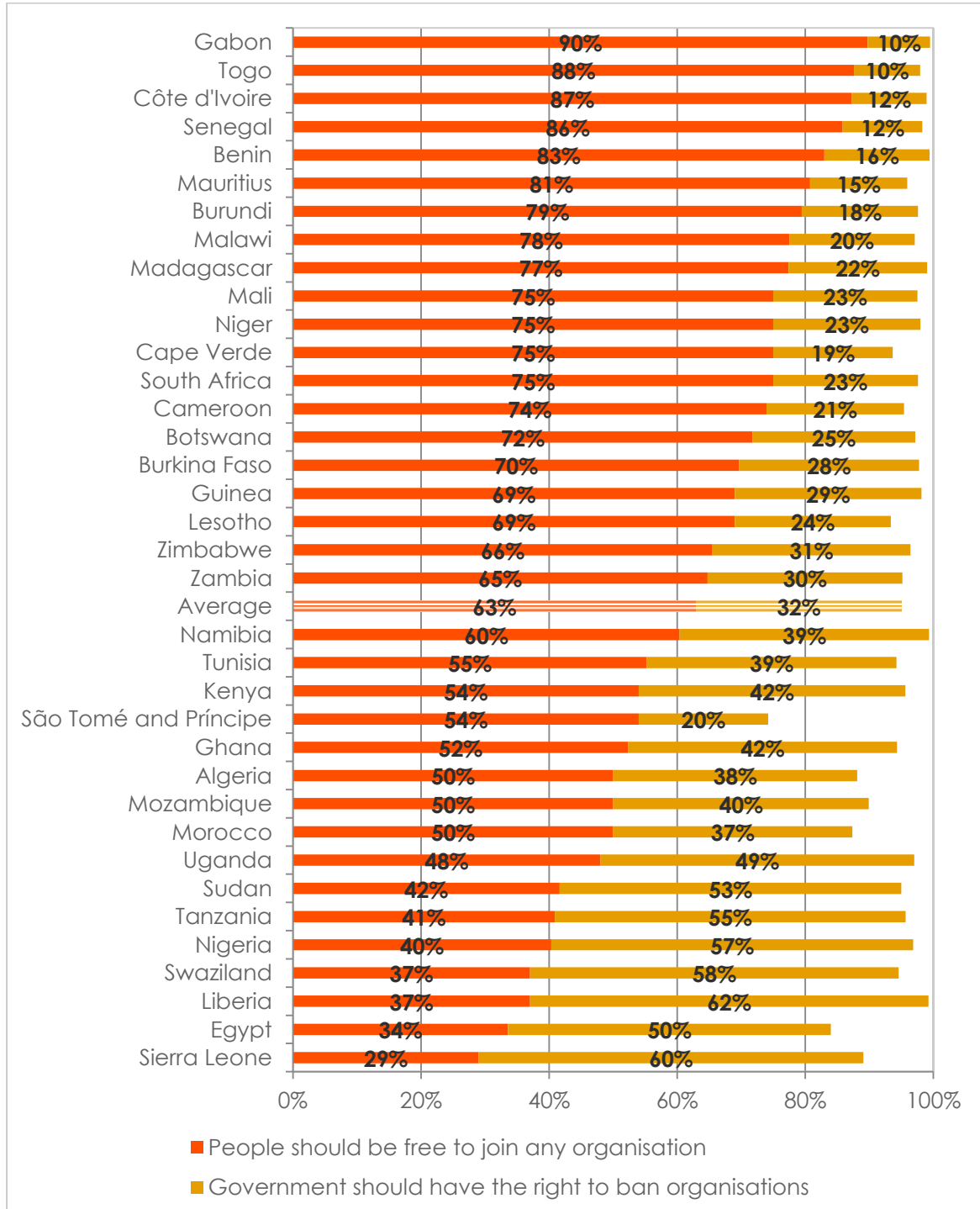
(Note: Pearson's R = 0.545, p<0.01)

**Respondents were asked:**

- In this country, how free are you: To join any political organization you want?
- In your opinion how much of a democracy is [your country] today?

To further explore this data, please visit  
 Afrobarometer's free online data analysis facility at  
[www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis](http://www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis).

**Figure 5: Popular support for freedom of association** | 36 countries | 2014/2015



**Respondents were asked:** Let's talk for a moment about the kind of society you would like to have in this country. Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

Statement 1: Government should be able to ban any organisation that goes against its policies.

Statement 2: We should be able to join any organisation, whether or not the government approves of it. (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

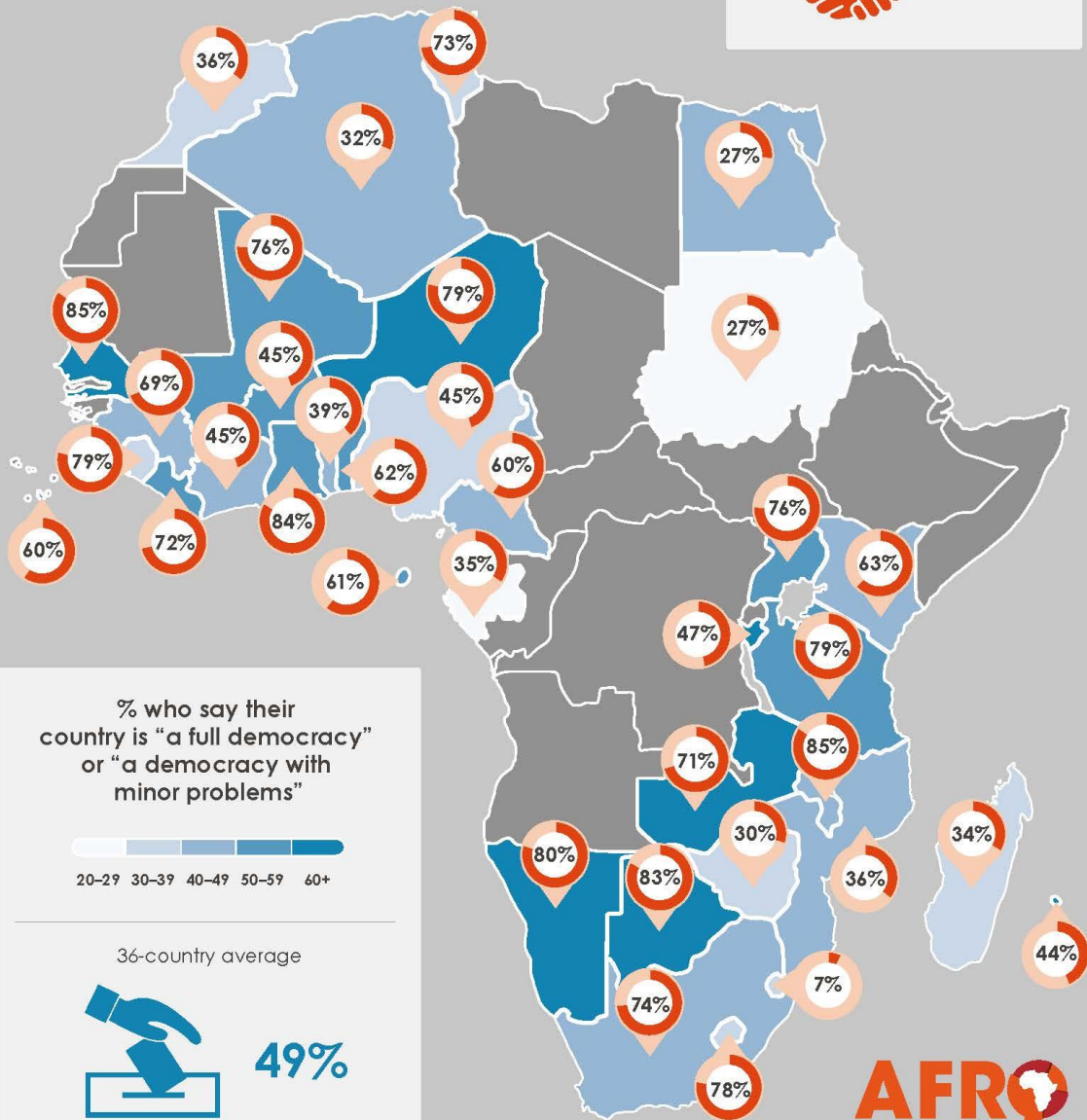
# Perceptions of freedom of association and democracy

36 African countries | 2014/2015

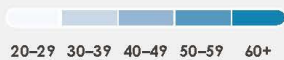
% "completely free" to join any organisation they want



36-country average



% who say their country is "a full democracy" or "a democracy with minor problems"



36-country average

